Everyday Art Peace:

Art as a Medium for Fostering Peace between Divided Societies in Sri Lanka

By

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Abstract

Despite the end of the civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, peace in the country remains fragile with many ethnic disputes taking place time and again. The limitations of top-down peacebuilding approaches as pointed out by critical wing scholars remain relevant to the state-centric peacebuilding mechanisms adopted in Sri Lanka. Everyday peace stands in contrast to such top-down peacebuilding policies and has gained significance in the literature on peace and conflict at present. This paper contributes to such literature by developing a framework on everyday art peace. Firstly, the paper develops a nuanced conceptual framework of everyday peace that incorporates the notions of the abundance of politics and ephemeral practices proposed by Guillaume and Huysmans into Mac Ginty's conceptualization of everyday peace built around reciprocity, sociality, and solidarity. Secondly, the paper highlights the significance of art as a medium to foster peace and improve relationships between divided communities. Thirdly, this paper makes an empirical contribution by analyzing two murals painted by three local initiatives in Sri Lanka to explore how everyday art peace can contribute to facilitating peace between divided communities. Visual analysis is conducted along the three sites of meaning-making of the murals; the production, the murals, and the interactions it has with the communities as proposed by Gillian Rose. The theoretical and methodological approach allowed to bring out the empirical potentiality of everyday art peace to foster peace and facilitate better relationships between divided societies.

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1 Introduction

May 18th, 2009 marked a historic day for all citizens in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Some citizens joined the sea of people who celebrated this day with milk rice, while others joined hands to mourn the loss of their loved ones. No one will ever forget the significance of this day as the three-decade-long civil war between the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan military ended. However, peace in the country remains fragile even though more than a decade has passed since the end of the conflict. Many riots and attacks that are carried out along the lines of ethnic divisions can be seen as examples. In 2014, a Sinhala-Buddhist revivalist group called *Bodu Bala Sena* started an anti-Muslim riot in the Kalutara district (BBC, 2014). Not only were mosques, houses, and shops owned by the Muslim community attacked, but at least four people were killed during the riots (Brewer, et al., 2018, 23). Similarly, the *National Thowheed Jamath*, an extremist Islamist group, carried out several attacks and vandalized Buddhist temples in Mawanella in 2018 (BBC, 2019). The Easter bombings in 2019 that targeted three famous church services in Colombo is yet another devastating incident that brought up horrific memories of the civil war (Kassim and Athas, 2023).

The fragility of peace and the animosity that prevails between different ethnic and religious communities stands as a testimony to the limitations of the top-down peacebuilding approaches that are carried out in Sri Lanka. The unique nature of the civil war, the lived experiences of the citizens, and the language barrier that stands in the way of reconciliation are often ignored in such policies. Furthermore, not only are the peace dividends that reach the local communities are minimal, but their agency in peacebuilding is undermined. However, such limitations are not only features of the Sri Lankan peacebuilding model but have been identified as shortcomings of many top-down peacebuilding approaches, including liberal peacebuilding. Liberal peacebuilding attempts to enforce a one-size-fits-all peacebuilding

model based on democratic institutions, liberal markets, and conflict resolution (Goodhand and Walton, 2009, 304). Nevertheless, liberal actors often fail to fully grasp the local context and cultural knowledge that is vital to fostering peace in conflict-prone societies. Consequently, liberal peacebuilding policies time and time again lead to illiberal outcomes (316). Pointing out such shortcomings, scholars have moved away from the 'big peace approach' that emphasizes international actors, political elites, and peace treaties and have turned towards critical peace theories that align with the 'local' turn in international relations. Furthermore, the aesthetic turn in academia has given rise to interpretive studies that attempt to grapple with unorthodox sites of politics such as visual art, poetry, literature, cinema, theater, and textiles (Bleiker, 2001, 523). Such developments have been able to move away from the language-dependent interpretations and representations of politics and broaden the scope of international relations.

The everyday peace that focuses on the potential of everyday activities and community-based actors is one such example of the critical wing that contests not only the top-down peacebuilding models that consider political elites and governmental institutions to be the most significant site of politics, but also limits the inquiry to peace talks, peace agreements, and policies. While many have made valuable contributions to the literature, Roger Mac Ginty's scholarship remains a cornerstone of developing the notion of everyday peace (2014). Furthermore, Xavier Guillaume and Jef Huysmans's work on the everyday complements Mac Ginty's work and further adds depth densifying the conceptualization (2019). Moreover, different forms of visual art such as murals, textiles, and photos are gaining prominence as tools for peacebuilding at a local level (Premaratna and Bleiker, 2016, 82). Such literature uncovers alternatives to language-dependent tools of peacebuilding. This is of great significance especially in the case of Sri Lanka because of the language barrier between different ethnicities.

Hence, this paper addresses the research question; how can everyday art peace contribute to facilitating peace between divided communities? In order to explore this research question, Mac Ginty's, Guillaume's, and Huysmans's work have been used as a conceptual tool to argue that everyday art peace, community-driven peace initiatives that occur at the local level, have the potential to act as a medium to foster peace between divided societies. Two murals painted in 2022 by three grassroots level organizations in Sri Lanka are chosen for exploration. Both murals are located in the Slave Islands area, one is painted on the Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters building, and the other on Rio Cinema. Using visual analysis as proposed by Gillian Rose, this paper will inquire into the three sites of meaning-making of these two murals, namely, the production of the murals, the murals, and the interactions with the audience, to analyze how local actors have been able to navigate through ethnic and language differences in society and build better relationships between each other and facilitate peace using art.

By doing so, this paper contributes to the wider literature on peace and conflict by developing a framework on everyday art peace. Firstly, it provides a nuanced conceptualization of everyday peace by going beyond Mac Ginty's conceptualization and adding the two notions of the everyday theory proposed by Guillaume and Huysmans namely, the abundance of politics and ephemeral practices. Secondly, this paper contributes to the literature that identifies the significance of art as a tool of peacebuilding and highlights how art can be used to foster better relationships among divided communities. Thirdly, this paper adds to empirical research conducted on everyday peace in Sri Lanka.

However, it should be noted that this paper does not aim to completely undermine top-down peacebuilding but simply attempt to highlight the untapped potential of everyday art peace to foster peace between divided communities. Establishing Lessons Learned and a Reconciliation Commission, reinstating the Human Rights Commission (Brewer, et al., 2018,

30), and holding elections in areas that were under the control of the LTTE such as Jaffna and Vavuniya (Parameswaran, 2009) can be seen as some top-down peacebuilding policies that are commendable. Nevertheless, these policies have not been able to prevent ethnic violence in the country as reconciliation between diverse ethnicities remains a faraway reality.

Such failures of top-down peacebuilding policies implemented in Sri Lanka can be attributed to four main limitations. Firstly, the international attempts at peacebuilding in Sri Lanka lacked the participation of local actors. For example, Norway, with the help of the United States, Japan, and India as co-chairs, mediated peace negotiations between the two conflicting parties from 2002-2008 (Goodhand and Walton, 2009, 303). These peace talks and the subsequent ceasefire were designed as a liberal peacebuilding experiment (304) and Sri Lanka was seen as a success story in 2003 (Goodhand and Korf, 2010, 2). However, the peace talks were limited to negotiations between Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and Anton Balasingham, the spokesperson of the LTTE (1). Such actors were not representative of the sentiments born by different local groups at the time. On the one hand, members of the LTTE and Tamil minorities saw international mediators to favor the government and neglect the power asymmetries of the conflict (1). On the other, nationalists Sinhalese accused mediators of violating national sovereignty and imposing political settlements that are not favored by the local communities (2). Hence, the peace negotiations held under the liberal peacebuilding quest failed to be representative of local opinions due to the lack of local participation. Consequently, the peace in the country was short-lived and violence resumed with higher intensity in 2006 (Karunarathna and Manawadu, 2018, 22).

