

Introduction

As a musician who works for peace, 'unity' holds less interest for me than 'harmony.' Unity is when we all sing the same note. Harmony is when we sing different notes, and they are beautiful together.

David Lamotte, musician and peace activist

This quote from David Lamotte points to important aesthetic and creative considerations. It also highlights some key related political concerns. Lamotte explains: 'Harmony is not homogeneity', and insists that, 'Creating that confluence takes attention, patience, and work ... [a]nd it is not achieved by eliminating difference, but instead by finding ways to work together that are mutually nourishing, that honour and reveal each other's gifts'.¹ In this book we demonstrate how dance can encourage these elements and thus support peacebuilding.

This book explores the relationship between dance and peacebuilding in pluralist societies. It highlights instructive insights that dance can provide when reflecting on existing theories and debates around peace and conflict. Our research deepens the understanding of the roles the arts, and dance in particular, play in peacebuilding. It builds on existing work in International Relations (IR), Peace and Conflict Studies, and Dance, as well as complementary areas of study, such as anthropology, neuroscience and law. This book considers the work of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and its participants deploying dance for youth peacebuilding through

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case studies in Colombia, the Philippines and the United States. This dance programme took place in several locations and in different contexts of violence or conflict and varied approaches to peace. Investigating the application of a dance-based peacebuilding programme across these three case studies allows us to consider nuance and context, as well as commonalities across the locales.

A young person designed this particular programme and most of the facilitators and participants were young people. Learning from their experiences contributes to the development of multifaceted understandings of youth in peace and conflict. The research focused on the experiences of young people, and it facilitates insights into existing debates and practical questions in relation to local–global interactions, while highlighting the possibilities for, and challenges to, dance and peacebuilding.

Our research connects with a number of practical efforts and applications. Indeed, people seeking to build peace in a variety of contexts have increasingly recognised the value of dance for peacebuilding.² Internationally, dance has grown in popularity as a means of connecting people and communities experiencing violence and conflict, with fellow peacebuilders around the world. Moreover, these connections have been amplified through the increased visibility and enhanced global awareness of a connection between dance and peacebuilding. Consider, for example, the global One Billion Rising (OBR) campaign, initiated by Eve Ensler.³ Participants around the world learn the OBR choreography through online platforms, and then stage local performances in public spaces as part of a campaign to end violence against women and girls. As a global movement featuring local performances that aim to reduce and prevent violence, OBR highlights prospects for dance and peacebuilding as well as questions of agency, power relations and politics more broadly, including ideas around what constitutes ‘local’ and ‘global’ in this context.

Yet standard approaches from the United Nations (UN) or other formal organisations engaged in peacebuilding tend to render dance

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– along with other everyday politics and everyday life practices – invisible, thereby dismissing arts and dance-based approaches as ‘soft’ or not ‘serious’.⁴ Limited research has been conducted on how dance might (or might not) be implemented for peacebuilding across a range of contexts of conflict, including through conflict prevention and peace education initiatives, for example.⁵ Existing scholarship considering creative approaches to peacebuilding serves as an important starting point for the work done here, but to date few studies have provided empirical analyses of what the programmes or efforts they mention do.⁶

We see the sidelining of dance as linked to IR’s lack of imagination when it comes to theorising bodies and their global political significance. There is a frequent division in IR between mind and body that slights the political significance of bodies themselves. In contrast, following Wilcox,⁷ we see bodies as constructed politically, socially and culturally, and thus both produced and productive. Bodies are targets of violence, but they are malleable, so they can also resist and produce different political possibilities and identities, and in the process generate new social configurations.

While most work in IR on embodiment has focused on its role in understanding violence,⁸ our work deeply interrogates embodiment in relation to peace. Our book explores how reflecting on embodiment might offer new insights into peacebuilding and how dance can inform our understandings of the everyday *practice* of peace. It explores how peacebuilding through dance profoundly builds relationships across stark differences, navigates local and global aspects of peacebuilding through a terrain of common ground, and addresses challenges in everyday conflict resolution and peacebuilding practice.

