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PLATFORM FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Imagining Together / Acting Together Virtual Learning Exchange Summary

Resistance Discussion Board | April 21, 2020
Summary and Reflections by Shokoufeh Sakhi

Co-conveners for this exchange



Partners for this exchange:



IMPACT Learning Exchanges are virtual conversations designed to offer unique spaces for sharing ideas, professional learning, and reflection on topics important to the growth and sustainability of the Art, Culture and Conflict Transformation (ACCT) ecosystem.

The Imagining Together / Acting Together Learning Exchange explored key concepts in the ecosystem: **resistance, re-humanization, reconciliation** (drawn from resources of the [Acting Together on the World Stage](#) multimedia educational initiative), and **re-enchantment** - alongside current events like **coronavirus** and **the power of the acct ecosystem**. The conversation took place in both Spanish and English, with each language having its own space. Click here to read the Spanish-language summaries.

This document is a summary of the **Resistance Discussion Board**. Here are links to summaries of the other discussion boards:

<i>Resistance</i>	<i>Re-humanization</i>	<i>ACCT Connections and Reflections: Coronavirus</i>
<i>Reconciliation</i>	<i>Re-enchantment</i>	
<i>The Power of the ACCT Ecosystem</i>	<i>Creative Spaces</i>	

Participants and discussions by the numbers

Number of participants: 51		Number of comments: 185	
Participant Countries		Number and names of the Facilitators: 10	
Argentina	Pakistan	Erica Rose Jeffrey	Dijana Milosevic
Australia	Palestine	Sarah Jane Moore	Lee Perlman
Canada	Serbia	Refilwe Nkomo	Lisette Anzoategui
Democratic Republic of Congo	South Africa	Ivana Milenovic Popovic	Rene Llapur
Germany	Spain	Maja Leo	Tom King
Israel	Switzerland		
Kenya	Uganda		
Lebanon	United Kingdom		
New Zealand	United States of America		
Participant Affiliations (when reported*)			
1- Adjunct Associate Lecturer within the Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences (BEES) UNSW, Australia			
2- the Secretary General, Acholi Religious Leader's Peace Initiative (ARLPI), Uganda			
3- Associate professor at the University of Leeds, England			
4- Freelance stage director and professor, TAI University, Spain			

- 5- Media, Film and Communication Department, Maasai Mara University, Kenya
- 6- Student at Theatre and Film and Conflict and Peace Studies at the University of Nairobi, practitioner of Participatory Theater and a current board member of Dance into Space, Kenya
- 7- Journalist and a lecturer at Al Quds- Bard College for Arts and Science- Media Studies program, Palestine
- 8- Director of Peace and Conflict Studies Australia (PaCSIA)
- 9- Director of Network Artists North East, England
- 10- Teacher, a volunteer with Kenya Young Women Christian Association
- 11- Peacebuilder and musician, working in Democratic Republic of Congo with Search For Common Ground
- 12- Playwright, director of Ajoka Theatre, Pakistan
- 13- Professor, The Interdepartmental Program in Theater and Drama, Brandeis University
- 14- Writer/poet, a member of Theater Without Borders and a tenured Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- 15- Female attorney
- 16- Documentary producer
- 17- Director, Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, Brandeis University
- 18- Teaching artist with a focus on children's rights issues exploring through recycled textiles and gardening.
- 19- Performance and Visual Artist, Film maker with a background in psychiatry & public health
- 20- A peacebuilding facilitator at Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute
- 21- Program Manager, Impact Evaluation. Social Impact
- 22- IMPACT Executive Committee Member, Author, Associate, International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life, Brandeis University
- 23- A peace trainer/activist and professor in peace studies in Canada.
- 24- Theatre facilitator and researcher
- 25- A peacebuilding professional with a background in theatre directing
- 26- Professor of social and community psychiatry, London
- 27- Independent Peacebuilder - Co-founder of Indie Peace
- 28- Actress and core member of DAH Theatre
- 29- A Senior Lecturer in Theatre at Massey University.
- 30- A lecturer at Maasai Mara University, Department of Linguistics, Languages and Culture. Currently the Chair of Kenya Performing Arts and Film Association (KUPAA)

**participants were asked to write an optional biography; this information is drawn from how participants in this discussion described themselves*

Questions that guided the discussion [copy from the discussion board]

Resistance can take many forms. Resistance is called upon when dealing with war, authoritarian regimes, colonialism and cultural imperialism, and gender-based violence. The first step toward transformation can often be a loud “NO!” an expression of resistance to conditions of violence, oppression, suppression, and disregard.

“Performing Truth in the Face of Denial” with Dijana Milošević in Serbia (Note: contains references to war, images of human remains, and images of uniformed officers)

- How does resistance manifest in the context of your work and life?
- As a global community: what is that we are resisting?
- How can we help keep voices of resistance safe in oppressive societies?
- How can we ensure resistance doesn't create or worsen deeper divides?
- How responsible are artists for the actions and safety of participants whom they seek to embolden or empower?
- How can arts-based and cultural resistance efforts avoid the traps of victimhood and perpetuating cycles of violence?
- Sometimes resistance looks like a 'NO' and sometimes it looks very different. What are some examples of resistance that has a message of 'YES' or something altogether different?

