

EU grants. Additionally, we have to mention the sense of solidarity an organisation in an oppressed situation can get from its partners in the network, which can count for almost as much as actual financial support.

On the other hand, as a consequence of the series of political decisions that have put the independent organisations in a disadvantaged situation, these organisations feel the necessity of “sticking together”, to collaborate on a national level (or on a city level). In both countries, national networks (still) work in an informal way, but there are more and more attempts and initiatives to establish a coalition or platform to gather the “like-minded” organisations, committed to free, critical thinking and democratic values.

As we can conclude from the above detailed examples, the two main “tactics” civil (art and cultural) organisations choose to survive in Hungary and Poland are to be engaged on a local level, to collaborate with local inhabitants, and to get involved in a more general civil political resistance. In both cases, it is crucial that CSOs rely on a community – be it a local or a wider one – and try to find solutions to the present situation, in which financial independence is strongly connected to the idea of independence as an attitude.

It would be difficult to close this essay with a positive conclusion. If we accept that a catastrophe can open ways to new opportunities, and out of the collapse of a certain system a new one can emerge, we might be able to hope that if the publicly-funded independent art scene has to disappear, a new structure, based on (international and national) collaborative networks of civil organisations as well as on intersectoral activities and cooperation might have the chance to arise.

## NEOCOLONIALISM AND CULTURAL POLICY

*“We need to stop the misappropriation/  
commodification of certain cultures and cultural  
practices”*

TUNDE ADEFIOYE

Racism, or to call it by another name, white supremacy, in the funding structures of the Flemish, Belgian, Dutch and wider-European arts and cultural sector has caused what some of us experience as nightmares. One could also say it is the neocolonial approaches of, for example, the Flemish cultural landscape where I live and work.

What can Flanders and other regions of Western Europe do to decrease this type of animosity? Stop using archaic standards to attract new talents and cultures. Do your homework, relax your fears, because the next non-white Vlaming that you hire might be the one that pushes your organisation to a new innovative and cosmopolitan horizon. Breathe...this is maybe not a nightmare... it’s going to be ok...we might get through this together. The structures and history that have created this system and its disadvantages, as well as criminalising people of colour, are the real horror.

Is this a nightmare or like the legendary Langston Hughes asks “what happens to a dream deferred...does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore ---And then run. Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over---like a syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it EXPLODE?” There are other solutions to this bad dream, which include things like apprenticeships and training projects that last at least a year for non-white individuals interested in leadership functions within the cultural world. Institutions and publicly-funded organisations need to move away from superficial “diversity” work. As Sara Ahmed puts it in her book *On Being Included*, “To be seen as ‘being diverse’ can be a way of ‘not doing diversity,’ because the organisation says it ‘is it,’ or that it already ‘does it,’ which means that it sees there is nothing left to do.”<sup>1</sup> As we all know, there is so much left to do. The situation in some institutions is dire and they have no real strategy to make their organisations more equitable. They may have a strategy to recruit more people of colour in their halls as audience members and may even achieve this on stage in terms of the productions that they support. Many, though not all, are not concerned with

1 Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. p. 76. Duke University Press. Durham and London. 2012



developing attainable goals of handing over more of their consolidated power to groups that have not generally had it on the work floor of many organisations. Even if we look at the situation of white womxn in Belgium – no single major institution that is the size of a Bozar, KVS, NT Gent, De Singel and so on, has a womxn as an artistic director whereas almost all of these institutions receive sometimes 2 million euros or more from public funding. When it comes to inclusion and equality, the situation is even worse. This is also true of institutions in Germany and other countries across Western Europe. What can be observed is that many well-meaning, left-leaning people in the cultural sector are against a US-style affirmative action or quota system. A system that in essence rewards and punishes publicly-funded institutions, based on what side of the diversity line they stand on. Quotas might not be for everyone, but we need to conceive strategies that encourage, in some situations, equity to be established. It was discouraging to learn that the Flemish government does not allow data to be collected on who works where, based on ethnicity. One can imagine it is for good reason but at the same time it is a certain level of woeful ignorance because without knowing what type of people occupy what work space, how does one start to effectively tackle the lack of diversity and equity on the work floor? We talk about equity because one can achieve diversity by hiring a womxn of colour to do the invisible work of cleaning our workspaces and proudly display those individuals as representing an aspired diversity, while simply reasserting colonial relationships. Or even more common, hiring a person of colour to do the work of diversity, such as an audience developer or a community manager. These individuals are then tasked to bring more colour to the institution. Nothing wrong with these positions but a problem arises when we start to observe just how many institutions still operate hierarchically. Meaning those individuals hired to do the diversity work do not have the same power as an artistic director or even a dramaturg, nor do they have much of a decision-making stake in the institution, so equity is not attained. In her seminal paper *Mapping the Margins*, Kimberlé Crenshaw explains: “The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of colour, and the failure of anti-racism to interrogate patriarchy means that anti-racism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women.”<sup>2</sup> In the vein of Crenshaw’s intersectionality, we need to know ethnicity, gender, dis-/ability and in some cases religion and sexual orientation, in order to know if we are truly being as diverse and more importantly, equitable, as we say we are. Without these data sets and without directed approaches and strategies to tackle the lack of diversity and equity, we are in essence, fumbling in the darkness of our own ignorance. This will insure that structures are being challenged and concrete steps are being taken to move away from long-standing practices. Examples of the above-mentioned apprenticeships are taking place in England at theatres such as Contact in Manchester or the Up Next program that takes place at Battersea and Bush theatres in London.

