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PEACESHAPING

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Introduction

The Cambridge Peaceshaping & Climate Lab (CPCL) is an initiative of Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation. CPCL aims to stimulate innovation to spot climate related conflict before it occurs, stop it through socio-ecological action or, failing that, inform the provision of timely peacekeeping interventions.

In this contribution Professors Neil Stott and Paul Tracy and Dr Jarrod Pendlebury explore what 'peaceshaping' means to them.

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Peaceshaping

“... if war is a choice, peace can be too”.

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, July 2023¹

Our future is one of immense perils. Perils like climate change, environmental degradation and exploitation of people and the planet. Such threats are the breeding grounds for enmity - mutual ill will or hatred - between individuals, groups and nations. Unchecked, enmities breed violence, conflict and war.

Assembling global peace institutions - the values, norms, shared expectations, rules and regulations - to check enmities since 1945 has been a momentous task. While global peace has been elusive, numerous conflicts have been mitigated and certain types of warfare (such as nuclear and bio-chemical) have been checked - at least for now.

But global peace institutions are under siege. There is the real danger of the deinstitutionalisation of peace. Even in the face of existential threats such as nuclear proliferation and the climate emergency, we collectively struggle to constrain enmity and preserve or create amity - the friendship and mutual understandings that underpin peaceful and just relationships.

Global agencies, framed by peace institutions, are struggling to prevent or constrain existing conflicts, let alone new ones. Numerous nations and organisations exacerbate enmities through the pursuit of power, ‘security’, greed and self-interest. In doing so, some actively undermine the institutional rationale of organisations such as the United Nations (UN). Generations of activists, scholars, diplomats, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and UN organizations have attempted to ‘fix’ peace institutions as well as challenge those who undermine them². As such, all parties are engaged in ‘institutional work’ - the ‘purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions’³.

We argue that there are two distinct but interrelated categories of institutional work with great consequences for peace institutions: ‘peaceshaping’ and ‘warshaping’. We define peaceshaping as the disruption of institutions which sustain enmity and the creation and preservation of institutions which constrain enmity and build amity. Conversely, we define warshaping as the disruption of institutions which sustain amity and the creation and preservation of institutions which constrains amity and builds enmity.

This essay focuses on peaceshaping. We discuss our rationale for peaceshaping in the context of contemporary challenges. We then outline our thoughts on peaceshaping work.

Why ‘peaceshaping’?

In institutional peace work, the creation of acceptable language is paramount and a prerequisite of action. Behind the text of every UN statement and resolution lies hours of deliberation, negotiation and

¹ UN (2023). A New Agenda for Peace. Policy Brief 9. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>

² Schneckener, U. (2016). ‘Peacebuilding in crisis? Debating peacebuilding paradigms and practices’, in *Peacebuilding in crisis*. Debiel, T., Held, T. & Schneckener, U (eds) (pp. 1-20). Routledge.

³ Lawrence, T.B., & Suddaby, R. (2006). ‘Institutions and institutional work’, In Clegg, S.R. & Nord, W.D (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Studies* (2nd ed) (pp 215-254). London. Sage.

compromise by a broad swathe of actors who, according to Hampel et al., endeavour to “build up, tear down, elaborate and contain institutions, as well as amplify or suppress their effects”⁴.

While a great deal of the language used in institutional peace work is obscure and technical, some is more familiar. Terms such as ‘peacekeeping’, ‘peacebuilding’, and ‘peacemaking’ are frequently deployed outside the world of international diplomacy, and thus firmly embedded in the peace institutional discourse (see Table 1 for definitions). This familiarity is aided by precise definitions in UN policy documents⁵, the specificity of which helps categorise, compartmentalise, and institutionalise the extraordinary scope of the UN’s work.

