CREATIVITY IN CONFLICT:
PERFORMING ARTS FOR SUSTAINED DIALOGUE, JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION

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Occasional Paper No. 22
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JANUARY 2017 / LINDSEY DOYLE

The performing arts are uniquely equipped to create order out of the chaos of conflicted societies. The arts are comfortable in that otherwise tumultuous space between justice and reconciliation, and have the potential to stimulate changes in attitudes and behaviours in the service of more balanced and inclusive societies. As the justice and peacebuilding fields continue to search for answers about how best to address widespread trauma in the midst of violent conflict, the arts, whether drawn from indigenous practice or external art forms modified for the cultural context, offer a few possible solutions. As one perspective of many on this topic, this paper seeks to, first, display some of the current approaches of how the performing arts are used to address the causes and consequences of conflict; second, present the findings of a pilot project carried out under the auspices of the IJR that tested the use of dance as a means of promoting dialogue in Cape Town, Western Cape; and third, compare how these same approaches were then modified and applied in Warrenton, Northern Cape.

Lessons for practitioners are also culled from these experiences to support continued practice.

Building on the IJR’s programmes – Memory, Arts, and Culture, Gender Justice and Reconciliation, and the Ashley Kriel Youth Leadership Development – this pilot project explored how the performing arts can be utilised to support efforts toward dialogue, understanding, and community-level reconciliation. This project developed out of a unique partnership between the IJR and the University of Cape Town (UCT) School of Dance. Taking place over a six-month period from July to December 2016, the pilot project entailed preliminary research, consultation with South African artists, dance companies, historians, and international dance practitioners, project design, and eight improvisational dance workshops. These activities culminated in public performances at the 2016 Baxter Dance Festival Fringe Programme in Cape Town and a performance at the 2016 IJR Reconciliation Award event. Preliminary findings suggest that dance movement and performance, if designed to reflect stories from the audience’s lived experiences, have the potential to catalyze key moments of increased understanding between historically disparate groups.

Given the success of the initial pilot, movement-based approaches were then applied in a two-day IJR intervention in Warrenton, Northern Cape that worked with a group of 20 cisgender and transgender women. Although not formally evaluated, this experience anecdotally revealed lessons about the utility of the arts in transforming attitudes and behaviours. In general, the application of a variety of artistic mediums allowed the women to increase their own self-esteem, improve their communication with family and neighbours, and feel motivated to work for change in their own communities.

Additional findings and lessons for practitioners are discussed within.

EXISTING USES OF THE PERFORMING ARTS IN THE DIALOGUE, JUSTICE, AND RECONCILIATION FIELDS

There are countless examples of practitioners and communities using the performing arts in conflict-affected contexts around the world in both indigenous and syncretistic ways. The arts frequently make up for the shortcomings of punitive justice systems, unmotivated and corrupt governance, and lack of moral leadership. These approaches are as diverse as the artists and community members who design them, yet some commonalities exist.

To frame the presentation of the IJR pilot project and subsequent community intervention, this section outlines seven areas within which the performing arts have been used to directly address the drivers and consequences of violent conflict. These areas are: 1) psychosocial support, 2) education, 3) diplomacy, 4) mediation and dialogue, 5) human rights and civil resistance, 6) advocacy and civic participation, and 7) justice, mourning, reconciliation, memorialisation, and celebration. Although far from exhaustive, this section documents a few illustrative examples of what has been done in recent history in order to situate the pilot with the UCT students in Cape Town and the intervention with the women’s group in Warrenton within a global context of practice. It also invites practitioners in the dialogue, justice, and reconciliation space to consider the myriad ways in which the arts, specifically dance and drama, can be used in their own work or are already being used in ways that merit increased support.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Nosindiso Mtimkulu, Leila Emdon, Eleanor Du Plooy, and Megan Robertson for making this pilot project and publication possible, and to the IJR leadership for allowing me to explore this topic in the context of the IJR’s sustained dialogue work. I am grateful to Maxwell Xolani Rani and Laura Fremont for our creative discussions leading up to this project, as well as to the University of Cape Town (UCT) School of Dance, Kapa Dance Theatre, and Cape Ballet Centre for availing rehearsal space for this initiative. I am indebted to dancers Teneal Galant, Tamsen Samuels, Mbasa Soga, and Ashleigh Schultz, and to the women of Warrenton in the Northern Cape.

About the Author

Lindsey Doyle is a visiting Rotary Peace Fellow at UCT from the Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research and a dancer-choreographer. Lindsey previously worked in U.S. government on issues related to international conflict prevention and mitigation, as well as at the Oscar Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Development. Lindsey has completed a Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Studies and a Master of Science in Development Studies from Stellenbosch University. She currently holds a Doctorate of Philosophy in Peace and Conflict Studies and is a co-founder of the Center for International Harmony and Development at Uppsala University. Lindsey is also a Visiting Scholar at the University of Cape Town and a Performance Artist. She has performed as a dancer-choreographer, and is a member of the NDUBA network of artists, working to promote and support the use of the performing arts in conflict-affected contexts around the world.

Due to time constraints, Lindsey will not be able to provide contact information for the people and organizations she thanks in her Acknowledgements section. She encourages readers to reach out to them directly for more information or to collaborate on future projects.

1 This initiative will be further evaluated by an on-going research project being conducted by Dr. Kim Walk, post-doctoral fellow at Stellenbosch University’s Historical Trauma and Transformation Department.

