



INSIGHTS

MISSION

USIP's Insights Newsletter aims to challenge and refine major assumptions about the theory and practice of peacebuilding and contributes to the design of specific peacebuilding tools applicable in conflict situations worldwide.

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STATE OF THE ART

The Arts and Peacebuilding: An Emerging Approach

BY KATHERINE WOOD, GRANTS ADVISOR, CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON CONFLICT, USIP

Four-star Admiral James Stavridis, retired from the U.S. Navy and now dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, advises those who want to understand Russia to stop reading “jargon-filled scholarly analysis from those political science journals” and to turn to works by Russian literary giants, such as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn. This, he writes, is the way to understand Russians and their leader, Vladimir Putin, for these artists illuminate Russia’s worldview, nationalism, and endurance like nothing else can. “Literature is the true lens. If you want to understand the Russian mind, remember that no other culture esteems its writers more than Russia. Every Russian can—and frequently does—quote Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Gogol; whereas you would be hard pressed to get a line of Whitman, Hemingway, or Toni Morrison out of a typical American. . . Russian literature shapes [Putin’s] worldview and illuminates the decisions of the Kremlin in powerful, focused prose.”¹

How, exactly, do these master writers interpret their national identity? Which aspects of their works are uniquely Russian and which portray something more universal about the human condition? What makes novels, poetry, theater, dance, music, painting, architecture, and film so compelling within and across cultural and national borders? And what might be their relevance for conflict and peace?

Research into these questions is young but growing as peacebuilders increasingly turn to the arts as a means of conflict transformation. Arts now appear in peacebuilding practice on a global scale, comprising a wide-ranging, colorful palette of activities. Governments, international organizations, academic institutions, civil society, and artists are all involved, whether through policymaking, research, funding, and/or practice. Many artists are themselves peacebuilders, incorporating themes of conflict, resistance, justice, hope, and reconciliation into their creative work and advancing social change through their art. The U.S. State Department and USAID both fund arts projects in conflict zones. The U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) supports them through its grantmaking. The World Bank, UNDP, UNFPA, UNEP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, and UNESCO all conduct arts programming for persons whose

lives have been uprooted by violence. At a policy level, many governments, the UN, and regional organizations such as ASEAN, OAS, and OIC recognize the systemic relationship between artistic creativity, cultural heritage, social cohesion, and sustainable development. An example is the Danish government's new Pakistan Culture and Development Program, where arts, heritage, economic growth, intercultural dialogue, and social transformation are integrated.²

With this proliferation of activity, some but not all of those who work at the intersection of the arts and peace are employing empirical research methodologies to evaluate impact and better understand the power of the arts in conflict and postconflict settings. However, beyond project impact, more systematic research is needed as to whether and how the arts influence human behavior in relation to violence. This requires a multifaceted approach, drawing on insights from psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, education, economics, cultural theory, social criticism, aesthetics, cultural policy, and the various art forms themselves. Moreover, research about the arts in relation to conflict and peace needs to take into account the unique characteristics of the arts in the context of dual praxis: creative-aesthetic and socio-political.

In conflict zones, often amplified by social media, the arts tell and interpret people's stories, heal trauma victims, mend communities, give voice to women and other marginalized groups, protest injustice, provide livelihoods, educate populations, express heritage, define identity, engage youth with alternatives to violence, and humanize the "other." This article presents a framework for understanding the transformative potential of the arts and suggests a way forward for this emerging field of violence prevention and peace-building practice.

From Rational Actors to Devoted Actors

The arts fundamentally change the discourse around conflict and peace. They provide new categories of analysis and new languages, verbal and nonverbal. The arts inspire, elicit, evoke, provoke, teach, challenge, memorialize, idealize, and unmask hidden truths. They are deeply ingrained in human experience: Since the Paleolithic period, *Homo sapiens* have drawn pictures, sung melodies, and told stories that originated in their everyday lives. Through the arts, humans engage their somatic, sensory, cognitive, affective, and symbolic faculties to manipulate and organize natural phenomena, such as light, color, sound, mathematical proportion, and movement. The form this organization takes depends in large part on the cultural context of the creator. Thus, the arts lie at the intersection of nature and culture and open a gate to better understand the emotional and psychological drivers of conflict.

