Article

Arts as Dialogic Practice: Deriving Lessons for Change from Community-based Art-making for International Development

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Abstract: Communities around the world struggle with weakening social bonds and political, racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural divides. This article argues the arts can be a means of raising public consciousness regarding such concerns by catalyzing conscious, thoughtful dialogue among individuals and groups possessing diverse values and beliefs. Change can only occur when people become aware of and actively reflect on the ontological and epistemic-scale norms and values that so often underpin their divisions, and the arts can help them do precisely that. We examine the dynamics of participatory performing arts and mural-making in diverse contexts to contend that the dialogic character of community art-making can be valuable for practitioners and scholars in a variety of efforts in international community development. We conclude by sharing lessons that we believe will aid artists and practitioners in devising more inclusive and participatory approaches to their international community change or development projects.

Keywords: community arts; dialogue; theater; music; murals; international development

1. Introduction

As communities around the world face numerous challenges—key among them political, racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural divides in their populations—scholars and practitioners in the fields of arts, development, governance, leadership, and social change are engaged in a constant search for ways to catalyze dialogue to address those concerns and secure positive social change. An increasing number of those individuals have been advocating for participatory arts-based approaches to help address community challenges, arguing that the arts are exceptionally well situated to allow the voices of otherwise marginalized populations to emerge and to assist citizens overall in identifying possibilities for change. By providing opportunities for conscious, thoughtful dialogue and discussion among individuals possessing diverse values and beliefs, the arts can be a means of raising public consciousness regarding differences and of helping residents consider, (re)construct, and (re)combine systems of meaning [1].

Following Paulo Freire, we suggest that the arts are codes representing social reality [2]. As such, individuals may address them to deepen their critical consciousness and encourage them to change their circumstances. We also adopt Choi's conception of dialogue as a process of building mutual understanding and relationships that involves both reason and emotion [3]. Such understanding, Choi has contended, may help individuals to comprehend each other better in terms of their fundamental cultural values, interests, and self-expression. Sullivan has described the ongoing dialogue between, within, and among the artist, artwork, viewer, and context as a cognitive and creative coalition between individuals and groups involved in co-constructing stories and meanings: "Making art and responding to art remains an iterative and strategic encounter that comprises a creative coalition of individuals,

ideas and actions" [4] (p. 10). As a representational form, the arts often successfully explore values and issues in social life, connecting with audiences on a deeper level than other forms of interaction, and, as a result, enjoy a higher probability on average to evoke compassion, empathy, sympathy, and understanding [5].

This article is organized into four parts. We first sketch the principal theoretical debates concerning community arts as an incubator of social change. These address how to define the approach, its guiding principles, goals, and aspirations, as well as how to understand and capture the forms of social change such efforts may catalyze. Second, we set the context by conceptualizing community arts and offering short vignettes of theater, music, and community murals used internationally, to argue that the experience of creating these works can open space for people to share their stories, stimulating the possibility for individual and collective processes of analysis and reflection concerning values and identities. Third, we outline the potential benefits that community art-making may bring to a variety of initiatives in international development, including, specifically, social capital building, peacebuilding, and democracy promotion. Our intention in this article is to highlight benefits of community arts across genres, rather than focus on any single type. That is, we have opted to provide a breadth of coverage to illustrate our argument. Finally, we employ international examples and arguments to suggest five lessons for professional artists and development, governance, leadership, and social change scholars and practitioners interested in fashioning more inclusive and participatory approaches to their community development projects.

2. Theoretical Debates in Community Arts

Theoretical debates concerning community arts can be organized around definitions of its practice, its guiding principles, goals, and aspirations, and understanding the sorts of social change it may engender. Cohen-Cruz has observed, for example, that that there is no agreement concerning the term "community-based arts." [6] Indeed, some scholars and practitioners prefer the term "grassroots arts" instead, to describe the aims of such efforts, as capturing more adequately artists' commitment to place [6] (p. 7). Other analysts have embraced the phrase "community cultural development" because community arts often describe conventional arts activities based in municipalities, including theater companies, drama, dance, and music societies [7]. Those adopting this definition suggest it accounts for the work of artists, organizers, and other community members collaborating to express identity, concerns, and aspirations through the arts [7].

Higgins has suggested that the practice of community art-making may properly be seen as a population's response to the social conditions and forces of globalization, and a meaningful way to assist those struggling to cope with those forces [7]. He has also argued that community arts emerged in part as a resistance to institutionalized arts teaching and learning. Higgins has also helpfully distinguished between community artists and artists in the community, with the former acting as "conscious facilitators or art leaders for people in communities to express themselves artistically" [7] (p. 30). This distinction emphasizes the crucial significance of residents' active participation in local arts projects.

The construct of cultural democracy serves as a guiding principle for community arts for many of the field's practitioners [7]. Adams and Goldbard have suggested that the idea of cultural democracy encompasses three interrelated components:

- Cultural diversity—preserving and promoting cultural activities from the array of traditions present in any community;
- Freedom of participation—ensuring that all people enjoy unfettered rights to access a full range of means of expression, from paper and pencils and pens to stages and musical instruments and social media;
- Democratic control—residents must enjoy broad opportunities to participate in determining the direction(s) and trajectory of cultural development initiatives [8].

