

Inclusive of Whom, and for What Purpose? Strategies of Inclusion in Peacemaking^{*}

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Introduction

Inclusion has emerged as a prominent theme at the heart of peacemaking across theory, policy and practice. Mediation scholars, policy makers, and practitioners have argued that inclusion is critical for ending armed conflicts (Nilsson, 2012; Krause et al, 2018; Yousuf, 2018) and building peaceful states and societies (Castillejo, 2014; Bell and Pospisil, 2017; International IDEA, 2017; Pospisil and Rocha Menocal, 2017; World Bank Group and United Nations, 2018). These insights have been accompanied by efforts to promote inclusive peacemaking through stronger international policy frameworks (de Waal, 2017; Turner, 2020). However, despite its recent ubiquity, inclusion has remained an ill-defined term (Hellmüller, 2019). Calling for *inclusive* peace processes inevitably raises the questions of *whom* to include, *how* and *why*. Since peacemaking commonly entails the (re)negotiation of core features of state and society, discourses and practices of inclusion can be critical. Inclusion raises a

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host of issues that are at the heart of violent conflict and its resolution, pertaining not only to political voice and representation, but to questions of the identity of the included, their relationships and the political community they are part of. It thus appears that the seemingly benign and consensual idea of inclusion is, in fact, highly political.

This chapter seeks to problematize the research, policy and practice of inclusion by situating it in larger debates about what peace means and how it can be achieved. The idea of inclusion, if not the exact term, has long played an important role in the study of peace. We therefore aim to bring the epistemic dimension of the term – theories of peacebuilding that stipulate the relationship between inclusion and peace – into conversation with the emerging international policy framework on inclusive peacemaking, as well as with the practical efforts of mediation actors to promote inclusion in peace processes. We identify three main rationales put forth for inclusion that can be derived from peacemaking theory, and argue that these correspond with specific strategies of inclusion in peacemaking policy and practice. Importantly, these strategies also have implications for how the included are framed and this lastly effects the kind of peace that can be achieved. The chapter thus highlights important tensions in the conceptualization and use of inclusion and offers ways forward for a reflexive research and practice of inclusion.

The chapter first discusses the rationales for inclusion put forward in peacemaking theory by asking how scholars have viewed the relationship between inclusion and peace. It discusses three broad rationales for inclusion: to increase the legitimacy of processes, to protect or empower specific groups, or to transform relationships. We then turn to policy. The second section discusses how three corresponding inclusion strategies are represented in key United Nations (UN) documents that provide guidance on inclusive peacemaking, and demonstrates how these rely on framing the included in open, closed or relational terms. In a final section, we ask how this is affecting practice. While efforts to foster inclusion are commonly associated with promoting broader participation of an openly defined public in order to increase the legitimacy of a given peace process, international inclusion policy and practice have also been shaped by essentializing discourses that aim to protect or empower specific groups. While this leads to trade-offs and contradictions in current peacemaking practice, we suggest that a relational inclusion strategy may help advance a peace that is both more contextually grounded and more focused on long-term conflict transformation. The conclusion sketches out the cornerstones of a research agenda that could contribute to a more critical and more relevant study of inclusion in peacemaking.

Rationales for Inclusion in Peacemaking Theory

Why should inclusion matter in peacemaking? What relationships have scholars found between inclusion and peace? In this section, we identify three major rationales for inclusion emerging from peacemaking and peacebuilding theory, which contain assumptions about the relationship between inclusion and peace. Each of these rationales corresponds with different framings of the included. First, inclusion is advanced to build a more legitimate peace through broader participation, secondly, to empower and protect specific, closely defined actor groups, promoting them as champions of peace, and thirdly to transform the social and political structures that underlie conflict. The first rationale frames the included in open terms that can accommodate a heterogeneity of characteristics and interests, the second in closed terms pertaining to specific identity traits, and the third frames the included in relational terms emerging within a specific social, cultural or political context. In the following, we briefly map these three rationales and corresponding framings in the peacemaking and peacebuilding literature.¹

Inclusion to Build Legitimacy

The first rationale for inclusion is based on the assumption that broadening participation in a peace process will make resulting peace agreements more legitimate by ensuring the process is representative of a broader set of interests. A version of this rationale is already evident in the literature on power sharing, focusing on ending violence by including major conflict parties and distributing power among them (Malmin Binningsbø, 2013). Power-sharing research initially focused narrowly on the role of armed actors and political elites, seeing elite cooperation and elite bargains as an important precondition for peace (Lindemann, 2008; Norris, 2008; Mehler, 2009; Lindemann, 2011). The question of inclusion further focused on so-called ‘spoilers’, actors that can derail agreements if excluded (Nilsson, 2008; Blaydes and de Maio, 2010; Nilsson and Söderberg Kovacs, 2011; Reiter, 2016). From this perspective, horizontal inclusion of all, usually armed, actors ensures that incentives are not created for those left out to destabilize an agreement (Raffoul, 2019).

