Arts in Peace Mediation

# Arts in Peace Mediation

Edited by Nicola Dahrendorf and Dagmar Reichert
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# Foreword

The origins of the work reflected in this publication go back to 2015 when I first met Dagmar Reichert of *artasfoundation* at a function in Geneva where I was serving as Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations. Dagmar was embarking on an exploration as to whether art and artistic practice, which she used in her peacebuilding work to great effect, could also have a useful purpose in peace mediation. I was fascinated by the question for I had long thought – both as a diplomat and a dilettante – that peace mediators and artists had in essence the same job. That is to sustain uncertainty and turn it into creative forces. A conversation ensued on how to best proceed in this exploration, since Dagmar's original approach to organising contemporary art exhibitions on the premises of an organisation working in peace mediation was not producing a notable momentum. This led to a workshop, in May of that year, with artists, mediators and mediation supporters from which emerged a shared sense that we could be on to something. But a clear path forward and especially an entry point into concrete mediation processes to test our initial ideas remained elusive.

This led to a hiatus in our work which was overcome in 2018 in London where I was by then posted. We started our journey all over again, together with some of the participants in the original workshop and with new colleagues brought on board by Nicola Dahrendorf. We worked in different formats – dinner conversations, academic studies and workshops, most of them online – and we expanded our investigation to the field of psychology in peace mediation. As we progressed, we felt we needed a landing zone that would focus our minds. We planned to hold a conference at Wilton Park that would set the scene of an international conversation on the topic, but the Covid-19 pandemic made that impossible.

We, therefore, needed another way to consolidate all the work we have done so far. This is the purpose of the present publication. We do not want to draw conclusions. This is very much a work in progress. But we wish, as Nicola Dahrendorf writes in the chapter *Arts in Peace Mediation – The Story so Far*, to provide a platform and a setting from which conversations and interactions can continue to move forward.

I would like to thank everyone who has been participating in this exploration, notably Dagmar Reichert (and her colleagues at *artasfoundation*) as well as Nicola Dahrendorf who were there at the start – and the re-start – of the project and have been pivotal in its evolution; the Zurich University of the Arts and my friends at the Swiss missions in Geneva and London, Andrea Aeby, David Kilian Beck, Isabel Käser and Stefanie Küng; Jonathan Cohen, Olivier Haener and Irene Bruna Seu who besides their active participation also served as members of the Steering Committee of the project; all the participants in our working sessions in the different formats; and finally Simon Geissbühler, Nadine Olivieri, Stéphane Rey and Matthias Siegfried at the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs who have accompanied the project with goodwill and made funding available for it.

Alexandre Fasel

# Contents

# Summary

Nicola Dahrendorf

This publication is in essence the story of an exploration. It is a compilation of perspectives on how art and arts practice could make peace mediation more effective, and it considers the potential of psychological input and knowledge for mediation practice. In 2015, the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva began to explore the role of the arts as an entry point and a tool for mediation and peace processes. This concept evolved further between 2018 and 2021 under the auspices of the Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom, London.

A series of encounters took place between arts and cultural practitioners, psychologists, mediators, and diplomats engaged in mediation processes. These discrete and largely informal meetings were held in different formats: in person and then virtually – prompted by Covid-19 restrictions, concluding with a semi-structured series of webinars in 2021. The conversations looped around key questions, including: Where in a peace process is it best to integrate the arts? What would best support a process? What would support a mediator? The underlying vision driving the process was to explore ways in which arts practice can unblock peace mediation processes and that ultimately "artistic practice is accepted by the international community as standard practice in a mediator's toolkit".

An academic research project was initiated in 2019 to explore the concept further, which focused on expanding academic research on the role of culture in political mediation processes by further liaising with cultural practitioners, mediators and other partners within relevant academic and professional fields.

A further perspective from these meetings and consultations was that psychological elements are closely intertwined with any exploration of arts practice in mediation. A separate project evolved investigating States of Mind in Conflict, a pilot study with the central aim of seeking to identify where a psychological perspective can help to enhance the insight and efficacy of mediation practitioners.

Participants in this six-year exploration were selected based on their active engagement in this area, and on their professional backgrounds, representing different perspectives from conflict

resolution, mediation, art and arts practice, and psychology. The institutional hosts and drivers were the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and Other International Organisations in Geneva, the NGO *artasfoundation*, the Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom in London, and the Centre for Researching and Embedding Human Rights at Birkbeck College, University of London who have hosted the *States of Mind in Conflict* (SOMIC) project since August 2020.

A consensus emerged that involving cultural and psychological practitioners will provide valuable perspectives for political mediation processes. Planning began for an international conference at Wilton Park in Spring 2021. Entitled *Rethinking mediation: exploring the potential of art and artistic practices in peace processes*, it had to be postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions imposed on travel and in-person meetings, with the latter deemed essential for a successful collaboration between artists and mediators. An international symposium might be held in Switzerland in 2022.

The overall objective of this exploration was to find other ways of working. The role of artists in mediation is not only to document but to contribute. Participants in mediation processes visualise and hear differently and bring their own experiences and psychopathology into the room. Artists and psychologists represent a range of different views, agendas, and worldviews with different perspectives and sensibilities. To perform their craft, they may be more open to nuances, 'the unspoken', the subtext, and they may have other ways of seeing and communicating.

This publication is arranged in six chapters. For further reference, the Annex contains a *Chronology of Gatherings and Recommendations* and lists the people who were involved in the discussions. To accompany the publication, a website (www.art-in-mediation.ch) has been created that contains the published texts in full, a biographical summary of all those who participated in this exploration, links to relevant art works and additional reference material. Further content on the arts in peace mediation will be uploaded on a regular basis.

*The Story So Far* is told in Chapter 1. This is a distillation of deliberations over the six years – from 2015 to 2021 – on how the arts and psychology could enhance peace mediation processes and possibly unblock pathways. It is intended as a platform on which this exploration can be taken forwards by the community of practice of mediators, artists and psychological practitioners, and potentially the international community. Various aspects are further developed in subsequent chapters. To uphold the richness of the many and varied discussions and to assist in organising the diversity of material, the summation concentrates on three main themes: *Trust* was referred to by many participants as the bedrock of all that goes on within a mediated space. Metaphors flourished throughout the conversations; hence some are disassembled in sections on *Bridges as Metaphor* and *How can the Arts Contribute? Language* as a theme examines conversations about how to listen and the use of spoken and written language and the importance of stories and narratives. An effort to address the *Convergence between Psychology and Mediation* includes sections on *The Role of the Mediator* and the call for *Reflective Practices.* An examination of how *qualities of artists, psychologists and mediators interconnect* condenses ideas of how they could collaborate and elicits concrete proposals and suggestions that were made during the discussions to pave the way towards taking this process forward.

Chapter 2, *Art in Mediation – Recollections and Reflections from a Colloquium,* returns to the starting point of this exploration. The initial exchange in 2015 between artists and people from the field of mediation, hosted by the Permanent Representative of Switzerland in Geneva focused on language and confidentiality in both professional fields; discussed possibilities for 'moments of art' in negotiation and mediation processes; and developed some options for concrete collaboration. The contours of the proposals that emanated from the 2015 colloquium echoed throughout the conversations that were recalibrated between 2018 and 2021, such as the idea for an artist in residence during a mediation process.

Chapter 3 is an abridged version of a research report on *Art and Artistic Practice in Peace Mediation – Building Common Ground and Creating "Ah-ha Moments"* (the full report with the same title

is accessible on www.art-in-mediation.ch). It explores the nexus between art and peacemaking and examines ways in which arts practices can be incorporated into formal peace processes. Drawing on interviews with mediators, peace practitioners, artists and academics who work on the intersections between peace and art, this report demonstrates that art already plays a crucial role in informal or civil society processes, although it is not yet widely practised in formal peace negotiations. Some key themes are highlighted including timing, power hierarchies, and the role of women. It sketches out examples where 'art worked', while also drawing attention to potential pitfalls when working with art in conflict landscapes. The report suggests that whether certain forms of art actually work is highly context-specific, but that a collaboration on an equal footing with local, regional or international artists could offer the mediator a new window into the worldviews of the conflict parties.

Chapter 4, *Mediation as Translation: Reflections on the EU Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade, from the Perspective of the People of Mitrovica* drills down to specific experiences and shares personal reflections by two peace dialogue practitioners who have also conducted Track 2 and Track 3 local dialogue initiatives. The focus is on the conflict in the divided and disputed small territory of Mitrovica, in the northern part of Kosovo. This region has endured multiple polarised communities and mutually exclusive claims by the Kosovo and Serbia governments. The chapter sketches key features of the conflict, and explores the needs of the people of Mitrovica and how the arts could play a significant role. It also examines the importance of translation and interpretation of language for a wider cultural understanding.

Chapter 5, *Making Links While Building Bridges: Reflections from the SOMIC Project*, addresses the psychological dimension and is an abridged synopsis of a longer report (entitled *The States of Mind in Conflict*, see website and www.bbk.ac.uk/research/centres/embedding-human-rights/projects). The project examined how to bring psychological insights into mediation and peace processes in ways that are acceptable to the professionals involved. The aim was also to gain better insight into the psychology of parties in a mediation process in order to better inform mediators and to map "the relational space of

conflict" from a psychological perspective. Based on a systematic analysis of the dataset from this pilot study and interviews with 25 mediation practitioners a focus on three psychosocial sites emerged: the mediation encounter; the minds of parties in conflict; and the mind of the mediator. Findings highlighted that there is a need to "change the narrative" in the current models of mediation and to focus on the *psychosocial* psychological perspective that situates the psychological in a particular sociopolitical context. This would lend itself to an application within mediation contexts because it frames psychology as being inextricably bound up with the geopolitical concerns that frame mediation encounters.

This compilation concludes in Chapter 6 with a *Postscript – Perspectives on Today's Challenges and Opportunities for Peace Mediation – Some Notes for Discussion.* The chapter explores the changing nature of conflicts and of peace, and examines the frequently posed questions as to whether mediation is in crisis, whether we need a new style and indeed a new generation of mediators, and whether we need new tools for mediation practice. The intention is to position this exploration in lockstep with global trends and to sketch out some perspectives on the future – based on a series of informal discussions with experienced mediators and some arts practitioners, and a rapid review of reports and research studies. Mediation practitioners 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 conversations (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 collection of meetings did not develop a formula of how arts and mediation practitioners could collaborate. A sense emerged that artistic support and interventions could assist

the mediator in 'reframing'. Artists "bear witness" and assist in creating "narrative complexity". Artists can pierce through an overreliance on policy arguments and static political discourse. A critical, underexplored aspect is a conversation about and with appropriate participants focused on the "creative energy of young people, as this new generation intuitively operates in the milieu of storytelling and content creation".

Some concrete entry points emerged from the conversations, which included:

- Initiating a pilot project of an 'artist in residence' in a Track 1 or 1.5 mediation, where the artist could simply follow the discussions without any specific goal. The sole purpose would be that she/he would absorb and feel the atmosphere, report on her/his experience and make suggestions. By providing observations, thoughts and discreet input, a different dynamic will be added, simply by being present and providing commentary in different forms afterwards. To implement this proposal, discussions would need to be held with Track 1 mediators in Geneva – or where appropriate.
- A second, possibly sequential, option could be to explore the possibility of artists meeting artists 'from the other sides' as part of the mediation process. This could create a different form of dynamic and interaction.
- It is crucial to find the right artists to work with, and the right mediators to work with the artists. A group of carefully chosen artists and mediators should be sought with whom close and long-term relationships can be established.
- To develop an academic network and collaboration with universities who have departments or institutes engaged in conflict resolution, peace mediation etc., and also to ensure the inclusion of non-Western institutions, such as universities in Somaliland, Ethiopia or Bangladesh, and others to be determined.
- Mediators and artists should be given the chance to ask each other questions, untangle their disciplines to find commonalities and differences. Doing so might help both artists and mediators discover new factors to consider and implement in their respective practices. A workshop between artists and mediators could start with an artwork and mediators could be introduced to the creative process behind it.

- In terms of the areas of convergence between the arts and psychological practice, a space for self-reflection, for a "reflective practice" should be provided for mediators and those providing mediation support.

The – at times patchy sequence of – conversations over the past six years raised more questions than answers. This presents real opportunities and a potential agenda for issues that need to be addressed in taking this exploration further. These include:

- Have we exhausted existing tools and means for peacebuilding? What tools are currently lacking in mediation practice, and what additional experience or skills would benefit mediation practitioners?
- 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?
- Can arts practitioners assist with the issue of translation and interpretation – and if so, how?
- Do we need a new generation of mediators with different ways of working? Quite simply, how can more women be brought in as mediation practitioners?
- How can mediation processes better harness the creative energy and understanding of younger people? How can arts practitioners help?
- What does it feel like to be mediated on? How can artists assist in exploring this underexplored aspect?
- 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?

It would be pre-emptive to draw conclusions based on these exchanges conducted in various forums and through diverse mediums. Many seeds have been sown and the shoots are yet to emerge. Based on practice and experience, and considering the issues presented in the conversations, it became apparent that a reality check is critical. Looking towards the future, a close examination is needed of what is now outdated, and who the real actors are now, including current issues, contexts and practices.

# 1

# Arts in Peace Mediation

## The Story So Far

Nicola Dahrendorf

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter on *The Story So Far* is a distillation of deliberations over six years – from 2015 to 2021 – on how the arts and psychology could enhance peace mediation processes and possibly unblock pathways. The intention is to provide a platform on which this initiative can be taken forwards by the community of practice of mediators, artists, and psychological practitioners, and potentially the international community.

Art and arts practice in peace mediation is about how to make mediation more effective and also to ensure psychological input, awareness and literacy. Conversations have looped around the following questions: Where in a peace process is it best to integrate the arts? What would support a process? What would support a mediator? The underlying vision has been that "artistic practice is accepted by the international community as standard practice in a mediator's toolkit".

Subsequent chapters will develop various aspects further. Chapter 2 tells the story of the Colloquium held in 2015 that started the inquiry on the potential contribution of art to peace mediation processes. Chapter 3 contains an in-depth research report on *Art and Artistic Practices in Peace Mediation.* Chapter 4 offers a perspective from the ground up, with personal reflections by two mediation practitioners. Chapter 5, *Making Links while Building Bridges: Reflections from the SOMIC Project* addresses the psychological dimension. Chapter 6 follows with a *Postscript – Perspectives on Today's Challenges and Opportunities for Peace Mediation.* For further reference, the Annex contains a chronology of encounters and recommendations and lists the people who were involved in the discussions.

### The Process[1]

The story of exploring arts practice in peace mediation (AiPM) began in May 2015 when the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva[2] (Swiss Permanent Mission) began to consider the role of art as a possible resource for mediation and peace processes. This idea evolved further between 2018 and 2021 in discreet and informal discussions in London

hosted by the Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom to the United Kingdom. Both stages of this initiative were hosted by the same Swiss Ambassador in his respective capacities as Head of the Swiss Permanent Mission in Geneva (2012–2016) and as Swiss Ambassador to the UK (2017–2021), together with his team at the Swiss Embassy in London. A series of conversations took place between cultural and psychological practitioners, mediators and diplomats engaged in mediation processes. These evolved into two thematic streams. One, centred on arts practice and mediation, led in 2019/2020 to a research project that focused on expanding academic research on the role of art in political mediation processes by further liaising with cultural practitioners, mediators, and other partners within relevant academic and professional fields.[3] The second stream concentrated on the psychological dimension in political mediation processes.[4] This became the subject of an ongoing project financed by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), which is led by Birkbeck College as a separate strand on *States of Mind in Conflict* (SOMiC).[5]

A consensus emerged that involving cultural and psychological practitioners will provide valuable perspectives for political mediation processes. Planning began for an international conference at Wilton Park in Spring 2021. Entitled *Rethinking Mediation: Exploring the Potential of Art and Artistic Practices in Peace Processes,* it had to be postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions imposed on travel and in-person meetings, with the latter deemed essential for a successful collaboration between artists and mediators. It is hoped that an international symposium will be held in Switzerland in 2022.[6] The Swiss non-profit foundation *artasfoundation*[7] was appointed in 2021 to lead a series of webinars arranged around themes on arts practice and mediation to ensure follow-up to the wealth of ideas and discussion threads generated over the past three years.[8]

A Steering Committee was formed in March 2020. Its aim was to provide oversight and advice to the AiPM initiative in the run-up to the Wilton Park conference, and on the general direction of this initiative. Six meetings were held between 16 March 2020 and November 2021. Members were chosen based on their involvement in the work and their professional backgrounds,

representing different perspectives from conflict resolution, mediation, art and arts practice, and psychology.

## Some Caveats

This is the story so far through the prism of several themes as distilled from conversations over the past six years.[9] It is an effort to summarise and disentangle the main threads and is entirety subjective and by no means exhaustive. To protect the integrity and confidentiality of the conversations, direct quotes are not attributed unless permission has been obtained. Mediation, psychological and arts concepts are referred to as they arose in the exchanges, but there is no further analysis or definition. In addition, the focus of this chapter is primarily on arts in mediation. Given overlaps in the discussions of the two 'strands', one section is dedicated to the *Convergence between Art and Psychology*.

## Terminology

Participants consisted of practising artists, poets, novelists, painters, sculptors, performance artists, and musicians, as well as arts producers, including performance and film producers. The generic terms used for the purposes of this text is 'artists' or 'arts practitioners'. Reference to mediation and mediators entails a range of 'mediation practitioners' and 'mediators' who have worked at different levels, Track 1 to 3[10], as well as Swiss and United Nations diplomats. The generic term in this chapter for 'psychological practitioner' encompasses psychologists, academics from psychosocial and medical fields, psychotherapists, and psychiatrists. Reference is made to 'arts practice' or 'the arts', rather than art, as the arts is considered to embody the interdisciplinarity more accurately. The terms 'contributors', 'participants', 'discussants' are used interchangeably referring to all those who participated in these events over the past six years, both in person and online.

## THEMES AND THREADS

The process was informal and experimental from the outset. Apart from a shared notion that there could be a mutually beneficial exchange between arts and mediation practitioners, no one knew what to expect and what might evolve.[11] Metaphors flourished throughout the conversations. To continue in this vein of understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another, the most apposite metaphor might be of a loom to weave thread or yarn into cloth, a rug or a tapestry. A number of themes looped through the wide-ranging discussions over six years. They are interlinked, separate and some run in parallel. The guiding questions were: How can artistic endeavour stimulate us to think differently? How can it demonstrate, through its own experience of creativity and challenging people's mindsets, something that can be brought into the world of mediation? As noted by a participant "mediation is all about trying to shift people, who are stuck in the midst of conflict, to rethink the parameters of what is possible and to try and help people to think differently". And another, "art can defy linguistic boundaries and be an ideal resource to understand the perspectives of others. Art can also directly nurture a process by providing a voice to those who are marginalised – and at the same time enhance the relevance and legitimacy of the process itself …".

To uphold the richness of the discussions and to assist in organising the diversity of material, this summation is structured around three main themes or threads and some sub-themes, concluding with a section on proposals made for the way forward to integrate artistic practice and psychological understanding into mediation processes. These themes are (1) Trust, with sections on *Bridges as Metaphor* and *How can the Arts Contribute?* Theme (2) is Language and includes sections on *Listening, Spoken and Written Language, How can the Arts Contribute?* and *Stories and Narratives.* (3) is Convergence between Psychology and Mediation and includes sections on *The Role of the Mediator* and *Reflective Practices.* The final part – Where Do the Qualities of Artists, Psychologists and Mediators Interconnect and How Can They Collaborate? – elicits concrete proposals and suggestions that were made during the discussions to pave the way towards taking this process forward.

## Trust

Trust was referred to by many participants as the bedrock of all that goes on within a mediated space. "Trust is paramount", and "the most important thing" is to create circles of trust and safe spaces and to deepen connections. Distinctions were drawn between trusting a process, trusting the person who leads the process, and trusting each other. The different threads and sub-threads encompass: (a) trust between people: opponents, parties and the mediator; within the mediation team; within the respective teams of participants; and with those who stand behind the mediation process, such as government representatives who are sponsoring the process etc.; (b) trust in political mechanisms; (c) trust in the mediation process; and (d) the underlying challenges of how to build trust and how to maintain it. Some questions also arose as to how trust as a concept translates into different languages and what it means in various cultural contexts.[12]

Trust and especially the impact of distrust were also interwoven through many exchanges dedicated to psychology and mediation. The complexity of building and maintaining trust and the basis of the connection were illustrated in a reflective discussion with a senior mediation practitioner:[13]

"Trust is a key element in X's relationship with the Burundian president who feels that his country has been treated badly and strongly distrusts the international community as a whole. One reason why the president seems to trust X is because of things he hasn't done: The fact that X is not criticising the Burundian government publicly has helped build that relationship. It was also noted that the Burundian people who meet with X might feel that he is emotionally connected to them at some level, which nourishes their trust. When asked about his personal motivations for this role, X himself said that he "does not want the system to leave them alone". He also mentioned having formed an attachment to the Burundian people, thus reinforcing the importance of understanding better the people involved in mediation and the nature of their bonds, not just the structures."[14]

Conversely other mediation practitioners challenged the idea that trust is germane to interaction and progress in a mediation space and were critical of the proclivity to "romanticise trust". They maintained that people do not, and simply cannot, trust each other after decades of conflict. Trust does not exist. "The mediation field is hooked onto so many words that do not have any bearing in the real context and reality, such as neutrality or trust ..." The absence of trust, a situation where people have lost

faith in institutions and government, such as in Lebanon, is synonymous with loss of trust. "The real question is, can it be regained? The reality is that we have to acknowledge that the starting point is distrust." Another call for pragmatism was cited with the example of Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian negotiator: "I can't trust my enemy. How can I trust my oppressor? I just need to be transactional. So, this is a business, a calculation with a healthy dose of mistrust, but we know we have to work together."[15]

Some suggested that "a different language" is needed, one that allows people in the mediation process dignity and their own personal sovereignty. Dignity provides participants with a sense of agency. All too frequently individual concerns are not being acknowledged and recognised. Shared spaces allow for shared experiences. One participant noted that "… the ability people have, even in the most difficult situations, to … leave the sphere of fear and calculation and invite the other to meet on a different level. It's giving a credit that is not counted as credit, or some kind of 'advance generosity' …" A more apposite concept might be 'benevolence' ('Wohlwollen' in German): "… he is my enemy, but we are in it now together, and I accept that he is well-meaning as well." Or: "… lawyers call it 'good faith'. It means that you would not knowingly do harm to the agreement." A common understanding emerged amongst contributors on the importance of "deep collaboration" and "relationship building".

Trust, acknowledgement and dignity are the cornerstones of a process and need to be established right from the start. However, this is not helped by what some perceived as rivalry and competition between different mediators, and those who 'owned' the processes. "We as a system have to be trustworthy before we can generate trust". Questions arose as to whether "peace mediation is in crisis", and if "we need a new generation of mediators". Conflicts today are increasingly complex and go beyond conventional national and state borders. The nature of the state and engaging with representative state authorities has also shifted as the backdrop of those who support parties in conflict has become infinitely more complex. However, some mediation practitioners felt that mediation as a field and a profession had not yet adapted and was still stuck in a post World War II model – "We need to transform the way we think about the process."

Emphasis was placed on the need for authenticity and vulnerability: "we (as mediation practitioners) have to be vulnerable when we step into any process of mediation – that also applies to painting or music – but in mediation practice we are held back by notions of 'state-building' or even 'neutrality'". Consequently, representation is important. For example, the mediation practitioner in the Burundi case was a white male 'leader' from a 'developed' country who is innately associated with connotations of 'state-building'. Trust may be built more successfully when there is the opportunity for mediators to be in an 'equal' relationship, especially with trusted local individuals. Some arts processes seek points of commonality as a starting point and explore what those who come to the table with great external differences have in common as human beings. A point made in the Burundi example was to look for what the mediator and the president had in common as a route to building a meaningful relationship.

Identifying suitable entry points is critical. Creativity and arts practice can play an important role in illuminating these small openings. Both in music, for example, and in mediation, "the process starts before the process itself". Prior to a musical performance, instruments are tuned, players rehearse together, and there is a soundcheck to ensure the right tone and volume; to adapt to the situation, producers and performers "check out the space" and try to "know the audience". Then there may be improvisation during the performance. Music happens at different levels, not just with sound but with how it makes people feel. In a not dissimilar vein, mediation processes undergo their own 'soundchecks': with planning and structuring of the process, setting the agenda, preparing the space, arranging the seating at the table. These respective pre-processes are essential to create an overall atmosphere of trust.

Bridges as metaphor symbolised in a way a perpendicular thread on the conversation loom. This well-worn metaphor recurred in discussions around trust and also language (see below) in the form of building bridges, meeting on bridges, and potential artistic entry points on bridges. What are the bridges where people recognise commonality? Bridges in the literal and metaphorical sense expedite travel and communication. We place

our trust in foundations but bridges collapse when we don't pay attention – and the trust and relationships that we thought were built proved to be not quite as strong.

