CULTURE REPORT

EUNIC Yearbook 2012/2013

Culture and Conflict

Challenges for Europe's Foreign Policy

EUNIC

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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?

Lifting the veil

By Sebastian Körber

Culture has a vital role to play in conflict regions. It can build bridges but it can also increase divisions. What are the opportunities and challenges, the risks and limitations of cultural engagement in regions beset by crisis and conflict? This question has of course been a central focus of international relations for more than 20 years, but there is still no clear answer. Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali put this item on the agenda of the United Nations as far back as 1992. In 1993 Samuel P. Huntington's thesis on the Clash of Civilisations unleashed a long-lasting debate on the geopolitical significance of culture, and after the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 it soon became clear to everyone that considering the role of culture in international relations is not just an intellectual exercise. In parallel to this, the limited success achieved by military interventions in Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq pose the question of whether other, softer, approaches would be more effective. Even international development assistance, something that – as Damien Helly discusses in this report – finds itself in a state of existential crisis, is on a quest for find alternative ways of dealing with fragile states. So it is logical that the network of European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) should ask what role cultural activity can play in conflict resolution.

First the good news: the number of extremely violent conflicts has dropped by 40 percent since 1992, as the journalist Michael Gleich notes in his contribution. He believes the fact that many people find this surprising is down to the media's distortion of reality. It is not violence that has increased but the reporting of violence. The media is not interested in successful approaches to crisis prevention and the absence of conflict. And do academics and researchers also suffer from this blind spot? Gleich believes there can surely be no more urgent topic for research. But the quiet work being done by culture is drowned out in journals and at conferences by – as Chinese poet Yang Lian puts it – the "tumult of conflict".

But when it is a question of proving that cultural activity is an effective tool in conflict resolution, the representatives of cultural relations institutes also often find themselves resorting to vague statements. So Gottfried Wagner, former Director of the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam, warns against the use of glib cultural rhetoric when it comes to conflicts. The writer Slavenka Drakulić says, "When talking about the role of culture in the reconciliation process, we should not ignore its capacity to produce ideology and propaganda", and reminds us of the writers, journalists and philologists who became cogs in the nationalist propaganda machine during the war in the Balkans. Political scientist Jochen Hippler concludes that if a conflict is interpreted as a clash of cultural values, then a conflict about

interests becomes a conflict about identity, something that is much more difficult to resolve. This culturalisation of conflicts ensures that practical interests such as guaranteeing supplies of raw materials and energy disappear behind a cultural smokescreen. Hippler believes that for this reason the job of cultural dialogue should not be to resolve conflicts but to open up new perspectives on the causes of conflict.

"Humans always want to make sense of things and need things to make sense. Ongoing violence also requires a narrative framework", says Jerusalem-based conflict expert Gudrun Kramer, describing the "signification spiral" of values, symbols, songs, monuments and street names. So it is a question of stopping the growth of emotion-laden myth-building and entrenched ideologies, which simply help to escalate conflict. Curator Moukhtar Kozache speaks of a "process of unlearning" and urges us to overcome the "non-creative and catastrophic notion of a 'clash of civilisations'" and instead to accept the interwoven history and mutability of civilisations.

Robin Davies, who recently joined the British Council from NATO headquarters, admits that he has long underestimated the transforming power of culture and therefore stresses all the more that we should no longer see culture as being separate from mainstream policies on international relations.

And EUNIC? Raj Isar, who currently holds teaching posts at universities in Sydney and Paris, proffers a controversial opinion. Although he values the potential of art as a vector and instrument of conflict resolution, he recommends that the network should of course offer moral support but otherwise leave the complex task of conflict resolution to the experts.

He points to "concord organisations" that bring together people with fundamentally opposing views, as is the case in divided societies, in order to initiate dialogue or offer training in conflict management.

But this report also has its share of optimistic voices. Austrian diplomat Martin Eichtinger speaks of a "noble task". The cultural institutes should make use of courageous and thought-provoking programmes to prepare the ground for breaking down stereotypes and prejudices. Little strokes fell big oaks. Echoing Winston Churchill, he praises the culture of listening: "In a conflict, it requires courage not just to stand up and speak, but also to sit down and listen." The current EUNIC President, Delphine Borione, points out that the European cultural institutes have particular credibility with regard to the contribution of culture to economic, social and human development because they represent countries that have experience of conflict stretching back over many hundreds of years.

This is the fifth edition of the Culture Report on the progress and shortcomings of Europe's cultural relations, and it is the second edition that also serves as the EUNIC Yearbook. I would like to thank all the contributors, translators and editors, along with the members of the EUNIC network, for their valuable assistance. My special thanks go to the Robert Bosch Foundation for funding the Culture Report from the very beginning. I am also delighted that it can once again appear in several languages thanks to the support of the British Council, the Gulbenkian Foundation and the French Foreign Ministry.

Sebastian Körber, Deputy General Secretary and Head of the Media Department at the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations

Beyond the cultural smokescreen

For as long as a conflict is predominantly about differences in interests, it is often easier to find pragmatic compromises. However, if the same conflict is also interpreted as a conflict between different cultural values, then the dispute over different interests becomes a dispute over identity. So what could be more obvious thanto into involve culture in conflict resolution? *By Jochen Hippler*

Since the 1990s, and especially since the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, the relationship between culture and cultural factors and potential or actual violent conflicts has attracted an increasing amount of attention from politicians and academics alike. This discussion actually goes back much further, though it has not always been carried out with the same degree of fervour. When Samuel Huntington published his widely acclaimed article in 1993 on the "Clash of Civilisations" (followed up by a book of the same name) it prompted intensive global discussion and was a key factor in the decision by the United Nations, at the suggestion of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, to declare 2001 to be the "Year of Dialogue Among Civilisations". Ironi-cally, it was in this very year that the Al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September took place.

Relations between Muslims and the West were placed under considerable strain as a result of this criminal act and the subsequent 'War on Terrorism' (including Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib), as well as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many governments and numerous private agencies also tried to improve Western-Islamic dialogue in an attempt to mitigate the current conflicts and avoid future ones. However, these efforts tended to tail off after a few years as the dramatic pictures from 11 September started to fade from people's memories.

The public soon started to take an interest in another aspect of the relationship between culture and conflict. The problem of fragile and failing states and the limited success of attempts to bring stability to Afghanistan (and, for some years, Iraq), despite the deployment of huge numbers of personnel and resources, raised the question as to whether attempts at conflict resolution based on a security policy approach (especially military deployment) were not overrated, and whether other, 'softer' instruments might

not be possible and potentially more successful. This question is all the more relevant given the fact that the dynamics of many conflict situations are bound up with ethnic or religious – and therefore cultural – issues and cannot be readily influenced by military means. This suggests that better use could be made of culturally-oriented approaches in such cases, which in turn would raise the profile of European Foreign Cultural and Education Policy (FCEP), which was and still could be an important vehicle for intercultural dialogue.

Internal or inter-societal conflicts are mostly the result of a clash of competing interests. When individuals or groups are pursuing similar interests, conflicts are much less likely. If conflicts do arise, perhaps due to a misunderstanding or because of psychological factors, then they tend to be short-lived and solutions are relatively easy to find, usually through some form of compromise. Conflicts tend to be of a more serious nature and so harder to resolve in cases where the interests of the parties involved are at odds with each other. Conflicts based on a zero-sum outcome (what one side gains, the other loses) are usually much more problematical, and, if they revolve around vitally important commodities or issues, they can be particularly intractable, bitter and difficult to resolve.

However, reference to different, contradictory or exclusive 'interests' can lead to the over-hasty conclusion that the resulting conflicts are somehow 'objective' in nature. This may well be true in certain extreme cases, if for example one side needs a non-divisible resource for its own survival and the other side needs it for the same reason, but as a general rule 'interests' are not 'objective' per se, but tend to be socially mediated.

My interests cannot be measured by a calculator or ruler, but are dependent on my needs, intentions, characteristics and other factors, which is to say they are defined by who I am and what I consider to be important or unimportant in life. Whether and to what extent I consider alcohol, art, conviviality, tranquillity, money, prestige, sports cars or other things to be central or of lesser importance to my life is dependent on what sort of person I am and how I want to live my life.

The same applies to smaller or larger groups or even whole countries. Gaining Lebensraum in the East was a key national interest for Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s, but in the 1960s it was no longer an issue, and this remains the case today.

Competition between particular political cultures

To put it another way, the 'interests' that play a key role in the origins and outcomes of conflicts are first and foremost determined by social, subjective and 'cultural' factors, but they are also changeable. We could say that interests are the societal and cultural articulation of common, socially-negotiated goals, intentions and needs that arise out of intra-societal disputes and debates. They are therefore a product of the 'political culture' of a group or society and develop out of the competition between the specific political cultures of individual sub-groups.

There is no doubt that 'objective' aspects can be included in this (export needs, pastureland, relieving population pressure, etc.). Ultimately, however, the importance of 'interests' lies in the fact that they are an articulation of the perception of the objective requirements for reproduction, rather than the requirements themselves. These requirements are rarely direct and irrefutable, but are mostly dependent on a particular path chosen (if an economy becomes more reliant on its internal market, its dependence on exports goes down; a switch from intensive animal husbandry to cultivation reduces the need for pastureland) and are culturally defined. As a result, the political culture of a society or group becomes a key factor in the origins of a conflict, and therefore also in its potential resolution.

There is a second aspect to the culturally-influenced articulation of the 'objective' requirements for reproduction: it is often the case that when a conflict starts it is not only one's own interests that are articulated but also those that are bound up with one's own identity and one's perception of others or of the opposing party. It is no longer only what I want, but also who I am (or who the opposing party is or allegedly is) that becomes an integral part of the conflict. In this way, prejudices and distorted pictures of a group of others can also play a significant role.

