

British Council  
**Evidence Session: Culture to Build Resilience to  
Radicalisation in MENA**  
24 January 2017

**Committee Members**

*David Warburton (Chair)*

*Baroness Hodgson*

*Lord Purvis*

*Baroness Suttie*

**Witnesses**

*Dr Bernadette Buckley, Convenor, MA Art and Politics, Goldsmiths, University of London*

*Prof David Cotterrell, Professor of Fine Art, Director of Research and Development, College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton*

*Stephen Stenning, Director Culture and Development, British Council*

*Lois Stonock, Independent Researcher, Curator and Cultural Strategist, Founder, LR Stonock Consultancy and Create Associates*

**Chair**

Hopefully we will get some more people joining us in a minute. People should come in and out throughout, and we may both want to go out to vote. There are a couple of votes. There is one potential vote for me and maybe votes for you as well, so we may have to run away and come back again. We will see how it goes. Some people are due to come for all of this, so they should be here in a second, and others will come and go because there is so much on at the moment.

I should say hello, thank you and welcome. Thank you for coming. We do have two hours, but we do not have to be two hours and we can be longer than two hours. It is very flexible and depends on you, what you want to talk about and how things open up. I should say this is a formal session, which means it is all being recorded and will go on the internet. It will serve to form part of the inquiry that we are doing and will be presented to the Government and others, so it will be useful. If you want, or if you are able, to provide written evidence as well that would be great, which we will pass on to someone from the British Council, and they will load it onto the website and incorporate in the whole.

The minutes, of course, will be all public so everybody knows what nonsense I am talking. We will ask each of you, if that is okay, to say a few words at the beginning or as much as you like. It can perhaps be five minutes or so – or longer if you like or whatever you like. Then we will ask questions. We have got three main topics, if I can find them. One is about the impact and the role of culture and the arts.

What is that? Is that me? Oh, no, that is me.

**Dr Bernadette Buckley**

It was nice meeting you anyway.

**Chair**

I will be about eight minutes; I am really sorry. I will be back. Talk amongst yourselves.

*Sitting suspended.*

*On resuming –*

**Chair**

Apologies. That should not happen again. I was saying that there are three different topics that we can ask you about. One is about the assumptions of the impact of the role of arts and culture, and then we will talk about whether arts and culture can work alongside governments and local authorities, and how you can use them to change policy and so on. Then it is what is going on now: current strategies and current interventions, and how our organisations respond to the situation.

Dr Bernadette Buckley, I shall say for the record that you are the convenor of arts and politics at Goldsmiths, and you joined the department in 2007. Before that you were a lecturer in contemporary art theory and practice at Newcastle University. Before that you were head of education and research at the John Hansard Gallery at Southampton University. Amongst many other things you are a board member of Tate Papers and the Journal for Museum Education. You are currently, I think, doing a doctorate in research into the ontology of curating.

**Dr Bernadette Buckley**

No, somebody else is doing that. I am overseeing it.

**Chair**

You are overseeing it. I was going to say, ‘Have you not done one?’ Welcome and over to you.

**Dr Bernadette Buckley**

I am not sure how much I can say in five minutes, but I suppose I wanted to start by questioning some of the underlying premises of the whole strategy. First of all, I know that you have addressed some of these issues in previous sessions. I do not really want to reiterate too much of what has been said, but I have read the first evidence session, where Professors Abbas, Joffé and Sedgwick made similar points to do with issues around the use of terms like radicalisation and extremism. Joffé in particular wanted to make a distinction between radicalism and extremism, and so I would concur with that. I would also bring to it another perspective, which is to do with where art comes into the picture here.

From the perspective of many artists that I work with or that I know in different MENA countries, the problem is they are not so much interested in attempts to *de*-radicalise. They are more trying to radicalise. They say, ‘What we need is more radicalisation not less.’ That is one issue. When you are talking about art, you are often talking about an attempt to *increase* people’s capacity to become *more* radically engaged or talking about understandings of art as a potentially radical practice. So this approach is a little out of sync with some of the assumptions that the APPC’s strategy seems to start from.

In addition to that I would also want to say that the strategy paper seems to again assume that art and politics are two separate things, and that art is something that is brought in after the event for

example, to try to deal with issues of poverty, deprivation or any range of social ills. Here is another one: that of ‘radicalisation’. This is in some ways to misunderstand art’s radical potential, and also to misunderstand the relationship between art and politics more broadly. Art is not some discrete, universal object that we appreciate from afar, contemplating it from a distance. In fact, we can’t be entirely sure *what* it is. Truth be told, none of us ‘experts’, I think, would offer a stable definition of what art is. Our concerns tend to be about *how* it is practised and about bringing together transversal *methodologies*, which are not focused on particular skills or maybe even on exhibition or display. The assumptions about art being brought in to try to attend to some kind of situation that is out of control are a hostage to fortune here.

Take for example, the Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Artists,, such as Yvonne Bucheim, who works in this ‘informal education project’, say that the central question is that they need to try to *radicalise* people, not to de-radicalise them. They need to try to radicalise them because they already live in circumstances that are very repressive. In the context of the Sisi Government, for example, people can experience their everyday lives as being more repressive now than it was under the Mubarak regime. For CILAS, the problem is how to create structures that allow them to build agendas in tandem with student-participants and not to impose agendas on them. That is, again, another basic critique that I would have of the strategy paper which seems to assume a top-down approach.

I would say we should scrap this agenda. In fact, what we should do is negotiate agendas in tandem with our colleagues in MENA. The language of the briefing paper that I have seen already, if not replete with words like ‘we’ and ‘they’, certainly has a fair smattering of them in it. What if we rethought that and instead started from a position of how we work together collectively to create new agendas that actually are of service to both us *and* our colleagues working in MENA, and not assume that there are those who are in need of redemption from their circumstances of poverty, potential radicalisation etc? Here in the UK we experience these issues too. We can *share* our resources here in order to think about how we can collaboratively and collectively tackle issues like this. For me that is also an important point of departure here.

CILAS, for example, is an organisation that was started from the bottom-up. The other examples that I am mentioning today are also mostly those of DIY strategies. They are mostly bottom-up, self-organised groups of people who stress the need for autonomy, agency and collective thinking, and this is one of them. CILAS started out as an NGO. Again, the briefing paper talks about the need to work more closely with government. For these activists and artists in Cairo, the issue is that government is too close and is often able to obstruct their work. In this instance for example, CILAS had funding from the Ford Foundation, which never got through to them. It was stopped at governmental level. To combat this, CILAS had to change their status from being an NGO to being a private company. The status change was necessary to ensure that they were not viewed as an object of suspicion by the Government, which of course is all too ready to interpret artists and leftist thinkers as being extremists or being, perhaps, part of the Muslim Brotherhood.

So for these activist/ artists, their whole way of thinking is, ‘How do we tread this thin line between being able of doing what we want to do and staying out of the eye of the Government.’ They do that by employing strategies of commoning and collectivity. The starting point is: ‘we assume, an equality of intelligence here. We do not exert syllabi on people.’ In fact, they do not even call themselves ‘teachers’. They are a mixture of fellows and students. When students go through the one-year degree, they also become fellows; and so the project continues as a self-reflexive, self-replicating collaborative strategy. It doesn’t revolve around something called ‘art’ but importantly, some of the people who drive this venture are artists.

From my perspective, it is not so much about thinking what the *forms* are that we can single out here and use, for example, to talk about ‘reconciliation’ and ‘extremism’. The experience of CILAS would suggest that to tackle any of these issues in a direct way is to embarrass or to silence people in the process. So CILAS tackles these issues very obliquely and only when the students that they work with *themselves suggest* that this is an issue that needs to be dealt with.

The school works around a tri-semester system. The core semester at the beginning is organised *in discussion* with students, and then students go through a modular system first looking at theoretical practices, and then shifting into working in practical circumstances. All of the students have to dedicate at least 60 hours to community service, but it is, unlike our university systems in the UK, intrinsically open-ended. The students that do these degrees aren’t a narrow insular group but are also joined by visitors who come for a day, an afternoon or an evening to take one-off classes. They make tea together. They hang out together. It is a very open-ended structure in comparison with the normative education system that we have here.