This book suggests that dance, as an aesthetic, embodied medium, can support peacebuilding in its capacity to embrace emotions, support relationships across difference, supplement and sustain verbal linguistic forms of dialogue, and bridge understandings of the local and global. Through the process of

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exploring *how* this takes place, we illuminate prospects and challenges in the practice and study of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Research puzzle

As conflicts become more localised, culturally specific and complex, the need for curious, creative and critical approaches to peacebuilding and politics has grown significantly. How can the subjective have value and be connected to multiple, diverse perspectives that are essential to peacebuilding? Further exploration is essential, particularly with young people, since they are increasingly affected by conflict and war, but remain starkly marginalised from peace and reconciliation initiatives. Moreover, their lives and experiences of conflict and peacebuilding offer important insights into changing local and global contexts.

Around the world, practitioners regularly engage in innovative and reflective arts-based peacebuilding work, yet there is limited analysis available to policy makers, practitioners, scholars and the public, despite the growth in popularity of arts-based approaches to conflict transformation and reconciliation. This book offers a unique insight into the application, practice and analysis of a dance-focused peacebuilding programme and interrogates the ways in which this programme fits into global peacebuilding and local and global politics. Our book explores the experiences and perspectives of young people who engage in dance for peacebuilding in Colombia, the Philippines and the United States, and tells an important story through interrogating the interface of dance and peacebuilding.

This book builds on research in the interdisciplinary field of Peace and Conflict Studies, as well as innovations in critical IR scholarship, including research on aesthetics and global politics,⁹ scholarship considering emotions and politics,¹⁰ and feminist work that has made embodiment of the subject central to the work of

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deconstruction and emancipation.¹¹ Our research brings together applied activities and ongoing political analysis, including reflecting on existing theories around the politics of peacebuilding. We seek to carve out a new research agenda that can account for the politics of considering dance as an aesthetic, emotional and embodied approach to peacebuilding.

Keeping this in mind, it is important to examine the relationship between dance and peace, including prospects for emancipatory outcomes, but also the risks and challenges of arts-based approaches to peacebuilding. There are many potentially problematic, though sometimes unintended, negative consequences in attempting to quantify the effects and results of peace programmes. The creative elements of arts-based peacebuilding efforts make them more difficult to fit into standard frameworks of effectiveness measurement. Yet it is important to critically reflect continually on the efficacy of these initiatives to identify and share best practices to explore what can and cannot be measured, and to shape further empirical and analytical indicators that stem from arts practice.

In peacebuilding efforts, the dominant approach has tended to focus on technical, quantifiable solutions; yet this kind of approach can obscure the processes and frameworks necessary to pursue constructive social change. Likewise, in contrast, our framework follows the work of Lederach,¹² as we agree that an approach that can enable peacebuilders to see themselves as artists rather than as technicians supports an everyday ontology defying the reductionist tendencies of a focus on metrics and outcomes. It instead asks questions of *how* peace can be articulated and enacted through creative approaches that include actual physical movement as part of a transformative social movement for peace.

Key terms

It is worthwhile explaining the key terms used in this book, including ‘dance’ and ‘peacebuilding’, which are central concepts in our

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research. We offer our working definitions here, and recognise that the process of this research also continues to challenge and deepen our understanding of them.

