

# **Working Paper Series n°4:**

## **Arts, Peace and Conflict**



**Satirical, propaganda and resistance arts as  
means to address individual and collective need  
for recognition in time of conflict and in post-  
conflict societies**

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## **Introduction**

This working paper addresses the following issue: What is the relationship between the individual need for recognition and the collective need to find reconciliation in times of conflict (open or repressed such as in dictatorial societies) and in post-conflict societies?

These are not contradictory. Indeed, reconciliation processes through history entail dealing with the individual expression of suffering and the institutionalized reception of it by truth and reconciliation commissions and fact-finding processes. In these processes, the individual expression meets the collective need to have trauma recognized.

However, such reconciliation processes are institutionalized despite the opposition which can exist between the two voices. Can communities reconcile when individual voices, as a means to grieve, put blame on another portion of the society? What role should be given to these individual expressions? When they take the form of art pieces, do they pose a threat or do they represent a safeguard that can ensure the existence of the community as a group?

This paper is at the crossroads of transitional justice, peace building, and the analysis of the role of arts in societies dealing with trauma issues. It does not intend to address art as a means to overcome sources of conflict. It will more specifically address the dynamics between the individual and the collective need for recognition and to voice suffering in the aftermath or in a conflict through specific examples satirical and resistance art. Of course, it can be argued that this process may result in avoiding further conflict.

After recalling traditional forms of reconciliation mechanisms and their limitations, this paper will explore the question at stake through examples from works of cartoonists and other artists using satirical art. Finally, the paper will explore how these artistic voices are not necessarily opposed to a unified society, but may play a positive role in guaranteeing such cohesion.

## **I- Reconciliation mechanisms and their shortcomings**

Much has been written on transitional processes in the aftermath of a conflict, opposing mostly government forces and citizens, but not exclusively. The aim of such processes usually entails establishing a balance between recording past human rights violations and resolving the conflict to lead the society towards reconciliation.

Various mechanisms attempting to achieve such goal can be accounted for:

- Criminal prosecutions in national or international settings

Such prosecutions usually imply selectivity. While selectivity is not per se a problem, it still entails having perpetrators walking free. Money and time are another problems, especially in countries transitioning from a conflict, where the resources are not fully recovered. Willingness of the authorities to complete the process and lack of authenticity of the investigations are other examples of shortcoming that can affect this type of process.

- Truth and reconciliation commissions

In this case, there are notable limitations: only some witnesses will be heard by the commission; words and public address are not always the most appropriate way for an individual to express himself or herself, because of fear or lack of knowledge on how to do so; amnesties are sometimes granted in cases where the mandate of the commission is to uncover the truth, in order to get the perpetrators testify. However, what some victims want is justice.

Another limitation common to these mechanisms is the perception that only a portion of the society is being prosecuted, even though in civil wars, both parties see themselves as victims. Feeling of victors justice is always a risk.

In this context, the role of art has been analyzed to see if a balance could be genuinely achieved. In cases where voices that could not be heard in reconciliation processes where the need to forget has taken over, art gives room for expressing what could not be expressed.

## **II- The importance of individual voices in reconciliation processes**

This talk aims at covering different type of contentious situations: situations that are part of the past, as in the case of Rwanda; ongoing, for example Syria; or ongoing in a less obvious way than open conflicts, for example the anti-war, anti-establishment and anti-capitalist art of **Banksy**, a graffiti-artist based in the United Kingdom.

*Napalm*

<http://www.banksy-art.com/oeuvres-art.html>

Banksy is an example that seems to be moving the debate away from the question of post-conflict or in-conflict societies, but, even though he is an outsider to the conflict, he either voices concerns about situations that implicate him (anti-capitalist art work), or points to other people's concerns involved in the conflict, as in the case of Israël and the Palestinian territories.

*Art Attack – Wall close to Qalandiya – July 2005*  
<http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/0,,1543331,00.html>

Christmas card – 2012

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/18/banksy-christmas-card\\_n\\_4468517.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/18/banksy-christmas-card_n_4468517.html)

Artistic and political movements such as political cartoonism are at the core of the question of how a society can live with a memory of its history, or without it. The animation media, for example *Waltz with Bashir*, creates a welcomed distance allowing for self-reflection. In *Waltz with Bashir*, the main character, Ari Folman, realizes in 2006 that he remembers nothing of his time in the Israeli Defence Forces in 1982 during the Lebanese Civil War. Later, memories will come back to him of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, which he thinks he repressed as a result of feeling guilty, as if it was him, and not the Lebanese Christian Phalanges militia members, who had perpetrated the acts. How sustainable can society be, if, like Ari Folman, its members obliterate what happened to them, or suddenly remember?

*Waltz with Bashir*, 2008

<http://waltzwithbashir.com/gallery.html>

In another type of situations – namely in the aftermath of a conflict – how can art addresses the remaining suffering and what role does it fill, for example giving a voice to victims. Different examples can be put forward:

- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has a very complex victim reparation and assistance regime (reparations ordered by the ICC and assistance from the Trust Fund for Victims) which allows for collective reparation. The question of these collective reparation to take the form of museums or other memorial sites is contemporaneous
- In Rwanda, *Upright Men* is a project initiated by the visual artist Bruce Clarke and the group Upright Men. They wanted to pay a tribute to victims in Rwanda by painting tall figures on memorial sites in Rwanda, representing disappeared individuals and giving them dignity. According to the description of the project on its website, « these figures are the guardians of our collective memory.