This to me seems like a really interesting example of a radical educative practice in which art is but one of the strategies that is being employed, and in which different expertise, and participants are coming together in order to think about: ‘How do we build a different kind of environment for ourselves?’ The emphasis is not on teaching or on instructing or on art but on building *collaborative* strategies where people have to play a role and where there are no passive people sitting at the back. These principles of collaborative structures are also employed in other settings.

For example, this is the Israeli Centre for Digital Art. In Holon, there is a large Ethiopian community, and because Ethiopian Jews are very readily identifiable by virtue of their darker skins, their presence in the area very quickly became racialised. From the Israeli Government perspective there have been waves of immigration into Israel since the late 1940s, and now there are successive generations of black Jewish, or Arab Jewish immigrants who, again from a government perspective, are not ‘integrating’ into society.

Here you have an arts centre that provides an infrastructure and a place for disgruntled, ‘alienated’ youth who live in the area and have nothing to do but hang out. Art is not so much the object and the focus of a project like this, but it is providing a kind of infrastructure that facilitates and builds solidarity amongst people whose very existence is under threat. Here, if you look in this slide at the spaces that the Centre has built, they are very makeshift. So the project stresses this DIY culture – the value of people organising themselves and making things happen for themselves, rather than being say, the subject of an exhibition. All of the structures here that you are looking at are on wheels so that they can be rolled around and used in different ways by different people.

The emphasis is continually on flexibility. Just having Wi-Fi available for lots of teenagers who have nothing to do, is itself a draw and a kind of mechanism which allows people to come together to talk and communicate – as pointed out by Mai Omer who is one of the artists involved in this project. In a sense the project might sound like ‘social work’, but this is driven by artists and run by artists. They are very conscious of the fact that the young Ethiopian community, for example, do not want to be ‘pictured’. Immigrant Ethiopians are very sensitive about the way that they are presented in Israeli society, so some of the issues that arise here, in a sense, are embedded in an aesthetic question. It is not this huge separation between the political and the aesthetic. Before they had established this space to work in, the project was organised around the use of bicycles. The artists and the art centre did not have any money so they used a bicycle as the basic mechanism around which they would conduct conversations with young first or second generation Ethiopians.

This slide, on the other hand, demonstrates that art is not ‘naturally’ positioned to engage with de-radicalisation agendas. In this instance, it is actively seeking either to radicalise itself or to radicalise others. This artist, Hafez Omar was the director of the al-Mahatta Gallery – one of the

first exhibition spaces in Ramallah. But Hafez left the gallery because he felt that, as an NGO, it was playing to *neoliberal* agendas, which he and his colleagues and fellow artists in Ramallah had not set. He wanted to get away from that, and so he became a poster designer. He talks about how one of the issues for him as a school child during the first Intifada was walking to school and discovering that the graffiti on the walls outside the school was offering him a better education – not the schools which, he felt, did not want to acknowledge Palestinian history, but were always sidestepping it.

Hafez stresses the need to sidestep western agendas and employ very simple tools and strategies to speak to and with people about their own histories. He was very influenced by Naji Al-Ali, the cartoonist who came up with ‘Handala’, who I am sure that all my colleagues are all aware of. You cannot overemphasise the importance of that little cartoon-child-witness to violence in Palestine. All of the Palestinian diaspora have Handala keyrings and Handala cards. This is an image that pulls at people’s heartstrings immediately. Hafez has deployed the same technique to create posters that sympathise with Palestinian hunger strikers in prisons. It is an issue that is close to his heart as his own brother has been in prison for eight years now.

So you can see how a visual meme like this very quickly spreads. The slide also shows a Malaysian-produced visual echo of Hafez’s poster. Again, the point is here that you cannot simply count on art being a ‘natural ally’ in a deradicalisation agenda, or a ‘public good’ to be dispensed at will in order to ‘fix’ things. You really have to try to understand the degree to which the aesthetic is always already part of the political. As people who perhaps know a little bit about art-making practices, we understand the degree to which artists can even be confused with terrorists.

For example, looking at the last 8-10 years, one might point for example to someone like Pyotr Pavlensky, a Russian artist who has nailed his scrotum to the floor in Red Square, and has burned down the wooden doors of the FSB offices. He has wanted his work to be understood precisely as *terrorism*. That is why I am calling for you to rethink the premise on which this strategy is based, and asking for a much more collaborative strategy, which is *co-designed with our colleagues* in different parts of the world, and which will allow us to *institute for a different kind of collective action*.

## **Chair**

Thank you very much. That was very interesting and refreshing.

## **Dr Bernadette Buckley**

Could I show you one more thing, sorry? Could we go through Jonas Staal? This is a Dutch artist called Jonas Staal, who has for some years been creating alternative parliaments. I think it is a really good example of how there can be no assumption as to the separation between art and politics. Staal started looking at the Clearing House list of officially declared terrorists, and he has been assembling them using art as an infrastructure or an umbrella under which this kind of assembly can occur. So for example, the Tamil Tigers, the IRA and the PKK have all attended these alternative parliaments. So this is an example of art employing radicalised democratic strategies in order to create new understandings about governance.

This most recent alternative parliament was built in Rojava, which in the British press is not usually referred to as Rojava but Northern Syria. Often, we hear that Syria is under attack and Northern Syria is a Kurdish area. Yes, of course there are a lot of Kurds there but there are also a lot of nomadic tribes. There are also different nomadic peoples there. Staal has worked for several years with Bedouin tribes and with Kurdish peoples in Rojava to create an alternative parliament there. That is what you are looking at here. It is intrinsically open structure. It is organised around these

iron arches, which have their principles imprinted on them – principles like communalism, confederalism and feminism.

The Rojavans have set up universities and instituted rules that all public institutions must be co-directed by one male and one female. These are really interesting, simple principles which ‘we’ in the West could learn hugely from. The organisation of the parliamentary space is necessarily circular, but the lectern at the centre is off centre and has a hole in the middle. You might think that is a relatively insignificant detail, but it asserts a non-hierarchical principle - the speaker is never at the centre. The principles of collaboration and co-instituting are even embedded in the architecture.

Work remains to be done – for instance currently Staal cannot get back in so the structure is not finished. It has got a public park around it but it does not yet have facilities, and the fighting in the region is making it difficult to complete the project, but this is a massively ambitious project which does not make a distinction between aesthetic and political but which acts out of a principle of creating solidarity. Thank you.

### **Chair**

Thank you. We have got a long way to go before we get one of those here.

### **Dr Bernadette Buckley**

We can try.

### **Chair**

Thank you very much. Professor David Cotterrell is the professor of fine art and director of arts and humanities research and development at Brighton University. David is an installation artist working across a wide range of media, to explore social and political issues. Your work has been commissioned and shown extensively in museums, galleries and public spaces across Europe, North America and Asia. Over to you, please.

### **Prof David Cotterrell**

Thank you. I will keep it brief. Thank you for allowing me to present to this APPG. For me, my experience is not directly rooted in the MENA region, but I think there are some real parallels and some relevance to the issues which you are discussing within that context. I have been working as an artist engaged in the challenge of urbanism and macro-planning of cities and urban developments since the late 1990s. My awareness of the tragic consequences of societal polarisation and potentially radicalisation within that, and certainly the failure of systems of governance, occurred in late 2007 when I was deployed as war artist to Helmand Province in Afghanistan. I travelled with the joint forces medical group and with 40 Commando through the south, and I saw the devastating aftermath of a society that had lost the systems of governance that might protect themselves against this dramatic polarisation. Obviously, it is the most extreme form when you have got militarised institutionalised violence being enacted across the landscape. It is sensational and it appears to be an entirely altered state of reality.

I made work considering this and trying to understand what it was that could cause the empathetic failure that allows for individuals to take up arms against each other and for people to objectify the other to the point where violence can be seen as legitimised, either through some moral mandate which is collective, or through some complete failure of understanding of the impact of your actions on the other. It is very hard to look at that in isolation. I returned to Afghanistan in the

north in 2008, and I spent time in the UK looking at the care pathway and other related activities, and looked at how I might be able to find a relationship between that exoticised context and my own.

