

# CREATIVITY IN CULTURAL PEACE WORK: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Thursday 15 May 2025  
12:00pm - 4:00pm  
Moot Court, School of Law,  
Queen's University Belfast



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**

THE SENATOR  
GEORGE J. MITCHELL  
INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL PEACE,  
SECURITY AND JUSTICE



**UNIVERSITY  
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# WELCOME

Cultural peace work refers to the active and dynamic role of the creative and cultural in peacebuilding. No single cultural form dominates peace work, rather an interconnected mosaic of local, place-specific programmes and groups engage with their landscapes and demographics to do the hard work of reducing cross-community segregation in Northern Ireland in meaningful ways through creative expression. However, such efforts are not always regarded as substantive in their impact on transformative relations nor held as tangible, productive modes of peacebuilding.

This workshop will bring together key community practitioners, city council, writers and academics to examine the significant relationship between creativity, culture and peace in Northern Ireland.

## Co-organisers

**Professor Fiona Magowan**

*Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace Security and Justice*

**Dr. Louise Harrington**

*University of Alberta, Canada*

# SCHEDULE

12:00pm - 1:00pm

## Lunch

1:00pm - 2:15pm

## Session 1

Presentations on the ways in which people do cultural peace work or research culture and peace.

### Chair:

Louise Harrington

### Panellists:

**Irene Boada-Montagut**, *Founder, Museum of the Troubles and Peace*

**Hilary Copeland**, *Director, Fighting Words NI*

**Niall Kerr**, *Head of Heritage and Community Relations, The Nerve Centre*

**Stefanie Lehner**, *Queen's University Belfast*

**Liam O'Hare**, *Queen's University Belfast*

2:15pm - 2:30pm

## Coffee break

2:30pm - 3:30pm

## Session 2

Roundtable on the relationship between creativity, culture and peace: opportunities and challenges.

### Chair:

Fiona Magowan

### Panellists:

**Sue Divin**, *Writer and peace worker*

**Fionnuala Fagan-Thiébot**, *Musician, installation artist and researcher*

**Eimear Henry**, *Creative and strategic lead, Belfast Stories*

**David Robinson**, *Good Relations Unit, City and Neighbourhood Services Department, Belfast City Council*

**Nisha Tandon**, *Chief executive, ArtsEkta*

3:30pm - 3:45pm

**Gail McConnell**, *Discussant, Queen's University Belfast*

4:00pm - 4:15pm

Closing discussion and further reflections



# BIOGRAPHIES



## **Dr. Louise Harrington**

Dr. Harrington is an Assistant Professor in postcolonial studies, decoloniality, and contemporary literatures in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta in Canada. She works primarily on cultural representations of peace, war and conflict, specializing in the study of Palestine and Israel, Northern Ireland, and South Asia. Other research projects focus on literary border studies and on Kurdish cultural production. She is leading a SSHRC-funded multidisciplinary research project (2022-25) that studies how a variety of cultural forms serve an essential function in mobilizing creative modes of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.



## **Professor Fiona Magowan**

Professor Magowan has published extensively on the analysis of conflict and the arts as well as on sex and gender in anthropology and ethnomusicology. Most recently, she has co-authored *Sounding Conflict: From Resistance to Reconciliation* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023) and co-authored/edited two books on sex and gender, *the Anthropology of Sex* (Berg, 2010 with Hastings Donnan) and *Transgressive Sex: Subversion and Control in Erotic Encounters* (Berghahn, 2009 with Hastings Donnan). Other work on performance includes the co-edited volume, *Performing Gender, Place and Emotion: Global Perspectives* (Rochester, 2013), which was nominated for the Seminar for Ethnomusicology's Marcia Herndon prize. Her research further addresses religion, performance and conflict in the co-edited volume *Christianity, Conflict and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific* (Brill, 2016 with Carolyn Schwarz). She has conducted long-term fieldwork in Australia and her authored book, *Melodies of Mourning*, shortlisted for the 2008 Australian Stanner Award, examines sense and emotion in performance. She has held a series of grants relating to conflict transformation and the arts. She was PI of *Sounding Conflict: From Resistance to Reconciliation* (AHRC 2017-2022) which explored sound, music, storytelling and digital media in Brazil, the Middle East and Northern Ireland.



