What are Creative Approaches to Coexistence and Reconciliation?

Creative approaches to coexistence and reconciliation engage individuals' and groups' creativity, wisdom, and cultural traditions in designing, implementing, and assessing coexistence and reconciliation efforts through cultural work and the arts.

Cultural work
identifies, amplifies, and relies on cultural resources existing within the community: artists, tradition bearers, cultural institutions, rituals, stories, traditional forms of conflict resolution, spiritual traditions, and other important expressive forms.

The arts
include music, drama, visual arts, literature and/or dance. They involve people of all ages in the enriching and enlivening processes of composition, design, revision, rehearsal, witnessing, critique, discussion, and performance.

Creative Approaches Support Community-Based Development in Conflict Regions

Sustainable development efforts must integrate local knowledge and culture.

Cultural work and the arts unearth local culture and knowledge and allow individuals and communities to define development in their own terms.

Sustainable development efforts must restore communities' capacities for development work.

Cultural work and the arts nourish capacities that are often impaired by violence – communication, imagination, vitality, and trust.

Traditional rituals can help communities to grieve losses.

Artists from opposing communities can collaborate, leading the way for broader conflict resolution.

Improvisational theatre can allow people from communities in conflict to develop more nuanced understandings of their own and each other's narratives.

Music can encourage people to empathize with the suffering of those who were once their enemies.
Integrating Creative Approaches into Development Initiatives

Creative approaches to coexistence and reconciliation are powerful tools for development initiatives. Our experience working in many regions of the world has yielded valuable lessons about how to best design, implement, and assess projects integrating cultural work and the arts.

Lessons Learned for Effective Design and Assessment

- When designing creative interventions consider a broad range of factors, including: cultural context, stage of conflict, degree of violence, power asymmetries, available creative talents, degree of trauma & resilience, and economic and social resources.

- Utilize a framework for assessment that includes the extent to which relationships are strengthened, capacities are restored, important questions are raised and explored, creative processes challenge existing power inequities, all communities involved in a conflict have participated, and the extent to which the project generated momentum for future work.

- Allow space for fluid objectives; creative projects will be most effective if they are not bound too tightly to pre-established goals and strategies and there is room for spontaneity.

- Create opportunities for practitioners who work in conflict regions to care for themselves; cultural workers risk being traumatized themselves by engaging deeply with stories of suffering.

- Consider multiple roles: artists and cultural workers can serve as listeners, witnesses, mediators, interpreters, teachers, documenters, performers, and facilitators.

- Invest in the education of tradition-bearers, artists, and cultural workers. Such investment can have a large secondary impact, as these individuals are often influential community members.

- Avoid false reconciliation. A pretense at reconciliation can be worse than none at all and can damage individuals, communities, and prospects for future reconciliation.

- Nourish reflectivity and critical thinking skills through art that invites and challenges rather than relying on propaganda and manipulation.

- Conceptualize creative projects both as development efforts themselves and as contributions to development projects in other sectors.

Recommendations for Policy Makers and Funders

- Provide opportunities for development workers and peacebuilding practitioners to learn about and experience the power and potential uses of creative approaches to addressing conflict.

- Provide opportunities for artists and cultural workers to interact with, learn from and contribute to development workers and peacebuilding practitioners.

- Support residencies for artists and cultural workers in peacebuilding and development organizations.

- Emphasize multi-disciplinary teams that work in collaboration to design and implement interventions.

- Support education and training programs for artists, cultural workers, and peacebuilders.

- Initiate fellowship programs for artists working in conflict regions.

- Encourage exemplary artists and cultural workers working in conflict regions to document, reflect on, and evaluate their work and make their learning available to others.

- Support cultural exchanges for artists and cultural workers from adversary communities.

- Support international exchanges among artists.

www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence
Creative Approaches to
Coexistence, Reconciliation, and Development

Cambodia: Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture
Case Study

The Reyum Institute of Art and Culture is a non-profit, non-governmental gallery and art school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The organization aims to provide a forum for research, preservation, and promotion of traditional and contemporary Cambodian arts and culture and to stimulate an exchange of ideas while fostering creative expressions and encouraging further research.

Past/Ongoing Projects
For an exhibition entitled Legacy of Absence, the Institute invites the artists of Cambodia to address the legacy of the Khmer Rouge era. The small storefront gallery becomes a space for conversation where viewers engage with the painful, complex, and usually silenced legacy of their violent past, a past in which many are implicated as perpetrators as well as victims.

