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TOWARDS INCLUSIVE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES: RESEARCH ON THE CLASH OF CONFLICT NARRATIVES IN THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND PEACE

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Title

TOWARDS INCLUSIVE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES: RESEARCH ON THE CLASH OF CONFLICT NARRATIVES IN THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND PEACE

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Abstract

This research explores the clash of conflict narratives youths share in the study of international reconciliation and peace in postwar societies. As narratives perpetuate different versions of social reality, conflict narratives are often exclusive and resistant. The clash of conflict narratives therefore tends to endure, posing a major obstacle to the peace process. By joining the aesthetic turn in Politics and International Relations (IR), the proposed research aims at investigating how arts affect individual agencies, youth in this paper, to understand competing conflict narratives through the eyes of others. Working with data collected through class observations and surveys, the research seeks for providing creative and inclusive means of shaping narratives that help individual agencies discover the world differently and in turn behave differently. The significance of the research stems from its importance to reveal the analytical purchase of everyday IR in exploring conflict resolution. The findings not only enrich IR scholarship on politics through arts, an understudied field. They also contribute to discovering innovative pedagogical skills, practiced and empowered through aesthetic means. Education policy makers and practitioners will come to a deeper understanding of individuals' view, which in turn will help them to set out and design a more effective conflict resolution protocol.

Keywords: Arts, Conflict Narrative, Inclusive Pedagogy, Individual Agencies, Everyday IR

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Contents

This research explores the clash of conflict narratives youths share in the study of international reconciliation and peace in postwar societies. Conflict narratives refer to shared stories about the course of conflicts, which events are crucial to make sense of them, who the main actors are, and what actions are needed to resolve them. As narratives create and perpetuate different versions of social reality and thereby affect what we think we know about the past or current conflicts (Delgado 1989), conflict narratives are often selective, exclusive, and resistant. Examples include genocide narratives in the Turkish-Armenian relations, comfort women narratives in the Japanese-South Korean relations, apology narratives in the Franco-Algerian relations, and colonial narratives in the UK-Kenyan relations. The clash of conflict narratives, observed not only at the state level but also at the societal level, tend to endure, posing a major obstacle to any potential breakthrough towards the peace process between enemy states.

In order to open up new possibilities, the proposed research aims at exploring the pedagogical use of arts in dealing with the clash of conflict narratives. Arts are introduced as providing innovative tools to create a space for dialogue to see the issues through the eyes of others. Arts are not inherently good or bad. They are however political as they engage the political in a very different and more creative ways than conventional approaches do. Since the ‘aesthetic turn’ in Politics and International Relations (Bleiker 2008; Moore & Shepherd 2010), innovative scholarship has made the profession open to interdisciplinary research on conflict resolution through visual arts (Callahan 2020), literature (Holden 2010), music (Franklin 2005), and performing arts (Premaratna 2019), to mention just a few. In doing so, intellectual advancements in the disciplines have attempted at transcending the narrow realities of high politics, making Politics and International Relations (IR) become closer to people, to their actual daily lives, the so-called ‘everyday IR’ (Björkdahl, Hall, and Svensson 2019). The research joins the current trend to study the everyday as constitutive of global politics by focusing on conflict narratives shared by individual agencies, youth in this paper, through arts. The key question for this research therefore is; ‘how do arts contribute to dealing with the clash of conflict narratives?’

National narratives in post-conflict societies tend to be ‘constructed as a set of binary opposites’ (Chayes and Minow 2003) with a clear division between us (good) versus them (bad), constituting a serious challenge to peace processes. Examples include the clash of Israeli-Palestinian narratives (Auerbach 2009), Turkish-Armenian narratives (Barkan 2009), and South Korean-Japanese narratives (Takayama 2009). By bringing arts into Politics and IR, the research project aims at bringing creative solutions to deal with the clash of narratives. Concretely, it aims to identify which art forms are best suited in providing alternatives and to explore how these art forms affect individual agencies, youth, to understand competing narratives through the eyes of others. Capturing how artistic sources affect their perceptual change on competing narratives can suggest reference points for their country’s future engagement in promoting peace as they become themselves actors of negotiation and reconciliation. There is cynicism about ‘politics through arts’: that the world of politics is too serious to be explored through the lens of arts. This research rests on the opposite belief: that the world of politics is too important to let all our efforts into one set of knowledge practices that currently prevail in the field. The originality of the research lies on its contributions to legitimize a greater variety of approaches to the study of world politics by revealing the analytical purchase of everyday IR. The research is by nature

creative as it investigates unconventional ways in analyzing political dilemmas. By investigating non-traditional means of shaping and sharing conflict narratives, the research project invites us to discover new ways of understanding world politics and thus helps us see the world differently and in turn behave differently.

