

Conceptualising Conflict Transformation as forms of Peace-building to take in Slow Memory
(descriptive working title)

Reader's note: This is very much a working paper in the sense that it does not forward a central argument as much as identifies contact points between memory studies and peace and conflict studies in order to think about fruitful cross-pollinations in relation to slow memory. I hope it might start some conversations between those of us working between memory studies and peacebuilding, both as academic and practical fields of engagement.

Questions of process:

In this working paper I depart from the understanding that transformations of conflict take time – they go slow. In other words, conflict transformations should always be understood as ongoing processes not events or particular points at which accords or agreements have been reached. Taking a processual perspective means staying with the trouble and rejecting “moments” of final completion or resolution in order to explore critical continuities of conflict beyond violence.

One way of doing this, is to think of conflict transformations as forms of peacebuilding in which conflict is not immediately transcended (see also Ramsbotham, 2010), but remains part of a process of a deeper transformation of structures and relationships (Lederach, 1997). In order to explore the affordances of slow memory in relation to conflict transformations, it is prescient to be aware of potentially different visions of peace and practices of peacebuilding. Scholten have suggested seven dimensions of peacebuilding (36) across which theories and practices come into disagreement. That is, in relation to: 1) how peace is defined (negative/positive); 2) what temporal frames are employed for the process (long term and short term investments in peace); 3) whether peace is conceived as a static goal or an ever changing ideal; 4) the level of relationship engaged (inter-personal, inter-group, international); the different domains and actors involved (legal, political, cultural), and the values underpinning the process (i.e. justice, harmony, reconciliation). Each of these dimensions, separately and collective, have consequences for how we can conceptualise, observe and work with slow memory.

So, we might conceptualise slow memory as something that is gradually produced in specific processes of peacebuilding (potentially giving rise to very different capabilities and

connectivities depending on the context and the dimensions and dynamics engaged).

Thinking through the prism and dimensions of peacebuilding can lead us to specific questions about slow memory: Is slow memory produced differently in conflict transformations where the main goal is to end violence (i.e. negative peace)? Are longer investments in peacebuilding more likely to deal specifically with the past and shape the social history of slow memory? If peace is thought to reside primarily in institutions (rather than individuals) how does slow memory figure there?

Questions of time:

The relationship between past-present-future is fundamental to conflict transformations and it is (of course) at once about continuity and change. As Jay Winter suggests in his work on *minor utopias*: “Envisioning the future is frequently a way of trying to break with the past while unwittingly revealing the hold of the present on the way we think and live” (2006, 7). Peace and conflict studies offer a variety of ways in which we can think about time and the ways in which the past-present-future relationship is weaved into transformations and change more generally. Elise Boulding’s favourite concept was the “The 200 year present” (which began 100 years ago and reaches to the 100th birthday of children born today). The 200 year present is not comparable to a historical period or era but encourages us to reflect on a social space that reaches into the past and the future and which is at once old, new and emergent. (1988). There are always multiple experiences and environments at play in perceptions of conflict. Grasping such a timespan also encourages us to go beyond the pull of immediate events or moving from moments to moments, into considerations of conjunctures and structures. Building on Boulding’s idea, John Paul Lederach has sketched out a model of nested pasts, presents and futures in which questions of who we are, where we are going and how we will get there, are tied to different distances of experience and imagination (1998, 2010). The past is conceptualized on a continuum of recent history, lived, remembered and narrative/mythical pasts. The future on a continuum of the immediate outcomes, preparation for outcomes, manifest change and desired destinations. In the present, we have to devise strategies and develop thinking for how we will get there (both addressing the past and creating the future). While memory studies provide us analytical tools for thinking about different distances of remembering, peace and conflict studies, offer us stratified thinking about futures and direct connections to theories of change in the present. As John Paul Lederach suggests: “To live between memory and potentiality is to live permanently in a

creative space, pregnant with the unexpected” [...] the continuous birthplace of the past that lies before us” (2010, 149)

Together, the fields of memory studies and peace of conflict studies remind us not only about the multiplicity of temporalities in play at once, but also the varied experiences of them as part of conflict transformations.