To put it another way, individuals and groups often see challengers for power or resources not just as competition, but also as culturally or ethnically 'different', especially in heterogeneous societies. And this fact of being different is often used as a justification for conflict, even if it is actually about tangible interests such as land, jobs or influence. In this way, conflicts can become 'culturalised', which makes them much more difficult to resolve.

For as long as a conflict is predominantly about differences in interests, it is often easier to find pragmatic compromises, such as introducing quotas in the civil service or the sharing of land and resources. However, if the same conflict is also interpreted as a conflict between different cultural values, then the dispute over different interests becomes a dispute over identity. And when this is the case, finding compromises becomes much more difficult. Groups may be able to resolve their different interests through compromise, but compromises are rare when it is a matter of individual identity. Who I am is not up for negotiation; at best we can talk about what I want. And anybody who is prepared to limit their own spheres of interest in order to mitigate a conflict is unlikely to put their own identity on the line.

A third aspect of cultural influences on conflict dynamics exists in the relationship between external demarcation and internal mobilisation. Political culture, especially political identities, can become resources for political actors, but can also take on a life of their own that

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under certain circumstances can get out of control. Political identities, including ethnicities in the broadest sense (taking into account national, religious or tribal aspects) are generally not as clearly defined, or as easy to define, as many actors claim and many observers assume.

The very fact that they are not clearly defined makes it possible to use these political identities as a method of demarcation and as a way of defining who is in the in-group and who is in the out-group. They can be used in an integrative way (all Muslims are the same and form one large community, even if they are from different nations and speak different languages), but also in a divisive way (Shiites are not real Muslims but heretics). However, this kind of demarcation is not reflected in reality in most societies, which are normally characterised by a whole series of overlapping identities. It is possible to be Iraqi, Muslim, Sunni, Kurd and secular as well as an intellectual, a man, a member of a particular party, a musician and a father, to name just a few possibilities. Creating a personal identity generally consists of bringing all these individual characteristics and part-identities together, establishing priorities, resolving or reconciling and, if possible, integrating potential contradictions. This is a creative and 'cultural' task carried out by individuals and groups with varying degrees of success.

When political and social conflicts flare up or escalate, especially if they are violent in nature, certain aspects of identity can come under pressure, especially those with potential or real political im-plications. If, for example, members of a religious, national or ethnic group are systematically persecuted, then membership (or non-membership) of this group and hence the corresponding part of their identity becomes more important. In extreme cases, membership or non-membership of a particular group can become a matter of life and death (for example, Hutu/Tutsi, Jewish/ 'Aryan').

Ethnic identity becomes a matter of personal safety

Redefining or re-evaluating group membership can fundamentally change the political culture of a country and is often a key component of the dynamics of conflicts. The importance of such factors in the escalation of political violence is clear for all to see in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Syria. When a certain level of violence is exceeded in such a context, demarcation tends to both accelerate and deepen, and ethnic identity can quickly turn into a matter of personal safety. The threat of danger comes either objectively or subjectively from another ethnic group, and protection can only be guaranteed through militias or other entities from one's 'own group'.

The justified or unjustified feeling of being threatened by an 'alien' group and the possibility of being protected by organisations within one's 'own' group can be the trigger for mobilising political support and inspiring activism and recruitment by those carrying out ethnic violence. This can lead to the division of society into large hostile groups that constantly threaten each other, along with a growing pressure towards conformity and

discipline within these groups. The political elites can use this division and confrontation externally in order to legitimise and strengthen their power internally and to generate and manipulate activism in society. I should add at this point that these aspects of 'political culture' that we have talked about so far all exist at an individual and collective level, and so are based on a broad understanding of the term culture. However, these issues are also closely bound up with what we understand by culture in the narrower sense. Musicians, archaeologists, linguists and other creative artists can play an important role in sharpening or even creating ethno-national, ethno-religious or other political identities – perhaps through the construction or standardisation of a national language, the retrospective creation of a 'national history' or the postulation of a national literature, music or culture in general.

The more that art and culture is used to create identity, the more people have a reason or opportunity to identify with a large social group at an emotional level, something that did not exist in this form in the past, or at most to a limited extent. Depending on the context, need or situation, historical science can therefore carve out real historical commonalities, systemise them ideologically and place them in a new context, or project the national concept of the present back to the past in order to revive old myths or create new ones. A good example is provided by the view of a German nation evolving seamlessly from and continuing the history of the Germanic peoples, and which reveres the "Hermann" of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest as a quasi-German hero. Poetry, history, painting, music and

architecture ('Hermann's Memorial') all played an important part in creating out of all the many German identities a single unified identity that could be directed against the 'Latins' (Romans and French).

The second half of the 19th century (and often the first decades of the following century) was an era of culturally-supported, nationalist identity-building, particularly in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. A similar process was undertaken and continues to be undertaken amongst ethnic groups, religious movements and larger tribal entities, but this is clearly just one political-historical option among many, as other 'nations' or ethnic groups have gone down a completely different path in the course of their history. Art and culture, in the narrower sense of the terms, can also play an increasingly important role in the strengthening or weakening of old and new political identities, as well as influencing the dynamics of conflicts. This means that both governmental and non-governmental cultural policies can be relevant to conflict situations.

So far we have talked either explicitly or implicitly of group conflicts within a society, but culturally-charged conflicts can arise between nations too – we only have to think of the earlier traditional German-French enmity that was supposedly rooted in fundamental differences of mentality, cultural systems and values.

Culturally-influenced conflicts can also arise at a level that goes beyond or is tangential to individual nation states. This can be the case on a regional sca-

le, where, for example, specific cultural, ethnic or other identity groups live in several neighbouring countries (for example, Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) where conflicts are directly or indirectly linked and influence each other.

The conflict for potential is somewhat different when such groups live in other, possibly distant diaspora communities (such as Turkish and Kurdish migrants in Germany or North Africans in France). When diaspora communities live under the influence of foreign cultural and legal systems and are only involved in limited interactions with the original societies, then additional factors come into play within the dynamics of conflict that arise from their degree of integration or non-integration into their new homeland. However, we are not in a position to investigate all these issues here.

One special case in the relationship between culture and conflict can be seen at a very general level: that of the aforementioned Western-Islam relations. It is a special case, firstly because the term 'Western' cannot be positively defined and the group of people covered by the term is very unclear.

In addition, two groups are set against each other that are in fact very difficult to compare. 'Muslims' can clearly be defined in religious and cultural terms, but they are not being compared to Christians (or any other religious community, or even atheists), but to a large group that cannot be defined in religious (or anti-religious) terms, but only on the basis of some vague cultural aspects. Christianity is often explicitly or implicitly attributed to the West, but this would also mean that Copts, Maronites and other Christians in the Middle East as well as the many Christians in Asia, Africa and Latin America would by definition be part of the West due to their religious affiliation, something which makes little sense. The opposite is also true – being part of the West can also not be defined by agnostic, secular, anti-religious or atheist attitudes, otherwise many US citizens and Europeans would be excluded.

What is also not clear in this concept is whether the millions of Muslims living in Europe or North America belong to the 'Muslim' or 'Western' side of the equation.

Rejection of the West

Although the groups referred to in the Western-Islam antithesis may be difficult to define, there is no doubt that they harbour a real potential for conflict. Just as Western policies and military interventions are not really directed against Islam itself (although the people of the region are often only too happy to assume this), but rather are intended to look after specific interests, so Muslim societies are not really permeated by a blanket rejection of

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the West and Western culture. Antipathy and opposition is often directed towards the United States and the US government and its policies, which are often perceived as imperialist and arrogant. Indeed, this is a view that is also shared by many (Western) Europeans, but in cultural terms it is articulated in a different way. Anti-Americanism in Europe is rarely clothed in religious formulas.

There appear to be a combination of several key factors that underlie the conflict between the West and Islam:

- The clear imbalance of power between North American/Western European countries and those of the Near and Middle East
- The convergence of economic, political and cultural crises in many countries in the Near and Middle East
- The contradiction between an admiration for Western achievements (technological, economic, political and cultural) and a desire for equality and the protection of their own independence and identity
- The experience that many dictators and repressive regimes in the region are or have been supported by Western governments (USA, France and others) and that they serve the interests of these supporters more than they do the interests of their own people
- Western governments' direct or indirect support of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories
- The foreign and military policies of Western countries in the Near and Middle East (and, again, especially the USA), which are perceived as being imperialist and arrogant, as

symbolised for a time by the occupation of Iraq.

The Western-Muslim conflict is, therefore, essentially political, even if it is also bound up with development crises and deficiencies within the societies of the Near and Middle East (corruption, dictatorships, stagnation, etc.) and also includes cultural components (a desire for cultural independence and identity that is often articulated in religious and not just nationalistic terms).

Secular and political origins

Ultimately, the origins of the conflict are essentially secular and political and a reflection of differences of interest. The relationship between the West and Islam (more accurately the relationship between the most important Western countries and the Near and Middle East) revolves around issues relating to energy supplies, stability and security, the security of Israel, the prevention of mass migration to Europe and the optimisation of Western power in the region. Many of the region's ruling elites have been keen to work closely with Western politicians, despite the fact that large sections of their people often rejected these policies, proving once again that the dividing line does not simply run between the West and Islam (or the Muslims).

As with many interest-based conflicts, the conflict between the West and Islam has also been heavily culturalised

and thus turned into ideology, making it out to be a "clash of civilisations". As a result, 'Islamic' and 'Western' societies suddenly find themselves locked in an apparent battle that is no longer about specific interests, but about 'values' and political cultural identity. This makes it much more difficult to find a solution to the conflict and leads to a hardening of political and ideological stances, which in turn are presented as a sign of cultural self-assertion.