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Contemporary scholars are confirming what artists have known intuitively for centuries: that humans are not entirely rational beings. Lisa Schirch and others have written about conflict's material, social, and symbolic aspects,³ and more recent empirical findings confirm the validity of this multilevel approach. In a study funded by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research through the Office of Naval Research, an interdisciplinary

team of social scientists argues that the "rational actor" framework used by governments for decades is insufficient for understanding violent conflict. Human beings make decisions and choices not only on the basis of material expediency but on the basis of their most deeply rooted values. Called "sacred values" by these researchers, these values may be explicitly religious in content, such as the importance of Jerusalem to followers of the three Abrahamic faiths, or nonreligious, such as the value parents place on their children, or the willingness of someone to die for a cause. Those who hold these values view them as intrinsic to life itself. Sacred values are largely emotional and unconscious in nature and lie at the core of personal and communal identity. They do not characterize rational actors; rather, "when people construe issues central to a conflict as sacred values they become devoted actors: avoiding the rational logic of *realpolitik*, game-theoretic analyses, or the marketplace... Devoted actors treat sacred values as being above utility calculations and may make decisions that appear absurd when viewed through the lens of the rational actor model."⁴

Anthropologist Scott Atran, who coauthored this study, addressed the National Security Council on devoted actors in 2006 and on April 23, 2015, became the first anthropologist to address the UN Security Council. During the Ministerial Debate on "The Role of Youth in Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Peace," he said that instead of negative messages countering extremist narratives, youth need ways to dream of lives of significance in comradeship and chances to create their own local initiatives. Dr. Atran closed his remarks by calling for, among other things, "physical activity, music, and entertainment to counter the growing global counterculture of violent extremism."⁵

The transformative power of the arts largely

lies in the fact that art operates—often simultaneously—in the physical, emotional, and existential realms. Existentially, the arts express and interpret the human search for meaning, purpose, community, identity, and values by which to live. These values, material or otherwise, are deeply embedded in the lives of individuals, groups, and nations, with roots in differing views of the world. The arts can open and enlarge someone's worldview and enhance understanding of another's, leading to empathy and inclusion. Alternatively, artistic media can intensify worldview disparities and dehumanize others. Slick, violent ISIS videos that repulse most people yet successfully recruit jihadis vividly demonstrate the potential of artistic techniques to fuel rather than heal conflict. More research is needed to better understand how creative content, production quality, and audience perceptions interact with various humanizing and dehumanizing effects.

Looking Ahead

For arts-based peacebuilding to advance, several things are needed:

Adaptation and adoption of evaluation methodologies to align with the intrinsic attributes of the arts.

Artists and social scientists approach peacebuilding through the different methods of their respective professions. Evaluation of arts programs in relation to conflict and peace is thus often assumed to be problematic, when in fact it is receiving thoughtful attention among arts practitioners. Examples of those applying quantitative social science assessment techniques to arts-based interventions are the New York-based Battery Dance Company for its work in Jerusalem, and Bedari, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Pakistan. The challenge is not that arts programs cannot be evaluated quantitatively, but rather that quantitative methods do not fully capture the intrinsic attributes of the arts—such as creativity, non-

verbal expression, worldview construction, and meaning-making—from which art's civic, economic, and social benefits derive. Patrycja Kaszynska, project researcher at the Cultural Value Project of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, notes, evaluation methods presently assume a “hierarchy of disciplines” in which “the econometric approach is itself a value choice.”⁶ In fact, current evaluation paradigms and practices, with theories of change and logic models, are based on Western assumptions of cause and effect that may not hold, for example, in African contexts, where traditional knowledge and quality of life are part of the investigative framework.⁷

Social science and the arts differ epistemologically. The arts have their own language, logic, reference points, and interpretive framework, inviting us to see the world through a new lens and use new assessment paradigms that can benefit the peacebuilding field.