Music can be a powerful bridge builder in political spaces. For example, chanting, drumming, or singing songs – even national anthems – allow for synchronisation. Although making music can be highly individual, it is predominantly a social activity and triggers social effects and behaviours. It plays a role in bonding and allows people to relate to others. Listening to music in the presence of others can have a stress-reducing effect. Rhythmic entrainment allows people to synchronise their movements with each other and evokes feelings of togetherness. Studies in neuroscience about dance and choreography demonstrate that movement and music increase feelings of cooperation and merging with others. A poignant example was cited from a community-based mediation process in Armenia where during a pause in tense proceedings, one of the participants broke into song. The majority joined and the mood completely shifted. All these elements underscored that trust needs to be built incrementally. Another metaphor used was that of 'yeast', a little of which can have a major ripple effect, fermenting the unseen and unexpected outcomes. Music is a universal language, offering deeper connections. Performers may not speak the same language or dialect but they can play and perform together with ease.

Some called for greater nuance when we try to articulate the requirements of divided communities, ideologies and politics. Bridging a divide between people, communities and places demands planning and forethought and needs to consider issues of consent. Following this perpendicular thread, questions arose such as: Is a bridge necessary? What two entities are we trying to connect? Are they equal in size and power? Is there consent ('planning permission' in a literal sense)? Do we want to build a bridge in order to colonise? Literally and figuratively, are we willing to build bridges from our own land – or is it made of materials that neither side has? Bridges can symbolise the absence and loss of trust. Complex historical examples of actual bridges highlight their symbolic ambiguity, such as the bridge in Sarajevo where both World War I and the 1990s' Bosnian war

started. City planners use roads and bridges to contain and bypass troubled neighbourhoods, such as in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The bridge metaphor could also be misleading, and underlying issues needed to be addressed, such as the need for justice as a precondition for peace. Communities cannot be reconciled without dealing with justice. "Why are we telling those in pain that their need for justice is subservient to our need for reconciliation?" In other words, both or all sides have to want it and reconciliation requires consent. At the same time, the desire to build bridges and exercising caution when imposing a notion of reconciliation that may not match the needs, histories and sensibilities of both or all parties, could also serve as an entry point for arts practitioners – to explain and tell stories. This frequently brought conversations back to listening, how to listen and the questions to be asked, such as: "What assumptions do we have about 'the other side'? Do we know why they do what they are doing? Do we know how they feel? Do we understand and see things from their perspective?"

In discussions it was reiterated that in communication about peace negotiations and peacebuilding we frequently start with our own message: what do we want to convey about peace? However, participants in a peace process come with their own narrative frames that will imbue our message with their meaning (see below *Stories and Narrative*). Participants may have a vision of a path towards peace that sees a stronger military, for example, or a particular political movement in charge. Therefore, it is a matter of shifting narratives, finding a new language. In an exchange around the 'militarisation' of language,[16] members of the group noted the dehumanising effect of using aggressive, militarised language (such as 'an invasion of refugees', 'a wave of insurgents' etc.), and encouraged a 'feminisation' of language.[17]

How Can the Arts Contribute?

Aesthetic activity engages our cognitive functions but also our senses and emotions and spiritual dimensions, and we as humans find that pleasurable. "When all our faculties are focused on the same thing that can provide a kind of animation in a context

where there has been so much pain and loss. It may allow people the space to imagine something different. It is an epistemological thing. It's about: How are we thinking? Are we thinking in conversations, in words? Or are we thinking in ways that engage more of us?"

Many participants stressed that artists and artistic expression must be detached from political identity. Narratives and theatre help, allowing both sides to identify themselves. There is an authenticity and vulnerability when we step into a mediation process founded in genuine self-expression, whether through words, painting, music or performance.

Some contributors stressed that it is not about trust but about connection. "When you work with indigenous people they say that conflicts are illnesses, so you have to recuperate the flux of energy in the community and the flux of energy between the humans and the planet. It is like music … I believe that is about getting connected, overcoming the 'THEM versus US' and looking together at common goods." "It does not have to be tangible, it needs silence, togetherness, … music, … beauty." Some described it as "this is for me the locus of trust, the locus of benevolence, maybe more than what we normally associate with people. And it is from here that you can begin a process. And this is where art can play an absolutely significative role: to change a bit … to overcome what yesterday was seen as totally impossible."

Overall, trust as a concept was a significant preoccupation throughout the conversations. There seemed consensus that it matters, but no consensus over the degree to which it matters. Trust in its totality seemed too high an expectation, though trust can be created in small parts and incrementally. Corridor conversations, impromptu responses, informal moments, all these move processes forwards. This leads to an awareness of interdependence. Discussions around trust brought to the fore conversations about multiple elements that form the "alchemy" of a process: harmony underpins what we are doing, awareness of interdependence, humility and audacity, courage, generosity and receptivity, benevolence and dissonances coexist. This could be about "the transmutation of matter", "an attempt to convert base metals into gold or a universal elixir, a seemingly

magical process of transformation, creation or combination." It is important not to romanticise trust as the one vital ingredient for a mediation process. Meanwhile, it was also pointed out that arts processes often begin with mistrust, suspicion or some form of apprehension either of the process or the participants (or both). The process of participatory arts is about finding commonality within a group, which then leads them to trust each other. Ultimately it is about human connection.

## LANGUAGE

The threads of language, its interpretation, and perception of the meaning of words, all wove themselves through discussions from 2015 onwards in both the arts and psychology conversations, with one entire webinar dedicated to language.[18] Language as communication plays a central role in mediation processes, impacting their integrity and the quality of outcomes. Each stage of mediation demands that all parties and the mediator communicate effectively and understand each other well to ensure the quality of the process.

The language spoken is influential on many levels. It can impact the way we think about time, space and even colours. People who speak different languages focus on different things, depending on words or sentence structures available to them. Language influences our thought processes and feelings. One important aspect in mediation work is the choice and role of the interpreter, in particular their use of dialect and the consequent level of trust (or distrust) placed in them. The complexity and importance of this presence was acknowledged in conversations but not further explored.

Mediators have to be circumspect in the language they use and adopt language strategies to facilitate the process and the conversations – as do psychologists. "Some mediators are artful" in how they adapt to the dynamics and shifts in a mediation process by modifying their use of words, phrases and tone. Mediation practitioners use specific categories of question for specific goals and purposes. Some linguistic features can underline the inclusiveness of mediation – the power dynamics between the parties – and highlight equality or inequality. For example,

in some cases "mediation becomes more of a conversation", losing its formality. Mediation training often does not provide descriptions of the kinds of language changes mediators can adopt to facilitate a process. The training is focused on techniques such as reframing, reshaping, emphasising neutrality, and rewording the statements of the different parties.

The parties' reactions demand continuous adaptation and awareness of underlying feelings. In individual conversations some mediators emphasised the need to be clear to the participants who they are, where they are from, and explain their belief system as an important general starting point that also influences or possibly "liberates" the use of language in the process. In essence this clarifies the mediators' motivation and is an important principle, which can lead to reciprocity between mediator and participants and is also part of building trust.

Mediation practitioners can be faced with challenging situations where parties express anger, aggression, frustrations, accusations and high emotions. One side may be more dominant than the other, thus shifting the dynamics so the 'other' side may be more reluctant to speak. Observing, and listening to reactions, tone and utterances of the parties means that mediation practitioners need to make stylistic choices based on these reactions. In addition, they may discover previously hidden points of conflict and underlying information during the process. The mediator needs to allow opportunities for all sides to express concerns, for example by calling for private meetings with one of the parties. Other tools are available, such as open-ended questions and "trying to get parties to focus on current rather than past issues".

## Listening

The skilled use of language comes with the need for effective listening, another recurring thread in both the psychology and arts exchanges. It was suggested that mediation practitioners need to become "super-listeners" in some instances. Mediation practitioners refine this fundamental skill throughout their careers, with many sub-threads: of listening effectively to understand the different interests and needs of the parties before

facilitating a process. Mediators are called upon to assist in clarifying issues and allow those who have less "definitional power" to describe the problem. The key is to listen to both the factual and emotional content. Reframing of a conflict can be the key to how it might be resolved. Definitional reframing is a central focus of the mediator's role in facilitating the negotiations.

Hurdles and 'impasses' can be both spoken and unspoken. To listen well, mediators must attend to spoken words and "to the silence between words" and understand the "types of silence". Silence could be regarded as a "semi-neutral place". This resonated closely with both psychology and arts practitioners. Artists expressed the view that they could play a role both in the definitional stage as well as in capturing and possibly intercepting silences. Musicians in particular underlined the need for active listening skills and parallels that could be drawn between music and mediated processes: what instruments or voices can one hear? What key is the song or the discourse in? How does the music, the discourse or the tone shift and why? What is the structure of the song or the music? Does it follow a common structure?

## Spoken and Written Language

Another dimension that surfaced was the difference between spoken and written language – the negotiated language of agreements which converts and translates emotions expressed into aspirational language. This also highlighted the contrast between the potentially ambiguous use of words in art and the very targeted use of wording in peace agreements. A mediation practitioner who is engaged in negotiating an agreement over time approaches language in a very different vein.

The choice of language – at times painstakingly negotiated – is best illustrated by the role of ambiguity deployed in peace agreements. For example, if parties have strong and contradictory interests and neither side seems prepared to concede their demands, or if negotiations are running out of time and parties are unable to discuss concessions in detail. Conflicting interests are resolved almost by "simulating" a compromise. The mediation team may devise a formula, which is open to at least two interpretations and carries at least two meanings.[19] Mediators

want to maintain the integrity and comprehensiveness of the draft. At the same time, they take a small step toward elaborating a compromise between the maximum demands of the conflicting parties who now become negotiating parties. In short, ambiguities make sure that on the one hand parties retain their individual perceptions on how things should proceed, and on the other a common language is adopted that can later be used.

Several examples were mentioned, such as the negotiations for the *Global Compact on Safe and Orderly Migration*.[20] Reference was made to agreements where language and ambiguity went hand in hand, such as the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords[21] where Madeleine Albright was quoted as saying "instead of glue it's been sandpaper", a deliberately ambiguous framework for a partnership between Israelis and Palestinians.

*The "Good Friday" Agreement*[22] set an institutional framework for the resolution of the political conflict in Northern Ireland. Negotiators achieved a relative compromise that brought partial satisfaction to the political ambitions of both sides, Unionists and Irish Nationalists.[23] The compromise rested on three key institutions, but the Agreement left certain relations vague. This allowed the parties to put incompatible constructions into the formulation of the deal. The critical issue was that at the time the original ambiguities in the Good Friday framework made it easier for both parties to embrace the deal, launch the peace process and, as articulated by some, "take the gun out of Irish politics".

Another device is the use of "open-ended sentences", which can be found in negotiated legal texts. A chapter in a peace treaty may begin with a precise enumeration of the powers that one entity, e.g. a central federal authority, may exercise. But at the end of the chapter an open-ended provision is inserted, which may, for instance, state that "the central federal authority may exercise some other duties as well", such as in the case of Kosovo. This clearly introduces an ambiguity and raises several questions – for example: if basic powers are clearly spelled out, then why would one need an additional open-ended clause to leave room for the expansion of the powers?

## How Can the Arts Contribute?

Arts practice could illuminate the cracks in the linguistic conventions and words described above and "allow the light to shine in". Artists can contribute by surfacing feelings, explaining history or historical narratives; their contribution can add precision and nuance, and create empathy. In some conversations, the spotlight fell on how poetry and music could help with the unspoken or the unspeakable and help to explain "the meaning that is lost in trauma".[24] The uses and misuses of language were dissected in a webinar arranged around these questions: What carries us closer to the promise of our words? How do turning points that make a difference happen? How does constructive change happen? How can we be more strategic in the pursuit of this change?

The Turkish Kurdish poet, Bejan Matur,[25] described artists as "being like shamans": a person who is regarded as having access and influence in the spirit world, with good and evil spirits. Typically, shamans enter this other world in a trance state during a ritual and practise divination and healing. This is similar to mystical or religious experts who, in some societies, function as healers and custodians of cultural tradition, such as for example in Aboriginal culture. Language can both open and close doors and its skilled or "artful" use can be considered as a bridge. Language is also representative of identity and shifting identities. The key is to go beneath the "veil of language", and behind the "'truth' by politicians". Language can also become "a uniform – we use it to de-individualise". But "poetry and music can open the space". Language of poetry also opens the door to listening in different ways, to hear the human story, to go deep and find the human reality, like being "an archaeologist of the soul".

Bir ağıtsa bu

Olmayan bir *ülkeden* söz ediyorlar Olmayan dilden, kardeşlikten. Konuşma yok
Yok kelimeler.
Anlaşılmak içinse yeryüzü Kim *ölümü* anlatacak Dağların aldığı nefesi *Çöken* karanlığı
Kim anlatacak,
Bir *çocuğun* rüyasında büyüyenleri Kim?
Kuşların kanatları
Eski bir masaldan bana doğru *çırpınıyor* Eski kadınların anlattığı
Tenin taşa yakınlığı.
Belli ki bir ağıtçıyım ben, Karanlık *çöktüğünde*
Dağların *ötesinde*
Kimi ansam bakıyor bana acıyla.
Bu bir ağıtsa
Ağlamak henüz başlamadı.

If This Is a Lament

They speak of a land that never was, a non-existent tongue.
There is no utterance,
No words.
If we're put on earth
To understand each other – Who can make sense of death?
Explain how mountains stole breath, Or translate the darkness
That has fallen?
Who can say what burgeons in a child's dream?
Flapping out of an ancient tale, Birds' wings bear down
On me – and skin
Akin to stone
As the old women used to say. When darkness falls
Beyond the mountains,
The people I remember look to me in pain. My words are elegy.
If this is a lament, we haven't even
Begun to cry.

Poem by Bejan Matur

The potential contributions of poetry and music were cited frequently in the various exchanges as these arts shared an affinity, both being arts of sound and using rhythm as a principle of order in sound. Poetry was offered as concrete intuitions on life and histories "the rehearsal of emotions attached to real things". Speech and language are communication, an utterance from a speaker to a hearer. In the case of speech deployed by mediators, or in ordinary speech, the aim is to effect some change of mind that will lead to an action beneficial to participants in a mediation process. In a sense the peace practitioner's speech is concrete, with the aim to influence and conduct. Poetry can be the

"spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", with the purpose of expressing life for the sake of values. Even when ostensibly directed to a particular person, "a poem has an audience that is really universal". No matter how intimate and spontaneous, no poem can escape being social.

In summary, language was considered as both an enabler and a disabler. Both artists and mediation practitioners agreed on the necessity of ambiguity in the use and interpretation of language, the creative ambiguity where "the aesthetic is happening inside a problem." "What happens? It is about the other, otherness, there is always the other side, always. The thing about literature, the literature brings us to a common centre, no matter where we were born. It is about reimagining a world that people are moved by – what we don't know we can imagine. The power of the story is what I believe in, the transformative power."

## Stories and Narratives

'Storytelling' in various mediums was repeatedly suggested as an entry point for artists. The terms 'narrative' and 'story' were used interchangeably. Some nuances teased out of the discussions elicit important distinctions between those terms. Storytelling in various forms is recognised as an important skill and tool to effect change, raise awareness, and is used even in some forms of strategic communication, for example for fundraising purposes or to advocate for social or political issues. The various means of storytelling proposed involved poetry, music, dance and theatre, and mirrored events of the past to explain history or histories. Oral storytelling is also common in many cultural traditions and a shared entry point for engagement. Storytelling is not just about sharing vignettes and conveying messages. Stories have characters, with a beginning, middle and an end, with a plot, conflict and resolution.

Narratives, however, denote a system of stories, that fit together (more or less) and aim to provide a coherent view of the world based on lived experience, culture and education. "Narratives contain patterns that fit the data of everyday life, explaining how events unfold over time and how one thing causes another."

Stories were likened to "trees that grow from the soil". Many different stories can grow from a shared narrative frame. Within this narrative soil, human interactions are thought of as battles or competitions where individuals or groups pursue divergent interests. Stories that spring from the soil can include, for example, "winners and losers", using the language of war or sport analogies.

A number of contributors called for "a change in narrative" at different levels of the mediation process. Dominant or 'meta' narratives are fundamental to societal underlying attitudes, actions and belief system. Much literature exists on how peacebuilders engage with narratives in different forms. The peacebuilding and conflict resolution field has used academic studies on narrative to foster dialogue and reconciliation initiatives. It has been the subject of interdisciplinary research in anthropology, psychology, sociology and political science. The aim of arts practice is not about combatting toxic narratives but how to assist mediation teams and parties to understand and incorporate different worldviews to create a platform for a jointly constructed and complex dominant narrative towards peaceful coexistence.

The dominant or meta narrative was referred to as the foundation for identity. These narratives affect our beliefs about how we belong to a group or a community and consider others as outsiders. "Many conflicts are based on identity makers of ethnicity". These can be narratives that are repeated over and over again and provide a foundation for an understanding of shared history and events. History is littered with examples of invoking nationalist narratives with devastating consequences. Amongst examples cited was the dominant narrative by Serbia's most ardent nationalists invoking the rebirth of the medieval Serbian kingdom lost to Ottoman Turks at the battle of Kosovo in 1389. This was infamously used by Milosevic in 1989, marking the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo amidst already rising ethnic tensions, whipping up divisions and polarising nationalist sentiments.[26] More recently, the narrative of the 'Proud Boys' in the US came to international attention following the storming of the Capitol on 6 January 2021, driven in part by their belief that white men and Western culture are under siege. Often it is

the narrative frame rather than reality that affects behaviour. Hard data, 'facts' and studies may not be the most effective tool to counter this. The way something is framed and the language used affect attitudes with profound and deep-seated consequences (as in the examples cited above).

The mediation process was equated with a form of narrative engagement as "an act of making meaning together". This is best done through dialogue with intended audiences. Therefore, partnerships with professional storytellers and other creative approaches could be key. Participatory arts practices are distinct from other arts practices and there is an important difference with professional storytellers who are not participatory artists. Participatory storytelling is premised on the belief that everyone has a story to tell.[27] "What is also necessary is to create a platform to maintain ongoing collaborations to reproduce and disseminate narratives towards peace... "Artists can tell stories, but this needs to be a reciprocal process and it is important HOW we listen to stories. The outdated model of communication that there is a sender, a message and a receiver is no longer appropriate. Research has shown that the making of meaning happens not in the message or story itself but 'in the mind of the receiver'.

## CONVERGENCE BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND MEDIATION

Many threads overlapped in both the arts and psychology conversations – a number of which have already been alluded to above. In part this was because participants included a mix of practitioners from the fields of psychology and psychotherapy, the arts and mediation; in part it was also due to the nature of the conversations which considered "the space between", the unexplored capacity, the leeway available for mediators and artists alike, "the scope for play and the intervals, possible lacuna, and omissions". "Participants made the bridge to previous discussions on the role of art in peace mediation processes and the necessity to make the two streams converge".[28]

During the four informal discussions on psychology and mediation, several reflections crisscrossed on the possible contributions of art and psychology to peace mediation, both jointly

and separately. They underline a conjunction of how arts and psychological practice and expertise can be mutually supportive and assist peace mediation processes – in preparation, during the process and in monitoring the implementation of an agreement.

Both streams of conversation emphasised the importance of the need to know about the negotiating party's background and the system that made leaders emerge. We need to ask, "what is driving them?" (as we do about mediators). A conflict analysis should therefore not only be based on the politico-geographic power play at stake, but needs to include questions of identity of the negotiating parties and the psychological terrain of a conflict. At present, there is no adequate psychological analysis of the motivations of parties. Both artists and psychologists expressed a desire to assist in addressing this gap. A tool to help establish this connection is 'strategic empathy', the ability of the mediator to connect with the parties and for the parties to connect with each other.

Other than analysing the psychological state of the adversaries, there is also a need to facilitate the mediator's self-awareness and to be aware of his/her background and mental health. What are the elements which the mediator is picking up emotionally and not just rationally? What is the mediator's 'Achilles' heel'? This is an intersection where participatory arts processes coincide with psychologists. Participatory arts processes have self-reflection implicit within the processes of arts making. Therefore, if mediators are involved alongside those with whom they are mediating, facilitated by skilled artists, there is much to learn through shared reflection.

Other connections that were highlighted included the use of space and in particular "the table" where and how participants are seated – literally and metaphorically,[29] the choreography of space and accompanying notions and dynamics of power, especially regarding the role of the mediator. The notion of space, the complexity of the process and the need to "read the room" require both instinct and expertise on the part of the mediator. Consequently, is the mediator a form of producer? What facilitates communication, how people are seated, the light, the shape

of the table – all this has a psychological and artistic dimension. "Both art and psychology create spaces; artists, mediators and therapists are always 'on the edge' and can reflect things differently. In this sense, both art and psychology create the conditions for working in liminal spaces. Engaging with local artists might help to sense the pulse of citizens in the country and help to begin asking questions we couldn't ask otherwise". At the same time, there is a need to create willingness for participants to be in the space together. Distinctions were drawn between the formal and the informal space – where can artists and mediators meet?

In addition, artistic processes could offer a methodology to assist mediators and contribute to their psychological 'toolkit'. While preparing to engage in complex negotiations, participants underlined that "art has the power to put people in a place of common humanity…". The arts are not there to be 'used' for messaging (instrumentalising), but to help us understand our differences by participating in meaningful exploration of what is important to each of us. To illustrate, in an exchange over the psychological support required in engaging with the (then) Burundian government, the question was posed how "… arts methodology might help to engage Burundian society in a conversation" and finding allies for the mediation practitioner through art: "The question was therefore raised where and who might be allies … (in Burundian society)".[30]

The role of the mediator represented a perpendicular thread in the conversation loom: the power exercised by one person, albeit supported by a mediation team, and being taken seriously by all parties. Psychologically oriented participants emphasised the notion of "the moral third" and the creation of a triangular space. But there are different types of mediators. "There is not one charismatic mediator – that era is over". Mediation models are based on views that human beings are rational beings, but "most mediators use psychology and intuition". Artists interjected with comparisons of the mediator as a "sponge" and whether peacemakers can be likened to the fulcrum or pivot point of a seesaw or to a conductor of an orchestra? The fulcrum or pivot point is the part of the lever that does not move, it is in the middle. The work or force applied to the lever is the person

sitting on the other end of the seesaw. The force that is applied by pushing down or pushing up on one end of the seesaw can substitute for the mass on the other end.

But how neutral or impartial are mediators? The notion of neutrality was repeatedly dismissed by most participants as a myth and "a complete delusion". Many felt that there is a need to unravel and expand conversations around empathy, impartiality, and neutrality. For example, some participants pointed out that it is impossible to be neutral in the face of brutality and that being neutral would mean to stop caring. On the other hand, remaining impartial means to not take sides, to advocate for an outcome and to be empathetic of the aspirations of all parties. Impartiality also implies the ability to remain objective, to be able to distance oneself and to act as an honest broker, focusing on outcomes. Some mediators distinguished the roles of artists and mediation practitioners as "some artists may have a personal stake", such as poets from one or other group. Mediation practitioners are supposed to "come to this in a more impersonal, impartial manner, as trained professionals". The same professionalism will apply to a participatory artist. Not all artists will be able or wish to engage in this work. Artists may be impartial but not impersonal, as artists they have to engage at a personal level.

## Reflective Practices

A critical aspect that emerged was the need for reflective practice to enable mediation practitioners to learn from what happened to develop and improve their future practice. The aim is to enable mediation practitioners to achieve better awareness of themselves, their knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies and their tools.[31] Reflective practice is an established and valued tool among psychiatrists, psychotherapists and general practitioners, and can have a particular value in bringing into focus positions or assumptions that might be operating unconsciously, as well as introducing alternative perspectives when a clinician or mediator feels stuck.

Reflective practice also plays a critical role in arts approaches, especially participatory art. The participatory artist is motivated

by the relational process of working with others – through whichever medium. They choose to be 'listening artists', working with people and their experiences directly. They tend to have carefully examined their motivation and the ethics of reciprocity and reflective practice is core to their work.

One mediation practitioner underlined how he had benefitted from the "outside perspective" of psychologists on his experience and found participants' inputs both revealing and educational. He supported the idea of a "reflective practice" – the offer of informal meetings between mediators and psychologists, giving the former an opportunity to reflect on different stages and challenges of a mediation process in which they are involved. He also suggested that such "sounding boards" can indeed "have a training effect" for the mediator but should be kept informal, and a high level of trust between those involved is essential.

In preparation for exploring the psychological dimensions of mediation with prominent mediation practitioners, questions were developed to provide a framework for conversations.[32] The objective was to define and investigate important, and at times very personal, issues raised by the mediators, such as the "loneliness of the mediator". The enquiry also focused on the potential of art and psychology in a number of aspects: to help out in critical phases; the potential of art and psychology to set up a "common safe space" for mediators and parties; and the way art and psychology might help the mediator to set up, frame and lead the mediation process.

