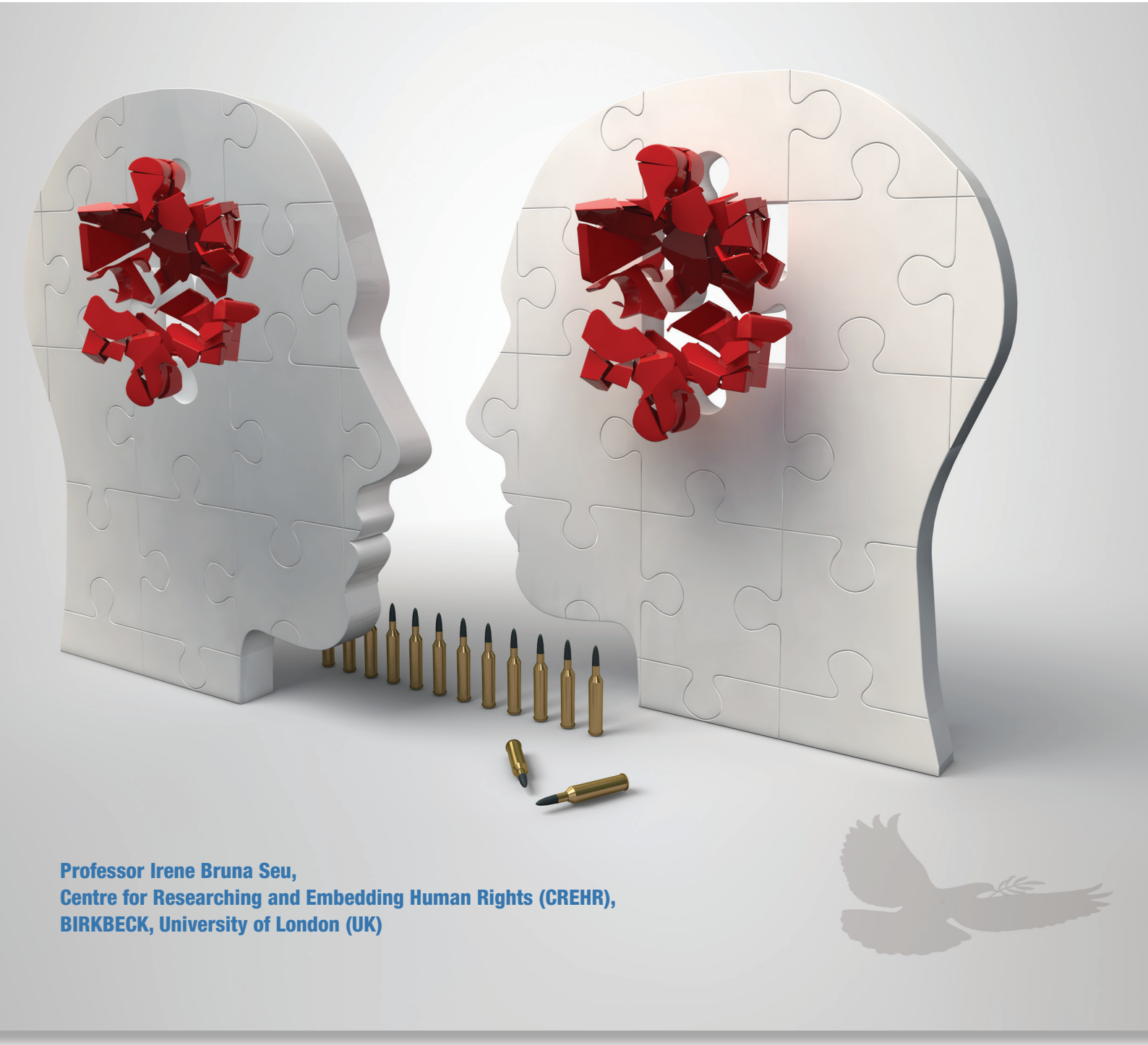
States of Mind in Conflict

Enhancing a psychological understanding of peace mediation

FINAL REPORT



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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Swiss FDFA.

The author's views are based on the expressions of the opinions and observations communicated by participants during preliminary interviews, focus groups and individual interviews, which have been reported as accurately as possible.

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FOREWORD

The report on *States of mind in conflict* (SOMIC) is clearly long overdue, necessary, and timely. I can speak on this from personal experience. Having worked in mediation, both humanitarian and political mediation over more than 45 years, I finally came to the conclusion that, in fact, what we do need is not so much a political senior adviser, because that we can get from headquarters, but someone who can help us to analyse psychologically the counterparts and our own position as well.

Ideology is no longer the key word in in geopolitics; you only need to look around to see evidence of this. This is the case not only with warlords and nonstate actors, but also with major leaders, and there are many who deserve to be analysed psychologically in order to understand their motivations, background, and their frustrations and aspirations, which are linked to some psychological trauma or background. They don't have a natural ideological underpinning to their position, but instead, often behind their position there is a religious mix of psychology, emotions, tribal links, and brutal aspirations. Can we analyse those without a psychologist? The bottom-line is, today is not so much about geopolitics, but what we need to be improving on is the *geopsychology*.

Another reason for needing a psychologist has to do with trust. We all know that one of the crucial points of a mediation is establishing trust. Indeed, I would argue that trust is the key factor. How do you do that? By simply using your manual of the perfect mediator? Or, instead, through trying to establish with the help of a psychologist the reasons why someone on the other side of the fence is having a certain position? You may not agree with them, in fact often probably we do not agree, but if we don't put ourselves, as they say, in their shoes, we will not be able to know how to understand their grievances. They might have an unacceptable position but, if you have done your homework through a psychologist, at least their position becomes understandable. Bottom line: we need this.

There is another argument too. You, as mediators, at least those I know and myself, are terribly lonely; believe me. Several factors contribute to this. First, mediators are given a very difficult task, which is based on cryptic instructions called the UN Security Council Resolutions, which are by definition a compromise between positions and a patchwork of various contributions from different countries plus the Secretariat. What you cannot do is think that the mandate you are given will provide you with clear instructions. Second, you are quite lonely because you are in the field and in the field the communications with headquarters are more limited. Third, because you are always 'on the job'. As a mediator you are in a constant show with your team, to reassure them and give them a vision, with the counterparts to show assertiveness, understanding, listening, and contributing to the negotiation, coming up with creative ideas. Of course, there is the support of your team but, at the end of the day, you are the one delivering. Then, there is the Media, which is constantly expecting from you something that can help, in your case the mission, but also their newsworthy approach. That means calculating every word, being careful not to say the wrong one, being aware that your emotions should not prevail in your press conference, because it may then undermine your own mediation. Finally, the UN members countries of the Security Council are all expecting something from you, and you have to calibrate your message and yet at the same time come up with something that is clear and proactive.

All that puts a lot of pressure psychologically on you because, at the end of the day, it is you, on your own, that has to deal with all these pressures. So, we need a psychologist to support mediators with the enormous pressures on them because the war is going on, people are dying, and you need to deliver.

How did I manage? First, I understood that I needed a psychologist or someone with the psychological competence to support the mission or to be consulted. Second, I'm fully aware that there is the danger of creeping post-traumatic stress, which affects the team, yourself and perhaps even your counterparts. You need to have someone to help you to identify that so that you can actually take that into account. I repeat, this is low intensity, creeping post-traumatic stress, which is not obviously apparent, but has an impact on the way you behave.

I will close by saying that I remember one day when I was confronted in a negotiation, and it started immediately

with an attack, a huge personal attack: 'Who are you, what do you want to bring here, you are obviously bringing a message from powerful countries, you don't understand how we feel and what we have been suffering. You are here only because you are a well-paid UN official." And that was the beginning of our conversation. I had gone through some training in psychology, and I remembered that this type of technique, which is instinctive in some warlords or some personalities on the other side, is meant to destabilise you and produce either a defence or a reactive aggressive reaction. Well, I learnt, and I did apply what I learnt. I just looked at the person, I did not blink, did not blush, probably did not turn white with anger, then I took 5 or 6 deep breaths, very deep breathing, with no overt reaction. Already that destabilised the other side who had finished their outburst of aggression. I then looked at him, and said "Good morning, my name is Staffan de Mistura, and I work for the UN." Then I looked at him, breathed again and said, "Let's start again." By that time, the other side had already expanded, exhausted his own outburst of natural, emotional energy which was psychologically tuned in order to destabilise me. He had nothing more to add, he was ready to listen, he was ready to interact.

That was proof to me of how important it is to implement the recommendations, very valid in my opinion, that Professor Bruna Seu is making in this report. Have a good read but, in particular, let's have a good implementation of them.

Staffan de Mistura,

Undersecretary-General, Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara

INTRODUCTION – putting SOMIC in context

There is no doubt that violent conflict is devastating and can feel protracted and intractable. In the last eighteen months we have seen brutal escalations of conflict in Nagorny Karabakh, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and, as I write, Ukraine. In Myanmar, Syria and Yemen violence persists and the hope for peaceful societies is a distant mirage. The degree of destruction and human misery gives one pause for thought as to what mediation can offer. Yet in the face of persistent hostilities the task of peacemaking and peacebuilding in general and mediation in particular is to find traction. The challenge is to find those opportunities that can help people and societies immersed in violent conflict to explore the parameters for acceptable compromise. This is needed in order to achieve political settlements and to transition from the use of force and violence to resolve conflicts to negotiating difference by non-violent political, legal and institutional means. This is far from easy and in recognising how extraordinarily difficult it is to bring conflicts to an end the States of Mind in Conflict (SOMIC) project presents a fresh and important part of the exploration of how mediation is currently situated and the challenges that have to be addressed to enable it to be more effective.

Violent conflict is dynamic and in recent years the world has seen an upsurge in the number and intensity of conflicts. Ukraine is an example of inter-state conflict rearing its head after several decades in which the predominant forms of violent conflict have been intra-state conflicts, between governments and their armed opponents. Geopolitical competition has been an undercurrent that sustains and often triggers conflicts, although they play out at local levels and often disregard borders as regional dynamics driven by competition for power, resources and transnational ideologies make them harder and harder to resolve. Conflicts are taking on new dimensions, moving into cyber space and on to social media with ever more sophisticated weapons. At the same time climate change is amplifying conflict drivers in many parts of the world and posing new challenges.

Peacemaking has not stood still in the face of the evolving challenges of conflicts. Significant peace agreements have been achieved with the assistance of mediation since the end of the Cold War – the Oslo Accords of 1993, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the Comprehensive Agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2014, the Colombian Final Peace Agreement in 2016 and the Asmara Agreement between the Government of Ethiopia and the Ogaden National Liberation Front in 2018 to name a few. Each of these agreements required peace processes involving different constellations of mediators, sometimes acting in synch with one another and sometimes in competition, and always part of broader peacebuilding endeavours.

Mediators in high level talks are usually drawn from multilateral organisations (such as the UN, EU, AU, OSCE) and governments (sometimes operating behind the scenes such as Switzerland or Norway, or sometimes more powerful states leveraging conflict parties towards a deal). Non-governmental organisations or private diplomacy organisations have increasingly played roles, both at political and community levels. There have also been hybrid initiatives such as the International Contact Group of four states and four NGOs that supported a Malaysian government official who was the facilitator of the aforementioned process in the Philippines.

Weaving together the efforts of different mediators is not always straightforward. The reality is that there can be multiple and at times duplicative efforts taking place at the same time. Some processes are more formal and official, others are informal. Sometimes there are different and competing sponsors, and sometimes coordination and collaboration are effective. Processes frequently involve diverse groups of local and external actors who promote dialogue and mediate agreements. There is also a growing tendency to see initiatives that address specific and more local conflicts, and this poses a challenge as to how to connect these into a more holistic process of peace in increasingly fragmented conflicts.

While the diversity of those engaged in mediation has grown so has a recognition that agreements negotiated at an elite level are never sufficient to sustain peace. This awareness has also been shaped by growing demands for inclusion and greater appreciation of the roles of local or ‘insider’ mediators and the absence of women from peace processes, which has been countered by more attention to Women, Peace and Security as a normative goal and growing numbers of networks to support women mediators.

Important changes to the landscape of mediation practice have also occurred in recent years. Sometimes these pull in different directions. On the one hand institutions like the UN and the EU as well as several governments have invested considerable thought in developing mediation units or divisions and guidelines to inform the practice of mediation. This has led to a far more intentional approach in regard to the preparation of mediation teams and the standards of work (although it does not always work out in practice). On the other hand, there is a perceptible demise of liberal internationalism in the face of costly and less than successful interventions over the past 20 years. This has been accompanied by the rise of interventions from countries like of China, India, Turkey and Russia that have changed approaches to peacemaking and peacebuilding, with some calling this a trend towards more authoritarian or illiberal conflict management.

Mediators land on this complex terrain with the challenge to find the elusive traction that can support those backing and those engaged in fighting to cease hostilities and build peace. It is perhaps not surprising that while the community of mediation practice has grown it has also experienced self-doubt in the face of the proliferation of conflicts and the rise in the number of conflict related deaths in recent years. Changing circumstances and new challenges require mediation practitioners to innovate, drawing on the experiences and insights of 'frontline' mediators who see first-hand the urgent need for new ways of working. Mediators and mediation support actors need to be prepared to learn from both success and failure, to embrace diverse disciplines and new methodologies and technologies, and to cooperate more effectively.

The interviews conducted to inform SOMIC demonstrate the passion and commitment that mediators bring to their task. They also reveal the frustrations that many mediators experience not just as a result of wrestling with the most destructive sides of humanity but also the limitations imposed by the way their work is funded, by the relationships between their institutions and the difficulties of working across the different arenas in which mediation operates.

A colleague recently said to me that one of the early victims of violent conflict is nuance; violence tends to reduce the complexity of conflicts to simple binary choices. The challenge for a mediator, individually or as part of a team, whether working in a formal process with political leaders or working with community and social leaders, is to help to navigate nuance back into the process. This requires a great deal of insight into the motivations and aspirations, the needs and fears of conflict parties as well as how they will react to risk and opportunity.

Psychology operates on different levels in the practice of peace. Emotions lie at the heart of conflict and are present in any mediation process. While mediation support, including guidance for mediators, has tended to focus on technical problem-solving approaches to substantive issues, the crucial role of building trust and relationships in peace processes is increasingly recognised. This is not a 'soft option' but is essential for conflict parties to be able to engage meaningfully in hardcore political negotiations. As many mediation practitioners attest, the relationships built between them and individual negotiators are often what allows a process to move forward and are also fundamental to the sustainability of a peace agreement. This has implications for the role, skills and qualities of mediators and those assisting negotiations. While they cannot engineer those important relationships, they can provide safe spaces for difficult emotions to be surfaced and for parties to connect across divides. They can also build parties' trust in themselves and in the negotiation process itself.

To be effective, mediators need to be conscious of the emotions that influence the positions of the protagonists they seek to bring together in the face of the trauma of violent conflict. While the mediator is not a professional in how to help people who might have been traumatised, she or he must be equipped to manage situations where trauma is surfaced during negotiations. It is also important to recognise that these experiences will shape how interlocutors encounter one another and the choices they make. For example, conflict parties may prefer to stay in an untenable position, rather than face the fear of contemplating something new or different, especially where it may mean giving up a long- held claim or belief. A mediator must therefore be aware of such psychological barriers and how they can be addressed.

In working with the representatives of conflict parties, separately and in joint spaces, mediators are grappling with the stress of the gravity of decisions that have to be taken to find ways out of violence. Understanding the

parties to conflicts is enriched by psychological perspectives and this is matched by the need for mediators to reflect on their own identity and how to bring their best qualities and skills to the process of mediation. To do this demands a more engaged relationship with psychology, not one that is implicit or one in which the abilities of mediators to do all that is required of them is taken for granted.

SOMIC provides a valuable window into the practical experiences and the mindset of mediators, helping to unpack what constrains, empowers, and inspires them. A deeper understanding of how these motivations interplay with those of the conflict parties will be one component of more effective mediation support. Undoubtedly there are factors rooted in geopolitics that influence the potential for mediation that are beyond the capacities of individual mediators or organisations to change (although this does not mean that collective efforts should not be made to contribute to exert pressure for change), but there are areas where new insights and questions should drive reflection and the evolution of practice. Examining how a psychological perspective can enhance the practice of peace mediation is very much one of these dimensions.

Jonathan Cohen,

Executive Director, Conciliation Resources

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

The 'States of Mind in Conflict' (SOMIC) project launched in August 2020, based in the *Centre for Researching & Embedding Human Rights* (CREHR) at Birkbeck, University of London. The project was funded by the Swiss Federal Government research programme, with subject matter expertise provided by the Human Security Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

SOMIC is a pilot study seeking to identify whether a psychological perspective might enhance the practice of peace mediation, and, if so, how. The overall aim is to assist mediators to cultivate an enhanced sensitivity to the psychological register of the peace mediation experience and to facilitate a particular type of encounter between parties to mediation that results in the creation of a 'safe space' – one where emotions and states of mind can be acknowledged and digested.

The team of psychologists based at CREHR[1] adopted an iterative methodology which started with exploratory talks with experienced mediators and two focus groups to feed into the design of the semi-structured research protocol subsequently used for the 1:1 interviews. The data were thematically analysed.

Appendices A and B give information about the participants. As the tables illustrate, the researchers spoke to mediators from a diverse range of geographies, with Europe as 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. As illustrated by Table 3, the majority of participants were experienced in frontline mediation and had acquired their experience in high-level geopolitical peace mediation processes.

The project received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychosocial Studies in the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy, at Birkbeck, University of London. Key ethical factors in this research were the need to guarantee the anonymity of participants and the importance of carefully and sensitively exploring subjects that might be linked to challenging, difficult or traumatic experiences for interviewees.

A significant disruptive factor in the execution of the project arose from ongoing COVID restrictions, which resulted in all the data collection phases of the project occurring remotely. While the researchers were denied the opportunity to meet participants face-to-face, conducting the project virtually also opened up new opportunities to interview mediators from around the world, and to bring together participants from diverse time zones and geographies. All interviews and focus groups interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams and safely stored behind the Birkbeck College firewall, thus further protecting participants' confidentiality.

As a pilot, SOMIC intended to establish whether practitioners thought psychology could enhance peace mediation practice, and if so, how. The question we started from and asked all participants during all the phases of data collection, was:

"In your experience, how can psychology enhance peace mediation practice?"

The interview questions were not guided by a pre-determined intellectual agenda, nor were they intended to test a theory. Underpinned by a grounded approach to research, the project intended to generate theory and knowledge, by building bottom-up from practitioners' experience and insights. In line with this epistemological orientation, the analysis and findings are entirely grounded in what participants said.

Because of this epistemological orientation, my position throughout the project has been one of an outsider to peace mediation, keen to find out how practitioners understand psychology and its uses in peace mediation through listening as a psychologist and a clinician to their accounts and experiences. Hence, my observations, findings and recommendations are those of an outsider looking in, with a commitment to reporting as accurately

1 The team was composed of Prof. Bruna Seu, project lead and author of this report, and Dr Dominic Reilly, Research Assistant. Both researchers were involved in the conduct of the interviews and focus groups, individually wrote fieldnotes after each interview, and held weekly debriefing meetings to reflect on the data collected and adjust the interview protocol accordingly. Additionally, the project benefitted from advice from an Advisory Board we consulted at critical moments. These regular reflexive exchanges facilitated the iterative methodology of the project.

as possible on what mediation practitioners shared with great generosity, passion for their mission, and concern for what they perceive is problematic in the field of peace mediation.

Phases of the Project and Iterative Methodology

Adopting an iterative approach involves incorporating insights and learnings yielded at one stage of the research process into the remainder of the research. In this project, both the form and content of the methodology were iterated. The research comprised 3 data gathering phases:

1. Ten exploratory interviews were conducted with experienced mediators and mediation support professionals, which were thematically analysed using a grounded approach (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004[2]). Feedback on the findings from the exploratory interviews was solicited from both the project Advisory Board and as part of the focus groups discussed in Step 2 below. This feedback validated a tripartite model proposed by the researchers to categorise the broad range of topics that came up in these early discussions of psychology and peace mediation: namely psychological themes pertaining to three psychosocial sites (i) the minds of parties in conflict, (ii) the minds of mediators, and (iii) the mediation encounter itself.

2. Two focus groups were conducted with the same group of eight experienced frontline mediators. In the first focus group, participants were presented with the findings from the exploratory interviews, which acted as a stimulus for a broader discussion of the psychological dimensions of peace mediation. The importance of potential interview topics was validated, and topics were consolidated, accented, and dropped out accordingly. Out of this discussion, and in the week between the two workshops, the researchers created a draft interview protocol for the 1-to-1 interviews discussed in Step 3. The protocol was user tested with the same participants in the second focus group, and then further iterated and refined in discussion with the project Advisory Board, culminating in the final interview protocol.

3. 1-to-1 interviews were conducted with 25 experienced mediators and mediation support professionals over a period of several months. 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. The data from the interviews were coded and analysed, before being written up in the final report. An external transcription service was used to translate the interview recordings into written files, which were then coded using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006[3]), assisted by the qualitative analysis software, 'Nvivo'. The researchers followed Braun & Clarke's model for thematic analysis, namely: (i) immersion in the data, including re-reading transcripts and taking them both on their own terms and in the context of the wider dataset; (ii) generation of initial codes; (iii) the clustering of codes into higher level themes; (iv) the review, consolidation, and naming of these themes; and finally (v) writing up the research. Once the codes were clustered into higher-level themes a 'preliminary findings' document was produced and user-tested with the project Advisory Board and, separately, with representatives of several mediation bodies. These discussions validated the majority of the themes, while re-accenting the utility of the tripartite model to organise the findings from the exploratory interviews conducted in Step 1. The findings are therefore presented here according to this model.

2 Pidgeon, N. and Henwood, K. (2004) Grounded Theory. In: Hardy, M. and Bryman, A. (Eds) *Handbook of Data Analysis*. London: Sage

3 Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Qualitative Research in Psychology. Using thematic analysis in psychology Vol3:2, 77-101

Basic assumptions

This pilot aims to make recommendations to enable the acquisition and refinement of a new and enhanced set of psychological skills and sensitivity. It is important to state from the beginning that psychology is not offered as a panacea, that I am not recommending that mediators should behave or act as psychologists, nor are mediation practitioners to be seen as being criticised in relation to their technical expertise. Rather, the enhanced psychological skillset proposed here is presented as an addition to existing and highly refined skillsets already possessed by peace mediation practitioners.

I am proposing that peace mediation processes should be considered not only as power-brokering processes with a variety of specific aims (ranging from ceasefires and stabilisation to structural changes, conciliation and sustainable peace), but also as psychosocial intersubjective encounters. That is, a meeting of individuals, each bringing their emotional lives, psychodynamics and histories, together with the various socio-political forces that have impacted on them and that form the context in which the encounter happens. A psychosocial perspective, because of its interest in the crisscrossing of internal (biographical, emotional, and unconscious) with external (cultural, social and political) aspects and dynamics within and between individuals, is the most suitable frame for the study of psychological aspects of peace mediation.

OVERARCHING OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendation is to use the findings of this research to grow and enhance peace mediation practice, by turning the identified gaps, tensions, and neglected aspects into a new paradigm where mediators are better equipped with psychosocial tools, strategies, and understandings.

As an overarching frame and reflecting participants' comments, there is a need to pay much more attention to and to shift the dial toward the psychological and, in particular, a psychosocial[4] perspective in peace mediation. Currently, technical, power-brokering aspects of mediation, which apply psychology instrumentally, appear to dominate practices in Track 1[5], while relational applications of psychology tend to characterise transformative practices in Track 2 and Track 3. Because the human aspect of mediation is inextricably bound with emotions, the report recommends a fundamental change in the way emotions are understood and dealt with in peace mediation, bringing 'the human'[6] into dialogue with the technical, power brokering aspects of mediation.

For a real shift to happen, the 4 **STIR** recommendations – **Systemic shifts** to integrate the psychosocial, **Training** enhancement, **Increased psychological support,** and **Research** for expertise/development – should be activated simultaneously and in collaboration with each other.

Overall Recommendations (STIR)

1. A **systemic** paradigm shift is needed in mediation practices that incorporates a different and more psychosocially-informed engagement with emotions, that expands understanding of what peace mediation consists of, and that more consciously and actively integrates the 'relationship-building' aspects with the technical, power-brokering in mediation. Such a shift would also facilitate a better integration of, and cross-fertilisation between, 'elite mediation' and 'transformative' practices.

   This paradigm shift should include a cultural change in the field of peace mediation (in particular in T1) to enhance practitioners' psychological agility[7]; to enable the embeddedness and consequent normalisation of psychologically-informed practices including supervision and psychological support for mediators to avoid stigma and attend to the needs of *all* mediation actors.

   The systemic shift is necessary but not sufficient to guarantee the embeddedness of the recommended changes. Their lasting and sustainable embeddedness requires the systemic shift to happen together with, and be integrated with, the other 3 STIR recommendations.

2. **Training enhancement:** Expanded incorporation of the psychological angle into mediation **training**, to humanise mediation processes, equip practitioners with psychological tools and techniques, and increase practitioner reflexivity.

4 A psychosocial perspective is interested in the criss-crossing of internal (biographical, emotional, and unconscious) with external (cultural, social and political) aspects and dynamics within and between individuals.

5 Tracks 1, 2, 3 (T1, T2, T3 henceforth) refer to: Track 1: negotiations between elite/top-level leadership; Track 2 negotiations between 'non-state actors', often involving civil society; Track 3 is often referred to as 'people to people' diplomacy and operates at grassroots level.

6 The shorthand term 'human' used in this report refers to any personal, emotional, interpersonal elements of both conflict parties and mediation practitioners which are touched on during peace mediation. I differentiate these 'human' aspects from the 'technical' aspects which are about strategies, power-brokering, agreements etc.

7 Psychological agility refers to practitioners' ability to apply psychology both instrumentally and relationally, depending on the context and nature of the conflict, and to switch between the two when the context requires, at all levels of mediation.

3. **Increased support for mediators:** to include individual and team psychological support and psychologically informed supervision. This needs to be embedded and institutionalised to avoid stigmatisation of practitioners by employers and colleagues.

4. **Research** to grow practitioners' psychosocial **expertise**. Further research is needed to explore in detail and map out existing uses of psychological insights, techniques, and breakthroughs in peace mediation, through interviews, focus groups, and real-life case studies, to build flexible, self-reflective and contextual psychosocial mediation expertise that brings together theory, practice and self-reflection.

The next 4 chapters elucidate how these recommendations emerged from the data analysis. They discuss the themes pertaining to the 3 psychosocial sites: (i) the minds of parties in conflict, (ii), the mind of the mediator and (iii) the mediation encounter itself. The fourth chapter offers a psychodynamic reading of a series of mediation vignettes.

CHAPTER 1

THE STATES OF MIND OF CONFLICT PARTIES - going behind the 'irrational'

Chapter 1 of this report focuses on the contribution that psychology can make to working with the parties in conflict. It reports on the key areas identified by practitioners that would benefit from psychological input, with a commentary of related psychological dynamics and concepts.

The overarching finding about the psychology of conflict parties, regardless of whether the work is happening at Track 1, 2 or 3 (T1,T2,T3 henceforth), is that participants believe that breakthroughs happen when peace mediators manage to relate to parties at a more personal level, and engage with what lies behind the parties' manifested behaviour.

Repeatedly, practitioners expressed their wish to do this more actively, while also asking for the psychological input that would provide them with the necessary skills.

The 7 sections of this chapter discuss the themes which emerged in the interviews and describe either the psychological aspects or dynamics affecting conflict parties' ability to engage constructively in peace mediation, or areas in which participants felt they would benefit from specific and more in-depth psychological knowledge or skills.

In addressing each, I will also indicate which specific areas of psychology could be included in the curriculum to support mediation practices, with the aim of labelling what is practitioners' existing intuitive application of psychology through the addition of a theoretically based new psychological/psychosocial vocabulary. Labelling involves the addition of psychological descriptors to give practitioners a new lens through which to recognise and work with psychological components of peace mediation processes. The descriptors are ensconced in psychological theory that enables an understanding of parties' behaviour in psychological terms.

Peace mediators, and in particular elite mediators, currently don't have sufficient psychological understanding or skills to be psychologically agile enough to attend to both the technical and psychological side of the process, as and when the context requires it. Mediators are not psychologists, nor should they be expected to act as such. Rather, mediators conveyed that a new and different engagement with what has been variously called the 'human' and 'personal' is needed as well as with the emotional aspects of peace mediation processes. This is where the imbalance in skillsets becomes manifest.

Although it might appear obvious that parties in conflict bring their passionately felt personal experience to the negotiation table and that the necessary starting point of any conciliation and reparation process is to listen and acknowledge people's experiences, I detected tensions and difficulties in integrating the personal within T1 mediation. These tensions are systemic and embedded in training and practices which, to some extent explains why many mediators, perhaps expecting institutional resistance, appeared to feel they had to make a strong case for the need to humanise all peace mediation processes through the integration of the personal with the technical, even during hard transactional processes. Equipping practitioners with more and targeted psychological understanding and techniques could begin to address these gaps and tensions.

The themes in this chapter summarise practitioners' reflections on the ways in which psychology is needed to enable the humanisation of peace mediation practices and engage with the personal aspects that conflict parties bring to the process.

Psychology is needed to more effectively:

1. Engage the parties at a more personal, relational level
2. View parties as traumatised and emotionally scarred
3. Shift the mindsets caused by conflict
4. Recognise what needs to happen psychologically for parties
5. Appreciate the emotional cost of peace for parties
6. Understand parties' emotions differently
7. Engage with and translate parties' psychosocial meaning-making processes

These areas will be discussed in turn.

1. Engaging parties at a more personal relational level

"when you succeed in convincing a rebel group that they're out to pursue peace as a strategy, a peaceful negotiation or a super peaceful dialogue, that's always a breakthrough, and normally it happens because you've been working on their ideology and tackling their personal issues, tackling their relationship issues, and engaging with them at a more personal level, yeah".

I chose this quote to start the chapter to strategically highlight the important message from practitioners that the personal is always present in mediation processes. Indeed, the second part of the quote suggests a causal correlation between engaging conflict parties at a more personal level and breakthroughs in mediation.