Creative resources mentioned [add cells as needed]

<p>(Language of the resource) A short descriptive phrase or sentence hyperlink to the url (Example: (English) Call for collaboration in mobilizing the arts for COVID-19 communication and coping)</p>	<p>Here is another online resource providing some interesting discussion points. https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/politics-art-resistance</p>
<p>This is an interesting project focusing on climate change, but that has had to become digital within the current context. National Water Dance 2020 https://www.nwdprojects.org/2020-nwd-event/?fbclid=IwAR3v-NfSVAXZG308_WFV0KSiiH5eU_a2--JOUZQ2R3M9kdVmh-IG0YIHt8</p>	<p>ABAAD advocates for the development and implementation of policies and laws that enhance women's effective participation, through a rights-based approach that would bring about tangible change to gender justice. https://www.abaadmena.org/?fbclid=IwAR3XkA4BE1BKYtburmuFENUw8yRf2dw4sFI95HXWU_h_lAV8yRxotjqvSAGg</p>
<p>Toni Morrison's article: “No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear”</p>	<p>Green String Network https://www.green-string.org/</p>

<p>https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/no-place-self-pity-no-room-fear/</p>	
<p>DAH Theatre is an independent, professional, contemporary theatre troupe and artistic collective that uses modern theatre techniques to create engaging art and initiate positive social change, both locally and globally</p> <p>http://en.dahteatarcentar.com/</p>	<p>AYNI INSTITUTE: https://ayni.institute/</p> <p>Movement ecology is about seeing what is behind those conflicts, what are the actual differences, because listening is not enough, one must see what is behind the words, the strategies that lie underneath.</p> <p>Movement Ecology in Times of Crisis (webinar) https://youtu.be/0327-uO_lvc</p>
<p>Palestinian House of Friendship</p> <p>https://palestinianhouseoffriendship.com/</p>	<p><i>Freedom or Death</i> by Nikos Kazantzakis is a novel on the heroic or epic scale about the rebellion of the Greek Christians against the Turks on the island of Crete, where Kazantzakis was from.</p> <p>https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/197661.Freedom_or_Death</p>
<p>An interview with Elif Shafak: Art is About Resistance</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgTYOmPTj2M.</p> <p>She speaks about the role of story-telling and literature in resistance, giving voice to the oppressed, ... asking difficult questions ..., how writers can help to build bridges between opposing sides, ...</p>	<p><i>The Forty Rules of Love</i> a book by Elif Shafak</p> <p>It is about resistance through love and Sufism</p> <p>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Forty_Rules_of_Love</p> <p>and, <i>10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World</i></p> <p>https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/43706466-10-minutes-38-seconds-in-this-strange-world</p>
<p>The Chorus Foundation works for a just transition to a regenerative economy in the United States. https://chorusfoundation.org/</p>	<p>The 'standing man' protests in Taksim square, a non-violent performative resistance: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/18/turkey-standing-man</p>
<p>Belarus Free Theatre (BFT), a radical underground theatre company founded under Europe's last surviving dictatorship.</p> <p>https://howlround.com/happenings/belarus-free-theatres-staging-revolution-festival</p>	<p>On the act of witnessing as action: a Ugandan/American production of Erik Ehn's <i>Maria Kizito</i> directed by Emily Mendelsohn.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTkVyJgo2jk</p>
<p>Peacebuilding scholar/practitioner Polly Walker describes the significance of ritual for</p>	<p>SEVEN tells the true stories of seven women who bravely fought for the well-being of</p>

<p>reconciliation between Indigenous people and descendents of settler people in Australia and the United States. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VR1fhkpOPh0&feature=youtu.be</p>	<p>women, families, and children around the globe https://seventheplay.com/ written by 7 of female playwrights and leaders.</p>
<p>Ajoka Theater is a Pakistani not-for-profit arts organization. The group have staged many popular society critical pieces in theatres, on the streets and in public spaces, https://ajoka.org.pk/</p>	<p>France - Dieudonné controversy - stand up comedy as the complex ground of art and resistance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Xm5-yFaS8w https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-case-of-dieudonn-a-french-comedians-hate</p>
<p>Actor-Director Iman Aoun discusses the importance of aesthetic integrity in Ashtar Theatre's performances which build capacities for a democratic society through addressing contemporary social issues. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-w_h1_lkmc&feature=youtu.be.</p>	<p>Palestinian youth worker and scholar Abeer Musleh highlights two theatre organizations in Palestine https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/actingtogether/casestudies/musleh/index.html</p>
<p>'Crear Vale la Pena' (To Create is Worth it) incorporates art, education and community action as a means of promotion, social, and individual development, and has been located in the north of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, Argentina, since 1997. https://www.crearvalelapena.org.ar/nuestro-actualidad.php</p>	<p>Kenya Universities Performing Arts and Film Association (KUPAA) https://zh-cn.facebook.com/pg/Kenya-Universities-Performing-Arts-and-Film-Association-2106277979492815/posts/?ref=page_internal</p>
<p>Nopebblemine movement's daily briefings https://www.defendbristolbay.com/</p>	<p>Interview with Ana Correa (2002) https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-interviews/item/385-yuya-int-acorrea-2002.html</p>

Suggestions and questions for moving forward

Please note: Italicized quotations indicate quotes from the discussion board. Names of respondents have been removed for the sake of anonymity.

Overview:

Overwhelmingly all participants in the discussion applauded ACCT ecosystem's initiative. The participants expressed a strong desire and need for more of similar global spaces to encourage

collaborative thinking and working and recommended finding ways of repeating similar activities both at local and global levels.

“Giving myself these two days to listen to others, [...] what an enormous gift I have given myself. As Polly [Walker] said, paraphrasing, ‘to come again and again and listen with ones’ heart’ I am not giving, I am being nourished by the knowing, and the voices of others.”

During this one-day discussion of the main theme and the guiding questions many more themes and questions emerged which are summarized below.

