

Conflict Textiles hosts event on Nonviolence and Empowerment at Ulster Museum

The 28th of November 2024 a joint event between Conflict Textiles, the Hune O'Neill Chair u Peace at Ulster University and the Irish Network for Nonviolent Action Training and Education (INNATE) took place at the Ulster Museum bringing together a wide range of researchers, experts and students to engage with the political philosopher, Ramin Jahanbegloo, and his work on nonviolence. Conflict Textiles trustee, Clem McCartney, provided some opening words to the dialogue framing the presence of Jahanbegloo in the museum in the broader context of the Threads of Empowerment exhibition. This installation displays the political role of artwork like the arpilleras as a channel to memorialize resistance, to make a call to action to the citizenry, etc. He also highlighted the work that was done with other actors within Northern Ireland during the visit of the philosopher to the region like meeting with representatives from nationalist and unionist communities as well as with university students.



Jahanbegloo opened his participation with a brief reference to some of the places that have shaped his identity and led him to the insights he shared at this event. The academic was born in Iran; however, most of his professional formation took place in France. Currently, he resides in Canada and spends half of each year in India where he teaches. At the centre of the argument he presented at the event is the need of citizen empowerment, placing nonviolence as an unavoidable way to do so successfully.

The empowerment that comes from nonviolence, he established, goes beyond that which is acquired through the use of violence by cultivating civic virtue. This means using the concept of nonviolence to define and internalize reasons as to why we live together and should work together; in other words, the creation of a common *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi*. Central to this theoretical framework is the concept of indebtedness, what we owe to each

other, to nature, etc. creating a sense of responsibility and contributing to the creation of a language of duties that runs parallel to the more mainstream language of rights.

For this to happen Jahanbegloo advocates for the creation of new spaces for citizens to engage in democratic deliberation and participation, reducing the lack of trust in existing institutions and political actors. He also defines it as a necessary task for the citizenry to move beyond fear and engage with authority in a way that questions and defies it. Working towards democratic accountability not only towards others but as a self examination practice is at the core of the actions the philosopher considers necessary to bring about empowerment through nonviolence. Carrying out these activities at levels that go from the individual to the collective should under this framework convert them into moral capital that lends both legitimacy and credibility to your actions and goals.

The philosopher also offered some reflections on the current situation in Northern Ireland and the way it engages with its violent past. He remarked on how when speaking with local actors the prevailing attitude, when looking at their history, is the sense that they did what they had to do at the time as well as an absence of strategies to engage with nonviolence as part of the future of Northern Ireland. He also commented on the need to look at the past not only from a historical perspective but also from a moral one.



During the remainder of the session the participants engaged in a lively Q&A session with Jahanbegloo expressing their opinions and doubts around key concepts like indebtedness and alternative framings of it; expanding on how nonviolence doesn't mean passivity; and

the tensions between the theory of nonviolence and its application in contexts of deep exposure to conflict and violence.