"People, under stress, they think with their heart and feel with their mind, so you need to know what is motivating the action, is it fear, is it a fear of losing face, these are all I imagine called psychological aspect, that losing face is - so you have to understand the culture, you have to do your homework, and don't rush".

This statement begins to unpack what engaging psychologically with parties as people involves. It is unclear what 'under stress' refers to, maybe the stress of being face to face with one's enemy and the pressures of the peace process, but I think it also hints implicitly at conflict parties being traumatised. The speaker offers an intriguing metaphorical articulation of the state of mind of parties as one in which emotions are the leading force – *they think with their heart*. This means that, on the one hand, under stress people cannot access their rational side but are in the grip of their emotions, and on the other hand, - *they feel with their mind* - that their emotions are mediated by cognition which involves histories, memories, and cognitive schemas through which filter new experiences. These schemas are invested with strong emotions.

Many have argued that emotions and cognitions do not exist in dichotomy or discontinuity, but that emotions help structure the social world and that affect and cognition are indissoluble because they are "integrally linked with an associative network of cognitive representations".[8] The role played by emotion regulation in cognition and behaviour has been long recognised by psychoanalysis, psychiatry and neuropsychology.[9]

Critical social psychologists have studied how social formations "grab" people because "personal history, subjectivity and affective practice develop in social relations . . . [and] the intimate connection between the personal

8 Joseph P. Forgas, Introduction to Thinking and Feeling: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition, ed. Forgas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11.

9 For a review of the literature see Seu (2021)

and the social is present in all lived affective trajectories."[10] The idea of histories and suffering 'grabbing' people is what I think is implied by *they think with their heart.*

The speaker seems to be arguing for a more expansive psychological understanding of behaviour to appreciate the complexity of parties' motivation, and the need for a culturally situated psychological framing of subjectivity to fully take into account the role of culture, emotions, status and other relational dynamics in motivation. To engage properly then, the speaker suggests, mediators need to do their *homework,* that is, they need to understand the complex psychosocial forces shaping parties' motivation, suspend the primacy of rationality predicated in the West and engage with the meaning and manifestations of thinking with one's heart.

This is also an important commentary on how approaching parties' decision-making as if they were entirely based on cold rationality misses the point. Psychology is key in understanding this as is an engagement with emotions and their relation with cognition and behaviour.

Amongst emotions, fear of losing face, a key aspect of the 'shame' family of emotions, is singled out here as it is in the literature, and it will be discussed later. Time is essential to this relationship building approach in which the psychological aspects are critical.

Many claimed that listening to parties' stories is the starting point for a deeper engagement with parties because, as two practitioners put it:

"the stories are personal for everybody"

"Stories go to places where hard facts have no access to which is the heart"

which, like the earlier quote, also invites a shift in perspective away from rationality towards a focus on the heart, that is, the emotions that are driving parties. Through stories, parties' behaviour is complexified and contextualised historically and relationally. Again, as argued previously, in order to really understand who the parties are, the 'personal' needs to take centre stage; the person is the entry point.

"So often we'll have to spend, you know, a lot of time initially when parties have actually met […][11] on, you know, what happened with that family and this family, you know, and you'll have to repeat and repeat, let the parties repeat and repeat it, repeat it. And it's sort of catharsis for the parties to go through and it's a necessary step because conflict has always huge consequences on each of the persons involved, also those sitting at the table and, they all have personal stories to tell, you know, they have been participating themselves in the war, they have their brothers and sisters that have been killed, they have their mother that has been raped, they have an uncle that has been kidnapped, everyone is touched one way or the other. So, you need to sort of psychologically get through that. If you just bring parties together and just jump through what the solution there (is), it's never going to work. They have told their story and the other party has listened to them and then they can move forward. Even though it's evident for everyone what the mechanisms should be, you can't—psychologically you're not able to go there before they're done with telling you a story. And often we say it's not so much about, you know, getting the parties to agree, it's about getting the parties to listen, listen to what they have to say, understand what they say even if you do not agree, so they can have a completely different narrative of what happened and at least they know that"

This rich extract articulates why storytelling is such a critical aspect of peace mediation processes.

First, it is not sufficient to understand the strategic and power brokering aspects of mediation. A conceptualisation of what mediation consists of needs to expand to integrate the psychological aspects without which mediation just won't work. This integration is a key recommendation made by this report.

The other reason that makes storytelling essential in peace mediation is its reparative role. The speaker seems to suggest that storytelling is important because it enables parties to feel heard, but we know that storytelling is

10 Margaret Wetherell, Affect and Emotion; A New Social Science Understanding (London: Sage, 2015), 2:122

11 […] indicates that some of the quote has been omitted for the sake of succinctness

also a key tool in processing trauma as it enables the integration and incorporation of traumatic events from the past into people's understanding of who they are now. It is a bridge between the *then-subjectivity* with the *now-subjectivity.* The traumatic events have broken the continuity of self and history and storytelling is a powerful way of making sense and reconnecting.

In terms of psychological underpinning, a changed, sometimes completely different, narrative results in and happens simultaneously with a shift in self-and-other perception and is directly related to identity. For narrative psychologists, identity *is* transition, always "producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong."[12] In this important sense, we are our narratives.

Revisiting of the past is not inert remembering, but an active reconstructing of our past to make it compatible with our present. "There is, of course, a complicated relationship between narrative, time, and memory for we revise and edit the remembered past to square with our identities in the present. This duality is often reflected in narratives of identity".[13] In a dynamic way then narrative constitutes past experience at the same time as it provides ways for the individuals to make sense of the past.[14] As such, storytelling and narratives perform a key role in human adaptation and identity fluidity. Through narrative we make our past meaningful by finding new understandings of past events and establish continuity between past and present. This is important psychologically because finding meaning in events helps to re-establish order in our existence. The re-established continuity makes us feel safe.

The speaker openly uses psychological language here by introducing the idea that catharsis is a necessary part of peace mediation. This statement has 3 significant ramifications. First, framing mediation processes as a cathartic process refers to the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions, and automatically implies that peace mediation needs to engage with emotions. Mediation is intrinsically cathartic because traumatic memories are highly charged emotionally and the often-overwhelming feelings cannot be processed once and for all but, as the speaker accurately points out, what might appear as simple repetition is a psychologically necessary processing that cannot be skipped.

Second, such engagement with emotions is not a corollary to, but a necessary and preliminary stage before getting to a solution. The speaker is clear that unless time is allowed for this, mediation *is never going to work* because, even though everyone (rationally) knows what needs to happen and what the solution is, the parties are not ready to engage with the solution before they have finished with the storytelling of their grievances.

Third, this statement is testimony to how mediation practitioners intuitively use psychology in their practice but do so tentatively. Without the vocabulary to describe it technically, nor the theoretical knowledge to understand why it is important, they can only narrate what they know happens and its importance. I will come back to this point later in this chapter, when discussing the importance of allowing parties to vent. Here this statement evidences the need for psychological labelling and theorising.

Towards the end, the quote offers a fundamental reframing of what peace mediation is about. It argues that it is not about *getting the parties to agree, it's about getting the parties to listen, listen to what they have to say, understand what they say even if you do not agree.* The key outcome of the process, therefore, is not the agreement, but the possibility of a *completely different narrative of what happened.*

12 Yuval-Davies, N. (2006) Belonging and the politics of belonging. Patterns of Prejudice, Vol. 40, No. 3, 197-214. pg.201

13 Brockmeier. J. (2000) pg.56 Autobiographical time. *Narrative Enquiry,* 10,51-73

14 Riessman, C.K. (2008) *Narrative methods for the Human Sciences*. London: Sage. Pg.8

Building relationships, fostering trust

"It dawned upon me that I shouldn't look for you know, the usual stuff that mediation tells you, you know, look for the interest and the needs and the values behind the public position you know, blah, blah, blah, what I wanted to know is the human behind the killer, so to speak, killer between quotation, because he's a husband etc. etc. […] so I just wanted to know how to relate to the other and that way build a trust because he lives in a universe where there is a deep trust deficit, […] and in order to build trust , as you know, there are certain things in life you cannot have, they have to be willingly given, they have to be earned, whether that's love, affection, a friendship, trust, that's something that you- no matter how badly you need them, "trust me", "why should I trust you?", so you have to earn it so you can go to the business, so suspend the urgency and understand the person behind".

The issue of time and the pressure to rush because of the urgency of the situation will be discussed in chapter 3 in relation to the challenges posed by clashing temporalities between different mediation priorities and/or phases. Here, time and trust are also relevant, but in terms of the need for practitioners to understand and engage with their counterparts as complex human beings beyond a reductionist view of the parties and a formulaic approach dominating mediation theory and training *("the usual stuff.. the interest and the needs and the values behind the public position, blah blah blah").*

This is not a purely instrumental move and goes beyond a complexification of the other. The implication is that the experience needs to be reparative and that a relationship needs to be built as a precondition to then going 'to business', that is, the technical side of mediation. Love, affection, friendship, trust – all key components of a relationship – must be freely given. Thus, this account constructs the psychological work involved in building a trusting relationship as the necessary preliminary work through which the mediator needs to earn trust. This formulation of peace mediation is in stark contrast to the archetypal parachuting superhero figure I will discuss later in the report. Rather than being parachuted in, with accompanying connotations of an action-packed sudden invasion, the recommended mediator attitude is one of patience, humility, openness and curiosity. The process of building trust, like building any relationship, takes time, and how long it will take cannot be prearranged, as pointedly and metaphorically described by the next speaker:

"like I said before, you've got to build some trust. If you don't have any trust, there's simply nothing to negotiate. But trust is like going up the staircase. It's step by step. You can't walk in on Monday and say, "By Thursday, I'm going to have their trust." Heavens not".

2. Viewing parties as psychologically traumatised and emotionally scarred

The previous section dealt with the meeting of the parties and established the need for a psychological approach to enable parties in conflict to meet their enemy differently through listening to their stories and telling them their own experience, thus enabling the beginning of a new, jointly constructed narrative of what happened, and a meeting of the enemy as a complex human being. This is part of the long and necessary process of rehumanising the enemy. This next section focuses on the meeting between mediators and their counterparts and how mediators perceive parties. It centres on the state of mind of parties in conflict when they come to the negotiation.

1. "The parties in conflict. When they're coming in, they're coming in dire conditions, you know, dire conditions. Some of them have been in the bush. They've been under ultra-medication. they've been healing whatever they had to heal and to a certain extent, they probably made a mess out of it. (Some), psychologically, they're just totally unbalanced. Others, to a certain extent, just don't even realise what it would mean to have to integrate into society or back into communities. And in that sense, they're under dire need of help. Now, how do they hide it? How do they not show it to their colleagues? How do they handle it? But quite often, quite often, it does break out in violence".

2. "(armed group) they had gone beyond the explainable or the justifiable or the acceptable".

3. "And there's a kind of, we call it dead walking. They're already dead inside".

The three extracts above evidence peace mediators' awareness of the profoundly harmful impact of conflict on the parties involved. They know that living in prolonged conditions of conflict, outside of their communities and often heavily medicated, have led members of armed groups to commit acts that are unimaginable and unjustifiable to those outside those conditions, and left them psychologically damaged – *'they're totally unbalanced".* Often these extreme experiences have resulted in a psychologically disassociated state giving the impression of the individual being absent or *dead walking.* The first speaker empathically recognises that parties in conflict are in dire need of help, but also expresses curiosity about their strategies for hiding it and managing the effects of trauma, thus implicitly conveying a need for mediators to be better informed about the psychology of trauma to enable them to identify the manifestations of a traumatised mind.

Similarly, the next speaker also recognises that members of militias and child soldiers are psychologically damaged by the conflict and that mediators are in the challenging position of having to use psychological techniques to convince them to abandon their weapons (narrow psychology), but not having the broad psychological skills to appreciate their personal experience and help them.

"this xxx militia leader of xxx and something similar I had earlier with these militias in xxx that we did not know the persons we are negotiating with. […] this child soldier who tells you the story. Yeah? And I mean, I'm not a psychologist, so to...to deal with this guy. Yeah? He needs therapy. I'm not a therapist, what the hell, yeah? My aim is again, narrow and broad psychology. The aim is this guy has to abandon his weapons, put into the containment areas in two months. That's the thing to do. Now, then he tells you his story, how he was recruited, yeah, or […] how these killings were in XXX where almost one million people were killed within a short period of time or so. Yeah? Now this was industrial killing. Yeah? Now they're living with this. And you try to convince, of course, these guys, child soldiers are the younger ones and we do not know how to deal with it. I took a psychologist with me, yes".

The above is a direct testimony of how mediators feel psychologically deskilled and simply do not know to deal with traumatised individuals. In this particular instance, the mediator consulted a psychologist as a personal initiative, but the broader implication of practitioners' testimonies is that they feel in need of psychological training and support to enable them to understand and sensitively relate to severely traumatised individuals, a point that is made clearly in the next extract:

"[…] the whole question of trauma and psychosocial support and help. In these places of chronic conflict, everybody is messed up for life. […] And one of the things we don't give any attention to is the social counselling and recovery processes, part of which start in the way we conduct negotiations by helping the leaders to come together and understand they're also traumatised and mad and full of, you know. So, this is a whole neglected area. As you will know, there's a lot of interesting work academically about it but very little implementation because it's not regarded as an investment by donors you know. They don't think that's important, but I do think it's important. And we could start at least with the parties, with the leaders and the commanders".

Similar to the previous, this speaker too acknowledges that chronic conflict permanently damages those affected - *'everybody is messed up for life'* - and also criticises the lack of psychological support and input offered to conflict parties, including their leaders and commanders. Additionally, it puts forward the view that the peace mediation is intrinsically a psychological intervention in so far as the parties' recovery process starts when mediation brings leaders together. This is a double recognition: an acknowledgement that peace mediators are implicated in psychological work, whether they are aware of it or not. Second, that part of that psychological work is to enable the leaders to recognise their traumas. Yet, the speaker laments, this complex task is not recognised as important by the donors, is completely neglected (presumably in training) and is not implemented because it is not recognised as a valuable investment.

This is staggering, considering that since the mid-1990s most conflicts have been recurrences[15] and in the light of what is known about the role of trauma and unresolved grievances on the recurrence of conflict, as the next speaker highlights:

"we thought this is behind us. And then we learn during the Balkan Wars that oh, no, this is, first of all, a trauma that happened a long, long time ago still influences behaviour and now we have it again. I think we need to, we need to, and I'm using the term without really understanding it. But...but I think we have to take this into account, I think this...this plays a big role. And then how long term, you know, especially in term, you know, any kind of conflict, how long term this lingers on. And is being passed on to, even to generations that didn't participate..."

This extract suggests that it is essential to know about the psychology of trauma, how it is transmitted generationally and impacts individuals long terms within their life time and those who come after. This knowledge is essential not only to enable mediators to understand their counterparts better as individuals, but also in understanding the conflict they are trying to mediate.

3. Using Psychology to Shift the mindset caused by conflict and help parties re-humanise the other

Most participants viewed as a key outcome of peace mediation the shifting of parties' mindset, and that this requires specific new skills, for both the parties and the mediators alike.

"good war-fighting generals or good peacekeeping generals know nothing about ceasefire processes. It's a totally new set of skills they have to learn. And in fact, many of skills actually are violations of some of the codes and doctrines they have acquired in their formal military education".

This extract captures the huge import of the shift in mindset that peace mediation requires and highlights how the new mindset and skills often run counter to what the parties have known, and the enormity of the paradigm shift involved in letting go of these.

15 Gates, S., Nygård, HM., and E. Trappeniers (2016) Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2016 (2)

https://www.prio.org/publications/9056

"Conflict creates a particular set of skills, a particular mindset and a particular behaviour. For example, an enemy must be dehumanised so that you can get him. Peace building requires new skills and I'm emphasising skills as well as mindset. And these new skills and new mindset have to be developed and learned to enable any kind of negotiation to be successful. Belligerent parties […] usually see negotiation as another theatre of struggle, a continuation of the struggle in which they're intending to gain advantage even within the framework of an agreement. So, one needs to understand that they don't come and say, "Look, I'm really sorry, I behaved badly." And so, the question is how can you enable conflict parties to shift to learn the new skills, the new behaviour and essentially to recognise that their enemy is the negotiating partner and the actual partner for the future. The enemy is not going away usually. The enemy lives with you so recognising that your enemy is your partner, your neighbour is about shifting the mindset […] having let off the steam and complained about the enemy, you then need a system to move toward real negotiations and you need a strategy for that".

The description above distils the essence of what peace mediation is about: shifting how parties in conflict perceive each other as they change from being enemies to becoming partners and neighbours. This is a long and delicate process but, from the very beginning, mediators should be aware that the goal is to enable parties to move from a frame of war to one of peace. This, as the speaker argues, is the fundamental psychological shift in mindset that mediation practitioners need to foster, and it involves important and unavoidable psychological processes. Like others, this speaker also sees that venting emotions and allowing parties to express the suffering they caused to each other is an essential and unavoidable stage when changing from enemies in war to partners in peace. The immensity of this shift in mindset doesn't need explaining. Crucially, 'real negotiations' can only happen after this shift in mindset takes place because, without this profound psychological change, the parties will use the mediation as a continuation of war and an opportunity to gain advantage over their opponents. Key to the formulation of how psychology can enhance peace mediation is that these new skills, mindset and behaviour can be learnt by parties, and mediators need to gain the psychological knowledge and skills to enable them to manage this delicate but fundamental process.

Some of the skills are identified in the next extract and they involve important psychological dynamics:

"If you can get a joint training session (with parties in conflict), you can really create a totally different environment. You can create an environment for engagement between the parties. If you use role plays and scenario style of training, you can find ways to enable the parties to see and possibly understand other points of view and other interests so get the general to play the rebel or do joint training activities where the parties have to collaborate in order to achieve a result collectively. So, there are all sorts of pedagogical tools that are applicable here that are really important. It's the first opportunity you have for the parties to engage each other where you're not actually in combat".

The speaker is referring to individual and group dynamics well known to psychologists. Enabling parties to see and understand others' points of view and interests is an aspect of dynamic empathy (Cameron 2011[16]), and the complex psychological changes that stepping into the other person's metaphorical shoes – *'the general playing the rebel'* – can enable. The technique of involving conflict parties in joint collaborative activities is recognised in group psychology as creating a shared group identity which, however temporary, is the first step towards seeing the other as a partner rather than an enemy. This complexified apprehension of the other or expansive function of *empathic mutual positioning* (Seu and Cameron, 2013[17]) is the first step towards re-humanising the enemy.

Although mediators intuitively apply these practice-based psychological techniques, which, I imagine, they have developed through experience, they lack an understanding of their psychological underpinnings, which practitioners argued is much needed and should be integrated in their mediation toolkit. This is felt particularly keenly by practitioners who are interested in gaining a more complex and layered grasp of parties' motivations to help them understand their counterparts better. These practitioners feel that the current technical toolkit on its

16 Lynne J. Cameron, Metaphor and Reconciliation: The Discourse Dynamics of Empathy in Post-Conflict Conversations (New York: Routledge, 2011)

17 Seu, I.B. and L. Cameron, "Empathic Mutual Positioning in Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation," Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 19, no. 3 (2013): 266–280.

own does not meet their needs, as described in the extract below:

"It dawned upon me that I shouldn't look for you know, the usual stuff that mediation tells you, you know, look for the interest and the needs and the values behind the public position you know, blah, blah, blah, what I wanted to know is the human behind the killer".

In the interviews, some participants were able to dig deeper and identified aspects of their counterparts' behaviour they wished to understand better psychologically. They knew from experience when a change occurs, but they need to know what psychological dynamics underpin the change. Without it, they feel unsure. For example, how the same individual interacts with the mediator individually and in a group:

"I'm sure everyone does, their behaviour changes drastically if they're individually talking to you or they're in a group. And so, you've got this problem that you're not too sure. I can't sit there and say, I know Albert, John and Michael. I know Albert, John and Michael individually. But within a group, I've got to be able to…"

Others referred to the mediator's need to better understand the psychology of their counterparts to facilitate communication with the public with the aim of reducing their resistance to peace and gain their support. This is a critical component of peace building, and mediators need specialist knowledge in group psychology and media psychology.

"Your public messaging, how do you, what slogans are you going to use? You have to read through with the psychology of your public. What will be, what captures their support. Because these negotiations are not popular, necessarily popular. I mean the public has its own idea. They may hate the other party, they don't want to give it a chance, they want them defeated through the use of violence. And precisely (because of that) you have to tell them "it's not succeeding. You've used violence all this time and it doesn't work". So, even this being able to frame your messages, requires a lot of understanding of the public, the public's mood".

4. Recognising what needs to happen psychologically for parties

Many seasoned mediators stressed the importance of not rushing towards the stated goal of the mediation – signing an agreement, reaching a ceasefire etc. – but instead patiently and carefully allowing specific parts of the process to happen first. Skipping this would jeopardise any agreement. Practitioners mentioned different steps, and they all had in common being psychological processes. We have already discussed storytelling, the concomitant catharsis, and resulting change in shared narrative. The next extract mentions a different aspect?:

"Conflict parties need to feel that you as a mediator, adviser, trainer have heard and understood the agreement so you should allow for that. Don't go straight to the business. Let them complain. Their first instinct is to obtain your understanding and if possible, your support in their struggle against the common enemy across the other side of the room. Allow that to happen".

Although mixed with the importance of venting, to be discussed next, this extract identifies the parties' need to feel that the peace mediation practitioner understands the agreement and to *obtain your understanding,* which is later connected to their need to complain. In the second part of the extract this is linked to an attempt to make the mediator side with them against the opponent. It would be misleading to read this as simply and exclusively as a strategic manoeuvring. I think what is described here is the parties' need to feel recognised.

Intersubjective recognition is a key concept in relational psychoanalysis which posits it is a fundamental existential human need. Based on the idea that our human essence is relational, recognition refers to the need to be recognised as a specific individual by the other to feel fully oneself, in this case with a particular history of belonging and suffering. The recognition from the other is the missing component of feeling fully human, and that cannot be generated by the self. In this sense, our self is ontologically dependent on the other. This is always

the case, but it is particularly critical in a situation of conflict where histories are passionately disputed. Going back to the quote, this translates into a need to feel that the mediation practitioner psychologically 'recognises' each party as having a valid and important story to tell and that their story will be taken into consideration when drafting the agreement.

We can see here how the instrumental and relational use of psychology are inextricably linked and, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, both are necessary in peace mediation. Peace mediators and in particular elite mediators currently don't have sufficient psychological understanding or skills to be psychologically agility to attend to both the technical and psychological side of the process, when the context requires it.

"Every time they talk about...the other party talks about the history, using up all the time, getting so angry, you know,[…] let them vent their anger [we need] the wisdom to say "they're angry, we let them vent their anger". And so [we need to know about] the psychology of our group going through the kind of historical, you know, that kind of history and, of course, the psychology of the individuals. [...] So, of course, they're saying," well, this is the international community [...] that's putting us under pressure or making us negotiate and we don't have anything to negotiate with those guys. The only thing we want to do is to exterminate them". So, you've got this kind of situations. And so, it's a question of say, well, how are you going to get this anger out of them. It's a question of saying, when are you going to address it and to what extent can you fill the space this anger is occupying with something else. But to be able to fill the space, you've got to get them to vent […] we usually are confronted with this, especially with fighting forces that are sitting down to negotiate, we know that they're going to ventilate at some moment, ventilate and, in mediation jargon, meaning they're going to blast out and give us hell. Now, when is that going to take place, how is that going to take place and how are we going to handle it remains to be seen. [...]"

The quote above is rich and insightful in many respects and highlights the need for a psychosocial approach that enables an appreciation of the group membership, history weighing down on both groups and individuals, and the psychology of the individual. The space metaphor - *To what extent can you fill the space this anger is occupying with something else?* - is particularly helpful as it gives a spatial representation of the state of minds of parties when they arrive at the negotiation table and the shift of mindset that peace mediation is striving to foster.

I find particularly evocative the idea that peace mediation is symbolically trying to make space in the minds of the parties in conflict for something new that is not anger. This formulation echoes the often referred to description of parties being *full* or bursting, thus implying that conflict parties' minds are taken over by explosive and overflowing emotions that are no longer containable.

Interestingly, and I would argue not accidentally, practitioners repeatedly described their reactions as 'absorbing' difficult emotions into themselves (see chapter 2), thus hinting at a complementarity between the *'blasting out'* of conflict parties and the *'absorbing'* of emotional disturbance though which peace mediators provide containment to the outbursts.

The psychodynamic concepts of container and containment were applied most potently by Bion[18] in his work with traumatized war veterans, building on observation of the psychological work of the primary caretaker with a small infant who is in the grips of overwhelming anxiety. In each case, the container takes in the experience, digests it, and gives it back to the traumatized individual in a form that is manageable. The process helps traumatized individuals to deal with overwhelming emotions through thinking and symbolic processing. The container must be safe, thus reiterating the key role of the mediator in making the process safe. Additionally, recognizing these regressed states of mind and acknowledging how they might be hidden under the surface, can give some insight into the sudden and ostensibly irrational blockages and resistance in the process (Seu, 2021[19]).

18 Wilfred R. Bion, Learning from Experience (London: Heinemann, 1962).

19 Seu, I.B. (2021) States of mind in conflict: offerings and translations from the Psychoanalytic and Psychosocial Field. *New England Journal of Public Policy* Vol 33 (1):12

Nevertheless, this key function shouldn't obscure the impact on mediators of what the speaker describes as *'they're going to give us hell',* and the damaging impact on practitioners which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The timing of the venting is of key importance. Although recognised as a necessary step, depending on the timing venting could fuel, rather than dissipate the conflict or, as some argued, it could turn the mediation process into an extension of or a new theatre for the conflict. Many also mentioned the dangers of emotional triggering and reinflaming old wounds, as well as that the venting and complaining, although necessary for the peace process, paradoxically also reinforce the identity of the other as the enemy until the space has been emptied of anger to some extent and parties are ready to move on.

How to manage this extremely delicate and volatile process is a tricky business for peace mediators, particularly without the required psychological knowledge, skills and support. I think this is what the speaker is hinting at when they ask the questions *how is that going to take place and how are we going to handle it remains to be seen.* What kind of psychological knowledge and skills do practitioners require to enable them to manage constructively this explosive phase and the slow transition to a different space?

Practitioners metaphorically described mediation as a boxing match (see chapter 2) in which the mediation practitioner is the referee while also trying to avoid getting too bruised themselves.

Here the speaker calls for wisdom, as well as the implied tolerance and patience of a saint, to enable venting to happen, but that's about all practitioners currently have in their psychological toolkit, which is clearly insufficient. In terms of expertise and knowledge transfer, further research is needed to discover more about what practitioners consider the most beneficial conditions for this to happen, and what worked or not in practitioners' experiences.

5. Appreciating the psychological and emotional cost of peace for parties

The importance of knowing the conflict parties' history, with which the previous quote started, was constantly mentioned:

"*what is really striking to me in terms of when we think about understanding psychology for peace processes, and I was discussing this with a colleague this morning, is you also need to understand the history. It isn't the psychological state of the person standing before you right this minute, that is one drop in a very long line of why they think the way they do and what has built their psychological worldview leading them to sitting in front of you right there […] so as mediators, you have to really understand what it feels like to be inside the conflict, and feeling the sort of the walls closing in, and the weight of history, and the weight of your community on you I give you an example. After they demobilised in XXX, you could see after the war is a lot of these guys […] they were on the road because they were supposed to go back to the community, but they are nobody anymore in that community. They don't know how to farm. […] And so they felt very left alone […] the peace agreement didn't provide them the services they were expected to receive after combatting. And in terms of identity, they are nobody. They are civilians, they were for 15 years or so combatant, they had a gun, they had power. So, in terms of their own security, as a person that's degraded, they don't have any more a position in the society".*

This speaker eloquently advocates for a psychosocial approach to enable practitioners to appreciate that individuals in conflict are not isolated entities, but an embodied moment of history. They are social beings that can be understood fully only through their position in their communities and histories. The speaker refers to a *'psychological worldview'* of the person facing the mediator and clarifies, correctly, that they are not just the person physically present in the moment, but who they are and what they think is the result of a long personal and community history. The lyrical description of the experience of the *walls closing in,* which is not a

rational reflection, but is experienced by the individual as a crushing feeling, is what the mediators need to feel themselves to fully understand who they are speaking to.

Psychologically this positionality is marked by a multiplicity of losses for former combatants: loss of identity (they were combatants, now they are civilians), loss of belonging (they no longer belong to the armed group, nor to their community), loss of skills (they don't know how to farm, and they can no longer fight), loss of power (carrying a gun gave them power, status, and belonging). As a result, *"in terms of identity, they are nobody".* Emotionally, this profound accumulation of losses is humiliating and shameful.

Another argument for the appreciation of individuals as psychosocial sites of criss-crossing forces – history, community pressure, personal history of trauma and belonging – is that conflict can often be what joins the individual to their community through the sharing of the same suffering. Volkan's[20] idea of the 'chosen trauma' is particularly illuminating. His work on group psychology offers a compelling articulation of the fluid relationship between individual and group identity, of the dynamic interaction between the interior psychic life of the individual and the sociohistorical context in which the individual developed, and how they are indivisible in the mutual co-formation.

Volkan refers to 'chosen trauma' as the shared mental representation of a massive trauma that the ancestors of a large group suffered at the hand of an enemy. With time, the function of the chosen trauma changes. The historical truth about the event is no longer important for the large group, while the function of the chosen trauma becomes to link together members of the group. Thus, the chosen trauma becomes a key component in individuals' identity that also binds them to their group. This characteristic of group and individual identity is not always visible or active. It can lie dormant for a long time but also suddenly be reactivated and exert a powerful psychological force. Chosen traumas are likely to form the psychological backlog of mediation, and, when those traumas are reactivated in the mediation process, the individuals involved might appear to shift, suddenly and unpredictably, between their present identity committed to the mediation, to that of the injured large-group identity seeking revenge for their past suffering.

