Research

Cultural Relations Collection

The recognition of divergent voices: The role of artistic expressions in shaping the conditions for a long-term positive peace

Daniela Fazio Vargas and Carlos Pineda-Ramos

Cultural relations and peacebuilding

Acknowledgements

The authors

Daniela Fazio Vargas holds a B.A. in Philosophy, a B.A. in History and a master's degree in Sociology from La Universidad de Los Andes (Colombia). Currently, she is a second-year Sociology PhD student at the University of Manchester where she is researching the political significance of music by taking as a case study the 2019 Chilean Uprising. One of her main interests have been broaden the notion of politics beyond the institutional sphere. Specifically, she is arguing that music is political as it transforms the aesthetics. According to her, music not only helps to make 'thinkable the unthinkable', by visibilising marginal actors and making their demands audible, but also modifies the sensible, transforming how subjects perceive, position, and relate to themselves, others, and the world.

Carlos Pineda-Ramos graduated from La Universidad de Los Andes (Colombia) with a B.A. in Philosophy, a B.A. in Psychology, and a master's degree in Sociology. He is currently a PhD student in Management at the University of Bristol. He is analysing the emotional dynamics involved in outsourcing service jobs. Particularly, he is interested in examining how service works demand emotional skills and emotional capital from their employees, who are required to deploy them as part of their work routines. Throughout his career, he has been fascinated by the interaction between emotions and aesthetics. Indeed, during his master's degree, he analysed the interrelation of these concepts in cleaning service companies and in his B.A. he investigated the photographers' emotional implications of the Colombian armed conflict. Ultimately, he is interested in how the interrelationship between emotions and aesthetic allows us to comprehend the thoughts and perspectives of actors from various backgrounds.

The contributor

Colette Norwood is an Arts & Cultural Manager with 25 years + experience in British Council and Northern Ireland's Arts & Cultural sector including Arts Trusts &

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Boards. Working in the British Council Northern Ireland country team as Head of Arts, Colette connects internally for Northern Ireland Arts and contributes to Global & UK Arts Teams with experience in developing the Northern Ireland Country Arts Portfolio through people, projects and partnerships to benefit Northern Ireland's inspiring arts, artists, festivals and creative sectors internationally.

The series editor

Christine Wilson has worked in the British Council since 2004. As Director Research and Insight, she oversees a global portfolio spanning education, arts and culture, youth and skills, as well as exploring the role of cultural relations in supporting the UK's soft power aims. She is accountable for global standards and practice, ethics, programmes, partnerships and networks. She directs the Next Generation research series, which aims to engage youth voices around the world and contribute to improved policymaking. She previously directed the Hammamet Conference, which brought together leaders from the UK and North Africa, and co-chaired the steering group for Peace and Beyond, which marked the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement by exploring international approaches to sustainable peacebuilding. Christine is an Advisory Board member at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) at the University of Edinburgh, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

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Foreword

The Cultural Relations Collection essay series, produced by the British Council's Research and Insight Team, asks early-career and established researchers to examine the theory and practice of cultural relations. We invite fresh perspectives on what has been the British Council's business for almost 90 years – building connections, understanding and trust.

This edition explores how cultural relations can contribute to peacebuilding in different settings and contexts.

Peacebuilding, and the erosion of peace, are intimately connected to many major challenges facing us nationally and internationally. No community that is divided by conflict, or the expectation or experience of conflict, can give adequate attention to less immediate but equally destructive threats, such as environmental degradation or economic instability.

Yet those same factors, left unaddressed, can only increase the likelihood of conflict. The result is a vicious circle which is increasingly difficult to escape.

These essays help us to understand what is meant by a cultural relations approach to peacebuilding and to demonstrate that this approach is both valid and valuable.

Each of the essays comes from a different disciplinary and regional perspective, but some common themes are evident.

One is Galtung's concept of positive (as opposed to negative) peace: peace as an active participatory experience, rather than simply the absence of violence. This supports proponents of cultural relations – and is a riposte to those who argue that soft power interventions in hard power situations are mere wishful thinking.

Also implicit in many of the essays is the importance of enabling safe spaces in which cultural relations can take place. Inclusivity and an atmosphere of trust are a sine qua non if citizens and communities are to experience a sense of their own agency.

Related to this is deep listening (listening experienced as a positive and empathetic activity, rather than simply an absence of interruption), a topic explored in depth by one of our essayists. Listening to others' truth and speaking our own, not only to power but to ourselves, is at the core of cultural relations – and especially in our peacebuilding efforts. No true or lasting peace is built on half-truths and evasions.

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Indeed, the importance of facing up to our own organisational and national history is addressed directly in one of these essays; and behind several authors stands the shadow of colonialism.

As in previous editions of this series, there is much here for readers, and the British Council itself, to reflect on and absorb. Peacebuilding is a complex and constantly developing subject, to which these essays make a valuable contribution.

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. To meet that goal, we will continue to explore with researchers, artists and peace practitioners how our cultural relations work can contribute to peacebuilding globally; this series is just the start.

