

Creative people's advocates When the rule of law has been eroded, when social services are lacking and there is no free press, the artist often takes on the role of government critic, people's advocate, community organiser, human rights defender or even movement leaders. But more importantly, they can create spaces for encounters. *By Mary Ann DeVlieg, Victoria Ivanova, Rosario Pavese and Ole Reitov*



It may be a truism to state that conflict is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. However, there is a tendency to summarily define contemporary conflicts using binary logic as either 'modern' struggles for resources, primordial 'tribal' antagonisms or epic confrontations between the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised'. As a result, policy is often informed by simplistic assumptions, bolstered by historical amnesia and the inability to grapple with the contextual nuances of contention.

These faux-pas lead to embarrassing situations (to put it mildly) where European states are found to be supporting oppressive regimes, trading financial aid for political leverage, and shielding people from responsibility within their own jurisdictions when they are directly or indirectly perpetrating violence elsewhere.

International criminal justice can also be seen in a critical light. The recent push to selectively tear certain violent acts from their contexts and bring them before the International Criminal Court in The Hague only succeeds in superficially demonising the perpetrators while leaving the victims with little more than their victimhood. This is not to say that the juridical notion of justice is irrelevant, but it should not be the sole mechanism for processing events that occur within and as a result of conflict situations. Juridical justice will always represent a top-down approach to regulating social relationships, and whereas it may be portrayed as a humane substitute for blood-soaked revenge (if we are to believe the French historian Rene Girard), the people it leaves behind will rarely feel any wiser.

'Culture' is a word that makes Europeans both proud and nervous. On the one hand, there is a feeling of great pride in the importance that Europe places on a robust cultural infrastructure, on its historical significance and its maintenance and development. On the other hand, there is the prickly subject of European member nations having used culture as a signifier of hierarchy (and supplement to violent invasion) during times of colonial subjugation. Both of these 'stamps' continue to exert their force on European attitudes

and actions to this day, which means that a truly sophisticated and forward-looking international cultural policy will necessarily have to take into account a balanced understanding of both trajectories.

Despite these foreboding complexities, one thing cannot be denied: bottom-up approaches to social development and individual/group empowerment are essential for sustainable conflict resolution, and socially engaging projects based in the arts and culture are a powerful resource (if not the most powerful) in facilitating such approaches.

For this reason, serious consideration should be given to the development of autonomous and independent cultural movements, spaces and institutions. They offer opportunities for free thinking and dialogue and can even act as safe havens in difficult socio-political environments. For instance, one of the most widespread global challenges today is pervasive social inequality and the violence that results from the inability of governments to control it, or their complicity in upholding it. Individuals are first and foremost citizens, but their formal recognition as equal members of a political body is the first step towards the effective exercising of their political rights. However, wide gaps in social equality, cultural and linguistic differences and political borders hinder mutual recognition between members of an integrated socio-political body. This is where art can make a significant contribution to easing tensions between diversity and homogeneity through the creation of

spaces where creative practice intersects with human rights agendas in the interests of a broader notion of social justice, particularly in defence of vulnerable communities. In this context, the recognition of the human rights violations suffered by these communities should be seen as the first step. Different forms of artistic expression can then provide the necessary platform for the second stage: reclaiming these rights.

Laboratory for creative collaboration

A similar dynamic is evident in post-war zones where the scars of conflict remain exposed. A good example is provided by the Cultural Centre REX in Belgrade, which played an important role in mediating the residual trauma prevalent in post-war Serbia. REX provided a safe space for socially engaging, psycho-therapeutic activities, whether through open forum debates as a backdrop to newly opened exhibits, or as a laboratory for creative collaborations, aimed at improving the social conditions of the city and the country. Yet rapidly disappearing public spaces worldwide means that 'open environments' are often hard to find or access, resulting in increased social atomisation and psycho-social alienation. In this sense, cultural spaces often serve as meeting-points for people whose paths might otherwise not cross, thereby fostering a more inclusive approach to social citizenship.