2 Theories that support the use of the performing arts in conflict management can be drawn from neuroscience, sociology, psychology, communications, political science, anthropology, creativity studies, and scholarship on justice and reconciliation. These theories lay a vital foundation for the programmatic work done in this area. One possible theoretical framework for conceptualizing how the arts affect conflict will be presented in a forthcoming paper titled, “The Strategic How” of the Performing Arts in Conflict-Affected Contexts.” For more information, please contact the author.
Psychosocial Support

Although not widely discussed in the justice, reconciliation, and conflict management fields, Dance Movement Therapy is perhaps one of the most thoroughly researched applications of the performing arts to trauma healing. At the clinical level, many of the fields of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) (Chace 1993; Lange 1975; Berroll 1992) and Drama Therapy (James & Johnson 1996) use movement-based approaches to serve the needs of people suffering the well-documented psychological and physical effects of violence, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, emotional detachment, decreased functionality, severed limbs, and psychological trauma (DSM-IV 2000; ADTA 2016; NADTA 2016). Such practices have been developed based on non-Western, “traditional modes of healing” that use music and dance (Dunphy, Elton & Jordan 2014: 18).

DMT in a group setting tends to involve a combination of body-based exercises to increase self-awareness, regulate breath, and human rights abuses related to war, civil violence, and torture survivors (Callaghan 1996 & 1998; Gray 2001). Although not widely discussed in the justice, the performing arts also have the capacity to bring people together across political and cultural lines, if designed with this intention. As examples, an organization called MindLeaps who successfully collected survey data from almost 90% said that the workshops gave them the opportunity to learn more about themselves and human rights abuses related to war, civil violence, and torture. These abuses are a direct attack on the physical human structure, and often one’s humanity. The emotions and excitations, or affect, that this attack produces are often necessarily repressed as a means to survive, and can sometimes safely be expressed through dance and movement, given the appropriate context. (Gray 2008: 226)

As an example of this practice, Gibney Dance outreach component, “Community Action,” works intensively through the present period (June 2016). Gibney Dance’s outreach component, “Community Action,” works intensively through the present period (June 2016). Gibney Dance has been used to support many different interventions: education-based approaches, training for children with varying degrees of paralysis (DSM-IV 2000; ADTA 2016; NADTA 2016). Such practices have been developed based on non-Western, “traditional modes of healing” that use music and dance (Dunphy, Elton & Jordan 2014: 18).

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Education

Research from the field of education in conflict-affected areas indicates that learning outcomes and well-being improve among students who participate in dance-based approaches. Education-based interventions tend to implement policies that are culturally and socially acceptable. Non-verbal body movements and mirroring are intervention tools that [can be used] to support attachment, understanding, and communication among children, their families, and the therapist (Levy, Ranibar & Dean 2006: 5). People who experience physical detachment as a result of violence found performance support attunement, understanding, and communication among others. (95.8% of clients reported...improved physical health and well-being," 94.4 percent reported reduced stress, and 94.7% reported improved self-esteem, and 90.2% confidence to try things they thought they couldn’t do" (Gibney Dance 2016). Moreover, a 12-week dance therapy program involving socialization, problem-solving skills, and creative expression effectively reduced aggressive behaviour among children who had experienced prolonged violence in their communities in the United States (Koshland & Wittaker 2004). The program addressed specifically that the eats, the third party: "limited ability...to deal with relationship conflicts." The participants’ group, while not necessarily exhibiting fully pro-social behaviour by the conclusion, had decreased frequency with which they acted aggressively when compared to the control group (Koshland & Wittaker 2004). This finding is also supported by evidence on the use of physical fitness activities as an effective tool for violence prevention (Eddy 1998; Callaghan 1996 & 1998; Gray 2001).

3 MindLeaps is now exploring whether their dance program can be applied as a form of emergency education in refugee camps. See the Lemery’s Volunteer of Africa and One Fine Day ballet classes in Kibera, Kenya.

4 See the drama groups that Beardall (2007) mentions: Urban Canvas, based at the University of New York, and the Pedagogical Drama approach, Activism with a Heart: The Voices Against Violence Project in Austin, Hope is What, The Intervention Through Performance Project, etc.

5 Goleman (1995) suggests that emotional intelligence is comprised of self-awareness, managing of self, empathy, and the ability to interact socially. See also Gardner’s (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences.

Diplomacy

The performing arts have been used for decades as a means of cultural exchange to facilitate the achievement of diplomatic goals. While worth interrogating as a means of exerting state power in narra, the performing arts also have the capacity to bring people together across political and cultural lines, if designed with this intention. As examples, an organization called MindLeaps who successfully collected survey data from almost 90% said that the workshops gave them the opportunity to learn more about themselves and human rights abuses related to war, civil violence, and torture. These abuses are a direct attack on the physical human structure, and often one’s humanity. The emotions and excitations, or affect, that this attack produces are often necessarily repressed as a means to survive, and can sometimes safely be expressed through dance and movement, given the appropriate context. (Gray 2008: 226)
Dance Company 2016). Their Cultural Diplomacy Toolkit also captures lessons from every country intervention. The “Dance without Borders” project, launched in Rabat, Morocco in 2004 that showcased a group of young Moroccan hip-hop dancers that left a profound impact on the audience (Satloff 2004). After watching the performance, one high-level policy advisor reflected: “Thanks to the power of art, dance, and music, the young Moroccans connected to America and to the Americans who helped bring alive their natural talent. And the hundreds of people in the audience—admittedly, hundreds of upper-class Moroccans, ministers, diplomats, entrepreneurs, the sort who would spend an evening devoted to modern dance too. Perhaps their most important connection was with the dancers themselves, those very same “angry young men” usually viewed in elite circles as a “problem” or a “burden,” people to be “handled” or “managed,” but rarely as people brimming with promise” (Satloff 2004).