Political scientists and IR scholars have recently shown growing interest in stimulating an inclusive learning experience (Frueh 2020; Gormley-Heenan and Lightfoot 2012; Ishiyama, Miller, and Simon 2015). IR teaching through visual arts (Ramel 2018) or contact improvisation (Rösch 2018) has been practiced with some success: it helps invent new perspective to understand global politics and empower individuals as agents of their own know-how. The research joins this current trend by aiming at elucidating two aspects: conceptualization and practical implications.

Conceptualization: To analyze which art forms are best suited in providing alternative, the research focuses on three categories of art forms: visual arts, literature, and music. Visual arts refer to photos and paintings presenting conflict narratives as well as drawings individual agencies are asked to draw themselves; literature refers to novels of which the plot exposes competing narratives of war and conflict that individual agencies are asked to read; music refers to songs written and musical activities performed for the purpose of resolving conflicts that individual agencies are asked to listen to.

Practical implications: To explore how these art forms affect individual agencies, youth in this research, to understand competing narratives through the eyes of others, the research mainly employs class observations and surveys in four undergraduate and graduate courses offered at APU: Conflict Resolution, International Peace Studies, Introduction to International Relations, and Seminars. APU is an ideal place to conduct such research as students from more than 30 nationalities, gathered in IR classrooms, are exposed to competing conflict narratives in the presence of others. The research will mainly elucidate how individual agencies can rethink peace and conflict narratives at stake when viewing them through aesthetic sources. It will also demonstrate to what extent aesthetic insight can give them new perspectives when dealing with them. In doing so, the findings not only enrich IR scholarship on politics through arts, an understudied field. They also contribute to discovering innovative negotiation skills, practiced and empowered through aesthetic means. The findings may also help policy makers and practitioners to come to a deeper understanding of individuals' view (everyday IR), which in turn will help them to set out and design a more effective conflict resolution protocol.

Through a combination of narrative analysis and an autoethnographic approach (Brigg and Bleiker 2010), the following section exposes a partial outcome of my current ongoing research focusing on one of four art forms mentioned above: music.

Reconciliation—becoming friends again after a fight—is a beautiful word. But it is not always so when it comes to researching, teaching, and living it. I had hard time finding a professor happy to

supervise a doctoral dissertation on reconciling hereditary enemy states. It was not on terrorism, global climate change, or human security, the so-called selling topics in international relations (IR). I had and have hard time writing on it because my personal life keeps intertwining with the subject of study. I could not continue arguing that it is important to face the dark side of one's own history when I was unable to do so in my life. And now I have hard time teaching it. Reconciliation is not a popular IR subject to take in Japan where I have been teaching for almost ten years now. Who would enjoy sitting in a classroom where we read books and articles comparing their home country to other "successful" ones and highlighting what is wrong with them?

I once gave my Japanese students a role-play assignment to develop an argument from a Korean or Chinese perspective since most of their papers were all about why *Nanjing* massacre is a lie or why *Takeshima* is part of Japanese territory. I still remember what one student was whispering: "You know, she is Korean." I was not their professor any more. I was just one of their enemies. In Seoul, I bluntly asked students what reconciliation means to them. I intentionally made them think at individual levels and did not refer to any specific case. They answered: "It means to apologize." When I asked "What about forgiving?" students showed a very violent reaction. One said that it was a pity that I live and teach in Japan "wasting" my talent to the enemy country. At my current institution we have students from more than 30 nationalities in a classroom. A French student is sitting next to a German, a Chinese next to a Japanese, an Indian next to a Pakistani, and a Tamil next to a Singhalese. Here we witness clashes of national narratives everyday when addressing issues of international peace and reconciliation (See for instance Baildon, *et al.* 2014). Does or should this reality affect the way we teach peace and conflict studies?

