Mediating Agonistic Peace

A Qualitative Content Analysis of the United Nations Guide for Effective Mediation

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Abstract

Agonistic theory has expanded into many research fields including peace and conflict studies, but it has yet to be used in the study of mediation. This thesis aims to fill this void by exploring the theoretical agonism-mediation nexus. By using agonistic peace theory to perform a qualitative content analysis of the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (GEM), a discussion on the theory's relevance in the mediation profession is possible. To do this, the latent agonistic principles of inclusion, spaces for contestation and framing of mediation efforts are detected through repurposed analytical tools. The result is that the GEM corresponds to agonistic principles to a certain degree, but lacks in its dialogical approach and in a conceptualization of post-implementation peace. The thesis then addresses an agonistic mediation paradox of the finality of peace agreements from an open-oriented mediation process. It proposes a theoretical perspective on this paradox by developing Chantal Mouffe's "moment of decision" as a multitude of moments in a mediation process that establishes conflictual consensus. As such, mediators can adopt a non-linear mediation design that allows for enemies to turn into adversaries.

Keywords: agonism, agonistic peace theory, mediation, UN guidelines, peace process.
Number of words: 10,098

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1 Introduction

Only 10 percent of mediation efforts result in ceasefires and 55 percent of peace agreement attempts are considered to have failed (Diehl & Greig 2012, 105). Another estimate is that around 36% of international mediation succeed to any degree of ceasefire or partial/comprehensive peace agreement, which means that 64% fully fail (Bercovitch & Schneider 2000, 156). The reversion rates back to violent confrontation, even post-accord, is thus an apparent problem for the mediation profession and overall efforts for propagating peace.

It is clear that mediation practices need to improve. The knowledge of conflict management has increased significantly over the last two decades. However, it has done so during an era of equally considerable changes of global and local dynamics. A refocus on the approach and evaluation of mediation designs is the necessary step for mediators to better facilitate peace. Agonistic peace theory offers a theoretical lens through which sustainable mediation design can be constructed and evaluated. The theory prescribes peace process designs consisting of inclusion, space for non-negotiator contestation, and an agonistic framing of the mediation efforts. Utilizing this theory can shape the academic and professional discussions on mediation and on how to make practical use of this theory. Exploring how the United Nation's Guide for Effective Mediation indirectly or directly uses agonistic peace theory is a concrete example of how this can be done.

This thesis hopes to inspire other scholars to use agonistic peace theory as a starting point when analyzing or evaluating other guidelines, policies or approaches in the search for new and better tools for peace negotiations and mediation.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, to take an account of the current degree of agonistic principles in international mediation. Secondly, to explore the application of agonistic peace theory on the mediation profession, and to do this with a normative approach. Although agonistic theory has made headways into discussions about agonistic democracy, peace and dialogue, the practicing

mediator's accessibility to turn theory into practice remains unexplored. The academic conceptualization of this agonism-mediation nexus has yet to be developed. The mandate of a mediator is intuitively tangent with agonism. Hence it warrants to be explored. The aim of this thesis is to expand the reach of agonism into the arena of mediation practices while necessarily nuancing its foundational principles through the context of on-the-ground mediation dynamics.

The research question that this thesis aims to answer is: *How can mediation efforts be agonistic and to what extent does the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation reflect agonistic principles?*

1.2   Thesis Roadmap

This paper begins with a theoretical overview of the current most relevant academic work on agonism, mediation and agonistic peace theory. It then offers a constructive theoretical framework from which both mediation processes and their result can be analyzed. In addition to an overview of the chosen material the paper's validity is discussed. Thereafter, this material is analyzed using the theoretical framework. In tandem with this analysis, the paper assesses the relevance of the result of this analysis – i.e., if the guide contains sufficient agonistic characteristics to equip the mediator with enough knowledge to apply agonistic principles in their work. This thesis then concludes the general outcome of the analysis of the mediator guide. Lastly, it offers a discussion on how agonism can be approached in mediation context.

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2 Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses two theoretical frameworks; agonism and mediation theory. Agonism provides this thesis with the theoretical foundation to conduct its analysis. Mediation theory is mainly relevant in the paper's post-analysis discussion. With these two frameworks as theoretical background, agonistic peace theory is described and subsequently repurposed into the principles most pertinent for effective analysis of mediation approaches.

2.1 Agonism

Agonistic theory rests on the axiom that conflict is inherent to politics. This axiom could be confused with the Hobbesian notion that life is difficult, short and brutish – but it is in fact a much more positive perspective. Much like when Clausewitz said that "war is an extension of politics," (Johansson 2006, 33) this conceptualization makes conflict manageable. If war is politics by other means, then we can avoid war by using political tools. Using the same logic, if conflict is inherent to the human experience, then we can find good solace in the fact that many more non-violent conflicts exist than violent ones. We can thus use non-violent conflict as an example to guide our attempt to transform violent conflict.

Agonistic theory states that group identities are created, exist and act dialectically with others within this political dimension. It therefore attempts to identify ways to manage conflicts in such a way that political contradictions can continue sustainably without escalation and without eroding peaceful democracies. Instead of a conflict party viewing another actor as an enemy, agonism attempts to facilitate this perception to be adversarial instead. The academic work on agonism stems originally from the insufficiency of liberal peacebuilding and the discontent with consensus-searching democratic theories, such as that of Habermas. The development of the founding principles of agonism can be attributed to Chantal Mouffe (2013), who made attempts at widening the reach of the theory by outlining the ontological dimension of antagonism.

Mouffe emphasizes two important concepts in her work: hegemony and antagonism. Within any society, a hegemonic structure exists. How we do politics, the manner in which we organize ourselves (Mouffe 2013, 14), is by using hegemonic structures, such as democratic society. When an opinion or idea

is described as political, it connotates the presence of conflicting opinions: antagonistic attitudes. To engage in politics, then, is to exist in the antagonistic dimension. The purpose of engaging is either to sustain the current hegemonic structure or to establish a new one, creating conflict between agents of these contradicting purposes. Opposing and replacing the current hegemonic structure is therefore inherently an antagonistic dynamic. As such, the political is considered to be inherently antagonistic (Mouffe 2013).