Scott McDonald
Chief Executive, British Council
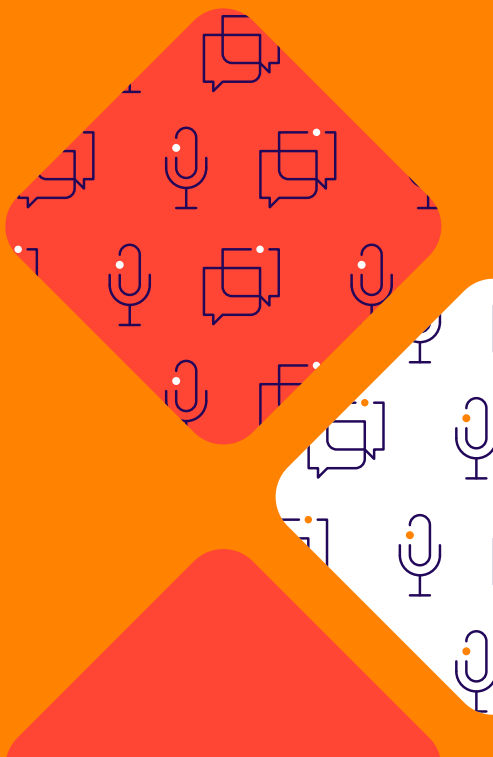
Preface to the Cultural Relations Collection

Welcome to the latest edition of the Cultural Relations Collection. As always, it has been stimulating to read fresh perspectives on cultural relations by new voices in the field. Previous editions in the Collection have examined cultural relations and climate change, and the impact of COVID-19 on cultural exchange. In 2022, we invited submissions on cultural relations and peacebuilding, given our renewed emphasis on the role of building trust and connections as central to the conditions required for sustainable peace, and in the spirit of what John-Paul Lederach calls 'an approach that addresses the culture of violence by transforming it into the culture of dialogue'.

This is not a new area for the British Council, which emerged from the global crisis leading up to the Second World War in the realisation that building trust and understanding between the UK and the rest of the world was crucial. In 2018, which marked the centenary of the end of the First World War, the centenary of Nobel Peace Laureate Nelson Mandela, and the 20th anniversary of

the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, the British Council worked with partners in Northern Ireland on the conference Peace and Beyond[1], an examination of global approaches to building lasting peace including reflections from contributors from countries including Lebanon, South Africa, and Colombia.

In 2023, the need to examine the conditions for peacebuilding are as relevant as they were in 2018. Colleagues around the world continue to work in communities affected by conflict, such as Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Yemen, to name but three. At the time of writing, we are working on research on the role of cultural events in addressing conflict and sharing the values of freedom and international co-operation, given the UK's role in hosting Eurovision on behalf of Ukraine.

And so, to the individual contributions herein. At the 2018 Peace and Beyond conference, Judith Thompson, Chief Commissioner for the Commission for Victims and Survivors[2], said: 'Building social trust [...]in a society transitioning from

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1   www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace

2   www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace

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conflict is an essential ingredient to […] building a better future for everyone and the generations that follow.' This collection builds on that imperative by breaking down varied approaches to the building of trust.

Alice Naisbitt examines the role of science as a peacebuilding tool in two ways: that the connections built reinforce the trust vital to harmonious relations; and that the outcomes of scientific co-operation address drivers of conflict, such as resource scarcity. As with Hannah Dalgliesh's contribution on the soft power of astronomy in a previous collection[3], Naisbitt underpins the role of science as providing neutral, common ground for collaboration.

Nasibitt does not shy away from the historic challenges that have been presented to the British Council over the years, and the accusation that cultural relations – in science, arts, language, or education – run the risk of being instrumentalised for the soft power outcomes, rather than their development objectives. This theme is picked up in Daniel Feather's fascinating history of educational co-operation between the UK and South Africa, including through the apartheid era when South Africa was globally isolated. He draws the distinction between cultural

diplomacy and cultural relations, although highlights where those lines can become blurred. While not uncritical of the role of the UK and the British Council over this period, his essay makes a powerful argument for the place of education in supporting a country's transition from structural violence to a more equitable and peaceful state.

Three essays focus on arts and culture as tools for building peace. George Wilkes et al. consider the role of the cultural relations organisation in bridging the local and the global; the need not to overlook the smallest detail of any given conflict, while still recognising the power of building links across borders and amplifying the voice of those affected by conflict. Their emphasis on the need to deal with memory, whether of previous friendships, or of deep trauma, also harks back to contributions in Peace and Beyond[4] by Candice Mama and Cindy Mizher.

The role of the arts to make visible what may previously have been hidden, as well as to imagine new futures, is central to the essay of Daniela Fazio-Vargas and Carlos Pineda-Ramos. They make a powerful case for artistic expression as a means by which different voices can be elevated and building a space in

3 www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/cultural-relations

4 www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace

which difference is recognised and valued, and that only in this way, can true peace be achieved. Nar Bahadur Saud takes this up in his essay that reminds us that before the arts can support peace and justice, they too must recognise difference. His contribution centres on the need to empower and enable disabled people to express themselves through the arts, and that in doing so not only addresses the inequalities they face as individuals but will contribute to more equitable and peaceful societies.

