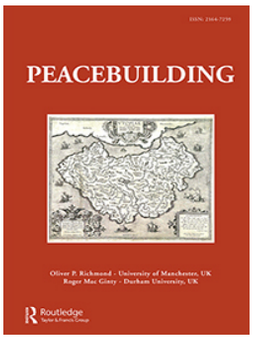

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Peace and the pluriverse: interrogating (post-)digital peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT

The Introduction to the Special Issue explores how research on (post)-digital peacebuilding can contribute to advancing approaches that are neither driven by the sense of an inevitable digital revolution, nor curtailed by the limits of the technically feasible. Instead of providing intellectual support for the idea that a singular, digitalised future is inevitable, the collection of articles in this Special Issue engages with the pluriversal possibilities of past, present, and future peacebuilding that increasingly involve the digital. The idea of the pluriverse, as proposed in the Zapatista declaration of a 'world in which many worlds fit', is to challenge Eurocentric Western universalist rationality by recognising that multiple ways of knowing, being, and doing exist. We translate these three dimensions to digital peacebuilding and discuss the most critical challenges that emerge when they are put to use in the (re)search of the pluriverse of digital peacebuilding approaches.

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Peacebuilding; digital technology; social media; pluriverse; decolonial thought

Peacebuilding, as a field of research and practice, is increasingly driven by technological innovation – especially in data science, digital information processing, and AI. Digital technologies now play a vital role in a variety of efforts that contribute to preventing the occurrence and recurrence of armed conflict, including conflict analysis, early warning, ceasefire monitoring, the protection of civilians, peace mediation, and reconciliation. The change to the field that comes with the digitalisation of peacebuilding is commonly perceived as rapid, disruptive and uneven, seemingly dominated by only a handful of organisations, change agents and entrepreneurs with close links to the Western tech avant-garde in 'Silicon Valley' and other global centres for innovation. Over the couple of years during which this Special Issue was in development, this sense was nourished, among other things, by advancements in generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs). The many brown-bag lunches, workshops, and blog posts organised by peacebuilding organisations to discuss this topic convey a sense of urgency and the need to align with technological innovations that promise to radically challenge how peacebuilding is done.

The discourse surrounding this moment makes clear that the change processes within peacebuilding are primarily technical, despite the increasingly widely held view that technical solutions alone cannot achieve peace without social, political and cultural shifts. For instance, the United Nations' Strategy for the Digital Transformation of Peacekeeping, published in 2021, defined digital transformation as 'a change process that is driven and enabled by digital technologies but involves a significant measure of *cultural change*'.[1] Much has been written in recent years on the potential of digital technologies to transform: For some, there is a sense of a 'digital revolution'[2] and potentially a 'digital renewal',[3] in which digital technologies are at the forefront of a data revolution with 'unprecedented possibilities for informing and transforming societies'.[4] Others, however, are more cautious of the possibilities, for instance, when observing that 'many of the developments in digital humanitarianism', and we would add digital peacebuilding, are 'driven by what is [technologically] possible rather than what is needed'.[5]

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[1]United Nations, *Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping* (New York: United Nations, 2021), emphasis added.
[2]Pamina Firchow et al., 'PeaceTech: The Liminal Spaces of Digital Technology in Peacebuilding', *International Studies Perspectives* (December 20, 2016): 5, https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekw007.
[3]Oliver P. Richmond and Ioannis Tellidis, 'Analogue Crisis, Digital Renewal? Current Dilemmas of Peacebuilding', *Globalizations* 17, no. 6 (2020): 935–5, https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1712169.
[4]The United Nations Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, *A World That Counts: Mobilizing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations Secretary-General, 2014), 2.
[5]Roisin Read, Bertrand Taithe, and Roger Mac Ginty, 'Data Hubris? Humanitarian Information Systems and the Mirage of Technology', *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (2016): 1314–31, 1315.

This Special Issue aims to reflect on and challenge both notions: on the one hand, that of a change process driven by an inevitable digital revolution; on the other, that comprehensive change will necessarily be curtailed by the limits of the technically feasible. Instead, we are seeking out a third path, inviting explorations of digital peacebuilding approaches and practices that present desirable alternatives to a trajectory of digitalisation that is seemingly set in stone. To this end, the Introduction to this Special Issue connects to the emerging interest of studying peacebuilding from a post-digital perspective and links it to explorations of what we describe as pluriversal peacebuilding. With this, we aim to provide an opportunity to continue the discussion about what *really* changes – and what *could* change – as peacebuilding practices increasingly rely on digital infrastructures, platforms and methods.

This conversation arguably unfolds at a critical juncture in global politics that will shape the prospects of peace and the trajectories of technological innovation for years to come. We are living through a period in which technology – and in particular AI – is being pushed as a solution to many of the political problems facing modern societies, while tech entrepreneurs are being given unprecedented control over policy-making decisions. We write this Introduction in the wake of Donald Trump's second term as President of the United States, which has seen several high-profile Silicon Valley tech entrepreneurs, including Mark Zuckerberg, Peter Thiel, and Elon Musk, provide both their financial and political support to the US Administration. Musk, in particular, has played a pivotal role in Trump's early administration with his appointment to head up the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). DOGE is ostensibly an advisory body established by executive order, tasked with enhancing the US government's efficiency through IT upgrades.[6] At the time of writing, Musk used his position to suspend US international foreign assistance, which has a wide-ranging impact on the aid sector, including funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.[7] In March 2025, DOGE also shut down USIP, which had previously hosted the US-based PeaceTech Lab and promoted the use of digital technologies for peacebuilding through research grants.[8]

Such developments demonstrate how leading tech entrepreneurs are seeking to break with the liberal internationalist canon that has underpinned international collaboration and, by extension, global efforts to prevent, terminate, and transform conflict since the inception of the international peacebuilding architecture following the Cold War. Therefore, we seek to shed light on what might emerge from the hard and soft power vacuums created by US withdrawal. We argue that rather than replacing US hegemony with another, there is scope for a multiplicity of actors working in multiple ways to challenge the convergence to universalism that characterises both liberal peacebuilding and Big Tech's desire for a singularity or Metaverse, which we discuss below. Moreover, the geopolitical rivalries that have overshadowed peace prospects for over a decade appear to be giving rise to a new global multipolarity, which will inform not only the trajectories of digitalisation but also how digital technologies are employed to end and prevent armed conflict.[9]