Agonistic theory accepts that, again, conflict is an inherent part of the human experience. If it is part of the human experience, it is therefore part of the human identity. Concurrently, Mouffe theorizes that this antagonistic dynamic within the political is a dialectic relationship between the adversaries, where the antagonistic interactions from attempting to establish different hegemonies constitute the self in opposition to the other (Mouffe 2013, 17). The extension of this co-constitutive dynamic of identities is that agonistic theory promotes pluralism. Without pluralism, all the identities and ideas present in society except two generalized ones are silenced. This risks societal backlash, manifested through both right-wing populism (Mouffe 2013, 104) or violent protest (read: spoilers). Since the political dimension contains inherent conflict, all groups that make a society, need to be given the opportunity to voice their trauma, displeasure and hopes for the future.

The neoliberal search for a rational solution to political issues is therefore deemed misguided (Mouffe 2013, 15), as the rational solutions imply that conflict is due to inefficient decision-making processes. However, despite how much neoliberals might wish it so, identities are not calculated and chosen. There are few rational solutions to violent conflict. Therefore, taking into account the co-constitutive nature of identities in conflict, the next logical step is to establish a structure where a multitude of actors are able to advocate for political change against their adversaries. These actors thus avoid a polarization of identity against one sole adversary (risking the escalation of turning the adversary into an enemy). The benefit of agonism is not a rational and perfect solution to a problem, but a structure and process through which an issue can take account of all of a society's political passions, be nuanced and continuously contested. Using agonistic theory, sustainable models for a constructive peace can be conceived.

2.2   Mediation Theory

Mediation is "a process of conflict management where disputants seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an individual, group, state, or organization to settle their conflict or resolve their differences without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of the law" (Bercovitch, et al., 1991, 9).

Mediation can be conceptualized as dual-natured; it attempts to manage the interactions between the parties during active negotiations through a conflict management approach, while it simultaneously attempts to move forward in the peace process in a peacemaking approach. While mediation theorists work in these dividing terms, such as peace management and making, the reality on the ground is one where practicing mediators need to balance both approaches simultaneously in order to not risk a re-escalation of violence. This could be construed as a negative dynamic, but an agonistic approach would advocate that it is not negative, but instead the required perspective shift in the mediation profession to properly propagate peace.

The scholarly work on mediation is not a linear, branching tree of always-connected research. It is era-sensitive, region-specific research directed towards a professionally practicing mediator. While taking inventory of the research-policy nexus in international mediation, Laurie Nathan describes the arena as an oligopsony; the imperfect market where many competing producers supply to a few important buyers (Nathan, 2022). This has the effect of creating an academic production geared towards 'the buyer' – the professionally practicing mediator. The interest lies not in the production of grand theory, but in more case-specific information and adaptive frameworks (Nathan 2022, 12). Although it could be deemed a reasonable outcome, given its purpose and use, it is not ideal for scientific purposes. It is likely that mediation is a field of study populated by a relatively high number of high-quality works, but a majority of these works' external validity is low to the point where their dissemination is too narrow to be enjoyed by the larger academic community.

2.2.1 Mediation Strands

Despite these scholarly conditions, Svensson (2020) offers an overview of three dominant approaches to the study of international mediation; social-psychology, rational choice and bargaining (Svensson 2020, 2). The bargaining strand refers to the strategic interaction of the mediator between the parties. The mediator can facilitate (or control) information exchange between the parties and aid in overcoming commitment problems. During initial phases of active fighting, disclosing information can make the discloser vulnerable to military actions from the other party. The security dilemma is present in any conflict between warring parties, but receives particular theoretical attention through the bargaining approach. The mediator's management of information thus becomes of vital importance for the outcome of the negotiations (Kydd, 2007).

The rational choice approach, instead, emphasizes the cost-benefit calculations done by the parties throughout negotiations. The mediator therefore prioritizes actions that increase the cost of war and decrease the perceived risk of peace. While the bargaining strand looks at information facilitation to make commitments easier, rational choice points to the need of artificially altering the relative benefit of choosing peace. Peace can thus still be a bad option for the negotiating parties, but also the least bad option because of mediator actions making all other options worse. This most often implies mediating with sufficient leverage to enact shifts in parties' cost-benefit calculation (Svensson 2020, 3). Furthermore, in order to actively shift parties' calculations, the mediator needs to 'trigger a recalculation.' This requires delivering the information of changed conditions to the parties – indicating that rational choice is an approach that utilizes smart and hard power to a larger degree than the others.

The social-psychology strand highlights the role of identities and attitudes of the participants in a peace negotiation. It concerns the basic cognitive, emotional, and social barriers that need to be overcome in order to communicate effectively and reach a process or solution that is acceptable (Svensson 2020, 2). This strand generally considers the perception of the Other to be a principal factor in inter-party relations. The key role that a mediator plays is therefore to reconstruct the perception of the opposing party, and to establish trust in the negotiations. Svensson maintains that such actions by the mediator needs to facilitate a more structured and effective dialogue between the conflict parties, and that mediation has the same function in any context, ranging from labor disputes, conflicts between cultural or social groups, or interstate armed conflicts (Svensson 2020, 2). The social-psychology strand tangents with agonism to such a large degree that it warrants its mention, and specifically agonistic dialogue. To understand which barriers the conflict parties need to overcome is crucial information. In active violent conflict between groups, the conflict augments their identities (Rumelili & Strömbom 2021, 3), and navigating this shift in an informed and precise way is useful for a mediator. Effective agonistic dialogue is one of the tools to both inform the mediator and the other conflict parties in such a way.

2.2.2 The Mediator Role

A substantial body of research exists on who the mediator should be. While this thesis limits itself to what the mediator should do, who it is has an undeniable effect as well. This is also relevant due to the fact that the number of mediators has increased greatly since the 1990s, and ten-fold since the 1980s (Diehl & Greig 2012, 63). This author acknowledges that academia can no longer talk about mediators in a vacuum. The interplay between different mediators and institutions promoting peace is too complex. In track 1 alone there are most often, at least in conflicts with a high international profile, several constellations working

simultaneously in getting warring parties to negotiate for peace. In tracks 2 and 3, their numbers only grow. Additionally, there is the call to increase coordination between levels of society, promoting a more holistic society-wide approach to mediation (Svensson 2020, 18). There is an academic debate on the labeling of non-neutral, third parties that intervene to promote peace (Svensson 2020, 14). Although frequent mediators, the US and the other members of the UN Security Council are rarely neutral in their promotion of peace (Bercovitch & Schneider, 2000). Similarly, insider-partial mediators bring bias to their actions but are potentially beneficial for building trust (Svensson & Lindgren 2013; Hove & Ndawana 2016).