In summary, there was unanimity that a vital contribution could be made to mediation efforts by linking different disciplines – a vertical thread woven through both streams of art and psychology. Talking across disciplines can lead to a translation of concepts and allows "us to understand 'the other'". Without this, "thoughts become rigidified and a person's position hardens, which makes it difficult to move into a more fluid space where compromise is possible". The key challenge here is "to humanise", to get beyond people's facade. Participants felt that art could liberate, and that psychologists lead to better understanding, hence both were part of a circle. "Psychologists and artists can assist by getting people 'unstuck'."

In any form of conflict people become entrenched in repetition, which needs to be "disrupted".

At the same time unorthodox opportunities should be encouraged. Sport was mentioned in several conversations, including those with individual mediators. The (Burundi) case study highlighted a shared interest in football between the Chair of the PBC Burundi Configuration and the Burundian President. Looking for what the mediator and the president had in common as a route to building a meaningful relationship can divert tension and allow for a more human discussion "before returning to 'tricky' issues." Often an arts process and conversations about sport start with exploring what we have in common as human beings who come to the table with significant external differences.

## WHERE DO THE QUALITIES OF ARTISTS, PSYCHOLOGISTS AND MEDIATORS INTERCONNECT AND HOW CAN THEY COLLABORATE?

To conclude with the metaphor of a weaving loom: While the threads of conversations may not at this stage amount to a tapestry, they began to weave a cloth, with a number of loose threads and space to weave more. The discussions were open-ended. This section extracts suggestions and concrete recommendations on how a mediation process can be understood and be made more effective through the arts. The collection of meetings did not develop a formula of how arts and mediation practitioners could collaborate. Many arts practitioners commented that "creativity is not a transferable skill". They expressed concern over being "instrumentalised". "Instrumentalisation happens when an artist is involved in a predefined result." The broad consensus emerged that "one size does not fit all":

"All art is political. The question is to what extent and how do we harness that. It is not possible to come up with … a document that fits all, it has to be bespoke and new. And in some ways, it is allowing for the unknown, the nuances of the unknown, the unlikely friendships that can be forged, as artists, to what extent can we harness that, promote those relationships as well."

A sense emerged that artistic support and interventions could assist the mediator in 'reframing'. Artists "bear witness" and assist in creating "narrative complexity". Engagement with peace narratives cannot be simplistic, where one view is always right, with simple cause and effect and a stable, static context. Artists can pierce through an overreliance on policy arguments and static political discourse. A critical underexplored aspect is a conversation about and with appropriate participants focused on the "creative energy of young people, as this new generation intuitively operates in the milieu of storytelling and content creation".

Some concrete entry points emerged from the conversations (see also *Annex*) and included both immediate and medium-term proposals.

- Initiating a pilot project of an 'artist in residence' in a Track 1 or 1.5 mediation, where the artist could simply follow the discussions without any specific goal. The sole purpose would be that she/he would absorb and feel the atmosphere, report on her/his experience and make suggestions. By providing observations, thoughts and discreet input, a different dynamic will be added, simply by being present and providing commentary in different forms afterwards. To implement this proposal, discussions would need to be held with Track 1 mediators in Geneva – or where appropriate.
- A second, possibly sequential option could be to explore the possibility of artists meeting artists 'from the other sides' as part of the mediation process. This could create a different form of dynamic and interaction.
- It is crucial to find the right artists to work with and the right mediators to work with the artists. A group of carefully chosen artists and mediators should be sought with whom close and long-term relationships can be established.
- To develop an academic network and collaboration with universities who have departments or institutes engaged in conflict resolution, peace mediation etc. Examples suggested were: the London School of Economics (LSE) and the University of Warwick in the UK, or in Zurich in Switzerland – and also to ensure the inclusion of non-Western institutions, such as universities in Somaliland, Ethiopia or Bangladesh, and others to

be determined. During the initial stage, mediators and artists should be given the chance to ask each other questions, untangle their disciplines to find commonalities and differences. Doing so might help both artists and mediators discover new factors to consider and implement in their respective practices. A workshop between artists and mediators could start with an artwork and mediators could be introduced to the creative process behind it.

- If there is an international symposium to take this further, practical workshops should play a prominent part to cover not only the cognitive dimensions of a collaboration between artists and mediators but also to give participants a chance to experience and apply new methods.
- In terms of the areas of convergence between the arts and psychological practice, a space for self-reflection might be provided for mediators and those providing mediation support as "reflective practice". Participants in the exchanges shared several names of mediators to whom a reflective practice session in a safe space could be offered.[33]
- The Embassy of Switzerland in the UK had agreed with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs that this reflective practice would be made available for Human Security Advisers who are implementing the department's peace promotion programmes in the field and who experience difficult situations. Feedback from this experience could be useful.
- To follow up on the recommendations of SOMIC to conduct a pilot study, which will primarily focus on identifying, mapping and conceptualising the psychological components of turning points, blockages and breakthroughs in mediation. The long-term aim would be to identify key psychological concepts, strategies and techniques. One objective would be to develop a psychological 'toolkit' and provide recommendations and training to better equip mediation practitioners.
- Some outstanding questions and issues that should be addressed going forward are:
    - Have we exhausted existing tools and means for peacebuilding?
    - Can arts practitioners assist with the issue of translation and interpretation – and if so, how?
    - Do we need a new generation of mediators with different ways of working?

- How can mediation processes better harness the creative energy and understanding of younger people? How can arts practitioners help?
- What does it feel like to be mediated on? How can artists assist in exploring this underexplored aspect?

As a final remark, it would be pre-emptive to draw conclusions based on the exchanges over the past six years conducted in various forums and through diverse mediums. Many seeds have been sown and the shoots are yet to emerge. This chapter is a perspective on a complex and at times patchy process. Many more loose threads could be added (depending on the weaver), such as probing the importance of empathy or identity, or the understanding of time and the time frame of the mediation process and of artistic design. The aim of this chapter is to provide a platform and a setting, from which conversations and interactions can continue to move forward.

NOTES

1 Chronology of meetings: The confidential dinner discussions pursuing *Arts in Peace Mediation* (AiPM) involved the Colloquium in 2015 in Geneva (see Chapter 2: *Art in Mediation – Recollections and Reflections from a Colloquium,* author: Dagmar Reichert, Director of *artasfoundation*) and two dedicated dinner discussions in London. In preparation and to inform the research report (see Chapter 4: *Art and Artistic Practices in Peace Mediation,* author: Isabel Käser, academic consultant to the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK, 2020), three Zoom workshops in 2019 focused on AiPM, co-hosted by the lead researcher and the director of *artasfoundation.* The *artasfoundation* organised seven webinars online between March and November 2021. To explore the potential role psychologists could play in supporting mediation processes, four dedicated dinner discussions were hosted at the Embassy of Switzerland in London. The Birkbeck College *States of Mind in Conflict* (SOMIC) followed its own methodology, including interviews with mediators and focus groups. (See Chapter 5: *Making Links while Building Bridges: Reflections from the SOMIC Project,* author: Irene Bruna Seu).
2 The Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and to the other international organisations in Geneva
3 See Chapter 3
4 From 13 November 2018.
5 The *States of Mind in Conflict* (SOMIC) project was launched in August 2020 and is based in the Centre for Researching & Embedding Human Rights at Birkbeck, University of London. SOMIC is a pilot study seeking to identify where a psychological perspective can help to enhance the insight and efficacy of conflict mediators.
See Chapter 5 for some of the findings.
6 Still to be confirmed
7 *artasfoundation* explores whether artistic ways of relating to the world – through art or artists – can contribute to peacebuilding. It initiates and implements art projects in conflict-affected regions, investigates whether art can support the work of peace-mediators, and conducts research on art in peace-building (www.artasfoundation.ch).
8 Between April – November 2021.
9 The author was both an observer and an active participant since 2018.
10 Outline of definitions: Track one: An instrument of foreign policy for the establishment and development of contacts between the governments of different states through the use of intermediaries mutually recognized by the respective parties.
Track 2: Unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, to influence public opinion, organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflicts.
Track 1.5: Diplomatic initiatives that are facilitated by unofficial bodies, but directly involve officials from the conflict in question.
Track 3: Mostly informal interactions involving local leaders, e.g. community developers, grassroots NGOs, local peace committees, community mediation programmes, insider-mediators.
11 See Annex: *Chronology of Gatherings and Recommendations*.
12 Webinar conversation 12 May 2021 devoted to the theme of trust – reflecting many aspects of the confidential discussions at the embassy of Switzerland and the 2015 Colloquium.
13 Embassy of Switzerland London, 3 April 2019.
14 From Summary Report of Meeting, 3 April 2019.
15 Webinar, 12 May 2021.
16 Webinar, 24 March 2021.
17 For a more detailed examination on feminisation, see Chapter 4: *Art and Artistic Practices in Peace Mediation,* Isabel Käser.
18 Webinar, 24 March 2021.
19 One to gratify the interests of party A and the other to gratify the interests of party B.
20 The *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* is an intergovernmental agreement, prepared under the umbrella of the United Nations, led by the Swiss Government, signed on 19 December 2018, drafted 13 July 2018. Described as covering "all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner".
21 In September 1993, Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles of Palestinian Self-Rule, the first agreement between the two sides and the initial document in what became generally known as the Oslo Accords. They comprised a series of agreements and the second, the Cairo Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho, was signed in May 1994.

22 Adopted on 10 April 1998.
23 Unionists favoured maintenance of links between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom whereas the Irish nationalists favoured integration of Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland.
24 Reference was made on several occasion to Dan Bar-On's book on exploring trauma *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable, Reconstructing Human Discourse After Trauma,* published 1999, Central European University Press.
25 Bejan Matur is a Kurdish poet, writer and journalist. She has won several literary prizes and has written extensively on Armenian issues, minority problems and women's issues.
26 The Gazimestan speech was given on 28 June 1989 by Slobodan Milošević, then president of Serbia, at the Gazimestan monument on the Kosovo field. It was the centrepiece of a day-long event to mark the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, which was fought at the site in 1389.
27 See François Matarasso, *A Restless Art – How participation won and why it matters,* published by Central Books, 19 January 2019.
28 Minutes of Discussion at Embassy of Switzerland in London, 19 April 2019.
29 Colloquium, May 2015 – see Chapter 3.
30 Minutes of 2 April 2019 meeting, Embassy of Switzerland in London.
31 Embassy of Switzerland Meeting, 13 November 2019, Psychology in Mediation.
32 Conversations with a senior mediation practitioner and a UN Diplomat – *Minutes of Steering Committee Meetings.*
33 Note: Invitations had been extended to other mediation practitioners, but these plans were curtailed because of Covid-19 restrictions.

# Hives

## Brigham Baker

With a text by Dagmar Reichert

Soon after the colloquium *Art in Mediation* in June 2015, I came across a work by the American artist Brigham Baker, an installation with which he graduated from the Zurich University of the Arts. It consisted of three closed glass boxes set up in a room, each divided into an upper and lower half; the two halves were connected by a partly worn sheet of blue paper. Within each of the two halves was a small loudspeaker, which directed most of the sound to the spaces inside the glass. From the outside I could hear only a hum. On a card I read: *Hive, 2015. Dyed newspapers, glass, exciters.* It seemed that the hum was the busy noise of insects. What struck me was the blue paper that lay between the spaces at the top and bottom. Why was it there? Why was it so frayed? What had been the process that had marked it with these traces and holes? Maybe it was because my mind was still busy with our colloquium, I immediately interpreted this work as referring to peace mediation. Later I found what the artist had written about his work:

"When beekeepers need to merge two separate beehives into one, a common technique is to place the two bee boxes on top of each other with only one single sheet of newspaper in between them. This barrier allows the two beehives to become familiar with each other's sound and smell, and over time, the bees will chew their way through the newspaper. The result is one single, combined hive. Without the newspaper, the two hives would likely attack each other.

For my work, international newspapers were dyed with blue food colouring diluted in 'Bee Tea', a mixture of herbs... They were given to various beekeepers in Switzerland… and were later collected again. Along with the holes are traces of nectar, pollen, and wax on the surface. They are placed in glass boxes, made to scale with the bee boxes... The sounds are recordings from the separate beehives that were combined in the project".

Was the blue paper in the position of a mediator, trying to unite two parties who would otherwise fight? Or, if not a person and being so worn, did the blue paper represent traces of a process of negotiation and convergence, a document that signified coming to an agreement? Or rather than mediation between two conflicting parties, which we had talked about in our colloquium, did the blue paper epitomise our colloquium itself, the meeting not of opponents, but of two 'colonies', artists and peace-mediators, who were strangers to each other, even though both were of the same species? And the traces on the blue paper: were they a kind of recollection and reflection of their meeting? And did the humming in the closed boxes suggest the discrete exchanges of a diplomatic process, or past conversations of a colloquium on art in mediation…?

Pages 49 and 51: Brigham Baker, Elements of the Installation "Hive", 2015

Unternehmen

Zahlen beschert Hamburg hohe Dividende

Auf der Flucht

2

# Art in Mediation

## Recollections and Reflections from a Colloquium

Dagmar Reichert

On 29 May 2015, fourteen persons met and enjoyed the beautiful environment and warm hospitality of Villa Frontenex-Saladin in Geneva.[1] They had been invited by Ambassador Alexandre Fasel, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the Office of the United Nations in Geneva (2013–2016), to consider both potential contributions of art to peace-mediation processes, and possible triggers for art to be elicited from peace mediation. Dagmar Reichert from the Swiss Foundation *artasfoundation* had organised the meeting and both she and Ambassador Fasel shared the belief that these seemingly separate fields had much in common and could strengthen each other through collaboration. The meeting was an experiment and a first attempt of its kind.

One of the basic premises for the organisers was to avoid role stereotypes and the trap of false representation. Nobody should be regarded as a representative of a collective or category when speaking as a person. Therefore, the colloquium did not start with 'Artists' vs. 'Mediators', but with two mixed working groups where participants told each other about their current activities and difficulties they encountered in their work. As the groups engaged in their stimulating exchanges, participants tried to formulate principles and guidelines implicit in their respective practices. When excerpts of these conversations were reported later to the other group, a consensus emerged swiftly that "artists and mediators should really work together". The second round of groupwork focused on how to begin and to structure such a collaboration in practice. Ideas were consolidated in the final plenary when participants formulated concrete proposals for collaboration between artists and mediators.

The atmosphere of the meeting was amicable and stimulating even though many participants had not known each other before. Alexandre Fasel captured this when he thanked the participants:

"I would like to express my warm thanks for your valuable contributions to the colloquium. It is my feeling that the quality and fluidity of contacts between the participants, as well as the interest you expressed towards one another and towards each other's experience, went beyond the usual sharing. The discussions were nourished by your human qualities and high level of expertise. As a person coming from the mediation side, what particularly struck me was the level of curiosity and the quality of listening on behalf of the artists, their sharp insights and the degree of precision with which they

described what they were doing. It is my impression that, as a result of the discussions, we are beginning to depict what the ground for collaboration between art and mediation might look like – that it grasped 'something' that could grow."

To support this growth and the next steps in a collaboration of artists and peace-mediators, the following sections recall some of the thoughts and ideas of this initial encounter.

## Meeting in 'Blind Spots'?

Old unresolved questions and new options can emerge within established routines when explaining the practices and challenges of one's work to interested outsiders – in this case, people active in the field of peace-mediation explaining their work to artists.

For example, what is the role of language in a mediation process? Is it language itself that mediates between conflicting parties? And if so, does language mediate in a different way than mediators? Language certainly has its own integral biases and values. As noted by one participant of the colloquium, the language that is used in negotiation processes usually has "the conflict built into it". This can be illustrated by the familiar dilemma of how to challenge discrimination by racial or religious distinction without using and reinforcing these very categories. Do mediators have to be less biased than the language they use? One mediator described one of the difficulties: "In reality it is often pretty clear from the outset what can count as a result of the talks, and what the result should be".

What is the language of mediation? Communicating in English, French or Spanish seems to be common, whereas information contained in glances, body movements and facial expressions, in the rhythm and tone of voice, while still considered significant, seems more difficult to capture. Yet, these are the very channels of communication familiar to some artists.

In the realm of mediation and in the language of words and sentences, what happens in the transition between spoken and written words, for example the written words of a treaty? Does this transition represent the crucial move in a mediator's craft?

Is it a move of 'pinning down' or one of a series of tangential contacts? It is interesting that the focus here is not on how to conceal unresolved issues in vague formulas, but on how to find words that capture the agreement in a precise and correct way, while allowing breathing space for the valuable potential of an unforeseeable future. How can one convey in the paragraphs of a legal contract the spirit of trust and goodwill (however minimal) that the parties were able to build up during their meetings? One participant pointed to the stylistic differences between the preamble and the operational paragraphs of a contract: a joint effort, perhaps, of poets and lawyers.

What is the significance of the table in mediated negotiations? Most seem to take place around a table, if not at the beginning, then soon after. Apart from its practical function, a table is also an important equalising symbol. It places all participants at the same level even though their position and leverage in the negotiation may be quite different. It is unsurprising that it can be difficult to "bring them to the table" and to convince conflicting parties to meet on an equal basis, on one level of humanity, despite differences in power, activities or intentions. If the table can be seen as an embodiment of the idea of mediation, could a carpet be even more appropriate for this idea – and actually for the practice? Even when coming from other cultures, many representatives of opposing parties are familiar with western lifestyles; hence sitting around a table may not be unusual. But why should positions, viewpoints and distances be fixed when their transformation is at the essence of the process? One participant, familiar with the possibility offered by dance, asked: what does the convention of sitting around a table really allow, and what does it hinder or exclude?

Another theme that arose is confidentiality, which seems to be a basic element in a mediator's' practice. Does it delineate a special, experimental space in which negotiating parties can say and try things out before they become "real" in the eyes and ears of their constituencies or opponents? This seemed to ring true, and such a framing would then also be familiar to artists, who mark their *Spielraum* by the edge of the stage or the border of an image and separate it in this way from the norms and roles of everyday life. Could artists 'lend' such experimental spaces to others?

At the same time some mediators also questioned their own convention of confidentiality, saying that if talks were more public it would be difficult to hide a political agenda, the agenda of a negotiating party or of other parties who might be involved. The stated aim of a mediation process is to present it as a neutral process, but in many cases the reality is that there is a political agenda behind supporting a mediation process and sending mediators to it.

## Reasons to Cooperate

Some of the blind spots in the practices and customs of the profession of peace-mediators may become visible in conversation with artists and – although this was not further elaborated on – equally, one would hope that such exchanges could enable people from the art world to realise the limiting conventions and alternatives in their own practice. But did the colloquium bring up other reasons for a possible integration of artists in mediation processes?

"We might be victims of our own success", one of the mediators said; "with increasing professionalisation, certain methods have become established, expectations have been formed, and our ways of proceeding feel often quite narrow". Here, art-based approaches can create new openings, but, as another participant said, they need not necessarily come from artists. There are mediators who just practise learned skills, but there are others who can rely on experience to follow their inspiration and who work in a way that could be called artistic. Therefore, it would not be particularly special if artists only contributed a "licence to be creative". What was really needed were special art-related competencies to expand the existing methodological repertoire.

One participant listed several situations that demanded such a broadening of the repertoire for peace-making: a critical challenge in a mediation process is often whether the mediator manages to "unlock the egos". This means bringing people from a mode of fighting and distrust to one of openness in which they can see others as potential partners, and being able to unlock fixed views and positions towards possible transformation. These turning points can become possible by what

happens outside the negotiation room. One of the many anecdotes where mediators recollected successful confidence-building measures concerns an occasion when adversaries at the dinner table, after some drinking, ended up singing songs they remembered from their communist youth camps. Leaving a highly pressured sphere, and meeting in another realm, a realm in which right or wrong is not at issue, in which one may differ in taste or not … this is the sphere that art could offer – even within a negotiation room. One mediator gave the example of inviting the participants around the table to describe a present stalemate by choosing and commenting on a photograph from a series provided. Such an innovative approach could be supported by the skills of a visual artist, working with pictures, able to provide images that counter (media) stereotypes, and invite reactions and leave space for a variety of interpretations.

## Moments of Art

Some challenges for peace-mediation in armed conflicts may stem from the difficulty of being able to resolve deep conflicts by using the mediator's established repertoire of methodological tools. As one participant explained, these involve legal argument and a very specific rationality, emphasising that there is a lot at stake in these negotiations and the pressure is often very high. Mediation would be a political process that would follow political demands and might be of another nature than activities in which personal or momentary needs matter instead, making it difficult to find an opening. The speaker underlined that mediation processes are highly ritualised and often about power, and therefore saw a significant difference from artistic practice, as artists could freely define new rules and change these rules as part of their work process. Another participant who shared this view added:

"Even under the conditions of high pressure that we face when mediating in an armed conflict, and even when certain rules have to be clearly set and accepted from the outset, there are many rules that have to change and many fixed ideas that have to be transformed. For such transformations we may need moments of art."

The concept of "moments of art" could be useful as it describes situations where new experiences or impressions can dissolve established concepts and re-form them. Even if artists may be more used to allowing such situations to occur, this concept might

overcome the rigid distinction between artists and non-artists. It could describe moments of another type of rationality, which can be found in the work of artists and mediators alike. In a short presentation to the colloquium, the author described some of the characteristics of this other type of rationality, a so-called 'aesthetic rationality':

The notion of aesthetic rationality comes from the philosophy of art and describes a special way of relating to the world and to one's surroundings. As in the practice of mediators, who want to serve their parties by being 'good listeners', it is a way of stepping back from intending something specific, and rather focusing on what one perceives: noticing – while trying to grasp what it is about – all the irritations and contradictions that make it difficult to capture what is meant; treating these irritations and contradictions not as something to be rid of, but as engines for change, and using one's authority to welcome them; upholding with one's personality a safe space for uncertainty, and trying to "put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words". Proceeding through an aesthetic rationality could perhaps explain what is meant by "moments of art".

## Cultivating Moments of Art

Even if an opportunity for moments of art may already appear in processes of peace-mediation, and even if such moments can be created by mediators themselves, artists could support their cultivation. One of the working groups proposed a list of hypotheses as to where and how artists, or their art, might usefully be introduced.

Some of these points were taken up and further explained in the plenary discussion:

- Art for atmosphere: the presence of artworks or a live art performance could create an atmosphere in a conference room. Forms of art that are particularly respected in the cultures of the negotiating parties, such as culturally-specific forms in poetry, music or calligraphy would be especially relevant.
- Artists as "muses of mediators": artists could be invited as conversation-partners for mediators when they are preparing or

reflecting on the process. Artists would not be present during the actual negotiations but might contribute questions or observations from their professional perspective and that of an interested outsider. They might encourage and consult mediators who want to try new methods and work with wider forms of expression.

- Artists mirroring the process: artists could be part of the mediation support team and be present in the conference room. At the end of the day during the mediation team meeting, artists could mirror the negotiation process from the perspective of an engaged outsider. One participant cited an example of the potential of creating distance and detachment by mirroring: a political conversation had been recorded and transcribed for a theatre production, and when it was read by some actors, it was heard in a very different way.
- Just art: trusted artists could be invited to present a work or to perform at certain moments during negotiations. Timing would be important, and mediators should not attach a specific a priori intention to the artistic intervention. They would treat it instead as a punctuation that could permit a shift and a fresh start.
- Artists as witnesses: with the explicit agreement of the negotiating parties, artists could be invited to witness the talks. They could be free to just be present and remain silent. Their mere presence could have a liberating effect on the dynamics, and participants in the room might allow themselves more freedom in expression. Alternatively, artists could offer an impression of the conversation through their art. Such a response could be spontaneous and improvised (music, dance), or created outside the room and brought back in later. But their contribution should not be made public without the mediator's consent.
- Artists as a bridge: based on the assumption that artists may have a different, possibly closer relationship to 'the people', they could serve as a bridge between them and their official representatives in the negotiation room. Artists could thereby reinforce members of civil society who might take part, and support their arguments through presentations by using other media or formats, such as storytelling or video presentations.
- "The artist is present": a trial run was mooted as a possibility, whereby an artist is invited into a mediation-support team or a negotiation process. The principal aim would be for both artists and mediators to determine what a meaningful contribution of an artist could be. An actual artistic intervention would not be necessary, but neither would it be necessarily excluded.

All participants of the colloquium considered this last option as a useful and concrete first step. The artists present expressed a strong interest in learning more about the practice of mediation, perhaps first as observers of a training workshop for mediators, before having to meet specific expectations. It was also important for them that in order to make a meaningful contribution, this collaboration – whether in a mirroring function, as witnesses or conversation partners – should be a continuous process, planned as such, and not merely a one-time visit. Now the next step is to take action and make concrete plans.