No if the purpose is mainly to transfer knowledge. But yes if by teaching we want students get interested in the subject and eventually invite them to become an active agent of peace (Bekerman and Zembylas 2014; Brock-Utne 2022; Clarke-Habibi 2018; Gill and Niens 2014; Pherali 2016). I used to start my class by asking them whether peace studies contribute to peace. Since one student pointed out that my question was wrong and that I should rather ask how peace studies contribute to peace, I started questioning the *how* of teaching peace studies, hence the pedagogical use of arts in dealing with peace and conflict narratives.

Music and politics are two distinct terms that IR students find it difficult to connect. This is not their fault. When we talk about Turkey and Armenia, we look into the G-word battle and discuss what denying the past means. When dealing with Israel and Palestine, we learn about identity politics. We focus on power and security to understand the Sino-Japanese reconciliation process. Colonial memories and "who is responsible for what happened (long time ago)?" are at the center of reflection when addressing relations between UK and Kenya, France and Algeria, or South Korea and Japan. When it comes to Indonesia and East Timor, we read articles on transitional justice, impunity, and human rights violation. I sometimes show pictures of the Green Line in Cyprus, the Peace Line in Northern Ireland, or the Armistice Line in Korea. We drew these lines to stop fighting or to make peace. So I ask them whether these lines did their job as their name suggests. By the end of the class students often end up concluding that there is no hope for reconciliation between historical enemy states.

I then bring the Franco-German case since most reconciliation scholars and national leaders have praised it the ideal model to follow. We study the European integration process, the US role, joint political leadership, and *Elysée* Treaty (the culmination of Franco-German reconciliation). I also bring the Polish-German case. We compare Willy Brandt's *kniefall* with Nicholas Sarkozy's no apology for Algeria speech and discuss what makes a politician to apologize and ask for forgiveness. Students end up concluding that these two cases are exceptions. Or simply put, it is Germany! Identity, power, security, and regional institutions are all core elements to zoom in in peace and conflict resolution classes. Nonetheless, because I want my IR students get interested in reconciliation (not walking out of the classroom believing that there is no such a thing called reconciliation between states and nations) and eventually become themselves an active agent of peace, I brought music into reconciliation studies.

Since 2016, I incorporated a theme on art into my peace courses and gave students a small research project to look for an artist that one think is engaged in rebuilding a broken relationship between nations or states and further explore how their artistic engagement contributes to reconciliation. By using the word artist, I left the category as broad as possible to better understand how students connect art to politics. Papers collected in 2022 show that 39.5 percent of students chose music (singer, composer, music band, concert hall...) followed by 31.1 percent in visual arts (calligraphist, painter, movie director...), 16.2 percent in literature (poet, novelist...), and 4.6 percent in performing arts (theatre group, dancer, musical...). Among 39.5 percent of music-oriented papers, 26 percent focused on the lyrics arguing that music (lyrics) can reveal hidden voices of minority groups such as black people, LGBTQ+ community, women, or vulnerable children. Some emphasized how musicians have been more influential than politicians in raising awareness of stopping the war or promoting peace. This hypothesis could be easily tested in classrooms. When we talked about the bombing attacks in Lebanon, France, or England, I noticed a sort of bombing attack fatigue: "Oh, again, another one?" To fight against the growing indifference, I started the class with Chris Martin's "Don't Look Back in Anger" and Black Eyed Peas' "Where is Love?" performed at Ariana Grande's One Love Manchester Concert in 2017. Students who looked at the incidents as something happening in a blockbuster movie, far from their life, became serious. Other cases include Murakami Haruki's antiwar songs list in a radio show and U2's surprise concert in Kyiv metro to discuss the Russian-Ukraine conflict.

While the majority of students connected music to peace in its broadest sense, 9.8% of students went more case-specific. It ranged from "Franco-German reconciliation, the song *Goettingen* written by Barbara, and Gerhard Schroeder," "The power of clinical music therapy in healing children's trauma from the Croat-Bosniak war," to "The role of Glenn Fredly in rebuilding the broken relationship between Christians and Muslims in the province of Maluku, Indonesia". Others chose a musical group to demonstrate how the multicultural nature of the band makes the message of peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness even stronger: The meaning of peace in the Japanese-American jazz band *Hiroshima*, Learning to forgive with the group *Carabao* in the Myanmar-Thailand relations, and Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in the Middle East.