In the Institute’s art school, 140 disadvantaged children study traditional and contemporary arts, sometimes working with their teachers to paint murals in the local orphanage or to develop signage on the national archives building. Many of the students become sufficiently skilled to earn a living as artists.

Students begin a study of Dus Cheadok, the Khmer version of the ten lives of Buddha prior to his enlightenment. Each story illustrates a particular virtue: generosity, honesty, equanimity, tolerance, compassion, self-determination, etc. The stories become the basis for discussion among the children, scholars, and religious leaders. Children are encouraged to reflect on their personal conduct and virtues and share their learning in a campaign that includes bumper stickers, billboards, posters, leaflets, and performances.

Lessons Learned
Art exhibitions can create spaces for positive public engagement with difficult historical legacies. Engagement is often more likely when the expression is understated or indirect.

Civil society can be nurtured through values embedded in traditional forms, such as religious and cultural narratives. Messages can be broadcast through both traditional forms and contemporary media.

Community cultural institutions can create spaces of generosity, respect, and trust, even as young people are learning skills that will allow them to earn a livelihood as adults.

Community cultural institutions, especially those that enjoy and cultivate local leadership and rely on existing webs of relationships, are more sustainable and can respond more readily to emerging issues than outside initiatives.

Future Projects/Innovations
To address the legacy of domination and violence in Cambodia, Reyum is seeking to collaborate with other institutions to plan for a nation-wide grassroots process that will take place parallel to the upcoming trial of top Khmer Rouge leaders. Traditional rituals, such as the Pchum Ben ritual of reconciliation with the dead can assist Cambodians to move forward and to heal.

Resources
www.reyum.org
www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence:
- The Goodness of Lives – Ingrid Muan
- Notes on Pchum Ben – Ly Daravuth
- Reconciliation, Where Are You? – Ly Daravuth

www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence
South Africa: Artist Proof Studio
Case Study

In Johannesburg, South Africa, Artist Proof Studio trains primarily black and coloured young adults in the skills they need to support themselves as artists. The Studio is home for some 80 artists to gather and attend classes in printmaking, photo processes, bookmaking, papermaking, and other techniques. Projects include education and training, income generating activities, AIDS awareness, and prison work. For example, the Studio enables rural women to gain economic independence by making paper products out of locally available indigenous plants and on commission by the government, embroidering AIDS awareness banners.

Past/Ongoing Projects
The legacies of the apartheid era include disparities in income and education, violence, and a breakdown in civility. When these forces threaten to undermine the organization from the inside, the Studio’s white co-founders and an emerging black leader together devise a creative approach to transforming the culture of the organization. They propose ‘ubuntu,’ an African concept of interdependence and connectedness, as the organizing principle for the entire Studio. Students in a first-year linocut class interview members of their families and villages to gather stories that reveal the meaning of the concept. They create journals as well as individual and collective artworks that bring ubuntu to life, both in the content and process of their work. At the organizational level, a new structure is designed that embodies the values of ubuntu in a system of mentorship and accountability.

Lessons Learned
Reconciliation is a never-ending journey. As communities consolidate relationships and build more trust, their members revisit ever deeper layers of traumatic memories.

Locally rooted concepts, such as ubuntu, can become powerful touchstones for transformation at personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels.

Community-based economic development projects can draw on the creative resources of both traditional expressive forms (such as narratives and rituals) as well as contemporary arts to counteract the legacy of violence and affirm a culture of respect, responsibility, and accountability.

Future Projects/Innovations
Artist Proof Studio is developing new documentary projects to be undertaken in South Africa or other conflict regions, such as Palestine/Israel and Cambodia. In one scenario, community members will use cameras to document the experiences of refugees, survivors of mass violence, people living with AIDS, etc. Presentations developed with the material will give voice and raise awareness in a way that is visceral and visually compelling. In another proposal, AIDS victims themselves would create memory boxes for friends and family members to express their life and their legacy in meaningful ways.

The Studio is also interested in consulting with other NGO’s to share its approach to transforming organizational culture based on locally relevant concepts of peace and interconnectedness.

Resources
www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence:

Artist Proof Studio: A Journey of Reconciliation – Kim Berman, with Stomppie Selibe
Art, Ubuntu & Reconciliation: Journeys from Members of Artist Proof Studio – Stomppie Selibe & students

www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence
Creative Approaches to Coexistence, Reconciliation, and Development

Playback Theatre Schools, United States and New Zealand
Case Study

In Playback Theatre (PBT), ensembles of actors and musicians immediately re-enact stories told by audience members, capturing the essence of the stories and honoring the tellers. PBT aims to acknowledge the individual stories and distinct voices that coexist within communities, to deepen people’s understanding of complex human conflicts and actions, and to build capacities for listening, empathizing, communicating, and making choices. There are hundreds of trained practitioners in over 50 countries.

