

An Empirical-Analytical Attempt to

Intercultural Mediation:

Assess the Impact of Cultural Differences

A Difficult Brokerage.

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I Introduction

This text provides a glimpse into the research-workings of a project entitled ‘Conflict Cultures and Intercultural Mediation’, based at the Berghof Research Center. It covers findings resulting from the pilot phase of the project, which came to an end in September 1995, and it can therefore only do partial justice to the range of expectations aroused by its title. The aim has been to bring home to the reader, working as closely as possible to the analysed material, just how difficult a form of intercession intercultural mediation is.

The term ‘intercultural mediation’ is open to misinterpretation. On the one hand, it can easily seduce one into thinking that what is involved is simply a specific *process* that is particularly well-suited for dealing with any kind of intercultural or ethnopolitical dispute or conflict. On the other hand, it is used as an umbrella-term covering various models of conflict resolution, as described in Berghof Report No. 1.¹

What we mean here by ‘intercultural mediation’ is a *process of negotiation*. When disputants of differing cultural origins make use of a process to try to settle their dispute, they are first of all faced with the task of having to check and see whether the chosen process can be contextualized in a way that is suitable for their particular situation, and, if so, to what extent. What competences conflict-resolvers need in order to create a situation which could then be termed ‘intercultural mediation’ is demonstrated in the third section of the present text. These competences are derived from the simulation of an intercultural conflict-resolution documented and interpreted in the second section. So that readers can get a good picture of the way in which this derivation comes about, this section is the most

1. Norbert Ropers, *Peaceful Intervention: Structures, Processes, and Strategies for the Constructive Resolution of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Berghof Report 1; Berlin, Oct. 1995).

detailed. At the present stage, the material does not allow of a thorough-going discussion of procedure.²

In order to forestall another possible disappointment, we should like to make it clear from the outset that the intercultural context presented here is not a particularly spectacular one. What is involved is a set of findings from a small-group experiment involving US-American, French, and German participants—men and women being represented in equal numbers. That there is some sense in trying to search out cultural differences even in cultures that are as close as these, and that are all Western, is demonstrated in the first section.

The Prologue that follows this Introduction tackles another, very widespread, misunderstanding about ‘interculturality’, and puts the reader into the appropriate frame of mind for the rest of the text.

2. Over the last few years, the increased interest in how social behaviour is affected by cultural factors has also spread to the theory and practice of mediation. An illustration of this is the criticism levelled at the Harvard concept from within the alternative-dispute-resolution movement. Its emphasis on monochronous intervention and individual behavioural ascriptions, it is said, casts doubt on its usefulness in collective/non-Western cultures. In our view, however, the decisive criterion is whether the process allows of interculturality, or whether it strictly excludes any kind of modification. Where contextualization is successful, the necessity for a process to be tied to a particular culture would seem to us, rather, to be of little consequence. On the Harvard concept, see Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving in* (New York *et al.*, 1991).

II Prologue

A Young German Mediator

Readers are asked to imagine a dispute—any kind of dispute—between neighbours. Think, for example, of Paul Watzlawick’s tale about the hammer:³ An obviously ill-humoured man rings furiously at his neighbour’s door. When the neighbour opens the door, the bad-tempered man shouts at him that he can jolly well keep his hammer; then he turns round and disappears into his flat, slamming the door as he goes. The neighbour stares in bafflement, wavers between rage and incomprehension, and finally shrugs his shoulders, goes back into his flat, and shuts his door. Watzlawick explains his protagonist’s behaviour by letting us listen into his inner monologue, and this reveals the presuppositions, distorted perceptions, and so on which led to his outburst.

Now let’s move the scene to the Schöneberg district of Berlin, to a socially mixed neighbourhood near the Kleistpark. Living in a block of flats in the area is a psychology student who, just at this moment, is busy working on a seminar paper on the Harvard concept of mediation. A vague rumour about events on the third floor is passed to him by the woman living next door, and he learns that things up there are going from bad to worse. Since the student has only just moved into the block and doesn’t know either Herr Müller or Herr Lipanski personally, he thinks he satisfies the criteria required of a neutral third party. He doesn’t want to know any of the details of the affair as a whole, because otherwise he would risk losing his non-partisan stance. He decides to add the finishing touch to his seminar paper by providing a practical example, and he offers himself as a mediator to the two disputants. Herr Lipanski and Herr Müller agree—albeit it with differing degrees of enthusiasm—and they arrange to meet on neutral territory, in the student’s flat. As a

3. Paul Watzlawick, *Anleitung zum Unglücklichsein* (Munich, 1983), 37 ff.

result of these preliminary talks, our young mediator discovers that Herr Lipanski doesn't just have a Polish-sounding name but is actually Polish, and has lived in Berlin for two years. He is 25 years old, is studying architecture at the Technical University, and speaks perfect German. Herr Müller is 67 years old, is a pensioner, and has lived in the block since 1953.

Seated once again at his desk, our young German mediator has fallen into a deep meditation. In all honesty, he has to admit that he knows nothing at all about Polish *culture*, and he wonders whether the fact that the two disputants have different *national* origins doesn't change the overall nature of the conflict, and whether, for example, he no longer fulfils the criteria of a neutral third party. Let's listen in for a while to the young mediator's ponderings:

'I really had my doubts about this Harvard concept right from the start, and now it's all looking a mess. Neutral third party? No way! How am I supposed to stay neutral when I think of this Müller. Typical Berlin reactionary. "Cosmopolitan" Berlin? No way! Give me my Swabian idyll any day! I know exactly what this oh-so-open city thinks about Poles, even if Müller didn't actually say anything about it himself. Anyway, he was such a grouse. He probably thinks he'll get a beer off me if he comes down. It's not surprising I immediately identify with Lipanski. Though I actually didn't do badly: whenever they wanted to talk about their quarrel, I veered them off it—really professional! On the other hand—all those illegal Polish workers—maybe Müller has something to do with the building-trade—I bet he has a fit when he thinks there'll be Polish architects here soon. He probably blames the Poles for the unemployment. That'd be just like him—thinks no further than his nose—if he thinks at all. But that Lipanski's a bit of a conformist. He was really upset when I commented on how well he spoke German. I didn't mean it like that. But they're bound to be especially prickly about that...'

Assuming this is indeed the young mediator's train of thoughts, then one is justified in claiming that the information that the disputants belong to different *na-*

tionalties leads him to see Herr Lipanski as the victim—and to see him as such because he is a Pole. And because Herr Müller is a German, he sees him as the putative offender. As far as the mediator is concerned, it is clear that, in dealing with the neighbours' conflict, a background of *intercultural* conflict will emerge. This assumption increases his commitment, given that it provides an opportunity for practical criticism of the Harvard concept of neutrality. This claims that intercultural negotiations—and mediation is a form of negotiation structured by a third party—do not differ *de facto* from monocultural negotiations. If the focus is successfully turned on common interests, any existing cultural differences will play, at best, only a folkloric role. The neutrality of the third party is not determined by the latter's membership of an ethnic, national, sexual, or any other kind of group, but by its ability to shape the process of negotiation in such a way that the disputants are able to identify common interests, with a view to arriving at a solution of the conflict that satisfies both sides.

The mediator, on the other hand, thinks intercultural negotiations are fundamentally different. Since the parties to the conflict—in a broad sense—do not have a common language, there can be no preconditionless negotiation between them. Identifying and clarifying culturally determined differences does not constitute an obstacle to communication; on the contrary, it is a precondition for successful intercultural communication. In order to bring such communication about, the mediator needs intercultural competence, and he can only acquire this by knowing as much as possible about the cultures involved in the conflict. The young mediator therefore sets about acquiring as much knowledge as he can about Polish culture.

The Young German Mediator's Girlfriend

The mediator's girlfriend is rather irritated at his new-found interest in Polish culture. Eventually—and not without a degree of pride—he explains his 'case' to her. Now it's his turn to be flabbergasted: she clearly thinks totally differently about it:

'I'm not casting doubt on what you call your "anti-racist" commitment, but the only intercultural conflict I can see is in you. You're behaving exactly like the chap with the hammer in Watzlawick's story: what's going on inside your head has become real to you. You're constructing an apparent intercultural conflict just because you know that the people involved are a Pole and a German. But they're also a pensioner and a student, an old person and a young person, someone who's lived here for ages and someone who's not been living here so long, etc. You're confusing nationality with culture, and you're misusing these two quarrelling neighbours in order to explain what may be your truly conflictual relationship to Polish people. I can understand why you should worry about being neutral, but you're not justified in worrying because you're German, but because you're inferring anything and everything from that fact, without knowing anything about the actual quarrel. Both of them want to meet up with you, so both of them want to arrive at some reasonable neighbourly *modus vivendi*. Don't go and make a great big song and dance about it!'

1 The Pilot Study: Conflict Cultures and Intercultural Mediation

1.1 Methods and Definitions

Since September 1994, the Berghof Research Center has been running a project entitled 'Conflict Cultures and Intercultural Mediation', with support from the Volkswagen Foundation and the Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk. The aim of the initial exploratory pilot-seminar described here was to formulate hypotheses about the real relevance of cultural differences in processes of conflict regulation as currently used in intercultural conflicts. Out of these findings, a precise set of aims emerged for the next stage of the project, begun in January 1996.

The aim of the main part of the project is, within an intercultural context, to develop, test, and theoretically substantiate a process for resolving intercultural conflicts, focusing in particular on the description, analysis, and conceptualization of the role of the third party. On the basis of the intercultural learning-process within the group, a concept of intercultural competence is to be developed which will be of general relevance for the constructive resolution of intercultural conflicts.

