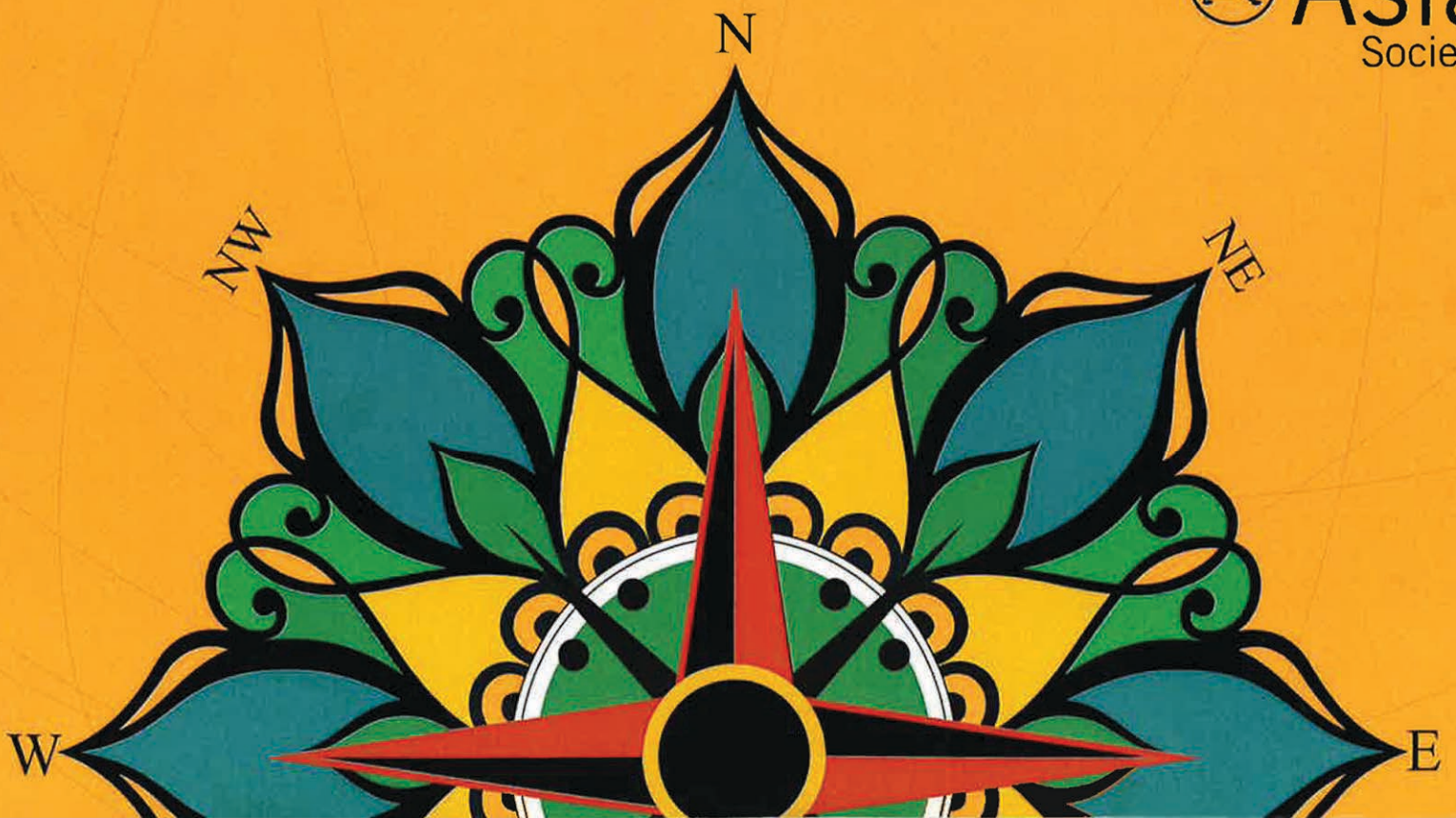




# Making a Difference Through the Arts: Strengthening America's Links with Asian Muslim Communities



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# **Making a Difference Through the Arts: Strengthening America's Links with Asian Muslim Communities**

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## Foreword

**For many Americans,** the events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath still cast an ominous shadow over the regions of Asia where more than half of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims live. Mediascapes of militant Islamists in Pakistan, Americans under attack in Afghanistan, and angry mobs in Kyrgyzstan fan the flames of fear and suspicion. A steady barrage of images portraying social tension, impoverishment, and violence contributes to the persistence of simplistic stereotypes that belie the exceptional diversity and cultural vibrancy of Asian Muslim communities.

Dismantling cultural stereotypes requires the broad dissemination of new knowledge. The Asia Society has long been a leader in building knowledge cross-culturally through dialogue and exchange in a range of fields and domains. Arts and culture are among the most conspicuous of these. In contrast to some cross-cultural dialogue projects that tend to universalize the understanding of artistic expression and experience, the Asia Society strives, through its exhibitions, performance programs, and publications, to particularize it.

The present report offers a cogent example of this approach. Through case studies of arts and culture projects in three regions of Asia, the report presents not simply "Muslim artists" or "Islamic art," but a plethora of specific forms of engagement with artistic languages, styles, forms, and genres. In doing so, it underscores the importance of long-term strategies rooted in local knowledge as a core component of building effective intercultural dialogue and exchange.

This report is one component of a larger project, "Creative Voices of Islam in Asia," a three-year initiative that challenges pervasive American misperceptions of Islam by fostering an understanding and appreciation of creative voices within the multicultural societies of contemporary Asia—societies in which Muslims are strongly represented. "Creative Voices" not only offers a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, but also provides audiences with a context for developing a deeper understanding of Islamic artists and their societies.

On behalf of the Asia Society, I want to express my gratitude to the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic

Art for its generous support of this initiative. The Doris Duke Foundation also supported an earlier report, "Mightier than the Sword: Arts and Culture in the U.S.-Muslim World Relationship," that was produced by the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy and focuses primarily on the Middle East. Together, the two reports make an exceptionally strong case for the role that arts and culture initiatives can and should play in international affairs.

Among the contributors to "Making a Difference," I want to offer special thanks to Dartmouth College Professor Theodore Levin, who served as lead writer and editor, bringing his expertise and experience of more than 30 years to the project.

I also want to extend my thanks to the Asia Society staff who guided and coordinated this effort and contributed to the conceptualization, research, and writing—in particular, Rachel Cooper, Director of Cultural Programs and Performing Arts, and Ayesha Sikander, who served as an indefatigable editorial coordinator and researcher. Thanks as well to the outside consultants who devoted their time and regional expertise to the project: Nermeen Shaikh, who wrote about Pakistan; Suzanne Charlé, who contributed to the chapter on Indonesia; Zeyba Rahman, who contributed case studies from India; and the entire team of researchers, writers, translators, and editors who worked on the contents of the report, including Samina Quraeshi, Mohd Anis Md Nor, John McGlynn, Alia Swatika, Amna Kusumo, Tamim Samee, Raziya Syrdybaeva, Anne-Laure Py, and Adam Grode.

In the United States, political support for strengthening connections with Muslim-majority nations and Muslim-minority communities around the world is strong. The need has never been more urgent. With its lucid cultural analysis and diverse case studies, this report provides a practical road map for a range of stakeholders in international affairs who aspire to strengthen intercultural connections through the social power of artistic creativity.

**Vishakha N. Desai**  
President, Asia Society

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## Executive Summary

**This Asia Society report**, “Making a Difference Through the Arts: Strengthening America’s Links with Asian Muslim Communities,” was conceived as an effort to stimulate new thinking and to identify extant resources that can enhance connectivity between the United States and Muslim communities in Asia. It is addressed to a broad range of constituencies: nongovernmental organizations seeking to initiate or expand their own projects; donor organizations active in economic, social, and cultural development; policy makers charged with considering the role of culture in public diplomacy initiatives; academic institutions seeking to enrich international studies programs; advocacy groups, scholars, and journalists; and entrepreneurial individuals with a passion to make a difference. The Asia Society report joins a growing number of recent studies that make a strong case for the role of arts and culture in expanding links between the United States and nations with Muslim-majority populations—Muslim, that is, in any of the myriad ways in which Muslim identity may be expressed in the early twenty-first century.

Though Islamic civilization arose in the Middle East, more than half of the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims presently live in Asia. The cultural contexts of Islam in Asia are as varied as the cultures of Asia themselves. In many contexts, Islamic practices and beliefs have syncretized with local forms of spirituality and culture to create exuberant tradition-based languages of art that are strikingly contemporary. These languages range from readily accessible forms of indigenous popular culture to cultivated and highly sophisticated genres of music, dance, theater, painting, and poetry. Other forms of local artistic and cultural creativity that display strong markers of place include handcraft, fashion, film, and cuisine. All of these creative languages embody forms of cultural knowledge that can be “translated,” explained, and widely shared as a basis for developing cross-cultural connectivity.

This report offers examples of the diverse ways in which stakeholders in cultural development and exchange initiatives in and with Asian Muslim communities have built successful projects by drawing on cultur-

ally grounded knowledge and strategies. The panoramic range of projects, the impressive degree of imagination and innovation with which they have been designed and carried out, and the vital role they serve in fostering cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism among both Americans and Asians makes these projects—and the people and organizations behind them—worthy of careful attention.