The idea of a "clash of civilisations" becomes more plausible when it is confirmed by dramatic acts of violence (such as the September 11 and other terrorist attacks on Western countries, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the occupation of Palestine). Interest and political power-based conflicts give the impression of being about values and identities, with the result that these kinds of cultural dimensions become even more important in reality. For example, the Islamic religion is used, under certain circumstances, as a kind of cultural and linguistic code to articulate anti-Western opposition.

This is where the cultural dialogue referred to above can and should be employed. As long as it is not just empty rhetoric,

it can be used to counter the culturalisation and manipulation for ideological purposes of the underlying disputes and bring the focus back to the real interests and political structures involved. Intercultural dialogue cannot resolve the conflict per se, because the origins of the conflict do not lie in cultural differences or practices. But it can play an important subsidiary role, as long as the political conflict is also resolved politically at the same time.

If this does not happen, there is a risk that it will just become a cultural smokescreen, designed to hide the 'real' politics, with people talking about religion, cultural values and commonalities, while pursuing an uncompromising policy of interests. However, if intercultural dialogue takes place in parallel to the political solution of conflicts and is accompanied by development policy measures and economic cooperation, then it can have some real value and make an important contribution. For it to succeed, it is vital that it is not seen as a substitute for policy, but as just one element of an overall conflict resolution package.

Against this background of a potential relationship between conflicts and culture, the question remains as to whether there is a role that Europe's foreign cultural policy can and should play, and what form this role should take. This presents a major challenge, as the European Union is a civilian power that is the neighbour of an unstable crisis region. But this is an area where it could and should be more active, not in competition with national

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foreign cultural policies but in a coordinating role, and the still-young European External Action Service should be set up in such a way that it is up to the task.

It should not simply be a question of giving foreign cultural policy an important role within European external policy, but rather that it should be tailored more towards conflict prevention and resolution in a wider cultural sense. There have been some tentative steps in this direction and these initiatives should be further encouraged and strongly reinforced.

But we should remind ourselves that these efforts are often undertaken in difficult environments, during crises and in conflict zones. These difficult circumstances often lead to limited chances of success. Potential or acute violent conflicts can have a major impact on foreign cultural activities and to a large extent determine their possibilities and limitations. Once a violent conflict has escalated, external cultural policy can become unworkable because the danger to personnel becomes too acute. By then it is too late for it to have some form of preventive effect in the short or medium term. The prevailing political situation often also presents a serious obstacle. In this case, it is a serious mistake to pay insufficient attention to the context of the conflict or to have unrealistically high expectations. It is therefore critical that foreign cultural policy takes all these aspects into consideration. However, it would be shortsighted to see the relationship between foreign cultural policy and conflicts only in negative terms. In many cases it can be designed in such a way that it can make a valuable contribution to conflict prevention or resolution. However, for this to work, the approach needs to be specifically tailored to the needs of the situation, the conflict should not have become too advanced and it should not be burdened by excessively high expectations.

European and national external cultural policies might then have a chance of success and gain in importance. Ethno-cultural identities are not readily accessible to classical diplomacy, but a well thought-out cultural policy can at least try to help reflect the character of separate identities, promote a pluralistic pattern of perception and counter the culturalisation of conflicts.

Appealing to feelings

We should of course not overestimate the importance of cultural work, but in combination with other tools of conflict management it can make a valuable contribution. When representatives of different identity groups come together to work on film, theatre, dialogue processes and joint artistic activities, this at least provides the possibility of not only appealing to people's sense of self-interest but also to their feelings and identities and encouraging them to reflect on their relationship. Films made against the background of the Palestine/Israel and India/Pakistan conflicts are good examples of this. The film "The Heart of Jenin" tells the story of a Palestinian who donates the organs of his dead son to Israeli children. The short film "Wagah" takes a humorous look at the border crossing between India and Pakistan. European and German fo-

reign cultural policy has played a positive role in promoting these two projects.

In Germany in 2001, as part of the political reaction to the 9/11 terror attacks, foreign cultural and education policies were given a stronger and more concrete role in conflict prevention and management. Large sums of anti-terror funding were fed into external cultural policy and into initiatives such as dialogue programmes organised by intermediary organisations. This trend towards involving cultural policy more closely in peace and security policy initiatives was demonstrated in 2004 when the German federal government published its "Civilian Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Action Plan". This Action Plan clearly states that crisis prevention has an important cultural dimension and that intercultural understanding and respect for other cultures are major prerequisites for crisis prevention. With this, Germany's foreign cultural and education policy opened up an important field of activity that included dialogue and exchange, but also "culturally-sensitive methods of communicating the values and instruments of crisis prevention as well as support for education systems that promote non-violent approaches to dealing

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with conflicts and allow different points of view, especially with regard to contemporary history curricula".

The paper refers to the German Foreign Office's Dialogue with Islam, its participation in the Year of Cultural Dialogue, the activities of the Goethe-Institut and of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations. It also states: "Capacity-building measures for local institutions are an integral part of the Federal Government's cultural relations and education policy. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the German Rectors' Conference are engaged in peacekeeping and crisis prevention activities in the context of international endeavours to promote stability" in areas such as South Eastern Europe and Afghanistan.

But since then, a certain amount of disillusionment seems to have crept in. It is not always clear whether fundamental statements of principle are really being taken seriously and implemented in full.

In its new concept, announced in September 2011, entitled "Foreign Cultural and Education Policy in the Age of Globalisation", the German Foreign Office made it clear that it was focusing on foreign cultural policy and raising the bar in this respect. It stated that securing peace was one of the three main aims of this initiative and that it would "contribute to the resolution of regional and local conflicts, particularly in places where they arise out of differences in cultural, religious or ideological views". The paper goes on to say: "Cultural dialogue and educa-

tional opportunities can provide a basis for political and societal stabilisation. Our aim is act earlier to use cultural and educational programmes to avert acute crises in countries and territories that are prone to conflict."

These are all worthwhile and meaningful policy objectives, but the striking thing is that they have been turned into a central focus of foreign cultural policy, or at least this is the intention. It is somewhat less clear whether this intention will become reality. This is particularly true of the Dialogue with Islam, a programme that is no longer being run by a special representative appointed by the Foreign Minister but instead has been integrated into the normal responsibilities of the Foreign Office. Indeed, over the last few years it seems that the emphasis on conflict management in Germany's foreign cultural policy and its efforts to initiate dialogue have dwindled rather than increased. This is most regrettable, and is a reason why European initiatives in this respect are particularly desirable and beneficial.

Overall, the possibilities – but also the limitations – of foreign cultural policy as an instrument of crisis prevention and management are very clear. It is evident that they alone will have little chance of resolving entrenched conflicts within or between nations and societies, such as in the Middle East, Afghanistan, or between India and Pakistan. Political approaches to resolving these conflicts are also necessary, and above all the exercise of political pressure and influence by means of coordinated European and national endeavours. If this kind of political approach is followed, then foreign cultural policy can make a useful, even significant, supplementary contribution. If such political

solutions are lacking or not seriously pursued, then foreign cultural policy cannot provide a replacement. Foreign cultural policy as a European instrument of crisis prevention and management is particularly effective in two areas. The first of these is in intensifying and redirecting dialogue with the Islam world to counter the still prevalent idea of a "clash of civilisations". In this respect, the Arab Spring has opened up new opportunities but also thrown up new exigencies. Secondly, Europe should do more to promote more pluralistic behaviours in heterogeneous societies and work to counter the culturalisation of conflicts. In these two areas, it is to be hoped that Germany and Europe can find new impetus to turn their good intentions into reality.

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The positive influence of cultural initiatives

Where political conflicts create division, culture can create space for encounters, dialogue and understanding. From organising a puppet theatre in Afghanistan to assisting young activists in Egypt – the members of the European National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network are increasing their focus on post-conflict regions and countries that are in transition.

By Katrin Mader
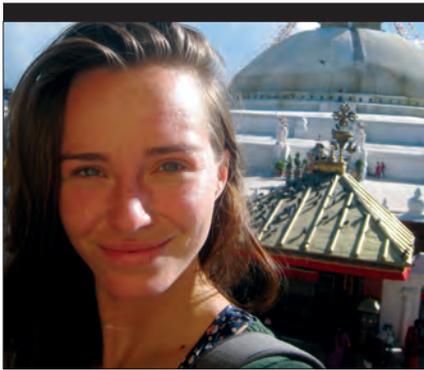
For many years now, peace and security policies have focused on civil society processes and their importance for political stabilisation in crisis zones. But to date there has been relatively little collaboration and cooperation between cultural institutes and the conflict management sector. Is this because culture is not yet fully acknowledged as a credible component of peace and security policy and the work of cultural institutes is still not considered sufficiently valid in this respect?

One thing is clear: if cultural and educational work is to be applied effectively in the field of conflict management, then cultural institutes and networks such as EUNIC must make their activities more transparent. They also have to prove that cultural activity can have a positive effect on conflict transformation. It is only in this way that groups can work together more effectively to achieve their goals of resolving cultural, social and political conflict and securing peace.

The European Parliament stated in a March 2011 report that culture should become a more integral part of European external relations. The report is part of a broader recognition of the importance of culture in foreign policy, a recognition that has helped to focus attention on the role of cultural initiatives in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and democratic transformation within the EU. Calling for a role for culture in civil conflict management, the report also placed renewed focus on the potential role of EUNIC in this respect.

EUNIC has confirmed that one of its strategic priorities is the development and enhancement of resources for cultural initiatives in countries that are undergoing transition and instability. Through its cultural activities, the network is keen to place more emphasis on peacebuilding. But it continues to be faced with the problem that – despite all the EU's efforts – the positive influence of cultural and educational work on conflict transformation remains insufficiently recognised or proven. It is important is to start finding evidence and arguments to prove to both national and

EU policymakers that cultural and educational programmes can contribute to conflict resolution.