Thus, non-linear, systemic models, such as the new Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE) developed by the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development and UNDP, may prove fruitful for evaluating arts initiatives.⁸ Another promising approach is emerging from the recently formed Art X Culture X Social Justice

Network. Its new Evaluation Learning Lab is building a framework of artistic characteristics and indicators to help assess the aesthetic process and the product or experience of art and social justice work. Among other things, this means “ensuring cultural competence in evaluation; elevating qualitative evidence and narrative discussion in tandem with meaningful quantitative measures; and articulating criteria for artistic as well as civic and social efficacy.”⁹

Social science and the arts differ epistemologically. The arts have their own language, logic, reference points, and interpretive framework, inviting us to see the world through a new lens and use new assessment paradigms that can benefit the peacebuilding field. Exclusive imposition of the standards and methods of one domain on the other does a disservice to both when instead they could constructively inform each other to develop best evaluation practices using both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

More scientific research on the arts in relation to emotional and psychological drivers of conflict and peace.

The disciplines of psychology and neuroscience are especially relevant for their studies of traits such as prejudice, dehumanization, tolerance, empathy, fear, trust, and group identity. In January 2015, the El-Hibri Foundation, Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Beyond Conflict convened a conference of psychologists, neuroscientists, peacebuilding practitioners, and policymakers to discuss conflict and peace mechanisms in the workings of the human brain. Among the findings presented were that human behavior is driven largely by emotions rather than rational thought processes, and the importance of “sacred values” as described above in human decision making.¹⁰ One of the conference's recommended next steps was the inclusion of artists in the conversation, which could become even more

fruitful by adding other neuroscientists who directly study the brain's cognitive and emotional processes in relation to the arts. These scientific research efforts need to be integrated to investigate possible relationships between art and the neural responses of, for example, empathy and hatred, and art's influence on the development of sacred values, both positive and negative.

Cross-sectoral convenings and trainings to form and inform communities of practice.

Arts-based peacebuilding requires the combined knowledge base of the professional arts community and traditional foreign affairs, conflict, and development experts. However, conversations between these two groups are rare and a sustained effort is needed to bridge the gap and

encourage cross-sectoral collaboration. Regular convenings of these various stakeholders through conferences, training, joint work projects, etc., would help to address this.

Peacebuilders would benefit from a greater knowledge of the vibrancy of the arts sector, which includes not only creative artists but also arts educators, arts administrators, art therapists, art historians, cultural policymakers, and others. Traditional peacebuilders also need to better understand what the different visual, performing, and literary art forms in various cultural contexts have to offer.

Conversely, artists who work in the peace and conflict field would benefit from developing their knowledge of conflict analysis,

prevention, resolution, and transformation, and of basic practices and concepts such as mediation, negotiation, dialogue, rule of law, and theories of change, among others.

The following articles further explore the arts and peacebuilding. Cynthia Cohen, a past USIP grant recipient, delves into the arts' expressive and aesthetic qualities as the basis for art's transformative power and raises important ethical considerations. Arthur Romano and Savina Sirik, whose organizations have received USIP grants, comment on a statement by two leading peacebuilding scholars. Anaïs Caput and Barmak Pazhwak provide examples of USIP-funded projects where the arts are central to peacebuilding practice. We hope this issue will generate further discussion around this topic. ■

Notes

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STATE OF THE ART

Arts and Building Peace: Affirming the Basics and Envisioning the Future

BY CYNTHIA E. COHEN, PH.D., DIRECTOR, PEACEBUILDING AND THE ARTS, BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Recognition of the contributions of arts and culture to peace is real and growing. It is fueled not only by artist-peacebuilders and cultural facilitators, who are strengthening their practice through documenting, assessing, and critically reflecting upon their work. Interest is also increasing from practitioners of more conventional peacebuilding approaches, such as mediation, facilitation, negotiation, transitional justice, human rights advocacy, and development, who are acknowledging that rational modes of engagement alone are insufficient to engender the kinds of transformation necessary for interrupting the dynamics of violent conflict.

What kinds of expressive forms are included in the peacebuilding and the arts field?