Secondly, the top-down peacebuilding policies carried out by the government after their military victory against the LTTE failed to take into consideration the root causes of the civil war. Under the leadership of President Mahinda Rajapakse, many top-down peacebuilding policies that focused on state-building were undertaken. For example, in the name of ensuring

security in the country, high political power was absorbed by the executive branch of the government. Consequently, political leaders such as Mahinda Rajapaksa were able to use nationalistic narratives to establish an authoritarian regime with the support of the Sinhala majority which further dampens minority representation (Akebo and Bastian, 2021, 79). However, such top-down policies failed to take into account how ethnic strife sprung up because of the lack of minority representation (Anandakugan, 2019).

Thirdly, peacebuilding policies undertaken by the government have ignored the lived experiences of the citizens. The policies that were taken to ensure security in the country rapidly militarized the North and East provinces of the country that were under the control of the LTTE during the war. Military camps of the Sri Lankan armed forces were built along with checkpoints that led to the ratio between civilians and security personnel to increase up to 5.04 to 1 in the Northern province (Colombo Telegraph, 2012). Such security build-up failed to address the grievances of the Tamil population and their hopes of demilitarization after the end of the war. Instead, it served as a constant reminder of wartime experiences and spread insecurity (Brewer, et al., 2018, 187). Hence, the top-down peace module implemented also failed to examine the importance of lived experiences of the community during the war and how militarization has affected their everyday life.

Lastly, peace policies in the country have been unsuccessful in weighing the unique nature of the civil war and how language plays an important role in the country. Following the goals of reconstruction, massive development projects were undertaken under the *Mahinda Chintana* development plan, which refurbished many infrastructures such as the A9 road and Northern railway line that improved connectivity in the country (Brewer, et al., 2018, 193). However, after the completion of development projects, many roads that were originally in Tamil were named in Sinhalese (Tamil Net, 2010). Such measures failed to consider the

sensitive nature of language and how conflicts between ethnicities have been previously aggravated through language policies such as the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 (Gunaratna, 2018).

Consequently, the top-down peacebuilding mechanisms that are implemented in Sri Lanka have not been able to foster better relationships among citizens from different ethnic communities and facilitate peace. Instead, on some occasions, they have created further division as it leaves out the lived experiences of citizens and lacks local participation in finding solutions. The unique history of the conflict due to under-representation of minority communities and how the language barrier that prevents diverse ethnic groups from conversing and building better relationships have not been a priority in state-centric peacebuilding mechanisms. However, many local initiatives in the country have been able to navigate such complex issues to create bottom-up peacebuilding mechanisms. Due to the high participation of local citizens, such bottom-up approaches have been able to create organic and context-dependent solutions which have the potential to foster better relationships among divided communities.

In order to explore the potential of such bottom-up peacebuilding approaches, the first part of this paper provides a conceptual overview of everyday peace and the everyday theory and highlights how it remains vital to understanding peace and post-conflict societies. Secondly, this paper explores how art can be a medium to foster peace and build better relationships among divided communities in Sri Lanka. The third section of this paper examines an everyday art peace project created by three grassroots level initiatives in collaboration namely, the *Sisterhood Initiative*, *We are from here,* and *The Fearless Collective,* to promote peace and foster better relationships among diverse communities in Slave Islands. The social media accounts of the three organizations along with local newspapers are used to argue that the two mural paintings as an everyday art peace project have immense potential in facilitating peace and building better relationships among divided communities.

2 Everyday Peace

Following critical studies that move away from the 'big peace' approach that limits the focus on the role of various international actors, peace negotiations, and peace treaties, Roger Mac Ginty (2014) has emphasized how the so-called ordinary people can advance towards peace through everyday practices. According to Mac Ginty (2014, 549), "Everyday peace refers to the routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages and be prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence." In his book, *Everyday Peace: How So-Called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict* (2021), Mac Ginty contributes to the literature of peace in three main ways. Firstly, he outlines everyday peace through the notions of sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity (2021, 51-79). Qualities of empathy, fairness, and collaboration can be identified as sociality, while reciprocity is the practice of acting with the expectation of getting the favor returned. Solidarity is understanding and showing active support for a cause. However, Mac Ginty (2021) highlights how showing sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity is highly context-dependent and needs emotional intelligence to read the social context and act appropriately. This is of great importance as in times of conflict or the immediate aftermath of war, state power and military power might be at their highest. Therefore, performing acts of everyday peace can have high costs as it can often be interpreted as resistance and changing the status quo. Mac Ginty also suggests to rethink power and move away from the strict notion of power as 'power over' as identified by international relations cannons such as realism. Instead, he points out how power can be redefined and reconstructed as 'power with', and 'power to' (2021, 81). By doing so, everyday acts conducted by ordinary citizens that show qualities of sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity that defy group thinking has significant power, which can be identified as Everyday Peace Power (80-103).

This Everyday Peace Power should not be taken lightly as it has the potential to disrupt conflicts and this is Mac Ginty's second contribution. Even though many international and national efforts to achieve peace are based on conflict management, resolution, and transformation, Mac Ginty (2021, 190-211) explores the potential of everyday peace for conflict disruption. Through acts of everyday peace, individuals, and groups, who are below the level of civil society or institutional formations, can create a counternarrative to the hegemonic divisions that are present during a conflict. Everyday peace acts can cut into stereotypical beliefs of the 'other' community and start the process of building trust. Everyday peace will thereby challenge the totalizing effects of conflicts and create space for re-assessment of the conflict at a grassroots level (205) and ordinary people with emotional intelligence and a charismatic personality will be able to undertake such acts of everyday peace that hold potentiality to disrupt conflicts (191). However, such actions are also limited to the context depending on the level of mobilization and the stage of a conflict (208). Nevertheless, the potential of everyday peace acts and the ability of ordinary citizens to disrupt the all-consuming conflict is of great significance that cannot be ignored when understanding peace.

Mac Ginty's third contribution explains the significance of diving into the acts of ordinary people by using circuitry as an analytical tool to explore the connection between everyday peace that occurs at the hyperlocal level and top-down peace approaches that function at national and international levels (2021, 25-50). Through circuitry, Mac Ginty addresses the limitations of everyday peace being limited to the grassroots level and explores how everyday peace which consists of a micro-circuit is in fact connected to wider circuits present in society. Accordingly, an individual performing an act of everyday peace is a part of multiple circuits. He or she will be a part of a family circuit, a religious circuit, and by being a part of the military circuit a participant in a wider circuit of the state (35). Each of these circuits is interconnected and interdependent of the other. The actions that take place in one circuit will impact another.

Hence, an act of everyday peace that will be enacted in a microcircuit is still connected to wider circuits of the state or political institutions and vice versa. As a result, even small acts of everyday peace will have the capacity to scale out or scale up causing significant implications (2021, 45). The everyday peace acts of sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity performed by an ordinary citizen then has the potential to make an impact on the decisions made at higher political institutions just as much as how choices made by the political elite have consequences on the lives of ordinary citizens. Hence, everyday acts of peace should not be ignored as they have immense potential and political significance to understanding peace in a country.

