

Baketik's annual initiative for reflection, proposals and outreach

# R

acento  
2021

for a new culture of coexistence and  
reconciliation

Art and creativity to rethink  
ourselves

baketik

April 2021



acento  
2021

for a new culture of coexistence and reconciliation

## Introduction

Since 2011, Baketik's *Accents for Reconciliation* initiative has been committed to building upon Baketik's viewpoints with other perspectives and contributing to the debates that we consider to be part of our social reality. Back in 2011, it was suggested that this annual document was intended to contribute, together with the hundreds of initiatives developed by different stakeholders, to a new culture of coexistence and reconciliation in our society. Reconciliation, reconstructing and repairing relationships was, in fact, one of the foundations of the previous document which in 2020 focused on 'Restoring the social fabric'.

It is now 10 years since the launch of the *Accents* initiative. **This decade has decisively changed the basis for coexistence** in our environment: the disappearance of terrorist violence by ETA and the political and social changes for the recognition of all suffering have generated new forms of communication, meetings and relationships in our community. However, a quick look around us will show that we are still often stuck in forms of violent, non-democratic communication, which bring back dichotomous, non-inclusive forms of communication. As a society, we still need languages and forms of communication that allow us to express ourselves without causing suffering.

At the same time, since *Accents* was last published in February 2020, reality has been abruptly altered by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and all the changes it has brought about in our daily lives and social structures. This pandemic has triggered a new social crisis, which highlights the need for solidarity, for social transformation through formulas of coexistence and support between social groups that are often distanced from each other. This new crisis, which may end up becoming structural, shows us the need to rethink ourselves socially, to look at our foundations and to ask ourselves how useful they are.

It is in this self-examination, once the initial shock of the pandemic has passed that we continue to find unresolved issues that still present us with immediate challenges on the one hand, and medium- to long-term needs, on the other. Social coexistence and the narrative of the memory of the violence that the Basque Country has known continues to appear intermittently, but it is present in daily situations, especially in experiences at the municipal level. A year ago in *Acento 2020*, we reaffirmed that 'the road to peacebuilding has no end in sight. It is rather the act of building, of walking, rather than arriving somewhere in particular'<sup>i</sup>. We noted a year ago that spaces of encounter 'confirm that the social fabric is still broken' and 'restorative spaces are



acento

2021

for a new culture of coexistence and reconciliation

needed to rebuild it'. The answers to building coexistence are not unambiguous and in 2021 we would like to look to cultural expressions and artistic forms as a mechanism for the restoration of the damaged social fabric.

## Art and creativity as tools

But why should we focus our attention on culture and art in 2021? Over the years, numerous proposals have encouraged us to create spaces for meetings, to share experiences, to recognise the suffering of others and to express our rejection of rights violations. However, often we still cannot find the words that allow us to build those bridges.

In response to this, 'aesthetic and symbolic language helps us to better express what is difficult to express through analytical or rational language. Faced with painful and confusing memories that we feel cannot be expressed, the creative process is a way of searching for meaning and creating narratives'<sup>ii</sup>, as we explained through the *Adiorik gabe/Sin adiós* project.

In this sense, creativity provides us with a means of going beyond what we are able to articulate rationally. It pushes us to make new associations of ideas, to focus on new conclusions or to construct, almost intuitively and even viscerally, different and innovative solutions.

This symbolic language of art becomes for many people a 'safe space' in which 'the creative person takes control of his or her inner world to deal with and make sense of memories that are difficult to evoke and express'<sup>iii</sup>. In turn, the person on the receiving end of this artistic expression can pick up, revalidate or reject and respond to these personal experiences that the artist wants to transmit and can even endow them with other meanings.

Artists from different backgrounds have portrayed the experiences, thoughts and emotions of the human rights violations and violence we have lived through their artistic expressions. Literature has emerged as perhaps one of the most fruitful spheres in which Basque artists and those from other parts of the world have sought



acento  
2021

for a new culture of coexistence and reconciliation

to address the conflicts of our environment. The writing/reading tandem allows us to go into other realities in a very intimate way and 'the narrative mobilises aspects that help us to look at ourselves from other perspectives, beyond those where we have been placed or have placed ourselves unconsciously'<sup>iv</sup>.

Often, these literary journeys have taken place through broader narratives and novels that have integrated some specific scenes of the conflict. At other times they have materialised in the form of short stories and, of course, with the generation of novels whose main focus is the lack of democratic coexistence and its ravages. This literature has a long and growing list of works, with more recent novels and works that often focus on the personal and human experiences of the victims of the conflict. There is also no shortage of novels and narrative works that begin to address the post-conflict years, and they offer a narrative perspective on the experiences that different stakeholders may have of the current need to continue building coexistence and generating an acknowledgement of the suffering experienced<sup>v</sup>. The graphic novel is also beginning to become a favourable setting for dealing with the recent violence in the Basque Country.