Making and studying art as meaningful communication in a cultural context can help citizens become more sensitive to each other's inner lives [9]. In this vital sense, the political aspirations of community art-making are rooted foremost in a view of cultural democracy as comprised of, and reflecting, people's dreams and desires [7]. Likewise, because cultural production is a site of ideological struggle in any society, art education must adopt a socially critical position [10], a stance that Dewhurst has called "social justice art-making". [11] (p. 8)

Community artists are increasingly concerned about their impacts upon the communities in which they work and their relationships with them, as their skills and efforts extend beyond aesthetic considerations to the role the arts can play in bridging or reimagining psychological, social, and political divides among citizens [7]. Because community artists believe in the capacity of the arts to encourage space for agential possibility, they overwhelmingly reject formalistic understandings of art [7]. Instead, in structuring art for life, art educators and practitioners seek to weave together, "the intrinsic, essentialist, personal, and psychological aspects of art-making as well as those that are social, community-based, extrinsic, and instrumentalist" [12] (p. 32).

Art by itself cannot have an effective, direct impact on the praxis of change, but it can prepare the proverbial ground for such to occur by prompting shifts in perception and consciousness [13]. Art's potential to reshape individual and collective consciousness cuts across many forms of identity—of individuals and groups, of places and spaces—and wields its power via its capacity to encourage individuals and groups to identify, shape, and adopt shared values and meanings. Those common claims regulate and organize human conduct and practices by helping to set the rules, norms, and conventions that order and govern social life [14]. Hall's "circuit of culture" suggests that meanings are produced at several different sites and circulated through different processes or practices that give individuals a sense of identity and belonging [14]. The "circuit of culture" includes the processes of production, representation, consumption, regulation, and identity, and the interrelated articulations among them, through which meanings are produced and shared within and across cultures. Meaning making processes operating in any one site depend on like processes and practices operating in other locations for their effect. As an instrument of power, culture is often used to establish identity within, and differences among, specific groups [14], often resulting in socially oppressive structures and practices. In working to address the social and political inequalities among artists/non-artists, product/process, individual/community, formal/informal art education, and consumption/participation, community artists and art educators seek to challenge extant undemocratic practices and structures of power and domination [7,10,11].

3. Community Arts: Theater, Murals, and Music

Community arts, whether as a process or a product, have great potential to reclaim and reshape the public space enervated or lost to the effects of neoliberal political-economic policies and their cultural impacts. Community arts bring artists and a share of their fellow citizens together to collaborate in art-making (paintings, performances, poetry, and the like) that express collective meanings [6,15], thus emphasizing the relationship between the arts and social context. In particular, communities worldwide are coping with weakened social bonds and continuing struggles across political, racial, economic, and cultural divides resulting from neoliberalism's emphases on market-focused individualism, efficiency, and commodification [16].

In many societies around the globe, involvement in art-making helps "mediate conflicts, rebuild economies, heal unspeakable trauma, and give new voice to the forgotten and disappeared," highlighting such issues and conditions as violence, repression, dictatorship, human rights, AIDS, poverty, and racism [15] (pp. 5–6). Cleveland has provided examples of groups offering such community arts possibilities in a diverse array of nations:

- A British theater group exploring democracy with former child soldiers in Eritrea;
- A Yemeni poet and army officer using poetry to combat gangsters and terrorism in rural villages;
- Modern dance giving voice to forgotten refugees in Gaza and the West Bank [15] (pp. 4–5).

We next offer three vignettes to highlight how community art-making across genres may help spur dialogue to identify, shape, and press for positive social change. We employ Hall's framework of "circuit of culture," with its elements of production, representation, consumption, regulation, and identity [14], to analyze these case examples. Hall's conceptualization offers a helpful understanding of how representation fundamentally constructs and is constructed by the world surrounding us. While it is impossible to analyze each of these elements in isolation, we hope that community artists and practitioners can recognize the interdependence of these processes in the discussion we offer of several examples below.

3.1. Theater

Drawing on Warren's work in creative therapy [17], Leavy has contended that drama is not only a form of communication, but also cultivates imagination, helping people examine their current lives while also assisting them to envision what they wish to become [5]. New York City-based Bond Street Theatre's (BST) ongoing project in Afghanistan offers an example of these benefits of dramatic performance. The troupe has been working in that war-torn nation since 2003. The Taliban's repressive rule in Afghanistan from 1996–2001, imposed severe restrictions on the nation's citizens, banning music, television, movies, and other forms of cultural expression [18,19]. Live theater is little known in much of Afghanistan. Consequently, for many of that nation's residents, a visit by Bond Street to their community constituted their first exposure to the live performing arts [20]. BST's Artistic Director Joanna Sherman has articulated theater's unique impact in Afghanistan:

> Recently we've had discussions about why theatre ... why it's more impactful. One reason is that, speaking of the multiplier effect, everybody has cell phones. They may not have electricity in their homes, but they have a cell phone. They might not be able to get television but they're going to video [record] the show. And if they actually get a chance to go up on the stage and speak their piece and act out their part (in the post-show dialogue), they are *really* going to show that to friends and neighbors. 'Look, I was part of this event! I got up there and I was doing this! Look at this!' They are all going to video [record] the show. And then the local TV stations, small local TV stations ... will come and video [record] it and put it on television, so it will actually end up on television. It is interesting to see how the information spreads. Because we start the dialog already in the marketplace, it goes home. It goes home with them because it is definitely something to discuss and it is out of the ordinary. But I think that is the other thing about live theatre, it is out of the ordinary. It is really an exciting thing that comes to town, not your everyday occurrence. You go to the marketplace, you buy fruit and vegetables and go home. This is something special. So, it has that super impact. [21] (her emphasis)

BST has sought to develop ways it can encourage peacebuilding and democratization efforts among the nation's citizens. For example, the company partnered with six Afghan theater troupes, including three comprised only of women, to educate people about voting rights in the villages of six provinces to promote the April 2014 general and presidential elections [22]. These groups performed for more than 120,000 Afghanis in a wide range of locations, including private homes, presenting entertaining plays that demonstrated the value of every vote. BST has focused on reaching communities with little access to information via radio or television and generally high rates of illiteracy, using theater to inform citizens about social and political issues and their rights under the nation's constitution.

Nonetheless, many Afghanis remained unaware of their voting rights and the processes associated with them, especially in rural areas and among young people and women. BST's plays provided information concerning who had the right to vote, how to register, how to detect signs of fraud and where to report it, all in an engaging format. Since custom and religious beliefs limit women's ability to travel, the three all-female Afghani drama troupes with which Bond Street has collaborated performed

in girls' schools, local councils, and women's shelters and prisons. BST has documented that the co-created plays succeeded in shifting many people's stance toward the elections from skepticism to enthusiasm [22].

Inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal founded the Theater of the Oppressed and pioneered the use of theatre to address the problems of communities, workers, Blacks, women, street children, the unemployed, the homeless, and other vulnerable populations in his home nation. Boal proposed that the public actively engage, including coming to the stage and proposing alternatives for theater productions in order to reflect their needs and aspirations [23]. His intention was to create a network of Theatre of the Oppressed groups in every city, through which more and more people could reflect and create ways to liberate themselves from oppression. Boal highlighted the moral character of theater as a central mechanism by which to present images of reality that could prompt individuals actively consider their views on specific contentious issues [24]. He also argued that the most important effect of theatre was not to motivate audiences to adopt certain views or to accept specific paths, but instead in the process of thinking it can encourage: "What changes is the attitude of the spectator of not being only consumer, but someone who questions" [24].

Higgins has profiled the efforts of three theater groups that have employed the work of Boal and the Theater of the Oppressed in their efforts to support, inform, and encourage change in their communities [7]. Cardboard Citizens, a London-based homeless people's professional theater company, has engaged Boalian ideas to explore options for dealing with the various issues their community confronts. In a similar vein, Performing Life has utilized Boal's approach to community theater-making to assist youth who are working and living on the streets of Cochabamba, Bolivia. Finally, another theater group in Guatemala, Iqui Balam, composed mostly of ex-gang members, has created plays based on its members' personal encounters with violence.

Sloman has recounted similar experiences with theater in Timor-Leste, where she worked from 2004–2007 [25]. A local women's theater group in that nation, Damas, staged performances in which women played both male and female roles and actively advocated for women's issues, thus challenging gender stereotypes and power balances in Timorese society and allowing members of that often marginalized community to express their voice [25]. Another Timorese group, Arte Moris, used theater and workshops in efforts to build conditions for peace talks at the local level during ethnic fighting between people from the east and the west in Timor-Leste in 2006. When an internally displaced persons camp was attacked nightly by local gangs, the group's performances and workshops stimulated dialogue among camp leaders and the belligerents, following which the raids ceased [25].

As Lederach has noted, in the aftermath of violence, artists are particularly well equipped to help expand people's capacity to imagine possibilities and to gain fresh insights into their situations [26]. In sum, the above experiences illustrate how participatory theater in its many forms can create openings for the marginalized to exercise agency and voice, challenge prevailing power relations; act as a powerful tool for advocacy, support awareness raising and behavioral change, and promote opportunities for positive dialogue [25].

Applying Hall's analytical framework to the examples of Community Theater discussed here suggests that this art form develops unique cultural practices and characteristics that reflect the diverse sociocultural and political situations in which it occurs. In post-conflict societies and those with relatively weak democratic foundations, people's creative expression in general, and theater in particular, can be heavily regulated by laws and policies. Participatory theater usually relies on community-driven performance spaces and offers its plays in the local vernacular. In terms of production and consumption, community theater differs from "mainstream" theater in its main goals and stakeholders. Locally created theater emphasizes the process of art-making and collaborative engagement and trust-building between and among artists and participants, while prototypically, for-profit theater, as a form of a commodity, focuses primarily on the end product and consumer experience. Finally, the processes of representation and identity that typify the politics of community

theater root it in the conditions of racial, ethnic, religious, and economic polarization that plague societies today. Today's dominant public philosophy of neoliberalism casts these dimensions of cultural identity and difference as mere matters of self-expression and life-style [27] that may be exploited for commercial gain. This fact poses important ethical challenges to community artists and practitioners as they work with varied conceptions of community and belonging and engage power structures and the voices of vulnerable groups and challenge this prevailing understanding on their behalf in so doing.