¹ This brief review of rationales for inclusion does not purport to be comprehensive. Rather, it serves to highlight that different rationales require different framings and assumptions about the included. The subsequent sections demonstrate the analytical utility of this perspective.

Beyond ending violence, power-sharing agreements also aim to build more legitimate political arrangements by distributing power among and between conflict parties and their constituencies (Spears, 2000; Hartzell and Hoddie, 2003; Hoddie, 2014; Hartzell and Hoddie, 2015). Therefore, the scope of inclusion is usually extended beyond armed elite actors, as evidenced in research on the role of civil society in peace processes (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007; Wanis-St. John, 2008; Paffenholz, 2010; Nilsson, 2012). For instance, scholars have argued that participation of actors beyond the main armed conflict parties makes peace processes more legitimate and agreements more likely to be implemented. Civil society can play an important role in increasing the transparency of peace process and holding conflict parties to account (Nilsson, 2012; Zanker, 2014) and can enable inclusive settlements beyond formal institutions and outside the capital (Heitz, 2009). It has also been suggested that civil society inclusion in negotiations increases the durability of peace, particularly in non-democratic societies (Nilsson, 2012).

Inclusion as a means to build legitimacy also features in debates about the importance of national or local ownership in peacebuilding and political transitions (Reich, 2006; Chesterman, 2007). The principle of ownership builds on the assumption that the 'success of any reform process depends on the extent to which it is perceived as legitimate by those who have to live with the outcomes' (Donais, 2009: 121) and seeks to reconcile international peacebuilding agendas with the participation of local actors in order to build a legitimate, 'popular peace' (Roberts, 2011). For mediators, this raises the practical question of which actors need to be included in order to reach legitimate agreements (Goldmann et al, 2013). In contrast, more critical scholars argue that the discourse of ownership is largely used as a tool to legitimize international activities in conflict-affected contexts, pointing to the largely symbolic and discursive value of calls for broader inclusion and participation (Kappler and Lemay-Hérbert, 2015; von Billerbeck, 2016). Importantly, calls for inclusion that aim to build legitimacy through broad participation generally use vague framings of the included, leaving their translation into tangible policy options open. Given the fact that seats at the negotiation table are limited, any efforts to make peace processes more broadly inclusive will face the challenge of reconciling the interests of more narrowly defined actor groups.

Inclusion to Empower and Protect

Inclusion is also advanced in order to empower and protect particular groups. In this case, the assumption is that building peace requires

strengthening the position of specific actors that have suffered in conflict or who can be champions of peace. Their inclusion aims at protecting their rights, enhancing their political voice or addressing previous harms. This rationale frames the included in closed terms, as specific groups with a common identity trait, such as gender, language or ethnicity, and as such accentuates and fixes these, particularly where they are linked to vulnerabilities that emerge in conflict. As Turner has argued, 'negotiating a settlement between elites and armed actors perpetuates the marginalisation of vulnerable groups who may have suffered the most as the result of conflict' (Turner, 2020). The inclusion of these groups thus serves as a counter-strategy.

In relation to ethnic, linguistic or religious groups, scholars have argued for their inclusion in peace processes and in favour of provisions for group rights in peace agreements as crucial for conflict resolution (Kempin Reuter, 2012; Wise, 2018), building on broader debates about the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994) and minority rights (Kymlicka, 1996). Critics have argued that these approaches overlook groups' nature as mutable social formations, noting that measures aimed at empowerment can entrench identities and conflict cleavages, thus potentially perpetuating conflict (Bose, 2002). However, empowerment and protection have been particularly prominent rationales in the context of the inclusion of women in peacemaking, as outlined in the UN's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Here too, scholars have highlighted the agenda's implicit essentialization of women as both vulnerable and peaceful (Davies and True, 2019). However, essentialized framings can also be used to advance changes in the distribution of power in post-conflict contexts (Porter, 2007, 2013). As such, the case for women's, and other marginalized actors', inclusion in peace processes can be made by drawing on Spivak's concept of 'strategic essentialism', whereby differences within a group are strategically downplayed for the sake of an emancipatory political project (Spivak, 1988). In fact, much of the women's empowerment discourse has focused on vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence. Women have been portrayed as victims of war in need of protection. The rationale of inclusion then is to counteract women's vulnerability by increasing their role in peace processes (Väyrynen, 2010: 147). While the view of women as peaceful victims, often reproduced in arguments for their inclusion in peacemaking, has empowered women to mobilize politically, it also reaffirms traditional gender roles that marginalize women in political life (Väyrynen, 2010; Aharoni, 2017: 311–12), with possible disempowering effects (Porter, 2007: 74).