Furthermore, we could observe how the “urban” arts (hip-hop, slam-poetry, breakdance, etc) and the culture scene in Flanders has been co-opted by bigger players and misappropriated by governmental institutions, as a way of doing their social works.

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2 Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. Stanford Law Review. Vol. 43, No 6. July 1991, p. 1241-1299.

A few years after Urban Woorden started in Leuven, we got to sit around the table with a well-respected cultural organisation. This was thanks to a friend who worked for an organisation that was based in the same building. In 2012, together with one of the young dancers we were working with, we presented the idea of our multidisciplinary dance project. About two weeks later, we got the news that our project was not selected for their festival that gave support to young amateur artists which, till that point, did not have many individuals of colour as participants. The aforementioned friend then decided he would convince his colleagues from his organisation to host our project as one of their festival selections. Thanks to this, three young Flemish womxn of colour got to stand on a bigger stage and present their work for a wider audience. They presented a story using urban dance and slam, which until that point, had never before been presented on stage in the Flemish context. Due to the empathetic coaching we received from a Dutch artist, the piece was well received as an artistically strong product, though not without its critics. Together with the dancers we were encouraged to make a second piece - this time focusing on a more “universal” theme - feminism. Through JINT (a Flemish organisation supporting organisations that want to apply for EU funding for youth-focused projects), we were able to garner financial support from the EU commission. This allowed time and space for research and ample resources to make a more quality piece. The piece opened to a sold-out audience. As a result of the success and message, we wanted to tour it so we applied for a provincial grant in 2014. We were not awarded the grant but who did get a grant from the province was the same organisation that turned their nose up to our first urban dance creation. They were given money to work out a dance project that eventually invited and worked with urban dancers in Leuven. Such all too common decisions makes me think of one of the points in the ten-point plan I wrote to address such issues. Point number 7 reads:

Cultural institutions, like governments, too often practise a type of appropriation that is endemic to parasites in the human gut. One of the most insidious cases of this is when the US government in 1975 under Gerald Ford appropriated the breakfast program from the Black Panthers and made it their own. In many ways this type of non-symbiotic relationship happens within the cultural landscape, for example, by working with smaller organisations without giving them credit for the work they have done. This is especially prevalent through the stealing of intellectual property. More specifically, larger organisations organise a meeting with a smaller one under the premise of a potential collaboration. And by the end of the meeting, the smaller organisation has divulged all their network names and some of their methods. The smaller organisation asks for a follow-up meeting but in return they only get the sounds of crickets in the night. When, in fact, they should either get a solid cooperation and acknowledgement or at least a consultation fee for the information they have divulged. Or even worse, a small organisation creates a concept, let’s call it an “urban bib” and a library in a city, let’s say Antwerp, hijacks the idea without the appropriate acknowledgement. Furthermore, the bigger organisation can use that information to fatten up their subsidy appli-

cation for their next round of provincial or federal subsidies.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from this point, I was also aware of the fact that I was being mined like coltan in the Congo only to never have any direct benefit from the refined product. I was conscious of these realities but more important than holding out, is that young folks that normally would not get a platform with this type of organisation, would finally get one. Far from an altruist, I do feel the need that youth living at the margins of society be served by a diverse array of organisations. What I hope for the future is that these organisations themselves become more diverse and that means less white men calling the shots and running the “cultural plantation”.