The UN charter (1945), Millennium Development Goals (2000), and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) sought to coalesce the UN’s work into a coherent institutional framework. Unfortunately, all has not gone to plan. As Tracey & Stott explain in a previous *Critical Perspectives* essay, the Millenium Sustainable Goals were not achieved, the Sustainable Development Goals are faltering⁶, and the UN is under considerable institutional stress.

Table 1: UN Definitions⁷

| | Peacebuilding | Peacemaking | Peacekeeping |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| Definition | ‘[A] range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development.’ | ‘[M]easures [designed] to address conflicts in progress and usually involves diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement.’ | ‘A technique designed to preserve the peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted, and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by the peacemakers.’ |
| Examples | Institution building Social inclusion work | ‘Good offices’ ⁸ Direct engagement of envoys/special representatives | Ceasefire monitoring Election support |

⁴ Hampel, C., Lawrence, T.B. & Tracey, P. (2017). ‘Institutional work: Taking stock and making it matter’, in R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, R. Suddaby and K Sahlin-Andersson (eds). *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*, 2nd Edition, Sage, pp. 558-590.

⁵ United Nations (2008), *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, (New York: Department of Peace Operations).

⁶ Tracey, P & Stott, N. (2024) Social innovation and the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Five blockages to progress. *Critical Perspectives on Social Innovation*. No 1 July 2024. Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation. <https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ccsi-2024-critical-perspectives-series-social-innovation-united-nations.pdf>

⁷ UN (2008), *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, pp 17-18.

⁸ The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) defines ‘Good Offices’ as ‘all diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives by a third country or a neutral institution whose purpose is to resolve a bilateral

Recognising the UN's struggles to adapt to contemporary challenges, Secretary-General Guterres laid out a stark critique in *New Agenda for Peace*, summarised in table 2⁹. He outlines the threats we face, the principles for an effective security system, and his ambitious vision for achieving peace. In doing so, Guterres calls out member states' attempts to deinstitutionalize UN norms.

"The United Nations is, at its core, a norms-based organization. It owes its birth to an international treaty, the Charter, signed and ratified by States. It faces a potentially existential dilemma when the different interpretations by Member States of these universal normative frameworks become so entrenched as to prevent adequate implementation"¹⁰

Guterres highlights the lack of efficacy of the UN secretariat as an 'international civil service'. The problems that Guterres faces are in part because the UN is a 'meta-organisation' - an organisation whose members are themselves organisations - which are inherently complex¹¹. For the UN, pursuing consensus among 193 sovereign member states to address urgent global crises is an enormous challenge, complicated by additional layers of bureaucratic, political and operational inertia that emerge across the myriad departments and delivery agencies.

Inertia can also be compounded by institutional ossification ('we always do it this way') or over institutionalisation. Guterres hints at the unhelpful silos created within the UN family around concepts such as peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Of course, attempts to make the UN strategic and streamlined are not new¹². A notable example is *The Skagen Document*, negotiated by Nordic member states in 1991¹³. In it, the signatories proposed a coalescence of 'peacemaking', 'peacekeeping' and 'peacebuilding' into one activity: 'Peaceshaping', with the ultimate goal of creating 'an extensive strategy for peace'.

While *The Skagen Document* focuses on strategic coordination of peace agencies, Visoka draws attention to a wider cast of actors who play their part, for better or worse. For Visoka, the term 'peace-shaping' reflects that peace is shaped by a combination of events driven within the 'liberal peace architecture' - the normative peace institutions - as well as outside events not normally

or international conflict or to bring the parties to the negotiating table.' FDFA (2024), 'Good Offices': <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/foreign-policy/human-rights/peace/switzerland-s-good-offices.html#:~:text=In%20international%20law%20and%20international,parties%20to%20the%20negotiating%20table>.

⁹ UN (2023). A New Agenda for Peace. Policy Brief 9. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>

¹⁰ As above, page 7

¹¹ Ahrne, G., Brunsson, N., & Kerwer, D. (2016). The paradox of organizing states: A meta-organization perspective on international organizations. *Journal of international organizations studies*, 7(1), 5-24.