Inclusion to Transform Relationships and Build Community

Inclusion can also be advanced to transform relations between groups, framing the included neither in broad and open, nor in essentialized and closed, but rather in relational terms. This rationale for inclusion is occupied with the relations between conflict stakeholders, and with transforming and rebuilding those in line with insights from the conflict transformation literature (Lederach, 1997, 2005). The latter views conflict as a consequence of contradictions in the structure of society that can be transcended through a change in relationships. Inclusive processes thus aim to build a community ‘in which the past division of winners versus losers, victims versus perpetrators, “us” and “them” are overcome’, however, without ‘erasing or evading differences between people’ (Mani, 2005: 511–12).

As captured in Galtung’s ‘triangle of violence’, this approach is interested in the interaction between direct, cultural and structural forms of violence (Chetail, 2009: 1). It also builds on development research and ‘dependency-thinking’, which advances concepts of positive peace that focus on the material and social relationships between conflict stakeholders (Götschel, 2009: 92–3) and rejects fixed understandings of conflict party identities and interests. Instead, scholars highlight how interests depend on social relationships and focus on changing the parties ‘from adversaries to something else’ (Mitchell, 2002: 16), arguing for peacebuilding to be ‘responsive to the experiential and subjective realities shaping people’s perspectives and needs’ (Lederach, 1997: 24). Lederach’s integrated framework for peacebuilding considers the visible *issue* in the context of the wider *relationship* among conflict parties, as well as the systems and sub-systems in which these relationships are located. For instance, conflicts underpinned by a relationship of prejudice or bias should be analysed and tackled as part of a broader system of social structures which create and perpetuate racism (Lederach, 1997: 24). Peace can thus be understood as a ‘dynamic social construct’ and peacebuilding should aim at ‘transform(ing) conflict towards more sustainable and peaceful relationships’ (Lederach, 1997: 20).

This approach requires peacemakers to make sense of the web of relationships in which conflict occurs, before aiming at social change through rebuilding the social spaces that give people a sense of identity (Lederach, 2005). For the question of inclusion in peacemaking, this implies a focus on the relationships between included actors. While not radically deconstructing actor categories, inclusion can nonetheless address cultures of domination and oppressive power structures by working on ‘culturally sanctioned forms of oppression, whether related to caste, ethnic identity, sexuality or ability’ (Francis, 2004: 7). The emphasis

on relationality is chosen in order to facilitate a change of the social and cultural structures that underpin conflict. From this point of view, inclusion can only play a meaningful role in peace processes if practised in a way that accounts for the constructedness of identities through relationships and aims at their transformation.

Strategies of Inclusion in International Peacemaking Policy

Following the discussion of the rationales for inclusion in peacemaking theory, this section discusses how these correspond with strategies of inclusion on the international policy level. To this end, we studied how different framings of inclusion are manifested in key UN documents. The documents are either guidance material produced by the UN's Mediation Support Unit (MSU) and its partners, or form part of the UN's normative framework on mediation, which include statements and reports by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG), and resolutions by the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the UN General Assembly (UNGA).² The document analysis was complemented by interviews with practitioners engaged in UN mediation and mediation support, whom we asked about their practices of fostering inclusion in peace processes, and their reflections on the purpose(s) of inclusion in peacemaking.³ Our analysis was guided by two questions: which referent object of inclusion do the policy documents identify, and for what purpose?⁴ In a first step,

² Most of these documents were retrieved from the UN's *Peacemaker* Website, [online] available from: www.peacemaker.un.org (accessed March 2018), which aims to provide 'actors involved in peace processes and the negotiation of peace agreements with key knowledge material to support their work effectively'. In addition, we retrieved further sources relevant for mediation from the Official Document System of the United Nations. These included UNSC and UNGA resolutions related to peacemaking without specific country focus, as well as UNSC Presidential statements and reports by the Secretary-General that discuss peace and security issues and mediation. In total, we analysed 108 documents.

³ We conducted nine expert interviews. In order to enable frank conversations about politically sensitive processes, we offered full anonymity to the respondents.

⁴ To this end, we screened more than 500 text segments that contain references to inclusion or participation. The basic unit of analysis was a paragraph. Using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software, we conducted an automated search for references to inclusion and participation, in either nominal or verbal constructions. The text segments were then qualitatively analysed, with the reading scope limited to the respective paragraph.

we descriptively coded the identified objects of inclusion. In most cases, these are specific actor types, such as women, youth or civil society, while sometimes reference is made to territorial, scalar or social dimensions, such as regions, marginalized groups, or minorities. Against the backdrop of the literature discussed earlier, we inferred that references to the object of inclusion can be grouped according to at least three main categories of framings: *open* references, such as to ‘stakeholders’, ‘communities’ or ‘citizens’, which are ambiguous in meaning and provide room for interpretation; *closed* references, such as to ‘women’ or ‘youth’, referring to an actor group that is identifiable according to relatively clear criteria; and *relational* references, such as to ‘powerful’ or ‘marginalised actors’, which derive their meaning from being situated in a specific socio-political context. Of course, it can be argued that all terms are ultimately relational as they form part of a system of signification in which no single signifier can independently convey meaning. However, the division into categories of framings serves to illustrate that these correspond with the three rationales for inclusion identified in the preceding section, variously shaping the view on the included and their role in peacemaking.⁵