As part of the pilot project, a ten-day intercultural research-seminar took place, in February 1995, in Chorin (Brandenburg). This was attended by groups of ten mediators from the USA, France, and Germany.⁴ The seminar was designed and conducted by an intercultural research-team.⁵

The main difficulty with this kind of work is that cultural differences are not susceptible of direct observation in the course of an interaction. For this reason, we

4. The criterion used in selecting the participants was place of residence, not nationality.

5. Those collaborating in the project are: Prof. Thomas Fiutak of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Prof. Jacques Salzer of the University of Paris (Dauphine); Petra Haumersen and Frank Liebe of the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management.

developed the observational concept of ‘irritation’, and, using this, we gathered data that would help us get closer to the entity under observation. The notion of irritation posits that, whenever, in a situation that is being observed or experienced, behavioural expectations are not fulfilled, and this then leads to an individual’s uncertainty in relation to his or her behaviour—in other words, actor A is ‘irritated’ (surprised, astonished, outraged, disconcerted, etc.) by actor B—it may initially be assumed that this ‘irritation’ may, in certain circumstances, derive from the fact that actor A and actor B are acting according to different behavioural rules, and that these reflect differing cultural characteristics.⁶ ‘Irritations’ such as these, initially identified in the analysis of the role-plays, served as a data-base, and were then triangulated with the methods from the group-discussion process and the participant observation, in order to check to what extent they were really traceable to the ‘culture’ factor, or were due to other elements.⁷

The quality of the data obtained in this way depends on the sensitization to intercultural learning of those undergoing, and those doing, the research. We work on the basis of a definition of intercultural learning according to which the starting-point of this process must be sought in the participants’ own (in this context!8) *national identity*.⁹ The irritation that results from encounter with another culture points to a culturally determined formation of the individual, to a type of behaviour which ‘I consider normal’, and it subjects the self-evident nature of that behaviour to relativizing scrutiny.¹⁰ This kind of work on conflict cultures is geared to the ques-

6. Here we are following a research line suggested by Georges Devereux. According to this, ‘disruptions’ should not be viewed as unfortunate occurrences but as sources of knowledge. See George Devereux, *Angst und Methode in den Verhaltenswissenschaften* (Frankfurt/Main, 1984).

7. ‘Triangulation’ here means looking at a slice of reality from different perspectives in order to structure the findings according to similarities and differences and thus weigh them up against one another. See Uwe Flick, ‘Triangulation’, in id., Ernst v. Kardorff, Heiner Keupp, Lutz v. Rosenthal, and Stephan Wolff (eds.), *Handbuch Qualitative Sozialforschung* (Munich, 1991), 432–5.

8. In a completely US-American group, on the other hand, one can imagine that it would be ethnic identity which would provide the starting-point of an intercultural learning-process.

9. The term ‘national identity’ here means the behavioural canon made available to the individual by the society in which he or she grows up.

10. See Petra Haumersen and Frank Liebe, *Eine schwierige Utopie Der Prozeß interkulturellen Lernens in deutsch-französischen Begegnungen* (Berlin, 1990), 18 ff.

tion of how we have learned to cope with conflicts in our various societies. The focus thus lies on becoming aware of our own cultural formation and not on clarifying and understanding another culture.

So that we would be operating with a common understanding of the notion of *intercultural conflict*, the following working definition was evolved in the course of the research seminar.

Even if the parties to a conflict have different national origins, this constellation will not necessarily result in an intercultural conflict. We therefore talk of an intercultural conflict only when, in the course of the conflict resolution, it becomes clear that differences between the observed behaviour of the actors can be explained in terms of membership of a national culture, and when this differing behaviour has a decisive influence on the process of conflict resolution.

We worked on the basis that cultural differences should be conceived of as nationally based differences. Ethnic and other possible differences within each 'national' subgroup should, meanwhile, take a back seat. We focused on the differences between various societies, each of which provides its members with a specific behavioural canon for each situation, with this canon reflecting the distinct path which national development has followed in each case. At the same time, we did not want to deny that all three participating societies have a markedly heterogeneous composition. Using this approach, specifically 'cultural' behaviour can be related to the specific national development of each distinct society and can then be opened up to explanation.

In terms of the short story presented in the Prologue, we are beginning by following the line of argument adopted by the young mediator's girlfriend. On the basis of the information as given, one cannot talk of an intercultural conflict. This does not preclude the possibility that, as mediation progresses, it will emerge that the behavioural differences derive from behavioural expectations whose differing character can be explained in terms of differing national-cultural background. If this turned out to be the case, then, in accordance with the definition given above, one would have to talk of an intercultural conflict.

1.2 The Difficulties with National Identity

As was to be expected, the crude approach of reducing the participants to their national origins aroused a great deal of opposition. All three participating national cultures are commonly described as ‘individualistic’.¹¹ Accordingly, the participants found it something of a presumption that they should be defined, in reductionist manner, as ‘German’, ‘French’, or ‘American’. What resulted was a phenomenon that is particularly common in intercultural groups of this ‘Western’ stamp, namely a tabooing of the national.¹² This emerged especially forcefully in the section on conflict cultures, in which each ‘national’ group was asked to provide a description of the two other conflict cultures in attendance. Thus, for example, the French were to say whether they thought that, in general, Americans inclined more to offensive or to defensive conduct in conflicts.¹³ Opposition to this task was equally strong in all three national groups but expressed itself very differently in the treatment of the issue—and this group-phenomenon was the really revelatory feature of the section.

- The *US-Americans*, who were very clear about the differences amongst themselves, and drew a distinction between opinions and ideas about the USA and about themselves as individuals, acted extremely homogeneously. All of them resolutely rejected attributions of particular behaviour to ‘the

11. See Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (London et al., 1989), 293 ff.

12. See Jean-René Ladmiral and Edmond Marc Lipiansky, *La Communication interculturelle* (Paris, 1989), 293 ff.

13. This was done by all the groups in relation to all the others. Groups were asked for their assessment of various conflict-related features: behaviour, history, philosophy, location (public/private domain), proclivity. Participants within national groups were then asked to give an individual assessment, on a scale of 1–7 indicating, at either end, the extremes concerned (e.g. historical conflicts significant/insignificant in daily consciousness). Following this, there was an exchange of information about how the assessments had been arrived at. A presentation of the descriptions was then made in the plenary group, and those described then gave their responses.

Americans’ as not applying to themselves personally—an attitude that even encompassed their body language. Equally, they refused, both as individuals and as a group, to make any exaggerated or caricaturing comments about the others—pointing out that they did not have enough reliable information, particularly about the Germans.

- One female American participant compared the reaction of the *French* to that of a contented cat. They accepted the positive depictions with satisfaction but overlooked the critical remarks. This changed dramatically when the German group began repeatedly to point out to them that other things had been said as well, and this led to a vociferous Franco-German debate (which the Americans sat back and observed with amazement bordering on incomprehension) in which very ‘typical’ mutual accusations were made, such as ‘You want to foist your guilt-complex on us’, or ‘Typical French arrogance’. In the course of this very intense debate, the French group became increasingly fragmented and perceptibly more individualistic. In the end, there were manifestly differing positions within the French group on *specific* issues.
- The non-Germans within the *German* group (i.e. those that had not been born Germans in terms of nationality) adopted, to varying degrees, the American position. The others reacted primarily to the negative descriptions of German conflict-culture (in other words, in exactly the opposite way to the French) and attempted to explain their relationship to German history to the others in a very personal and differentiated way, taking great care not to excuse themselves, but to clarify their own individual way of tackling that history. Since no similar effort was made in so clear a way by the other two groups, they took it upon themselves to ask that this should be done, and this did work out, at least with the French. The Americans, however, remained unreceptive to this.

This brief description of the various reactions shows up our aim in working on conflict cultures. For intercultural mediators, it is, of course, unreasonable to ask them to provide caricatures of other cultures.¹⁴ From the very start, it was clear that the pictures that emerged had only inconsequential value in terms of the information yielded. But if one looks at the way in which the group reacted to the unreasonable request, some very tangible differences emerge which can be explained in terms of, *amongst other things*, membership of a particular national culture. It was clear that these particular Americans in this particular context did not want to talk about prejudices. (One woman participant stated explicitly that this would be dangerous, because there would then be more prejudices than there had been before.) It was also clear that these particular French people were initially quite happy with the pictures of themselves; and, lastly, it was clear that these particular Germans were afraid of the prejudices held against them as Germans. In terms of theory, this observation yields nothing new; in practical terms, however, the process resulted in a piece of experiential learning that revealed that there are greatly contrasting and very distinct I–We balances,¹⁵ and that these may, to a great extent, be explicable in terms of differing national development.

This goes some way to mitigating a criticism that was frequently voiced during the preparatory phase of the project, namely why, in this of all research-fields, three so ‘closely related’ cultures had to be chosen to work with. As already mentioned, the participants regarded themselves almost exclusively as individuals and not as representatives of a culture—let alone a national one. We could easily have avoided this difficulty by giving the group a different composition. But a more individualistic group has the advantage of safeguarding against precipitate interpretations of behaviour, explained in terms of some supposed cultural difference. Since any cultural influence in shared interactions is not directly observable and cannot

14. We based this exercise on Helmolt Rademacher and Maria Wilhelm’s prejudice game ‘Haben Sie Vorurteile? (Are You Prejudiced?)’ in eid., *Spiele und Übungen zum interkulturellen Lernen* (Berlin, 1991), 214.

15. The term ‘I–We balance’ is used by Norbert Elias to describe and compare relationships between individuals and societies independently of historical developments. His ‘I-identity’ denotes the significance attributed to the individual in this relationship, the ‘We-identity’ the significance of membership of a family, tribe, or state. Norbert Elias, *Die Gesellschaft der Individuen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1987), 209 ff.

be isolated, there is, in any case, a danger that *all* behavioural uncertainties in an intercultural context will, on principle, be classified as culturally determined, and thus regarded as explicable. Culture then becomes a bottomless pit with no real informative value. In contrast, this unit of the project brought to light concrete behavioural differences between national cultural groups, and these yielded, in a relatively unintended way (unintended at least by the participants), indications that the different concepts of national identity in this situation of an unreasonable demand, and in this context, were experienced in different ways. And different concepts of national identity do, precisely, also influence understanding of intercultural mediation, understanding of neutrality, and the formulation of procedures.