2.3   Agonistic Peace Theory

Agonistic peace theory is situated within the scholarly work on conflict transformation, which contains many diverging tracks and schools of thought. Well-known works by Jenny Peterson, Vivienne Jabri, Louis Kriesberg and Oliver Ramsbotham make out much of the relevant schools of thought from which agonistic peace theory has originated (Aggestam et al. 2015, 1737). The scholarly strand of agonistic peace theory was initiated by Rosemary E. Shinko (2008), who incorporated agonistic theory into conflict theory (Shinko 2008, 473). This has led to diverging, exploratory and normative research in different subfields of peace and conflict research (Shinko 2022, 2). Diversifying work has been done on the Israel-Palestine conflict (Aggestam et al., 2015), agonistic interactions (Bramsen, 2021), and agonistic peace agreement (Strömbom et al., 2022). These three works serve as the theoretical foundation through which the theoretical lens will be constructed. To be expanded on later.

2.3.1 Inclusion

Inclusion is a key principle of agonistic peace theory. Derived from the call for a pluralistic society, the emphasis in a peace process becomes the inclusion of a variety of groups with differing positions, interests and needs. Focusing on institutional analysis, Strömbom (2020) specifies this principle of inclusion into two parts; the diversity of interests that are included, and the degree to which the institutions are guided by a dialogical process. Already in a multilateral peace negotiation, the inclusion of a stakeholder and their consensual participation indicates a level of (thin) recognition (Strömbom 2019, 950). To recognize the other as the party to negotiate with has the potential to deepen communication channels later on. However, while inclusion of, e.g., women's groups' representatives can give international legitimacy, they need to be able to fully

voice their needs in a dialogical process design in order for them to feel truly included. Strömbom's specification is thus useful in grasping the nuances of different inclusion mechanisms.

An agonistic dialogical process refers to when adversaries exchange their contradicting positions and interests, and then continue to listen to each other despite their unresolved disagreement (Strömbom 2019, 959–961). A mediation process that is unable to facilitate an exchange of unresolved interests more than once will not survive. This agonistic dialogue is specified further by Maddison (2015) to be sustained over time. Dialogue is not an event, or one negotiation, but a process (Maddison 2015, 1023). It is a process, and thus not the single occurrence of signing a paper; it needs to be part of the whole peace effort (Strömbom et al. 2022, 4) including the mediation approach. Together, the inclusion of various interest groups combined with a true agonistic dialogical process provides supple foundations for a shift in the Self-identity, and for the Other-perception from enemy to adversary.

2.3.2 Contestation and Conflictual Consensus

A crucial addition to the principle of inclusion is the one of contestation. Inclusion and dialogue can easily be confused with the neoliberal idea of reaching consensus, which the literature tends to lean towards (Strömbom 2019, 961). Instead, agonistic peace theory requires that the design of a platform is dedicated to dialogue between a plurality of actors/hegemonies that incorporates intentional space for antagonistic contestation. To have the framework of agonistic interaction constantly open to renegotiation and scrutiny by the parties becomes the very mechanism that makes the approach sustainable (Aggestam et al. 2015, 1739). Since the parties can renegotiate, they have the possibility to keep coming back to the table. It allows for an always-updated institutional acknowledgment of the on-the-ground dialectic relationship between the adversaries as their co-constructive identities shift.

Transforming enemy to adversary is not the result of a supposed liberal idea of a 'rational' game-theory outcome of a multilateral platform, although such repurposing of theory could be made (Keohane 1998, 88). According to Mouffe, it also requires a common norm, principle or idea that facilitates agonistic contestation; a conflictual consensus (see Mouffe 2013: 8, 18, 22, 30, 41, 55, 56 and 119). To make enemies into adversaries, the western democracies employ liberal democratic principles to a great extent. The quote, spuriously assigned to Voltaire, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it," points to these principles that enable agonistic relations. Within such a principle, various forms of agonistic dialogues can be designed, as seen in the various forms of democracy. However, in active violent conflict the parties view

each other not as adversaries, but as enemies. In negotiations where the participants lack respect for each other, they would therefore misappropriate this quote to be; "I disapprove of what you say, and I will defend to the death my right to say so." In such fashion, enemies can utilize spaces dedicated for agonistic dialogue in bad faith for short-term gains. It is therefore crucial for a mediator to facilitate the necessary respect using a conflictual consensus for dissent to be voiced by one party without being either an existential threat to the other or simply disregarded. This is the idea of establishing a conflictual consensus (Mouffe 2013, 22). Non-violent dissensus can only exist within a conflictual consensus on how to manifest these contradicting positions, and is a key idea for the mediator to nurture in the conflict parties they manage.

2.3.3 The Theoretical Agonism-Mediation Nexus

The widening of agonistic peace theory has come far in 15 years, but to sufficiently analyze mediation processes and designs this thesis will repurpose the theorization done by Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein (2022) to analyze signed peace agreements. Their theory consists of three indicators from which to detect agonistic principles in peace agreements; (1) spaces for interaction offered post-accord; (2) stipulated forms of inclusion; and (3) the framing of the peace agreement in terms of conflict termination and consensus/dissensus (Strömbom et al. 2022, 1). However, the (often covert) nature of an active mediation process renders these tools somewhat null. To analyze the nature of a mediation process needs more holistic categories that a researcher can identify both in the design of a mediation process, but also at the end of a peace process. With the goal of developing this approach, this analytical lens allows this thesis to establish a theoretical set of agonistic mediation principles that are identifiable in their latent form and in their resulting final form (peace agreement or not). Agonistic mediation principles will therefore be analyzed through the lens of three agonistic repurposed principles; i) inclusion (*in diversity and in dialogical processes*), ii) space for *contestation*, and iii) the framing of the *peace negotiation* in terms of conflict termination and consensus/dissensus.

i) Inclusion
The first principle is unaltered, and fully reflects the key agonistic principle of pluralism. This will be divided into the two specifications from Strömbom (2019). The diversity of interests that are included will pertain to their formal inclusion, and the degree to which the institutions are guided by a dialogical process will refer to the reason why stakeholders should have dialogue (Strömbom 2019, 959–961). A source of much discussion is that the mediator, in their process design, needs to carefully weigh the benefits versus the risks of including more actors in peace negotiations. Since agonistic peace theory emphasizes inclusion, the width

of interests and their depths are indications of the degree to which a mediation process adheres to agonistic principles.

ii) Space for contestation
Agonistic peace theory rests on the concept of contestation. Without it, there is no outlet for inherent antagonistic politics, which in turn risks delegitimizing the entire agonistic approach. The second principle is therefore intentional in altering for whom the space to contest is given in a mediation context. Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein (2022) looked at post-accord spaces coded into the agreements. This thesis concerns an earlier stage of conflict, where no such coded text exists. Fittingly, a mediation process is to an extent inherently a space for contestation. As the mediator canvases the political landscape and learns of parties' contradicting positions, the mediating person/institution then "holds" these contradicting positions in the sense of a non-violent space. This shows an intuitive tangency of agonism and mediation.