A birds-eye view on the body of documents reveals a pattern in the distribution of framings of inclusion, with considerable variation between guidance documents and the normative framework. For example, UNSC resolutions predominantly use closed formulations that fix actor identities, with references to women making up the majority of these, while mediation guidance relies more on open and relational terminology. Reports by the Secretary-General use both relational and open terminology but are dominated by closed terms, which are used at least once in every report. The use of relational terminology is strongest in UN mediation guidance, where almost a third of all mentions of inclusion use a relational framing, occurring in two thirds of all documents. The relevance of these findings lies in the different purposes of these documents in practice. While the normative framework, and in particular UNSC resolutions, are in principle binding documents, mediation guidance notes are suggestive, rather than authoritative, and reflect UN best practice.

⁵ Some terms also fit more than one of these categories. For instance, the term ‘stakeholder’ has a strongly relational dimension as membership of this group depends on an interest in the peace process in question. On the other hand, the term provides room for interpretation since it could potentially extend more broadly to everyone affected by a conflict, whether domestically or abroad. In those cases, terms were added to both categories.

Open Framings: Voices, Stakeholders and Civil Society

The UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012), the UN's cornerstone document on mediation, defines 'inclusivity' as referring to 'the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort' (UNSG, 2012: 11). The emphasis is on inclusion beyond the conflict parties, and the argument is grounded in inclusion as a path to broad-based buy-in to peace. The guidance stresses that 'it cannot be assumed that conflict parties have legitimacy with, or represent, the wider public'; mediation efforts limited to the main conflict parties may thus create perverse incentives for violence, while civil society actors can increase the legitimacy of a peace process (UNSG, 2012: 11).

References to inclusion with the aim of increasing the legitimacy of peace processes predominantly employ open framings, for instance when reference is made to the participation of 'stakeholders', 'voices' or 'perspectives'. References to civil society inclusion are often grounded in arguments about strengthening a peace process's legitimacy (UNGA, 2012: 25–6), or local ownership (UNGA, 2012: 50), as a means of including a variety of perspectives (UNGA, 2012: 48), ensuring that grievances are addressed (UNGA, 2012: 101), or exerting influence on conflict parties (UNSC, 2014: 6). Alongside 'civil society', the term 'stakeholders' is also dominant. The UNSG Report on *Strengthening the Role of Mediation*, for instance, makes several references to stakeholder inclusion, arguing that it 'creates mechanisms to include all perspectives along the process' (UNGA, 2012: 20), and for 'cultivating and exercising ownership' (UNGA, 2012: 50). Interestingly, reference to 'stakeholders' is largely absent from UNSC and UNGA resolutions. Reference to stakeholders is much more pronounced in mediation guidance documents, which establish a link between stakeholder inclusion and more sustainable and legitimate processes based on national or local ownership (UNSG, 2012: 12; Mason, 2013: 2; UNDP and UNEP, 2015: 10), establishing broader buy-in (UNDP and UNEP, 2015: 11), creating room for a diversity of ideas (Mason, 2013: 77), including all or different perspectives (UNSG, 2012: 4, 10), and a greater likelihood of conflict causes being addressed (UNDP and UNEP, 2015: 6). Open terminology that refers to the need for broad-based inclusion of stakeholders, voices, and perspectives is thus mainly based on instrumental arguments, which claim that broad-based inclusion will increase the legitimacy of the process and will lead to more sustainable results.

Closed Framings: Women, Youth and Religious Actors

The dominant framings across all document types, however, are closed framings, and among these, references to women. This is unsurprising given the number of UNSC resolutions that were adopted in the past two decades as part of the UN's WPS agenda, which has been accompanied by significant international advocacy efforts to promote women's inclusion in peacemaking (Martin de Almagro, 2018; True and Wiener, 2019). Our interviews with practitioners similarly suggest a widespread equation of 'inclusion' with 'women's inclusion' among mediation professionals, indicating that the inclusion agenda has been decidedly shaped by the WPS agenda.

The most well-known resolution on women's inclusion, UNSC resolution 1325, establishes a relationship between the 'maintenance and promotion of international peace security' and the 'protection and full participation' of women and girls (UNSC, 2000). Based on the claim that 'civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict', the resolution suggests a range of measures aimed at the increased participation of women in conflict prevention, management and resolution. At the same time, the resolution explicitly cites international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, while repeatedly stressing their 'special needs', and calls on all parties to armed conflict to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and on states to prosecute respective crimes. The provisions for increased participation are thus closely tied to the protection of women's rights.