The broad field of peacebuilding and the arts incorporates many modes of expression. It encompasses oral and written literary forms, vocal and instrumental musical works, drawing and painting, photography, movies and three-dimensional works, theater and dance, digital and broadcast arts. “Artist-based” and “community-based” works as well as collective folk expressions are crafted to nourish capacities required for peacebuilding and to contribute to the creative transformation of conflict in all stages of the conflict cycle.

Community-based works are inclusive, and generally focus on transformation of those who engage in creating and performing the art. **Artist-based** works emphasize refinement of the expression of a particular artist or ensemble and, through their virtuosity, invite transformations in those who witness. **Collective forms** generally are participatory, and focus on affirmation or transformation at the level of community.¹ Peacebuilding and the arts, therefore, embraces both paintings to be viewed by solitary museumgoers and the participatory rituals of dance, drum-

ming, and masks; mass market movies and booklets of stories written by children in refugee camps; and staged theatrical productions and improvised scenes enacted within a dialogue group.

“Artist-based” and “community-based” works as well as collective folk expressions are crafted to nourish capacities required for peacebuilding and to contribute to the creative transformation of conflict in all stages of the conflict cycle.

Whether a work, artist, or institution contributes to more just and less violent communities depends upon the creators’ skill and the aesthetic and ethical intentions of the artists and producers; the aesthetic and ethical sensibilities embodied in the

work and ancillary activities; the resources—sometimes from nonarts groups, such as mayor’s offices,² truth commissions,³ or human rights organizations⁴—devoted to extending the reach of an initiative; and, of course, the responses of those who witness and interpret the work.

What is distinctive about the arts for peacebuilding?

When the arts function as art, they evoke distinctive qualities of attention and response that can best be understood within the framework of “aesthetic experience.” Early conceptions of aesthetics were largely developed and applied to the expressive forms of elites in literate societies and often were used to judge the expressive forms of oral, “primitive” cultures. The conception offered below is consistent with peacebuilding because it draws on aesthetic theories of different cultures and expands definitions to include the collective expressions typical of traditional cultures and oral societies.⁵

Aesthetic experiences, in general, are intensely felt human apprehensions of the world, engendered by engagement with nature and with certain human-made forms and processes. They arise from the reciproc-

ity between the forms being perceived and the perceptual capacities and sensibilities of the perceiver(s). Aesthetic apprehension of a work results from the interplay between the formal qualities of the work (rhythm, texture, form, density, pacing, etc.) and the perceivers, who open their senses and their minds, allowing themselves to receive the work and notice its resonances within them. Even when an artwork's content is upsetting, painful, or jarring, its formal qualities can enliven and energize its perceivers to face and act on conditions that otherwise might be unbearable to confront.

Aesthetic experiences engage the senses as well as the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual faculties to invite special qualities of embodied attention and response, such as disinterestedness, passionate commitment, receptivity, alertness, serenity, playfulness, and metacognitive awareness. These qualities of presence afford unique opportunities for individual and collective learning, empathy, imagination, and innovation, all of which are central to peacebuilding efforts.

Also, for both artists and witnesses, engaging with the arts can restore and nourish capacities most needed for the creative transformation of conflict, including abilities that can be diminished by violence. These include receptive listening, the ability to express oneself so others can hear, awareness of oneself in the context of environment, creativity, curiosity about the paradoxical nature of seemingly opposed circumstances, the habit of bringing contradictory elements into generative (as opposed to destructive) tension, and the capacity to trust and even to discern whether trust is warranted.

Many art forms communicate nonverbally, which can be especially helpful when adversaries do not share a spoken language and linguistic issues fuel conflict. Also, in cases of dislocation, and of traumatic

events that defy linguistic expression, memories sometimes can be accessed and meaning can be shaped through non-narrative forms, such as instrumental music and movement.

In peacebuilding initiatives, the arts and cultural practices aim to embody a kind of power that rests not on injury or domination but rather on reciprocity, connectivity, and generativity. The arts can be crafted to engage people compellingly, but non-coercively, in the issues that confront their communities. Evidence of this power can be felt in the transformation of energy in a theater or in changes in relationships evoked by a poetry workshop; it can also be assumed based on the record of illegitimate regimes that repress, imprison, exile, and even assassinate artists.