I came to realise that conflict is not necessarily a state. It's not a binary oppositional sense of reality, but it is simply an area on a scale of disengagement, of complete polarisation, and the aggressive collapse of systems, which protect us from that. Rather than seeing violence and war as foreign in the same way as we might see radicalisation or extremism as foreign or a situation of the other, we can see them as something that we might have symptoms relating to in a situation that is ostensibly peaceful, well governed and protected against those things. This transition through to a situation of emergency and drama is something that can be iteratively developed towards, long before we actually find we have the headline that suggests there is a declared war or there is a declared threat of extremism or violence.

When I returned to the north of Afghanistan, I was then looking at post-conflict landscapes. Ostensibly Kabul was much safer than Helmand, and there I saw the world's NGOs, the World Bank, the British Government and donor organisations all actively there looking to try and build peace, in a landscape which was only a few hundred miles away from where there were active tactical engagements between foreign armies and the Taliban. I saw, I suppose, a situation of extreme threat to the NGOs. They were attempting to try and engage with rebuilding society as outsiders or supporting those inside that would wish to do the same thing. They were looking at to try and reinstate the empathetic link to societal solidarity and the systems that would protect the individual, and the sense of collective ownership of landscape and government and nation.

At the same time they were struggling because at that point, it was too late. The walls had been built. HESCO boundaries protected the British Embassy. People travelled by armoured car. They had security escorts with them, and their ability to step on the ground and to meet the people they were supposed to represent and to engage with was limited. They could do it through intermediaries but it was very hard for them to be able to achieve that on their own, and to some extent it was always going to be based on assumptions, second-hand information and analyses, which would not be their own. They could not possibly relate to the pluralism that you might hope to understand if you were looking at a place that was not subject to threat.

In recent years I have been going to Pakistan. In a way, I think of it as a pre-conflict area. It may not, hopefully, enter the polarised, uniformed wars which we have seen raging across the Middle East, North Africa and Afghanistan, but has many of the same pressures. It is a centre of global economic forces. It is a centre of religious tension and political tension too. It is somewhere, which has many internal struggles, but also subject to all sorts of interest from the rest of the world. When I was there I was struck by several things. One of them was that I was there just after the Peshawar massacre.

You may remember there was an awful massacre in a school in the north. At that point, there was a natural response by the Government to build walls around every school and every university. They were to be built high and topped with barbed wire. Diktats were given as to how many armed guards and sangars were needed to protect each school, and, of course, they were built.

It occurred to me at that point the tragedy of it. I went to speak at universities and met with various NGOs while I was there, and I was aware that nobody could argue legitimately for not having the wall. In the same way it is very hard for us to argue in Kabul against travelling in armoured cars.

It is very hard for us to argue against disengaging to the point where we are receiving information from a distance, because of the institutional risk and the risk to those that we have a duty of care over.

It was also hard to imagine a situation where anyone had the confidence to reduce the size of the walls, once the threat had receded. I worked with the local community, and in between the university, the academics and the governments, and the people they were hoping to engage with, it became something that we mediated and managed, and something which was formalised rather than something that could naturally happen through a permeable societal space.

Going back to art and the question ‘What can artists do?’ This is something that I had to wrestle with. After being in Helmand Province there was a real sense of moral guilt about taking up space in a helicopter when probably people wanted plastic knives and forks. You are thinking, ‘How do I justify my role as an artist? What can art offer?’ I came to think there were several things that artists offer. For one thing, we are trained to be accountable for our own voice. We champion our own subjectivity. We cannot claim to be responsive to a brief or an organisation that is dealing with the complexities of the moral mandate, which we may have to rely on. We have to argue not only to defend the questions we are raising as our own, but also we have to ostensibly look to admit our subjectivity in a way that journalists, historians, social scientists and others may be aware of but of course will be trying to reduce.

Artists are there essentially representing one of many distinct voices within the pluralism of existence that we all have in our civilian lives. If we have enough artists and they offer enough contradictory views and voices, we might end up with something, which involves more of the fine-grained texture of understanding that we would hope to have in places that are not subject to traumatic pressures.

The second thing is that artists are engaged in empathy. If war is the absolute failure of empathy, or at least it can be seen as a symptom of the failure of empathy in the same way that radicalisation probably is not the cause of wars, it is probably a symptom of societal failure. The reason why people might get drawn towards an authoritarian group, a nationalistic group, a radical group or an extremist group, it is probably because the systems of governance which offer democracy or shared ownership of society are seen as not to be functioning effectively, or they may not be necessarily representative. There is a problem in that people have lost their stake with the empathetic space that allows people to feel that they are represented by the Government, and the Government’s actual empathetic engagement with them has been eroded.

Artists have to develop empathetic space between their audiences and their work. Their methods of research, which are diverse, are all engaged in attempting to try and find empathetic bridges between themselves and another. They try, in many different ways, to maintain the dialogues that are being lost when we build walls. Potentially, there are areas in Karachi where artists are the ones that are still representing the complexity of communities where the military cannot go. They could, if we had a place for them to be listened to, offer us insights that are far beyond remote studies that have been commissioned through academic institutions, social scientists and consultants.

The problem we have is that the arts’ engagement with humanity, with individuals, the representations, the insights and the contradictory understandings, which are honest but may be limited to specific views, are not being presented back to those that are trying to create policy that represents the complexity and works out how you can engage in landscapes that are infinitely complex. They are being shown to audiences. They might be seen as decorative. They might be seen as ways of offering catharsis to communities that are traumatised.

Rarely are they being put in front of DfID, the MoD or in front of parliamentary committees in such a way to actually challenge the choice of which questions we are asking of people and what are the real challenges of the ground in terms of understanding it. The root causes for societal failings and tensions might be leaning towards things, which we then realise from a distance, at the last minute,

are an increase in radicalisation or extremism. I am arguing potentially for arts to be seen as one of the many intellectual ways in which we can engage with finding out what the challenges are, rather than mitigating for the effects of the situation.

### **Chair**

Thank you very much. That is fascinating stuff.

### **Baroness Hodgson**

Did you engage with any of the women out there, in both countries?

### **Prof David Cotterrell**

In Helmand, I was in a military bubble, so the women I met were the helicopter pilots of the US Air Force and they were the doctors from the Royal Army Medical Corps. In the north, however, I gave a lecture at Kabul University and I was involved in the curation of the first Afghan contemporary art prize. There we had equal numbers of women and men involved, and we were able to engage in very careful dialogue in a shared space between women, men, artists and intellectuals and other disciplines. Of course it varies from village to village and region to region.

Even in Helmand Province, in Lashkar Gah, I met with a Danish group called CIMIC group, (which is Civil-Military Cooperation). I am sure you are familiar with this. They were going into Taliban controlled territory in order to support women's groups that were involved in crafts and other activities, and trying to find an outlet for them to reach an audience and to inspire other artists and other women in other parts of the country. It is complex but, of course, all of these landscapes are inhabited by both genders. It is just a matter of making sure there are safe spaces for dialogue to happen.

### **Chair**

Stephen is on home ground, as Director of Culture and Development at the British Council. He has led the work to set up a new £30 million cultural protection fund. Stephen joined the British Council as Director of Arts for MENA in 2011 based in Cairo, leading the British Council's art work in response to the so-called Arab Spring and setting up the strategy across the 17 countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Before that you were a playwright and director, a theatre director, a festival producer and on the board of various things. Welcome, over to you.

### **Stephen Stenning**

Thank you very much, and I am very excited about this, because I see it as an opportunity to highlight a different way of working and a different approach to international development. I would echo a lot of points that Bernadette and David made. In particular, artistic and creative approaches should be seen as one of a number of engagement strategies. Also, and probably more important, is to recognise context and co-designing with knowledge of what is going on. Offering support and doing that in an appropriate way. I have taken a slightly different approach to this, because, as you say, my training was as an actor and then working in the theatre as a director and writer and on large-scale, outdoor events. It is very much practice I am looking at. I am going to reflect on the sort of practice that I saw going on and the engagement that I witnessed in the Middle East, including examples mentioned in Bernadette's presentation and more that will be I suspect, in Lois's as well.

