Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts: A Virtual Collection

Synthesis

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I. Overview

Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts was an inquiry into the unique relationship between aesthetic experience and the processes of intercommunal reconciliation. The fellowship began with the positing of a conception of reconciliation, an articulation of the tasks that might be required in order for people who have been alienated from one another by oppression, violence, and war to restore trust and a recognition of their interdependence. We offered for consideration a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which aesthetic experiences are uniquely suited for supporting reconciliation work. (See the introduction to this collection for a fuller discussion of this framework.)

The fellowship then proceeded as a consideration, an investigation, a revision of these definitions and theories. The Fellows spent a year reflecting upon aspects of their practices as artists, cultural workers, and peacebuilders, at least partly reconsidering their practices in light of the theoretical framework discussed at the outset of the fellowship, and reconsidering the theoretical framework in light of their own practices.

In this section, we have synthesized what we have learned from conducting this investigation into the complex and multi-faceted relationship between the arts, culture, and reconciliation. We have incorporated here important knowledge and diverse perspectives of the ten Fellows.
This synthesis consists of three parts: What We Have Learned, Questions and Dilemmas for Reflection, and Recommendations for Policymakers and Funders. In the first part, we present our learnings in five broad categories, highlighting the most salient and widely applicable of the Fellows' insights, both those that are explicitly stated in their papers, portfolios, and creative projects and those that are suggested in them more subtly. We have looked for and articulated common themes, areas where the work of different Fellows (in different media and different parts of the world) seemed to point to similar truths.

In the second part, we articulate some of the challenging questions and dilemmas that seem to be at the core of reconciliation work in general, and arts-and-culture-based reconciliation work specifically. Many of the Fellows' papers, portfolios, and creative projects either directly address or suggest a set of questions that practitioners in their specific contexts grapple with, questions that are ripe for further exploration. Here, we have highlighted those questions that cut across a number of the Fellows' reflections, and that seem to have broad and pressing relevance to the work of reconciliation. Ultimately, there are no simple or certain answers for these questions. Rather, they are questions peacebuilders must ask themselves again and again, grappling with them continually as they engage in their difficult work.

In the third part, we put forth a set of recommendations for policymakers and funders who are concerned about the destructive effects of violent conflict and who want to support effective reconciliation initiatives. With these recommendations we have made explicit the exigencies that are implicit in the Fellows' descriptions and analyses of their work.

We hope that this synthesis will be useful to and meaningful for other peacebuilders, artists, cultural workers, policymakers, and funders.