Airy formulations

In assessing the effects and risks of cultural and educational work in conflict intervention, it appears that cultural institutes often engage in educated guesswork more than rigorous measurement. Outside the cultural sector, it is hard to find voices that recognise the value of cultural initiatives in conflict settings. As Rainer Nolte, head of the Dialogue Programme of Germany's Institute for Cultural Foreign Relations (ifa) stated last year in the magazine "Politik und Kultur": "The role that can be played by aesthetic production as the goal of a cultural programme within a systematic framework of actions [of civil conflict management], has so far been left undefined."

What seems to be missing is an overarching strategy for demonstrating the effectiveness of cultural programmes in

"What seems to be missing is an over-arching strategy for demonstrating the effectiveness of cultural programmes in peacebuilding processes and an answer to the question whether the positive influence of cultural organisations is just an illusion or whether it does in fact have an effect on conflict transformation."

peacebuilding processes and an answer to the question whether the positive influence of cultural organisations is just an illusion or whether it does in fact have an effect on conflict transformation. Does the culture sector base its actions on concrete knowledge or simply on long-held beliefs and hopes?

It is time to start finding answers to this crucial question and to close the gap between theory and practice. There is a need to build a stronger, evidence-based case for the importance of cultural initiatives in fragile countries. The field of civil conflict management has made progress in measuring its accomplishments. An exchange of knowledge could be a starting point in better measuring the achievements of cultural groups in peacebuilding.

The nature of global conflict has changed in recent decades, from a bi-polar clash of ideology during the Cold War to a series of smaller intra-state and inter-state conflicts today, triggered by causes ranging from dwindling natural resources to cultural, religious and ethnic differences.

The mainstay of peacebuilding once focused mainly on political, economical and security assistance. However, with no significant decrease in civil conflicts and the number of failed and failing states since the 1990s, a new framework has emerged that focuses on crisis prevention and peacebuilding as means of avoiding wars and de-escalating conflicts. In this way, it is hoped that the causes and consequences of conflicts can be overcome. Work in the area of crisis and conflict increasingly takes the form of long-term projects designed to lead to lasting peace processes.

Currently most of the EU's actions still remain focused on improving state organs such as police departments or bureaucra-

tic infrastructure. However, in recent years the EU has started to focus more on peacebuilding and conflict prevention. In 2007, the EU created the Instrument for Stability (IfS) a fund dedicated to building the capacities of relevant organisations and services that contribute to preventing or mitigating conflicts in crisis zones. Here the recognised concept of 'soft power' also plays its part – the use of influence, persuasion and consensus-building to bring about changes in other countries and as a tool for conflict resolution. This is where European cultural institutes can expand their activities.

In Germany, this process began fairly early on. The federal government's "Konzeption 2000" strategy paper that was first published 12 years ago stressed how foreign cultural policy is an integral part of foreign policy. Foreign cultural policy is aligned with the general goals and interests of German foreign policy in terms of stabilising peace, resolving conflicts and exercising a positive influence on the maintenance of human rights. This can be achieved equally effectively by supporting local cultural organisations as through PR and educational work.

A recently-published paper by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office on "Building Stability Overseas" (2011) states that 'soft power' will play an important role in supporting the UK's efforts to create stability. The paper confirms that the work of the British Council is becoming more significant through its efforts to create transparency and promote acceptance of different systems of cultural values, thus building mutual understanding. The Stability Pact for Afghanistan has also described one of its objectives as being to shape identity through cultural activities and creating opportunities for the potential involvement of foreign cultural institutes in the country.

This new role for external cultural policy was articulated by Hans-Georg Knopp, Secretary-General of the Goethe Institute, at a December 2009 conference in Tokyo: "Culture, not just in the narrow sense which limits it to the arts, but also in a more general sense that includes, for instance, sports or popular arts and crafts, helps to overcome the traumatic consequences of conflict and to promote the idea of co-existence in peace and security."

Clear guidelines and responsibilities

The EUNIC network can play a substantial role in developing a joint framework for the participation of cultural institutes in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Some national cultural institutes are already running a range of programmes in conflict zones, so only a coordinated approach can guarantee the effective use of resources and skills by bringing together knowledge and perspectives learned from past projects. Fragmented national cultural policies should be integrated and co-exist in a European strategy that outlines concrete, clear policies and responsibilities in order to improve individual projects and make them more effective.

One possible action would be the development of a joint European action plan along the lines of Germany's "Konzeption 2000". Another starting point could be to take an inventory of those projects that have successfully used the medium of culture to contribute to conflict transformation. All future projects could benefit from gathering together the experiences of eve-

ryone involved in these successful projects.

Coordination is crucial. The multiplicity of governmental and non-governmental actors in civil conflict management (who are all competing for funding and as a result have little motivation to work together) presents a further obstacle for cultural actors. What is necessary is a national or European framework for integrating themselves in a coherent civil conflict management system. Projects need to be designed with this in mind and have specific goals. This is vital if cultural actors are to become credible partners. There needs to be a clear set of parameters and standards to show the success and impact of cultural activities on ending conflict, even though it may take generations for changes to become visible.

How can we possibly know whether watching a play promoting tolerance and mutual acceptance at a puppet theatre in Afghanistan will deter a child from becoming an insurgent? As the German peace activist and confict expert, Dr. Jochen Hippler, recently observed at an ifa conference: "When security and development cooperation fail to enforce peace, we should be realistic enough to see that artists can't necessarily do that either". Or as Fareed C. Majari, director of the Goethe Institute in Ramallah, stated at a conference in Tokyo 2009: "Would you invite a burglar who just

"How can we possibly know whether watching a play promoting tolerance and mutual acceptance at a puppet theatre in Afghanistan will deter a child from becoming an insurgent?"

broke into your home and is pointing a gun at you while he steals your belongings to sing a song with you?"

It is clear that culture cannot solve conflict, but it can contribute to peace processes. However, as Jochen Hippler points out, cultural dialogue and bringing people together do not always bring positive results. For example, after the Iran Conference in 2000 organised by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, some Iranian participants were subsequently handed out lengthy prison sentences. This is why a dialogue process has to happen at the right time and be carefully planned and monitored. It must be clear what such programmes can achieve and how effective they are. This is the only way that artists and artistic exchanges can make a worthwhile contribution.

Project funding is also a problem. Cultural institutes often feel their work is inhibited by meagre budgets and the need to find potential sponsors. This does, however, force them to set long-term goals and develop procedures for evaluating their work.

Peacebuilding organisations are facing similar challenges; "How do we know when a peacebuilding project has actually built peace? What indicators are most appropriate? What evaluation tools are most useful in assessing the theories of peace building on which projects are based?" asks Ken Menkhaus in his publication "Impact Assessment in Post- Conflict Peace Building" (2004) for the Swiss organisation Interpeace. However, peacebuilding organisations are now investing much more time and effort in analysing and assessing their work in order to find answers to these crucial questions.

Raj Isar, an independent cultural ex-

pert and scholar, argues that established instruments could be useful for evaluating the impact of cultural work in conflict settings. His paper "Artistic activism in situations of extreme conflict – the challenge of evaluation" makes the case for applying methodologies from the humanitarian aid field to culture projects. Peacebuilding evaluation processes such as 'Peace Impact Assessment', 'Do No Harm' or 'Conflict Sensitivity Approach' should be used to ensure the balanced development of criteria and indicators for assessing the impact, results and relevance of a project. The American peacebuilding organisation Search for Common Ground, for example, has compiled a Training Manual for 'Participatory Theatre' in conflict transformation, providing clear guidelines of how to use theatre as a healing process in a specific conflict setting.

Given the complex nature of conflict management, there is a need for an exchange of knowledge across disciplines in order to increase capacities, overcome weaknesses and make use of strengths. The recent ifa and EUNIC roundtable discussion on 'Culture and Conflict' in Brussels in December 2011 brought together experts from the fields of cultural relations, conflict management and EU foreign and security policy to share their knowledge and learn from each other's experiences. The follow-up initiative of setting up a "Culture and Conflict" working group led by zivik, ifa's civil conflict resolution funding programme, could be another good starting point.

From all this, we can draw the following conclusions:

- The emergence of civil conflict prevention and peacebuilding has created new opportunities for European cultural institutes.
- European cultural institutes can help peace processes in crisis regions.
- A unified strategy needs to be developed in this respect.
- Institutes need to be realistic about what they can achieve and what risks their projects entail.
- This process could be facilitated by sharing knowledge with established civil conflict management organisations on how to evaluate the impact, results and effectiveness of projects.
- A good starting point could be to make an inventory of lessons learned from successful programmes and gather possible methods of evaluating the effectiveness of cultural programmes.
- EUNIC can play a key role in this process. As a network-based organisation it offers a platform for knowledge exchange and for building strategic partnerships with experts from outside the cultural sector.

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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 Girrard), 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 psychosocial 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-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

"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."

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 EU-NIC 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.

Healing from within

When vision and will come together, anything is possible. Even peace. Fearless, strong-willed people are working in conflict zones, undeterred by the day-to-day violence, and dedicating themselves to civil society initiatives. They combine professional strategies for conflict resolution with cultural empathy and are demonstrating how cultural differences can be experienced in a constructive way. *By Michael Gleich*

Of all the peacemakers, it was the two murderers who touched me the most. As a young man, Joe had fought for the Catholic armed underground, shot a British officer and been handed a 22-year prison sentence. Peter had long been a career terrorist on the Protestant side and had an even more serious record. As members of two cultures that were battling for supremacy in Northern Ireland, they found themselves fighting a civil war in which everyone was a loser.