Here lies the potential of a psychosocial approach for mediation, in the ability to appreciate that individual identity is never separate from social identity, and social identity is always charged with powerful affects infused with the emotional remnants of individual histories. Such an approach bypasses the society-individual binary, enabling a deeper understanding of the complexity of human subjectivity and the psychological shifts and turns in the mediation process.

"I think, for the people, all they can think about is "What am I going to lose"?"

The psychological insight of the previous speaker is repeated in the quote above. It might seem counterintuitive to think of peace in terms of loss, but this is the understanding that can be gained if the mediator is able to step into the psychological mindset of conflict parties.

"I do sometimes wonder about when you've been fighting all your life, the idea of not (fighting) is actually scarier than the persistent fight".

Attachment theory has revolutionised the way we understand human response to repetition and change. It tells us that we identify familiarity with safety, an identification that has disastrous consequences for individuals with histories of violence or abuse. Through this psychological lens, resistance to change that appears counterintuitive from a rational point of view, acquires a different meaning when understood as people repeating what they know. For populations who have lived in conflict all their lives, conflict is *all* they know. I think this is what the quote above is referring to. Appreciating the psychology of attachment and parties' history, and thus understanding that peace also involves important losses, can enable mediators to reframe what they otherwise might perceive as pure obstructiveness.

20 V. D. Volkan, "Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large Group Identity," Group Analysis 34 (2001): 79

6. Psychology and Understanding parties' emotions differently

The need for a psychological reframing appears ever more urgent when addressing how emotions are perceived and handled in T1 mediation.

"you see a lot of mediators (saying) "these crazy guys", you know. Hang on, yes, they are crazy. But that's what you have to work with now. Maybe you should change the way you're working with".

"you realise you are dealing with emotional human beings and no matter their position, regardless of their position, education, whatnot, I mean, you can see that a president of a country might have this sense of vindication and revenge and, you know, other than the dry security needs or the dry political needs that you might have. You're not having the personality that drives his agenda because there is...there's these emotions that are driving you. What do we do with it? And can we deal with it?"

The required reframing has several aspects. First, as argued in the second extract, it is necessary that mediators realise that there is a mismatch between the focus and framing of the mediation – *the dry security needs, the dry political needs* – and what is fundamentally driving the counterpart (in this case the president of a country), which is his passions – *this sense of vindication and revenge.* The speaker seems to suggest that, because of its focus on power brokering and hard bargaining, there seems to be no space in elite mediation for the human behind the role and their emotions. Yet, it is their emotions that are driving the agenda, in this case a wish for vindication and revenge. So, this quote suggests, the first problem is the lack of integration of the psychological with the technical aspects and the consequent reductionist view of the counterparts. The implied need for an expanded appreciation of the emotions driving conflict parties can be addressed by a rebalancing in T1 mediation practice so that the human side of negotiations is taken into account and incorporated.

This expansion in framing involves an inversion of vision, as described in the first quote. If the counterpart is experienced as crazy, it is not them who need to change, but the way the mediators work. Indeed, the previous sections on the effect of traumatisation, of historical patterns, and of the state of mind of conflict parties when they reach mediation, have demonstrated that integration of human aspects, understood psychosocially, and a different appreciation of emotions are necessary and urgent.

Indeed, many mediators argued that a shift in understanding and approach to emotions is a key component in the desired integration of the psychological with the technical:

"Emotions are so important for the success of the process. Because, unless you can feel the other person, the other person's hurt…."

"if you have to get into negotiating after for example the Rwanda genocide, or if you imagine that Palestinians and the Israelis eventually getting to the table, and you tell me there are no trauma - there's no trauma there or there are no emotions, then people are more effective in suppressing them, but it doesn't mean that they're absent. How, in Rwanda after the genocide, how do you expect people at whatever level to sit there in a completely emotionless state and just purely intellectually deal with the issues, it's just not possible. I also really believe strongly that a general, a bigger understanding of the psychology of conflict parties can be really useful in getting both the lone mediator camp and the others to see the entire system differently because I do think it's been a really neglected area, and I think (for example) about xxx general running off to the bush and getting himself killed and the sort of questions of like "is that rational action or not", and so many particularly of the (name of population) that I know, that are so deeply traumatised by what has happened over so many decades that what they see as rational action is not the same as what you see and the way they need to work through a process is just so deeply different. And understanding that psychology so that you can understand how to connect with them and how to build a process that relates to them as the elites but also the psychology of the wider society I think is a really interesting door to try and open with both of these camps".

It is preposterous to believe that in the case of prolonged conflict and dispossession lasting generations or genocide and extreme violence, there will be no trauma or strong emotions, and the parties will be able to have

only a rational engagement with the issues. As the speaker says, it is just not possible.

A general and deeper psychological understanding of parties in conflict is urgently needed because the parties' state of mind is a neglected area. The speaker argues that this should not be window dressing, with small bites of psychological knowledge offered to mediators, but that a paradigm shift is needed to be able 'to see the entire system differently' and to appreciate not only the contextual and relative nature of what constitutes 'rational' behaviour, but also that their history of trauma and conflict informs the way in which parties go through a process thus making it deeply different. Knowing about the psychology of parties, the speaker argues, is essential to mediators to enable them to connect with them and to build a process that is meaningful to both the elites and wider society.

The quote concludes with a metaphor, likening the psychological knowledge of conflict parties' state of mind to a door that by implication is closed at the moment and it would be interesting to open, for both elite mediators and transformative practices professionals.

Another aspect identified by practitioners as important in the mediation process, but in need to be understood better psychologically, was the psychology of the interaction between mediators and parties, particularly the 'spoilers' or 'hardliners':

"Let's say if working with difficult people. We always have the difficult ones. You have this...they call them spoilers or hardliners, working with hardliners. [...] I always look for the hardliners and I work with them because that's where you go. In other words, it's, yeah, it's a deal breaker in a way, right? If you don't work with them, you become resentful, you side-line them, it becomes worse. So, you work with them. And usually your access is the psychological stuff, right? I mean, [...] your access to the human side. You don't go dry. You know, you realise, okay, what's this person missing? So, the entry point is the human side and then you get to the substance over time. So, what I don't know, like, what will be interesting to understand and how then, how can I amplify on that experience?"

The speaker mentions the importance of an 'entry point', which sounds similar to the open or close door metaphor used in the previous extract, and it could be taken to be an instrumental use of psychology, but it stems from a relational interest, thus suggesting that an engagement with the psychology of parties is always the beginning or the entry point into the process. Similarly to previous speaker and many others, this practitioner also argues that the relational and psychological aspects are a pre-requisite for the process and that *the substance,* that is, the technical stages of reaching an agreement, will come later.

This extract evidences the importance of the mediator's self-reflexivity and emotional self-awareness. This practitioner's strategy is to confront head on what is likely to cause resentment in themselves and the unhelpful reaction of avoidance. I find this formulation particularly interesting in terms of psychological modelling, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. Self-awareness enables this practitioner to be mindful of their own likely emotional response of resentment, retaliation, and avoidance, and pre-empt these responses by actively engaging the very individuals that trigger them so much. Symbolically, this could also serve as a parable about, or a representation of, what happens in the relationship with emotions in mediation. Similar to the hardliners, the current paradigm in mediation is that emotions work like 'spoilers' and the fantasy is that if one could just get rid of them, the process would be smooth, easy and rational. But that is not likely to happen as mediators repeatedly argued and illustrated. Emotions, like hardliners and spoilers, are not going to disappear from mediation processes, but when they are not dealt with, they disrupt and make matters worse. Hence, as exemplified by this speaker, one needs to work with them (emotions and spoilers alike) and as a matter of priority.

The extract, like many others before, closes with the practitioner's expression of a need for psychological input: how can I understand this better? How can I learn about these individual experiences so that they can inform their and other practitioners' mediation practice?

7. Engaging with and translating meaning in mediation

Several participants identified the need to explain the structure and function of peace mediation to conflict parties to bridge the cultural gap between mediation practitioners and conflict parties, which will be discussed further in chapter 3. Partly in relation to the idea of preparing parties of mediation, participants proposed that mediation processes involve 'translating' at several levels and should be performed by a psychologist or mediators themselves, depending on the type of translation required.

One type of translation is cultural, and it involves mediators stepping out of their customary, Western communication style and assumptions, and stepping into the parties cultural universe. This is a necessary step to understand the counterpart, but also, importantly, to avoid embarrassing them:

"*in most societies, traditional societies, saving face is very important. This is very important. You know, don't embarrass the other party because in their position […] they never say things straight. You know, they say things in metaphors. And so you have to read through all of this"*

The importance of feelings of shame, humiliation, and the need to understand the role of fear of loss of face in negotiation was repeatedly mentioned and is considered, as the speaker says, 'very important'. The phrase 'what is behind' was used frequently by practitioners, and the connected need for psychological input. Fear of loss of face is a good example of what adding psychological theories and descriptors can contribute to mediators' toolkit.

Conflict produces what social psychologists call "ego threats," which greatly complicate conflict resolution. When a party's pride is wounded during negotiation, even acceptable offers may be rejected out of spite, or to preserve dignity and self-esteem. In the psychoanalytic literature, ego-threats may be referred to as 'narcissistic issues', while in conflict resolution literature, there is a tendency to speak of them as party's need to 'save face' or of a person's 'ego' or 'egocentric' perspective clouding their thinking [21] Loss of face, humiliation and shame and its counterpart pride are intimately linked to these 'ego-threats' and 'narcissistic wounds', and they can play a key role in blocking conciliation and peace. Additionally, losing face is a threat to the social bond, and in relation to the group one represents implies potential loss of status and respect, but can result in material losses too.

In clinical practice, the relative benefit resulting from clinging to old and dysfunctional behaviours and patterns is called secondary gain. Part of the therapeutic work consists in understanding the secondary gains, that is, what is of value and invested in the patterns that makes it hard for the patient to relinquish them and uncouple it from the dysfunctional patterns. I think there is reference to this psychological dynamis in the speaker's statement that conflict parties 'never say things straight' and that the mediator has to *'read through all of this'.* In other words, mediators need a metaphorical psychological lens to read and decipher the other meanings hiding behind positions, resistance, ostensibly unreasonable behaviour as complex, often self-protective, psychosocial dynamics.

This work of translation was considered crucial by many, both in terms of mediators improved and nuanced understanding of parties, and in the role mediators can then play through that enhanced understanding. For example:

"we assume when different parties speak to each other, that they understand each other's point of view or that they understand each other's narrative. Or they understand each other's way of communicating. And I think one of the things we've really missed in mediation is the need for either helping parties to a conflict to be more explicit about what's behind what they're saying, so to speak to their narrative, […] to give some nuances or explanation or for us to be able to help explain to each side, the reason they're saying this is…and it was something that I found both in XXX and XXX where a whole lot of what we're doing…either formally or informally,

21 See Seu (2021) for further details

is trying to translate…and I don't mean language translate, I mean the reason they're saying that point is because dah, dah, dah. Do you understand when they say that, what they're actually saying is dah. And I think that's something that we haven't really understood about the role because we've got all caught up in neutrality and impartiality and not intervening".

As well as articulating the importance of the psychological translation needed in accessing complex reasons behind parties' behaviour, the extract above introduces that idea of the mediator mirroring and modelling behaviours to parties before they can perform those behaviours themselves, which will be discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4.

The psychological operation described above has three aspects. First the mediator needs to translate for themselves what one party is really trying to say; in other words, a translation of the manifest into the latent – *' the reason they are saying that is because of dah, dah, dah, they are actually saying is dah'* - . This involves mediation practitioners' empathic curiosity in the party's predicament and an openness to a more complex view of the party beyond their posturing. Secondly, grasping psychosocial needs motivating their behaviour, enables mediators to help each party to articulate the latent psychological meaning and incorporate it into their narrative, thus helping them *'to be more explicit'.* Thirdly, this in turn enables the mediator to translate what a party is saying in a way that their counterpart can understand. This complex psychological operation is based on the *empathic mutual positioning dynamic* [22] which, importantly, the mediator needs to model for the parties.

The speaker suggests that the mediator's role as translator hasn't been developed because it appears to interfere with their neutrality and impartiality. I would offer an alternative to his perception and suggest instead this translator function is an aspect of building the 'third space', to be discussed further in chapter 3. The 'third space' can be conceptualised as an in-between space where parties are not triggered, not in the 'fight-flight' state of mind and therefore enables thinking and different experiences to take place. Benjamin defines the figure of the 'moral third' as a figure that does not side with one or the other party but holds both views in a new space that is not appropriated or colonised into either party's narrative. This third space is where both narratives can be heard and a new, jointly constructed narrative can emerge. We can see the critical importance of the role as translator played by the mediator in offering, through their modelling, the possibility of mutual recognition.

I expect many mediation practitioners already do some of this intuitively, or because they know from experience that it is needed and that doing it helps the process. However, they lack the psychological understanding of why it helps and what are the psychological dynamics underpinning it. In addition, many practitioners lamented that often this operation stays 'dry' by not going beyond the technical aspects of the process, and behind the posturing and performance.

The need for a psychosocial psychologist to help in making the latent psychological meanings manifest is further articulated in the next extract:

"What we have done, and I think this is common, if we see that a party, an important party is unable to articulate themselves, very often, they're asked if they would like some training, mainly trainings in articulating themselves, "can we bring in somebody to help you think through, to rationalise your ideas". That happens quite often. And I can see the role of the psychologist right there. Getting to underlying feelings and motivation So, you know, respecting or being very aware of anything that that's really a psychological dimension in that, you know, understanding where they come from and understand that they're intransigents or arrogant, you know, it's very often the result of they're feeling being the weaker part, you know, the weaker or being tricked, et cetera, et cetera. So, you have to spend much, much, much more time on them".

The speaker above explains the added value of a psychological input. While support exist in the form of training for parties to help them articulate better their positions, mediation practitioners don't have the skill to access

22 I. B. Seu and L. Cameron, "Empathic Mutual Positioning in Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation," Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 19, no. 3 (2013): 266–280.

the underlying psychological dimensions which, the speaker implies, are key to operate the inversion of reading involved in seeing vulnerability and fear where intransigence or arrogance is manifested. Acquiring psychological skills, descriptors, and theory would enable practitioners to reframe the manifest intransigence as a defensive, self-protective manoeuvre, based on a psychosocial conceptualisation of human subjectivity as complex, dynamic and using defence mechanisms.

Conclusions

The overarching finding about the psychology of conflict parties, regardless of whether the work is happening at Track 1, 2 or 3, is that participants believe that breakthroughs happen when peace mediators manage to relate to parties at a more personal level and engage with what lies behind the parties' manifest behaviour. This chapter summarised practitioners' suggestions on how psychology is needed to enable the humanisation of peace mediation practices and engage with the conflict parties' personal aspects in the process, while also asking for the psychological input that would provide them with the necessary skills.

In summary:

1. Engaging with the personal facilitates breakthroughs and storytelling plays a critical role in engaging with the personal.
2. Mediation practitioners need to approach, understand, and engage with emotions differently, including appreciating the difficulties in emotional regulation caused by trauma, and the emotional underpinnings of parties' mindsets.
3. Mediation practitioners need to relate to conflict parties psychosocially, which involves taking into account the role of history, culture, emotions and trauma, status and other relational dynamics in motivating their behaviour.
4. Mediation practitioners should be better informed about the psychology of trauma to enable them to recognise and understand the manifestations of a traumatised mind, particularly when trauma has been repeated and intergenerational. This will enable both a more sensitive handling of interactions with traumatised conflict parties, and a deeper understanding of the context, nature, and history of the conflict.
5. Preliminary psychological work needs to take place to enhance the likelihood of success of the mediation process. Among these, practitioners identified:
    a. allowing conflict parties to tell their stories and to vent their anger.
    b. preparatory work for parties, including a) mediation practitioners needing to explain and translate the culturally specific aims and format of the process they are proposing, rather than assume their universal intelligibility, to enable parties to make better use of it, b) enabling parties to learn new skills to facilitate better expression of their own needs, and the communication between parties in conflict,
    c. understanding parties' mindsets and the psychological work required to shift them
    d. actively foster relationship building which practitioners consider a prerequisite to peace mediation work at all levels.
6. An appreciation of the psychology of attachment and the parties' history can enable a different understanding of parties' resistance to peace and the stuckness of the process not as sheer obstructiveness but as resistance to the multiple losses - identity, status, revenge, power and pride -involved in accepting peace.

7. There is an overarching need in peace mediation practice for psychologically reframing parties' behaviour to enable a more layered understanding of the person underneath.

When engaging with parties in conflict, embracing a psychological approach can increase practitioners' openness to a more complex and layered understanding of the parties and the psychological dynamics at play in the mediation process. Practitioners openly identified areas in which they feel deskilled and in need of psychological input to understand better the psychological dynamics motivating parties' behaviour, and to be trained to sensitively handle the interactions. Directly or indirectly, they asked for help through specialist psychological input into their mediation work and training.

Specifically, they identified the need for deeper psychological understanding and application to:

a. Engage conflict parties at a more personal, relational level

b. View parties as traumatised and emotionally scarred

c. Shift parties' mindsets caused by conflict

d. Enable parties to vent safely

e. Reframe the role of emotions in peace mediation

f. Appreciate the emotional cost of peace for parties

g. Appreciate the cultural embeddedness of conflict

This summary identifies gaps in psychological skills and their uneven distribution that can be addressed through *labelling* and enhanced psychological agility.

The psychological *labelling* builds on practitioners' existing intuitive application of psychology, through the a

dition of a new theoretically-based vocabulary. It involves introducing psychological descriptors to give practitioners a vocabulary to recognise, name and work with the psychological components of peace mediation. The descriptors are ensconced in relevant psychological theory which explains parties' and mediation practitioners' behaviour in psychological terms. Additionally, the process of labelling intends to develop practitioners' psychological sensitivity towards the human aspects of the mediation and integrate these into the technical power brokering.

Giving practitioners the same range of skills and skilling everyone equitably would counter the uneven distribution of mediation practices and uses of psychology that we found. Currently, technical power-brokering aspects of mediation, which apply psychology instrumentally, appear to dominate practices in T1, while relational applications of psychology tend to characterise transformative practices in T2 and 3.

The data suggest that peace mediators, and in particular elite mediators, currently don't have sufficient psychological understanding or skills to be psychologically agile and flexibly attend to both the technical and psychological side of the process, as and when the context requires it. A key part of the recommendations involves enabling a new and different engagement by mediators with what has been variously called the 'human' and 'personal', and the emotional aspects of peace mediation processes.

Psychological Descriptors

The descriptors discussed in relation to conflict parties are:

1. loss of face and fear of humiliation
2. attachment patterns and identity which, together with loss of face and fear of humiliation can lead to resistance or performative behaviour as self-defence.
3. safe spaces as a third space
4. translation of manifested behaviour psychologically to gain insight into latent motivations.

Recommendations

Systemic changes: A systemic paradigm shift is needed to include a deeper engagement with the psychology of conflict parties, and more consciously and actively integrate the 'relationship-building' aspects with the technical, power-brokering in mediation. A systemic shift in orientation towards emotions and the affective aspects of peace mediation is also recommended. The shift in practitioners' mindset required for the integration of psychological skills and understanding with the power-brokering aspects of their practice, can only be achieved if it is institutionally embedded through systemic changes. The participants believed that this desired conceptual and practical expansiveness is necessary for mediation processes to succeed and last.

Training: The embedding of the paradigm shift described above starts with the incorporation into and promotion through mediation training of an enhanced psychological sensitivity and skills. The aim of the expanded consideration of the psychological angle in mediation training is to humanise mediation processes, equip practitioners with psychological tools and techniques, and increase practitioners' reflexivity. *Inter alia,* this should include specialist input to increase mediators' competency in and understanding of a) the impact of trauma on parties in conflict; b) the psychological preparatory work necessary to enable parties' full participation in peace mediation; c) the psychosocial interconnectedness between parties' history and identity, as well as between their individual and group identity; c) an awareness of and psychological sensitivity towards the cultural and historical gap between mediators and parties in conflict that needs to be bridged so that mediation processes become meaningful and useful to parties; d) learning psychological techniques, for example active listening, paraphrasing, and enhance mediators' capacity for holding and containment). Additionally, numerous interviewees talked about the usefulness of training as a tool of engagement for working with parties in conflict, which – if it had a focus on the psychological dimensions of conflict and making reparations – could contribute to the psychological ripeness of the wider mediation context.

The setting up of targeted psychological training for mediation practitioners should consist of both an integration of the psychological into existing provision and as stand-alone training. While some training with a psychological dimension already occurs, this should be complemented with a 'psychosocial' psychological approach that situates the individual mind in a specific social and cultural context.

Research: Further research is recommended to learn more about situated practices and successful integrations of the personal with technical aspects, timing and management of venting, collaborative activities between parties to shift their mindset.

Chapter 2
MEDIATORS' STATES OF MIND

Chapter 2 of this report deals with the psychology of the mediator. I will start with how the practitioners described the experience of being in a mediator's role and then discuss the cumulative psychological impact of the toxicity of peace mediation processes on the mediators.

The participants made ample use of metaphors to convey the lived experience of peace mediation processes. Out of these, three captured the essential qualities depicted by most practitioners. The first described mediation processes as a pressure cooker, highlighting the speed, the building pressure and the danger of explosion if mishandled.

The pressure stemming from this underlying danger was also part of the second metaphor, which described the experience of mediation as being like holding back two walls of water to stop them from crashing in and drowning everyone.

"The burden of mediators in this area is serious […] Sometimes you feel like you're kind of holding back walls of water on either side and you're trying to keep them from crashing in and drowning everyone, this feeling that if you don't get this agreement things are going to be so much worse, or trying to figure out how to convince the powers that be when you feel maybe powerless that you can make those kind of changes, I think that's really, I think that's really hard".

This vivid imagery conveys the overwhelming, exhausting, and near-impossible quality of the mission and speaks to the mediators' constant awareness of the disastrous consequences if the negotiations were to fail, "crashing in and drowning everyone." It also highlights that the task feels unequal to their means and how practitioners in peace mediation might feel relatively inadequate, powerless and unequipped as one would feel when trying to hold back an impending tsunami.

The enormity of the task compared to what is humanly possible was strikingly described by a different participant as being similar to a Messiah role.

"One or two individuals who by virtue of their individual excellence, so to speak, they have to do the whole thing, it is almost a messiah type of role that they want to ascribe to the mediator and it's unfair to everyone involved really, just to carry that burden of being this messiah is terrible, I can tell you, and on the other hand, it is not true, it's just not workable, it's not realistic".

The third metaphor was of a boxing match which, similarly to the metaphor about crashing walls of water captures the vulnerability of the mediator, but also the violence and aggression inherent in the process.

"it's very hard to explain that pressure because nobody's aware of that reality outside the room, it happens in that room and once you are inside, you- all gloves are off, it's like a boxing match, and when you are there you need to really not only defend but at the same time you need to play it in a way that by the end of the day you come out without any bruises, and that is the most difficult part, you can't even tell, you can't even speak about it".

Feeling powerless, anxious and unequipped was encapsulated by a participant who described the state of mind of mediators as being 'courageously afraid'.

"afraid of making mistakes, afraid of not being able to succeed in your mission, or afraid because you're supposed to be afraid for other people being killed".

As a psychologist listening to these accounts, the overarching message was that all the attention is on the

parties in conflict and their interactions, metaphorically referred to in the last two examples as walls of water or boxers, while little attention is paid to the metaphorical bruises on the mediators, what it feels like to be in that position and the impact it has on the peace practitioners' well-being. Although it is understandable that conflict parties should be the focus of attention, practitioners emphatically communicated their unhappiness with this picture which is unhealthy for practitioners and for the process too. This is the focus of chapter 2.

1. The Experience – 'having to deny one's humanity'

The two words that participants mentioned repeatedly when describing their experience of mediation were pressure and aloneness.

The sources of pressure were multiple. On the one hand, pressure seems to come from the confluence of accountability to the practitioners' bosses who assign them to the mission and want to see results, pressures from donors who want a quick resolution to save human lives and reduce the humanitarian cost of the conflict, and accountability to the process itself. On the other hand, these pressures were compounded by the intrinsic pressure of how processes are structured and conducted, the pace, the long hours, the compressed and relentless meetings.

Although all practitioners referred to how the combination of all these factors took a toll, they somehow viewed it as structural, inevitable, and intrinsic to the process. Added to this is the constant threat of the process collapsing.

The next extract mentions the need for support for mediators to tolerate and deal with the ups and downs of peace mediation processes. The speaker is very experienced and has learnt that peace mediation processes are never linear, but complicated and fragile, for example when one or both conflict parties walk out of the negotiation. They call this the mediator's *daily bread* thus acknowledging the frustrating and soul-destroying experience of mediation, particularly so, I imagine, for inexperienced mediators before they acquire the Sisyphean capacity for acceptance described in the extract:

"[...] walk outs, you know, is our daily bread. You don't panic when they walk out. You handle the walking out. That's what you do. People always – I mean the mediator won't survive it if he's literally worried, constantly worried about are they going to walk out or not walk out? It's part of your daily bread. Let them walk out and then see how you get them back in. That's what's important".

Added to these was the angst of the private soul-searching, the agonising doubts, uncertainty, and stress practitioners face on their own.

"Can you live with this uncertainty? Can you live with the pressure, like the possibility of failure? […] very few people expected this latest process I was in to succeed. And failure...when I took the mandate, I had to discuss with my (superiors) can I do it? and they were very sceptical. They said, "it's too risky, it's not going to happen". I said, "yeah let's try and if it fails, you know, everybody will know that it was really complicated and the reputational damage will be limited", but then you're in this. And you don't want to be responsible for the failure like that. So, I had periods of like, like, really bad nights. And... that was on an unsustainable level. And if I imagine people worry much more in complicated contexts. […] in every one of these processes there are periods of doom and uncertainty. Then I think, if you've...then you need alternative mechanisms for decompression and then be able to deal with the stress. And again, I think that that's where (psychological support) comes in again, it could be helpful, I think".

This kind of account was a recurrent feature in the interviews and reveals a hidden side of the peace mediation profession that is not openly talked about: the long sleepless nights of doubt and anxiety. In these solitary moments of reckoning, practitioners feel particularly alone, but the loneliness permeates the whole experience, as the next three extracts illustrate:

***"i**f you're negotiating a ceasefire, or if you're negotiating access of humanitarian goods to...to a refugee camps*

or things, like, pretty hardcore, you negotiate with people who are, who have a track record of...of lawlessness and violence. And you know that whether you succeed or not will have an impact on the well-being of people. And you are alone because at the end of the day, you know, you will have to make decisions and the pressures are enormous".

"It's a very, very lonely space to be"

"it was very lonely work and I thought very often about the possibility of basically looking back and thinking, I basically squandered five years of my life. […] It takes this kind of persons who are willing to do that sacrifice, because even if you plan to fly back home on Friday afternoon to see the family or go to this party with your friends, you'll have to stay for another week waiting maybe for them (parties in conflict) to start moving. So, you know, I think, personally, this kind of work takes quite a high toll on lots of the mediators. Yeah, so, you know, there were many examples of that, people leaving the business maybe very late in their career. Not having achieved much in terms of getting the recognition that they were hoping to get or aiming for. So, lots of bitterness, I think, goes as well".

It goes without saying that peace mediation processes are imbued with secrecy for the purpose of creating a safe boundary around the process, to enable participants to have a frank and honest exchange, and to shelter the process from the interference of the media, spoilers, et cetera. Here, however, I am interested in a different kind of secrecy surrounding the mediators, not just in regard to what can be said, expressed, and named to parties in conflict, colleagues, and bosses, but the systemic dynamics that interfere with practitioners speaking out about the emotional challenges of peace mediation. Although participants seem to be aware to some extent of the impact of the processes on their lives and wellbeing, there seemed to be a lack of validating language to express their psychological experiences in the process.

Absorbing emotions

Several practitioners made reference to having to 'absorb', to 'take in' quite a lot and still remain poised and neutral.

"a lot of dirty laundry comes out when you're dealing with these issues, and some of those things are quite horrific or really, really direct, you can't even say quite a lot of things, but you need to manage as you go along, you need to absorb it in yourself, […] you really need to take in quite a lot and be able to remain objective, otherwise it's very easy to fall into one track or the other one, and once you're engaged in this kind of processes, you are tested, your partiality is tested again and again. The moment you slip, there is no second chance in mediation".

The familiar scenario described above points to mediators having to bear witness to testimonies of extreme violence and brutality whilst at the same time having to repress any ordinary human emotion they might have in response. The self-censorship is clearly articulated here you *can't even say quite a lot of things* as it is the need to manage one's own emotions and those of the parties in conflict.

The rationale is that such strict self-discipline is necessary to preserve neutrality and not take sides. Again, the pressure on practitioners is evident, expressed above through *the moment you slip, there is no second chance in mediation,* suggesting the urgent need for constant self-monitoring and self-control.

This is clearly not an easy task, and some spoke openly of the difficulties involved in trying to stay neutral:

"[Y]ou know, I'm often…often times asked about neutrality, and I will be frank with you and tell you there's nothing like being neutral […] I sat on my anger, totally concealed it, totally concealed it because otherwise, you allow other people who will come in wailing and crying and saying, "he killed, he abducted" and…then that destroys everything. So, I think it is often…it's very important that a mediator takes time off to reflect especially over contentious issues. […] To reflect and not be put under too much pressure to just continue for the sake of continuing".

Here the pressure this exercises on mediators is openly described and so is the intensity of emotions they have to face and not react to. Similarly to the previous extract commenting on not having a second chance and how much it is riding on mediation, here the practitioners refers indirectly to the tenuous and fragile nature of negotiation which is under threat from what has the potential to *'destroys everything'.* These are strong words which bring to mind a nuclear explosion or a catastrophic event.

"You are supposed to negotiate with a warlord while knowing that he or she – well, normally, it's a he – has been bombing and killing people, and you are supposed to not feel too much outrage or control your outrage. Hmm, testing. Especially when you meet them, and they lie to you, and they say that you are not supposed to get involved in all this".

As a psychologist, I wondered about the effect on practitioners of constantly having to conceal their emotions and repress the upsurge of their human feelings of anger, horror, shock, sadness, upset.