2022 brought sport to the fore in the discourse on positive peacebuilding – that is, not just addressing violent conflict, but addressing the drivers of conflict, such as inherent violence against marginalised communities, or the continuation of structural inequities. Many people looked to the World Cup in Qatar with mixed feelings, as to whether this was 'sportswashing' or an opportunity to open up a human rights dialogue on the world stage. In his essay, Grant Jarvie explores the link between sports and diplomacy, and suggests a more prominent role for sport in development, particularly in peacebuilding, given its emphasis on team spirit, co-operation, and solidarity.

Lastly, Emily Kasriel examines a concept at the heart of peacebuilding – listening. Her essay on deep listening illustrates an approach that prepares individuals for encounters across any divides they find within their communities, however they are experiencing conflict. Drawing on both theory and practice, she draws out the transformational nature of this method, and the impact it has had on individuals and communities around the world, enabling them to truly see, hear and understand the person opposite them.

One of the participants in a deep listening exercise said it allowed her 'to create an atmosphere of inclusivity, trust and positive discourse'. It feels as if we are in a time in which that approach is urgently needed. I hope too that this Cultural Relations Collection makes a similarly positive contribution, and I urge all readers to embrace that spirit.

Christine Wilson
Director of Research and Insight, British Council

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Introduction

Peacebuilding is a complex and multifaceted process that involves addressing the underlying causes of conflict and rebuilding trust and relationships to create sustainable peace. Echoing Johan Galtung (2013), we believe that, to achieve positive peace, it is necessary to go beyond eliminating direct forms of violence and generate conditions where everybody can voice their demands and can do it in a system that recognises their equality. As this essay will argue, peacebuilding is a process that cannot be reduced to a ceasefire but also requires a change that allows for *thinking the unthinkable,* that is, the existence of a society based on equality that does not deny difference. As such, this essay highlights that peace does not seek to eliminate the differences but recognise and understand them as a way to repair the damage.

In this essay, we will stress the double role of artistic expressions in setting the conditions for long-lasting positive peace. On the one hand, the arts allow for making visible the people affected by the conflict and their demands audible, which is essential for building a community where everyone – despite their differences – can have a life worth living. On the other hand,

we will show that through the arts, identities previously understood as irreconcilable can be reconciled, which denotes not only a change in a thinking that "welcomes what was formerly unthinkable" (Rancière, 2013) but also one that heals the harms. Throughout the essay, we will emphasise that the process of recognition is crucial for repairing the damages and creating the conditions where multiple (and sometimes contrasting) voices can coexist in a democratic scenario. Having this in mind, we will compare two notable examples of peacebuilding, Colombia and Northern Ireland, and some of their artistic expressions, which we will analyse using the frameworks of Positive and Negative Peace developed by Johan Galtung, the theory of Recognition by Axel Honneth, and the theory of Handling of a Wrong by Jacques Rancière.

As such, the Colombian and Northern Ireland conflicts offer two interesting cases for studying the role of artistic expressions in powering a long-lasting positive peace. Having this in mind, in the next sections, we will briefly refer to the historical context of Northern Ireland and Colombia and analyse some artworks that illustrate how the arts might foster the creation of long-term

positive peace. Hence, we will show that sustainable peace cannot be achieved only by eliminating the direct and psychological forms of violence but also requires rebuilding the structural and symbolic elements that guarantee the conditions for developing a society based on equality and reciprocity (Galtung, 2013), where contrasting forms of thinking are not destroyed but welcomed.

From our perspective, a peacebuilding process requires a transformation in the *regime of thought*, which can be fuelled by artistic expressions. In both cases, Colombia and Northern Ireland ran a plebiscite that summoned the participation of the civilian population in the peacebuilding process. As Acosta-López (2016) highlighted, the case of Colombia is the closest to Northern Ireland given that, in both cases, it was agreed that the peace would be subjected to the people's approval ever since the start of the conversations. Although the nature and the length of the conflicts differed in both countries, The Good Friday Agreement and the Peace Agreements between the Colombian Government and FARC-EP share some similarities (KROC Institute, 2021). For instance, both agreements aimed to end the conflict while comprehensively addressing various issues such as political power-sharing, cross-border cooperation, disarmament,

demobilisation, and reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life – to name a few. This does not mean, however, that the referendums were unquestionably accepted. In the case of Northern Ireland, although the multi-Party agreement was approved by the two referendums celebrated on both sides of the island, the implementation faced challenges due to the lack of support from some parties and the episodes of dissident violence; in the case of Colombia, apart from the dissident violence and the institutional resistance, it shall be added that not all the population agreed with the treaty – as shown by the referendum of 2016 – when the "No" peace prevailed, with 50.3% of people voting against it.

Hence, although in both cases the governments agreed to sign the peace with the insurgent groups and consented to a plebiscite, it does not mean that all of the population was actively involved in the proposed change. For this reason, it is crucial to examine the arts' role in achieving peace for all since it contributes to involving divergent voices. As Galtung (2013) taught, when addressing conflicts, it is necessary to go beyond negative peace (absence of violence) in the name of a positive peace where all subjects, despite their differences, have the same opportunity to participate in decision-making and problem-solving processes, ensuring sustainability and co-operation.