Predetermined issues and goals can be woven into the design of an initiative, or even addressed in the content of a work, but when nonarts agendas overpower the artistry of the production, the transformative potential of the arts will be compromised.

Of course not all artistic works or expressive cultural practices build peace. In fact, there are many instances of art's power marshaled in service of militaristic regimes and used to exploit vulnerable constituencies in the quest for profit. For instance, colonial administrators built grand theaters for showcasing the hegemonic culture of

the empire, diminishing by comparison local and indigenous performative practices and cultural forms.⁶ Infamously, music has been appropriated into regimes of torture,⁷ and aesthetically-refined films were used as Nazi propaganda.⁸

How are the arts and cultural practices making unique contributions to the creative transformation of conflict?

In conflict regions around the world, artists and cultural workers undertake projects that address important peacebuilding challenges. By way of illustration, but by no means an exhaustive accounting, arts- and culture-based initiatives can be crafted to:

- strengthen campaigns of nonviolent resistance by supporting oppressed and exploited communities to assert their dignity and their rights, embrace humor, and communicate with each other in coded ways that evade censors;
- create opportunities for members of adversarial communities to meet in positive, creative contexts, and break down stereotypes and barriers of mistrust;
- support former enemies as they seek to rehumanize both themselves and each other;
- support communities to engage in the difficult work of reconciliation, including mourning losses, empathizing with others' suffering, acknowledging past harms, seeking justice, letting go of bitterness, and imagining a new future;⁹
- draw global attention to abuses of human rights and reinstate a sense of agency among victims; and
- restore identity, meaning, and hope in the face of alienation, dislocation, and disruption.

What challenges confront the field of peacebuilding and the arts?

As the field of peacebuilding and the arts gains legitimacy, artist-practitioners are grappling with several interrelated challenges. Among them are acknowledging and minimizing risks of doing harm and composing teams of practitioners that can link the transformative power of the arts with the strategic power of analysis and the larger peacebuilding field.

Minimizing risks of harm: The project *Acting Together on the World Stage: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict*¹⁰ analyzed fourteen case studies of performance and peacebuilding in conflict regions around the world. The team identified six ways in which performance and peacebuilding initiatives run the risk of doing harm, and considered how such risks can be minimized.¹¹ For instance, artist-peacebuilders can minimize the risk of:

- engaging in “epistemic violence” (injury to local ways of knowing, cultural practices, and forms of expression) by involving cultural leaders from relevant communities in the design of art initiatives;
- worsening divisions between conflicting groups by lifting up the cultural forms and traditions of all groups;
- re-traumatizing communities and individuals that have suffered from violence by avoiding the imposition of external conceptions of healing when such ideas are not culturally resonant;
- undermining artistic integrity by involving artists in crafting requests for proposals and calls for productions;
- creating or perpetuating injurious power dynamics by acknowledging factors that differentially affect participants outside as well as inside the workshop or creative space; and
- subjecting artists and project participants to physical harm or incarceration, particularly in societies

with limited freedom of expression or autocratic governance, by staying alert as to how projects are presented to different publics by various stakeholders.¹²

Building teams that address both sociopolitical and affective dimensions of conflicts: While artist-peacebuilders want their approaches to be embraced by and be of use to the related fields of development, public health, education, human rights, transitional justice, etc., they would like their partners to understand that the transformative power of the arts relies on artistic integrity. Predetermined issues and goals can be woven into the design of an initiative, or even addressed in the content of a work, but when nonarts agendas overpower the artistry of the production, the transformative potential of the arts will be compromised.

Arts-informed initiatives can support communities to identify sources of resilience and craft imaginative solutions to seemingly insurmountable threats.