Mediation and Dialogue

Mediation and dialogue are other key areas in which the performing arts have proven useful for resolving or shifting interpersonal conflict. While not yet widely applied to high-level negotiations, there are promising efforts to apply movement to mid- and community-level dialogue processes. Much of this work, due to the non-verbal and non-reductive power of movement and the medium of physical communication, in contrast to body language literature that focuses solely on static body positions, Warren Lamb’s Movement Pattern Analysis predicts behaviour by observing and analyzing bodily movement and dynamics (Lamb 1985). His work has been applied to executive management and in therapy contexts. The Dancing at the Crossroads Project from 2009 to 2013 led by attorney Michele LeBaron highlights the example of a physical exercises created by modern dancer Margie Gillis intended to create the conditions for productive dialogue:

“...The exercises maximize the potential of dance to enhance sensory awareness, empathy, receptivity, reflection, and communication, yet are accessible to all levels of movers. By offering physical forms of expression, these exercises can help mediators notice where and how they can pivot when stuck, find space when squeezed, and literally shift dynamics through physical movement. Participating mediators reported that they were more attuned to nuances, subtle shifts, intuition, and creative possibilities following the project” (Beausoleil & LeBaron 2013: 151).

This functions similarly to the use of recreational breaks during extended, years-long peace talks to allow negotiators to “clear their heads.” Yet, instead of simply to speak to one another, it can offer use movement to create new insights to break their stalemate.

Human Rights and Civil Resistance

The performing arts have also been used to resist limitations on freedoms of expression and speech in societies characterised by violence, particularly in cases of state-led oppression against civilians. Under certain circumstances, the performing arts create and redistribute power that defies oppressive regimes or armed groups. There are countless examples of the use of the arts in such contexts (Jackson & Shakpo-Lee 2008). In South Korea, dance was used as a means for resisting abuses of power relations in an unequal society. South Korean dance used humour in its movements as a way for performers and audiences to feel empowered against political oppression. “The mockery of officialdom is a standard feature of Korean popular folk theater [sic], song, and dance” (Abelmee 1996: 266). This characteristic allowed social activists to take advantage of existing norms of satirical dance to undermine the regime. The performing arts also allowed the Iranians to create a “culture of dissent,” when the farmers gathered on three days of the week, their protests included a dance that was organically a part of their daily life, not implanted from the urban centres from which most powers emanated (Ibid: 1996: 61).

Anthony Shav highlights how the banning of dance in parts of the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa created space for those same movements to be used as resistance to oppression (Shay 2005). Shay highlights how varying applications of jurisprudence across the region have resulted in differing levels of restrictions, including the banning of wedding dances by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and Ayatollah Khomeni’s blanket prohibition of all forms of dance in Iran in 1979, and that those restrictions also change over time. Other restrictions on dance in the Middle East have been documented in Egypt where artists need “a government-approved certificate or license to perform and there are restrictions concerning costume and movement” (Dance Gazette 2011). Shay argues:

“Any cultural production such as dance that can raise such powerful negative reactions that religious and civil authorities from multiple attempts to ban its performance in its various forms...can be conceived of as an activity that is also saturated with potential subversive power” (Shay 1999).

“...Dance in many parts of the Middle East now provides a space for political resistance to oppressive regimes” (Shay 2005).

The South African Gumboot dance developed during colonization at a time when black, coloured, and Indian South Africans were forced to work in mines and were not allowed to speak to one another. In the mines the mine workers developed a percussive, stomping dance using the work boots they wore as a means of communicating non-verbally. This dance was practised years later during apartheid. Similarly, Shany Shank and Lisa Schirch highlight the example of the toyi-toyi dance, originally developed in Zimbabwe, which was historically used by police officers who were enforcing brutal laws against the black, coloured, and Indian populations (Shank & Schirch 2008). Under the apartheid Amenities Act, the South African Performance Arts Council was segregated according to race category; only white South Africans could participate, while any other forms of dance or arts were prohibited. Gumboot dancing, toyi-toyi, and other forms of dance in South Africa were aimed to serve to uphold morale and dignity at a time of deep-seated race-based oppression and abuse. Toyi-toyi is still used today as a protest technique in southern Africa, and was even banned by Zimbabwean dictator, Robert Mugabe, in 2008 prior to an election as part of a county-wide crackdown on civil liberties (Karmakwenda 2008). Mugabe’s security infrastructure monitored other dance forms and restricted a number of a prominent South African choreographer whose work was interpreted as a critique of the regime in 2007, as an example (Kweyama 2016).

The performing arts have also been used to apply to protecting artists who are attempting to voice human rights concerns or critiques of abusive regimes or groups. David Alan Harris worked in the aftermath of the 2008 crack-down to help the Democratic Party volunteer-based project of networks to support civil society members in resisting violence. Networks of artists are actively working to shed light on instances of state oppression of artists, as well as train artists they have networked with in techniques. Such an example is the Arthatwerk Africa of the Arterial Network that is based in South Africa and highlights cases from all over the continent (Arthatwerk Africa 2018).