A strong emphasis on women's participation is also visible in reports by the UNSG. The *Strengthening the Role of Mediation* (2012) report discusses UN-led mediation activities, and documents how mediators have aimed to include women therein, including through the employment of gender advisers (UNGA, 2012: 33), the provision of funds to support women's participation in peace panels, and consultations with women (UNGA, 2012: 122). These efforts are built on the assumption that it requires women to address the gendered dimensions of conflict, as 'women' and 'gender expertise' are almost always mentioned jointly without differentiation. Importantly, this essentialism is not strategic in its effort to empower women as a social group, but seems to associate gender expertise with women as a fixed category. Our interviews with mediation practitioners similarly suggest that the inclusion of women in peace processes is often driven by assumptions about their roles and interests that leave little room for their empowerment through inclusion, and in fact may cement their marginalization in public life.

In addition to women, other closed terms, such as ‘youth’ or ‘religious groups’ also feature in the policy documents, albeit far less prominently. These are more strongly represented in the mediation guidance documents than in the international normative framework. In contrast to women, the participation of these groups is not justified by protection or empowerment rationales, but rather on functional grounds. While ‘youth’ and ‘religious groups’ are often subsumed under civil society (UNSG, 2017: 28), in some cases they are singled out as actors with a distinct role, for instance when ‘youth’ are identified as possible spoilers to an agreement (Mason, 2013: 47). As the interviews discussed later illustrate, references to different closed categories in policy documents can lead to competing claims for inclusion in light of the ultimately limited seats available at a negotiation table.

Relational Framings: the Marginalized and Vulnerable, Versus Powerful Actors

Finally, relational framings feature relatively weakly in the policy documents. Their use is largely confined to mediation guidance and a few sections of UNSG reports. One plausible explanation for this pattern is that relational thinking stems mainly from the practice of mediation and gains its entry through the reporting on best practices and lessons learned. The most striking examples of the use of a relational term are references to ‘marginalised’ groups or actors, sometimes in relation with the more open term ‘stakeholder’ (UNDP and UNEP, 2015: 9). Other relational terms, such as ‘minorities’, ‘powerful actors’ or ‘vulnerable groups’, are largely absent from UNSC and UNGA resolutions, while featuring strongly in mediation guidance. The latter discuss marginalization, for example in relation to decision-making in negotiation processes, which should safeguard marginalized interests vis-à-vis ‘the most powerful stakeholders’ (Mason, 2013: 76; UNDP and UNEP, 2015: 34). While sometimes reference is broadly made to ‘social, demographic, religious and regional minority identities’ (UNDP, 2017: 10), some statements limit the focus to specific groups such as women (UNITAR and UNDP, 2010: 14; UNDP, 2017: 10), indigenous people (UNDP and UNEP, 2015: 8, 36), or youth (UNDP and UNEP, 2015: 8, 36; UNDP, 2017: 10), thus merging relational and closed terms.

Relational framings of inclusion situate the object of inclusion within their social and political relationships and thus hint at structural inequalities and power imbalances as underlying causes of conflict. This reflects the underlying assumptions of the conflict transformation school, resulting

in the combination of closed and relational terminology employed with a view to transforming conflict. The focus on the relationship between conflict parties is complemented by an open conception of the community in which conflict transformation has to take place. This reason can also take instrumental forms: inclusive mediation is portrayed as a prerequisite to prevent ‘marginalised groups ... [from] end[ing] up with the desire to undermine any agreements reached’ (Mason, 2013: 75). This is particularly visible in statements about the necessity to include marginalized regions in which armed conflict has occurred, such as Darfur (Mason, 2013: 50).

Complementary or Conflicting Framings of Inclusion?

The review of international peacemaking policy demonstrates a tension between efforts to empower and protect specific groups, which requires naming and defining them, and the urge to stress their socio-political construction and thus malleability. The latter would allow for a context-sensitive and dynamic practice of inclusion that avoids the pitfalls of essentialization, while the former may be necessary to combat the long-standing exclusion of certain actors from peacemaking. The policy documents at times acknowledge this tension. For instance, the UN Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies recognizes that ‘it may be difficult to engage interest groups that are not easily defined or lack clear leadership, such as social movements, youth, and women’s groups’ while at the same time asking mediators to ‘put a premium on stakeholder mapping, planning and management of the process’ (UNDP, 2017: 21). Interviews with mediation practitioners indicate that such stakeholder mapping is often beyond their capacities, leading them to fall back on inclusion strategies that rely on closed terms and a ‘box-ticking’ mentality. Efforts to avoid essentializing understandings of the included are also evident in the guidance, which stresses that the ‘call for inclusion ... is not limited to women, but applies to social, demographic, religious and regional minority identities as well as to youth and to organised civil society and professional organisations’ (UNDP, 2017: 6). However, the document justifies the focus on the ‘gender dimension’ by reference to the fact that ‘women and girls tend to be identified first and foremost as victims of violence’, therefore ‘rights-based attention to their needs is of paramount importance’ (UNDP, 2017: 6–7). It also argues that while ‘women are frequently part of movements demanding change’, they ‘tend to be excluded from peace and transition processes’, and further makes the case that women’s inclusion can have broader positive effects

as it is ‘more likely to generate broad national ownership and support’ by expanding ‘the range of domestic constituencies engaged in a peace processes’ (UNDP, 2017: 8).