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Having this in mind, in the first section, we will show the relevance that *recognition* plays in peace processes and in the generation of new structures based on reciprocity and solidarity (Honneth, 1995). Particularly, we will refer to two artistic expressions from Northern Ireland that have sought to question the fact that 'difference' can be used as a justification for violence. Thus, we will explore how these works invite us to welcome the difference as a way of verifying the *universal* of politics according to which – despite the differences – "we are all equal" (Rancière, 2013a).

In the second section, we will explore how the arts have offered a space to *handle the wrong*, which is understood as the denial of the fundamental equality amongst individuals (Rancière, 1992). We will show how equality can be verified by creating a situation of speech that did not exist before, where all subjects have an equal right to tell their truth. For this, we will refer to a Colombian artwork in which the artist sought not to speak on victims' behalf but instead generate the conditions so their voices could be heard.

In the third section, we will emphasise how the arts sustained the initial shift in the regime that fuelled the agreements by helping the society to think what was previously *unthinkable*. The possibility of building peace for all requires recognising that divergent voices can coexist in a democratic scenario. In other words, a distribution in which everyone has a share and an equal voice amidst the divergences since building peace does not imply denying difference but 'comprehending' it. Consequently, it does not imply establishing a unilateral point of view but guaranteeing *ways-of-being-in-common* where everyone can contribute to creating a new and plural society – something we will illustrate by referring to two artworks in which it is possible to glimpse an invitation for *thinking the unthinkable*.

Reshaping the visible through new ways-of-living-in-common: the recognition of the difference

As parts of the project *Exercises in Spontaneity* (1988–1992), James King and Eamonn O'Donnell intervened on various streets in Londonderry to call attention to the impacts of the *Troubles* – the name used to describe the period of violence, social polarisation, and instability that, from 1969 until 1998, shook Northern Ireland. In one of their interventions, the artists drew a line dividing a red brick wall and wrote: "another pointless dividing line". As emphasised by the artists, this artwork epitomised their concerns about the sectarian divide existing in the city (Troubles Archive, n/d), which was, in turn, an echo of the profound rift affecting the country.

Indeed, even before the upsurge of violence, cities like Belfast and Londonderry were already divided communities, with many working-class Protestants and Catholics living in religiously segregated neighbourhoods (Leonard & McKnight, 2011). It should be noted that in this conflict, the dispute over identity was paramount and cannot be reduced to a purely religious conflict. When we talk about the Troubles, we must also refer to the

tensions that arose over political representation, discrimination, and civil rights, which led to a period of violence and conflict that lasted for several decades between unionists and nationalists, loyalists and republicans.

The divisions were partly a consequence of the partition of Ireland in 1921, which resulted in the creation of two countries: the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In spite of the political, economic, and social marginalisation of some groups in Northern Ireland, the years that followed the partition were characterised by fragile stability (Woodwell, 2005). This stability endured until the sixties when, inspired by the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and the student protests that were taking place all over the world, a series of civil rights groups manifested against the increasing discrimination towards religious and political minorities. The claims revolved around the impacts of segregation since, apart from living in separated neighbourhoods, the communities were also set apart in terms of employment and education.

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In the late sixties, the community divisions intensified due to the escalation of violence. In 1969, apart from the sit-downs organised by the supporters of the Civil Rights Movement in the main cities of Northern Ireland, there were also sporadic riots and episodes of violence –most of which appeared to be due to the tensions associated with the Twelfth of July Celebrations[5] (The National Archives, n/d). Notwithstanding the riots and clashes soaring around these parades, it shall be noted that the episodes of violence took place all year around, mainly due to the inclusion/exclusion generated by the social, economic, political and educational inequalities.

Over eighty security barriers (sometimes called peace walls or peace lines) were built in predominantly urban working-class communities to respond to sectarian violence. From a security perspective, these walls aimed to protect people from violent acts and help them identify 'friendly territories' – indeed, even nowadays, some stress the need for peace lines due to the latent violence (Ulster University, 2012). However, the existence of these barriers has been questioned (see: Gormley-Heenan & Byrne, 2012; McAtackney, 2011), in part because of the negative response given by the government to violence in the community but also because of the negative emphasis placed on the cultural, political, and religious differences that exist across the country (Byrne et al., 2012).

Leonard and McKnight (2012) pinpointed how peace lines solidified the differences between the multiple communities. Here it is important to note that conflict exacerbates the differences to such an extent that 'the other' becomes someone who is denied recognition, as it is seen as so distant that it is not even possible to start a conversation. Honneth (1995) has suggested that the lack of recognition provides one of the bases for social struggle, as it constitutes one of the most significant harms that subjects may experience. A dialogue in Kenneth Branagh's movie *Belfast* is very illustrative in this regard. The movie focuses on Buddy, a nine-year-old child from a working-class Protestant family living in Belfast amid the tumult of 1969. In one scene, Buddy asks his father, "Was that our side that done all that?" to which his father replies: "There is no *our side* and *their side* on our street, or there never used to be anyway".