1. A comprehensive summary of the Resistance Discussion Board

- Definition of resistance
- Context of resistance
- Transformational art-based resistance
- Art-based and cultural resistance
- Negating and affirming resistance
- Responsibility of artists and participants
- Leadership

2. Guiding questions

- 2.1 How does resistance manifest in the context of your work and life?
- 2.2 As a global community: what is that we are resisting?
- 2.3 How can we help keep voices of resistance safe in oppressive societies?
- 2.4 How can we ensure resistance doesn’t create or worsen deeper divides?
- 2.5 How responsible are artists for the actions and safety of participants whom they seek to embolden or empower?
- 2.6 How can arts-based and cultural resistance efforts avoid the traps of victimhood and perpetuating cycles of violence?
- 2.7 Sometimes resistance looks like a ‘NO’ and sometimes it looks very different. What are some examples of resistance that has a message of ‘YES’ or something altogether different?

3. Key themes

- 3.1 Resistance as a contextual phenomenon
- 3.2 Resistance and artistic creativity
- 3.3 Modes and spaces of resistance
- 3.4 Positive resistance/a resistance different than saying no

4. Concerns and challenges to cultural and art-based resistance

5. Questions

Appendix: Summarized Discussion Thread

1. A comprehensive summary of the Resistance Discussion Board:

Defining resistance within ACCT ecosystem

There are different levels to the phenomenon of resistance. From the most abstract one shared by whole humanity, to the most particular and singular one which can be unique to every instant and place, from a macro to a micro level. A common theme among all these is that resistance is an act of saying 'no' to something, and, an act of saying 'yes' to something different.

Resistance is an individual and a shared struggle. It is a social product, even when it is an individual response to something. As a social movement, it encompasses a constellation of individual perspectives, reactions and responses to and for something. Individuals create or enter a movement from their own standpoints, their own needs to struggle against something but also from their own desires for something different. They enter a movement from their own understanding of the issue and their own set of values. Then the question would be how to create a shared language and a shared perspective in a way that it would not trample on the singularity of individuals nor ending into the division of the movement into many factions.

Resistance is as varied as there are injustices. It is a standing against a cohort of oppressive power relations, and oppressive social and political structures everywhere:

“Resistance means different things to different people/societies, even to same people/societies at different times. It could mean stopping or stalling the advance of an occupying force. It is defined by the aggressor, is rather defensive. Here NO means no to the aggressor, his/her values, refusal to be dictated or controlled. But Resistance can also have positive meaning. For what you stand for: your dignity, identity. So, it can also be defiance or reclamation, reaffirmation. That is where art can play a big role.”

In other words, resistance is an effort to exist differently.

On the other hand, resistance always resides and relies on a different set of values and visions than those which it rejects. That is why resistance by itself is not a value to uphold; there are resistances which only lead to the replacement of one violent and oppressive system with another. For instance, in the current age of populism *“those who swing to the right think they are resisting the very thing that they are succumbing to. Or their act of surrender to the right is an act of resistance in itself because they’ve given up to ‘being politically correct’ (associated with the ‘left’) with a sign of collective relief.”*

In the words of another participant: *“resistance is not only a matter of denying an oppressive power, but also of creating ways of existing, which includes ways of feeling, thinking, and acting in a world that is building itself through of various insurgencies and irruptions that seek to constitute it as a human world”.*

The underlying ethical values in each act and work of resistance are another common aspect of affirming resistance. These values, consciously or unconsciously orient our questions and responses such as: *“how to resist this onslaught on our emotions? How to pause, reflect. And how to break through the cacophony of voices? Independent art is seen as being on the left, while a lot of commercial art is there to prevent us from resisting the capitalist consumerism. Surely first we have to say ‘no’ before we can say ‘yes’ to the alternative??”*

Participants broadly agreed that art and resistance require reflection at the level of the self, the community, and the global humanity.

“Both at the local and global levels, resistance should be value driven by an over-arching philosophy which is ecocentric and not anthropocentric so that whatever we pursue is for the sustainability of all the actors within the ecosystems we live in.”

Another prominent thread in the discussion formed around four questions concerning the relationship between the need for “a shared language”, the role of “leadership”, “personal responsibility” of artists, and the question of “commitment”. The participants discussed the challenge of finding a shared language without denying individuality which led to a discussion on leadership and responsibility of artists. The responsibility which comes with the leadership would be as much towards the participants and the integrity of an art-based cultural project, as it would be towards the social issues they have taken on, and their audience. However, there is also the responsibility of the participants in an art production towards their struggle as well as their relationship with their leaders. All of this accentuates the need for a common language capable of respecting the differences, as well as commitment.

During the day, the discussants exchanged their experiences with different modes of art and resistance. By referring to specific cases in different parts of the world, they showed that resistance manifests in different forms and through different methods depending on what is being resisted and what is being fought for. They elucidated that resistance can be active and can also be ‘still’. It can be expressed and acted out vocally and silently, through movement and through stillness. Resistance is in the act of a storyteller but also in the act of story-listeners; resistance comes into life in the time and space between the artists and the audience.

The Resistance Discussion Board provides an example for the meaning and value of ACCT ecosystem. Though no official practical recommendation was discussed, the discussants participated in a co-reflection on their own and each other’s practical experiences and questions. They all felt and expressed the need for similar platforms:

“It would be indeed great to continue the dialogue among the participants, maybe also providing opportunity to better get to know each other. I think this could lead to more beautiful events emerging from the new bridges built, new connections and friendships forged”.