At some point, something snapped. When Joe was released from prison he was depressed by what he saw: frustrated young people with no chance of training or a job were inciting mini-revolts in the poor areas of Belfast out of sheer boredom. Peter's life collapsed even more spectacularly. He dropped out when he was ordered to shoot a disgraced member of his own paramilitary group. Out there in the woods, he found he was unable to pull the trigger and asked himself in despair: "What has this war done to me?"

Joe and Peter separately came to the same decision. They wanted to carry on fighting, but non-violently. They both had a difficult path ahead of them as they attempted to escape the orbit of their former comrades-in-arms. They were in constant danger of being denounced as traitors. Today, they are both social workers who work with young people to persuade them to keep their distance from the paramilitary groups. They are putting all their efforts into finding a political solution to the conflict. It is not the 'Road to Damascus' story that impresses me about them so much as their unerring belief that Catholics and Protestants can live together as equals, along with their strong will to begin life afresh in their mid-forties. When vision and will come together, anything is possible. Even peace.

It happens more often than we might think. Since the early 1990s, more than 80 violent conflicts have been resolved: in

"Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere." Albert Einstein

Mali, Mozambique, Haiti, East Timor, Kosovo, to name but a few. The situation in these countries ranges from fragile to stable. And there are yet more reasons for optimism. Since 1992, there has been a 40 percent reduction in particularly violent conflicts, and the number of people killed in such conflicts has fallen by 98 percent since 1950. And we should not forget events in places like South Africa, where a country ruled by fear and racism made the transition to democracy with hardly a drop of blood being spilled. This was more than anyone had hoped for. But charismatic leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk possessed both imagination and initiative.

War is now an event

So why are we not celebrating? Why is the International Day of Peace not a public holiday? And why does watching the evening news make us feel that the world is increasingly ruled by war, death and destruction? The explanation is simple and twofold. Simple, because we are dealing with the way the media typically distorts reality – the amount of violence in the world has not increased, just the number of reports. Twofold, because the responsibility for this does not lie solely with sensationalist journalists seeking to increase their viewing figures or sell more newspapers.

The public is also to blame for focusing on the negative. We are fascinated by dramas involving life and death, and war brings them into our homes every day. The battlefields are reported like football matches. During the last Gulf War, embedded journalists related what was happening like over-excited sports commentators.

War is now an event. Peace is quiet, slow, boring, and reporters soon lose patience with it as they race around the globe.

And they are not the only ones. Research also cultivates its blind spots. There should be nothing more important than finding out when and how peace can be achieved, but unfortunately very few researchers are interested in breaking new ground by exploring the causes of peace. War sells better – even in trade journals and at conferences.

So any kind of exciting changes go unnoticed. In the past, war was declared by statesmen, prosecuted by generals and armies and brought to an end by presidents signing treaties. Nowadays these kinds of wars between countries involving huge numbers of victims have become the exception. This is surely a step forward for civilisation.

But now we are faced with new challenges. The international community is confronted by violent conflicts that emerge from within societies. They are a society's heart attack, its organ failure. Generally, two or more ethnic groups with different cultures come to blows in order to gain power. Or so it seems. But underneath it all, it is about mutual respect and recognition. I would even go as far as to say it is about the desire to be respected and loved by others. Every single one of us yearns for love, and communities are no different.

The healing of such societies that are torn apart by hate also has to come from within. The poet Hölderlin remarked that "where danger is deliverance also grows", and indeed, a new generation of peacemakers is growing up. They do not demonstrate, and they no longer leave it to politicians and armies to take charge of events, preferring to roll up their sleeves and get

involved. Doctors and human rights activists, trade unionists and housewives, sportspeople, aid workers, priests and educators – many of them are risking their lives in their desire to find non-violent solutions. They are creative, professional, courageous and, above all, successful.

They count it as progress when rebels lay down their arms, as happened in 1995 in Mali; when minefields are cleared and peasants return to their fields, as in the north of Sri Lanka; when the army removes road blocks, as in Israel; when Catholic children can once again walk to school through a Protestant suburb, as in Northern Ireland; when Ugandan child soldiers are allowed to take up civilian jobs.

Project Civilisation

With every step, peace regains a tiny piece of territory. Behind every step there are social innovators, empathetic people who are perfecting techniques for promoting mediation, active listening and reconciliation. The art of peace requires great skill. All together, they form civil society. It sounds like they are sitting around drinking tea, but in fact they are creating a secret superpower. Alongside national governments, multinational organisations and transnational corporations, they are increasingly becoming the face of globalisation. Whether small circles of activists or large special interest groups, one thing unites them: they are extremely flexible, which makes them difficult to control and even harder to stop. Their strength lies in their global networks. They use the internet and emails to tell each other what does and doesn't work. Suddenly a successful campaign in one place has become an object lesson somewhere else.

Working together in a loose alliance, private peacemakers all over the world are advancing Project Civilisation.

These days a good idea needs no time to spread from the Cape of Good Hope to the other side of the globe. In the aftermath of its apartheid regime, South Africa found itself faced with the question: should we allow people who have tortured and massacred to go free in order to maintain peace in our country? Or should we take them to court and once again risk furious uprisings on the part of entire ethnic groups? This is a typical dilemma faced by societies the morning after the night before. South Africa found its response in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The main culprits were punished, while lesser miscreants and victims were invited to conciliation talks. This balancing act proved to be successful, allowing wounds to heal and democracy to endure.

Since then, other countries have experimented with similar instruments, as has happened in Rwanda. The village communities organised their own tribunals called Gacaca, which means "sitting in the grass". Lay judges and elders presided over these open-air courts, pronouncing judgement on the main perpetrators of genocide against the Tutsi. This was a desperate, common effort to heal the deep sense of shock caused by the genocide. This grassroots movement in its most literal sense can be viewed as a real success story. It is proof that all peace is created by peoples; otherwise it is not created at all.

Civil wars tear societies apart. The leave in their wake traumatised children, shattered villages and hostile groups that still mistrust each other and contemplate revenge, despite any ceasefire that has been imposed. Ethnic groups often live in se-

parate areas and have no communication with each other.

This is where non-governmental peacemakers have an important role to play. Unlike official diplomats, they can find unconventional ways of bringing the members of enemy groups to the negotiating table. When the German Benedictine abbot Benedikt Lindemann opens the doors of his monastery in Jerusalem for discreet talks, Israelis and Palestinians know that they can come together without fear of spies. The hallowed walls provide a refuge. The monk is the mediator. He does not ask the politicians whether he is allowed to get involved. He just does it. He is inspired by an image that he has never lost sight of: the image of Jews, Christians and Arabs all living together in peace in the Holy Land.

This flame burns inside all successful peacemakers. They are driven by a vision of how they can change their country for the better. They are "unrealistic" in the positive sense of the word. They don't accept things as they are. The importance of this has been shown in Sri Lanka, a country that has been torn apart by a bloody civil war for over 20 years. A young colleague from the shattered north of the country

 "They use the internet and emails to tell each other what does and doesn't work. Suddenly a successful campaign in one place has become an object lesson somewhere else. Working together in a loose alliance, private peacemakers all over the world are advancing Project Civilisation."

told me: "The war has been going on all my life. It has poisoned our minds and our hearts. We just can't imagine a life without attacks and bombings." The worst thing about this is that people who have only ever known violence will always turn to violence as a solution when in doubt. Of course it presents a risk, but at least it is a familiar risk, whereas peace is a journey into the unknown, an adventure with an unpredictable outcome.

This is why imagination is so critical. It unleashes energies that – as Einstein said – can take people everywhere. When Singham, a Tamil who had lived a carefree life in Berlin for 15 years, decided to return to war-torn Sri Lanka, his friends told him he was crazy. But he dared to dream: "One day the island will once again be rightly called "Happy Lanka." He didn't just leave it at that, but used donations to build houses for refugee families, set up a school for children orphaned by the war, and looked after street kids. Tamils and Singhalese, supposed enemies, work side-by-side in his organisation. Singham is one of those volunteer bridge-builders who are prepared to risk all in the quest for reconciliation. The very best of them are a charismatic blend of Mahatma Gandhi and Bill Gates. They have that rare ability to think big and act decisively – and be good managers. These new professional peace activists understand that security and stability are also linked to money, jobs, economic growth and development.

It is worth investing in humankind's number one dream. According to experts at Oxford University, the average civil war last seven years. Of course, every year and every victim are one too many, but the good news is that wars do come to an end, sooner or later. But sooner is better than later. If it is not possible to prevent a war, then the

international community can at least try to curtail it. United Nations interventions are in fact better than their reputation suggests. According to a study by the US think tank RAND, two out of three peacekeeping missions are successful. And they are cheaper than might be thought when listening to the awkward skirmishes in the Security Council. The total cost of all 16 blue-helmet missions carried out in the last year was just under five billion dollars. To put this into perspective, the USA spent more than this every month on the war in Iraq, and as the world's self-proclaimed sheriff, they have just experienced one debacle after another.

Multinational institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union are the state counterpart to a closely-linked civil society. The UN and EU have made great strides over the last few decades in combating poverty, improving health and promoting human rights. In this way, they have made a major contribution to building 'positive peace': a peace that is more than just the absence of war, a culture that is no longer governed by violence and fear, but by respect and love. In the end, this is what it's all about.