Only a few years ago, the dominance of North American companies in the provision of hardware and software, internet services, social media platforms and the many intelligent algorithms that underpin them triggered legitimate concerns about how the digitalisation of peacebuilding would not lead to a transformative change, but simply an adaptation of dominant approaches – and with it – a reproduction of the global power inequalities that underpin how peacebuilding is carried out. Today, the potential collapse of this dominance is palpable, largely due to the disintegration of what could, a few years ago, plausibly be perceived as a productive alliance between liberal peacebuilding approaches and digital entrepreneurism such as that encapsulated in the PeaceTech Lab at the United States Institute of Peace. With some of the owners of the biggest social media platforms and most impactful AI startups breaking with democratic principles of promoting free speech, human rights and access for all, and with liberal peacebuilding being replaced by authoritarian and populist forms of conflict management, it seems pertinent to ask: What positive could come from this crisis? How else could innovations in digital

[6]Jennifer Clarke, 'What Is Doge and Why Has Musk Left?', *BBC News,* December 5, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c23vkd57471o.
[7]Maryam Mohsin, 'The impact of the USAid funding freeze: What we know so far', *Bond,* February 20, 2025, https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2025/02/the-impact-of-the-usaid-funding-freeze-what-we-know-so-far/.
[8]Aishvarya Kavi, 'Musk's Team Evicts Officials at the U.S. Institute of Peace', *The New York Times*, March 3, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/17/us/politics/doge-musk-institute-of-peace.html.
[9]Michael Lloyd and Chris Dixon, 'A Future Multipolar World', *Global Policy* 13, no. 5 (2022): 818–27, https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13145; and Rosalie L. Tung, Ivo Zander, and Tony Fang, 'The Tech Cold War, the Multipolarization of the World Economy, and IB Research', *International Business Review* 32, no. 6 (2023): 102195, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2023.102195.

technology give rise to radically new ways of understanding, knowing and building peace? And what stands in the way of such a development? The articles contained within this Special Issue sit on the spectrum between hopeful and critical of digital peacebuilding's potential, but they all share in common a concern with the impact of different instances, manifestations and shapes of digital peacebuilding on how we understand and build peace.

Beyond the binary logic: post-digital peacebuilding

It is widely known that digital data is composed of binaries: at its core is the so-called 'base-2 system', which generates information by only using two digits, namely 0 and 1. We suggest taking this view of the digital as a binary in metaphorical terms as constraining our view on what digitalisation is, what it is composed of, how it manifests, and how it enables approaches and practices of peacebuilding. The current discourse – across academia, policy and practice – tends to paint, or at least implicitly represent, the digitalisation of peacebuilding as a relation of binaries. The binaries that we observe in conversations about the digital in peacebuilding include distinctions being drawn between the before and after of digitalisation, backwardness and progress, the offline and the online, the tangible and the virtual, the digital haves and the digital have-nots, and the digital Global North vs the digital Global South, to mention only some of the most prominent ones.

Yet, approaching digital peacebuilding in terms of binaries is problematic for various reasons, as we have observed before. Our Special Issue furthers and consolidates the sense that peacebuilding research could benefit from a 'post-digital' perspective – as a means of critically interrogating the impact of digitalisation and moving beyond it. It is essential to note here that the 'post-' in post-digital does not imply that we believe the era of digitalisation has come to an end, but rather that, contrary to binary framings, digitalisation is not the sole or necessarily defining feature of our current times. Following Hirblinger's earlier work on defining the post-digital, we therefore seek to use 'post-digital' as a lens 'to research, rewrite, and rework the digital while simultaneously staying with and moving beyond digitalisation in its current manifestation.[10] This research agenda springs from a heterogeneous set of loosely related critical observations. To begin with, drawing a clear line between the 'digital' on the one hand and the 'analogue' on the other, or a 'pre-digital' and a 'digital' age of peacebuilding, comes with many challenges.[11] More importantly, it seems pivotal to step away from narratives that describe digitalisation as linear and homogenous processes that unfold in a globally even manner.

Furthermore, we may want to consider not only the impact of digitalisation on peacebuilding but also the impact of its absence or non-occurrence, the unequal distribution of its consequences and effects, and the power relations that emerge from these dynamics, such as promoting elite interests at the expense of a diversity of marginalised voices.[12] Yet a mere concern with the absence or inequality of the digital may lead us to reduce the heterogeneous manifestations of the digitalisation of peacebuilding to a delay from catching up with, or deviance from, what is often portrayed as the cradles of digitalisation that are in geographical, economic and cultural terms usually associated with the West. Moreover, popular representations of digital technologies, especially Artificial Intelligence, often give rise to hubristic (and apocalyptic) imaginations of a singular digital future. Instead of thinking in such binaries, could we, for instance, investigate the global interdependencies of path-dependently forming relations between the political, the digital and the material? Digital approaches to peacebuilding are unthinkable without essential components such as semiconductors – and these are not evenly available across the world, nor does their production affect all of us equally. The creation of this digital hardware has material (analogue) effects in terms of both human exploitation[13] and environmental destruction.[14] As Caffentzis cautions: 'activists and scholars

[10]Hirblinger, 'When the Digits Don't Add Up', 425.
[11]Ibid.
[12]Suda Perera, 'To Boldly Know: Knowledge, Peacekeeping and Remote Data Gathering in Conflict-Affected States', *International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 5 (2017): 803–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2017.1383566.
[13]See for example Jeffrey W. Mantz, 'From Digital Divides to Creative Destruction: Epistemological Encounters in the Regulation of the "Blood Mineral" Trade in the Congo', *Anthropological Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (2018): 525–49.
[14]Joyeeta Gupta, Hilmer Bosch, and Luc van Vliet, 'AI's Excessive Water Consumption Threatens to Drown Out its Environmental Contributions', *The Conversation*, March 21, 2024. https://theconversation.com/ais-excessive-water-consumption-threatens-to-drown-out-its-environmental-contributions-225854.

should refrain from celebrating digitisation without accounting for the conditions under which its technologies are produced'.[15]

All this demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the socio-technical nature of digital peacebuilding, i.e. grappling with the mutual constitution of the social and the technical in efforts to design and implement digital approaches to end conflict and build peace.[16] We conceive of peacebuilding broadly in this Special Issue to refer to the range of activities that those identifying as peacebuilders may undertake to make societies prone to armed conflict. Some of these efforts may fall within an understanding of peacebuilding as bringing about the end of war and preventing its recurrence, while others are in line with a conception of peacebuilding as preventative or mitigative action that reduces the risk of large-scale violence.[17] Importantly, digital peacebuilding increasingly encompasses a range of new projects, initiatives and forms of activism which have become integral to building peace due to the increasing role of digital technologies in armed violence, as much as the availability of digital means and methods, including initiatives focused on social media, such as aimed to shift public discourse on peace and conflict and counter harmful speech.[18]Peacebuilding policy, practice and research increasingly acknowledges such activities as integral to peacebuilding.[19]