2. Guiding Questions:

2.1 How does resistance manifest in the context of your work and life?

- In a very general way resistance is part of our everyday life, the ecosystem we live in and partake in.

“Resistance is not necessarily immediate but can be gradual, something that grows from seemingly non-connected events that start to build a picture of a whole that demands a form of resistance. It is part of the complex ecosystem that we create around us, and is a healthy and necessary sign in any society for growth and change to take place.”

- It is honoring First Peoples’ creative voices.

“We can easily get lulled into thinking that has allowed us/me as settlers to believe that we don't hold responsibility for past atrocities: residential schools or the 60s scoop [in Canada]. Resist colonial thinking, sexist/racist thinking. You are resisting when you: Ask, wonder, innovate, care.”

“[I]n the light of sustaining platforms in our community, [...] [my indigenous artistic collaborator] mentioned the importance of care, maintaining relationships, awareness of power relationships, and more importantly the impact of beauty.”

- In the context of apartheid and colonial power dynamics, to live and survive with integrity is itself resistance.

“[R]esistance as a mode of survival – It could be on a microlevel (a prisoner resisting restrictions by using things innovative ways); or saying ‘yes’ to unsanctioned or delegitimized behaviors (eg: Ugandan LGBT activists that staged a pride parade despite repression/ potential imprisonment)”

“[E]xistence/persistence/survival is also an act of resistance. Simply being able to be a presence in a world that is antithetical to who some of us are--because we're poor, or people of color, are immigrants, are Indigenous, are LGBTQ or gender non-conforming--is an act of resistance. [...] Simply holding on to our unique cultures, being able to tell our stories (both past and ones that look to a new and different future) is resistance.”

- In the context of educational and cultural institutions, resistance is also manifested through individual and collaborative research, writing and teaching, all of which “can be a way to resist the power of forgetting”:

“Writing and research can be resistant and can 'talk back' in a way that artistic practice can too. Artistic languages and modes and expressions can provide a form to safely 'talk

back' to power, discrimination and hierarchy. I have had the opportunity to work with, in and through artistic collaborations that empower and articulate the importance of the First Peoples creative voice and learned much through listening to stories, hearing poetry and observing dance and cultural practice. Observing and cultivating your own cultural practice, rituals and ways of knowing and being can be a way to resist the power of forgetting. Claiming visibility resists."

"[I]t involves gaining the respect of an audience or classroom. It can happen with sharing a story, getting people to imagine themselves in the situations of others or using humor to reveal our shared humanity."

"An artist often resist through his / her art because he / she may not be able to do so in any other way. That realization may help one think of 'collaborations' not merely with artists but anyone who 'resists' through whatever he / she knows best."

- In some societies, the everyday life gives space to resistance unbeknown to the resisters. For example, "delayed" response to authorities at workplaces can be conceived as resistance without being a deliberate movement.

"Resistance at times occurs unknowingly to those resisting. For instance, at the workplace there could [be] an assignment that requires a quick response. But then the people you require to respond probably have other assignments. Delayed response would be termed as resistance. Therefore, to me at times resistance can be perceived but not a reality."

On the other hand, like every other strategy delay by itself can be ambivalent: "delay can be intentional or non-intentionally used as a sort of silence or non-reaction. It seems to be a non-response but it is just letting the moment of attention shift. It can be used for good or ill it seems."

- In the context of American society with all its privileges, and as an educator:

"[M]y resistance is first and foremost to challenge monolithic dominant culture [...]. This puts me in a constant lifelong state of resistance though there are times I intersect positively as a citizen of this regime [...]. I Resist with a capital R in protest, by vote, influence, purchase, or directly in the "content" of what I write or make. At these times I throw everything in my being - all my sociopolitical capital towards my resistance."

2.2 **As a global community: what is that we are resisting?**

- Resistance is against increasing xenophobia and violence, homogenizing power, discrimination, and hierarchy, against destruction of different people, and forgetting.
- It is against "social inequality, exploitation through consumerism, climate crisis"

- It is against “*productivity and outcome*” agenda. It is against the market driven value system which judges a human’s value based on their role in the production-consumption cycle:

“When I think of resistance I think about joy and rest. In the United States I am experiencing many fellow Black people creating spaces for joy and rest to counter the ideas that we must work nonstop, that the work my body produces is my value. As a descendant of African slaves this is simple and radical thinking. As an artist I am thinking about how to create spaces of joy in the artistic experiences I create.”

- It is against “*bigotry, [...] majoritarian dictation, [...] oppressive traditionalism, [...] market-dictated art...*”
- It is in “*saying NO to mistreatment from government and its agencies [...] As a global community, we are resisting the dictatorship of a few companies on the decision of what foods we can eat- organic or GMO, and what medicines we can have and when. We are also resisting actions that hurt the environment.*”

“As a global community we seems to be resisting dictatorships and overstay in power, terrorism, nuclear aggression, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, Devil worship and economic suppression and dependence”

- It is against cultural erosion and unequal treatment of people, of dividing the humanity to those whose life and culture is more valuable than the rest:

“As a global community what we are resisting is that fact of one behaving like he knows more than the others. We are all endowed differently, and act differently based on the situation and resource. There has been a misconception that some people are less human beings. Cultural erosion is another thing we are resisting.”

- It is against Gender Based Violence (GBV).
- It is against a general imbalance in power relations among humans and between humans and the nature:

“Asymmetrical relationships definitely create an imbalance in power relationships which is reflected in the narratives implicit within our discourses”

“[T]he colonizer, the ethnic cleanser, the land thief, the violent, the torturer, the dehumanizer”

2.3 **How can we help keep voices of resistance safe in oppressive societies?**

The question of safety for the voices of resistance was discussed from various points of view and levels, especially considering the fluidity of risks and safety across time and space.