1 The author thanks Andrea Aeby and Andrea Saemann for taking notes of the colloquium's conversations and Nicola Dahrendorf for editing the present text.

3

# Art and Artistic Practices in Peace Mediation

## Building Common Ground and Creating "Ah-hah Moments"[1]

Isabel Käser

## Introduction

"Too often artists are called at celebrations, inaugurations, and victories, or when leaders' decisions need to be blessed, or when group and national ethos need to be solidified and sentiments of loyalty and allegiance affirmed, or when national grief needs to be expressed. Rarely, if ever, when faced with large-scale life-and-death issues do leaders invite artists – from musicians and poets to painters, filmmakers, and playwrights – to respond imaginatively from within their disciplines to the challenges they face as leaders. Yet in the aftermath of the events that follow, it is often the artist who penetrates the deeper essence of humanity's plight. Why not in the foremath? Why must politics be a field of human activity that relies almost exclusively on cognitive understandings of complex realities and by virtue of its self-definition limits its capacity to imagine whole new possibilities and insights?"[2]

John Paul Lederach, known for his pioneering work in conflict transformation, both as a practitioner and an academic, is calling on mediators to make space for artists in mediation. He argues that this could lead to "significant ah-hah [...] moments that penetrate complexity in the form of breakthrough insights", and could nurture attentiveness to individual and group intuition.[3] Similarly, *Peacebuilding and the Arts,* a recent publication that brings together academics and practitioners, argues that peace processes should be adapted and expanded to include filmmakers, musicians, artists, and writers because "[a]rtists and creators can be among those who 'train to wage peace' and contribute to processes of education, communication and healing in the service of peace".[4]

These insights speak to some of the questions the project *Arts in Peace Mediation* has been exploring since 2015,[5] asking in what ways art and peacemaking intersect and how these synergies could be harnessed more actively in formal mediation processes. Clearly, cultural and artistic elements are already being used successfully in post-agreement processes of reconciliation and dealing with the past.[6] There is a widespread consensus among practitioners who work with artists and artistic practices, often on the civil society (Track 2) level, that art has the power to shift perspectives, humanise the other, and create a common ground upon which a vision for a shared future can be built. This is often not the case in formal (Track 1) mediation processes, particularly in the 'West',[7] where political and technical formats dominate. Depending on the context, however, (insider) mediators[8] have been using artistic elements such as poetry for hundreds of years.[9] Moreover, most of the mediators who were

interviewed for this report have a set of tools and mechanisms they employ to make sure they respond to the cultural specificities of a geopolitical context and try to bring those into the mediation process. However, art as an expression of culture is not systematically being used in formal mediation processes and its potential remains underexplored.[10] Many mediators named a lack of trust, time, or funding as reasons for this.[11] Yet, most respondents also acknowledged that the 'old way of doing things' often does not lead to sustainable results and that, given the changing nature and increasing number of protracted conflicts and civil wars, innovation in the field of mediation is much needed.[12]

The aim of this research project was to investigate the potential for including art and artistic practices in formal peace negotiations, during the different tasks of a mediation process: humanising, analysing, mediating, and implementing. It tested the hypothesis that an engagement with art might not only lead to making peace processes more innovative but also more accessible for a wider range of stakeholders, particularly women and communities otherwise marginalised during formal talks. In order to make this intervention, this study asks; in what way can artists and artistic or cultural practice aid mediation processes? At which point during the multi-track negotiations can the inclusion of artistic practice make an impact? What methods need to be developed so that mediators and artists benefit from a systematic exchange?

Based on the interviews conducted and the literature consulted, this report finds that depending on the context, art and artistic practices already are an integral part of how mediation works. However, these processes are often not formalised but an intuitive part of how mediators work and how people relate with each other. The question that remains, then, is if and how established Track 3 processes and localised knowledge can be transferred into Track 1, and what mechanisms have to be created so that the potential of art and artistic practices becomes available to a wider community of mediators and peace practitioners?

## Scope and Method

This research report sketches out the intersections between art and peacemaking, or how art and artistic practices can help foster common ground upon which negotiations can take place. In order to do this, three themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with 65 mediators, artists, academics and practitioners in the field of conflict resolution are discussed: timing, power and access. The report then outlines ways in which art and artistic practices are already being used in mediation and discusses some of the possible pitfalls. There is currently no qualitative ethnographic research that analyses the potential of art in the formal Track 1 and 2 negotiation processes, which is why this report is mostly based on interviews. The mediation experts consulted for this report are based in different geographies and disciplines: some are special envoys, others insider mediators. Most of the artists interviewed come from a region with a history of conflict or have produced work in a 'conflict landscape'. The interviewees were asked to elaborate on their practice, their experience with 'art in mediation', their views on potential openings in formal mediation processes for more artistic engagement, and how they assess the potential and challenges of working with artistic practice and artists, or mediation and mediators respectively. These interviews were semi-structured and often developed into a conversation or a brainstorming session, evolving around the question of how these experts could imagine art playing a more central role in formal mediation processes.

## Timing and Funding: Not If, But How and When is the Question

"In a peace process everything is possible, but everything depends on timing", Julian Hottinger, who is deployed as a mediation and facilitation expert on assignments for the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, emphasised:

"Cultural events can be introduced when you have built trust, but how and when you sequence them is key. It is up to the parties how far they want to go and how receptive they are. If you only have 2–3 weeks to hash out a ceasefire agreement, you are not going to work with artists, it's too risky and the funders will not allow it. The longer processes, which take up to 3–5 years are the ones where you can introduce these elements. At the same time, most mediators, when they hear about your project, will say: God damn, I don't have the time."[13]

With this, Hottinger summarises some of the key issues when thinking about the intersections of art and mediation: timing, funding, trust, and context. Peace mediation is comprised of a series of issues, a mosaic-like effort with lots of smaller sub-activities taking place at the same time to eventually lead to a greater whole. There are no processes that are only Track 1 processes, and every type of mediation, e.g. mediation support, has different phases (pre, during, post) and operates on different tracks (government, professional, civil society). The formal negotiation is only a very short and highly stylised moment in the mediation process as a whole. Usually, the real negotiations take place elsewhere, either in the corridors of the hotels where the conflict parties are meeting, or in a different setting all together. In Yemen, for example, the men meet and discuss the real issues at Qat sessions.[14] During the formal technical negotiations, ceasefire agreements, demobilisation and reintegration are being discussed. In the thematic mediation, parties have to agree on issues around autonomy, power sharing, transitional justice, dealing with the past, gender-based violence, land restitution, refugees, and political participation.

Who will pay for artmaking in this highly tense and stylised environment? This was another recurring concern that came up in the interviews; however, as the examples discussed below illustrate, creative ways can be found to include moments of art or artists in the process. Mirko Manzoni, the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy to Mozambique stressed that the timing of conflict parties and the mediation team often does not correspond: "We often want to close negotiations faster than the parties would like and they do not accept our timing. […] But still, anybody will pay [for artmaking] if you can justify it".[15] Mô Bleeker, a special envoy at the Human Security Division in Bern, who spent many years working on peace processes in Columbia and the Philippines, among others, argued that cultural practices could contribute to cathartic moments before and after to create a "conducive environment" for the mediation to take place.[16]

During the interviews with mediators and artists, it became evident that cultural and artistic elements are always 'there' but need to be brought consciously into the process. In Columbia, for example, culture and multiple forms of artistic expressions were

part of the mobilisation for the peace process and, as a result, there was an eruption of artistic activity in the public sphere that in many instances of deadlock helped the process to regain momentum. Through these cultural initiatives, the real human cost of violence became tangible, and it became very difficult for the parties to continue justifying the continuation of the war against an 'enemy', while thousands of civilians were bearing the brunt of the conflict. "Parties were shocked by what the victims told them, it somehow deconstructed the 'just cause' justification".[17] Simultaneously, there was a surge of memory museums and art productions, which were supported by regional and national governments. The Historical Memory Centre[18] sent victims to the negotiation process to convey their messages to the negotiating parties, some through poetry, others through short films.[19] Asked whether mediators are receptive to these kinds of methods, Mô Bleeker replied: "I would say that in general, women mediators would be much more inclined to use these kinds of methods."

## Power Hierarchies – Or Making Women Count

Women have always played key roles in both war and peacemaking but have traditionally been excluded from the formal spaces of negotiations. The UN Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, following the landmark 1325 UN Resolution in 2000, called for the adoption of a gender perspective, which considers the special positioning of women and girls during and after conflict and to enhance women's roles in peace negotiations.[20] Over the last twenty years women's activism through political institutions and local communities, advocacy, litigation and scholarship have been instrumental in securing the progressive development of this resolution, in order to ensure equal rights for women to be included at all levels of peacemaking. Yet, transformation has been slow and women, especially minority women and LGBTIQ+ people, continue to be excluded from mainstream peacemaking initiatives or included only in small numbers.[21]

Women not only face a number of challenges on their way to the negotiation table, but also in peace and security institutions themselves. Miriam Bensky, who used to work for the HD Centre and is now an independent mediation advisor, argued in a recent article that:

"Every woman working in peace and security is familiar with the unsettling feeling of being the only woman in a meeting room, either overlooked or ogled as new prey. #Metoo has not reached the peace and security field yet, but the absence of publicly reported harassment cases should be read as a sign of feared retaliation rather than vindication. Male leaders in this field are known to recommend to each other female employees with praise such as 'cast-iron ability to keep her mouth shut'. Some speak of their staff as 'hunters' and 'gatherers,' as a way of distinguishing between those who do frontline fieldwork (men) and those who better focus on administering projects in headquarters (women). The replication of a traditional 1950s household is the model for many peace and security projects in 2020."[22]

Bensky further refers to a report conducted by the Geneva Graduate Institute and UN Women, which shows that the inclusion of women in peace processes does not per se increase the likelihood that more peace agreements are signed and successfully implemented. What makes a difference, however, is the roles women play and the influence they have on a process. "In short, making women's participation count is more important than merely counting the number of women included in peace processes."[23] This critique by feminist academics and practitioners is relevant for this project because they demonstrate the shortcomings and inadequacies in the workings of peace and security institutions. As one of the main goals of this project was to make mediation more transparent and inclusive through the inclusion of artistic practices, it is key to link this effort to the already existing work, often led by women mediators, politicians and academics.

In recent years, several women mediator networks have been established, in an effort to make women count and to challenge the patriarchal structures that prop up peace and security organisations.[24] During this study, 18 members of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) and the Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth Network (WMC) have been interviewed and asked about their mediation practice, how they use creativity, and how their gender influences their work. It is important to note that this focus on women mediators does not seek to reproduce the old trope that equates men with war and women with peace and depicts women as the natural, often passive mother or peacemaker. Instead, this report asks whether women, due to their special positioning in society and distinct points of access, are more inclined to use creative and artistic tools to make their demands visible and their voices heard. Overall, it emerged that women mediators use artistic and creative

practices to amplify the voices of those otherwise unheard, to cross the conflict lines in a non-threatening way, to gain support for the peace process in wider society, and to heal as a community. Moreover, women see great potential in using artistic tools as a form of communicating what happens in Track 1 negotiations and at the level of Track 3 community engagement, where women's activities are usually sidelined to.[25] In what follows, the example of Cameroon will briefly be discussed to demonstrate how art is being used on a daily basis by women mediators and their allies and how art has the potential to transcend the boundaries between formal and informal, between pre-during-and-after conflict stages.

Cameroon: The Bakassi conflict is an ongoing insurgency which sees Nigeria and Cameroon fight over the border region of Bakassi. In 2006, Nigeria signed the Greentree Agreement, which marked the formal transfer of authority in the region, and the Nigerian Army partly withdrew from Bakassi. The move was opposed by many Bakassians who considered themselves Nigerians, as a result of which they started to arm themselves in July 2006. Since then, sporadic clashes have occurred in Bakassi. In this conflict landscape, women are subjected to gender-based violence such as rape, incest and kidnapping. "Peacebuilding is about the common woman who is in the village but women there were not listened to. So we had to find a way so that the politicians and diplomats would get the message: we want peace in Bakassi", Esther Omam, a Cameroonian mediator recounted:

"We organised a lot of workshops with the women where we taught them how to turn their grievances into lyrics, music, and a dance. In 2014, on the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Cameroon, a lot of heads of states and diplomats were travelling to Buea. We bussed 100 women from Bakassi, both Nigerian and Cameroonians, to Buea to perform their song in front of everyone that mattered in Cameroon. Imagine, 100 women singing and marching!"[26]

Asked about the effects this initiative had Omam replied: "They became the stars with their message of peace. Most importantly, when the rebels and the military forces saw how much support we have with their women, things calmed down. Some of the women are mayors now, others are senators." And most importantly, the renewed cycle of conflict in Cameroon has not entered Bakassi "because of the work we have done there", Omam reiterated.

At the end of these interviews, the women mediators were asked to what extent their gender impacts their work. The consensus among them was that women try to think creatively because they know that in so many instances 'classical' mediation tools don't work. Furthermore, it was emphasised that women often have to work a lot harder and be more skilful to be taken seriously. Mossarat Qadeem, a mediator in Pakistan who uses artistic tools such as storytelling and poetry to mediate between extremist groups stressed that "as a woman mediator in Pakistan, I have to know the history, culture and the religious references better than the men, in order to be listened to and be able to create a shared language".[27] Visaka Dharmadasa, a mediator in Sri Lanka further argued that women have to have more innovative tools because men have already been hired and get paid, whereas women have to be more vigilant, strong and effective to achieve the same status.[28] "In the end it is about trust", Bebhinn McKinley and Sara Cook, two mediators from Northern Ireland stated "Sometimes people trust you more because you are a woman and sometimes less. But if they do trust you, they will engage in well-thought-out and carefully planned creative endeavours under your watch."[29]

## Access: Building Trust, Credibility, and Momentum

Under certain circumstances, artistic practices or specific artists can help to negotiate access to conflict parties. Jeremy Brickhill, a Zimbabwean mediator who has worked on security transitions in many African countries, including as a Senior Advisor for Security Sector Planning in Somalia recounted his experience when working in Somaliland in the 1990s:

"I was called to work on an UNDP-funded project to figure out DDR in Somaliland. At first, I was trapped in a UN compound, which gave me no access to the population or the militias I was supposed to work with. I escaped from the compound as often as I could, I needed to understand the place. If you don't understand the people you are dealing with, if you don't try to go deeper into their cultures and their customs, if you just stay in the hotel, you have no real way of understanding how you can facilitate a mediation, you are operating in a void. After a while, I understood that this was a society in which poets and poetry was the most significant cultural element. There had been no written language 20 years earlier, the poet had the role of the news reader and the historian and was absolutely critical. I put together a team of experts, former guerrillas from Zimbabwe that I housed in a base of our own, and I included a guerrilla poet from Zimbabwe."[30]

The UN did not respond kindly to the request to have a poet on the team, after which Brickhill relabelled him as a "heavy weapons specialist". "He became the most important member of my team. Wherever we went we took flour, sugar and tea, we said we've come to stay with you. And we have a poet here, we have come to share some of our experience and our poetry with you." He reiterated that in order to get access they had to do something unusual which would give them a reputation and gain the respect of the militias:

"You have to create a basis for respect, gain access, and build a reputation that enables you to be taken seriously. We were ex-guerrillas too, we could tell them about the battles we fought, bond over the weapons we both had, but the key thing was the cultural access. That poetry gave us the respect and helped us to gain public influence and momentum for the process."

Aside from building common ground through poetry, in their DDR efforts, Brickhill and his team started a campaign with women's groups, who were selling tea at tea stands. "Women were not armed so no one was taking them seriously. We asked them to put a 'no arms sign' outside the kiosk with agreement that they would not sell tea to anyone who was armed. We also organised music and poetry festivals."[31] The measures taken and described here by Brickhill prepared the ground for and eventually led to the establishment of a representative national coalition between 20 militia groups and the government.

How and when exactly do mediators facilitate that encounter so that it comes across in a non-contrived manner? The following example from Mozambique further demonstrates the importance of making a diversity of voices audible through creative means.

Mozambique: Artists play an integral role in society in Mozambique, and already during the Mozambican Civil War (1977–1992) it was artistic practices at the grassroots that prepared the ground on which peace (Rome General Peace Accords, 1992) was eventually built. Anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom found that "average citizens unmade the possibility and the power of violence, and in doing so set the stage for peace". For Nordstrom, it was not through the work of international news organisations nor through the efforts of United Nations troops, but

through locally produced plays, prose, poetry and pictures that Mozambicans themselves created the conditions for peace.[32] In the aftermath of this conflict a number of art projects were initiated which saw the decommissioned weapons, collected since the end of the civil war, made into artwork, such as the Throne of Weapons,[33] or the Tree of Life.[34] When violence flared up again in 2013 and 2015, artists again played a key role in the peace process. Neha Sanghrajka, Senior Political Advisor to the Peace Process in Mozambique, recounted how she and her team came to collaborate with local artists during the last mediation process, which resulted in the signing of a peace deal in 2019:

"You have to identify who the driving force in a country is. It might be religious leaders; it might be the private sector. In Mozambique the civil society is not strong, but the religious community is powerful, and similarly, for the young people it is music and art. In the beginning, we reached out to key people of the art fraternity and they used their networks to get the message across. We worked with artists, poets, storytellers and musicians because they have a lot of influence over people. If a famous writer writes an op-ed he will be heard, also by politicians. Mozambique is quite small, and there are not that many famous people here, maybe 5–10. Artists are seen as apolitical; they can approach people differently. So our idea was that artists can not only help us get support for the peace process in society, but can also approach politicians and the business section, in an apolitical way, which can be very powerful."[35]

To create a new aesthetic around the peace process, Neha Sanghrajka and her team also asked artists, in collaboration with civil society groups, to come up with a new logo for the peace process, which resulted in an image of two people hugging under a tree, linked by a bridge, symbolising reconciliation, longevity and openness. This logo, gold on blue fabric, was then used everywhere, on flags, fabric and official documentation, and during the Covid-19 pandemic even as masks for the DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration) combatants.[36] Mirko Manzoni, Neha Sanghrajka's colleague, maintained that art used in a peace process can only come from the people themselves, it cannot be imposed by the mediator. However, once agreed upon, it can help people to gain a sense of ownership over the process; "Incorporating artists will give you more options. It is a matter of knowledge and feeling. You are not part of that society and culture, so that partner with that type of sensibility would give you more chances of succeeding in finding a new window into a society."[37] Including artists in the Mozambique peace process allowed the mediation team to obtain a more nuanced sense of society, gain access to different

stakeholders, foster support for the peace process itself, and prepare the ground for the agreement to succeed and last.

Context is clearly crucial when sequencing cultural and artistic elements. While the above examples suggest they could not have done their work without the support of poets and musicians, each context requires the adaption of frameworks used. Luxshi Vimalarajah, a mediator at Berghof Foundation, shared her experiences with these complexities:

"In the Basque context we tried to use creative means to bring the parties together, such as using songs or food, different ways to create empathy, so that both sides can associate and have a feeling for each other's grievances. But it was not really that useful, I have to say. It was ok, people felt relaxed, when it wasn't intellectually challenging, but in that cultural context, in the European setting, it was not taken seriously. It felt like, we are dealing with serious issues and you are bringing in things that we find ok for a while but now we have to deal with substance, thematic issues. In Nepal, we experienced different reactions to cultural practices. When we started off with small things like photographs, to get them to talk, people felt that they have never seen the other side's problems in such a way."[38]

Similarly, Antje Herrberg, a mediator at the European Union External Action, during one of our *Art in Mediation Mini-Workshops*[39] mentioned that art can also be a hindrance. "One time we brought together 30–40 Yemeni artists in Amman. I thought we will have a dialogue, and maybe they will talk differently to each other. This was absolutely not the case; it was very visceral and difficult to mediate. I don't know how we could have done it better, but I know it was not the right thing to do".[40] Herrberg raises the important point of structure and aim here. This project seeks to not simply bring together artists but find working models in which they, in exchange with mediators, can find new ways to collaborate on an equal footing.

Ali Saleem, a Bangkok-based mediator, who was one of those involved in the peace process in Mindanao, stressed the importance of the East/West divide: "Western mediators come with their inflated egos, their structures and checklists. But that's not how it works." Even if the parties sign an agreement, if mediation teams have not done the groundwork, if you did not take the time to create the critical mass, it will not be sustainable. According to Saleem, in 'the East', mediation work is much more about human relationships and spending time to transform

them, to create space for a political agreement. "Here mediation needs to be a way of life; you live with them, you suffer with them, and because you have helped them see an important issue in a different way, that experience of transformation doesn't go away". In practice, for Saleem, this means visiting the parties on a regular basis and celebrating their rituals with them. "Only after I have prepared the ground, sat with the leaders for days, after I have prayed with them do I bring the issues forward". For this, the venue, the place, has to be right so that the solutions can come from them. "All I as a mediator do is to give them a structure and international legitimacy". Saleem's accounts of his working methods show that artistic practices need to be considered in the wider framework of cultural practices, rather than limited to art or the artists themselves.

Instead of reproducing binaries between East and West, this report proposes that it is more useful to analyse the specific context in which a peace process is taking place to assess whether cultural and artistic methods might resonate. Moreover, a number of respondents pointed out that just because groups engage in an artistic activity does not mean that 'it works'. Or in Julian Hottinger's words: "In Latin America, they jump on anything that is labelled culture or art, they love it. But the next day they will continue stabbing each other."[41] This leads to the question of sustainability and impact. Conflict and post-conflict landscapes are well-populated with artistic projects that try to build bridges, heal wounds, and create empathy. But does it really work? "I always wondered about that", Sarah Jankowitz, a scholar at Queen's University Belfast who works on the intersection between art and reconciliation, cautioned. "What if, with your artistic intervention you shift the perspective of some participants, but others come away feeling retraumatised?"[42] Similarly, Stephen Duncombe, professor for media, culture and communication at New York University, struck by the recurring inadequacy of the conceptualisation of the relationship between activist art and social change asks, "does it work"?

"This is an uncomfortable topic for many artists since accounting for the impact of creativity is often considered a form of heresy. [...] The ability of artists to create worlds and move people,

which strikes fear into the hearts of philosophers and gods, is what makes art so powerful as a form of activism. Yet the exact nature of this power remains elusive".[43]

Duncombe does not answer the question whether 'it works' or not, and instead advocates for a methodology with which to think through the affect and efficiency (which he calls æfficacy) of activist art. During the interview for this report, Stephen Duncombe further stated that artists don't think so much about audience and impact. "Theatre people are the best in this, visual artists are the worst, their enterprise is not collaborative, they have been trained to separate themselves out. And we tend to let artists off the hook, if it didn't work".[44] The following section discusses a number of contexts where mediators used artistic practices, sometimes more and sometimes less successfully so.

