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Music development and post-conflict reconciliation in Sri Lanka

GILLIAN HOWELL

ABSTRACT  Can music development programs such as large-scale public festivals help to repair the sociocultural divisions wrought by war and violent conflict? If so, under what facilitating conditions? This chapter engages with these questions, presenting research into the Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation, a partnership between Sri Lankan development NGO Sevalanka Foundation and Concerts Norway, the Norwegian state concerts agency that was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2009 to 2018.

KEYWORDS  music development | reconciliation | music festivals | intergroup contact theory | Sri Lanka


NØKkelas/ord  musikk-utviklingsprosjekt | forsoning | musikkfestivaler | Sri Lanka | inter-gruppe kontaktteori

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INTRODUCTION

When the civil war in Sri Lanka reached its destructive yet decisive end in 2009, the social, cultural, economic, political and environmental tolls on the country and its people were immense. Three decades of fighting between the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam [LTTE] and the Sri Lankan government armed forces had entrenched geographical divisions between the populations of the North and East of the island (the main war-affected areas) and the rest of the country. Major connecting routes were off-limits or only recently opened; many parts of the country remained militarized, with military personnel a standard sight; and checkpoints existed, challenging freedom of movement and any presumptions of a unified and accessible national territory (Subramanian, 2014). The spatial divisions reinforced existing linguistic divisions, perpetuated through monolingual education systems (with schools and universities denoted as Sinhala-, Tamil- or English-medium) and the limited opportunities or incentives to develop proficiency in another local language (Davis, 2015; Herath, 2015). The “victor’s peace” that the war’s military conclusion produced had left the conflict that fueled the civil war in stalemate, and consequently the war-weary population was divided emotionally, psychologically and politically, as well as spatially and linguistically.

Meanwhile, the war had destroyed infrastructure and many of the material resources of communities in the war-affected areas. Across the Northern and Eastern provinces, people had been displaced multiple times, with a resulting loss of connection to their traditional lands and the resources with which to affirm their cultural identity to each other and others. Of particular interest to this study is the fact that these losses included instruments, costumes and performance spaces.

Into this complex space entered a radically different post-conflict reconciliation project. The Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation (hereafter referred to as SLNMC or the Music Cooperation) was a program that sought to “strengthen reconciliation through music activities” in post-war Sri Lanka (Concerts Norway, 2015), using music and performing arts as a platform to bring divided people together into shared meeting spaces, while simultaneously reviving, strengthening and celebrating the diverse folk traditions of modern Sri Lanka. It built upon Norwegian partner Concerts Norway’s expertise in music sector development (they had established similar development-focused music co-operations in Nepal, Bangladesh, China and Palestine, among others), and Sri Lankan partner Sevalanka Foundation’s expertise in community development, their island-wide agencies and established community networks. The flagship event of the SLNMC was an annual folk music festival, held in Jaffna (in the Tamil-majority North) and Galle (in the Sinhalese-majority South) in alternate years, in addition
to a year-round program of capacity building for different elements of the music sector.

The idea that reviving and strengthening the music sector could concurrently reconnect and strengthen society and therefore support reconciliation was taken as a matter of faith. At the time of the first Jaffna Music Festival in 2011, the act of bringing diverse artists together in a shared “artist village” for three days and presenting performances of traditions that had lain dormant during the war years was so novel and so emotionally charged that the festival acquired the mantle of “reconciliation” almost by default (Fernando & Rambukwella, 2014; Sevalanka Foundation, 2011, 2012). However, by 2015, new demands from the program donor (the Norwegian Embassy and its upstream funder, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) for a more robust assessment of the SLNMC’s achievement of reconciliation goals prompted the partner organizations Concerts Norway and Sevalanka Foundation to seek external expertise to ascertain how their development of the Sri Lankan music sector was delivering on its mission to support Sri Lanka’s post-war reconciliation agenda. I took on this role in 2016, and the findings and conclusions presented in this chapter are drawn from that research (see Howell, 2016).

