

# IMPACT

IMAGINING TOGETHER

PLATFORM FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND  
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

## Imagining Together / Acting Together Virtual Learning Exchange Summary

**Reconciliation Discussion Board** | April 22, 2020  
Summary and Reflections by Rand Hazou

Co-conveners for this exchange



Partners for this exchange:



IMPACT - the [Imagining Together Platform for Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation](#) - is a worldwide, values-driven collaboration to design and activate strategies to strengthen the *arts, culture and conflict transformation ecosystem (acct)*.

IMPACT Learning Exchanges are virtual conversations designed to offer unique spaces for sharing ideas, professional learning, and reflection on topics important to the growth and sustainability of the Art, Culture and Conflict Transformation (ACCT) ecosystem.

The Imagining Together / Acting Together Learning Exchange explored key concepts in the ecosystem: **resistance, re-humanization, reconciliation** (drawn from resources of the [Acting Together on the World Stage](#) multimedia educational initiative), and **re-enchantment** - alongside current events like **coronavirus** and **the power of the acct ecosystem**. The conversation took place in both Spanish and English, with each language having its own space. Click here to read the Spanish-language summaries.

This document is a summary of the [Reconciliation Discussion Board](#). Here are links to summaries of the other discussion boards:

<a href="#"><u>Resistance</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Re-humanization</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>ACCT Connections and Reflections: Coronavirus</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Reconciliation</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Re-enchantment</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>The Power of the ACCT Ecosystem</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Creative Spaces</u></a>	

## 1. Participants and discussions by the numbers

<b>Number of participants: 51</b>		<b>Number of comments: 202</b>	
<b>Participant Countries</b>		<b>Number and names of the Facilitators: 12</b>	
United States of America	Spain	Leight Swigart	Germaine Ingram
Australia	Israel	Sarah Jane Moore	Polly Walker
Malta	Lebanon	Mary Ann Hunter	Dijana Milosevic
Kenya	Uganda	Shahid Nadeem	Maja Leo
United Kingdom	Finland	Lisette Anzoategui	Georg Engeli
Pakistan	Columbia	Cindy Cohen	Ivana Milenovic Popovic
Philippines	Canada		
France	Serbia		
Palestine	Switzerland		
<b>Participant Affiliations (when reported*)</b>			
1. Brandeis University, Massachusetts.			
2. A member of the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES)			
3. Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences (BEES) at University of New South Wales (UNSW)			
4. University of Malta			
5. University of Nairobi			
6. A board member of Dance into Space - a mixability dance and community theatre group in Nairobi			

7. The University of Leeds
8. Ministry of Untold Stories
9. Leads Tidal - activist organisation in Leeds focused on social, economic and environmental justice
10. Maasai Mara University
11. Kenya Performing Arts and Film Association (KUPAA)
12. The Ajoka Theatre Group, Pakistan
13. ForumZFD
14. King's College London
15. PhotoVoice
16. UNESCO
17. Al Quds- Bard College for Arts and Science
18. TAI University, Spain
19. Warwick University, UK.
20. The Martin-Springer Center for Conflict Studies at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel
21. Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute
22. Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Uganda
23. Indie Peace
24. Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies
35. University of Sydney
36. Sibelius Academy, Uniarts Helsinki
37. Amani People's Theatre, Kenya
38. Prolongar Foundation, Colombia
39. Martin-Springer Institute at the Northern Arizona University
40. DAH Theatre

*\*participants were asked to write an optional biography; this information is drawn from how participants in this discussion described themselves*

## **2. Questions that guided the discussion**

Reconciliation requires that losses be mourned, and that opportunities are created for those who have been in conflict to empathize with each other's suffering, even across lines of hatred and power. Societies must seek justice and honour memories while also imagining and creating a more secure future - where conflicts and their ongoing impacts can be addressed constructively. The communication skills and moral capacities needed to reconcile with one and others often need to be consciously developed, routinely restored and always strengthened. After watching the film "[Peru - Reconciliation Ritual](#)" (By Ana Correa & Augusto Casafranca 2018), participants were asked to address the following questions:

- In your communities, where do you see efforts to rebuild relationships of reciprocity, trust and trustworthiness? What challenges are these efforts addressing?
- How are the arts and other aspects of culture being engaged to support these efforts?
- From your perspective, what needs to happen before, during and after reconciliation?