## In Practice: Putting Art to Work

Activist art or art that seeks a transformational process has a number of different aims. The artists may aim to foster dialogue, build community, make a place, invite participation, transform environment and experience, reveal reality, alter perception, humanise the 'other', create disruption, inspire dreaming, provide utility, amplify political expression, encourage experimentation, maintain hegemony, or make nothing happen.[45] As such, art and artistic practices have been used widely and successfully in civil society processes (Track 3) and post-conflict reconstruction phases across the globe;[46] however, aside from backdrop decoration, art has mostly been kept away from the negotiating table, especially in formal processes. Instead, during formal processes, 'informal formats' are used, sometimes as part of Confidence Building Measures (CBM),[47] which range from watching football together, drinking alcohol, going for nature walks or visiting cultural sites. It is here where many of the 'ah-hah moments' happen because the delegates get to know each other and 'show themselves' in a less strictly regulated environment. According to Antje Herrberg, during highly tense formal mediations, the moments of connections do not come through intellectual exercises, but through experiences in nature, singing together or watching other people dance and perform:

"I work a lot with very traditional diplomats who think it is a bit wacky but then always appreciated it. I always have music on at the beginning of a session because I feel like it creates a different vibration. I also have a set of A5 postcards of paintings, and I ask people to introduce themselves through a reflection of the painting they have in their hand. Interestingly, they always feel like I chose the painting for them and find a specific relationship to that painting. Yes, I do instrumentalise art, because it is another way of connecting people, of finding common space."[48]

The fundamental premise of the project *Arts in Peace Mediation* is that artists and art practice can assist mediators during certain stages of the peace process – if the parties are willing. However, to get parties to talk to the other side is difficult, and getting them into a space where artistic engagement is possible is even more challenging.[49] Only if trust is built and both parties agree, like in the above example, can artistic practice help to re-humanise the 'other', enable an emotional encounter with the impact of the conflict among victims and society, and offer a potential voyage into a shared cultural representation.[50]

Ali Saleem highlighted the importance of creating a critical mass when trying to garner support for a peace process. One way to achieve that is through artistic and cultural expressions, for which one has to think about a communication strategy and public campaigns, a complex web of activities that is rolled out, which need to be carefully interwoven with the larger peace efforts. In Asia, using artistic means such as dance, street performance, music, and theatre, is prevalent: "You need an excuse to bring people together and art can be that excuse. We often try to mobilise young people for art or sports to bring rival factions together. You can get politicians to accept that they are wrong through these kinds of initiatives".[51] Furthermore, art is useful in setting a new narrative around a conflict. Saleem uses what he calls "strategic communication", a communication strategy implemented alongside the peace talks in which each message has an objective and target audience:

"By designing talk shows, theatres and songs for specific audiences, you create a whole communication framework for all sides. You are not challenging the existing narrative openly; you are slightly adjusting it. You are tackling contagious and hidden issues without naming them and setting the scene for a shared future."[52]

Art is a medium of culture that is particularly effective in creating a safe space that encourages reflexivity and receptivity, a humanised space inspired by personal experiences, a creative

space for exploration of new perspectives on 'old narratives', and a shared space for co-creating new narratives. Eugene Koh, a Melbourne-based peacebuilding consultant who works on the intersection of culture, art and trauma, argues that art is able to introduce an idea in a non-threatening, non-imposing manner. It does this by simply allowing itself to be dismissed as 'only art'. Importantly, it can bring into the space the emotional dimension in a contained form. The strategic display of art from the culture of the respective actors involved in the mediation offers not only a softer version than flags and emblems but also a respectful acknowledgment of their context and an opportunity for dialogue over the creative work. A carefully curated exhibition or performance can encourage and assist those involved to engage with subjects that are 'unspeakable' or perhaps even 'unthinkable', such as past atrocities. These traumatic subjects are often pushed beyond one's awareness and yet have a powerful hold on negotiations. Art can bring these subjects subtly into consciousness, without any deliberate discussion of the topic. In other words, art can be a very potent addition to the peace mediation process, but it is a double-edged sword: it needs to be curated carefully, sensitively, and strategically to achieve its most beneficial aim.[53]

Scilla Elworthy, peacebuilder and founder of the Oxford Research Group, also opts for the strategic and careful approach in her work. Asked how she can envision artistic practices in formal mediation settings, she recounted that smaller, less intrusive activities are more conducive:

"You can say, 'gentlemen, we need to take some time to absorb what has been said'. You ask them for complete silence, to feel what has been said. I have done it in the toughest situations. And it works. They are permitted to stop talking and this enables people to move from their brain to their heart. Then you have a bridge. Not everything is possible during formal negotiations but it would be acceptable to introduce some quiet breathing, whenever things get tense. This is infallible as a methodology to shift the energy."[54]

She also underlined the importance of setting the scene, recounting an example when she was mediating a completely off-the-record meeting in an old manor house in the English countryside. "We put fresh flowers and home-made cookies in every room. Little touches of kindness and beauty. They all noticed it. We also had flowers in the mediation room, but no desks, no

computers and no notes".[55] Elworthy's experience demonstrates how important key aesthetic elements can be when creating a space in which parties can meet each other, a space in which something might shift.

Mô Bleeker, who has also been working on the Guatemala peace process for many years, shared another example:

> "In some processes, shamans would open the space for another kind of dialogue, and this introduction is a call to touch upon human values and community interdependence. One time, in a very difficult Track-1.5 negotiation process, an indigenous shaman opened the session through a long ceremony, we were standing around the fire. He asked the people to go back to the meaning of their existence and the deepest reason why they were engaged in this whole process and what they wanted to leave to their communities, their society; the call of the Universe to humanize, to treat each other as humans, otherwise, Mother Earth becomes too ill, and we do too. It was a kind of conditioning to open their souls, so that their deeper inside would be involved, driven by the conviction that the technical efforts only work if the 'inside', the soul, the deepest identity is involved. The whole art in our work is to put people in touch with these dimensions. It is a small step, but it can make a difference, beyond negotiations."[56]

The examples sketched out here demonstrate that in order to be useful and applicable globally, the definition of art has to remain broad; perhaps an immaterial aesthetic expression of culture and identity, the imaginary of a nation.[57] Mediation teams sometimes do find and collaborate with these artists, as the example of Mozambique illustrates. This project seeks to eventually equip the mediators with the tools and methods to tease out who these artists are and how they can collaborate effectively. Lederach, in his book *The Moral Imagination*, calls upon peacebuilders to "explore the moral imagination as the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist." However, moments when this is possible do not emerge through the application of strict processes or checklists, instead "[t]hey must be explored and understood in the context of something that approximates the artistic process, imbued as it is with creativity, skill, serendipity, and craftsmanship."[58] However, he finds that in the process of professionalisation mediators have lost their creativity and have become more technicians than artists, reliant on rigid techniques. Thus, he calls on mediators to return to aesthetics, because "[t]ime and again, social change that sticks and makes a difference has behind it the artist's intuition: the complexity of human experience captured in a simple

image and in a way that moves individuals and whole societies. The true genius of the moral imagination is the ability to touch the art and soul of the matter."[59] Importantly, many mediators do have an artistic or spiritual practice that influences their mediation practice,[60] however, this is not something that is encouraged in mediation training. What Lederach proposes is that each mediator finds his or her inner artist, already during conflict resolution, mediation, and peacebuilding training: "Much of what currently takes place in 'skill training' orients itself toward understanding and managing cognitive and behavioural responses in human interactions. Tapping the creative side, touching intuition, knowing things kinetically, visually, metaphorically, and artistically requires avenues of exploration in the educational process that tap whole other parts of human 'being' and 'knowing'".[61] In this line of argument, the mediators become the artist, in order to tease out hidden knowledge and new moral imaginations of the people they work with. Leading on from that, this project explored whether models could be envisioned and developed that would allow artists and mediators to collaborate during peace processes. Could artists play a more active role in mediation processes, as translators, discerning the complexities that the mediator might not otherwise have access to? And if so, which artists? Do they have to be embedded in the local communities? And who decides?

Most mediators and artists interviewed for this study cautioned against having an artist in the room or encouraging 'art-making' during highly politicised and tense negotiations. This is not to say that it is not possible, but again, it depends on time, trust and the sociocultural and political context. As the examples sketched out above illustrate, every mediator has different tools in his or her box to brighten the mood, create a break, and allow the parties to relate to each other in a new way, and make themselves known to the other side. "One time I brought the favourite fruit of the most difficult person in the negotiation, as a trick to keep everyone around the table. Another time, I invited a guitarist who lightened everyone's mood", Ali Saleem remembered. "We have done artmaking as well when we asked all the parties to draw instead of discuss the rules of procedure".

In summary, it is important to acknowledge that all art is political and to inquire how a collaboration between mediators and artists can harness that. Many mediators already sequence artistic or cultural elements, but this cannot be fully planned or staged. Furthermore, it is not possible to come up with a 'one size fits all' document or methodology for 'art in mediation', instead it has to be bespoke and new every time, in order to avoid becoming just another box to be ticked in an effort to innovate.

## Propaganda Art, Instrumentalisation and Other Pitfalls

"If truth is the first casualty of war, then art is also a casualty, being quickly turned from a cultural ploughshare into a sword for propaganda and psychological warfare",[62] the Irish journalist Bernard Conlon writes, and so addresses one of the main challenges when working with art in conflict; the potential of art to both divide and unite, to draw out the worst in human beings and to foster beauty, justice and humanity.[63] Likewise, most of my respondents who work with the arts in practice expressed words of caution, emphasising that art is very powerful and can be a force of good and ill, and that art is a medium which is not better or worse than the people who use it. According to Colin Davidson, a painter from Northern Ireland, "there are a lot of egos in the artworld, but there is no room for bullshit in transformative art; the motives of the artist working with communities have to be right".[64]

Another recurring theme during the interviews was that of the instrumentalisation of artists. Rama Mani, a peacebuilder, poet, and performance artist, predicted that: "the artists will say 'Yay finally we will be included!' but the challenge is to not instrumentalise, tokenise, or co-opt". This project seeks to encourage and equip mediation teams to seek out those few artists who touch the nerve of a society and who put their finger on what the community feels.[65] In order to avoid the instrumentalisation of artists, once found, working models are needed that ensure a conversation on equal footing between mediators and artists can take place, in which creative practices can shed light on mediation practices, avoiding an 'add artists and stir' approach, which leaves existing power structures in place and merely adds a few moments of artmaking.[66]

Elizabeth Solomon, a mediator based in Trinidad and Tobago, recalled an instance when she was working on the Cyprus conflict and Track 3 initiatives were brought into Track 1 negotiation rooms. Artists were working collaboratively across the Turkish-Greek divide and their paintings were hung in the mediation room:

"When the two parties arrived, there would be coffee beforehand, which is a cultural tradition and they both drink their coffee in the same way. There were then discussions about the paintings in the room, but it wasn't a formal part of the talks, and we as the mediators could have guided that discussion more methodologically. The other challenge was that the talks were so secret that the artists had little to go by. There was no mechanism for people's expression, nor was something communicated from top down."[67]

Solomon recounted feeling like this was a lost opportunity but also mentions feeling hesitant to direct the parties towards more engagement with the arts when she saw her role as more of a guide. This example demonstrates what happens if artmaking is siloed to a side activity and is not part of the process as a whole; when the artists are not part of the wider process but sidelined to community engagement. This issue of weaving the arts in organically also came up in the interview with Anna Hess Sargsyan, a Senior Programme Officer at the Centre for Security Studies in Switzerland, who has worked in a number of contexts, including Nepal and Cambodia, where art, such as theatre and dance was an integral part of the everyday to deal with the consequences of the conflict. "Once one of our partners invited a German arts facilitator to work with us, which turned out to be a disaster, because the women were doing it anyway, in an intuitive way". Another risk of including artists and art, according to Sargsyan, is that art becomes yet another 'tick box', like gender. "Just because a UN person is sitting there, speaking about the importance of gender equality – or arts for that matter – it doesn't mean people believe it. People internalise it through training, practical exercises and personal experiences".[68] Both examples demonstrate that artistic interventions, either by artists themselves, or by 'artmaking', only makes sense if they are endorsed by the parties and organically part of the process.

Lastly, the challenges for artists to make art in a (post-)conflict setting are vast. Colin Davidson, who produced the portrait

series Silent Testimony, during our *Art in Mediation Mini-Workshop,* cautioned:

"There were many more reasons for me not to comment on the conflict than to do it. There is a risk that you may be seen as being patronising, as being self-promoting, as being overly self-conscious, and as artists, we are constantly walking this tightrope of our own self-consciousness of what we are trying to say, if we are trying to say anything at all. The power of art is in the engagement and the fact that the maker has left a gap in their art which is inhabited by and filled by the person who engages with that. In that engagement an answer can emerge. But it is not the art itself that gives the answer".[69]

However, not all art is transformative and perhaps doesn't have to be. But "if you want the artistic engagement to be transformative, it needs to start somewhere and go somewhere, only then can it lead to a new understanding", Hannah Reich, a facilitator and researcher in the field of constructive conflict transformation reiterated.[70] Similarly, Davidson said that in order for art to 'do something', it needs to be accessible and acknowledge the unspeakable; the loss, the pain, that which was not addressed in the Good Friday Agreement (1998). In practice this means creating clear structures and a safe environment in which these kinds of processes can take place. Riham Isaac, a performance artist from Palestine described these structures as follows:

"When I work, my participants want to feel like they are in control, like they can do 'it', because art can be very scary if you just tell them they have to be creative. You have to define the tasks, it is a journey from one task to the other, it is in a frame of a game, a game you know, like a football game that has rules. I always think about this when I do any [arts-based] workshops".[71]

During the *Mini-Workshop* in April 2020, Riham Isaac further urged us to always keep in mind the asymmetry between different artists. Colin Davidson suggested in the same workshop to do a series of portraits of Israeli and Palestinian mothers who had lost children in the conflict, without labels, leaving out their political and ethnic affiliations, to depict the human loss that affects both sides, similar to his Silent Testimony series. Riham Isaac vehemently opposed this idea, saying that one cannot talk about shared suffering under the conditions of occupation. Hence, just as mediators have to carefully assess power asymmetry during the peace process,[72] any activities that plan to bring together artists from across conflict lines need to take into consideration the different standpoints from which artists produce their work.

## Conclusion

A peace process is a cultural, emotional and spiritual journey, aside from the political and technical negotiation process that takes place on Track 1; and peace treaties only hold if all of these dimensions are included.[73] Art as an expression of culture is present at every stage of a conflict and visible through symbols, murals, rituals, songs, colours and flags. Bringing art into the formal negotiations gives mediators a chance to use its potential, but also to defuse its polarising power. Through artistic engagement, different experiences and diverging truths can be expressed that are otherwise deniable or unspeakable.[74] However, it is crucial to be clear about the timing and aim of an artistic activity, which might include facilitating communication, creating bridges, bearing witness, and enabling healing.

Art is already being used in different capacities in peace processes around the globe, depending on the cultural context, be it poetry, dance, music, or storytelling. However, this is heavily dependent on the cultural context, the chief mediator, and the mediation team. Cultural elements such as sport (watching and doing), communal cooking and eating, or spending time in nature or at cultural sites are often sequenced at the appropriate time. Most mediators named a lack of trust, time, funding and political will as reasons why art is not used systematically in formal processes. Moreover, art as a transformative experience cannot be planned but needs to happen organically, a process that the mediator/facilitator cannot fully control or impose but that has to come from the parties themselves.

Importantly, women and insider mediators working in both formal and informal processes are already using a wide variety of culturally relevant and artistic tools to build bridges between different worldviews. The challenge that remains is to make sure that their efforts do not get sidelined as 'soft practices' or 'women's community art' but that their knowledge is transferred into formal processes.

Suggestions on how to work with art and artistic practices during peace processes:

- Include artistic training in mediation training: mediators discover their inner artist and acquire tools and creative approaches to mediations that actualise their potential and that of those in the room;
- Establish a culture by which each mediation design includes a bespoke and culturally sensitive artistic strategy, which runs alongside the economic, security and political strategies;
- Create space for an exchange between the mediation team and artists during the debriefing phase;
- Start dealing with the past early on in the process, collaborating with local artists who can offer a distinct access and window into society and people's grievances. Here it is important to carefully think through and plan these artistic interventions and ensure that the different strategies speak to each other in order to avoid the arts being sidelined;
- Include local artists and/or international artists from other conflict landscapes who are able to speak to the local sensibilities and operate as a bridge between the communities and the mediation team;
- Listen to the women. They are already doing the work.

NOTES

1 This chapter is a short and updated version of the research report Isabel Käser wrote in 2020 for the Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom. A full, updated version of this report can be downloaded from: www.art-in-mediation.ch
2 Lederach, John Paul. 2005. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.176.
3 Ibid., p.174.
4 Mitchell, Jolyon, Giselle Vincett, Theodora Hawksley, and Hal Culbertson, eds. 2020. *Peacebuilding and the Arts. Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, p.5.
5 The project was initiated by Dagmar Reichert (*artasfoundation:* www.artasfoundation.ch) and Swiss Ambassador Alexandre Fasel, who held a first workshop on the topic in Geneva in 2015. Since then, the conversation continued among artists and mediators at the Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom (London), and during the research conducted by Isabel Käser that led to this report (2019–2020). A part of the data from the original report will be published in a book chapter co-authored by Isabel Käser and Jolyon Mitchell in a forthcoming book with Wiley-Blackwell titled *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Peace* (2021).
6 Kim, Sebastian, Pauline Kollontai, and Sue Yore, eds. 2015. *Mediating Peace: Reconciliation Through Visual Arts, Music and Film.* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing; Robinson, and Keavy Martin, eds. 2016. *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.* Indigenous Studies. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
7 The 'West' here refers to Europe and North America.
8 Insider mediators are people from the respective conflict regions, with in-depth knowledge of the context, who work in both the informal and formal process, Mason, Simon J. A. 2009. *Insider Mediators: Exploring Their Key Role in Informal Peace Processes.* Berghof Foundation for Peace Support, swisspeace and CSS.
9 Afrax, Maxamed Daahir. 2010. *Towards a Culture for Peace: Poetry, Drama and Music in Somali Society.* In Whose Peace Is It Anyway? Connecting Somali and International Peacemaking, edited by Mark Bradbury and Healy Sally, 72–74, and Mason, Simon J. A. 2009. *Insider Mediators: Exploring Their Key Role in Informal Peace Processes.*
10 Art here is defined broadly as an aesthetic practice of relating to the world, which is culturally specific but can have a cross-cultural appeal (Carroll 2000; Wiehl 2005).
11 Interview with Julian Hottinger, 3.7.2020; Interview with Matthias Siegfried, 30.6.2020.
12 In a similar vein, *AVIS28,* the Swiss foreign policy vision for 2028, emphasises the importance of Switzerland's good offices, and reiterates that those need to be continuously "modernised and optimally positioned" in order to stay relevant and respond to the complexity of conflicts. AVIS28, Switzerland in the world 2028. Report by the working group *Switzerland's 2018 Foreign Policy Visio*n to Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, p.31–33.
13 Interview with Julian Hottinger, 3.7.2020.
14 Qat is a plant native to the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and is a key component of any social function, causing light euphoria, among other side effects. Qat serves a similar function as coffee or alcohol and brings people together across conflict lines. However, the Qat sessions are exclusively male: Yemeni women, for example, cannot enter that space but have their own sessions. Interview with Atiaf Alwazir, 5.6.2020.
15 Interview with Mirko Manzoni, 13.7.2020.
16 Interview with Mô Bleeker, 24.3.2020.
17 Ibid.
18 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, in: https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/ (12.7.2020).
19 Interview with Mô Bleeker, 24.3.2020, Interview with Philipp Lustenberger, 6.7.2020.
20 See UN Resolution 1325 (2000), in: https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000).
21 Despite women's contributions to preventing and resolving conflicts, they are often excluded from negotiating tables. In peace processes between 1992–2018 women only made up 3% of mediators, 4% of signatories, 13% of negotiators, only 2 women (Miriam Coronel Ferrer and Tzipi Livni) have served as chief negotiators, and only Ferrer has ever signed a final peace accord as a chief negotiator. A mere 19% of peace agreements contain reference to women, and 5% mention conflict-related gender-based violence, in: Council on Foreign Relations. 2019. *Women's Participation in*

*Peace Processes:* www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/ (9.9.2020).

22 Bensky, Miriam. 2020. *'Good Offices' for Others, Bad Offices for Us?* LSE Women Peace and Security (blog). 5 May 2020. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/05/05/good-offices-for-others-bad-offices-for-us/.

23 Paffenholz, Thania, Nick Ross, Steven Dixon, Anna-Lena Schluchter, and Jacqui True. 2016. *Making Women Count – Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations.* Geneva: Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies) and UN Women, p.5.

24 Catherine Turner and Fleur Heyworth. 2019. *Advancing Inclusive Mediation Through the Lens of Leadership.* Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

25 Interview with Maria Butler, WILPF, 22.11.2019.

26 "All over Bakassi, women is peace (4x). Obstacles to peace, she tries to overcome, the armed conflict like kidnappings, all rapings she tries to avoid. All over of Bakassi woman is peace (4x). Obstacles to peace she tries to overcome, gossiping and incest she tries to overcome. All over of Bakassi woman is peace (4x)." As sung by Esther Omam during the interview with Esther Omam, 19.5.2020.

27 Interview with Mossarat Qadeem, 4.5.2020.

28 Interview with Visaka Dharmadasa, 4.5.2020.

29 Interview with Bebhinn McKinley and Sara Cook, 1.5.2020.

30 Interview with Jeremy Brickhill, 23.7.2020.

31 Ibid., see also: Brickhill, Jeremy. 2018. *Mediating Security Arrangements in Peace Mediation: Critical Perspectives from the Field.* CSS Mediation Resources. Zürich: Centre for Security Studies.

32 Nordstrom, Carolyn. 1997. *A Different Kind of War Story.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p.220, quoted in Mitchell, Jolyon et al, p.12.

33 *The Throne of Weapons* by Cristóvão Canhavato (Kester) in 2001, see: http://museum.wa.gov.au/extraordinary-stories/highlights/throne-weapons/ (18.7.2020).

34 *Tree of Life* sculpture was created by four artists, Hilario Nhatugueja, Fiel dos Santos, Adelino Serafim Maté and Kester in 2005. Both the Throne and the Tree grew out of the project *Transforming Arms into Tools,* see: Tester, Frank James. 2006. *Art and Disarmament: Turning Arms into Ploughshares in Mozambique.* Development in Practice 16 (2): 169–78. For other more recent examples of 'weapons into artmaking' see *The Bell Project* (Iraq) by Hiwa K: https://aeon.co/videos/why-the-kurdish-iraqi-artist-hiwa-k-melts-weapons-of-war-into-art-for-everyone; and *Fragmentos* (Columbia) by Doris Salcedo: http://www.museonacional.gov.co/micrositios1/Fragmentos/index.html. The latter was part of the agreement that was signed in Havana, when it was decided that three monuments would be built.

35 Interview with Neha Sanghrajka, 11.5.2020.

36 Find an example of the logo in the Annex (p.22).

37 Interview with Mirko Manzoni, 13.7.2020.

38 Luxshi Vimalarajah at the *Art in Mediation Workshop,* 7.4.2020.

39 Due to the pandemic, the workshops that would have brought together mediators and artists in person to test some of our hunches had to be postponed. Instead, three 'mini-workshops' brought together a total of 12 participants on Zoom, discussing the need and possibility of including artistic practices in mediation processes.

40 Antje Herrberg at the *Art in Mediation Mini-Workshop,* 28.4.2020.

41 Interview with Julian Hottinger, 3.7.2020.

42 Interview with Sarah Jankowitz, 3.7.2020.

43 Duncombe, Stephen. 2016. *Does It Work? The Æffect of Activist Art. Social Research: An International Quarterly* 83 (1): 115-116.

44 Interview with Stephen Duncombe, 14.7.2020.

45 Duncombe, Stephen. 2016. *Does It Work? The Æffect of Activist Art,* p.120–124.

46 Cohen, Cynthia. *Creative Approaches to Reconciliation.* In The Psychology of Resolving Conflicts: From War to Peace, eds. Mari Fitzduff and Christopher E. Stout. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.

47 Mason, Simon J. A. 2012. *Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in Peace Processes.* In Managing Peace Processes: Process Related Questions. A Handbook for AU Practitioners, 1:57–77. African Union and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

48 Antje Herrberg at the *Art in Mediation Mini-Workshop,* 28.4.2020.

49 Personal correspondence with Simon J. A. Mason, senior researcher CSS, ETH, Switzerland.

50 Interview with Mô Bleeker, 24.3.2020

51 Interview with Ali Saleem, 26.6.2020.
52 Ibid.
53 Interview and personal correspondence with Eugen Koh, 3.12.2019.
54 Interview Scilla Elworthy, 22.7.2020.
55 Ibid., see also: Elworthy, Scilla. 2020. *The Mighty Heart: How to Transform Conflict*. London: Peace Direct.
56 Interview with Mô Bleeker, 24.3.2020.
57 Ibid.
58 Lederach, John Paul. 2005. *The Moral Imagination,* p.29.
59 Ibid., p.73.
60 Ben Hoffman was a woodcarver, John Paul Lederach writes Haiku, and Brendan McAllister is a singer, to name a few.
61 Ibid., p.175.
62 Conlon, Bernard. n.d. *The Art of Peace in Northern Ireland,* in: http://poieinkaiprattein.org/kids-guernica/kids-guernica-in-usa/art-education-for-social-justice/the-art-of-conflict-and-peace-in-northern-ireland-by-bernard-conlon/ (22.7.2020).
63 Mitchell, Jolyon et al., p.10; Interview with Hannah Reich, 11.11.19.
64 Interview with Colin Davidson, 4.2.20.
65 Interview with Rama Mani, 20.3.2020.
66 Mitchell, Jolyon et al., p.25.
67 Interview with Elizabeth Solomon, 7.5.2020.
68 Interview with Anna Hess Sargsyan, 28.4.2020.
69 Colin Davidson at the *Art in Mediation Mini-Workshop,* 28.4.2020.
70 Interview with Hannah Reich, 11.11.2019.
71 Interview with Riham Isaac, 17.3.2020.
72 McAuley, James W., Catherine McGlynn, and Jon Tonge. 2008. *Conflict Resolution in Asymmetric and Symmetric Situations: Northern Ireland as a Case Study.* Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict 1 (1): 88–102, and; Aggestam, K. 2010. *Mediating Asymmetrical Conflict.* Mediterranean Politics 7 (1): 69–91.
73 Interview with Mô Bleeker, 24.3.2020.
74 Interview with François Matarasso, 10.12.2019.

