The Politics of Inclusion in Peace Negotiations

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Abstract: The article analyses the notion of societal inclusion in peace negotiations, a subject that has gained increasing importance in politics, policy, norm, and scholarship over the last few decades. It argues that inclusion has gone from being considered an unnecessary disturbance to a necessary one in peace processes, especially due to its growing association with the fostering of political legitimacy and peace sustainability. Reducing inclusion to its usefulness, however, obscures its fundamentally political nature and implications. The article thus tracks and unpacks the discussion on societal inclusion, drawing in particular from Chantal Mouffe's reading of political agonism and the more recent literature about agonistic peace. Ultimately, it argues that instrumentalizing and depoliticizing political inclusion is hurtful for the democratic safeguarding of previously denied rights and counter-productive even for minimal legitimizing ends. Peacebuilding benefits from agonistic standpoints of analysis by introducing, from the negotiation stage, a political model of engagement that allows in conflict by peacefully tackling it instead of sweeping it under the rug.

Keywords: political inclusion; agonistic peace; peace negotiations; peace process; Peace and Conflict Studies.

Introduction

Inclusion has become a buzzword in peacemaking studies (Hellmüller 2019). Especially from the 2000s onwards, the role of society in peace processes started to earn increasing attention in debates relating to theory, practice, policy and norm. Post-Cold War global transformations, which reached so many aspects of international relations, had a reflex over the way conflict is seen to take place and how it is handled by armed parties and international actors. The ambitious peacebuilding projects of the 1990s left such actors with no choice but to address the role of society in the goal of constructing solid and sustainable peace in post-conflict scenarios. In this process, the context of peace negotiations, be they mediated or not, remain as a sort of 'last frontier' – while the need for including society in implementation stages of peacebuilding has become relatively

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uncontroversial across different discourses on peace, for many, including society at the negotiation stage is still considered tricky and secondary.

But what is inclusion? What does it entail? As a vague and imprecise notion that may be appropriated for diverse ends, the vocabulary of inclusion takes different forms to different actors and audiences. In the present article, I refer to societal inclusion as the mechanisms of political engagement by nonviolent social movements and/or nongovernmental organisations in the context of peace negotiations. While there are a range of indirect modalities of action we could call inclusion – such as street protests or civil society events –, I refer here more specifically to those mechanisms that reach negotiation table actors and activities (Paffenholz 2014). These may include a seat at the table or other roles voluntarily attributed by armed parties to social actors, but they also encompass inclusive initiatives that result directly from social pressure.

Given the ad hoc nature of the rules of peace processes, as well as the imprecision behind the idea of inclusion, getting to a 'minimal definition' of it seems insufficient to understand its implications for peacemaking. Due to the limited space and the fragility of peace talks, deciding who gets to participate often becomes a heated debate – most organised social sectors, among them women, victims, ethnic/racial groups, youths, workers, and many others, are often able to make compelling cases as to why they have the right to influence the drafting of peace measures.

More important than trying to narrow down what inclusion *is*, therefore, is to enquire what it *does*. Scholars and practitioners have been attempting to estimate the potential impact of inclusion to assess its necessity or desirability at the negotiating stage of peacebuilding. The centre of such discussions, however, is often a utilitarian take on political inclusion – they have been largely framed around either its usefulness or its disadvantage for the signing and sustainability of peace agreements. The usual stance of contestation of social actors, their claims for the guaranteeing of individual and collective rights, their critiques to the status quo and their own internal disputes, on the other hand, are approached with caution. Whereas it seems nonsensical to search for more conflict where consensus is the target, it is precisely the conflictive and agonistic character of inclusive politics that are missing from the peacemaking debate, which tends to domesticate societal inclusion as neutral and benign.

Seeing inclusion in peacemaking as contested is important not only for reaching agreements that are more legitimate and fairer; it also opens space for the construction of agonistic democratic politics in post-conflictual scenarios – that is, politics that incorporates agonistic behaviour instead of trying to suffocate or wholly exclude conflict. The objective of this article is to track and unpack the political facets of the discussion on societal inclusion in peace negotiations, in particular those aiming to put an end to armed conflicts of internal character, which need to address and mediate among the grievances of the different sectors of a single society and often involve the reinvention of a political system.

I want to place a magnifying glass over the notion of inclusion as elaborated and exercised by specialists and practitioners. This involves a dissection of its instrumentalization as a neutral legitimizing tool and a dialogue with the growing literature on agonistic

peace, drawing in particular from the work of Chantal Mouffe. As opposed to liberal approaches, which privilege consensus and unity, agonistic peace involves 'a very fine balancing act between the need for political unity and popular demands for plurality' (Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein 2022: 692).

> Unlike its liberal counterpart, [which focuses on consensus], an agonistic peace does not seek to move beyond deep-rooted differences in identity or values; agonistic peace seeks instead to find forms of peaceful conflict management rather than working towards conflict elimination. Under an agonistic model, contestation is encouraged and dialogue serves as a way to transform the Other from an enemy into an adversary. (Murphy and Walsh 2022: 1381)

Above all, I want to call attention to the benefits of thinking about societal inclusion in light of the conflict contained within achieved consensuses, as well as the social and political context in which it exists and that it transforms.

With the above in mind, I will map the discussion on societal inclusion in peace negotiations, arguing that it went from being deemed an unnecessary disturbance to a necessary one. In other words, in a first moment, one could see that inclusion was overwhelmingly approached as a disturbance that was also seen as unnecessary – civil society actors were mainly associated with matters of technical skill, and inclusion is conditioned by clear spatial, temporal, and thematic control. Recently, however, due to normative moves that made inclusivity a norm to be considered and empirical findings that associate inclusive peace processes with durable peace, the treatment received by inclusion in Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) has changed considerably. Still, as I shall argue, this does not take away from the cautiousness or the control that usually surrounds the role of society in peace negotiations; what it does is indeed give it a paradoxical character, and being deemed simultaneously necessary and disturbing creates some contradictory moves towards accepting and promoting inclusion all the while maintaining its limited reach and impact.