The Asia Society team that researched, wrote, and compiled this report has been fortunate to undertake its work in a political climate that has been supportive of cultural exchange initiatives with Muslim-majority countries. President Barack Obama’s June 2009 speech in Cairo reset the tone of American diplomacy and sent a signal that the United States is serious about building stronger ties with the Muslim world. An April 2010 White House conference on entrepreneurship in Muslim-majority countries reinforced that message. Nonetheless, the political atmosphere that frames American relations with Muslim-majority nations and regions remains volatile, underscoring the fragility of cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy.

This Asia Society report complements a 2008 paper produced by the Brookings Institution’s Saban Center for Middle East Policy, “Mightier than the Sword: Arts and Culture in the U.S.-Muslim World Relationship,” which focuses primarily on the Middle East. A number of the Asia Society report’s findings and recommendations parallel and underscore those conveyed in the Brookings paper—in particular, the urgency of reaching out to young populations and the vast potential of new media and social networking platforms to do so. At the same time, the present report’s focus on Asia rather than the Middle East, as well as the professional expertise of the principal investigators in the world of not-for-profit cultural organizations, academe, and international foundations, has led us to frame the challenges and solutions in a different way than the authors of the Brookings paper.

We agree wholeheartedly with the recommendation of previous reports that arts and culture should play a central role in strengthening mutual understanding be-

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tween Americans and citizens of Muslim-majority nations. These reports have presented persuasive evidence and arguments to support their position. Our own priority has been to profile actual arts and culture projects and initiatives that provide compelling models for strengthening cross-cultural connectivity, and, in so doing, to illuminate the qualities that make them successful. Consequently, in place of policy recommendations, “Making a Difference” presents six core principles and strategies synthesized from the empirical case studies featured in the report.

These principles and strategies exemplify best practices in seeding and cultivating cross-cultural connectivity, and are applicable to a broad constituency of interested parties. The six principles and attendant strategies are summarized as follows (see the Conclusion for a fuller presentation):

**1.** Knowledge and accurate information are crucial to strengthening cross-cultural understanding. The arts offer a powerful domain in which individuals and communities can acquire knowledge about the achievements, values, and aspirations of other cultures.

**Strategy:** Create strong cultural contextualization for cross-cultural arts projects, such as documentary films, translations of texts, lecture-demonstrations, and debates, that contribute to nuanced cultural translation.

**2.** Cross-cultural collaborations should be formulated in a way that creates parity and equity between and among collaborators.

**Strategy:** Build programs from the ground up, rather than the top down, with frequent consultation, sharing of information, and consensus building about tactics.

**3.** Successful cultural initiatives and advocacy work need sustained investment over a long duration.

**Strategy:** Invest in building relationships with a minimum five- to seven-year time frame, focusing on support for creative work as well as organizational capacity building.

**4.** Powerful forces for social change are linked to the invention of new technologies, such as the printing press, the Internet, cell phones, and digital media.

**Strategy:** Exploit new communications technologies to promote connectivity.

**5.** Rather than viewing cultural production as a mechanism for “monetizing” creativity, culture should be viewed as a unique form of social currency that serves as a positive force in building community.

**Strategy:** Explore new forms of noncommercial cultural dissemination and sharing (such as the Creative Commons model) that challenge conventional models of cultural ownership.

**6.** Direct people-to-people connectivity retains an abiding power in the age of the Internet and digital mediation. Events that bring together artists and audiences from different cultures create a *frisson*—difficult to replicate in mediated forms—that can open new, potentially transformative modes of perception.

**Strategy:** Invest in programs built on promoting direct, personal experience of high-quality artistic performance, ideally accompanied by cultural interpretation that renders performance accessible to nonspecialists.

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## Introduction

**This Asia Society report**, “Making a Difference Through the Arts: Strengthening America’s Links with Asian Muslim Communities,” was conceived as an effort to stimulate new thinking and to identify extant resources that can enhance connectivity between the United States and Muslim communities in Asia. It joins a growing number of recent studies that make a strong case for the role of arts and culture in expanding links between the United States and nations with Muslim-majority populations—Muslim, that is, in any of the myriad ways in which Muslim identity may be expressed in the early twenty-first century.

Though Islamic civilization arose in the Middle East, more than half of the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims presently live in Asia. The cultural contexts of Islam in Asia are as varied as the cultures of Asia themselves. In many contexts, Islamic practices and beliefs have syncretized with local forms of spirituality and culture to create exuberant tradition-based languages of art that are strikingly contemporary. These languages range from readily accessible forms of indigenous popular culture to cultivated and highly sophisticated genres of music, dance, theater, painting, and poetry. Other forms of local artistic and cultural creativity that display strong markers of place include handcraft, fashion, film, and cuisine. All of these creative languages embody forms of cultural knowledge that can be “translated,” explained, and widely shared as a basis for developing cross-cultural connectivity.

This report offers examples of the diverse ways in which stakeholders in cultural development and exchange initiatives in and with Asian Muslim communities have built successful projects by drawing on culturally grounded knowledge and strategies. The panoramic range of projects, the impressive degree of imagination and innovation with which they have been designed and carried out, and the vital role they serve in fostering cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism on the part of both Americans and Asians makes these projects—and the people and organizations behind them—worthy of careful attention.

The Asia Society team that researched, wrote, and

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This Asia Society report complements a 2008 paper produced by the Brookings Institution’s Saban Center for Middle East Policy, “*Mightier than the Sword: Arts and Culture in the U.S.-Muslim World Relationship*,” which focuses primarily on the Middle East. “*Mightier than the Sword*” comprises a series of persuasive essays that underscore the importance of arts and culture as a medium for fostering cross-cultural understanding, and the role that governments, international foundations, major cultural institutions, and multinational cultural industries can and should play in developing large-scale initiatives to link Americans with what the authors call the “global Muslim community.”

A number of the Asia Society report’s findings and recommendations parallel and underscore those conveyed in the Brookings paper—in particular, the urgency of reaching out to young populations and the vast potential of new media and social networking platforms to do so. At the same time, the Asia Society’s report differs from “*Mightier than the Sword*” both in geographic focus and in methodology.

First, “*Making a Difference*” focuses on Asia rather than the Middle East. More specifically, it focuses on selected countries in three regions of Asia with significant Muslim populations: Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The staggering diversity of cultures and languages both within and among these large regions resists generalization. If this report points to one overarching conclusion, it is that effective cultural exchange

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arises from a keen awareness of cultural distinctions no less than commonalities, and from an intimate familiarity with the traditions, practices, beliefs, and worldviews of specific communities. While the notion of a “global Muslim community” is invoked in the concept of *ummah*, the Arabic word that Muslims use to refer to their faith community, this specific meaning should be kept separate from the many other ways in which “community” is understood and expressed—culturally, socially, and politically—in local and global contexts. These geographically particularized expressions of community are the focus of “Making a Difference.”

Second, the report’s authors have drawn on multiple approaches: in-depth, ethnographic research rooted in knowledge of local languages and cultures; reportage based on interviews with stakeholders engaged in a variety of ongoing arts and culture initiatives; participation in an international conference in Bangalore, India, devoted to facilitating dialogue among arts and culture nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) based in Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia; and invitations to a select group of exemplary “bridge builders” to tell their own stories of striving to make a difference through the power of the arts. These stories are included in the report under the rubric “Individuals Making a Difference.”

Within each of the three geocultural target regions addressed in “Making a Difference,” one country has been selected as a focal point. A variety of constraints made it impractical to undertake research in all countries within each region; moreover, the aim of the report is not to provide exhaustive geographic coverage, but rather to illuminate selected models of successful arts and culture projects within specific social and political contexts. The model projects and the contexts in which they are framed provide a panoramic, if necessarily selective, view of work that is nourishing artistic creativity, linking communities, and empowering underrepresented social groups. Some of these projects were designed from the start to span countries and continents. Others are intrinsically local, but offer enticing opportunities for international connectivity: a contemporary art prize in Afghanistan whose winning works could be exhibited in American galleries; a music revitalization project in Kyrgyzstan whose per-

forming ensemble could present concerts in the West; an Indonesian arts service organization that could provide a talent base for the worldwide circulation of Indonesian performing arts.

In South Asia, “Making a Difference” focuses on Pakistan, a nation that for many Americans has come to epitomize a monolith of Islamic militancy. The projects described in these pages illuminate a different face

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of Pakistan, and offer a glimpse of how Pakistani and Pakistani American cultural activists are laboring to cultivate new forms of Pakistani modernity through the arts. Analogous work is widespread in other parts of South Asia—in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India, where the scale and diversity of cultural activism would require a voluminous report of its own. Sprawling diaspora communities from these nations are also active in developing projects to strengthen transnational cultural connections. One such project—initiated by two brothers whose family immigrated to New York from the disputed territory of Kashmir—is profiled in a separate section of the report (Supplementary Case Studies) that features projects from India, Afghanistan, and the United States that resonate strongly with the themes of “Making a Difference.”

In Southeast Asia, the report focuses on Indonesia, where 88% of the national population of around 240 million self-identify as Muslims, thus constituting the world’s largest Muslim population within a single country. Nominal religious homogeneity and national

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consciousness notwithstanding, Indonesian society is characterized by myriad local identities and cultural practices. Unpacking the relationships among national, regional, and local identities within Indonesia is one of the recurring themes of arts and culture projects that represent Indonesia to other nations.