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4

# Mediation as Translation

## Reflections on the EU Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade, from the Perspective of the People of Mitrovica

Olivier Haener,
Miodrag Marinković

## Introduction

This chapter intends to share the personal reflections of two peace dialogue practitioners[1] about the possible contribution of the arts in a mediation process. It relates to the specific context of the conflict in the divided and disputed Mitrovica region in the northern part of Kosovo. This small territory is subject to mutually exclusive claims of the governments of Kosovo and Serbia, as the local Albanian and Serbian communities are polarised among each other. The chapter sketches key features of the conflict today, the needs of citizens and state responses, as well as mediation attempts. It further reflects on what could result from the inclusion of citizens – alongside state representatives and diplomats – and explores the role art and culture could play in that regard. Finally, since both authors have conducted Track 2 and Track 3 local dialogue initiatives, they share some reflections based on projects they have developed, focusing on the importance of translation and interpretation, as applied to languages, and also to wider elements, such as perceptions or cultural codes. It calls for the inclusion of the citizens of the region in the EU dialogue process, by connecting local Track 2 and 3 initiatives with official Track 1 negotiations, using arts and culture to that end.

## The Kosovo Conflict Today

Some 22 years after the war ended, and 13 years after Pristina authorities declared independence, the form of the state of that small territory is still not clearly defined. Nevertheless, Pristina officials claim Kosovo is fully independent and Belgrade representatives declare it is still a province of Serbia. Legally, Kosovo is an independent and sovereign state according to its constitution, an autonomous province of Serbia according to Serbia's constitution, and an entity under interim international administration according to the UN (Resolution 1244). While mutually contradictory, all three texts affirm the territorial unity of Kosovo. However, rather than being wholly independent or fully integrated with Serbia, Kosovo is *de facto* divided; none of the above definitions matching reality. Since 2011, Kosovo and Serbia have been engaged in an EU-led mediation process, the *Brussels Dialogue,* that aims at the 'normalisation' of their relations.[2] If

the recognition by Serbia of Kosovo's full independence and sovereignty is the ultimate goal of its government, the Serbian authorities maintain that they will not recognise it as an independent state but rather pursue the 'normalisation' of their relations in economic terms.

In practice, the larger part of Kosovo (essentially inhabited by Kosovo Albanians, with Serbian-populated enclaves) functions mostly as an independent state, while its northern part, adjacent to Serbia (with some Albanian enclaves), operates in many ways as part of Serbia. The northern part of Kosovo,[3] centred on the divided city of Mitrovica, is the point of confrontation of these systems, where the contradictions are most apparent, and the conflict latent with regular outbursts of violence.

Several interwoven causes are at the root of this conflict: the Serbian and Albanian communities of Kosovo are deeply divided, and they have different cultural and religious traditions. They also have distinct languages, which further hampers communication and understanding. Although both are Indo-European languages, only Serbian belongs to the Slavic branch. In practice, mutual comprehension is very limited. Conflicting perceptions and interpretations of the present and of the past also impact relationships. History is generally not understood in its factual (past) context, but as a justification for present claims, with concepts from present times projected onto past realities. A key, yet underestimated, root cause lies in the deep and long-term crisis of de-industrialisation that led to massive unemployment: with the nearby Trepca mines and heavy industry, Mitrovica slipped from being the richest to the poorest region in Kosovo. As a result, the northern part of Kosovo, once a thriving centre, became a small and remote peripheral area, a 'double periphery' from Belgrade and Pristina, both parts being completely dependent on the resources from these centres. Hence, the unresolved social crisis feeds the political conflict. This is also the tiny 2000 km² hotspot of the Belgrade-Pristina confrontation, part of wider 'East-West' tensions, a challenge to the EU's enlargement strategy for two decades.

Independent of community affiliation, or state loyalty, the citizens in that context face important and specific needs, which

are largely unmet: profoundly low unemployment (especially among the young), and poor public services, with unequal access to them (notably in each community's own language). Services often rely on string-pulling or petty corruption, leading to dependency on institutions, political parties or individuals of rank or status. Ordinary people on both sides of the divide, above all seek a normal, predictable life. Instead, citizens – feeling helplessly trapped in a conflict unfolding way beyond them – still wait for their state to achieve a conceivable shape: for Kosovo Albanians, the long-awaited independent state – seen as a condition *sine qua non* for the non-recurrence of past domination and atrocities – is neither definitely settled nor fully recognised internationally. On the other side, Kosovo Serbs fear that the state they believe they live in (Serbia) is dissolving around them or that it may use them as a negotiation chip, to be opportunely traded against some better political advantage. The anxiety of not knowing the fate of the state one is living in is aggravated by the fear of other communities, who are often perceived as a threat to one's integrity and aspirations for a state that grants secure, wealthy and normal living. In psychological terms, this has a strong impact on individuals, many of whom also suffer from war-related trauma and have already experienced, with the disappearance of Yugoslavia, what the destruction of a state involves.

State responses to this situation, rather than addressing their citizens' needs, appear to use these to oppose communities, hoping to create new leverage on the ground, or to be more focused on gaining international validation of their views. Nevertheless, politicians often claim their actions to be the 'will of the people', presenting their decisions as being in the best interest of their community. Consensus within a community (which may also know internal divisions)[4] is not shaped by public debate around the genuine interests of individuals or social groups that are freely expressed and democratically represented at the political level. Instead, it is achieved by attracting citizens with abstract patriotic ideas, and homogenising communities through the fear of the other or with antagonistic narratives. Even the EU mediation process is used to fuel the conflict, as any progress is domestically presented as a diplomatic victory or a forced necessity, but not as a gesture of legitimisation of

mutual interests. In that process, victimisation[5] plays a key role, where a community is described by its own politicians as the immutable victim of the other community, presented as the eternal executioner.

For the State, especially Serbia in its relation to Kosovo Serbs, the citizens are used on the forefront of the political struggle.[6] In this condition of constant patriotic mobilisation, no social contract has emerged in the more than two decades following the war. It is as if officials were saying to citizens: "let us first win the conflict, and then we will have plenty of time to talk about social arrangements. Meanwhile, stand your ground on the barricades and protect the nation". Communities are still polarised, with minimal communication, and are defined one against the other, not on the basis of their genuine interests (i.e. use of own language) combined with interests that would reach beyond communities (e.g. economic development, environment). In a way, the conflict has hampered a true democratisation, and the definition, within a democratic framework of interest of individuals, communities, and ultimately the whole of society. Democratisation was also seen as a possible effect of an eventual EU integration. Yet, after great hopes, citizens were not only disappointed by the EU's perceived empty integration promises or poor performance on the ground (e.g. its EULEX7 rule of law mission), but also by an endless mediation process with uncertain results. As a consequence, citizens feel excluded from the *Brussels Dialogue,* despite sophisticated democratic parlance.

In a way, the transition towards pluralist democracy, started in 1989 in Berlin, did not reach the northern part of Kosovo. The democratisation of this part of Europe has been significantly hindered by the wars in the former Yugoslavia and frozen in the Kosovo status conflict. Political parties, despite democratic coating, appear to remain in a communist single-party mindset. The people often don't know what is the responsibility of institutions or of the party or its leaders.

## Mediation Attempts

Different mediation attempts have tried to settle the long-lasting Kosovo issue. During the war, a failed NATO mediation in

Rambouillet (France) led to the Alliance's intervention against Yugoslavia. Ending the war, UN Resolution 1244 established the interim UN and NATO presence in Kosovo, with the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces. However, it ambiguously referred to Kosovo's final status as "substantial autonomy",[8] a formulation interpreted by Serbia as an assurance of its sovereignty over Kosovo. In a way, this has set a trend to base the arbitrations between Serbia and Kosovo on the notion of "constructive ambiguity",[9] a concept developed by Henry Kissinger, which mirrors the tensions within the Helsinki Accords (1975) between the principles of "territorial integrity of states" and "self-determination of peoples" that they stated.[10] In 2005, UN mediation led to the Ahtisaari proposal which, along with a detailed state building plan, recommended Kosovo's independence. Turned down by Serbia, it was endorsed by Pristina, which proclaimed Kosovo's independence in 2008 on that basis. This unilateral move caused a deep crisis among parties and renewed hostility and division between communities.

In 2010, the UN[11] welcomed "[…] the readiness of the [EU] to facilitate a process of dialogue between the parties; the process of dialogue in itself would be a factor for peace, security and stability in the region, and that dialogue would be to promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the [EU] and improve the lives of the people", leading to a breakthrough in 2013, with the *Brussels Agreement*.[12] Both parties linked the normalisation of their relations with their own EU integration path. However, for Pristina the key stake is the full recognition by Serbia of Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state throughout its whole territory, whereas Serbia continuously states that it opposes any kind of Kosovo independence, considering 'normalisation' as pertaining solely to economic relations. Nevertheless, the agreement paved the way for the integration of the Kosovo Serb community into the Kosovo legal framework and produced some tangible results, with agreements on practical issues. This positive momentum was soon lost, however, by the selective implementation of agreements by the parties and one-sided interpretations. In 2018, Serbia's and Kosovo's Presidents even informally agreed, with obvious consent of the then EU mediators, to partition Kosovo along ethnic lines and exchange territories. Such potentially harmful

attitudes of political leaders, including the EU, along with inflammable public discourses of local leaders, turned the promising normalisation into renewed tensions among communities. Despite fresh impetus from J. Borrell and M. Lajčák,[13] the EU faced the difficulty of re-crediting its dialogue as the sole process, and even faced an offhand Trump administration mediation competition.

In our view, a key result of the dialogue was to channel the conflict into a formal diplomatic process, bringing Pristina and Belgrade closer and releasing citizens from the psychological burden of conflict management. However, over time, this rather secretive top-down process remained unreadable for many and delivered far less than expected. As A. Demjaha notes: "[...], the EU's ambivalent, inconsistent and often ambiguous position has increased confusion and tensions. Conflicting interpretations and contradictory narratives of Kosovo and Serbia exacerbated differences. [...]., its end result so far has been the empowerment of ethno-nationalists, both in Belgrade and Pristina, while at the same time limiting benefits to communities in Kosovo".[14] The open-ended nature of the *Brussels Dialogue* also means unpredictability and uncertainty for the citizens, and ambiguity – that might once have been 'constructive' – developed as a source of tension for both populations. As shown by K. Gashi et al., it is not only the content and outcomes of the dialogue that are ambiguous, but also its very meaning to parties and mediators.[15]

Furthermore, the dialogue's secretive nature makes it much closer to the state than to the citizens: it seems to remain a top-down process, at the Track 1 level, with few Track 2 and 3 connections, that does not foster democratic engagement of societies towards an acutely needed social contract, nor really "improve[s] the lives of the people" as intended by the *Brussels Agreement*. In other words, it doesn't seem to offer an alternative horizon to the nationalist narratives. This is reinforced by the fact that no citizens from the northern part of Kosovo, not even Kosovo Serbs, are present in the dialogue. As the citizens appear to be captives of the patriotic policies of their own states, the dialogue appears to be locked up by state protagonists through its incapacity to develop connections to the societies it

aims to serve. As observed during the *Arts in Peace Mediation* discussions, the implementation of eventual peace accords is a very sensitive and often neglected phase of mediation processes, frequently leading to the perpetuation of conflict. From our perspective, the future implementation of a Belgrade-Pristina agreement would benefit from including Kosovo societies in the process, in clear, sustainable and appropriate ways, by connecting the Track 1 processes with Track 2 and 3 initiatives.

## Benefits of Citizens' Inclusion in Mediation Processes

A recent study indicates that despite agreeing with the dialogue, citizens have very different understandings of its goal.[16] This is due, among other reasons, to the fact that they mainly access information through media in their own language, which mostly reflect divergent readings of the conflict, and that there are no real places for a debate at the inter-community level. In a way, there is no social dialogue about the governments' dialogue. However, citizens concur that the dialogue lacks transparency and impact, and that they have little benefit from it. Citizens "do not view the process to mean normalisation between the two societies [...]" but rather between states, and that agreements "do not see[m] to be translated in the same way in the society as a whole". Hence, a normalisation agreement cannot supplant the necessity "for a process of reconciliation and healing" among citizens. In such an obvious discrepancy, what could be the way forward? Observing that there is as much distance between governments as there is between the process (including parties and mediators) and the citizens, it would be meaningful, in our opinion, – for the sake of the process and of the implementation of its results – to try to bridge both gaps in parallel. While the major efforts are put on the former, any new engagement should also support the latter.

As of 2013, renewed efforts by civil society organisations (CSOs), with their ability to encapsulate and convey citizens' needs, have facilitated inter-community cooperation in Kosovo, which developed after the first results of the *Brussels Dialogue* partially lifted the social stigma burdening reconciliation initiatives. Their relative independence and flexibility proved to be an asset in overcoming characteristic institutional passiveness

or rigidity. Exchanges emerged between interested individuals within civic initiatives, but were often limited by their circumstantial nature (donor-driven projects, availability of funds), deep ethnic distrust, and social pressure to hold back from substantial dialogue, actively supported by those political actors maintaining conflict dynamics. It also proved uneasy to recruit skills to deal with sensitive and complex processes such as dealing with the past, building confidence and trust, developing empathy, etc. Despite setbacks, the civic engagement produced initiatives with significant and positive impact in increasing inter-community understanding and appreciation. The work of the Kosovo Humanitarian Law Center, for instance, by promoting transitional justice and addressing human rights violations is, in that regard, exemplary.[17]

However, the emerging dialogue between Kosovo communities is not structured as a direct support to the EU dialogue. It appears disconnected, even if EU institutions or member states support civic initiatives. What seems to be most needed is a clear and durable relation between civic initiatives and the *Brussels Dialogue*. In other words, to include them in the process as genuine Track 2 and 3 initiatives aimed at supporting Track 1 negotiations. And – as in any relationship – building trust between both processes is essential. As well, a specific emphasis on the Mitrovica region seems key to us in answering the specific features of this conflict. It is worth noting that similar processes elsewhere have accepted interesting initiatives to include the civil society, such as the Civil Society Support Room in the Syrian talks.[18]

## The Potential for the Arts to Include Citizens

Nationalist activists have recognised the appealing power of art and culture. Patriotic street art frescoes, especially visible in northern Mitrovica's city centre or nearby Zvecan, benefit from high exposure. They articulate clear political messages to citizens in the public space, suggesting the city is under siege, calling for resistance or sacrifice. Some – with obvious technical mastery – illustrate angry soccer hooligans in front of Serbia's coat of arms[19] or fighting with Kosovo, EU and NATO police;[20] 1998 Serbian soldiers in uniform flying the national flag;[21] orthodox

high clergy;[22] or some that even glorify commanders sentenced of war crimes.[23] Illustrative works – with an occasional use of formal codes of medieval orthodox church frescoes, suggesting a continuity in resistance – are accompanied by slogans such as "There is no way back from here"; "It is worth dying violently for this land" or, simply, "Fuck the police".

On the other end of the ideological scope, some civic initiatives also recognised the value of art in trust-building, producing admirable results. As of 1997, in the wake of war, Belgrade and Pristina artists joined in the exhibition *Përtej* ('beyond' in Albanian) in Belgrade.[24] Today, a prominent initiative is the regional *Mirëdita – Dobar dan* Festival.[25] Since 2014, it aims at bringing Kosovo and Serbia cultural scenes closer to one another, by exchanging quality works (cinema, photography, literature), and with debates in Belgrade or Pristina, on social and political issues. The festival is a good example of peer-to-peer cooperation between artists from Kosovo and Serbia that contributes to the creation of a unique framework for artistic expression and dialogue. Similar results were achieved through the festival *FemArt* – by *Artpolis Pristina*,[26] which promotes feminism and gender-equality through artistic expression. *Femart* succeeded in connecting a number of feminists and civic activists from Kosovo and Serbia. Furthermore, both co-authors have also used art in the context of their peacebuilding activities. Miodrag Marinković has regularly used *Forum Theater* techniques[27] to instigate the artistic engagement of young people to discuss various social issues, such as ethnic intolerance and ethnic stereotyping. Olivier Haener accompanied youngsters in reflections and practical works through the teaching of the practice of photography at the *Aktiv Art Centre*[28] in Mitrovica. They explored the relationship between the photographer and his/her subject during the act of photo shooting. This led to shifts in perceptions triggered by visual work relating to local communities' relationships. In particular, they spontaneously noted that one sees the other through a lens, but also the other way round.

Both examples show the spectrum that can be covered by artistic and cultural acts and practice. However, the inclusion of art in reconciliation initiatives remains a sensitive process. Artistic expression, which is emotional and subjective in essence,

can sometimes lead to replicating conflict, especially when it directly addresses the different and opposing conflict narratives. As mentioned above, these narratives often aim at stimulating feelings of victimhood and target legitimate fears or past traumas. Some cultural interventions even proved counterproductive, with exchanges slipping towards rivalry about which community supposedly suffered the most, or accounts of differing numbers of victims.

Currently, a variety of issues limit the full development of artistic cooperation in Kosovo. First, its basic framework is unsuitable: very few, if any, artistic exchanges are undertaken with only local means, i.e. without international donor funding. Hence, the framework is almost exclusively project-based, shaped by corporate management (timeframe, pressure for results, controlled resource use etc.), ending-up in with projects inserted into a trimester or fiscal year, with no certainty of continuation and limited maintenance of established connections. Fragmentation of efforts and difficulty in establishing a sense of local ownership further limit the achievement of a critical mass. The modest Kosovo reconciliation process also takes place in a highly complex environment, with immense social pressure on its stakeholders. For decades, ethnic relations between Serbs and Albanians were built around the conflict and its narratives, contributing to detached and adversarial societies, each with its own views on what had happened in Kosovo, and each with a strong sense of victimisation. Under such circumstances, initiatives that open a space for the articulation of genuine interests, views of 'the other side', in artistic or any other forms, are often met with strong social disapproval, counter-narratives and political manipulation.

Yet, adequately conceived, they can substantially contribute to the development of Track 2 and 3 initiatives, and bring divided Kosovo populations closer. Approaches based on art and culture can prompt citizens to shift their perspective and develop alternatives or additional identities to the solely conflict-oriented identities. This won't concern all of society but will focus on specific social strata and categories with an aim of attaining a critical mass able to bring about social change. The shifts in perception will help in making the citizens' genuine interests

more visible, starting with elements of the observable reality over the abstract or mythical notions filling the mainstream political discourse. At the start of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, a graffiti on Sarajevo's main post office claimed "This is Serbia". Shortly after, another graffiti answered "This is the post office, idiot".[29] Removing the deforming lens of populism that portrays the social reality only in ethnic terms is the first step towards building a common understanding of what citizens want and need (while respecting the specific nature, needs and sensitivities of all communities and cultures). This can, ultimately, lead to a durable social contract. Despite diverging views on history and its use to justify present national claims or allegedly irreconcilable destinies of Kosovo communities, serious and professional local platforms are hosting debates on present social and political issues of importance, some of them using high-quality translation. In Mitrovica these include, for instance, the show *Sporazoom* by the NGO *Aktiv,*[30] the debates on the news portal *KoSSev,*[31] or *Kosovo 2.0*[32] in Pristina.

Thus, in the experience of both authors, the facilitation of artistic or other forms of cooperation in that context speaks in favour of undertakings that do not directly address the conflict or its narratives. Rather than trying to counter polarising narratives (e.g. "Don't fuck the police"), it should focus on the needs of individuals, with regard to their social-, gender- and age-related concerns within peer groups. The conflict, as such, should not be the focal topic of the meetings, but addressing instead the needs of those who are present as individual persons, as professionals; answering them together is crucial in building trust. Notably, it gives an opportunity to explain different interests, sensitivities, needs, hopes, fears, and worldviews or to mitigate narratives. But doing things together – rather than only talking – and ideally developing common professional activities, answers material and societal needs at the same time, creating substantial motivation for those involved. A key facilitating factor in bringing together people across the divide is that they share a common practice or professional background (in our projects, forest owners, journalists, students, entrepreneurs, and musicians were involved in discussion with their peers). In addition, high-quality translation proved key in mutual (linguistic and emotional) comprehension. Such an indirect

approach can lead to the expression of shared views, concerns or challenges by participants, nurturing the necessary trust to later address more sensitive issues.

This type of approach can help non-ethnic identities of participants to surface and be expressed, and be understood as multiple, cumulative and non-exclusive. In that sense, the *Mirëdita – Dobar dan* Festival, opportunely mentions the great Yugoslav artist of Kosovo Albanian origin, later established in Belgrade, Bekim Fehmiu[33] (1936–2010) as a role model, presenting him as "an Albanian, Kosovo, Belgrade, Yugoslav and world actor".[34]

Interviews with art practitioners who have performed in the Mitrovica region also hint at the importance of not addressing the conflict directly. In 2021, the Swiss visual artist Sophie Guyot projected stylised images of historical inhabitants that lived in Mitrovica from the 1920s until the 1980s on the city walls, with the support of the local NGO *Aktiv*.[35] For her, art can make an important contribution, precisely in NOT talking about the conflict. Addressing issues that are important to citizens with quality art work – as for anyone all over the world – , is what can help transcend the conflict. As an external actor, she is also aware of "some naiveté of mine", which can be an advantage in trust-building, being less constrained by local loyalties. Developing projects with local artists or cultural actors from both sides of the divide can also help activities to be less prone to social pressure. Ursula Burger, a literary translator from Croatia, who co-organised the theatre and poetry festival *Krokodil* in Mitrovica in 2013,[36] shares this opinion, adding that developing a continuity of artistic and cultural activities in a peacebuilding perspective is essential for trust to be expanded effectively. For Lulzim Hoti, Director of the local NGO *7 Arte*,[37] setting an ambitious, yet realistic, objective in a mid-term future would greatly help to shape a foreseeable horizon and mainstream efforts across the civic sector. He suggests, for example, preparing a common candidacy for Mitrovica as the *European Capital of Culture*[38] within a 15-year timeframe.

As for the Mitrovica local initiatives involving art and culture, there is a vivid, yet limited, scene around some pioneering NGOs such as *CBM Mitrovica*, which organises storytelling events

across the divide that also include artists;[39] the NGO *7 Arte* that develops programmes specifically for young people through mural painting and art festivals such as *Green Fest* or a city lights festival; the NGO *Link* has also edited a monograph of ancient and recent photographs of the city and citizens of Mitrovica[40] and supported street art;[41] while the *Mitrovica Museum* sometimes organises mutual artistic events.[42]

## The Importance of Translation

From their own experience in reconciliation initiatives in the Mitrovica region, both authors conclude that translation and interpretation play a vital, yet widely underestimated, role in the resolution of that type of conflict. Despite not being seen as one of the major arts, translation and interpretation play a key role in mediation. Beyond bare words, they convey and make understandable to someone the intentions, references, aspirations, fears, hopes, doubts, dreams maybe of someone else. And vice versa. It is also about making cultural codes, perceptions, representations and needs understandable and accessible to each other (including mediators). The translator – from Latin 'translātor' "the one who carries over" or "one who transfers a thing" – has the responsibility to stay true to both interlocutors, while crafting sense with words that are unintelligible to each of them. Interpreters have to decode a perception of reality and recode it, with accuracy and sincerity, into another perception. In polarised environments, this can be highly sensitive. They have to be careful of the trust they are given. As discussed in an *Arts in Peace Mediation* encounter, it is often about smuggling words through the front line and making understandable – beyond orders, flags and loyalties –, the humanity of the other. As observed in these encounters, diplomats crafting agreements have the same responsibility: beyond the words, they are entrusted with trust.

In the Kosovo context, with languages that do not allow for direct mutual comprehension, due to there being no more teaching of the one language in the other community, communication opportunities are rare and limited to few English speakers or to people above 50, who are able and willing to speak Serbian, once a common language. Without reliable translation, in which

people can trust in very sensitive moments, no group cohesion can be reached. Lessons from these projects indicate that translating very practical activities help participants to develop a regular working relationship, allowing for trust to be built through regularity and the progressive development of a feeling of group belonging. The triangular dimension of trust-building proved crucial, as each participant could develop their own relations with the mediation team, as well as with other participants. Other trust-related elements include maintaining professional, fair and efficient standards that help dialogue participants gain and maintain trust in the process and in each other. In the implementation phase, it proved of key importance for the project to produce tangible results that are in accordance with the needs expressed earlier in the process.

Yet translation is not only a means; it can also be the goal of an initiative. In this way, the Mitrovica local NGO *Center for Affirmative Social Action* (CASA) developed the initiative *Barabar* – an archaism for 'equality' or 'fairness', in both the Serbian and Albanian languages. It aims to use art in the promotion or creation of positive examples (from past or present times) of cooperation between divided communities. In that sense, it does not aim to reconcile differences, but rather to affirm their normality, and thus, promote the appreciation of ethnic distinctiveness. The expected result is not only increased social cohesion and space for dialogue, but also increased trust.