Similar to Mac Ginty's contribution, which stemmed from dissatisfaction at classical international relations theories that are quick to dismiss the potential of the everyday, Guillaume and Huysmans explore the vitality of analyzing the political implications of mundane, routine, and quotidian actions of the everyday. Mac Ginty's use of circuity as an analytical tool that connects the microcircuits of everyday peace with wider circuits of international and national institutions, structures, and actions go side-by-side with Guillaume and Huysmans's horizontal conception of relations that identifies the complex and messy entanglements between daily practices. Mac Ginty (44) has identified the relationship between pro-social acts of individuals at the community, state, and international levels and suggested exploring their relations as assemblages. Similarly, Guillaume and Huysmans's theory of everyday points out the inability to distinctively identify and conform to the commonly used three levels of analysis; individual, state, and international (2019, 283), and the existence of a horizontal relationship between the levels of analysis which can only be categorized as complex and interconnected.

However, going beyond Mac Ginty's classification of everyday acts as a part of a microcircuit, Guillaume and Huysmans point out how the notion of everyday will perform an epistemological operation rather than an ontological operation (2019, 280). Therefore, the

theory of everyday is not focused on simply adding a distinct scale of reality as micro or taking into consideration unorthodox political actors such as ordinary citizens (279). Rather, it should be seen as a way of questioning the commonsensical understanding of the everyday and what it consists of. Understanding everyday peace through this conceptualization will not only prevent it from being a mere bottom-up peacebuilding approach but will also open the potential of everyday as a way of thinking about and understanding conflicts.

In order to undertake this ontological operation, Guillaume and Huysmans (2019) develop two notions of the everyday, namely the abundance of political life and ephemeral practices. The notion of the abundance of political life challenges the limitations imposed on political analysis to sites of conventional politics. Hence, Guillaume and Huysmans go beyond political institutions, elections, politicians, their policies, and international political spheres and argue that politics are manifested in routine and mundane acts of everyday (2019, 282). For example, the quotidian act of an ordinary citizen going to the supermarket to buy milk can be seen as an act that is comprised of many political elements. The mode of transportation he or she uses to go to the supermarket can be determined by the availability of public infrastructure which is directly dependent on the policies implemented by the government. If he or she decides to buy milk from one brand which has been imported, it can reflect the export and import policies of the country and the trade deals a country has with other international actors. If the citizen is unable to purchase any amount of milk cartons and is only allowed a quota, it will reflect the limitations the government has implemented depending on their political ideology. Furthermore, if the citizen decides to boycott a certain brand of milk that is produced in unsustainable ways it also shows how he or she is engaging their political agency. Therefore, the notion of abundance accepts the diverse and nuanced forms of political meaning-making sites. Consequently, political analysis is densified through exploring the potential of everyday activities.

Additionally, Guillaume and Huysmans expand the notion of everyday by highlighting the political implication of ephemeral practices. Even though such ephemeral practices are fleeting and momentary, the authors identify how they have lasting political ramifications (2019, 286). Flash mobs, billboards, and street posters can be seen as examples of ephemeral practices. However, the temporality of such acts has not limited the significant political implications they can bring about. During the term of President Gotabaya Rajapakse, many citizens gathered in the street to show their displeasure over the price hikes, fuel shortages, and long power outrages (Thenthamizh, 2022). Small flash mobs would gather in the street for a few hours and were initially organized between families and friends. Despite the fleeting and momentary nature of these flash mobs they had significant political implications in Sri Lanka. Not only did these flash mobs developed into a protest hub named *Gota Go Gama* which succeeded in pressurizing the President to step down from his post, but they also became a mobilizing force of all Sri Lankans living abroad (Rabel and Umar, 2022). Therefore, as Guillaume and Huysmans point out, the everyday that analyzes ephemeral acts that are temporal and fleeting can capture the many political implications that are lost in the literature that solely focuses on conventional political sites and politics in times of crisis.

Furthermore, the notion of the abundance of political life and ephemeral life also expands Mac Ginty's conceptualization of everyday peace that is limited to human interactions that constitute of sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity. While such relations, acts of kindness, and friendships are of utmost importance, the everyday also constitutes other actions that might not be considered human interactions. For example, Guillaume and Huysmans point out the study conducted by Camilo Trumper (2016) in Chile on graffiti and how it enabled political mobilization. Such forms of everyday peace through mediums of art such as graffiti might be overlooked through Mac Ginty's everyday peace that is limited to sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity but can be bought into the analysis through the conceptualization of the everyday put

forth by Guillaume and Huysmans. Given the rise of literature that identifies the potential of art as a tool of peacebuilding, moving away from Mac Ginty's limited focus on human actions will be beneficial in further understanding everyday peace.

Moreover, art-based mediums such as graffiti, theater, poetry, photos, and textiles fit under the conceptualization of Guillaume and Huysmans's everyday. Even though art is often mistaken to be a politically neutral site, many artists have used art-based media to carry political messages. The resistance movement carried out by many Tamil artists after the government imposed the discriminatory Sinhala only Act in 1956, which limited Sinhala to be the only official language in the country, can be seen as one such example. During the early 1960s, a collection of poetry came out with some leading artists in the country under the name 'Tamil is our weapon' to show their displeasure and resistance towards the Language Act (Waravita, 2022). Even though poetry is not traditionally seen as a site of political inquiry, Tamil artists in Sri Lanka have used it as a platform to voice their political demands and manifested their political agency through art. Hence, such art has been able to make political life more abundant and prevent political analysis from being limited to conventional sites of politics such as the parliament or elections.

Similarly, the graffiti that has been painted in Spain can be seen as an example of art that encapsulates ephemeral practices with political implications. Graffiti often is considered either as an act of vandalism or a part of the landscape in streets that is appreciated. However, Graffiti is not only temporal, it is also a fleeting practice as it can be painted over and changed quickly (Vogel, et al., 2020, 2157). Nevertheless, graffiti has been used as a political tool in Spain specially to bring about different perspectives on the political debates related to issues of Catalonia's independence (Javier, 2020). Even though graffiti is fleeting and located in unconventional sites of politics, it has major implications as it has been used as a political meaning-making site in Spain. Various initiatives also organize street art tours at present,

making such graffiti and political debates prominent to tourists and international communities (Javier, 2020). Hence, such art-based ephemeral practices such as graffiti cannot be ignored as politically insignificant but should be given emphasis when addressing the everyday.

Therefore, Mac Ginty's conceptualization of everyday peace can be further developed through adding the notions of abundance of politics and ephemeral practices as introduced by Guillaume and Huysmans. This conceptualization of the everyday provides the necessary analytical tools to analyze how art has been used as a tool to foster everyday peace that facilitates better relationships between divided communities.

3 Everyday Art Peace

While many everyday acts show sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity as pointed out by Mac Ginty, art as a medium plays a significant role in fostering peace and building better relationships among divided societies as it also makes politics more abundant and captures the political implications of ephemeral practices. As Nilanjana Premaratna and Roland Bleiker (2016) observe, art performs three vital functions that expand its potential as a peacebuilding medium. Firstly, art can expand the peacebuilding discourse by providing a space for communication (84-87). Even though many top-down peacebuilding approaches take steps to foster better relationships between divided communities by establishing Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, the highly institutionalized and one-size-fits-all procedures followed fail to consider the complexities of societal relations and lived experiences (Kerr, 2020, 19). However, art has the potential to expand the channels of everyday communication between divided societies (Premaratna and Bleiker, 2016, 84). In a multi-lingual country like Sri Lanka, where the two conflicting ethnicities do not share a common language, visual art has the potential to remove this barrier and provide an opportunity for ordinary citizens to converse with each other through non-verbal mediums.