The denial of recognition and, specifically, the fact that the 'other' is seen as so distant that their differences appear incomprehensible might fuel the conflict. Nevertheless,

5 The annual parade celebrates the Battle of the Boyne when, in 1690, William d'Orange defeated Catholic King James II.

as the intervention of King and O'Donnell (1988) has shown, although the divisions can be questioned, this does not mean that they are not recognised. Conversely, their artwork emphasises the differences but suggests questioning the need to demarcate them through "another pointless dividing line". Efforts to transform the visible and replace old signs of sectarianism have also been made by grassroots actors seeking to change the spaces where they live into somewhere new where none of the social divides can tear them apart (see: Crowley, 2011). Since 2006, the government initiative *Re-imaging Communities Programme* has been tackling the separation of the public community by encouraging citizens to replace – together – the divisive imagery with new spaces that welcome all sections of the community. As stated by Dawnson et al. (2009), projects like this aim at creating spaces where everyone "[has] a voice in how their community is represented" (p.xi)

In order to understand the role that these artistic expressions have in the construction of sustainable and long-lasting peace, it is important to recall that, as Galtung (2013) stated, a positive peace has to promote the right conditions so everyone involved can exchange 'goods' instead of 'bads' and can do it in a social structure based on reciprocity and solidarity. Thus, our essay proposes that at the core of this exchange lies

the recognition of 'the other'. This recognition is not only essential for the development of the 'self' – as the self can only be in the relationship with the other – (Honneth, 1995), but so too is the cornerstone for the construction of community (see: Basaure, 2011).

Rolston (2010), when speaking about the murals that cover the peace walls in Northern Ireland, warned about the dangers of forgetting and dismissing the past. The sociologist pinpoints that the debate around the politics of murals cannot be solved by destroying them or painting over the 'anachronic' symbols of the divide. It is important to recall that, as referred to in the article by Gormley-Heenan and Jonny Byrne (2012), in Northern Ireland great part of the population considers that the walls (and, hence, the murals) should come down in the future. Indeed, many murals have been modified by the citizens and artists because the messages conveyed are not seen longer relevant. The problem, however, is not their eradication but keeping them as a memory device to find a way for reconciliation: the murals could act as an outdoor gallery that preserves the testimonies from previous times (Rolston, 2004).

The artworks mentioned above show the double relevance of affirming this recognition. On the one hand, *Another pointless dividing line* does not deny the existence of 'the other'

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in the name of unity. By using an everyday element, such as the line of chalk, the artists trivialise the need for artificial divides. Hence, they are not questioning the difference *per se* but the rift and conflict that may emerge from it. On the other hand, the community intervention of the *Re-imaging Communities Programme* is a clear example of the 'goods' that can be retrieved from embracing difference; in this case, participants are not only recognising that the accepted perceptions of reality can be altered but in doing that they are creating new ways of living-in-common.

Here it is worth bearing in mind that a long-lasting peace cannot have homogenising pretensions as this would imply a denial of recognition towards the others -who are different- but this does not mean that they are not valid interlocutors. Conversely, sustainable peace needs to offer space so that heterogeneous voices can equally speak without dismissing their own identities. Nevertheless, Rolston (2010) warned that initiatives like the *Re-imaging Communities Programme* must be approached carefully. Particularly because projects akin entangle a peril: urging citizens to remove the references to the divides might encourage people to forget their past. According to him, future reconciliation can only be achieved by acknowledging the (troubled) past.

A lack of recognition denies the 'fundamental equality' that can lead to seeing the 'other' as someone who must be defeated and whose voice must be silenced. Still, as we have argued, the arts have had a central role in showing that the difference can be recognised and embraced and a role in showing that heterogeneous realities can coexist in a democratic scenario. However, multiple and sometimes struggling truths might come to light during this process. As we will show in the next section, the arts have provided spaces so that all the actors involved in the conflict can enounce and listen to the truths of others. The relevance of this stems from the fact that as Galtung (2013) stressed, a culture of peace needs to pave the way for a community based on reciprocity and solidarity where ''what you want for yourself you should also be willing to give to other'' (p. 174).

I can share my truths too: I am also *a painter*

In this section, we will argue that one of the central roles the arts have in peacebuilding processes is to offer spaces for recognising those affected by the conflict and making their demands audible. By doing this, the arts have been handling the 'wrong' that damaged the unique universal of politics according to which "we are all equal" (Rancière, 1992). As such, the arts have been providing spaces so that all the actors involved in the conflict can say: "me too, I am a painter!"[6] (Rancière, 1991, p. 67). That means that, although we all have differences, we are all given the same right to speak and to be heard. Throughout this section, we will show that guaranteeing everyone an equal right to speak is essential for building a long-lasting positive peace.

The artwork *Mouths of Ash* by Juan Manuel Echavarría can shed light on how the arts helped victims to make their stories audible. This work is a compendium of videos in which the civilian victims of the armed conflict sang songs to narrate the atrocities of the war they lived in. It shall be noted that Echavarría offered a speaking space where the victims

could translate their pain into music (De Nanteuil, 2013). Thus, it is not the artist who speaks in the name of the victims, but the victims who are enabled to say: *¡me too, I am a singer!* This means they can sing and have an equal right to express what they experienced as, in Rancière's (1991) words, they "also have feelings to communicate to their fellow-men" (p. 67). It is important to bear in mind that the 'wrong' cannot be solved by speaking in the name of others nor by giving voice to those who did not have a voice, as this reproduces inequality and, therefore, denies the universal of politics. Instead, the artist is supposed to help the victims to make their voices resound with their own strength.