Advocacy and Civic Participation

Dance or theatre performed publicly by survivors of violence and their supporters has been used in many programs to inform and galvanise a broader public base to press for political action. “One Billion Rising” is an international campaign that plans “flash mobs” – attention-grabbing outbreaks of coordinated dancing performed in unconventional, public places – to raise awareness about violence against women and girls worldwide. The campaign’s slogan is: “One in three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in her lifetime. One billion women violated is an atrocity. One billion women speaking out is unstoppable” (One Billion Rising 2013). The campaign has featured the work of commercial dance artists who teach a simple piece of choreography through YouTube, which is then disseminated by the campaign and learned by anyone who wants to participate. In some instances, local organisations or dance companies step in to teach participants. This can be an effective means of enlisting groups of people in solidarity through dance to increase public understanding of sexual violence by “disrupting” the typical urban space.

One example of such advocacy are the music and dance videos produced to promote the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. One video features young girls from around the world dancing to the UN’s “How I see the future” song, which focuses on women and girls – calls to eliminate sexual violence, increase educational opportunities, and create gender-equal conditions for employment (Project Everyone 2016).8 One other video features Japanese artists who are in support of the SDGs (United Nations 2016). Flash mobs have also been used in support of political candidates, such as the 2016 Parkhurst Power performance by 170 New York City-based dancers in support of Hillary Clinton’s bid for the United States’ presidency as means of resisting the hate speech used by her opponent (Kaufman 2016), who is widely considered to have no substantial views.

Also in the realm of elections, in Afghanistan, Bond Street Theater uses drama productions to educate voters about voter fraud ahead of key elections in which violent protests were expected. The performance enabled diplomats to focus on women and girls – calls to eliminate sexual violence, increase educational opportunities, and create gender-equal conditions for employment (Project Everyone 2016).8 The performing arts’ capacity to send messages has also been applied to military management. In the 1970s, for every one person killed in combat in the United States military, there were 10 pre-death combat deaths among teenagers and young adults in and around U.S. training bases (Hilt 2015). In response, after failing to capture the “south-bound” high safety briefings, the United States Department of Defense commissioned Fort Bragg’s “Soldier Safety Show” from the 1970s-1990s.

7 See also: Global Water Dances, an artistic initiative that uses a similar advocacy approach of creating dances in various countries to bring attention to water and to garner support for local and national efforts to address water shortages, pollution of waterways, fracking, and climate change (Global Water Dances 2019). Animal Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, which uses the arts and culture to promote civic engagement and social change without borders. There is also a company that focuses on advocacy on a variety of topics (Dancing Without Borders 2016), and Thats of Transformation founded by Rama Mani (Graduate Institute Geneva 2016).

8 This work is funded by the United Nations, United States Institute of Peace, United States Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and several international theatre conglomerates.
to reduce fatal off-duty accidents (Ibid. 2015). The show, which originated in the favelas of São Paulo, Brazil, has since been adapted for use in conflict-affected areas. The show features a single performer who tells his or her story; the drama ensemble then acts out the story as the storyteller.

A similar example is Storycatchers, located in Chicago, Illinois, United States, which works with high-school level youth to increase civic engagement and uses art as an alternative to violence prevention. The program was created by theatre director, Lee Yop, and effectively captured the theatre (Storycatchers 2016). Shakespeare Behind Bars does the same thing. It was started by Theatre Impact (Orlowski & Schich 2008). Keshet Dance Company in Albuquerque, New Mexico and the Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network in Los Angeles, California are two other organisations that are working in this field. (Dancy 2014; AYIN 2016). These organisations generate social capital that serves an important violence prevention function among constituencies affected by, and, in some cases, using violence as a means of expression.

Justice, Mourning, Reconciliation, Memorialisation, and Celebration

Currently, the debate around the role and effectiveness of transitional justice practices and institutions is gaining momentum. This debate problematises the existing models for post-conflict justice. As in many aspects of the performing arts, there are several creative approaches that serve as alternatives. She notes that the arts are very well placed to address the challenges of reconstructing… lives and adapting to change because they engage people in sensory experiences of placement in time and space, and that “mediate tensions” that create reciprocity among people where there was none before (Cohen 2005: 6). She cites the Sangre Festival of Bunyoro that incorporated over 800 performers in dance, drumming, visual arts, and music to reunite communities torn apart by violence and the Dr. Kandasarmy Sithamparanathan’s Theatre Arts Group in Sri Lanka which acts out traumatic events as a way of reconciling.

Jonathan Fox’s work in Playback Theater that began in 1975 features prominently in Cohen’s discussion. Playback Theatre is a practice by which a facilitator asks the audience for a story; the audience member is invited up to tell his or her story; the drama ensemble then acts out the story as the storyteller. The facilitator then serves as the “conductor” to coordinate the action. The audience becomes a part of the story as well, and the audience’s reactions are used to drive the narrative forward. This method is designed to transform relationships of hatred and mistrust into relationships of trust and trustworthiness. These processes involve forms of non-violent competition or cooperation, which depend on the practices of accessibility, decision from the highest level…Rather these efforts paint a different canvas of social change, which depends on the practices of accessibility, reconnecting people in actual relationships, and local responsibility (Lederach, 2004: 145, quoting Zehr).

For many, [restorative justice] models may appear to be micro-oriented in application, but therein lies their genius. The impetus that drives restorative approaches away from the punitive and decision from the highest level…Rather these efforts paint a different canvas of social change, which depends on the practices of accessibility, reconnecting people in actual relationships, and local responsibility (Howard Zehr). Cohen makes the important point that the arts “can be crafted to fully honor the experiences of people on all sides of a conflict without assuming an equality of suffering or responsibility” (Cohen 2005: 36). Moreover, Howard Zahr suggests:

“...PT [Playback Theater] holds great promise for the work of coexistence and reconciliation because both its formal structures and the educational processes through which its practitioners are mentored allow painful stories to be both told and received in their full complexity. Oppressive dynamics can be acknowledged, but within a framework that focuses more on the potential for transformation than on blame” (Cohen 2005: 25).