3.2. Community Murals

Overall, as Mexican educator Sergio G. "Checo" Valdez has observed, community arts in general and participatory murals, in particular, can help individuals develop a broader vision of leadership and learning [28]. This perspective "honors the diverse voices and images of people who have been marginalized—from land, economic survival, political participation, racial and gendered structures, and . . . from ways of expressing their histories and identities in multiple artistic forms" [28] (p. 112). The existing literature suggests three main approaches to participatory mural production: for the community, with the community and from or by the community [28]. In the first case, an artist conceives of and produces a mural for a community, on his or her own. In the second mode, an individual artisan visualizes a mural and organizes its production with residents as assistants. In the third instance, the artist acts as a facilitator to help engaged citizens create their own mural based on themes, images, and decision-making processes of their devising. These different forms and formats suggest that mural projects may be designed to encourage self-efficacy, empathy, and a sense of purpose, following a close analysis of community identities, social concerns, and tensions.

Muralists have engaged with local citizens in collaborative public endeavors to produce works of art for at least six decades [29]. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and the end of World War II, artist Tom Anderson, with colleagues from Japan, created and exchanged children's peace murals. The depictions were developed by children in workshops that explored the concept of peace in abstract and universal, and in concrete, locally specific, and culturally significant terms. The murals were painted on large moveable canvases the size of Picasso's "Guernica" painting (11 feet high and approximately 26 feet wide). Indeed, the project came to be known as the Guernica Children's Peace Mural Project. Over the years, the initiative has expanded and embraced partners from, numerous countries, including France, Korea, Nepal, Canada, and Kuwait in addition to the United States and Japan. The peace murals' organizers have suggested that the power and potential of their effort was rooted in the "idea of unity of purpose and diversity of approach" [9] (p. 142).

Hutzel's work with murals in a low-income neighborhood in Cincinnati, Ohio, revealed how a community arts curriculum could contribute to social change by engaging local children and youth in reimagining their community and reclaiming a playground that had been associated with drugs and violence [30]. Reflecting on her experience in Cincinnati, Hutzel has contended that art educators may learn a great deal when they listen deeply and seek to teach through the eyes and experiences of their students and local residents and strive to employ art-making to assist them in meeting their collective needs [30].

Valdez has chronicled his experience as a community mural project facilitator during 1998 in Taniperla, a Zapatista community in Chiapas, Mexico. The Zapatista rebellion began in January 1994, as the indigenous communities in Chiapas were losing control of historic lands and were often being forced to live and work on the most marginal and isolated lands in their state. High levels of poverty and lack of health care and education plagued the communities. The Zapatista uprising aimed to address those conditions [31].

Valdez's inclusive approach to community mural-making produced a mosaic of resident-proposed topics, ranging from their origins as a people to their aspirations for the future [28] (pp. 104–105). Government troops destroyed the mural 'Vida y Sueños de la Cañada del Río Perla,' or "Life and Dreams of the Ravine of the Pearl River," just hours after it had been completed, when they invaded Taniperla,. Mexican army soldiers beat and imprisoned Valdez and other community leaders. However,

in the following years, images of Taniperla's "Life and Dreams" were reproduced 46 times in 12 other countries, including Argentina, Germany, Spain, Italy, the United States, and Canada, with the result that the painting has become an icon of the Zapatista movement [32]. Valdez has argued that the mural's destruction became intensely significant for those members of national and international civil society that supported the Zapatista struggle: "*Zapatismo* was recognizable now by way of the ski mask, the red bandana, and the Taniperla mural. These are like the iconic figures that represent *Zapatismo*" [32] (italics in the original).

Following their release from prison, Valdez and his colleagues organized another participatory mural, this time with the engagement of the inmates of a Chiapas prison. The prisoners, their families, friends, and some other area residents participated in a range of mural-related activities, from design conception to realization. Project participants collaboratively identified the themes the mural would depict by conducting surveys among their number. Valdez has described the completed community artwork as follows:

> The resulting mural was framed by the silhouette of a white dove; inside the figure of the bird, the daily activities of people living in the municipality as well as symbols of resistance were portrayed. It was entitled *The Dove of Land and Freedom*. [28] (p. 105)

These examples of mural creation and production suggest that the distinct nature of community arts rests in its collaborative spirit, with crucial outcomes of such processes being enhanced solidarity and stronger interpersonal relationships among individuals and within and across groups, which then may be mobilized to demonstrate that racial, ethnic, and generational boundaries can be bridged and/or reimagined [33]. After studying the processes by which 14 participatory murals were developed between 1998 and 2005 in Mexico, Valdez concluded that, "A mural, created through a constant dialogue process by a group in a particular community, can become a powerful transformative tool for social communication and solidarity, strengthening the group's recognition of its cultural, social and political identity" [28] (p. 107).