Past/Ongoing Projects
In Burundi, adolescents who were perpetrators of violence relate heartfelt personal stories and watch as an interethnic team of Tutsi and Hutu adult actors act them out with respect and creativity.

In Fiji, a local group sponsors PBT performances for 13- and 14-year-olds in an effort to ameliorate the effects of violence among young teenagers. Initially, their stories are preoccupied with the details of violence; after months of seeing their stories validated through performance, their stories shift, becoming more self-reflective and including a broader range of themes.

In Southern India, communities of Dalits use PBT to articulate stories about the effects of poverty and their experiences as bonded laborers. After witnessing their collective stories, they create collective development strategies.

Lessons Learned
PBT creates spaces for social dialogue and cultivates the capacity to listen. It allows people to engage with their own and each other’s stories from multiple perspectives, as tellers, actors, audience members, and discussants.

PBT is most effective in conflict regions (i.e. with groups of people who have been traumatized) when performers are highly trained. Care must be taken not to re-traumatize actors or audiences.

The forms of PBT can be modified to incorporate elements of local cultures, making the approach culturally resonant and accessible in many different cultural contexts.

PBT takes time. Attitudes and stories change over months of regular participation in PBT sessions.

PBT provides forums in which the concerns of a community can be elicited, collectively examined, and then incorporated into planning efforts, an important tool for community-based development.

Future Projects/Innovations
Experienced PBT practitioners will support emerging PBT companies through professional development, training of new members, and exchanges. Requests have been received from interested groups in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Samoa, among others.

PBT will create opportunities for dialogue within Muslim societies and strengthen relations between Christians and Muslims by introducing PBT to Arabic Middle Eastern countries.

An international PBT team will travel to and perform in crisis areas to address the immediate needs of various populations and seed the creation of PBT in conflict regions.

PBT will work with education and development projects among non-literate populations so they can contribute to curricula and development plans.

Resources
Gathering Voices: Essays on Playback Theatre – Jonathan Fox and Heinrich Dauber, editors
www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence:

Playback Theatre: A Creative Resource for Reconciliation – Jenny Hutt and Beverly Hosking

www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence
Burundi, Ghana, Rwanda, South Africa: NGOs & non-affiliated drumming groups
Case Study

Drumming is a central element of many cultural landscapes. In Africa, it is a primary medium through which people learn and experience the deepest aspects of African philosophy and cosmology. In both traditional and contemporary settings, drumming brings people together to create, celebrate, and renew community life.

Past/Ongoing Projects
In Burundi, drumming groups have long included both Hutus and Tutsis. Throughout the years of violence, many members of drumming groups have stayed together, emphasizing their identities as drummers above ethnic identities.

In Ghana, members of the community are not allowed to join a drumming circle if they are in conflict with another member. Elders in the community notice absences, and work to bring those in conflict back into relationship, so all can participate in drumming rituals. This cultural tradition serves as an early warning system for local conflicts.

In Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi young men come together in drumming workshops led by drummers/peacebuilders as part of preparations for the tenth anniversary of the genocide. Drumming together offered an experience of interdependence, a metaphor for what might be possible, and the basis for building new relationships.

In South Africa, West African drums have been introduced into drumming circles, which take place on beaches, in cafes, in corporate settings, and within special communities (victims of violence, for instance, or vision-impaired people). With interaction mediated through a cultural tradition foreign to both black and white South Africans, people gain an experience of equal participation.

Lessons Learned
Drumming is effective as a resource in reconciliation efforts but it is not sufficient to transform social, cultural and political dynamics. It could be more effective if linked to on-going development and coexistence initiatives.

Care must be taken when importing elements from one culture into another to be sure that neither culture is violated. This is especially important when elements from sacred rituals are incorporated into activities in secular settings.

Especially in cultures with strong indigenous drumming traditions, drumming is a source of individual equanimity and group solidarity. It inspires feelings of vitality and relatedness.

Drumming experiences can be crafted to bring former enemies together to share viscerally compelling experiences of interdependence.

Future Projects/Innovations
Brandeis International Fellow Nicholas Djanie, a Ghanaian master drummer, intends to return to Ghana to incorporate drumming into village-level reconciliation efforts and to educate young people about the power of their cultural heritage, including drumming.

Brandeis International Fellow Lena Schachmujlder envisions creating new annual reconciliation rituals to establish and reinforce a shared Burundian identity. In every household and in public spaces drummers, dancers, and visual artists would invent and repeat the literal 'rhythm of reconciliation.'