Specifically, the centrality of victims stands out in this artwork. The artist does not intervene in the work; he does not determine the music nor the content of the songs; he only records them over a white background to avoid distractions. In the video, we can see that each singer tells their story regarding the conflict; some narrate how they survived the crossfire between the guerrillas and

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6　This sentence was retrieved from Rancière's work on emancipation, "The Ignorant Schoolmaster" (1991), and it should be understood as a call to verify equality.

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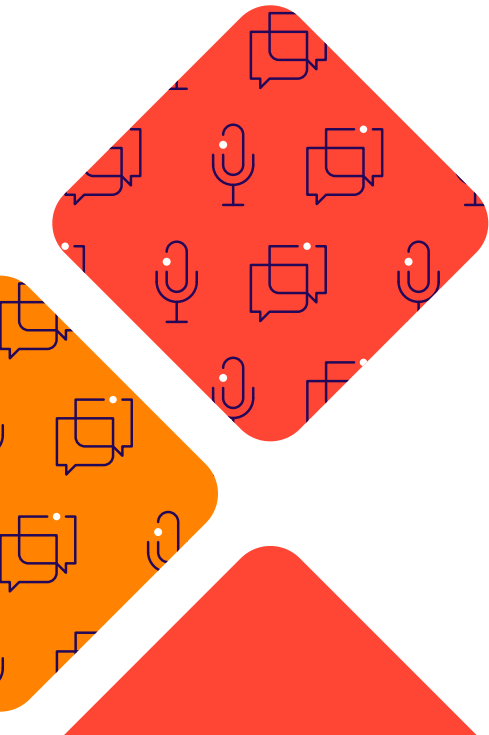in Shaping the Conditions for a Long-Term Positive Peace

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the paramilitaries, others refer to the massacres they witnessed, and others tell the story behind their displacement. The songs vary not only depending on the topic but also the format; some songs take the form of a complaint against the government or armed groups, while others form a story in which they can trust their dreams, aspirations, and longings. As such, *Mouths of Ash* can defy the homogenising and encompassing pretensions where only one truth is presented without recognising the other.

Apart from the lyrics, the musicality chosen by the victims also stands out as they resort to various autochthonous musical forms of the region (e.g. *cumbia, vallenato* or *champeta...*). Similarly to how the musical styles spread throughout the region, the conflict in Colombia also crossed the entire national territory. The Armed conflict in Colombia is long and complex; it is not only one of the world's longest-running civil wars but also the result of complex linkages among illegal armed groups, self-defence groups and criminal drug trafficking activities (Sánchez et al., 2005). The conflict has devastated the civilian population producing over 220,000 deaths, 45,000 disappearances, and 6.9 million internally displaced people (GMH, 2013).

However, unlike these institutional accounts, arts can invite us to look at the biography behind the statistics. The artist Luis Camnitzer (2013) suggested that highlighting the number of individual stories is a form of dishonouring and depersonalising the 'other', which deepens the conflict as it eliminates the possibility of recognition. That is why artworks like *Mouths of Ash* are so relevant since they not only show that the other is someone who demands recognition but also that their truth can be heard and understood. By doing this, they can challenge the monopoly of truth by showing that there is not a unique truth; rather, they are multiple and sometimes contrasting.

Accordingly, the arts can offer spaces for handling the wrong and, therefore, enable the subjects to say: "me too, I am a painter". In this way, the arts can support peacebuilding not only because they offer a platform where actors can share their multiple, and sometimes contrasting, truths but also because, in doing that, it verifies the universal of politics according to which all -although the differences- have an equal right to speak and to be heard. Yet, the crux is not merely 'giving voice to the dispossessed', as this practice reproduces inequality, but altering the conditions for the noise to be heard as speech (Rancière, 1992; Deranty, 2003). To put it differently, it is a speech that claims to be heard by everyone, even by those who were

once at odds. Precisely, the fact that voices once at odds can speak with the same right denotes a shift in the regime of thought that welcomes the unthinkable: a new way of living in common where the extant order can be challenged so that all the subjects can live a life worth living.

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Healing by welcoming the unthinkable

A durable peace cannot be equated to the absence of violence, nor is it a process limited to the institutional sphere; it requires a shift in the "regime of thought" to welcome *the unthinkable*. In other words, for change to come about, there has to be a recognition that peace can be achieved without suppressing the voices once at odds. Thus, it does not seek to deny the difference in the name of unity, as this might make certain actors invisible and make their demands inaudible, but in recognising and comprehending that divergent voices can contribute to constructing a democratic scenario. It shall be noted that the term democracy is not indicating a political regime but a distribution in which everyone has a share and an equal voice amidst the divergences (Rancière, 1992). Indeed, in this section, we will refer to two artworks that called people to think differently. On the one hand, by inviting them to react against a dividing and polarising thought; on the other, by healing through welcoming the unthinkable, encouraging a constructive dialogue that verifies the universal of politics according to which: "we are all equal".