Dance can elude definition in universalising terms because of 'its longevity and multiplicity of forms and functions'.¹³ While we acknowledge that this merits ongoing reflection, we follow the definition of dance provided by Hanna, who explains dance as 'human behavior composed of purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of nonverbal body movements and stillness in time and space and with effort. The movements are mostly not those performed in ordinary motor activities but may refer to them.'¹⁴ She recognises that 'dance serves a wide spectrum of purposes, often several simultaneously'.¹⁵ Similarly, Coe and Strachan suggest that dance is multifaceted, 'a multisensory experience that includes the visual, the spiritual, the kinesthetic, and the auditory'.¹⁶ Moreover, following established dance educators,¹⁷ we see dance as movement within space, time, shape and motion. We recognise that everyday movement is a basis for dance while acknowledging creative dance and movement approaches emphasising imagination, embodied problem solving and development of individual aesthetic expression.¹⁸

Dance is thus necessarily socially and culturally situated. Grau suggests that being able to move together in a rhythm is what has enabled individuals to work together to acquire language and, consequently, culture.¹⁹ Likewise, for Grau, the power of dance is understood to reside in its capacity to bring together intellect, emotion and feeling.

Dance is also deeply interconnected with music. There are strong interrelations between dance and music activities in practice, participation and performance. Likewise, rather than comparing or contrasting the benefits of dance and music in peacebuilding, here we seek to increase understanding of dance in peacebuilding while continuing to refine the broader dialogue around arts and peacebuilding.

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In this book we consider dance to include a wide variety of activities that may also include professional dance performances. However, the focus of our empirical study remains on community dance activities most often centred on young people's participation in peacebuilding.

As for peacebuilding, our understanding of this concept incorporates a broad range of projects, initiatives, actions and policies that seek to prevent, reduce or assist recovery from violence and conflict in various forms. Peacebuilding thus encompasses a spectrum of actions that can include high-level UN-sponsored post-conflict peace negotiations as well as bottom-up approaches from individuals and grassroots community organisers.²⁰ However, our perspective focuses on a positive approach to peace, which requires 'working in a bottom-up rather than a top-down fashion ... to ultimately change general cultural norms about dealing with violence'.²¹ Moreover, we see this spectrum of peacebuilding as including peacebuilders' own quality of life, which is critical to the sustainability of their work,²² though it has yet to be well explored in existing literature.

Data collection and analysis

To consider the concepts, themes and queries articulated above, this book reports on a study examining the use of dance in peacebuilding programmes across a range of contexts, including Colombia, now commonly deemed a post-conflict site;²³ the United States, specifically in inner-city locations in New York City, Washington DC and Baltimore, where violence is commonly seen as widespread;²⁴ and in the Philippines, which, even in the context of a signed peace agreement and steps towards the creation of an autonomous region, continues to experience conflict in the southern island of Mindanao.²⁵

The programmes in all three countries were run by the same global NGO, which originated in Colombia and expanded to the

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United States, the Philippines and elsewhere.²⁶ The NGO, which began in 2010 and is referred to here as ‘Movement4Peace’ (M4P),²⁷ ran programmes in schools and community centres to teach young people about empathy and nonviolent means for dealing with conflict. Driven by her own local and international dance experiences, a young woman developed the programme based on her belief that dance could be useful in promoting empathy and building peace. A programme was created using embodied, creative approaches to support young people in peacebuilding. M4P thus developed a series of partnerships with community-based organisations, universities, development agencies and government ministries in Colombia and the Philippines, and with schools and community groups in the US.

Implemented over a series of workshops, the programme was facilitated by a group of young peer leaders whose work incorporated dance and creative movement to involve other young people in peacebuilding. In general, each workshop began with a warm-up, then moved to a task-based dance activity, including discussion of a peacebuilding skill (e.g. expressing emotions), and then closed following a relaxation exercise. Through these physical, creative activities, dialogue and relaxation, M4P peer leaders sought to engage participants in identifying and expressing emotions, discovering and valuing difference, promoting empathy, supporting leadership development and working collaboratively to build peace.

During the time of our study, the M4P programme utilised a combination of creative movement activities, such as engaging participants in creating, sharing and copying each other’s movements, or learning choreography from other global branches of the programme. While deploying a general curriculum for peacebuilding through dance and creative movement, M4P worked under the assumption that this curriculum could be adapted based on the context of the conflict and the status of peace initiatives.