- Being and acting 'safe' is contextual, it is "not defined the same way for all peoples".
- Considering the impossibility of perfectly predicting the risks involved in an act of resistance, it would be important to have a transparent and collective reflection on the balance between the risks involved and the integrity/potential of the work:

"I think there is a balance between the artistic potential of an idea/ storyline and the group consensus that would need to consider the risks. But as you say we don't always know to predict risks associated with regime change or otherwise".

- Micro-resistance is a subtle resistance in daily affairs; it can be cumulative without resulting into violence or causing risk for its participants.

"At school before a teacher enters a class, students would draw pictures of what they dislike on the chalk board to communicate their resistance. [...] Due to marginalization by the current government, the Acholi people have resisted by not voting members of the ruling party into any electoral office since this current government came to power. At work when new laws and policies are introduced, employees resist by not acknowledging them".

- Considering the oppressive effects of capitalistic culture of productivity on artists and their creativity, the artists also need to protect themselves and their creativity against the dominant pressure of being "productive".

We need to "extended notion of safely talking back to the 'productivity' agenda that has created boundaries and expectations about time and its role in creativity and the transformation of conflict".

"[D]o these notions of 'seeing' productivity and 'enacting outcomes' take us off track? Do they prevent us from the heavy lifting? Prevent the real work? Yes. The productivity agenda is real. It's in conflict with healing. It stifles the ancient. The long term. The lived."

- Acting together would protect individuals in an act of resistance

"My country is highly oppressive and we've managed it as a Faith based institution by working together in a coalition, issuing joint statements and always acting together so that you are not single out."

- In fighting against gender-based violence, providing safe spaces for women's voices is an essential step. Social media, alternative, local or national ones – all can be utilized as a safe space for airing and sharing women's stories.

“[P]roviding an enabling space for the woman voice through various media would reduce gender-based violence. Utility of both traditional and mass media gender based debates would also reduce the vice.”

“In South Africa, I've seen communities use the idea of "safe houses" or "safe spaces" and mobilizing collectively. I've also seen and participated in theatre, especially public and street theatre which has been very effective for communication and education and poetry/storytelling and sharing and dance as a powerful healing and speak out method for survivors.”

“Community radio still remains the preferred channel of communication because it affords the presenters possibility of using local languages to reach their target audiences.”

“in Lebanon an initiative was launched by ABAAD, a resource center for gender equality, to write their hotline for women facing domestic violence on bedsheets or similar and hang it from your balcony, so that also women without internet access learn about the helpline and can get information and eventually support.”

2.4 **How can we ensure resistance doesn't create or worsen deeper divides?**

- Participants explored the positive potential of “stillness” as a component to the process of creation and resistance. Stillness and patience, it was argued, could create the space and time for reflection, for looking backward to imagine the forward movements. Stillness can open a space for resisting responsibly, which is necessary to avoid worsening the divides within an oppressed community.

“Stasis/ stillness as resistance: I'm thinking of the 'standing man' protests in Taksim square against brutal policing and often used in non-violent performative moments elsewhere too”

“I also find stillness in the heart of any action performed mindfully and intentionally, with precision and discipline. Stillness in committing to every aspect of each action. I think such stillness can make intentionality visible”.

- Another suggestion was that to avoid deeper divides, a resistance movement should stay focused on ‘what’ is being resisted more than ‘who’ is doing the resisting.

“[R]esistance must be kept to the issues and not people and personality, the affected people must understand that they have significant contributions to ending the oppression. For instance, if police and the army are sensitized [on the issues], they will turn round and stand with the citizens instead of following orders from above.”

- A multidisciplinary approach can open a space of resistance which itself resists self-righteous positions and binary thinking, as well as divisive tendencies rampant within a conflict-ridden community:

“Resistance calls for multidisciplinary, multisectoral and holistic approaches to conflict transformation away from the usual siloed thinking of reifying and essentializing one form of violence over the rest”

“[A]rt can help to avoid taking binary approach, which often leads to growing divisions. Art can help opposing sides hear and understand each other and imagine what otherwise would not be possible to see if we adopt a self-righteous position.”

2.5 **How responsible are artists for the actions and safety of participants whom they seek to embolden or empower?**

- The safety of artists and participants in art projects or acts of resistance was discussed from different angles. It was brought to attention that both notions of ‘safe’ and ‘responsibility’ are contingent to place, time and the project. This makes it difficult to come up with one or several ‘safe’ or ‘responsible’ frameworks:

“[The question of] safety and risk can be contingent on the conditions of the moment. So, a work might be safe for participants when it is created, but if the political or social context changes it might suddenly become risky to have been part of..”

- The question of responsibility is multifaced and multidimensional. Responsibility is “to the message, to the elements, to self and to other[s]”. And that is not always clear at the time of creation and presentation. It has an “ephemeral” quality.
- Artists need to think critically and deeply about the purpose and the risks involved in a project and to communicate it clearly with the participants.

“I tend towards thinking that artists have a high degree of responsibility to the welfare and well-being of their participants, to thinking really critically and deeply about any risks involved and making sure participants are really clear on the purpose and know what they are committing to.”