From an agonistic approach, such a tool can offer official procedures through which the thus-far-excluded parties can contest or constructively contribute to the agreements already made. This way, a mediator can remain effective in keeping momentum during active peace negotiations while offering key societal actors a place to feel participant and constructive to the process. This can be especially potent after a ceasefire. All this is contingent on the consent of the 'original' negotiating parties, naturally.

iii) Framing
The third principle is only altered in accordance with the context. It is, in many ways, the indicator that makes the other two indicators possible to enact. There will always be at least two actors included in a mediated negotiation, and there will always be some form of intentional contestation. It is through the agonistic contextualization of the mediation design that the inclusion and contestation can be construed as necessary steps, not obstacles. With the explicit framing of the mediated negotiations through the use of agonistic terminology (towards the populations to who the potential peace concerns), it also enables the negotiators to participate in an agonistic mediation design intentionally. The framing is the reason why a specific design is chosen; why certain steps are taken. As it is difficult to convince an entire population that the use of agonistic theory is good for them, a framing is instead intentional in managing expectations and preparing relevant parties of what the process will look like. Additionally, such framing potentially aids as a catalyst in reaching/finding a conflict consensus through which agonistic relations can be established.

3   Method and Material

In this part, the method of this thesis is described and motivated. It will then display and give context to the material, the *UN Guide for Effective Mediation,* chosen for this analysis. This paper is a qualitative, descriptive, single-N content analysis. It also holds a prescriptive value in the development of theoretical and policy-operative processes.

3.1   Limiting the Scope

This thesis takes extended action to limit the scope of its analysis. There is an inherent risk of intending to analyze an aspect of the United Nations (UN). Due to its various mandates and intersectional work, a research project could quickly find itself investigating the entire organization. For this paper's research question this is a relevant consideration as the United Nations was created to, amongst other things, "maintain international peace and security" (UN Charter, 1945). Although potent for a larger academic project on the UN as an agonistic institution, the time required and the heavy document load is deemed not suitable for this thesis. Relevant material can instead be found in a focus on the principles and recommendations produced by the organization and presented externally as a product. This way, it is not the United Nations *itself* that is being analyzed, but a unit of analysis that is separate from its constitutive body.

Furthermore, for the purpose of answering the research question, the material chosen needs to reflect the UN principles on international mediation in a holistic manner. The risk of a too narrow focus, inversely proportional to the risk of an overly broad focus, is that it does not encapsule enough material to give proper foundation and information for an effective analysis. These risks, weighed together, inform this paper that the material chosen should therefore appropriately be of manageable amounts while still sufficiently capturing the full picture of UN mediation principles.

3.2   The Material

Limiting the scope of this paper in this fashion leads to the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) in the Policy and Mediation Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) in the United Nations. Created in 2006, it is the institutional step toward professionalizing mediation efforts. MSU is a service provider to its own organization which "develops mediation guidance and lessons learned" and is described as "the institutional repository of mediation knowledge, lessons learned and best practices" (Mediation Support Unit, 2022). As an annex to a report by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (A/66/811), the *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation* was published. This guide is the material analyzed in this thesis. There are more reports and resolutions regarding mediation processes that have been delivered and accepted since 2012 (A/RES/66/291; A/RES/70/304). However, they do not contain updated guides and are documents directed towards an internal audience; the reports serve to develop the organization's internal capacity to mediation effectively, but are not *per se* products disseminated externally to practicing or potential mediators and thus fall outside the scope of this thesis.

The purpose of the *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation* (GEM) is to guide mediators in the general principles relevant to their peace efforts This guide contains eight chapters of as many principles over 26 pages. Designed for easy digestion and learning, it is also the product of input from "Member States, the United Nations system, regional, subregional and other international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's groups, religious leaders, the academic community, as well as mediators and mediation specialists" (GEM 2012, 3). It has since been both a staple resource and reference in the practitioner's and policy maker's work (e.g., O'Reilly & Súilleabháin 2013). With such wide input, disseminated by the 'institutional repository for mediation knowledge', this guide serves as an excellent representation of the principles of international conflict mediation presented to practicing mediators.

3.3   Qualitative, Descriptive, Content Analysis

This thesis executes a qualitative content analysis in order to enable an analysis of a *degree of principles*. This decision can be illustrated and justified in opposition to quantitative content analysis. Quantitative content analysis generally concerns the manifest content of texts. It asks questions such as 'how often?' and 'how many?'. It then counts the amount of the relevant coded recording units, and from that result reaches a conclusion (Halperin & Heath 2012, 319). These questions

could be extended to 'how much?' and is tangent with 'to what degree?'. As such, quantitative content analysis could seem like the intuitive choice. However, despite the temptation, it would be insufficient for the topic of agonistic principles to code for singular words or phrases and answer the research question based on the total number of coded words. Agonistic principles as a theoretical framework will not present themselves in an explicit form in a document. Instead, principles are synonymous with themes; constructed by the 'boundaries' around an idea (Holsti 1969: 116). It is thus latent content in the GEM that this thesis aims to identify. This motivates the choice of qualitative content analysis as it allows for a more in-depth analysis of abstract concepts and ideas. To further this end, this thesis designates the recording unit to be the latent content of nominally categorized themes of the repurposed principles of agonistic peace; inclusion, spaces for non-negotiator contestation, and the framing of the mediation process in terms of conflict termination and consensus/dissensus.

In addition to agonistic principles, the nominal, latent theme of rational consensus is included as a recording unit. This category is included to explore the GEM's "anti-agonistic" principles. Since agonism originates from the insufficiency of neoliberal rationalism (Mouffe 2013), the degree to which the GEM relies on the neoliberal idea of reaching a rational consensus would negatively reflect the degree to which the agonistic principles are present in the guide. The thesis's research design thus accounts for bias in recording units (Halperin & Heath 2012, 368). Only by juxtaposing these agonistic and neoliberal themes can a holistic analysis and conclusion be made of the GEM.