By studying the programme’s deployment across diverse sites, we interrogate similarities and differences, including ways

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dance may or may not work in peacebuilding efforts around the world or within a particular locale. Throughout the book, our analysis includes background and contextual information on the kinds of conflicts that are endemic to these societies as well as information on broader approaches to peace used in the various contexts.

Using participant observation, interviews and document analysis, the research presented here incorporates data collected by the authors in each of the three countries featured in the study. This intensive data gathering included Lesley participating in the NGO's full global peer leader training held in the US, as well as months of participant observation of the programmes in the US and Colombia. Meanwhile, Erica Rose similarly spent months conducting participant observation in the Philippines. This methodological approach offered rich insights into how dance and creative movement can and do engage young people in peacebuilding across a range of diverse contexts.

Semi-structured interviews cited throughout the book were conducted with peer leaders in the various locations.²⁸ Lesley conducted the US interviews and some Colombian interviews, while Mariana Zuluaga Mejia, a research assistant with translation capacity, completed the rest in Colombia. The ten US interviewees were all female and in their twenties. Most were from white, middle-class backgrounds, except for one young white woman from a working-class background and two young women who each had one non-white parent. Two were first-generation Americans. At the time of the interviews, all were living in Washington DC, Baltimore or New York City, working for M4P. In Colombia, ten individuals were interviewed – seven females and three males between the ages of 21 and 32. All were from middle-class families and had university qualifications. Erica Rose conducted the interviews in the Philippines as a research assistant. The ten interviews conducted there (seven females and three males) included young people aged 18–33.²⁹ All Filipino interviewees

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were high-school educated and in the process of pursuing or had completed university.

Exploring the experiences of young people involved in peacebuilding in these diverse communities shows us the varied ways violence is experienced and peace is understood and enacted. The analysis also includes intersecting factors such as age and gender, which may be represented and negotiated differently in a variety of settings. The aim is not to make comparisons between the sites; rather, the inclusion of different areas helps to strengthen the data's richness.

Key themes

This book offers insights into the application and practice of a dance-based, localised peacebuilding programme, and interrogates the ways in which this programme fits into the broader global context. Incorporating the multiple elements of dance practice, participant voices and critical political analysis, this book reveals important implications and nuances regarding an arts-based peace initiative that, when applied, can offer needed understandings within the peacebuilding field. This book makes an important contribution to multiple fields and enhances understandings of the potential, challenges and political dynamics of integrating dance into peacebuilding. By exploring the politics of dancing peace, interpersonal interactions, the ability to 'practise peace', and local and global connections, this book highlights and analyses key themes in arts-based peacebuilding work. Noting the need to revise or replace existing dominant approaches to addressing conflict, the global community continues to seek ways to build peace across differences – such as race, religion, gender, culture, age and locality. Heeding these efforts, this book provides a critical in-depth analysis and recommendations for practice by exploring the benefits and challenges of arts-based peacebuilding.

In light of existing research and analysis of the data collected in this project, what can we say about dance and peacebuilding at

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this point? Firstly, participant statements indicated that ‘dance can be useful in engaging youth in peacebuilding but that it must be applied in sensitive, reflexive and culturally relevant ways to appeal to, and include, both young men and young women’.³⁰ The inclusion of age here is salient, given the importance and growth in attention to the roles of youth in peace and conflict. This book specifically asks how, if at all, dance functioned as a useful way for youth to take part in peacebuilding. The book also goes beyond applications with youth to consider what we can learn about peacebuilding and how we can enact it through dance and creative movement across a lifetime. Key findings from the project include the ways in which dance is perceived as being useful in peacebuilding, the value of embodiment and practising peace with others, and the potential for dance to bridge perceived local–global divides.