Buzzwords by definition are 'concepts that are regularly referred to, but whose real value is diluted the more they are used' (Hellmüller 2019: 47). The lack of clarity around the notion of inclusion has a lot to do with the above-described ambivalence. This article will thus approach and problematize such ambivalence by looking into the two halves of the expressions used above. In the first section, it will discuss the 'unnecessary/necessary' half by questioning the frequent attachment of inclusion and its utility to newly founding political orders and their earning of legitimacy in the eyes of the population. In the following section, it touches upon the perception that inclusion is a 'disturbance,' arguing, from an agonistic peace standpoint, that consensus is a hegemonic accommodation in need of politicization and what is considered a disturbance to a peace process needs to be seen in light of that. Ultimately, it argues that instrumentalizing and depoliticizing political inclusion is hurtful for the democratic safeguarding of previously denied rights and counter-productive even for minimal legitimizing ends. Peacebuilding benefits from agonistic standpoints of analysis by introducing, from the negotiation stage, a

political model of engagement that allows in conflict by peacefully tackling it instead of sweeping it under the rug.

Inclusion: from unnecessary to necessary disturbance in peace processes

This section will map the discussion concerning inclusion in peacemaking, with special emphasis on contexts of peace negotiation. It will identify two portrayals of inclusion in the PCS literature – inclusion as 'unnecessary disturbance' and, more recently, as 'necessary disturbance' to peace processes. In short, it will argue inclusion is (still) seen as a source of disturbance for peace processes and even more so for peace negotiations but will also observe this narrative has not stopped recent movements towards slow acceptance that it is necessary for the construction of what the literature often calls 'durable' or 'sustainable' peace.

Far from clear-cut and mutually exclusive, these two portrayals aim to clarify recent arguments advanced in this discussion, as well as the one proposed by this article. It is clear, nevertheless, that each peace process has its own background, frames the role of society differently and thus inclusion may be thought of beyond these two categories shaped here. Their objective, in turn, is to clarify how the debate on the issue has advanced.

Inclusion as unnecessary disturbance

The role of organized social groups other than conflict parties in peace processes has been traditionally treated as secondary. At worst, it was simply deemed unthinkable – a non-issue. It is easy to see how, in Cold War conflict management schemes, there was no room for even beginning to consider social demands for participation at negotiation tables. Even when instances of civil society involvement begin to surface, between the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the form of problem-solving workshops and informal high-level civil society forums for debating peace, they were punctual and still very exclusive. Not only was the task of building peace assumed to be exclusive; exclusiveness and secrecy were often seen as salutary for the drafting of peace agreements.

In general, even when considered desirable or 'the right thing to do,' Conflict Resolution approaches have represented inclusion as an *unnecessary disturbance* to peacemaking. Peter Wallensteen and Mikael Eriksson (2009: 28) express a common concern among these views of inclusion, for example, when they say that 'the mediator needs to keep in mind that when too numerous members of civil society, with different and perhaps unclear mandates, are brought into a process, it may danger to fragment negotiating dynamics.'

Such approaches condition their openness to inclusion to its utility for peacebuilding, and this cost-benefit calculation has consistently led to recommendations against societal inclusion at the negotiation stage. Fisas argues that

> there is no room for third-row players at the negotiation table, so it is always necessary to start from an inclusive approach that gives

> voice to the actors, even if they are not the desired ones but are *key to resolving the conflict* (2010: 22-23, my emphasis).

There is thus a well-consolidated discourse that determines that some actors (i.e. those with military power) are necessary and should be at the table, as opposed to unnecessary unarmed or 'third-row' actors. Such discourse is grounded in a specific idea not only of what is key for ending conflict but also of what the word conflict stands for. This feeds into a consensus in the specialized literature that the echo of 'too many voices' at the table is simply detrimental to the signing of peace agreements and may preclude a peace process from even reaching its implementation stage.

The attachment between inclusion and its potential utility for peace explains and leads to a couple of other important points. First, it inspires an association of civil society inclusion with neutral conceptions of NGO expertise and technical skill, not with citizenship-related issues. Kriesberg (2009: 22) notes that, alongside the interactive problem-solving workshops of the 1970s and 1980s, 'NGOs were founded ... [and] conducted training, consultations, and workshops relating to large-scale conflicts.' From the 1990s on, when Conflict Resolution starts experiencing what Kriesberg calls diffusion and differentiation, he likewise links non-governmental action to technical attributions. NGOs are then called upon by government and IGOs 'to carry out some of the needed work of humanitarian relief, institution building, protection of human rights, and training in conflict resolution skills' (Kriesberg 2009: 25). NGOs are thus largely recognized as flexible and potentially more efficient mediators and facilitators in complex peace processes in which state and international actors are either unwilling or unable to reach solutions (Bartoli 2009: 393).

The professional role of NGOs in peace-related activities, in particular facilitation and mediation support, tends to obfuscate alternative views of inclusion as stemming from political action and disputes that aim not at being useful, but at advocating for rights. Most peace processes are not limited to ceasefires and military policy; they involve a negotiated redefinition of people's fundamental rights. As such, inclusion also needs to be understood as having a say in this redefinition process.

Moreover, this type of nongovernmental involvement in negotiation processes is in tight consonance with the knowledge production expected and practiced in this field, i.e. one that revolves around the gathering of lessons learned and best practices. The expectation that there is such a thing as all-encompassing models and neutral expertise regarding peace and conflict makes it more difficult for anyone to see social inclusion in peace negotiations as an inherently political endeavour. The interaction between international institutions and academic actors in the production and circulation of knowledge, as well as the conformation of normative standards regarding inclusion and inclusivity, are of central importance in this debate and should be kept in mind. Even as political and social demands more recently start being recognized as worthy of inclusion, the placement of civil society as a technical actor that must bring something to the table remains.