"The other aspect which has been very difficult to manage is controlling your outrage because you didn't join the UN because you want to sell cars or Coca-Cola. You joined because you look at it as a mission to save people, okay? Or to make a difference for people if you can. And that is confronted by you having to deal with people who are bombing those people, and you are supposed to meet him, shake hands, smile and listen, and not be outraged to the point of saying, "You know what…" And that element has a price. You need a psychologist. I didn't have one, so I had to manage it for xxx years in my last mission".

This powerful narrative articulates the paradoxical position mediators must hold, in which their emotional investment and ethical motivation for their job are in contrast with the actions they have to perform in their UN role. There is almost a schizophrenic quality to these demands coming from feeling one thing and having to manifest another. Managing such disconnect and estrangement from oneself is extremely hard, particularly over prolonged periods of time, and requires support. Yet, according to mediators no psychological support is available.

This selection of accounts, only a small part of a shared narrative, highlights how practitioners feel unequipped and unsupported in dealing with the intense emotional experience involved in peace mediation. The recurrent words were the need to 'absorb in yourself' and 'manage' the intense feelings which are evoked in mediation. This is a psychologically toxic environment that mediators are expected to manage somehow. Most do by taking in and absorbing the emotional toxicity into themselves but, as the speaker above says, *'that element has a price",* which is discussed in the next section. The need for psychological support for mediation actors was also openly and repeatedly voiced.

Because of the psychological cost of the mental gymnastics described above and the lack of psychological support, it is not surprising that some practitioners feel alone and abandoned by the system

"Between their conscience, their feelings, their emotions, their outrage, their ambitions to succeed, the pressure they are getting. All that, it's there, but they are alone. They can hardly talk to anyone about it. Neither to their bosses because that makes the bosses then start wondering whether you can handle it. Neither to the people around you, your family, because then they will say, "Come on. It's a crazy job. You should not be doing it." Neither, obviously, to your team because they need to look up to you as the leader who is supposed to actually give a course of leadership in what looks to be a very complicated environment. And, finally, you can't, obviously, hint anything of that to your counterparts because then they would know how they can have an entry point in you. So, the word is "alone", unless you start talking to a psychologist. But the moment it's known that you are actually having - while you're having a negotiation, you are actually going to a psychologist to handle your concerns, that would send a signal. And no secrets are secrets, even by your family, who complains, "Oh, my husband is going to that psychologist. You know, this mission is so unfair," and then the rumour goes around. That weakens you. So, you don't do it".

This eloquent quote calls attention to the impossible situation peace mediators are placed in and the compounding silencing of any call for help coming from all angles: bosses, colleagues, support team and family. It suggests that this is not an individual's problem or predicament but is embedded and systemic. In the absence

of acknowledgement and support, the structural denial of the emotional impact of mediation processes becomes normalised and practitioners, in their individual isolation and self-silencing, have to find ways to manage and/or secretly find psychological support.

The circulating fantasy of superhuman capacity to remain unscathed reinforces this myth.

"When you intervene in this set of situations you are intervening in a mess, and to think you can go in there and come out without looking like a mess yourself, you are deluding yourself. I mean you are deluding yourself, it is a very complex and difficult process at the best of times, so it's easier to be clever afterwards from the outside, but is very difficult when you're in it, really, to keep everything together. […] The state of mind of the mediator. I think it's crucial […]"

Hence, the participants argued, there is a disconnect between the outer performance of control, and the reality of how incredibly hard it is to *keep everything together.* There seems to be a cyclical dynamic in this *'delusion',* as the speaker calls it: it starts with the expectation of superhuman abilities of particular individuals, the Messiah type role, actively promoted by a systemic denial of the human vulnerabilities of practitioners who, in turn, comply by suffering in private and performing invulnerability in public, thus feeding into the mystique.

The next section deals with the impact

2. The Impact on Mediators – like a war veteran but unacknowledged

The list of traumatic and disturbing experiences connected to the peace mediation work was long and varied. Some talked about being exposed to verbal aggression in the mediation encounters and having to absorb that aggression:

"I think he even had a triple bypass due to that, because the pressure on them was enormous, and the arrogance and the aggressiveness of the counterparts from all sides were extremely violent. And you are supposed to, (maybe) not smile, but you have to absorb it and go forward, not just respond in kind, you know?"

Some referred having witnessed violence directly:

"I was called in to assist a high-level UN mediator in the worsening situation in (name of country) when there was a lot of violence, and when I arrived, the evening I looked out of my hotel room and I was warned not to look through the window, but I did, and I saw people being shot down in the street".

Others described the excruciating experience of having to listen to traumatic stories:

"I think the more committed you are, the stronger price you're going to pay for good or for bad. If you're fully committed, you put all your soul in this thing then you're going to get hurt. it took quite some (.) having the parties, the individuals look each other in the face and say, "Do you remember the day that you cut off this arm here and you know this one here? Do you remember the day that you cut off my limbs?" And to have people sit in the same room and actually discuss that, I, for me, personally, it was excruciating".

The previous extract makes a particularly poignant connection between full commitment – metaphorically described as putting all your soul in the peace process – and getting hurt. It implies that practitioners' only possible self-protection is in a half-hearted involvement in peace processes, which is hard to imagine, or finding ways to detach or disconnect somehow because a full commitment is damaging, and/or that getting hurt is the inevitable by-product of committing fully to a process.

This is complex narrative because it seems to acknowledge the damage while simultaneously normalising it by formulating it as 'full commitment'. The normalisation and rationalisations contained in this construction are troubling because they obscure what in clinical terms is a repeated experience of vicarious or secondary trauma. The normalisation of secondary trauma as inevitable part of the package feeds into the denial that peace

mediation, however invested with personal passion, is a professional enterprise that should be supported and protected as the employers' duty of care.

Many reported losses they had suffered, either of colleagues or those that worked under their responsibility:

"I have to admit, you know, at night, not sleeping. Not sleeping well is one. When I'm in charge of hundreds of people, and six of them - eight of them - have been killed in (name of country), and they were young, and they were under my watch - because a riot took place and took over the base because an idiot (reference to infamous incident), for instance, and you probably remember. And there was a series of horrible acts and happened to my colleagues. […] and these are young, 30 years old, newly married people to whom I say, "Let's go." Because we needed to bring aid, whenever I could, I went, we go, but I can't be everywhere. And that responsibility, I was never able to overcome easily at all. There were constant sleepless nights. .. Because the feeling of responsibility that you have in handling a negotiation or a mission has that aspect".

The example above is very specific and might pertain only to senior mediators and Special Envoys but, as shown in previous extracts, the crushing sense of direct or indirect responsibility for people's lives was a common experience amongst the participants. Also shared was the anxiety and worry keeping them awake at night. Added to that, participants also mentioned the loss of close colleagues:

"I could've done with someone to talk to once in a while. I mean, you know, we lost a lot of company… From our inner circle, only two of us have… There's only—apart from me, there's only two of us still alive. So, I lost seven very close colleagues – oh, they were more than colleagues, they were my friends and comrades, and the struggles they… Several were assassinated. Because if you're a good and effective peace builder and peace mediator, then you will be upsetting some power players".

In this context, it is not surprising that a participant likened peace mediators to war veterans. Indeed, the kind of experiences described so far shares key features with war in terms of direct or indirect exposure to violence and brutalities, in the bonds of camaraderie forming between people working/fighting close to each other, and in living a parallel reality so distant from everyday life at home that many come to experience it as a bubble.

"For four years we hadn't been allowed to talk to anybody. […] And I was like, oh my Lord, we didn't remember that the rest of the world was out there and hadn't been through this painful experience of giving birth to an agreement. […] now we have to translate what we've done to everybody else because they don't see that either. And there was this, sort of, shared defensiveness that we all had facing the world".

The experience of full immersion and the accompanying prolonged disconnection from the world outside peace negotiations is psychologically critical. It involves a bracketing off of the ordinary and a normalisation of the extraordinary. The personal sphere and affective bonds also must be suspended. Most participants had experienced not being able to attend funerals, children's birthdays, Christmas or other important religious events, death of parents, illness of children or coming home after prolonged absences and not being recognised by their own children. The bubble is a closed system that practitioners can rarely step out of while on a mission and what is of primary importance in ordinary life becomes secondary.

This is likely to involve important and drastic psychological strategies. I expect peace mediators become proficient at compartmentalising not only parts of their lives but parts of their minds too. Earlier we saw an example of that in terms of repression of emotions, but others articulated the long-term consequences of spending long periods of time in missions and disconnected from friends and family. Some reported having become guarded even when at home and with people they intrinsically trusted, and friends commenting on how they no longer were able to speak openly or without measuring every word. It is not surprising that relationship problems appear to be a common occurrence.

I" know quite a lot of mediators; they often have difficulties in personal life but it's the nature of the pressures they're exposed to and they will let it out in different ways".

Others described experiencing psychological dislocation:

"it's just different from when I'm sitting in (European city), you know? And so there can be a big dislocation, I mean, for people like me coming back here, it's like nobody has an idea of what you're on about because it's not in their realm of experience and quite often they don't want to know because it's… Well, it's difficult and it's, I guess it's provocative and… yeah, it's upsetting, I suppose, and maybe people would rather be in their comfort zones or something".

This account is resonant with experience when they return home, having had disturbing and difficult experiences but not being able to share them, with an accompanying sense of isolation and disconnection. This internal fracture is hard to bridge or to let others see it. More senior and seasoned mediators described long lasting changes resulting from this split existence

"[T]hose processes change your life […] really go into your soul, your brain, your body, you'll have the kind of the scars of the negotiation all over you […] It's something that really gets into you in a way that is difficult, it's like an accident, it's really…it sticks with you because of the long hours, months and months, leaving together, co-existing, fighting […] it's like a rollercoaster".

"[t]he state of mind of the mediator, I think it's critical, I think it's absolutely critical, I don't think you can do this work in isolation, but also deeper down, I mean just with that one stage, in that process with the peace accord by the end of xxx, I was very close to depression, where I- because I discovered because being an introvert you know, I pulled everything into myself and when there was a failure as there were, of course there were failures, I blamed myself for the failure, and so I really had to stay back at that time and consciously stayed back from accepting responsibility from what other people do and for the decision that I make, and I found- and that stayed with me to this day that it's something that I have be conscious about, I have to do it consistently and I have to talk when necessary, talk to people about this".

The profound and long-lasting damaging impact on peace mediators as individuals is clear from these accounts and it needs to be acknowledged and addressed urgently. Beside the personal cost, many argued that the psychological impact on the mediator affects negatively peace processes too.

"we shouldn't forget that very often the mediators themselves need psychological therapy during the process. Because it can be so mentally taxing to the extent that you become irrational, and that becomes unhealthy to the process […] It seems so rational to do it".

"[t]he potential of psychological harm to the mediator is I think high, that's the one thing, secondly, I think a mediator who is not aware of the way in which his own psychological issues are influencing the process that he or she is trying to manage is an idiot. It is just so obvious, it's just so obvious that, you know, your own insecurities, your own prejudices, your own dislikes and likes and all these have a very real influence on the process, and if you deny that, you're in self-denial, I mean it's just not good enough".

This powerful statement was echoed by others who recounted instances in which something destabilised them so profoundly that they could not continue with their mission, or fell into depression or, most commonly, became burnt out.

"This goes deep under my skin. My whole resilience barrier is probably going to collapse. Yeah? It touches you. If (he) tells you how his parents were shot, and his mother was raped in front of his eyes and then shot and then they have taken him for military training. Yeah? And resilience collapses relatively quickly. How do you...what... what's the advice of an expert? What should you do in the situation?"

"we have consultants or even experts on on-call basis or even full-time on post-traumatic stress that we didn't have before. We do have them now. And they're called in when they're in a dramatic event, and I don't need to elaborate on that. But you don't have them for the micro stress. You don't have them for the chronic stress. You don't have them for the low-intensity approach, where you don't show anything. You, in fact, don't ask for help for the reason we just said. That aspect is totally missing. It should be there. It only comes in when you are pathologically affected, but that's where you also give up on your mission, and, therefore, you're not a mediator anymore".

"I don't know if it's recognised or not, you get burned out multiple times, you get burned out, absolutely".

Again, as an outsider, I was struck by how normalised this status quo is in the field of peace mediation and wondered, puzzled, what attracts people to and keeps them in this kind of work that is clearly so toxic and damaging at a personal level. Earlier quotes shed some light on this question by attributing the motivation to an altruistic mission to save lives, or what a participant called 'the saviour complex', or an unconscious wish to vicariously repair something in their past.

"we have this helper's syndrome, right? Most of us. I always ask my colleagues. How did they get into this field? Well, if you don't have conflict background like me, then there is always something in the family that person wanted to fix. And when you come in with the syndrome, most of us, then we have to deal with this at some point".

What practitioners shared confidentially during the interviews confirmed that *all the stories are personal,* as one participant pointedly phrased it. The comment did not refer exclusively to the conflict parties' venting of grievances and the importance of telling their story. It also referred to the traumas, losses and suffering from their own personal lives that unconsciously set them on a path to saving or repairing other people's lives and vicariously also repair their own. This is another important overlap between peace mediators and clinical practitioners. The idea of 'wounded healers', frequently referred to by mediation practitioners, resonates with Jung's belief that "only the wounded physician heals" and Rumi's famous quote "the wound is where the light enters".

This personal and emotional underbelly seems to power practitioners in profound ways, but it needs to be acknowledged and mediators need to *deal with it at some point,* as the speaker above says, both for their own wellbeing, but also for the vulnerability that personal stories generate.

Here is where mediators' self-reflexivity is vital in recognising contents, dynamics and events in the mediation process that touch them, and that can potentially destabilise them. Psychological support is also essential in those crucial moments to help mediators recognise the personal resonance of what is happening in the process and deal with its emotional impact separately from the mediation process.

"so maybe it would have been good if I'd had this insight may be 10 years ago. Had there been a training or had there been someone enabling me in the formal setting. To do this, it would have been good. You know yourself better. The mediator has to be stable as we discussed, that's why it has to also psychologically be stable and know about his motivation".

Aside from personal resonances, other comments touched on other reasons motivating mediators. For example, the full immersion described earlier in terms of the damaging effects, was also experienced as exhilarating and intoxicating

"that was exhilarating. I cannot even describe the feeling I had at the time because immediately, I'm looking at over 2 million people internally displaced going back to their homes. Immediately, I'm seeing that xxx would stop. I was seeing that all this destruction and killings that had gone on for a long time would come to an end".

"I mean it's completely intoxicating to a certain extent. There are no limits to it so it can absorb you totally you see".

Ordinary reality, previously described as safe and nourishing, pales into comparison with being able to stop killings and violence. Undoubtedly, contributing to peace is a deeply meaningful enterprise and it is understandable that, particularly when successful, it can be intoxicating and, some argued, addictive:

"But also, you know, live hard and play hard, it was… you know, it was tremendous fun, and also you do get… that one does get addicted to the adrenalin".

"I mean, it's...it's clearly an addiction. You see, I don't miss the (Country's ministerial government) Office. If somebody tells me now, "Listen, become an ambassador in...in somewhere?" Yeah? I think I wouldn't do it except in emergencies. But I wouldn't do it. This is not this kind of intoxicating addiction atmosphere. Somebody

tells me "Do you want to become SRSG in Afghanistan?" I wouldn't even ask my wife; I have to do it".

It's important to acknowledge these important and intoxicating aspects of the often-extreme work conditions in which peace mediators operate but, alas, these exciting descriptions were rare and shouldn't obscure the more frequent experience of intense frustration, hopelessness, and cumulative damaging effects on practitioners' wellbeing that seems to be currently denied. To do so would be particularly grievous, given the lack of support which leaves peace practitioners to find alternative, often dysfunctional, coping strategies.

3. Dysfunctional coping strategies and gaps in support

"I know there were a couple of moments of inappropriate relationships in the room and as far as I can see looking back, those relationships were based on high levels of stress. And didn't help the process because of, you know, they became obvious, and people knew about them. And that became a side show and a distraction. But it was, like, a manifestation of stress. "I'm stuck in this bubble, I can't vent it out", whatever, whatever."

"we have many examples of very self-destructive behaviour…One is...one is alcoholism? And then one is, you know, like, indecent, personal behaviour. I will put them in the same category, and you're better at judging this. It's this kind of decompression, which is...this was overlooked for a long time, I think that this will cause problems more and more".

"As for coping strategies. Yeah, well, I mean, it's like, you know, I survived five years in XXX by doing, you know, exercising a lot. I drank and smoked, but mostly I was abusing myself, you know, running and bicycling and stuff like that. But, yeah, no, I think there's a tremendous amount of self-medication as coping strategy going on in this field, so yeah".

"I met this person a couple of weeks back, they had been… Yeah, anyway, he had suffered tremendous attacks in social media, I understood, by an opponent, an international opponent, who had leaked stories about him in newspapers about him visiting various (sexual) establishments in XXX. Yeah, pretty serious stuff, things that if it's true that you don't really, really don't want that to come out. I have no idea what it was, what it might have been, but you know everyone has secrets and with the, you know, what is it called, digital communication, you know, they're probably more vulnerable I guess because, you know, the opponents that you confront often have access to lots of… yeah, you know, in terms of information campaigns and, you know, technological tools to sort of dig up information about people. So, it could become pretty ugly".

"I've seen drinking a lot, but when you're engaged in sensitive mediation, there seems to be a cut off, there seems to be a cut off, there might be instances of sexual harassment internally within the group, but that's internal to each of the groups, but I think you can't even have access to (…) when you go in a process, you're effectively locked up in a hotel for days, what you do after the process you know, it's nothing to do with the process, I think that's (up to) the conduct of a person and ability to manage stress".

It would be easy to either attribute these dysfunctional behaviours to personal failing or normalise them as reasonable decompression strategies and stress management. To me this appears as a systemic failure of duty of care on the part of the employers. Even amongst those who normalised the status quo to some extent, there was no doubt that this situation is untenable, and many saw this project as an opportunity to express the profession's unrecognised and unmet needs and to be vocal about what structures and support should be put in place.

The majority of participants identified the need for psychological support for practitioners, both for the sake of their wellbeing, and for the health of the process. For example:

"one of the things that we shouldn't forget is that very often the mediators themselves need psychological therapy during the process. Because it can be so mentally taxing to the extent that you become irrational. And that becomes unhealthy to the process".

As well as identifying the need for individual psychological support for his practitioners, others also claimed that support teams too need psychological support:

"Once you start the team, you will have issues for sure. It's a mathematical fact. (chuckles) […] I keep thinking one thing that we missed was to have some sort of coaching or psychologist or support or something in (location of the mission) for the team. And every time I go to a mission, I feel the same thing, I think that it will be very important for negotiation settings and teams to have this kind of support, an expert to give support on how to deal with emotions, with the stress, with the feelings, and because these are usually teams made by men, it's very difficult for them to express feelings, so then they end up drinking or doing other stuff, that's the way it is. I think that if we had been able to access a, I don't know, an expert or a…so I think that could help us to defuse this kind of feelings and stuff, our lives will have been a little bit easier. It was highly, highly stressful. Not only because of (parties in conflict) but because of our team too".

This extract makes several important points, often referred to by other participants. The first is the identification of the problematic side of gender dimension in the team, discussed more directly in the next chapter. Here the participant makes a related but separate point, referring to a particular version of masculinity which lacks emotional intelligence and finds it difficult to express feelings. In this formulation, psychological support is proposed as a healthier option to the dysfunctional coping strategies that we saw in previous accounts. The choice of word *to defuse* is interesting in this respect, as it metaphorically refers to the very high level of stress and the feelings evoked in the mission as a bomb ready to detonate. This metaphorical description captures the toxic content of peace building work discussed earlier in this section, and frames dysfunctional coping strategies like *drinking and doing other stuff* as a way of avoiding implosion that is, burnout and breakdowns.

Others talked of creating informal support networks, given the lack of structural support:

"I have a group of people I work with and the- over the years we've learned how to cover each other's back and be able to help each other. Processes like briefings things, debriefings things, all of those things need to be more structured, more organised, I think. Profiling of the media"tor is much more important than the profiling of the parties, and then actually assessing them for burnouts nonstop, there has to be a process that comes in, and it comes in with practical help in place, and again I think there ought to be repetitions of some concepts which they continue to go back to. […] you can have it as a part of your engagement to the donors or with the donors or- so it's a part of funded aspect that there is capacity available, it's not only mediation people who are engaged in mediation support, people who go back channelling their different set of people, people who do bridge building, there are different set of people, people who do communications together, that's a total different set of people, all of them get burned, because your cognitive sort of first conditions are challenged all the time so everything is pushed to limit".

Although this particular speaker accessed support from informal networks, it is evident that this is not sufficient. They argue for the need for several innovations that need to be formalised and structured. The first measure, as many also argued, regards the profiling of mediators to check their psychological suitability, a point that will be unpacked in a later extract. In parallel to that, the speaker also argues for the need for continuous psychological assessment of mediators' (and their support teams) state of mind to prevent burnout. Given that being pushed to the limit is a recurrent experience, it seems vital that practitioners are self-aware and able to recognise when they are reaching their own limit. However, a culture of macho bravado inevitably militates against self-reflexivity.

Similarly, many were concerned with the funding of such innovation, thus underscoring that embedded structural change is needed to expand capacity to provide ongoing support in a sustainable way. This implies that, because this is essential part of good practice, donors should be educated and encouraged to support such initiative. The speaker is particularly concerned with the widespread threat of burnout at all the levels and stages of peace building and is attributed to practitioners being constantly pushed to the limit. I found the reference to the challenging of *cognitive first conditions* particularly intriguing. As I understand it, it is referring to the challenging of ordinary basic assumptions involved in stepping into what earlier was described as a bubble, a psychological location with rules and conditions that are very different from ordinary life. The implication is that there is a

stepping out of one's comfort zone that can be profoundly destabilising and pushes practitioners to the limits of their resilience. This point raises the issue of self-reflexivity and the kind of psychological qualities and skills that need to be fostered in practitioners so that they become able to reflect and be aware of their own limits.

As well as perceiving the gender dynamics as stumbling blocks to a healthier working culture, participants also made repeated reference to peace mediation being a closed system. The extract below explains why this is problematic in terms of the much-needed psychological support and debriefing for mediators:

"And then there's another problem […] the people who debrief us, because we have to go through debriefing now, in fact, are our elderly mediators who have retired. So, their end is bad as mental state as you are, if you're in a bad mental state. And to a certain extent, of course completely conditioned or should I say defending the kind of life they used to lead in the past. And I'm always saying, "Listen, we shouldn't be talking to old mediators." It's not that I mind talking to them. I've got nothing against them, but it's not the kind of people we should be talking to. How the hell are they going to detect something that's wrong in the debriefing? Apart from telling you, "instead of doing this, you could have done that". But apart from that, what are they going to be able to detect? They're as bonkers as I am!".

This quote points to the insularity and circularity of the peace mediation system which creates a kind of echo chamber which reproduces the system unchanged. The astute psychological analysis presented here criticises the self-referential and self-perpetuating quality of the current debriefing system, by identifying the emotional investment of retired mediators in keeping things exactly as they've always been. In terms of the psychological usefulness of such debriefing the speaker is openly damning in presenting current debriefing as the blind leading the blind. I have chosen this idiom because a kind of blindness is implied in this rendition and points to the need for input from external professionals to bring different understandings and to break the unhealthy repetition of models. The point here is the systemic blindness to the psychological distress of mediators as well as professional psychological support. Participants also insisted that teaching psychological skills and sensibilities should be integral part of peace mediation training:

"what I'm trying to advocate for, it's the training to prepare the mediator for the rough ride they are embarking on […] So that they're prepared mentally and physically to absorb because I've seen in some cases where they walk out and say, "you don't even appreciate what I'm doing, so I'm getting out of here". It's useless. […] So I think preparing them mentally and physically is very, very critical because otherwise, they can get a nervous breakdown. I mean it takes, there's a higher bloody price to pay for this, marriages, relationships, kids, also being – and alcohol and substance abuse is there and so on and so forth. But there's no – unless, I don't know, maybe you go to your own doctor when you get home say I'm feeling depressed. But there isn't any kind of mediation related specific advisory support and counselling that I know of which would understand the environment properly. And that may be something that you could be recommending.

Similarly to an earlier extract, this one also argues for the critical importance of psychological training for both the well-being of the practitioners and the health of the process. The speaker is particularly concerned with the rough ride of mediation processes. The illustration presented by the speaker draws attention to the soul-destroying and thankless quality of mediation processes and the urgent need to be trained in self reflexivity in order for practitioners to recognise their own vulnerabilities and their own personal investment that can get in the way of the process. The speaker is very specific in clarifying that the training should be twofold. First, it should deal with the ego of peace practitioners and the necessity for self-awareness of their motives, implicitly criticising peace mediation viewed as an opportunity for personal aggrandising instead of a selfless service. Second, the speaker returns to the idea of mediators as sponges who need training to be able to absorb, I imagine, toxicity and metaphorical punches, and survive.

The speaker warns of the risks involved both in terms of mental health, the damage to practitioners' personal life, and self-destructive coping strategies, and concludes by urging the interviewer to recommend the systemic introduction of specific advisory support and counselling for peace mediators.

The congruence of all these accounts in terms of recognising an urgent need for the introduction of psychological support and training begs the question of why this hasn't happened already. The key answer to these seems to

be the culture of denial embedded in peace mediation field.

"what you would want is you would want a specialist who was kind of just for you as the mediator, or you and the mediators, right? And somebody who you felt you could kind of trust and connect with. So I think it's necessary, I think there's a lot of barriers you'd have to break down because I mean at least 70% of the mediators would be like, "I don't need that, fuck it.""

This is an intriguing statement. What are the psychological mechanisms that lead to 70% of the mediators disavowing their own vulnerabilities and need for psychological support? According to a senior high-level mediator this is a systemic and gendered problem:

"[T]hese are NGO, INGO, UN personnel. And there's a kind of boy zone bravado about this, which is about the refusal to recognise the impact. If you're staying in (name of African country) and it's shelling every night and you're away from your family and there's hostility, and killing is going on and it's dreadful, it has a huge impact. In general, you're being a wuss if you admit that you're under pressure and going crazy. And it's – so, it's something that the UN and other multilateral agencies have been very slow to recognise as being (a problem), and the responsibility they have towards their employees. And so, I would start just by saying there's a problem here. You're sending, and it's very often young people from different environments, young girls going into very misogynistic, hostile environments sometimes who are unsupported. There's no counselling available or support. And if you complain, you'll be told you're not capable of doing the job".

The speaker openly frames the problem as a failure of duty of care on the part of employing institutions who neglect their responsibility towards their employees, by denying the psychological impact on them of peace mediation work. The speaker also offers a cogent analysis of the psychological dynamics of how this culture of denial and neglect become internalised and self-perpetuated by practitioners who have to deny their own severe distress for fear of being considerate inadequate. The gender component of these self-sustaining practices is crucial. The fear of being considered 'a wuss', a colloquial term to denote weakness, cowardice or incompetence, in short, being a wimp, is part of the *'boy zone bravado'* which seems integral to the peace mediation culture. The compounded effect of performing an archaic form of masculinity with the institutional silencing of requests for help reproduces a culture in which 'boys don't cry'.

Gendered undertones were mentioned by others too who, for example, attributed the ingrained self-neglect to the macho culture and the normalisation of misogynistic coping strategies.

"we work so hard, we look after ourselves so little anyway, yeah, quite… It's a bit macho for want of a better word".

"I think one piece would be how do you have psychosocial support […] for example if you're in a mediation process but you'd want to be able to offer something even if, especially with some of the big men that I worked with (they would say) "I don't do that" or whatever, "I go to prostitutes, I'm fine," various things like that".

Similarly to previously commented the next extract, also from a senior high level mediator, is also critical of the culture of denial preventing mediators from openly acknowledging the destabilising impact of horrific experiences on their resilience. This speaker also refers to a particular discourse of masculinity that seems to dominate the field and according to which having an emotional response is unmanly.

"This goes deep under my skin. My whole resilience barrier is probably going to collapse. Yeah? It touches you. […]And resilience collapses relatively quickly. How do you...what...what's the advice of an expert? What should you do in the situation? But you cannot allow weaknesses or whatever. Now this question of allowing weakness, which is unmanly, so to say, so. But that this is unmanly is more...more of a psychological environment which is not professional. …"

The final comment shifts the debate by redefining priorities and responsibilities – the issue is not the nature of masculinity, but how to foster professional work ethics and for employers to fulfil their duty of care towards their employees. Without that, the culture of denial will thrive and serious psychological damage, as described in the extract below, will continue to be normalised, unrecognised and unaddressed. The institutional

embeddedness is key for the effectiveness and sustainability of any new and much-needed measures. Change is needed at the institutional not individual level. The fact that mediators are not more damaged speaks to their remarkable resilience, but their (understandable) silence has inadvertently contributed to the rationalisation and normalisation that plagues the profession. What is required is a shift in culture, from macho bravado and stiff upper lips to self-awareness and duty of care.

"we were a very close-knit group in terms of the kind of neglect of one's own needs which then catch up with you later […] I'll give you an example that just came to mind. So there was one of our colleagues at XXX who had been… effectively, he was basically under house arrest by (religious insurgent group) for three months in his compound and everyday wondering if that was the day he was going to be killed […] He escaped, got out and so one day in the office, I heard my very close colleague […] shout at this guy and the guy left, the guy left the office, and I went in and I spoke to my colleague, my friend, very dear friend. I said, "Were you just shouting at…" I'll call him Ali, "Were you shouting at Ali?" and he said, "Yes, he hasn't written any of the reports, he hasn't given us anything about…" you know, da, da, da. So, he was focused on the kind of accountability of the organisation in a way. And I said, "The guy is completely—he's traumatised, he's been on house arrest for three months," and he said, "Oh, we're all traumatised." Which was true, you know?.. …whenever we went travelling quite often they'd start telling me some stories about what had happened to them. It was quite interesting that if… if you're just hanging out in (names of 2 countries), it wouldn't tend to come out. You know, it was just like 'business as usual', you know, 'everyday life' which is getting on with stuff. But when we—I noticed that when we travelled somewhere, quite often they'd tell me stories. So over the years, that very close colleague of mine, […] gradually over the years I could hear some of his story and it was just like… (laughter)" you know, I feel those as well". And then he'd start saying, "okay, we're in a… where everybody is operating with a massive amount of what we in the west would think of as post-traumatic stress, and things like that, it's the environment we're in"".

