



Podcasting Pedagogy for Teaching Peace and War

KUJTESE BEJTULLAHU, RAHEL KUNZ, AND RUXANDRA STOICESCU

Audio podcasting is a powerful way of communicating in today’s world. Radio and audio podcasts are used in conflict situations, both as a tool for instigating and preventing it, or building peace. Radio stations, such as those set up by the Hironnelle Foundation, have been established specifically in conflict settings to get parties to dialogue, to diffuse unsubstantiated rumors, and to provide more “balanced” reporting of news.

Podcasts have already become a pedagogical tool in the social sciences, but less so in International Relations (IR). There is an ongoing debate about the pedagogical risks and benefits of using podcasts in the classroom, but the literature does not explore how different disciplines can engage with the medium. When podcasts are predominantly used as a source of information or a way of disseminating it, one can question their pedagogical usefulness depending on content and receptivity, as Steven Lonn and Stephanie Teasley do. If, however, one shifts attention from podcasts as finished products to podcasting as a process of putting together and narrating stories, then it is this collaborative *mise-en-scène* and the creative choices and affects that go with it that matter pedagogically.

Through the lens of writings on using podcasts in higher education and on critical/alternative pedagogy in IR, we explore—in the following—the potential for podcasting in teaching peace and war. We draw on our experience of co-teaching a course on International Security using podcasting in an interactive process of teaching, learning, and evaluation. By designing and producing their own podcast, students not only used them as a source of information, but experienced podcasting as a more creative and reflective process of exploring and narrating challenging stories about peace and war.

We argue that podcasting is particularly suited to the study of peace and war because it encourages students to relay facts and arguments, and to include the different sensibilities that render some arguments or narratives more believable and memorable than others. Podcasting encourages students

to fine-tune their listening skills; to think about creative ways to voice difficult problems and conversations to a concerned audience; and to scrutinize the “scriptedness” behind existing stories on peace and war. Ultimately, we propose that the pedagogical potential of podcasting is its ability to embody and humanize the study of peace and war in a way that traditional IR teaching struggles to do.

The literature on the use of podcasts in higher education ranges from extolling its virtues to doubting its efficacy in helping students improve their academic performance. New technologies do not necessarily open up our thinking. While the use of podcasting with other social goals remains something to develop or debate, certain studies show that they can bring strong learning benefits when students engage in their production. Specifically, the responsibility of delivering a product encourages a more attentive examination of its content and the development of academic responsibility toward it. Key advantages include ease of production, portability, synthetic presentation of a subject, as well as experimenting with language, format, and target audience.

Our starting point was that a mix of creative freedom, technical training, varied sources, and reflective probing can not only turn podcasting into a memorable and stimulating learning experience for students, but it can also help embody and humanize the study of peace and war. Therefore, we linked up with the literature on critical/alternative pedagogies in IR where authors cite the use of alternative tools and sites for teaching and learning. Naeem Inayatullah uses Music of the African Diaspora to develop student’s aesthetic and political sensibilities. Felix Rösch teaches IR through contact improvisation dance. Shiera El-Malik proposes various “experiments in intimacy” in the classroom in an attempt to “expose, and potentially disrupt, contemporary knowledge practices” and to “unseat practices that yield to processes of ‘thingification.’” The search for critical/alternative pedagogies reflects a more profound desire to decolonize or displace existing logics that are familiar, but painfully so. As Henry Giroux underlines, one of the key elements of critical learning is to “unsettle common sense, make power accountable, and connect classroom knowledge to larger civic issues.”

The literature on the so-called aesthetic turn further strengthens the case for podcasting. It highlights the limits of more traditional IR scholarship, which privileges logical reasoning, but struggles to accommodate situations or conversations that are difficult because they do not quite conform to expected logics. We need to allow for the possibility, too, that in-your-face questions of (in)security cannot always be contained in neat matrices or the logical expectations we draw around them, for they also involve an interplay of emotions and aesthetics, at times a certain “excess” that we cannot quite pin down but cannot ignore either. To talk about peace and war more

meaningfully, we must bring forth a wider palette of emotions and the sensibilities around them that make some voices resonate more than others. Yet these are not easily taught nor acquired. As Roland Bleiker points out, this requires us to mobilize a wider register of human faculties, moving “back and forth between imagination and reason, thought and sensibility, memory and understanding, without imposing one faculty upon another.”