3.4   Validity & Reliability

The benefit of executing a content analysis of the GEM is an unobtrusive and non-biased data collection. Research designs such as semi-structured interviews carry the risk of the 'interview effect'; the unconscious attempt by the interviewee to socially accommodate the interviewer, but at the peril of the data collected (Halperin & Heath 2012, 318). The MSU produced a document to be disseminated to any and all those who will mediate. This way, this thesis is able to avoid anecdotal mediation principles used in a single peace process that would affect the external validity of the results. The wide array of contributors to this material instead increases the external validity of this thesis's conclusion. The internal validity is in turn inferred from the direct operationalization of theoretical agonistic principles. The construct of the measurement of rationality, inclusion, and contestation is not diluted through context, but instead describes in their theoretical purity to be applied onto the GEM.

4 Analysis

In this section the analysis of the *United Nations' Guide for Effective Mediation* (GEM) is conducted. It will be structured according to the previously discussed repurposed tools from Strömbom et al. (2022): inclusion, space for non-negotiator spaces, and framing of mediation efforts. The analysis will also include the opposing theme of rationality, ending in a conclusion.

The GEM is a comparatively short guideline that identifies eight different 'key fundamentals' that should be considered in a mediation design and process: "preparedness; consent; impartiality; inclusivity; national ownership; international law and normative frameworks; coherence, coordination and complementarity of the mediation effort; and quality peace agreements" (GEM 2012, 3). Two thirds of the GEM consist of these key fundamentals (17 out of the 23 pages). Additionally, it contains two pages of a discussion on mediation logic.

To remind the reader, the research question that this thesis aims to answer is: *How can mediation efforts be agonistic and to what extent does the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation reflect agonistic principles?*

4.1 Inclusion

The *UN Guide for Effective Mediation* (GEM) contains a full chapter on inclusivity (GEM 2012, 11), which bodes well for its concurrency to agonistic principles. The GEM refers to inclusivity 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" (GEM 2012, 11). To include conflict parties *and other stakeholders* in the process and outcome of a mediation effort is in line with the agonistic principles of inclusion. However, it is not explicitly so. This understanding of inclusivity in the GEM falls only within the scope of the theory. It is not explicit in terms of diversity and dialogue; which are the essential parts of this agonistic principle. Indeed, an overarching aspect of this analysis is that the GEM is intentionally written as a flexible guide meant to offer a foundation from which to create a context-relevant mediation design. This is true when it comes to the use of the agonistic concept of inclusion.

4.1.1 Diversity

The guide promotes inclusion, but not as a categoric imperative. "An inclusive process does not imply that all stakeholders participate directly in the formal negotiations" (ibid., 11). It rather stresses the importance of the mediator to choose which actors to include. This is an aspect given attention to in more than one chapter of the GEM. The guide views the representation of a diverse number of interests as positive to "identify and address the root causes of conflict" (ibid., 11). However, using agonistic peace theory, one could question the feasibility to sustainably 'fix' root causes without the procedural acknowledgment of potential future tensions.

The GEM offers nuance as it emphasizes the problematizing and complicating aspects of inclusivity. GEM states that formal inclusion is not deemed to be a necessity. Instead, an inclusive process "facilitates interaction between the conflict parties and other stakeholders" (11). From an agonistic point of view, however, back-channels and informal talks are not considered sufficient substitutes compared to formal inclusion. Not only is the representation of different interests important, but also the interest group's formal integration into an agonistic mediation design itself. This is needed in order to legitimize the interest group's identity and positions in the eyes of the other parties.

Only giving a formal mandate to the conflict parties can have two outcomes. Either it makes other stakeholders' interests not adequately represented, or they are represented through the mandate of a conflict party or the mediator. In turn, this would make the interest-informed position associated with the conflict party or the mediator, not the original stakeholder. Antagonistic interaction between the conflict parties can therefore villainize the interest simply because of its association with the 'enemy'. In the case of the mediator representing the interest, it can instead make the mediator seem overly demanding and in turn affects their acceptance amongst the conflict parties. Hence, the formal inclusion of other stakeholders is the most concrete and sustainable way for the mediator to reach pluralistic conditions during and after negotiation.

To aggregate genuine grievances in this fashion makes the agonistic process of voicing ones contradicting opinions non-constructive. The advice in the GEM, that it is not necessary to include other stakeholders, therefore risks failing at facilitating a shift of identity-perceptions from enemy to adversary. Moreover, the mediator risks becoming a too-crucial actor if they are the only actor to bring certain interests to the formal negotiation table. If the mediator leaves, the interest group lacks representation. At the same time, it should be said that if the mediator includes all relevant conflicting parties from the very start, for example the most extreme or radical on each side, it might be impossible to create an enabling environment that allows formal inclusion of all relevant parties. On the degree of correspondence to the agonistic principle of diversity, however, the GEM does not go far.

4.1.2 Dialogical processes

To turn to the degree in which the mediation design is guided by agonistic dialogical processes, the GEM does not contain such an approach. It mentions dialogue, perhaps surprisingly, only three times in total (4, 11). Under its 'Mediation logic', the guide actually separates mediation efforts from dialogue efforts: "Mediation often exists alongside facilitation, good offices and dialogue efforts" (4). While this potentially could be specific designations or terminology within the UN-system, this separation of concepts indicates a non-agonistic perspective on the nature of peace and conflict. The guide focuses on how diversity can reach the root causes of conflict, but not how. Informal talks and the creation of inclusion-mechanisms are mentioned. However, it does not indicate that exchanging of contradicting positions can offer the opportunity for a change in the Other-perception.

According to the GEM, a skillful mediator "promotes exchange through listening and dialogue" but also propagates a "spirit of collaboration through problem solving" (4–5). As expected, this is a flexible set of skills meant to be applicable to any conflict. To facilitate listening and sustained dialogue between the included actors are essential parts of an agonistic mediation design. When GEM pairs listening and sustained dialogue with collaboration and problem solving, it dilutes the degree to which this guide corresponds with agonistic principles. Collaboration indicates a search for consensus in decision-making, which agonism views as the deficiency of neoliberal peacebuilding. In the eyes of the GEM, therefore, the intended use of dialogue is not to facilitate sustainable agonistic dialogue but to reach the optimal and most rational solution to the problem.