There are a few slides. I was aware of the set up, so I am not going to refer to them, but we can click through some images. At times I will mention something from them; if we are at the right

point when I do, great. The good news is that is the size of my book, so it should be quite quick. I cannot make five minutes, but I think I can make eight minutes, 32 seconds.

I joined the British Council as Director of Arts for the Middle East and North Africa based in Cairo in 2011. I had worked a lot internationally as an artist but I had never lived abroad. It was an amazing time to find yourself in Cairo. There was a glorious sense of post revolution optimism and an idea that there was a new order and future. There was a very different sort of radicalisation, if you like. There was a sense that everybody was an activist. There was an explosion of creativity and across North Africa an appetite for community and social engagement with artists to the fore. Every space, it appeared, was hosting a performance, a community celebration or an artistic event of some kind. I am not just taking about those recognised as artists, or even those who would describe themselves as artists but also activists and enthusiasts using creativity and art to connect or engage. There was the desire to express and be heard through one creative or artist means or another. As fascinating and, for me, even more exhilarating was that alongside that there was a really notable ambition and desire to get involved in social action and civic projects – again, by artists and activists but by young people generally.

There were and are some extraordinary projects that, if I had time, I would love to highlight, but broadly they were recording and celebrating the popular movements and, in some cases, revolutions. There were very intricate and ambitious community action projects, and some very complex regeneration projects led by art and/or artists. It was very clear the British Council's arts work needed to be different. It needed to be relevant. It needed to focus on that context.

There were two foundations for that change programme. One was using the fact that in most countries we had been there for about 80 years, and secondly 95% of the staff was local with incredible connections. At the same time we also commissioned a large-scale piece of research that was carried out by Sultan Barakat from the Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit of the University of York. That looked at artists' practice and social change in Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

That piece of research can be made available afterwards alongside *The Voice of the People* – a thought piece that came from it. The result was that we worked with more grassroots activity and community-based organisations, and also connecting with different forms of support, artists and practitioners in the UK: those with socially engaged practice and those who use participatory practice in projects. Lois has written a great piece about that interaction.

Additionally, it meant working with not so much art as a product but the ability of art and creativity to engage people and transform people. That really resonated, for me, because of the work that I had done before. As a theatre director I was always looking not just to be working with those who chose to come into a building, but looking at how you can work with social care, health care and education.

The power of art to transform is generally recognised but often only harnessed when the 'chips are down'. When all else has failed. When young people are excluded from school and they cannot engage with them in any other way. It is when the rates of reoffending for addicts who have a custodial sentence get above 85%. It is when violence in prisons becomes unmanageable. Then artists and creative practitioners are asked to put together programmes. Bernadette touched upon the danger of seeing art coming in only at that point rather than planning for what creative engagement can give throughout. I was involved in work that became part of a powerful study, now about 20 years old, called *Use or Ornament: the social impact of participation in the arts*. Some of the things that it laid out as the benefits to the individual of participation were - building self-confidence, generating a sense of purpose and self-worth, encouraging self-motivation and reliance, and helping individuals to build stronger social and support networks. I note that those are

just about the same four things cited in the papers given at the previous sessions as what individual resilience looks like. That is no surprise; they are the same things you are seeking to do whether with excluded young people in Dundee or disaffected youth in Tunisia. You are working with and recognising the human experience, helping to give agency, a voice, helping people to find their place and that can contribute to community cohesion and social well-being.

Admittedly, those benefits can also be achieved by participation in other activities... sport, for example. We might point to Premier Skills a football programme in MENA and the work that does. However, there are some additional things that art brings with it. One is exploring and developing empathy, just as David was talking about. Another that we saw all the time in the Middle East was a way of looking at things with a slight remove, and that gives you licence and space to look at divergence and difference of opinions. I could give you any number of examples whether things that could not be talked about in another sphere can be talked about as part of the arts. Thirdly, it can allow you to model alternative realities... alternative versions of the present or alternative futures.

I will give a quick example, [*points to a picture of a dancer spinning on his head*] That was part of a breakdancing and hip hop project we did. That very picture was what was used on the front of the *Independent* when they did a big, seven-page article on it in 2014. The well-known broadcaster and journalist Sarfraz Manzoor wrote an excellent piece but the headline it was given went something along the lines of, 'Breakdancing diverting the young men of Tunisia from the killing fields of Iraq and Syria?' It was over simplistic and not terribly healthy to see things in those binary terms.

The thing I would highlight is the extraordinary work being done in Tunisia by our partner organisation Art Solutions. It is basically about opening up a space for young people including that physical space [*points out slide*] there with graffiti all over it – it is in Tunis but they go out and work all over Tunisia with hip hop music and street dance as a way of giving purpose and direction to young people. What we then brought to that by partnering with them and highlighted in the article, was connection with Hakeem Onibudo 'Mr Impact' – a choreographer from the UK. He worked with them on ways of using the form to tell their stories.

Their form of dance is talked about as a b-boy 'battle'. It was a shift to move from that competitive confrontational framework. There was an extraordinary power from that. Suddenly you used your dance skills to tell your own story. Then later we brought introduced them to Kate Scanlan, a choreographer, whose background is contemporary dance. She worked with the females and males in slightly different way by bringing in contemporary dance and opening up horizons. It was not just about different forms but different ways of understanding.

I will come back to the link with resilience. If I might, I will tackle it using other people's quotes, hiding behind the fact that I am not an academic. Charles Tripp is an expert in Middle Eastern Politics at SOAS. He came to Tunis as part of a big street arts event. Basically, his brief was just watching it and commenting on it. He wrote a wonderful report that you can make available as well, but there are just a couple of quotes. 'Artistic interventions capture the nature of struggle and provoke debate within a plural public.' 'By these means members of the public found their voices for the first time.' 'It opens up the potential of new ways of seeing the world and evaluating it.'

Finally, here is my nod towards the question of radicalisation. I was watching recently a TED talk by Manwar Ali, and I highlighted him because he is not an artist or, for that matter, someone you would look at and think him 'arty'. He does not make the case for art. He is not an artist. He is now a cleric; he was a jihadi. His talk is about what counters the pull of radicalisation, given his experience. He talks about that in great detail, but what he comes up with is the promotion of human values: of seeing and understanding the human experience.

Again, it is about promoting self-reliance and self-worth, and encouraging debate and exploration as a way of countering what he called, 'dogmatic authority'. 'How do you do that?' I would say most directly through the arts. Or as he puts it in his conclusion "encourage people to "create beautiful and/or useful things that will outlast us".

### **Chair**

Marvellous. Thank you very much. Last but not least, Lois, you are an independent researcher, curator, cultural strategist and founder of L R Stonock Consultancy and Create Associates. In 2016 Lois worked on a series of projects in the Middle East, focusing on the impact of artists and the search for new ways for them to tell the story of the conflict. You have worked in Beirut and showcased some work with Syrian artists, a research project and exhibition; previously you were responsible for the arts programme for Bloomberg Philanthropies, and you are on the non-executive board at Bold Tendencies. Over to you.

### **Lois Stonock**

Thank you. My perspective today is coming from a few areas. The artist that I met on this trip will be where most of my ideas are coming from. In 2015 I took a trip around the border of Syria, in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, to meet artists who were still very much engaged with what was happening in Syria. I met artists that were going back into Syria. I met one guy in Gaziantep who goes back every week into Aleppo to record music that he learnt as a child growing up. He came back into Turkey, and he recorded it and disseminated it around when he got back. What I am going to be talking about today is the opinions of those people that I met through various different projects and exhibitions that I curated, particularly around Syria.

I am going to be five minutes, and there are two main points that I really want to talk about today, from my experience of looking, listening and hearing from artists who are engaged and using the arts as way to get their stories out, and find new ways of communicating and staying in touch with each other and with what is happening in Syria at the minute. I have two points and two ways that I have seen that. I talk a lot about it in this piece, *We Built this City on Rock and Roll*, which we did with the British Council. The first point is about artists, out there, supporting free thinking by just being artists and through their practice. That is everything that David talked about. It is about artists having commitment to their surroundings and to ask questions of them. It is to be independent and not to have people to answer to or audiences that want them to say a certain thing at a certain time.