Where is the neocolonialism in all of this anyways? To some this might just seem like a collection of sob stories. Some Flemish left-wing individuals might even call it navelstaren (navel gazing). For those individuals, here is a break down.

Leuven is actually a microcosm for what is happening in many parts of Flanders. Pardon, make that rest of Western “Errorpe”. Though these realities play themselves out in very different ways in the different cities, not to mention different countries, one thing is for sure: whether we are talking Athens, Greece, Leicester, England or Leuven, Belgium some individuals feel the need to hold on to certain ways of being with a death grip. The idea of change for the better is hard for these individuals to fathom because for them the way they grew up shapes the way they know history, thus making it the most appropriate manner to conduct society. So that even when it comes down to culture and who gets to determine what is culture, many individuals that have traditionally held the reins of what culture is and isn’t, want to continue to run the show even though their cultural practices or ideas might not be innovative or relevant to the changing demographics around them. Let us venture to the absurd and agree with some commentators within the Flemish context who argue that colonialism actually brought civilisation to countries like Congo or Mexico. What history has shown us is that, due to the changing ideologies of the colonised in those countries, there were violent revolts to push out or at least attempts to restructure the power dynamics in these colonised lands. Furthermore, what one sees is that in places like Congo these revolts “failed”. But what the attempts ensured during the different time periods is that it made colonial powers reassess how they were holding power and doing business. In places like Ghana, where those in power actually were able to form relatively stable governments after bloody revolution, it meant that the country folk could feel proud again and assert a pride in their own cultural heritage. To extend that absurdity to the Leuven context one could argue that since Leuven is growing increasingly diverse, it might be time for violent revolution. Hopefully without blood but one that shakes up and topples those who hold both political and cultural power.

In a speech entitled “Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice in a Postcolonial World”,

3 Adefioye, Tunde. A Critical Ten Point Plan to Creating Professional Sectors that Reflect Society. IETM Porto. 22.05.2018. <https://www.ietm.org/en/themes/ietm-porto-plenary-meeting-2018-keynote-speech-by-tunde-adebioye>

Nikita Dhawan mentions, “[Michel] Foucault would argue, ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ Dhawan then adds, “where there is resistance there is power”<sup>4</sup>. What power structures are our cultural practices harboring? And what individuals and initiatives are mounting a resistance to the status quo of our practices? And how can we ensure that we create enough space and facilitate their own use of power to help us all drastically change the way we conduct our cultural sector(s)? An important question that Dhawan later asks is “What do we do with our will to empower the disenfranchised and the vulnerable? How do we deal with those who refuse to be interpolated as appropriate objects of our will to do justice?” This is when we have to learn to move out of the way. Or at least create the right conditions for others to do the job with approaches that might be more appealing to “those who refuse”. Co-founder of Black Lives Matter and queer activist Alicia Garza puts it differently: “For me, power is the ability to determine your own circumstances. This is bigger than personal power or individual agency... The ability to shape the narrative--to create and maintain the story of who we are, the ability to define who is the ‘we.’”<sup>5</sup>

In a city that boasts the third most diverse population in Flanders and currently has its first mayor of Moroccan descent, it is a scandal that the individuals in Leuven that determine both the cultural policy and programming are overwhelmingly white. It is similar to the days of colonization when the ruling class in cities like Brazzaville or Port Au Prince were the white Europeans who were a minority in those cities. From the director of culture on down to the individuals who run most of the cultural organisations in Leuven, most are white and more specifically, male. In fact, not until the formation of certain urban initiatives was there an organisation that was able to challenge who created culture and who got to receive and participate in culture. This meant that many individuals especially individuals with an immigrant background were overwhelmingly being left out of consideration of how their parents’ tax money was being used for culture. In simpler terms, the colonial masters ask for the working class to mine the resources but when the grants are distributed they end up in the hands of mostly cis-white able-bodied men who are charged with creating interesting cultural programming for an increasingly diversifying population. It is no wonder then that many individuals on the margins of Leuven society decide to stay home instead of going to the theatre halls of the Leuven cultural institutions. They simply do not feel like their needs are being addressed and how can they be when individuals that resemble them culturally or otherwise are not part of the decision-making process when it comes to policy or programming? In short, it is long past due and time to divide more of the cultural cake. No 1884 Berlin Conference-type divisions. More fitting is a division that would increase the diversity not only in the audience but more importantly in terms of those who make the policy and programming decisions. In other words, the hierarchical structures and “minorities” that have long determined culture for the majority need to widen their ranks. Maybe like some past colonial rulers did, white men