Most Mira, the art-based initiative established in Prijedor, one of the most conflict-affected cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is one example of how art has been used as a tool to build better relationships among different ethnic groups and celebrate their diversity (Kerr, 2020, 21). The organization has gotten the participation of over 1500 Serbian, Roma, Croatian, and Muslim youths along with their parents and teachers (Most Mira Website, 2023). The organization has been able to bring people from different backgrounds and lived experiences of the conflict to participate and learn artistic activities such as dancing, music, photography, theatre, and circus skills (Kerr, 2020, 21). By doing so, *Most Mira* has created a platform where stereotypical narratives of other ethnic communities, which are often created through political

ideologies, are contested. Instead, the various experiences of the conflict are brought up through their interactions when learning art together making politics more abundant in the community. Furthermore, through such art-based mediums this initiative aims to provide opportunities, especially for the youth population, to build lasting friendships with others from diverse backgrounds and contribute to everyday peace.

Secondly, correcting one of the main limitations of one-size-fits-all top-down peacebuilding approaches, art can be used as a tool to understand how to create context-specific and organic approaches to advance peace with local participation (Premaratna and Bleiker, 2016, 87). Liberal peacebuilding projects that believe in the possibility of imposing universal models of peace on various countries, often either romanticize the local or dismiss the local knowledge and agency altogether. Consequently, such approaches largely fail to capture the diverse socio-economic factors and the complexities that are embedded in a country. However, art that has been created by ordinary citizens and grassroots level initiatives, reflects diverse perspectives and provides an alternative understanding of peace.

Jana Sanskriti, a theatre group based in West Bengal, can be given as an example of such an art-based project. The political theatre group brings the participation of communities from rural areas to address issues of structural injustice and power inequality (Premaratna, 2018, 154). Not only are the plays composed and enacted by locals, but they are also performed for the very community. As a result, the everyday life of the community is portrayed and their realities of battling with injustice and inequality are brought to life through the play. Jana Sanskriti also skilfully gets the participation of the community by inviting the audience to transform the negative ending of the play through their own narratives (Premaratna and Bleiker, 2016, 91). Consequently, an opportunity to engage in collaborative work with others to find creative and organic solutions to problems is created on stage. Even though such interactions are momentary to the duration of the play and everchanging as the same solutions will not be

created by the next audience, it has potential for lasting impacts on the citizens. Not only does it empower the locals to challenge the stereotypical narratives and power structures that are embedded in the community that negatively impacts their everyday life, but it also reinforces their agency in creating everyday peace. Increased participation of ordinary citizens also raises the acceptability of peacebuilding mechanisms and builds trust in the process. Therefore, such art projects that engage with a local community can play a significant role in creating context-dependent solutions. Hence, art projects such as *Jana Sanskriti* highlight the importance of ephemeral practices in creating everyday peace and show the potential of art to facilitate better relationships between communities.

Thirdly, Premaratna and Bleiker argue how art can diversify the narratives that have been built around conflict and peacebuilding (2016, 89). Many conflicts, including the ethnic war in Sri Lanka, stem from the lack of opportunities for representation and the inability of minority communities to voice their needs and grievances. However, top-down peacebuilding mechanisms, such as liberal peacebuilding which focuses on establishing democratic institutions, usually fail to address such impediments as the majority is given the primary position through elections (90). As a result, the vital element of inclusivity and plurality that should be embedded in peacebuilding mechanisms are restricted. Art can be used as a medium to counter such limitations and create space for minority representation and alternative narratives.

As art is identified as an unthreatening medium, alternative realities that often cannot be depicted elsewhere can be bought into light. The use of textiles in South Africa by *Amazwi Abesifazane*, the Voices of Women, shows how art can bring multi-vocality in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes (Andrä, 2020, 1492). Even though the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was established in South Africa documented over 21,400 testimonies and addressed a wide range of violations and atrocities committed under apartheid (Department of

Justice and Constitutional Development, 2023), the experiences of indigenous women were largely left out (Becker, 2004, 117). In response, *Amazwi Abesifazane* used textiles as a medium to document their lived experiences and the violence they faced under the theme "a day I will never forget" (120). Textiles, a material seen as soft and inconsequential, were used creatively to document the tragic experiences of indigenous women. The visual representation was able to evoke emotions and the embroidery and beads used added rough textures to their textiles. This represents the duality of textiles, a soft material that can document violence (Andrä, 2020).

Such art projects were able to diversify the narratives present in the context of violence committed under the apartheid government and allowed minority groups to voice their experiences. Therefore, textile art has been able to contribute to creating everyday peace as such varying narratives depicted through textiles have made politics more abundant and bought it closer to the communities instead of limiting the sphere of politics to political elites and institutions. Such textile art was also able to point out the limitations of the institutionalized mechanisms created to deal with such issues making a significant political contribution.

Apart from these three elements, art also plays a significant role in providing a safe space for addressing the emotional elements of lived experiences during and after a conflict. The emotions of anger, sadness, resentment, embarrassment, and fear often shape the perspectives and determine how relationships are built with each other. Brewer et al. (2018, 154-198) portray the complexities of emotions that different ethnic populations deal with in the case of Sri Lanka in relation to their victimhood, loss, anxieties for the future, and empathy. Nevertheless, such emotional impacts of a conflict are often not addressed in top-down peacebuilding (Premaratna and Bleiker, 2016, 85). Therefore, art can be seen as a medium to express emotions and come to terms with the past. As different forms of art such as graffiti can

transform everyday spaces into a platform for conveying grievances, a wider audience can be reached, and such lived experiences could be acknowledged and validated.

The street art campaign conducted by Murad Subay in Yemen, known as *The Walls Remember Their Faces*, to commemorate people who were subjected to forced disappearances can be seen as an example of how art has been used as a medium to express loss and gain acknowledgment (Tellidis, 2020, 2). The artists created portraits of missing persons with their names and date of disappearance (2). Such artistic endeavors humanized the costs of political violence that are merely seen as statistical numbers by making the political costs more abundant to the community. Furthermore, this project also allowed the families of disappeared people to appeal to receive justice and get acknowledgment for their loss. This art project also yielded structural and institutional changes as the attention drawn from this street art campaign led to the creation of a special committee to investigate the enforced disappearances in Yemen and opened up dialogues on transnational justice law (2). Furthermore, some disappeared personnel were also located showing the success of the project.

The inherent nature of an art-based medium and its need for interpretation can also bring different narratives into conversation with each other (Premaratna and Bleiker, 2016, 90-91). Consequently, ordinary citizens with different perceptions can open a dialogue with each other through art and showcase their perspectives and lived experiences. *Jana Karaliya*, a multi-ethnic theatre group in Sri Lanka, can be given as an example of how art facilitates conversations within groups from opposing backgrounds. As the name suggests, *Jana Karaliya*, or the Theatre of the People, as a group itself aims to represent the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of the country. Actors not only come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, but also speak different languages. Such differences are also translated into the plays they produce. Plays are carried out in both Sinhalese and Tamil and invite the audience to contest the popular narratives present in society without directly addressing the civil war

(Premaratna, 2018, 122). The dialogic and multivocal technique of theatre that is adopted in *Jana Karaliya* allows the two ethnicities to represent their narratives and engage in conversation with each other (107). Even though such dialogues are fleeting and ephemeral, through such conversations and hearing different narratives, participants re-image and re-create their own narratives and stories leading to improved relations between the divided communities in the country.