The growing utilisation of digital technologies in peacebuilding brings not only challenges but also opportunities for thinking and practising peacebuilding differently. The contributions of this Special Issue make the case that, rather than reproducing narratives of fast-paced and linear, singular innovation in peacebuilding that may result from both the fetishisation of the digital mainstream, a post-digital approach can help bring out the heterogeneous manifestations of digital peacebuilding. It can recover ways of being, knowing and acting digitally that have been erased by the marginalisation of viable alternatives – but it also helps to shed light on the difficulties, limitations and failures of such efforts. The contributions to this Special Issue intend to deepen and broaden the conversation of the possibilities of (post-)digital peacebuilding by presenting empirically informed case studies and fresh theoretical perspectives that the authors connect to pluriversal thought. In presenting them together, our objective was to render the often-disjunct contributions as part of an engagement with the possibility of peace in the digital pluriverse, rather than lending intellectual support to the idea that a particular, singular, digitalised future is inevitable. Therefore, the articles gathered in this Special Issue, in some way, demonstrate the need for a pause in the breakneck speed with which linear understandings of the digital assume progress and inevitability, while reflecting on the possibilities, limits, and challenges in imagining, thinking, and practising digital peacebuilding differently.

Towards turbulence: post-digital peacebuilding in the pluriverse

To understand what's at stake here, let's recall Mark Zuckerberg's vision of the Metaverse: a utopian digital environment in which humans socialise inside virtual and augmented worlds crafted by a single Big Tech company operating from San Francisco, California.[20] The Metaverse creates what pluriversal thinkers would call the 'One World', a notion of a singular reality that shapes our experiences. However, Meta's project stands for a larger trend that engulfs digitalisation, namely fostering 'digital monocultures' dominated by standards of technologies, infrastructures and institutions that emerge from an exclusive community of governmental and technological entrepreneurs that shape the digital international. The concerns about this development have been well expressed. For instance, in their 'Declaration of the Interdependence of Cyberspace', a collective of writers, researchers, and technologists call out the dominance of large

[15]George Caggentizis, 'Digital Tools', in *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, ed. Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria and Alberto Acosta (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2019), 36–9.
[16]Andreas T. Hirblinger, 'Fighting Hate Speech on Social Media: The Challenge of "Deep Work" in Digital Peacebuilding', in *Social Media and Peacebuilding. How Digital Spaces Shape Conflict and Peace*, Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies, ed. Stephan Stetter and Anna Reuss (2024).
[17]Michael Barnett, Hunjoon Kim, Madalene O'Donnell, and Laura Sitea, 'Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?', *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 13, no. 1 (2007): 35–58, https://doi.org/10.5555/ggov.2007.13.1.35; Johan Galtung, 'Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses', *Journal of Peace Research* 22, no. 2 (1985): 141–58, https://doi.org/10.1177/002234338502200205; and Lisa Schirch, *Strategic Peacebuilding: State of the Field* (2015), https://wiscomp.org/peaceprints/1-1/1.1.1.pdf.
[18]Hirblinger, 'Fighting Hate Speech on Social Media'.
[19]Peter Mandaville and Julia Schiwal, 'A New Approach for Digital Media, Peace and Conflict', *United States Institute of Peace*, 2023, https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/02/new-approach-digital-media-peace-and-conflict.
[20]https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/09/technology/meta-zuckerberg-metaverse.html.

technology companies in today's cyberspace as the 'Closed Fiefdoms of the platform world'.[21] Instead, the declaration calls for a digital world in which 'many worlds would fit' to oppose the dominant trends visible in homogeneous digitalisation, the centralisation of infrastructures and platforms, the assimilation of alternative ecosystems, the displacement of other digital species, the creation of artificial digital scarcity, and the commercialisation of the digital, to mention only a few.[22] Notably, the digital pluriverse they envisage would be more than merely a rejection of the Metaverse because it privileges plurality and epistemic diversity by re-centring alternative forms of being, knowing, and producing in/with cyberspace.[23]

Similar invocations of pluriversality can be made visible where digital technologies are designed and employed to support peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This Special Issue embarks on this very project. International peacebuilding has long been criticised for reinforcing a one-world ontology that commits ontological and epistemological violence due to its inherent Eurocentric orientations and disciplinary origins.[24] For instance, the expertisation of the field and limited integrations of local conceptions of peace have spurred academic and activist critique and resistance. Azarmandi traces the 'racial silence' within peacebuilding to modern/colonial discursive dynamics, which fail to account for the constitutive role of race in structuring discourses around peace and violence.[25] Similarly, Iglesias[26] casts the resistance among Indigenous and Afro-descended communities against the formal peace process in Colombia as a sign of the limited inclusion of subaltern understandings of peace that are at odds with hegemonic significations of liberal/modern peace. All this renders an investigation of pluriversality in digital peacebuilding even more necessary and urgent.

As we investigate and entertain the possibility of a (digital) pluriverse and a pluriversal approach to digital peacebuilding, we draw on and learn from the established body of pluriversal thought that has emerged in decolonial and post-colonial IR. The notion of the pluriverse that it has given rise to contains a dual assertion:[27] On the one hand, to uncover the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the one-world ontology upon which colonial modernity is premised.[28] On the other hand, to give 'full ontological weight' to alternative worlds,[29] which coexist without subsuming one another.[30] As Escobar put it: 'The pluriverse is a tool to first, make alternatives to one world plausible to one-worlders, and second, provide resonance to those other worlds that interrupt the one world story'.[31]

We attempt to explain how pluriversal thinking can contribute to knowledge production on peacebuilding through an imagery of flows: Academic and practice discourses on the digitalisation of peacebuilding commonly perpetuate an image of digitalisation as a laminar flow, i.e. one linear process that merely takes place at different speeds: Innovations such as big data analytics and remote sensing determine progress in the field, and they are rolled out merely at a slower pace at the margins of the global. It is also possible that this linear flow of digitalisation may be interrupted by maelstroms, i.e. catastrophic dynamics in which the malevolent affordances of digital technologies and their effects unfold, such as automated weapons systems, algorithmic polarisation or surveillance, all of which endanger the flow towards peaceful coexistence.[32] However, these malevolent uses of technology and their adverse effects are nonetheless perceived as part of the same singular digital modernity (namely, a Western, industrial, and capitalist one).

