

**Written Evidence Submission by Lois Stonock, to the British Council APPG  
Inquiry into Building Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA**

*(Supplementary to my Oral Evidence Submission to the Inquiry Committee on Tuesday 24th  
January 2017 titled, 'Culture to Build Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA')*

## **Spaces for Artists**

Lois Stonock is an independent researcher, curator and cultural strategist. She is the founder of the LR Stonock Consultancy and Create Associates. Central to all her work is a desire to look into the application of all artistic practice on the day-to-day conversations that impact on the places we live and how we interact with each other both locally and internationally. Website links: <http://createassociates.co.uk> and <http://stonock.com/>

### **Introduction**

In addition to my Oral Evidence submission, which I presented to the British Council APPG Inquiry Committee on '*Culture to Build Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA*', I would like to use this submission to give key recommendations moving forward, whilst drawing upon a couple of case studies. I will be connecting the common thread between the recommendations the other three witnesses presented at the evidence session.

### **What links up the evidence and recommendations present at the Oral Inquiry Session?**

The common thread between all of us (witnesses who presented), and something which could come through as recommendation, is around the concept of space. The space which an artist builds through the nature of the way they work and enquire into a society right through to the places they create to allow conversations to happen.

**Dr Bernadette Buckley:** talked about institutions and artists as both, activists/ practitioners and mediators of conversation in communities. She mentioned specific places like the Israeli Centre for Digital Art and the Cairo Institute for Learning as places which almost act as badged spaces to talk about alternative politics and ideas. She drilled into this more throughout the session through co-created content and highlighted the importance of how something happens rather than what it is.

**Prof David Cotterrell** talked about the accountability of the artist and how subjectivity around their exploration is something which they need to embrace and own unlike perhaps a journalist or historian would do. They are not answerable to an institution but to themselves. The artist is someone on a constant journey; absorbing, reflecting, changing and developing their story. An artist is totally outside of the institution, out of religion, family, politics, school, culture, and government. Their practice work and enquiry often navigates assumptions built around these things, holding them to account and questioning their limitations and responsibilities. David discussed the role duty of care in his statement within the military as well as his responsibility for deciding how and if you publish the images he had gathered while in the Helmand province.

**Steve Stenning** talked about how artists and arts organisations are often a go-to when the 'chips' are down. He referenced the National Theatre's Run Free project in Glasgow which worked with young people who had been expelled from school to develop a Parkour troop, which instilled discipline and commitment. He talked about the way artists and projects can be another way to teach. Perhaps through an acknowledgement of shared values which

creates a space, not only for learning, but for difference within that. Like Steve said, all of this has a knock on effect of self-confidence, friendship, trust and tolerance.

I would like to present two example case studies to support what the three witnesses recommended.

### **Case Study 1: Human Drama in Myanmar**

The forum theatre project was created by Human Drama, a participatory theatre company created by Pan Arts to 'tackle burning social issues'. The process works something like this: An intermediary in the local community gathers people in a hall, under a tree, in a tent or in an NGO's building, wherever they can. Four facilitators work with anything from 20 to 100 people. The facilitators work on physical warm-up exercises like saying your name and accompanying it with a gesture, so that people feel more comfortable talking about more personal issues. This also helps the facilitators identify pre-existing group dynamics between husbands and wives, friends etc. The group then move on to exercises that test social attitudes and norms - e.g. asking people to stand along a sliding scale according to how bad they think child labour is. This helps the facilitators to identify 'justice issues' in the group, which in this project turned out to be trafficking and domestic violence. These stories become the basis for a play which is developed by the facilitators and actors over a further 5 visits. When the play is performed, the spectators are given a chance to suggest alternative ways for resolving the dispute or injustice.

#### **The space created:**

The space created here is not physical but rather a 'space' for discussion or conversation. It can happen under a tree or in a building but it is the form of the theatre workshop that creates the space for people to share and learn.

### **Case Study 2: Say it through Breakdance** *(Steve Stenning spoke about this at the Inquiry so I will not explain the project, and you can find more details in the published minutes).*

In 2010, Tunisia was ranked 144th in the Economist's democracy league table of 165 countries. Congregating on street corners in cities and open spaces was outlawed. This prevented the evolution of a colourful youth culture common to cities the world over. But, conversely, it also made the artistic appropriation of public spaces during the 2011 revolution a politically charged act as well as a cultural one. This project is important because not only did it show that breakdancing gave young people focus and an international platform to talk about new futures for Tunisia, but it happened in the spaces that would of been taboo to do anything otherwise. Yet, through this activity of breakdancing, a new physical space was created for young people, a place where they felt comfortable to come to, be open and collaborative together.

This is not the first time we have seen the re-appropriation of space through culture. In Germany, the K21 Museum played a central role in Hitler's army. Today it is one of Germany's most successful public art galleries.

#### **The space created:**

Physical space adopted for the community through grassroots activity.

#### **Impact:**

The impact ranges from international recognition for the art form, right through to building a more inclusive society and building new relationships within a community.

## **Summary**

Artists, grass-root artists and arts led organisations, respond to society, as observers, as participants, as provocateurs, as conversationalists and as introverts. Through their practice and projects they create and employ methodologies which can manifest as spaces or activity. And it is in these places or through these activities that artists create spaces independent of religion, family, government and education structures. Artists and individuals remain autonomous in their pursuit of their ideas and projects, and throughout this process it brings others along. But it is not for their personal cause, rather for the creativity, and the process of exploration. It is in this way the arts can build bridges between people; create space for understanding, and thus supporting the development of more resilient societies.

So what can come out of these approaches which could be carried forward to influence policy? Perhaps one suggestion could be to support artist activity which creates space for discussion and brings together communities in different ways outside formal avenues such as schools, religion and family. This would build into working with artists to develop and share their own practice and create spaces which can become places for people to explore issues such as identity.