From the perspective of the "circuit of culture" frame, participatory murals communicate symbolically the meanings driving a community's life by featuring a mélange of values-freighted objects, people, and events. The process of participatory mural-making is in many ways similar to that of community theater or of a music project, but the end product is likely to be quite different in character, not only in form, but also because murals may transcend the time and space of the context in which they are conceived and produced. With community theater and music projects, those who produce and witness them are the primary "audiences" of the end product. The "consumers" of community murals can be both local residents and visitors from elsewhere, evidencing the potential of cross-community collaboration and imitation, as happened with Taniperla's "Life and Dreams" mural. According to neoliberal tenets, culture can be marketed to add value to products and services [27] and, indeed, community murals have been depoliticized and marketed as tourist attractions [34]. As a result, and in so doing, cultural policies can be shaped to serve economic development agendas by local or national governments. By marketizing community murals, authorities weaken both the roles such evocations play for communities and, thereby, the incentives to produce them. Community artists, practitioners, and local community members engaged in such projects require uncommodified space to explore this form of art-making to plumb its implications for representations of their personal and collective identities, narratives, and aspirations. It is these motifs ultimately that give this art form its motive power.

3.3. Music

Music is used for many purposes and can simultaneously be many things: "a commodity, an ideological text, a political tool, a resistive tool, and an integral component of cultural rituals and daily social life" [5] (p. 101). Music can also connect people through emotional evocation that may transcend existing boundaries and barriers, including language, economic, and social differences [5].

Furthermore, music helps individuals gain insights into the peoples and cultures that produce it and the contexts in which they live, including racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (Ibid, 104).

Music can help capture complex discussions more richly than other representational forms, since, "[i]n music, voices can speak together without negating one another." [35] (pp. 126–127) Leong has argued that music education should empower students to make connections among themselves and with the world around them, "deriving [thereby] the joy of a sense of community, identity and self-worth." [36] (p. 163) Leong has also contended that with a more interconnected world and the fusion of international styles and genres, music education programs should be reconfigured to develop "planetary musicians," who can transcend geographic and ethnic boundaries and be able to work creatively and cross-culturally [36] (p. 164). Similarly, drawing on Walker [37], Carignan has explained that music educators must do more than teach skills and techniques, but also help their students generate meaning through developing "critical consciousness," a central element of Freire's pedagogy [38]. Freire highlighted educators' unique contribution to the creation and maintenance of democratic societies in their efforts to help their students form critical attitudes [2]. To do this, Carignan has suggested that music educators need to, "work at re-defining and experiencing the musical phenomenon as a socio-cultural activity that is concerned with people in 'their' given society, in 'their' space, and in 'their' given time" [38] (p. 49).

Because community music activities are "too diverse, complex, multifaceted, and contextual to be captured in one universal statement of meaning," Higgins has suggested that many have been resistant to defining the term, believing that doing so would not capture the entirety and complexity of the phenomenon and thus leave the concept open to individual interpretation [7]. Community music's political ambitions vary from nation to nation and culture to culture. However, Higgins has claimed that community music exerts a political force in at least two distinct ways:

1. On a micro level via the relational interaction between individuals (music facilitator and participants) within workshop environments, and
2. On a macro level by means of offering challenges and raising questions for those who arbitrate funding for music, music organizations, and institutions that engage people in music-making, teaching, and learning [7] (p. 168).

Higgins has distinguished among three broad views of community music: community music as the "music of a community," community music as "communal music making," and community music as an active exchange between a music leader or leaders and community members [7]. The first two describe music expressed by community residents and point toward an expression, through music, of a community's local identities, traditions, aspirations, and social interactions. The third perspective understands community music as an approach to active music-making and musical knowing outside of formal teaching and learning situations (e.g., delivered by professionals in schools, colleges, and other organizations through formalized curricula). In this view, community music is "an intentional intervention, involving skilled music leaders, who facilitate group music-making experiences in environments that do not have set curricula," with an emphasis on people, participation, context, equality of opportunity, and diversity [7] (p. 5). This perspective captures the character of the nonprofit organization American Voices' work, as briefly described below.

American Voices (AV), a nonprofit organization founded in the early 1990s, has worked to realize Leong's vision of music as potentially empowering. The entity's mission is "to provide cultural exchange through the performing arts and education in nations emerging from conflict and isolation" [39]. John Ferguson, the nonprofit's founder and Executive Director, has explained in a radio interview that AV seeks to promote mutual understanding and cross-cultural awareness through performing arts academies, workshops, and education programs, to serve as inspiration for young musicians [40].

Ferguson has also argued that AV programs not only teach specific music genre skills but also help participating youth share and communicate through music among themselves and with their

communities. Their engagement expands their awareness of what is possible through artistic effort. Ferguson has specifically cited hip-hop as a musical form, which he sees as an excellent means by which young people from the United States and other nations may communicate. Ferguson has employed the term "hiplomacy," a combination of hip-hop and diplomacy, to underscore the genre's significance as a communications strategy and tool for youth [41]. AV faculty and musicians contend that when the diverse groups with whom they have worked in Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere, cooperate to work on hip-hop choreography or another musical piece, their differences disappear, and the experience of harnessing their energies and knowledge in an environment of tolerance and respect for each other may be recreated thereafter in other contexts. AV programs strive to provide their youth participants an understanding of both expression and communication through the arts, envisioning diverse possibilities.

Hip-hop activism has become pervasive throughout the world as a platform to organize youth, open space for social and political change, and raise awareness of a variety of issues, from globalization and poverty to corruption and AIDS [42]. A musical hybrid form has emerged in Ghana, for example, called Hiplife, which has combined American-style hip-hop and that country's pop genre, known as high-life. Young local artists have employed Hiplife to call for social change by highlighting Ghana's struggles with poverty, political and social corruption, child abuse, and injustice [42].