Therefore, art certainly earned its place to be investigated as a tool for peacebuilding. Its ability to expand the discourse on peacebuilding by creating space for communication, providing opportunities to build context-dependent peacebuilding mechanisms, diversifying the narrative on peace, addressing emotional elements of citizens, and facilitating dialogues with opposing narratives cannot be neglected. Such capacities of art-based mediums not only make politics more abundant, but also capture the lasting implications of ephemeral practices. Hence, such art that has the potential to facilitate everyday peace can be conceptualized as everyday art peace and it can be used as a tool to facilitate better relationships between divided communities.

However, it should be noted that some everyday art peace projects have more limitations in terms of their peacebuilding outreach than others. While art exhibitions, photography collections, and theatre productions have immense potential in facilitating peace in communities, barriers such as entrance tickets that are needed to access such art limit the audience. Consequently, communities who do not possess the economic might to remove such barriers cannot access art even if it has peacebuilding potential. Similarly, text-based art or art mediums that heavily depend on language have limitations when fostering everyday peace. For example, in a multi-lingual country like Sri Lanka where diverse languages divided along ethnic lines are being used, poetry or theatre that is based on language can only reach communities that speak and understand that language. As a result, the capacity of art to make

politics abundant and capture the implication of ephemeral politics which will benefit the people by fostering everyday peace will be constrained to the population that shares the common language.

Hence, this paper limits its analysis of everyday art peace to mural paintings in Sri Lanka as it surpasses both such barriers. Firstly, mural paintings have unrestrictive access. As murals are seen on streets they do not limit the audience to any specific community based on racial or economic standards (Tellidis, 2020, 3-4). The streets are also a significant platform for everyday actions and it is an unorthodox political sphere where politics are made abundant through art. This form of art is also ephemeral as it can be subjected to change by everyday citizens, who can add their interpretations to the art piece. Secondly, murals also largely take away the language barrier that has stood in the way of fostering better relationships with diverse ethnic communities. Consequently, murals can be seen as everyday art peace that are relevant in the context of Sri Lanka as all citizens will be able to interpret and understand murals without learning another language. Therefore, murals in Sri Lanka are analyzed to understand how everyday art peace can be seen as a tool that fosters better relationships within divided communities.

4 Methodology

Despite the great potential, exploring everyday art peace as a tool that is significant to achieve peacebuilding is not a common practice in traditional epistemologies such as positivism, where scholars of international relations for a long time limited their research of world events and political order to strictly structured and systematic methodologies (Bleiker, 2001, 510). Consequently, their sites of inquiry were constrained to conventional sites of politics and international relations. However, the aesthetic turn in academia has freed politics and international relations from such restrictions. Accordingly, the first step of the aesthetic turn was seen in the 1980s, when post-modern scholars contested the rigid epistemologies giving rise to interpretive scholarship (521). The second step of the aesthetic turn emerged in the 21st century bringing unorthodox sites of politics such as visual art, poetry, literature, cinema, theater, and textiles into the analysis (523).

This aesthetic turn has been able to move away from the language-dependent interpretations and representations of politics and broaden the scope of international relations. For example, the aesthetic turn has been able to incorporate the implications of visual analysis in international relations. Even though pictures and images have not been included in the political analysis under traditional epistemologies as the causal effects of such visuals are harder to determine, methodologies under the aesthetic turn have been able to identify the emotional and psychological ramifications of such elements (Bleiker, 2015, 874).

Therefore, following the footsteps of the aesthetic turn, this paper uses the methodology of visual analysis proposed by Gillian Rose with three sites of meaning-making (2001, 16) to capture the effects of everyday art peace, such as murals, on building better relationships among divided communities in Sri Lanka. Current literature that uses visual analysis often debates which site of meaning-making has the most significance in their understanding (Rose, 2001). In contrast to such disputes, Bleiker claims that a pluralistic method should be used

when engaging in visual analysis to capture the complexities and nuances of images (2015, 877). Hence, this paper grapples with all these sites of meaning-making in visual analysis, namely the production of the murals, understanding the murals itself, and how the audience interprets the murals (Rose, 2001, 16).

"All visual representations are made in one way or another, and the circumstances of their production may contribute towards the effect they have" (Rose, 2001, 17). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to investigate the production of various everyday art peace as the process of production itself brings out a different understanding of the visual. For example, in many countries, grassroots communities have used textiles as a medium to deal with their lived experiences during conflict and bring about peace in post-war societies. The Peace Ribbon that was tied around the United States Capitol and the Pentagon is one such account (Andrä, 2020, 1493). It was made by ordinary women in the United States and many other countries to protest the nuclear arms race. A ribbon which is known to be a soft and non-threatening medium was used by these women to make a statement on the nuclear arms race, a high-stake military development (1493). Nevertheless, without looking at the production process and focusing on the mere visual of the Peace Ribbon itself would lose their intention behind producing this ribbon, the decisions these women made in the production process to navigate certain barriers in the political sphere, and their use of the dual nature of textiles as a medium of contestation. Hence, when conducting visual analysis of everyday art peace, it is important to look at the production of the murals.

The visual itself is another site of meaning-making that needs to be explored. The various symbols and signs that are embedded in everyday art peace can be identified when examining the visual itself (Bleiker, 2015, 878). Such elements also help situate the visual in relation to other mediums and objects and grapple with how they interact with each other (878). Furthermore, analyzing the visual will also point out different power structures that came about

and how the artists have chosen to portray them (878). Depending on the technologies used to produce certain visuals, the meaning-making of the visual itself will change. Rose points out how technologies used by different photographers have affected the photographs they have produced (2001, 23) and how such elements have changed the meaning of photos. Hence, the two murals in Sri Lanka as everyday art peace will be analyzed for such aspects.

The interaction between the visual and the audience it aims to reach is one of the most important aspects that needs to be explored in visual analysis, especially in understanding the potential of everyday art peace in building better relationships between divided communities. As different viewers of the visuals bring their interpretation of the image, the meaning of the visual is constantly created and re-created (Rose, 2001, 25). Unlike, text-based mediums where the interpretations are static, the visual-based art medium is subjected to the elucidation of its audience. This is both the beauty and the danger of everyday art peace. While art creates a space where different and creative interpretations can be formed that in return will build better relationships among divided communities, art can also be used as a form of propaganda and manipulation. Therefore, the dual nature of art should be kept in mind while conducting visual analysis of the two murals. Furthermore, where the visuals are located also changes the reaction it receives (26). An image exhibited in a museum or photographic exhibition invites different reactions than visuals that are seen in the street. The audience's ideas and interpretations in a museum might be controlled due to social norms, while they can be expressed freely on the street. At the same time, the geographic location of the visual will have implications in deciding which audience can reach the art easily and how people are given the space to react. For example, if a mural is on a busy street more people will interact with it. Similarly, if it is painted near a school or a temple, the reactions of the audience to the mural should fit respectable social standards. Hence, such factors should also be taken into consideration when conducting visual

analysis as the interpretations and reflections shown by the viewers will directly impact the potential of every art peace.