Finally, in Central Asia, “Making a Difference” focuses on the small nation of Kyrgyzstan. Among the post-Soviet Central Asian “stans,” Kyrgyzstan has the

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A series of case studies profiles extant projects and initiatives—many of them small scale and grassroots—that have demonstrated the capacity to connect communities and contribute to the building of mutual trust and understanding within and among them.

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most democratic—and also the most volatile—political culture. Within the last five years, opposition forces have overthrown two successive Kyrgyz presidents. Meanwhile, the United States, Russia, and China vie for influence with the shifting leadership of the strategically situated country. The same forces that create a dynamic political culture have also fostered an active civil society sector, along with a number of thriving cultural industries. With a population of around 5 million, Kyrgyzstan offers excellent models of how international cultural connectivity can flourish amid economically challenging conditions.

Seeding and cultivating connectivity among communities that are diverse in their habitat, social life, level of education, and degree of access to communications technology calls for mechanisms that register and respond to the nuances of cultural difference: not lofty “dialogue among civilizations,” but rather a confluence of focused dialogues among and between diverse affinity groups, taste communities, social networks, and pro-

fessional guilds. Such an approach offers both a more manageable scale and a more realistic starting point for thinking about concrete strategies and tactics for enabling connectivity. “Making a Difference” embodies this approach through its two principal aims:

- Sharing knowledge about projects, initiatives, and activities that represent best practices in strengthening cultural connectivity between Americans and residents of Asian countries with significant Muslim populations.
- Stimulating collaboration among institutional stakeholders in international cultural exchange and cultural development initiatives. Such stakeholders include civil society organizations, businesses, intergovernmental organizations, and state agencies, both within the United States and internationally.

The core content of “Making a Difference” is a series of case studies profiling extant projects and initiatives—many of them small scale and grassroots—that have demonstrated the capacity to connect communities and contribute to the building of mutual trust and understanding within and among them. Some of these communities are local, defined by a bounded physical territory. Others are regional or international, linked through common geographic or linguistic origins, or through shared tastes and common convictions. Local cultural activists and civil society organizations play an essential role in creating a strong base for successful transnational initiatives that may come later. By creating grassroots organizations and networks, attracting supporters, and marshaling resources, local actors provide the crucial elements needed to build high-visibility international exchange programs. Such actors are prominently featured in the case studies that follow.

The projects and initiatives described in these case studies arose not from the recommendations of multinational working groups, expert panels, or government programs, but from the passion, conviction, vision, and talent of individuals, small collectives, and, in a few cases, larger organizations that might be described as “cultural entrepreneurs.” These entrepreneurial initiatives represent a broad spectrum of approaches to creating, stimulating, revitalizing, and disseminating artis-

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tic and cultural production. Some of them draw on the enormous potential for global connectivity offered by the digital revolution: the Internet, film and video, recordings, electronic books, and so on. Other initiatives rely on the abiding power of person-to-person contact, which remains a crucial vessel of transnational exchange in the Internet age.

The authors of the case studies come from Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the United States. They are scholars, writers, performing artists, curators, filmmakers, and social activists. All share a commitment to drawing on the power of art to break through stereotypes based on nationality, religion, or ethnicity and, in so doing, to build stronger and more resilient links between Asia and the West. They aim neither to make a case for the superiority of one culture over another—as was the case, for example, with U.S.–U.S.S.R. Cold War cultural diplomacy—nor to disseminate the products of America’s entertainment industry as a way of promoting a “global language” of world culture. Rather, the report’s contributors share a belief that cultural pluralism, by cultivating tolerance and mutual understanding, creates conditions in which artistic work, aesthetic values, and cultural practices can be shared, reinterpreted, appropriated, and further developed by individuals and communities worldwide. Moreover, they believe that working to understand the art and culture of other nations and peoples in the context of local values, attitudes, and beliefs is the best way to strengthen cross-cultural understanding.

Through their case studies, the contributors to “Making a Difference” hope to offer a combination of inspiration and practical knowledge that will be useful to a broad audience: NGOs seeking to initiate or expand their own projects; donor organizations active in economic, social, and cultural development; policy makers charged with considering the role of culture in public diplomacy initiatives; academic institutions seeking to enrich international studies programs; and entrepreneurial individuals with a passion to make a difference. Case studies, of course, offer no claim to comprehensiveness, nor are they intended to be broadly representative. On the contrary, the projects selected,

and the individuals profiled in the case studies, are all exceptional in their own way. The criteria for inclusion are straightforward: Have the projects been successful? What is the evidence of their social impact? If it is too soon to tell, as is often the case with long-term cultural development projects, do they hold the promise of significant future results, and provide a model or a starting point for future cultural entrepreneurs? Whatever the measure of success, the purpose of the case studies is not simply to describe successful projects, but to analyze them: to examine the principles on which they are based, and the strategies and tactics they have drawn on to achieve results. These brief analyses are included as part of each case study. A summary of the principles and strategies illuminated by the case studies is provided in the report’s conclusion.

Each of the three regions examined in “Making a Difference” presents a different challenge for building connectivity through arts and culture. In South Asia, where the civil society sector is well developed, a wealth of options greets individuals and organizations seeking local partners (India is estimated to have 1–2 million NGOs; in Pakistan, the number is estimated at more than 100,000<sup>1</sup>). Indonesia also has a burgeoning civil society sector with hundreds of thousands of autonomous NGOs. Central Asia, by contrast, presents a mixed situation. At one extreme are Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where NGO activities are strictly regulated, Internet content is censored, and the autonomous cultural sector is weak. Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan have a more active civil society sector, but limited sources of local financing, creating intense competition for funding from international donors. Throughout Central, South, and Southeast Asia, however, demographics leave no question about the urgency of reaching out to youth. In Pakistan, for example, 63% of the population—some 103 million people—is under the age of 25 (compared to around 25% in the United States). These young Pakistanis and their peers in other Muslim-majority nations make up the body politic whose understanding of the world will shape international relations in the decades ahead. For Americans, there could be no stronger imperative than getting to know them.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/south-asia/over-100000-ngos-operational-in-pakistan\\_100211256.html](http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/south-asia/over-100000-ngos-operational-in-pakistan_100211256.html) (accessed April 15, 2010).

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## East–West Cultural Exchange in Historical Perspective

East–West cultural exchange has ancient roots. The trans-Eurasian trade routes collectively known as the Silk Road are best known as arteries for long-distance commerce in luxury goods, yet this commerce arose in response to developments in taste and fashion—which is to say, to culture. History records the ancient Romans’ fondness for silk, and even a curmudgeonly caveat from no less than Seneca the Elder about what he considered its decadent property of transparency: “Wretched flocks of maids labour so that the adulteress may be visible through her thin dress, so that her husband has no more acquaintance than any outsider or foreigner with his wife’s body.”<sup>2</sup> Just as markets created by cultural preferences stimulate commerce, commerce diffuses culture. The commercial networks established to manage trade in silk, jade, porcelain, and other precious goods also facilitated the exchange of scientific and technological knowledge, musical instruments, religious practices, food and spices, and other manifestations of culture.

The modern era of East–West cultural exchange is rooted in European colonialism. The Netherlands in Southeast Asia, Great Britain in South Asia, and Russia in Central Asia developed commercial relations with their colonies based on trade in natural resources, commodities, and mercantile goods. But they also developed cultural relations whose resources and commodities consisted of language, fashion, food, art, music, and spiritual practices and beliefs.

The built-in asymmetry of power relations between colonizer and colonized created a corresponding asymmetry of cultural relations. The history of decolonization, the postcolonial realignment of power relations, and the rise of Asian nations to the front ranks of world economic power have moved international politics in the direction of greater parity between East and West. Parity in cultural knowledge, however, has lagged far behind political and economic realignment. Revolutionary developments in global communications and connectivity notwithstanding, vestigial asymmetries of knowledge between Americans and residents of many Asian countries are stubbornly persistent.

In the years following the end of World War II and continuing until the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, both the United States and the U.S.S.R. committed significant financial and human resources to bilateral exchange in the form of cultural and public diplomacy initiatives. The purpose of these initiatives was overtly ideological: to demonstrate the superiority of capitalism and communism not only as economic systems, but also as social systems that could nurture talent and realize creative human potential. On the American side, cultural diplomacy was managed by the United States Information Agency (USIA), which was created in 1953 “to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest, and broaden the dialogue between Americans and U.S. institutions, and their counterparts abroad,” according to its mission statement. Beginning in the mid-1980s, with the ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies of perestroika (transformation) and glasnost (openness), a robust and broad-based citizen diplomacy movement arguably eclipsed official cultural diplomacy as a significant social and political force in both the United States and the Soviet Union. On the Soviet side, organizations that presented themselves as civil society initiatives were often manipulated or monitored by state security organs, but nonetheless served as touchstones for citizen-to-citizen networking and advocacy projects. The citizen diplomacy movement had a significant impact on changing the cultural climate in which politicians in both the United States and the Soviet Union made decisions that led to the end of the Cold War.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, cultural diplomacy was pared back—on the American side, because it was no longer deemed a priority for government spending, and on the side of the Russian Federation and other Soviet successor nations, because of a lack of financial resources in the chaotic aftermath of the dissolution of Soviet power. In 1999, the USIA was abolished, and the agency’s functions were absorbed into the State Department under the direction of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

In the United States, cultural diplomacy gained momentum once again in the aftermath of the 2001

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<sup>2</sup> *The Elder Seneca: Declamations*, vol. 1, *Controversiae*, trans. M. Winterbottom (London: Heinemann, 1974), 375.