- In your communities, is the word ‘reconciliation’ useful? If not, are there other words that refer to the journey toward peace that so many seek?
- Are there useful roles that outsiders can play in reconciliation efforts? If so, what ethical principles should guide them?
- What are the risks of bringing adversarial communities together (through arts initiatives or otherwise)? When is it helpful to work separately at first?

### 3. Suggestions and questions for moving forward

#### Questions emerging from the discussion:

- How should artists position themselves in relation to vulnerable communities?
- How can individuals provide ongoing mutual encouragement and support for those working on the ground with vulnerable communities?
- What further support can Platform4 Dialogue provide?
- How can we avoid having these forces of co-option and instrumentalisation causing paralysis? And what aptitudes and tools do artists need in order to avoid being "used"?

#### Suggestion: Decolonise ‘Reconciliation’

The discussion was dominated by a critique of the English term ‘reconciliation’, its religious undertones, and the perceived shortcomings of what might be perceived as a western-centric approach that focuses on individual and instrumental outcomes. In contrast, the discussion highlighted meanings of reconciliation in other languages that often highlighted notions of the processual, the inter-relational and the communal. While the suggestion to ‘decolonise’ the practice was not explicitly mentioned, the discussion critiqued what appeared to be western-centric approaches to reconciliation that have been co-opted by states, institutions and NGOs to the point that reconciliation was regarded with cynicism by certain local communities where it is associated with top-down, short-term and imposed modes of peace-building. This criticism suggests that further work might be needed to decolonise the theory and practice of reconciliation and to further explore non-western, indigeneous and alternative approaches that highlight interrelationality and help restore relationships, enhance dignity, and promote healing in communities impacted by conflict.

*Reconciliation that is worthy of the trust of people on all sides' means that it would need to be co-created/ designed in negotiation and not imposed from one paradigm, language, positionality or perspective*

#### Suggestion: Exploring Ecological Dimensions

One suggestion emerging from the discussion was the need to further develop the ecological dimensions of reconciliation to focus on horizontal inter-relationships between humans and their wider environments and as a process that occurs simultaneously at multiple levels.

*Reconciliation feels like rain. Tastes like river and smells like tree, gum, seed*

*Reconciliation definition should be pursued from the larger human ecological relationships because it is a process that tries to restore symmetrical inter-human relations. Individuals relate not only with their fellow human beings but also animals, plants and the physical environment*

#### 4. Creative resources mentioned

<p>(English) A dramatic play by Australian First Nations artists Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman: “Wreck, Con, Silly, Nation. What’s the use in having a word if we don’t think and talk about it”. <a href="#">Enoch, W and Mailman, D., (1996) <i>The 7 Stages of Grieving</i>. Brisbane: Playlab Press</a></p>	<p>(English) The Nez Perce Ft. Vancouver Memorial. An annual ceremony that brings together members of the Nez Perce Nation, military from Fort Vancouver, officials from the City of Vancouver, and members of the surrounding community through a range of rituals.</p>
<p>(French) A meeting in France exploring the cultural rights and the co-option of artists working with vulnerable communities by political institutions: <a href="https://reseauculture21.fr/blog/2019/12/04/les-droits-culturelsun-rempart-contre-le-hold-up-de-la-misere/">https://reseauculture21.fr/blog/2019/12/04/les-droits-culturelsun-rempart-contre-le-hold-up-de-la-misere/</a></p>	<p>(English) In ex-Yugoslavia countries the The Women’s Court allows women to become subjects of justice, encouraged to create different legal practices and the influence institutional legal system: <a href="http://www.zenskisud.org/en/">http://www.zenskisud.org/en/</a></p>
<p>(Arabic) A popular Arabic song from the 80s entitled ‘Al Solh Khair’ (Reconciliation is good): <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7ui7E8QnRE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7ui7E8QnRE</a> Its</p>	<p><i>Request</i> by the German Jewish Hilde Domin. (A poem translated and put to music by Deborah Langstaff).</p>
<p>Sculptor Ann Hamilton's practice of "Making not Knowing". See Hamilton, A. (2009). Making not knowing. <i>Learning mind: Experience into art</i>, 67-74.</p>	
<p><b>Other Resources, articles, ideas, and research</b></p>	
<p>The work of Kelly Oliver, who goes ‘beyond recognition’, and turns the focus back on ourselves and our own responsibility to ‘bear witness to that which cannot be seen’. See Oliver, K. (2018). <i>Response Ethics</i>. Rowman &amp; Littlefield.</p>	<p>Krondorfer, B. (Ed.). (2018). <i>Reconciliation in Global Context: Why it is Needed and how it Works</i>. SUNY Press.</p>

Pujol, E. (2018). *Walking art practice: Reflections on socially engaged paths*. Triarchy Press.