Artists can also play a fundamental role in the peacebuilding process, particularly in societies divided by armed conflict or where open conflict is curtailed by all-pervasive repression. When the rule of law has been eroded, when social services are lacking and there is no free press, the artist often takes on the role of government critic, people's advocate, community organiser, human rights defender or even movement leader. Individuals who use creativity to fight injustice often face direct or indirect persecution for their activism. While frameworks for the support of human rights defenders already exist, these support mechanisms often do not take into account such latent forms of activism and overlook the specific risks faced by artists and culture workers doing the work normally associated with activists.

Nowadays, it is not uncommon for cultural workers who are also active within civil society to work in multiple media, while culture is also a common ingredient in projects striving for social justice and equality. Thus, collaborative relationships between human rights and arts organisations and networks hold great potential for developing alternative support structures for rights defenders that function by accessing under-utilised resources (which often originate in the art world) and occu-

“Theatrical improvisation allows people to investigate the root causes of difficult social, political and economic realities, explore personal feelings and relate to the emotional expressions of others through story-telling.”

py interstitial spaces in larger social justice agendas.

Perhaps the most thoroughly explored artistic methodology employed in conflict situations is the use of theatre with vulnerable individuals and communities. Augusto Boal's famous Forum Theatre method and the work that this visionary creative practitioner initiated in his native Rio de Janeiro and across South America provide an excellent example of the virtues of participatory cultural activities that are built on principles of direct engagement, creative expression and dialogue.

Theatrical improvisation allows people to investigate the root causes of difficult social, political and economic realities, explore personal feelings and relate to the emotional expressions of others through story-telling and spontaneous action. At the same time, they are an active celebration of the strength of their own voices and of mutual, equitable exchange between people. By creating an alternative space for social engagement, theatre for development can educate, empower and even heal. Numerous initiatives of this kind have been launched all over the world, such as the Amani People's Theatre in Kenya, Zwakwane in Zimbabwe, and the Berlin Fountainhead Tanz Theatre in Germany.

Apart from the obvious benefits to those directly involved, there is also great value in the knowledge and understanding that is generated. The people we tend to call 'victims of conflict' rarely have a chance to tell their own stories first-hand. Typically, their stories are recounted by mediators

who unilaterally interpret their needs and dictate solutions. However, when human rights and development actors actively collaborate, the specific needs of specific groups can be directly linked to appropriate resources and solutions devised in collaboration with the users. This not only makes the work more effective, but also makes it easier for marginalised discourses to reach the mainstream.

Starting points could also be found in the existing human rights infrastructure. Transparency International, for example, has 45 ALACs (Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres) in 40 countries with different historical, cultural, legal and social backgrounds. These centres are dedicated to encouraging citizen participation in the fight against corruption in particular and the defence of rights in general. Citizens can use the centres to highlight rights violations and lodge complaints. Linking these (or similar human rights organisations) with artists' and cultural networks could create a space where both parties could work together in realising different forms of social justice. Dynamic initiatives of this nature could provide a timely response to today's global conditions where flexibility, creativity and innovation are key to moving beyond the pervasive disenchantment and passivity that can often result from overexposure to conflict.

Often the leading institutional cultures of the different disciplines (arts and culture/human rights/development), including planning timeframes, evaluation criteria, funder management, assumptions

on valid outcomes or priorities, can create obstacles to such collaborative experiences. Language is used with different weighting – for example 'development' activities are not the same for those concerned only with economic development as for those who value human development above all. Likewise, freedom of expression advocates do not bend before questions of taste, local sensitivity or controversy: a human right is a human right. And artists often work on less obvious, more immaterial levels of consciousness or self-confidence. While there have been successful cross-disciplinary, cross-sector projects for many years now, NGOs can often be wedded to their own methodologies.

In this context, institutions such as EUNIC and the main human development agencies and foundations could act as catalysts for increased dialogue and mutual understanding between sectors. By highlighting good practice, commissioning joint analyses and bringing key players together, overall perspectives can be created to demonstrate the value and constraints of separate approaches and the synergies created in collaborations, as experimental as these may be.

There is also a need for mapping both the dangers and the resources available to non-professional activists working in the culture sector. 2011 saw an increase in the repression of and attacks on artists and culture workers globally, most notably in the

“While there have been successful cross-disciplinary, cross-sector projects for many years now, NGOs can often be wedded to their own methodologies.”

Middle East/North Africa, China, South East Asia and Central America. Systematic and widespread repression of artists and culture workers indicates the need for both global and local mechanisms to support and defend artistic free expression.