2.6 **How can arts-based and cultural resistance efforts avoid the traps of victimhood and perpetuating cycles of violence?**

- Peacebuilding is an art, besides being a way to resist violence. Like with in any art form, peacebuilding also needs to be reflective in order to envision ways of releasing people from the state of victimhood, while avoiding falling into another cycle of violence:

“Our brains process information differently when we relax or think creatively. The arts can help with this. Peacebuilding must be reflective, reflexive and finding the fine line between individual and communal resistance, passive and active resistance and ways of expressing and communicating resistance is what draws me to the arts.”

“Creativity, working together and being consistent in approach can avoid victimhood and cycles of violence. For instance, ARLPI in pursuit to a peaceful end to the LRA conflict all insisted on dialogue to end the conflict and government had to listen to them.”

- Arts-based and cultural resistance efforts can give a space for survivors to regain their agency *“to speak their truth and find community and solidarity with others”*. Dance, music, songs and storytelling are also traditional ways to aboriginal people resist against their own victimhood and erasure and erosion of their culture.
- A “healing narrative” is a method to address internalized oppression and historical trauma as well as resisting the perpetuating cycle of violence:
 - *“[I]n Kenya we have endeavored to make trauma-informed approaches as part of the emancipatory peacebuilding approach and therefore and supporting everyday resistance. [...] Through the Green String Network we work with local community members and artistes to create healing narratives by using water colour paintings for use by local people to tell their stories of victimhood, aggressor and breaking out the violent cycles of violence.*
- One of the participants gave “economic education” as a way of resisting the domination of big corporations in food industry:

“Artists have to be very responsible for the safety of the participants. When enlightenment happens suddenly for a crowd it may lead to unplanned action like attacking a police station or factory that may cause more harm than good. Artists must provide a safe space, a safe story world for the participants to explore their real-world in. In my country, economic education - on the power of many littles put together- that then leads to economic empowerment could help break the cycle.”

2.7 **Sometimes resistance looks like a ‘NO’ and sometimes it looks very different. What are some examples of resistance that has a message of ‘YES’ or something altogether different?**

- Resistance was discussed both as an act and expression *against* something as well as an act and expression *for* something. However, saying Yes or No, itself is contextual. The choice relies on the availability of options, but more importantly on the capacity for and freedom to choose.

“If you are truly “free”, then you have the right to make a decision between Yes and No. You may say Yes or No, depending upon what you are being shown internally and using your intellect to make the best decision that you can make based upon the facts surrounding you. There are many things that can interfere with freedom: expectations of family or society; mental incapacity; outside interference or coercion. Our ability to make correct choices can be influenced by these factors and others.”

- There is an ethical aspect to resistance, which is more pronounced when it is inspired by a sense of care and responsibility for people, animals, and the environment suffering from the forces of destruction. This is rather different from saying ‘no’, or just resisting against an injustice.

“[R]esistance is a part of being a human. Resistance is in the act of care and love. And that is what I call effective resistance, one that goes beyond anger and vengeance, one that is not personal nor out of guilt, but because of care and responsibility. Performing arts is one of the best venues to awaken that spirit of resistance in their audience, especially when it is delivered directly to the people who are directly affected by violence.”

- Artwork can create a space to imagine a different way of being and doing. It can allow the imagination to explore newer, more ethical and just ways of relating to one another and to Nature.

“Artworks that creates an experience or space in which people imagine or reflect on other ways of being and doing things, ways that are more just, more ethical, can be highly resistant countering pedagogies and politics of ‘disimagination’ and ‘indifference’ (Giroux).”

- Art resists death, so in other words it is a Yes to life. With such an approach to the artwork and work of resistance can carry be turned into a Yes:

“Yes! To the joy of movement. Yes to walking with safety. Yes to running on power. Yes to resting with ease. Yes to shouldering the complexity of our existences and sharing what’s in our dilly bags. Yes to dancing with fire. On angry coals. Yes to the great unveiling.”

- If we consider resistance – both arts-based and cultural – as the act of standing against what has been denied and negated from people, then resistance is a Yes to equal rights and access to life and dignity.

“Yes to preserve and embrace memory, yes to celebrate culture and rituals, yes to create and share, yes to resilience and perseverance, yes to write a novel and smuggle it from prison to be transformed to a world-film award, yes to clinging on

your land, Yes to keep your humanity intact in the face of monsters, yes to sing for nature. Yes to freedom of ideas, dreams, and hope. Arts-based resilience is an important pillar to achieve freedom because it starts with the free spirit and soul.”

- The space within which resistance takes shape and the issues it addresses have a significant role in the Yes vs. No message:

“How can arts-based resistance mirror messages of YES? It could start in small ways in individual communities - the natural ones at this time being families. Then families connect with natural networks of other families or churches. ... [And these can “coalesce” around] celebrations across cultures - Earth Day, Ramadan, Eid.”

- Beauty can also be a force of resistance.

“Sometimes I think that creating beauty in our lives -- in the rhythms of our days and conversations; in the way we arrange objects in space; in the recipes and rituals we bring forward from our grandparents -- can be acts of affirmative resistance to the homogenizing influences or corporate socio-political culture in these times.”

- When resistance becomes a way of “re-existence” it becomes affirmative:

“Resistance in one radical sense should perhaps be understood as an effort for re-existence. In other words, that resistance is not only a matter of denying an oppressive power, but also of creating ways of existing, which includes ways of feeling, thinking, and acting in a world that is building itself through of various insurgencies and irruptions that seek to constitute it as a human world”

3. Key Themes

3.1 Resistance as a contextual phenomenon

- In the context of aboriginal resistance against the deliberate disregard of their colonial history, resistance is an act against forgetting and for remembering one’s history, pre/post colonialism, tradition, and language. It is an act of confirming one’s agency and upholding a different set of values than the dominant colonial ones.