In designing our course, we engaged with the idea that it is pedagogically and politically important to encourage an interplay of various sensibilities in the classroom so as to carve our way to insights that help us talk about uncomfortable, vexing, sometimes irresolvable aspects of international politics, such as the experience of war, the cost of peace, or how security turns on itself. Interlacing the literature on podcasting, critical security studies, and the aesthetic turn in IR, we further explored how podcasting can help us move away from the traditional “scriptedness” of the discipline so as to tune in to other possibilities—of listening, voice, and embodiment—when broaching questions of peace and war. How, more pragmatically, can podcasting help students navigate that challenging nexus where the political invests us intellectually, emotionally, and aesthetically too? We now present some insights from our experience, which may be applicable to other courses on peace and war or in IR more broadly.

Our course was structured around four types of activities: introductory lectures on peace, war, and security; reading and debating sessions on more specific themes—such as securitization, gender and (in)security, terrorism and security, privatization of security, security and migration, the quotidian and (in)security; workshop modules on listening and developing a voice, multimedia analysis, the technicalities of producing a scenario, recording and editing a podcast; and presentations by external experts working in the field of radio and podcast production. It also included a number of sessions on peer and teacher feedback to ensure a more interactive and reflexive learning experience.

While the basic parameters of podcast production were specified in a guide, there was substantial freedom in the choice of subject, style of expression, the types of sources or testimonies brought in, the choice of tone, sound design, the overall *mise-en-scène*, and the different creative elements behind it. In the process of conceptualizing and producing their podcast, students autonomously acquired theoretical and empirical knowledge relevant to their topic. We encouraged a creative play with sources by combining scientific articles and newspaper material with podcasts, narratives, historic testimonials, rituals from the quotidian, poetry, curated imagery, videos, talks, and so forth.

To talk about the experience of peace and war, we brought into conversation the academic with the poetic, such as present in Carol Nordstrom’s

piece *A Different Kind of War Story*. Exploring securitization theory, we discussed not only its enabling conditions or why certain issues are easier to “securitize” than others, but what the ritualized incantation of a charged phrase like weapons of mass destruction (WMD) does to public debate and understanding of security. Talking about terrorism, we reflected, with Judith Butler’s voice, on how the experience of terror laces the personal with the political, and on the difficulty of bearing our grief and others’ loss without wielding further destruction. We reflected, too, on whether talking more about bearing loss can help us live with our fears, or when to question how much security is enough.

Students were invited to probe the limits of what constitutes “proper” academic practice, and to question what we should be mindful about when it comes to narrating the experience of violence or its political significance. Why do we read some points of view or listen to some voices more than others? Why do we find certain sources more credible or relevant and others more forgettable or negligible? Given the above, students had to think about what kind of sources, voices, testimonies, or experiences to bring into their podcasts, why and how.

This process of meeting in groups to flesh out the meaningful sources or testimonies, the choice of words, music, or location for recording together with the actual recording, enacting, and editing of living voices also introduced an embodied effort. A key criticism leveled at traditional IR pedagogy is the way in which it renders the study of peace and war abstract and disembodied. Scholars such as Shiera El-Malik, Himadeep Muppidi, and Erzsebet Strausz approach this from different angles, pointing to a common trend, equally verified by us: increasingly in undergraduate courses, students receive their reading pack in an online folder, with little incentive to visit a library or archive, conduct interviews, collect different testimonies, or look for the concrete ways in which abstract questions of peace and war, or international politics more broadly, are manifest in people’s lives. Encouraging a more creative play with sources whereby students had to make their bodies move as much as their voices and brains allowed them to embody academic activity. This process helps withstand that tendency to turn students into passive absorbers of knowledge who often end up feeling distanced.

Podcasting is also promising because it contributes to humanizing the study of peace and war. Students often already share their political views or frustrations through social media, but using a podcast in class challenges them to elaborate on complex problems and academic concepts in a way that can resonate with a broader audience, themselves included. As such, podcasting encourages students to invest themselves as students, teachers, and concerned members of society at once. They actively search for the sounds and utterances that make it possible to translate a complex problem of peace and war

into a shared concern. They must work, too, with that challenge of striking too distant or abstract a note that obscures the human in their story. The way in which podcasting fosters student attentiveness to human voices, choices, limits, emotions, misunderstandings, hopes, missed expectations, and so forth, is by encouraging them to revisit and practice the ways in which political grievances and problems can be expressed. Namely, it helps them become better attuned to the importance of listening, voicing, and ways of un/re-scripting the difficult, at times ambiguous, conversations that are part and parcel of debates on peace and war.