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terrorist attacks, which focused Americans' attention on the so-called Muslim world as a locus of anti-American sentiment. Military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan were accompanied by efforts to reach out to Muslim populations—mostly in the Middle East—through a range of government-sponsored programs launched by the office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. During the presidency of George W. Bush, that office was held by three successive appointees—Charlotte Beers, Margaret Tutwiler, and Karen Hughes—whose efforts to build a favorable international image of the United States, in particular, in Muslim-majority countries, have been widely assessed as failures. A parallel initiative, the youth-oriented Arabic-language Radio Sawa, funded by the U.S. Congress and supervised by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, has received mixed reviews—but in any event, it does not broadcast to the non-Arabic-speaking regions discussed in the present report. (Within these regions,

Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe, also funded by the U.S. Congress and based in Prague, broadcasts to all of the post-Soviet nations of Central Asia, as well as to Afghanistan and Pakistan.)

The U.S. government was not alone in responding to the urgent need to seek new forms of dialogue between Americans and citizens of countries with Muslim-majority populations. Both in the United States and around the world, myriad nongovernmental initiatives that range across a broad spectrum of civic and cultural life have emerged from NGOs, academe, policy research institutes, faith-based organizations, foundations, and community groups. Newly founded grassroots initiatives driven by passion and social commitment have joined well-established development organizations with long-term strategies to promote social justice, international political dialogue, access to education, and the embrace of cultural pluralism.



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# KYRGYZSTAN AND POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

## Introduction

Central Asia is commonly understood to encompass the territory of six nations: Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Yet patterns of settlement and cultural links that predate the establishment of current political boundaries argue for a broader definition of the region. For example, the Uyghurs, a Muslim, Turkic-speaking people whose traditional territory is in western China, have old cultural affinities with other Central Asian groups. The Turkmen, the titular ethnic group of Turkmenistan, are strongly represented in the Iranian region of Khorasan that flanks Turkmenistan to the southwest. Azerbaijan, which geographically is part of the Caucasus, is closely bound to Central Asia through a common cultural heritage of music, literature, philosophy, and art. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Russian military campaigns and diplomatic initiatives brought much of Central Asia under Russian rule—one side of the “Great Game” played out between Russia and Great Britain in support of their colonial ambitions.

In the years following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and through the 1920s and 1930s, Russia’s sphere of influence in Central Asia, known as “Russian Turkestan” or “West Turkestan,” was transformed into Soviet Central Asia.

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This all-encompassing sociopolitical transformation ruptured traditions of spiritual and expressive culture among the region's indigenous population, who spoke a variety of Turkic and Persian languages and dialects and overwhelmingly identified with Islam as an active religious practice, a cultural legacy, a worldview that informs everyday social life, or all of these. Soviet ideology regarded tradition and modernity as incompatible, and mandated a "battle against the past" as a precondition for the establishment of socialist culture.

The forces of local tradition and Russian-style modernization clashed, but also melded together, resulting in myriad forms of cultural rapprochement and artistic hybridity. Many of these hybrid forms survive today: orchestras of local Central Asian folk instruments that perform musical masterpieces from the European classical repertoire; modernist architecture inspired by vernacular tradition; and Orientalist depictions of the East produced not by Europeans, but by local artists. Many of the Soviet-era cultural institutions that nurtured these artistic phenomena—conservatories, art academies, and professional guilds for composers, writers, and artists—remain largely intact two decades after the breakup of the Soviet Union, reanimated and repurposed by the Soviet successor states to validate their own national cultural heritage and identity in music, art, architecture, film, and literature.

among peoples." Ethnonationalist cultural heritage legitimates and aggrandizes the historical legacy and cultural achievements of a particular social group, defined politically as constituting the titular nationality of a modern nation state: Turkmen in Turkmenistan, Tajiks in Tajikistan, Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, and so on. Its resources include history and mythology—or, as is often the case, a seamless amalgam of the two; the construction and preservation of historical monuments; the publication of epic literature, the staging of ritualized festivals and celebrations, museum exhibitions, film, sculpture, architecture, and the canonization of performance traditions in music, theater, and dance that become icons of a constructed national identity.

Within Central Asia, the forces of ethnonationalism are locked in an abiding political-aesthetic tension with those of cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism, which are promoted by a mostly post-Soviet generation of artists and cultural entrepreneurs who seek stronger international connections, particularly with culture producers, patrons, and civil society organizations based in the West. The balance of cultural authority between state-controlled cultural institutions and "nonstate actors" varies from one Central Asian nation to the next. At one extreme are Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where arts, media, and culture are not only dominated by the state, but also, to a large extent, under the direct control of the president, his family, and his apparat. The autonomous cultural sector is stronger in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and strongest in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In the Soviet successor nations, neither state-sponsored ideologies of ethnonationalism nor opposing ideologies of Western-style pluralism and cosmopolitanism offer a voice to Islamists or, more broadly, to political Islam (in Afghanistan, the situation is different, and considerably more complex). The post-Soviet leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have all charted a course of nation building whose aim is to create secular societies infused with what Alexander Djumaev, a Tashkent-based Central Asian specialist writing in the Russian culture journal *Druzhba Narodov*, has called "a revival of Islamic culture and Islamic cultural values with humanistic content."<sup>1</sup>

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**"Of course, the West wants to help us learn to survive, but it's not that simple. It's as if we live in different temporal dimensions, different epochs."**

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Observers of political and cultural trends in Central Eurasia have used the term "ethnonationalism" to characterize the ideology of monocultural nationalism that has largely replaced the officially ordained multiculturalism of the Soviet era, with its 15 "brotherly socialist republics" and politically enforced "friendship

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Djumaev, *Naidem li my sebya v potoke peremen?: Dinamika istoricheskogo protsessa v kartiny mira v kul'ture sredneaziatskikh narodov* [Can we find ourselves amid the flow of change? The dynamic of historical process and worldview in the culture of Central Asian peoples], *Druzhba Narodov*, no. 4 (2008): 25.

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Djumaev explained, “Along with specifically Islamic forms of artistic creativity (religious architecture, miniatures, calligraphy, the recitation of sacred texts, etc.), there’s been an enormous interest in transforming Islamic and Sufi values, symbols, and traditions into secular artistic genres and forms in theater, film, literature, and painting. Interesting work along these lines has already appeared—judging, at least, from a series of theatrical productions by Tashkent’s Ilhom Studio Theater created by the director Mark Weill (who was murdered in 2007), or the extremely expressive productions of Turkmen director Ovlyakuli Khodjakuli that were mounted in Uzbekistan.”<sup>2</sup> Djumaev points to at least five principal directions for contemporary Central Asian culture that, as he put it, “are to various extents conceptually formulated, and along which contemporary Central Asian culture might move.” These include:

1. The path of the West
2. The path of Russia, or with Russia
3. The pan-Iranian concept
4. The pan-Turkic concept
5. The Central Asia–specific path, represented through various models of national and regional cultural politics

Djumaev’s analysis leads him to doubt that the “path of the West” can work for Central Asia. “Of course, the West wants to help us learn to survive, earn money on our own, lessen our dependence on the government, and reform our ‘damaged’ thinking. Having faced these same kinds of problems, the West is actually trying to save us from them, and help us enter a new world order. But it’s not that simple. It’s as if we live in different temporal dimensions, different epochs.” According to Djumaev, the last of his five possible directions—the Central Asia–specific path—offers the best hope for creating a shared Central Asian cultural space. This is the space that can offer a counterweight to ethnonationalism, with its “inevitable egoism and unbounded mythological approach to artistic creativity.” Djumaev added that the regional cultural identity

he proposes in no way detracts from or contradicts the building of national cultures, but, on the contrary, “absorbs all that is valuable from our common cultural heritage.”

Djumaev’s thoughtful analysis and recommendations for building a strong and vibrant regional contemporary culture in Central Asia offer a sensible starting point for Western organizations that seek

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**Arts and culture projects can provide an entrée into societies where direct political advocacy is likely to be ineffective or counterproductive.**

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to become involved in the region. Arts and culture projects can provide an entrée into societies where direct political advocacy is likely to be ineffective or counterproductive. Building respect for both old cultural knowledge and new is key. Nurturing open and candid conversations among diverse artistic voices, stimulating experimentation, nourishing visionary talent, and encouraging cross-cultural exchange—all of these represent incremental steps toward invigorating the arts and making them a vital part of Central Asian modernity.

## **Kyrgyzstan in the Context of Post-Soviet Central Asia**

The same social forces that have supported a strong civil society sector in Kyrgyzstan have also contributed to the country’s volatile politics. Within the last five years, political opposition groups have forced two successive Kyrgyz presidents to resign from office and flee the country (in both cases, the presidents fled first and resigned later). This unsettled, and unsettling, political landscape is only one manifestation of abiding social and economic instability that has led many observers

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 25

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to warn that Kyrgyzstan is in danger of becoming a “failed state” (Kyrgyzstan ranked 42nd out of 177 countries listed in the 2009 Fund for Peace/*Foreign Policy* Failed State Index). Kyrgyzstan’s nomadic heritage has strong vestiges in the clan-based allegiances that continue to shape the country’s politics and demographics. After the popular uprising of April 2010, during which the president fled from Bishkek, the capital city located in the north of the country, to his clan’s famil-

cooperate with nongovernmental organizations, as well as its willingness to more or less leave them alone to pursue their own agendas, has created a bustling and somewhat chaotic autonomous cultural sector in Kyrgyzstan. Two arts and culture programs that are part of large international nongovernmental organizations active in Kyrgyzstan’s civil society sector—the Open Society Foundations and the Aga Khan Development Network—are profiled in the case studies that follow.