And of course it's about money. It's amazing but true that it makes economic sense to invest in peace. The Oxford experts have calculated that a typical civil war costs around 70 billion dollars. On the loss side, they place lower economic growth, equipment, illness, refugees and organised crime. To look at it another way, every year that such a war can be shortened brings a dividend of 10 billion dollars. It costs just a fraction of this amount to try to end the war by deploying an international intervention force. The new wars need both approaches. They need their societies to be healed from within, with civil society initiatives and peacemakers being the decisive factor in this respect. They also need strong resolve on the part of the international community if it decides in favour of military intervention. In many troubled regions, the fighting is not done by regular soldiers but by militias organised into unruly gangs. Many of them are still teenagers with the emotional maturity of children. And so this is how they behave – wildly, erratically, turning killing into a game. From my own experience of war zones I know that if someone bangs his fist on the table everyone shuts up. There has to be an authority figure to say 'that's enough!', like the strict father that so many of these children in uniform have never known.

Of course, non-violent interventions are in principle always preferable. Europe's present-day unity has been won at the cost of centuries of bloody war and new spirals of violence. It has been a long hard road to reach today's union of nations where cultural differences are valued and seen as a positive enrichment. United in Diversity – the EU's external and cultural policies should spread this motto as inspiration for the rest of the world. There is a good chance that this voice will be heard in places where people are struggling to return to peace. But only if Europe continues to really live its cultural diversity – in a constructive way.

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Fighting trauma and taboo

Cultural production alone is not enough to break down the dominance of ethno-nationalist parties and beliefs, to overthrow corrupt ruling systems and create a tolerant society. But it is able to create niches where alternative debate is possible, and in this way give people hope and encourage them to put into context the omnipotence of the ethnocentric and counter it with other concepts of belonging, tradition, history and identity.

By Martina Fischer

For years, German and European cultural institutes, along with political and private foundations, have been doing their best to encourage cultural initiatives in regions that are beset by crises or recovering from wars. In the past, the focus was on regions such as Southeast Europe and the former Yugoslavia, then from 2002 onwards it was on Afghanistan, and now in the wake of the 'Arabellion' it is increasingly on the countries of the Mediterranean that find themselves undergoing a process of transition.

Along with establishing educational institutes and independent media, the main emphasis tends to be on encouraging the development of civil society, with many projects being targeted specifically at young people. The reason for this is the belief that cultural neglect and lack of economic prospects can leave young people open to ethno-nationalist propaganda and make them easy recruits for wars and civil wars. Instead, a country's youth should be inspired to work on rebuilding their society and the processes of democratisation. As part of Germany's presidency of the EU Council in May/June 2007, a Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament was created for the benefit of young people. The aim was to encourage dialogue between cultures in the Mediterranean region and to help the participants to gain intercultural skills. Initial funding was provided by the EU Commission, and it is to be hoped that the project can be driven forward by the Mediterranean countries in conjunction with EU bodies.

Initiatives to promote dialogue and bring people together are considered to be very important in this respect. Examples are the European-Islamic Dialogue, or steps taken to promote settlements and reconciliation between rival groups in divided communities and societies that have been devastated by war.

It is generally assumed that cultural initiatives and educational programmes can assist with the peace process. But we still have to ask ourselves the following questions: what potential do cultural initiatives have to aid in conflict resolution?

How can cultural activities be linked to activities that promote peace in a meaningful and lasting way? What conditions are necessary for them to make a contribution to rebuilding and reconciling societies devastated by war?

First of all, if we are to look at ways of promoting culture as a means of promoting peace, we should not forget that culture can be a two-edged sword. This was clearly demonstrated during the escalating conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, when some people in educational institutions and the media worked actively to try to increase political polarisation, marginalisation and expulsion. Intellectuals and journalists from the different ethno-nationalist camps came together with politicians to emphasise cultural differences and prove the superiority of their 'own' culture and religious orientation over that of the 'others'. In this way they provided an ideological justification for acts of brutality and genocide. Historical facts were ignored or distorted in order to construct a false idea of racial purity and to fuel perceptions of religious and cultural differences. An incredible desire for destruction led to the devastation of the cultural treasures of the 'other' enemy camp, and even people in the cultural sector played their part in creating this ethnopolitical conflict. Before the war, and even more strongly in its wake, a folk culture that harked back to historical myths enjoyed a dubious renaissance.

Myths of heroes and sacrifice surround many of the memorials that have been erected to honour the soldiers and civilians killed during the war. In Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, many forms of commemoration have emerged that run counter to peacebuilding efforts. In divided societies, cultures of remembrance often manifest themselves in very selective ways that just serve to intensify polarisation along ethnopolitical lines. The feelings of people who have been through loss and suffering are ignored and slighted, and relations become ever more strained.

Myths of heroes and sacrifice

So cultural forms of expression can have an emancipatory effect, but in equal measure they can also cause indoctrination and serve to glorify violence. Cultural products can be used to campaign for tolerance, pluralism, multiculturalism and an open, democratic society, but at the same time they can foster intolerance by cementing monoethnic group identities and supporting models of closed societies, or even by providing the aesthetic backbone of dictatorial regimes. Above all, cultural forms of expression serve to forge an identity or identities at individual and collective levels, and this should be borne in mind when considering the potential of cultural initiatives to help promote peace.

The post-war situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides a good example of the ambivalent nature of culture. The official cultural policies of the still-hostile political parties focused mainly on using language and their own versions of history for the purposes of creating division. Educational establishments and the media were enlisted to promote these policies, and literature, film and the visual arts did not remain immune. However, at the same

time various cultural forms emerged that dealt with the war in ways that were both critical and constructive. With the help of international funding, the cultural and media scene has developed a new dynamic since 1995 and educated a significant section of civil society, providing a contrast to the ethnocratic model that dominates political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Alongside the shallow and nationalistically-tinged 'folk culture', another culture began to emerge that defied the definition of belonging and exclusion along ethnic lines. A creative cultural sector that transcended territorial and ideological boundaries – particularly in youth culture – could have an integrating effect and at least contribute to breaking down the 'us versus them' mentality. International assistance programmes are vital to support these kinds of initiatives.

Cultural production alone is not enough to break down the dominance of ethno-nationalist parties and beliefs, to overthrow corrupt ruling systems and create a tolerant society. But it is able to create niches where alternative debate is possible. In this way it can give people hope and encourage them to put into context "the omnipotence of ethnocentric autism", as diagnosed by Croat writer Ivan Lovrenovic, and counter it with other concepts of belonging, tradition, history and identity.

"Cultural neglect and lack of economic prospects can leave young people open to ethno-nationalist propaganda and make them easy recruits for wars and civil wars."

Cultural initiatives in themselves cannot create a dynamic to resolve deeply-rooted conflicts or reconcile hostile societies. But as one element within a group of policies designed to promote development and peace they can help to stimulate significant change. As long as there is the political will to find compromises, they can help war-ravaged communities to recover from their traumatic experiences and assist them in their journey towards building trust and reconciliation. They can play their part in creating a society based on democratic participation, pluralism and tolerance.

This presupposes that international actors that are involved in war-affected regions will identify areas of potential and take a long-term view by supporting projects in a systematic way rather than just on an ad-hoc and short-term basis. They must carefully seek out suitable partners for these projects because – as previously mentioned – not all cultural productions are designed to encourage plurality but instead can have a strong nationalistic bent.

Everyone involved in the field of culture, educational institutions and the media can help to glorify things that happened during the war, participate in myth-building and prolong exclusion and suffering. But they can also make a significant contribution towards helping societies deal with the violence they have experienced and in the long term they can assist in their regeneration through public debate. On the other hand, there are examples from post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina where victims of the war were often used to fuel

a one-sided politics of remembrance but at the same time were offered no protection. The fate of women who were raped or tortured during the war was long ignored and the whole subject was treated by society as a major taboo.

The film "Grbavica" (released in the UK as "Esma's Secret: Grbavica") by Bosnian director Jasmila Zbanic won many international awards and played a part in helping to break the silence surrounding this issue. The film shows the relationship between a Bosniak woman who was raped during the war and her adolescent daughter in post-war Sarajevo. It reveals how the trauma of the war influenced individual destinies and how social taboos served to prolong the suffering and make it difficult to deal with it in a constructive way.

More than 100,000 people went to see the film in the year after it was premiered in Bosnia. Its release was accompanied by a campaign by local and international NGOs to promote the rights of women who had been the victims of sexual violence. The Medica Mondiale organisation played a particularly prominent role. However, political pressure meant that the film was not shown in the Republika Srpska, the Serbian entity of Bosnia.

Inclusive forms of remembrance

In mid-2006, in the aftermath of the film's release, the Bosnian parliament decided that women who had been raped should be legally recognised as 'war victims' and should receive the same compensation as that given to men who had fought in the war. This was viewed as a great success by human rights organisations and women's groups, even though it should be noted that to date many of the victims have still received nothing and a great many others are still fighting for this compensation. The film Grbavica forms part of the artistic growth of a director who has spent years working with the Deblokada group of artists in Sarajevo making documentaries dealing with the war and how people have been affected by it, and also with the fate of people from all sides as they returned to their communities.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with other parts of the former Yugoslavia such as Serbia and Croatia, civil society groups and individuals have over recent years dedicated themselves to finding constructive ways of dealing with the past. Their mission is to establish the facts, influence teaching in educational establishments and to make the wider public more aware of the need to come to terms with the violence of the past. They want to inspire people to face up to the roles played by individuals during the war and the need for politicians to take responsibility for war crimes and human rights abuses. They are making every effort to create new, inclusive forms of remembrance in order to counter the tendency towards a very selective perception of war victims. The creation of memorials is a controversial issue and artists are faced with huge challenges when designing their concepts. They have to proceed with great circumspection and sensitivity and ensure the public at large is involved in the decision-making process.

Under certain conditions, the encouragement of cultural exchange forums can contribute to conflict transformation and

reconciliation. But this does not mean that per se that projects promoting intercultural exchange and dialogue between people in opposing camps produce positive results in terms of peacebuilding.