[21]Verses, 'A Declaration of the Interdependence of Cyberspace', 2021, https://www.interdependence.online/declaration.
[22]https://pluriverse.world/.
[23]Verses, 'A Declaration of the Interdependence of Cyberspace'.
[24]Catherine Götze, *The Distinction of Peace: A Social Analysis of Peacebuilding, Configurations: Critical Studies of World Politics* (University of Michigan Press, 2017); and Vivienne Jabri, 'Peacebuilding, the Local and the International: A Colonial or a Postcolonial Rationality?', *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2013): 3–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2013.756253.
[25]Mahdis Azarmandi, 'The Racial Silence within Peace Studies', *Peace Review* 30, no. 1 (2018): 69–77, https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2017.1418659.
[26]Ana Isabel Rodríguez Iglesias, 'A Decolonial Critique of the Liberal Peace: Insights from Peace Practices of Ethnic People in Colombia', *Revista de Paz y Conflictos* 12, no. 2 (2019): 2, https://doi.org/10.30827/revpaz.v12i2.9379.
[27]Kimberly Hutchings, 'Decolonizing Global Ethics: Thinking with the Pluriverse', *Ethics & International Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2019): 115–25, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679419000169.
[28]Maggie FitzGerald, 'Rethinking the Political in the Pluriverse: The Ethico-Political Significance of Care', *Journal of International Political Theory* (June 5, 2023): 17550882231178884, https://doi.org/10.1177/17550882231178884.
[29]Martin Holbraad, Morten Axel Pedersen, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'The Politics of Ontology: Anthropological Positions', *Society for Cultural Anthropology*, January 13, 2014, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-politics-of-ontology-anthropological-positions.
[30]Maggie FitzGerald, *Care and the Pluriverse: Rethinking Global Ethics, Bristol Studies on International Theory* (University Press, 2022).
[31]Arturo Escobar, 'Thinking-feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South', *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 11, no. 1 (2016): 11–32.
[32]Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (Crown, 2017).

What could be done to break out of this singular linearity? Some critical scholars seem to suggest a reading of digital peacebuilding in terms of tidal flows, in which a mix of technological affordances and socio-technical arrangements leads to 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' counter-movements. 'Top-down' approaches, enabled through digital methods that operate in remote, extractive, and Black-boxed fashions, would be counteracted by 'bottom-up' approaches, such as crowdsourcing, with the effect that their difference becomes reduced to a quality of co-dependence, complementarity, or reactivity.[33] However, we propose that post-digital perspectives on peacebuilding may find more value in the imagery of a turbulent flow: Turbulence is a motion that is shaped by a cross-current of flows, often unplanned, random, chaotic, and difficult to predict. Digital peacebuilding is undoubtedly shaped by some strong currents, created, for instance, by large tech companies that develop and provide access to social media platforms or foundational AI, national governments and international or regional organisations that promote tech regulation or deregulation, or large peacebuilding organisations or private companies that develop and employ tailor-made digital solutions. However, the change that these innovations bring is not at all linear and often creates new dynamics that are difficult to plan out and control. More importantly, the notion of turbulence also directs our focus towards the clashing of a heterogeneity of flows that coincide (such as non-Western digital innovation and uses of technology), the context conditions that shape digitalisation and the use of digital technology (such interdependencies and power relations driving global inequalities); as well as path-dependencies (such as the legacies of colonial rule and trajectories of technological development).

Pluriversalising digital peacebuilding: three challenges

How may such digital turbulence give rise to pluriversal peacebuilding, and how can we study these dynamics and possibly support them? We suggest that engagements with the pluriversal potential of post-digital peacebuilding can unfold along three interrelated dimensions: epistemology, ontology, and praxis. The idea of the pluriverse, as proposed in the Zapatista declaration of a 'world in which many worlds fit' is to challenge Eurocentric Western universalist rationality, not by replacing it with an alternative rationality, but by recognising that multiple ways of knowing, being and doing exist. These three dimensions are not necessarily separate but rather entangled and constitutive of each other. The remainder of the Introduction introduces these three dimensions and discusses some of the challenges we see emerging when attempting to foster a pluriverse of digital peacebuilding approaches

The challenge of epistemology

The use of digital technologies in peacebuilding shapes how we know about conflict and peace and, therefore, our epistemological approaches to peacebuilding. Data – and evidence-driven approaches, relying on remote sensing, earth observation or Big Data analysis, have led to fundamental changes in the field. Yet, they also stand in the long durée of technocratic and bureaucratic efforts of making conflict and peace visible and measurable. The datafication of peacebuilding renders both conflict and peace something that can be quantified and compared; it is driven by an empiricist logic that attempts to close the gap between data representation and reality as much as possible. This empiricist impetus of digital peacebuilding is undoubtedly closely related to an arguably modernist impetus of planning, managing and governing conflict and peace.[34]

We thus suggest that one crucial entry point for pluriversalising digital peacebuilding is enabling alternative views on the world, therefore fostering our ability to know conflict and peace differently. Neither the authors nor editors of this volume claim to be decolonial scholars, nor do we suggest that we necessarily work in a decolonial way. However, in trying to conceive of what it means to understand what might be produced through post-digital peacebuilding, we have found the work of decolonial theorists very useful – particularly the theoretical work on the coloniality of universal knowledge production and the epistemic richness that can be found in pluriversal thinking. As several decolonial scholars have pointed out,

[33]Ioannis Tellidis, 'Technology and Peace', in *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Peace and Conflict Studies*, ed. Oliver P. Richmond and Gezim Visoka (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11795-5_26-1

[34]Andreas T. Hirblinger, 'Building a Peace We Don't Know? The Power of Subjunctive Technologies in Digital Peacebuilding', *Peacebuilding* 11, no. 2 (2023): 113–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2022.2154957.

even though the formal European colonisation of much of the world has ended, there remains a coloniality of power in which the colonial systems of hierarchy, knowledge and culture endure today.[35] For instance, Grosfugel's work on the coloniality of knowledge traces a series of epistemicides in the long sixteenth century', as erased knowledge was replaced with the notion of universal rationality.[36] He focuses on the legacies of Cartesian philosophy and its influence on Western knowledge production. Cartesian logic argues that all knowledge can be produced through the method of solipsism, in which 'the subject asks and answers questions in an internal monologue until he reaches certitude in knowledge'.[37] This allows knowledge to be divorced from social relations and the knower to assume that their knowledge is objectively rational and universal. 'Any knowledge that claims to be situated in the body-politics of knowledge (Anzaldúa, 1987; Fanon, 2010) or the geopolitics of knowledge (Dussel, 1977) – as opposed to the myth of the unsituated knowledge of the Cartesian ego-politics of knowledge – is discarded as biased, invalid, irrelevant, unserious; that is, inferior knowledge'.[38] The data revolution that emerges from increased digitalisation often relies on similar metatheoretical assumptions – that the numbers don't lie and that the more information we can mine, the closer we can get to an objective universal truth.