The Israeli-Palestinian case is one of the most painful ones to deal with in peace studies classrooms. No one really believes that there is a chance to reconcile. We used to discuss why

the United States pulled UNESCO funding after Palestine was granted full membership in 2011. Now we read news that Israel—with the United States—officially quit UNESCO. Students' reaction: "Oh yeah, not surprising." This deep skepticism was shuffled when listening to young musicians of the Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. Meirav Kadichevski, an Oboist from Israel, confessed how the way she was brought up led her hate others but that Divan made her realize how "they" are also precious people in her life. Nabih Bulos, a violinist from Jordan, said that he does not think playing Beethoven will bring world peace but the power of Divan is still significant: "[...] I want them out of my life, I want them dead. But in Divan, my set partner is an Israeli and I want him to play well. Now it sounds like a tiny point. It sounds insignificant. But I actually think it is a big deal. Because we are trying to think about someone who is ostensibly against you, in a positive way." My students were surprised themselves. It opened up a new horizon for reflection and discussion.

A touch of music into IR classes helps students get interested in the subject and makes them think issues from perspectives that they have not known yet. We listen to music, read the lyrics, analyze the political context with more interest, and explore how influential music is in changing the public perception from enmity to amity. It all matters. But music can do more. Getting interested in peace and reconciliation studies is one thing but becoming aware of one's own agency is another. In my current institution, students are constantly exposed to competing national narratives. We learn that what brought us glory brought them pain. We discover that there are different official narratives of the same event. We get surprised by what we forgot still resonates strongly in them. Students have a lot to say when it comes to blaming others or justifying one's own position. Their arguments presume that reconciliation can only start when you take action, not us. They however become quickly silent when asked what is required to transform the enmity to amity or to rebuild the relationship. How can we expect students to become aware of their own peace agency if they are not even convinced that they can work with others inside the classroom? The fundamental problem I encounter while teaching peace and reconciliation is that students do not know how to listen to and work with others when they are exposed to conflicting national narratives. One of my students from India (but living with her family in Pakistan) shared her experience of how her friends all turned their back on her when she suggested launching an Indian-Pakistani joint culture festival instead of the existing separated ones. Some students confessed that they have never experienced such a strong nationalistic emotion while preparing for their own country's culture week. In the name of diversity, we celebrate one culture next to another, but not together.

The power of music in studying peace and reconciliation relies on providing us a framework for discovering and practicing how to listen to others even when we do not agree with them. In a jazz big band, the pianist listens to the way the saxophonist plays and the drummer sends a sign to the bassist. Some musicians catch it and spontaneously respond while others prefer concentrating on performing what they have practiced. It still plays but does not swing anymore. Without trust in others, without opening ourselves to others, swing can never swing, just like in any relationship. We create something together. It will not go the way I or you planned. But that is the beauty of music, thus the beauty of humanity. Since we are not professional musicians, we cannot create an orchestra or a big band to truly experience it. But I often get surprised by how allowing students to express their argument through music performance in class brings a creative approach to analyzing IR studies.

Reconciliation probably needs more politics than arts. Peace may be achieved without music. Nevertheless what music can do is to bring light back into the countless “seemingly impossible to reconcile” cases. In international reconciliation classrooms, jazz and its performing style (See for instance Williamson 2014) can be used as a tool to invite students not only to trigger their interest in the subject but also to raise the awareness of their own peace agency. Learning to listen to “enemies” and to work with them are two sides of a coin, necessary to embark on the lifelong journey towards reconciliation. Music thus provides a unique lens to look into the connection between IR and peace education. Any creative way of approaching reconciliation needs to be exploited when we have so little hope in it. Aesthetics enables students to approach what unfolds as reality in front of them in different ways, experience international affairs beyond ‘high politics’, and connect it to their own life-worlds. It is my ambition to gain for myself and my students agency in their studies, and, rather than despair and give in to all the horrors that the study of international politics entails, contribute towards what I refer to as a ‘positive IR’ that highlights anthropological constants, seeks for human cooperation, and considers possibilities for peace and reconciliation.

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PLAYLIST

Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. Available at < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K22pkacxfN0>> and <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEEfjddzCPI>>, last accessed November 25, 2022.