This chapter responds to the questions, “Can music development programs such as large-scale public festivals contribute to reconciliation following war and violent conflict? If so, under what conditions?” It shows that while music development work shares a number of practices and values in common with “music for reconciliation” work, there are important conditions and points of divergence that are critical to the realization of goals in the latter. These divergences are particularly evident in relation to festival programming. To demonstrate this, I first present a theoretical framework linking music participation, intergroup contact and reconciliation. I then present empirical findings that illustrate both the potential and the constraints of these efforts in relation to inter-group reconciliation.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MUSIC AND RECONCILIATION

“Reconciliation” is a much-debated and multi-faceted concept associated with a complex of tasks with societal, cultural, political, educational, individual and even economic dimensions. These multiple dimensions meant that the first step in developing the theoretical framework for this study of the SLNMC was to determine which aspects of the festival experience might be generating conciliatory experiences for which participant groups. At the outset of the research program in 2016, I encountered some program advisors who believed festival audiences were
the desired group for change. The experience of sharing the concerts with fellow audience members from different ethno-religious groups, as well as through the symbolic power of seeing performers from both sides of the conflict sharing the stage together and enacting inter-ethnic “harmony” (Belkind, 2010; Dardashti, 2013; Howell, 2018), would, they believed, promote conciliatory feelings across the audience. However, while shared festival experiences may help to reinforce existing social bonds (Wilson, Arshed, Shaw & Pret, 2017), research indicates that they are unlikely to generate what social capital theorist Robert Putnam refers to as the bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) that links hitherto divided or unlike groups. This is despite the general sense of friendliness and trust that many festival attenders identify (Wilks, 2011).

Therefore, rather than looking for change among audiences, this research investigated positive changes towards reconciliation among the festival artists, adopting Bloomfield’s (2006) conceptualization of reconciliation as an interpersonal process taking place at the individual and community levels of society through social and cultural tasks. Interpersonal conciliatory processes complement the structural and political processes that produce change at the societal level; however, the two approaches (interpersonal and structural/political) require very different tools and tasks, with interpersonal reconciliation working from the bottom up.

Cohen’s (2005) theoretical framework for reconciliation through the arts offered guidance on what these bottom-up, social and cultural tasks might look like in reconciliation work taking place through aesthetic, artistic engagements. Strongly grounded in the experiences of peacebuilding practitioners, this framework is concerned with the deep and often daunting interpersonal processes required to “transform relationships of hatred and mistrust into relationships of trust and trustworthiness” among former adversaries (p. 10). Cohen’s framework proposes seven tasks that support this transformation:

1. Appreciating each other’s humanity and respecting each other’s culture
2. Telling and listening to each other’s stories, and developing more complex narratives and more nuanced understandings of identity
3. Acknowledging harms, telling truths and mourning losses
4. Empathizing with each other’s suffering
5. Acknowledging and redressing injustices
6. Expressing remorse, repenting, apologizing; letting go of bitterness, forgiving
7. Imagining and substantiating a new future, including agreements about how future conflicts will be engaged constructively.

(Cohen, 2005, pp. 10–11)
Of these, the first two tasks were assessed as likely to be accommodated within a music development program and therefore part of an artist’s experience in an intercultural music festival. They can be summarized as tasks of intercultural learning, respect and appreciation. The remainder of this article will use the phrase cultural learning to encompass these first two tasks.

A further concern for the SLNMC research project was to consider the extent to which the SLNMC festival experiences were likely to result in positive changes to the interpersonal relationships among artists from different communities. Intergroup Contact Theory provided a model for considering the quality of contact between groups, and the interpersonal transformations that could be connected to this.

Arising within the field of social psychology, Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Hewstone, 2003; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011) theorizes the conditions, mechanisms and moderating factors through which contact between conflicting groups is likely to result in a reduction in prejudices, and the development of more positive perceptions of each other. This enduring theory – first proposed by Allport in 1954, developed further by other scholars (see Pettigrew et al., 2011, for a detailed review) and used effectively as an evaluation framework for music and conflict transformation projects (Bergh, 2010) – proposes that the conditions of the contact situation are key to the outcomes of the contact, mediated by the type of activities and tasks, and moderated by the meaning that the contact holds for participants. Table 11.1, below, summarizes the main points of the theory.

Across the contact theory literature, the possibility of generating affective ties and forming friendships is consistently shown to be an immensely important factor (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Friendships formed through repeated contact are likely generators of positive behaviors for prejudice reduction, such as increased empathy, self-disclosure, reduced anxiety and more nuanced perspectives on the other group (Hewstone, 2003; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Intergroup friendships also increase knowledge about the other group, enhancing the potential for cultural learning.