Writing and research can be resistant and can 'talk back' in a way that artistic practise can too. Artistic languages and modes and expressions can provide a form to safely 'talk back' to power, discrimination and hierarchy. I have had the opportunity to work with, in and through artistic collaborations that empower and articulate the importance of the First Peoples creative voice and learned much through listening to stories, hearing poetry and observing dance and cultural practise. Observing and cultivating your own cultural practise, rituals and ways of

knowing and being can be a way to resist the power of forgetting. Claiming visibility resists.

- In the current context of living a consumerist way of life, being part of an exploitative structure and by default contributing to the ecological crisis, it is important to recognize our ambivalent position.

“[I]t is almost impossible not to be part of both sides at the same time. I feel this is a fundamental challenge, to ‘resist’ against something that we contribute to and still not to be disheartened by it.”

- In the context of pervasive consumerism and identity politics in modern society where consumption has become integral to identity, it is of importance to explore:

“the role of the arts--both individual and communal--in foregrounding committed, intentional practice instead of consumerism. And since we too often use consumption to acquire recognition for and present our personal and group identities to others, how can we foreground relationality rather than identity, commitments rather than consumption?”

“[R]esistance depends on the perceptive you take, whether you are an onlooker, someone who takes part, the person or group leading the way, or passively experiencing a form of change. Like art, it can be interpreted in different ways and the resulting impact can be both positive and negative depending on how it is perceived and by whom”.

- Resistance cannot be separated from one’s perspective:

“Resistance means different things to different people/societies, even to same people/societies at different times. It could mean stopping or stalling the advance of an occupying force. It is defined by the aggressor, is rather defensive. Here NO means no to the aggressor, his/her values, refusal to be dictated or controlled”.

3.2 Resistance and artistic creativity

- Creativity needs to resist the pressure of ‘outcome’ orientated organization of the society. It needs to safeguard the time and space needed for creativity from the rush of productivity.

“In many instances, letting the use and structure time be more fluid and open and refusing pressure to produce ‘outputs’ or ‘outcomes’ are acts of resistance within the organization or curation of a creative process”

- Artists need to be aware of the unavoidable ambivalence inherent to any artwork:

“Artistic approaches can offer a space for physical or sensual experience that allows and invites for ambiguity. In our practical theatre work in Lebanon for example, we try to create spaces where we can experience several things at the same time, like dealing with prejudice and making contradicting personal experiences by encountering a person as an individual and not merely as a carrier of a certain ideology or other marker”.

- Artists need to resist orthodoxy in their own space of creativity. For example, Theater of Oppressed has been a favored methodology for socially engaged performance around the world. However, there is a danger of its dominance over other local approaches:

“I’m worried that one form is starting to be seen as THE way to do socially engaged performance when there are loads of local and interesting ways to do it which might be crowded out, or seen as less valuable, because there’s this one system which is so well-known and spoken about”

“Different types of emancipatory theatre offer practical embodied experiences and imagination to create realities.”

- Artists need to present work that resists the forces of “patronizing audiences” and preconceived expectations of what socially-engaged art should be:

“[It is] important for the artists to be working with experimental and performative art making processes - because it was less readily patronised by audiences, [such processes] forcing them to view the work outside of the 'charitable'/'victim' lense on the artists and their lives”

3.3 Modes and spaces of resistance

- Stillness: “Active stillness” as allowing a space and time for creative imagination to reflect upon the past and project towards the future. An active “patience” for envisioning resistance beyond saying No.
- Micro resistance: One’s daily life is abundant with opportunities for micro resistance, ranging from the small acts of practicing silence in response to an authority figure, to drawing graffiti, and delaying productivity through slow act in response to the outcome-driven demands.
- Collaboration with communities, families, and faith-based institutions.
- Creating safe houses, safe spaces, and safe media for survivors of violence to express their agency:

“[G]lobal movements like #metoo have powerfully given many survivors agency to speak their truth and find community and solidarity with others.”

- Critical thinking is a mode of resistance. Critical thinking comes with excepting responsibility to ask a question about the past and about all the others.

- Music:

“Music therapy is therapeutic but also allows a space for finding one’s voice and boundaries.”

- Dance:

“[T]he power of dance as resistance is very strong when I both dance and bear witness to the body in motion. The necessary tensions of the body's fluid and component parts - working in tension - in order to transform, change, to move! ... gives some insight of the necessary tensions we must all encounter.”

- Storytelling:

“What a wonderful, enriching discussion. I just wanted to share this interview with Elif Shafak Art is About Resistance [...] She speaks about the role of story-telling and literature in resistance, giving voice to the oppressed, to the marginalized, to the silenced, asking difficult questions prompting discussions about taboos, how writers can help to build bridges between opposing sides, humanize the other and raise awareness about women's rights, LGBTQ rights, about gender-based violence.”