This and other policy documents are thus characterized by an intermingling of two functional arguments: on the one hand, specific groups such as women merit particular protection, which their inclusion in peacemaking is posited to enhance. On the other hand, these groups are included for their substantive contributions to peacemaking and in order to contribute to broader participation. In practice, however, promoting broad-based inclusion through closed categories comes with trade-offs, as will be argued in the next section. In contrast, relational framings that focus on the material, social and cultural relations between groups may transcend this tension and offer an avenue for context-sensitive and transformative inclusion practices.

Strategies of Inclusion in Peacemaking Practice

This final section explores how mediation professionals directly involved in peace process design make practical decisions about inclusion and how their choices relate to the rationales and framings found in peacemaking theory and policy.⁶ To this end, we asked professionals with experience in UN mediation and mediation support about their practices of fostering inclusion in peace processes and the role of policy and guidance documents therein.⁷ Overall, the focus on inclusion in policy discourses is mirrored in peacemaking practice. However, the normative framework and guidance

⁶ This section builds on nine expert interviews with current and former UN mediators, mediation support actors, and members of UN mediation teams. The interviewees included current and former staff at MSU, who were involved both in drafting guidance documents and in supporting UN Special Envoys and their teams, as well as former senior members of UN Special Envoy teams and political missions. Jointly, the interviewees have experience working directly on over a dozen peace processes on behalf of the UN in the past two decades, including in Afghanistan, Somalia, Colombia, Syria, Yemen and Cyprus. All interviews were conducted between July 2018 and April 2019. One interview was conducted in person, and the remainder via phone or video call, and all but two interviews were conducted jointly by the two authors.

⁷ This reflection was inspired by two years of engagement in research–policy transfer in the field of peace process design and mediation, during which the authors were able to observe first-hand the prevailing discourses and practices of inclusion. These experiences additionally fed into the analysis. Unless otherwise noted, the statements made in this section are based on the expert interviews conducted. To protect their anonymity we do not attribute any findings to specific interviewees.

on inclusion stands in tension with the pragmatic choices of mediators and their often limited influence in a given peace process. Inclusive peacemaking is easier prescribed than done. In fact, for practitioners, there exist significant trade-offs and dilemmas when operationalizing inclusion. While inclusion discourse has led to a heightening of demands for participation in peace processes and has thus fuelled the game of ‘enlarging the table’ – which had traditionally been both exclusive and elitist – seats at the negotiation table are inevitably limited. This problem is augmented by the increasing fragmentation of armed groups and conflict stakeholders in contemporary armed conflicts.⁸

The previously mentioned policy documents affect peacemaking practice in various ways, ranging from directive to suggestive. UNSC resolutions inform the mandates of UN peace operations and political missions, thus providing clear prescriptions for how to practise inclusion. While UNSC resolutions provide ‘a floor, not a ceiling’ for inclusion, as one high-level mediator put it, they certainly shape the menu of options by putting political weight behind the inclusion of specific actors. Resolutions by the UNSC and UNGA also shape the discourse on inclusion more broadly, by rallying member states behind particular inclusion agendas that highlight specific conflict stakeholders. UN guidance documents, on the other hand, originate with the MSU’s mission to professionalize mediation (Convergne, 2016), signalling that mediation is not an intuitive practice, but a principled and structured one. While not binding, they provide advice and principles that serve as a foundation for mediation practice. However, for practitioners these documents often appear too broadly worded to be readily implementable. Moreover, several interviewees mentioned that the ambitious nature of international policy on inclusion overstates the actual influence that mediators exercise at the negotiation table. Mediators may shape the process by suggesting specific designs and making arguments for inclusion on normative or pragmatic grounds. However, they cannot impose any inclusive arrangements against the will of the conflict parties or influential stakeholders.

⁸ This is certainly the case for seats at the formal negotiation table, but practically also applies to other inclusion formats such as consultations. Even internet-based consultations remain limitedly inclusive in practice due to challenges in processing large numbers of responses.

Operationalizing an Inclusive Peace for All?

While conflict parties tend to understand inclusion as confined to those who bear arms, for mediators, inclusion beyond armed actors aims at securing a more lasting peace, by avoiding elite deals that create incentives for future violence. Some mediators also consider the purpose of broadening inclusion as fostering public support for a peace process, in which case they concede that often a merely symbolic form of inclusion is practised, culminating in the ‘photo opportunity’ with members of religious groups, civil society, or women. This is because the political realities of peace processes make broad-based inclusion an ideal, rather than a realistic objective. Some mediators bemoan the fact that the UN normative framework and guidance documents ignore these realities, making inclusion appear like a largely rhetorical aspiration by the UN, rather than a method employed strategically to make peace according to one of the earlier-mentioned rationales.