Considered together, these two theoretical models indicated a framework for understanding and assessing the potential for interpersonal reconciliation through arts processes. They suggested that reconciliation outcomes would be best supported in the Music Cooperation through opportunities for artists to engage in deep and nuanced learning about the other group and through contact among artists from different cultural/ethnic/linguistic groups that addressed the conditions, mediators and moderators of contact theory, with particular emphasis on the opportunity to build strong affective ties and make friends.
TABLE 11.1 Summary of Intergroup Contact Theory created by the author after Pettigrew et al. (2011) and Hewstone (2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITIONS</th>
<th>If contact takes place between two (conflicting) groups in situations where</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is equal status between groups</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The situation is one where stereotypes are likely to be disconfirmed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The group members share a common goal or objective for the contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intergroup cooperation is required</td>
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<td></td>
<td>They have the opportunity to get to know each other properly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The contact has the support of authorities or leaders, and wider social norms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>support contact and equality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIATORS</th>
<th>And there are opportunities for group members to be engaged in</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning about the out-group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Behavior-driven attitude change (e.g., forming more positive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>towards out-group members through being involved in a cooperative lea-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rning task with them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-group re-appraisal, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generating affective ties and forming friendships</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODERATORS</th>
<th>And if</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The intergroup contact is meaningful to the involved parties, rather than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>superficial;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is strong group salience (meaning that it is evident which group each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participant belongs to); and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The contact has been entered into voluntarily by all parties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then the contact is more likely to result in “more positive, or at least less negative, out-group attitudes” (Hewstone, 2003, p. 352).

METHODOLOGY

As already noted, this chapter draws upon data from a larger research project that took place in Sri Lanka between February and May 2016. That larger project involved a mixed methods design and considered multiple components of the Music Cooperation’s programming. However, this chapter presents the findings
relating to performer experiences of the Jaffna and Galle Music Festivals, which used qualitative data only.

The research design focused in particular on seeking out performers who had had two or more festival experiences, as this increased the likelihood (without guaranteeing it) that they might have had repeated meetings with artists from other parts of the country. Data gathering focused on artists’ perspectives (rather than organizers’ perspectives) for two reasons: first, it was useful to create some distance from the more idealistic rhetoric and assumptions of program organizers, who could be deemed to be professionally invested in the reconciliation outcomes of the project being presented in the most positive light (Bergh, 2010). More importantly, the conceptualization of the festivals as sites for interpersonal reconciliation among artists positioned the artists as the “first line” targets and key agents of change. They were therefore considered the best-placed to reveal the reconciliation achievements of the Music Cooperation’s festival activities.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the primary data-gathering tool. The interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter and sought to understand the opportunities for sustained friendships and intercultural learning that the festivals provided. The interviews also invited discussion of any other significant changes that had occurred as a result of the artists’ Music Festival experiences. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, and further contextualized with participant observation of the 2016 Galle Music Festival, in which the researcher was both an observer and an active participant in one of the stage acts. Data from these observations were also included in the analysis. Table 11.2, below, gives the full list of informants, with their festival performances indicated as JMF (Jaffna Music Festival) and GMF (Galle Music Festival), and the relevant years of their participation.
TABLE 11.2 Research participants, locations and festival appearances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist/group name</th>
<th>Art form</th>
<th>Regional/Cultural group</th>
<th>Festival participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kovalan Koothu</td>
<td>Tamil Folk Theatre</td>
<td>Northern province, Mullaitivu, war-affected area</td>
<td>JMF 2011, GMF 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaffer Manja</td>
<td>Afro-Portuguese derived <em>baila</em> dance music</td>
<td>West coast Minority group with African heritage</td>
<td>GMF 2013, JMF 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kali Kambatam</td>
<td>Muslim music and dance</td>
<td>Eastern province, Akkarai-pattu near Batticaloa (war-affected, tsunami-affected area)</td>
<td>JMF 2013, GMF 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangala Isai</td>
<td>Tamil art music – professional performers</td>
<td>Northern province, Jaffna</td>
<td>JMF 2013, GMF 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thappu drumming group</td>
<td>Parai drummers and dancers</td>
<td>Northern province, Kili-nochchi (war-affected area)</td>
<td>JMF 2015, GMF 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navadharshani</td>
<td>Tamil musicologist; professor of performing arts, Jaffna University</td>
<td>Northern province, Jaffna</td>
<td>Consultant to JMF 2011, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FINDINGS**

The findings are presented here under four themes. The first two – cultural learning and the generation of affective ties and friendships – were the main subjects of interest as determined by the overarching theoretical framework for the study. However, the artist informants also discussed barriers and obstacles that limited the depth of these opportunities for learning and friendship, and these are considered as a separate theme. The fourth theme, capacity building, emerged as a source of significant positive change that artists associated with their festival participation. Capacity building was found to help create what Allport (1954) considers to be optimal conditions for intergroup contact.