Krondorfer, B. (2020) *Unsettling Empathy Working with Groups in Conflict*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

## Themes

### **Wreck, Con, Silly Nation: Interrogating the English term ‘Reconciliation’**

An important focus of the conversation was to critically evaluate the semantic meanings associated with the English term ‘Reconciliation’ and to explore equivalent words in other languages that might hold different meanings. This was prompted by an acknowledgement of religious undertones associated with the English term which might have attributed to the failure of reconciliation efforts in various global contexts. The discussion acknowledged the religious undertones that inflect the English word ‘Reconciliation’. Other comments pointed to how in certain contexts such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, the term had been co-opted by political actors and NGO’s to the point that it was regarded with cynicism by local communities where it is associated with top-down, short-term and imposed modes of peace-building. Similar sentiments were expressed in relation to Indigenous communities where the word seemed to be imposed as part of an ongoing colonial attitude. Western-centric and colonial associations with the term have also produced distrust within indigeneous communities with some Aboriginal communities in Australia labelling reconciliation a ‘white fella issue’. The discussion also acknowledged how the ‘re’ in the term pre-supposes that good relationships may have existed and that reconciliation is repairing or restoring broken relations. Yet the idea of pre-existing relationships is often an assumption that might not be reflected in historical realities. The terms ‘conciliation’ and ‘coexistence’ were suggested as possibly more appropriate terms for productive engagements with conflict.

*“Wreck, Con, Silly, Nation. What’s the use in having a word if we don’t think and talk about it”. Australian Aboriginal Artists Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman Quoted in discussions. From their play ‘The 7 Stages of Grieving’, 1996.*

*...the religious roots connected to reconciliation can also divide people further.*

*Reconciliation is a white fella issue.*

*Some young people I have spoken with actively chose not to participate in youth arts projects that used the term ‘reconciliation’ - as a form of resisting what they view as top-down, short-termist and imposed modes of peace building.*

*there is something passive in the construction of reconciliation that can easily be co-opted by nation states.*

### **Translations and Alternative Meanings:**

*... Does the term used by your language community imply elements of meaning that are not covered by the English word “reconciliation”?*

In response to the invitation to explore equivalent words in other languages that might hold different meanings, several participants offered different translations of 'Reconciliation' that informed the discussion. While many of the offered translations also carried notions of forgiveness and atonement, the terms offered in discussion seemed to emphasise notions of restoration, mutual recognition and acknowledgement which might not often be associated with the English term. Part of the conversation also acknowledged meanings focusing on 'internal' processes related to conscience rather than as an 'external' process focused on an action with another.

*The German equivalent of reconciliation is "Versöhnung". [...] It carries with it a significant religious meaning. Part of the German word is the medieval word for penance or atonement ("Sühne"). [...] The word has a lot of gravitas and requires taking responsibility for one's actions.*

*In Maltese [...] reconciliation as a term is a very recent introduction. [...] In informal conflict resolution people would use either *ħafer* (meaning to forgive), which obviously highlights a judgement that whoever forgives is also in the right, or *nesa* (to forget). The latter would imply that you give up the option of making a judgement in order to reconcile .*

*In Swahili - Upatanisho and Luhya - Liambaasia -mean bring/come back together. These words are so strong that they are used in the bible translations to mean atonement, so both participants dialogue and agree to be each others' keeper.*

*In the Visayan dialect (Cebuano language, Philippines) Reconciliation [...] is "Pakighi-uli" which means restoring bonds. It usually involves at least two parties. Take note of the words 'restore' and 'bond'. "Pakighi-uli" preempts that there was a good, if not neutral, connection among concerned parties built on respect.*

*In Arabic [...] tasaloh or musalaha [...] is a profound word that relates, first and foremost in our culture, to oneself: self-reconciliation is to act and behave according to your conscience and beliefs, so you can have your inner peace.*

*In Islamic countries, reconciliation as a word and practice doesn't reach its full meaning. It stops at a point where it only means to stop the fight or ceasefire.*

*In Hebrew the term used is "Piyus" which means more or less - ending a conflict in a good spirit, housing/making a place to settle peace.*