In most peace processes, there is also a ‘politics of the “post”’ at play. Henrique Tavares Furtado has argued that the start of a narrative of transition comes into view as soon as the ‘post-conflict’ can be imagined (2020). This point of imagination is not defined by a peace agreement but by the effects of a broader peacebuilding process. Furthermore, there is no ‘homogenous time’ in peace processes. People do not come in and out of conflict at the same time and at the same pace. Conflict transformations are uneven processes and should be understood as such. Put differently, experiences of conflict are not homogeneously distributed - and how we can make meaning of beginnings and ends matter for how we may remember (McQuaid 2023).

In this context, slowness can be understood accumulatively, as a gradual buildup of memory, meaning and matter over time; it can be understood as a reflective practice, - a kind of careful consideration of new orientations in the light of what is understood to have already happened, or it can be understood as a form of unconscious or deliberate resistance to adjust to changes brought about in transformations of conflict.

Questions of violence:

In order to take in multiple types of conflict and contradiction, we need to employ multiple conceptualisations of violence. Not just the brute violence of physical attacks but also the slow and accumulated violences that are reproduced in systems and structures, cultural formations and the exhaustion and predation of nature. Galtung’s work on direct, structural and cultural violence is helpful in this endeavour (1969, 1990). *Direct violence* denotes the immediate connection between a subject and an object through a violent physical or psychological action. What Galtung calls *structural violence* is much more indirect and does not immediately have concrete subjects, objects and actions. Instead, violence is built into the structures and shows up as unequal power and uneven distribution (1969, 169-171), the causal chain is longer and more diffuse. His definition of structural violence is tied to whether

something (a deadly or harmful outcome) could have been avoided or not. Finally, he defines *cultural violence* as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form (1990, 291).

There are of course important temporal dimensions to these different forms of violence, We might say they enter time differently and create different chronicities and states of permanence in conflict and conflict transformation. One of our key ambitions in the working group could be to conceptualise these different forms of violence and their temporalities in relation to slow memory and conflict transformation. Keeping in mind that change and transitions are often in themselves conflictual and peacebuilding is never apolitical.

Questions of Critique:

In peace and conflict studies the international orthodoxy of liberal peacebuilding (which simply put, focuses on the introduction of democracy and free market capitalism) has been challenged by a number of new schools which call for deeper forms of participation, emancipation and recognising ongoing (social) conflict and politicization across different domains: there is a 'local turn', the 'everyday of peace' (I.e. Boulding 1988, Lederach 1995, MacGinty 2014, 2015) 'welfare peace' (Pugh 2010), 'agonistic peace' (Shinko 2008) as well as the composite turn towards hybrid peace' (Richmond and Mitchell 2010).

These critiques in peace and conflict studies are highly relevant for our explorations of slow memory, particularly if we work with conflict transformations specifically as forms of peacebuilding. To return to some of my questions above in a slightly different guise: What kind of slow memory barriers, blocks, flows and flux are created in different peace processes, infused with different (institutionalized) visions of peace and conflict? What difference does a liberal peace-building paradigm make in terms of slow memory, if it creates a competitive economy which is not peaceful (as welfare critiques would have it)? How does it reproduce/impact/create slow memory if liberal peacebuilding does not change circumstances in the lives of ordinary people (as everyday peace critiques would have it)?

In this working paper, I have asked more questions than given answers. I have tentatively begun to think through the potentialities of drawing on peace and conflict literatures to reflect on our ideas of slow memory in conflict transformations. I have focused on entry points raised in our ongoing discussions of what constitutes conflict transformations, and

specifically how to think about processes, time and violence. The questions I have raised have conceptual, methodological and practical answers and implications, and I look forward to discussing how to spark further ideas and firmer definitions in our collaborative work.

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