**CULTURAL LEARNING**

Artists described opportunities for both inter- and intra-cultural learning within the Music Festivals. *Inter*-cultural learning refers to learning about the cultural
practices of other groups, while *intra*-cultural learning concerns a deepened understanding of the diversity and nuances of practices within their own cultural group. The research found that both types of cultural learning had implications for strengthening reconciliation.

Inter- and *intra*-cultural learning took place through four mechanisms in particular: seeing and hearing new sounds, performance forms, and performers (including international artists); having conversations with other artists about performance forms and instruments; getting to try the instruments of other performers; and through actively exchanging knowledge and skills, such as through performing together or teaching each other.

For many artists, seeing and hearing new sounds and performance forms was a significant and valued learning opportunity, given the way the war years had eroded opportunities for performers from different communities to meet and perform for each other. For example,

> The performance [in JMF 2011] gave us a chance for other people to come, other performers, the Sinhalese people, to come and talk to us. And they had a kind of passion to learn more about our art form. And we had time to learn that too. We had time to talk with these people. (Kovolan Koothu focus group)

Artists from minority groups were glad to have the opportunity to educate others about their folk forms. For example, the Muslim Kali Kambatam performers were eager to dispel the entrenched idea that “the Muslims don’t dance” or that dance is *haram* [forbidden] for them. They were proud to show off their intricate stick dance and percussion tradition and delighted to witness other people’s curiosity. *Intra*-cultural learning within the Music Festivals was particularly pronounced for artists from the war-affected areas, as the militarization of the Northern province meant that “even the Vanni people had never met the Jaffna people [two war-affected regions in the North] or seen their performances. We don’t have connections with others, we are all isolated” (Navadharshani, Jaffna Music Festival consultant).

In this context, *intra*-cultural learning was an important step in celebrating connections and diversity, which supported community healing, which in turn laid the foundations for appreciating the culture and identity markers of others. *Intra*-cultural exchanges were fortified through a further SLNMC programming strategy of producing “village-level” festivals in which rural performers presented local traditions to local audiences. Village-level festivals were programmed as “dress rehearsals” for performances at the national-level (and higher-profile) Jaffna or
Galle Music Festivals, but they simultaneously represented a significant investment in the revival and local celebration of traditional practices that the war years had disrupted. SLNMC financial and intellectual support enabled village custodians of the traditional music, dance and theatre forms to rehearse, train new performers and strengthen their performance practices. Thus, intra-cultural learning can be connected to the outcome of capacity building and will be discussed shortly.

The most substantial examples of intercultural learning were found in two cross-community collaborative projects that involved young music and dance students in creating performance works that integrated performance elements from all the traditions represented in the groups. These collaborations took place in the weeks leading up to the 2016 Galle Music Festival, and the performance groups were included in the Festival program. The projects demanded high levels of collaboration and navigation of different cultural practices, and involved the performers presenting music and dance from their own and other groups’ traditions. They were projects in which cooperation between groups towards a shared goal was required, and that were supported by higher-level authorities (such as university institutions and Church sponsors), and thus addressed a number of the conditions, mediators and moderators of Intergroup Contact Theory, as summarized in Table 11.1.

Overall, artist informants valued the opportunity to learn more about other cultural groups, an important mediator in Intergroup Contact Theory and a key task in Cohen’s framework for arts-based reconciliation. However, the interactions within the main festival model rarely went beyond superficial exchanges of information, suggesting that the festivals played a useful role in making introductions, but were not necessarily positioned to facilitate deeper cross-cultural engagements in most artists’ experiences, or to robustly disconfirm stereotypes.

AFFECTIVE TIES AND FRIENDSHIPS

Many of the interviewed artists described open and friendly interactions with the artists they met through their Music Cooperation experiences. During the first two music festivals in particular (Jaffna Music Festival 2011 and Galle Music Festival 2012), when the artists were accommodated together in a purpose-built, temporary Artist Village, performers had ample time to interact and socialize in unscheduled, organic ways. Artists experienced multiple occasions of singing, playing and dancing together; sharing food; and “talking about positive things, and also about the difficult things that we had in our lives” (Kovalan Koothu focus
This engagement in processes such as self-disclosure and empathy corresponds with the tasks that Cohen’s theoretical framework for reconciliation through the arts and the conditions that Intergroup Contact Theory suggest can lead to reduced intergroup prejudice.

Supporting this, several of the artist groups observed that the Music Festival offered artists a space where they could engage with each other as musicians and artists, rather than as representatives of their ethnic group. As the Kovalan Koothu artists explained, “We were together in that moment because we were all folk artists there. No race was looked at”. The artists suggested that an important mechanism for friendship formation was having the opportunity to meet on multiple occasions. For example, the Kovalan Koothu artists (Tamil, from Mullaitivu) formed a friendship with a group of Sinhalese performers (from Kurunegala). They first met at the 2011 Jaffna Festival, then met again at the 2012 Galle Festival.