The "circuit of culture" frame allows analysts to reach beyond the production/consumption binary of community music that is concerned with encouraging active participation in music-making among local populations. In a broader cultural context, neoliberal ideology has gradually turned certain musical genres (e.g., hip-hop, rap) into valuable commodities that can be traded internationally. However, such efforts run the risk of undermining the innate power of the genre, as in the examples above, in which it represented empowerment and activism for engaged youth, extending the possibilities of their understanding of themselves and their communities. Music professionals and educators engaged in community music projects should be mindful of these dynamics of representation, which can be influenced by public regulatory practices, as in Iran in the early 2000s [43], by identity, and by existing meanings. It follows, too, that they should work to avoid the commodification of the art forms they are employing in order to promote individual and community reflection.

This section has offered examples of community mural-making and performing arts (theater and music) to point up the potential power of art forms to reach diverse audiences as well as the significance of those modes of involvement as mechanisms by which individuals may gain insights into creating processes to attain shared purpose and common understanding with others across differences. We turn next to describe the value of the dialogic character of community art-making in international development programs, including specifically, community building, peacebuilding, and democratization initiatives.

4. The Value of Community Arts for International Development

International development is a broad and interdisciplinary field, but at its core, it grapples with ameliorating poverty amidst the complexities of, often, heterogeneous populations of individuals living together. As we have noted above, scholars and practitioners have begun to incorporate diverse forms of participatory arts into international development initiatives [25], as they recognize the limitations of verbal discourse and the roles the arts can play in conveying information and eliciting shared meanings otherwise challenging to communicate in words [42]. Shank and Schirch have argued that artists can use various community art forms as capacity-building mechanisms to bolster participants' self-confidence, enable self-expression, and provide training in leadership, public speaking, and creative problem-solving [42].

4.1. Community Building

Community building seeks to empower residents to address specific collective needs and help them access such external resources and influence as they may require while doing so [44]. This view

of community building entails residents building trust with one another while engaging power structures to achieve collectively determined goals. Community building efforts play a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the voices of residents generally, but particularly those of disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals. Community art engages people in representing their personal and collective identities, histories, and aspirations using multiple forms of expression [45]. The arts may serve to spur active dialogue concerning attitudes, social norms, and economic assumptions that need to be challenged or changed to promote community development and leadership capacity [46].

Community art-making offers participants space to share their stories and shape those narratives, memories, and aspirations in ways that other methods of engagement cannot. Leavy has offered one example, which she refers to as dialogical performance, involving a conversation among different people and texts, enabling multiple views and ideas, and seeking an open-ended and co-existential understanding of the self and the other [5]. As our examples of Bond Street, Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, Damas, and Arte Moris above illustrated, participatory theater in its many forms can promote opportunities for constructive dialogue in communities and positive changes in human relations. Similarly, murals can be powerful tools in efforts to mobilize groups for change, as the Chiapas Taniperla case, we profiled suggested. However, these examples also implied that appropriate participatory processes must be an integral part of community art-making if they are to realize their potential to catalyze change [25].

As noted above, American Voices has helped youth participating in its programs focus on the needs of others—students, audiences, and communities—rather than themselves. The ties and service encouraged by such projects counter the competition and individualism that often otherwise characterize neoliberal life generally and music practice and performance particularly [35]. Such connections to others and the inclination to a common purpose that interactive ties can create may facilitate community development initiatives and, in any case, are integral to their eventual success.

4.2. Peacebuilding

Violent conflicts affect the economic, political, social, and cultural life and characteristics of the communities and nations they touch. When the social fabric of society is damaged, human relations and sense of community fray and may even break, requiring rebuilding efforts. Peacebuilding requires diverse and sophisticated tools, approaches, and skills from scholars and practitioners alike, yet many such initiatives do not involve the arts [42]. Shank and Schirch have pointed to the untapped potential for arts-based peacebuilding and proposed ways to realize this latent resource through its strategic employment [42]. They have challenged peacebuilding practitioners to find ways of incorporating the arts into their conflict amelioration efforts to create spaces where people from contending groups may express their perspectives and concerns, heal, and work toward reconciliation.

Working in conditions of violence, artists can interrupt the cycle of emotional, spiritual, physical, and psychological harm through diverse art forms, in order to create an environment in which victims may address and come to terms with personal and collective trauma [42]. Theater can be used to humanize those who have been "othered" by the essentialist and fundamentalist assumptions typically used to justify conflict. Performance art interventions possess the potential to encourage social change by stimulating reflective public dialogue concerning dominant social, political, and ideological frameworks [47]. Theater can serve as a compelling alternative to the passive spectatorship that is otherwise often encouraged in today's societies by inviting its audience to play an active role in constructing narratives and associations that thereafter become a shared experience [48].