On the 17th of November 1983, on one of the busiest streets in Belfast, Alastair MacLennan, with his face covered by a white cloth, and his clothes covered by newspapers, began distributing flyers to the passer-by. His purpose was to warn them about the dangers of having oppositional thinking and invite them to adopt a holistic thought to ease the conflict and heal the wounds. As can be read in the leaflet, the wounds the artist sees are not merely physical but also religious, political, social, and cultural. All of them, he explains, derive from fragmented systems of understanding that, by splitting our thinking, end up splitting our world (MacLennan, 1983).

The idea that wounds are not only physical can be related to the tripartition of violence that Galtung (1990) proposes. In a conflict, the violence is not only direct (or physical); therefore, eliminating it would not lead the conflict to an end. Achieving sustainable peace also requires overcoming the structural and symbolic forms of violence. As MacLennan emphasises, how we conceive the world has material effects that impact how we decide to relate to others and, therefore, can legitimise forms of violence that

derive from an oppositional system in which 'us' are seen opposed to 'them': 'Protestants vs Catholics', 'Unionists vs Nationalists', 'Loyalists vs Republicans'.

Yet, amidst the violent outbreaks of the conflict, MacLennan is assuming a highly political position, inviting to tackle the symbolic violence, and replacing a dichotomic way of thinking with a holistic one. Echoing Rancière (1992), the artist can be seen as an 'impossible identity' –that is to say, actors that are 'together' even if they are 'in between' two identities but incapable of assuming either of them. As indicated by the even-handedness of his clothes, he is not Protestant nor Catholic, not Unionist nor Nationalist, not Loyalist nor Republican; in being none, he is all: he is assuming a holistic position (Troubles Archive, n/d). Indeed, in the quest for verifying equality, the impossible identities undertake a process of rejecting to be assigned a unique identity to challenge the order and inaugurate other *ways of-being-in-common*.

As we have been arguing, the arts have helped to fuel the idea according to which divergent communities can coexist in a democratic scenario. With the term democracy, we are not referring to a political regime or an institution of politics; in this essay, we are following the notion by Rancière (2013a), according to which democracy is

the overturn of the order of things where the power is held by those who are not entitled to govern, the *demos*: "the name of a community and the name for its division, for the handling of a wrong" (p. 59). In other words, the impossible identities challenge the order by proposing a new aesthetics where divisions can no longer justify inequality, as no principle of distribution works. As such, not only is MacLennan assuming an impossible identity, but in his artwork, he is also inviting people to do something alike: to be art and do what the arts do, that is, "heals wounds within and without the self" (MacLennan, 1983). By doing this, it would be possible to inaugurate a new community where divides cannot justify the conflict as the new way of thinking teach us that differences should be embraced: "To HEAL is to make WHOLE" (MacLennan, 1983).

In Colombia, there have also been efforts in the arts to create opportunities where the actors affected by the conflict can be healed. Particularly, we want to refer to the theatre play *Victus* which was first staged on the eve of the signing of the peace agreement in 2016. The artwork was planned so that everyone, regardless of the side of the conflict they were on, could narrate their truth. It is worth mentioning that the actors are not merely actors, as all of them were somehow involved in the conflict.
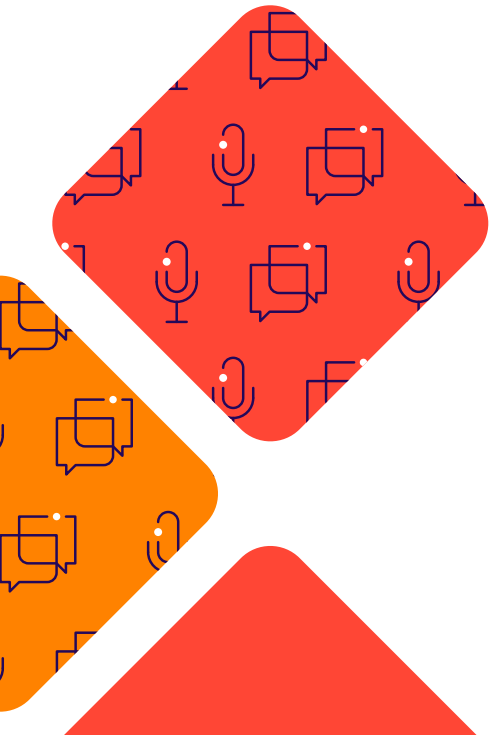
On the stage, labels were rejected; it is not mentioned that some are paramilitaries, other guerrillas, other civilian victims, other soldiers, or police officers; rather, all of them are introduced as individuals seeking to tell their stories. Echoing Rancière, they emerged on the stage as "impossible identities", which means identities that reject the classifications that once placed them on opposite sides. Here it should be noted that in the struggle for recognition, 'suspensive subjects' emerge to question the hierarchical order on the basis of radical equality (Rancière 2013a; Deranty, 2003). Indeed, what prevails in the play is an act of recognition where the 'other' is treated as an equal with a different truth to tell. By avoiding referring to divisive labels, the play invites the audience to listen to what is different as a way of promoting reconciliation and forgiveness.

The fact that impossible identities can appear in the visible spectrum requires a shift in the regime of thought so that the unthinkable becomes thinkable. As Rancière (2013b) stated: "For thinking is always firstly thinking the thinkable – a thinking that modifies what is thinkable by welcoming what was unthinkable" (p. xi). In the case of *Victus*, the unthinkable that is made thinkable is the harmonious coexistence of actors who, before, would not have been able to be on the same stage.