As David said, they are only accountable to themselves, and as a result that puts them in this brilliant position of being fantastic translators, negotiators and mediators between people from different backgrounds. That allows them to broker conversations in places that might not be possible otherwise.

One of the projects that I have been working with is the Syrian Mobile Phone Film Festival. This festival is very simple. It collates films that Syrian people have made on their mobile phones and some in Syria telling their stories. A lot of those come from women in particular who have remained in Syria looking after their families, and also films by Syrians in host communities. Some of it is slapstick and quite funny, but some of it is obviously quite painful, and it is a mechanism for those people to share their stories with each other.

What is unique about the festival structure is that it shows both in Syria and internationally. In Syria it functions as a way of bringing people together and allowing them to talk about things that they might not be allowed to talk about in open society for worrying that people will hear them,

censorship and their safety. Externally and internationally it is a way of providing a different view and a different opinion to what is happening in Syria.

That is the first point, which is artists as independent mediators showing art as a way of bringing in different perspectives, bringing different people together and looking at things in ways that they might not have looked at them otherwise. It is very much what David does in his work as well. I will add that many of the artists I met had just become artists post-2011, because being an artist represents freedom of speech. It represents the act of telling your story and someone wanting to listen. Huge numbers of people I interviewed had no formal training; they had no understanding of what art was in a Western context. It was about having a camera and having a voice and wanting to share it. I would say 60% of the people that I interviewed had become artists on leaving Syria. A lot of that is probably about being inspired by the posters and the interventions that the artists carried out through the revolution as well.

The second point was, particularly in refugee camps, that some of it was great and some of it was a bit dodgy, but it was where you could use art with a particular aim and a particular audience in mind to have a conversation. One of the examples of this is the use of forum theatre. I am not sure if you are aware of that, but it is a form of theatre where the audience can take part, though there might be an overall structure to it. I interviewed one girl in Kilis in Turkey, who was using it with a group of young boys. She said they were between eight and about 13, who were at risk of being radicalised. What they would do was to make a fake narrative about what future would be: 'What would you like to do? Would you like to go to school?' Then what the young men can do is, 'I would like to do this', or, 'I had a friend and this has happened.'

That format allowed a lot of young men to share stories about being approached by people, about sharing, how to deal with it, to come up with different strategies and to have a very safe space. When theatre directors and these theatre groups work in this space, it is a safe space. There are a certain set of rules that everyone is aware of when they come into it. There is a knowledge that whatever goes on in that space does not happen outside. It is a structure.

For me, I struggle with it. It is less about an individual artist in practice. It takes the methodology of what an artist does and makes it quite useful in a developmental context, to achieve a certain goal of building a conversation. It is very easy to see the impact of that and it is easy to see the results of it, but I do not want that to belittle the first point, which is that the nature of art is to be a mediator, be independent, be free thinking and do things that we cannot imagine, because that is how artists think. Those two things very much come up with all of the work that I have done. I wanted to end to say that I do not think this is a very easy thing to do, to work with art in these contexts. Artists are very difficult to work with, no offence intended.

### **Dr Bernadette Buckley**

No, we agree.

### **Lois Stonock**

That is a really good thing, and how you work with those artists is really important. One of the first questions that I was asked was, 'Where have you got this money from? We are not talking to you.' The reason I did it was because I started this research for the British Council over the summer. Some people would not talk to me because the money was coming from the British Council, but this was a way to have conversations that were outside the NGO funding. What artists do bring is a nuanced approach. They know their communities really well. They know it better than us and they know it better than the intermediaries, and it is invaluable. Needed with that as well are intermediaries to be able to match the artists with the communities and the materials that they need.

One of the things that I always think is the most brilliant thing about the British Council is its network of local people on the ground, like Stephen mentioned in Egypt. They are people that are really embedded and know the artists, why they work, where they work, how they work and how you can support that. It would be very easy to come up with a model where you bring in a theatre director who wants to take a certain approach, but actually that does not work and causes more problems. It is about using what you have got and supporting that.

The other thing is that they already have organic ecosystems. If you do not support the systems that are already there, then whatever you are doing to support it will not work or will not last, because it is not supported from the start. The other thing is to be very open to what art is, including mobile phones. This guy when I went to interview him gave me a rock, but it is what it is for them, at that moment, to be human and to share. There is a tendency, particularly within institutionalised structures around art and its role, to try and say what art is. A lot of the stuff that I saw was questioning that. In conclusion, I think those are the two ways that I felt quite strongly that I saw art intervening. It was like how David ended his talk. These are not necessarily the mechanisms to stop radicalisation. That has already happened. They are mechanisms to build conversations with people from the beginning so you do not get into that situation.

### **Chair**

Thank you very much.

### **Lois Stonock**

I think that was five minutes, but I also know I have a dry throat.

## **Q&A**

### **Chair**

You said that artists are hard to work with and that that is a good thing. In what way are they hard to work with, and why is that a good thing?

### **Lois Stonock**

It may be something that David said, which is that they are accountable to themselves. If you would go with an agenda and you would be like, 'We would quite like to work with you, and this is why we want to get there', you would have to be very careful in instrumentalising art and artists. Artists are brilliant, but as soon as you start to try and instrumentalise it, you struggle.

### **Stephen Stenning**

Some of the ways that artists are difficult to work with are really useful in terms of working in different ways, because those questions they will ask... why you want them to do it? and where the money is coming from? They are really useful... important things. Particularly when working in the Middle East, I remember the first event I was at, I was thoroughly enjoying myself, but a concerned colleague took me aside thinking I might be distressed... 'Are you alright?' It took me a while to work out what it was they were referring to, and I realised it was just because people were throwing questions at me like 'What is the hidden agenda', which it is quite easy to answer because the clue is in the name: the British Council. Creating art with people you get used to that. It is important you have to push all that out in order to create anything worthwhile, and that is a help.

**Prof David Cotterrell**

It is interesting that there is more risk involved working with artists than with consultants or others that might work to a brief. Because of that, the message that comes back from the artists could potentially reach audiences and command a hidden position within a debate. The Ministry of Defence, to allow me access to Helmand Province, showed me a standard contract, which would normally be issued to journalists. I crossed out the bit where the Ministry of Defence would own copyright over my images, and where they would have the right to censor or to decide what was made publically available. There was a profound difference in terms of the contract, but also issues about what I was allowed to witness and photograph, and that made it difficult because there was institutional risk for them.

When I came back it was possible that I could have said something that was highly critical and represent a position that was not endorsed by them, and they would have no ability to control that. But I was bound by my own code of ethics, as they were bound by theirs. I was bound as an academic and as an artist, but what it meant was that when I entered the public debate about censorship of British casualties and the way in which the British casualties had access to images of their own healthcare, it was something that I was taking ethical responsibility for in my view rather than appearing to be a puppet for the Ministry of Defence. It may be that I was going to say something that was difficult for them or to them, but it did mean that there was genuinely an additional voice added to that debate, and it was possible for me to take responsibility for whatever came back in terms of that opinion.

**Baroness Hodgson**

How did they respond to that?

**Prof David Cotterrell**

It was interesting. There was recognition at that time, and you may remember it was a time when journalists were not allowed to show documentation of British casualties in Afghanistan or in theatres of war. They were allowed to show documentation of foreign nationals who were injured, but not British. It was possible to see documentation of rehabilitation, but you would not find any journalist embedded with British troops showing somebody who had been injured on TV. The problem was, of course, at that point there was a lot of unexpected survivals, so we were beginning to become aware. Headley Court and the swimming pools nearby showed an awful lot of amputees coming back, and the society actually had a lot of injured soldiers.

The narrative as to how they got there, how that relates to the footage and the documentation of conflict that was allowed, was beginning to become problematic. The Ministry of Defence acted with caution and anxiety. They were allowed to know what I was going to show at the Wellcome Trust before it happened but they were not allowed to change it. There was also recognition that this debate had to be in the open; otherwise there was a real problem in terms of people's understanding of the reality and the sense of the fabricated message, which before we had but at that time was no longer retaining credibility. It was an interesting and difficult time for everyone involved but it was also something that had to be aired and discussed. That was probably why I was given permission at that point.