Though one has to be extremely cautious, and constantly bear in mind non-permissible generalizations, the following observations can none the less safely be made.

1.3 Interim Findings from the Work on Conflict Cultures

- In this group at least, there was a tendency for the US mediators not to want to describe or regard themselves as Americans. They saw themselves as autonomous individuals, shaped by a multiplicity of different cultural, ethnic, and other differences, which had made these US individuals into intercultural individuals. On this view, a general description of US society ordinarily bears no relation to an actual inhabitant of the USA. This ability almost completely to separate national cultural history from one's own personal history is necessarily reflected in these individuals' understanding of intercultural mediation. If the 'I' is seen as a product of a multicultural society, then all procedures proposed by this 'I' are, in some sense, themselves universal—at least where the mediators operate as individuals and not as representatives of a national culture, and where the parties to the conflict are viewed in

similarly unprejudiced fashion simply as individuals. This explains why the concept of neutrality as formulated in the Harvard scheme is at all possible. Where a professional distinction is made between the 'I' and the 'collective', cultural differences are not denied, but neither do they have any special, or indeed, independent weight. They are merely a natural but not very revealing component of personal identity. This attitude exactly reflects the relationship between majorities and minorities as present in the 'melting-pot' of American society. Strict individuality then appears as an expedient for being able to define oneself in any sense as US-American. From this 'American' perspective, the notion of the 'I-We balance' makes little sense. Because of the distinctions of all kinds that are present there, the 'We' cannot, for all practical purposes, be described or explained. The 'I' is indeed a product of the 'We', because the 'I' also appears as the result of a whole variety of influences; but it is within everyone's sphere of responsibility to be able to experience differences, whatever their source, as normality and thus to experience them in a value-free way.

- The French participants clearly had no reason to distance themselves from the picture of France which was presented to them. This also applied, in particular, to individuals who, in German legal terms, were non-French. The relationship of minorities to majorities is here determined by the integrating power of the French model of the nation. Independently of cultural identity, they showed themselves, in this situation and this context, to be individualistic French persons. Talk about the positive sides was welcomed; talk about the others was—initially—ignored. These French people at least had no problem with being described by the others as French, because they at first expected, and heard, only positive things. This reflects a stable self-image—one that leads one to expect that, in the context of intercultural mediation, they will not raise any particularly significant problems such as the influence which their national/cultural affiliation may have on their neutrality. In the debate—imposed and assented to—there were, it is true, differing positions as regards interpretation of, and enmeshment with, their own

history; but the same assured self-image was preserved, perhaps partly because such differentiation was possible. In the 'French' case, the 'We' bolsters the 'I'. On the basis of a fundamental recognition of the 'We', the 'I' develops its individuality.

- For the particular Germans involved, the situation had yet another character: they were not able either to distance themselves from their collective history, or to take in the positive and ignore the negative portrayals. For them, individualism is only possible via a public engagement with their history. In the case of these Germans, such an engagement appears to have become an integral part of their (national) identity, and, quite understandably, they demand a similar process from others. It is obvious that there is, here, a certain fear of being identified as 'Germans' without being given the opportunity of demonstrating how one has personally tackled history. From this standpoint, therefore, the question of neutrality in the case of intercultural mediation must be viewed in quite a different light. The 'German' I-We balance is such that the 'I' tends to appear under threat from the 'We'. The relationship between 'We' and 'I' is problematic, and thus of great significance. Only through engagement, combined with the corresponding rational distancing from the 'We', is the 'I' enabled to operate freely. The fact that the 'non-Germans' in the German group were able to distance themselves from this dilemma fits in perfectly with the more (unconnected) 'side-by-side' multiculturalism of German society.

1.4 Summary and Further Topics for Investigation

Once again: the aim of this work was not to throw stereotypes and prejudices back in each other's faces. Nor were we looking for an outsider's description of French, German, or US conflict cultures. What *was* important was for a process to be experienced in which the dialectical relationship between 'We' and 'I' became clear, and in the course of which the 'I', however individualistic, could become a 'We', without the 'I' necessarily disappearing. In this context, the perception of the differences in the I-We balance was the result of a process of intercultural sensitization and provided a structured framework for the observation of cultural differences in this group. On the basis of this sensitization, the further question can now be asked of how far the differences that were experienced actually have an effect on the interactions that take place as part of intercultural mediation. However, it was not intended that any connection should be drawn during the pilot phase between the behaviour actually observed in intercultural mediation and the conflict-cultures involved. This task was reserved for the subsequent main study. As a next step, however, we should like to examine the question of the extent to which intercultural differs from monocultural mediation.¹⁶

16. We take 'monocultural' to mean 'within a single national context'.

2 Analysis of Interaction in an Example of Intercultural Mediation

The first question that arises is whether it is actually possible, by analysing a role-play, to draw any conclusions that could be generalized to provide an outline of a process of intercultural mediation. We should therefore like to remind readers at this point that the pilot phase was intended to be no more than exploratory, and that the findings presented here were meant only to provide well-founded indications as to the direction in which research should proceed in the main study. A role-play is, unarguably, a simulation, and the degree of authenticity it involves is therefore rightly open to question. On the other hand, a role-play enables insights to be gained—particularly as regards the gradual honing of the questions and questioning of the observations—to which a purely field-based type of research would be unable to gain access without massively influencing the actors and interactions and thus distorting the results.

Our main aim is not to provide an analysis of a *particular* intercultural conflict, but to deliver generalizable propositions about how far the interculturality of a conflict affects interaction in a process of conflict resolution. Hence, the reason we have documented extracts of *this particular* role-play is not that we believe the actors behaved particularly authentically (in relation to the real underlying conflict), but that these extracts can shed light on some of the typical sequences of events in an intercultural context.

2.1 The Problem

This section will deal with the question of whether the ‘culture’ factor is really of relevance in formulating processes of conflict regulation, and, if so, to what extent. How far do monocultural and intercultural mediation differ? Is it possible to make out sufficiently significant and, above all, identifiable differences?

We want to try to approach these issues with the help of a video recording of a role-play showing an attempt at intercultural mediation. We shall deal with the first twenty minutes of the simulation. This time is divided into *sequences*. A ‘sequence’ here means a complete intentional sense-unit, embracing all interactions from the original intention to the reactions prompted by it. Where an intention of one of the actors was not fulfilled—for example, where a ‘wrong’ answer was given, or a question was interpreted ‘differently’—the sequence is subdivided into ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’, and so on, up to the point where there is a recognizable relative conclusion to this chain of interaction.

The *descriptions* of the sequences mostly follow sense and only occasionally reproduce speech word-for-word,¹⁷ this being clearly indicated. The descriptions are straight statements of content, reproducing the event more or less objectively. ‘More or less’, because in each case, only that part of the interaction is described which, when it came to recording the events, we considered had emerged as relevant for the subsequent process of interaction. The descriptions are thus recapitulatory, and hence also always interpretive. This more generalized approach to the sequencing—in comparison, say, with the coding process in grounded theory, in which a strict line-by-line interpretation is required¹⁸—no doubt allows a lot of material to fall through the net. But for us it was a way of approaching the complex situation in a methodical manner—without being defeated by the simultaneity of the interactions and the concomitant flood of data—and thus also of managing to produce some propositions.

17. Reproducing an exact transcription seemed excessive where the aim was simply to produce exploratory propositions.

18. See Anselm L. Strauss, *Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung* (Munich, 1991).

The descriptions are followed by an *interpretation* relating directly and solely to the description that precedes it. The interpretations often read like commentaries on the sequences. They are not complete, but are intended to stimulate readers to formulate their own opinions and to consider how plausible they seem in intersubjective terms.

The *construals* are interpretations that relate not just to the preceding sequence but to the whole sequence of events up to that point. They restore the interactional flow artificially interrupted by the sequencing, and they verify and confirm or contradict the interpretations.

The evaluative approach presented here seeks to be highly transparent. It is not a complete process but is geared instead to the kind of dialogic understanding of research aimed at here.

2.2 On the Role-Play

The simulation took place at the end of the research meeting in Chorin. The group had therefore already built up a fund of shared experience and was sensitized to intercultural processes. The scenario for the role-play was suggested by a German woman participant and was based on her own experiences. As in the rest of the seminar, there was only a very brief description of context:

This role-play concerns a conflict between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. A renewed escalation of the conflict is prompted by the Israeli settlers' decision to extend their settlement area and bulldoze houses inhabited by Palestinians. They are stopped from doing this and agree to enter into negotiations. The neutral third party is made up of one US man and one Jordanian woman.

It was agreed that the ‘Palestinians’ should speak French, and the ‘Israelis’ English. To begin with, the different parties came together according to language ability (in the course of the role-play, the participants changed roles, but not during the first twenty minutes). The part of the mediators was played by two Germans—a man and a woman—who decided, on their own initiative, that they would speak English. Each of the parties to the role-play was assigned an interpreter. The two parties each consisted of three delegates.

2.3 Description, Interpretation, and Construal

2.3.1 Sequence 1: ‘Do you Feel Comfortable?’

Description

- MEDIATOR A: Expresses thanks for being invited. Points out that the first task is to clarify the rules. Hence her first question is whether everyone feels welcome and comfortable with the existing arrangements.
- ISRAELIS: One of the Israelis intervenes to say that he is the spokesman for the group.
- ISRAELI INTERPRETER: Translates what the mediator has said, and the Israeli proposal, for the Palestinians.
- ISRAELIS: Israelis again intervene to explain their own mode of operation in more detail: we want to do it like this in order to systematize and simplify communication.
- MEDIATOR A: Gestures towards the Palestinians, inviting them to respond to the proposal.