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In Kyrgyzstan, the ACNP supports the work of several local arts organizations that are striving to develop broader social interest in contemporary art and train a new generation of post-Soviet artists.

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ial stronghold in the south, some observers warned of the danger of a north–south civil war.

In the face of daunting economic and social challenges, Kyrgyzstan nonetheless devotes approximately 0.9% of its annual budget to support for arts and culture. In 2009, this amount was around \$15.5 million at the current exchange rate. (An identical percentage of the 2009 U.S. federal budget of \$3.52 trillion would yield \$31.6 billion in support of culture, which exceeds the actual expenditure by a factor of 100.) The Kyrgyz government focuses its funding on the “preservation and propaganda of historical-cultural heritage, and toward the realization of the spiritual, ideological, patriotic and educational potential of culture and art,” as Raziya Syrдыbaeva, the Kyrgyz researcher for “Making a Difference,” wrote in her report. Syrдыbaeva also noted that the government “readily collaborates with professional associations, public foundations, and NGOs to implement its ambitious plan for ‘100 Cultural Projects’ as well as nationwide initiatives such as the Year of Youth, the Year of Heritage, and the Year of the Village in Kyrgyzstan.”

The willingness of the Kyrgyz cultural apparatus to

## CASE STUDIES

### **OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS/ARTS AND CULTURE NETWORK PROGRAM: Building Open Societies by Strengthening the Autonomous Cultural Sector**

The Open Society Foundations (OSF), founded by Hungarian American financier and social activist George Soros, works to build “vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens.” OSF’s initiatives are implemented through autonomous national foundations based in specific countries, and through centralized “network programs” that operate regionally and internationally. Among these is the Arts and Culture Network Program (ACNP), which is based in OSF’s Budapest office. The ACNP has been active in Central Asia since the mid-1990s, and supports local and regional arts and culture initiatives through an extensive grants program and its own operating programs. While the Kyrgyz government has directed its support for arts and culture primarily at cultural heritage preservation and traditional arts, the ACNP’s focus is contemporary arts—in particular, visual arts, theater, multimedia art, and music. In 2007, and again in 2009, the ACNP co-sponsored a Central Asian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, together with the Dutch Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (Hivos). The 2009 pavilion featured an exhibition called *Making Interstices* (the theme for the entire 2009 Biennale was “Making Worlds”), with works by artists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In a description of the exhibition, curator Beral Madra wrote, “*Making Interstices* indicates the

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way artists work, operate and produce in Central Asian countries—and many other countries that have similar tensions between the recent past and the present . . . [R]apid ideological and governmental transformations [have] aggravated the artists’ ability to discover, to employ and to exploit the little gaps (interstices) between the conventional and most of the time oppressive macro-politics and economy. *Making Interstices* is a strategy that allows the artist to configure his/her thoughts, desires and humour freely into a tactical, experimental and exploratory intervention through art.”

Each of the works displayed in *Making Interstices* represents its creator’s attempt to stake a claim to the contemporary languages and technologies of art from which Central Asia has been largely cut off. Nourishing the production and critical reception of contemporary art in former Soviet bloc countries has long been a strategic priority for the ACNP. A decade before it supported Central Asian pavilions at the 2007 and 2009 Venice Biennales (as well as a Roma Pavilion at the 2007 Biennale), the ACNP established a network of Soros Centers for Contemporary Arts in 17 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. As the centers fulfilled their mission to help revitalize contemporary art communities, most of them were closed.

In Kyrgyzstan, the ACNP supports the work of several local arts organizations that are striving to develop broader social interest in contemporary art and train a new generation of post-Soviet artists. One of these organizations is ArtEast, founded by two young artists whose work has gained a foothold in the West. Muratbek Djumaliev and Gulnara Kasmalieva are represented by the Winkleman Gallery in New York City, and within the last two years, their work has been shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. As managing director and creative director, respectively, of ArtEast, Kasmalieva and Djumaliev launched an unconventional School of Contemporary Art that accepts students with any kind of background between the ages of 18 and 35. Selection criteria are “creativity and an open mind.” The school’s focus is training for contemporary artists, art critics, and art managers. The school aims to:

- Provide knowledge about contemporary art and art criticism to new students

- Give emerging artists, art managers, and art critics an opportunity to develop their own artistic projects
- Improve the state of art criticism
- Promote international exchange and mobility
- Stimulate a new generation of artists and art managers to work toward the long-term sustainability of contemporary art in Kyrgyzstan

Kasmalieva and Djumaliev hope that a sustainable contemporary art community in Kyrgyzstan will become an integral element of civil society, and contribute to the broader goal of supporting democratic values and a spirit of tolerance and cosmopolitanism.

Another area of broad concern to the ACNP is the relationship between cultural centers and cultural peripheries. Artists have been prominently represented among the ranks of labor migrants who have moved from the countryside to the city in developing countries around the world. For these artists, connecting to the globalized commercial networks that sponsor exhibitions, produce concerts, and promote careers, as well as to the globalized professional networks that facilitate creative collaborations and open doors to potentially lucrative cross-disciplinary encounters, means living in a location with good Internet access, cell phone coverage, and proximity to an airport. As artists, musicians, and writers leave the countryside, they not only weaken spiritual connections that serve as a source of artistic inspiration, but also leave rural communities bereft of art makers and art teachers.

In an effort to build stronger cultural connections between center and periphery in Kyrgyzstan, the ACNP has supported the work of Sakhna Theater, a Bishkek-based company that brings theater productions to rural areas. In a proposal submitted to the ACNP, Sakhna’s artistic director, Nurlan Asanbekov, painted a dire portrait of the social problems that his theater is working to address: “These days a great number of young people are unfamiliar with the theater. This niche is occupied instead by pop music and kitsch. Alcoholism, drug addiction, and social and personal disorders lead young people in the provinces to a spiritual crisis. In a ‘search for happiness’ they move to the cities, and sometimes abroad. Due to the

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outflow of young people, there's a trend of 'aging' villages. Slowed economic growth and social development in the country has exacerbated the situation." Asanbekov's solution is to create youth theater groups in several rural regional centers and train them to perform what he calls "small epic productions" comprising theatrical adaptations of the rich and ubiquitous (within Kyrgyzstan) tradition of Kyrgyz oral poetry. Asanbekov believes that by involving young people in performing poems and stories that are well known to an older generation of Kyrgyz, Sakhna Theater can help bridge a generational divide. He has established a good working relationship with the State Agency for Culture and its local regional affiliates, thus bridging an ideological divide that often pits civil society organizations against state agencies.

Like artists Djumaliev and Kasmalieva, Sakhna Theater brought its work to New York City, where, in 2007, the company performed at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club. The cachet of performing in the West—and in particular, in New York—reverberates strongly on Sakhna Theater's home turf, and has helped win respect from state culture authorities as well as from audiences. The project that Asanbekov proposed to the ACNP, and that the ACNP agreed to co-fund with the State Agency for Culture, will unfold over three years. Multiyear grant support for long-term projects is a key part of the ACNP's cultural development strategy.

A third area in which the ACNP is active in Kyrgyzstan is support for local film culture. Its support takes a variety of approaches: it has helped sponsor an annual Human Rights Film Festival that screens documentary films about human rights issues—almost all of them produced in other countries and subtitled in Kyrgyz or Russian; screenings are followed by open discussions and forums with the films' directors. Together with other cultural stakeholders, the ACNP has also provided funding to the Cinema Development Fund, a local nongovernmental organization that works to develop private-sector film production and distribution mechanisms, organizes training courses for young filmmakers, supports a website to provide information about cinema in Kyrgyzstan (<http://www.cinema.kg>), and produces an art house film festival called "Kinostan"

(*kino* is the Russian word for "film"). The goal of the festival is to promote Kyrgyz films to international film festivals and world markets, develop cooperation and co-production agreements with filmmakers from other countries, and participate in the formation of a regional film market in Central Asia.

The goals of "Kinostan" are not as quixotic as they may seem. Kyrgyzstan's much larger and wealthier neighbor, Kazakhstan, has had considerable success of late in leveraging its film industry into international co-production agreements. Working with producers from Russia, Mongolia, and Germany, Kazakhstan's state-owned film studio participated in the production of *Mongol* (2007), a revisionist portrait of the early life of Genghis Khan. *Mongol* received an Oscar nomination for best foreign language film, and has generally been positively reviewed. A Kazakh-French co-production, *Nomad* (2005), was also widely distributed in international markets.

For the ACNP, strategies to support cinema in Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere in Central Asia, must address the same kinds of obstacles that appear in different forms in other artistic domains: a cohort of talented artists with insufficient access to world-class training, adequate production support and financing, and distribution; an insufficient capacity for internal dissemination (Kyrgyzstan's population of around 5 million is served by 50 movie theaters, of which only four would be considered technically up to date; in the United States, the ratio of cinemas to population is more than 10 times greater); insufficient opportunities for professional networking, both regionally and internationally; and lack of management expertise to build long-term sustainability in cultural industries.