Caution is needed in this respect, at least in regions that are riven by ethnopolitical conflict. In recent years, a series of evaluation reports and impact analyses across various regional contexts have shown that the success of dialogue projects is very much dependent on whether they are carried out at the right time and are focused on the right target groups. During some conflict stages, multi-ethnic dialogue projects between hostile camps can actually have the opposite effect to that intended, that is to say they can increase confrontation and mistrust rather than encourage rapprochement. In certain situations, peace education initiatives within the individual camps can be more effective than artificial attempts to bring people together. And at times insufficient importance is given to the fact that structural aspects also need to be taken into account alongside the time factor. Taking steps towards building trust need a certain level of economic stability and a sense of security within society.

"Cultural initiatives can help war-ravaged communities to recover from their traumatic experiences and assist them in their journey towards building trust and reconciliation. They can play their part in creating a society based on democratic participation, pluralism and tolerance."

However, existing empirical knowledge about the effectiveness of dialogue projects in post-war and crisis situations is as yet insufficient to draw up a list of lessons learned. This would require more comprehensive studies to be carried out, along with active research measures. It is a highly complex task to measure the effectiveness of peacebuilding actions. One of the main challenges when evaluating such actions is how to define the criteria for success and failure. There is also the problem of how to allocate specific results – particular social developments – to specific actions. The duty of accountability certainly demands that the use and benefit of donations and public money should be appraised, along with an evaluation of actions to promote peace and conflict transformation and to support development policies.

But is much more complicated to assess effectiveness in this area than in the field of traditional development cooperation. This is partly due to the limited resources and tight deadlines required by such evaluation activities. The value of such evaluations is also often somewhat dubious because of the difficulty of coming up with conclusive indicators and because the effects of work in the areas of peacebuilding and conflict resolution can only be evaluated in the long term, many years after particular measures and programmes have drawn to a close.

In any case, evaluations need to be set up in a participative way, i.e. those involved need to be constantly included in the process. The results need to be linked back to those whose actions are being investigated, and evaluations have to be integra-

ted into courses of action in the planning stage. This is the only way to ensure they are part of a realistic definition of goals and provide an aid to self-reflection on the part of those carrying out the evaluations, or even help the latter when they are developing methods for reviewing their goals and strategies (self-evaluation). Critical self-reflection and ongoing self-appraisal are essential processes for international actors who intervene in conflict regions. It is also important to avoid undesirable and negative side-effects as a result of their actions.

It is, however, extremely difficult to prove the effectiveness of cultural initiatives in aiding the peacebuilding process. The empirical measurement of educational programmes is an extremely complex and difficult task because the results only become evident in the long term. It is even more difficult to determine the effects of cultural events in the areas of music, literature and the visual and dramatic arts.

Different forms of artistic expression can play their part in exposing the mechanisms of power and violence, in ensuring that forbidden narratives are heard and in stimulating alternative perceptions and ways of thinking. They can help people to process their experiences of violence, but they do not necessarily *have* to do this. Art is autonomous. Only a few artists devote their work to political activism and peacebuilding. At the end of the day, it is not the primary responsibility of artists to actively influence society by having a political agenda. The role of the visual arts, literature, music, film and theatre is rather to anticipate and mirror trends in politics

and society. Culture expresses the quest for identity, suffering and the desire for recognition in a wide variety of ways.

At the same time, we should be clear that cultural production can only be influenced to a limited extent by international support programmes, and it normally does not allow itself to be hitched to set agendas. Moreover, these products are often the cultural expression of political and ideological messages that outsiders with little real understanding of the country find difficult to discern and interpret. International actors should therefore guard against excessively narrow categorisations into 'emancipative' and 'manipulative' forms of cultural expression and would do better to focus on looking for areas where a constructive approach is being taken towards the ambivalence of culture.

In extremely polarised societies it is important to focus above all on creating forums where people from all sides can familiarise themselves with and gain an understanding of the cultural characteristics of the 'other' group that provide them with their identity. In this respect, the external role consists of moderating discussion processes rather than making political assessments and categorisations. Readings and exhibitions can help to set in motion this kind of dialogue that highlights the interests and needs of 'others' while at the same time allowing the expression of one's own interests and needs. However, this presupposes that this takes place in an environment of mutual respect and safety for

"The role of the visual arts, literature, music, film and theatre is rather to anticipate and mirror trends in politics and society."

those taking part. Creating these kinds of protected spaces presents one of the main challenges.

International support programmes for post-war and crisis-ridden regions should therefore be less focused on the 'instrumentalisation' of cultural initiatives for the purposes of promoting peace and more on encouraging plurality and providing meeting places for initiating discourse. But in essence they should espouse values and principles that encourage conflict transformation. The most important of these is inclusivity, in the sense of inclusion and openness not only for cultural actors who are clearly dedicated to supporting peace processes, but also for more 'difficult' actors who are indifferent or opposed to these values.

Impartiality towards the opposing camps is also important. However, this should not be manifested in a way that goes against the principle of siding with people who have had their rights abused or whose interests have been ignored during asymmetric conflicts. One of the main preconditions for conflict transformation is exposing and raising awareness of cultures of dominance and structures of inequity.

Ownership is another important principle – the power of people who are caught up in conflicts to determine and shape their lives. Successfully tackling the causes of conflict and setting in motion the processes of reconciliation largely depends on these people, but external support can of course be a great help. These international actors not only need to have expertise in the area of cultural policy but must also possess and put into practice the same high level of intercultural awareness and experience that they expect from their local counterparts. They must display transparency in their goals and strategies and a willingness to create relationships based on a partnership of equals. Collaboration between international and national actors should open the doors to a mutual learning process. International and national cultural actors also need to develop trust, to carry out ongoing needs assessments and have staying power. Cultural studies expert Tina Balla puts it very clearly: "A process that is moved forward with patience and that must involve the agreement of the society involved", and a "planning process that is sensitively adapted to the conflict involved which allows step-by-step progress from one project to the next". If these standards were upheld when sponsoring, planning and carrying out cultural initiatives, then it is much more likely that they would make a meaningful contribution towards building trust, restoring damaged relations and achieving conflict transformation.

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Wars begin in the minds of men Whether it is Catholics in Northern Ireland or Basques in Spain, cultural arguments have been used to reject what is seen as foreign rule. Culture plays a key role in the way conflicts between different groups and ethnicities play out and it must play its part in resolving conflicts. But how? Cross-border cultural and educational programmes have powerful potential for promoting peace in many places around the world. *By Raphael Vergin*

When understood as a dynamic, multi-faceted and often unconscious vehicle for identity and meaning, culture can shape perceptions, judgements and ideas about what constitutes 'us and them'. It can separate the 'normal' from the 'strange' and unfortunately in this way can engender an 'us against them' mentality. As a result, cultural devaluation and identity crises amongst marginalised ethnic groups are often the root cause of internal conflicts in many countries.

Secessionist movements often dispute the right to rule of 'the others' on the basis of their cultural differences: the Catholics in Northern Ireland, for example, or the Basques in Spain and the Palestinians in Israel. In one of the forgotten conflicts of our time, the independence struggles in the Casamance region of Senegal, nation-building and ethnicity are central to the conflict. In simple terms, the ruling elites are rejecting the cultural otherness of those on the periphery.

The creation of the African Union in 1963 provided the continent with a territorial/nationalist model. This led to political elites in nation states such as Senegal trying to absorb different ethnic patterns of identity and specific cultural characteristics in order to create national unity and integration. This national unity was to be achieved through homogeneity and through assimilating the 'otherness of peripheral groups'. In order to gain access to the political and economic resources of state power, those on the periphery (as in Casamance) find themselves forced to give up their own identities in order to become part of the dominant model. Stereotypes and disparaging descriptions such as 'noble savages', 'anarchists' or 'forest dwellers who eat monkeys and palm oil' have created a sense of inferiority among the ethnic groups involved, especially the Diola people, and sparked a desire to escape such taunts. In its extreme form, opposition to such political and economic marginalisation leads either to social and cultural assimilation or to violent conflict and rebellion.

By looking at a specific conflict in context and focusing on the cultural dimension, we can start to understand the potential and limitations of culture in conflict transformation. Despite the relatively high importance of ethnicity in the conflict mentioned above, the political and socio-economic prerequisites for providing equal opportunities for all ethnic groups and peoples also need to be guaranteed in terms of universal human rights, democracy, security and the rule of law. It is also vital to progress the multi-track negotiations with the fragmented rebel group Mouvement des forces démocratique de la Casamance (MFDC). After nearly 30 years of conflict, some of the group's factions are still calling for independence and keeping the struggle alive with the help of transnational financial support.

Geopolitical implications

But the cultural dimension has much more than just a niche role to play in the complexity of the Casamance conflict – it has geopolitical implications. How, for example, do we deal with the fact that unified cultural areas can exist homogeneously across national borders but not maintain a symbolic bond with the centralised state?

When the German writer and thinker Gottfried Herder wrote that "the wild mixture of various races and nations under one sceptre" is in conflict with the aims of government, then it seems fair to ask just what governments can do to create a sense of integration in spite of and on the basis of cultural diversity. I interviewed the Senegalese historian Abderrahmane Ngaide in 2007 as part of a field study on the Casamance conflict. He believes that the solution lies in cross-border regionalisation, saying that this would help increase the legitimacy of the nation state and ensure that people still feel they are maintaining their ties to their ethnic roots, while at the same time seeing the effects of economic development within the nation.

Along with improvements to infrastructure in order to increase people's mobility and expand trade as part of creating regional economic areas, cross-border culture and education programmes also offer huge potential for promoting peace. Fostering an appreciation of the culture of previously denigrated ethnic groups, promoting the maintenance of traditions, customs and cultural heritage, and creating a regional centre of excellence can all help the people of the region to develop a new, more self-confident sense of identity that is of benefit in the process of nation-building.