The absence of a shared vocabulary can create an obstacle for artists and nonartists who seek to collaborate. The *Acting Together on the World Stage* project proposes a framework that is designed to facilitate communication and respectful exchanges between artists and other peacebuilders. The framework focuses attention on both the transformations achieved within the bounded spaces of artistic workshops, rehearsals, and productions and the impact when such

changes are “cast back” into communities. It proposes that evaluators consider the ethical sensibilities and artistry embodied in productions, the strength of strategic insights that inform audience development and ancillary activities, as well as the care taken to minimize risks of harm.¹³

What’s next for the field of peacebuilding and the arts?

In the coming half century, the world will be grappling with violent conflicts related to extremism, climate change, migration, growing inequality, and unaddressed grievances, as well as the apparent breakdown of the governmental, financial, and educational systems that have been relied upon to address such problems. Solutions to these overwhelming challenges require creative approaches, global in scale but finely tuned to meet the challenges of local contexts.

Arts-informed initiatives can support communities to identify sources of resilience and craft imaginative solutions to seemingly insurmountable threats. To make its most effective contributions, however, the peacebuilding and the arts field would benefit from a much more robust infrastructure:¹⁴ institutional spaces for documentation, dissemination, and research; e-journals that invite multi-modal presentations that reflect both artistic excellence and intellectual rigor; and local, regional, and global networks of effective action that link practitioners across generations and regions.

Might such an infrastructure be built? Might artists and cultural leaders be invited to the table when the most urgent and challenging of issues are framed? Readers of *Insights* might well play a role in answering these questions. ■

Please see *Notes* on page 11.

PEACE ARENA

Theory vs. Practice

In each Newsletter, the Peace Arena offers a space for discussion between scholars and practitioners as they comment on a selected quote. This Summer we feature an exchange between: Dr. Arthur Romano, Assistant Professor, School for Conflict Resolution and Analysis, George Mason University, and Savina Sirik, Director, Museum of Memory at the Sleuk Rith Institute of the Documentation Center of Cambodia. The selected quote comes from Dr. Michael Shank, Director of Media Strategy at Climate Nexus, and Dr. Lisa Schirch, Director of Human Security at the Alliance for Peacebuilding, who wrote the following in the article “Strategic Arts-Based Peacebuilding,” published in *Peace & Change* in April 2008:

“Art is a tool that can communicate and transform the way people think and act. Arts can change the dynamics in intractable interpersonal, intercommunal, national, and global conflicts.”

BY DR. ARTHUR ROMANO



Michael Shank and Lisa Schirch highlight the potential of artistic processes to impact change within larger peacebuilding efforts. Art and peacebuilding often share a vital similarity—the desire to creatively engage with conflict. That engagement generates a central tension for both the peacebuilder and artist, as their vision or aesthetic sense of

what they wish to make real in the world meets the limits of existing processes, existential realities and social arrangements.

Consider this excerpt from African-American poet CJ Suitt about racial inequality in the United States:

*They forget this was never our movie...
We just wrote the soundtrack
A people with stolen Language
Lost in Trans Atlantic translation
like a piece of Santa Maria driftwood¹*

As Schirch and Shank rightly point out, the arts can change the way people act, but those changes in attitudes, processes, and institutions are built while simultaneously embedded within patterns of violence and destructive conflict. Part of the transformative promise of the arts, then, is to more deeply expand analysis of underlying causes of conflicts, to excavate the depths of the impacts of violence on individuals and communities and to practice creative forms of resilience, healing, and resistance. Further, the arts have the possibility to reach a larger audience, engaging the social imagination, breaking into the mundane, and experimenting with collective possibility for a more just world.

While the arts can have a transformative orientation, the focus on arts in the peacebuilding field has, however, often been instrumental, using art and artists as “tools” for achieving relatively narrow programmatic aims. While useful, many practitioners may not be amenable to these aims, instead pushing back and in so doing illuminating some of the limits of our assumptions about the nature of the conflicts we are engaging in and the possibilities for change over time.

BY SAVINA SIRIK



While Shank and Schirch state that art can change the dynamics in deeply-rooted conflicts, they should also emphasize the role of art in reconstructing a postconflict society. Despite all wartime efforts to destroy, art fosters a people’s survival and revival and reunites them in conflict’s aftermath. The arts play a vital role in the process of healing

and reconciliation at the individual and societal level in countries that have gone through mass atrocities. While legal justice is a key mechanism in dealing with the atrocious past, interventions from the perspective of arts and cultural heritage also help to address past trauma. The revival of arts and heritage is itself a healing process for survivors of past atrocities.