Researcher: When you saw them again in 2012, did you remember each other? Artist: Oh yes [emphatic]. We had a very good acquaintance and interaction with them. They came to our performance and when it finished the close bonds were still there. Some of the performers came from Kurunegala and we would send cards to each other for Sinhalese and Tamil New Year. At that time, we were talking about teaching each other our respective music and theatre forms … we talked about how they [the Kurunegala group] wanted to perform here in the Tamil area. That is an indicator of how strong the relationship between us was at that time. (Kovolan Koothu focus group)

Other groups (e.g., Kali Kambatam, Kaffer Manja) reported meeting artists they had met at the Galle or Jaffna Music Festival at subsequent events organized by third parties, such as the Government of Sri Lanka’s festivities for Independence Day, or the cultural program attached to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Colombo in 2013. This suggests that SLNMC participation positioned artists to become part of a national network of recognized folk performers, and friendships could form through the interactions that occurred through these wider networks. However, as with the findings connected to cultural learning, the main outcomes connected to the formation of affective ties between artists from divided communities are suggestive of seeds planted towards possible friendships, rather than the creation of robust ties that could endure beyond the boundaries of the SLMNC activities. There were a number of reasons for this containment, which we now examine.
BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES TO FRIENDSHIPS AND LEARNING

Many artists found that the time allowed within festival schedules for artist interactions was very limited, particularly from 2013 onwards when the festivals moved from the three-day “Artist Village” model to shorter events. Artist groups had bespoke travel and accommodation arrangements and tightly packed schedules that did not allow them to witness each other’s performances, share meals, gather in social groups or exchange information about their cultural practices in any meaningful way.

Additionally, there were few opportunities for repeated meetings within the SLNMC structure. The festival programmers sought to share opportunities for music development widely across the island, and to present new artists to its audiences each year. From the artists’ point of view, this diluted the potential for intercultural exchange and friendship formation that the festivals promised.

The best way to converse is through [seeing each other’s] performance. But we only had limited opportunities to perform. Often a group comes for the first time, and then the second time we don’t see the same group. I don’t know why the selection committee rejects them or whatever it is. But for our folk traditions to be kept in good form [and by implication the social bonds] then the same groups should be selected for the next program. (Kovalan Koottu focus group)

Communication barriers also limited opportunities for artists to form meaningful cross-community friendships, given Sri Lanka’s institutionalized language segregation, and the paucity of bilingualism (across Sinhala and Tamil) among the population (Davis, 2015). According to one group, language was the first and most prominent barrier.

If we know the language, then lots of things become easier. We used a little English when we could, and some people were translating for other people. Each group has got a translator with them, so they helped us too. (Kali Kambatam focus group)

An interesting finding was that the social goals of the Festival were outside the interest and focus of professional performers (here “professional” denotes those artists who regularly perform outside their communities in response to invitations and paid bookings and earn a significant proportion of their income from music). One Tamil group, responding to a question about the Music Festival’s capacity to generate cross-community friendships, explained:
We are all just there performing our music, and when the concert is finished then everything gets finished. At the 2014 festival, the connection with other artists was not anything special. We made their acquaintance, but it didn’t progress from there. If there were social meetings organized for the artists, we would be happy to take part, but if there was another engagement we had to go to, then that is what we would prioritize. (Mangala Isai focus group, Jaffna)

In contrast, community-level artists repeatedly nominated the experience of meeting other performers – Sri Lankan, international and of different faith groups – as one of the most important outcomes of their Festival experience. This finding has implications for artist selection and festival programming: SLNMC festival programmers did not explicitly consider whether the artists selected each year were interested and invested in forming cross-community friendships with other performers.

For those artists who formed friendships and hoped to continue an independent and on-going exchange, such as the aforementioned friendship between the Tamil Kovalan Koothu artists and the Sinhalese artists from Kurunegala, financial and political barriers arose. Following their 2012 meeting, these two artist groups conceived a plan for further skills exchanges, in which the Kurunegala group would travel to Mullaitivu (a town in the Tamil-majority north-east of the island) in order to learn the Kovalan Koothu folk theatre form, and to teach wood-carving skills in exchange. The artists offered to do this for free. However, as the Kovalan Koothu focus group explained, other financial barriers remained, such as the need for artists to be compensated for their time away from other work. Many folk artists subsist on daily wage labor, and therefore any travel away from home impacts the household income significantly.