PALESTINIANS: Consult amongst themselves, say they are agreeable. They adopt the proposed model and now also have a spokesman; the others have advisory status.

MEDIATOR: Is everyone happy with this?
Indicate agreement by nodding.¹⁹

Source: Video recording 0.00–2 m. 45 s.

Interpretation

The mediator begins by saying that she would like to start by fixing the rules for the proceedings, but in fact she starts by asking the disputants whether they are all comfortable with the existing arrangements.

Without waiting for the translation to be given, the ‘Israelis’ intervene and remark that they have already independently made changes to the arrangements. They have an official spokesman; no mention is at first made of the function of the other two ‘Israelis’. They explain how they envisage conducting their talk with the others.

The mediator has spoken in English; the ‘Israelis’ also speak in English. This may be why a direct intervention was possible. The ‘Israelis’ can communicate directly with the mediator. At this point, the ‘Palestinians’ have not yet understood anything that has been said.

Only now does the ‘Israeli’ interpreter translate what has been said for the ‘Palestinians’. The ‘Israelis’ again use the ensuing pause to explain their mode of operation. A straightforward statement of fact is followed by a very reasonable-sounding explanation.

One problem seems to be the way the linguistic proximity of the mediators to one of the disputants is dealt with. With their support, this turns into a dominance in terms of the substance of the dispute. Mediator A’s initial intention is to explain the rules, but rules are already being set up by one of the parties to the conflict. There is no clear arrangement by Mediator A about when people may speak; there

19. In the descriptions of the sequences we omit quotation marks when naming the parties to the conflict.

is no clear structure for the timing of translation. The initiative to translate is taken by the translators, and the translation therefore comes across more as a kind of disruption than as a normal and natural part of the setting.

By their statement, the ‘Israelis’ achieve three things:

1. They show that they have come prepared and that they have already done some thinking. They justify the way they proceed with an argument that is difficult to reject, and in so doing they demonstrate their readiness to be constructive. Since they are the authors of the idea, and since it sounds very reasonable, they force the others into taking a stand—even if they do not explicitly propose that the other party to the conflict should adopt the idea.
2. The ‘spokesperson’ model not only simplifies communication but also protects the group. It is likely that only *one* openly declared opinion will reach the other parties. Internal dissensions and differing opinions thus remain within the Israeli group. The spokesperson becomes a diplomat. Only what he says is translated, and this is the only thing the other party gets to know about.
3. As a result, the principle of delegation that is initially present undergoes alteration, or is at least defined in a specific way. Since this is *their* procedure, and they do not open it up to modification, the ‘Israelis’ unilaterally change the setting and thus take charge of shaping it.

When the ‘Israeli’ statement has been translated, Mediator A invites the ‘Palestinians’ to speak by gesturing to them—in other words without speaking. One can imagine two possible interpretations for this:

1. The mediator’s wordless gesture is an expression of helplessness. She simply passes on what she has received, without any comment, thus approving the ‘Israelis’ procedure, signalling her assent to it. Neither the latter’s interruptions nor their imposition of a definition are called into question by her. She allows it to happen and turns, silently, to the other party, whose language she does not speak. This silence also expresses the fact that she feels the other party to be more distant. She ‘speaks’ only with her hands, a

symbol that communication with them is more difficult for her, that it can take place only on a very basic level.

2. The gesture transforms the one-sided statement into a proposal to the other party to the conflict. The wordless passing-on of the statement signals that she assents to its contents and invites the other party to give its reaction. She leaves the decision as to whether the rule should be discussed in greater depth to the other party to the conflict.

After internal discussion, the 'Palestinians' declare themselves in agreement, and they too adopt the 'spokesperson' model. The spokesman declares the other members of the delegation to be his advisers. The 'Palestinians' have thus responded to the implicit proposal and have accepted it. In so doing, they too signal their readiness to be constructive and co-operative. They thereby show that they are quite able to adopt reasonable proposals, even if these come from the other party.

The mediator asks whether everyone is happy with the agreement, and both parties indicate that they are.

By posing her question, the mediator assumes the initiative again. The course of events leading to the agreement was not determined by her, nor did she receive the answers she probably expected to her question; but by her action she approves and accepts the process. The setting has been changed, seemingly as the result of negotiation.

2.3.2 Sequence 2a: Mediator A Sets the Rules

Description

MEDIATOR B: The sequence is introduced by Mediator B. He explains that everyone has something to say and each will have their turn.

MEDIATOR A: Stresses that everyone will get an opportunity, that each person will be taken seriously.

Translation.

Parties to the conflict nod in acknowledgement.

PALESTINIANS: The Palestinians take the nodding as a cue to speak up for the first time on their own initiative.

Source: Video recording –3 m. 36 s.

Interpretation

The mediators do what they had said they were going to do at the beginning. Mediator B announces the first rule, which is, however, formulated in very general terms and does not introduce anything substantially new. As a communication rule, it seems weak, almost trite. It does not in any way clearly signal that the mediators now intend to take charge of the real discussion. On the contrary: the rule comes across as an extremely cautious step, greatly concerned not to foist anything excessive on the disputants. This being so, the disputants have no difficulty assenting to it.

Mediator A expressly underlines the fact that each person will be taken seriously. This use of a pause for reiteration is rather surprising. It could, in certain circumstances, indicate that she herself has the feeling that she has not adequately fulfilled her duty of neutrality; and this would mean that Interpretation 1 in Sequence 1 was the right one. In comparison with the forthright approach of the disputants, the mediators seem very hesitant. They try not to make any mistakes, not to provoke but rather to mollify in advance. By doing this, they forfeit the opportunity to structure the encounter. Power over the process remains with the disputants, and this is also reflected in the fact that the ‘Palestinians’ are able to speak up.

2.3.3 Sequence 2b: Who is the Guest?

Description

- PALESTINIAN: 'I should like to begin...'
- ISRAELIS (turning to the mediators)
Asks why the Palestinian is beginning.
- MEDIATOR B (turning to the Palestinians)
Excuses himself and says he still has a few things to say.
- INTERPRETER: Begins translating but is interrupted...
- PALESTINIANS: 'I only wanted [turning to the mediators] to welcome them [turning to the Israelis]. Shalom, Shalom allecheim!' (He says this quite aggressively.)
- MEDIATOR B: Apologizes and remarks that Palestinians come from different cultures and that he, or any mediator, could easily unintentionally overstep boundaries. Asks them to tell mediators if they do anything like this, observing that it would be helpful for the process.
- ISRAELIS: Say they would like to say something.
- MEDIATOR B: Interrupts with apology.
- ISRAELIS: Says would like to say that Palestinian has started off as if Israelis were guests, whereas he is the guest.
- MEDIATOR A: Says in her opinion they are all guests there.

Source: Video recording –4M52S

Interpretation

After the apparently very calm and constructive beginning in Sequence 2a, we now have a first escalation. The 'Palestinians' use the moment of nodding to speak, but they are immediately interrupted by the 'Israelis', who turn to the mediators.

The 'Palestinians' do no more than follow the existing rules. They have something to say, and so they use the pause after the end of an interaction (the nod-

ding), in order to add something new. The ‘Israelis’ make what is a successful appeal to the mediators in the sense that the latter then intervene. We see clearly here that the ‘Israelis’ are structuring the process and making use of the mediators for their own purpose—something which the latter allow to happen to themselves. This time, it is the ‘Palestinians’ who interrupt the subsequent translation, and it may be assumed that their indignation is very real. They have been prevented from doing what, up to this point, has been a matter of course, and they have some right to feel discriminated against. Nevertheless, they stick up for their right to speak, although their greeting comes out more aggressive than perhaps intended. Five minutes have, after all, elapsed during which they have had no opportunity to articulate something as natural as a greeting.

Mediator B apologizes to the ‘Palestinians’ for perhaps overlooking the fact that such a gesture is usual in their culture. But at the same time he overlooks the fact that the mediators greeted both parties at the beginning of the encounter, and that a greeting is therefore by no means to be categorized as unusual.

He interprets the persistence of the ‘Palestinians’ as reflecting his failure to take their culture into proper consideration, and he expressly encourages them to point out to him whenever this sort of thing happens. This cultural line of argument both overlooks possible, objectively real causes for the indignation, and attaches a stigma to ‘the others’: ‘Well, Arabs are impulsive and very traditional, aren’t they?’ The other culture is cited to account for a piece of behaviour that is entirely comprehensible to the mediators as well, and it thus blocks any thought about other causes.

The ‘Israelis’ then speak, and are immediately interrupted by Mediator B. But they too manage to assert themselves, responding to the ‘Palestinians’ on a quite different level.

Once again they speak directly to the mediators, thus again blocking translation for the ‘Palestinians’. In what then follows, the latter are therefore no more than spectators, left alone with their anger and not having received any answer in their own language—not even a response to their greeting. The fact that the ‘Palestinians’ take (allegedly) the first turn to speak, in order to greet those present, is interpreted symbolically by the ‘Israelis’. They act to rectify the situation: the ‘Pales-

tinians' do not have the right to greet us, because they, not the 'Israelis', are the guests. Whoever speaks first is the host and the one who greets the others. They do not want to concede this right to the 'Palestinians'; they want it reversed.