The ACNP is working a step at a time to address these challenges. Two years ago, it began a mentoring program for grant applicants to help them formulate more strategically coherent proposals. Local mentors in the countries where the ACNP operates are available to meet with applicants, field questions, and, if grants are awarded, troubleshoot any problems that arise. The national Soros Foundations can also offer logistical, if not always financial, support to ACNP grantees. Several of the national foundations in Central Eurasia and the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) employ

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a culture coordinator whose mandate is to cultivate arts and culture programs on the basis of priorities and strategies articulated by the national foundation. The Open Society Foundations' dual structure of national foundations and network programs assures that local sensibilities are represented in funding decisions about grants.

As with any program that supports arts and culture activities, results are difficult to assess. Qualitative indicators can be used to critically evaluate artistic works, while quantitative indicators best measure an artistic activity's social resonance. In the unstable social and political environment of present-day Kyrgyzstan, notions of the "social resonance" of art may be viewed in some quarters with alarm. Yet in striving to strengthen the autonomous cultural sector in Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere in Central Eurasia and the Caucasus, the ACNP's aim is not to support the creation of a civil society brand of agitprop; rather, it is to aid artists whose work is shaped by sustained and sophisticated critical reflection to connect with viewers, listeners, and readers, both in their own country and internationally. If the work is strong, it will speak for itself in ways that trump the effectiveness of direct advocacy efforts. That, after all, is one of the powers of art.

### **Connecting Local Musicians Globally: THE AGA KHAN MUSIC INITIATIVE<sup>3</sup>**

The Aga Khan Music Initiative was launched in 2000 by His Highness the Aga Khan in response to a critical social need in post-Soviet Central Asia: a lack of resources and knowledge to develop indigenous artistic traditions that validate local identities and cultural heritage while, at the same time, forging an internationally recognized Central Asian artistic modernity. The Music Initiative helps local musicians master the skills they need to revitalize their musical traditions—the ability to compose and extemporize in tradition-based forms—and works to connect musicians from Central Asia to global networks of artists, arts presenters, and media companies.

The Music Initiative is a program of the Aga Khan

Trust for Culture, an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The AKDN, founded and guided by His Highness the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, is a contemporary endeavor of the Ismaili Imam to "realize the

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**Music has long served social groups in Central Asia as a means of preserving and transmitting beliefs, practices, and moral values that contribute to the construction of social identities.**

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social conscience of Islam through institutional action," as the AKDN describes its mandate. The AKDN brings together a group of development agencies working in the domains of health, education, architecture, music, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, promotion of private-sector enterprise, and revitalization of historic cities. The crucial idea behind the AKDN is that the social impact of development is maximized when social, economic, and cultural initiatives are interconnected and carried out cooperatively, in accordance with a comprehensive and long-range strategic plan.

Music may seem an unlikely domain for an international development organization, but the rich musical heritage of Central Asia, where the impact of Islam as a spiritual and cultural force has been sustained over 13 centuries of dramatic political, social, and demographic change, indeed offers fertile ground for institutional action through cultural advocacy and development work. Music and the training of young musicians have long served social groups in Central Asia as means of preserving and transmitting beliefs, practices, and moral values that contribute to the construction of social identities—local, regional, and national—and, in

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<sup>3</sup> Parts of this text are excerpted from Theodore Levin and Fairouz R. Nishanova, "Civil Sounds: The Aga Khan Music Initiative in Central Asia." In *Muslim Modernities: Expressions of the Civil Imagination*, ed. Aryn B. Sajoo, 93-117. London & New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008, 93-117.

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so doing, assuring and reaffirming links between past and present. These links, however, are anything but straightforward. The present-day political boundaries that define the nations of Central Asia are largely in-

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## The Aga Khan Music Initiative has helped musicians, music educators, and grassroots cultural strategists recast Central Asian musical traditions in contemporary forms and contexts that are rooted in local cultural heritage.

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congruent with the cultural boundaries that have been shaped by centuries of migration, rivalry, and intermingling among the region's social groups. As a consequence, the efforts of post-Soviet Central Asian nations to provide their citizenry with a coherent cultural history often resemble a kind of historicism, and for many residents of the region, the relationship between cultural identity and citizenship remains vexed. By contrast, it is local cultural heritage—the traditions of a particular city, province, autonomous region, or even clan or family lineage—that resonates most strongly with Central Asians.

The Aga Khan Music Initiative has helped musicians, music educators, and grassroots cultural strategists recast Central Asian musical traditions in contemporary forms and contexts that are rooted in local cultural heritage. More broadly, the Music Initiative's mission focuses on the role that the revitalization of cultural heritage can play in the contemporary development of nations that embrace a dynamic cultural and intellectual pluralism. In all of its interventions, a principal concern of the Music Initiative is how to facilitate the reimagination of traditional musical culture within a cosmopolitan and pluralistic Central Asian modernity that is shaped by multiple social, economic, and cultural forces.

The Music Initiative carries out its mission through four integrated approaches:

1. Supporting a network of music schools and centers where outstanding tradition bearers work to ensure the transmission of musical expertise to the next generation of artists and audiences
2. Raising the prestige of traditional music and musicians in their own communities
3. Documenting and disseminating the work of leading exponents of Central Asian music through recordings, concert tours, films, and educational outreach activities
4. Cultivating new approaches to music performance, and innovative collaborations between musicians from Central Asia and beyond the region that expand traditional artistic languages

Among the music schools and centers in the Music Initiative's "Supporting Tradition-Bearers" network is Center Ustatshakirt, which is based in Kyrgyzstan's capital city, Bishkek, with satellite teaching centers throughout the country. "Ustatshakirt" is a Kyrgyz rendering of the Persian expression *ustad-shagird* (master-apprentice), which, throughout the broad geographic sphere of Persian cultural influence, is used to describe the method by which music has been transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Under the energetic direction of Raziya Syrdybaeva, a Kyrgyz musicologist and cultural entrepreneur (and one of the researchers for this report), Center Ustatshakirt offers a modified form of master-apprentice music education in which students meet with master-teachers in small groups. As an alternative to vestigial Soviet-style music schools, which teach indigenous music through the prism of European music theory and notation, often using Europeanized forms of local instruments, Center Ustatshakirt's master-apprentice methodology has won a strong following among music educators and students. Evidence of its effectiveness can be found in the musical skills displayed by its graduates, the most accomplished of whom are beginning to assume leadership roles in the rising generation of Kyrgyz artists, musicians, filmmakers, and writers.

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For Center Ustatshakirt, the work of revitalizing and transmitting traditional Kyrgyz musical repertoires is closely connected to the cultivation of new approaches to music performance and the expansion of traditional artistic languages. It recently launched an experimental music laboratory in which young musicians explore collaborative forms of music making using both Kyrgyz and European instruments. What distinguishes Center Ustatshakirt's experimental laboratory from Soviet-era fusions of European and indigenous musical styles and instruments—for example, the much-touted “folk orchestras”—is that, in the Ustatshakirt version, “East” meets “West” on a level playing field. Kyrgyz musicians are left free to apprehend and appropriate European music, or other forms of world music, through the prism of their own aesthetic sensibilities. Decisions about style, content, and form are theirs, and the aesthetic parameters of appropriation are under their control.

Center Ustatshakirt's experimental music laboratory reflects the understanding of its director, Raziya Syrdybaeva, and her collaborator, Nurlanbek Nyshanov, a leading performer, teacher, and composer of tradition-based Kyrgyz music, that if artistic manifestations of intangible cultural heritage are to remain robust and socially relevant, they must contain the living DNA that allows them to regenerate, mutate, and evolve. Intangible cultural heritage, as the term suggests, is not a thing; rather, it is a creative process, a mechanism, a product of trial and error, chance encounters, and persistent restless curiosity. Living traditions are not simply atavistic vestiges of the past, but must continually renew and reinvent themselves.

Like musicians everywhere, musicians in Kyrgyzstan want to be globally connected and networked. Though kitsch may be one by-product of connectivity, musical globalization, on balance, has had a salutary effect on traditional arts by stimulating creativity and innovation. The challenge is to find organizational mechanisms that bring together musicians from East and West, or North and South, as equal partners in a creative endeavor, and to

come up with languages of art in which music arising from tradition can meet contemporary musical idioms on equal terms. This was the challenge accepted by the Aga Khan Music Initiative in launching an artistic collaboration with the San Francisco–based Kronos Quartet, whose long-standing commitment to expanding the range and context of the string quartet through cross-cultural collaborations and new works commissioned from composers around the world is unparalleled.