¹² Schneckener, U. (2016). 'Peacebuilding in crisis? Debating peacebuilding paradigms and practices', in Debiel, T., Held, T. & Schneckener, U (Eds) *Peacebuilding in crisis* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.

¹³ Archer, C. (1994). 'Conflict Prevention in Europe: The Case of the Nordic States and Macedonia', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 29(4), 367-86.

Table 2: Summary of the *New Agenda for Peace*

| | Peacebuilding |
|-------------------|---|
| Threats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing nature of armed conflict - such as the rise of inter-state conflict • Persistent violence outside armed conflict - such as gender-based violence • The perils of weaponizing new and emerging technologies - such as drones and AI • Rising inequalities within and among nations • Shrinking space for civic participation • The climate emergency |
| Principles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Solidarity • Universality |
| Vision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Charter and international law must be upheld • Diplomacy for peace must be the driving force • Prevention as a political priority but currently 'chronically unprioritized' • Improve mechanisms to manage disputes and improve trust - cold war mechanisms of crisis management deteriorated in recent decades • Build robust regional frameworks and organizations • National action for peace should at the centre of states concerns • People-centred approaches should underpin action • Eradication of violence in all its forms - such as gender violence, criminal violence • Prioritising comprehensive approaches over securitized responses - tackle the root cause • Dismantling patriarchal power structures • Ensuring that young people have a say in their future • Improve financing for peace • Strengthen the toolbox for networked multilateralism • Strengthen an effective and impartial United Nations Secretariat -the 'international civil service' |

accounted for (or discounted) in post-intervention accounts of external actors. Also, that peace is actually determined by local actors who may or may not be involved in formal peacekeeping¹⁴.

Using Kosovo as an example, Visoka argues that external actors sought rapid results and lacked contextual knowledge, but local actors understood the context and had the long view in mind. While some local actors were motivated by self-interest, others sought to transcend ethnic divisions and created new social movements for 'progressive peace' supported by NGOs global civil society organisations¹⁵. Also, the rise of 'Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping' (UCP) is a good example of peace NGOs giving 'primacy to the local' and a non-violent and non-partisan approach¹⁶.

While we agree wholeheartedly with Guterres' call for an overhaul of the institutions and mechanisms of peace, peace work does need to be reconceptualised as integrated activity within a holistic ecosystem. To achieve this, we build on the concept of peaceshaping, championed in *The Skagen Document*, to strengthen global peace institutions and develop coherent strategies. Strategies that avoid paternalistic top-down governance, linear thinking and one-size-fits-all solutions¹⁷. To do so will require the dismantlement of existing stove piped activity which privileges the parts rather than the whole.

We also agree that peace institutions should be 'people-centred', with particular emphasis given to the less powerful voices - those who are most impacted by violence and conflict or likely to be. This recognises that threats - such as the climate emergency - rekindle enmities or stoke new ones, disproportionately affecting those outside the hegemonic power centres. Work to enhance the agency of those at risk of conflict and the 'peace-kept' - those who the UN and other agencies seek to protect - is of particular importance.

We see peaceshaping as a moral imperative and collective and individual responsibility. This includes the ability to listen to other perspectives, take account of the contextual nature of enmities, and be open to different types of institutionalising security and peace such as the demilitarised approach of UCPs.

Peaceshaping work

We conceptualise peaceshaping as highly consequential institutional work which has profound effects on global challenges. We define peaceshaping as the disruption of institutions which sustain enmity and the creation and preservation of institutions which constrain enmity and build amity.

An institutional work perspective helps us spotlight the role of actors as they 'interact with and influence institutions'¹⁸. Institutions shape how individuals and organizations do things, including what is deemed

¹⁴ Visoka, G. (2016a). Peace is what we make of it? Peace-shaping events and 'non-events'. *Peacebuilding*, 4(1), 54-70.