The mediators then stop any further discussion with the philosophical-sounding observation that they are all guests there. For the first time, the mediators act in a directive manner. However, they do not clarify, they clamp down. But the offer made by the 'Israelis' is also complex: first of all, a connection is made between the right to utter the first word and the role of host—hence a direct reference to the real conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. In addition, they reject Mediator B's cultural interpretation by imputing to the 'Palestinians' a desire to arrogate the host-role to themselves—in other words, they interpret the greeting as a symbol, to which they must inevitably respond with rejection. Since, in the view of the 'Israelis', the mediators do not see through this tactic, they are obliged to intervene. 'We are all guests here' rejects the interpretation and sets the events in a neutral but hostless space. In a figurative sense, however, the shaping of a 'mediation arena' by a mediator is undoubtedly the kind of thing a host does. The mediators are thus admitting that they are not the ones shaping this process. It should be remembered that the 'Palestinians' are not aware of any of this and have still not received any response to their greeting. They are being negotiated about, but they themselves are not questioned. Hence the issue raised in this sequence is not taken up. The question of who speaks first is evidently an important one for both sides. The mediators' 'culture-based interpretation' neutralizes the interchange because it does not acknowledge that there is a point of contention lurking behind the procedural question. What is at issue here is not just a traditional gesture, but power: in this context, who is guest and who is host is the decisive question.

2.3.4 Sequence 2c: The Translation

Description

INTERPRETER: The interpreter summarizes events so far.

MEDIATOR A: Rounds off the translation by stressing the importance of asking questions, because she is keen to understand both sides.

Source: Video recording –6 m. 18 s.

Interpretation

The translation calms people's feelings. It comes across as an objectivization of the events that have just taken place, and it puts a brake on emotions. These kinds of breathing-spaces, which allow some distancing to take place, are very difficult to achieve in a monocultural context. Mediator A makes use of this time, taking charge of proceedings once again when the translation is finished. By doing this, she prevents the 'Palestinians' from responding to the translation, because she wants to get away from this topic. At the same time, she expresses her desire to understand both sides. She is thus canvassing, on the one hand, trust, and, on the other, understanding. This canvassing is in marked contrast to the end of the previous sequence (directive behaviour). She is trying to make good. However, in doing so, she sticks with the 'cultural' explanation and thus presents herself as someone to whom the kind of behaviour just experienced is totally alien.

Construal

The way the interactions that have so far taken place have developed shows that the parties to the conflict—particularly the 'Israelis'—are exerting a much greater structuring influence on the process than are the mediators. On the one hand, the latter's attempts at structuring are not cogent (Sequence 2a), and on the other, these attempts are rejected—indeed, straightforwardly disallowed— by the parties to the conflict. The mediators make these moves in an authoritarian manner

(Sequence 2b) and subsequently apologize for this (Sequence 2c). As an explanation of the relative non-functioning of their attempts at structuring, they cite cultural differences—a fact which, once again, militates in favour of Interpretation 1 in Sequence 1.

The lack of verbal communication *vis-à-vis* the ‘Palestinians’ continues, but they, the mediators, try their best to understand them better. They, the mediators, have forgotten that the ‘Palestinians’ belong to another culture and therefore sometimes also behave ‘differently’. With this undoubtedly well-intentioned interpretation, the mediators make it quite clear that the ‘Israelis’ stand in a markedly closer relationship to them: after all, the ‘Palestinians’ have basically not done anything different from what the Israelis have done up to now. The rebuke directed at the ‘Israelis’ at the end of Sequence 2b could quite reasonably be interpreted as a call to them to make an effort to understand the other culture instead of always assuming the worst. Culture as an explanatory argument has thus already gone quite a way to acquiring independent validity.

Because of the ‘cultural veiling’, the objective inequalities as regards participation in the interactions are neglected. At the same time, the ‘Israeli’ argument is neutralized. Even if one supposes that the ‘Israelis’ misinterpret the ‘Palestinian’ greeting quite deliberately, for tactical reasons, they are nevertheless clearly pointing to the heart of the conflict. And yet the ‘Palestinians’ are not given the opportunity to respond to the imputations; nor is there any attempt to counter the linking of the symbolic significance of the first remark—a significance that is crucial to the process—with the substance of the conflict. The mediators thus forfeit the chance of clearly structuring the process.

2.3.5 Sequence 3a: Planning the Time

Description

Mediator B: Raises the question of differing approaches to time and encourages the disputants always to say straight away when they would like a break.

MEDIATOR A: Asks, additionally, whether there are any constraints on timing of which they are not yet aware.

PALESTINIANS: The Palestinians would like to work until 5 p.m.. They have to stop at that point, because it is Ramadan.

MEDIATOR A: Makes a gesture of invitation at the Israelis but notices that the translation is not finished yet, and withdraws her gesture.

MEDIATOR A: Asks the Israelis to respond to her suggestion about time.

ISRAELIS: Say they have the Sabbath the next day, and so would like to finish that day.

Translation.

The Israelis then add that they could all meet again after that.

MEDIATOR A: (With a gesture embracing both sides) Assures herself that everyone is agreed that they can have up to 5 o'clock that day.

Parties to the conflict nod in agreement.

Source: Video recording –8 m. 32 s.

Interpretation

The sequence seems like a new beginning. Now, it is the mediators who are structuring communication. This sequence is the first occasion on which the translation has assumed a natural place. The issue of time is extremely sensitively handled. The gist is: the process takes account of the fact that time is not the same for everyone, and attention will be paid to this. Both parties are able to present themselves in their cultural distinctiveness. The differences are taken seriously.

The mediators thus confine current planning to the present day, with a view to reviewing the situation at the end. This proposal is so cogent at this point that both sides necessarily assent to it.

2.3.6 Sequence 3b: Provocation by the 'Israelis'

Description

- MEDIATOR B: Thanks participants for resolving the time-problem. (The short pause here is made use of by the Israelis...)
- ISRAELIS: The next time, they would prefer not to begin until after dusk.
- MEDIATOR A: Embarks on a suggestion.
She notices that the spokesman has not finished and apologizes for interrupting.
- ISRAELIS: During the day, they say, they have to work.
- MEDIATOR A: Avoids the question of further timing by pointing out that that discussion will arise when they can see how much progress they have made with one another today.

Source: Video recording –9 m. 27 s.

Interpretation

The mediators are basically satisfied with the way they have structured proceedings, and they believe they have just brought a particular negotiation within the negotiations to a successful conclusion. They express thanks for the collaboration—no doubt as a symbolic indication that other problems can be solved in this manner as well. The expression of thanks can be viewed as encouragement and confirmation, as praise for what has been achieved jointly. The underlying message is: Right, so it's OK after all.

The 'Israelis', however, want to relativize this joint success. They have the feeling that their own different time-scheme—which cannot be explained solely in

terms of tradition and which sets them apart from the ‘Palestinians’—was not really heard. They have agreed to this solution, but they are now making it clear that in future they will no longer be prepared to ‘sacrifice’ their working time for negotiation. As far as they are concerned, work will in future take precedence; negotiation is less important. This may have to do with the fact that the mediators have indeed become more neutral and the ‘Israelis’ therefore have to be clearer. By answering as they do, the mediators cut the ground from under the attempted provocation. Even though they apologize for their interruption, it is clear that they are not prepared to hang back behind what has been achieved so far.

Construal

Because the outcome of the negotiations about timing for the day was clear and precise, the mediators are in a position to be able to withstand the provocation. For the first time, the negotiating strategy employed by the ‘Israelis’ is unsuccessful; they are repeatedly directed back to the solution which they themselves supported. The introduction of the time-scheme gives clearer shape to the procedure, and, for a party which perhaps basically does not want to enter into negotiations at all, this may already constitute a threat.

The parties to the conflict make differing use of time as a negotiating strategy. Both of them make the basic timing dependent on their culture. The mediators are prepared for this. The ‘Israelis’ additionally make it clear that time is a scarce resource for them. In so doing, they link into a Western notion and thus both create what they assume is another point in common with the mediators, and also introduce a further distinguishing feature in relation to the others. The way they apply pressure also betrays a dissatisfaction with the way the negotiation is being conducted. At first they say they want to finish today, and this conveys the impression that the whole set-up is a drag for them. Later on, they themselves mitigate this impression.

None the less, this sequence casts the previous interventions by the ‘Israelis’ in a different light. If the impression that they actually regard the negotiations as a nuisance is correct, and their prime concern is to get to the end as quickly as possi-

ble—in other words, they have no great interest in the whole proceedings—their first constructive proposal (the ‘spokesperson model’ in Sequence 1) then becomes a model aimed at efficiency, the prime objective of which is not to give so much away. Up to now, it is largely they who have structured the process. This threatens to change in this sequence, and the ‘Israelis’ accordingly become more rebellious towards the mediators.

The ‘Palestinians’ continue to adopt a more ‘wait and see’ stance. The most they do is show their willingness to engage in the negotiation; though they have no particular desires of their own as regards shaping the process, they are willing to put their trust in it.

The mediators have definitely acquired a higher profile during this sequence. They have focused and structured the theme of timing in such a way that the varying wishes have been integrated into the process without any justifications being sought. This stance reveals what may be interpreted as neutrality.

2.3.7 Sequence 4a: The ‘Palestinians’ Present their Case

Description

MEDIATOR B: Pursues the matter of the rules to be set for the process. Sounds out the question of voluntariness. On this basis, he says, solutions can be arrived at which are acceptable to both sides.

PALESTINIANS: ‘Yes, we’re here voluntarily, as Palestinians, because [the interpreter has to ask exactly what it is he wants to say] the Israelis are destroying our houses, because our children are in prison, and because we don’t understand why they are taking our land away.’

MEDIATOR B: Takes up the point about voluntariness and reiterates that the Palestinians are there voluntarily, to clarify a number of things with the other party.

Translation.

- PALESTINIANS: Respond by saying that they are there to show their good will.
- ISRAELIS: Even as the mediator is posing his question, the Israelis have begun to talk quietly amongst themselves.
- MEDIATOR A: Tells the Israelis they should listen to what the Palestinians have to say.

Source: Video recording –11 m. 20 s.