In addition, there was a perception of likely political resistance:

Mostly all the folk artists are not very much into politics. But the non-artists in charge, or the group leaders in the background, they are political. And because of this and of the financial problems, it is not easy to be able to go somewhere else and do a performance. If we Tamil artists want to go out of the North, there are ethnic problems. Not from the performers but from those who could be behind them. The government, and some local leaders. (Kovalan Koothu focus group)

Thus, while the Festival model theoretically had potential to deliver opportunities for intercultural learning and cross-community friendships, there were numerous barriers linked to festival programming, scheduling and artist selection. For those
artists eager to maintain their connections beyond the festival, the realities of entrenched linguistic and political segregation created obstacles that were insurmountable without access to further resources. The festival experience planted the seeds of possibility but struggled to nurture these seeds further. To do so would have required some different strategies, and this will be considered in the Discussion section of this chapter. However, these barriers did not mean that the artists’ SLNMC experience was a negative one. All of those interviewed shared stories of significant change that had occurred in their lives due to their SLNMC participation. These changes have an indirect link to reconciliation goals and are discussed next.

CAPACITY BUILDING

All of the folk artists interviewed for this research were adamant that the most significant changes that the SLNMC had brought about in their artistic lives came as a result of the Music Cooperation’s support and investments in art-form revival and performance skills. There was a cascading effect, initiated through provision of material supports, that led to greater public and state recognition of the performance traditions and their custodians.

Material supports (such as new instruments, replenished costumes and resources for staging and presentation at both village- and national-level festivals) enabled damaged and endangered performance traditions to be revived and shared once again with their communities.

Through displacement [the war-affected artists] lost everything to perform with, they don’t have anything even to live with. They had stopped imagining that they could have the chance to perform again, or that they could have a life like that. Then Sevalanka provided the essential things like costumes and instruments and they started to perform. (Navadharshani, Jaffna Music Festival Consultant, 2011, 2013)

Through these investments and performance opportunities, the folk artists began to see the esteem that their performances garnered in the eyes of outsiders. This was a significant change, as many of the artists from war-affected areas were highly self-conscious about the decades spent away from their art form. According to Navadharshani, many had “an inferiority complex. They felt they had not been trained for the stage or had the same performance experiences as the Sinhala artists had.” Furthermore, their performance forms were traditionally only presented in community settings. Those from rural, minority or historically low-caste
folk traditions suspected that their folk instruments denoted them as “working on a different level” to musicians playing more modern instruments or presenting urban or court-derived art forms.

The recognition and admiration the artists found in that positive “outsider” perspective brought psychological benefits. Artists saw the ways their performances inspired and satisfied others. The Thappu drummers were very encouraged by the interest that other artists and foreigners showed in their performance at Jaffna Music Festival in 2015. “They asked, ‘Where can we learn this drumming?’” (Thappu Drummers focus group, Kilinochchi). The Kaffer Manja musicians were thrilled and proud to find that their performances of Afro-Portuguese-derived baila music inspired the festival audience to leave their seats and begin to dance, having remained seated for all the earlier performers.

The initial investment from the Music Cooperation also made participation in national and local festivals or other performance platforms viable, enabling many of the artists to perform outside their village or local context more frequently (Navadharshani, Jaffna Music Festival Consultant, 2011, 2013), including on television (Kaffer Manja focus group). Invitations from state institutions arrived for some. For example, the Tamil Parai drummers, a traditionally low-status group whose music is typically associated with funerals, were one of the stand-out acts of the 2011 Jaffna Music Festival. After the festival, Jaffna University decided to open an auspicious event with Parai drummers rather than with the more typical higher-status instruments (Navadharshani, Jaffna Music Festival consultant), indicating a positive shift in perception of the Parai art form in the Tamil community. The Kali Kambatam performers noted that they were “the only Sri Lanka Muslim group performing at [the 2013] festival” and believed that their inclusion had been instrumental in helping to build the profile of Muslim performance forms in Sri Lanka. They considered that this recognition helped to persuade the state music competitions to include a category for Muslim music traditions, alongside those already existing for Tamil and Sinhalese performers.

For all of the artists interviewed, increased esteem and agency prompted them to think more positively about the future. “Being given the chance to perform in the festival changed our psychological satisfaction towards our future and towards everything. We now had something to do, to take charge of” (Kovalan Koothu focus group). This was in stark contrast to the sense of desolation that many artists experienced in the initial aftermath of the war, when many “stopped imagining that they could have the chance to perform again, or that they could have a life like that” (Navadharshani, Jaffna Music Festival consultant). The artists described the way that their festival experiences and subsequent invitations prompted them to
approach the future more strategically. They “needed to become more organized, [as they had] bookings in the calendar a long way in advance” (Kaffer Manja focus group), and to start to train the next generation of performers in order to meet the demand for performances and preserve their traditions.