This is where labelling is relevant in the mediation encounter and should be used to self-reflectively recognise that the ongoing exposure to primary and secondary trauma, makes peace mediation practitioners vulnerable to post-traumatic stress conditions. What is described here is interpretive denial (Cohen, 2011) whereby there is recognition that practitioners operate in a traumatising context, but the impact is minimised *' oh, we are all traumatised',* normalised *'business as usual; everyday life',* and ultimately unrecognised. This is a shared narrative while they are in the 'bubble' and the recognition only comes if and when practitioners step out of the closed circle and gain a different perspective from the outside. This links back to the earlier comment about the defensiveness of old mediators and the echo chamber. We can see the circularity and self-reinforcement of (gendered) dynamics embedded in the mediation culture. In such situation, it is extremely hard for individuals to challenge the system, given that job security, professional and personal reputation are at stake, and behave out of role. It is not surprising then, that mediators long for a safe place in which to be themselves, instead of performing a role:

"those spaces can be quite involving emotionally and intellectually, you know, mentally. So it can be very exhausting. That's why (we need a space) where you can drop your guard. You know, you are no longer a doctor or you're no longer this, but you're just yourself, you know. So, there is definitely something tin hat for me, I feel it is essential".

Equally, participants expressed the need for psychological profiling of mediators and psychological debriefing and increased self-reflexivity as part of mediators training, preparation, and skillset:

"I think it's oftentimes that mediators don't have the skill set to reflect and, you see, that's where the presence of help is a natural way of doing the mediation business comes into play, and (should be) part of practice. I mean, look, […] Debriefing comes in because we need to help this person digest and speak everything, otherwise, you know… […] That allows you to conclude in your mind before you finish that specific aspect of your engagement".

In advocating for psychological debriefing, the speaker above refers to the psychological idea that difficult and intense experiences need to be 'digested' emotionally and cognitively. This is urgently needed because mediators

lack the skills to reflect and so need to process what they have experienced by talking it through and in this way reach some kind of closure and move on.

Conclusions

The overarching finding in relation to the states of mind of mediators was that the sector suffers from a problematic culture of denial of emotions, both in terms of not validating their importance and role in peace mediation, and in not recognising the toxicity of the environment for practitioners.

A dominant imaginary of the figure of the mediator came to light through the interviews. It is gendered and draws on a discourse of archaic masculinity in which mediators are expected to be devoid of emotions and where the acknowledgement of the emotional impact on their wellbeing and the need for psychological support are equated with weakness, cowardice and professional incompetence. Added to the sanitisation of emotions in high-level mediation, and the lack of legitimation of practitioners' emotional responses, this militates against practitioners' ability to recognise and validate their distress and ask for psychological support.

The compounded effect of performing an archaic form of masculinity with the institutional silencing of requests for help, and practitioners' fear of the professional and reputational repercussions, reproduces a culture of denial which prevents mediators from openly acknowledging the destabilising impact of horrific experiences on their resilience. It is urgent that the system reflects on itself, and the employers fulfil their duty of care towards their employees. Without that, the culture of denial will thrive, and psychological damage will continue to be normalised, unrecognised and unaddressed. Institutional embeddedness is key for the effectiveness and sustainability of any new and much-needed measures.

In summary, the data highlighted the following:

1. The lived experience of working as peace mediation practitioners was encapsulated by metaphors of pressure cookers, or a boxing match, or feeling like holding back two walls of water. These images emphasised the vulnerability of mediators, the enormous pressure bearing down on them and the violence intrinsic to the process. Hence practitioners feel "courageously afraid"

2. Mediators reported a multifaceted aloneness of mediators and multiple sources of pressure with sleepless nights of doubt and anxiety amongst the most frequently mentioned.

3. Mediators act as emotional sponges by absorbing into themselves the distress and toxicity of the process. Given the paucity of psychological support to provide an outlet, practitioners feel they have to apply a strict self-censorship and self-control and, above all, self-repression of the shock, upset, anger and outrage they feel, particularly in T1 mediation in which the mediator must appear friendly towards brutal oppressors. Overall, practitioners, and in particular T1 mediators, conveyed the need to functionally disconnect and estrange from themselves to manage their feelings. These self-protective measures have serious implications for mediators' wellbeing.

4. Mediators' internalisation of the culture of denial of the emotional impact of mediation processes on the practitioners, along with its systemic silencing and normalisation, are considered by mediators to be damaging to their wellbeing, and also detrimental to the process

5. Practitioners reported on the severe physical, mental, psychological and relational impacts of the process on their wellbeing, which resulted in chronic stress, vicarious or secondary trauma, and an overload on mediators' resilience. Many reported losses of colleagues or members of their team, loss of relationships through breakups and/or missing out on important family milestones and experiencing psychosocial dislocation resulting from the bracketing off of the ordinary and the normalisation of the extraordinary while on a mission.

6. In terms of coping strategies practitioners exemplified psychological defence mechanism of compartmentalisation, rationalisation, repression, and denial. Ample reference was also made to self-destructive behaviour, alcoholism, use of drugs, smoking, punitive exercise regimes, and some sexual transgressing.

7. Practitioners explain their attraction to peace mediation work, despite its serious drawbacks, as motivated by two sets of factors. On the one hand, an unconscious wish for reparation or the so-called saviour complex, which further highlights the importance of self-reflexivity and self-awareness of their motivation. On the other hand, peace mediation work was referred as being not only toxic but also intoxicating, exhilarating and addictive.

8. Practitioners unequivocally regretted the fact that their emotional needs are unrecognised and unmet, and requested that psychological support is offered to both individual mediators and their support teams.

9. The data point to the system's problematic lack of self-reflexivity. The sector and T1 mediation in particular, seems to be dominated by archaic gender roles and a macho bravado culture, which equates needing support with weakness. T1 mediation was also criticised its insularity and for operating as a closed system and an echo chamber.

10. The need for increased self-reflexivity on the part of mediation practitioners was accompanied by a request for profiling of mediators in regard to their psychological suitability, and a continuous psychological assessment of mediators and their team to gauge their state of mind and prevent burnout

In conclusion, a paradigm shift and structural changes to reframe, recognise and address psychological distress in mediators is urgently needed. Additionally, participants were unequivocal about the urgent need for psychological support.

Psychological Descriptors

The key descriptors in relation to mediators' state of mind are: secondary or vicarious trauma; post-traumatic stress disorder and its manifestations; emotional burnout; psychological defence mechanisms including rationalisation, compartmentalisation, functional disassociation, denial; self-reflexivity and self-awareness; unconscious reparation and saviour complex.

Recommendations

1. Systemic changes are needed to:

a) foster the embeddedness of a professional duty of care that redefines strength and key skillsets in mediation professionals;

b) provide psychological support to practitioners and foster a culture of self-care;

c) establish a professional culture able to reflect on its gender biases and break through the denial and self-silencing that currently dominates it;

d) recognise the key role played by practitioners' self-reflexivity and promote psychological sensitivity as a critical toolkit;

e) institutionalisation and normalisation of psychological support to avoid stigmatisation, pernicious denial and damage to actors.

2. Training - Psychosocial psychology should become an integral part of **training** (some suggested compulsory), to improve self-reflexivity and self-knowledge/awareness. As practitioners recommended, this would include:

a) reflexivity training/workshops particularly at beginning of career.

b) ad-hoc 'top-up training' for experienced mediator before they start/join the mission.

3. Increased psychological support should be provided in different formats:

a) 'peer-debriefing'/supervision for mediators and mediation teams (to support mediation processes), one-to-one and group

b) psychological support available as personal consultant to mediator(s) at critical moments of process/on call (with a focus on well- being and resilience of mediator(s)

Chapter 3

THE MEDIATION ENCOUNTER

Introduction

This section deals with the third psychosocial site, the mediation encounter, and focuses on the metapsychology[23] of mediation. It discusses aspects of the data when participants answered the question 'How can psychology enhance the practice of peace mediation?' by focussing on the models and theories of mediation and the related uses of psychology deriving from them.

As an observer external to the mediation world, I found this site the most surprising. I wasn't expecting it, it emerged unprompted, and it occupied a considerable part of the interviews. The surprise was compounded by the intensity of feelings accompanying the discussion of the mediation encounter, their desire nature, and the underlying ideologies.

Several mental representations of mediation and mediators emerged together with a spectrum of opinions about how mediation and peacebuilding processes are understood and practiced. The divided and passionate views within the field clustered around what participants described as two camps: "The realist, big man, big power" camp and the "hippie-dippy Birkenstock wearing, tree huggers" camp, which I took to refer to 'elite, T1 mediation' and 'peacebuilding and transformative initiatives.

The imagery used to describe these 'camps' suggests that, rather than real distinct camps, these are archetypes; that is, models or prototypes that over time have consolidated, often stereotypically, around particular characteristics or behaviours of a group or individuals and are used as a shorthand to represent reductively those groups and individuals.

It is important to reflect on the meaning and function of these commonly held and polarised archetypes, despite the danger of recirculating them and consequently inadvertently validating and reifying them, which I will argue against throughout this chapter. I will engage with them at face value to learn about how practitioners understand and define the nature of a mediation encounter, while simultaneously reflecting on their psychological components including what is expressed through the archetypes and polarisation.

Based on the interviews, the differences are experienced as real and important, and the tensions and disagreements within the peace mediation community deserve attention. The complex and constantly evolving field of peace mediation faces several challenges, and internal division is only one of these challenges. Within that, I will only address its psychological dimensions. The introduction of the psychological dimension here, as in the rest of the report, is not offered as a panacea, but to illustrate the psychological significance and impact of polarisation within the field and friction between practitioners. These are particularly significant to those interested in a holistic approach to multitrack mediation.

In terms of psychology, the two archetypal camps seem to require different things psychologically and use psychology in different ways. Broadly speaking, the 'big power' archetype of mediation applies psychology *instrumentally* to achieve a desired outcome (e.g., reaching a peace agreement), by using psychology, for example, to gain leverage in negotiation, to find entry points, and to convince the counterpart(s) to "buy a product they don't want to buy". This power-based approach is predominant in T1 mediation.

The other archetypal camp is interested in and applies psychology *relationally.* Primarily aiming at building

23 Metapsychology: any aspect of a psychological theory which refers to the structure of the theory itself

relationships, it draws on psychological principles and techniques to enhance interpersonal connectivity; for example, to facilitate getting to know the parties, and for them to know each other and communicate more effectively with each other, and to model non-judgement and empathy. This relational approach is predominant in T2 and T3.

While it is important to consider the meaning and function of these models and archetypes, it would be a mistake to reify them or to assume that each approach is exclusive prerogative of one camp or track only. On the contrary, it is clear from interviewing elite mediators and Special Envoys that, undoubtedly, they also endeavour to build relationships, to foster trust and listen empathically. Indeed, as discussed in Part 1, the most experienced ones clearly stated that mediation can progress only after the parties feel they have been listened to and some kind of relationship and mutual understanding have been established[24]. Similarly, I would expect practitioners operating in T2 and T3 also to use psychology instrumentally and deal with power dynamics while trying to affect structural changes.

Rather, and this is why I approach these issues as meta-psychological, the critical aspects of these divisions seem institutional and systemic in origin, stemming from contrasting political and ethical intents and worldviews. Important dynamics cascade from the systemic differences and the different applications of psychology, for example, divisions between and enduring mental representation of practitioners (and their counterparts), positionings and animosity that are real and passionately felt.

In summary, arguably, Track 1 is insufficiently equipped with psychological skills and agility but also relies excessively on a basic conviction that transformation can be realised primarily through power brokering. Tracks 2 and 3 lack status and question that the power centred approach is a useful part of peace processes, thus disavowing the instrumental and power-based aspects in their own practices. In this sense, tracks undermine each other, rather than building on the complementarity between them.

A concerted effort and ongoing dialogue between tracks are needed but also and crucially, a systemic integration of the psychologies and theories of change underpinning peace mediation practices. These steps are essential to build *psychological agility* for all peace mediation practitioners to enable them to use psychology instrumentally and relationally depending on the context, the stage, and the nature of the conflict.

Above all, a clear need emerged for the community of mediators and peacebuilders to self-reflect on their practices and approaches, in order, in the first instance, to unpack and clarify the psychological tools they need and, in the final instance, to maximise the potential of each camp to improve mediation practices.

To elucidate this emerging need, this chapter focuses on the psychological aspects of what the participants presented as differing mediation practices in the peacebuilding field, with a particular focus on their psychological impact on mediation processes and the mediation community.

These reflections are underpinned by the assumption that approaches to, and models of, peace mediation are not simply techniques or neutral theoretical constructs but, beyond their proclaimed goals and objectives, they are an intervention in themselves. As such, they leave a 'footprint'.

The idea of mediation leaving a footprint was helpfully articulated by one participant, although in socio-economic terms:

"And one of the big problems with our work, when we arrive in the town as a mediation team, we distort everything including salary scales for local peace activists who are suddenly now on international pay, and the price of accommodation goes up, and we cause prostitution. I mean, that's another factor, we're a whole juggernaut".

This quote skirts over the different types of presence in conflict and the corresponding impact, but it evidences practitioners' awareness that mediation and peace operations make an impact beyond their stated objectives. The psychological footprint, however, that is, mediation as a psychological juggernaut impacting the mediation

24 See relevant quote on pg.15 & 18

encounter, seems to be unexplored and undertheorized. This is the focus of this chapter.

My contribution to moving the debate forward consists in strategically not engaging with whether the participants' statements are a fair rendition of what happens in reality in mediation, or the merits of one approach over another. Instead, while recognising that mediation and peacebuilding are not entirely the same thing, I will pay attention to what the statements convey about the mediation and peacebuilding community, the circulating assumptions about what practitioners think happens in 'other camps' and what other practitioners are trying to do and why, and to the imaginaries of what mediation is or should be about, in order to reflect on the mindsets and emotional climate each model engenders. That is, what does each model 'communicate' to the mediation actors and practitioners, and how does it shape the mediation encounter psychologically? How is the alleged incommensurability acted out in the mediation encounter? How is this perceived incommensurability of models experienced by practitioners and how does it affect the community psychologically?

The metapsychological reflection in this section unfolds through the discussion of four themes around which participants' comments clustered:

1. The psychology and mindset of tracks in peace mediation
2. *The medium is the message* – what is being modelled psychologically in mediation tracks?
3. The psychology of trust and hope
4. Incommensurability, re-enactment and reflexivity - towards integration

Following some concluding remarks, this section will propose some recommendations for training and practice.

About complexity

Whitfield (2018:5) captures the complexity of track 1 mediators' role.

> In leading the peacemaking effort, they take daily decisions on what they will prioritise that have profound implications for the political direction and impact of their efforts. These decisions span at least three areas: how to balance building relations with conflict parties with the necessity for diplomacy with regional and international actors; how to maintain attention to the central political conflict whilst also engaging on other vital, but more localised, issues; and how, and how much, to engage on the important question of inclusion. This is all in addition to the internal attention which needs to be paid to process design and preparation on a range of substantive issues including ceasefires, demobilisation and reintegration programmes, power-sharing arrangements, transitional justice or constitutional reform

This quote succinctly conveys the magnitude and complexity of the mediator's role. Many participants recognised the tensions mentioned above and commented on the changing and increasingly complex nature of current conflict, and the need for mediation practices to also further complexify to be fit for purpose:

"The distinction between local and national and international is to a large degree artificial and unhelpful because you know, the way conflict systems work, these things are interlinked".

"The way that conflict is now, it's geopolitical, it's regional, it's economic, it's connected in with criminal elements, it's based on ethnic disputes on the ground and racism, it's so complex. […] we're getting mediation wrong and in the response to the kinds of conflicts we're working on. And a lot of the models we have are too limiting and not complex enough to respond to the complexity we're dealing with".

Participants recognised that the field of mediation has changed drastically and continues to change and diversify to adapt to the complexity of conflicts, with a spectrum of approaches ranging from UN Envoys to 'insider mediators':

"It's changing, there is now a UN mediation support unit, there wasn't one five years ago, which is capable of influencing the Secretary General, probably not enough but a bit. And we have some professional capabilities

that are being developed".

"There's a whole spectrum of mediation approaches where on the one hand you have a really strong power-based intervention of the type that the UN would sanction a security council or, you know, the Africa Union would sanction also, that's where they appoint a mediator and everyone has no choice, they just have to cooperate. From that point as to one end of the spectrum, you can go through a complete spectrum, and this approach[25] is really at almost the extreme other end of the spectrum, and I think the beauty of that approach is precisely because that approach addresses the study matter that we are discussing now (psychology in mediation) in that you know, if you really have all the stakeholders involved in the- not only in being mediated but in designing the mediation process and deciding on who should be included and who should not be included and what we should discuss and so on, and all those decisions that you have to make around mediation are made by those whose conflict it is and they do that".

Against this dynamic backdrop, however, a sense of stuckness also emerged, primarily around a deep and widespread dissatisfaction and frustration with Track 1 mediation which was perceived by many participants to be outdated, ineffectual and, according to a few, counterproductive in the long term.

"[i]t (Track 1 mediation) sort of stems from Nobel Peace Prizes, right? […] the guy that wins it because he brokered the peace. […] we need to get past this notion that any one of us can crack the deal, crack the thing and that there's some secret magic to mediation. There actually isn't, there's no secret formula that you show up and you have particular skills that have enabled people. It's so complex in terms of the political will of parties, who's behind them? How much preparation has been done? What are the other external factors that are playing into the room?"

The points made in this extract resonate with those made by many other interviewees. For example, the differential in visibility – with Special Envoys being highly visible and having their value recognised, while other peace processes are often portrayed as taking place in the background, hence less visible, but also potentially positioned as not where the 'real work' happens -, the myth of the 'star mediator' who has been selected for possessing special skills, and the idea of a 'formula'. For example, several senior mediators reported being called unexpectedly after a conflict just broke out, or being stopped in airports, to be asked for solutions. This points to the circulation of a mental representation or archetype of a quasi-mythical figure of the mediator who holds the solution to any conflict and can singlehandedly deliver a recipe for a way forward.

Hence, throughout the interviews, I detected a tension between, on the one hand, the existing awareness of an ever-increasing complexity of conflicts requiring multi-layered approaches:

"[…] it's impossible to think that one even highly competent man without an ego could even begin to handle all that complexity like none of us can. And so not even superman could fly in and deal with what we're trying to face today".

and, on the other hand, the circulation of an enduring myth about a star mediator with super-hero abilities:

"[O]ne or two individuals who by virtue of their individual excellence so to speak, they have to do the whole thing, it is almost a messiah type of role […] and it's unfair to everyone involved really, just to carry that burden of being this messiah is terrible, I can tell you, and on the other hand it's not true, it's just not workable, it's not realistic".

This notwithstanding, overall, practitioners regarded the field of mediation as a complex ecosystem[26] and believed that for peace to be sustainable it is vital that the international, national, and local, levels (roughly represented in Tracks 1,2,3) and their interlinking nature are recognised. This is because both in the conflict and in its solution these levels are always interlinked. Additionally, there was widespread consensus amongst participants that all levels are vital and that both the, so-called, 'power-based' and 'relationship building'

25 (the speaker referred to this approach earlier)

26 (in general use) a complex network or interconnected system

approaches are needed. For example:

"It's important to understand the relationship between process and content. Both are very important, and each one shapes the other. If you see the two as distinct and separate, you make a big mistake. The process is the way you do it and the content is the content of the agreements. And each one shapes the other and you have to understand their relationships because they impact on each other".

However, although many viewed the two approaches as complementary, recognised the need for both, and expressed a wish for deeper integration between the two, the field was consistently described as divided along two camps, which were presented in stark opposition to each other.

"There's this sort of idea that one is kind of 'the realist camp, the lone mediator, big power camp', and the other is 'the hippie-dippy Birkenstock-wearing tree-hugger camp'. This is how I feel the camp one sees camp two, and camp two sounds like "those evil men who don't think about any of these things", but they do think about this stuff, but they don't think of it in the same way, and so there needs (to be) almost a dialogue between these two different sides, in a different way to figure out how to do it all differently, right?"

It's important to qualify this vivid metaphor and acknowledge that many practitioners do work well together across track boundaries. That notwithstanding, the spirit of this extract, which was referred to by many participants, paints a picture in which multi-track diplomacy collapses into a 'us and them' dichotomous and fractious field, in which practitioners take emotionally charged positions, and hold negative attributions about 'the other side'. As we will see later, the frustration and anger are not levelled at individuals, but at the system and seem to relate to the inequality in the field in terms of status and recognition, but also to the perception that the more valued T1 mediation is increasingly failing. Psychologically, this suggests that in this respect, the field of mediation and peace building does not practice what it preaches.

On the one hand, the problem seems to relate to a perceived incommensurability of approaches and a lack of integration between tracks. On the other hand, it was striking to observe the intensity of emotions evoked by these perceived camps, and the pattern of narratives and themes circulating in the mediation community. For the purpose of this investigation into the psychological aspects of the mediation encounter, it is key to differentiate between (a) the professional reflection on the psychological undertones and implications of the various technical and strategic approaches, and (b) the psychological experience and emotional response to being or being perceived as being in one of the two camps.

The following discussion of the four themes illustrates how (a) and (b) are intertwined and that both are important to understand the psychology of the mediation encounter as they highlight the live tensions and dilemmas in mediation and peacebuilding practices, but also how these are experienced by practitioners.

1. The psychology and mindset of Track 1 mediation

Several participants made reference to what happens in Track 1 mediation as a closed system. In chapter two, on the psychology of the mediator, reference was made to how debriefing is conducted by retired mediators who are socialised into a particular culture and are unlikely to bring innovative insight into the practice. This also happens at the beginning of the process, through the way mediators are traditionally selected. As a senior mediator put it:

"[y]ou have the so-called, what in our jargon you call the "blue blue the UN UN." You know, those people, like myself, like xxx, like xxx, who have started at P-1 level. In other words, starting at the most junior position at the UN, and grown over (several decades) into a career and missions, that then reach to the point of being Under-Secretary-General and Special Envoy".

Mediators tend to be individuals who have progressed through the UN ranks or are politicians. The resulting mindset of the mediators was repeatedly criticised:

"for me, that's one of the major problems. If we continue to just send retired politicians to do these, they have a totally different set of skills and psychological approach. They're like winning elections. They approach these things from a very different point of view, and I think that's an important thing for you to explore, why we're sending these retired politicians to do this when they have no capacity to craft compromises. They go into parliament to oppose the other parties. They go into parliament to promote their careers, to pursue their own political ambitions and to ensure that their own programmes are implemented. And that's not a set of skills that helps you in this work".

Similarly, another participant commented:

"you have heads of states (who) will come in as chief mediators and they give out ultimatum and "if you can't accept that, we're going to move on"".

The mindset of the mediator, its psychosocial orientation, and how their career and professional development have socialised them are critically important in the psychological set up of the mediation encounter. I will return later to these points when discussing the impact of these factors on trust. Staying with the psychological footprint of what the mediator as a person and the function they believe they play, another participant used the metaphor of mediation as refereeing a football game:

I" often use the example, say, in soccer, you know, if you want to be a referee in a soccer game, the qualification is not whether you have been a good striker to be a good referee, because a striker and the referee operate according to two different instincts. When the striker sees the ball, he wants to kick it into the net, and you hope that the referee does not have that instinct. So, it's a different instinct that mediators need to have than politicians have".

One of the impacts of how the mediator's role is understood and performed is in determining how psychology is used:

"And that's exactly the mind-set in the mediation, that's why it has to be white guy flying in and to save the world and then leave quite a lot of trash behind, and the people who work on relationship aspects, they have to then pick the garbage up and throw it out of the process and then prepare the ground for the process to move forward".

Again, the psychological positionings contained in this extract were mentioned by many others. In terms of power dynamics, visibility and importance, peacebuilding practitioners working on relationship aspects and operating at tracks 2 and 3 are construed as the cleaners, the less visible people who come after the *white guy* and clean up the mess he has left behind. We can see here an example of the negative attributions I mentioned earlier, whereby Track 1 mediation is described as generating *garbage* that needs to be *thrown out* first in order to *move the process forward,* thus implicitly positioning Track 1 mediation as counterproductive to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The juxtaposition of the superhero-like figure and the cleaner is particularly powerful and resonates with the oft-referred gender distribution in the mediation field (high level mediators are overwhelmingly men[27], while women operate primarily at local and national level), which in turn maps onto structural gender divisions, exclusion and silencing of women. The next extract also touches on this, highlighting the inbuilt contradiction and damage of excluding women from elite mediation, given that women are socially and historically the main drivers in building and sustaining relationships, and are part of and care for those who are most affected by the conflict:

"to be perfectly honest, if we don't include the persons that suffer most, your chances of having a sustainable agreement is very much linked […] I have always said, "Give me the demographics of this country. What's the representative of women?" Fifty-two percent. "how many on this?" Twenty percent. Do you think we can do something reasonable by excluding the large population that we know suffers the most, that we know cares

27 The UN study analysing peace negotiations between 1998 and 2018 shows that women only made up 3% of the mediators and 4% of signatories. Interview with Flurina Derungs (2020) a propos Vol. 67 Gender and Peace in 2020: Celebrate or Recriminate?. In:

Not much to celebrate | à propos (swisspeace.ch)

after the dying and death? […] the fewer the people in the negotiations room, the fewer the people will share the spoils".

A different participant made an almost identical point, raising again the issue of the problematic by-product of T1 mediation:

"if you have less weight on your shoulder and the baggage on your shoulder of being a star mediator, you might serve the parties in the context better, so it's a mess, you can't go create mess, come out, and then let somebody else clean it up".

Here, the *mess* is attributed, somewhat sympathetically, to the mediator carrying the burden of having to behave as a *star mediator*. I will return to the idea of the 'star mediator', one of the most powerful and enduring imageries in the field, to discuss how it affects negatively the psychology of the encounter in various ways. Here, similarly to the previous extract, it implicitly refers to a problematic dichotomy between T1 mediators who fly in and out, and those who are left to clean up the mess. The emotional undertones are clear; this division of labour is experienced as unfair to practitioners and unhelpful to the process.

Gender dimensions in mediation are widely discussed (e.g. Kaser, 2020[28]), but Miriam Bensky, criticising the patriarchal organisational culture that still dominates the peace and security field, makes the particularly relevant claim that "The replication of a traditional 1950s household is the model for many peace and security projects in 2020."[29]

Rationalist framing in T1 mediation

Track 1 mediation was also repeatedly criticised for its focus on rationality and disregard of emotions:

"*to me, it goes back to this whole focus on rationality, right? […] basically, in this business, we are...we're approaching the whole conflict settlement and negotiations from a purely rational perspective, right? And our European, forgive me for saying this, it's a little bit of a neo-, I don't want to say imperialist, but neo-colonial thinking like, "okay, you guys are so irrational because you're in conflict. Here we come, we have this rational methodology, you know, or the Harvard stuff, the North American stuff, right? So, if we just switch off our hearts and minds and focus on the book that Roger Fisher has written, we're going to get there" and then the frustration when the conflict parties don't buy into this, right? So, for me, this is at the core of it and we're all, that's how we are wired. That's our education system, right?"*

"we're stuck in a 1980's model […] And we've, kind of, held on to it and we've developed it and we've taught it. And you get it in your master's degree programme. But we've really got locked into it and we haven't critiqued it in a really long time".

Both extracts, from different speakers, express dissatisfaction with models of mediation which are embedded and reinforced through training but are perceived to be stuck and outdated. In the first extract, the speaker makes the important link between the rationalist framework in mediation and neo-colonialism, thus suggesting that the privileging and application of western rationalist worldview in mediation is a legacy of historically oppressive operations of power. Given the ongoing and lively debate around this, I will focus exclusively on the psychological implications of how, according to this participant, mediators are trained. The sentence *just switch off our hearts and minds and focus on the book that Roger Fisher has written* is particularly significant.

Theories of mediation have evolved from the field of international relations (IR), which has taken a strong

28 Kaser, I (2020) *Art and artistic practices in peace mediation; building common ground and creating ah-hah moments.* Research report

29 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/. Quoted in Kaser, I. 2020

negative stance toward emotions. Nathan and Ash [30]question the premises of this stance, which they link to IR's reliance on an allegedly dispassionate rational actor model (RAM), as 'far-fetched'. This model assumes that conflict parties' decisions are based on a rational cost-benefit assessment of their options, ignoring the emotions of the parties as a relevant variable.

I think it is this disregard for emotions that the quote is referring to through the metaphors of *switching off hearts.* If there is truth in the claim that mediators are trained to believe that 'conflict is irrational' and that in order to deal with the irrationality of conflict mediators need to switch off their hearts and minds and, instead, look for answers in a book, then mediation does operate as a psychological juggernaut insofar as it silences and dismisses the emotions that have fuelled the conflict: hatred, rage, resentment, fear, loss, trauma.

This 'switching off', the speaker argues, is embedded in mediation training and shapes mediators. Its institutionalisation makes it 'wired into' practitioners. This is particularly important because it is not a criticism of individuals but identifies the problem as systemic and structural.

Furthermore, the psychology of the mediation encounter, which is presented as sanitised of emotions and dominated by a rationalist framework, connects to the impact of this emotional silencing experienced by the mediators themselves, discussed in chapter 2. It is not only the emotions of the parties in conflict that are silenced or disapproved of, but also those of the mediators, with serious consequences for all the actors. Here is what a Special Envoy said:

"Between their (mediators) conscience, their feelings, their emotions, their outrage, their ambitions to succeed, the pressure they are getting, all that it's there, but they are alone. They can hardly talk to anyone about it. Neither to their bosses because that makes the bosses then start wondering whether you can handle it. Neither to the people around you, your family, because then they will say, "Come on. It's a crazy job. You should not be doing it." Neither, obviously, to your team because they need to look up to you as the leader who is supposed to actually give a course of leadership in what looks to be a very complicated environment. And, finally, you can't, obviously, hint anything of that to your counterparts because then they would know how they can have an entry point in you. So, the word is "alone", unless you start talking to a psychologist. But the moment it's known that you are actually having, while you're having a negotiation, you are actually going to a psychologist to handle your concerns, that would send a signal. And no secret are secrets, even by your family, who complains, "Oh, my husband is going to that psychologist. You know, this mission is so unfair," and then the rumour goes around. That weakens you. So, you don't do it".