Africa's past is of course totally different from that of Europe with its recent experiences of military conflicts and the redrawing of borders. Lack of political will and the fear of losing power mean that many African governments are (still) inclined to reject these kinds of transnational proposals. It may also remain too unclear what unintended consequences there might be on the fragile states and war economies of West Africa. This is where European cultural institutes and cultural policies could help in the medium-to-long term by offering advice and helping with implementation. They can also bring to bear their experiences relating to hybridity, transculturalism and identity on the delicate balancing act created by globalisation, regionalisation and nation building. Transnational cultural projects are already booming in Europe and can surely be adapted to suit the needs of other continents.

If we look more closely at current projects, we can see that cultural activities are being supported as a means of exercising soft power to deal with the consequences of protracted violence in the Casamance conflict and as part of other peace processes. Inter-ethnic festivals, peace radio, interactive theatre, films and photography all offer the potential and opportunities to overcome feelings of deprecation, division and difference between ethnic groups and to create opportunities for dialogue between formerly hostile parties. Suddenly rehabilitation, trust, humanity, reconciliation and healing start to emerge and there is the discovery of a commonality amid diversity that does not rely on a common language. It is important to be inclusive, particularly by involving people living in remote regions and not simply focusing on urban centres or elite groups.

Issues such as sustainable growth (in this instance the creative economy), gender, human rights, education, health and environment need to be addressed as part of projects dealing with culture and conflict – at the point where the link to non-violent conflict resolution is justified in the regional context and above all is triggered by the suggestions and initiatives of the local people themselves.

Overall, it is a good idea to predominantly support and promote existing local structures based on a participatory assessment of needs. Before launching projects – and not only those in the area of culture and conflict – it could be worthwhile to invest in some cultural reconnaissance in order to get a better picture of intercultural competence and sensitivity to cultural differences and needs.

The Arab Spring has made it even more obvious that it is worth focusing on digital media and its potential to support the processes of social change by increasing pluralism. Digital media also offer an innovative way of strengthening ties between sponsors and donors and specific projects, in as much as they provide additional ways of documenting project activities and progress in a transparent way and promoting direct and interactive dialogue. Finally, from the perspective of grass-roots initiatives, it is important to find ways of creating dialogue between policymakers and the main actors in conflicts, so that these key individuals can appropriately adapt their attitudes, positions and approaches to meet the calls for peace and international understanding on the part of local people and communities, and also, quite simply, so that they talk to each other. This kind of advocacy work could well benefit from the creative methods such as the use of audio-visuals to influence the awareness and decision-making process of the key players concerned. Community radio is a widespread discussion platform that is generally well-accepted by the local population. Radio programmes and radio plays are often much more successful than conferences and round table discussions at keeping people informed across wide geographic areas, irrespective of their level of education, and can influence them much more profoundly at an emotional and symbolic level.

If "wars begin in the minds of men" as suggested by UNESCO's charter, then the reverse must also be true and overcoming violence and hostility must also start with people's minds. This is where cultural activities have a potential role to play in helping to change people's attitudes and behaviours. However, it is not always the case that culture is used to help prevent violence

and war. As Martina Fischer and others point out in this report, it can actually contribute to violence and hatred as well. The ambivalence of culture in conflicts therefore makes it imperative to look more critically at calls for independence and freedom for the arts, at least from the point of view of culture's practical role in conflict transformation, and even to put forward counter-arguments in favour of more control and a greater sense of responsibility.

Here, we are talking about responsibility in the sense that projects undertaken within the context of civil conflict management efforts always serve an external and interventionist function, in spite of all right and proper attempts to ensure participation, self-determination and ownership. By taking into account not only the interests of sponsors, donors and tax-payers, but also our own motivation, responsibility and willingness to learn, it is imperative that we assess whether our projects might not also have the potential to actually intensify the conflict. The principle of 'do no harm' must be respected.

We need to work on the basis of the lessons-learned principle so that people on the ground can be guided in a more effective way. To do this we need specific criteria, frameworks and indicators that are developed, continuously tested and enhanced in a dynamic way through dialogue and the exchange of ideas and experiences amongst all the key players from both the culture and conflict camps, in order to promote the maximum amount of peace and the minimum amount of violence.

We have to accept that it is currently very difficult and time-consuming to quickly or accurately measure progress towards peace. Having said that, it is important to focus on best practice examples that show how potential outcomes can be both devised and evaluated.

"How senseless is everything that can ever be written, done, or thought, when such things are possible. It must be all lies and of no account when the culture of a thousand years could not prevent this stream of blood being poured out, these torture-chambers in their hundreds of thousands."

Erich Maria Remarque – All Quiet on the Western Front, 1929.

It is precisely this question we have to ask ourselves in relation to post-conflict Nepal, a country where we have for some years been running a number of projects as part of an initiative called culture4peace. Working with representatives from Nepalese civil society, we have been supporting dialogue and reconciliation processes through workshops, training sessions and community radio initiatives that build upon the success of each other. Interactive theatre, film and radio plays are all integrated as components of follow-up projects.

In this example, it is relatively easy to quantify the effects of these initiatives in terms of the numbers of people informed about civil conflict resolution; the number of participants at training sessions on the

"Transnational culture projects are already booming in Europe and can surely be adapted to suit the needs of other continents."

subject; the number of actors; the topics addressed; the estimated number of listeners to radio programmes or audiences at films shown in villages. Age, sex, social status can all be measured and quantified. What is much more difficult to quantify is their effectiveness, the intensity of the dialogues or the transformative nature of what is said and heard.

However, in terms of monitoring and evaluation, it is possible to gather important qualitative feedback from participants (and random samples of audiences in various communities) using questionnaires, group discussions, telephone interviews and participative observation, and also to provide these people with qualitative feedback from our side. The interpersonal aspects involved in the implementation and evaluation of projects, such as trust building, non-violent communication, readiness to embrace dialogue and conflict resolution, can all be observed and assessed in the field. However, people often pursue their own interests and egotistical goals, so answers to surveys and questionnaires can be deliberately biased. Nevertheless, despite these potential shortcomings or inadequacies, and despite a lack of resources, we have had some success in terms of monitoring effectiveness and in gathering useful data based on experience, and we can build on this.

The kind of practical information gathered in the course of project work (and in this case underpinned by the experiences gained in a project that has been running since 2009 under the auspices of the Nepali Civil Peace Service, in which training seminars on interactive theatre play a key role) could and should be continuously added to, expanded and made more transparent through inter-organisational dialo-

gue. But how can we now even think about more flexible frameworks for cultural activities in the area of conflict transformation? How can we reconcile the apparently insurmountable differences between the desire to honour the 'temple of art' on the one hand and specific peace agendas on the other?

If the causes of conflicts are infinitely complex then so are the potential solutions. For example, it is undeniable that freedom of expression is a fundamental principle of human rights, democracy and pluralism. According to democratic peace theory, these in turn can, under certain circumstances, help to foster non-violent conflict management and so promote peace. It could also be argued that every form of conflict, even the most violent, can at first be necessary, sensible and right.

Stirred to action by artists

A society that is moved and stirred to action by artists and that denounces the current state of affairs and identifies solutions, effectively shapes its conflicts and determines their form. Building stable nations and achieving national unity within Europe was a long, slow progress that often involved violent altercations.

It could be argued that independent artists should simply be given a bag of money and their freedom (within the restrictions imposed by their society at least) with our best wishes, without worrying about other issues, such as a sense of awareness. The consequences could be either positive or negative.

The fact is, those who are primarily interested in promoting a peace agenda rather than artistic freedom would need

to impose strict criteria in order to ensure they have the maximum amount of control over the success of this approach. In this way they would follow an intrinsic logic that is also designed to make them less vulnerable and legitimise their own peace efforts. This could result in much creative potential being lost, but could also prevent some damage occurring, the consequences of which might be much more severe than the potential success envisaged.

Having said that, this does not mean that it is impossible for artists to be given the maximum amount of freedom in a conflict transformation situation. Various organisations, such as the Dutch Prince Claus Fund, are already supporting culture and conflict initiatives in a more flexible way. Other initiatives, such as the British Culture+Conflict programme, are making a valuable contribution in terms of gathering, evaluating and publishing valuable data through their approach to documentation and best practice. What is clear is that the resulting lessons learned should be evaluated in as transparent a way as possible and widely discussed in order to be able to use the success of a more flexible approach as a key bargaining point when dealing with more conservative donors.

In principle, cultural activities should not be subject to any more restrictions than the general peace process itself, whatever the potential outcome paradigms, for it is just as difficult to effectively and quickly measure the impact of, say, a symposium, as it is to foresee in detail the potential impact of setting up a peace museum. The fact that in terms of peace work both can be equally well conceived, implemented and evaluated and that local target groups can also give important qualitative feedback on these and other similar activities should be

sufficient reason to pursue both options.

There may be a benefit in shifting the discussion away from specific positive outcomes towards reflecting on potential unintended negative consequences. In this way, background checks and trust-building within the framework of freedom for the artist could help to prevent unwanted potential damage. As a result, artists would have freedom of choice in the creation and presentation of their work and would simply be 'assessed' through regular monitoring and a final evaluation for documentation. Workshops on awareness and responsibility could also be integrated into the programme.

In general, there is a need to gather more data based on experience and to increase funding and resources aimed at the practical and analytical management of the cultural dimension of conflicts. The exchange of ideas and experiences within Europe could and should be actively promoted by the European cultural institutes and pursued in international and cross-discipline forums, as is the case with the informal working group Culture and Conflict, co-ordinated by the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, ifa). This provides clear evidence of the important role played in conflicts by art and culture.

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