Interpretation

It seems no coincide that Mediator B chooses this precise point at which to take up the question of voluntariness. Psychoanalytically speaking, this intervention could be described in terms of the transference/counter-transference model. In the previous sequence, the ‘Israelis’ attempted to devalue the negotiation and provoke the mediators. A resistance manifested itself. Now, Mediator B (consciously or intuitively—this question cannot be addressed here) takes up the question of voluntariness. The theme is once again determined by the ‘Israelis’; but in terms of the mediator’s intention, it is an attempt to address the resistances that have emerged. Because of the issue of voluntariness, the ‘Israelis’ are forced to tackle the question of why they are here. There is a strong likelihood that having to do this would mean that the deprecatory stance that has emerged previously would be relativized.

The ‘Palestinians’ answer the question but at the same time give an account that indicts the ‘Israelis’ and portrays the ‘Palestinians’ themselves as victims. In his first intervention, the mediator still manages to bring the ‘Palestinians’ back to the point about voluntariness: they finish what they say by remarking that they want to show their good will.

The whole interaction is disrupted by the internal ‘Israeli’ discussion. Mediator A therefore tells the ‘Israelis’ they should listen to the ‘Palestinians’. This provides us with our first instance of the two mediators acting simultaneously; up to this point, they have always taken turns. Here, Mediator B works with the ‘Palestinians’, whilst Mediator A tries to get the ‘Israelis’ to listen. This split focus not only breaks the principle of consecutive speaking; it confers acceptability on simultane-

ous speaking , and the whole joint communication-structure falls apart. There is no doubt that Mediator A's intention is to prevent just such a development, but by addressing a single party and acting in parallel with her colleague, she legitimizes what she is seeking to proscribe. The 'Israelis' have thus succeeded in causing a split between the mediators and in entering into direct simultaneous contact with one side.

2.3.8 Sequence 4b: The 'Israelis' Succeed in Interrupting

Description

- ISRAELIS: The Israelis object vociferously to Mediator B that the Palestinians have (once again) spoken first.
- PALESTINIANS: Say nothing, because Mediator B is turned completely towards the Israelis.
- MEDIATOR B: Makes a mollifying gesture towards the Israelis and says that he can see they are upset. (There is a short pause.)

Source: Video recording –11 m. 39 s.

Interpretation

Having succeeded in creating a bridge to the mediators, the 'Israelis' now turn directly to the mediator currently in action and complain that the 'Palestinians' have again spoken first. It should by now be clear that whenever there is a danger that the other party to the conflict may succeed in giving their view of things, the 'Israelis' at least attempt to prevent this. This time, we have a variation of a theme we have already met: whereas in Sequence 2b, they sought to make the greeting into an issue of substance, they here ignore the substance and try to get back to the procedural issue. 'Then', this issue was simply scotched; now it can reappear in a new guise. Mediator B thus has little alternative but to address their anger: they have, after all, revealed a weak point in the process, and this constitutes a material criticism against the mediators. The pause can be interpreted as reflecting

helplessness on the part of the mediators, who are here confronted with the consequences of a mistake of their own making.

Construal

Throughout the proceedings, a power-struggle rages between the mediators and the 'Israelis' over how the process is to be structured. The 'Israelis' try every means to block the process; and the mediators—after some initial hesitation—try to structure it. Given this constellation, the 'Palestinians' can only hope that the mediators will 'win'. When, in Sequence 3a, the mediators get the upper hand for the first time, the 'Palestinians', accordingly, use the first available opportunity to explain their position in regard to the substance of the dispute. This provides the 'Israelis' with a pretext, and thus puts the mediators at a disadvantage again. This relapse means that it is once again the 'Israelis' who are structuring the process. The 'Palestinians' once again become spectators of the interaction between the mediators and the 'Israelis'.

2.3.9 Sequence 4c: The 'Palestinians' Emotional Account

Description

(The pause is made use of by the Palestinians.)

PALESTINIAN WOMAN (not the spokesperson):

Emotional reiteration and justification of the original account of situation, combined with a gesture that clearly indicts the Israelis and seeks to win understanding from the mediators.

INTERPRETER: Translates (after a short hesitation, because only what the spokesperson says should really be translated; looks towards the mediators with annoyance).

MEDIATOR B: Shows understanding. He understands that they are in a distressing situation and acknowledges their feeling of oppression. Nev-

ertheless, he would like, he says, to return to the process. A few more matters need to be clarified. In his experience, he says, mediation functions better if rules are clarified in advance. He again stresses that they are responsible for the process and not for the solution.

Translation.

PALESTINIANS: Listen to the translation, nod vigorously in the direction of Mediator B, and then start again.

Source: Video recording –13 m. 00 s.

Interpretation

The ‘Palestinians’ break away from the so far accepted rule that there is only one spokesman, and only what he says is translated. The spokesman for the ‘Palestinians’ has given a relatively factual description of their position; but now there is an emotional outburst that clearly indicts the ‘Israelis’ and equally clearly appeals to the mediators for help. It occurs because the ‘Palestinian woman’ perceives—probably quite rightly—that the official statement has been completely forgotten and the mediator is showing sympathetic understanding for the ‘Israelis’. It is a clear attempt to appeal to the mediators in a way that asks them kindly not to confuse the victims with the offenders.

Mediator B accepts the violation of the rules, tries accommodate the emotionalism, in order to redirect attention to the rule. As an enticement, he promises that, as he himself knows from experience, it will then be easier for them to find a solution to their conflict. He asks them to trust him and appeals to them to let him get on with it. Although the ‘Palestinians’ nod, it is clear that, despite his longish remarks and the translation, he has not succeeded in eliminating emotion from the interchange. The ‘Palestinians’ clearly want to stick with it.

The ‘Palestinians’ basically step in to occupy the breach; they refuse to allow a ‘relapse’ and will not tolerate the ‘Israelis’ again taking charge of structuring the process. They throw themselves with all their might into the centre of the arena—but the official spokesman has not said anything yet and cannot therefore be called

to account. The ‘diplomacy’ model is thus circumvented, although it is still present. In terms of the power-struggle between the ‘Israelis’ and the mediators, they appeal to the mediators to put the ‘Israelis’ in their place. The mediators now find themselves in a cleft stick: on the one hand, they have allowed the ‘Palestinians’ to move far away from their (the mediators’) original intention of clarifying the rules, and they have allowed themselves to be put under pressure and appealed to by the Palestinians to act as moral arbiters; on the other hand, they have the ‘Israelis’ breathing down their necks, accusing them, rightly, of not structuring the process in a transparent manner. When the mediator says that they are not responsible for the solution to their conflict, only for the process, this comes across as a perception distorted by projection. Up to this point, the problem for the mediators lay, precisely, in structuring the process, and not in the fact that solutions were expected of them.

2.3.10 Sequence 4d: The ‘Israelis’ Emotional Account

Description

- ISRAELIS: At the renewed resumption of the Palestinian monologue, the Israelis turn, in a clear state of agitation, to the mediators in the hope of receiving some indication of how the speaking time is to be divided.
- MEDIATOR A: Indicates with a mollifying movement of her hand that all sides will have enough time to give their accounts.
- ISRAELIS: Respond with the observation that they had, precisely, got the impression they were not being allocated enough time.
- MEDIATOR A: Explains that they have not got into the real discussion yet, and that they are still going to try to clarify the rules.

Source: Video recording –13 m. 50 s.

Interpretation

Communication is now completely at cross-purposes. One has the impression that Mediator A is talking more to the ‘Palestinians’ (although nothing is being translated for them at present) than to the ‘Israelis’. The latter are, after all, asking for what the mediator is supposedly trying to establish, namely the rules according to which communication is to take place here. It is therefore not surprising that the ‘Israelis’ should actually adopt an ironic tone. The mediators are clearly in dire straits, and the ‘Israelis’ are beginning to enjoy this vulnerability.

But this sequence also produces a repetition of the pattern. The ‘Israelis’ also become more emotional, and they too insist on their standpoint, reinforcing it with the aid of increased agitation. This is a duplication of the behaviour of the ‘Palestinians’ in the previous sequence, only under appropriately changed conditions. It is undoubtedly a moment of escalation. When the ‘Palestinians’ want the mediators to listen to their complaint, the ‘Israelis’ at a particular juncture call for clarity in the communication-structure. And the mediators for their part address a totally different point, so that the degree to which the lines are crossed could not be greater.

2.3.11 Sequence 4e: The ‘Israelis’ Present their Case

Description

MEDIATOR B: Now turns to the Israelis and asks them whether they are also here voluntarily.

ISRAELIS: Yes, they are here voluntarily because they were invited. And they are here so that the mediators can explain the situation to the Palestinians. They, the Palestinians, would not manage to listen in any case; they would only ever talk.

Translation.

PALESTINIANS: One Palestinian woman makes a remark about what has been said.

(When the interpreter is about to translate, she is stopped by the mediator, who intervenes to prohibit any interjections.)

MEDIATOR B: Remarks that each side will have an opportunity to present its view of the case. The mediators will chair the session.

Source: Video recording –16 m. 06 s.

Interpretation

Since the 'Israelis' have now got the right to speak, they no longer insist on having the speaking times clarified but instead respond briefly to the mediator's question. Their account makes it clear that there is no joint communication with the other side and that they therefore expect the mediators to explain their standpoint to the 'Palestinians'. They demote the mediators to the status of translators, without even an indication that they have any interest in what the other side might have to say. Their answer is no more than a condescending gesture. The translation of the 'Palestinian woman's' remark is blocked by the mediator. This is a very belated attempt to bring some order into the process of communication.

2.3.12 Sequence 5: Chaos

Description

The Palestinian woman's remark has been understood without being translated, and the Israelis respond by complaining.

The interpreters also complain, because they no longer know whom they should be translating.

Communication breaks down completely. The role-play is only able to continue after a ten-minute reorganization.

Source: Video recording –18 m. 18 s.