*The word reconciliation in my Language is "Apuconor" meaning conflicting parties agree to forgive, forget the past hatred, injuries or even death and jointly work out better ways for a brighter future as a family.*

*[...] The term we use in the Indigenous Education Institute [...] is 'collaborations of integrity' meaning in this context American Indian peoples working with settler descended peoples in ways that respect the ways of being and knowing of the many groups that make up these two identities. The concept of rebalancing power is also included in 'collaborations of integrity' given the vast and protracted global marginalization and oppression of Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing, these collaborations require a reentering of Indigeneity.*

*The Finnish words "sovinto" and "sovinnonteko" point at atonement. Furthermore, the latter includes an act, as in making a deal.*

*[..] Reconciliation in my language of Setswana is "poelano" which is more like bringing or coming together. There is something quite important about this "coming together" in a way of meeting and seeing each other, which I see now can relate to the idea of "recognition" brought up earlier - it says to me - "I see (you/me/us/this/that), I acknowledge (you/myself/us/this/that).*



## **Coexistence/Convivencia Vs Superficial Tolerance**

An alternative term that was suggested that might ameliorate negative associations with the term 'reconciliation' was the notion of coexistence and convivencia. While coexistence might be a useful term to facilitate the restoration and building of relationships, it might also foster superficial tolerance of the 'other' without the **necessity of addressing past injustices or reparations**. Despite these reservations, the discussion suggests that coexistence might be a useful term to explore further in relation to peace-building practices.

*Another term related to reconciliation yet less political is "convivencia" or "coexistence" which is really the peacebuilding emphasis of rebuilding and establishing relationships.*

*When I think about coexistence, it seems to aim toward a kind of relationship building that is less demanding (and probably less sturdy) than reconciliation. Coexistence calls on us to respect the right of the other to exist, to live; reconciliation (as I understand it) demands a reckoning with the past, addressing injustices.*

## **Young People**

Another important emerging theme was consideration of young people, their engagement and their skepticism about participating in institutionally driven reconciliation projects. The discussion appeared to link to the semantic meanings associated with the term 'reconciliation' and that certain negative connotations are particularly prevalent among younger sections of various communities.

*[In Capetown] young people want to imagine a future for themselves, not a story of state success in de-escalation or reducing violence.*

*[In Bosnia and Herzegovina] Young people I have spoken with actively chose not to participate in youth arts projects that used the term 'reconciliation' - as a form of resisting what they view as top-down, short-termist and imposed modes of peace building.*

## **Macro and Micro Features**

The discussion emphasised the needs and the benefits of understanding the macro and micro scale implications of reconciliation practice. An acknowledgement emerged about the macro scale features which were perceived as potentially apolitical and coercive. There was also an acknowledgement that at a micro level, both interpersonally and within local communities, reconciliation is extremely valuable for developing transitional justice and understanding.

*[on the micro-scale] ... for individuals, the dramaturgy of reconciliation is most likely interpersonal and community-driven.*

## **Internal and External Features**

The discussion also acknowledged the different internal and external processes engendered by reconciliation. This theme acknowledged that while reconciliation might be aimed at the facilitation of projects bringing external actors together, ultimately the process also requires internal change both on behalf of the participants but also on behalf of artists and facilitators..

*... Reconciliation is more about a change of heart, a shift in attention away from blaming the other to taking responsibility for one's own (or one's own community's) actions.*

*My experience leads me to suggest that what makes reconciliation so difficult, so utterly and existentially demanding - and so intrinsically ambiguous and unpredictable - is that we ourselves must change.*

## **Recognition and Rights**

While forgiveness was acknowledged as part of reconciliation approaches, the discussion highlighted instead the importance of recognition and rights. This might be partly influenced by indigenous political concerns that reject the need to assuage 'white' guilt associated with coloniality as the focus of reconciliation efforts - particularly if this does not result in the recognition of indigenous culture and rights.

*Reconciliation, broadly articulated and represented, entails recognition, rights and reform. Recognition of culture, land and story, rights to the telling of black histories and reforms to the disadvantages, stigma and prejudice as passed down and supported through the institutions that we currently know as pre-schools, schools and universities.*

*'Recognition, Rights and Reform' [...] provide a far greater sense of equality and possibility towards justice.*

## **Reparations and Material Justice**

Linked to the theme of recognition and rights was the importance of reconciliation leading to substantive and material justice. In colonial contexts this was highlighted in discussion about reparations and the need for reconciliation to involve the return of land and resources to indigenous peoples.