Of the young interviewees for this project, most, if not all, participants articulated examples of how dance had been useful for peacebuilding. For example, some noted that dance served as a nonviolent means of communication and a mechanism to connect with one’s feelings in a peaceful way. Dance was seen as culturally relevant and familiar, so many youth could relate to it. They also noted that dance does not always require a great deal of training or expensive equipment. Plus, participants saw dance as a way to reduce and release stress, an important part of recovering from witnessing or experiencing violence.

Participants also recognised a variety of limitations regarding what dance could do and how. For example, they identified how short-term funding cycles – often common to global peacebuilding initiatives, particularly those run by NGOs – can at times create programmes that are short-sighted. Participants pointed out that, without careful attention to inclusion and access, attempts at engaging youth in peacebuilding through dance and creative movement might overlook some people’s needs – for example, people living with disabilities or those who speak a language other than the one in which programmes are delivered, such as young indigenous

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people in Colombia. Still, these limitations are not inherent to dance, nor are they always present, as seen, for example, in the work of VisAbility in Sri Lanka, a country recovering from conflict, where dance programming has been used to engage people with and without disabilities in coordination with a rights empowerment initiative.³¹

It appears that dance and creative movement, when applied in thoughtful ways, can help foster peacebuilding. However, dance can also be ineffective; sometimes it can even create exclusions. After all, research has uncovered connections between choreography and war,³² including conceptualisations of how conflict is choreographed through activities such as military drills and rituals.

However, when used in thoughtful, reflexive ways in the pursuit of peace, dance can have much to offer. In one of our interviews for this research, one facilitator of programmes using dance and creative movement for peacebuilding in Washington DC and Baltimore spoke about stepping out of one's comfort zone to engage within a group:

When one person takes a positive risk, it shows the rest of us that we can take a positive risk and encourages us to do that also. So hopefully, after a while they will be able to see that if they can just do one thing that makes them uncomfortable or kind of step outside their comfort zone that it actually helps other people to do the same and get the most out of the experience.

Such steps – both metaphorical and embodied – can surely be a useful means for reflecting on ways of finding harmony within the dissonance of conflict.

Structure of the book

While research around creative approaches to peacebuilding has inspired growing interest, several aspects remain ripe for exploration, with dance remaining particularly under-studied. We are pleased

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to have this opportunity to continue the scholarly conversation while exploring new dimensions and pointing to new directions for the future. Each chapter of this book seeks to depict the complex and multidimensional interactions between dance and peacebuilding. The chapters are structured as follows.

Chapter 1 considers dance in relation to peacebuilding; it interrogates existing research from across a range of fields of study, including law and development studies and the key disciplines informing this research project: Peace and Conflict Studies, IR, and Dance. The chapter explores how growing interest and research in arts-based peacebuilding highlight the importance of utilising multiple pathways in the pursuit of peace. It also examines how dance and music are recognised globally as important facilitators of social cohesion and the creation and expression of culture. The chapter considers theories and practices of dance and peacebuilding, including discussions of embodiment and empathy, among other key concepts. This exploration provides context to understand how and where dance and peacebuilding meet. We argue for recognising the important roles dance can play in encouraging diverse forms of communication, building relationships across difference and engaging the participation of diverse actors in local, national and international forums.

Chapter 2 discusses the role of young people in peacebuilding and the ways in which dance plays a part in this process. Previous research has identified the importance and political significance of young people in peacebuilding.³³ International organisations such as the UN have also made steps to increase the opportunities and support for young people in peacebuilding endeavours, locally and globally, for example through the passage of UN Security Council resolutions 2250 and 2419 on Youth, Peace and Security in 2015 and 2018, respectively. Despite these efforts, and the extent to which youth are immersed in conflict both as recipients of violence and as perpetrators, young people remain on the sidelines of peace initiatives and are not sufficiently recognised and engaged

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in policy, theory or practice. This research suggests that dance can constitute an effective, inclusive pathway to support youth participation in peacebuilding. At the same time, the data gathered highlights the importance of including options for peace, reconciliation and social transformation that are age appropriate, gender sensitive, culturally relevant and flexible.