These experiences (of recognition, performance opportunities and positive orientation towards the future) combined to counteract and disprove feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. This contributed one of the facilitating conditions of positive intergroup contact, that of equal group status (see Table 11.1). This is a significant finding. When considerable power asymmetry exists between conflicting social groups (such as through perceptions of higher and lesser status, greater or lesser education and competence, greater or lesser legitimacy), it can hinder tasks of interpersonal reconciliation (Rouhana, 2004). But the more secure psychological and emotional foundations that capacity-building work helped to establish enabled artists from minority groups or from the war-affected and less developed regions of the island to participate on a more equal footing with their Sinhalese counterparts; this meant that all participants were better placed to build positive affective ties and engage in cultural learning exchanges. In other words, through helping to establish feelings of equal group status among the festival performers, the capacity-building aspects of music development helped to prepare the ground for the SLNMC goal of interpersonal reconciliation.

Across each of these outcomes – cultural learning, friendship formation and capacity building – it is clear that the conditions and mechanisms that Intergroup Contact Theory suggests help to reduce intercultural prejudice (see Table 11.1) were only modestly present. The different ethnic groups sometimes needed to cooperate, they sometimes had the opportunity to get to know each other properly and to learn more about each other’s lives and practices; there was tacit (sometimes enthusiastic) support from higher authorities; there were sometimes opportunities to form friendships; and capacity-building work helped to create a more equal status between the groups. The next section considers the implications of these ambivalent findings, and what that indicates about positioning music festivals, and music development more broadly, as a strategy for supporting reconciliation.

DISCUSSION: MAKING MUSIC FESTIVALS WORK AS VEHICLES FOR RECONCILIATION

The findings of this research indicate that the SLNMC music festivals can only claim an equivocal contribution to reconciliation goals. The organizers and donors had hoped that through developing the skills and capacities of the folk music sec-
tor and bringing diverse artists together for celebratory public festivals, artists would be able to reconnect, and the divisions of the war years would be dismantled (or at least, the process of dismantling would begin). However, the festival experience was intensive and short; it offered scant opportunities for meaningful exchanges between the artists. This meant that the interpersonal tasks required to take any initial connections between artists beyond mere acquaintance and exposure were unlikely to occur. The festivals were positioned as the flagship SLNMC event each year in terms of investment of resources and public recognition, but for the artists, the festivals represented only the starting point for intercultural learning and ties. Just as the seeds were planted, the support for their germination and blossoming ended.

These outcomes indicate that music development programming has some potential to contribute towards reconciliation between divided groups, potential that was under-realized in the SLNMC program. Reconciliation was a presumed by-product of the programming strategy of presenting folk traditions from across the island, juxtaposing artists from across the lines of political division and enabling (to some extent) artists to interact and learn from each other. Intergroup Contact Theory offers a theoretical guide for the way that the conditions and mechanisms associated with the music interactions could bring these presumed by-products more reliably to the fore. We can thus speculate that more substantive reconciliation outcomes could have been achieved if organizational decisions around programming, scheduling and logistics had strategically prioritized interpersonal relationships and opportunities for interArtist learning as part of the music development.

There are some notable ways that a festival-programming logic concerned with music development diverges from a festival-programming logic seeking to develop conciliatory cross-community relations through music. Consider, for example, the logics that drive scheduling and programming decisions. A music development goal may be to create greater recognition and performance opportunities for as wide a range of folk performance forms as possible. This goal might be delivered through a programming strategy of including many different artists and groups in the annual festivals, filling the schedule with presentational activities and offering constant new discoveries for audiences. Artist selection decisions would be made on each performer’s (or group’s) capacity to engage the audience and represent the high quality and diversity of performance forms in the folk music and dance sector.

However, a “music for reconciliation” programming strategy would seek to maximize the quality of relationships between the artists. It might prioritize the
building of meaningful social connections and bonds between performers and enable these to be strengthened through multiple and/or prolonged occasions to meet, talk, play and collaborate. The reconciliation goal suggests a programming strategy of repeat invitations to perform; of scheduling the artists’ activities within the festival to maximize opportunities for cross-cultural interactions, exchanges, shared unstructured downtime and dialogue between artists; and even of targeting specific communities where the most impact on reconciliation can be made. Music development would be the overt reason for the gathering, and would also be an outcome of the festival, but the intention towards reconciliation would require quite different strategies to those for a music development festival without the reconciliation overlay.