The International Coalition for Arts, Human Rights and Social Justice (ICARJ, www.artsrightsjustice.net) has the potential to be a useful and timely platform for local, regional and international networks defending creative activism. A recent proposal by Freemuse, the world forum on music and censorship <http://freemuse.org>, and others to create a global monitoring system (<http://artsfex.org>) for freedom of artistic expression is a welcome step in the same direction, as is the new Working Group 'ARJ' (arts-rights-justice) within the EU civil society platform 'Access to Culture', which had its constitutive meeting in Brussels on 13 February 2012.

Potential ways forward should now include the following:

- Mapping existing organisations that support artists and cultural operators whose rights are abused or endangered;
- Commissioning studies on short-, medium- and longer-term actions to improve protection of threatened artists and arts initiatives;
- Collaborating with existing work on more humanistic and cultural indicators for measuring development;
- Creating a clearing house for sharing information, cases and analyses so

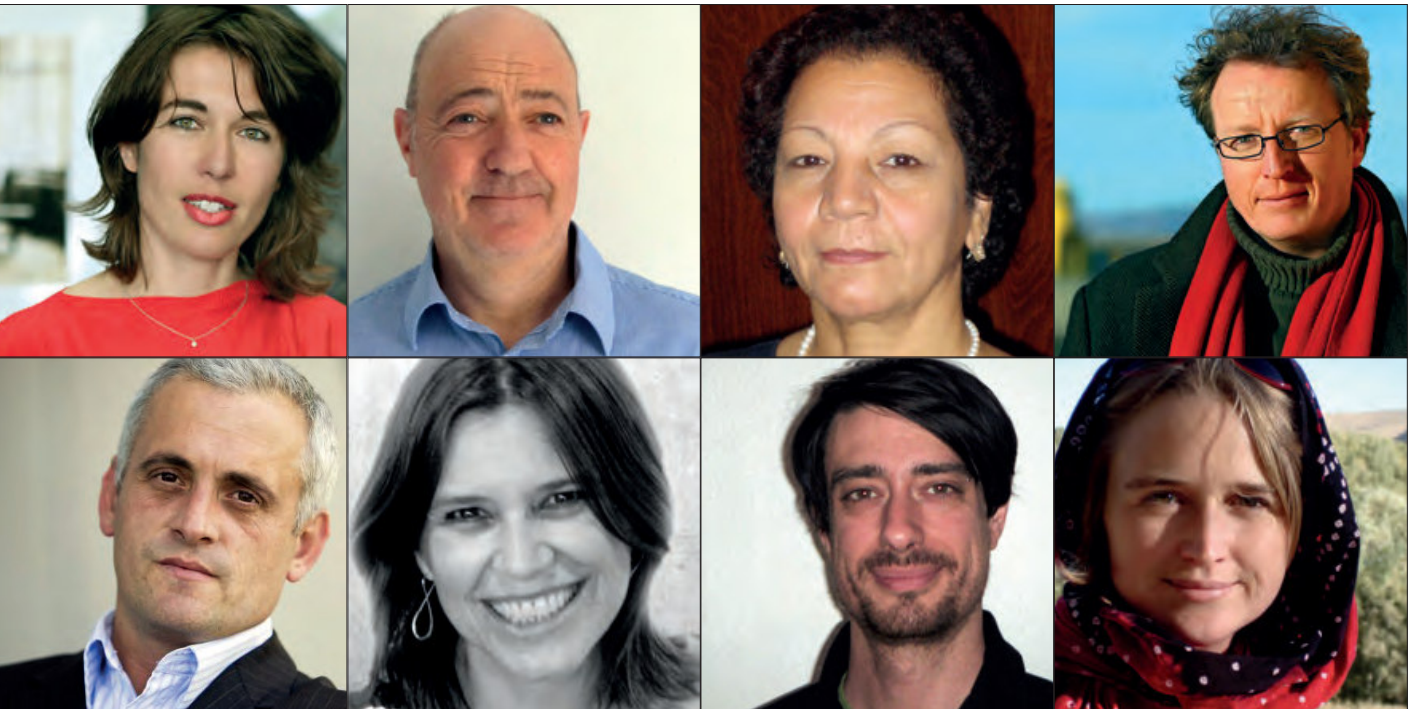
that cases can be better matched to the appropriate resources;

- Creating a global monitoring system for abuse of freedom of artistic expression;
- Awareness-raising and training projects addressing the arts sector, the human rights sector and policy makers.