4 Dhawan, Nikita. Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice in a Postcolonial World. Dictionary of Now #11. Haus der Kulturen der Welt. 19.04.2018. <https://www.hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/video/63347>

5 Garza, Alicia. Alicia Garza Speaks on Building Power to the AMC2017 Opening Ceremony. Allied Media Conference. 5.09.2017. <https://www.alliedmedia.org/news/2017/09/05/alicia-garza-speaks-building-power-amc2017-opening-ceremony>

need to peacefully step down from their reign. Even more, in these times when federal funding for culture is being diverted to maintaining a heavily militarised state, we need to come up with new innovative ways to envision how we practise culture. If names like Ish Ait Hamou, Rachida Lamrabet, Junior Mthombeni, Aminata Demba, Moya Michael and Sachli Gholamalizad among others, do not already encourage one to see the wealth of culture and innovations that individuals with an immigrant background bring to the fore, then maybe we need to look way across the pond. Where people like George and Ira Gershwin, Oscar de la Renta, Mira Nair, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and many more immigrants have not only broadened the scope of cultural understanding in the US, but have also added significantly to the economic good of society. This is not including what African Americans, descendants of slaves that were forcibly migrated/shipped to the US (with hundreds of thousands murdered along the way), have brought to the world of culture. Rock ‘n’ Roll anyone?!

In Flanders, there are already many examples of good practices such as Gen2020, Mestizo Arts Festival, CityLab/Pianofabriek and Gentse Lente where artists are given space to create their own productions and folks of colour call the shots sometimes in a collective non-hierarchical manner. These examples serve us all better, instead of what generally happens, taking artists from marginalised groups, instrumentalising them to create projects or theatre pieces that big institutions want to make, an often damaging top-down approach.

We need to stop the misappropriation/commodification of certain cultures and cultural practices; be it those called urban, Black, queer and so on, in order to only serve the “diversity” goals of major institutions.

This model of neocolonialism has been the type that China has used in recent times as it lays claim to the African continent. With all its issues, including the dehumanising afrophobia that exists with some Chinese, this type of colonisation at least tries to build infrastructure. Even when the resources have been stripped and taken back to mainland China, the people have schools, railroads and other infrastructures. This, though, cannot be a desired option. There are other more sustainable alternatives we could look at. For example, how Wangari Maathai in Kenya worked in the past to observe the local needs and used that as a starting point to replace the tree plantations that fed into the colonial tea demands of the English, with a harvest that was more appropriate for the local Kenyan context. Or, you have Vandana Shiva at the foothills of the Himalayas in Dehradun, who conceived a program to help meet the needs of women farmers that created a sustainable agriculture while preserving the local seed bank. Not only was this approach more ecological, but it also challenged the behemoth, Monsanto, from having a capital on the seed strains in that region of India. More contemporaneous, Garza reminds us in her AMC speech, “...How we transform power so that power never harms another person, but instead power ensures that everyone has what they need and nothing they don’t... We are here to create new stories of who we are, how we got here, and what is possible on the other side. We are here to examine how we can bring about the world we desire while dismantling the one we don’t. We are here not to create smaller and smaller groups of people who tell the same story, but instead to expand the nuance of

our stories so that we can learn more about who we are and who we can be”.

The Flemish should make like the Wangari, Vandana and Garzas of our world and invest more in training the future cultural programmers and decision makers that will be best able to cater to the needs of the growing diverse population as well as create a healthy cultural ecosystem. In the ten-point plan delivered at IETM, it was put this way:

Funding bodies need to make sure that resources are better redistributed. Not only large institutions should be getting funding for new projects. Institutions like the Flemish Royal Theater in Brussels, Kammerspiele in Munich, Royal Court Theater in London and De Singel in Antwerp need to find new backdoor ways to give some of their budgets to smaller organisations... In other words, smaller organisations that are doing cultural work that better serve those at the margins of our society also need to be better funded. Speaking of subsidies, whose idea was it to streamline and encourage fusion anyways? There is a hole in the logic, because one needs to see the cultural landscape as an ecosystem... This type of insistence on the “bigger is better” organisation is a counter-intuitive process. In a speech given in 1968 at Bard College on power and violence, Hannah Arendt proclaimed “...As things stand today, we see how the superpowers are bogged down under the monstrous weight of their own bigness. It looks as though the new example will have a chance to rise... in a small well-defined sector in a mass society of the large powers... bigness itself is afflicted with vulnerability. While no one can say with any assurance, where and when the breaking point will be reached. We can observe, almost to the point of measuring it, how strength and resiliency are insidiously seeping from our institutions, drop by drop...”<sup>3</sup>