3 Conclusions from the Analysis of the Interaction

At the end of the role-play documented here, the communication structure collapses completely. This failure—which was not a foregone conclusion—was what originally prompted the decision to document this particular role-play. The people involved were, after all, experienced role-players and mediators, some of whom, at least, also had intercultural experience. The other role-plays, which dealt with interpersonal conflicts and disputes from the world of work, and which mostly took place within language-groups, generally went off ‘more successfully’.²⁰

The people who initiated the collapse of the communication structure in the case documented here were the interpreters. They simply no longer knew whom they were supposed to be translating, and they responded by refusing to go on. In terms of the *technical* side of communication, the language-problem is undoubtedly a symbol for the way in which communication becomes more complex in an intercultural context. But what relevance should be attached to this problem in trying to explain why the process failed? In what follows here, we should like to discuss various possible reasons for the failure:

- The increased complexity arising from the intercultural situation
- How the the language problem is dealt with
- Interculturality as contextualization
- Culture as strategy
- The intercultural competence of the mediators

20. There was a very obvious tendency to make use of, amongst other things, ‘politeness’ to extricate oneself from the complications generated by the intercultural context. People were more prepared to put up with not understanding perfectly than to ask for a translation. As a result, many of the solutions that were negotiated turned out, in the evaluation, to be not very viable.

3.1 The Increased Complexity Arising from the Intercultural Situation

In the subsequent evaluation carried out by the role-players and observers, stress was laid on the change in pace compared with the usual pace of a mediation. The change in the dynamic of the interaction was explained both by the slowing-down caused by the translation,²¹ and by the difficulties in identifying shared rules. The part of the role-play documented here covers a total of twenty minutes. During this time, the mediators were concerned to determine valid rules for communication. ‘Normally’, mediators propose these rules to the disputants, and, as a rule, they are accepted and all the mediators subsequently have to do, if anything, is to remind people of them. Establishing a communication structure valid for all takes place in a relatively problem-free way, because both parties hope that such a structure will help them talk more easily together, be heard better, and be understood better. The task of structuring this process is readily handed over to the mediators.

In the present case, the elaboration of this structure proved considerably more difficult. Suggested rules were not simply accepted; they were examined to see what their significance was; in this way, they were linked to material factors in the dispute, and these, using the process of rule-setting as a medium, emerged into view. A good example of this is Sequence 2, in which the right to speak first (relating to the communication process) was linked to the question of who was guest (substance of the dispute).²² This shows how the communication rules lose their ‘innocence’, i.e. the universality and neutrality imputed to them by the rule-makers (in most cases the mediators), and have themselves to be made—in explicit fashion—the subject of the negotiations.²³ Thus, if one cannot assume, without precondition, that a joint communication-structure is possible, this indicates greater com-

21. This aspect is dealt with in the next section.

22. The strategic aspect of this interaction is discussed elsewhere.

23. In terms of the present example: it is clear that one of the two parties to the conflict must be given the right to speak first; this is universally true. Here, however, it ought to have been made clear that the right to speak first was not connected with the role of the host, and this should have been acknowledged by both sides in advance. (It is probably this kind of connection which John Paul Lederach is referring to when he talks of ‘underlying cultural assumptions’.) See John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse et al., 1995).

plexity in the process. Precisely for this reason, it is crucial that mediators should structure the process of rule-setting in an unequivocal way, so that they really do fulfil their responsibility for the process properly. If they are not adequately prepared for this, the proceedings can easily end in a power-struggle over structuring, and this inevitably weakens the mediators' competence.

3.2 How the Language Problem is Dealt with

Several conclusions can be drawn from the bilingual nature of the interchange:

- Sequence 2c shows very clearly the extent to which translation can calm things down and create distance. In this sequence, it acts as a filter and thus prevents the clash that would probably follow in a monolingual exchange. Here, the translation comes across simply as the passing-on of information to the other party to the conflict, leaving the latter the choice of whether it enters the debate or not. In this case, it decides that what is going on is a dispute between the mediators and the other party to the conflict, and that it therefore need not intervene. The disputants also become calmer as a result of the translation; it constitutes a break, a breathing-space, and it allows time for thought, without any feeling arising that one ought to be giving an answer. There are thus moments in which the supposed disruption caused by the translation can be extremely helpful.
- In selecting the two mediators, it was intended that one of them should be able to speak the language of one of the disputants, and the other the other. But the mediator-team decided to speak a common language. In retrospect, this decision must be regarded as highly unfortunate. From the very first sequence, it is clear that this linguistic proximity to one of the parties to the conflict made it possible for that party to communicate *directly* with the

mediators. Because, in addition, this practice was not disallowed by the mediators, this party acquired a disproportionate weight in the communication process. As a result, the mediators devoted substantially more attention to this party, and this, in its turn, undermined their neutrality. The illusion here—one which the mediators perhaps also fell victim to—consists in the fact that the language which one speaks oneself appears not to be of such consequence, precisely because it seems more natural, whereas the ‘other’ language, because it has to be translated, acquires a seemingly special presence and thus can often easily seem to be being heard for a disproportionate amount of time. Since the party that was, in any case, already determining the course of the interaction, also repeatedly complained that it was not being allowed to speak, it may, in retrospect, be surprising to everyone, including the mediators, just how little the ‘others’ managed to say. If the mediators had agreed to use both languages, they would probably have acted in a much more directive manner in regard to the translation, and it is much more likely that participation in the communication process would have been evenly distributed.²⁴

- In acting as they did, the mediators made their task a lot more difficult. Just how supportive systematic and orderly translation can be for the structuring of the process is clear from Sequence 3a. In this setting, the translation—in other words, the mediation of speech—is an expression of the readiness to listen to each other and be responsive to each other. If there is no systematic translation, this readiness is absent. It is therefore important that mediators and interpreters should work as a team and discover the points which they have in common in their work.²⁵ Systematic translation requires a clear

24. Another variant would have been for the mediators to decide to speak in their own language—i.e. German. But no thought was given to this possibility.

25. The structural similarity between the two activities became clear when, in the course of Sequence 5 (which is not documented in detail here), the one party to the conflict refused any longer to trust the translations being given by the other party’s interpreter. Reproaching the interpreters in this way has the same kind of feel as reproaching the mediators for not being neutral any more. In the setting as it existed here, the interpreters

communication-structure, and the translation, for its part, facilitates joint communication. When the interpreters refused to go on in Sequence 5, and allowed the communication structure to collapse, this had been preceded, in Sequence 4c, by a violation of the ‘spokesperson’ model in force up till then. The way that the setting was structured by the mediators meant that the interpreters were interpreters for the disputants, not for the mediators. But if the interpreters are to be integrated in a meaningful way into the process—which they clearly can help to bolster—they should be there for the mediators. They must clearly be part of *their* setting.

- Overall, the liveliness and intensity of the role-play indicates that intercultural conflicts should—if possible—be tackled in the particular languages concerned. Linguistic disparity brings out the existing differences in an audible way. The parties to the conflict are enabled to act in a way that expresses the true emotional impact. To render this communicable is the task of both the interpreters and the mediators. This approach prevents diplomatic or linguistically determined cautiousness on the part of the disputants, of a kind that arises if one agrees, instead, to deal with the conflict in a supposedly common language, in order to facilitate communication. The reason why this mediation failed lies not in the extent of the linguistic difficulties, but in the way they were tackled.

3.3 Interculturality as Contextualization

Under this heading, we should like to discuss how the interculturality of the parties to the conflict was reflected in their way of tackling the dispute.

were helpless to defend themselves against this reproach. The mediators, who are supposed to structure the communication process, had no means of controlling the translation. Such a means only exists when interpreters and mediators appear as a single entity and the mediators can ‘protect’ the interpreters with their neutrality.

After Sequence 2b, the mediators are clearly striving, by establishing a joint body of rules, to create a framework that takes account of the differing cultural origins of the parties to the conflict. These efforts are well illustrated in Sequence 3a, where the mediators begin by asking whether there are any constraints on time, in order then to establish a time-structure valid for all the parties involved. This is a successful example of *contextualization*. It implies a reduction of cultural complexity in order to fix, for a particular situation, joint rules of conduct agreeable to all the participants, without the differences between them disappearing.

The mediators are here implicitly working on the prior assumption that a person, as a cultural being, uses his or her culture as a fund of knowledge providing points of reference. In a particular situation—Situation X—his culture provides him with suggestions for behaviour which, in the course of history, have shown themselves to be sensible ways of tackling Situation x. The reproduction of this behaviour mostly takes place without the actors being aware of it. We are not claiming a putative cultural determination of every piece of human behaviour. Cultures are not static; they also contain, in each case, a potential for change.²⁶ If the cultural background to a piece of behaviour is made explicit, the subjects then have the choice of whether to adapt their behaviour to the given situation—in other words, if necessary to realign it. In a negotiating situation such as that which occurred here, the subjects can decide how far they want to behave as usual, or to what extent it seems more advantageous to them to distance themselves from the usual behaviour and agree a joint solution to which all the participants can give their assent.

The strength of this kind of contextualization becomes clear in Sequence 3b. The attack by one of the disputants on the joint agreement can be successfully countered by pointing to the limited time for which it is to remain in force.²⁷

26. Jacques Demorgon describes culture as a store of collective ways of dealing with situations through the regulation of pre-adaptive dialectical opposites—continuity and change, standardization and differentiation, receptivity and demarcation. See Jacques Demorgon and Markus Molz, 'Bedingungen und Auswirkungen der Analyse von Kultur(en) und interkulturelle Interaktionen', in Alexander Thomas (ed.), *Psychologie interkulturellen Handelns* (Göttingen et al., 1996), 50 ff.