**Lord Purvis**

Apologies for arriving late; I was asking a question in the Chamber. Thank you for your presentations. I want to ask a question, and it might be to you, David. It about whether for young people, who have taken the decision that the way to express their views or to have issues resolved

is through violence or through extreme behaviour, there is any understanding that they view art in a different way from others. Do they use culture or see culture a different way to others, including some of their peers, who may be more naturally involved in some artistic business? Is there any work or any knowledge of that, or am I going along a completely red herring?

### **Prof David Cotterrell**

It depends whether the art is seen as something that is affiliated with the institutions they are rallying against. Whether the ownership of it is affiliated with the state, or the organisations which they are acting violently against, or whether it relates to the narratives or the ideologies that they are finding themselves having recourse to violence as a way of protesting against. What is interesting is that if the art is not affiliated with those things it can create an ambiguous shared space that does not necessarily align itself to the same allegiances that could be used in terms of violence in the street, in terms of reactions to government or in terms of religious ideologies. It can provide something that is dynamically formed for the purpose of that interaction and engagement through narrative or process or through conversation that cannot be facilitated through a more stable institutional mechanism.

In Karachi, there is an elderly choreographer active out there bringing groups of young people together in places where there is very little in terms of local government, and absolutely nothing in terms of police force or military to protect them or to suggest how they should interact. What has been brought together is a shared space that they may each have a reason to be associated with, but none of them actually feels a sense that its ownership is related to the same polarised identities which are causing the fractions within the community. It is not owned by the BJP, the Taliban or other organisations, but is an area, which potentially is owned by those that are engaged with the narrative being professed or explored within it. What is interesting is that it can transcend some of those very obvious polarisations, which cause people to feel identities based on the polarising forces that are pulling them apart.

### **Lois Stonock**

I have something to add to that. On the flip side of that is some of the work that the Institute for Strategic Dialogue has been doing with people like Facebook and Twitter. It is the use of the methodologies of art, artists, and film-makers to encourage young people to buy into their ideologies as well. That is the negative view of it, but if the question is about whether young people are looking at art differently, then the same mechanisms are used, particularly online in the dark net. It is those mechanisms that mimic the way that artists work as a way to engage young people, particularly online. That is the other side to it. My point is that takes one very small thing that art can do, and art can do a hell of a lot more, but that is one thing that is mimicked all the time.

### **Lord Purvis**

The reason that I was asking was because previous panels have considered it on education. It has certainly been very interesting for me to see that those who have either gone from country to country to be fighters or who have developed more potentially dangerous, extreme views themselves are also educated, but cognitively, and as their education develops, not necessarily in the way that we have been educated. They have particular forms of education which are consistent with them receiving messages from whatever perceived authority, either through social media or elsewhere. I was wondering whether or not art instinctively is about us thinking and challenging our received wisdoms about ourselves, about society and about the country we live, and whether that is similar to a different form of education that might be resisted.

**Dr Bernadette Buckley**

One of the other pieces that I was going to show was that of Campus in Camps, which is a kind of self-organised, self-educating system. That is being co-built by Palestinian architects, by the Decolonizing Architecture group in Palestine, along with international educators, theorists, artists and thinkers. The camp that you are looking at is a refugee camp in Bethlehem that has been there for decades – since the 1940s – and people have grown up there. I was actually speaking to someone from this camp a few weeks ago who wanted to apply for the MA Art and Politics programme in Goldsmiths. He said, ‘For us the choice is very simple; you either fight or you get educated.’ This is an instance where people are deciding how to educate themselves: ‘What do you need to know? What do we need to know? How can we transform our collective consciousness in a way that will empower us?’

It is not really about imposing educational agendas on people but people co-designing and co-learning together. It is a really interesting project. For example, the structure that you are looking at here is a concrete tent. The tent, of course, immediately articulates in a very clear way the history of Palestinian peoples who first arrived in this refugee camp literally in tents. By turning that into a literal concrete structure you are attesting to a shared history already – a history that is not organised around victimisation. It is creating a sense of ‘What can we do about this? What is there to be done? How do we do it? Who does it?’ The space inside the tent, which is here, does not have a podium or a raised space, but it has an indentation in the centre.

Again, that is an opportunity for a multi-dimensional space of engagement. This is a space where people play bingo, they have prayer meetings, and they dance. They also learn and, if you look at some of the modules that are on the website for this group, you will see the really interesting courses they are producing there. They are all discussion-based courses, but they are incredibly emancipatory in ways that lead people to bring their ingenuity and to think about how we create the world that we are going to be a part of.

**Stephen Stenning**

I was lucky enough, as it opened, to be at a talk in the concrete tent in Bethlehem. One of the most controversial things about that is that it is concrete, because you are not meant, in that instance, to be doing something that is deliberately permanent. The whole idea is the need for a camp will disappear very shortly. That is the idea, and, therefore, you are making a statement by putting something into concrete. On that question there are two contradictory things. One, I think it is that view that looks at education by rote or a very tight idea of education. There is an alternative, and there are different ways that open up critical thinking and creative thinking. It can happen in more informed environments. Absolutely, in one sense I would say, ‘Yes, let us encourage that.’ There is, however, also a danger in thinking that the link from that to being radicalised is too consistent, because, for example, people are being radicalised in the UK, with our education system, and many other countries as well. Some of those very basic things about your sense of purpose, about being listened to and about having agency are the simple things. They are the simple things that you look to in all sorts of instances, but they are important.

**Baroness Hodgson**

We are talking today about using arts and culture to perhaps pull people back from radicalisation. Is there any evidence that Daesh is using it to radicalise people? In terms of the things you were talking about Pakistan, are arts taught in madrassas, where a lot of people are being fundamentalised? What does Sufism, with all its wonderful drumming and music, stand in all of this? Has it stepped away from it?

**Prof David Cotterrell**

There are several points there. Every political movement tries to use culture, social infrastructure and all sorts of incentives. The Taliban built schools as they went through, as the Russians did throughout Afghanistan, as the British did in Helmand Province and as whoever will be there next will build them. They also try to promote local culture and appear to take ownership of it. ISIS has very specific understanding of what creative expression includes. However, as in Afghanistan, there are different kinds of sets of accepted orthodoxies and levels of conservatism to do with everything from calligraphy through to geometric design to contemporary art, which are accepted by different governing bodies and political movements.

In a way I see it as a bit of a red herring. The madrassas may be attributed to the development of the Taliban, but the madrassas were only populated because of the huge refugee crisis and a number of people that were disenfranchised from a wider education system in northern Pakistan. For the refugees from Afghanistan, it was the desperation to find any form of education and the possibility of children being fed at school, among other things, that encouraged the madrassas to be occupied by people who might gladly have accepted places in more liberal education facilities, if they had been available and they had been enfranchised. It is interesting that sometimes we are looking at things which are symptoms of much more complex geopolitical forces and assuming that they are the causes.

As to the narrow remit of certain art forms as being attributed or affiliated with any governing body, whether it is Soviet Russia, the States or ISIS, it is not necessarily the culture itself that is responsible for that or the relationship with the people. It is about the way in which it has been appropriated by the organisation that is trying to claim it for propaganda purposes. What is interesting about art is that it can be pluralistic. Even in a landscape, which is potentially becoming homogenised through a single ideology, it can offer space for the complicated contradictory narrative, which can sometimes reveal the weaknesses in the meta-narrative and in the more simplistic ideological view.

Any ideological view, whether it is United States foreign policy or it is the Taliban in Karachi, can be challenged when you test it in terms of the direct human experience of those people who would be living under it. For some people it will work and for other people it will be deeply flawed in terms of the relationship between their experience, their aspirations and what this headline ideology represents. Articulating the complexity of the individual experience does challenge the simplicity of slogan-based politics and ideologies that offer a simple approximation of the way we live.

It (cultural activity) possibly offers a powerful counterpoint, because in the absence of those alternative narratives people are more likely to accept the only well articulated narrative that is offered, in the same way that you are more likely to accept that the only well established school system, even if it is not your preferred one, if there no alternative to consider. Having a shared space where other narratives can be revealed can present the idea of alternate ideologies and allegiances, and variations, which may transcend tribal boundaries, the religious boundaries or others that are being advocated for political gain by the people who are currently representing them. There can be value in opening up these conversations again, even if it seems too late.