Western-derived justice mechanisms to address trauma. Another example from after the conflict in Sierra Leone, the returnees and women dressed in white indigenous clothing in a presentation that involved men dressed as militants – to participate in a dance performance and singing ceremony: “During a ceremonial dance, done in a circle, a battle scene is enacted. The initial single group of dancers representing the army and the other group representing the parties to the conflict. Later the peacemakers arrive. These are men dressed as women making characteristically feminine movements and gestures (symbolizing the important role of women in peacemaking). They come between the combatants and eventually all the dancers form a single circle again. The values reinforced in this activity reflect indigenous beliefs about complementarity and the importance of all segments of society in efforts to re-establish harmony and restore continuity.” (Huyse & Salter 2008: 139, citing Aile & Gaima 2000)
performance itself re-enacted scenes of rape through dance. The dance concluded with the men pulling a red sash out from underneath the women's white dresses. Entirely non-verbal, the choreography was used as a mechanism to increase awareness among the public about what had happened, thereby increasing collective memory. The dancers included members of the community bear witness to the crime that the individual suffered through performance, which can contribute to a sense of collective responsibility.

In the South African case, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation’s projects on Memory, Arts, and Culture and Schools Oral Histories speak to the importance of “democratising the narrative” after centuries of colonialism, slavery, and apartheid (IJR 2017). Reconciliation at the local level involves writing new histories from the perspective of historically marginalised populations and reinvigorating interest in indigenous performing arts. This work does not seek to erase the dominant history in favour of the other, but rather demonstrates the interconnectedness of stories from marginalised and dominant histories in order to reframe understanding and lived experiences into authentic, cathartic, if not restorative, performances. As examples, the Baxter Theatre’s timely run of the production “The Fall” performed by University of Cape Town’s students along with the diverse backgrounds and actions around the #RhodesMustFall and by association, #FeesMustFall, student movements that were pushing for the decolonisation of higher education (UCT 2016). Site-specific performances have produced a work that productively captured many sides of the same debate.

Other examples include the on-going partnership between the Royal Winnipeg Ballet of Canada and the Royal Winnepeg Ballet of Canada with aboriginal musicians to create “Going Home Star,” a storied dance piece in conjunction with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada that will go on a national tour (Ko Din 2016). In the same vein, Liz Lerman’s seminal work commissioned by Harvard University professor Martha Minnow in 2005 to commemorate the sixty anniversary of the Nuremberg Trials, and her collaboration with Yale University to do a performance that questioned formal justice mechanisms after mass atrocities, drawing on several important historical examples (Lerman 2011; 57). Such productions serve to creatively disrupt what exists and reintroduce nuanced narratives.

Site-specific dances have also been used to problematise the neglect of key political and social issues faced by communities. The Panther of Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre created a work that involved a group of dancers who were of different races. This dance piece presented the past, present, and warned of the future if action was not taken. Flatfoot Dance, Phendukda Dance Ensemble, and the Soweto Dance Project all performed by black South Africans are company are several other prominent Durban-based dance companies that create politically-aware pieces of dance, as well as KZN DanceLink which serves as a network of dance organisations for social change (Maree 2008).

Site-specific dances that draw crowds of people and force them to consider the space in the immediate ways have the capacity to enliven static monuments or sites of memory otherwise forgotten. Claudia Bernardi, a world-renowned Argentine muralist who guides mural projects with descendants of the disappeared (desaparecidos) of Argentina and El Salvador has commented that monuments lose their meaning over time because they are permanent fixtures in the post-conflict landscape. People pass by them every day and through this constant exposure, the meaning of the landmarks also disappear (Bernardi 2016). The performing arts have a role to play in conjunction with permanent monuments or monuments. Physical infrastructure that commemorate the suffering during war to renew and maintain the meaning behind such sites. Performance that stimulates social capital among communities, especially when political transitions fall short of their promises for change. Globalization, urbanization, and forced migration also threaten certain heritage sites and have an important function for conflict-affected populations. As examples, in northern Uganda, centuries-old dance forms of the Acholi tribe, such as the twolo, a royal dance to celebrate visitors, the otolo, a war dance, and lukeme dance which included political and social commentary, were threatened and sometimes prohibited by the Ugandan government following the 2005 war. In collaboration with Yale University, the Acholi tribe was invited back to University to do a performance that questioned formal justice mechanisms after mass atrocities, drawing on several important historical examples (Lerman 2011). As a result, the Acholi significantly modified their art forms or ceased practicing them all together (Ibid. 2009). While not all dance forms were equally threatened, the conflict changed the landscape of the art form. Teaching traditional performing arts, then, becomes a form of “post-conflict” resistance, as the wounds of conflict can last for decades after a negotiated settlement or military victory. Because performing arts are often fleeting, teaching the art form in-person is one of the only ways to ensure its continuity.