Thus far, both in theorizing and in analyzing, this thesis has treated the 'conflict parties and other stakeholders' as clearly defined actors with a leadership structure. This is in many cases not the case, and is recognized by the GEM. Social movements or youth groups can grow from abstract needs without a common manifest to streamline positions, and can change rapidly. As such, it is pointed out by the GEM to be a difficult question for mediators (to include, or not to include: that is the question!). The advice given in the guide is to prioritize stakeholder mapping, planning and management (12). While not explicit in this advice, it does correspond to the principle of facilitating agonistic dialogue.

To encourage ill-defined groups to voice their antagonistic attitudes not only provides the group an opportunity to internally decide on clearer leadership and long-term strategies, but also makes it easier for conflict parties to listen. Ill-defined groups risk feeling excluded if the mediator includes them too soon, without enough time to coagulate their common positions. Used in moderation, and at the appropriate level and stage in the peace process (ill-defined: low level at early stages, more defined with leadership: formal levels at later stages), it can provide a crucial addition to the making and building of agonistic peace. Additionally, it provides the mediator with a tool to manage the stakeholder in

ways that can be beneficial for the high-level peace negotiations. A mediator that knows that antagonistic dialogue is co-constructive to all participants' identity. The mediator can, with great care, lift a leader within an ill-defined group and help them galvanize their members. Depending on the leader and position taken by them, it has the potential of shifting the enemies' talks towards adversarial interactions.

4.2   Space for Contestation

While inclusion is necessary to facilitate the transformation from enemies to adversaries, to then transfer this agonistic design and its space for continued contestation onto peace agreements and post-accord implementation (the institutionalization of non-violent conflict management mechanisms) is the most crucial aspect of a mediation design that is focused on facilitating an agonistic peace. This is a clear goal for the approach of mediating agonistic peace.

The GEM corresponds to the principle of space for non-negotiator contestation to a larger degree than that of inclusion. When it states that mediators and their teams "provide a buffer for conflict parties and instill confidence in the process" (4), the term 'buffer' could be used to imply that the role of the mediator is to act as a space where emotions and passions can be voiced in a non-violent manner. The GEM keeps making passes at different phrasings in this regard, such as mechanisms, spaces, platforms, processes and modalities. Moreover, the GEM advices the mediation-mandating entity that the deployment should be planned to be continuous for a medium- and long-term engagement (7). This demonstrates that the GEM's approach to mediation is for it to be sustained over time, which is essential in reaching an agonistic peace.

According to agonistic peace theory, a plurality of stakeholders need space to offer genuine critique and be/feel heard. Otherwise, there is considerable risk that excluded stakeholders become spoilers, and actively disrupt the negotiations through provoking actions (9). The GEM elaborates quite extensively on this issue and advices mediators to;

- ❖ "create mechanisms to include all perspectives" (11),
- ❖ "develop mechanisms to broaden participation in the process, and to engage and include the different perspectives within civil society and other stakeholders, throughout the various phases of the peace process" (13),
- ❖ "create opportunities and support for [civil society] to engage on procedure and substance" (15),
- ❖ to pay attention to the "institutionalization of mechanisms that provide for the non-violent resolution of the conflict and prevent reemergence of violent conflict" (21),

- ❖ to establish "new mechanisms and/or institutions to address [unresolved issues] over time through democratic processes" (21),
- ❖ "incorporate clear modalities for implementation, monitoring and dispute resolution to address disagreements that may arise during implementation" (21).

The most positive aspect here is that the GEM not only conceptualizes the formal negotiations as a space for conflict parties, but as a process in which there needs to be conflict management mechanisms built in for long-term use.

An agonistic mediation design faces the conundrum of confidentiality when designing spaces for contestation. A mediator builds trust, consent, and legitimacy to access all relevant parties and stakeholders in a conflict. To then facilitate frank exchanges is something that requires great care in navigating inter-party relations and perceptions. The GEM in this fashion states that frank exchanges should be made in private, instead of exposing the conflict parties to public criticism (10). This can be very much needed, especially at the beginning or at the end of a negotiation process or when spoilers are expected to sabotage mediation effort. However, there is a risk that the peace talks become elite negotiations without diversity, without contestation from more than one party, and without legitimacy; everything an agonistic mediation approach tries to amend. Hence, such approach requires a clear strategy for how to increase ownership and anchor the positions with the main stake holder.

In order to increase national ownership, GEM states that the mediators are supposed to "inform civil society and other stakeholders about developments in the peace process (respecting confidentiality, where required) and create opportunities and support for them to engage on procedure and substance" (15). In this way negative effects of exclusive elite-negotiations are lessened. The implicit procedure is, however, that the decisions which are made by the elite are then relayed to the public. There is also reason to question the preface of this sentence. Civil society has no opportunity to 'engage on procedure' when the opportunity is given when the procedure is already set to prioritize the conflict parties. To have entire populations react to the results from a confidential room of elite negotiators – and hope for the best that they agree, and do not use the opportunity to engage to rip the peace agreement apart – is not optimal for making and building an agonistic peace. The conundrum is making the relevant conflict parties actively listen and engage in agonistic dialogue, with each other and with other stakeholders. Their consent is obviously key to peace negotiations, and confidentiality is a tool to garner consent to engage further in agonistic dialogue. There is a thin line between the optimal approach and the pragmatic solution that mediators need to walk and balance on.

4.3   Agonistic Framing of Mediation Efforts

The GEM follows the idea of framing the mediation efforts in agonistic terms in different ways. Already in the foreword, UNSG Ban Ki-moon states that "[a]ntagonists often need to be persuaded of the merits of mediation" (1). To initiate a process where conflicting parties sit down at a table and talk alters the relations between the actors instantly. While agonistic principles hold that the dialogue should be sustained over time, the agonistic dialogue shifts all parties' identities from the beginning. To take this step can therefore be a big decision to make, which therefore requires the contextual framing given by the mediator. To frame the mediation process in agonistic terminology is necessary to sustainably recruit a stakeholder's consent. Framing an agonistic peace process in this fashion means that the mediator needs to be "able to manage expectation" (6), potentially through a communication strategy (15).