One consequence of the inclusion-utility attachment is the spatial, temporal, and thematic control of inclusion. Even when accepted as useful for peace, it happens under a complex combination of hierarchizations. In their reading of affected populations' role in a peace process, mainstream approaches resort to pyramidal models such as Lederach's, which show social movements belonging to a wide base spatially separated from the top. Another (perhaps even more enlightening) example of the spatial insulation of negotiation tables is the concept of Track II diplomacy, as well as resulting notions such as Track one and a half and Multitrack diplomacy, and close synonyms such as Citizen diplomacy. While it exists in practice since the late 1960s, the term 'Track II diplomacy' itself was coined in 1981 by American diplomat Joseph Montville to 'denote unofficial conflict resolution dialogues' (Jones 2015: 9). Therefore, Track II surfaces to provide both an alternative and a complementary space to Track I activity, i.e. official state diplomacy. Even more so in the context of widening and deepening post-Cold War agendas (Buzan and Hansen 2009), PCS theories channelled the concept to discuss multiplicity and inclusion in peacebuilding.

The idea of having two or more tracks of engagement in conflict resolution works as separation and a division of labour between different sectors of society, as well as a backchannel charged with revamping dialogues when official arenas go sour. More importantly, however, it also opens up the possibility of adding up the work all tracks do separately around the common goal of building peace.

Pyramidal models and the train track metaphor are rather illustrative of inclusion's spatial (de)limitations and a shared sense of cautiousness regarding its effects on peace negotiations. In Lederach's model, political instances of decision-making are at the narrow tip of the pyramid and their relation to the grassroots is mediated by middle sectors of society, which visually reinforces the idea that the table is not the place for wide social debate. In this view, the exclusion of social demands at the negotiation table and the encouragement of grassroots initiatives at the local level become two sides of the same coin. Tracks, in turn, run parallel, each in its path; parallel lines by definition never meet. If a track tilts towards the other, they may safely cross each other, under certain conditions, but they may also tragically collide. The renderings of social inclusion underlined above adhere and reinforce a spatial hierarchization of politics that does not stand alone; it is socially constructed and discursively maintained.

If we switch this analysis to a temporal key, we likewise see these (de)limitations are present and in accordance with spatial ones. Most authors tend to agree it is best to promote social inclusion once a peace agreement is reached and in process of implementation – or, to a lesser degree and in a more limited, professional way, in preventive and exploratory stages. This solution comes off as natural due to the long-term character of recent peacebuilding endeavours. It also stems from the fact that an ambitious peace project will never 'catch on' if people are not on board, working collectively towards taking those agreed-upon measures from paper to life. In terms of utility, therefore, having inclusion happen after negotiations is often seen as ideal because it holds the promise of a more useful and stable role for it to exercise.

Along with spatial and temporal control of inclusion, we may also say inclusion is conditioned by thematic hierarchizations. Some topics, especially those of military character, are deemed strategic priorities and are usually much less permeable to societal demands. While recent peace processes have been dealing with a wider gamut of topics – not only of military but also social, political, and economic nature –, the disparate levels of openness to society among negotiation topics can become mechanisms of 'exclusion within inclusion.' Although some aspects of the liberal peace toolkit (such as economic development planning) are more inclusion-friendly, these are directly affected by exclusive political decisions that continue happening behind closed doors.

Inclusion as necessary disturbance

Over the last few decades, the peacebuilding scenario has made it impossible for the maintenance of exclusion as the norm of the field. The tools developed to deal with armed conflicts, especially intrastate ones of social, ethnic and/or religious nature, generated a growing sense that the peace process can no longer be the exclusive territory of rulers and rebels. More than ever, decisions taken by parties at the negotiation table are not limited to their grievances and the continuation or termination of physical strife.

More than solving differences and judging war crimes, the plan from the 1990s onwards involved reconciling and rebuilding societies in the long run. This was clear in the UN's ambitious post-Cold War performance and the mainstreaming of positive peace theories and new versions of peacebuilding that advocate the inclusion of civil society actors in peace processes. While the trade-offs identified in this discussion in essence remain the same, it acquired new contours recently, after undergoing some important transformations. These have to do both with recent international normatizing moves and studies that have shown inclusion might reveal not just potentially useful, but *necessary* for peace.

The transition between unnecessary and necessary inclusion is made up of both continuities and discontinuities. Inclusion has both changed and stayed the same in this process. It is still conditioned and controlled based on its potential utility, and ultimately faced as a disturbance for negotiations. It also has quite paradoxically grown into a necessity due to normative and theoretical developments, explained next, which turned social inclusion into both an unavoidable debate and a demand much harder to ignore. Recent studies have made an effort to analyse normative and practical aspects of this renewed take on inclusion, trying to understand when inclusion usually takes place and how.

The best example of inclusion's normatization into peacebuilding protocol is probably the emergence of the inclusivity norm. In its *Guidance for Effective Mediation* the UN (2012: 11) lists it as a fundamental of mediation, defining it as '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.' For the UN, we cannot assume armed parties represent the wider public, which is why restricting openness to armed actors may send the message that violence pays off. Balancing out inclusion and process efficiency is seen as a challenge for mediators, as well as their role in convincing

armed parties that broad participation is preferable to closed dialogues. Inclusivity is considered a settled norm in the sense that its consolidation is hardly ever questioned anymore, and exclusionary practices now demand public justification (von Burg 2015: 10, see also Hellmüller 2019). It is important not to confuse the norm of inclusivity and actual measures aimed at inclusion. The normatization of inclusion indeed does not guarantee inclusive processes, whatever they are defined to be. It does, on the other hand, strengthen the case for inclusion and raises costs for those who insist on exclusion. One important example concerns the norms established by UNSC Resolution 1325 (and its resulting resolutions) on the role of women in peace processes.