Resources
www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence:

Touch of the Drums – Nicholas "Africa" Djanie
The Rhythm of Reconciliation: A Reflection on Drumming as a Contribution to Reconciliation Processes in Burundi and South Africa – Lena Schachmujlder

www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence
Palestine: Palestinian House of Friendship
Case Study

The Palestinian House of Friendship (PHF) in Nablus engages in human rights and democracy education and leads local election monitoring efforts. A primary goal of PHF is to develop the critical thinking skills required for democracy through investing in the personal development of each individual.

Past/Ongoing Projects
Smiling Faces summer camps and cultural heritage festivals engage children in the Nablus area in dance and visual arts rooted in Palestinian traditions. Children are provided access to computers, are offered tutoring in academic subjects, and attend English classes in preparation for TOEFL exams. Participants, staff, and volunteers reflect the diversity of economic conditions and political affiliations of the region. In collaboration with the ministry of youth, PHF sponsors a marathon for hundreds of boys and girls.

PHF offers English and Hebrew classes to Palestinians and Arabic classes to international visitors, raising income to support other projects and remaining unaffiliated of any local parties and factions.

Lessons Learned
Opportunities for expression and creative collaboration provide youth with a sense of hope in their own futures and alternatives that make them less vulnerable to potentially destructive and extremist influences in their societies.

Creative projects can create platforms for conversation among people of different political persuasion, urban and rural dwellers, and people living in the city and those in refugee camps.

Future Projects/Innovations
Amid the extremely constraining and dangerous conditions of the ongoing intifadeh, PHF will turn to institutions such as the family, trade unions, and women's associations to research local customs and narratives that highlight democratic and non-violent practices originating in Palestinian culture. PHF will develop new democracy education initiatives based on these findings, counteracting claims that democracy is an outside imposition.

PHF intends to build a low-power FM community radio station that will involve young people between the ages of 15 and 25. Young people will be key players in the operation of the station. Through process and product, the station will give a voice to disempowered youth and educate them in democratic practice and human rights. The station will serve as a platform for all segments of the society to express views, debate issues, and reflect on options. In a region with significant travel restrictions, it will extend PHF's reach to include the diverse populations of the northern West Bank region. The station will also create jobs.

Resources
www.brandeis.edu/ethics/Nablus/index.html
www.cctvcambridge.org/media/video/chyme/index.html
Creative Approaches to Coexistence, Reconciliation, and Development

Brandeis Resources and Projects

Creative Approaches to Coexistence and Reconciliation is an action/research initiative based in the Slifka Program in Intercommunal Coexistence at Brandeis University. It explores the ways in which cultural traditions and the arts can be crafted to bridge differences and mediate conflicts. Through fellowships, consultancies, and residencies, we collaborate with artists who work in divided communities to strengthen, document, and reflect on their practice, and we share resulting knowledge with others.

Knowledge Sharing

Creative Resources for Coexistence and Reconciliation

www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence

A virtual resource center providing access to a wealth of knowledge about creative approaches through chapters, articles, working papers, portfolios, syllabi, reports, and links to related resources.

Creative Approaches Resource & Design Teams

Staff, affiliated artists, cultural workers, and development and peacebuilding practitioners comprise multidisciplinary teams that partner with organizations working in conflict regions to integrate cultural work and the arts into the design of diverse development and peacebuilding initiatives.

Handbook for Policy Makers


The Arts of Building Peace

A recurring course at Brandeis University open to students and community members.

Projects

CHYME – Community Histories by Youth in the Middle East, 2000–2002

A partnership among Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian organizations. Youth workers from all three societies learned a new media-based process, Digital Storytelling, and advised each other on how to make the stories accessible to audiences throughout the region.

Dialogue in Diasporas, 2005–

Building on the experience of Brandeis’s Arab-Jewish and Indian-Pakistani dialogues, we are now supporting a new effort to facilitate dialogue among Armenians, Azeris, and Turks. Participants currently living in Boston, New York, and Washington, DC are generally unable to be in contact or conversation in their home regions.

Global Partnership for Education, 2001

A skill-building institute led by the African-American cultural worker and musician Jane Sapp for community educators and coexistence workers from Grenada, Haifa, and refugee communities in Boston.

Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts, 2002–2005

A major international fellowship program involving theatre artists, musicians, filmmakers and visual artists working in South Africa, Burundi, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and New Zealand. Fellows explored theories of reconciliation, documented their arts-based programs in conflict regions, and reflected on the ethical dimensions of their work.