One of the Music Initiative's ongoing projects is a 10-volume CD-DVD series, *Music of Central Asia*, co-produced with Smithsonian Folkways Recordings (as of spring 2010, nine volumes in the series had been released). For volume 8 in the series, the Music Initiative invited the Kronos Quartet to perform newly commissioned works with musicians on its artist roster. This collaboration became *Rainbow: Kronos Quartet with Alim & Fargana Qasimov and Homayun Sakhi*. The CD fea-



Children in Aga Khan Music Initiative-sponsored school program, Kazakhstan

tures a 29-minute work, the eponymous *Rangin Kaman* (Persian for “rainbow”), composed by Sakhi for string quartet, Afghan *rubab*, and percussion. Sakhi, the leading Afghan *rubab* player of his generation, left Afghanistan in the 1990s, and presently lives in the large Afghan émigré community centered in Fremont,

California. Also featured on *Rainbow* is a set of Azerbaijani *ashiq* (troubadour) songs performed by Kronos Quartet and Azerbaijani vocalists Alim and Fargana Qasimov, together with their four-man ensemble play-

tic genres challenges the linearity and canonicity often promulgated by ethnonationalism and its constructions of “national cultural heritage.” For artists from nations where expressive culture has been co-opted by ethnonationalist constructions of cultural heritage, tradition-based hybrid art points to the possibility of alternative cultural genealogies that can challenge official narratives of cultural history and cultural development.

Like Center Ustatshakirt’s experimental music laboratory, the East–West collaboration represented by *Rainbow* may appear to be a retake on the Soviet-era Europeanization of indigenous music from vast swaths of Eurasia. But, like the music laboratory, *Rainbow* was conceived and conducted on a level playing field, allowing the players to meet one another halfway. For producers and presenters of such collaborations, the question is whether traditions such as Azerbaijani *ashiq* songs and Afghan *rubab* music can play a role in facilitating international cross-cultural connectivity—that is, whether they can become cosmopolitan without losing the essential quality of connection to a local spiritual source that makes them powerful.

In his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, published in 2006, Kwame Anthony Appiah underscored the seemingly paradoxical effect of artistic cosmopolitanism in strengthening the appreciation of cultural heritage. Appiah wrote, “The connection people feel to cultural objects that are symbolically theirs, because they were produced from within a world of meaning created by their ancestors—the connection to art through identity—is powerful. It should be acknowledged. The cosmopolitan, though, wants to remind us of other connections. One connection—the one neglected in talk of cultural patrimony—is the connection not *through* identity but *despite* difference. We can respond to art that is not ours; indeed, we can fully respond to ‘our’ art only if we move beyond thinking of it as ours and start to respond to it as art.”<sup>4</sup>

The achievement of European artistic modernity has been to free art from national fetishization. Central Asian artistic modernity still largely awaits that freedom. The Aga Khan Music Initiative continues to work actively with musicians in Central Asia, as well as in the Middle East, to expand the role of cosmopoli-



Poster for concert of Alim Qasimov Ensemble and Kronos Quartet at London’s Barbican Centre.

ing traditional Azerbaijani instruments. In March 2010, this work was performed in a series of concerts at Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall hosted by the Kronos Quartet. Audience response was enthusiastic, as was the case when the collaborative works were premiered in 2008 at London’s Barbican Centre (Azerbaijani songs) and San Francisco’s Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (*Rangin Kaman*).

Explorations of artistic hybridity represent one way to create contemporary work that is rooted in, but not constrained by, traditional models—that is, work that one might call tradition based rather than traditional. Hybrid work that crosses cultural categories and artis-

<sup>4</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 134–35.

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tanism and cultural pluralism in the region's musical life. Its work supports the premise that culture evolves through a combination of continuity and innovation, and that traditional arts can not only thrive in pluralist, post-traditional societies, but also make important contributions to their development. The defining feature of tradition in the context of pluralist modernity is that an individual's embrace of transmitted practices or beliefs ought to represent a choice, not a necessity beholden to lineage, caste, religion, ethnicity or other inherited social markers. More specifically, in the domain of art, tradition as a system of transmitted formal and stylistic constraints ought to become simply one among many possible sources for creativity and imagination in today's globalized world.



<http://www.akdn.org/music>

### **Building a Social Business in Partnership with Artisans in Central Asia: CENTRAL ASIAN CRAFTSPRING**

Craftspring LLC was founded in 2009 as a social business—a profit-seeking start-up whose goal was to tap into the power of global markets in order preserve some of Central Asia's oldest handmade crafts and traditions. Its founder is Anne-Laure Py, a young French American woman raised in the United States and Europe. After graduating from Wellesley College, where she majored in economics and German, Py spent four years working in a marketing position in Beijing, becoming fluent in Mandarin. In 2006, she received a Mary Elvira Stevens Travel Fellowship from her alma mater, which enabled her to pursue a year of independent research on small entrepreneurs in the crafts industries of western China, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The idea for Craftspring grew out of that work.

Invited to contribute a profile of Craftspring for this report, Py submitted an inspiring chronicle of her work to date, and her vision for the future development of her business. Her chronicle follows:

Craftspring's mission is to support exceptional craftsmen and women from Central Asia who are looking to expand their sales and consumer base beyond the Central Asian region. We partner with interested craftspeople and their workshops to help design and

develop products, which we then help to sell in retail outlets in both Europe and North America. By linking the artisan producers of Central Asia to European and North American consumers, we hope to tap into the opportunities of our global economy, and provide key Central Asian traditions with the markets they need to stay afloat, survive, and, perhaps, even expand.

Craftspring is grounded in entrepreneurship and the belief that, without an economically sustainable market, many handmade crafts and traditions will disappear. Faced with a dwindling local market for their products, artisans once committed to producing age-old traditional products are rapidly turning to other more immediately profitable jobs and opportunities. We hope to stop this migration away from traditional crafts, and work to build the market effervescence essential for artisans to maintain their livelihoods and traditions. Since our launch in the summer of 2009, we have developed several large purchasing deals for our partners, including one with a major U.S. retailer, Anthropologie, and are currently expanding our sales and marketing outreach through our website, <http://www.CAcraftspring.com>, and our catalogue of products.

As of February 2010, we have worked closely with six crafts workshops in Kyrgyzstan to develop products and produce orders, which we have sold to four major retailers. Looking forward over the next 12 months, we will scale up our production partnerships not only with-

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**“We believe that by promoting the region's cultural workmanship, and bringing beautiful products to Western consumers, we can provide a different and healthier vision of Central Asia.”**

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in Kyrgyzstan, but also in Tajikistan, where we have already identified partnership opportunities with two artisans. Due to the lack of a local or tourist-supported market for their products, these Tajik artisans are on the brink of leaving their crafts enterprises. Bringing

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them sales opportunities could enable them to rekindle their businesses and uphold the local Chitgari (wood-stamp cotton print) and Shaona (wooden hair comb) traditions, of which they are the last local producers. Craftspring will invest in developing product samples with them, give them each an initial order, and then work to sell their products and find future long-term clients for each crafts workshop.

We believe that by promoting the region's cultural workmanship, and bringing beautiful products to Western consumers, we can provide a different and healthier vision of Central Asia—a vision that is not blistered by violence, war, and stereotypes of Islam, but a vision anchored in aesthetic beauty and the shared values of entrepreneurship. When we pitch our products to potential retail clients, we tell them the socioeconomic

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**We partner with workshops anchored in their communities that source their production inputs locally. We also focus on bringing back traditional details, shapes, and methods of production.**

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story of the region, and highlight the fierceness, resolve, and talent of the entrepreneurs we work with—a story that is also present on our labels and tags. So far, we have received an extraordinarily positive response and gained significant traction from telling this story. We hope to tell it more often and to a wider audience.

### **What Led to the Start of Craftspring?**

In 2006–2007, while pursuing my fellowship-sponsored independent research on Central Asian crafts industries, I identified one of the key problems facing Central Asian craft entrepreneurs: the lack of steady, year-round sales opportunities, and access to an educated consumer base willing and ready to support master artisans. Without this access, key ancient crafts and traditions are on the brink of disappearing. Meanwhile, in the West, the rise of consumer awareness about Fair

Trade, organic, handmade, or eco-friendly products created an obvious market for the artisans' products. I founded Craftspring LLC to link Central Asian artisans and committed Western consumers using personal savings and investment from family and friends. The support of key mentors from the academic and business communities, as well as the opportunity to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas with them, has been integral to getting the project up and running. These relationships will continue to play a key role as we look to expand and gain traction.

### **Our Business Model**

The quality and “soul” of our products are at the center of our business model. We want to make long-lasting products whose beauty embodies a sustainable and wholesome production process. We partner with workshops anchored in their communities that source their production inputs locally, employ local men and women, and provide employees with fair wages and comfortable working conditions. In our design input, we also focus on bringing back traditional details, shapes, and methods of production.

To enable and ensure this kind of quality, our business model focuses on the relationships that we have with our partner producers. We know all of the workshops we partner with, visit them frequently, and have built strong relationships not only with their owners but also with their employees. At the heart of our business are partnerships, friendships, and respect. Our challenge is to link these to demand in the West by building retail partnerships that can bring sales and growth.

### **Production-Side Partnerships**

All of our production is based in Central Asia. So far, our major institutional partner, based in Kyrgyzstan, is CACSA Trade—the for-profit arm of a nongovernmental organization called the Central Asian Crafts Support Association. In exchange for a fee, CACSA Trade provides us with logistical support for shipping and packing, as well as continued outreach to artisans when our team is not on the ground in Central Asia. When on site, CACSA Trade also provides us with an office and a small-scale storage facility for the crafts before final shipment. This partnership, first initiated

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during my fellowship year, has been very productive for Craftspring, and has enabled us to be a supportive part of the region's strongest crafts organization.