*In Australia reconciliation is focused on "moving on" without those with a settler heritage having to do anything other than say they are aware that Indigenous people existed before our ancestors came and stole everything. Repatriation needs to happen before there is a true reconciliation.*

*Wab Kinew [a member of the Onigaming First Nation in Canada] said that until the injustice of land seizure is addressed and the issues of land restoration are dealt with, reconciliation will have little significance in Canada.*

## **Concerns**

- How should artists position themselves in relation to vulnerable communities? Especially as there is a trend on the part of political institutions to 'use' artists as social and educational operators without appropriate means and training.

- The instrumentalization of reconciliation processes. Practitioners report there is never enough time to create the kinds of arts projects they want to as such projects take place with partners from development, education, or peace sectors, who don't always understand how long a genuine reconciliation process can take.
- The instrumentalization of reconciliation processes. Funding bodies and NGOs are more interested in how projects can be used in promotion on things like blogs, photos, reports. Etc.

## Appendix: Summarized Discussion Thread

This is a summary of the key points in the discussion, in their original chronological order.

- Questioning the semantic meanings of the english term and exploring meanings in other languages.
- Reconciliation often conceived as a 'white fella issue'. Critically exploring implications of reconciliation in relation to colonial processes.
- Acknowledging the micro and macro scale implications of reconciliation practice, where macro scales features can be potentially apolitical and coercive and where at a micro level, reconciliation can be valuable for developing transitional justice and understanding.
- The need to further develop the ecological dimensions of reconciliation to focus on horizontal inter-relationships between humans and their wider environments and as a process that occurs simultaneously at multiple levels.
- Reconciliation is a loaded term that has been co-opted by states, institutions and NGOs to focus on delivering short term outcomes.
- The question was how to position oneself as an artist engaging with vulnerable communities especially as there is a trend on the part of political institutions to 'use' artists as social and educational operators without appropriate means and training.
- Reconciliation with the "other" requires reciprocity and what if a society elects a government antithetical to reciprocity or reconciliation. How can art serve in the process when only one side seeks for it? What is the role of the artist in such circumstances?
- The role of the arts as a ritual that brings the audience and artist together - not necessarily one that brings together vulnerable communities and oppressors.
- The impact that religions can have on reconciliation.
- The increasingly problematic issues associated with instrumentalizing reconciliation processes. Funding bodies and NGOs often don't understand how long reconciliation processes can take and are often more interested in how projects can be used in promotion on things like blogs, photos, reports. Etc.
- The 're' in term often assumes that two parties were previously in good relations with each other.
- Reconciliation needs to be about recognition, rights and reform.
- The ethical roles that outsiders can play in reconciliation efforts.
- How can individuals provide ongoing mutual encouragement and support for those working on the ground with vulnerable communities?
- "Forgive and Forget" can unfortunately often be used as a substitution action for reconciliation.

- How do we move from relationships of alienation (characterized by direct and structural violence, slavery, apartheid, occupation) to relationships of respect for human rights, cooperation, trust and trustworthiness, reciprocity, and productive engagement with conflict.
- In terms of ethical principles for outsiders, artists should acknowledge that they cannot dictate how long healing takes. It is not their pain.
- It is risky bringing adversarial groups together before the separate groups feel they have practiced self-healing and have a strong support network to go to after a difficult meeting.
- Making reconciliation a personal daily practice.
- Dwelling on definitions can paralyze action. In contrast, Art can help to overcome verbal/vocabulary/language limitations be it through visual, performance or other forms.
- The notion of 'collaboration of integrity' as an alternative to 'reconciliation' to describe the work between American Indian peoples working with settler descended peoples in ways that respect the ways of being and knowing of the many groups that make up these two identities.
- Indigenous understandings of the term reconciliation. In colonial contexts, it has arisen from governments (national, state and local). In contrast indigenous peoples might use terms such as 'collaborations of integrity' and 'relationships of respect and reciprocity'.
- In transforming ethnic conflicts, theatre offers myriad opportunities for transforming negative emotions to positive ones. The theatre metaphor offers brave space for reflection and embodiment of reconciliation.
- If reconciliation is creating the space for living together outside of fear and wrath, it requires all parties involved in acts of violence to transform it from a process of forgiving and forgetting into a citizenship process of remembering and acting responsibly.