As pointed out by Fitzgerald, modernity as a discursive formation and colonial project is inherently linked to the erasure or subalternisation of non-European peoples and their ways of knowing their worlds.[39] This stance is based on the realisation that the transformation processes that brought about modernity did not only entail genocidal violence against colonial subjects but also epistemological (and often related, ontological) destruction.[40] Such epistemic erasure happened – and happens – for instance, through the imposition of European languages as vehicles to accumulate, communicate and store knowledge.[41] Digitalisation and digital economies supercharge such erasure further, for example, through the neglect of non-European languages in the development of natural language processing (NLP) or Large Language Models (LLMs) that are used for conflict analysis, partly because data from these languages is more difficult to monetise.

Furthermore, while technocratic peacebuilding approaches have been widely criticised for their insistence on linear theories of change,[42] digitalisation threatens to privilege knowledge that is constructed from data correlations that can be represented in algorithmic models derived from machine learning. Such knowledge rests exclusively on data that can be machine-read, which means that informal, tacit, or embodied forms of knowledge will not be represented in the data. Scholars are thus increasingly able to predict conflict outbreaks based on an analysis of media sentiment[43] or measurable indicators that capture social, economic or institutional developments.[44] However, when it comes to terminating conflict and building peace, the situated and subjective views on the world that are maintained by those in conflict matter a great deal – for anything from reaching agreements to shaping a post-conflict political community that can recognise and accommodate diverse and agonistic identities, including those from minority groups but also populist, nationalist and otherwise identity-based movements.[45]

However, because statistical approaches aim to generate predictive value based on observable correlations, algorithmic knowledge necessarily ignores (and epistemically reduces) the heterogeneity of context-specific experiences and manifestations of peace and conflict that could theoretically inform peacebuilding practice. The obsession with data correlations renders everything that has

[35]See Anibal Quijano 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentricism and Latin America', *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.
[36]Ramon Grosfoguel, 'Epistemic Racism/Sexism, Westernized Universities and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long Sixteenth Century', in *Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge: Debates on History and Power in Europe and the Americas*, ed. M. Araujo and S. R. Maeso (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 23–45
[37]Ibid., 26.
[38]Ibid., 27.
[39]Garrett Fitzgerald, 'Pluriversal Peacebuilding: Peace Beyond Epistemic and Ontological Violence', *E-International Relations*, 2021, 1–9.
[40]Hutchings, 'Decolonizing Global Ethics', 117.
[41]Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options, Latin America Otherwise* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
[42]Charles T. Hunt, 'Avoiding Perplexity: Complexity-Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation for UN Peace Operations', in *Complexity Thinking for Peacebuilding Practice and Evaluation*, ed. Emery Brusset, Cedric de Coning, and Bryn Hughes (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-60111-7_4.
[43]Anne Spencer Jamison, Jason Miklian, Kristian Hoelscher, Witold J. Henisz, and Brian Ganson, 'Is Media Sentiment Associated with Future Conflict Events?', *SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 4573695*, September 16, 2023, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4573695.
[44]Håvard Hegre, Marie Allansson, Matthias Basedau, et al., 'ViEWS: A Political Violence Early-Warning System', *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 155–74, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319823860.
[45]Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen, 'On Agonistic Memory', *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016): 390–404, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698015615935; and John Nagle, 'From the Politics of Antagonistic Recognition to Agonistic Peace Building: An Exploration of Symbols and Rituals in Divided Societies', *Peace & Change* 39, no. 4 (2014): 468–94, https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12090.

insufficient statistical significance invisible and meaningless. This is particularly striking, given that even data scientists acknowledge the disproportionate impact of both contexts, and the 'outliers' that explain the onset of large-scale conflict are often difficult to represent in machine-learning models of conflict and violence.[46] And even if conflict prevention were possible based on objectively measurable indicators, we would want to ask about its social and political costs: what digital peace would prevail if outbreaks of violence could be forecasted and stifled without a sensitivity for the situated, subjective, and often ill-articulated experiences of those affected by oppression, conflict, and violence?

In peacebuilding, we can think of this universalising impulse as manifesting in a range of ways. Writing in this journal, for example, Juan Daniel Cruz notes an enduring coloniality of power in 'affirming that epistemically speaking peace is only valid if it represents the values, practices and knowledge that arises from the Global North'.[47] Indeed, the processing of data to produce 'knowledge for peacebuilding' often focuses on the measurable and verifiable, excluding and silencing the messy realities of war.[48] This makes peacebuilding knowledge legible to peace bureaucracies that can only process certain kinds of information and act in particular ways.[49] One of our concerns with the growth of digital peacebuilding tools is an increased quantification of peacebuilding data,[50] which reduces complex dynamics and multifaceted human experiences to mere numbers for algorithmic processing. The point of pluriversal thinking is not to deny the existence or validity of Western rationalist logic but to recognise that its ontological and epistemological underpinnings are not universal and exist as just one cosmology among many. We are inspired by calls from the decolonial literature to examine what spaces emerge for knowledges surging 'from below'[51] and how they can express themselves, operate and (re)generate in relation to the knowledge(s) imposed from above.