Thus, both in relation to the parties in conflict, to the intersubjective encounter, and to mediators themselves, it is clear that the embedded practice of sanitisation and avoidance of and refusal to engage with emotions in mediation is viewed as a handicap and backfires in many ways. Crucially, it leaves mediators deskilled and at a disadvantage. As the mediator eloquently explains above, mediators have neither a language for nor an understanding of the emotional currents and impacts in mediation. By not being able to talk about emotional dimensions, not only do mediators end up having to shoulder the weight of this, with grave consequences for their wellbeing, but also the opportunity for insights from and integration of emotional dimensions is lost.

In this context, then, when mediators adhere so closely to the 'manual', an archetype itself, that so many lamented, can be understood not simply as a rigid and unhelpful compliance with rules and mandates, but as a psychological self-defence, a cutting-off from and avoidance of the emotional aspects of mediation and conflict that mediators are not currently trained to deal with. This is expressed eloquently in the next quote which suggests that following instructions or the book is a way for mediators to shelter themselves from the dark and deeper emotional currents in mediation encounters – almost like clinging to a raft in a stormy sea:

"[p]eople follow this kind of template-driven formula approach and are not sufficiently confident or able to dig deeper. And they can't dig deeper because that deeper is frightening. It's nasty down there".

30 L. Nathan and Ash, The Dispassionate Rational Actor: A Sound Model for International Mediation Research? Concept note, August 26, 2020

I would argue that embedded resistance to emotions in mediation and rigid clinging to protocols are underpinned by a problematic lack of understanding and skills, which offers a new perspective on the reasons behind the resistance in the Track 1 model to emotions and the mediators' clinging to protocols. Yet, this is not the full story. Ryffell[31] (2021) refers to "a gap between the rationalist-inspired analyses of peace mediation practices in the literature and the strong human touch found when listening to personal accounts of seasoned mediators", which was also identified in the SOMIC interviews. This reconfirms many mediators' desire to refine their intuitive skills and increase their resilience when dealing with disturbing emotional content of conflict. Such psychological upskilling can be achieved through the incorporation of psychological aspects into the training.

Interestingly, both camps identified serious drawbacks in a purely rationalist framework. This is important for two reasons:

Firstly, it further confirms that the reciprocal negative attributions between the two camps do not map necessarily on how individuals practice and their views on mediation. It is not just that practices are more fluid, idiosyncratic and often ad-hoc than the 'two camps' archetypes give credit to, it is also that mediators themselves made repeated reference to how they viewed the constraints and pressures of the protocols as unhelpful. In particular, the super-human expectations put on them, the unrealistic sanitisation of emotions in the name of neutrality, and the mystique around 'silver bullet' mediation were repeatedly mentioned as problematic.

Secondly, the shared dissatisfaction with T1 model of mediation suggests that the problem is with the rigidity and hyper-rationality of the model, which many felt leave out the 'human', and the myths surrounding T1 mediation, and that the dissatisfaction becomes personalised within the peacebuilding community with resulting tensions and antagonisms between practitioners that impact negatively on people and practices.

2. The medium is the message[32] - what is being modelled psychologically in the different mediation tracks

Mediation as theatre and speaking to the gallery

"Everybody felt like they didn't belong there, or they didn't have something to contribute. And it was somehow because the room initially is so formal and it's such a big deal and the media is sitting outside and we're in this big hotel and we're all wearing our suits and we're all suited up. But actually, that's not an enabling environment. And I think that we see that over and over again. It's like remember the XXX talks when they were in such a long room in XXX and everybody had to look at a TV screen? It was, like, how can you be your best self in that space when it's all about appearance and how you're posturing? Rather than, you know, helping people have the confidence to really negotiate and to feel safe in a negotiating space? So, I think that's really a critical element that we haven't looked deeply enough into.[…]"

"I really, really object to this notion of a mediator sits at the head table and says your turn, your turn, your turn".

"No tables, just couches and only a few people. Not the whole theatre because, you know, negotiations is performance. Especially in a big room with so many people. And we don't want performance. We want, you know, the kind of real, honest, eyeball-to-eyeball talk".

"You can be sure what happens is the parties behave in the most awkward ways and are just impossible to get

31 Ryffell, M (2021)

32 A statement by Marshall McLuhan, meaning that the form of a message (print, visual, musical, etc.) determines the ways in which that message will be perceived. This idea, originating from Media studies, proposes that a communication medium itself, not the messages it carries, should be the primary focus of study. The content of the medium is a message that can be easily grasped, and the character of the medium is another message which can be easily overlooked.
On similar lines, here I am suggesting that while a great deal of attention is paid to the content of the desired outcome of mediation (e.g., the content of a peace agreement), its psychological communication, performance and re-enactment are overlooked and discarded.

any form of compromise or common understanding out of them because there's a gallery watching and because the gallery is watching, they feel, well, they have to play up to shop. And this is always a huge problem".

The choreography of the space in which mediation happens is a live issue and a lot of soul-searching is taking place on what constitutes an interpersonally facilitating environment, particularly across different cultures. There is also a considerable amount of literature on positions, interests and the posturing accompanying positions. Needs, which are a central concern for relationship building, are the hardest to reach. Given this recognition in the field, it's important to understand and explore further what emotional responses and reactions are set in motion by setting the mediation encounter as a theatre.

In that respect the words of the first speaker – *we are all suited up* – conjure images beyond the concrete description of a formal attire. The image brings to mind protective suits worn to go into contaminated zones, radioactive areas or hostile atmospheres such as outer space. Emotionally, this points to defensiveness and the need to protect oneself because, as one participant described it: *it's nasty down there,* which is picked up at the end of the first extract in terms of how formal set ups feel unsafe to negotiate in. All extracts illustrate the feeling that this is unhelpful and that it runs contrary to the desired atmosphere: *we don't want performance. We want, you know, the kind of real, honest, eyeball-to-eyeball talk.* Because of its origin in conflict, a mediation encounter is intrinsically built on feelings of danger, suspicion and hostility. But it appears from the extracts that mediation as performance feeds into, rather than mitigate those feelings. For example, it was commented that:

"Often, negotiators are brought in based on loyalty and based on somebody being very articulate, but it's also somebody who is very arrogant and needs to be there because they will…by being arrogant, they derail the other side especially with non-state actors. […] they're not chosen, they're not selected by their respective constituencies on the basis of knowledge of mediation. Like I said before, they're selected on the basis of loyalty, being articulate or being extremely arrogant".

This suggests that mediation as theatre invites a show of strength, antagonism, and that the aim is to undermine and win rather than listen and cooperate with the other.

Interestingly, both camps seem to struggle with this and both critics of the suggested domineering and controlling position of the *mediator who sits at the head of the table,* and those who indeed do sit at the head of the table who feel that *this is always a huge problem.*

Again, this is a divide in terms of the formal set up of Track 1 mediation and the work at other tracks which was conceptualised as a healing space, in which to start longer term peace processes. Metaphors of space abounded in this context, particularly around the perception that T1 closes spaces by controlling them too tightly, versus the recommended opening of spaces.

Parachutists and healers

The psychological impact of the ways in which the encounter is differently framed was made particularly visible by recurrent metaphors used by the advocates of each camp to describe their imaginaries of what mediation encounters are about and their experience of them. Roughly, the two clustered around what I will label an 'emergency action' discourse and a 'healing' discourse', mapping onto short-term and medium/long-term temporalities respectively.

In the emergency action discourse, participants talked of parachutists, superheroes, pressure cookers, and Accident & Emergency doctors (the fact that A&E, rather than any other kind of doctor, was specified is significant as it highlights how the emergency attempt at saving lives is at the heart of the intervention). Similarly, parachutists, who drop out of the sky to save the day, convey the 'short and sharp' emotional tone of these metaphors, which also involve a lot of flying in and out by superheroes, parachutists, and Special Envoys.

The paradigm is of war – regardless of whether one is fighting criminals, enemies or death – and confrontation – for example through the description of the mediation encounter as a boxing match. In this paradigm, urgency is dominant, and the action-packed metaphors convey that time is of the essence. However, this enduring

imaginary is rarely borne in reality, given that hardly ever a ceasefire is so swiftly agreed. Indeed, the imagined 'short and sharp' mission of the parachuted mediator often turns into years of prolonged negotiation.

In the healing discourse, the pace and focus are entirely different. Here we have continuous references to hearts – healing hearts, getting to hearts, opening hearts etc. – and a prolonged, cyclical and almost hypnotic telling and retelling of stories. For example:

"It's the idea that first steps always are about kind of clarifying position, listening and listening and listening to the narratives, the endless recreation of the narratives of why somebody is there in the first place and all of that. And it's about establishing a relationship".

"So, often we'll have to spend, you know, a lot of time initially when parties have actually met […] on, you know, what happened with that family and this family, you know, and you'll have to repeat and repeat, let the parties repeat and repeat it, repeat it. And it's sort of catharsis for the parties to go through and it's a necessary step».

Not surprisingly, because of the open-ended nature of establishing a relationship, the key role of telling and listening to stories, and the centrality of needing to heal wounds, trauma, and re-establish trust, in this discourse mediators are likened to healers, counsellors, social workers and psychoanalysts.

"for me the purpose of dialogue and mediation is to create that space which is sometimes difficult and uncomfortable, but you create a conversation that makes it possible for people to learn from one another. Now, that's deeply psychological. It's not a purely technical exercise of drawing up agendas and focusing on carrots and sticks, and cajoling people to become involved in a process that they're probably resisting to or resist against".

"It's also kind of seeing where the fault lines are and understanding the types of personalities that you're dealing with, what makes them tick, what makes them blow up".

"You get the sense that, it's that ability to listen and to not judge. And so, in a way, when you take that as a profile in a kind of non-judgemental good listener, somebody who uses all the tools in the toolbox from humour to storytelling to food, to whatever, it is to try open a person's heart. To me, that's absolutely, kind of it just resonates with what a psychoanalyst or a counsellor or any person whose role is essentially to understand the person on the outside and then to help them. That, all of those components, kind of resonates. And as a result, I think the problem with mediation very often now is this kind of textbook. They have all the chapters already written out, the security sector, a chapter, the constitutional chapter, whatever chapter. It's all already kind of there, the reconciliation and transitional justice. And we get somebody from New York or wherever, London, flown in who basically has the handbook and all of that. And then they will help that particular mediation to kind of go through the whole process, 'how we're going to structure this'. And amazing that they wouldn't think of that very, very core human kind of what would make the whole process tick. And by not having it, how dangerous that would be".

Here we have both formulations of how psychology could be helpfully applied by the two camps. One is 'instrumental' – getting to know parties as a (light touch) form of profiling – and 'relationship building' – which is about forming a relationship with the other, based on knowledge and openness towards the other. Given that such orientation of curiosity and openness towards each other is what cannot be expected from parties in conflict, the modelling of this by the mediator is key to creating a different type of encounter, by providing a new imaginary of what relating to the other could be like.

At the metapsychological level, these extracts are a good illustration of the difference in the ways psychology is taken up and utilised in the different approaches to mediation and, importantly, in the psychological environment each operates in and recreates.

As noted earlier, there is a lot of stereotyping and mutual attribution between the archetypal camps: the realist camp is portrayed as soulless, robotically following the handbook, while the 'soft and slow' approach of the 'tree-huggers' is anathema to the 'short and sharp' style of those who want to get on with the 'real work'.

This polarisation is problematic in many respects, most unhelpful and needs to be addressed. To take these archetypal camps at face value would involve accepting that no relationship-building takes place in T1 and no power-brokering happens in T2 and T3. I find this hard to believe not only because the interviews were laden with elite mediators arguing that without relationships there is no trust and the process cannot progress, but also because power-shifting is an intrinsic and critical part of transformational practices aiming to bring justice and structural changes into the peace process. We need to engage with differences in assumptions, practices and theories of changes, while uncoupling them from their deterministically attributed Tracks, to understand where and how connectivity between tracks happens or fails. It is in identifying complementarity and opportunity for cross-fertilisation that the *psychological agility* I advocate for becomes essential, by fluidly and circumstantially applying a range of tools as the context requires.

The polarisation also erases existing attempts at integration and obscures the different positionings of individual mediators and peace builders. Indeed, the majority of elite mediators in this project, also dismissed the 'short and sharp' as a myth, recognised the essential function of establishing a trusting relationship in the mediation encounter, the historical legacies inbuilt in Track 1 mediation, and want to understand and engage constructively with emotions. For example, it was a Special Envoy who described himself as a social worker or the following statement from a different Senior mediator:

"I have to admit in 26 years of mediation, I've seen very, very few major breakthroughs. I would have seen gradual build-ups that bring to a breakthrough […] (gives two examples) So, you have these moments where, after working on the substance, talking to the parties, not necessarily negotiating but more than anything else, exchanging point of views, you get to a point where you say, "Ah, this is a breakthrough. It's a breakthrough that will take my process down a certain path". But I've never lived really, as far as I can remember, those moments when we say overnight things have drastically changed. And because they drastically changed overnight, today, we're going to get different result. It's always been like a building process more than anything else. And I think this is due to the fact that negotiations, you can negotiate to a certain point but if you haven't been able to convince those who you're working with, what it's all about, how it's going to work and to a certain extent, what can they expect, well, it's extremely hard to make new progress or to get anywhere. Conflict parties need to feel that you as a mediator, adviser, trainer have heard and understood the agreement so you should allow for that. Don't go straight to the business. Let them complain. The first instinct is to obtain your understanding and if possible, your support in their struggle against the common enemy [inaudible 01:05:20] across the other side of the room. Allow that to happen. And yeah, I think we claim we are going to fix things again, not fixable for by ourselves and is very, very colonial in a way to think that way you know, very colonial, somehow".

The problem, then, seems to be the archetypal 'handbook' and the institutional embeddedness of a model of mediation that approaches and teaches mediation as a purely technical exercise. It suggests that T1 might benefit from reflecting on the alleged rigidity of its protocols and how it may foreclose opportunities for relational progress in mediation leading to sustainable peace that so many lamented.

One participant lyrically described its suffocating quality and the need for an injection of

"[t]hose creative spaces (that) are like the spaces between logs in a fire, that provide the oxygen for the fire to grow. If it's too tightly packed, the fire won't work".

Opening and closing spaces

Spaces were recurrently referred to by practitioners, in terms of physical choreography, but also their symbolism and psychological function.

For example, practitioners often referred to the mediation as a space for healing, and within that the role of storytelling in processing traumatic material, to present oneself and one's history of suffering, but also to acknowledge the other's history of suffering. As such mediation encounters have the potential of offering a space for mutual recognition, aimed at shifting perceptions and rigid mindset, but also of personal healing.

"Progression in mediation and dialogue is not a linear thing. It's a cyclical thing, it goes back to the depths of the

story, and people retell the stories and retell the stories. And in that retelling of the story lies the healing".

"That kind of thing had an extraordinary effect on people I think because it created that kind of, and really, I mean almost like a sacred space where people kind of felt "okay, somewhere we're together again even if I've mistrusted you and been far away from each other"".

Although the relational use of psychology described above is central predominantly for those engaged in transformational practices, the telling and retelling of stories was seen as essential and unavoidable by elite mediators too, as we have seen above. I will return to this later when discussing integration, but it should be noted that in this sense, the recognition of the centrality of storytelling is an important commonality between the two camps.

One of the practitioners offered a particularly sophisticated articulation of how mediation encounters function as different psychological spaces depending on how they are used in different tracks:

"it's a bit like what they advise you to do when you're coming out of a very traumatic episode. If you're sucked into it and you're panicking and everything else, you take a deep breath, and then you breathe out for, you know, x number of seconds and then it disconnects (you). I think prayer and quiet conversation does that. Whereas sitting in a room and then looking at a text that reminds you of what the conflict was about is exactly the opposite. Of course, it triggers you at every level and seeing your opponent there and everything else. So, it's using some of the other aspects of human nature to maybe help people move away, take a step away. […] all that glues the spiritual, the personal, the physical, the historical, everything. It (aggression/hostility) suddenly just starts to fall apart because they (the parties in conflict), can't only rely on that combative kind of space that's very often, unfortunately, that space, it's the only space provided".

This is a psychologically-nuanced comparison between the kind of space created often in Track 1, or in a mediation that attends only to the technical side of the encounter, and the function of a space that is more open to other aspects of the encounter. It argues that Track 1 mediation, while attempting to put an end to conflict, creates a polarised space where the only available positions are as enemies. What happens in the alternative formulation of space is an excellent description of the psychoanalytic 'moral third'[33] which refers to the space between the positions entrapping parties as enemies. "The third," an intersubjective mental space co-created by both subjects, 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[34]. It's an in-between space where you are not triggered, not in the 'fight-flight' state of mind, and where thinking and different experiences can take place.

This dynamic is captured by Benjamin's idea of the moral third as offering a place to look away from the other in order to find a means of living with that other. As a consequence, the "moral third" is predicated on the ability of the individual to identify, focus on, and invest in something other than the lost object.

The speaker refers to *space to breath* both concretely – the taking of deep breaths and then breathing out to regulate the automatic response of panic in traumatised individuals – and metaphorically, by implying that this 'breathing space' (or 'third space') prevents being sucked into the old antagonistic and triggering relationship with the other, by disconnecting parties from their rigid roles and positions.

Others made similar comparisons between Track 1 and other tracks' mediation processes, in terms of how Track 1 compartmentalises sections of the process in unhelpful ways:

"Everything stands in relation to everything else, and so you cannot separate the objective from the subjective, […] (instead) we compartmentalize everything, there is a problem, let us decorticate, let us separate it in small pieces and now we solve this one and then we'll have the disarmament and then we'll have confidence building and we'll have- and so we tend to compartmentalise".

33 Jessica Benjamin, "Beyond Doer and Done To: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness," Psychoanalytic Quarterly 74, no. 1 (2004): 5–46

34 Seu, 2021:10

Like the rigid rationalist approach described earlier, compartmentalisation too is a psychological defence mechanism aimed at preventing feeling overwhelmed. But, the speaker argues, compartmentalisation misses the relations between parts of complex systems.

3. The Psychology of Trust and Hope

The role of trust and how to build trust in mediation processes is currently much discussed and researched. Trust is defined as: to believe that someone is good and honest and will not harm you, or that something is safe and reliable. To have trust is synonymous with feeling confidence, belief, faith in someone's or something's reliability, truth and ability to keep their word and deliver.

All the practitioners we interviewed believed firmly that trust is hard to build but essential for mediation to work. This is because:

"[y]ou've got to build some trust. If you don't have any trust, there is simply nothing to negotiate. But trust is like going up the staircase. It's step by step. You can't walk in on Monday and say, "by Thursday I am going to have their trust", heavens no!"

They referred to trust, or lack of it, in 3 main ways:

1. Trust in the process, in terms of whether parties trusted the effectiveness of the process, or the system/ beliefs underpinning it, including whether the mediation processes offered to the parties made sense to them.

2. Trust in the people involved, in terms of whether they were perceived to be truthful, honest, and reliable. This interpersonal trust referred to both the relationship between parties and the mediator as a person, and between mediation practitioners.

3. Trust as faith or belief that there is hope, whether because of the person mediating or the process. This type of trust, mentioned by several participants, is harder to define but seemed to have nothing to do with the technical side of mediation, but refers to a leap of faith that would bring hope. The psychological skills of the mediator and the quality of the interpersonal encounter seemed to be key to this. Often, it had to do with the mediator sharing something personal or showing some vulnerability that would make the parties feel that the mediator understood their struggle *personally* at a human level and that it was possible to get through the process, however impossible it seemed.

Feeling safe stems from a combination of all these components but having a human encounter with the other seems key. I imagine this is one of the reasons why the often referred to informal spaces in mediation processes are considered so important, in that they allow a human encounter outside the restrictions of the protocols. There is a paradox here: protocols and procedures provide a necessary structure to bring order and some stability to a volatile and embattled situation, yet they are not sufficient, as of themselves, psychologically and emotionally to sustain the process and move it forward. Some (see previous section) argued that, on the contrary, the strictures of formal protocols and the framing of Track 1 mediation might actually further entrench parties in their positions by triggering a repetition of past experiences and trapping individuals and parties, by definition, in their positions as enemies. Instead, informal settings and in-between spaces, like the fabled exchanges in corridors or bars, add complexities to the individuals involved by allowing them to be *people,* with a multitude of social identities – e.g., parent, child, friend, - beyond that of enemy.

In terms of how mediation is perceived and experienced in the context of T1 mediation, it seems that the cultural and political systems T1 mediation represent can be another stumbling block, particularly for parties with different worldviews or the constituencies beyond the elites:

"I mean there's an idea that conflict is dysfunctional. And that, to my mind is? incorrect. Take a look at XXX before they were heavily armed by us. They had thousands of years of conflict involving poetry, stones, and

sticks and intermarriage. And every year, they had exactly the same conflict in xxx, they had the same first of all, quarrel and then kiss and make up and then exchange some wives and they did it exactly the same next year. We have a view about conflict which is determined by a predilection to regulation and government which is particularly a concept that is, I would say, not to be found in many cultures where conflicts take place".

The need for cultural sensitivity and awareness of potential cultural undertones in mediation is taken very seriously by the peacebuilding community (see, for example Abatis[35]). In terms of psychological footprint, this extract raises the important question of *misrecognition* deriving from the cultural erasure of traditional and existing peace practices and cultural understandings of conflict in non-western contexts. This erasure is bound to have a profound psychological impact on the mediation parties – how can a group identify with, trust, and commit to a process that is so foreign to them and meaningless in their worldview? Psychologically, this requires a hard to make leap of faith from the parties, at a time of great vulnerability and, as expressed by one participant, of 'trust deficit'. Furthermore, some participants were doubtful that existing efforts within the mediation community had gone far enough towards changing existing mediation frameworks and practices:

"They did some research to look into different contexts where you can see how conflicts have been settled in that particular context like, what is the cultural tradition to deal with conflicts? And whether there are some similarities with mediation? So, I'm just saying there are efforts like that to try to tap into local experiences and then somehow bring them into our work. But, by and large, this industry is driven by the North American and European hemisphere".

This acknowledges that progress is being made, but is there any consideration of how such foreign process and setup impact on the parties' sense of identity, self-worth, self-respect and commitment to mediation processes?

The extracts below illustrate these tensions and how trust, or lack of, is connected to the intertwining of structural, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions in mediation. Above all, it points to how Track 1 mediation practices can act as a block to trust building, because trust is always relational and takes time to build and maintain it:

"I think particularly when you have, you know, high profile mediators who really don't have the time to sit with the parties for hours and days and weeks and months and years, they fly in and they fly out. And, you know, it never stops to surprise me that people, who think they have a solution they fly in, they're often White Europeans or North Americans flying in somewhere and, you know, having the recipe ready for how to resolve things and not setting aside sufficient time to really talk to the parties or listen to the parties".

Many of the tensions mentioned above were referred to repeatedly throughout all the interviews. First there is the clash of worldviews – what is being offered is culturally, ethnically, and geopolitically foreign. Then there is the interpersonal – the mediator is perceived as approaching the process with a one-size-fits-all *recipe* and trying to apply it without knowing the parties. This is the space in which prejudice and mutual stereotyping breed. Above all, there is no space for a relationship to develop and, in order for a resolution to be reached, one needs to get to know the parties.

These tensions are compounded by the pressure from donors' expectations:

"one of the lessons there was the risks and dangers of external donor driven political imperatives, public measure, publicity, and also, how would I put this, this kind of fixation with state building as part of peace building. Actually, state building, certainly in xxx context is very often conflict inducing, it's not a recipe for conflict reduction. But for a Western politician, you need to get the government back and the state back and that will create peace but effectively, that's actually a conflict inducing system. So, there was the question of this process being driven externally and our inability to actually develop internally a process outside of the pressure".

Here we see clearly how the structural pressures interfere with what the process needs. It highlights the incommensurability between a Western centric understanding of peace and the accompanying essential role

35 Abatis, K. (2021) *Inviting the elephant into the room: culturally oriented mediation and peace practice.* CSS Mediation Resources. ETH: Zurich

of the state in ensuring it, and the opposite meaning this framing acquires in a different cultural context. The speaker's sympathetic appreciation of the impossible pressures on the process and mediator, highlights, yet again, the need to engage with the lived experience of mediators and locates the source of the difficulties in the structural and systemic aspects of Track 1 mediation.

Stemming from this, many participants argued for an ethical duty to inform the mediation parties about the structure and process of what is being offered, rather than assume that it is universally known and understood. I have touched on this in chapter 1 as an important facilitative move in preparing the parties to mediation. Here the focus is on how such sensitivity towards the counterparts and their experience of mediation is key in fostering trust in the process and a real commitment to its success.

Additionally, many participants made emphatic reference to the mismatch between T1 mediation settings and the state of mind of parties in conflict:

"when they (parties in conflict) are coming in, they're coming in dire conditions, you know, dire conditions. Some of them have been in the bush".

"you get these normal people from XXX that have been traumatized having to enter this huge hall in (location of the talks), sitting far away from the people that they need to talk to".

"Can you imagine what it will mean, if in these big tables of mediation, the people who suffer can come to tell their stories, so that everybody understands it, rather than just going to read some newspaper as to what the conflict is about".

Others commented on the absurdity of table and chair arrangements in formal setting for cultures where chairs are not used, or when conflict is dealt with by sitting around a tree.

"I mean, body language varies a terrible lot according to the cultural background you're talking of. And we're always reading it with our good Western culture. Well, I'm sorry, you can't read a Burmese with your Western culture. To tell the truth, some of these guys we're bringing in, they're probably sitting on a chair for the first time in their life because they're used to sitting on the floor. Chairs is not a piece of furniture that you find in the northern part of Burma, if you want, for the very simple reason, that's just a different lifestyle to ours".

"In actual fact, a circle around a tree in a village and a circle around the ground is the best place where everybody can see everybody else. And no one is standing at the top of the table or sitting at the top of the table pontificating about a problem that they have never suffered".

"I mean, when you look at the (current conflict) mediation table in (location of meeting), for example. I've been in that hotel before, it is probably around 40 to 50 meters long table, just one table. And the further you sit away from the middle, where the chief mediators is, the less power you've got. So, the people at the end of the table had to watch on TV screens what's happening in the middle of the table. And that's the setup that the mediators have designed and it's...it's...it's lunatic, it is just completely outrageous".

Others linked the disconnects – between worldviews and the impact of formal settings on the parties - to short-lived agreements

"that's also about the European conception of some kind of global normative framework which does not take account of realities in which people live in real worlds, in which if they don't own the solutions, they will never implement them".

"National ownership, it's absolutely critical. "It's my conflict, it needs to be my peace". It's why I try never to draft agreements with the parties because they'll never own them if they didn't draft them. And this is another big problem we have with the institutional, multilateral approach, an agency, institutional sort of mindset which is they pay lip service to it".

As suggested by the extracts above, clearly mediators and peace makers are extremely concerned and feel passionately about the negative impact of existing T1 mediation practices on the possibility of sustainable peace.

Returning to psychology, I am interested in the emotional experience of taking part in and having to adapt to a process that is foreign, hard to understand, and in which parties re-experience being disenfranchised. Is it reasonable to expect trust in response to such experience? Given that understanding is key to trust and that we make sense of the world through our socio-cultural meaning-making worldviews, there is a danger, as several speakers argued, that western models of mediation and peacebuilding might result in inducing, rather than reducing conflict in different cultural context.

These are worrying claims which point to the structural and systemic nature of the problem, rather than individual mediators' biases. Indeed, because Track 1 protocols and structured processes, however necessary, are perceived to have a trapping effect and militate against trust building, some mediators described how they had to step out of these constraints in order to develop trust in their counterparts. Several practitioners described the transformative impact of not following rules as mediators and how their 'unorthodox' actions resulted in a breakthrough. For example:

"I wanted to know the human behind the killer, so to speak, killer between quotation, because he's a husband etc. etc. […] so I just wanted to know how to relate to the other and that way build trust because he lives in a universe where there is a deep trust deficit, so I had to meet this person, I had to get a deal with my own security guard, I left them far away, we had to meet in a particular place and so on and so forth so we can build trust, and in order to build trust you know, as you know, there are certain things in life you cannot have, they have to be willingly given, they have to be earned, whether that's love, affection, a friendship, trust, that's something that you - no matter how badly you need them, "trust me", "why should I trust you?", so you have to earn it so you can go to the business, so suspend the urgency and understand the person behind".

Similarly, another participant shared the following personal experience:

"what bothers me sometimes is that some people really go in with book approach. They've read in the book and they're trying to apply it. […] the leadership said to me "we never believed you would (take the) risk." Yes, "the fact that you came personally. Others would send other people, but the fact that you didn't delegate anybody, you came yourself. We never believed that you would do it." So, it kind of touched them that I was ready to walk the distance, just take all the risks".

In both these examples, the mediators felt that it was imperative that they met their counterparts on their ground, as it were, and on terms they had set. The articulation of this gesture as something that *touched them* is layered with meaning. I imagine the speaker is referring to the counterpart feeling emotionally affected by meeting them in person and alone – it communicated the mediator's commitment and personal investment - but it is also a graphic representation of the distance between mediation actors; the physical, cultural, emotional gap that must be bridged for the parties to be brought closer together, to, metaphorically speaking, be able to 'touch each other'. There is also, of course, a shift in the power dynamic brought about by the mediator's readiness to walk the distance in the second example or agreeing to a meeting without security guards in the previous extract, that conveys that the mediator is meeting the counterpart as equals. That's one fundamental starting point for trust.

The first quote also highlights the interpersonal nature of trust and how it involves meeting the other as a person, rather than the role they play. Indeed, mediators repeatedly stated that the establishment of an interpersonal connection is a necessary condition to establishing trust and often lead to a breakthrough.