¹⁵ Visoka, G. (2016b). Peace multitudes: Liberal peace, local agency, and peace formation in Kosovo. In Richmond O.P & Pogodda, S (Eds). *Post-liberal peace transitions: Between peace formation and state formation*, pp65-82. Edinburgh University Press.

¹⁶ Julian, R. (2020). The transformative impact of unarmed civilian peacekeeping. *Global Society*, 34(1), 99-111.

¹⁷ Schneckener, U. (2016). 'Peacebuilding in crisis? Debating peacebuilding paradigms and practices', in Debiel, T., Held, T. & Schneckener, U (Eds) *Peacebuilding in crisis* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.

¹⁸ Hampel, C., Lawrence, T.B. & Tracey, P. (2017). 'Institutional work: Taking stock and making it matter', in R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, R. Suddaby and K Sahlin-Andersson (eds). (2017). *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*, 2nd Edition, Sage, pp. 558-590. P559.

legitimate or acceptable and the consequences of unacceptable or illegitimate actions. Hence, institutions provide the meaning, motivation and scope for action.

We learn about institutions through participation in families, education and work as well as our interaction with organizations, societies and culture. Many institutions are taken for granted. Many are perceived to be God-given or immutable. But institutions are human constructs which can be upheld, ignored, contested or overthrown. For instance, we might obey or run a red light. We might even campaign for traffic lights to be abolished.

In the section below we outline our preliminary thoughts on the key dimensions of the institutional work of peaceshaping.

Disruptive peaceshaping work

Disruptive peaceshaping work focuses on reframing, contesting or dismantling institutions which work against efforts to achieve enduring peace. *Reframing* work attempts to influence the set of shared understandings that underpin an institution. An example might be security sector reform work to address the marginalisation of women or other groups within military or police forces of a state. Reframing what is acceptable or legitimate can be a powerful method of disrupting and refocusing institutions.

In contrast, *contesting* work mounts a challenge to institutions with the aim of replacing them. The creation of the United Nations, which rose from the ashes of the ill-fated League of Nations, is an example of contesting work. Plagued with fundamental flaws affecting its ability to address international security challenges, a more legitimate model of multilateralism successfully contested its primacy, resulting in the birth of the United Nations in 1945.

Finally, *dismantling* work seeks the removal of institutions that perpetuate social injustice, power imbalances and militarism and aims to introduce new institutional frameworks. The civil rights movement in the United States is an example of work aimed at dismantling institutionalised power structures.

Creative peaceshaping work

While disruptive peaceshaping work offers a lens through which the efficacy of existing institutions can be assessed and contested, creative peaceshaping work seeks avenues to construct new institutions in support of peace efforts. This work is realised in a number of ways.

Performative work draws on linguistic and sociological concepts that describe how social outcomes can be brought into being through the 'stylised repetition of acts'¹⁹. In essence, performative peaceshaping 'creates' social understandings, norms and cultures through socially reinforced acts. For example, engaging children in immersive educational experiences that reinforce principles of non-violence over years-long school programs falls into this category of work. It offers a powerful, performative counter to socially ingrained cultures of violence that give rise to the normalisation of child soldiers. This was observed by Graça Machel, a former Minister for Education from Mozambique appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to undertake a two-year study of the impact of conflict on children:

¹⁹ Butler, J (1988), 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), pp. 519-531; Austin, J.L. (1962), *How to do Things with Words*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press).

'[education] gives shape and structure to children's lives and can instil community values, promote justice and respect for human rights and enhance peace, stability and interdependence.'²⁰

Consensus work seeks to construct agreement for new peace institutions within established peace structures. This occurs through the institutional work of global, regional and state organisations within the legitimised framework of the UN and international law. It also occurs through the interaction of social movements, NGOs and meta-organisations representing a myriad of interests with normative peace institutions. The COP process is a good example of intense consensus peaceshaping from numerous perspectives.