While mediators’ long-term goal may be to build legitimate peace and inclusive governance, these matter less in the short-term politics of peacemaking, and might even impede mediators’ priority to end violence, requiring first and foremost getting armed actors to the negotiation table. In this reading, ‘open term’ inclusion suffers additionally from the weakening of liberal approaches and the space for civil society shrinking across the world. Recent attempts at broadening inclusion to women and civil society in UN-mediated peace processes for Syria and Yemen have demonstrated that little room exists for ambitious normative projects. Nonetheless, a common mediator strategy to foster inclusion is to present pragmatic arguments to conflict parties, focusing on how enlarging representation at the table beyond the conflict parties, or diversifying their own delegations, can enhance their legitimacy and strengthen ties to their constituents, increase public support for the talks, and strengthen the legacy of the process. These considerations are particularly pressing in light of the increased fragmentation of armed groups in contemporary conflicts.

However, the inherently context-specific nature of peacemaking is in tension with generic formulations in policy documents that frame the included in open terms, such as ‘stakeholders’ or ‘civil society’, leaving mediators with difficult choices in operationalizing inclusion. In practice, stakeholders need to be mapped out – a task that requires time, resources and deep context knowledge, none of which are guaranteed features in mediation. And while the term ‘civil society’ continues to convey a sense of impartiality, in practice, included civil society actors have political opinions that do not correspond with a neutral, umbrella-like

perspective of the needs and interests of a broader population. In the end, political and operational pressures on mediation teams often lead to inclusion efforts following a ‘standard formula’ of consultations and ‘photo opportunities’, giving voice predominantly to representatives of urban-based, professionalized civil society organizations.

Box-ticking Exercises: an Inclusive Peace for Few?

Mediation professionals commonly invoke closed framings of the included, most prominently in relation to a prioritization of women’s inclusion, and to a lesser extent of youth. This reflects the significant emphasis there has been on women’s participation in peace processes since the passing of UNSC resolution 1325. The ready association of ‘inclusion’ with ‘women’ among practitioners is also facilitated by institutionalized UN mechanisms, including the MSU’s Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, which includes an expert on ‘Gender and Inclusion’, or the direct support provided by UN Women to women’s inclusion in various ongoing peace processes.

However, the reverting to closed terms is also a fallback option in light of the difficulties of operationalizing an open framing of the included. This is because without in-depth knowledge of a given context, as one interviewee put it, ‘it is impossible to see who is missing from the table’. Predefined actor groups based on gender or age simplify this intricate task. Women are an identifiable group: outsiders can easily count the number of women in a process, which then serves as a proxy for its inclusiveness. Several interviewees noted the danger of developing a ‘box-ticking’ mentality around inclusion, which reduces sensitivity to the conflict context, potentially obscures important fault lines, and can turn inclusion into a tokenistic exercise.

Inclusion strategies that apply closed framings also presume an essentialized group interest. For mediation practitioners, the rationale for women’s inclusion corresponds with arguments presented in UN policy: to enhance women’s voices and foster more diverse participation in order to advance women’s rights and combat sexual and gender-based violence. Concrete UN mediation support activities in the realm of women’s inclusion have empowerment at their core, typically involving capacity building and networking to prepare women for upcoming negotiations. However, respondents noted that the empowerment rhetoric often falls short: the mere presence of a small number of traditionally excluded individuals at the negotiation table can backfire as they are unlikely to make their contributions heard.

Furthermore, mediators' experiences demonstrate that concerns about essentializing women's (and other) identities are warranted. The earlier-mentioned interventions in support of women's inclusion obscure women's heterogeneous identities and create erroneous assumptions about their apolitical and 'independent' nature. Conflict parties may strategically exploit the inclusion discourse to place loyal women representatives at the table, a problem mentioned by several interviewees who spoke of 'regime women' or 'proxy women' included in negotiations. Moreover, inclusion by fixed actor category tends to deny the included the choice to speak on matters unrelated to their group membership. The resulting dynamic was described in interviews as one where, for example, included women 'fail to perform' the role expected of them by inclusion advocates since they sometimes even take 'regressive' positions on women's rights. The same can be said for those included by ethnicity or region: identity traits can be co-opted in order to occupy seats on a minority ticket, while advancing other agendas. This suggests that a strategic essentialism 'from the top' is likely to fail as it typically overlooks the complex interplay of the identities and interests of those included or excluded from a given process.