Bertram I. Spector (2015: 91) believes that, in a context of growing pressure for inclusion, people start to seek ways of communicating their stands beyond mere protest, since '[t]hey not only want their voices heard, but they want to be directly involved in making the change happen through collective action.' The significance of the problem of exclusion in peace processes, on the other hand, does not eliminate the caution that always pervaded approaches to including third parties at negotiating tables. Wallensteen's and Eriksson's previously mentioned concern, in this sense, does not go away; it is simply reshaped when faced with new developments in this debate. In the midst of violent confrontation, the approach to non-violent contact between rival parties is usually surrounded by an aura of fragility. Hence, for example, the concern of experts with issues of timing and the influence of spoilers[1] on the failure of negotiations. Even with the emergence of the inclusivity norm, there is still an overall consensus in the literature that direct inclusion of voices deemed unnecessary at the negotiation table is a disturbance and even perhaps an impediment to a negotiated solution (Nilsson 2012; Wanis St-John and Kew 2008; Lanz 2011).

The inherent contradiction of having inclusion promise both utility and disruption grows even deeper with a few recent transformations that increasingly turn the issue of its potential utility into one of outward necessity. Parallel to the rise of the inclusivity norm, recent studies have shown inclusion might be more than just punctually useful; it might in fact be *necessary* for peace to endure. Here the concept of sustainability in theoretical and global governance discourse is of central importance, permeating discussions on development, environment, as well as peace and conflict.

If, on the one hand, welcoming additional points of view into the elaboration of a peace agreement in theory makes consensus more difficult to come by, specialists have found that it was precisely the peace negotiations deemed inclusive that presented the lowest rates of subsequent return to violence. Two quantitative studies stand out in this sense: one published by Anthony Wanis-St. John and Darren Kew in 2008, and another by Desirée Nilsson, published four years later. The first observed that, among the cases studied, all those with high civil society involvement led to a stable peace throughout the implementation phase (Wanis-St. John and Kew 2008: 27). The vast majority of cases with low civil society involvement, in contrast, experienced a return to violence. Nilsson (2012: 244), in turn, found results consistent with the expectation that the inclusion of civil society actors increases the chances of peace. In all cases involving the inclusion

of civil society actors and members of political parties, together or separately, Nilsson noted that the risk of a negotiated peace failing was significantly reduced. More recent studies concerning the role played by women in peacebuilding have placed such more general conclusions to the test, finding that peace negotiations that are inclusive of women achieve better quality and longer lasting peace (Paffenholz 2015; Krause, Krause and Branfors 2018; Mendes 2023).

Thus, inclusive initiatives are slowly recognized as legitimating factors for the re-foundation of war-torn political systems, and linked to a sense of national ownership and public buy-in. As the next section shall maintain, there is some reductionism – and, more importantly, a silenced political character – in considering inclusion solely an instrument to produce legitimacy.

Ultimately, what these arguments demonstrate is that the issue of inclusion in peace negotiations develops a paradoxical character: the effort for inclusion is seen as simultaneously good and bad, as both necessary and disruptive for the success of peace negotiations. In spite of the recognition of the importance of considering groups normally excluded and particularly affected by armed conflicts, it is usually controlled, conditioned and tentative in comparison to the urgency of ending violence between parties. Inclusion is only admitted if under control, i.e. if its manifestation is spatially, temporally and thematically managed so as to not compromise negotiation efforts. Secondly, these control mechanisms work to establish the conditions under which inclusion may take place. As a consequence, inclusion is most often laid out as a tentative effort by decision-makers, one that may be quickly discarded when more urgent matters surface throughout negotiations.

Of all the tensions observed in this apparent catch-22, none is clearer than that between direct inclusion mechanisms (i.e. those that grant access to the negotiating table) and indirect ones (i.e. those that seek to influence table activities but do not reach it directly). Thus, the sense of stalemate – or pure unfeasibility – is especially neuralgic when demands for inclusion aim at seats at the negotiating table since such inclusion needs the stamp of the armed actors involved and/or international mediators and sponsors.

A few authors have explored these contradictions to try and understand how armed parties and sponsors deal with popular demands and then foresee when and in which situations inclusion will occur. Ultimately, as previously indicated, the discussion usually goes back to questions of utility (or, more recently, one may say *necessity*) and normativity. In this vein, David Lanz (2011) believes that the factors that lead to the inclusion or exclusion of actors at negotiation tables depend fundamentally on the crossing between practical and normative dynamics. The practical argument seeks to understand if the inclusion of a particular participant increases the chances of an agreement being reached; the normative, in turn, questions whether such participation is consistent with the norms and values of the actors who conduct the process. If the inclusion or exclusion of an actor is perceived as necessary in the practical sense and appropriate in the normative sense, there is mutual reinforcement between the two parameters and, consequently, the choice of participants is uncomplicated. The difficulty for Lanz lies, however, in cases where

practical and normative requirements do not coincide – whether an actor is seen as practically necessary, but normatively reprehensible, e.g. groups considered to be terrorists; or the opposite, if it is seen as harmful in the practical sense though 'legitimate' in the normative sense, e.g. some civil society actors.

The feeling of isolation around negotiation tables has led specialists to search for alternative ways of overcoming this perceived paradox between inclusion and effectiveness in peace processes. This was mainly done by expanding the notion of inclusion beyond the granting of seats at the table. A series of indirect modes of social mobilization and vocalization of demands also start 'counting' as inclusion. For Wanis-St. John and Kew (2008: 20), because access to the table is controlled by powerful actors that can resort to violence, most often civil society exerts influence through indirect means such as political lobbying, transfer of expertise and the mobilization of public opinion.

The *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation* (2012: 11) stresses that inclusion 'does not imply that all stakeholders participate directly in the formal negotiations but facilitates interaction between the conflict parties and other stakeholders and creates mechanisms to include all perspectives in the process.' In her study of inclusivity, Corinne Von Burg (2015: 9) observes that, while it is most often recognized as a process-related norm (i.e. referring to 'the number and diversity of actors involved'), it can also at times be understood as content-related, in which case it would refer to the inclusion of issues at the negotiation table's agenda. As the author stresses, the two types of inclusion that come out of such norms do not necessarily go hand in hand: an actor can be personally included only not to be able to advance his or her agenda; on the contrary, an issue or specific agenda may be included without the physical presence of the actors behind it (von Burg 2015: 16-7).