For example, in Afghanistan, Bond Street found that Afghani audience members have often formed more nuanced views about what should be done concerning a variety of vital social matters in their country by becoming engaged with plays that provide valuable information they had not previously been willing to consider or to share in any other forum. As BST's Artistic Director observed in an interview with the authors, the troupe helped Afghani women create theater performances about their concerns that spoke directly to their shared concerns:

The group that we formed in Kandahar went from door to door, knocking on doors and gathering the women in the neighborhood, just to go to one woman's house and do the performance in the courtyard or the living room, for maybe just 20–25 women. These are women that really never leave home and would not be able to have access to this particular information about domestic violence or about some of the traditions about how in-laws treat their new young brides. They start breaking them [traditions] down. A woman playing an abusive husband is a scary sight to see because they really know what it's like. Afterward, the women in the audience get a chance to come up and act out the scene with them, with the character of their choice, and say how they would treat the situation. It is some interesting dialogue, as you can imagine [21].

Bond Street and its collaborators make ample use of talkbacks Engaging audiences in problem-solving concerning the issues presented in their plays. The company also routinely encourages individuals to come to the stage to address characters in its productions. Bond Street's social theater entertains while it teaches, heals, fosters community, and seeks to produce something beautiful. The company has performed in refugee camps, in areas of conflict and in post-conflict environments while collaborating with local artists to develop plays that further the value of the arts in helping individuals and communities promote and shape more peaceful futures.

Similarly, musical performances offer many insights into the identity issues and points of similarity and difference across peoples and cultures that produce it, opening spaces to expand consciousness, transcend differences and build coalitions and [5]. However, Leavy has lamented the fact that music is infrequently used in conflict and social research [5]. Employing music in broader sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts can be a powerful tool to facilitate knowledge, understanding, and connection with other cultures [49]. By engaging in music education as a form and forum for youth development in post-conflict zones, American Voices, for example, provides young people ways to use performing arts to assist in addressing problems in their communities while helping to build more tolerant and respectful relationships among those it engages. In an interview, the organization's executive director John Ferguson has described an American Voices show featuring rappers and hip–hop performers that drew 4000 people to a parking lot in Khartoum, Sudan [40]. That performance was the first American cultural event in that city in three years, and it offered an opportunity for the residents of a conflict-filled community to come together and put their differences aside, at least for its duration.

4.3. Democratization

Civic dialogue is vital for democracy, since it serves as a primary means of addressing differences in values, beliefs, and ideas. Hawes has argued that performative methods of such interaction create a safe place for people to discuss disruptive and emotionally charged issues that affect their communities and improve relations with other individuals and groups within them [47]. In the same way that BST engages with its audiences in post-show dialogues, the Tunaweza program in Tanzania works with youth groups in Magnet Theatre, improvisational performances in which young volunteers use freeze-frame scenarios (pausing a performance at specific points), to discuss with the audience (local residents) how the presentation might or should continue [50]. Paramasivan has contended that such interaction is aimed at promoting community dialogue concerning commonly experienced problems and scenarios [50].

Drawing on Conrad [51], Pontious has argued that community mural-making processes can be democratizing, since they are able to encourage a sense of respect among artists, art, and the community members who create them to address concerns relevant to all of these groups [52]. In keeping with this idea, Pontious also concluded that mural-making could provide an opportunity to equip art-making participants and artists with new skills as well as with opportunities to develop critical democratic capacities [52]. Such may occur when artists undertake mural creation as a form of collaborative engagement by, with and for community members, to depict significant individual and shared stories. Collective mural development entails team-building, as participants provide specific content they

would like to see highlighted and discern mechanisms by which to settle differences on that count as well as to develop and bring their shared vision to fruition [28].

Similarly, music programs promoted by nongovernmental organizations abroad, such as those offered by American Voices, help youth with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds come together, learn and perform on stage, as Shia and Sunni Muslims have, for example, by playing in the same American Voices-sponsored orchestra in Kurdistan in Iraq. By framing music as a socio-cultural activity, AV and its music educators seek to contribute to the construction of more democratic, inclusive, and equitable societies. Values of trust, respect, and responsibility are essential in the projects lead by community musicians and in the dialogue they encourage with and among their project participants [7]. While the concern for quality musicianship and performance is always present, a higher value is placed on the process that brings together both experienced and inexperienced musicians, many of whom have not been given, or have not taken up, the opportunity to play music [7].

These examples have illustrated the intersection between the arts and international development initiatives. We contend that the sentiments of solidarity and shared identity that participatory arts approaches may stimulate may prompt community members to come together to address other relevant issues they face. Our hope is that this brief discussion of the benefits of community art-making in the international context, in addition to the vignettes outlined above, will encourage researchers and practitioners in the fields of community building, peacebuilding, and democracy promotion, as well as many others, to become more interested and willing to engage with arts-based approaches. In the following section, we draw on previous initiatives, to suggest several lessons we believe are likely to assist those interested in pursuing future arts-based international community initiatives.

5. Lessons for Community-Based Artists and Practitioners

First, it is essential for arts-centered development practitioners to keep in mind that adopting a bottom-up community-based approach may not be inherently participatory and inclusive. Participation patterns in communities will reflect existing cultural and social divisions, as American Voices' musical instructors and BST's performers learned first-hand in Iraq and Afghanistan. Barndt has rightly argued that power and inequality are likely to prove as central to the arts as to any other human endeavor [45]. Therefore, one of the key lessons for community-based artists is to be highly aware of the relations of power among those engaged with them in their work. It may be necessary to design mechanisms especially to reach out to marginalized groups to ensure their participation and inclusion, which can be "an empowering and radical act," as Valdez concluded following his experience with multiple arts-oriented engagement projects [28] (pp. 105–106). Indeed, several authors profiled here, in their own ways, have suggested that art educators and community arts practitioners should be concerned both with issues of power/inequality and aesthetics as they attempt to bridge or promote a reconsideration of psychological, social, and political divides and challenge existing undemocratic practices [7,10,11].