Finally, the use of closed framings can lead to competition for inclusion between fragmented interest groups that complicates peacemaking efforts. For instance, the latest trend to highlight the inclusion of youth has raised fears that representatives of 'quota' civil society groups may no longer engage in joint agendas, but rather compete in a struggle for seats at the table. Similarly, in contexts such as the UN-mediated Syria talks, calls for a separate women's delegation were met with fears that this could undermine other civil society representatives (Kapur, 2017). In sum, peacemaking strategies that frame the included in closed terms may help to fulfil international demands for inclusion, however they also contain the risks and trade-offs explored previously.

Towards Relational Inclusion

In contrast, a relational approach aims to account for the complexity, fluidity and intersectionality of actors' multiple interests and identities. Relationality requires thinking about the included not as homogeneous actor groups with clearly defined identities and interests, but moving the focus to the space between actors, asking how their multiple relationships can be transformed through peacemaking. It is less concerned with who has a voice at the table than with what this voice expresses, and for what purpose. This perspective may not produce easy answers. Unsurprisingly, we note that the practice of relational inclusion is less established among

mediation professionals. Nonetheless, many acknowledge its potential to address the tensions arising from open and closed framings of inclusion, and aspire to more tailored, context-sensitive inclusion strategies built on thorough conflict and context analyses that can account for the cleavages and exclusionary fault lines of a particular conflict, be they regional, linguistic, ethnic, age or gender related.

Such an approach not only considers gender relations, for example, but includes a woman's position in existing power relations related to class, race and ethnicity. Relational inclusion therefore requires embracing the ontological complexity of social relationships that underpin both conflict and peace when studying and practising inclusion. It means asking less about who should be included, than what relations need to be transformed. This may require moving away from a notion of formal inclusion at the table that puts emphasis on the physical presence of a group representative voicing the seemingly homogeneous interests of a bounded constituency, towards a notion of substantive inclusion that focuses on the themes, narratives and interests that underpin relationships and therefore need to be brought to the table.

The outcome-oriented nature of mediation processes means the negotiation table may not be the obvious venue for conflict transformation. In fact, in discussions on sequencing, interviewees referred to the need to combine mediation with longer-term dialogue processes. Nonetheless, the decision on which relationships need to be discussed at the table should ideally itself be taken through a participatory, relational process in which mediators map out the web of relationships, including conflict fault lines and power relations. This means bringing perceptions and assumptions to the table as well so that conflict parties' and stakeholders' views on the conflict, and the inclusive arrangements through which the conflict can be transformed, can be co-constituted. Relationality thus invites us to think beyond the ideal-typical peace table constituted by single actors with bounded identities that define their interests, rights and needs, and move towards complex, dynamic mechanisms of negotiation that put those relationships on the table that are in need of transformation.

Conclusion and Outlook

Inclusion is currently omnipresent in international peacemaking agendas and discourses. As a concept it is deeply intertwined with many questions that are at the heart of the pursuit of peace. Inclusion may be promoted with the implicit aims of empowerment and protection

of rights, the transformation of society or to increase the legitimacy of processes and outcomes. This points to the more fundamental question of what, ultimately, makes a good peace. In its current popularity however, inclusion risks becoming an empty buzzword, added as a qualifier to 'peace' in policy discourses, advocacy campaigns and diplomatic statements. We argue that if inclusion is to avoid this fate and make a meaningful contribution to peacemaking practice, scholars, policy makers, and practitioners must examine and make explicit its unspoken assumptions, theoretical groundings and political uses.

The analysis of key UN documents revealed a tension between the international normative framework, which exhibits a strong emphasis on closed terms with the aim of protecting and empowering included groups, and mediation guidance documents, which emphasize the merit of open and relational framings and ask for a deeper engagement with the conflict contexts. The predominant use of open and closed, as opposed to relational, framings leads to limitations in mediation practice: while open framings require operationalization if they are to transcend a merely symbolic function, closed framings can have essentializing and disempowering effects and can pitch actors with seemingly fixed identities against one another. In contrast, a transformative approach to inclusion, which engages with the relationships between actors, seems better placed to account for the intersectional, complex and fluid nature of their identities and interests. Relational inclusion thus focuses less on who has a seat at the table, and more on which relationships are brought to, and transformed, at the table.

Further research can contribute to the articulation of such an approach. A future research agenda on inclusion should focus more explicitly on the relational dimension of inclusion by conceiving of actors at the table not as representatives of static group interests, but rather as part of a dynamic web of relationships. This would shift the focus of current inclusion practice to how mediation efforts can support deeper social and political transformation. To better understand the merits and risks of relational inclusion, such research should employ an intersectional lens and critically reflect on claims about the interests and identities of the included. Relational inclusion should also be studied in its temporal and socio-spatial dimensions, asking how mediation efforts at the negotiation table interact with and can be complemented by broader conflict transformation efforts, and in what sequence this occurs. Building on the problematization of inclusion in peacemaking presented in this chapter, this emerging research agenda can ultimately contribute to a more critical, reflexive and relevant discourse and practice of inclusion.

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