Still, the relevance of this play cannot be limited to what happened on stage, as the importance of *Victus* is not merely the outcome but the process. Indeed, as a way of preventing division labels from hampering the development of the project, the first rehearsals were carried out under the indication of not sharing (yet) the role they assumed during the war. It is important to remember that, similarly to Northern Ireland, in Colombia, the conflict also produced profound divides. However, each of the actors was able to show the truth about themselves in the process of learning and reconciliation in which it becomes possible to overcome dichotomous thoughts –similarly to MacLennan's work. Thus, *Victus* can teach that the difference can be recognised and embraced, no matter how distant the 'other' may be thought.

Taken as a whole, this artwork can be understood as a peace laboratory where the unconceivable became conceivable. To put it differently, a space where identities, once at odds, can engage in a dialogue that verifies the universal of politics according to which: "we are all equal". As such, this play not only can be seen as an effort for 'handling the wrong' as it verifies the idea according to which everyone – despite their differences – are equal but also demonstrates that thinking can be transformed and can embrace what formerly was seen as unthinkable.

Victus somehow embodied the invitation that MacLennan proposed in *Healing Wounds*: everyone can be an artist capable of healing inner and outer conflict. In other words, this artwork sets the stage for building bridges between contrasting truths and perspectives, where heterogeneity is not reduced in the name of anonymous unity. It shall be noted that, before releasing the play, some actors participated in the dialogues that ultimately led to the signing of the peace agreement (RTVC, 2016). As we have been arguing, artistic expressions sustained the initial shift in the regime that fuelled the agreements and helped the society to think about what was previously 'unthinkable'.

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in Shaping the Conditions for a Long-Term Positive Peace

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Conclusion

As shown throughout this essay, the arts have contributed to peacebuilding processes by opening spaces so that the actors affected by the conflict can say, "¡me too; I am a painter!" and can do it without silencing their peculiarities. We have shown that divides *per se* are not problematic; the conflict arises when they are used to legitimate violence. Specifically, we have highlighted that a culture of peace must not only recognise that the 'other' exists but also should embrace it. Embracing it does not mean encompassing it, as this would silence their individual story, but rather, welcome it in its difference.

By referring to artistic expressions in Colombia and Northern Ireland – that range from theatre, passing from performances to movies, murals, architectural interventions, or music-, we have sought to show that the arts can handle 'the wrong' that damages the universal politics by denying the fundamental equality amongst subjects. We have argued that the arts can contribute to overcoming conflict and constructing a positive peace by stressing the importance of handling the wrong and recognising the other. Although we centred our essay on the cases of Colombia and Northern Ireland, its reach can be applied to other contexts where the arts – no matter their expression – might have contributed to expressing the inexpressible by making thinkable the unthinkable.

While the historical contexts of each nation differ, we must rescue the similarities in the challenges and strategies faced by each nation to overcome their conflictive situation. By addressing how arts can build positive peace, it is possible to establish how it invites us to *think the unthinkable* so that we can heal the damage of the conflict, and we can do it to an extent where the other is not suppressed but welcomed in its differences. Thus, the arts teach us that they are not only necessary to challenge dichotomous ways of thinking that can lead to more conflict but also that different – and sometimes contrasting – voices can coexist in a democratic scenario.

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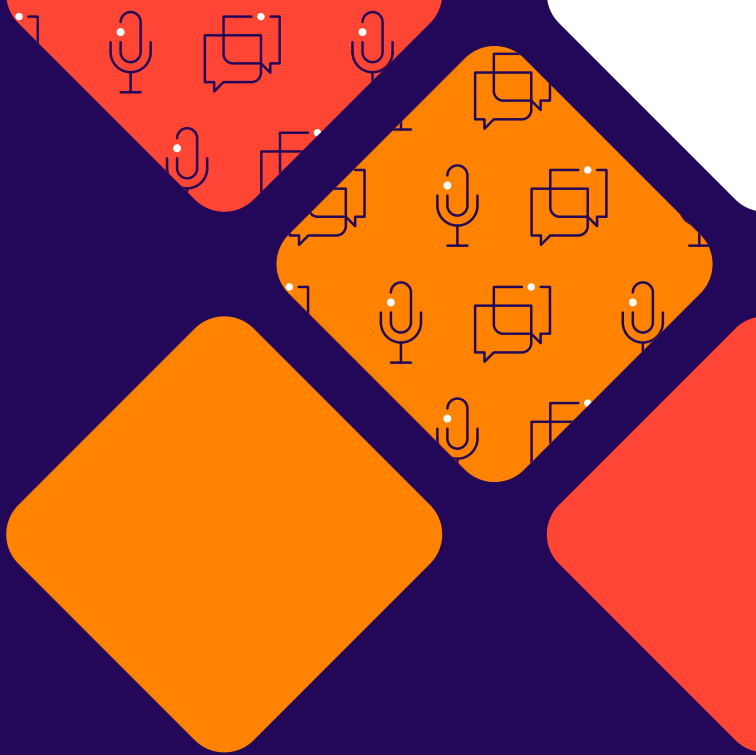
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