Finally, *prefigurative* work seeks to create new or alternative institutions. In a similar way to performative work, prefiguration happens when individuals or organisations experiment with and 'live' the values, norms, practices and relationships they aspire to rather than working within current parameters²¹. It is therefore future orientated and seeks to create institutional arrangements that are a radical departure from existing values, norms, and practices, and in ways that are not currently envisioned by the dominant actors. In essence, prefigurative work includes 'those forms of performativity that only operate through forms of coordinated action, whose condition and aim is the reconstitution of plural forms of agency and social practices of resistance'.²² Examples include the UCPs that seek to build alternative demilitarised institutions, as well as the peace work of pacifist movements such as the Quakers.

Preservation peaceshaping work

Preservation peaceshaping work focuses on the protection of peace institutions. Most institutions require *maintenance work* to ensure they remain fit for purpose or not forgotten. For instance, reviewing UN policy documents, procedural rules and peacekeeping rules of engagement. Maintenance work is underpinned by *socialisation work* whereby actors within the peace infrastructure internalise the institutional values, norms and rules through training, education (for instance the UN University²³) and operational experience.

Given that peace work is increasingly contested, peace institutions also require guarding. *Guard work* includes protecting institutions from being undermined. It also includes protection of gains from disruptive or creative peaceshaping. For instance, the 'Women, Peace and Security' (WPS) agenda was adopted by the UN Security Council through the landmark 'Resolution 1325'²⁴. Yet, China and Russia increasingly lack a commitment to the WPS agenda and Russia has questioned whether WPS should be in the Security Council's purview. As an institutional gain, WPS must be actively guarded from being undermined.²⁵

²⁰ Machel, G. (1996). *Impact of Conflict on Children: Report of the Expert of the Secretary-General, Ms Graça Machel, submitted pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 48/157, A/51/306* (New York: UN General Assembly), p. 54.

²¹ Reinecke, J. (2018). Social movements and prefigurative organizing: Confronting entrenched inequalities in Occupy London. *Organization Studies*, 39(9), 1299-1321.

²² Butler, J. (2015). *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press), p. 18.

²³ <https://unu.edu/>

²⁴ UN Resolution 1325 Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting. UN General Assembly. October 31, 2000

²⁵ Zahar, M. J., & Deschamps-Laporte, L. (2023). 'Is the Future of Peacekeeping Female? Middle Powers, Liberal Internationalism and the 1325 Agenda'. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 17(30), 313-332.

Conclusion

The expansion of the United Nations - in scope, membership and global reach - since the Second World War demonstrates the effectiveness of multilateralism in capturing the imagination of the international community. Today's UN undertakes activities on a scale that would have been difficult for the drafters of *the Charter* to imagine, and yet the organisation remains plagued by accusations of ineffectuality.

As we outline above, this is not due to an absence of focus. In the realm of peacekeeping, for instance, the UN approaches its work methodically, directed by Security Council mandates and guided by detailed policy and procedures. Yet *coordinated* action remains elusive. As such, efforts by the UN to comprehensively address threats to international security resemble a patchwork of activity resting on an assumption of linear progression from conflict to peace.

Drawing inspiration from the drafters of *The Skagen Document*, we argue an urgent need to coordinate this activity through a single lens of *peaceshaping*. As distinct from the current focus on temporality (that is, peace and conflict as two ends of a spectrum), peaceshaping's focus on understanding the effect of *disruptive*, *creative* and *preserving* actions holds the key to unlocking a deeper understanding of the interdependent nature of the peace interventions. More importantly, peaceshaping's focus on institutions, rather than activity, sets the foundation for effective strategic planning and analysis of peace work.

The UN's anaemic response to contemporary crises - from Gaza to Ukraine to the climate emergency - demonstrates an urgent need to evolve the global community's capacity for response. As the UN ponders how best to pursue Antonio Guterres' *New Agenda for Peace*, the strategic lens of peaceshaping offers new avenues to reform and rebuild the institutions that represent the last bulwark of the international community in building and sustaining global amity.

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