

# SOS. A Praxis-Oriented Theoretical Reflection on Decolonising through Non-formal Arts-based Peace Education

## SOS. Una Reflexión Teórica Orientada a la Práctica sobre la Descolonización a través de la Educación para la Paz no Formal Basada en las Artes

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### KEYWORDS:

Peace education  
Aesthetic education  
Global citizen education  
Decolonization  
Environmental awareness

### ABSTRACT:

The aim of the article is to explore how the critical exercise of decolonizing approaches can inform peace education. The methodology will be an auto-ethnographic action-based research that explores literature on decolonizing peace education and applies its principles to the analysis of a nonformal arts-based project. The experiences gained through work in a music-based peace education project called *La Escuela Encantada* (LEE), serve as a link to practice, which will be nourished by theory and vice versa. The structure of this article is as follows: Starting from Martínez-Guzmán's foundations of an epistemological turn for social sciences from philosophy for peace(s) as a basis, the decolonizing project within peace education will be unfolded to elicit the potential of nonformal arts-based peace education to inform concrete decolonial projects in the peace education sector. The main findings show that LEE contributes to decolonizing peace education by promoting emotional transformation, (re-)enchantment, and connectedness while engaging in process-oriented decolonial reflexivity.

### DESCRIPTORES:

Educación para la paz  
Educación para la ciudadanía mundial  
Educación estética  
Descolonización  
Sensibilización ambiental

### RESUMEN:

El objetivo de este artículo es explorar las aportaciones para la educación para la paz de un ejercicio crítico de descolonización. La metodología utilizada es una investigación acción auto-etnográfica que explora la bibliografía existente sobre educación para la paz descolonizadora y aplica los principios localizados al análisis de un proyecto de educación no formal basada en el arte. Las experiencias adquiridas a través del trabajo en un proyecto de educación para la paz basado en la música denominado *La Escuela Encantada* (LEE), sirven de vínculo con la práctica, que se nutrirá a su vez de la teoría y viceversa. La estructura de este artículo es la siguiente: partiendo de los fundamentos del giro epistemológico de Martínez-Guzmán para las Ciencias Sociales anclado en la filosofía para hacer las paces, se desgana el proyecto teórico de descolonizar la educación para la paz para mostrar el potencial de la educación para la paz no formal sustentada en las artes para informar proyectos decoloniales específicos en la educación para la paz. Los resultados muestran que LEE contribuye a la descolonización de la educación para la paz al promover la transformación emocional, el (re)encantamiento y la conexión, mientras se involucra en un proceso de reflexividad decolonial.

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of the article is to explore how nonformal arts-based education<sup>1</sup> can contribute to the decolonization of peace education. We do this by reviewing literature on decolonizing peace education and complementing it through auto-ethnographic-inspired reflections of the experiences gained in a music-based peace education project, called *La Escuela Encantada*<sup>2</sup> (LEE).

The structure of this paper is as follows: With the foundations of philosophy for peace (Martínez-Guzmán, 2000; Martínez-Guzmán 2001), Freire's libertarian education (2020) and feminist standpoint theory (Stanley & Wise, 2002) as a basis, we embark on the decolonizing project within peace education.

Peace education can happen in formal, nonformal and informal spaces<sup>3</sup>. We explore the decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres & Cavouris, 2017) in academic and educational contexts and expose the potential of nonformal arts-based peace education exposed through the case of LEE:

We apply “decolonial reflexivity” (Moosavi, 2023, p. 138), using the following questions to guide this process: What does peace education at LEE imply? What are its underlying values and how are they implemented through practice? Does LEE apply decolonial reflexivity?

## 2. Research Problem

The following questions have motivated this research: How may education for social justice contribute to a more equitable educational system and society? What is the role of ethical creativity and imagination in transformative education? What are the benefits of integrating values and capacities such as eco-social regeneration into educational curricula for promoting eco-social justice?

We understand decolonial education for eco-social justice from the perspective of philosophy for making peace(s) by Vicent Martínez Guzmán (2000, 2019), which yields a normative understanding of peace as a value and seeks to foster positive structural and cultural peace (Galtung, 1990).

Peace needs to be plural and decolonial to transform historical and everyday violences and should include different cultures of peace (Martínez-Guzmán, 2000, 2019). The absence of structural<sup>4</sup> and cultural violence is never complete but imperfect and procedural (Muñoz, 2006), hence we ought to work to construct and recognize every day peace (París-Albert, 2020, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> We choose the term arts-based education to highlight the hands-on character and every-day applicability as opposed to the UNESCO Thesaurus term, “aesthetic education”. Both refer to education that encompasses all the arts, including music.

<sup>2</sup> The Spanish name of the project can be translated as The Enchanted School.

<sup>3</sup> Nonformal education refers to organized but not institutionalized learning and informal means learning that happens without deliberate organization (Tudor, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Note that the term structural violence requires caution, due to its tendency to obscure the ethical and moral components and the individual responsibility that is contained in this form of violence (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015, p. 150).