In the version of inclusion proposed here, the way it is seen and portrayed both changed and stayed the same over time. It stayed the same because it is still viewed as a disturbance. As discussed, the role of society at this stage of peacebuilding is usually read as additional conflict to an already conflicted scenario. The portion of the expression that did change (from unnecessary to necessary), on the other hand, had to do with the normatization of inclusion and the growing endorsement of studies that suggest it bears a central role in fostering sustainable peace.

In this sense, there is permanence within the change observed – even where we can find discourses on inclusion that are grounded on the guarantee of basic rights, most of the time it is valued for its utility and controlled in function of such utility, a trend that may be found across academic and expert production, practitioners' discourses and international institutions' guidelines for inclusion. The above-mentioned hierarchizations still frame what inclusion is and the role it plays in a peace process. Spatial, temporal and thematic control of inclusion is thus decisive for the way it is perceived both in theory and practice today. Next section will place under critical light the issues of 'necessity' and 'disturbance' when it comes to the inclusion of society in peace negotiations.

Beyond utility and consensus: the agonistic politics of 'necessity' and 'disturbance'

The two categories outlined above have a lot to say about the advances and limitations of current approaches to inclusion in peace negotiations. Despite the growing concern with this topic, it still calls for deeper critical reflection over what ultimately means for a peace process to be 'inclusive,' and whom such inclusion serves. It is also necessary to reflect on the tendency to oppose languages of practicality and normativity, as previously highlighted, and the significance of their adoption to explain inclusion. Reducing inclusion to its usefulness leads to its instrumentalization and potentially misses the point of asking more fundamental questions about it. Therefore, while investigations on the role of inclusion and the way it unfolds have gained space in PCS debates in the past years, it also seems increasingly necessary to see it as shaping and shaped by political dynamics.

My aim in this section is to critically reflect about each half of the expressions I proposed before. First, I want to look at the 'necessary/unnecessary' component and its creation of an attachment between inclusion and legitimacy. Next, and related to the previous discussion, I will evaluate the 'disturbance' component, questioning the place of agonistic conflict and dispute within the attempted consensus underlying peace processes. Together, the two will lead to seeing the peace process as a place and time not only for deliberation and consensus but also for political dispute – a debate which should not be avoided despite the general sense that it hurts the larger objective of peace. On the contrary, seeing the dispute behind the consensus might just be what we all need in order to see inclusion from a deeper, more nuanced perspective. In this sense, I follow authors that have recently framed different PCS debates under the notion of *agonistic peace*, in particular views that apply it to the specific issue of societal inclusion in peace processes.

Let's start with the issue of *necessity*. Behind both practical and normative arguments for inclusion as 'necessary,' there is a fairly widespread belief that it benefits peace processes by helping foster legitimacy and thus, as a result, also contributing towards peace durability. Examples establishing a causal relation between sustainability and legitimacy abound. The UN Guidance (2012: 11) says '[c]ivil society actors can play a critical role in increasing the legitimacy of a peace process and are potentially important allies.' Roberto Belloni (2008: 199) argues inclusion 'can increase the legitimacy of a peace agreement and the prospects for its implementation – even when domestic elites expect civil society involvement will have only a modest impact on the drafting of the peace settlement.' For Paffenholz (2014: 74), 'engaging civil society in the various stages of the peace process can promote higher levels of accountability among the conflict parties, and a sense that the negotiations have greater legitimacy, which can lead, in turn, to a shift in public opinion about the process.' Guelke (2008: 70) believes '[h]ow inclusive the process is of significant strands of political opinion has a strong bearing on perceptions of its legitimacy, both internally and externally.'

Conditioning inclusion to its 'practical validity' suggests it is only a possibility if useful – taking as given, accepting and omitting power dynamics as they exist, which

affects the treatment of inclusive efforts as potential mechanisms of transformation. The normative argument (which may work to justify the inclusion of social groups deemed unnecessary for the signature of an agreement, e.g. conflict victims) ends up attached to the loose objective of legitimation. As an end in and of itself, the goal of political legitimation not only serves instrumental purposes and ignores the political character of peace processes, but also suggests that inclusion itself matters less than the *perception* and consequent *acceptance* that it happened.

Andreas Hirblinger and Dana Landau show how vague calls for societal inclusion and its role in political legitimization run across theory, policy and practice of inclusion in peacemaking, but hold little transformative potential. First, legitimacy-oriented theoretical arguments usually 'use open and vague framings of the included, leaving their translation into tangible policy options open' (Hirblinger and Landau 2020: 4), as a consequence also ignoring the antagonistic dynamics at the core of armed conflicts. In policy, this usually translates into references to broad-based inclusion of 'stakeholders,' 'voices' or 'civil society,' which do not facilitate their practical application by parties and mediators (Hirblinger and Landau 2020: 7). Mapping out stakeholders reveals key in this sense, which is not always within reach of those working in negotiations. As a result, what we see is an inclusion that follows 'a "standard formula" of consultations, giving voice predominantly to representatives of urban-based, professionalized civil society organizations' (Hirblinger and Landau 2020: 10-1).

Far from aiming to exhaust the issue of legitimacy, which is subject to vast theoretical debate, it is fitting to briefly discuss its significance for peace processes and enquire how its connections to inclusion have been forged. What is it, then, that PCS authors are calling legitimacy? Are they referring to the creation of legality in the form of new political institutions? Is it related to literal or tacit ideas of popular consent to such institutions? Or – what seems more likely –, is legitimacy here taken simply as the belief that it actually exists, with little focus on what is the practical anchor of such belief?

More than anything, it is strictly treated as something to aspire to. This is only natural since legitimacy is a key aspect of going from the widespread and undisciplined use of force to the classical Weberian formulation of state monopoly over the legitimate use of force. On the other hand, since force is not enough to sustain a political order and should not be the state's first resort in dealing with society, a well-accepted sense of authority, that leads people to obey without violence, ranks pretty high in peacebuilding's priorities. As legitimacy is about *the justification of political power*, it cannot be taken as neutral (Bobbio 2017: 113) and it is problematic to see its achievement as merely an end instead of a (contested) process.