Despite its recent, tragic history of genocide and violence, Cambodia has a rich cultural heritage. Memories have come, in many ways, to define the country. In dealing with the tragic past, the Museum of Memory at the Documentation Center of Cambodia’s Sleuk Rith Institute recognizes the role of arts and heritage in reconciliation and healing. Museum practitioners and artists share their visions of reconciliation with the Cambodian public. Exhibitions and performances that directly address the trauma left behind by the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–79) are powerful tools to draw survivors of the brutal regime together and preserve their memories. The museum’s recent “Forced Transfer” exhibition features forced evacuations of the population during the Khmer Rouge regime and the role of cultural preservation in memorializing the Khmer Rouge era. The exhibition has traveled to provinces throughout the country and serves to end a long silence, encourage dialogue, preserve memory, and promote reconciliation. With reference to Shank and Schirch, this demonstrates that the arts can indeed transform how people act, but beyond changing conflict dynamics, they have a special role to play in postconflict settings.

Savina Sirik's Response to Dr. Arthur Romano

Arthur Romano's response to the quote is significant for its analysis of how the arts can influence larger peacebuilding efforts. He points out that the use of arts as mechanisms to make changes may enhance peacebuilders' ability to delve deeply into the root causes of violence or conflicts. More importantly, artistic efforts make it possible for affected individuals and societies to heal and move on. Through their ability to engage and influence, the arts make meaningful contributions to mitigate the consequences of violence.

Arts practitioners who interact with persons and communities affected by conflict not only have the power to highlight structural violence that remains in the postconflict society, but they can also communicate people's thoughts which are fundamental to promoting understanding. This, however, usually takes generations to achieve. Hence, it is important for us to focus more on the process than the ultimate goal itself. Attitudinal change in an individual or a community takes not only a particular artist's or group's efforts, but it takes an entire institutional commitment and time to make positive progress. ■

Please see *Note* on page 12

Dr. Arthur Romano's Response to Savina Sirik

Savina Sirik offers an important point, that the arts can be used to both remember and critically reflect on violent social conflicts. Like any methodology, the arts can also generate negative and unintended consequences, and these risks are often overlooked. For third parties and those "parachuting" in, peacebuilding work often involves crossing significant cultural and economic gaps which generates a number of problems. In particular, cultural meaning-making frames may not be understood or taken into consideration during artistic practices, which are sometimes framed as universal. Even when culture is highlighted as a critical component of the arts, it can be framed in homogeneous, overly unified or inflexible ways that reinforce imbalanced power relations.

While practices like music, drama, and art therapy have been proven to assist with healing, they can also contribute to re-traumatization. Most importantly, peacebuilders are not adequately supported in doing the necessary long-term follow-up. It is a positive development that the arts are being recognized for their value to critically reflect on violence, manifest resistance to oppression, and assist in healing trauma. ■

IN PRACTICE

Inspiring Youth in Burundi and the Great Lakes: A Creative Approach to Peacebuilding

BY ANAÏS CAPUT, PROGRAM OFFICER, EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA, SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

Almost half of the total population of Burundi, one of the world's poorest countries, is under the age of fifteen. Food scarcity, economic stagnation, and the trauma resulting from years of ethnic conflict have created vulnerabilities through which youth can be manipulated into violence, especially around electoral periods. For marginalized youth, participation in violent networks offers an opportunity to access power, a chance of economic advancement, and a sense of belonging and purpose.

To respond to this risk of manipulation and engage youth in a positive and creative manner, Search for Common Ground has leveraged the power of the arts as an essential tool for peacebuilding. Building upon Burundi's shared cultural heritage, including traditional drumming and dances, Peace Festivals were held throughout the country, supported through a USIP grant. Co-organized by youth leaders across political divides, these Peace Festivals brought together over ten thousand participants, giving youth artists the opportunity to perform a series of dances, songs,

and theater sketches on the themes of social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.