International community development practitioners work in multiple locales, regions, nations, and across continents, in different cultural contexts, in which diverse communication styles are likely to be required. Valdez has recounted how the heterogeneous communities in which he has worked have caused him to reconsider his approach to participatory mural production: "[I]t made us rethink what we meant by 'community,' as we tried to identify the shared values of urban groups who might see themselves as a community of identity or interest rather than of geography" [28] (p. 105). When a community is conceived in terms of geographical space, its residents assume the primary significance of face-to-face relations that nurture feelings of belonging [53]. Consequently, a second lesson for community-based artists is to explore the different conceptions of "community" that residents have embraced, since such understanding is crucial to identifying potentials for shared purpose(s) and aspirations. A third lesson, closely related to the second one, concerns the need for artists to link community art-making to a broader understanding of the development context in which they work, which Sloman has argued will generate deeper impacts on participants [25]. The arts can offer

individuals and communities capacity to uncover alternative meanings linked to the issues they may wish to address and help catalyze "informed conversations about bringing about more responsive, just, and democratic social arrangements" [54] (p. 126). Art can serve as "an instrument for understanding society and how to live successfully in it" [9] (p. 143). Such an approach demands that the content and structure of art education focus on themes that encourage students to immerse themselves in communal issues, rather than simply or solely on the elements and principles of design or media [9,12].

The complexity of community concerns requires a variety of traditional and new knowledge forms, skills, and collaborations. To produce a participatory and culturally relevant arts-based intervention, an artist needs to respect the traditional ways of knowing, assumptions, and capacities of the residents with whom he or she works. Thus, a fourth lesson we suggest for those wishing to employ the arts in development initiatives concerns the need for artists to balance their efforts to question existing values, norms, mores with a self-conscious awareness of the boundaries of the habitual understandings of those they wish to engage. Such efforts can help with using the space their work can generate to broaden community members' perspectives and create new opportunities for residents actively to reflect on, and to question, their experience and assumptions.

Finally, Barndt [45] and Lear [55] have pointed to the importance of hope that diverse forms of creative expression may help to stimulate in communities. A fifth lesson we suggest, therefore, is that artists be conscious of the power of participatory arts projects to nurture hope and to recall that it is hope that ultimately gives people reasons to persevere, regardless of the conditions they may be confronting. At their best, community artists can challenge those with whom they work to envision a creative future marked by active and meaningful participation [7]. The inscription on the recreated Zapatista Taniperla mural near the City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, California, captures the essence of this lesson: "Like the corn that grows from the buried seed, symbol of hope and rebirth, the Taniperla mural reminds us that creativity outlives violence, and that dignity that gives life to people is not so easily silenced." [56]

6. Conclusions

The short vignettes sketched above offered insights into the ways that the arts may promote social change processes that are often difficult to prompt via more conventional strategies. Using the examples of participatory murals, theater, and music, we have sought to convey the value of community-based art-making across genres in diverse international engagement contexts.

If community building, peacebuilding, and democratization are to succeed, they must revisit and (re)build communal relationships, and such social ties will not develop without shared processes of identity-building. The arts can be a means of raising public consciousness regarding attitudes, social norms, and ontologic and epistemic assumptions by self-consciously nurturing dialogue and discussion among individuals otherwise possessing diverse values and beliefs. Theater in its many forms has been increasingly used in international community development as many of these artists have moved toward incorporating an array of participatory practices into their work [25]. Music, too, has great potential to aid communities engaged in collective identity struggles and negotiations, as it can merge elements from different times, cultures, and genres [5] and involve individuals in a shared enterprise. Community murals encourage residents' self-expression and may also help form alliances for broader social struggles [28]. The innate potential of participatory artistic efforts to help open space for individual and group reflection can result in heightened popular awareness of the implications of existing norms supporting dominant social orders for all population groups; the first step necessary for any social change to occur. In this sense, community arts projects can also help build self-conscious citizen awareness, understanding, and consideration of the social, political, and economic status quo.

Overall, this analysis has suggested five lessons for community artists and practitioners involved in international development. They highlight the importance of such individuals actively assessing and reflecting on:

- The power relations evident in the communities they seek to serve,
- Ensuring they are aware of the conceptions of "community" at play among those with whom they wish to collaborate,
- The broader picture of development in the jurisdictions they target,
- Ways to be aware of and demonstrate respect for, while also fostering self-conscious awareness among residents of, traditional ways of knowing, knowledge and skills in the populations they choose to serve, and
- Finding ways to foster and nurture hope for the future among those with whom they work.

We hope these lessons will contribute to the growing support for and use of participatory arts processes in international development initiatives. By focusing on human relationships and social narratives, the arts can help groups mobilize around shared purposes, thus facilitating community change efforts and thereby serving as a critical ingredient of their ultimate success.

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