### Hilary Copeland

Hilary Copeland is the inaugural Director of Fighting Words NI, the creative writing network for children and young people. Hilary has worked across business management, strategic planning, programming and events for cultural heritage and arts non-profits in Edinburgh, Belfast and Dublin since 2008. She is a founding member and former Chair of Integrated AlumNI, who advocate for Integrated Education, a movement which champions all-ability education for those of all faiths and none, addressing segregation in the education system in Northern Ireland. She sits on the Board of Trustees of Integrated Education Fund and as a Governor of New-Bridge Integrated College.



### Sue Divin

Sue Divin is a Derry based writer and peace worker, originally from Armagh. With a Masters in Peace and Conflict Studies and a career in local government Good Relations, her writing often touches on diversity, reconciliation, borders and the legacy of the Troubles today.

She has two Young Adult novels (Macmillan). *Truth Be Told* (Parent Trap meets Derry Girls) won the McCrea Literary Award and shortlisted in the Irish Book Awards and UK Literacy Awards. *Guard Your Heart* (A 'Romeo and Juliet' set in NI 2016) was Carnegie shortlisted and won the Great Reads Award (Ireland). She is working on her third novel, *I Once Was Lost* (exploring Youth Justice, Border and anti-racism themes).

Her writing has been described as '*Profoundly powerful, subtle and effective*' (The Guardian), '*Compelling*' (Irish Times) and '*Laced with dry wit, emotion and self-deprecating humour*' (Irish News). Of *Truth Be Told*, The Irish Times stated, '*This polished novel makes space for the messy complexity of human existence, and gently offers, but does not preach, hope.*'

She is a Director of Irish PEN/PEN na hÉireann and her novels are used internationally to teach about Northern Ireland through English language. In her 'day job' she is the Manager of Derry City and Strabane District Council's £8m PEACEPLUS Programme.



### **Fionnuala Fagan-Thiébot**

During the last 15 years, Fionnuala Fagan-Thiébot has carved out a path for herself as songwriter, composer and sound designer, with many critically-acclaimed performance projects under her belt, creatively re-telling oral histories of post-conflict communities.

Fionnuala was Artist-in-Residence at The Metropolitan Arts Centre Belfast in 2014, and was awarded a PhD from Sonic Arts Research Centre, Queen's University Belfast in 2015. Her research is published in the Oral History Journal, with four of her studio recorded albums archived at The British Library. Recent commissions include, Lisnabreeny Townland, a work for Solo Flute and Electronics for the Hard Rain Soloist Ensemble, and, Wondrous JAM, a piece for the children's choir at the Junior Academy of Music, Queen's University Belfast. Fionnuala is a recent recipient of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival Music Bursary and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland Project Fund, enabling her to record a collection of original songs in 2025.

Fionnuala lectures in Songwriting and Work-based Learning at Queen's University, Belfast. She works as Company Manager, Creative Reminiscence and Community Arts Facilitator at c21 Theatre Company.



### **Eimear Henry**

Eimear Henry has been involved with Belfast Stories since its conception in 2015 and in her current position as Creative and Strategic Lead is responsible for strategy, content and experience.

Having joined Belfast City Council in 2013, she has had various roles across Culture, Tourism and Regeneration including the development of A City Imagining, a ten-year cultural strategy, Make Yourself at Home, a vision for the future of tourism, Belfast's bid to become European Capital of Culture and its designation as a UNESCO City of Music.

Hugely passionate about supporting the creative capacity of individuals and communities, Eimear's earlier career involved teaching family history programmes along the Appalachian trail to running an independent theatre company whilst advocating for the rights of young people to access the arts.





### **Niall Kerr**

Niall Kerr is Head of Heritage and Community Relations at Nerve Centre, Northern Ireland's leading creative arts organisation which works across creative learning, music, culture and film. Niall is responsible for a range of innovative engagement, digital creativity and arts projects, partnering with cultural and heritage partners across NI and beyond. He was Project Manager for *Making the Future*, an EU funded cultural heritage project delivered in partnership with National Museums NI, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and Linen Hall Library. He has collaborated with the artist Joe Caslin on site takeovers around NI, was Head of Communications for the award winning *Our Place in Space* project with artist Oliver Jeffers, established youth heritage programme *Reimagine Remake Replay*, has managed EU-funded engagement projects, large-scale exhibitions and overseen the delivery of cutting-edge digital education resources.