In a programming logic seeking to develop the music sector, festivals might play an important culminating role, providing a way to celebrate the achievements within the sector and build new audiences. The Jaffna and Galle Music Festivals played this kind of role. However, the findings in this research indicate that for artists, the festivals offer an initial opportunity to connect with other artists. Artist interviews indicated that subsequent exchanges and collaborations between artists are more likely sites for nurturing and deepening social bonds and intercultural learning exchange. Therefore, repeated opportunities to meet, connect and collaborate are important. With this in mind, festivals should be planned as components within a multi-year endeavor in order to build cross-community connections between artists, rather than as culminating events.

In both programming logics, building the capacity of local traditions and practicing artists (i.e., strengthening practices and practitioners and access to resources and infrastructure) plays a highly significant role. Within a music development logic, it is a goal within itself. Within a “music for reconciliation” model, building capacity serves an additional purpose of establishing the important condition of equal group status among the performers. It is a necessary step in laying the groundwork for positive and forward-looking artist interactions, and is highly valued among artists. Similarly, investing resources towards intra-cultural learning supports feelings of equal status and value among artists, increasing predispositions towards reconciliation.

These learnings lead us towards a possible logic model for music festivals as part of a larger music development and reconciliation initiative (Figure 11.1, below). A noteworthy aspect of this model is that the music festival is a midpoint in the process, rather than a culminating event, and its purpose is one of energizing, inspiring and connecting people prior to further scaffolded development programs. It is described in the model as a “national” event, but the scale and scope
of the festival should be determined with consideration for artists’ performance strengths, as well as for the benefits that high production values may afford in terms of status and importance to the work of folk artists.

The logic model shows that the tasks of music development and reconciliation can be connected in a meaningful way, but also shows that the intentions that underpin strategies and stages in the music development process are paramount. It concurs with the intuitive idea that drawing divided people together across and through music can help to strengthen intergroup relations, but theorizes that this will occur as a result of strategic effort rather than as a by-product. Importantly, the model shifts the focus on music sharing as the primary mechanism of social change to the quality and conditions of the intergroup contact, and the depth to which the key reconciliation tasks (of learning and friendship formation) can be undertaken. Its components bear strong resemblance to those of the Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation, but the festival is an early rather than a culminating event, and it precedes an indeterminate set of “cross-community exchanges and collaborations”, as these are where the artist informants in this research indicate that a depth of cultural learning will occur and robust affective ties will be formed.
CONCLUSION

Reflecting on her experience of the festival programming in the Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation, Jaffna Music Festival advisor Navadharshani suggested that “psychologically, these performances of folk traditions were very essential for recreating our society and our minds”. The reviewed theories linking reconciliation and the arts concurred with this assessment, indicating that aesthetic experiences that draw divided people together could indeed help people navigate divisions that are entrenched in spirit and body, as well as in mind. But the findings of the 2016 research into SLNMC demonstrate that these projects are not straightforward. The operational context is complex, and the presence of multiple concurrent aspirations can complicate planning and programming. The answer to the research question, *Can music development programs such as large-scale public festivals contribute to reconciliation following war and violent conflict?* is therefore an ambivalent “maybe”.

This research found that if post-conflict reconciliation through music is the goal, it needs to be planned strategically, rather than left to simply occur as an organic and assumed by-product of intercultural music development activities. Planning for reconciliation through music diverges in key ways from that of music development, particularly with regard to programming, scheduling, and artist selection. At the same time, one of the staple activities of music development work, capacity building, makes an important contribution to cultural learning, confidence and recognition. External investment in resources, knowledge and skills, and provision of new platforms for promoting, celebrating and sharing folk performance practices, can help to ensure that all artists can participate in cross-community music activities on an equal (or less unequal) footing, an important pre-condition for positive intergroup cooperation and reconciliation.

Expressive culture and distinctive performance practices are indeed among the casualties of war, and there is something inherently heartening about the possibility that strengthening and replenishing traditional performance practices might also be a way to repair the damages to the social fabric. This chapter illustrates both the limitations and possibilities of post-conflict music development work as a vehicle for reconciliation, and offers a theoretical framework and logic model to guide future program implementation and development.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research project that this chapter presents took place in 2016 with funding through the Australian Government’s Endeavour Research Fellowship program. Fieldwork was undertaken between March and May 2016, and the completed report was made publicly available in November 2016. The author also thanks the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and critical feedback on an earlier draft of the chapter.

LITERATURE