This literature often merges with the audiovisual, and they complement` each other. In this way, more than one piece of work has been translated into cinematographic languages, in the form of a feature film for the cinema or even as a television series. For its part, cinema - we refer particularly to fiction - offers another totally expansive formula for elaborating narratives, conveying points of view and generating social reflection. Basque creators have at different times focused their work on the pain generated by violence or on the narrative of events experienced in our environment in recent decades.

At the same time, theatrical works are beginning to appear that deal with the experiences of victims, cases of police surveillance, the management of pain, the lack of communication between people and a long list of other human conditions that can be conveyed through the language of the stage.

Visual art has been no exception, and our region's museums treasure works from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that seek to question the public about their reactions to suffering and human rights violations. Other artistic forms - such as music and the countless songs that appeal to the recent violence, or the multitude of *bertsolaris* with their creations, among many other expressions - should certainly also be mentioned if we were to make a more systematic reading.



acento

2021

for a new culture of coexistence and reconciliation

## From individual creativity to social transformation

Creativity and art offers us a personal experience, a possibility to approach by means of an artistic language inner emotions that are often difficult to express in words. But, beyond this personal moment, this individual moment, 'on a social level, the fact of socialising a creation allows pain to be shared and dealt with collectively, and creates conditions for reconciliation'<sup>vi</sup>. That is to say, **culture can - and must - drive social reflection.**

Artistic expressions and 'actions in the cultural sphere facilitate cultural interaction and understanding and can help design new cultural landscapes, encompassing and reflective of the plurality'<sup>vii</sup>. Ultimately, also as a society, art and the creative aspect of artistic practices offer us communicative and reflexive mechanisms through play, knowledge and communication, by means of different languages<sup>viii</sup>.

This ability that art gives us to look at something from another perspective, both for the creator and the observer, allows us to work on something necessary in the reconstruction of a broken social fabric. It allows us to observe the result while we consider the process. Creativity allows us and forces us to look through the eyes of another person and thus encourages us to put empathy at the centre of the process. **Artistic construction strips away part of our rationality to allow us to enter the intimacy of other people's experiences.**

But how do we break the possible collision or clash between something as free and borderless as artistic creation and expression, and the need for processes of social reconstruction and the creation of memory that are faithful to the foundations of human rights?<sup>ix</sup> This is perhaps one of the most complex situations to resolve: **how can artistic freedom be guaranteed while maintaining an ethical foundation compatible with a rights-based approach?** How can we encourage liberating cultural creation that questions the experiences resulting from human rights violations during a conflict rather than ideologies, theories or other points of view that are difficult to reconcile during peace-building processes?<sup>x</sup>



acento

2021

for a new culture of coexistence and reconciliation

## Memorialisation processes

Every society constructs memory of its experiences: without memory of the past, there can be no right to truth, justice, reparation or a guarantee of it not happening again. Memorialisation 'is a vital tool for enabling societies to emerge from the cycle of hatred and conflict and begin taking definite steps towards building a culture of peace<sup>xi</sup>. These memory processes can shed light on the violence experienced in the past, address the challenges we still face in the present and prepare for a future where potential violence is prevented. It is in these processes where creativity must also have a place.

In this framework, **memory processes, also by means of artistic expressions, contribute to democratic social engagement**, encourage debates on the representation of the past and allow problems to be addressed in an appropriate way. At the societal level, **culture can also be a mechanism to create the conditions for debate in our society on the causes, responsibilities and consequences of violence<sup>xii</sup>**. At the same time, this debate requires public policies on memory and coexistence, but **artistic expression can serve to unblock silences and encourage other ways of listening**.

On 18 April 2021, the theme *Complex Pasts: Diverse Futures<sup>xiii</sup>* on the International Day for Monuments and Sites prompted reflection on our past, encouraging a critical examination of the past and taking on the challenge that dealing with controversial histories and conflict situations involves complex conversations that are oriented towards the defence of human rights and avoid biased interpretations of the past.

Ultimately, in the construction of memory the central issue is to ensure that the stories of others are heard, that narratives and voices incorporate different perspectives, and that these voices bring about an acknowledgement of shared humanity<sup>xiv</sup>.