27. An example of an unsuccessful contextualization would be Sequence 4c. The mediators allow an 'adviser' to intervene. This means the contract from Sequence 1 has been broken. In terms of content, one can see why this

Interculturality in a contextualization cannot therefore be viewed either as the overlap where the shared features of the participating cultures coincide, or as a quest for a process that would completely ‘capture’ both cultures.²⁸ What is meant is one-off, fixed-duration outcomes of negotiating processes in respect of a joint framework for behaviour to which all the participants can agree. And it is quite possible for such a framework to be located outside the cultural contexts involved.

3.4 Culture as Strategy

‘Culture as strategy’ occurs when participants in an intercultural conflict make conscious or unconscious use of the objective fact of the difference in cultural origins in order to influence negotiations to their own advantage. Since these cultural differences do objectively exist, but they also have an aura of nebulosity about them, it is impossible for outsiders to assess their true relevance, given that, in intercultural negotiations, such differences have a potential for astonishing changes of direction. Cultural difference is instrumentalized when it is used to explain why mutual understanding is ‘objectively’ not possible. Such an approach can be used to rob arguments of their force, since *fundamental* differences remain incommunicable. This means, to put it in emphatic terms, that it is possible, if necessary, to withdraw from any kind of negotiation. There are several points in the role-play material at which the cultural difference is made use of quite deliberately, albeit in very different ways.

concession occurred, but it damaged the process. The mediators should at this point have asked whether the situation that had arisen necessitated new negotiation about the ‘spokesperson’ model.

28. A position that is not documented here—namely, when the mediators work on the assumption that they themselves decide the framework and draw up the rules, and that both these things can then be adopted by the parties to the conflict without further questioning, because the framework they have established in some sense has universal validity.

- The first example occurs in Sequence 2b. It comes in the form of a surprising variant. The mediators account for the stormy course of this sequence by referring to their failure adequately to examine the differing needs arising from the differing cultural origins. They excuse themselves by saying that they do not know these cultures well enough, and they encourage the parties to the conflict to intervene whenever they make these kinds of mistakes. In our interpretation of the sequence, we then explained that this cultural discourse says more about the mediators' covering-up of their own mistakes in guiding the proceedings than about the other cultures. In other words, they construct the factor 'cultural difference' in order to make comprehensible a piece of behaviour which could easily be explained without this construction. A quite comprehensible case of 'getting worked up' is then transformed into an exotic occurrence.
- A quite different example appears in Sequence 4b. The 'victims' account of their situation becomes more urgent because it is not given by the appointed spokesman. The mediators thus become an authority from whom one expects justice. Any empathetic person would react with understanding to such a flood of charges, but this makes it almost impossible at the same time to give the other party the feeling that one remains neutral. Because the 'victim' status is explained in terms of cultural difference, the impact produced creates an emotional link, one that was quite deliberately intended to win the mediators over to that party's side. In this sense, it operates strategically.
- In Sequence 4e, it is explicitly stated that it is impossible to talk with the other side because it is not capable of listening. The mediators must therefore explain things to the others. The differences between the cultures are here magnified to such an extent—for strategic purposes—that outside help must be relied on to get the others to understand what one is trying to say. This marks a renunciation of any effort, on the part of that party itself, to achieve joint communication.

‘Culture as strategy’ thus emerges through a variety of prisms that cannot be disallowed. In these sequences, elements crop up which initially do not seem negotiable. How one can contextualize these kinds of interventions, and make them communicable, will be the central question posed in the main study.

3.5 The Intercultural Competence of the Mediators

The material presented here shows that the mediators had enormous problems in structuring the communication process. Their style could be summarized by saying that they acted extremely cautiously and kept enunciating their desire to structure the process in accordance with the needs of the parties to the conflict. There was clearly an attempt to deal empathetically with the situations of the parties even when the latter circumvented the mediators’ own attempt at structuring (Sequence 2b, whole of Sequence 4). Their whole demeanour expresses an openness²⁹ to which their own notions about structuring are subordinated. On the one hand, this leads to the impression that they themselves do not exactly know where things should be heading in the long term; and on the other hand, it is made easy for the parties to the conflict to structure the process themselves. Behind the assertions about taking the disputants seriously (Sequence 2a), the mediators’ own position becomes blurred.

Both mediators have ‘proved’ in other role-plays that they are quite capable of structuring a mediation. The lack of assertiveness in regard to their own notions about structuring *may*, quite possibly, stem from an unease explicable in terms of the interculturality of the situation. The lack of knowledge about how the others

29. However, this openness is often no more than voiced. It reveals itself to be the reverse-side of the attempt at empathy, because it signals that everything is possible at any time. But the issues which the parties to the conflict are able to raise because of this are *de facto* not yet ‘up for discussion’, and so the mediators are constantly struggling with the problem of having to reject the issues raised and at the same time stress their openness.

function is expressed in a caution and restraint that constantly bears in mind that one's own proposal may be rejected as inappropriate. With such a defensive stance, however, it is impossible to assume responsibility for the process. The general terms in which they formulate their proposals for rules lead one to conclude that they are seeking to establish a setting that is as universal—or at least as supra-cultural—as possible, without bringing in their own position as a negotiating quantity. They not only accept the cultural limitations of their proposals; they relativize those proposals to such an extent that they become formless. They thus render themselves incapable of acting, and disqualify themselves as promoters of a constructive resolution of the conflict.³⁰

On the basis of this analysis, it is possible to identify three levels at which intercultural competence can be defined:

1. *Knowledge about the Participating Cultures*

The role-play material reveals that the mediators account for their own uncertainty about how the setting should be structured by reference to their lack of knowledge about the participating cultures (Sequence 2b, 2c). In the Interpretation of these sequences, we pointed out that this was a case of the mediators instrumentalizing culture. And yet one can, in principle, assume that an intercultural context relativizes the self-evident nature of a person's actions and thus has an unnerving effect. Even though opinions differ as to how much contextual knowledge is required for, or hinders, the constructive resolution of a conflict, we believe that a certain amount of knowledge about the cultural background is indispensable for neutral third parties as a preparation, so that they themselves can in advance conduct the examination

30. This harsh judgement gives rise to an objection and a conjecture. The objection—a justified one—is that after a week during which attention was deliberately focused on cultural differences, it is not surprising that participants should have nothing but culture in mind—in other words, that this outcome was brought about more by the setting than by the activities of the participants. The conjecture is that the increased or exaggerated attention to the cultural aspect that was observable in both mediators has something to do with the fact that German mediators have a tendency to attribute particular significance to culture.

of their own ideas that will otherwise be done by the parties to the conflict, and thus be able to act with greater self-confidence.

2. *Seeing from Other Points of View*

The ability to view the conflict as far as possible from the standpoints of the disputants involved—something that can, necessarily, only ever be approximately accomplished—springs on the one hand from the first level, in which case the *rapprochement* would be a more rational one, and, on the other hand, from an empathetic approach—in other words, an emotional way in, an affective accompaniment of the process (Sequence 4c). This ability too has a distinguishing feature of a peculiarly intercultural kind. In a monocultural context, it is easy to think that, if the swapping of viewpoints works, if the conflict and the differing positions are understood, all that has to be done is to bring about a swapping of viewpoints amongst the parties to the conflict. In this process, the mediators seek to liberate the disputants from their ‘social autism’ by enabling them to regain contact with their emotional world, and thus become capable of empathy once again.³¹ In circumstances such as these, it also becomes easier to discover shared features, and a *rapprochement* becomes possible. This kind of swapping of viewpoints becomes that much easier, the more familiar the other party to the conflict appears. In the case of an intercultural conflict, however, this process is rendered more difficult by the fact that the non-comprehension remains visible and audible, even when the process of *rapprochement* has got under way. Initiating a mutual swapping of viewpoints is, of course, possible and necessary; but it needs more time and more in the way of reciprocal clarification. In this phase, the mediators become initiators of a process of intercultural learning that enables the parties to the conflict to adopt a stance in which they are able to tolerate the non-comprehension without feeling threatened. Part of intercultural competence is being able to perceive the

31. See Friedrich Glasl, *Konfliktmanagement: Ein Handbuch für Führungskräfte und Berater* (Berne et al., 1994), 38 ff.

supposed added difficulty—namely, the manifest otherness—as an aid to the process of understanding. This would mean arriving at a position of not denying differences, but rendering them livable—in other words, integrating non-comprehension into the proceedings as a normal feature.

3. *Constructing a Shared Culture*

The third level is that of the contextualization of given differences in a particular situation at a particular time (Sequence 3a). This implies a new durable temporary shared culture which emerges as a product of negotiation. Such a construction presupposes acknowledgement of the given differences as a basis for joint negotiation. The process of negotiation looses the cultural bonds existing at the outset (bonds which result, for example, in retreat to one's own position or in the accentuation of differences). Every culture makes offers in order to be able to adjust to a changing environment. This flexibility must be exploited for the joint construction; and that construction cannot, inevitably, overlap exactly with the parties' own cultures, but cannot, either, be something entirely new, entirely imposed from outside. This kind of construction, by its very nature, is vulnerable to disruption, and preserving it is like a balancing-act. It requires the ability both to safeguard the agreements already arrived at and at the same time to allow renewed negotiation where necessary.

3.6 Summary and Prospects

The findings presented here support the view that further observations about intercultural mediation can only be derived from an intercultural context. The competence required to deal constructively with intercultural conflicts implies a personal, well-considered process of intercultural learning, and this is difficult to achieve within a national society. From the current state of our research, one may conclude that, when conflict resolution fails, this is due not to the processes, but to a lack of ability on the part of the conflict-resolvers to contextualize the processes in an appropriate way. Although it is undoubtedly the case that a qualitative experiment lacks authenticity, the self-educative character which the seminars assumed for the participants demonstrates that this lack also allows a density of reflection that makes it possible to reconstruct and interpret a situation as complex as that of intercultural mediation, and to arrive at a better understanding of the interactions involved in the resolution of a conflict.

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