Such teaching depends on educational systems and institutional support are still on-going. If practiced even after direct violence has ended, certain performing arts can take on even deeper historical meaning and serve as cultural pillars of resistance. During colonization and apartheid rule in South Africa, black African dance forms were subjugated by Eurocentric art forms as a means of oppression. Classical ballet performed by white South Africans was deemed one of the ethnic dances to be suppressed while the Colonial and Kaffir dancing was attempted to systematically remove reflection and self-reflection from black South Africans by disallowing certain types of dance and music associated with the black community (Rani 2016). While many black, colourless, Indian, and indigenous South Africans are still dealing with both the trauma of oppression and the trauma of everyday discrimination and socioeconomic injustices (Amoroso 2016), this community is now taking back their dignity. Today, there is a push within the South African dance community and the racially-integrated Ministry of Arts and Culture, founded after the negotiated settlement in 1994, to revive black and Indian South African dance forms (Maree 2008, Ndlouv 2016; Rani 2016) and combine their movements with other African dance forms and contemporary dance (Maree 2016). These moves are a response to the omission of and oppression and segregation continues to play out, the debates about whether to fuse African and European styles and which art forms should receive funding and institutional support are still on-going.

The same kind of resurgence of previously prohibited dance forms is seen in India as dance companies that practice traditional dances and music protest against occupation through dance. One such company is Kalamandalam, established in the 1930s in the southern, coastal state of Kerala by a dancer who defied societal demand in order to practice. The company champions the rights of “dahmin and kathakali, dances which were originally developed in the 16th century. As a result of this practice, there is newfound interest among people of all walks of life to learn a traditional dance that was once seen as an occupation. The company’s mandate is to ensure that the dance becomes inviting and accessible to all and is run by a woman. The same kind of resurgence of previously prohibited dance forms is seen in India as dance companies that practice traditional dances and music protest against occupation through dance. One such company is Kalamandalam, established in the 1930s in the southern, coastal state of Kerala by a dancer who defied societal demand in order to practice. The company’s mandate is to ensure that the dance becomes inviting and accessible to all and is run by a woman.

“China’s flagship dance company was charged with spreading ideology to the masses. Founded in 1959, the company’s earliest dancers studied Soviet technique under visiting scholars, but by 1961, the Russo-Sino relationship was permanently ruptured and the teachers packed their bags. This coincided with Mao Zedong’s disastrous economic experiment, the Great Leap Forward, that left upwards of 30 million dead from starvation” (Pellegrini 2011:37).

The company now performs in the same theatre space that was used for “regular class struggle meetings where suspect persons were denounced and abused,” yet is working to develop its own identity (Pellegrini 2011). They utilise traditional Chinese dance and music forms with Eurasian balletic influences – a kind of fusion that seems characteristic of post-conflict artistic development and a wedding of the past and present.

In addition to preserving traditional dance forms in the aftermath of armed conflict, there is also a need to use the experiences garnered from war to educate the public about its realities. While political narratives, media outlets, and general public that war is a proper course of action, the performing arts have a role in playing to counteract and warming against misguided and manipulative narratives. Performances can also uphold the dignity of rank-and-file soldiers who fight unpopular wars and tell the untold stories of how war affects everyday people. Along these lines, EXIT 12 Dance Company in the United States, founded by Iraq War (2003) veteran from the U.S. Marine Corps, Roman Baca works to:

“Inspire conversations about world differences and the lasting effects of violence and conflict on communities, individuals, and cultures and challenge the general public that war is a proper course of action, the performing arts have a role in playing to counteract and warming against misguided and manipulative narratives. Performances can also uphold the dignity of rank-and-file soldiers who fight unpopular wars and tell the untold stories of how war affects everyday people. Along these lines, EXIT 12 Dance Company in the United States, founded by Iraq War (2003) veteran from the U.S. Marine Corps, Roman Baca works to:

“Exit 12 uses what they call “experiential journalistic choreography” to explore themes related to violence (Ibid. 2016). In so doing, EXIT 12 heightens public consciousness as a means of shaping public opinion on warfare. Similarly, Natalia Duong’s dance work with survivors of Agent Orange attacks during the American-Vietnam War is also notable. Individuals share their stories of survival through movement and have them mirrored by their peers (Duong 2016). The storytellers raise awareness about how the chemical used in Agent Orange – dioxin – continues to negatively affect the offspring of survivors and people who contributed to concepts of warfare by sharing their experiences with other communities and individuals. Through the stories of how war affects everyday people. Along these lines, EXIT 12 Dance Company in the United States, founded by Iraq War (2003) veteran from the U.S. Marine Corps, Roman Baca works to:

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“One example of an enormous range of applications of the performing arts to stimulate conversations and interaction that may lead toward more harmonious coexistence in the aftermath of segregation, armed conflict, and political turmoil.
Improvisation requires quick decision-making on the part of the dancers, a sense of shared responsibility for producing a compelling work, channeling one’s own lived experiences, and critical thinking. These dynamics created a listening feedback loop between the dancers in which they watch for and feel how their fellow dancers are moving in space then respond with their own movements. Such techniques increased the dancers’ in-group cohesion, and encouraged them to question and understand their own artistic choices and expression. One of the main techniques used was called “playback” in which the choreographer acted as a facilitator to elicit a storyline from one of the dancers, an observer, or audience member.15 The technique has not been widely applied to dance performance, though this pilot project was a very successful means of increasing audience engagement in dance and of challenging dancers to broaden their own artistic scope.

Improvisation builds trust between the performers, as it is an individual’s sense of their body relating to another. Both proprioception and synchronization of movements, especially with music, has been studied by neuroscientists as key factors that generate social connection. It has also been documented that Women on Farms Project and similar projects increase empathy between participants.