*Young girls perform a dance expressing messages of peace at a "Youth Inspired" peace festival in Burundi.
Photo Credit: SFCG*

Use of the arts enables the build-up of relationships across dividing lines, in a way that is culturally sensitive and locally owned. Musical and dance performances gave youth the opportunity for wordless collaborations that go beyond differences in identity, ethnicity, or political affiliation. Theater performances helped the audience better understand concepts of social cohesion and humanization of the "others."

Throughout the Great Lakes, the arts are used to empower marginalized groups and to foster cohesion in the region. In

Rwanda, Ingoma Nshya, the country's first and only women's drumming troupe, has contributed to heal and empower dozens of Rwandan women from different backgrounds. Both Hutus and Tutsis, as well as orphans, widows, and daughters of the perpetrators of the genocide, collaborate and break down barriers through drumming, a traditionally male-dominated area. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Amani festival is held every year in Goma to create positivity amid the legacy of conflict and against the images of despair in the region. The music and dance festival has brought together hundreds of artists and thousands of people from the Great Lakes to deliver key messages of peace, regional cohesion, and positive change. These initiatives are supported by partnerships between local civil society, international donors, and private corporations.

When tensions hinder traditional dialogue-based approaches to peacebuilding, creative programs based on artistic, non-violent forms of expression can be powerful alternatives to transforming individuals, relationships, and ultimately conflicts. ■

Bond Street Theatre: Fraud Mitigation by Educating the Electorate

BY BARMAK PAZHWAQ, SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER, SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA CENTER, USIP

The importance of creative artistic initiatives in bringing about positive change in conflict-torn societies cannot be overstressed. The arts can provide a unique platform for communicating new ideas, stimulating creative thinking, and helping heal traumatic stress. More than

three decades of war and violence have badly devastated Afghanistan's cultural heritage, and substantial efforts are required to revitalize the arts as an effective means of promoting social change and stability in the country. For example, initiatives are underway by NGOs such as the Society for

the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Afghanistan, and Turquoise Mountain to revive and rehabilitate Afghanistan's traditional arts and handicrafts, train new artisans, and restore architectural treasures badly damaged by war. Their projects result

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in quality works of art that are reviving Afghanistan's heritage, revitalizing urban areas, creating entrepreneurs, and spurring sustainable development.

The performing arts also have been devastated by war and were banned by the Taliban, so the few theater programs in the country are scarce and limited in number and outreach. However, under USIP grant funding, the New York-based Bond Street Theatre has helped to re-build the theater sector and promote peaceful alternatives to violent conflict through interactive theater in five major cities of Afghanistan since early 2010. The group worked with the very few re-emerging theater groups in the country and furthered their capacity to approach peacebuilding through artistic expression and live theater. The company trained new arts partners, produced a field-tested training manual on best theater-based approaches to peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and engaged in a voter education and fraud mitigation project in the context of Afghanistan's chaotic 2014 presidential election. The project

especially targeted women and youth to motivate them to participate in the electoral process. Through educational mobile theater performances and interactive post-performance activities, Bond Street Theatre directly reached 119,570 men and women in six major Afghan provinces, including Kandahar and Nangarhar, offering a total of 213 live performances.

The project's achievements were truly remarkable. The re-emerging arts partners completed all planned performances in the security-contested and high-risk project areas. Performances were structured to reflect local concerns about the election process and reach the maximum number of people. Theater productions involved separate troupes of male and female actors, the latter reaching Afghan women who were largely isolated and illiterate. In many places, this was the first time that women had the opportunity to attend and watch a live theater performance.

As a result of the activities, participants showed a marked increase in voter engage-



"Who will vote?" Afghan women seeing their first theater production answer, "We will."

Photo Credit: Bond Street Theatre



A men's theater troupe performs before a large audience at a park in Kandahar.

Photo Credit: Bond Street Theatre

ment and the perceived role of women in the electoral process, measured by pre- and post-performance surveys. ■

Notes for Arts and Building Peace

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Note for Peace Arena

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