*Photomontage sur l'Eglise de Rwamagama*

<http://www.uprightmen.org/>

- In April 2014, so ten years after the genocide took place, the Dutch photographer **Pieter Hugo** went to Rwanda on the request of *Creative Court*, an arts organization based in The Hague, in The Netherlands. He traveled to Rwanda to photography survivors and perpetrators of the genocide, together.

*Jean-Pierre Karenzi (perpetrator)*

*Viviane Nyiramana (survivor)*

[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/04/06/magazine/06-pieter-hugo-rwanda-portraits.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/04/06/magazine/06-pieter-hugo-rwanda-portraits.html?_r=0)

Sometimes, art pieces are the only way individuals have to voice their suffering. This paper will take the example of political “cartoonism”, very present and on which the international community focuses. **Cartooning for Peace** is an initiative born in October 2006 after a fatwa had been release against the Danish cartoonist who had represented the Prophet Muhammad. The project was launched at the UN headquarters in New-York : a two-days conference organized by Koffi Annan who brought together 12 political cartoonists with the purpose of « unlearning intolerance ». An exhibition was also organized in various places in the world, where cartoons were shown to the public.

*Je ne dois pas dessiner Mahomet, Plantu*

<http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2006/11/09/ce-que-plantu-ne-doit-pas-dessiner/>

One of the cartoonists that participated to this initiative is **Ali Ferzat**, from Syria, who has been persecuted by Bashir al-Assad's men (they broke his hands in an attack on 25 August 2011). Ali Ferzat speaks of his drawings as satires to depict dictators who use oppression against people. His wish is that they will give people hope that these dictators are "empty", and courage to criticize the power in place.

<http://joemurraystudio.com/1277/april-26-2012/>

<http://www.cultureandconflict.org.uk/projects/ali-ferzat/>

In the case of artists such as Ali Ferzat, "cartoonism" is a form of resistance art opposing the power.

**Willie Bester** is a South African artist born in 1956 in Montagu, a small town 150 km from Cape Town, South Africa. When he was 10 years old, his family was forcibly removed in accordance with the Group Areas Act. Bester soon had to leave school to help the family economically. He uses his art to express a political conscience. His art is his way of remaining political.

<http://www.contemporary-african-art.com/contemporary-african-art.html#sthash.qz6CZPi2.dpbs>

"People have built up a resistance to anything that addresses the psyche of mankind or people or themselves. I believe that we must protest against that which is wrong. There is no form of escape; remaining apolitical is a luxury that South Africans simply cannot afford."

History shows that the voice of one person expressed through artistic means is sometimes regained by the group, or utters the concerns of a group. A good example is **Diego Rivera**, a Mexican painter who lived from the end of the 19th century until 1957. He developed techniques of *fresco*, namely mural painting, that helped establishing the Mexican mural movement. His murals dealt with Mexican society and reflected the country's 1910 Revolution. As in the case of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, the mural works of Diego Rivera are an expression of the trauma experienced by a nation in a conflict as it tries to redefine its collective identity. The artist, through his work, makes a statement about emotions of a community he is not necessarily a part of.

*Indian Warrior, 1931*

<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/288/3227>

Finally, **Ai Weiwei** is a Chinese visual artist who lives under travel ban since he was incarcerated on charges of tax evasion and online dissemination of pornography and bigamy. Ai Weiwei is clear about the aim of his artwork: there is no aim. The perverse intentions attributed to him by the Chinese authorities do not stand: how can nudity be inappropriate?, is his answer. His artwork contains another truth than the one supported by the authorities, the truth of Ai Weiwei. The wave of support he received from the Chinese people is unprecedented in this country: he received 1.5 million dollars from the public, who wanted to contribute to the tax bill. People also posted pictures of themselves naked on the internet, in a tribute to Ai Weiwei being accused of indecency by the government.

*One picture from the naked series*

<http://www.jotdown.es/2014/06/como-acabar-de-una-vez-por-todas-con-el-porno/ainakedwithfriends/>

**II- Concluding remarks**

The fact that the opposition is taking place through artistic means allows for all voices to be heard; at least those who want to. Victims and opponents cannot be seen as one

homogenous entity. In this respect, art is a perfect media as it allows for individualities to express themselves.

Civilian society is allowed to play an important role in the aftermath of the conflict, without rules or institutions dictating the terms of the intervention.

In the aforementioned cases, addressing the issue of the coexistence of groups in societies through art allows :

- to capture and influence collective memory of conflict and trauma;
- to participate to the record of human rights abuses;
- to tell stories of others in the conflict;
- to documente the past;
- to inform a society about what needs to be addressed. When psychology might not be the best way, art can give access to what people think they are. From this, initiatives can be set up to re-build the collective life;
- to bring social change, raise awareness, and empower individuals and communities.

In other words, art offers a common expression that transcends differences: my story is the story of my country, therefore it is your story as well.

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