Within this initiative, the project called *The Dictionary of the Words that Need no Translation* promotes intercultural linguistic literacy among the young. Hence, some 50 young people from various ethnic communities received the seemingly simple task of finding matching words shared between the dissimilar Serbian and Albanian languages.[43]

They were thus exposed to narratives that promoted shared social and historical contexts from which these words originated, and to neglected ethnic and historical connections between Serbs and Albanians, at times when communication and cooperation were common (e.g. from the 1950s or 1970s). Sequels include a national contest of *Poems that Need no Translation* (where young artists compete with poems created with words

from the *Dictionary*) or the exhibiting in public space of these words (expressed through artistic installations) as public demands of young people, regardless of their ethnic background, towards the decision-makers. This can contribute to transforming the angle from which community needs are observed, from the current ethnic viewpoint and age-based angle. A careful and innovative approach in the engagement of ethnic groups in artistic activities can have an immensely positive impact on the community, leading to more openness towards other communities.

## Conclusion

As a conclusion, we observe that citizens from both communities from the northern part of Kosovo are only marginally included in the *Brussels Dialogue* that aims at 'normalising' the Belgrade and Pristina relations, as well as improving "the lives of the people" as claimed by the *Brussels Agreement*. This mirrors the distance at which both governments keep their own citizens. The process appears to be confined to the governments. It is often unreadable for citizens, limiting their possbility for support or participation. In our opinion, it would be meaningful – for the sake of the process and of the implementation of its results – to try to bridge both gaps in parallel. The process could seek to include citizens, in order to bring communities closer to one another, but also closer to the process itself. What seems to be needed most is a clear and durable relation between civic initiatives and the *Brussels Dialogue*. It seems important to include civic initiatives in the process as genuine Track 2 and 3 initiatives aimed at supporting Track 1 negotiations. Moreover, a specific emphasis on the Mitrovica region and the inclusion of its communities' representatives in the dialogue seems key to us in answering the specific features of this conflict. In doing so, an approach that uses artistic and cultural elements could, if designed appropriately, play an important supporting role, in particular in translating perceptions and stimulating narratives of normality, helping transcend the conflict into becoming a durable social contract.

NOTES

1 Please see the Authors' section to access their biographies. Olivier Haener authored a field research article on the causes of conflict in Northern Kosovo (2010–2011): Un Kosovo unitaire divisé (A unitary divided Kosovo). Miodrag Marinković authored many research articles on the position of the Serbian community in Kosovo as well as on the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade, including *Characteristics of the Open Society in the Kosovo Serb Community and On the Road to Nowhere – A Soundtrack for the Brussels Dialogue.*

2 Cf. European External Action Service: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/349/Dialogue%20between%20Belgrade%20and%20Pristina

3 In this chapter, the term is used in its geographical sense, covering the seven municipalities of the Mitrovica region (listed here with their Albanian and, then, Serbian names, according to the administrative practice): Mitrovicë/Mitrovica South, Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Skenderaj/Srbica, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica North, Zveçan/Zvečan, Leposaviq/Leposavić, Zubin Potok. Demographically, the first three have a Kosovo-Albanian majority, while the last four have a Kosovo-Serb majority. The region has ca. 225,000 inhabitants and covers 2000 km².

4 See e.g. Miodrag Miki Marinković Kosovski *Srbi sa obe strane reke: Podele o kojima se ćuti,* (Kosovo Serbs on both sides of the Ibar River: unspoken divisions), Radio KiM, 11.10.2021, www.radiokim.net/vesti/analiza/kosovski-srbi-sa-obe-strane-reke-podele-o-kojima-se-cuti.html.

5 The linguist H. Zdravković observes that the narrative schemes in both Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo is very similar in their structure while symmetrical in their content. See Helena Zdravković, *The vernacular discourses of historical victimisation of Kosovo Serbs and Albanians,* Balcanica, Belgrade, no. 36, 2005, p. 111 (www.balcanica.rs/balcanica-xxxvi.html).

6 As in the September 2021 'number plates' crisis', cf., *Na barikade na severu Kosova 'po dužnosti'* (On Northern Kosovo barricades ex officio), Radio Free Europe, 23.09.2021 (www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/barikade-kosovo-duznost/31475025.html).

7 The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), launched in 2008, under the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union, cf. https://eulex-kosovo.eu/.

8 UN Security Council Resolution 1244 [http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1244].

9 Maya Jegen, Frédéric Mérand, *Constructive Ambiguity: Does it Work?* Comparing the European Union's Energy and Defence Policies (2014) conclude that "Ambiguity is found to be an attractive strategy for political entrepreneurs when member state preferences are heterogeneous and the EU's legal basis is weak. It is likely to be effective, however, only if it is embedded in […], a formal-legal context".

10 Signed by 35 heads of states, incl. G. Ford (USA), L. Brezhnev (USSR) and J. Broz, Tito (SFR Yugoslavia). See Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Final Act*, Helsinki 1975 (www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/c/39501.pdf)

11 See UN General Assembly *Resolution 64/298* (2010) (https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/64/298).

12 See e.g. https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/repository/docs/FIRST_AGREEMENT_OF_PRINCIPLES_ GOVERNING_THE_NORMALIZATION_OF_RELATIONS,_APRIL_19,_2013_BRUSSELS_en.pdf.

13 Respectively the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue.

14 Agon Demjaha, 'The Impact of Brussels Dialogue on Kosovo's Sovereignty', in: David L. Phillips, Lulzim Peci (Eds), *Threats and challenges to Kosovo's sovereignty,* Columbia University, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, and Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), New York, Pristina, October 2018, p. 14. (www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Threats AndChallenges_Vers-FIN_(1)_94986.pdf).

15 K. Gashi, V. Musliu, J. Orbie *Mediation Through Recontextualisation: The European Union and The Dialogue Between Kosovo and Serbia.* In European Foreign Affairs Review, 22, No. 4, 2017, pp. 533–550 (https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8554525/file/8554529.pdf).

16 See *Perception on Kosovo – Serbia Dialogue and Identity issues,* Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) and Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BCSP), February 2021 (www.qkss.org/en/Kosovo-Security-Barometer/Perception-on-Kosovo-Serbia-Dialogue-and-Identity-issues-1405).

17 http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?lang=de.
18 see https://cssrweb.org/en/
19 Cf. https://kossev.info/survey-75-of-serb-citizens-would-consider-the-recognition-of-kosovo-as-treason.
20 Cf. www.flickr.com/photos/77904706@N07/8632529002.
21 Cf. www.mdr.de/heute-im-osten/kosovo-mitrovica-132.html, slide 2].
22 https://radiokontaktplus.org/vesti/kosovska-mitrovica-mural-kao-omaz-patrijarhu-pavlu-i-mitropolitu-amfilohiju/30316.
23 Cf. www.flickr.com/photos/77904706@N07/8632991348/in/photostream.
24 www.czkd.org/en/cycle/pertej-en.
25 https://mireditadobardan.com/en/home/
26 https://femart-ks.com/about/
27 Developed by the Brazilian theatre practitioner, drama theorist, and political activist Augusto Boal (1931–2009), See A. Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed, London: Pluto Press, 1979.
28 www.ngoaktiv.org/project/aktiv-art-center.
29 Cf. https://furaj.ba/ovo-je-posta-budalo/
30 www.ngoaktiv.org/news/sporazoom-transitional-justice-reality-or-utopia
31 https://kossev.info/reset/ or https://kossev.info/na-38/
32 https://kosovotwopointzero.com/
33 Cf. Bekim Fehmiu on Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com/name/nm0270443/).
34 Cf. https://mireditadobardan.com/sq/per-festivalin/.
35 Cf. www.stardustmemoryproject.com and www.ngoaktiv.org/news/stardust-mitrovica-opening-event.
36 Cf. www.krokodil.rs/2013/10/festival-u-mitrovici/.
37 www.7-arte.org.
38 https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture.
39 www.cbmitrovica.org/publication/news/storytelling-night-with-miljana-and-nora.
40 https://linkkosovo.org/en/publikacija/old-new-mitrovica/.
41 https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/21/street-artists-brighten-up-kosovos-divided-mitrovica/.
42 http://www.facebook.com/muzeuimitrovices/
43 They have, for example, identified the words ‘barabar’ (mentioned above, which gave its name to the project), the exclamation ‘hajde’ (used to prompt movement, development or to grant one’s consent, similarly to ‘let’s’ in English) or the expression ‘mašala/mashallah’ (here in Serbian/Albanian written forms, yet pronounced the same way, meaning originally ‘by God’s will’, is colloquially used to approve a positive or happy event). During a workshop, young Albanian participants invited their Serbian peers to join by combining the three words in “Hajde barabar, mašala”, which could be translated as “Let’s be equals, that’s great”.

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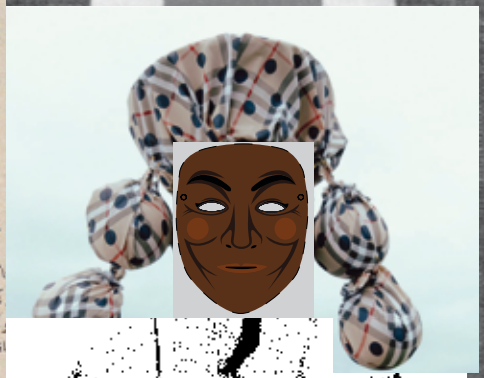
# The Mediator, not All of a Piece

Eran Schaerf








Turban, iStock; bowler hat, Baker, Istanbul; diverse Guy Fawkes masks, ANIMAL headdress, Ib Kamara; raincoat, Re-casting; John Kapernick TIME 2016; Nike Brands in front of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial, Der Spiegel, 1970; sneakers, Adidas; "Obviously there was no one of color in the room when the marketing team said this"; mickey mouse trig, ebay; Arab slave master, J. W. Boyle; terrors of the Barn Conference, 1863.

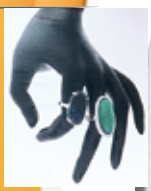
The Jazz Singer, 1927, Warner Bros.; artist wooden manikin hand, Prugo; polo neck sweater, Gucci ("It was a tribute to Leigh Bowery, to his camp/trash art; to his ability to challenge the bourgeois conventions and conformism, to his eccentricity as a performer; to his extraordinary vocation to masquerade meant as a hymn to freedom."); white mask, PM Scenarios; leather gloves, Chanel; keychain, Prada ("The Prodamalia are [...] imaginary creatures not intended to have any reference to the real world and certainly not blackface."); trousers, Comme des Garçons; youths in front of police during protests in Soweto, 1976, Jan Hamman; sneakers by Adidas.





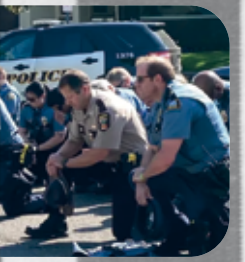
A Jewish woman during the Lviv pogroms, 1941; Wehrmacht propaganda company; defender gloves; black snakes; jumpsuit; H&M (“The mere fact that ‘Peshmerga-chic’ exists should be a source of pride.”); diverse Guy Fawkes masks, ANIMAL; white mask, FM-Scenario; Dersimli trucker cap, Designds; statue of a captive from the pyramid complex of Pepi I, ca. 2246–2152 B.C., Metropolitan Museum of Art; Doc Martens, Dior; re-enactment of Israeli pogroms of torture in Gaza City, 2008, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

The first remembers that which the second understands and the third wills; the second understands that which the first remembers and the third wills; the third wills that which the first remembers and the second understands.

Text, Ramon Llull; hands, Disney employee protest, Atelier d'assimilation, Thomas Ball's Emancipation Memorial; hoodie, Palm Angels; half face knitted balaclava, Isa Boulder; Jubba Thobe, aliexpress; police officers outside the St. Paul Governor's Mansion, Andrea Yoch; 'Soldier Kneeling at French Memorial, 1918', Joseph Christian Leyendecker;



The accession of the Queen of India, 1858, Punch magazine; beanie, new balance; Dersimli trucker cap, Dersimli; Vendetta mask, Tedi; Sheriff baby-shirt, Zara ("the garment was inspired by the classic Western films, but we now recognize that the design could be seen as insensitive."); pirate gloves, Kidorable; trousers, Comme des Garçons Sleep collection; Doc Martens, Dior; sneakers, Adidas.

Martin Luther King Jr. and other marchers for civil rights, Alabama, 1965. BHAP- Emancipation Memorial by Thomas Ball, 1876. Currier & Ives ("The first contribution of 5$ to the Statue Fund was made [...] by Charlotte Scott, a colored woman, of Marietta, Ohio."); defender gloves, Black Kshake@; forearm, unknown; jacket and trousers, Comme des Garçons Sleep collection ("There is no meaning."); mask, London demonstrator for human rights of the Uyghurs; manikin legs, hobbyshop; sneakers, new balance.


Pages 111–116: Eran Schaerf,
The Mediator, not All of a Piece, 2021

5

# Making Links while Building Bridges

## Reflections from the SOMIC Project

Irene Bruna Seu

## Introduction

The SOMIC (States of Mind in Conflict) project developed out of the *Arts in Peace Mediation* initiative. Hosted by Alexandre Fasel, the Swiss Ambassador to the United Kingdom, it started with conversations, some of which took the form of 'reflective practices'. Mediation practitioners were invited to the Swiss Embassy in London to engage in confidential conversations with a group of psychologists (and some arts practitioners) on challenges and opportunities of the process the respective mediator was working on (or had worked on in the past). These discussions led to the conclusion that the psychological aspect is a crucial element which is underestimated and often overlooked in peace mediation processes and therefore deserves deeper analysis.[1] Although a psychological approach is sometimes practised intuitively, psychological interventions have not been made explicit or properly studied and neither has their importance been recognised. In particular, the way mediation in highly escalated and violent conflicts is framed, theorised, and taught today does not sufficiently engage with the state of mind of the parties within the mediation process.

SOMIC sought to make explicit the psychological component of existing mediation practices and, specifically, to bring insights into the state of mind of all the participants in the mediation encounters. As an inductive and exploratory pilot, and as a starting point for evidence-based recommendations, it primarily aimed to map out what psychological input is needed, based on practitioners' experience.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers began the project with a deep dive into the relatively small body of existing literature that explores the intersection of peace mediation and psychology. They focused principally on academic journal searches, and policy reports and articles recommended by mediator friends of the project. Despite the particular formation of the researchers in psychosocial and psychoanalytic approaches to the human mind, 'psychology' was defined broadly at this stage, incorporating work from experimental and cognitive psychology paradigms and neuroscience.

In the early weeks of the project, the researchers and funders assembled an 'Advisory Board' for the project that consisted of three experts in peace mediation: a mediation scholar; a mediation support professional; and a frontline mediator. The Advisory Board met regularly to provide feedback on research findings and were crucial to facilitating the iterative methodology of the project.

The project received ethical approval from Birkbeck, University of London. Because of the disruption caused by Covid-19 restrictions all the data collection occurred remotely, which gave us the opportunity to interview mediators from around the world, and to bring together participants from diverse time zones and geographies. Although Europe was the major continent of origin, participants had experience of mediating across a range of geographies, with East Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Southern Africa especially well represented. The majority of participants were experienced in frontline mediation and had acquired their experience in high-level geopolitical peace mediation processes.[2]

The research consisted of three data-gathering phases: (1) Ten exploratory interviews with experienced mediators and mediation support professionals; (2) Two focus groups with a group of eight experienced frontline mediators; (3) Twenty-five 1-to-1 interviews with experienced mediators and mediation support professionals. These interviews were semi-structured in that they were structured around the research protocol while also following up on participant responses in order to generate new lines of enquiry.

## SOMIC Findings and their Relevance for Arts in Peace Mediation

SOMIC's overarching research question to practitioners was: Based on your experience, how can psychology enhance mediation and peacebuilding practices? The SOMIC findings cannot be discussed in detail in this chapter.[3] In brief we found that participants' answers to this question tended to cluster around: (1) the psychology of parties in conflict; (2) the psychology of the mediator/s; (3) the mediation encounter, thus giving an indication of where psychological input is needed most urgently.

In terms of the parties in conflict, all mediator actors expressed a desire to gain a better psychological understanding of the states of mind of the parties, in particular the impact of trauma on the parties in conflict and on the quality of their participation in mediation processes. Trauma also emerged as a recurrent theme when discussing the psychology of mediators, in particular secondary trauma and its impact on the mediators' well-being.

In order to reflect on overlaps and synergies between the SOMIC findings and those from the *Arts in Peace Mediation* project, I will concentrate on the third of the SOMIC psychosocial sites – the mediation encounter – first, to elaborate on some of the key psychological dynamics of the encounter; and, second, to reflect on how the arts could be utilised to facilitate key psychological shifts within and between the mediation actors. In doing so, my approach is in line with a view of mediation as "a process which holds the relationships as central" (Abatis, 2021:22),[4] thus framing peace mediation practices as intersubjective relational encounters.

Against the backdrop of the synergies and overlaps identified in Chapter 1, *Arts in Peace Mediation: The Story So Far,* the final section of this chapter focuses on the themes of emotions in mediation, their management, and the key role played by 'space(s)' in mediation practices which were mentioned by mediation practitioners in both the *Arts in Peace Mediation* and *Psychology in Mediation* strands as being important in the practice of mediation and peacebuilding. I propose that, in order to enable psychology and the arts to make a meaningful contribution to peace mediation, it is necessary to articulate a contextualised, flexible and dynamic model of how the three domains – mediation practices, psychological insights and artistic activities – connect with and intersect with each other.

This necessitates a three-step process, not necessarily in the order below:

a. To home in on nodal points, blockages and desired shifts in the encounter dynamics, as identified by mediation and peacebuilding practitioners;

b. to analyse the psychological dynamics underpinning the blockages and nodal points, and why these dynamics and the proposed shifts are important for and beneficial to the mediation process;
c. to identify specific artistic interventions and at what point of the process they could be introduced most fruitfully to initiate and/or support the desired shifts and dynamics in the mediation.

## Emotions, Spaces and 'The Third'

In some of the discussions (as summarised in Chapter 1) participants stated that "both art and psychology create space" and that "both art and psychology create the conditions for working in liminal spaces". What exactly do we mean by that? Why is it important to 'create space'? How can we understand the nature and function of such 'space(s)'?

In the SOMIC interviews mediation actors often spoke of the beneficial impact of 'safe spaces' when referring to encounters between parties – spontaneous conversations, coffee breaks etc. – that take place outside the formal settings, thus suggesting that the physical stepping out of the constraining formality of mediation settings enables a different and creative quality of exchange. Similarly, safety and safe spaces have also been referred to by artists as being important. However, beyond the direct reference to locality, what 'safe' means psychologically and why it matters is not articulated or explored by either group but, rather assumed as a shared, and taken for granted, understanding of its meaning.

If we consider feeling threatened and anxious as the opposite of feeling safe, we can begin to appreciate the different states of mind that feeling threatened and feeling safe engender. In the first case, we have an embattled state of mind, characterised by polarised and rigid thinking, and pushing individuals to resort to primitive defence mechanisms such as splitting[5] and projection to maintain a modicum of safety. In the context of parties who have been deadly enemies, these responses are based on real experience. In the battleground of positions, hurts, resentments, and clashing worldviews, it feels as if there is only space for 'either-or', 'my experience or your experience'.

Psychologically safe spaces enable an in-between or liminal space in which, metaphorically speaking, there is 'room to breathe' (and to think) in intersubjective encounters flooded with difficult and intense emotions. The Relational Psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin conceptualises this 'third space'[6] as an intersubjective mental space co-created by both subjects, which hinges on the ability to surrender, that is, allow oneself a certain letting-go of the self, adopt the view of the other, and perceive things from his or her perspective. It's hard to empathise with one's enemy, to 'walk in their shoes', but a third space allows parties to "enter actively into another individuality, another perspective on the world – without losing sight even momentarily on one's unique perspective, one's own 'surplus' of life experience, one's own sense of self" (Valentino, 2005:5).[7]

I have argued elsewhere (Seu, 2021)[8] that mediators and peacebuilding actors have the potential to act as 'the moral third', by being deeply involved in the psychological dimensions of mediation while resisting being pulled into either of the polarised positions and, instead, facilitating and modelling a 'third space' where truths and experiences from both parties can be validated and coexist. This third position/space brings something new by introducing possibilities which are otherwise unconceivable to the polarised and embattled minds of parties in conflict. The role of the moral third is to withstand the ambivalence – the need for, and simultaneous resistance to, a new encounter – to foster the encounter as a safe space, and to reflect back the hope for, if not the possibility of, a different way of being and coexisting with others (Seu, 2021:10).

However, despite the involved role of mediators and other peacebuilding actors, positions can sometimes be too entrenched, minds too polarised and emotions too raw, and new possibilities might feel too threatening. This is where the arts can contribute to and bolster mediators' function as 'the moral third', by creating a 'third space' that speaks to each party but does not belong exclusively to either. The essence of this dynamic was captured by a participant to the *Arts in Peace Mediation* webinar: "Making arts is a physical process of imagining and shaping possibility".[9]

Trauma blocks and distorts access to imagination because the traumatic past is still too real and intrudes into the present. When fear and trauma dominate minds, it is hard to imagine a more hopeful and benign future. Again, this was commented on in the SOMIC interviews – in terms of the need for mediators to have the psychological knowledge and skills to support parties in conflict to shift their rigid mindset – and in the *Arts in Peace Mediation* webinars, "Artwork actions the premise that imagination can transform despair into hope and agency, and art can offer critical and meaningful readings of the world and possible futures".[10]

Mirroring this statement, SOMIC participants also identified their psychological role in bringing hope and conveying that, however unthinkable at any given moment, it is possible to get through the ostensibly insurmountable obstacles in peacebuilding. In this vein, one of the mediators we interviewed likened their role to that of a doctor: "You are psychologically approaching it (mediation) as a doctor (who) wants to try to reduce the pain, prolong the life, give hope".

"Safe spaces" within mediation, as advocated by Rifkind and Yawanarajah (2019),[11] play a crucial role in facilitating the creation of a 'third space', by enabling conflict parties to explore their feelings, internal narratives, and personal motives. I would add that a key element of that psychological and emotional safety is that they enable the imagining of a different way of being with the other, without fully letting go of the past. The third space psychologically holds both past and imagined futures; and does not do away with the tension but harnesses it creatively. Thus, in the new 'in-between' third space minds and emotions can expand, actors can experience themselves and others differently, and for the first time encounter the former enemy as a human being. The psychological fluidity and expansiveness of the 'third space' can, however briefly, bring hope and release from harrowing pasts and pressing traumas and be the first step in the difficult road to reconciliation.

It is clear from the above that an additional and different understanding of mediation encounters is necessary to begin to identify the psychological tools required for the creation of a

'third space' and to manage the powerful emotional charge in peace mediations. Many of the practitioners we interviewed wished for a shift in how emotions are understood and dealt with in mediation practices and lamented the lack of psychological knowledge in mediation trainings on how to understand and deal with emotions. They argued that not only are emotions in mediation processes unavoidable, they should also be recognised as a potential force to move the process forward, rather than an obstacle to be overcome. This is because, as one mediator put it: "(it is not) the personality that drives his agenda because there's these emotions that are driving (him). What do we do with it? And can we deal with it?"

Referring to the arts, a peace mediator practitioner said "During the meetings, the artists can help calm emotions, they can restore calm to the discussion, they can build bridges among participants".[12] Psychology can help us understand how this 'calming' function happens and why it helps 'build bridges'. The psychoanalytic concepts of 'psychic containment' and 'mentalisation' seem particularly important in this context (see Seu, 2021 for a review).

Mentalisation is the capacity to distinguish and understand mental states in oneself and others. The role played by emotion regulation in cognition and behaviour has long been recognised by psychoanalysis and psychiatry as a key function of mentalisation and reflective capacities. The discovery of the mirror neurons as well as research into early imitation, which sets in immediately after birth, have boosted the opinion that intersubjectivity is an innate capability and is facilitated by mentalisation, which, in turn, is a component of a more general psychological capacity called reflective functioning. Reflective functioning is important during interpersonal conflict and, consequently, for mediation because "conflict – or, rather, its adaptive resolution – prototypically calls for the perception of the self and of the other in relation to the self",[13] "requiring individuals to reconcile their own legitimate claims with concern for the other".[14] I have argued (Seu, 2021) that mediation has the potential to mobilise that innate capability for intersubjectivity and to move the parties in conflict away from their rigid and polarised position towards a new experience of encountering

the other, and themselves, anew. The mediators' capacity to hold, that is, to be aware of and tolerate particular emotional states without turning to action or repressing them, and their ability to contain emotions in the process are key. Similar to the mediator's function, which can be modelled and internalised, the arts can also contribute to the containment of emotions by, for example, giving expression to affects that cannot be articulated through words. They can provide a useful canvas – literal and metaphorical – onto which to project, make visible, and then process raw affects. Arguably, the safety in artistic production comes from it happening in a space that reflects everyday life but is also "separated from it by a frame, the edge of a stage, by playing a 'role'".[15] The liminal quality of the performance – real, but not reality – offers a transitional 'third space' in which emotions can be experienced safely, thus psychologically contained.