Mary Ann DeVlieg has worked in the culture sector for more than 30 years. Since 1994 she has been the General Secretary of the IETM international network for contemporary performing arts. In 2010 she founded the International Coalition for Arts, Human Rights & Social Justice, www.artsrightsjustice.net. Co-authors **Victoria Ivanova**, **Sidd Joag**, **Rosario Pavese** and **Ole Reitov** are also members of this organisation. Victoria Ivanova works as a strategy coordinator at an arts foundation in Donetsk in the Ukraine and is a member of the art platform Trans Europe Halles (TEH). Sidd Joag is an artist and experimental filmmaker. He is the co-founder of Zero Capital Arts, an organisation which supports low-cost socially and politically engaged creative projects and exhibitions. He is also a member of FreeDimensional, an initiative which supports the freedom of art around the world. Rosario Pavese is a member of the Latin American Network Art for Social Transformation initiative, which is committed to fighting for social justice. Ole Reitov is the Programme Manager at Freemuse, a Danish organisation that advocates freedom of expression for musicians around the world.

CULTURE REPORT

EUNIC YEARBOOK 2012/2013



Although a painting can never stop a bullet, a painting can stop a bullet from being fired. Culture is a central component of conflicts between different groups and ethnicities. So what could be more appropriate than using culture as a tool for conflict resolution? After centuries of war, Europe has particular experience in how to create peaceful and cooperative ways of co-existing. What kinds of external cultural policies does Europe need to embrace that will allow art, education and intercultural dialogue to open doors and build trust between communities – and help prevent conflicts around the globe?

Foreword	4
Lifting the veil <i>By Sebastian Körber</i>	

CHAPTER 1: THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURE

Beyond the cultural smokescreen <i>by Jochen Hippler</i>	10
More culture in global politics <i>by Damien Helly</i>	23
Signification spirals and moral imagination <i>by Gudrun Kramer, Thomas Ernstbrunner and Wilfried Graf</i>	28
Message in a bottle <i>by Moukhtar Kocache</i>	36
The positive influence of cultural initiatives <i>by Katrin Mader</i>	50
A question of security <i>by Mike Hardy and Aurélie Bröckerhoff</i>	55
Creative people's advocates <i>by Mary Ann DeVlieg, Victoria Ivanova, Sidd Joag, Rosario Pavese and Ole Reitov</i>	63

CHAPTER 2: PEACEBUILDING – LEARNING FROM LOCAL EXPERIENCES

Healing from within <i>by Michael Gleich</i>	72
Fighting trauma and taboo <i>by Martina Fischer</i>	77
Afghanistan and beyond <i>by Jemima Montagu</i>	86
War begins in the minds of men <i>by Raphael Vergin</i>	92
A voice for the voiceless <i>by Bernd Reiter</i>	98
Setting the truth free <i>by Peter Jenkinson</i>	107

CHAPTER 3: THE POWER OF THE ARTIST - THE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

The political in the poetical <i>by Yang Lian</i>	118
Reconciliation is not just going through the motions <i>by Slavenka Drakulić</i>	129
Europe’s problem zone <i>by Beqë Cufaj</i>	139
Seeing with both eyes <i>by Salwa Bakr</i>	149
Heckling from the balcony <i>by Andrea Grill</i>	157
The language of music <i>by Vladimir Ivanoff</i>	163
Art and conflict <i>by Christian Schoen</i>	170

CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF EUNIC IN CRISIS REGIONS

A buffer for pacifying the people <i>by Delphine Borione</i>	180
Far from the feasible <i>by Gottfried Wagner</i>	187
Beware of vaulting ambitions <i>by Yudhishthir Raj Isar</i>	192
Keeping doors open in difficult times <i>by Robin Davies</i>	201
Little strokes fell big oaks <i>by Martin Eichtinger</i>	206
A domain of peace <i>by Luciano Rispoli</i>	211
Food for the soul <i>Ruth Ur talks to Jok Madut Jok</i>	215
EUNIC Annual Report	224
Editorial information	236