However, in our examination of the digital world, we attempt to avoid using a top-down vs bottom-up analogy. The reasons for this are twofold and interrelated: Firstly, we are keen to avoid repeating old mistakes, especially the tendency to respond to the critique of top-down liberal peacebuilding interventions with calls for more bottom-up, locally sensitive approaches. What we are looking for instead is an attempt to disrupt the dominant form of knowledge-making at whatever level it manifests. Secondly, the categorical distinction between top-down and bottom-up simplifies actors and knowledge into a binary classification that often simplifies and obscures the multiple and complex power relations that underpin peacebuilding. For instance, much of the rise in right-wing populism, which tech entrepreneurs have harnessed to hurt or dismantle long-standing peacebuilding institutions, involves a certain amount of grassroots mobilisation (or at least appeals to it). What we are interested in, instead, is how the singular way of knowing envisaged by large technological companies, which promotes a digital Metaverse, can be challenged and/or complicated by initiatives that put forward alternative methods of knowing and being. This, as the contributions to the Special Issue make clear, tends to involve a heterogeneity of actors across different locations and scales. Nonetheless, as technological power is unevenly distributed, so is the capacity to produce knowledge relevant for peacebuilding. Therefore, this Special Issue aims to explore what it would entail to enable pluriversal knowledge through digital methods and whether generating something like pluriversal peacebuilding data is at all possible.

The challenge of ontology

Our effort should go further than seeking to employ digital technologies to encourage a diversity of views on a single reality towards the ontological work of enabling different enactments of the digital reality of peacebuilding. To this end, we draw on Political Ontology as a field of study. Arturo Escobar argues that 'On the one hand, political ontology refers to the power-laden practices involved in bringing into being

[46]Lars-Erik Cederman and Nils B. Weidmann, 'Predicting Armed Conflict: Time to Adjust Our Expectations?', *Science* 355, no. 6324 (2017): 474–76.
[47]Juan Daniel Cruz, 'Colonial Power and Decolonial Peace', *Peacebuilding* 9, no. 3 (2021): 274–88, 279.
[48]Suda Perera, 'Bermuda Triangulation: Embracing the Messiness of Researching in Conflict', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 1 (2017): 42–57.
[49]Sarah Phillips, 'Making al-Qa'ida Legible: Counter-Terrorism and the Reproduction of Terrorism', *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 4 (2019): 1132–56.
[50]For a critical analysis of this see Danah Boyd, and Kate Crawford, 'Critical Questions For Big Data', *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 662–79.
[51]Catherine E. Walsh, 'Decoloniality in/as Praxis', in *On Decoloniality*, ed. W. Mignolo and C. Walsh (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 15–104, 19.

a particular world or ontology; on the other hand, it refers to a field of study that focuses on the inter-relations among worlds, including the conflicts that ensue as different ontologies strive to sustain their own existence in their interaction with other worlds'.[52] When discussing ontology, we thus touch on the challenge of making sense of what constitutes digital peacebuilding and the peace it enables – as well as accounting for the material and tangible elements that condition its various manifestations.

Pluriversalising digital peacebuilding in ontological terms means engaging in a 'politics of ontology' – or conflicts over 'what exists' - and challenging mainstream (often Western) projects that claim to produce a singular reality through a universal paradigm of knowledge.[53] Put differently, pluriveralising in ontological terms is an effort to enable a world where many different worlds can coexist.[54] This would contribute to what Escobar described as a struggle between 'two visions of globality', the 'one-world world' created by a global modernity vs. the many-world worlds created by a globality as a pluriverse.[55] In the discipline of International Relations more broadly defined, such struggles may entail the rejection of the singular (post-)colonial ontology that reinforces the distinction between Western (or international), civilised, seemingly rational agents and the subjects of their interventions that need rescue, development, modernisation, or peace-support. Concerning digital peacebuilding, this will mean being sceptical of concepts and heuristics that paint the digitalisation of the field as a singular and universal process, such as conveyed in the terminology of the 'digital gap' or the need to build 'digital literacy'. On the other hand, we should be sceptical of naïve attempts to create (and romanticise) an 'Other' of digitalisation- one that is diametrically opposed, such as 'indigenous people' that remain 'off the grid'.[56] Neither does the pluriverse necessarily emerge through alternative or opposing approaches. For instance, open-source data, creative commons licencing and data and crowdsourcing, once hailed as radical alternatives to commercial digital approaches, have long been incorporated into the one-world of digital peacebuilding.

To understand how radically different worlds and ontologies could coexist without being subsumed by one another, the concept of 'partial connection' may help. It suggests that worlds can be shaped by each other while still remaining radically different.[57] According to Escobar,[58] partial connection implies that 'every world is more than one' because a single world can never be 'complete' or 'total' by itself, but it is also 'less than many', which means we should not be thinking of the pluriverse as 'interacting separate worlds' – rather: 'all worlds are (. . .) within the pluriverse'. This suggests that no one world is reducible to another, and none can exist independently. The question then becomes how to enable (and acknowledge) difference among these partially connected worlds. Returning to the image of digitalisation as turbulence introduced above, we suggest describing digital peacebuilding as a product of frictional confluence between various worlds that cannot be thought of in separation. Raw earth, mined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is used to build microchips used in mobile phones that are distributed to enable community-based, crowdsourced early warning in South Sudan. Funded by international organisations, such projects are meant to enable 'localised and 'inclusive' peacebuilding that fits the ontologies on which liberal peace-building is premised. However, the same mobile phones may also be used to enable other forms of conflict management that have emerged at the interface of community culture and (post-)colonial administration, at times enabling forms of restorative justice and at times enabling authoritarian control and exploitation and resting on different conceptions of community and society.

This turbulence is worthwhile studying, because within it, different situated understandings of 'what exists' may emerge – and with it, a pluriversality of approaches, practices and ways of being in the world – and thus, ways of struggling for peace. The critical question appears to be: does this turbulence allow for difference, by letting subaltern worlds diverge,[59] or will it submerge them under one dominant way of being

[52]Arturo Escobar, 'Transiciones: A Space for Research and Design for Transitions to the Pluriverse', *Design Philosophy Papers* 13, no. 1 (2015): 13–23, 19, doi:10.1080/14487136.2015.1085690.
[53]David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner, 'Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR', *Millennium* 45, no. 3 (2017): 293–311, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817702446.
[54]Walter D. Mignolo, 'Foreword. On Pluriversality and Multipolarity', in *Constructing the Pluriverse* (Duke University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478002017-001.
[55]Arturo Escobar, 'Transition Discourses and the Politics of Relationality: Toward Designs for the Pluriverse', in *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. Bernd Reiter (Duke University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002017.
[56]Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478093626.
[57]Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2018).
[58]Ibid., 216.
[59]Ibid., 217.

in the world? To make sense of these dynamics, it is worthwhile to examine the intricate, relational blending of the social and the technical that shapes digital peacebuilding, while noting that many agents in these socio-technical networks may maintain ontologies that are neither necessarily relational nor pluriversal.[60] Consider, for instance, the divisions produced by licenced software, fire-walled data, and the ontological insularity of an Excel sheet. However, digital technology may also (attempt to) represent different ontologies and adapt to a user's points of view. While text-bound and limited by context-specific training data, Large Language Models can be trained to contain 'superpositions' of various cultures, which means that responses to a user's prompts respond to individual perspectives that reflect different values, knowledge and cognition.[61] Yet, whether such alignment can give rise to difference is another question altogether.