Contact improvisation, as another tool, is a practice in which the dancers begin with points of physical contact and attempt to maintain this point throughout their movements. This kind of improvisation lends itself to spectacular lifts and intimate moments that reflect both the athletic and artistic abilities of the dancers, but also truly human moments of touch. Contact improvisation builds trust between the performers, as they are physically taking on each other’s body weight, or leg, while the other followed along without making contact with that person. The purpose was to increase engagement between the dancers and have them hone their synchronization and proprioception, which is an individual’s sense of their body in relation to another. Both proprioception and synchronization of movements, especially with music, has been studied by neuroscientists as key factors that generate social connection. It has also been documented that Women on Farms Project and similar projects increase empathy between participants.

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Workshops often concluded with a guided reflection that prompted the dancers to quietly process what they had created that day, and take stock of new emotions that may have surfaced as a result of engagement with a particular subject matter. This was critical for artistic development, but also as a mechanism of self-care when dealing with often challenging storylines that included topics such as bullying in schools, suicide, racism, discrimination, HIV/AIDS, truth and reconciliation, and so on.

The facilitating used this as a way to put parameters around the emotive components of performance, and to ensure that the dancers did not delve too far into a topic on which the facilitator was not equipped to support.

The shared experience of “playback” the improvisational dance at the 2016 Baxter Dance Festival in the Fringe Programme on October 15 and had the opportunity to interact with the audience using one of their stories. About 200 audience members were prompted by the facilitator to compare their story to one from 1994 to the present year, 2016, and asked how things had changed. A simple reflection of comparing the past and present yielded a storyline from an audience member who then asked the dancers then to interpret their story with the group. Improvisation elicited genuine laughter from onlookers, which was atypical for a dance performance, because the performers were able to use culturally-relevant humor. There was also an element of thrill for the audience, as they were informed in the introduction that the dancers were un-rehearsed, so were held in suspense to see if the performers would be capable of producing a compelling and entertaining performance. While they did not permit for a full dialogue, the dancers brought key themes of the story that could have been discussed, including the tumultuous transition from childhood to adulthood, conformity or departure from the routine of modern life, boredom as a common emotion, and much more. Moreover, the power of “playback” techniques is the ability for audience stories to be mirrored in a playful manner.

Finally, the group performed at the 2016 IJR Reconciliation Award event at the historic District 6 Museum Homecoming Centre on November 23 that honours the Women on Farms Project and other young, rising leaders for their significant contributions to on-going reconciliation in South Africa. To prepare, the dancers listened to audio-recordings of the IJR’s events on the TRC at 20 years and reflected on the current debates around the TRC, land restitution, race, and gender. The event itself included two 10-minute performances. The first called upon the audience to consider to what extent they had seen moments or examples of reconciliation in their own communities. The second asked a beneficiary of the Women on Farms Project to tell her story of how the project has shaped her life and experience (Cape Town TV 2016). The dancers then shaped their improvisational performances around these prompts.

The techniques in this pilot project were a very successful means of increasing audience engagement in dance and of challenging dancers to broaden their own artistic scope.
mind in relation to the prompt. This often leads to veryrank characterizations of a specific issue. “Playback”
techniques (or “mirror” techniques) can help do what many people may be afraid to say. It involves a
freedom of expression that is often lost in theatre productions or dance performances that are over-rehearsed.

Improvisation, unlike other more structured performing arts, has the capacity to immediately respond to the current events of the day. When the #FeesMustFall student protests broke out in September 2016 in Cape Town and other major South African cities, the four students involved in shifting attitudes or
to draw on their personal experiences as students to
tell compelling storylines. Dancers were extremely
successful in capturing nearly all sides of the multi-
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were living it in that moment. Localised performing arts,
in this sense, are highly efficient tools for communicating a
reaction, and can even motivate behavioural change.

As an audience member, seeing one’s story performed creates new insights, catalyzes reflection, and can even motivate behavioural change. “Playback” techniques are indirect ways of seeing oneself. Because performers rarely receive the
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Key Lessons for Practitioners

- Because the facilitator cannot entirely control how an audience member may feel after viewing a poigniant performance, the facilitator’s role is to both help the audience to draw strategically from their wealth of experience to contribute to the storyline. As a result, some found that they
could process their experiences through the workshops
and that it was both a surprising and freeing experience.

- Delving into one’s own experiences prompted a discussion about where performers should “draw the line” for themselves emotionally, especially when depicting quite intense stories. In the long run, this contributed to the professionalization of the dancers, as they are able to better command their own emotions and be able to identify when certain experiences are
either matured enough or too raw to use on stage. They
especially enjoy helping to keep the development of the
performers’ emotional intelligence and their own
reconciliation with self and past experiences. Engaging the
performers on the choreographic elements of their emotionally-charged improvisations also played an important role. In switching between the “chaos” of the
emotions elicited during improvisation and the “order” of
discussing the technical sides of the artistic process
afterwards, there appears to be immense potential for
working through both event-based and structural
traumas, such as racism. The same could be said about the
alternation between the fiction of what happens on
stage and the reality of everyday life that performers
practice regularly.

- Improvisation, unlike other more structured performing arts, has the capacity to immediately respond to the current events of the day. When the #FeesMustFall student protests broke out in September 2016 in Cape Town and other major South African cities, the four students involved in shifting attitudes or
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reaction, and can even motivate behavioural change.
Building on the findings and lessons learned from the initial pilot, IJR then applied similar approaches in another group of 20 cisgender and transgender women in the Warrenton, Northern Cape area who had little previous experience with structured movement therapies. This group included women from Warrenvale and Ikhutseng, two areas near Warrenton. Previous dialogue workshops with this group yielded accounts of sexual, psychological, and physical abuse from intimate partners and family members. Many spoke of the challenges facing their community, including violence, substance abuse, and lack of access to resources, psychosocial support, education, and employment opportunities. Most of the women were unemployable or unemployed and had several children. Even if they had access to safe spaces in which they could engage in self-care and receive psychosocial support.