To emphasize the power and ethics of listening, we explored in class not only how to be attentive to subtler aspects of utterances or sounds—including the use of tone, silences, irony, humor, repetitive chants, and so on—but also to the responsibilities that come with listening. We discussed Italo Calvino's *Un roi à l'écoute*, a text that reveals a sovereign who tends to his power through intense listening of everything that might be happening in corners of his palace, behind the curtains, in whispers, sighs, movements, silences, laughs, and so on. Through such heightened surveillance, he dissolves his presence in a network of ears and echoes, sometimes hearing his own doubts loudest. The point about listening is not only that it may be useful or necessary; it matters too how and to whom we listen when we cannot listen to everything at the same time nor listen to ourselves only.

Particularly interesting was the experience of students listening to their own podcasts during and at the end of the course: how they sounded to themselves and their audience when role-playing experts, politicians, concerned citizens, migrants, or victims; when stereotyping or caricaturing them too; when assigning gendered roles to their voices; when reproducing too much of the same trope or clarifying one “-ism” by way of another. Also fascinating was how they varied the tones or used background noises, pauses, irony, humor, sighs of frustration, interruptions, escalation of voices or meditative sounds to dramatize, stimulate, or subdue the audience into thinking or feeling. This listening to how we sound when tackling questions of peace and war made possible further reflection that beyond the desire to sound appealing, there is also a certain responsibility to engage a public in a meaningful way.

Central to podcasting on peace and war is also the question of voice, or voicing as an active but selective way of broaching something that is difficult to do. Students not only had to make choices which voices to include but also how: how loud, serious, ridiculous, articulate, distant, moving, and so forth. They had to think moreover about where or what was their voice in that noise they produced. One of the interesting things was that unlike an academic paper that often lays its premises to deliver its punch line,

some of the podcasts treated a problem or debate without resolving it. This reveals a unique potential of podcasting: working in a group, different voices appear; the differences or multiplicities present are not easily or necessarily dissolved; students allow themselves to experience some discomfort before proposing a quick fix. They explore, instead, how to voice something and how to perceive the *mise-en-scène* of different voices, including our own, in a debate.

Finally, podcasting also helps students reflect on working with scripts and the “scriptedness” of politics. As they developed their concept, students moved between drafting a script and enacting it. Printed in black and white, words still keep their nuances, but sounds also have their way: silencing us into reflection, tuning us in, making our bodies move. As the students toyed with both words and sounds to produce something resonant, they discovered the challenge of realizing a *mise-en-scène* that was somewhat scripted, but not unduly, or overly so. Pedagogically speaking, the students had to make that quasi-paradoxical move where they include the familiar scripts in their heads and books and how much those needed tweaking: what to unscript? Where to rescript? Thus discussing what scripts do for and to us in international politics, we touched in particular on binary-driven thinking that all too often hands us scripts to follow without beckoning reflection. The discipline of IR, and debates on security, are particularly susceptible to binary set ups, such as between realism or idealism, enemy and friend, North and South, state and nonstate actors, axis of good and evil, international saviors and victims, rational and irrational actors, and so on. This is one of the most valuable but challenging pedagogical points to communicate: how do we un-script ourselves out of binaries we no longer believe to be taking us anywhere meaningful? How do we strike a different note that permits us an insight or perhaps a question we might not habitually ask? What if peace is not an acquiescent state? Then what is war? And what would happen if our discourse did not split them always so?

Through podcasting, we can un/rescript pedagogy for teaching peace and war in a number of ways. Paying attention to various genres and taking seriously humor and poetry, practicing listening and voicing skills, and dehumanizing and embodying the study of peace and war, students’ multiple sensibilities are fine-tuned. This opens up alternative ways of experiencing the study of peace and war. In Strausz’s words: as “autonomous thinking and feeling beings who turn(ed) to the other with compassion and care.” It allows us to inhabit the space of international relations as a site of connection, respect, and shared understanding. It also encourages to move beyond black and white thinking, even to question the idea that there is a clear difference between peace and war, or that we must study them by distancing one from the other.

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Rahel Kunz is a Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Political, Historical and International Studies, University of Lausanne. Her research interests are feminist international political economy, gender issues in migration and development, gender and security sector reform, and feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial thought. E-mail: rahel.kunz@unil.ch.

Kujtesa Bejtullahu resides in Geneva, where she completed her doctorate at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. A native of Kosovo, she is also a graduate of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and Stanford University. She enjoys teaching and writing about things that matter and things that don't. E-mail: kujteseb@gmail.com.

Ruxandra Stoicescu is an independent researcher and media producer based in Geneva. She loves radio and literature and seeks to bring them ever closer to the study of international relations. E-mail: mariaruxandra.stoicescu@gmail.com.

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