Franzisca Zanker (2018: 7) notes that the approach received by legitimacy in studies of inclusion is circular: 'Public buy-in results in legitimacy, and because of legitimacy, there is public buy-in. Therefore, while several of these scholars mention legitimacy, they leave the exact mechanisms of how legitimacy works largely unaddressed.' Based on this, she calls attention to the importance of a closer look at this specific idea of legitimacy, questioning 'what would make peace negotiations more legitimate for the population, rather than in what ways civil society can contribute to the legitimacy of peace talks'

(Zanker 2018: 9). In a related argument, Anderlini (2007: 60-1) points out that the legitimacy and objectivity of civil society actors demanding inclusion are often questioned; these are questions 'rarely, if ever, applied to the political and military leaders who claim to be representative of their societies but often appear to gain their legitimacy through the barrel of a gun.' The direction assumed in different views of post-conflict legitimacy is therefore anything but trivial – most of the time it is mentioned in reference to what society can contribute towards enabling new political institutions, not the other way around. Instead of seeing legitimation as one unproblematic feature of a peace process or an easy answer to a yes or no question, it is important to recognize it as both a *two-way street* and as an *informal (i.e. noninstitutionalized) and contested process* (Zanker 2018: 10).

It is also important to underline that since the production of agreements and their legitimation must be accommodated by consensus, it starts by automatically excluding those who question the basis for consensus itself. This shows that this association between inclusion and legitimacy is problematic because it assumes consensus as a universe, whereas it is possible, in a different interpretation, to see the creation of legitimacy as something that simultaneously includes *and* excludes.

This is directly related to the *disturbance* debate, to which I now move on. Thinking about the disturbance societal inclusion is said to pose necessarily involves bringing up its political significance for peace processes, as well as its place in transforming power dynamics. The consensual universe imagined within the enterprise of peace negotiations is restrictive of disagreement beyond those fundamental ones between conflict parties motivating the peace process. This shapes the very labelling of what constitutes politically relevant actors or agendas in the handling of armed conflicts. Societal actors are either completely stripped of political value, being portrayed as passive bystanders, or, if/when inclusion becomes a controlled and hierarchized possibility, they are recognized as political actors yet also as potential troublemakers. The first option is seen in approaches that contemplate power and politics in peace processes as the exclusive realm of conflict parties and elites; the second, in the more recent inclusion-friendly viewpoints discussed here.

In consonance with conflict management schemes, the literature that does place power and politics at centre stage still limits itself to studying elite bargains, with little or no attention to societal actors and a lack of critical purpose. In inclusion-friendly literature, on the other hand, the political and contested character of society's involvement in peace processes is usually admitted but cast aside as 'too complex to tackle,' in favour of more manageable and neutralized viewpoints that set out to study it 'as it is,' without questioning existent power dynamics. Oftentimes inclusion is seen as penetrating loopholes within specific political configurations that are perceived as naturally exclusory. Once found and seized, these loopholes are evaluated by scholars in an isolated way, losing sight of the configuration that generated them. Taken in isolation, technical categories accept power dynamics as they are and contribute towards turning political aspects of inclusion into a black box.

However, one cannot lose from sight that the agency of any actor is necessarily connected to the structural continuities of the political and social life of conflicting societies

– continuities that are made possible and maintained by institutional and discursive developments (Jabri 2006: 2). For Vivienne Jabri (2006: 5), '[t]he problem lies in the extraction of conflict resolution from its social and political context.' In fact, a widening of political and social agency in peace processes is crucial if a deeper reflection on the topic of inclusion is to be undertaken, and this goes through the problematization of the political as the 'realm of the possible' and a stage for power dynamics. As Stefano Guzzini explains, thus,

> '[p]ower' implies an idea of counterfactuals; i.e., it could also have been otherwise. The act of attributing power redefines the borders of what can be done. In the usual way we conceive of the term, this links power inextricably to 'politics' in the sense of the 'art of the possible.' (Guzzini 2005: 511)

In the context of peace negotiations and the political refoundation of states in the face of ever less palpable and well-delineated wars (Jabri 2007), the 'art of the possible' meets the extreme of reinvention.

The hierarchization and control of inclusion are indissociable from the attribution of what is political and what is not, as well as what is political and deserves attention, and what is political but 'too disruptive' to enter analyses. As stressed by Catherine O'Rourke (2017: 605) in her critique of the political settlement framework, '[t]he determination to "do politics" apolitically leaves the discipline blind to its own implicit politics.' Moreover, the idea of achieving 'possible' inclusion discloses a 'commitment ... to "work with the grain" (Levy, 2014)[2] of prevailing distributions of power and to focus on securing marginal policy gains,' which inevitably carries an 'implicit normativity' (O'Rourke 2017: 605). As it so happens, the separation between elites and non-elites, a categorization that appears as central in conflict management schemes and to a certain extent is incorporated by more recent takes on inclusion, is also far from neutral. As O'Rourke (2017: 600) argues, '[i]t is unlikely to be clear at all times and in all settings who, in fact, constitute "the elites." Rather, it is a term inherently laden with both ambiguity and values.'

A different framing of politics and power is called for, in order for their expression in peace processes not to be merely acknowledged and accepted but scrutinized and criticized instead. This also means assuming a distinct outlook on consensus, which is not only the main objective behind the idea of peace processes but also their main standard of analysis, traditionally based on rational-actor frameworks and liberal individualistic conceptions of politics. Whereas I am not trying to deny the centrality of decision-making in the handling of violent conflicts, I want to call attention to the conflict contained within achieved consensuses, as well as the social and political context in which it exists and that it transforms – especially if one agrees that the flipside of this coin might just be the exclusions contained within 'possible' inclusions.