As we know, democratic reconstruction processes must be measured in decades and even generations<sup>xv</sup> and this is where we also see a necessary mechanism in culture: despite many voices claiming that the time to develop initiatives for coexistence has passed, artistic expressions are having an impressive impact on Basque society. During 2020 and 2021, two years which have been completely dominated by the pandemic, people's attention has been focused on different TV series and soap



acento  
2021

for a new culture of coexistence and reconciliation

operas during their long hours at home. As confinement has given way to a new reality, cinemas and theatres have welcomed new plays, with many performances sold out. While part of this success can be attributed to the increase in cultural consumption in the wake of the pandemic<sup>xvi</sup>, **it is undeniable that part of the population is looking for cultural referents that allow them to process their recent memory**, their experiences of violence and to help them address issues of coexistence from other perspectives.

## Building the way forward

We began this document by pointing out that the last decade has decisively changed some of the foundations for coexistence in the Basque Country. However, we cannot fall into the naïve assumption that we already have all the tools to guarantee democratic coexistence and that we have protected ourselves against the possibility of future human rights violations. We must be aware of the **need for building new paths that will allow us to continue walking the long and permanent process of social reconstruction. Culture and art must therefore be a companion - *bidelagun* - , that allows us to develop different new methods and to explore ourselves, individually and collectively.**

It is therefore important to understand that here we ardently defend the role of art as a tool for building coexistence. Art provides us with a unique way of generating spaces and moments that are ideal for addressing social fears and creating new dynamics. But at the same time, **we need to flee from utilitarianism that hampers artistic development in all its essence<sup>xvii</sup>, while ensuring that creative processes do not revictimize, nor promote the justification of violence or prove to be at odds with human rights.** It is not a simple debate and, perhaps for this reason, it is crucial to keep it in mind.

---

<sup>i</sup> Baketik (2020). *Acento 2020. Restaurar el tejido social*  
<http://baketik.org/imagenes/Acento%202020.pdf>

- 
- <sup>ii</sup> Baketik (2019). *Adiorik gabe*. <http://baketik.org/imagenes/Sin%20Adios%20-Adiorik%20Gabe%202019%20-%20guia%20pedagogica.pdf>
- <sup>iii</sup> *Adiorik gabe*.
- <sup>iv</sup> López Fernández Cao, M. (2017). *Aletheia: contra el olvido. Estrategias a través del arte para elaborar la memoria emocional. ¿Qué hacer con el patrimonio inmaterial del recuerdo traumático?*, in *Estudios Pedagógicos XLIII*, No. 4: 147-160, 2017.
- <sup>v</sup> The list of novels in Basque can be found in the *Adiorik gabe* pedagogical guide (Baketik, 2019). In addition to this, there are numerous publications, essays and works that include lists and analyses of books on the violence experienced in the Basque Country.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Adiorik gabe*.
- <sup>vii</sup> United Nations (2014) - Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. United Nations General Assembly, 23 January 2014, A/HRC/25/49. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/25/49>
- <sup>viii</sup> Zapata Restrep, G. P. (2017). *Arte y construcción de paz: la experiencia musical vital*, in *Calle 14*. Vol. 12, No. 22 / April-June 2017.
- <sup>ix</sup> Different works address this relationship between artistic creation and the narrative of violence, such as the work '*Las narrativas del terrorismo. Cómo contamos, cómo transmitimos, cómo entendemos*' (Rivero and Mateo, eds., 2020), among many others.
- <sup>x</sup> Maraña, M. (ed.) (2020). *Aprovechar el potencial del turismo en lugares de conflicto histórico para promover la paz. Una reflexión sobre el pasado y una fuente de inspiración para el futuro*. GV, 2020. [https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/documentos\\_paz\\_convivencia/es\\_def/adjuntos/TURISMO-Y-PAZ-CAST.pdf](https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/documentos_paz_convivencia/es_def/adjuntos/TURISMO-Y-PAZ-CAST.pdf)
- <sup>xi</sup> United Nations (2020) - Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. United Nations General Assembly, 9 July 2020, A/HRC/45/45. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/45/45>
- <sup>xii</sup> Special Rapporteur (2020).
- <sup>xiii</sup> ICOMOS (2021) <https://icomos.es/18-de-abril-dia-internacional-de-los-monumentos-y-sitios-2021/>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Special Rapporteur (2014).
- <sup>xv</sup> Special Rapporteur (2020).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Numerous studies have shown an increase in most households' cultural consumption during the Covid-19 confinements.
- <sup>xvii</sup> See, among others, Iban Zaldua's reflection on this matter. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoWVIZlhDrl>

-----  
WITH THE SUPPORT of

Gipuzkoako  
Foru Aldundia  
Diputación Foral  
de Gipuzkoa



ORAIN  
GIPUZKOA