- Poetry

- Humor and satire

- Drawing/Painting (visual arts)

- Photography

- Spiritual resistance

3.4 Positive resistance/a resistance different than saying ‘no’

- Resistance needs to be “value driven”. Values which are not limited to humans but are “*for the sustainability of all the actors within the ecosystem we live in*”.
- To overcome oppression artists need “*to look for narratives that support symmetrical relationships hence overcoming oppression. We need to create platforms for performance but also reflect on mode- should we hide under the illusion of performance or have a mix of the participatory modes such as theatre of oppression. I feel we need to keep on evaluating the impact of our engagement with audiences*”.
- Art-based resistance is not enough by itself. There is also a “*need to connect with groups and experts who we share perspectives with to try and create wider change*” .
- “[F]orms and artistic structures need to help us model how creative thinking can include change, potential for transformation and non-binary thinking.”
- It is difficult but necessary to envision how to “*pull away from the situation, see the big picture, make room / time / space for an alternative to emerge in a very live reality with ongoing struggles*”.
- There is a need for a *shared language* capable of bridging and articulating “*a shared yet individual struggle*”.
- An effective resistance needs to be directed by “*the act of care and love*”
- There is a need for “*safety with fluidity and understanding context*”

4. Concerns and challenges to cultural and art-based resistance

- One challenge in art-based resistance is to have a clear idea about aesthetic choices and its dynamic relations with other areas. For example, artists need to think about “*the political significance of what might seem like aesthetic choices*” , as well as, their impact “*on the overall communication*” .
- Resistance with peacebuilding aspirations requires a multifaceted, multisectoral and multidisciplinary approach. Among other aspects, it requires resources to provide venues for different voices. “[F]unders and institutions need to address, which is the distribution of work, funding different voices and stories to reach more people” .
- Acquiring funding for critical cultural production is another challenge: What are “*models or experiences on how to make critical cultural production fair and yet independent from biased or even ideological funding?*”

- The challenge of “leadership and personal responsibility” is also contextual. There cannot be one set of right answers for different places and times:

“Should it be one person, a collective, a divided minority that influences the majority through local action?”

“[T]here has to be a balance between leadership and personal responsibility. We have to be able to acknowledge our own culpability and then join the 'resistance!'”

5. Questions

The discussion was especially fruitful in raising thought provoking questions. Along with clearly expressing a desire for further activities like the Learning Exchange to take place, participants indicated that such platforms should take place at different levels (local, regional and global). This would optimize the process of discussing and sharing ideas and experiences within the AACT Ecosystem. Here is a sample of key questions raised:

- What is resistance?
- *“[H]ow resistance differs to other strategies in political art/art for social change - what it does or offers that is different to transgression, subversion”?*
- *“Is art enough? What is our responsibility as artists towards injustice?”*
- *“The question is how to resist this onslaught on our emotions? how to pause, reflect. And how to break through the cacophony of voices? Independent art is seen as being on the left, while a lot of commercial art is there to prevent us from resisting the capitalist consumerism. Surely first we have to say 'no' before we can say 'yes' to the alternative ? ?”*
- What is the role of the artist at the time of crisis?
- In the current pandemic context artists offer online writing, dance, poetry classes free of charge. How can *“this exchange be fair and equitable towards the creators as well”?*
- *“How do we imagine futures that we’ve never experienced but know/imagine or possible? How do we look back and learn, take what we need to and leave what we need to?”*
- *“[H]ow can we foreground relationality rather than identity, commitments rather than consumption?”*
- *“How to make critical cultural production fair and yet independent from biased or even ideological funding”*
- *“[H]ow to do we know the 'truth' and to which we should say YES and to which NO”*

- *“How do we know when to use which strategy?”*
- What would it mean to be actively still together?
- *“Could working in solidarity be more about starting from the point that we all equally need to be empowered, that no one method or person can catalyse that?”*
- *“How can we use the arts to facilitate collaboration rather than competition among our approaches to social change?”*
- *“Does resistance mean being part of something and if yes how to balance it with the need to do individual act against what we resist to?”*
- *“How to show and reveal the act and effect of perpetrators without condemning those who received the violence to either victimhood or a fixed hero character?”*
- *“How to bring the awareness to the history where the society is proud of it BUT new generation finds it differently”? When and where art and resistance can be taken as a truth and where and when as “a personal interpretation”?*
- A recurring question was how to resist oppressors and operations without becoming oppressors to others?

Appendix: Summarized Discussion Thread

This is a summary of the key points in the discussion, in their original chronological order.

- Importance of honoring First Peoples’ creative voices.
- Diverse ways to ‘talk back’ to power discrimination and hierarchy.
- Subtle strategies of resistance, micro-resistances that can be cumulative
- Responsibilities of artists around safety, and the fluidity of contexts. One example: when enlightenment happens for a crowd it may lead to unplanned action.
- Tensions around forward movement in creativity and ideas of time and productivity.
- The power of many little things which put together can lead to great change.
- Resistances that are hidden in plain sight / Actions that are explicitly stated as resistant.
- Actions that show a clear commitment to a (single) position / Actions that involve exploration of ambiguity or intersectionality.
- Macro and micro resistances.

- Resistant actions that have a clear target and outcome, external to or beyond the artists-activists themselves (e.g., targeting a dominant group, a non-ethical corporation, an executive misusing their power, a structural inequality).
- Resistance through promotion of a new form of daily life that begins with a change in the artists themselves.
- Resistance as opposition vs. resistance as entering into dialogue with other stakeholders.
- Resistance as opposition vs. resistance to binary thinking.
- Resistance as anthropocentrism vs. an ecosystems approach: *"Both at the local and global levels, resistance should be value driven by an over-arching philosophy which is ecocentric and not anthropocentric so that whatever we pursue is for the sustainability of all the actors within the ecosystems we live in."* (Bonface Beti)
- How do we know when to use which strategy?
- Spiritual resistance.
- How delay in tasks can be intentional or non-intentionally used as a sort of silence or non-reaction.
- Playing with the artistic "form" as a way to resist.
- Being nourished by the knowing, and the voices of others. The work of artist to communicate the necessity of this nourishment.
- Resist with a capital R in protest, by vote, influence, purchase, or directly in the "content".
- Opening the door to learning, empathy and understanding is the first step.
- The power of beauty.