To begin to address this gap, IJR designed a two-day intergenerational "retreat" as a women-only space, inclusive of transgender and cisgender women who spoke different languages. Activities included embodiment exercises, guided meditation, free writing, crafts, discussions in a circle, stretching, mirroring, mirroring exercises, and back-to-back drawing. The art facilitators arranged the space to look like a theatre stage with audience seating, and set up the final art gallery on the wall with the titles of each painting showcased below.

One facilitator read the group poem and each of the four groups performed their prepared dance pieces to music. The retreat concluded with an informal evaluation and discussion.

Main Findings

Rather than working with people’s trauma directly and explicitly as the objective of a dialogue, utilizing artistic approaches allowed the women to bring to the process what they wanted to, whether that was the expression of traumatic events or a desire to have a break from the stressors of their daily lives. Given the well-documented risks of re-traumatisation through storytelling and truth telling, the facilitators never asked the participants about challenges or traumas in their own lives, and many of the women spoke of these topics on their own volition. Although IJR was aware that violence was occurring in their homes, the participants in this group felt comfortable talking about the trauma without feeling overwhelmed. In fact, the retreat did not force anyone to speak about it. Rather, the facilitators allowed the topic to come up “naturally” as people felt the need to discuss it. One of the reasons why dialogue is often challenging is because of the fear that artistic approaches allow for. A blank canvas, page, stage, or space is an opportunity – those who wish to take movement, express themselves, or process trauma will do so on their own without being prompted.

As an example of how this ambiguity works, some of the women interpreted what were designated as secular activities in religious or spiritual terms instead. They used their own faith as their frame of reference for the experience of new sensory activities without being prompted to do so by the facilitators. After an embodiment exercise, one of the elder community leaders expressed that she “felt like [she] needed to touch the people around [her] to share with them what she was experiencing.” Later, another reflected that “this would not have been possible [sic] if God was not in this space with us” and that she painted according to the biblical story of Noah’s Ark as a symbol of hope. Also while reflecting after a painting exercise, another mentioned, “I often feel cut off from others and I feel the need to do what I did to be with God.”

This contributed to the creation of a “safe space” as people who were religious could engage in that way, and those who were not could still comfortably participate in the painting, active listening exercises, poetry, games, and a final performance that involved spoken word, dance, and an art gallery presentation of the women’s paintings. The embodiment and mirroring exercises were similar to those mentioned in the previous sections. The guided meditations focused on concepts of self-care and appreciation. The meditations, embodiment, and mirroring exercises were vehicles for the women to become aware of and actively use their senses of touch, hearing, vision, smell, taste, and proprioception (sense of one’s own body in space). They would often be asked to switch between two different senses, while non-verbal communication shifts between two different senses, thereby helping them shift their focus from concrete thoughts to sensations. This tends to “saturate,” or occupy the mind in a way that allows participants to reduce the “chatter” in their minds.

The group also did a craft activity in which they created a paper flower and wrote down their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs on the petals as a tool for discussion. Participants were also taught the fundamentals of free writing and provided with a notebook and pen to keep.

The painting exercise, called “Creative Conversations”17 invited the women to pair up and switch off painting the same picture using watercolours and oil pastels while sitting back-to-back so as not to view the painting while the other was working. This session also included a guided meditation. After the women had completed their paintings, the facilitators asked them to sign and jointly name their painting as a signal of ownership.

Dance performance by two transgender and two cisgender women at the intergenerational retreat, Warrenton (Photo by author)

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example, once the art gallery was set up, without being ourselves to flowers was a really powerful thing since we reflected on the craft exercise saying that “comparing recognised is an important experience. One woman Seeing oneself in artistic products and having it representation of self can motivate and empower. artistic experience to realise that they were talented mediums caused some people with little previous young person’s level of education. Another pair decided managed this, mentioning how they treated each other based hierarchies in the room. Without being prompted, makes choices together; deciding who should paint first of intergenerational interaction. The painting activity what kinds of safe spaces we need. I channelled the challenges presented by using artistic materials caused some people with little previous young person’s level of education. Another pair decided managed this, mentioning how they treated each other based hierarchies in the room. Without being prompted, makes choices together; deciding who should paint first of intergenerational interaction. The painting activity what kinds of safe spaces we need. I channelled the challenges presented by using artistic materials caused some people with little previous young person’s level of education. Another pair decided managed this, mentioning how they treated each other based hierarchies in the room. Without being prompted, makes choices together; deciding who should paint first of intergenerational interaction. The painting activity what kinds of safe spaces we need. I channelled the challenges presented by using artistic materials caused some people with little previous young person’s level of education. Another pair decided managed this, mentioning how they treated each other based hierarchies in the room. Without being prompted, makes choices together; deciding who should paint first of intergenerational interaction. The painting activity what kinds of safe spaces we need. I channelled the challenges presented by using artistic materials caused some people with little previous young person’s level of education. Another pair decided managed this, mentioning how they treated each other based hierarchies in the room. Without being prompted, makes choices together; deciding who should paint first of intergenerational interaction. The painting activity what kinds of safe spaces we need. I channelled the


CREATIVITY IN CONFLICT: PERFORMING ARTS FOR SUSTAINED DIALOGUE, JUSTICE, AND RECONCILIATION

LINDSEY DOYLE