The GEM recognizes that conflict management requires a conflict consensus, but only to a narrow degree. When the mediator is advised to "create a common understanding with […] the ground rules" (9), it pairs such rules with references to enforce accordance with international law. It is not surprising that a UN-produced document on mediation contains an entire chapter that advocates for international law (16). There are two ways of analyzing the insistence of international law in the degree that it concurs with agonistic principles. Firstly, they can provide an opportunity to provide a symbolic space for the conflict parties and the mediator from which a framework where agonistic dialogue and contestation can be created. Because of the internationally established nature of these laws and norms, if the parties agree then it is an excellent starting point. However, the other viewpoint is that international law is often violated and therefore makes conflict parties reluctant to accept the application of international law to a mediation process. The GEM recognizes this difficulty in the chapter on international law (16), but offers no nuance in the use of international law. Instead, it advises mediators to rely on civil society to enforce these norms. The content of international law is not negotiable, which limits the space for contestation for both conflict parties and other stakeholders.

4.4   Opposing Themes: Rationality

There is an underlying understanding that peace agreements are the end goal of mediation. The peace agreements should be as comprehensive and as "precise as possible in order to limit the points of contention that would have to be negotiated during the implementation stage" (21). As previously shown, the GEM makes repeated mentions of post-accord mechanisms to cover any eventuality of disagreement during implementation. This does show GEM application of

agonistic principles, but only to a certain degree. Despite these recommended mechanisms the GEM only recognizes disputes regarding the peace agreement's implementation. Consequently, the guide gives the impression that once a peace agreement has been implemented and completed, there would be a total absence of conflict. This is the neoliberal rationality present throughout the guide, and stands in clear opposition to the agonistic perspective on the role of conflict in society.

A main aspect to analyze is the criterion for when mediation is feasible. This is discussed in the guide as part of its 'mediation logic'. It states that, "first and most importantly, the main conflict parties must be open to trying to negotiate a settlement" (5). This point directly contradicts the principle of agonistic dialogue. To listen to each other without necessarily resolving the issues can be performed without entering into constructive negotiation. The GEM's criterion rids itself of perhaps the most essential work of a mediator; to change the perception of the enemy into one of adversarial nature. Agonistic peace theory views peace as a continuous process, and therefore contains no ideas of a supposed 'ripeness' to mediate. To be open to the idea of a settlement could indicate that the perception of the enemy has already shifted towards an adversarial approach. Secondly, according to the GEM, "a mediator must be accepted, credible and well supported" (5). This is less controversial, although this could be specified further that the process that the mediator designs must be accepted by both the conflict parties and other stakeholders. Lastly, the GEM states that "there must be general consensus at the regional and international levels to support the process" (5). While an understandable wish, the number of internationalized conflicts renders this criterion unlikely to be fulfilled. In such fashion, the mediation designs need to manage these external lobbying (which is pointed out by the GEM as well; 10).

The GEM suggests the option of abandoning mediation if it is not proving successful, and instead using "other efforts […] to contain the conflict or to mitigate the human suffering […]" (5). To essentially impose coercive measures onto conflict parties to stop the short-term suffering is typical for the traditional peacemaking and building approaches. It is only one sentence in the whole guide, but is in the same paragraph as that of the criteria for good conditions for effective mediation. This indicates that if these lacking criteria are not fulfilled, mediation is not feasible. If certain boxes are ticked off, mediators show up and help. If not, then coercive military measures are deployed. However, the reader could instead decide to find more value in the rest of the same sentence; "[…] but there should be constant efforts to remain engaged so as to identify and seize possible windows of opportunity for mediation in the future" (5). The sustained effort and dialogue with the conflict parties are essential to an agonistic approach to mediation. Paradoxically, the least and the most agonistic part of the GEM exists in the same sentence.

The guide confuses effectiveness with efficiency; it tries to save the mediator's time by means of exclusion (12) and their resources through out-sourcing the

leveraging of the parties' cost-benefit analysis to other actors (5). The name of the guide is the UN Guidance for *Effective* Mediation. The effect of this terminology is that the guide does not offer guidance on successful mediation (success/successful is mentioned 7 times, effective 45). Agonism begs the question if effectiveness is a relevant ideal. To evaluate efficiently (pun intended), warrants two theoretical points on processes. Agonistic peace is a procedural dynamic of continuous, anti-hegemonic, agonistic contestation; not a final state of being (Mouffe 2013). To make this process more efficient, without having an end goal, risks aggregating necessary steps in an identity-transforming, agonistic peace process. Not formally including stakeholders would be one of these effects. Making a mediation process more efficient carries the viewpoint that there are rational choices to aggregate and ration resources. Agonistic peace theory, as well as most academic theories, agrees that there are rational choices to make in a mediation design. However, great care needs to be taken to not confuse this with a rationality of the conflict parties. A mediator that attempts to transform identities from enemies to adversaries cannot only take into account that the parties' rationality will make them 'see reason'. Instead, agonistic theory highlights the perception of the Other as being a guiding aspect of dialogue design. Agonism views antagonism as inherent in the political dimension, and conflict as co-constructive to the participants, which then leads to consequential, rational principles on conflict management.

4.5   Summary

The answer to the question of whether the *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation* corresponds to agonistic principles is that parts of it reflect agonistic principles and parts of it do not. The guide offers much advise on inclusivity and its benefits, but lacks a dialogical approach. The hierarchal structure of conceptualizing conflict parties' agency as more important compared to other stakeholders (essentially giving them a more advisory role) risks affecting a mediation design's potential to adopt a pluralistic approach negatively. The GEM provides considerable guidance to incorporate spaces and mechanisms to manage post-agreement disputes, but does not envisage (according to agonism: a conflict-ridden) life after successful peace accord implementation. The guide also gives attention to frame the mediation efforts according to the expected outcome, and to manage expectations of both negotiating participants and of the larger populations as well. Combined with all other advice, however, the framing is not particularly in line with agonistic framing. Finally, the neoliberal rationalistic approach is an underlying aspect of the GEM's conception of peace. The GEM contains criteria for optimal conditions for effective mediation which are comfortable but not necessarily constructive for a mediator aiming to design an agonistic peace process. The sentence that implied coercive options for mediation is in direct opposition to agonistic mediation processes.

5 Discussion

This last section addresses the elephant in the room; the paradox of the finality of peace agreements from an open-oriented agonistic mediation perspective. By using Mouffe's 'moment of decision' (Mouffe 2013, 23), this paradox is described, discussed and then offered a theoretical perspective that unravels this paradox. Thereafter, the three approaches to mediation are discussed in relation to this perspective.