### **Dr. Stefanie Lehner**

Dr. Lehner is Senior Lecturer in Irish Literature and Culture at Queen's University, Belfast, and Fellow: Religion, Arts and Peacebuilding, at the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast. Her current research explores the role of the arts, specifically performance, in conflict transformation processes, with a focus on the Northern Irish context. She also researches and teaches on representations of trauma and memory in (Northern) Irish drama, fiction, film, and photography. She is author of *Subaltern Ethics in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Literature* (Palgrave, 2011) and co-author of *Sounding Conflict: From Resistance to Reconciliation* (Bloomsbury, 2023).



### **Dr. Gail McConnell**

Dr. Gail McConnell is from Belfast. Her debut poetry book, *The Sun is Open* (Penned in the Margins, 2021), about her father's murder by the IRA, won The John Pollard Foundation International Poetry Award and The Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize. She has also published *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology*, *Fothermather and Fourteen* and made arts features on poetry for BBC Radio 4: *Fothermather*, *The Open Box* and *Seamus Heaney and the Troubles*. Gail is Reader in English and Fellow: Religion, Arts and Peacebuilding, at the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast.



### **Dr. Irene Boada Montagut**

Dr. Irene Boada Montagut has been a Spanish lecturer in Ulster University, Ramon Llull, and Vic universities in her native Barcelona. She has been a Northern Ireland correspondent for Spanish media. As a peace activist, she has been a founder and Project Manager Volunteer of Museum of the Troubles & Peace and the cross community group, Children of the Troubles.





### **Dr. Liam O'Hare**

Dr. O'Hare is a Mitchell Institute Fellow: Religion, Arts and Peacebuilding, and Principal Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. He is Director of Queen's Innovation Zones where he leads several projects focused on arts and peacebuilding. For example, Crescendo is a music, social and emotional learning programme provided in primary schools in conflict affected communities. It is delivered through a partnership between Queen's University, Ulster Orchestra, Colin Neighbourhood Partnership, Shankill Children and Young People Zone and four primary schools in West Belfast. He is also principal investigator on a project with the Ulster Museum looking at museum education, peacebuilding and creativity. The project will centre around the Ulster Museum's Troubles and Beyond collection. Dr O'Hare also has a wide network of international collaborators in universities, including Yale, National University of Kharkiv Ukraine, Stellenbosch University and University of the Witwatersrand, working on peacebuilding projects in conflict affected communities across the world.



### **David Robinson**

David Robinson has worked as a Good Relations Officer with Belfast City Council for the last 19 years, having previously worked with the charities The Corrymeela Community and Co-Operation Ireland. His role is to promote better community relations between communities throughout the City, in particular tackling sectarianism and racism and promoting cultural diversity.

Between 2016 and 2021, David was also an independent member of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Cultural and Tradition. This Commission was established after the Stormont House Agreement and had its final report published by The Executive Office in December 2021.

David is from Bray, in Co. Wicklow in the Republic of Ireland, but has worked all of his career in community relations, peace-building and reconciliation throughout Northern Ireland.



## **Nisha Tandon**

Nisha Tandon is the founder and director of ArtsEkta - one of the only organisations on the island of Ireland promoting intercultural arts, culture and heritage and a vibrant social enterprise. She founded this organisation in 2006 following two decades of experience in the arts and after discovering a critical gap for quality ethnic minority arts engagement in the sector. She holds a degree from the National School of Drama in New Delhi. She has also been a previous board member of Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Cultural Cities Enquiry and currently serving Board member on Community Relations Council.

In 2007 initiated Northern Ireland's first multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary arts festival Belfast Mela now attracting annual audiences of up to 60,000 people for full week Festival. At the early stages of her career, she worked across different roles in the private sector and as a freelance artist.

In June 2014, Nisha was the first Asian women from Northern Ireland to be awarded the prestigious UK Asian Women of Achievement Award for contribution to arts culture and heritage, and later that month was awarded an OBE for services to the minority ethnic sector in the 2014 Queen's Honours List. In 2015, Nisha won the British Indian Award for 'Indian Spirit in the Community' presented by Trade Next and BDO. Nisha has also been awarded the Chief Officers Third Sector award for Leading Growth and Innovation in 2016. In 2023 Nisha received an Honorary doctorate from Queens University for service to the communities. She also won an outstanding achievement award of MRANI in 2023.

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