"when you succeed in convincing a rebel group that they're out to pursue peace as a strategy, a peaceful negotiation or a super peaceful dialogue, that's always a breakthrough, and normally it is - it happens because you've been working on their ideology and tackling their personal issues, tackling their relationship issues, and engaging with them at a more personal level, yeah".

In summary, trust results from building a relationship, experiencing respect, and is built when parties experience a 'genuine encounter'. Unfortunately, a trust gap exists not only between parties in conflict, but also between parties and mediator practitioners. Many participants made reference to mediators 'big egos' and their personal investment in the success of mediation as a step on their career ladder:

"I know colleagues like this. It's their egos, that's why they are doing it. They are in the limelight and the results

they achieve it's because they want to be in the limelight. They don't give a damn about this kind of things, they just want to be in the limelight, period".

The most extreme formulation of how Track 1 mediators are experienced as not being genuinely interested in peace processes, but instead profiting from it, was expressed in the following extract in which the speaker is reporting an exchange with a *(Religious leader) of XXX,*

"[…] I met him in Washington, and he said to me," are you one of the peace vultures?" So, I say, "what's a peace vulture?" He says, "you know, you guys. You're a high-flying consultant, right? So, you fly and then you see a carcass of a conflict. You go down Somalia, yeah. And you feast and you eat, and then there are just dry bones. And when everybody has feasted, then…then you take off and you fly, say to Afghanistan, South Sudan." And so…so that's…that's how the local person experienced us as…"

The parasitical representation of peace makers was referred to by many, albeit in more muted tones, who referred to the sectors as an 'industry' producing a lucrative peacebuilding business.

In stark contrast to this, others talked about how sharing personal experience gave the parties in conflict the experience of a genuine encounter which led to a breakthrough.

"I have to say that my own background, I mean, I don't know if you know, I'm xxx and I have gone through the xxx misery myself. So, this I have noticed that working with conflict parties that helps me establish a certain rapport because they know that, yes, I am the xxx expert but I'm also a person who has felt the conflict on herself. So, that has helped me,[…] you know, it's humbling. For them, it's like, "okay, she's not from the book. So, she has seen it right?" […] for example, at one moment, there was maybe this was a little breakthrough, too. They (the parties in in conflict) were stuck, they were upset that they, you know, they can't meet the other on their ground and how do you overcome the enemy immediately et cetera. And I shared this experience of mine that when I was in my early 20s, as an xxx going to (enemy country), the first time I went it was horrendous […] And then I said, "look at me now, you know, like all of these years after I'm sitting here" […] So, when I told that story, you know, there was this silence and they had like tears going and then it was like," oh, my God that,", like I said, "it's possible because here I am and I'm talking to you" and that helps when you talk about (it) and they feel that I'm genuinely sharing what I'm going through. "I know that it's possible", giving them the hope and et cetera. […] somebody that can identify with the pain, not only the process and content".

These are important tensions which, not exclusively but importantly, map onto the two archetypes, what is being modelled in the mediation encounter and consequently how psychology is utilised: whether it is used instrumentally to win an argument or strategically undermine the opponent, or to enable the experience of a genuine encounter which in turn can foster trust in the process.

Some thought that the best way to manage these tensions is to apply a" good cop/ bad cop" strategy:

"So, the special envoy is the kind of head, and you keep him for the big battles. The mediator, essentially, they're crafting an agreement and they get their hands dirty. And the parties don't trust them but expect them to deliver politically. An adviser's role is very different. An adviser needs to develop the confidence of the party. And that can't be done if an adviser involves himself in crafting compromises or in applying pressure. That's what the mediators should do. An adviser is much more like a good lawyer. An adviser gives the party the best advice available based on the party's perception and ambition and requirement, including saying, "Well, they tried that in xxx. It didn't work. If I was you, I wouldn't go down that road." And to develop that relationship is very different. And I'm mentioning this because this is close to the work you're doing (psychology in mediation), and it is about how we need to train the teams and understand the different roles".

Others viewed the complexity of situation and the tensions as running much deeper than roles or performing different tasks, and related them to a fundamental existential question:

"what are you trying to do here? Are you just trying to get an agreement that you can announce or you're trying to help these people to come to terms with their realities, their problems, and their hostilities? So, in which case, you need to think about more than just a technical agreement. You need to think about the human beings which

is why I'm talking about the psychosocial. And I mentioned it that I'm pleased with your framing of it".

4. Incommensurability, re-enactment, and reflexivity – towards integration

The data point to a divide and key differences between Track 1 or 'elite mediation' practices and those in other Tracks, often described as 'transformative practices'. Despite most particpants' declared wish for dialogue and integration between Track 1 and other Tracks, participants implicitly or explicitly articulated and expressed concern about an incommensurability between the approaches.

Incommensurability is a concept from philosophy of science, introduced and popularised by Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, to refer to what happens when theories are embedded in starkly contrasting conceptual frameworks without a common language to compare or discuss them. As a result, scientists advocating different theories talk across each other.

At a metapsychological level, this claimed incommensurability in the peacebuilding field communicates (a) the need to find ways to overcome such incommensurability and integrate the approaches, and (b) the need for dialogue between the camps, so that practitioners can talk to, rather than across, each other.

In looking at the narration of the proclaimed incommensurability, my aim is to 'give voice' to and reflect on the psychology of what came across as a passionately felt conflict within the peacebuilding community while identifying the dimensions of incommensurability as they were articulated by practitioners. The dimensions are presented here as opposites strategically, to begin to unpack and trouble, rather than reaffirm, the dichotomies. This is underpinned by a concern about what these dichotomies do to peace processes, and to the interpersonal and professional relationships between practitioners. Foremost, my aim is to highlight the tensions and challenges, but also the missed opportunities for collaboration, solidarity, support between peacebuilding practitioners (this includes mediators in all tracks) AND to what this mismatch does to mediation and peace processes.

Polarities

The approaches were described in various ways and through different polarities, each carrying specific challenges.

Temporalities.

There seems to be a fundamental divide between the temporalities of Track 1 mediation and other peacebuilding practices. Track 1 operates within an emergency temporality, characterised by urgency, lack of time and resources, and is result-driven, while the other Tracks consider the open-endedness of relationship-building essential to the desired outcome of sustainable peace.

This extract captures the tension between these temporalities, but also the dangers of being dominated by or attending only to "the urgent":

"I[I]t's time consuming and you can imagine if you're a minister in the cabinet you know, and you have a big country here you know, how much time do you have in a day to give attention to each and every one of these, you just can't do that so that's part of the problem, that's part of the complexity of this thing. But the flip side of that is if you don't do it in this way, then you don't solve anything and that means you sit with these conflicts, you continue to sit with them for how long. So, it works both ways really, you can choose to say "no, this is insignificant, I can't give attention to this thing now", but this thing keeps on bugging you for how many years, you know, it's not going to go away, so. […] In my mind about two-thirds of the time of a mediation process is the airing of grievances, the airing of anger and so on, and yeah, and if you're trying to supress that and you try to move on, beyond that is, to my mind, I think it's counterproductive. You may score a bit on time by pushing the

process, but in the end it's all going to come back to you".

The key point of this extract is the false economy of rushing. This comment was made repeatedly across interviews, particularly by Special Envoys taking the long view on mediation and peace processes. Many lamented that, not only the intersubjective and relational dynamics ("airing of grievances") cannot be skipped, but that rushing and reaching an agreement prematurely often backfires, making future attempts much less likely to succeed because the parties become jaded and distrusting of the process.

In this context, practitioners expressed the tremendous time pressure they experienced through metaphors of pressure cookers and being A&E doctors, but also they disappointedly described these rushed processes as *instant coffee,* which I take to mean something that can be produced quickly, but lacks substance and the fullbodiedness of real coffee, and as *putting a patch/plaster* on a wound signalling a temporary and superficial intervention which does not address the root causes of a problem.

Temporalities were also mentioned in relation to the central issue of sequencing. Again, as the extract below illustrates, practitioners are fully aware of and struggle with the dilemmas involved:

"[t]he sequencing of reconciliation versus the negotiation […] is a classic question by now. I came up myself with that big question about the sequencing in XXX and XXX (names of two nations) because you realise that the time when you need to do reconciliation is before everything collapses, right, you still have something left, you know, on a societal level. Let's separate the levels, right? On a societal level on Track Two or Three, people don't want to talk about reconciliation at a time where actually there is the possibility for reconciliation, paradoxically which is during the conflict. Now during the hot phase of a conflict is. (hard?) but by the time these negotiations happen on the societal level, all the membrane, the societal membrane starts eroding. I'm talking about civil wars, so let's say, ideally, the negotiations end up with some agreement. By the time you end up with an agreement, on the societal level, you have all of this societal membrane cracking up and there isn't much to patch back. You know what I mean? So, when do we do this? Because when we start talking about reconciliation, it's too late because the pieces are not there anymore to be picked up. It's gone. It's eroded. So how do we sew it back together? Do we make a collage out of it? Can we do that? So, it's a question that we struggle with, right? But then there is all kinds of reconciliation, the legal reconciliation, the psychosocial reconciliation, on different tracks. On Track 1, the way is that you don't have time for that stuff, right? You don't have time to be [inaudible 00:51:31], you need to stop the war, stop the conflict, come up with political solution or the ceasefire and then the political solution at some point. While parallel to that all of the psychosocial elements have to happen on different levels. So that's the practice. It's not necessarily efficient. We're not...not seeing much success with it, right?"

Outcome vs Process.

The clash of temporalities described in detail above was conceptualised by a different practitioner as a clash between 'the urgent' and 'the important':

"let's rush to stabilise, stabilise - and so we are under pressure to deliver that version of peace, so in other words the entry point is state building according to a particular prescription, however if on the other hand you can resist and have room where peace is the entry point and the ultimate aim, you will have a different approach that will enable you to, how shall I put it, to recalibrate and find a balance between the urgent and the important, and so the important is peace, is long term self-sustainable peace".

This is a hopeful and helpful formulation, acknowledging the multiple sources of pressure and the experienced need to rush the process, but also posing the possibility of a recalibration that enables a balance between reaching a desired and urgent outcome (e.g., ceasefire) and the process of building sustainable peace.

It is not only the mandate and the humanitarian cost that put pressure on the practitioners to achieve a particular goal, but also the donors:

"[t]he donors are usually very impatient. They want to see change immediately, but it is equally important to explain to them that patience is a virtue in this process (with) people who have looked at one another through the

lens of guns".

"[p]eace building as it stands needs a major reshuffle and rethink and reorganizing that the way that we've been working, and the way that we've seen this work being done, from the way it's funded, it actually doesn't centre the people who are actually suffering, put them in the centre of the table […] I think we've been taught almost like these mediations can't happen until you get to somebody's office".

Compartmentalised and technical vs holistic and human.

Many practitioners connected the prioritisation of outcome over process with the perceived mechanistic, robotic, soulless quality of Track 1 protocols. Others made similar comparisons between Track 1 and other tracks mediation processes, but in terms of how Track 1 compartmentalises sections of the process in unhelpful ways.

"[e]verything stands in relation to everything else, and so you cannot separate the objective from the subjective, […] (instead) we compartmentalize everything, there is a problem, let us decorticate, let us separate it in small pieces and now we solve this one and then we'll have the disarmament and then we'll have confidence building and we'll have- and so we tend to compartmentalise".

I have discussed this quote earlier in relation to compartmentalisation as a psychological defence mechanism. Here its relevance is in relation to the danger of losing sight of the bigger picture and the relations between parts of the complex system that is peacebuilding.

This point is mentioned also in the next extract that introduces yet another set of metaphors: Track 1 mediation as the *hardware* and transformative practices as *the software* of peace processes:

"[S]tructurally what does peace mean? […] it isn't just a series of structures that you put in place in an agreement, a constitution, a transitional arrangement, demobilisation plan and so forth. How do you deal societally with the social and cultural norms that will lead people to embrace peace, to not fear the unknown and want to go back to the bush to fight, to see other communities that they've been fighting with as country people rather than as enemies, and all of that (is) peace, and I just feel like we've spent so much time on the hardware, on the laws and constitutions and policies, and we're really nowhere on the software".

These two extracts focus not so much on the incommensurability between the two types of peace building practices, but on the imbalance between them in terms of investment in thinking and development, and the dangers of prioritising one over the other. Practitioners suggested that the compartmentalisation inbuilt in Track 1 mediation makes it harder to link the technical side of mediation (drawing an agreement) with getting the affected population to psychologically invest in and commit to the outcome of mediation, both of which are necessary for the agreement to be implemented and peacebuilding to happen.

Superheroes and social workers.

Metaphors mapping onto the polarities discussed so far captured the imaginaries circulating in the peacebuilding communities. One of the most enduring figures is the 'star mediator' which links up to imaginaries of superheroes, parachutists, A&E doctors, army generals, paratroopers and war veterans. These speak to the time pressure experienced by mediators and the embattled nature of their task. A Darwinian model of survival of the fittest seems to underpin this imaginary, which is actively sustained by a systemic denial of the emotional impact of mediation on mediators, discussed in chapter 2 of this report.

On the other side, the metaphors were underpinned by an ethics of care, thus likening mediation actors to social workers, healers, psychotherapists and counsellors, in general trying to help or facilitate others.

I want to stress again that despite the polarisation in the field and the portrayal of mediators as 'big man, big power', many mediators saw their role as doing both.

The emotional footprint of divisions - Re-enactment, affective permeability and reflexivity

It is important to state again that these roles and imaginaries do not map neatly onto the two archetypal camps. Differences between models and approaches notwithstanding, a polarised view highlights divisions as psychological by-products needing urgent attention. What is the practitioners experience of operating in a divided field?

A feeling of disenfranchisement was expressed repeatedly by those advocating for transformational practices. For example, they conveyed feeling disregard and that their work did not matter:

"And all the attention and the cameras are on (Special Envoy and their team), you know, so I have also found that in my work with UN people when we asked them about what they would like to know about mediation, they would say "we want to have interviews with (Special Envoy) at that stage"".

This lack of validation and replication of hierarchies of power and visibility was conveyed by many, both in terms of the primacy of elite capturing versus their constituencies, but also within the peacebuilding community.

In turn, the interviews were peppered with sarcastic remarks about, for example, mediators "pontificating" or the increased segmentation of mediation tracks to ridiculous points. For example:

"[w]e even developed track 1.45. Sorry, but what is that?"

Or the special secret stuff:

["w]e developed a hierarchical system called multitrack diplomacy. Which says this is where you belong. "oh, you're civil society, you're here in this track. Oh, you're an academic, you're in this track. Oh, the special secret stuff happens in track one". And we even have organisations that have set themselves up around that, it's "we're specialists in track one mediation". Well, what is it that's so special in that special room?"

Others described their difficulties in working with the very idea of tracks and how they feel traumatized by it.

It is urgent that these tensions between practitioners are addressed for the health of the field, and also because they are bound to affect peace processes in important ways. The next vignette, used by the speaker to illustrate the damaging impact on the mediation process of the unrecognised and unresolved conflict between T1 mediation and relationship-building approach, provides an example of psychological enactment. I argue that a capacity for psychological reflexivity on the part of the mediator and the support team could have helped prevent the breakdown in negotiations:

"[So] back to the negotiation (at a time when an opposition leader was challenging the President and violence had erupted), […] I think there were eventually like 14 points that they had on the agenda, that they were trying to reach agreement on. There was agreement on 12 and a half of these points, so there was just one and a half to go. And I remember this very vividly. It was at that point when one of opposition group negotiators, who was an ex-general in the army, said "We've just received report that tonight we will be arrested." To which the chief negotiator on the ruling party's side said, "We will go with you, and we will make sure that nothing happens to you." I saw that as one of those moments that you're looking for in a mediation where the attention shifts from negotiating about topics to reaching out to the others as human beings, and I thought that was a brilliant moment. So, I stepped in and said, "This is very encouraging that we can at this point in time where we begin to understand that our future lies in the hands of all of us. So, if we can begin to protect the dignity and safety of one another, I think it's a step forward." The UN mediator chastised me, and he said, "It's not a time for preaching," and I shouldn't do that. So, and lo and behold, that night, the opposition negotiators went into hiding and that was the end of the mediation. Gone. Boom. Yeah. […] For him (UN mediator), it was about reaching agreement on topics. I'm not criticising him as a person, he was a great guy, but in terms of how the UN mediator at that stage saw mediation, what I did didn't fit into what mediation should be about. I think I tried to acknowledge the psychological shifts that were happening because, here, former enemies who couldn't stand one another, reached out and said, "I will go with you, and I will protect you." Yeah, so, eventually that whole

thing fell apart".

This rich account tells many stories.

First, it exemplifies what a clash of models or 'camps' not working together can do to a peace process. Maybe the process would have collapsed anyway but, arguably, the belittling did not just target the mediation support practitioner but the parties in conflict too, who had reached out to one another and began to build psychological bridges. The interviewee did not give sufficient details to support the implied claim that the negotiations collapsed because of this episode, but the vignette was offered as an exemplification of the negative impact on peace mediation processes of the lack of mediators' psychological agility and rigidity of mandates.

Second, and following on from a lack of psychological agility, it is interesting to observe how the conflict moved from between the parties in conflict to between the mediators. Psychodynamically this could be a manifestation of 'affective permeability', which refers to a shared experience of intense affect across permeable boundaries that precedes or bypasses a more conscious emotional processing.

This is a well-known phenomenon in clinical settings. It partly refers to 'indigestible' contents before they are sufficiently worked through. In that phase they need to be recognised and held (I will discuss in detail a successful example of this in Part 4 of this report). Without such awareness and reflexivity, when powerful affective contents are not processed symbolically, emotionally, cognitively, those experiencing them are in danger of acting them out. Maybe it was a step too far and too quickly for the parties, or maybe the new and unexpected threat added more pathos than the fragile interaction could manage, but suddenly something happened in the encounter: the parties previously in conflict began to be on the same side while the mediators clashed. This is not a problem per se. Indeed, affective permeability is a vital means of communication when words are not yet available and, if recognised, it can provide critical information for the mediators. In that case, if worked through by the mediators, they could have modelled that it is possible for completely different understandings and opposite positions to be bridged. As it happens, at a psychological level, the mediators modelled the impossibility of that bridging and, the speaker implies, the process fell apart.

Hence, this vignette is a good illustration of how providing mediators with the additional psychological lens to read a situation, enhance their psychological agility, and learnt reflexivity would equip mediators better for their difficult task.

Towards integration

Despite the open or implied proclamation of incommensurability between camps, models and tracks in mediation and peace building, many practitioners lamented the divisions within the field and argued for the possibility, and indeed the need for a more holistic and linked up practice across the tracks:

"I feel like we're in kind of two camps. I feel like we're in the camp of…"you got to get what you can get from the people at the table and you've got them there, and they're not going to agree to much, so you have to get them to agree with what they're going to agree to." And then there's the other side that says "there have to be bigger societal efforts", and I reject the notion that you can only have one or the other".

"the outcome of track one tends to be highly unstable or at least the gains are highly reversible unless you factor track two and track three at the same time […] if you want effective peace building transmission, you need to link up the efforts and the context in all the quadrants. So, you have to - you know, hearts and minds will be psychology or one approach. But you also need a "structures and institutions". And you need the key people, the elite…"

"if you want to achieve sustainable peace, you also have to be able to use leveraged pressure and reality check so it's not all just about finding each other and so on. It's also about addressing root causes which is a difficult part of it".

The three speakers above do not deny the differences between frameworks and approaches but propose a vision that bypasses the splits. Indeed, the second speaker spells out why this is not simply desirable but necessary, as different tracks need to bolster each other and come together in the name of peace. As they all argue, the issue is not the incommensurability of models and tracks, but what happens in between them.

The psychosocial framework applied in this project enables us to appreciate and engage with the crucial importance of what happens "in-between". We have seen in chapters 1 and 2 of this report the importance of the in-between in relation to parties in conflict, and between mediators and their counterparts. Here I am arguing that it is necessary to articulate and understand the in-between in terms of stages, aspects, and contexts of peacebuilding, and in between the practitioners engaged at all these levels.

Some claimed that it is a matter of balance:

"you know, there's a huge pressure on the parties to get to an agreement that, you know, it might miss something out, then the parties even though they knowingly, they know that, the paper they're signing is not going to work because of this and that, that and this, but they're still… you know, there's this high profile man in town, he wants to get an agreement, he will get an agreement. And he gets the agreement, flies away and then the implementation is… is not necessarily impossible but difficult because they didn't take into account all the issues that they needed to take them into account. But, I mean, there's really a balance there. Sometimes you need to move forward and, you know, hammer things out and get things done, because you can't really resolve every little snag, possible snag that will emerge in the future, sometimes you need, you know, tempo and getting a deal done and, yeah, get down to business".

The scenario described by this practitioner is a familiar one that most participants refer to: there is a rush to sign an agreement, but the agreement doesn't hold, and it is very difficult to implement. For the speaker it is a matter of balance – how to attend to the inevitable urgency of having to reach an agreement whilst also taking into consideration the challenges and complexities of implementation so that the agreement can be a meaningful tool in peace building. How these could be achieved is not specified by the speaker, but the next extract offers a helpful metaphorical articulation of how this could happen. We have seen this extract earlier, when discussing spaces and trust in peace building; here I am interested in how it formulates the relationship between components, the 'in-between'.

"those creative spaces are like the spaces between logs in a fire, that provide the oxygen for the fire to grow. If it's too tightly packed, the fire won't work".

This beautiful metaphor captures how T1 mediation could feed into peacebuilding, and vice versa, and the need to find a way to link the two. In this metaphor, the logs represent Track 1 mediation, and the oxygen is the work that happens in other Tracks. It is clear that both are indispensable for a fire to work. However, without understanding how the two work together and the delicate management between the two, the 'fire' of peace will not catch and last.

Many similar metaphors of complementarity between tracks were offered by different practitioners. For example, how you need both the hardware and software for a computer to work or, as others have expressed, you need to pay attention to both the content and the process, or the urgent and the important. This fire metaphor, however, pushes the understanding further by suggesting that the problem is not with the logs (Track 1 mediation, or the technical and powerbase components of the process), but its dominance and the suffocating impact of their technical rigidity on the process. Hence, it is recommended that the psychological tools that are used in other Tracks are also integrated into Track 1's over-technical approach. The metaphor of logs and oxygen working together to feed the fire, and the complementarity and mutual dependency of logs and oxygen, is a diametrically opposite image of what has been described by many as a disjointed process where one intervention creates mess for others to clean up. Nobody is disputing here the need for both camps/components/frameworks/models. What seems to be missing is an appreciation and understanding of the psychological meaning of each of these. What is their emotional impact? how are they perceived and experienced? what can be done to mitigate these impacts and bring in the human and relational dimension whilst also using psychology instrumentally?

This point is helpfully illustrated by the function of a metaphorical hammer in mediation used by two different participants:

"Sometimes you need to move forward and, you know, hammer things out and get things done, because you can't really resolve every little snag, so, you know, possible snag that will emerge in the future, sometimes you need, you know, tempo and getting a deal done and, yeah, get down to business".

"whether the door opens depends on the quality of the knock. If you hammer on the door, people probably won't open. People will probably shut the door on you. But it's worth knocking again and so eventually the door will be open and maybe, just slightly. But you never know…you never know when you knock on a door whether the conversation will happen or not".

In the first quote, the metaphorical mediation hammer is talked about as a blunt but necessary instrument when needing to *get down to business.* The reference to needing *tempo* hints at the urgency of the situation and, I imagine, the need to reach an agreement, a ceasefire.

In the second extract, the hammering is perceived as an aggressive act that deters people from *opening up* to dialogue, trust, engagement, which are essential components of building a relationship.

We can see here the psychological difference between what the mediation hammer does instrumentally and strategically and what it does relationally.

The psychological function of interventions and models and their psychological footprint is an additional dimension unexplored so far in the peace mediation field. That's where a dialogue between the camps could be profoundly transformative to T1 and other peacebuilding interventions and might bring a much-needed sensitivity to the psychological impact of their mediation tools.

Conclusions

Whether by design or through the organic development of mediation and peacebuilding practices, the field is currently rife with tensions and clashing views about the nature of the mediation encounter, and what the purpose and the practice of mediation and peacebuilding are and should be. The data evidenced practitioners experiencing an incommensurability between elite mediation and transformative practices. Additionally, interviews with practitioners operating at all levels of the mediation tracks conveyed the perception that the old ways cannot be sustained.

The critical aspects of these divisions seem institutional and systemic in origin and stemming from contrasting political and ethical intents and worldviews. Important dynamics cascade from the systemic differences and the accompanying different applications of psychology, for example, divisions between and enduring mental representation of practitioners (and their counterparts), positionings and animosity that are real and passionately felt.

Chapter 3 has offered a psychological reflection on the mindset and emotional climate engendered by practices at different tracks and asked the following metapsychological questions: what does each model 'communicate' to the mediation actors and practitioners, and how does it shape the mediation encounter psychologically? How is the alleged incommensurability acted out in the mediation encounter? How is this perceived incommensurability of models experienced by practitioners and how does it affect the community psychologically?

4 key themes which data analysis identified from the interviews have been described and discussed:

1. The psychology and mindset of tracks in peace mediation and, in particular, of T1 mediators. Interviewees used metaphors of referees and strikers in football matches to compare the mindset of practitioners operating in different tracks, identified gender divisions and uneven representativeness in different tracks, and criticised the dominance of Western rationalist framework which is institutionalised and embedded

and informs training of T1 mediators.

2. The medium is the message – what is being modelled psychologically in mediation tracks? In this theme practitioners illustrated assumptions about how practitioners operate in different tracks through metaphorical images, e.g. parachutists, listeners/healers, A&E doctors, superheroes and social workers.

3. The psychology of trust and hope theme discussed the psychological significance of opening and closing spaces in mediation encounters and the difference between technical and relational approaches was compared to the hardware and software of peace mediation.

4. Incommensurability, re-enactment and reflexivity - towards integration. In this theme practitioners highlighted the differences in temporality between tracks - T1 operating with short-term, T2 and 3 with medium and long-term temporalities - and the false economy of rushing. They stressed the dangers of prioritising the urgent over the important. This was also discussed in terms of the polarities between content vs process, the differences between technical vs holistic and human approaches, and the dangers of compartmentalisation.

Two key archetypes of practices emerged from the data and were used as a shorthand to represent two allegedly distinct groups of practitioners: 'the realist, big power' camp and the 'hippy-dippy' camp, which can be broadly understood as elite mediation and transformative practices.

The stark polarisation between the archetypes does not seem an accurate description of the more fluid and dynamic variety of practices, but it does draw attention to the disparity and differences between mediation tracks in terms of (a) hierarchy, power, visibility and status of the practitioners (e.g. Special Envoys vs grassroot peacebuilders); (b) hierarchy, power, visibility and status of each track's counterparts and interlocutors (e.g. politicians, civil society, people on the ground); (c) beliefs, ideologies and theories of change underpinning the work happening in each track; (d) prioritising power brokering or transformational changes.

The realist/power-brokering and the transformational practices seem to require different things psychologically and use psychology in different ways. Broadly speaking, the power-based approach applies psychology instrumentally and is predominant in T1 mediation, while transformational practice apply psychology relationally and are predominant in T2 and 3.

It is important that the peace mediation field addresses the psychological manifestations of and impacts stemming from different practices because:

1. The psychological footprint of the un-reflected-upon clashing models and the emotional ripples this causes in the peacebuilding community inform and affect the whole system: from the impact of the Darwinian model of survival of the fittest on mediators' wellbeing, through the closed system nature of Track 1 mediation (e.g. selection, training and debriefing of mediators), to the overall frequent lack of integration between levels and phases of peacebuilding and mediation processes.

2. The power-based T1 practices are in danger of inadvertently reproducing conflict-based interactions by modelling in important ways the very opposite of what mediation and peacebuilding try to change, and initiates a cascade of psychological responses: for example, it sets up 'the theatre' and 'acting to the gallery' and communicates that power is all that matters. Furthermore, the conflict between camps gets re-enacted in the setting – both in the choreography of the mediation and in the dynamics within mediation encounters.

3. The friction in the field damage trust and replicate a hierarchy of visibility and invisibility (and with it, importance, relevance, speaking power, influence), which mirrors power differentials between the parties in conflict. The silencing of minorities (here referred to in terms of relative power, rather than actual representativeness, e.g. women) is particularly grievous for concomitant or subsequent reconciliation and peace building initiatives aiming at repairing the social fabric. Psychologically, this interferes with the ability to establish trust with parties, as 'top down' forms of mediation are not trusted.

4. They feed discontent and unhelpful polarisations within the field which damage the practice and reproduces splits and 'us-them' damaging attributions, rather than cross-fertilisation and knowledge

transfer across tracks and within the community of practitioners. Consequently, it is hard to capitalise on the complementarity of models and approaches.

The alleged 'us and them' division into camps speaks to frictions and tensions within the field, which engenders discontent and resentment, and interferes with a more joined-up thinking.

In summary, the data suggest that Track 1 is not sufficiently equipped with psychological skills and agility but it is also excessively informed by a basic conviction that transformation can be realised primarily or exclusively through power brokering. Tracks 2 and 3 lack status and question that the power centred approach is a useful part of peace processes, thus disavowing the instrumental and power-based aspects in their own practices. In this sense, tracks undermine each other, rather than build on the complementarity between them.

Notwithstanding that at times it is strategically necessary to keep what happens in tracks isolated, the lack of connectivity between different stages and aspects of mediation and peace building interventions is problematic for implementation, for lack of stabilisation of treaty agreements, and it is damaging to the community of mediation/peace building practitioners.

We need to engage with differences in assumptions, practices and theories of changes, while uncoupling them from their deterministically attributed Tracks, to understand where and how connectivity between tracks happens or fails. It is in identifying complementarity and opportunity for cross-fertilisation that the psychological agility I advocate for becomes essential, by fluidly and circumstantially applying a range of tools as the context requires.

A more fluid and balanced distribution of skills across tracks is recommended, particularly in terms of injecting relational aspects into T1 practices, and T1 needing to reflect on the perceived rigidity of its protocols and how it may foreclose opportunities for relational progress in mediation leading to sustainable peace that so many lamented.