5.1 The Paradox of Non-Finality

The finality of mediation ending in peace agreements is paradoxical to the process-oriented agonistic peace. Track 1-mediation in its traditional form brings elite representatives from conflict parties together to hopefully sign a peace agreement. However, the act of signing is also an act of agreeing. If all parties agree, there is consensus. Consensus denies the fact that conflict (antagonism) is inherent in the political dimension, and therefore violates the foundational axiom of agonism. Does agonism therefore view modern peace agreements as an illegitimate neoliberal invention? Although this presents an interesting research question for future projects, this thesis will not attempt to upend the goal of mediation to be anything other than a peace agreement. The consequences of such a reformulation would reach outside the scope of this discussion as well as deny all past knowledge collected on peacemaking. Instead, the main challenge in this mediation-esque-pragmatic conceptualization is to marry dissensus with a necessary track 1-level consensus: can agonistic negotiations even make decisions? The focus here should be on track 1 negotiation, as tracks 2 and 3 do not necessitate the same rigorous formalization of processes and agreements.

Mouffe states that her theory on agonism takes into account the "moment of decision" (or closure) as a constitutive necessary for the political (Mouffe 2013, 23). A consensus in the signing of a peace agreement is indeed the moment of decision. Mouffe also argues that "the domain of politics is not and cannot be the domain of the unconditional because it requires making decisions in an undecidable terrain. This is why the type of order which is established through a given hegemonic configuration of power is always a political, contestable one; it should never be justified as dictated by a higher order and presented as the only legitimate one" (Mouffe 2013, 23–25). Essentially, establishing a hegemonic configuration is legitimate as long as it is contestable. In a mediation context, this

could translate to peace agreements being a mechanism to establish non-violent politics that should contain space for contestation.

Conflictual consensus (highlighted in section two) connects the finality of peace agreements with the openness of agonistic peace theory. With the perspective of Mouffe's moment of decision, peace agreements are thus a platform on which to codify a conflictual consensus. Consequently, this discussion arrives at a place where consensus in and of itself does not violate the agonistic axiom that antagonism is inherent in the political dimension; only if it pertains to anything other than codifying agonism. This does, however, not treat the entirety of peace agreements, which very much pertains to more than just post-accord dispute mechanisms.

While a moment of decision is intuitively associated with a peace agreement, as they are commonly viewed to exist in singular, this does not need to be the case. Later in her book Mouffe mentions a second moment (69), but to mediate agonism could benefit from expanding on this notion of more than one moment. If moment(s) of decision is "the necessary moment of closure that is constitutive of the political" (23), and the political is inherently antagonistic, to then conclude 'talks about talks' also becomes a moment of decision. Additionally, its requirement to be contestable results in the prospect of having to take the same decision twice if there is substantial contestation by an actor. There can therefore be argued that a mediation process contains more than one moment of decision. If there are two, there could be more. A formal contestation post-agreement, such as a revision of a portion of a peace accord, can also be considered to constitute another moment of decision. In this manner, agonistic peace theory can view a peace process as a process containing necessary manifestations of hegemonic structures from which continued contestation can proceed.

5.2 Approaching Agonistic Mediation

The points made above solicit a practical discussion about how this could practically shape well-known approaches to mediation. How can mediators promote agonistic peace? The social-psychology strand of the study of international mediation, that highlights the role of identities and attitudes, would be an especially relevant approach to enact agonistic mediation. To conceptualize several moments of decision during a mediation process indicates an increase in the number of times when the parties establish a hegemonic structure that constitutes their identities in relation to each other. With time and recurrence, these de- and re-articulations of the hegemonic structure augments that structure, and with it, the parties' identity in how they relate to one another. These dialectic relations also depend on the exchange of information, which points to the role of a bargaining approach of information-management as a complement to agonistic mediation design, especially when facilitating agonistic dialogue.

The contribution from the rational choice approach to agonistic mediation is limited, but could aid in one limitation of the space for contestation. The contestation needs to be substantial and constructive in its use. Conflicting parties should, for example, be disincentivized to tear apart an agreement without an optional hegemonic structure to contend with. This would risk a negative spiral of any mediation effort being torn down using spaces for contestation in bad faith. The space for contestation presents the risk of unravelling a moment of decision. It should only be done in order to establish another hegemonic structure. While this is a major risk in the agonistic mediation design, the rational choice emphasizes that the mediator takes actions that increase the cost of war and decrease the perceived risk of peace. In similar fashion, the mediator can thus affect parties' calculations to adopt a constructive use of the space for contestation.

With the suggestions above, to approach the consensus required in track 1 as moments of decision that happen throughout the peace process, it informs the ambition of each phase of mediation. To order linear phases towards the goal of a peace agreement is repeatedly disputed. On one hand, modelling orderly phases makes its enactment easier. On the other hand, most indistinct mediation phases of 1, 2, 3 and 4 do not occur in this order. They can instead end up being executed in an order such as 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 2, 3, and finally 4. These phases loops back into each other (Svensson 2020, 5). Agonistic moments of decision, accompanied with prudent space for contestation, account for this non-linear mediation process. As such, this critical discussion on the order of mediation processes is an argument for the incorporation of agonistic peace theory into mediation design.

6   Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the theoretical agonism-mediation nexus. This was facilitated through an analysis of the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (GEM) by using repurposed theoretical principles conceived by Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein (2022). The result was that the guide does follow agonistic principles, but to a partial degree. It contains a nuanced discussion on the aspect of inclusion, incorporates much advise to establish spaces for contestation, and mentions the framing of mediation efforts. On the other hand, it lacks a dialogical approach and a capacity to account for life after an implemented peace agreement, which is deemed important for a fully agonistic mediation design. It also contains an underlying neoliberal rationalistic approach, shown through its criteria of when effective mediation can occur.

The reason why the GEM was written in an abstract and flexible way is a direct consequence of the mediation profession, which needs to adapt to the facts on the ground. This accounts for why this mediation guide does not correspond to agonistic to its greatest degree, since it would risk triggering the paradox of non-finality; that peace agreements require elite consensus, something that potentially would violate the agonistic axiom that conflict is inherent to society. This thesis proposes a theoretical perspective to unravel this paradox. A mediator that designs an agonistic peace process needs to recognize that a mediation process contains several of Mouffe's moment of decision (Mouffe 2013). Contingent on that there are prudent spaces for contestation for a diversity of stakeholders in between these moments, they can therefore account for the role of peace agreements as a platform of conflictual consensus. Through these moments' recurrence, enemies have ample opportunity to transform their relationship to be one of agonistic adversity – creating the foundation for agonistic peace.

7   References

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