In the introductory guidance, we gave to the authors in this Special Issue, we asked them to consider how digital tools and spaces exist in the pluriverse, drawing on two alternative ideas about power: First, we asked them to consider Audre Lorde's famous declaration that the 'Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House'.[62] Indeed, despite the initial optimism that digital tools could be used as tools of empowerment for marginalised populations to organise in their struggles against power and disseminate their knowledge borne of struggle,[63] relatively early examples from the Arab Spring showed that this digital infrastructure was ultimately owned by powerful actors such as states, who could turn those tools into tools of oppression and surveillance.[64] Nonetheless, we do not think that this dooms the digital space as a site of potential pluriversal conviviality. We have seen, for example, the way that digital communications have been used to challenge hegemonic discourses about the conflict in Gaza and show the humanity of populations facing Genocide. Despite discourses which often minimise Israeli war crimes or frame Palestinian resistance within a discourse of terrorism, technology has been used by global solidarity movements to challenge this discourse, reframe dominant debates and show the outside world the realities of living in Gaza in this present moment. This, at the very least, has rattled dominant power-backed media representations in ways that were previously unchallenged, for example, during the Cold War. Such representation has also mobilised protest movements around the world against their own governments' perceived complicity in genocidal war. The use of powerfully controlled digital technologies – such as Facebook and X to facilitate this challenge to power presents an interesting example of the tools of universalism being used themselves to challenge universal narratives. Therefore, we have also asked our authors to consider Emmanuel Martey's repudiation of Lourde's above declaration: "[We] are fully convinced that the gun, in efficient hands, could well kill its owner'.[65] Here, we focus on the owner rather than the house: We do not suggest that digital tools alone (or at all) can entirely overturn or upend global inequality and the political and economic power that sustains it. Rather, we ask whether digital tools may be one gun in an arsenal of many others that might initiate such change, or at least create new friction?

As digital relations are continuously made and broken, single, stable realities of digital peacebuilding emerge – if at all – only in terms of accepted conceptions, narratives and beliefs among ontological communities. The worlds these ontologies give rise to are not necessarily desirable from one's point of view, whether they are observed from within or without these worlds. From a post-digital lens, our project thus becomes one of narrating those ontologies that promise to invoke alternative worlds and explore their potential to help solve the problems we consider most worthwhile addressing. This requires first breaking with foundational theories that postulate that any single world *is* in one way but not another. This becomes palpable if we approach the ontological work of enacting the pluriverse as a practice of making what Blaser described as 'foundationless foundational claims' to engage in an effort of 'worlding, a form of enacting reality'.[66] Consequently, a pluriversal ontology will be less concerned with the reality that is, but more with reality as a possibility of becoming: As Blaser put it, 'the claim of the pluriverse (or multiple ontologies) is not concerned with presenting itself as a more "accurate" picture of how things are "in reality" (a sort of

[60]Suzanne Klein Schaarsberg, 'Enacting the Pluriverse in the West: Contemplative Activism as a Challenge to the Disenchanted One-World World', *European Journal of International Relations*, October 9, 2023, 13540661231200864, https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661231200864.
[61]Grgur Kovac, Masataka Sawayama, Rémy Portelas, Cédric Colas, Peter Dominey, and Pierre-Yves Oudeyer, 'Large Language Models as Superpositions of Cultural Perspectives', July 15, 2023.
[62]Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 110.
[63]Boaventura de Sousa Santo, *Epistemologies of the South and the Future* (2016).
[64]Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World* (London: Penguin, 2012).
[65]Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009).
[66]Mario Blaser, 'Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe: Toward a Conversation on Political Ontology', *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 5 (2013): 547–68, https://doi.org/10.1086/672270.

meta-ontology); it is concerned with the possibilities that this claim may open to address emergent (and urgent) intellectual/political problems'.[67] Perhaps this means embracing the co-constitution of problems and solutions that characterises digital peacebuilding as a professional field, as something that must be done, with the important caveat that we aim to turn to problem-understandings situated in such ontologies that we find worthwhile pursuing. For instance, because they help to maintain a critical distance from the historically grown modernist project of digitalisation or because they help us to scrutinise power relations or side with those whose (digital) identities are threatened to be marginalised or erased.

The challenge of praxis

The pluriverse in which digital peacebuilding unfolds is populated by worlds that – from the observer's point of view and the onto-epistemological position they employ – may be normatively desirable – or not. The discussion above points thus to the fact that the post-digital project of enabling digital peacebuilding in the pluriverse – and the worlding of desirable worlds – is first and foremost one of praxis: of (re-)engaging with the digital through forms of activism that may encompass the research, design and implementation of digital peacebuilding projects. Hutchings suggested approaching this challenge in terms of a 'pluriversal ethics' since the pluriverse is 'not something that can be known in any satisfactory way; it is only something that can be done'.[68] Likewise, Klein Schaarsberg has argued that we should think of the pluriverse as a methodological rather than (merely) an ontological or epistemological commitment. As she put it: 'A pluriversal approach probes us to consider how reality is constructed and made, not somehow prior to our analytical engagement with ontologies that seem to differ from our own, but exactly through it'.[69] Therefore, we finally turn towards the challenge of *doing* the pluriverse.

The digital design of pluriversal peacebuilding comes with both negative and positive commitments. Negatively speaking, a pluriversal praxis entails a rejection of projects which view the world as knowable and governable from within a singular ontology that claims to subsume all other really existing worlds. This entails dismantling teleological, universally applicable narratives of linear and singular digitalisation underpinning the PeaceTech initiatives of many peacebuilding organisations that operate with the standard digital ecosystem and making visible how this narrative forecloses alternative ways of knowing and being in the world. In the positive sense, a pluriversal practice entails caring for worlds that are vulnerable or marginalised by relations of power and ensuring their (re)production and maintenance.[70] This is as much an epistemological as it is an ontological task. Escobar discusses the importance of 'ontological design' that could 'seed' diversity,[71] advancing our ability to enable different ways of being and relating to the world – and, more specifically, engage in peacebuilding with the help of digital technology. Taking this impetus to the study of digital peacebuilding, we notice that many questions remain unanswered. For instance, which methods of data collection enable a diversity of knowledge? Which technology affordances enable conflict-affected populations to overcome antagonisms and violence commensurate with their own ways of seeing – and being in – the world? And how could the many worlds in which peacebuilding can (and should) unfold be brought into being by both practitioners and researchers of the digital? By speaking to these and other questions, this Special Issue aims to contribute to the greater effort of nourishing a post-digital approach to peacebuilding that ultimately contributes to the urgent task of enabling alternatives to our current world – a world in which the pathways of digitalisation have all too often become closely entwined not only with violence and suffering but also ill-fitted and unproductive attempts to end conflict and build peace.