**Baroness Suttie**

Apologies for being late. I was spectacularly failing to ask a question in the Chamber.

**Dr Bernadette Buckley**

We feel your pain.

**Baroness Suttie**

I may need to go on an assertiveness training course. I am utterly convinced about the importance of culture in turning this around, but one of the things we have been looking at in this inquiry is about how to scale up. I guess it is one of the paradoxes here. The easiest way to scale up is to have a top-down approach, but if what you are talking about – and I believe it to be the case – is to be successful, it has to be organic and bottom-up. Based on your personal experiences, I was interested to know examples of projects, and how you managed to communicate and to sell them to people. How did you manage to say, ‘Come and join us?’

What are the best ways, without being top-down, of getting people involved and engaged? The risk always is that people who are already quite well connected are more likely to be able to benefit from them, because they are aware or they are out there or pushy – like I clearly was not today. If you have the quieter psychological types, who we understand are often the types who might become more attracted by radical alternatives, how would you reach out to them if you are not going to be top-down?

**Dr Bernadette Buckley**

From my perspective as an educator who knows other educators in Jordan, Cairo and Palestine, etc., the crucial thing is that we co design the agendas and do not set the strategy in advance. We must come around the table together and discuss them. Out of those discussions that tend to arise is common agendas and common interests. In the example of the project hall in Israel, that project extended out to work with a project in Stuttgart. The young Ethiopian immigrants, in the region of Israel where that centre is, started working with similarly alienated, impoverished people living in Stuttgart.

Together, they were able to think about how a DIY culture could come up with often very simple strategies that would empower people to do something about their circumstances. That might be doing something with a hammer, or doing something with a conversation about a text or a bicycle. They are not really complicated issues. The important thing is that we co design the agendas. We are working in a context here where it is really important to acknowledge the need for decolonisation.

Many of the MENA countries have colonial histories and colonial contexts. We have to understand that if we bring our agendas to bear on people in situations which, as David, Lois and Stephen have all said, are incredibly complex and multidimensional, we will get resistance, hostility, suspicion, silence and disengagement. What I find in the case of Jordan, where there is something like Spring Sessions where they run 100 day session workshops, is that people there are creating networks that are engaging people in Europe, but also importantly engaging people in the global south. They are looking to create relationships with Sri Lanka, Thailand and South America, and if ‘we’ are not part of the conversation somebody else will be.

**Stephen Stenning**

I am really glad about that question, because from the British Council’s standpoint it is the most common area of discussion and debate, much more so than the idea of changing the way we work and the resistance to working with arts per se. The biggest question is if this can be at scale. I think, especially in anything that comes with development money, there is a tendency to judge what is scale by the amount of money that you are spending and assuming that impact is better achieved if you are spending a great deal of money. Necessarily, a lot of work alluded to is at grassroots level. In one sense it is very small, but assuming that you are looking at a subject like community cohesion and support, there are massively complex things you can do.

A huge amount can change through things that are small, and then the impact becomes huge. As slightly silly example of how that works, I have eluded a lot of to Tunisia, and without happenstance, even within the British Council, neither of the projects that are at the forefront of my mind would be in anybody else's. There is one called Citizen Child, which was a group that literally went around primary schools. They were Tunisian artists who were doing all sorts of crazy things around, 'What does our future look like? What does a good president look like?' In terms of financial input it was a tiny project, and so was the breakdancing. Suddenly there is a great deal of press around Sarfraz Manzoor's article and suddenly that gets all over the press. It is quoted alongside multi-million pound interventions and it has led to major EU Investment. Thereby it is a very impactful project.

I noticed there was an article in the *Guardian* that one of the guys is an amputee doing breakdancing. That is one person, but the impact of that has become huge. There is a quote I will read. It sounds like I am reading it for the sake of bigging up the British Council; I am honestly not. Chouaib Brik, the artistic director of Art Solutions, said, 'The British Council funding is so important. We never got support from the Ministry of Culture in Tunisia before. Now, they are starting to contact us.' That is something I wanted to highlight because, yes, we started working because there was not a possibility at that time to work, even if we wanted to do, with governments. However, in places like Tunisia and Egypt, the distance between the state and independent operators is massive. There are some examples of that being closed. Someone like Chouaib, who was way out of any connection with local government, suddenly feels they are knocking on his door. A big change can happen through little things.

### **Prof David Cotterrell**

I agree with both, but there is an additional thing, which is that there is real impact that art projects can have, and the greatest impact is where you do not dictate the outcomes. Artists have the potential to identify questions that we may not be addressing, so as soon as you tell them, 'This is the question I want you to address', then you have lost the advantage they can offer you.

### **Dr Bernadette Buckley**

You have lost the artist probably too in the process.

### **Prof David Cotterrell**

Quite possibly, some do carry on, and we saw it within the UK, within the safety of our own cities. We saw the way that artists were commissioned sometimes to champion the successes in the way we regenerated cities, and sometimes they were there to make sure that the organisations and the regional development agencies were seen as being worthy in doing that. Sometimes they were there to be the intermediaries between disenfranchised communities and government, and occasionally they were brought in to challenge the assumptions of the master-planners before they made the delivery plan; or there was a break in the delivery plan, which allowed the artist to actually question whether assumptions were adequate enough for us to make a 35-year plan for Ashford or for the Thames Gateway area.

It takes huge courage to allow artists to have access to the intellectual stage and decision makers, rather than be there to disseminate and interpret the activities and the knowledge that comes from other domains. It is possible for artists to be allowed access to that conversation, for intellectual hierarchies to be flattened in the way they have been in academia, to the point where artists can challenge surgeons on the correct way to engage with the ethics of surgery through medical humanities. Artists can be involved not only in looking at how you interpret and engage people with science, but also challenging the assumptions that scientists may have found the correct

questions to engage with in terms of our relationship with the planet or other aspects of our lives. It seems odd from outside the arts because we are assuming the arts are there to essentially offer a way in to more difficult subjects.

If you start thinking about art as simply a methodology of people arriving with a critical independence, possibly as lay observers, to challenge the assumptions that we may have made within the systems that we have become embedded within, they can make us question things. For example, ‘Are the legal guidelines for developing cities adequate in a contemporary city? They were developed 40 years ago. Are they still adequate for Sunderland?’ It is that, rather than saying, ‘Within the regional development plan we will need to have some public art at the end of it. We must bring artists in because we believe in art.’ It is about whether we allow artists to access to the intellectual stage, as well as being there to leave monuments and artistic works to represent our communities that will inhabit the stage. It is a difficult thing.

For me, one of the great online evidence repositories for this is the REF 2014 (Research Excellence Framework 2014), which was the website that documented excellence and achievement within university research. Within it there was something called ‘impact’, which was added as a new term and terrified all universities because we never had to measure ourselves against impact before. We thought immediately it must have been conferences. Actually, what it turned out to be, when the terms of reference were defined, it was impact beyond the academy and university, beyond the expected disciplinary community, whether it was pure mathematics or whether it was contemporary art.

What was interesting for me was that, when you look at the REF 2014 website and unit assessment 34, it refers to arts projects that have had impact on society and that have been evidenced absolutely conclusively to have world-leading impact. This included in terms of changing policy, in terms of affecting people’s access to healthcare, affecting people’s ability to maintain a franchise within an electoral system or engage with ways in which they might be able mitigate for the effects of crime and violence.

The whole point was that the artworks and the artists’ engagement happened before the criterion was known. Those artists were doing it long before the universities knew they were going to be measured for impact. They just happened to believe in the artists and the value of their work, regardless of the fact that was going to give them credibility or credit for a future system of metrics. What was amazing about REF 2014 and those case studies was that all of them are people looking back at extraordinary things that were done, long before we knew they would give financial benefit back to the universities. It was evidenced and articulated and it provides an amazing library of possible ways that the arts can effect real change in society without being told what to do.

It is about whether you can trust the artist and spread-bet enough to trust that you will have some failures, but that you can invest in the artist in the same way you might with a consultant, social scientist, historian or journalist. The assumption is that some things will bring back something that is truthful and challenging enough to change the opinions of the people that are writing the policy.