Nevertheless, conducting visual analysis to explore the potential of art as a medium to foster better relationships among divided communities in Sri Lanka has its limitations. Firstly, many scholars and journalists that have researched the civil war in Sri Lanka have failed to identify the biases that arose from their positionality. Consequently, the narratives that promote stereotypical beliefs and understanding of other ethnic communities have been propagated. However, it was also interesting to see that while such stereotypical narratives of the other ethnic community exist at the forefront when addressing issues of military operations, international intervention, and transnational justice, in the literature on art as a medium of peace and reconciliation such narratives are softened or not prevalent. As a Sri Lankan and as a Sinhalese myself, I too carry such biases. However, the local and cultural knowledge I possess about the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict will be more beneficial in analyzing everyday art peace and its potentiality to foster better relationships between different ethnicities rather than not engaging in this research based on my predispositions.

Secondly, there is a lack of data when identifying everyday art peace such as mural paintings in the context of Sri Lanka. Even though art has been used widely to foster peace and reconciliation in the country, many scholars focus on military aspects of the Sri Lankan civil war, rather than grappling with interpretive studies that try to highlight the potential of art as a peacebuilding tool. Similarly, non-academic sources such as newspaper articles that help to explore the reactions of communities to such grassroots initiatives that use art have also been limited.

Bearing in mind such limitations of analyzing everyday art peace, a collaborative initiative that was undertaken by three grassroots-level organizations to paint murals in Sri Lanka to foster peace is explored in this paper to understand the potentiality of everyday art

peace in facilitating better relationships between divided communities. The analysis is based on various visuals produced on the official websites and social media accounts of grassroots level organizations. The pluralistic visual analysis is conducted in three sites of meaning-making; the production of the murals, the murals itself, and the reactions of citizens who interacted with the murals, to understand the potential everyday art peace has in facilitating peace and fostering better relationships between divided communities.

5 Everyday Art Peace in Sri Lanka

While many everyday art peace projects have been undertaken by local communities in Sri Lanka, the two mural paintings created in 2022 by three local initiatives, *Sisterhood Initiative*, *We are from here*, and *The Fearless Collective* are explored in this paper. Using the conceptual tool developed with the theoretical contribution of Mac Ginty, Guillaume, and Huysmans the two murals are analyzed to identify how everyday art peace depicts sociality, reciprocity, solidarity, and circuity while also making politics abundant and emphasizing the ephemeral practices that have potentiality to leave lasting impacts. This project was selected for this study for three main reasons. Firstly, as the two murals painted through this project primarily take a visual nature and move away from language-based art forms, it is highly fitting to the multi-lingual nature of Sri Lankan society. Hence, this visual-based everyday art peace project has been able to remove the language barriers that stand in the way of building better relationships among diverse ethnic communities. Secondly, the murals are in two public street spaces, one on the Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters and the other on Rio Cinema in Colombo (Wijesinghe, 2022). This not only allows a wider audience to interact with the mural paintings without any barriers to access, but as a street mural it is also at the heart of everyday activities. Furthermore, both murals are in Slave Islands, Colombo 2. This increases the potential of these murals to facilitate better relationships between divided communities especially given that Slave Islands is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse areas with Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim Malay, and Muslim Moor communities living in close proximity (Albano, 2020). Thirdly, as this project is a collaborative project of three initiatives, more resources were produced that allowed overcoming one of the limitations of exploring everyday art peace in Sri Lanka.

All three grassroots level organizations that collaborated in bringing the two murals to life were founded by driven ordinary individuals showing the capacity of everyday citizens to

make an impact. Nabeela Iqbal is a peacebuilding activist who founded the *Sisterhood Initiative* to provide a safe space for Muslim women in the country to raise awareness about their issues, advocate for their rights, and empower leadership within communities (Sisterhood Initiative, 2022). The initiative is "non-profit, non-political, and non-religious" and it aims to work towards gaining recognition of Muslim women as vital stakeholders in the country (Sisterhood Initiative, 2022). Even though the civil war in Sri Lanka is fractured along ethnic lines of Sinhalese and Tamils, Muslim communities, much like many other minority groups, faced the consequences of the war, especially those living in the North and East provinces of the country. Not only were they subjected to direct violence, but many Muslim communities were also forced by the LTTE to leave their homes in the North province making them internally displaced persons (Brewer et al., 2018, 164). Furthermore, given the long history of anti-Muslim riots in the country from 1915 to 2019 (Wettimuny, 2019), the *Sisterhood Initiative* plays an important role in not only giving a voice to the community, but also empowering Muslim women to harbor their agency to lead policy change.

We are from here is the second local initiative involved in creating the two murals in Sri Lanka and was founded by three local artists, Firi Rahman, Vicky Shahjahan, and Parilojithan Ramanathan (Hannan, 2019). The initiative aims to create a different narrative of the Slave Island area. Through painting murals that highlight the unique beauty of the area and represent the diverse community, the initiative hopes to move away from the negative narratives associated with crime and re-invent a positive image of the area (Albano, 2020). In line with this research, the goal of this local initiative further emphasizes the potential of art as a medium to challenge stereotypical narratives and the ability to recreate new meanings. Even though the third initiative, *The Fearless Collective*, is not based in Sri Lanka, it is yet another local initiative founded by the artist Shilo Shiv Suleman (Wijesinghe, 2022). Frustrated by the discrepancies seen between protests that stemmed as a response to the *Nirbhaya* gang rape in

India and how the media reported it, Shilo was determined to bring the emotions, lived experiences, and voices of women to the community through art (Jayasuriya, 2022). The initiative aims to turn crises into opportunities for creative thinking, beauty, and collective imagination (The Fearless Collective, 2023b). Hence, this initiative too stands in the scope of this study as it is a local initiative that is empowering everyday citizens to bring out their stories through collaborative mural arts.

5.1 Production of the murals

The creation of the two murals started in March 2022 with the arrival of the Fearless artists in Colombo. During the first three days of the art residency, the artists from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh participated in various workshops that allowed them to be reflective on their respective cultures, political situations, personal histories, resistance movements, and fears (Mahoob, 2022). Through various activities such as stepping into a borderless map of South Asia, the artists learned about how they were interconnected and share common stories (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). During the workshops, *The Fearless Collective* trained the artists on how to engage with local communities to create murals that were representative of their voices which are often ignored. Such training was put into use when the artists led two workshops with the participation of local communities with the engagement of the two local initiatives, the *Sisterhood Initiative* and *We are from here*.

The first workshop was centered around the scope of the *Sisterhood Initiative* with a group of Muslim women in Colombo (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). During the workshop, Muslim women shared what it means to be a Muslim woman, their relationship with their faith, and what the implications are of living in Sri Lankan society (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). The struggles of the women who are often disrespected and unheard were also shared among the group. Furthermore, participants answered the question "we come together if" with responses such as "majority communities are organized and collective in making room,

creating opportunity," "if we respect each others thinking," and "we teach our children not to shun others." (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). Such answers show that women acknowledged that fostering better relationships with other communities holds the key to unlocking immense growth potential. Given that the *Sisterhood Initiative* itself is composed of women who are not believers of Islam faith, many women also use the space to depict the valuable connections they have with other communities (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). Enriched by such conversations, an image was created with the participation of ordinary women to depict their experiences and stories in the way they would like to be represented in the mural on the Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters.