Often the people suffering from discrimination in the cultural sector are the same ones facing ecological discrimination. In the US context you have, for example, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan that largely impacted poor and/or people of colour. In Cape Town the impact of global warming and bad political management has also caused a water crisis there and it is the overwhelmingly large Black population living in the rundown townships of that city who must bear the brunt of that catastrophe. As we develop new cultural and innovative landscapes and policies that shape them, we need to make sure we also think more about the ecological impact of our work. How do we get around to the different cities we go to for tours, conferences and theatre performances? What do we do with our old computers? Are we able to reuse old stage sets instead of just dumping them and having them end up in some landfill? The more we think about these and other questions, the more we can truly push and create a cultural landscape that will make all of our futures much more inclusive while engaging various communities.

To conclude, when we think about our present colonial/neocolonial realities we have to spend as much time, if not more, thinking about these futures I refer to above. In a speech delivered during the first Black feminist retreat, Audre Lorde reminds us:

If we restrict ourselves only to the use of those dominant power games which we have been

taught to fear...then we risk defining our work simply as shifting our own roles within the same oppressive power relationships, rather than as seeking to alter and redefine the nature of those relationships. This will result only in the rise of yet another oppressed group, this time with us as overseer...it is our visions which sustain us. They point the way toward a future made possible by our belief in them...There is a world in which we all wish to live. That world is not attained lightly... If as Black Feminists, we do not begin talking, thinking, feeling ourselves for its shape, we will condemn ourselves and our children to a repetition of corruption and error.<sup>6</sup>

What these futures can look like concretely are organisations like BLM, Contact, Battersea, Urban Wooden and CityLab, which are providing us with possible frameworks for that future.



<sup>6</sup> Byrd, Rudolph P; Betsch Cole, Johnnetta; Guy-Sheftall, Beverly. "I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde". Difference and Survival. The First Black Feminist Retreat. 06.07.1977. Oxford University Press. New York, New York. 2009

## NEW BUSINESS MODELS IN EU CULTURAL POLICY

### *The History of a (Dangerous?) Idea<sup>1</sup>*

BETHANY REX

Culture has long formed part of the justification for the very idea of Europe. A language of shared identity remains prevalent in policy statements and programme documents and through various cultural initiatives the EU ventures to foster notions of shared 'European' culture, memory and values. Now more than ever, with popular consent for the idea of Europe dwindling and the gains made by far right and nationalist political parties who use notions of 'culture' and 'values' to justify their positions, the EU is increasingly looking to cultural policy and projects as one means of producing what is known as European heritage or culture.<sup>2</sup> Recent developments, however, mean cultural organisations increasingly depend on the EU, a lesser acknowledged dynamic. This is particularly pronounced where cultural organisations operate within countries marked by deep austerity measures or where state spending on culture is limited or reserved for elite cultural forms such as opera, ballet and museums. For organisations outside the conventionally subsidised arts, the support of the EU may be crucial to their financial sustainability in the coming years.

In contrast to diminishing national government support for culture, the EU is expanding its efforts, as evidenced by the proposed 27% increase to the budget for the EC's Creative Europe programme, supporting cultural and creative sectors (including the audiovisual industry) in the next long-term budget (2021-2027). While questions remain over how these funds will be allocated, organisations looking for public support can take some comfort in these developments. Given the hope invested in culture by the EU as a catalyst for economic growth, social integration and fostering the shared sense of identity essential to the legitimacy of the European project, it could be argued that the EU's involvement and continued support for cultural programmes is unlikely to waver in the near future.

This does not remove the possibility of a change in emphasis in cultural policy, however. Many would argue that a shift within the language used by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG-EAC) from an identity-based justification for EU cultural action to an economic one has al-

<sup>1</sup> This title is inspired by Mark Blyth, *Austerity: the history of a dangerous idea*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Though, as Chiara De Cesari argues, ideas of a shared or common past can be used for inclusive or exclusionary ends for 'shared culture' implies cultural difference and cultural otherness.