## Summary

I have attempted to illustrate, through a focus on emotional regulation and the use of 'third space', how the arts can potentially be beneficially employed to facilitate important psychological shifts in peace mediation processes. It also exemplifies how, in order to provide targeted recommendations and interventions, we need to articulate more specifically what the desired psychological shifts are in any given mediation process, to then identify the most appropriate form of artistic intervention and its timing. To achieve that, we need to gain more grounded knowledge of real-life peace mediation interventions with a focus on desired psychological and strategic shifts and/or blockages.

What I have proposed in this chapter is only one of the many possible ways in which the creative potential of an in-depth collaboration between the arts and psychology can be developed to enhance the practice and effectiveness of peace mediation. Despite the obvious overlaps and synergies between the arts and psychology, however, we are left with many questions on how a collaboration between the two fields could be built to offer concrete and effective contributions to peace mediation processes. From my perspective as a psychological practitioner,

the most urgent to be tackled involves the development of a grounded contextual model to articulate the crucial interlinking of the 'what' (the specific focus/challenge in a mediation process) and the 'why' (how can we understand this challenge psychologically) with the 'how' (how can the arts make an intervention in that context). That is, a grounded identification of shifts, changes, and dynamics in mediation settings needing intervention, accompanied by an analysis of their psychological underpinnings and function, to arrive at a targeted application of the arts to impact and shift the identified dynamics and blockages.

Like cogs in a mechanism, it is the interlinking, rather than the order in which these questions might be answered that matters and, indeed, the movement has to be dynamic and fluid for it to adapt to the complex and ever-changing dynamics of peace mediation.

NOTES

1 At this point the term 'psychology' is used to encompass a variety of approaches to the human mind and behaviour, leaving aside, for the moment, the fundamental and important epistemological differences between the various branches of psychology – e.g. psychonalysis/psychodynamics, neuropsychology, social and group psychology, developmental psychology and so on.
2 For further information about the project's methodology and findings please refer to the *Final Report* https://www.bbk.ac.uk/research/centres/embedding-human-rights
3 Please refer to the *Final Report* for further information.
4 Abatis, K. (2021) *Inviting the Elephant into the Room: Culturally Oriented Mediation and Peace Practices.* Centre for Security Studies, ETH: Zurich.
5 I am referring to the splitting of the mind when experiencing trauma, and the splitting of the Other into either good or bad.
6 Benjamin, J. (2017) *Beyond Doer and Done to: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity and the Third.* London: Routledge.
7 Valentino, R. S. (2005). *The Oxymoron of Empathic Criticism.* Poroi, 4 (1), 5.
8 Seu, I. B. (2021) *States of Mind in Conflict: Offerings and Translations from the Psychoanalytic and Psychosocial Fields.* The New England Journal of Public Policy.
9 Oral communication, webinar on *Arts in Peace Mediation,* 6.10.2021.
10 Oral communication, webinar on *Arts in Peace Mediation,* 6.10.2021.
11 Gabrielle Rifkind and Nita Yawanarajah, *Preparing the Psychological Space for Peacemaking*, New England Journal of Public Policy 31, no.1 (2019), art.7
12 Oral communication, webinar on *Arts in Peace Mediation,* 5.5.2021.
13 Werner Bohleber (2013). *The Concept of Intersubjectivity in Psychoanalysis: Taking Critical Stock,* International Journal of Psychoanalysis 94, no.4:800
14 Peter Fonagy, Gyorgy Gergely, Elliott L. Jurist, and Mary Target (2004). *Affect Regulation, Mentalization, and the Development of the Self,* London: Karnc, 3–23
15 Dagmar Reichert, personal communication

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# 6

# Postscript

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

Nicola Dahrendorf

## 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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# Annex

## Chronology of Gatherings and Recommendations

## List of Participants

29 MAY 2015

Event

Villa Frontenex, Geneva, at invitation of Ambassador Alexandre Fasel, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the Office of the United Nations in Geneva. Organised by Dagmar Reichert from the Swiss Foundation *artasfoundation*.

Focus

To consider both potential contributions of art to peace-mediation processes, and possible triggers for art to be elicited from peace mediation. Based on the organiser's belief that these seemingly separate fields have much in common and could strengthen each other through cooperation; this meeting was an experiment and a first attempt of its kind.

26 JULY 2018

Event

London, Residence of the Ambassador of Switzerland to the UK – Exploration on Art in Peace Mediation

Focus

To explore the supposition that theatre directors, film producers, writers, painters, musicians etc. are needed to assist in unblocking and advancing mediation processes. The reason behind this initiative was to find other ways of working. The role of artists in mediation is not only to document but to contribute. Participants or 'warring factions' in mediation processes visualise, hear different things, inevitably bring their own experiences and psychopathology into the room. Artists express, communicate, comment, stay apart, sometimes break out, and provide other angles.

The aim was to test a concept and to introduce artists and political mediators to each other, building on the colloquium held in Geneva on 29 May 2015. Invitations went to a select group of mediators and artists who are actively involved and recognised in their field. Mediators present were actively involved in peace processes in different capacities.

Summary Recommendations

- To consider a pilot project of an 'artist in residence' in a Track 1 mediation: the artist would follow the discussions without any specific goal. He/she would absorb and feel the atmosphere and report on his/her experience and make some recommendations. Planned actions: To hold discussions with Track 1 mediators in Geneva.
- To develop an academic network and collaboration with universities who have departments or institutes engaged in conflict resolution, peace mediation etc., such as the London School of Economics (LSE), the University of Warwick, Zurich University of the Arts, and also to ensure the inclusion of non-Western institutions such as, for example, universities in Somaliland, Ethiopia or Bangladesh.
- To explore the inclusion of a psychological and psychotherapeutic dimension in mediation processes as distinct from or allied with artists in mediation processes.

13 NOV. 2018

Event

London, Residence of the Ambassador of Switzerland to the UK – Exploration on Mediation and Psychology

Focus

To hold an informal brainstorming session exploring the potential to involve psychologists, psychotherapists and artists in peace mediation processes. This was based on one of the critical observations of the 26 July 2018 meeting that the psychological dimension was pivotal to political mediation processes and yet insufficiently explored.

Invitations went to a select group of psychologists/therapists and mediators who are actively involved and recognised in their field, with a particular emphasis on those whose work bridges different disciplines and ways of working.

Key participants included a senior Swiss diplomat – who joined by video link – who had been involved in a number of 'behind the scenes' negotiations and was instrumental in negotiating international agreements.

3 APRIL 2019

Event

London, Residence of the Ambassador of Switzerland to the UK – Exploration on Mediation and Psychology

Focus

To follow up in person to the brainstorming session of 13 November 2018 with a confidential conversation between the above mentioned senior Swiss diplomat and a group of psychologists, psychotherapists and mediation support practitioners to reflect on challenges and opportunities which the person faces in chairing a complex UN-led peacebuilding process.

Participants present were largely the same as on 13 November 2018 as well as two new participants who joined the discussion.

Summary Recommendations

- Continuation of a 'reflective practice': Some senior mediation practitioners and UN envoys agreed to participate in this reflective discussion. Dates need to be confirmed during 2019.
- It was agreed with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) that this reflective practice will be made available for Human Security Advisers who are implementing the department's peace promotion programmes in the field and who experience difficult situations.
- Participants shared a number of names of mediators to whom a reflective practice session in a safe space could be offered. The embassy will be approaching these individuals.
- It was discussed that the continuation of meetings with specific individuals as outlined above might enable a grounded thematic approach and the identification of common themes.
- Continuation of meta-reflections (concepts such as projective identification, countertransference, divided consciousness), contributing to a conceptualisation of the emerging themes and the foundations to a concept-note for the project.
- The discussion stream *Arts in Peace Mediation* will also continue.

17 JUNE 2019

Event

London, Residence of the Ambassador of Switzerland to the UK – Exploration on *Arts in Peace Mediation.*

Focus

To convene a group of professionals from the fields of art, academia and peacebuilding to discuss how art and artistic practice could support the work of peace mediators.

The central conclusion, present within the discussion from the outset, was that alongside the initial mapping and thorough research on everything that has been written and practised thus far about art and mediation, there needed to be a way of testing it as well.

Summary
Recommendations

- In an initial practical stage, mediators and artists should be given the chance to ask each other questions and unpick their disciplines to find commonalities and differences. Doing so might help both artists and mediators to discover new factors to consider and implement in their respective practices. A workshop between artists and mediators could start with an artwork and mediators could be introduced to the creative process behind it.
- It is pivotal to find the right artists to work with. A group of carefully chosen artists should be sought with whom close and long-term relationships can be established.
- Practical workshops should be part of the planned Wilton Park Conference, to cover not only the cognitive dimensions of the project but also to give participants a chance to experience and apply new methods.
- The focus group for these workshops and interventions should be not only mediators and artists, but also the mediation support networks.
- The Ambassador of Switzerland's (to the UK) existing network of artists, mediators, academics and professionals active within the field of conflict resolution will have the function of an 'advisory board' for the new project leader/research analyst and help him or her to conceptualise, structure and organise the formats mentioned above.

20 SEPT. 2019

Event

London, Residence of the Ambassador of Switzerland to the UK – Exploration on Mediation and Psychology

Focus

To convene confidential conversations between a senior UN envoy and a group of psychologists, psychotherapists and mediation support practitioners to reflect on their respective experiences in their former function.

The envoy agreed to be part of this conversation because over four decades of experience in peace mediation have led him to conclude that the psychological aspect is a crucial element that is missing in peace negotiation.

Summary
Recommendations

- The group developed some key points from the illustrations of the envoy's experience:
- Importance of knowing a lot about the negotiating party's background and about the system that made the leader emerge. We need to ask, "What is driving them?"
- A conflict analysis should therefore not only be based on the politico-geographic power play at stake but needs to include questions of identity of the negotiating parties and the psychological terrain of a conflict (the anthropology of what happens on the ground). At the moment, an adequate psychological analysis of motivations of parties is lacking. How can this connection become the norm? One tool mentioned which could help establish this connection is strategic empathy, the ability of the mediator to connect with the parties and for the parties to connect with each other.
- The discussion around empathy, impartiality and neutrality warrants deeper examination. Some members of the group pointed out that it is impossible to be neutral in the face of brutality and that being neutral would mean to stop caring. On the other hand, remaining impartial means to not take sides, to advocate for an outcome and not the sides; to be empathetic of the aspirations of all parties. Impartiality also implies the ability to remain objective, to be able to distance oneself and to act as an honest broker (with moral integrity), focusing on outcomes.
- Other than analysing the psychological state of the adversaries, there is also a need to facilitate the mediator's self-awareness and to be aware of his/her background and mental health. What are the elements which the mediator is picking up emotionally and not just rationally? What is the mediator's Achilles' heel?

20 NOV. 2019

Event

London, Residence of the Ambassador of Switzerland to the UK – Exploration on Mediation and Psychology

Focus

To host a confidential conversation between a well-established woman mediator, who is a member of the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Network, and a group of psychologists, psychotherapists and mediation support practitioners to reflect on her experiences, mainly during her key role in mediating between a long-standing resistance movement and a government.

Summary
Recommendations

- Continuation of a 'reflective practice' – a succession of mediators coming through London to meet the supervision group. The next meeting was scheduled for a senior practitioner, head of a European research group and former UN official.
- Drafting of a one-pager, outlining the purpose of these meetings, the process and the framework, as well as further consolidating the questions to be put to the mediator.
- Seek funding from the FDFA to conduct a pilot study which will primarily focus on identifying, mapping and conceptualising the psychological components of turning points, blockages and breakthroughs

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| | in mediation with the long-term aim to identify key psychological concepts, strategies and techniques, with the objective, inter alia, to develop a psychological 'toolkit' and provide recommendations and training to better equip mediation practitioners.<br>• Continuation of a 'reflective practice' – a succession of mediators coming through London to meet the supervision group and to continue with the gathering of data, points of entry and patterns, contributing to a conceptualisation of the emerging themes and the foundations of a concept-note for the project.<br>• In October, a research analyst for Culture and Peace Mediation has taken up her one-year position at the Embassy of Switzerland and is exploring the role of art in mediation processes. Funding sources for research assistance for the "psychology-stream" will now be explored by the Embassy. The team will continue to seek complementarity and points of contact between the two working streams. |
| 16 MARCH 2020<br><br>Event | Art in Mediation Steering Committee |
| 7 APRIL 2020<br><br>Event<br><br>Focus | Zoom workshop (1) with artists and mediators –<br>Facilitated by Isabel Käser<br><br>Participants: a mix of four to five arts and mediation practitioners. |
| 15 APRIL 2020<br><br>Event<br><br>Focus | Zoom workshop (2) with artists and mediators –<br>Facilitated by Isabel Käser<br><br>Participants: a mix of four to five arts and mediation practitioners. |
| 28 APRIL 2020<br><br>Event<br><br>Focus | Zoom workshop (3) with artists and mediators –<br>Facilitated by Isabel Käser<br><br>Participants: a mix of four to five arts and mediation practitioners. |

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| 6 MAY 2020<br>Event | Art in Mediation Steering Committee |
| 24 JUNE 2020<br>Event | Art in Mediation Steering Committee |
| 6 MAY 2020<br>Event | Art in Mediation Steering Committee |
| 28 JAN. 2021<br>Event | Art in Mediation Steering Committee |
| 25 FEB. 2021<br>Event | Art in Mediation Steering Committee |
| 24 MARCH 2021<br>Event<br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Focus | Webinar 1 –<br>Organised by *artasfoundation* for the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK. Part of a digital webinar series of seven events to continue the conversation on *Arts in Peace Mediation* leading up to the scheduled Wilton Park Conference.<br>Due to the Covid pandemic, the conference was delayed and then cancelled.<br>NOTE: All webinars were held on Zoom<br><br>Working with language / Demilitarisation of Language – Comparison of working with language in diplomacy and in poetry.<br>Dialogue between a mediator and an arts practitioner followed by a discussion between 20 invited participants and working groups. |

Summary
Recommendations

- There are many dimensions to language: direct impact when used as propaganda, as a bridge and 'non-linguistic' forms of communication (e.g., silence, gaze).
- The necessity of "demilitarising language" and of building trust to reach through multiple layers of meaning. Translation, not only between different idioms, but also between the deeper meaning of the stories of the different sides in a conflict, are tasks shared by both mediators and poets.
- The practice of "creative ambiguity", which is different in both professional fields, was discussed in terms of its potential and its dangers.

12 MAY 2021

Event

Webinar 2 –
Organised by *artasfoundation* for the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

Focus

Trust, building trust, trusting in persons and trusting in processes.
Dialogue between a mediator and an arts practitioner followed by a discussion between 22 invited participants and working groups.

Summary
Recommendations

- At the outset there was a strong plea to rethink existing mediation practice and that the arts could contribute. E.g., "trust" is frequently mentioned as a precondition for mediation, but the possibility for conflicting parties to build trust between each other (or even with the mediator/facilitator) is far from assured.
- Mediation should be viewed as a collaboration between antagonists, and a certain level of mistrust may be necessary. Building confidence in the process and mutual predictability might be more important.
- Critical questions are: "When is the moment when change becomes possible?" and "Can the arts help in bringing about such moments?"
- Discussions focused on art as a space for shared experience, as creating new sensibilities and opening new realms of communication as different dimensions of a possible contribution of art to peace mediation.

9 JUNE 2021

Event

Webinar 3 –
Organised by *artasfoundation* for the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

Focus

Focus: Arts to advocate and mediate for peace in South Sudan.
Presentation by a South Sudanese arts practitioner followed by a discussion between 18 invited participants and working groups.

Summary
Recommendations

- The arts play a key communicative role in a country where less than half the population is literate. Artistic expression was an acceptable means to address delicate topics in a sensitive manner; it also helped avoid fostering division in the population and putting authors at risk.
- The use of music, spoken-word poetry or mural paintings allowed for a critical mass to be reached in a safe and constructive way. Using social media brought both comfort and a sense of togetherness on a large scale.
- Artists were actively involved with civil society in the African Union-led mediation process in South Sudan; they consulted experts, and mobilised civil society and the diaspora to support and exert influence over the peace process. Short videos were produced to remind the negotiating parties that their progress in peace talks was closely monitored and that they were accountable.
- In discussions, the work of the South Sudan artist movement was viewed as representing concerns of the population across tribal divisions and as advocacy. The question arose whether the ability to reach such a wide population might also be used for war propaganda. The speaker underlined the training process the artist movement used for artists.
- Another question focused on the threats and dangers that activist artists are exposed to.

7 JULY 2021

Event

Webinar 4 –
Organised by *artasfoundation* for the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

Focus

The philosophy of art and the characteristics of artistic thinking.
Presentation by a Philosopher of Aesthetics followed by a discussion between 18 invited participants and working groups.

Summary
Recommendations

- The distinctive characteristics of the "artistic gaze" are not specific to artists. They are:
- A general possibility of relating to the world that differs from the functional orientation of everyday life or from scientific thinking.
- It looks at things from a different angle, in what can be called a "transversal gaze" and develops an idiosyncratic understanding.
- It aims at the specific existential conditions of action or communication.
- By offering previously unseen perspectives that question the reader or viewer provides the potential for artists to contribute to mediation processes.
- Participants highlighted many similarities between mediation and the arts, such as: good mediation must be creative and needs a safe space to be productive; mediation requires a form of artfulness.
- It was suggested that perhaps a basis for the collaboration of both disciplines is the necessity to apply an oblique gaze to reality to allow for new options to emerge.

15 SEPT. 2021

Event

Webinar 5 –
Organised by *artasfoundation* for the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

Focus

The potential of artists and art in a specific ongoing negotiation and mediation process: *The Civil Society Support Room* (CSSR), established in 2016 by the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria and implemented by *swisspeace* and *NOREF*, and its relation to the work of the UN Special Envoy for Syria during the talks in Geneva.

Presentation by a peacebuilding expert involved in the Syria process, followed by a discussion between 16 invited participants and working groups.

Summary
Recommendations

- The aim of the CSSR was to assist in overcoming the crisis by focusing on the views of civil society organisations. Artists were not included in their specific capacity as artists, but some NGO representatives had a background in the arts.
- The speaker recalled how those with an artist's background emphasized their ability to represent Syrian identity across political lines, build bridges among participants and improve the flow of discussions by calming emotions.
- Beyond the CSSR, the prime ability of artists was to navigate the highly sensitive topic of national identity. The presenter saw potential for the inclusion of artists in the reconstruction of areas of enormous cultural significance, such as the old markets of Aleppo and Homs.
- Some artistic activities took place outside the actual meetings during CSSR gatherings – but the formal mediation processes followed a more classical model.

6 OCT. 2021

Event

Webinar 6 –
Organised by *artasfoundation* for the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

Focus

Where does transformation happen? Learning from grassroots art initiatives.

The webinar centred on the potential of the arts to enact change. It sought to answer a set of three related questions: How are artists agents of change? How does artmaking activate change? Should the arts be used as a tool for change?

Presentation by a visual artist from South Africa who is also engaged in community art projects, followed by a discussion between 16 invited participants and working groups.

Summary
Recommendations

- The action of making art is in itself fostering change: artworks challenge the status quo when they imagine new worlds. Change is also enacted in art institutions, where students may acquire more than artistic skills.

- The speaker described how simple art-making techniques had been powerfully implemented to spread information about AIDS in South African communities at a time of strong denialism about the AIDS epidemic.
- Equating art with a tool may 'ruffle feathers'. Yet, taking a pragmatic and open-minded view, in the right circumstances, the ends might justify the means. During the recent Covid-related lockdown, the speaker set up artwork auctions to fund bursaries for underprivileged art students.
- The speaker concluded: "Artwork actions the premise that imagination can transform despair into hope and agency. Art can offer critical and meaningful readings of the world and possible futures. It can also inspire activist coalitions to collaborate towards social justice in society."

3 NOV. 2021

Event

Webinar 7 –
Organised by *artasfoundation* for the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

Focus

Focus: Summing up of the webinar series on *Arts in Peace Mediation*
Presentation by two peacebuilding practitioners who had actively participated in the process throughout. Focus on key take-aways from this 'exploration' and possible next steps.
Plenary discussion between 20 invited participants.

Summary
Recommendations

- Participants' observations included that conflicts are different now as are the demands on mediation.
- It is not a matter of whether but how arts practitioners can contribute to mediation processes – but artists and mediators need to collaborate in person – and it needs to be tested in a concrete mediation process.
- Some participants expressed the view that the past few years had failed in integrating an artistic process. There is a real danger that art and artists are instrumentalised.
- There were some missed opportunities – for example some voices were missing: first and foremost from communities who were being mediated on, and more artists should have participated.
- More structured discussions to bring together arts and psychology would have allowed a more joined-up approach. There are many similarities both in practice and approach, including around creating connections, use of language, building trust etc.
- Conversations are now underway about the next steps.

10 NOV. 2021

Event

Art in Mediation Steering Committee

PARTICIPANTS

Abou Fakher, Firas
Alderdice, John
Beck, David Kilian
Ben Ezer, Inbal
Berman, Kim
Biéler, Jean-Daniel
Bigombe, Betty
Bleeker, Mô
Buckley, Bernadette
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Schoch, Steven
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Schwald, Marcel
Seu, Irene Bruna
Shukla, Nikesh
Siegfried, Matthias
Sigg, Alain
Stuart-Smith, Sue
Vimalarajah, Luxshi
Waldman, Matt
Weinberg, Julian
Wood, David
Young, Louisa

Please see the website www.art-in-mediation.ch
for more information about the participants.

# Authors

- Brigham Baker
  Artist and photographer, graduate from the Zurich University of the Arts (BA, MA), winner of the Manor Art Award, 2019. Brigham Baker lives and works in Zurich.

- Nicola Dahrendorf
  Human rights and humanitarian practitioner, focused on peacebuilding and conflict resolution in conflict and post-war contexts. Worked with international non-governmental organisations, the United Nations, the Norwegian, United Kingdom and Swiss governments and in an academic capacity. Holds Master's degrees in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge and in Law and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

- Alexandre Fasel
  Ambassador, Swiss Special Representative for Science Diplomacy and Ambassador of Switzerland to the United Kingdom 2017–2021. During the course of his career he has engaged with the topics of European integration, including Brexit, the interface between foreign and domestic policy, foreign policy analysis and policy formulation as well as multilateral diplomacy. Co-initiator of the project *Art in Peace Mediation*.

- Olivier Haener
  Is a trained mediator holding Master's degrees in History and Slavic languages as well as a CAS in Territorial Governance. As a political analyst and policy advisor, specialising in the Western Balkans (Swiss FDFA, EU mission to Kosovo), he has designed and implemented civilian peace projects, such as a local dialogue in Mitrovica, Kosovo (2012–2015), addressing the social and economic roots of the conflict, with local actors from both sides of this divided region.

- Isabel Käser
  Visiting Fellow at The London School of Economics and Political Science, Art in Peace Mediation Project Lead at the Embassy of Switzerland in London, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bern. Holds a PhD in Gender Studies from SOAS and is the author of the book *The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement: Gender, Body Politics and Militant Femininities*.

- Bejan Matur
  Born in the ancient Hittite city of Maraş in 1968, Bejan is a graduate of Ankara University's Faculty of Law. A pioneering figure in contemporary poetry, her work has been translated into 36 languages and won numerous awards. She has performed at conferences and festivals around the world, including the Royal Opera House and Kings Place in London, Princeton University, and in Ubud, Bali. Her book, *How Abraham Abandoned Me* (Arc, 2012) was the Poetry Book Society's 'Recommended Translation for Spring 2012'.

- Miodrag Miki Marinković
  Founder and director of the Centre for Affirmative Social Action (CASA) in Mitrovica, Kosovo, Miodrag is a lawyer and civic activist born in 1975 in Pristina. He worked as a political advisor in the European Union Office in Kosovo (2011–2016), the EU Rule of Law mission in Kosovo – EULEX (2009–2011), and the International Civilian Office (2007–2009). He has authored many research articles on the position of the Serbian community in Kosovo as well as on the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade.

- Dagmar Reichert
  Founder and Executive Director of the Swiss foundation *artasfoundation*, consultant and senior lecturer at the Zurich University of the Arts. Former Professor of Cultural Geography at Kassel University. Studied Geography, Sports and Philosophy in Vienna, Toronto, Stockholm and Cambridge (Mag.Phil., MA, PhD, habil.).

- Eran Schaerf
  Artist and essayist exploring the intersection of fashion, mass media, language and the built environment in migrant societies. His current research focuses on Levantine culture and mutual assimilation. Member of the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Arts) in Berlin since 2016.

- Irene Bruna Seu
  Prof. Dr. Irene Bruna Seu is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, Chartered Psychologist and Professor of Psychosocial Studies and Critical Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. She is the founding director of CREHR (Centre for Researching and Embedding Human Rights, Birkbeck, University of London) and the project lead on SOMIC (States of Mind in Conflict), also funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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Further information on the *Arts in Peace Mediation* initiative and additional resource material can be found on the website:
www.art-in-mediation.ch

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