The contributions to the special issue

Julie Hawke and Helena Puig Larrauri discuss how we should think of the work of digital peacebuilding activists on social media. Contributing to the quest for pluriversal digital peacebuilding, the authors argue for a form of digital activism that differs from how social media platforms frame and respond to conflict

[67]Ibid., 554.
[68]Hutchings, 'Decolonizing Global Ethics', 124.
[69]Klein Schaarsberg, 'Enacting the Pluriverse in the West', 19.
[70]FitzGerald, *Care and the Pluriverse*.
[71]Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 4.

between their users. To this end, the authors draw on William Ury's idea that every conflict has a 'third side', which focuses on the 'emergent will' of a community and discusses what it entails for individual action, platform design, and policy. This approach stands in contrast to how profit-driven platforms approach conflict, namely as dyadic and agentic, primarily occurring between opposing conflict parties and driven by individual agency. Instead, Hawke and Larrauri highlight how collective initiatives can contribute to shifts in norms, attitudes, and behaviours that make armed conflict and violence less likely.

Charles Martin-Shields retraces the role of crowdsourcing in early humanitarian and peacebuilding initiatives under the banner of 'crisis mapping'. He recalls how such efforts were initially inspired by ideals of 'communicative action' but also had to meet the interests of international organisations and private sector partners. Thus, the contribution provides essential insights into how attempts to use technology to prevent and mitigate conflict in ways that break with existing power relations can quickly be curtailed when practices are institutionalised. As Martin-Shields highlights, this has as much to do with the partnerships necessary to make digital approaches work. Yet, ideals of collective communicative action faltered due to features inherent to digital technologies and data, which demonstrates well how the quest for pluriversality must go beyond epistemic concerns. While crowdsourcing technologies were often dressed as an effort of collective action that would amply a diversity of voices, the method itself had inherently 'atomising' tendencies, and the overwhelming volume of unstructured information often stood in the way of tangible action.

Luisa Lobato's article examines how externally imposed digital interventions can be co-opted and utilised by local populations to better serve their needs. She does so through a case study of the Brazilian app Fogo Cruzado, which allows marginalised populations affected by violence to raise visibility and awareness of the violence that is enacted upon them. The app also uses the attention brought by the visibility of such violence as a deterrent against further violence and/or state violence. Lobato notes that, while Fogo Cruzado relies on externally owned 'Big Tech' infrastructure such as WhatsApp, social media, and Google-related services, Fogo Cruzado activists using the app employ a politics of pragmatic engagement. Returning to the question of the master's tools discussed above, the article explores the extent to which it is possible to achieve radical change or emancipatory goals through commercial platforms.

Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos explores the role of digital technologies in strengthening women's participation in peacebuilding, employing a pluriversal lens to shed light on the multiple, alternative views of peacebuilding and peace processes, as well as women's place in them. Focusing on her experiences and participatory observations during the COVID-19 pandemic, she argues that digital tools have expanded possibilities for women peacebuilders. Yet, digital spaces have also become sites of exclusion, cyber violence, and patriarchal power. Thus, as Fal-Dutra Santos argues, 'meaningful participation' must go beyond the simplistic view of digitalisation as an inherent equaliser and instead recognise the co-constitution of digital technologies and the social-political contexts in which they are embedded. Her analysis advocates for a nuanced perspective that acknowledges both the disillusionment and the adaptive strategies employed by women peacebuilders to navigate and reshape digital spaces.

Sokfa John's contribution highlights the risk that our view on innovation in digital peacebuilding becomes tied to a notion of universal progress and demonstrates the merits of context-sensitive research that can shed light on how digital and local peacebuilding practices are mutually constituted. Drawing on a post-digital perspective, John examines peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria and Kenya, demonstrating how 'online' tools, such as social media, are integrated with 'offline' tools, including radio programmes and town hall meetings, rather than replacing them. This points to the multiplicity of equally legitimate ways of engaging with the potentials of digitalisation, rather than a single and linear trajectory that replaces locally conditioned approaches. Rather than framing digital peacebuilding as a binary between technological advancement and traditional methods, the article highlights the creative agency of local actors who adapt, innovate, and redefine digital tools within their own socio-technical ecosystems, thus imbuing digital peacebuilding practices with unique significance.

Enock Ndwana's article examines how online activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa utilise digital means to advocate for improved service delivery and explores the connections between online activism and the realisation of tangible political change. He argues that such action may represent a form of pluriversal peacebuilding practice because it shifts the attention away from the

hegemonic discourses by governments and the state, which legitimise a negative peace. Ndwana contrasts this with the calls of online activists for alternative visions of peace that emphasise concerns with justice and dignity. Notably, the article demonstrates that calls for 'other worlds', enacted through online activism, are context-dependent: while the 'positive peace' that digital activists advocated for may seem part of the (Western) peacebuilding mainstream, its realisation in places like Zimbabwe could indeed mean a break with the One World that is enacted through state propaganda, censorship or intimidation. However, the article also points to the challenges of promoting alternative forms of knowledge and translating them into change that meets the needs of ordinary citizens.

Finally, **Christopher Lamont** examines the role of AI-enabled digital investigations in support of transitional justice, illustrating that AI's ability to structure and process vast amounts of data introduces algorithmic logics into accountability and truth-seeking, shapes how atrocities are documented, remembered, and narrated. By adopting a post-digital perspective, Lamont challenges the assumption that AI inherently advances transitional justice. Drawing on a pluriversal lens to critically reflect on the emerging technology-centred approaches to transitional justice, Lamont argues that there is a risk that universalising assumptions about the transformative impact of AI may obscure the many context-specific obstacles to domestic accountability. The article thus ultimately argues for the need to recognise the multiple ways of understanding and practising justice, to which digital approaches have to cater.

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