Since cultures of peace necessarily coexist on planet Earth, two key ideas emerge: First communication is key in order to make plurality visible and become aware of it through dialogue. This challenge also includes transforming narratives to embrace diversity and complexity as every interaction implies informal education. There is a tight connection between peace education and communication for peace (Nos-Aldás, 2020), as everything communicates and everything educates, too (Kaplún, 1998).

Second, as co-inhabitants of planet Earth, humans are interdependent and also eco-dependent (Herrero, 2013), which is increasingly evident as we face multiple global interlocking crises at various levels: economic, ecological and social and of the imaginary (Bock, 2021). In a nutshell, the Earth has its limits (Meadows et al., 2018; Rockström et al., 2009). These urgently need to be taken into account, including in the realm of peace education.

Education about peace epistemologies based on proposals of philosophy for peace that elicit education and communication and touch upon human inter-and eco-dependence, should not happen only in the confinement of theoretical, academic spaces. It should be brought back to the streets where it originally emerged (Martínez-Guzmán, in París-Albert, 2020). Peace education covers a broad spectrum of human interactions. As Mesa (2019) proposes, it is time that educational practice transcends the institutional realm and tightly collaborates with nonformal education and social organizations. In the light of this, imagination and creativity play crucial roles (París-Albert, 2023).

In this article we focus on the potential of arts-based peace education in nonformal peace education settings in order to activate people's ethical sensitivity (Nos-Aldás & Pinazo, 2013) to engage in eco-social transformation. Creativity finds expression in the arts, and has the potential to stimulate imagination too. Arts-based peace education integrates creativity, imagination, and ethics to foster deep engagement through both emotional and intellectual experience.

Thus, one aspect addressed in Martínez Guzmán's (2001) epistemological shift, ought to be highlighted: We speak of reasons, feelings, emotions, affection and tenderness (Martínez Guzmán, in Bock, 2021, p. 237). This article addresses activism, as the epistemological turn of Vicent Martínez Guzmán for Social Sciences is an activist approach and, as Stephen Duncombe (2016) has defined in his activist academic practice, it bases itself on *affect*: an effect based on affect. Reasons and emotions cross each other (Martínez-Guzmán, 2003).

*Affect* remains at the margins of academic, formal peace education settings. In informal public education, trends on specific action on climate change and eco-social justice focus precisely on the emotion of hope, as feeling the possibility to transform violences to the Earth, which Freire also developed in his *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 2021). Working on how those human ways of knowing beyond the rational faculty can inform peace education and research is desirable. This article aims to do so in settings where rationality cedes its space as a central goal in communication to those other aspects which can be evoked through the arts (Duncombe, 2016).

Whereas listening to and learning from voices from the South is crucial to transform colonial patterns of exclusion and marginalization, decolonial scholarship and education should not be confined to the South. Martínez-Guzmán (2019) suggests decolonizing our minds from the new reason of the neoliberal world, which ought to take place through debate and mutual questioning among cultures, ways of thinking and ways of making peace(s) and transforming conflicts (p. 88). This decolonizing mission also links to a scrutiny of the notion of development, which in many occasions

has been linked to peace, and needs to be debunked and retought from postcolonial perspectives (Omar, 2012). Hence the proposition that we should not fear the failure of development but its success (Martínez-Guzmán, 2019, p. 112).

The concept of the *Pluriverse* helps to envision alternatives to development. Pluriverse describes the Zapatista vision of “a world where many worlds fit” (Kothari et al., 2019, p. xxviii), meaning a world in which diverse onto-epistemologies can coexist at eye-level without one dominating one. This is described by Kothari et al (2019), who created the *Pluriverse – a Postdevelopment Dictionary*, where a myriad of people’s transformative initiatives serve as counter-proposals to development-related crises and universalizing solutions.

The Pluriverse concept has been picked up in different recent decolonizing works (Toca Lahuerta, 2023; Werther, 2023). In the spirit of contributing to the pluriverse, this research is guided by the following question: *How can nonformal arts-based education contribute to decolonizing peace education?*

### 3. Methods

This article departs from a theoretical exploration based on philosophy for making peace(s) that applies a dialogical and hermeneutic analysis of interdisciplinary secondary academic literature (Bakhtin, 2010). Its methodology is based on a feminist participatory action research that develops an iterative process between decolonial transformative education theory and a nonformal education practice. We agree with Biglia (2005) on the need of knowledge validation processes redefined by action research practices.

To this end, the research uses an autoethnographic approach, as one of the authors is part of the team that organizes the project under study. Testimonies from its founder were also collected. Interpretative and narrative methods are applied to draw insights through decolonial reflexivity.

The project analyzed is a nonformal peace education project, *La Escuela Encantada* (LEE), which uses music to convey messages of peace and planetary regeneration to its audience through song, live performances and workshops. This project can be seen as one more transformative initiative that may insert itself on the pluriversal color palette.

As authors of this article we assume the premises of feminist standpoint theory and situate our knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Rich, 2003) in the following paragraphs: This paper is written by two white, cis female authors. Both have a PhD, Marisol Bock in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies and Eloísa Nos Aldás in Communication; one is currently situated at the interface between academia and nonformal peace education practices, and the other develops her professional responsibility in academia and transfers her results to organizations of the structured civil society, communication companies and administrations enriching her knowledge from their practices as well.

We acknowledge that being European nationals affiliated with research universities affords us a platform not equally accessible to others. Our interest in delving into this topic comes from recognizing the necessity to critically evaluate and enhance our own research methods. Our approaches have also been submitted to scrutiny by international communities, including the Interdisciplinary Research Institute on Social Development and Peace and its International University Master in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies of the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace at UJI.

## 4. A Decolonial Turn for Peace Education

Decolonization can be seen as an ongoing process reclaiming citizenship rights, not confined to a specific time (Mbembe, 2021). Besides formal transfer of power and state-building, it involves a political and normative ethic and practice centered on resistance and deliberate dismantling, challenging unjust norms and creating new spaces beyond colonial influence (Kessi et al., 2020).

In academia, decolonization is linked to the notion of coloniality of power coined by Aníbal Quijano (Mignolo, 2013; Quijano, 2024). He argues that colonialism did not end with political independence, but rather morphed into a complex system of power relations that continue to shape social, economic, and cultural dynamics. Coloniality is the creation of a hierarchical order of peoples and cultures, where certain groups are positioned as superior and others as inferior. This ontological stance perpetuates epistemological systems that justify the continued domination.

In the realm of epistemology, the hierarchical binary between reason (above) and emotion (below) is the continuation of a Cartesian legacy. Here, epistemic privilege is given to Western man, who can create a “knowledge that is truth beyond time and space, universal, unconditioned by any particularity” (Grosfoguel, 2013, p.75). This seemingly objective and neutral stance also led to “point-zero epistemology” (p.76), the pretension of producing knowledge “from nowhere”, reserved for the superior ones in colonial relations.

Coloniality imposes what counts as legitimate knowledge and whose voices are heard in academic discourse, by marginalizing or silencing non-Western, or other non-dominant perspectives. This means that power structures shape our understanding of the world as well as the production of knowledge in academic disciplines.

Western nations have suppressed and even eradicated non-Western knowledge systems, a phenomenon termed “epistemicide” (Santos, 2015). Syed Hussein Alatas (2000) claims that intellectual imperialism prevails, which is “the domination of one people by another in their world of thinking” (p. 24).

Academic decolonisation is an ongoing process with the aim to contribute to the “decolonial turn” (Maldonado-Torres & Cavouris, 2017) within academia. Morreira et al. (2020, p.2) denounce that “there is a gap between high-level decolonial theory and its practices of implementation.” Moosavi (2023) critiques that academic decolonization lacks introspection about the ways in which colonialism has had a lasting impact on academia. He calls for decolonial reflexivity, which means to “turn the decolonial gaze towards ourselves and interrogate our own positionality or scholarship in relation to coloniality” (p.138).

In peace education, Kester and Cremin (2017) introduce post-structural violence as a fourth type of violence, after direct, structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990). This describes situations in which well-intentioned actors in the field accidentally perpetuate the violence they want to alleviate. As a remedy, humbleness, vulnerability and second-order reflexivity are proposed (Hajir & Keser, 2023). The latter serves to hold peace educators accountable for their role in different forms of violence (re)production.

Zembylas (2018) advocates for critical peace education, drawing upon postcolonial and decolonial perspectives to address structural inequalities and empower students to effect transformative change (Purwanto et al., 2023). Peace education must thus also confront power imbalances, structural inequalities, and equip students with the tools for generating meaningful change.

Fátima Álvarez Castillo (2024) sees decolonization as a transformative endeavor that moves beyond the confines of colonialism's victims to encompass all of humanity. Decolonial scholarship entails assuming a dual role as both the subject and object; the decolonial scholar carries within her the remnants of colonial consciousness, and must liberate herself by acknowledging and interrogating it. Maldonado Torres (2017, p. 439) speaks about cultivating a decolonial attitude, which is not about applying specific methods or understanding a tradition, but about a deeply epistemological, ethical, political and aesthetic exercise.

Sara Cuentas (2022), situating herself as part of the Abya Yala, explains it precisely when mentions, in Spanish, the importance of including the “s” to emphasize the process of emancipating from coloniality: “descolonial”. Decolonial feminisms also insist on the importance of combining thinking and feeling in the Spanish word “sentipensar” (Cuentas, 2022, minute 5). Decolonial feminism links to intersectional feminism (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2013) as both intend to change systems of oppression. Intersectional feminism stems from Black feminist streams from the United States; it emphasizes the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, including race, gender, class, sexuality.

The process of decolonizing involves not only deconstructing inherited ideas, but also engaging in the construction and refinement of new understandings, through the unveiling of truths (Lugones, 2016). Keren Poliah reflects that to her, decolonization is an act of love (Poliah et al., 2024). She links her interpretation to Paulo Freire’s statements on love as “an act of courage” and “commitment to others” (p.92). Although she does not define them as such, bell hooks’ (1994) “teaching to transgress” starts liberation processes of resistance to colonialism and trusts in passion and freedom as part of learning based on feminist values, community building and pleasure.

We coincide with the cited authors in the view that decolonizing is a process and practice that requires scrutiny and includes a critical inward-gaze, be it at the academic level as an individual, a decolonial scholar, as an entire discipline and beyond.

## 5. Decolonizing guidelines and pitfalls

Across the reviewed literature we have identified a number of considerations for the endeavor of decolonizing:

First, we should be cautious not to reduce decolonization to a mere slogan. Instead, we should start by decolonizing the way to decolonization (Cárdenas, 2023). In Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2010) words, “critique becomes rhetoric when it detaches ideas from practices, finding its ultimate goal in rewording concepts, rather than in the transformation of institutional practice” (Cárdenas, 2023, p. 49).

Decolonizing as a process through which decoloniality can be attained. While decoloniality should remain an ultimate goal, the primary focus should be on decolonizing the means to reach it. This encourages us to include ourselves and our actions into our observations, rather than observing a context from an apparently detached standpoint, as the concept of decolonial reflexivity by Moosavi (2023) explains. Decolonial praxis aims to uncover (post-)colonial dynamics and dismantle them through introspection, awareness, and behavioral change. It should be applied to formal and nonformal educational spaces alike.

Second, we should “Learn from Indigenous peoples, not just about them for a better world” (Alberto Gomes, 2021, in Poliah, 2024, p. 38). While learning from Indigenous



perspectives is important, romanticizing them is detrimental, so we aim to learn from those who bear the weight of coloniality without idealizing them.

Third, decolonization is often approached through the necessity of epistemic change. However, it is important to make sure that this change should also be able to transform material inequalities. In fact, as decolonial perspectives are embraced, we must not obviate other intersectional categories of marginalization and oppression along the lines of class, gender and others (Duvisac, 2022).

Since decolonization is not a one-way street, an active commitment needs to be made not only to listen, but, as Lewis Gordon stresses, to admit what is being listened to (Jang, 2018, p. 77). This links to Austin's speech act theory, speaking belongs to the things we do to one another (Martínez-Guzmán, 2019). This attitude includes questioning one's own assumptions, which is how the transformation of meanings, values and relationships can begin. In the same spirit, for John Yuen decolonizing requires interlocutors to be willing to try to comprehend what exists outside their world (Poliah, 2024). As Nos-Aldás and Pinazo (2013) expressed:

*It is vital that nonviolent social change processes incorporate the fact that our frames of reference are just one reference frame, but not an all-encompassing frame under which we all have to live. This acceptance decreases tension and allows us to open up empathically to other ways of seeing and framing. Through discussion and acceptance, we can understand the reference frames of others. Through these dialectics of understanding and positive vulnerability inherent in allowing, daring and trusting, peace can be projected from the individual to the community and then back again. It also potentially influences how we represent, frame and interpret reality. (p. 346)*

This dialogues with the importance of arising interest in those publics who are not interested in change (or even do not hold this value -the possibility of change-), which relates to public engagement. As Canning and Reinsborough (2008) remember as part of their narrative power analysis: in order to connect with people it is relevant to interpell what they already know and hold dear, as "the obstacle to convincing people is often not what they don't yet know but actually what they already do know" (Canning & Reinsborough, 2012).

Fourth, it is helpful to embrace idealism. Idealism often is mocked and related to dreamy, unrealistic approaches, as opposed to practical, feasible ones. This argument is echoed in Vicent Martínez Guzmán's philosophy for peace and epistemological shift (2001), where peace workers, students and researchers are defended as the actual realists. The argument says that realism entails recognizing that we humans have both the capacity to act violently *and* also peacefully with one another. Maldonado-Torres claims that the pursuit of practicality perpetuates the status quo of global coloniality and its exploitative economic structures and instead highlights the imperative of engaging in insurgent scholarship that is characterized by truthfulness, courage, imagination, and idealism (Alvares Castillo, 2024, p.37).

## 6. Peace Education at *La Escuela Encantada*

*La Escuela Encantada* (LEE) is an association of musicians and educators dedicated to music for planetary<sup>5</sup> regeneration. It began as a project for children's music, for which

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<sup>5</sup> At LEE, planetary regeneration refers to both ecological regeneration as opposed to mere environmental conservation or protection, as well as a social transformation aligned with ecological regeneration, while seeking peace and social justice. In short: eco-social regeneration.

Rosalía Royo Hernández, with the artistic name Rosalía Mowgli, had a particular idea in mind: versions of unknown traditional Spanish songs, musicalized poems, a potpourri of children's tunes with a higher level of complexity in harmonies and melodies, to counter the often poor quality of children's music that is often viewed as a "lower" separate genre.

In 2017, Marisol Bock (vocals, trumpet) joined the trio composed by Rosalía Mowgli, (guitar, vocals, traditional and rare aerophones) and two more musicians Luis Gálvez (percussion) and David Larrínaga (vocals, guitar, sitar). With Bock entering the group, the fact that it was actually carrying out peace education through music became apparent, as she was doing her PhD research in peace studies. Since then, alongside musical concerts, additional workshops were offered by members of the group, exploring the links between music and peace education for different audiences.

LEE produced two music videos in 2020: *Cuida el Agua*<sup>6</sup> (Take Care of Water) and *Mensaje de una Morsa*<sup>7</sup> (Message of a Walrus) with a focus on eco-social regeneration. Reforestation activities as well as plastic clean-up campaigns were linked to the concerts as extra activities to be carried out with band members.

In 2023 the group was invited to a musical tour in Colombia, which is when the project of decolonizing entered their awareness. They played a series of concerts reaching roughly eight thousand children from all kinds of neighborhoods as part of a social program offered by the Major Theater in Bogotá. In Colombia, LEE went to the female prison to play songs in sections of young mothers with their children and for women on a drug dependency program. They also performed music in rural areas for peasant's children.

### 6.1. LEE's Values

LEE has been rethinking its values to create a clearer nexus between the artistic and educational sides of the project and to be more transparent in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals of the Global Development Agenda 2030 that it resonates with. This is necessary in order to assure and allow the group to continue financing its activities and engaging with the global strategic agenda of international institutions with a social change philosophy.

In this spirit SDG 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" stands out, in particular point 4.7:

*by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.* (Alexander, 2018, p. 25)

As the group studies the SDGs to see how it fits in, an overall critique towards the SDGs arises: What is the place of culture, the arts and communication in the SDGs? This critique has been made, even a specific SDG on this proposed and its potential explored (Cabral & Galvão, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> The videoclip can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQgwXatmmRQ>

<sup>7</sup> The videoclip can be watched at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw\\_QpAiYfsA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw_QpAiYfsA)



Some of these missing points are mentioned in the much more recent European GE2050 report on Global Education, albeit with limitations. The report defines Global Education as:

*education that enables people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it; to open their eyes, hearts and minds to the reality of the world at local and global level. It empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring about a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary sustainability, and international understanding. It involves respect for human rights and diversity, inclusion, and a decent life for all, now and into the future. Global Education encompasses a broad range of educational provision: formal, nonformal and informal; life-long and life-wide. We consider it essential to the transformative power of, and the transformation of, education. (GENE, 2022, p. 3)*

The notion of global education provided in this report entails a metaphorical reference to knowing beyond reason (opening our minds) to open also our hearts. While it seems to transcend the focus on reason, it still echoes the Cartesian split that permeates Western thinking.

Another point is that there is a reference made to the imagination that precedes action for social transformation. This makes sense from the viewpoint of peacebuilding where the preamble of UNESCO's Constitution states “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO, 1948). Moreover, the formal, nonformal and informal aspects of education are acknowledged alongside its transformative potential and the potential to change itself.

Another point in this report is the necessity to foster a “Greater critical public understanding of historical and geo-political relationships, including the legacies of colonialism, conflict, wars and oppression, and greater critical public engagement with global challenges and power dynamics” (GENE, 2022, p. 6).

The SDGs entail the principle of leaving no one behind recognizing the need to address the historical injustices and marginalization but they do not explicitly mention colonial legacies. It is relevant, therefore, to insist on the necessity to put all SDG -and even those missing- in dialogue, as SDG 13, Climate action, makes no sense without acknowledging the rest, and vice versa, or reinforcing SDG 16 and 17, as we need to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” and build alliances for it in all different scenarios, including education.

As presented before, this project elicits theoretical knowledge regarding decolonization and the values identified in peace education in order to transgress violence and exclusion in social and cultural relations. Previous studies on development frames such as Darnton and Kirk (2011) already pointed out the importance of acknowledging people's beliefs as a filter to their public engagement with social transformation. They applied Schwartz's model where values can be closely related to power and competition, or stability and security, or closer to autonomy and change and care and empathy.

A relevant advance in relation to the values activists act by, is Mesa et al. (2013), which dialogues with previous analysis recovering the values identified in 1235 women peace activists life stories from all over the world. They present a series of transgressive values, which help us develop further on care and transformative relations. These go from inclusive, to universal to emancipated, pointing out at the importance of how we approach relations focusing on connections, and embracing not only diversity but also

dynamism, movement and change – key points in a critical global citizenship. They insist on defending dialogue and creating bridges through the power of words, so that emancipated values are shown, such as freedom, creativity, other ways of looking, hope, optimism. We find these criteria in transgressive informal and nonformal education projects linked to eco-social regeneration: project a possible better future and the ways to arrive believing in its possibility (e.g. Lainterseccion.net, a transgressive communication collective initiative).

We have identified three particular values through which LEE operates: Emotional transformation, (re-)enchantment and connectedness.

## 6.2. Emotional transformation

LEE seeks to convey messages for peace and eco-social regeneration not by appealing to rational argumentation, but through other means, mainly emotion. Emotion comes from the Latin word “*emovere*”, composed by *e-* (out) and *movere* (move). The current sense dates from the early 19th century (Dixon, 2012). Hence, it moves people. Moving people inside is a precondition for action outside.

This links to the idea in peace education that not just skills and knowledge need to be conveyed but that the arts and creative process originating from imagination, have a role to play too. In this sense, “as a civilized way of doing and living, peace implies as an embodied and relational experience, rather than merely an intellectual endeavor” (Lehner, 2021, in Purwanto et al., 2023, p. 3).

Music in particular can touch and move people in many different ways. Whereas the lyrics can represent critical reflections of the status quo, such as the climate crisis, the emotions that LEE aims to trigger are mainly positive. The song *Mensaje de una Morsa*<sup>8</sup> reflects this, as an earlier article describes:

*During the prerecording of the song, I started having second thoughts about the lyrics. Up until now, the ending of the song said, “SOS, and what are you doing to prevent it [the climate crisis]? Don’t tell me you’re doing nothing.” We thought it said what needed to be said, just like the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg when she spoke at the World Economic Forum in 2019: “I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is.” Still, I found that the ending of the song would leave people feeling sad and guilty. [...] Based on these ideas, we changed the ending of our song to: “SOS, become alert/ What are you doing on this Earth? / Everything you do matters”. (Bock, 2022, p. 39)*

Mowgli’s reflections below show that she is well aware of the powerful tool that music can be in terms of affect (Duncombe, 2016):

*I have observed countless times the fact that an emotional transformation occurs in people [...] exposed to artistic experiences. There is a fascination, an enthusiasm, perhaps a sweet sadness like a nostalgia for paradise lost. It’s as if suddenly there’s a reconnection, a kind of rewiring of the system. Many times, someone after one of our performances comes to the dressing room or approaches the stage eager to hug you and says things like, “Thank you, I came reluctantly because I was angry, depressed, tired of work, sad... but I’m leaving happy! What a great concert!”. (Mowgli, 2024, Annex 1)*

Emotional transformation thus occurs through the music, the lyrics, the message presented, which represents a rewiring of one’s attitude towards life and the possibility of change, while being aware of the problems and crises faced. This can be experienced as renewed hope.

<sup>8</sup> The videoclip can be consulted here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw\\_QpAiYfsA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw_QpAiYfsA)

#### 6.4. (Re-)enchantment

In LEE the element of re-enchantment is conveyed in the name of the group and is a transversal element of its work. It has to do with surprise, with the possibility of seeing the world through child-like eyes:

*People are also exposed to extraordinary instruments taken from day-to-day life, such as a crutch, handlebars from a bicycle and a faucet, which Mowgli plays like a flute, and all convey the magical idea that things are not what they seem. To me, this element alone contains a creative metaphor for the audience. Keeping a flexible and imaginative mind turns out to be a key requirement in building peaceful relationships. (Bock, 2022, p. 36)*

Mowgli comments:

*I've seen how music can change a person's mood in an instant, and even more, it can inspire a deep aesthetic delight, which is doubled when accompanied by words as it happens in songs, where aesthetic delight is added to reflection, empathy with the messages conveyed, and the evocation of dreamed worlds. To change the world, you have to be able to imagine it first. This muscle of imagination has deteriorated and is atrophied. I see art as an instrument that precisely manages to activate the forgotten power buried under the mechanization of our jobs. It's a round trip experience; I try to provoke an illusion, a poetic sensation, a surprise, delight, a kind of nostalgia because I have felt all these things as an audience member and thus have been deeply inspired to want to develop my art. (Mowgli, 2024, Annex 1)*

Hence, what LEE seeks to trigger through enchanting is aesthetic delight together with reflection, and a renewed capacity to imagine change due to the gift of gaining a different surprising viewpoint and a deep inspiration.

#### 6.5. Connectedness

Whereas light is shed upon the reality of ecological crises, such as the melting ice-caps, this critical message is combined with the empowering message: the Earth can be seen as a large whole living entity made up of a myriad of interconnected systems. This can help us recognize that our actions and behaviors as individuals are linked with larger systems, and even small changes can have ripple effects.

The interconnectedness of all things is shown in the Message of a Walrus song: “When you plant a flower, when you take care of your grandmother, every little bit of love you give to others...What you do counts.”<sup>9</sup> The Buddhist monk Thich Nath Han, sums up the underlying message of the song with his concept of interbeing, which refers to the idea that, “We cannot exist by ourselves; hence, we are only together with other beings that all belong to a huge web of life.” (Bock, 2022, p. 39).

Regarding connectedness, Mowgli writes:

*I believe we are all artists; some manifest it, and others are covert, repressed. When you involve the audience in such a way that they can see themselves there, you awaken the memory of their spiritual, creative, unlimited being; it's like activating a seed that has always been there inside. One is fascinated by what one sees in the other that was already inside oneself. For me, this is the basis of peace among human beings, not seeing the other as another but as an extension of oneself. And thus, you don't see nature as the "environment" in which the isolated ego moves... in the air where music dances, in the fire that awakens in the heart, in the vibration of the strings that resonate on our skin when the drum skin beats. [...] A highly inspiring, contagious mental and emotional state arises,*

<sup>9</sup> Authors' translation from the original text in Spanish: “Cuando tú plantas una flor, cuando cuidas de tu abuela, cada trocito de amor que tú das a los demás...Lo que haces cuenta”.

*and it is there where I see the reconnection with nature and with others.*  
(Mowgli, 2024, Annex 1)

Thus, in line with Edward Brandtmeier (Kester et al., 2023) connectedness in this sense relates to peace and to spiritual awareness. It has to do with the dissolution of the difference between you and me as individual entities. It also is related to the recognition that all beings exist together and because of each other, i.e. a spiritual extension of the notion of inter-and eco-dependence that Yayo Herrero (2013) uses.

### **6.5. LEE on a decolonizing journey**

The endeavor of decolonizing the way to decolonization and engaging in decolonial reflexivity to us implies being mindful of what LEE communicates internally and outwards. How does it relate to the decolonizing guidelines presented above?

With this article LEE has begun a decolonizing process as part of the cross-pollination they intend to foster between theory and practice. During their visit to Colombia in 2023 they were treated differently: As musicians on tour and as white people from the Global North<sup>10</sup>, they were sometimes received with admiration and sometimes with disdain, due to their privileged positions. Both reactions at times triggered discomfort in the members of the group. Rather than ignoring it, at least internally it is crucial to be aware of its colonial origins, to then explore the possibilities how this situatedness could be used as part of the pedagogy (Hajir & Kester, 2020). This can also lead to a sense of vulnerability tightly linked to the experience of being in a foreign country and in touch with people among whom one is considered “other”.

Several aspects of what LEE reflect the first guideline, decolonial reflexivity:

The hierarchy between the artists and the audience is broken as often as possible in LEE’s performances. For smaller events, the musicians like to sit or stand in a circle integrating the audience into it, so that everyone sees each other and there is no need to be in rows behind. In such spaces, usually no amplification is needed, which makes it easier to include the audience in call-and-answer singing or other invitations to sing along.

Mowgli has learned and created a version of a Quechua song called *Al Cautiverio* (In Captivity), by Luzmila Carpio, an Indigenous Bolivian composer, singer and charango player. Importantly, Mowgli studied where the song comes from and what the lyrics mean and she explains this while in concert.

LEE has framed itself as an *Enchanted School*, precisely because it has no building, no walls, and the teachers of the school are simultaneously students, which reminds of libertarian education principles (Freire, 2020). An example of this is a workshop LEE has prepared, which seeks to uncover the common African roots of Spanish and Afro-Colombian percussion. Formulating this proposal was an act of sensitization for LEE members, who had to pay attention to the differences between Pacific and Caribbean Afro-Colombian communities, seeing their own tendency to generalize and homogenize.

During their last visit to Colombia in 2023 LEE members participated as voluntary musicians in a newly created carnival, *La Chica*, organized for and by Mhuysqa Indigenous communities in Bogotá. Here they witnessed a set of different traditions

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<sup>10</sup> Note that besides their European identities, both Mowgli and Bock carry passports from South America (Colombia and Venezuela, respectively) but they are white or white-passing (Piper, 2022). The other two members are from Spain.

related to the harvesting of crops, the dances and rituals that accompany these. This experience was new, fascinating and humbling for the musicians. However, the second guideline of learning from Indigenous people has a much longer history: Mowgli's interest in learning from and together with Indigenous communities spans over a decade of research, music making and traveling. In 2010 she visited the Huichol community in the hills of Jalisco, in Mexico, where she befriended the elder Don José Ramírez, locally called Urramuyre, and recorded a home-made documentary to plead for *Water for the Huicholes*<sup>11</sup>.

The documentary leads to the third guideline which suggests fostering material change to overcome structural inequalities and, in this context, admitting what is being listened to. The theme of caring for water is echoed in the much later music video called *Cuida el Agua* (Take Care of the Water). In it, Don José Ramírez appears singing as a playback. The theme of water has continued to accompany LEE, which has been participating at local rural gatherings in the Spanish region of Extremadura, around water policy and community action, in connection with local politicians, professionals and civil society organizations. Here, alliances have been created for future action to raise awareness and seek just solutions for the effects of climate change. Since LEE members are still learning about this subject, they are committed to listening to local, professional and non professional experts.

The fourth guideline, idealism, is one of the driving forces of LEE, which believes that eco-social transformation can happen through arts-based peace education, one concert or workshop at a time. LEE sees itself as a transformative initiative for a world where many worlds fit, as the Zapatista saying goes (Kothari et al., 2019).

## 7. Conclusion

As a nonformal peace education project *La Escuela Encantada* seeks to contribute to eco-social regeneration through music. In dialog with the institutional level, LEE fosters global citizen education (SDG 4.7), and Global Education. The universal values that LEE promotes resonate with decolonial, feminist transgressive or emancipatory values identified by Mesa et al. (2013).

Its activities include educational concerts with a particular set of instruments, themes, lyrics and style that aim to move their audience by means of three interlinked principles: emotional transformation, (re-)enchantment, and connectedness. The principles and practices by which LEE operates tend to transgress the epistemological fault lines of Cartesian inheritance: whereas critical messages are conveyed through songs' lyrics, the main aim is to operate through positive emotions such as hope, affecting people to empower their action for eco-social change.

Applying the decolonizing guidelines to LEE, it becomes apparent that the group makes an effort to break colonial continuities through the ways in which they interact with their audience, their attitude of being in a learning process, including learning from Indigenous people, and their intention to affect meaningful structural change, by engaging with the topic of water from their situated perspectives.

This auto-ethnographic action-based research meant to place the case of *La Escuela Encantada* in the perspective of a decolonizing peace education. It has done so by applying the critical notion of decolonial reflexivity. Our hope is to serve as a creative

<sup>11</sup> The documentary can be watched here [https://youtu.be/e5Kv6\\_j50eA?si=DXXt-IMtEBtDi315](https://youtu.be/e5Kv6_j50eA?si=DXXt-IMtEBtDi315)

inspiration to contribute to further corrode the walls of academic resistance to trans-rational approaches by blurring the boundaries of informal, nonformal, and formal education.

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## Annex 1

Rosalía Mowgli made a one-page written reflection on the question, which she preferred to write in Spanish: What have you learned about impacting people for positive eco-social transformation through your work?

En mi experiencia yo he observado innumerables veces el hecho de que ocurre una transformación emocional en las personas (niños, profesores, ancianos, presos, enfermos) al ser expuestas a la experiencia artística.

Acontece una fascinación, un entusiasmo, tal vez una dulce tristeza como una nostalgia del paraíso perdido. Es como si de pronto hubiese una reconexión, una especie de rewiring del sistema. Muchas veces alguien al terminar una de nuestras actuaciones viene al camerino o se acerca al escenario con ganas de abrazarte y te dice cosas como “gracias, vine de mala gana porque estaba enfadado, deprimido, cansado del trabajo, triste... ¡pero me marchó feliz! ¡Qué gran concierto!”

Se trata de una transformación a nivel emocional del individuo que indefectiblemente afecta a su entorno. A menudo digo que hacemos “música-medicina” pero esto es ya una redundancia porque la música ya es medicina de por sí, solamente con cumplir con la magia de su equilibrio armónico intrínseco. Esto está muy probado por la musicoterapia, cuando se despliega la armonía en el éter su poder armoniza todo lo que toca.

He visto cómo la música es capaz de cambiar el humor de una persona en un instante, y aún más es capaz de inspirar un deleite estético profundo, que se duplica cuando es acompañada de palabras como ocurre en las canciones, donde al deleite estético se suma la reflexión, la empatía con los mensajes transmitidos, la evocación de mundos soñados.

Para cambiar el mundo hay que poder imaginarlo primero, este músculo de la imaginación está deteriorado, atrofiado, veo el arte como un instrumento que

justamente logra poner en funcionamiento el poder olvidado, sepultado bajo la mecanización de nuestros trabajos.

Es una experiencia de ida y vuelta, intento provocar una ilusión, una sensación poética, una sorpresa, el deleite, una especie de nostalgia, porque yo la he sentido todas esas cosas como público y así he sido profundamente inspirada para querer desarrollar mi arte.

Yo creo que todos somos artistas, unos lo manifestamos y otros lo son de manera encubierta, reprimida. Cuando involucras al público de forma tal que pueden verse ahí a ellos mismos, despiertas el recuerdo de su ser espiritual, creativo, ilimitado, es como activar una semilla que siempre estuvo ahí dentro, a uno le fascina lo que ve en el otro que ya estaba dentro de uno. Para mí esta es la base de la paz entre los seres humanos, no ver al otro como otro sino como una extensión de uno mismo. Y así tampoco ves la naturaleza como el “medio ambiente” en el que el ego aislado se mueve...en el aire donde la música baila, en el fuego que despierta en el corazón, en la vibración de las cuerdas que repercuten en nuestra piel cuando bombea la piel de un tambor.

Aunque el que escucha no sepa tocar físicamente un instrumento musical hay un anhelo, una comprensión, una empatía, que consigue aprehender ese evento como algo propio. Aquí yo veo la base de una comunicación sublime capaz de armonizar a los seres humanos.

Villanueva de la Vera, 20 de abril 2024

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