The concept of agonistic peace recently developed in the PCS literature is illuminating in this regard. Drawing inspiration from authors inside and out of the PCS discipline, debates on agonistic peace have represented 'an opportunity to politicise the concept of peace and in so doing to illuminate points where peace slides all too comfortably

back into familiarised hegemonic iterations of disciplinary order' (Shinko 2008: 475). They came as a response to what authors call 'a technical turn' that advances a depoliticized view of conflict and leads towards 'counterproductive' peacebuilding practices (Aggestam, Cristiano and Strömbom 2015; Strömbom 2020). In short, agonistic peace presents itself as an alternative to violent antagonisms that does not deny the conflictual nature of politics; instead, it proposes to see peace as a reframing of conflict, from a clash between enemies to a dispute between (peaceful) adversaries (Maddison 2015).

Inserted within the agonistic peace debate, in an attempt to tackle peace processes' political and power dynamics from a critical angle and reframe societal inclusion in a political key, I want to mobilize alternative ways of discussing politics, antagonism and consensus, drawing particularly from the work of Chantal Mouffe. This means briefly discussing her differentiation between 'politics' and 'the political;' the relationship between antagonism and agonism; and the essential contradictions within liberal ideals of peace, expressed in the form of hegemonic relations.

For Mouffe, 'politics' refers to the practices and institutions making up a specific political order; by 'the political,' on the other hand, she means a more fundamental and constitutive aspect of societies, which is indissociable from power, conflict and antagonism. As a 'struggle between enemies,' antagonism is central for the political because it frames the constitution of collective forms of identification – which always surface through 'us' versus 'them' dynamics (2013: 184). Antagonism, in this context, is defined as a situation in which 'the presence of the "Other" prevents me from being fully myself.' The constant possibility of (violent) antagonism underlying political orders thus 'impedes the full totalization of society and forecloses the possibility of a society beyond division and power. This, in turn, requires coming to terms with the lack of a final ground and the undecidability that pervades every order' (2013: 158).

Mouffe believes that it is only by recognizing antagonism and the ever-changing character of conflict that *agonistic* democratic politics – i.e. a struggle between mutually recognized (and therefore legitimate) adversaries, not enemies – becomes possible. Armed conflict may thus be viewed as the violent expression of such antagonisms, and peace processes as transitional moments in which both politics and the political are under reconstruction. While a successful peace process can and often does establish agonistic democratic politics, the existence of antagonism at the root of the political remains the basis for the identification of social groups and their interaction in newly founded political orders.

According to the author, it is because liberal and rationalistic interpretations of politics completely miss this point that they find it possible to devise technical solutions for conflicts. However, '...political questions are not merely technical issues to be solved by experts. Proper political questions always involve decisions that require making a choice between conflicting alternatives' (Mouffe 2013: 171). As Mouffe points out, modern liberal ideals were built over a paradoxical connection forged between equality and liberty. The tension between these two principles can only be accommodated through political negotiations that establish temporary hegemonic power patterns.

Once it is granted that the tension between equality and liberty cannot be reconciled and that there can only be contingent hegemonic forms of stabilization of their conflict, it becomes clear that, once the very idea of an alternative to the existing configuration of power disappears, what disappears also is the very possibility of a legitimate form of expression for the resistances against the dominant power relations. The status quo has become naturalized and made into the way 'things really are.' (Mouffe 2000: 5)

The idea of hegemonic articulation originally conceived by Mouffe and Laclau (2001: 95) necessarily relates to the openness of the social, i.e. to the unfeasibility of conceiving society as a founding totality. In this perspective, political orders stem from the sedimentation of hegemonic practices, which are constantly susceptible to counter-hegemonic attempts to substitute them with new ones (Mouffe 2013: 158).

Addressing PCS approaches from this standpoint presupposes not only considering the elimination of conflict an impossibility, as conflict transformation approaches already do, but also reframing how antagonism is brought into the analysis, seeing 'any form of consensus [as] the result of a hegemonic articulation' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: xviii). By reconceptualizing classical Marxist discourse and its exclusive focus on the working class as a unified agent, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemonic articulations works to highlight the plurality of (often contradictory) subject positions and struggles that act in society. While it may seem nonsensical to flesh out more conflictual relationships in the context of desperate attempts for armed conflict resolution or transformation, the recognition and embracing of this sort of conflict is also in line with a view of politics as, yes, a realm of conflict, but an agonistic conflict nonetheless.

On the one hand, the belief in the impossibility of 'definitive conflict resolution' is already present in the PCS literature, for example in the lasting influence of Galtunian peacebuilding and, more recently, in Lederach's work and the notion of conflict transformation. It is clear, on the other hand, that the hegemonic practices behind given political orders are usually a blind spot for PCS, which most often adhere to specific power configurations by trying to grasp reality 'as it is.' In contrast, Laclau and Mouffe (2001: xii) propose to 'privilege the political moment in the structuring of society,' which constitutes a first step towards destabilizing the political silences of PCS literature in relation to the role of society in peace negotiations, as well as capturing the plurality and asymmetry of positions involved in peace talks.

Agonistic peace approaches go further than conflict transformation in that they focus not only on relationship-building and identity change but also on institutional arrangements (Strömbom 2019: 5). For Lisa Strömbom (2019), an agonistic peace analytical framework is capable of addressing not only issues related to the mutual recognition of former enemies but also institutional solutions that dismiss standardized peacebuilding formulas. In her view, recognition may be thin or thick, with the first being more superficial – e.g. the formal recognition between negotiation parties – and the second involving deeper engagement with particularities of identities (Strömbom 2019: 17). Agonistic approaches to institutions, in turn, should safeguard a plurality of political voices and claims as well as a dialogical process that 'is built on the idea of dissensus as a progressive source of social life' (Strömbom 2019: 15). Through such parameters, the author argues

that we can assess whether a scenario of agonistic peace may be deemed deep, partial or shallow, depending on its reach within different levels of society – if agonistic pluralism only reaches elite-level instances, it is shallow; it is deep when it reaches mid- and local levels; and it is partial if it is high in certain instances but not others (Strömbom 2019: 20).