A similar pattern was followed during the second workshop, which engaged with the *We are from here* initiative and a group of women who live in the Slave Islands area (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). The space was used to share stories about the importance of Slave Islands and how many of them not only call the area home, but also feel a strong sense of community with each other. The group found a common thread of shared fear of losing their home due to development projects that are being undertaken by the government, along with the fear of erasure of their lived experiences (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). At the end of the workshop, another image was created by the group of women living in Slave Islands that are representative of their heterogenous community and the strengths they share by standing in solidarity (The Fearless Collective, 2023a). This was then turned into the Rio Cinema mural. Thereafter, the artists painted the two murals using the imagery created that were representative of the communities. Social media channels of all three initiatives also invited the public and ordinary citizens to participate in painting the murals in Colombo (Jayasuriya, 2022; sisterhood.initiative, 2022; wearefromhere, 2022a).

Throughout the production of these murals, local citizens were able to perform acts of sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity that are vital for everyday peace as identified by Mac Ginty.

The workshops that were held in many ways provided opportunities for local communities not only to voice their experiences and represent their diverse stories through murals, but also allowed them to create better relationships among diverse communities. For example, the group of women participating in the second workshop held in collaboration with the *We are from here* was composed of Sinhalese, Muslim, and Hindu women. Through storytelling, they were able to see the common fears they hold about losing their homes and the need to unite to prevent the erasure of their unique culture. Furthermore, through the collaborative workshop with the *Sisterhood Initiative*, women also learn the significance of building better relationships with other communities and how such alliances are vital to navigating the daily struggles to be heard and respected as women in the country. Hence, these workshops laid the groundwork for communities living in Slave Islands to perform acts of sociality and solidarity manifesting everyday peace.

Furthermore, the workshops held to produce and paint the two murals have also made politics abundant and performed ephemeral practices that have potential for lasting implications. During the discussion, various struggles that communities share due to political policies were identified. For example, many families living in the Slave Island area earn daily wages as mobile vendors, who push their carts to the beach in the afternoon and return at night (De Sayrah, 2021). The development projects that force eviction have disrupted the everyday life of many citizens as they have been relocated to homes further from the beaches. Similarly, the struggles of Muslim women to be who they are in the country due to discriminatory policies were heard. By sharing these stories all women were able to have a better understanding of each other. As a result, even though the workshops were ephemeral, momentary, and fleeting, the shared experience all women had has potentiality to hold lasting implications as it not only empowers the women but also makes them see their political agency. Women in these groups were also given the courage to go past these difficulties to see their strengths and build better

relationships based on shared fears. Moreover, their strength and agency will further be embodied when looking at the mural they created and painted. As the mural stands as a counternarrative and as a sign of resistance to erasure, especially the one in Rio Cinema that represents the diversity in the Slave Islands community who are soon to be forgotten, politics have been made more abundant through this everyday art peace.

The production of the mural with the collaboration of three local initiatives also shows the circuity introduced by Mac Ginty. Even though the initiatives were started by one or a few individuals, their organizations together have made an impact in many circuits. For example, the Indian artist, Shilo, started her activism by painting murals in India (Jayasuriya, 2023). Through such murals, she has been able to impact the local communities in India. She further expanded her sphere of influence by collaborating with two local initiatives in Sri Lanka. Along with these two organizations, Shilo and other Fearless artists were able to connect with Muslim women and residents of Slave Islands. As a result, the use of murals to bring political change, which started as an idea in the personal circuit of Shilo, has expanded to local communities not only in India, but also in Sri Lanka. Hence, the circuits of local women in Slave Islands are also connected to the circuits of women in Delhi, where Shilo first painted murals to protest the *Nirbhaya* gang rape as they share common values and stories of resistance. Hence, the production process of this everyday art peace captures elements of everyday peace as it provides the opportunity for communities to perform acts of sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity, making political life more abundant, and undertaking ephemeral practices that have potential for fostering peace in many circuits.

5.2 The murals

Furthermore, the murals itself contribute to facilitating everyday peace in the country by creating a sense of community. It does this by portraying how women from diverse ethnic and religious groups are standing in solidarity with each other. The first mural created in

collaboration with the *Sisterhood Initiative*, as shown in Figure 1, depicts two women holding hands. The two women are representative of women who participated in the workshop, one of them is Muslim, while the other is a Tamil Christian (Pulse, 2022, 3:53). Even though they are holding hands, the two women are looking in different directions. This shows how despite the different struggles, goals, and varying walks of life women have, they still can stand in unity with each other and have a sisterhood between them. Furthermore, the two women in the mural are wrapped with roots that bloom into a flowering tree behind them and a dialogue bubble in between encapsulates the words "our roots entwine, we are divine." This highlights the common history, culture, and background women share that go beyond their ethnic and religious differences. Similarly, at the bottom of the roots, there are shapes that symbolize gravestones which shows how both women stand on the foundation laid by their common ancestors. Nevertheless, inside these shapes, different messages such as "hello", "hope",

"sisterhood", and "equality" have been encrypted in all three different languages used in Sri Lanka. These messages bring attention to language barriers the community has overcome to build bridges between each other and stand in solidarity, while also highlighting their strengths.

Figure 1*:* The mural on Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters (Fearless Collective, 2022a).

The second mural (see Figure 2), painted on the Rio Cinema, shows four women and one young girl. Similar to the first mural, this too represents the diverse ethnic composition of women living in the Slave Islands area. Two Muslim women, one Sinhalese, and one Tamil woman stand close to each other. While three of them hold their fists up high depicting strength, one Muslim woman has an arm around the Sinhalese woman showing unity, sisterhood, and inter-faith solidarity. The young girl is carried in-between two women showing how the sisterhood and the comradery women have will be passed on to the next generations as well. The mural also depicts a sewing machine at the side of the women. This highlights how women in the Slave Islands often use sewing as an everyday practice to overcome their economic hardships. Furthermore, the mural also portrays how Muslim women who typically speak in Tamil or Malay express themselves in Sinhala, saying that "This is my village, this is my strength." Such texts have been able to create a narrative of how languages that are often seen as a barrier have not been able to divide women living in the Slave Islands. Instead, minority women have learned Sinhalese to navigate their everyday life and use it as a strength. Accompanying the Sinhalese text, Tamil quotes have also been written on the side of the mural that read "This is our time. Let's rise together and unite our strengths." This constitutes a strong

message given that at the time of painting the mural, the country was suffering a severe economic crisis that rallied people from all ethnicities to protest against the government.

Figure 2: The mural on Rio Cinema
(Fearless Collective, 2022b).

Therefore, this project of painting murals in the Slave Islands has immense potential for creating everyday peace among local communities. The murals have made politics more abundant in Slave Islands. The murals have successfully brought the voices of women from diverse ethnic and religious communities, who are often underrepresented or ignored as stakeholders in society. The struggles of women to achieve equality and the everyday acts they have taken to navigate their life such as sewing is portrayed in the murals. Furthermore, the murals also stand as a message of resistance to dividing the community based on ethnic and language barriers, a tactic used by politicians, as they show the strength and the sisterhood that is shared by women in the community. Such narratives have made political life abundant in society and have created space for everyday peace.