Chapter 3 considers the creation and sharing of ‘hub dances’ – group dance exchange activities – across and between programme sites, to investigate what dance can tell us about local and/or global approaches to peacebuilding, including how these two different types of approaches are defined, interact, or may co-constitute one another. It also examines the political ramifications of this co-creation and/or interchange. The hub dances are envisioned to serve as a vehicle for cross-cultural moments of exchange and to provide opportunities for (re)creating identities in ways that can support peacebuilding. The use of hub dances also prompts further examination of the different cultural contexts in which conflict occurs. The practice also prompts reflection on the tensions between dance styles featuring individual or group freedoms versus the homogenisation of dance ideas. In short, complexities around hub dances help us to think through the possibilities of instilling stereotypes and/or being valued for difference. We consider the ways in which the creation, practice and exchange of hub dances enacts meaning around the identities of self, others and the community, and how this relates to the creation of broader social change for peacebuilding.

Chapter 4 explores practising peace by investigating a set of activities involving the use of mirroring movements. Cultivating empathy has been identified as one crucial element of building peace. As researchers have established, empathy is essential to the restructuring of relationships after violence. Mirroring is a well-established dance activity that is used in many settings and contexts, including theatre, dance therapy, dance education and community dance. Simple variations are also included in some mainstream

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peacebuilding resources as icebreakers. The case studies across cultures demonstrate that peace must be practised, and the process of mirroring provides opportunities for this. It invites interpersonal exchange and builds kinaesthetic, or felt, empathy, which provides avenues through which to see, understand and feel others across difference. In addition to the potential of empathy within peacebuilding, this chapter discusses the politics of empathy and its challenges in arts-based peacebuilding.

To date, practitioner self-care is underexplored in Peace and Conflict Studies, even though peacebuilders themselves could benefit immensely from further investigation in this area, which could in turn strengthen the depth and quality of their work as facilitators for peace. The research for this book suggested that participants had an opportunity to experience themselves in ways that enabled them to express a deeper sense of self-understanding, embodiment and strength to go on with their work. Beginning with an exploration of the practice of relaxation embedded in the programme and across the case studies, in Chapter 5 we consider how, in the midst of difficult work in conflict-ridden circumstances, peacebuilders have embraced the opportunities that dance provides to relieve stress and re-engage with their bodies. Chapter 5 acknowledges that diverse bodies may be placed differently in settings of conflict. It also interrogates the prospects and challenges posed by gender and age norms in particular sites of peacebuilding. We suggest that dance has broader implications in peacebuilding because it can help enable a more reflective stance for considering conflict. In this sense, it has the potential to offer new, creative directions for pursuing peace.

The conclusion summarises the key points of the preceding chapters and identifies implications for theory and practice. It considers how creative approaches such as dance have specific applications in relation to peacebuilding and why they matter more broadly. It also discusses the wider use of arts in peacebuilding and proposes suggestions for future relevant research.

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Notes

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- 2 E. Beausoleil, 'Dance and neuroscience: implications for conflict transformation', in *The Choreography of Resolution*, ed. by M. LeBaron, C. MacLeod and A. F. Acland (Chicago: American Bar Association, Section of Dispute Resolution, 2013), pp. 55–80; M. Eddy, 'Dancing solutions to conflict: field-tested somatic dance for peace', *Journal of Dance Education*, 16 (2016), pp. 99–111; E. R. Jeffrey and L. J. Pruitt, 'Dancing it out: building positive peace', in *Dance and the Quality of Life*, ed. by K. Bond (New York: Springer, 2018), pp. 475–93.
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- 27 A pseudonym has been chosen for the organisation to preserve the anonymity of research participants in sites with small numbers of interviewees.
- 28 All interviewees will be referred to using a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

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