Agonistic approaches to peace thus help to reposition the discussion on inclusion in peace negotiations. For Strömbom (2019: 9), '[a]gonistic practices can help mitigate violent conflict, since they aim towards problematising exclusionary practices, marginalisation, relations of domination and also probe how these could be overthrown, resisted or altered.' In a similar vein, Murphy and Walsh (2022: 1383) highlight that agonistic approaches help create pathways that include 'a variety of local voices,' casting off the simplification of their political roles and making sure that they echo throughout all stages of peacebuilding.

Thus, such approaches stress that the role of society in peace processes should be more than 'the inclusion of less powerful groups in already existing structures,' since '[a] heterogeneity of voices within a homogenous system cannot alter the status quo' (Peterson 2013: 323).

> Agonistic peacebuilding must probe questions regarding the transformation of power relations. Ultimately this means striving towards an inclusive society that values contestation, in which all parties have the possibility to make their claims heard and where all individuals feel that their interests are represented. (Aggestam, Cristiano and Strömbom 2015: 1740)

Beyond the recognition of the silencing effects of static consensuses, then, the literature on agonistic peace values and searches for the creation of spaces for agonistic encounters and, in a more formal expression, the institutionalisation of dissent. It also involves the recognition of the multiple narratives of conflicts and, at a deeper level, the adoption of intersectional lenses that allow for the elucidation of overlapping and interrelated types of oppression across diverse identity facets (Murphy and Walsh 2022, Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein 2022). It is fundamental, in this sense, to take into consideration 'the multiple and intersecting boundaries along which identities coalesce and are contested' (Murphy and Walsh 2022: 1387).

Agonistic lenses are therefore more adequate for thinking about peace negotiations as a political and contested endeavour, also revealing more in line with recent approaches to societal inclusion that evaluate it through civil society articulation (Nilsson et al. 2020; Eschmann and Nilsson 2023; Corredor 2023; Mendes 2022), and democratic conceptual lenses of political participation and representation (Mendes 2019). In light of more politicized approaches, the simplification of inclusion as a source of legitimacy and/or disturbance may be reread and reinterpreted. Looking at inclusion from a different perspective allows for the construction of a critical approach that considers peace processes a renegotiation of both politics and the political; that sees consensus as a tool for hegemonic accommodation; and that takes inclusion in peace processes as a simultaneously controlled and disputed struggle.

Final thoughts

This article tried to locate and critically analyse the notion of inclusion within the Peace and Conflict Studies umbrella. It mapped how the notion of inclusion in peace processes surfaced and unfolded throughout the last few decades, arguing that the discussion on inclusion has gone from considering it an *unnecessary disturbance* to portraying it as a *necessary* one. This move is closely related to its normatization and the empirical verification that it is important for building lasting peace. Thus, exclusion went from the unquestioned norm in peace processes, especially peace negotiations, to a point in which it is received with criticism and activism from both domestic and international actors. The main driver behind this change is the perceived utility of inclusion, despite the fact it remains a 'disturbance.' I have also observed that, despite the changes from one expression to the other, there is also permanence in the sense that inclusive initiatives are always controlled and temporally, spatially, and thematically hierarchized.

With inclusion increasingly revealing an important component of peace, studies begin to focus on identifying how and when it takes place, as well as the potential benefits it may have in bringing armed conflicts to a closure. Therefore, I tried to leave the established political boundary around accepting inclusion as a necessary disturbance for peace, proposing instead to analyse the two parts of the expression under critical light. Influenced by studies on political agonism and agonistic peace, it questioned, on the one hand, the association between inclusion and its usefulness and legitimizing potential, and, on the other, the idea that it constitutes a disturbance for peace dialogues and the reaching of peace agreements. In this sense, thinking agonistically helps to build a (re) politicized approach for looking at inclusion beyond established liberal and technical conventions.

It is thus necessary to rethink (or rather *unveil* and *dissect*) the idea of inclusion in peace processes. The unquestioned adoption of the notion of societal inclusion as it is often portrayed induces one to think of it as a static and uncontroversial end product. This is hurtful for the democratic safeguarding of previously denied rights and the reparation of violations perpetrated during conflict, as well as counter-productive even for minimal legitimizing and sustainability ends. Peace processes may thus benefit from agonistic standpoints that allow in conflict, peacefully incorporate it into political dynamics and, most importantly, truly include previously excluded and victimized sectors of society.

Notes

1   Spoilers are actors who either refuse to negotiate peace and sabotage it from afar or enter negotiations with the purpose of disrupting them.
2   The text mentioned is Levy (2014).

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A política da inclusão nas negociações de paz

Resumo: O artigo analisa a noção de inclusão social nas negociações de paz, um assunto que ganhou importância crescente na política, nas normas e nos estudos nas últimas décadas. Argumenta-se que a inclusão deixou de ser considerada um distúrbio desnecessário e passou a ser necessária nos processos de paz, especialmente devido à sua crescente associação com a promoção da legitimidade política e da sustentabilidade da paz. Reduzir a inclusão à sua utilidade, entretanto, obscurece sua natureza e implicações fundamentalmente políticas. O artigo, portanto, rastreia e desdobra a discussão sobre a inclusão social, baseando-se especialmente na leitura de Chantal Mouffe sobre o agonismo político e na literatura mais recente sobre a paz agonística. Por fim, argumenta-se que instrumentalizar e despolitizar a inclusão política é prejudicial para a salvaguarda democrática de direitos anteriormente negados e contraproducente até mesmo para fins de legitimação mínima. A construção da paz se beneficia de pontos de vista agonísticos de análise ao introduzir, desde o estágio de negociação, um modelo político de engajamento que permite que o conflito seja abordado pacificamente em vez de ser varrido para debaixo do tapete.

Palavras-chave: inclusão política; paz agonística; negociações de paz; processo de paz; Estudos de Paz e Conflito.