Furthermore, the two murals as everyday art peace have the potential for leaving lasting impacts through ephemeral practices. For example, to observe the murals, the audience needs to look up as they are painted on large walls. As pointed out by one of the artists, Vicky Shahjehan, this action itself creates a counternarrative on how women are often looked down upon in society (Pulse, 2022, 0:10). Hence, these murals demand respect for women by society. Even though such a practice is fleeting, it can create lasting impacts and lead to transformation as women are acknowledged as vital actors in society and treated with more respect. At the same time, as the mural is located at a central location, it is passed by many locals from diverse communities. The portrayal of unity shared among women from different ethnicities and the sisterhood they have rooted in common ancestry has the potential to be a thought-provoking exercise in such a diverse environment. Consequently, local communities will understand each other better and see the potential strength they hold by working together. Hence, the depiction of solidarity between inter-faith communities and the strength also contributes to everyday peace as pointed out by Mac Ginty.

Moreover, the murals hold the potential for positive rippling effects through different circuits. Women who are represented in the mural will be empowered through these murals to voice their opinions. At the same time, women living in Slave Islands as a whole will see the potential unity holds, leading to better relationships among neighbors from other ethnicities. Such improved relations ultimately could translate into the political sphere leading to policy changes that not only acknowledge women as important stakeholders in the country, but also foster peace. Hence, the two murals as an everyday art peace have immense potential to facilitate better relations in divided communities in Sri Lanka and bring about everyday peace in Slave Islands.

5.3 Interactions with the murals

Even though the number of sources that evaluate how the two murals interact with the audience is limited, there are a few documents that show how the murals are perceived. During the production of the murals, local communities were invited through social media accounts and a newspaper to participate in painting the murals. Accordingly, many ordinary citizens and children showed up to help the artists paint them (Mahboob, 2022). Both murals were painted during power outages, rain, and island-wide curfew due to protests that broke out in Sri Lanka against the government. However, the local communities and households living in the area provided the artists with tea, shade, and food to complete the mural that represents their community. Such acts of kindness show the support local communities had towards the project while illuminating how everyday peace is manifesting in the community through acts of sociality. Furthermore, many images show that local citizens living in the area also took time to look at how the murals were being painted (wearefromhere, 2022a; Pulse, 2022). This often created the space for people from diverse communities to converse with each other and build better relationships, an opportunity that is lacking in the country. Such interactions even though ephemeral and momentary hold potentiality to create positive impacts that break the silence between divided communities.

Additionally, as the two murals were painted during Ramadan, the three local initiatives held an iftar to break the fasting on the day the two murals were unveiled (wearefromhere, 2022b). Many citizens from diverse religious groups participated in the iftar to eat snacks and sweets. This also provided the opportunity for communities other than those who are of the Islam faith to participate in Muslim traditions and understand each other's customs. Such engagement can be seen as an act of solidarity that acknowledges the Muslim community and shows the support that builds everyday peace in the country. Furthermore, even though such an act is ephemeral and fleeting as it is only limited to the iftar, it could have lasting

implications as it has the potential to develop better relationships among diverse ethnicities. The iftar also provided the space to converse about the unveiling of the two murals that are representative of their struggles, goals, and strength that are often ignored due to ethnic strife.

Many women who participated in the workshops that were held to create the murals also showed great satisfaction and empowerment upon the completion of the project. One participant of the workshop noted that "it is really nice to see so much representation on this wall" (Pulse, 2022, 3:50). Such reactions show that women felt that the murals have been able to represent their suppressed voices and can stand as a symbol of their united power. At the same time, the interactions with the murals also make politics abundant as the two murals mark a milestone in the journey women in Slave Islands are on to get full representation and acknowledgment. The two murals were representative of the heterogenous community as one of the artists claimed, "I saw the joy and the power it [the mural] immediately brought into the community…" (Mahboob, 2022, para.20). Such feelings of empowerment and triumph will continue to flourish in Slave Islands as the murals stand the test of time. The murals will stand as a constant reminder of the united sisterhood and how women are important stakeholders in the country. Hence, the two murals as everyday art peace have been able to make a positive impact in the Slave Islands community, thereby paving the way to better relationships among the divided communities as it not only stands as a representation of the community, but also creates a safe space to converse with each other.

6 Conclusion

The everyday art peace project carried out by the three grassroots level initiatives stands as a testimony to show the potentiality and necessity of bottom-up approaches when advancing peace in divided communities. Addressing the limitations of top-down peacebuilding approaches, the two murals are able to represent the diverse local communities and provide a space to bring about the voices of minorities and women in the country who are often ignored in top-down peacebuilding policies. The art initiative is also able to create opportunities for communities from different ethnicities to communicate with each other sparking the potential for better relationships.

Furthermore, the two murals stand as a symbol of interfaith solidarity and the potentiality of art to create rippling effects in different circuits from women in India to Slave Islands. Such elements of sociality, reciprocity, solidarity, and circuity the two murals depict are the very components Mac Ginty identified as everyday peace. By representing the grievances and resistance of minority women the two murals also make politics more abundant. Even though the practices of looking up at the murals that command respect for women and the spaces created before, during, and after the production of the murals that encourage conversation with each other are ephemeral they hold the potential to build better relationships among divided communities in Sri Lanka. Hence, the two murals also consist of the two components of everyday, an abundance of politics and ephemeral practices, that are introduced by Guillaume and Huysmans. Consequently, this research through the empirical analysis of two murals painted in Sri Lanka has contributed towards densifying the notion of everyday peace by joining Mac Ginty's everyday peace theory with the everyday theory put forward by Guillaume and Huysmans.

Moreover, the two murals also stand as an example of how everyday art peace has the potential to facilitate peace. The murals not only provide the space for communication but also

diversify the narratives around peace by representing the struggles and strengths of women from diverse ethnic groups. As interpreting and understanding the murals does not require proficiency in any particular language, they stand as an example of how the language barriers that have been detrimental to advancing better relationships between divided communities can be navigated through mediums such as art. Hence, this research further advances the proposition that everyday art peace should not be taken lightly in peacebuilding discourse as art has the potential to be a medium that fosters peace and facilitate better relationships between divided communities.

However, the depth of empirical research in this paper has been limited in two ways. Firstly, the analysis of how this everyday art peace project was perceived by the audience has been limited due to a lack of sources. Secondly, empirical analysis on everyday art peace was confined to two murals in Slave Islands leaving out other murals located in the country. In order to correct such limitations, further research could be undertaken to carry out field research that consists of informal interviews with residents in the Slave Islands area which could shed light on how the communities responded to the production process of the murals, how the murals represented the unique narratives of diverse communities, and how the existence of the murals have bought positive changes to the communities and allowed better channels of communication between residence from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Following similar research conducted by Mac Ginty in Colombia (2021, 7), Everyday Peace Indicators could also be developed for Sri Lankan context by understanding the needs and priorities for peace as imagined by local communities. Using such peace indicators, the effectiveness of this everyday art peace project in bringing about such peace outcomes can be evaluated.

Moreover, correcting the restricted number of sites taken into consideration in this paper, further research could also include other murals in Colombo. Furthermore, a comparative study could be undertaken to explore whether everyday art peace projects or

murals have different reactions depending on the geographic location of the country. A study on everyday art peace in the Jaffna district, where the civil war was most intense and has a majority of Tamil communities residing, could be compared to everyday art peace in Hambantota where residents are mostly Sinhalese and had minimum direct experience with military confrontations. Adopting such a research design as a model, further research could also be expanded to other post-conflict societies to explore the potentiality of everyday art peace in fostering peace and facilitating better relationships between divided communities in post-conflict societies.

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