A series of gatherings for theatre artists, peacebuilding practitioners, and scholars to learn from each other and exchange cutting-edge theory and practice. The series, a collaboration with Theatre Without Borders and Coexistence International, will lead to an anthology documenting the state of the art.

www.brandeis.edu/go/CreateCoexistence
Hizkias Assefa is the founder and co-director of the African Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Network in Nairobi, Kenya and has been engaged in second-track diplomacy and grass-roots peacebuilding around the world. He is Professor of Conflict Studies at the Conflict Transformation Graduate Program at Eastern Mennonite University and Distinguished Fellow at the Institute of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.

Mark Auslander is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Director of the interdisciplinary Master's program in Cultural Production, and Florence Kay Fellow in African Arts and Aesthetics at Brandeis. He is a sociocultural anthropologist with strong interests in political and symbolic processes. His principal ethnographic research has been in Eastern Zambian Ngoni communities and among African American families in rural Georgia, USA.

Kim Berman is a printmaker and educator who in 1991 founded Artist's Proof studio in South Africa, a community-based art center for teaching printmaking skills to black artists.

Jessica Berns is the program manager for Coexistence International, a component of the Slika Program at Brandeis, where she is responsible for the development and implementation of CI's strategy and programs. Jessica holds a master's degree in Law and Diplomacy from The Fletcher School at Tufts University and a B.A. in Spanish from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Cynthia E. Cohen is director of the Creative Approaches to Coexistence and Reconciliation initiative and international collaborations for the Slika Program in Intercommunal Coexistence at Brandeis. She has facilitated coexistence efforts involving participants from the Middle East, the United States, Central America, and Sri Lanka. She holds a Ph.D. in Education from the University of New Hampshire, and a Masters in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Ly Daravuth is a visual artist, art historian, and curator who was born in Cambodia and left as a refugee in 1980. He emigrated to France and eventually studied art history and visual arts at the Sorbonne. In 1995, Ly returned to Cambodia where he co-founded Reyum, a gallery and arts school. He lectures in art history at the Faculty of Archeology of the Royal University of Fine Arts.

Nicholas Kotei Djanie is a master drummer, dancer, teacher and performer with an impressive record of performances and collaborations in Ghana and other African countries. He has led drumming workshops with Hutu and Tutsi youth in Rwanda and Burundi in conjunction with Search for Common Ground and worked for the Drum Café, leading drumming sessions in corporate and social service settings in South Africa. He is a percussionist who also plays the ateneteben flute, xylophone (gyile), ashiwa, cow horn and two-stringed calabash guitar.

Jonathan Fox is the director of the School for Playback Theatre and co-director of Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts. He taught for ten years on the faculty of the State University of New York and regularly serves as guest faculty at many institutions.

Beverly Hosking is an international Playback Theatre trainer based in New Zealand. She founded Wellington Playback Theatre in 1987 and was a member of playback theatre companies in Sydney and Wellington for 15 years. Trained in psychodrama and theatre, she currently works as a counselor, group worker, and consultant trainer.

Jane Sapp is a cultural worker who engages with disenfranchised urban & rural communities in the United States. She is a powerful, highly-regarded performer, songwriter, recording artist, & educator. As an educator, Jane Sapp has developed community-based cultural development programs to help the silenced find their voices through arts.

Mohammad Sawalha is a professor of Linguistics and Translation at An-Najah University in Nablus and the founder and director of the Palestinian House of Friendship, a non-governmental organization that develop constructive activities for young people in Nablus and engages in democracy and human rights education among university students. Professor Sawalha’s current research is on the changing meanings of words in Palestine as a window to understanding the transformations within Palestinian society under occupation.

Stompie Selibe was born in Soweto, South Africa to Tswana and Sotho parents. He trained as an art teacher in the late 90's is currently a printmaker, teacher, musician, music healer, and speaker of seven African languages. He works in various communities using art and musical performance as a tool for healing, with particular focus on the impact of HIV/AIDS.

Lena Siachmujjider is a musician and cultural facilitator and an experienced radio and print journalist who directs Studio Ijambo, a radio station affiliated with Search for Common Ground in Burundi. She has over fifteen years of experience as a producer, editor and journalist with media outlets in Burundi, South Africa, Ghana and the United States. Lena is an accomplished percussionist.

Wen-ti Tsen is muralist, graphic designer and visual artist based in Boston. As a Millennial Artist in Washington state, he constructed a public installation bringing together Native, Mexican, Japanese, and European American residents to revisit their shared history and imagine a new future. His murals in Boston’s Chinatown highlight Asian American culture and history.