Psychological Descriptors

The 'moral third' and third spaces; the psychology of trust and hope; recognition and misrecognition; self-reflection on the impact of mediation practices on parties' self-worth, self-respect, and commitment to the process; anger, resentment and disenfranchisement; 'us and them' group psychology; affective permeability.

Recommendations

Concerted efforts and ongoing dialogue between tracks are needed and strongly recommended, but also and crucially, a **systemic integration** of the psychologies and theories of change underpinning peace mediation practices. These steps are essential to build psychological agility for all peace mediation practitioners to enable them to use psychology instrumentally and relationally depending on the context, the stage, and the nature of the conflict. As an overarching recommendation, it seems imperative that the sector engages in reflexive dialogues on the existing problems in the field to identify where the deeper problems lie, to raise awareness, and start cultural changes in ways that are constructive, mend divides, and increase connectivity between tracks.

It is essential that connectivity and interlinking is built not just between parties in conflict, between parties and their constituencies, and between segments of society, but also between Tracks, and within the mediation/peace building community. Active effort and resources should be directed towards further **research** to identify and operationalising dynamic and flexible modes of integration between tracks, models and initiatives. The overall sense which emerged from data is of 'stuckness' and, partly because of the dominant 'emergency' quality of mediation, and a lack of opportunity for reflection. The interviews suggested that it is pressing that space for reflection and ongoing re-examination of model(s) of mediation are created.

Chapter 4

UNDERSTANDING MEDIATION ENCOUNTERS DIFFERENTLY
- towards a psychological toolkit

Throughout the interviews, practitioners made implicit or explicit reference to what they viewed as the key qualities of a good mediator, and to the skills they considered helpful or indispensable in facilitating a successful mediation. In this section, I discuss the tools, qualities, and skills identified by participants, and their psychological meaning and significance.

Some of the skills mentioned regularly were a capacity for active and non-judgemental listening, humility, curiosity, patience, tolerance, aptitude for neutrality, and a developed emotional intelligence. These are also the characteristics of a skilled psychological practitioner and, indeed, the parallels with clinical practice are multiple. For example, practitioners frequently referenced the positive power of telling one's story and feeling listened to, and many, particularly those advocating for a relational use of psychology in mediation, likened the role of mediation to healing. I am not arguing that mediation is the same as therapy, but rather that both therapy and mediation are relational encounters and, as such, they are most effective when emotions can be managed and contained, and the people involved feel safe and treated with respect and care. Hence, given that Psychology specialises in studying emotional safety and developing skills to enable it, I explore psychological concepts and techniques that might be useful as tools in peace mediation, through a detailed discussion of three real-life vignettes which gives a grounded illustration of how psychological tools are already applied intuitively in peace mediation.

The vignettes illustrate how the more emotionally intelligent and experienced practitioners know what works psychologically in mediation, but not necessarily how and why it works. Additionally, because of the lack of attention paid to psychological factors so far, the existing knowledge is currently fragmented, ad-hoc, and anecdotal.

My aim is twofold. Firstly, I aim to offer a psychological reading of key moments in the vignettes and characteristics of the actors described to link turning points with relevant psychological concepts and techniques. In doing so I draw primarily on psychodynamic theory and practice with the intent to begin to develop a vocabulary and a toolkit for mediation practitioners and to promote the development of a sensitivity to the emotional currents as a key dynamic in peace mediation.

Secondly, in doing so, I aim to illustrate the importance of approaching and appreciating mediation encounters as emotionally charged intersubjective encounters, thus bringing to the fore the fundamental role of emotions and the urgent need to attend to, understand, and manage the emotional register and currents powerfully pulsing through the encounters.

The psychological lens offered here is not an alternative, but a complementing addition to the real-politick, power-brokering and diplomatic skills already finetuned in mediators. Nor are psychological skills and understandings offered as a panacea, but as new tools and skills for interventions in extremely difficult and volatile encounters.

The extracts in chapter 3 and the vignettes in this chapter show that many practitioners are already sensitised to psychological work and are able, although often unaware of doing it, to bring psychological understanding and techniques into mediation and negotiation. When they do, however, they are tentative and, as it has been illustrated earlier and clearly below, they feel anxious, uncertain and frustrated, at times defiant. The systemic

refusal to engage with emotions thus militates against a desire and in many cases an existing capacity to apply psychological understanding in ways that benefit the process. Thus, the richness and potential are lost.

The first extract contains the description of a particularly skilled mediator and negotiator. I reflect on the psychological meaning of what the speaker describes as his special qualities and how they make the mediation encounter a safe space.

The second vignette offers a detailed example of the application of psychological tools and techniques, like containment, holding and managing splits, to progress the negotiations and restore the health and effectiveness of the negotiating team. Differently from the final vignette in chapter 3, in which the mediator and his support were not able to work with and through the difficulties of the encounter and disagreement, extracts 1 and 2 in this section illustrate what can be achieved in a moment of stuckness through a keen ability to be attuned to and to manage the shifting emotional registers in the mediation encounter.

The third vignette offers a creative, psychologically informed intervention dealing with the problematic effect of unnamed and unprocessed emotions on the mediators' capacity to work

All the examples highlight the need for increased reflexivity on the part of mediation practitioners and for an expanded framing of mediation encounters able to incorporate psychological tools in the practice of mediation. I argue that such crucial skills, in these examples probably resulting from a mixture of the practitioners' emotional intelligence, extensive experience in the field, seniority and likely personal experience, can be taught and developed in mediators, through their inclusion in mediators' professional development.

Vignette 1 – Transference and reading the room

"[t]hen having that sense like a leader who was holding the space together, X (name of the chief mediation/ negotiation) was that person. He would really...he would be like a grandfather figure to some or father figure to others. A big brother to others, but he was holding that room and he was watching the dynamics. And he used to say he thought it was because of his intelligence training that he was able to do it which probably connects back to psychology. It's that he was aware of everything that was happening. It didn't always look he was, but he knew when so and so shuts that book, it means this. When she starts screaming about that, it means like, time to wrap it up for the day. He was really aware of all the little dynamics and he'd read whatever. And so, I think the sense that we had somebody holding it all together. And it was, it was really a safe space and so it's okay to be in this space. And yeah, a safe space. And a safe space doesn't mean the two parties trust each other. It meant we're all going to get through this somehow, and somebody's in charge of this…holding this process together. …..It was like, yes, the problem is here in the centre. We're dealing with the problem, not with each other. And so, we talk a lot in mediation and peace about trust building, what's the dynamic in the room, how's the atmosphere…."

The first striking feature in this account is that it does not refer at all to the technical abilities of the leading figure but revolves entirely around his psychological skills. Within the first three lines the speaker refers to a transferential[36] relationship between the mediator actors and the leader who represented for various people a grandfather, father, or a big brother figure.

All the transferential figures – grandfather, father, old brother - are male and senior; for example, the speaker specifies *big brother.* This could simply be because the chief negotiator/mediator is a man, but significantly all these roles also imply protectiveness and authority. The key function he plays is to do the *holding together* which is repeated 4 times (*holding the space together, holding that room, holding it all together, holding this process together*), signalling the fundamental importance of keeping together something fragile and in constant danger of falling apart. Metaphorically then, a good mediator acts as psychological glue in a fractious and fragmented

36 Transference refers to the someone experiencing feelings for a key figure in their childhood – parent, grandparent, sibling – for a third person. In psychanalysis this tends to be the analysist, but transference is often experienced outside a clinical relationship.

encounter.

One of the ways in which he does this *holding together* is by being keenly tuned into what each person in the room is experiencing: he *watched the dynamics,* is *aware of everything that was happening',* and *really aware of all the little dynamics* which he could read, even when he did not appear to be. Importantly, he was able to read people beyond their manifest behaviour and instead engaged with the latent meaning of people's actions. In short, he tuned into and paid close attention to the deeper meaning of behaviours and the underlying emotions they expressed. He *read* people psychologically. Hence, if someone started screaming, he did not see aggression or rudeness, but tiredness. Metaphorically, a good mediator has psychological X-ray capacities, enabling them to see underneath and reach deeper into what is happening.

These skills are attributed to the leader's intelligence training but, differently from intelligence, which is applied defensively to gather information about threats, this leader is a benign figure. Indeed, the transferential attributions to grandfathers, fathers and big brothers suggest that he managed to convey a genuine sense of care. As a result, the participants felt *held* [37]emotionally which, in turn, make the space safe – *it's ok to be in this space.*

This detailed and insightful description of emotional holding transcends the specific context of peace negotiation and adds significance to the transference reference – under normal circumstances, this is how one feels with a grandfather, father and big brother: safe and cared for.

The final observations in the extract reconnect to a dynamic discussed earlier in relation to the third type of trust linked to hope – *we are all going to get through this somehow.* There is nothing fluffy, touchy-feely or Pollyannish about this, but considerable skill and deep commitment on the part of a leader who manages to convey that he is in charge of and protective of this extremely fragile, delicate and important process.

The comment that *the problem is here in the centre. We are dealing with the problem, not with each other* is particularly significant psychoanalytically. The participant seems to describe the creation of a 'third space', discussed in chapter 3, which enables the parties in conflict to momentarily step aside of the antagonism with the enemy and find a space to explore alternative positions and solutions.

The next extract, from the same participant, came at the very end of the interview. The participant was surprised to be sharing this with me, because normally she doesn't know how to explain what happened and she feels most people would be judgemental. I also think not being able to share such a powerful and rich story results from the current lack of validation of the role of emotions in mediation and peacebuilding and the absence of a vocabulary to make sense of the psychological dynamics.

Against the backdrop of the previous extract illustrating the remarkable skill of the negotiator, the relevance of the vignette, again told in detail and with great insight, is in showcasing the highly volatile nature of emotions in peacebuilding and the importance of being able to recognise and manage them. Indeed, as the speaker poignantly describes it, in mediation and peacebuilding once can be suddenly confronted with *things that come from nowhere…*

37 the term 'holding' originally coined by Donald Winnicott and now regularly used in psychoanalysis, refers to the supportive environment that a therapist creates for a client. The concept can be likened to the nurturing and caring behaviour a mother engages in with her child that results in a sense of trust and safety. Therefore, a holding environment is a therapeutic space that allows an emotionally fragile person to deal with affects that might potentially be overwhelming

Vignette 2 – Holding and containment

"*We had been there for 10 days, everyone was really tired…everyone was tired and nobody was getting anywhere. And there was like a bad violent situation on the ground, all this stuff. So we were talking to one of the parties, the international contact group, one of the parties, the facilitator was there and he asked us what should we do. Each of my male diplomatic colleagues said "You should do this and you should think about this strategy". And then I said, "I just think everyone's tired and we should go home". The facilitator lost it with me, said, this is my, you know, grandfatherly person who holds the room together. He stood up and he started screaming at me, "If you don't have this done, I'll call your people whatever headquarters you have, I'll tell your donors you can't be bothered to stick this out, this is.." He stripped me down like totally inappropriately. And screamed and screamed and screamed at me. and I put my head down and waited until he'd finished and then declared the meeting was over and everybody left……..But everybody was mortified. It was like an awful moment when nobody knew what to do, nobody knew where to look. Nobody knew how to look at me, I didn't know where to look, it was just like terrible. And I went out and I kept doing that thing that women do, like, "Don't cry, cry, don't cry, don't cry, I'm not going to cry, I'm not going to cry, I'm just going to face it, take it on the chin, I know he's stressed, he's venting on me, but ouch, that hurt". […] then my Pakistani colleague came over and picked up my hand and went "Oh, I'm so sorry he did that". And of course then I started crying. We went back into the room, I sat at my seat […] and I couldn't stop, right. […] I remember getting a text message from my British colleague across the room, "I hate to say this, but I think it's time you manned up and stopped crying." […]… …The armed group(s) were furious about this. "You don't yell at (participant's name) like that, that's not acceptable behaviour". So they started passing me notes back in the room. "This is not okay; we're going to deal with this. You don't have to be treated like this." So I'm getting all these notes. The facilitator sitting there, also feeling mortified because he's yelled at me across the room. Now it's time to go for lunch, we go to lunch. I'm thinking, where the hell am I going to sit? I don't want to explain, everybody's listening. So do you know where I sat? I sat next to the facilitator. (Laughter). He was like...he's like...we sat there in silence eating. (Laughter). And the whole room was, like, looking like...what's going to happen next? Why is she sitting next to him? We went back into the room, we finished the talks, I'd stopped crying by then, thankfully. End of the day, like, the tension is still in the room, like, nobody can touch it...nobody knows what it is. But it's him and me, like, in this thing, everybody's seen it except for the government. The government doesn't know what's going on. We're getting to the end of the day, debriefing with just the internationals and facilitator. Everybody goes through the issues and talks about it. I'm just sitting there quietly. And then the facilitator says "Well, there's one last agenda for today and that is that I have to apologise because I was completely inappropriate". Now, this man is (elderly, high status, senior, powerful, culturally specific) And he says, "I have to apologise to (participant's name) because my behaviour was completely inappropriate. And I'm extremely sorry that I treated you like that, it was unfair and I vented all of my tiredness and frustration on you. And I apologize"….*

Everyone was like...I could start crying again. […] I accepted his apology. And I said "Yes, I understand". I left the room and I went over to the room where the (?) and the armed group were and I went, "He apologized." And they went, "Oh..." And they were cheering. And they were so relieved because they were thinking about how they were going to take this up with him and tell him it wasn't okay. But that's the kind of vulnerability and humanity that man had in the room is one, he vented out, he didn't do it intentionally, it was just natural. It just came from nowhere. I was the safest person to yell at. He tolerated me sitting next to him at lunch. (Laughter). And then he apologized at the end of the day and he didn't care that everybody knew it.

And I think that story I don't even know how to explain to most people. And as I said I don't usually tell it because for most people again, it's like, "Well, that's not okay, he shouldn't be treating you like that in the room". And it's like, yes, but if you understand human beings and the level of stress etc. And the fact that he owned it unlocked a whole new day where everybody was in a great mood the next day because we got through something weird and difficult. Right and that's really, really powerful".

I will discuss key moments in the extract by following the temporal structure of the narrative.

The context is stuckness – *nobody was getting anywhere* – and pressure – *a bad violent situation on the ground.*

After 10 days of work the negotiations had reached a stalemate. It is at this point that the benign, experienced and protective negotiator *lost it* which, according to the Cambridge dictionary means to stop being able to control one's emotions and suddenly start to shout, cry, or laugh. The speaker points out that this is uncharacteristic for someone who usually is completely in control of his and others' emotions and implicitly underscores that in highly pressurised contexts unbridled emotions can slip through even when someone is highly skilled.

This is unavoidable, given the context and the work conditions, and is not a problem per se. The issue is the capacity to be aware of the sudden shift in one's own emotional register and to reflect on it, the ability to hold the discomfort and enable time and space to find a way through. Navigating through those moments of pressure and sudden irrational outbursts is what makes it a space safe.

In such moments, emotions can become unregulated and explosive. It sounds as if the facilitator was momentarily unaware of his own frustrations, tiredness and exhaustion, as he acknowledged later. The trigger seems to have been the speaker's suggestion that people were tired, and everybody should go home. If we read his angry and threatening words *I'll tell your donors you can't be bothered to stick this out* as a projection of his own feelings, arguably that's exactly what the negotiator couldn't face - that if they stopped it meant that *he* couldn't be bothered to stick it out, and that he had failed as a negotiator to move the negotiations forward. Ultimately, the exact reasons behind the negotiator's outburst are not the focus here. What does matter is (a) that the situation and his own feelings had become momentarily unbearable for the negotiator, and he had irrationally 'evacuated' them through attack and blame and, (b) that he had lost momentarily his capacity for self-reflection and his attunement with the emotional register in the room. In other words, he had gone over his resilience threshold without realising it.

The emotional attack is vicious in its content – it questions the speaker's professional integrity and belittles her – and in this context, it is a public humiliation. The speaker's idiom to describe how she experienced this attack tells us of how it made her feel: *stripped down,* which signifies both the experience of being taken apart (like a machine), *exposed* (as if she felt naked in her humiliating exposure), but also *stripped* of her professional status and authority. Again, it's important to reiterate, as the speaker reminds us, that this behaviour was a striking anomaly for someone whose key skill is to hold fragile situations together and to be mindful of others' feelings. He turns from benign grandfather to judgemental, threatening, and punitive.

The impact of this verbal attack on its target and the group is considerable. The speaker puts her head down – the typical bodily response of someone being shamed – and the shame spreads to the others present, conveyed through the observation *everybody was mortified and nobody knew where to look* – there was no longer any safe space. The shame and humiliation were accompanied by intense vulnerability.

This is the point, in the familiar way in which an injury often turns into conflict, when individuals in the group take up particular positions and the previous cohesion of the group begins to splinter. The immediate individual reactions are polarised. The first is from a colleague who offers acknowledgement and empathy *I'm so sorry he did that.*

The second, opposite reaction is a request for the speaker to man up and recommend performing denial: *behave as if nothing had happened.* Given the previous statement which was openly qualified in gendered terms as *what women do* (being in touch with their emotions, but fearful of expressing them in ways that evoke contempt), this request to turn into a man point to the gendered divisions in the peacebuilding field and what is acceptable or disapproved of, such as a show of vulnerability.

Then we begin to see the fragmentation in the group and the onset of 'us-them' factions and discontent. The armed groups where furious and threatened action: *we are going to deal with this.*

Remarkably, despite the sudden cacophony of messages and recommendations (in itself testifying to the arousal of powerful and uncontrollable emotions), the speaker is able to contain her difficult feelings, not act upon them, and not get drawn into any of the factions which would have further splintered the group. Instead, interestingly, she opts to sit next to the then-grandfather, now-attacker, as still the safest option for her.

What we are seeing here is not simply an interpersonal tiff, but the unfolding of the psychology of conflict and reconciliation. I argue that, by sitting next to the now-attacker, she was able to resist fomenting the splitting and instead she modelled a key stage of reconciliation: coexistence. Enemies who have hurt each other and cannot yet elaborate their mutual experience, need to manage to co-exist, despite their painful emotions. This is powerfully modelled through the speaker and the negotiator *tolerating* sitting side by side, despite general puzzlement. This is a silent coexistence, as words to name and process what has happened haven't been found yet.

Of course, this doesn't resolve the conflict and indeed, *the tension is still in the room, like, nobody can touch it...nobody knows what it is. But it's him and me, like, in this thing.* This is a particularly poignant description of the irrational component of conflict and how, if left unaddressed and uncontained, it acquires a life of its own, it becomes a *thing.* As a *thing,* it cannot be named or talked about -nobody can touch it, nobody knows what it is - but its force affects everybody and changes the dynamics within and between groups.

Finally, at the end of the day, come acknowledgement and reparation: *I have to apologise because I was completely inappropriate. It was unfair and I vented all my tiredness and frustration on you.*

The public apology shows great psychological sophistication: the negotiator recognises the hurt he had caused, but also shows deep self-reflection on his motives. Implicitly, he explains his behaviour as projection of his own uncontained feelings of tiredness and frustration.

The speaker's reply is deceptively simple: *Yes, I understand,* which is not an act of politeness but, as conveyed by her later comments, an empathic appreciation that what happened was not an intentional attack, but that he *vented out* on her. The idiom means to 'let loose, pour out (one's anger, spleen, etc.) upon a person[38] or to subject someone, especially an innocent party, to one's negative emotions or reaction. Thus, the speaker, intuitively formulating her understanding psychologically, is recognising the inevitability of irrational outburst in that pressurised and frustrating context, and that the negotiator was evacuating unbearable feelings onto her because he trusted that, in his temporary inability to contain them, she would do the containing, rather than retaliate. I think this is what she means when she says: I was *the safest person to yell at.*

The comment *if you understand human beings and the level of stress* is a further insight into the psychological toxicity of mediation encounters and the human limits in absorbing it. A superhero can endlessly be hit by bullets, bombs, nuclear radiation and remain unscathed. Peace practitioners are human and as such they have natural resilience thresholds. What we see in this vignette is that the negotiator's ordinarily high capacity for self-reflection momentarily failed. What ensued felt as if *it came from nowhere* which, psychodynamically refer to the disavowed and repressed emotions which violently burst out but, crucially and differently from the last extract in chapter 3, the negotiator and his support were able to work together, rather than become antagonistic. The speaker stepped in and took over the holding function until the negotiator could recover, because it is vital that somebody holds the affects in the room; particularly those affects that cannot be recognised/verbalised yet, that feel like they come from nowhere.

The final comment *I don't even know how to explain to most people* is particularly revealing of the systemic limitations which only allow for a legalistic and normative understanding of conflict: *well, that's not okay, he shouldn't be treating you like that in the room.* Although she agrees that the negotiator's behaviour was wrong, she was able to see that something else was being acted out and that her understanding had to expand. Unfortunately, even though she intuitively understood and managed the crisis, she did not have a psychological toolkit or a psychological vocabulary to make sense of the event and because of this lacuna in the system, she cannot share or utilise her experience for the benefit of peacebuilding practice.

The final paragraph elucidates why this is vitally important for peace mediation. She describes how *the fact that he owned it unlocked a whole new day where everybody was in a great mood the next day because we got through something weird and difficult. Right, and that's really, really powerful.* The key points are: a) that this was a breakthrough – *it unlocked a whole new day* – particularly noticeable in comparison to the starting point

38 The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

nobody was getting anywhere and, b) that this re-established the safety of the encounter and hope - *we got through something weird and difficult* – which was discussed in relation to the third type of trust.

Vignette 3 – Working reflexively with emotions

"I remember one day where I...we...everybody had got very angry on a particular day in the talks. And that night I went back to my hotel room and on the way, I saw this balloon seller and he was selling angry birds balloons. And I bought five of them thinking "Tomorrow I'm going to take these to the room and just put them in the corner because that will be the message that everyone was a bit angry yesterday, let's, like, turn this down a bit". And I spent half the night awake just thinking, am I really going to do this or not? Am I going do this or not? Because everybody else, all the other...my colleagues in the international contact group are just going to say, "No, this is unacceptable behaviour". And I did it. And oh my God, it cracked open that room that day. People were laughing, like, "I think X (speaker's name) is giving us feedback, have you got a balloon? I want a balloon, there aren't enough balloons. Now that we're...if we get through this today, can we get ice cream too?" […] they got through that day, they laughed all the way through it. It unlocked all the issues and on we went. But of course, the British diplomats said to me, "Oh you might have gone too far here." He now tells that story to say, "I was wrong about what (the speaker) did that day. I admit that what she did is that she unlocked an energy in the space that we could now go forward." But, he said "I was against it because I'm a diplomat and I don't think those things are appropriate". And it took him a year or two to say that. But it was exactly that kind of, let's do other ways. […] I mean, you're in a five-star hotel for days on end. You're all eating the same food, you're exhausted, you're trying to think of something new. Let's back up a bit and be normal. And then let's get back to business".

This is an unusual account of an intervention that deviates considerably from protocols, real-politick, or strategic planning. Indeed, the intervention was so 'left field' that the speaker is kept awake at night worrying about the expected negative judgement from her international colleagues'. Yet, what she[39] was able to do is highly valued in mediation practice and is often referred to as 'reading the room', also discussed above, but, given the denial and disregard of the role of emotions in mediation, her intervention is remarkable. Not only did she recognise the emotional register in the negotiation, but she also identified anger as a blockage to the work and found a creative way of addressing it. The unorthodox move of purchasing the balloons was clearly not in her mediation protocol, but it is familiar to clinicians in the form of what we call 'mirroring'. Through this original and seemingly light-hearted act, she was able to bring the emotions to the centre of the room in a way that the participants were able to identify with from a safe distance. Instead of repressing their emotions or staying stuck in a conflictual position, this enabled reflexivity and unblocked the stuckness – *it cracked open the room and, in the words of the diplomat: what she did is that she unlocked an energy in the space that we could now go forward.* The mediation actors recognised that the balloons were giving feedback on what had happened the day before and the childlike request for ice cream if they got through this today is a recognition that dealing with conflict is demanding work and stirs up difficult emotions, but also conveys relief. Something heavy and uncomfortable had been named, brought to attention in a manageable, non-blaming and non-persecutory way.

We also have in this vignette a repetition of what we saw in chapter 3, both in the final vignette and in the perception that mediators rigidly followed the book, even when the "recipe" is out of sync with what is actually happening in the room. The stern disapproval expressed by the mediator in chapter 3, and by the diplomat in this vignette, speaks to the stuckness in the field and the embedded, systemic resistance to interventions and models that deviate from an exclusively technical and rationalist approach to peace mediation.

39 The speaker volunteered to lifting anonymity in terms of her gender which, I think, is significant in terms of what she was able to do.

Conclusions

Throughout the interviews, practitioners made implicit or explicit reference to what they viewed as the key qualities of a good mediator, and to the skills they considered helpful or indispensable in facilitating a successful mediation. In this chapter I have discussed the tools, qualities and skills identified by the participants, and explained their psychological meaning and significance. Some of the skills mentioned regularly were a capacity for active and non-judgemental listening, humility, curiosity, patience, tolerance, aptitude for neutrality, and a developed emotional intelligence. Based on the premise that both therapy and mediation are relational encounters and, as such, they are most effective when emotions can be managed and contained and the people involved feel safe and treated with respect and care, I applied a psychodynamic lens to a series of vignettes to:

offer a psychological reading of key moments in the vignettes and characteristics of the actors described by drawing primarily on psychodynamic theory and practice with the intent to begin to develop a vocabulary and a toolkit for mediation practitioners and to promote the development of a sensitivity to the emotional currents as a key dynamic in peace mediation.

In doing so, I aimed to illustrate the importance of approaching and appreciating mediation encounters as emotionally charged intersubjective encounters, thus bringing to the fore the fundamental role of emotions and the urgent need to attend to, understand, and manage the emotional register and currents powerfully pulsing through the encounters.

Through a psychodynamic reading, the vignettes illustrated that:

1. What erupts in mediation encounters might not be simply interpersonal or personal to the individuals involved but could also be a communication through enactment of unrecognised contexts and aspects of the conflict (see final vignette at the end of chapter 3). I argue that the vignettes, in particular vignette 2, illustrate and model the unfolding of the psychology of conflict and reconciliation. Moreover, it illustrates the importance of training mediation actors to develop awareness of and resist the ongoing pull towards splitting and the necessity of instead modelling psychological containment and reparative actions such as coexistence.

2. Approaching interpersonal interactions between practitioners in mediation settings as modelling the psychology of conflict and reconciliation illustrates the vital role that psychological insight can play in breakthroughs in peace mediation processes. It highlights the importance of containing something not yet recognised or processed, e.g. the 'excessive' in the room that is creating anxiety. It can also open new imaginaries when a way forward cannot be imagined yet and provide evidence for hope.

3. The central place of emotions in mediation contexts and the key role played by practitioners' self-reflexivity in recognising and managing abrupt changes in the emotional register, particularly when dealing with psychological evacuations of unacknowledged and unprocessed feelings.

Psychological descriptors

holding; containment; splitting; acting out and enactment; mirroring; latent and manifest aspects of behaviour and responses; need for psychological sensitivity to read later meanings; active listening and paraphrasing; empathy; relationality; intersubjective encounters; reflexivity; emotional intelligence; transference; safe spaces; third space; psychodynamic defence mechanism such as projection, disavowal, repression; vulnerability, resilience, and resilience thresholds.

Recommendations

1. Introduce key concepts from psychodynamic psychology into mediation **trainings** to develop psychological sensitivity and agility in peace mediation practitioners by providing them with a vocabulary and a theoretical understanding of the operations of the unconscious mind and unprocessed affects.

2. Further **research** is needed to setup a practice-based archive of practice to contribute to the creation of a psychological toolkit for mediation practitioners. Further research is needed to gather grounded experience gained in a variety of culturally and politically different settings into an archive of techniques and tools. These experience-based archive should be accessible to other practitioners to facilitate knowledge transfer among practitioners, and to feed into an iterative toolkit for practice, through a psychological learning loop. The toolkit should be situated, flexible and, importantly, combine theoretical conceptualisation with contextual real-life applications. Gathering and mapping the anecdotes and reading them psychologically is the first necessary step in this process.

3. Combine hard science (technical aspects of training and theory, both mediation and psychology) with soft science (accumulation of experience and contextual application of the hard science) into expertise.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I want to conclude this report with a personal reflection. It has been a great privilege to carry out this research. I have learnt a huge amount from the rich interviews with peace mediators who have impressed me greatly for their commitment, the depth of their thinking and dedication, and the passion with which they work. It is clear to me that being a peace mediator is a vocation, not a mere job. Their skills and what they achieve, against all odds, are remarkable and increasingly needed. I hope that this pilot project will contribute to peace mediation and will enhance practitioners' skills for a task that is desperately needed in today's world.

Professor Dr Irene Bruna Seu

APPENDIX

Table 1: Participants' Region of Origin

The table below categorises participants at the broad level of North/South/East/West of Continents to better preserve the anonymity of participants.

Continent	Total number of participants (N)
North Africa	2
East Africa	2
Southern Africa	5
North America	1
South America	1
East Asia	1
South Asia	1
Australasia	1
Europe	11
Total	25

Table 2: Participants' Region of Operation

The table lists the continent of operation in which individual participants had worked. Participants have been counted against multiple geographies where this reflects the breadth of their experience.

Continent	(N)
North Africa	4
Central Africa	4
East Africa	10
Southern Africa	5
West Africa	3
South America	3
East Asia	3
Middle East	6
Europe	5

Table 3: Type of mediation

Table 3 provides information on the type of mediation that participants are/were engaged in: frontline mediation or mediation support (top grouping), and whether the mediation processes they are/were engaged in are high-level geopolitical mediation processes (e.g. 'Track 1') or civil society mediation (e.g. 'Track 2' and 'Track 3' processes). Where some participants had experience across both front line and mediation support, and across both geopolitical and civil society processes, they have been categorized according to where they have delivered most of their work.

Type of Mediation	(N)
Frontline Mediation	20
Mediation Support	5
Total	25
High-level Geopolitical Processes	19
Civil Society Processes	6
Total	25

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

CREHR
Centre for Researching & Embedding Human Rights

Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON