

Mount Network for Community-Engaged Research on War

Community Stories of War and Peace

April 20, 2016

Mount Saint Vincent University



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Maya Eichler, Charlotte Kiddell, and Tracy Moniz, on behalf of the Mount Network for Community-Engaged Research on War (NCERW)

THE WORKSHOP

On April 20, 2016, the workshop “Community Stories of War and Peace” took place at Mount Saint Vincent University, organized by the Mount’s Network for Community-Engaged Research on War (NCERW). The workshop united academics, practitioners, and community members to share stories of war and peace from diverse Nova Scotian communities, including veterans, refugees, peace activists, and artists. The workshop included a keynote address by Stephen Puddicombe (CBC reporter), two panel discussions, an open discussion and planning session, and a public reading by Shahin Sayadi (Artistic Director of Onelight Theatre). Graphic recorder Brave Space provided visual templates to facilitate small-group discussion, and captured the day’s conversations in a dynamic visual representation (pictured on front cover). The workshop was the first step in developing a long-term research project on sharing community stories of war and peace to challenge and expand current Canadian narratives of war.

PROGRAM

9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m. **Welcome by Maya Eichler**

9:10 a.m. – 9:50 a.m. **Keynote speaker Stephen Puddicombe**

9:50 a.m. – 11:10 a.m. **War’s Impact on Diverse Communities**

Panelists: Julie Chamagne (Halifax Refugee Clinic) and a client of the Halifax Refugee Clinic, Nadine de Blois (Operational Stress Injury Social Support), Tiffany Richards (World University Services Canada MSVU), John Whelan (Whelan Associates)

11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. **How and Why We Share Stories of War**

Panelists: Nabiha Atallah (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia), Kathryn Bates-Khan (YMCA Immigrant Services), Emily Burton (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21), Wanda Graham (Heat Theatre Halifax), Jessica Wiebe (artist)

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. **Discussion and Planning Session**

This session engaged all workshop participants in sharing their experience and insight. Together, we discussed how to establish this research project in a Halifax context. We identified what work is already being done, what resources and needs the community has, and where to go next.

The discussion and conversations resulted in a number of profound insights, categorized below into four key questions:

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

(1) What characterizes stories of war and peace?

- [There is no single story of war or peace.](#) This point was brought up in discussion throughout the day. Stories of war and peace are diverse and varied. These varying stories are connected and even layered. We found surprising common threads across seemingly distinct stories, such as those of veterans and refugees.
- [Stories of war and peace are gendered.](#) Discussions of women in the military, civilian women, and military and veteran partners vividly illustrated the gender dynamics of war.
- [Stories of war and peace linger.](#) Both refugees and veterans noted that their stories of war always remain as part of their identity. The effects of these stories linger, even when untold, and manifest in disconnects and silences.
- [There are many more stories to be told.](#) Participant feedback highlighted the need to include stories from Indigenous communities, African Nova Scotian communities, Chinese settlement workers, draft dodgers, and a more diverse immigrant community.

(2) What are the challenges to telling/sharing these stories?

- [There is power in who gets to tell the story.](#) Participants expressed concerns over their stories being appropriated and instrumentalized. There is a fine line between humanizing and de-politicizing war through stories; tellers must straddle it carefully. As representatives of diverse communities, we struggled with

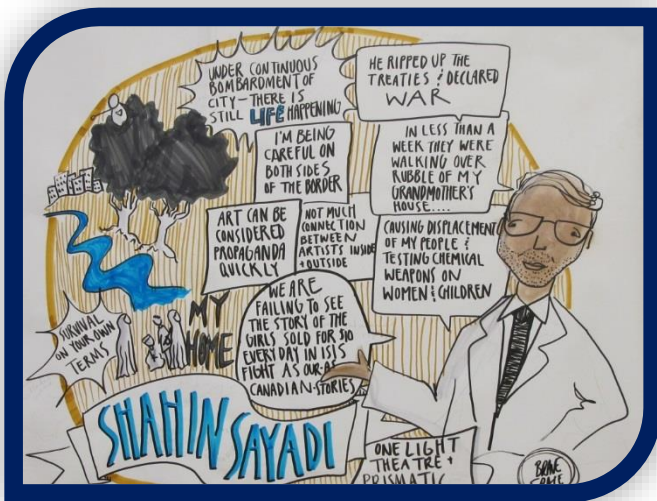


the questions of who speaks for a community and how we ensure all voices of a community are heard.

- [There is resistance to hearing stories.](#) Stories of war and peace are uncomfortable; listeners tend to resist discomfort. There is an impulse to label or categorize stories of war and peace as other from one's own experience. This can result in misrepresentation or even erasure of stories that need to be told.
- [Stories are difficult to tell.](#) Participants noted a number of logistical barriers to telling stories, such as a lack of safe(r) spaces in which to tell stories and the funding and resources to sustain them. Others noted the emotional labour of storytelling. For those sharing stories of their personal pain, it can be hard to tell the same story over and over.

(3) What are the reasons to tell stories?

- [Stories are educational.](#) Telling stories can raise public awareness, provide greater depth of understanding, and challenge and expand dominant narratives of war.



- [Stories build belonging.](#) Survivors of war can tell their stories to find community among others with similar experiences. Stories can also reveal connections between seemingly unconnected experiences. Stories can foster empathy and understanding, creating a connection between listener and teller.

- [Stories are healing.](#) Telling stories of pain and loss can be a means for healing.

Storytellers can feel validated by telling their

story and/or by receiving recognition of their

experience from listeners. There is power in stories and potential for empowerment in reclaiming one's own story.

- [Stories are agents of change.](#) Telling a story changes the teller and hearing it changes the listener. Stories themselves tend to change each time they are told. Stories can affect change, and telling stories of war and peace may prevent future wars or break past silences.

(4) How should we tell stories of war and peace?

- Stories of war and peace need diverse ways of telling. We need a diversity of media (verbal, visual, performative) through which to tell stories. We need a diversity of spaces and venues in which to tell stories. We need a diversity of voices to do the telling.



- Storytellers need to be supported. It is difficult to tell and hear stories of war and peace. We need to create spaces for telling that allow for vulnerability. We need to approach each other's stories with respect, not judgment or blame. We need to recognize that we are all impacted by war and peace, and respect the diversity of our lived experience.
- Stories need to be told for their own sake. To share stories openly and honestly, we must refrain from instrumentalization and appropriation. We need to allow for the telling of stories in ways that don't necessitate resolution. And we need to accept that not all stories can or need to be told.

MOVING FORWARD

The workshop was the first step in a longer-term (2-3 year) research project. The workshop was organized with the intent to provide guidance into where this project can and should go next. Now it's time to decide what our priorities for moving forward will be over the next year!

Based on the workshop discussion we've identified four possible directions for moving forward: *spaces for storytelling and community building*, *public engagement*, *educational tools*, and *innovations in policy and practice*.

In the list below, we list ideas for activities and initiatives that may be included in each. We hope for the insights above to inform what happens next. Each **Thematic Area** responds to current barriers to sharing stories within our communities, offering ideas and opportunities for storytelling and social change. The **Potential Next Activities** represent a range of diverse approaches to storytelling, reflecting the diversity of needs in our communities.

Thematic Areas

	Spaces for storytelling and community building	Public engagement	Educational tools	Innovations in Policy and Practice
Potential Next Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Networking events -Meetings -Storytelling groups -Writing groups -Craft/art groups -Annual workshop -Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public reading -Exhibition -Performance -Movie nights -Public discussion -Speaker series -Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Scholarship/edited volume -Conference panels -Curriculum -Youth camps -Retreats -Workshops -Teach-ins -Film/Documentary -Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Guidelines -Alternative policy documents -Protests -Lobbying -Other

What We Would Like From You

We hope to move this project forward collectively and collaboratively, so all may share in the power of our stories.

What type of initiatives or projects would you and your community be interested in participating in? Please select one to three **Potential Next Activities** from one or two **Thematic Areas** on the list above. Please indicate your selections on our [online survey](#) no later than **June 10, 2016**. The survey is our attempt to get a sense of the capacity and interest of our community participants. If none of the options above match your community’s interest, please take the opportunity to tell us more. You can provide feedback online through the [survey](#), or by emailing maya.eichler@msvu.ca.

We look forward to continuing this important work with you.

It was a pleasure to be joined by all our participants:

Nabiha Atallah, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia; Catherine Baillie Abidi, Mount Saint Vincent University; Kathryn Bates-Khan, YMCA Immigrant Services; Victoria Bryce, The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative; Emily Burton, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21; Julie Chamagne, Halifax Refugee Clinic; Linda Christiansen-Ruffman, NS Voice of Women for Peace; Emma Cruddas, Dalhousie University; Mallika Das, Mount Saint Vincent University; Ellen Davis, Mount Saint Vincent University; Nadine deBlois, Operational Stress Injury Support Social Support (Department of National Defence); Alexandra Dobrowolsky, Saint Mary's University; Ahmed Dougaish, Halifax Refugee Clinic; Maya Eichler, Mount Saint Vincent University; Maida Follini, Religious Society Friends; Wanda George, Mount Saint Vincent University; Wanda Graham, Heat Theatre; Reina Green, Mount Saint Vincent University; Emily Jackson, Acadia University; Charlotte Kiddell, Mount Saint Vincent University; Janice Landry, Groundhog Productions; Denise Landry, Acadia University; Akram al Masalma, Halifax Refugee Clinic; Janet Maybee, author; David McArdle, Operational Stress Injury Support Social Support (Department of National Defence); Janet McClain, Mount Saint Vincent University; Cassandra McDonald, Mount Saint Vincent University; Tracy Moniz, Mount Saint Vincent University; Adam Murphy, Mount Saint Vincent University; Deborah Norris, Mount Saint Vincent University; Sinisa Obradovic, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21; Kelsey Power, journalist; Meredith Ralston, Mount Saint Vincent University; Tiffany Richards, World University Services Canada MSVU; Shahin Sayadi, Onelight Theatre; Marilyn Scholes, Mount Saint Vincent University; Kim Smith-Evans, Mount Saint Vincent University; John Whelan, Whelan Associates; Jessica Wiebe, artist.



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