### **Lord Purvis**

Our session is in terms of the arts and culture, and I am just wondering whether it is wise in our inquiry on this topic to bring the two together or whether or not it is wiser to separate out culture. Culture, for some countries, is much more associated with the political history or the religious present, and, therefore, the role of the ministry is much more integrated into the government policy or indeed the regime’s policy if it is not a democracy. Therefore, we should separate it out and focus on art for art’s sake, and ask what is the role for the British Council and the role for the UK in

all of these countries in disseminating art for the art's sake, because we have not touched much on that.

### **Dr Bernadette Buckley**

Not at all. In fact, the substance of all of our presentations here has been to stress exactly the opposite. Increasingly, if it does not reject art for art's sake, it is very invested in collaborative, communing projects. I started out at the beginning talking about why simply separating art and politics produces some terribly dated and ideological informed thinking. That is the short response to that. Also, to pick up on what Lois said earlier, you have it where you have a sudden surge of people nominating themselves as artists who have not been necessarily even been trained as artists. Also you were saying, Lois, how people in Syria do not necessarily recognise our understanding of art. Art comes with huge colonial baggage. It is a Western construct, and in many countries in MENA art is not recognised as a discrete, indifferent object of contemplation but is integrated with rituals and ways of doing things. We are in a sense advocating exactly the opposite of an art for art's sake structure.

### **Stephen Stenning**

For my point of view I would say that there are problems with term 'culture', because often it is used for the thing you are doing and the thing that surrounds it. That wider sense of what we are talking about is so important, because of all the baggage that comes with it. Often people I am working with in the Middle East would have a wry smile about how they have to approach the British Council because not only does it come with a very hard-edged notion of art; they then have to get to Spring Gardens and decide which one of these boxes they fit into. 'Am I a visual artist? Am I a film artist?' There can be problems with that. There is a beauty in the fact that we are talking about your family relations, your religion, the food that you eat, the recipes you have inherited as well as formal structures and disciplines.

### **Lord Purvis**

Our inquiry will make recommendations, whether they are to the government, to the British Council itself or for Parliament to discuss. I am just wondering in my head how we as an inquiry can make recommendations to those that have been responsible for ministries of culture. All I was saying was that that takes us into a slightly different territory than saying that promoting and having well funded arts with an impact that we are talking about, where we can make quite clear recommendations. I am trying to wonder in my head, when it comes to the state culture side, for example in Bahrain, what we say to the Ministry of Culture in Bahrain.

### **Prof David Cotterrell**

Potentially what we are dealing with is the problem that any term used is going to be problematic. The problem with 'arts' is as we have been describing and the problem with culture is also that. What we are looking at is culture. We are not looking at a single one, and we have a Department for Culture, Media and Sport. That is really confusing to many other countries, potentially, because there is a question whether that is one activity that we are mixing together.

### **Chair**

It is confusing for all of us.

**Lord Purvis**

It is very well established for many years that there is the principle of arm's length arts funding, whereas that is not commonplace in all countries where that separation is made. Arts funding is for arm's length government, not dictating, because this fits the cultural policy of the country, associated with the political balance.

**Prof David Cotterrell**

Indeed, and it is extremely political. For some countries that we are talking about there is very little funding for the arts. There is not just arm's length funding: there may not be funding at all. Even in this country there is an awful lot of funding which is corporate funding or it is funding for a specific type of art as a commodity as opposed to a research tool or process-based method of enquiry. We have multiple funding streams for this and we have a multiple sense of ownership, and always have had. The arts have always been forced-fit with society, whether it is patronised by the church, the state, the market, or whether it is an independent revolutionary practice against any of those regimes.

What we are talking about here is not only how you support the arts in terms of funding, but also how much recognition and presence you give it within intellectual engagement. It may be that it is better not to fund the arts that are happening in terms of the street protests and the artists in a certain place, because it would delegitimise them. However, it is really important that the World Bank considers what is coming up from these very self-determined, important movements. That is whether it is an artist which has spent 10 years in an area of a country that the World Bank does not have an office in, or whether there is something coming up from generation that is not yet represented by the elected officials or the regime officials that they would normally be negotiating with. It may be offering them a counterpoint or another perspective.

The problem is that will come through the media and through colloquial understanding. It may come through being invited to go to an exhibition launch, but it is not necessary something which is introduced in the same way as we might get an expert opinion on sustainability, military operations or some other aspect that we would claim to expect a consultant come in and offer us advice on. There is not automatically a place within the debate for us to reflect on the expertise and knowledge that has been fed to us by artists, cultural practitioners and people that engage in cultural processes. It is important, obviously not to own those terms or to respect the way that they may have been adopted by any organisation or government, because they are more complex, as they always have been.

**Baroness Hodgson**

I was going to ask about countries like Tunisia, which has sent a huge number of fighters to Daesh. Do they come from any particular socioeconomic groups? Do we know anything about whether they go individually or whether it is clusters of people that are self-radicalised in a way and then move in? Is it a peer group influence? Do we have any information on that?

**Dr Bernadette Buckley**

I am sure we do, but you are probably asking the wrong bunch of people for that since our natural area of expertise is not in those sociologically established empirical data. Certainly, from the first evidence session, the experts there were attesting to the fact that generally radicalisation occurs in circumstances of poverty, alienation or where people do not feel bonded to a community. That evidence tends to be fairly consistent. That is the case in Northern Ireland as much as it is in refugee camps in Palestine. I cannot claim to have any special expertise there or to be able to

present you with any empirical data, but certainly from reading your own inquiry that would suggest it to be a fairly consistent occurrence.

### **Stephen Stenning**

There is a narrative point rather than a databased one that was given to me by people working in Tunisia, which was around the notion often spread. There is also an equation to do with your expectations. Perhaps in Tunisia, because of the history and in some cases greater connections to the West, you have higher expectations of where you might go. Then you are hugely disappointed that this is perhaps more present in Tunisia than in other places. You certainly see that and you have that feeling. It is not a good thing that you recognise less expectation amongst youth in Egypt than you do in Tunisia, but it is very obvious. I was just reading today in preparation a list of quotes which happen to come from young people in Tunisia involved in the hip hop project. The thing that struck me was how many of them started by saying, 'Tunisia is a terrible place to live. I hate my country.' That stuck out as something you would not necessarily see in other countries.

### **Prof David Cotterrell**

Unfortunately I am no expert on the Sahel; my knowledge is from an entirely different region. What is apparent, and what we saw in Helmand Province, is that if the Taliban were destroyed and the British Army left, it would be left without any form of local government that would protect an individual farmer against warlords, mafia and others. As there was so much struggle and trauma in their lives, that allowed them to welcome the Taliban in as a least bad alternative. It offered stability from abuse that was being experienced in other ways by less sensationalised organisations. I do not know individually what causes radicalisation, but I know that any form of ideology is more attractive if you are in a situation that at present appears to have disenfranchised you and does not offer you a viable alternative. That may, for some reason, be filling a gap or addressing a deficiency within either your representation in the country you live in or the country's organisational structures and the way in which you may feel an affinity with it. It seems to me that we cannot think about radicalisation in isolation, as if it is a force that is external, without understanding the internal failings, which are allowing people to yearn so much for something that is so difficult as an alternative. They must have fallen deeply out of love with the systems that were there for the alternative to arise.

### **Chair**

Unfortunately there are people waiting to take over at half past, so we are going to have to stop. We have run around a lot, which has been fantastic, hugely interesting and immensely useful. There are some amazing things here, but there is a fundamental conflict, which is intriguing. Artists are trained to be accountable for their own voice and they have to admit their subjectivity, and art gives us purpose, self-worth and self-reliance. These are exactly the things that in our previous sessions we have established we need or would like to encourage and develop. In wielding a power like that, we cannot impose something without any instructions, but we cannot use a deliberate force. There is a real difficulty.

### **Dr Bernadette Buckley**

We can co-design.

## **Chair**

Collaborate, yes, exactly. I must say that I love your definition of art: ‘Art is to be human and to share’. That is fantastic. It is terrific. Thank you to my Committee and thank you so much for coming in. It was incredibly useful and really interesting stuff. I am going to read it back, but thank you very much indeed. It is much appreciated.

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