While continuing our partnership with CACSA and CACSA Trade is of key importance, we plan to expand beyond the organization's "monopoly" presence in the Kyrgyz and Central Asian crafts market. In so doing, we will work with those artisans looking for growth opportunities, but not yet integrated into an institutional or business framework. CACSA has also encouraged us to do this.

### Production-Side Challenges

We are in the process of building relationships in the region, and are still defining our role as an intermediary and "buffer." Our partners are working hard to preserve key traditions and crafts, but are not all ready, or willing, to handle the time and quality pressures of Western retail. Craftspring is learning how to enable these business relationships by building an effective strategy to shield and protect our partner workshops, while also pushing retailers to be flexible and lenient.

In the past 10 months, we have partnered with a variety of artisanal workshops, ranging from established workshops that have already proven that they can produce large amounts with consistent quality, to smaller more novice organizations with everything to prove. For our production of Christmas ornaments for Anthropologie, one of the workshops that we partnered with to produce more than 3,000 pieces within a two-month time limit had never produced such a large amount. We worked closely with Gulnara, the workshop's director, throughout the production schedule to help her stay on track. Although the process went smoothly, several questions and issues arose. Never having done such a large deal, Gulnara had underpriced her products to us. She had not accounted for the unexpected costs of hiring additional hands and working overtime. To make sure that Gulnara would make a good profit from her work, we renegotiated the price at which we bought her products.

Working with small workshops also means that we need to pay advances and final compensation faster

than the monthly payment schedules in the West. Our working capital and cash flow needs to be managed to provide cash advances during the production period, often prior to receiving full payment from our end clients. For our most recent order, the retail client was three weeks late in making the final payment, and Craftspring had to find the cash to bridge that gap.

Other local challenges include the high cost of



Tree Ornaments from Craftspring's Noël Nomad Collection

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shipping from mostly landlocked Central Asian states, often underserved by international logistics companies. We are currently investigating shipment options from neighboring China, but Beijing and its ports remain more than 2,000 miles away.

### Sales-Side Partnerships

We are starting small, and are currently producing to order. Although this limits our flexibility, it also lowers our inventory risk, and enables us to customize our products for large and important clients. Our sales strategy is two-pronged:

1. We work with distributors who have the same values as Craftspring, and who already have established networks of clients and buyers.
2. We are also starting to work directly with retail stores, visiting key target clients and pitching our products directly to their buyers.

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Our work with distributors has yielded quite a few deals. We currently have a distributor in North America, and are looking for distributors in Europe and Asia. However, all of the products we have sold through distributors have been unbranded. They did not carry the Craftspring label, or any tag to let the consumer know that the products were handmade in Central Asia. This year, we are pushing to include information about where, how, and by whom our products are made.

For our direct sales, we have one commission-based salesperson on the West Coast, and one on the East Coast of the United States. We plan to increase this method of outreach and sales, as it enables us to build a network of buyers, and gain greater control over pricing and production time constraints.

### **Marketing/Outreach/Impact**

In order to cultivate greater exchange between our customers and our partners in Central Asia, we are building our web presence with <http://www.CAcraftspring.com>. The website includes our Craftspring blog and e-newsletter, which share the challenges of building a socially responsible business with artisans in Central Asia. The blog includes stories about the daily lives of our partners, with posts about their entrepreneurial projects and craft techniques, as well as short introductions to the socioeconomic, cultural, and faith contexts in which our local partners and Craftspring operate. We will also be adding a multimedia component to the blog that features short videos about the organizations and the craftsmen and women with whom we partner.

The Craftspring blog not only provides a glimpse into Central Asian creative entrepreneurship, but also acts as a resource with links to key Central Asian cultural organizations, events, and businesses, as well as a platform for us to engage with clients, partners and investors.

Through our direct sales and outreach to clients, we have already seen a great interest on the part of customers in France and the United States to learn about Central Asia. After I participated in a small crafts sale in New York, a local mother petitioned a middle school teacher to invite me to present Craftspring and the Central Asian region to her students. The students first went to visit an exhibit on the Silk Road at the American Museum of Natural History, and I then presented pictures,

stories and Craftspring's products to a very interested and motivated group of seventh graders. This was the middle school students' first exposure to Central Asia, and at the end of my presentation, they were surprised to learn that Afghanistan was a major country in the region. They had never learned about anything other than war and violence in this zone of the world—and were surprised that our stories of color, entrepreneurship, and creativity came from the same place.

We are convinced that by sharing creative and entrepreneurial products from Central Asia, businesses such as Craftspring can build understanding, knowledge, and exchange, while also spawning new creative opportunities, designs, and perhaps even new business models. We are excited to be engaged in this exceptionally rich and dynamic part of the world, and know that its great cultural wealth, and its stories, color, and texture can be shared with a receptive audience of Western consumers in this generation and the next.



<http://www.CAcraftspring.com>

### **Kyrgyz Ethno-Chic Fashion in Global Markets: DILBAR FASHION HOUSE**

Fashion has been one of the great engines of cross-cultural connectivity at least since antiquity. The Silk Road, though it provided an artery for the transport of much more than silk, was so named (in the late nineteenth century, by the German geologist and explorer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen) to acknowledge silk's enormous role in stimulating trans-Eurasian trade and cultural exchange. The merchants whose caravans carried silk from China and Central Asia to the West were perhaps the first to exploit the commercial potential of "ethno-chic"—the cultivation of a taste for clothing materials and designs appropriated from the traditions and sensibilities of other cultures. These days, farmers in Central Asia still raise silkworms, and skilled weavers continue to weave intricately dyed silk cloth, called ikat. But Central Asia also boasts world-class fashion designers who use local silk to produce haute couture apparel. One such designer is Dilbar Ashymbay, whose Dilbar Fashion House is headquartered in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan.

Dilbar Fashion House is a design line, mainly fo-

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cused on prêt-à-porter clothing for women.<sup>5</sup> One of Dilbar's founding principles is to work with natural materials available in Central Asia—silk, wool, cotton, leather, and fur—and to use local weaving, dyeing, sewing, and embroidery techniques developed by artisans from India, China, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. A distinctive feature of Dilbar's design line is the antique-style hand-embroidered Kyrgyz accents on her clothing. Fusing the traditional fashion of nomadic steppe dwellers and urbanites, Dilbar's line incorporates, for example, a full-bodied silk skirt with a radiant Uzbek design of multicolored geometric and floral patterns. Dilbar thinks of her style, at once bohemian and intellectual, as embodying a specifically Kyrgyz sensibility in its use of a wide palette of vibrant colors.

Dilbar credits her grandmother, a talented embroiderer who wove and sewed all the garments worn by her large family, with inspiring her to become a designer. After studies at the Moscow Textile Academy, Dilbar returned to Kyrgyzstan just as the Soviet Union was about to break apart. Starting off as a costume designer for theater and film, she gradually attracted the attention of the foreign diplomatic community stationed in newly independent Kyrgyzstan. Contact with foreigners led to invitations to participate in ethnic fashion fairs and festivals in Europe and the United States. One of these was the Vista 360° Festival in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which, in 2003, focused on the traditional nomadic culture of Kyrgyzstan. Vista 360° describes its mission as helping “mountain communities preserve their cultural identity and environmental integrity while enjoying full participation in the global society of the 21st century.”<sup>6</sup> The organization's website notes, “We make use of the arts and cultural exchange to introduce people to one another and to activate a sense of connection. Once these relationships are established, the opportunities for cooperation and communication extend beyond arts and creative work, and include economic trade, education, environmental protection and other avenues for learning. We call this

process of harnessing the power of the arts to promote cooperation ‘putting the arts to work.’”<sup>7</sup>

Dilbar Fashion House was established in 2004, and presently maintains three showrooms—one in Bishkek and two in Almaty, the bustling commercial center of Kazakhstan. “I create clothes for women who feel free in any foreign country, but never forget where they came from,” said Dilbar.

Dilbar is far from the only fashion entrepreneur to draw on local materials and traditional design sources to create contemporary apparel at once cosmopolitan and culturally situated. One of the most successful



Fashions by Kyrgyz designer Dilbar Ashambay

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such designers is Christina Kim, founder of Dosa, a Los Angeles-based company celebrated for its collaborations with artisans and craftspeople from South Asia and Mexico, for its fair labor practices, and for its use of recycled fabric scraps as integral design elements in new garments (see <http://www.dosainc.com/>). Dosa's strategy of building long-term partnerships with artisan communities in developing countries has been highly successful, both for its retail business in the United States, and for the far-flung communities in which it invests. This model can be replicated not only for clothing, but also for other artisan-produced goods from Central Asia: carpets, embroidered textiles, and artifacts made from felt, the ubiquitous fiber art material of Central Asian nomads.

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<sup>5</sup> Photos of Dilbar Fashion House clothes are available at <http://ns.sme0.net/dilbar/products> (accessed April 22, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.vista360.org> (accessed April 18, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



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# PAKISTAN

## Introduction

These days, Pakistan is frequently in the news, both in the United States and throughout the world. The war in Afghanistan that followed the attacks of September 11, 2001, the gradual widening of the conflict to the northern areas of Pakistan, and the intrigue surrounding Pakistan's vexed relations with both Afghanistan and the United States explain the intense focus of foreign journalists on political and military affairs. That narrow focus, however, disregards the very resources within Pakistani culture and society that could best support the strengthening of relations between the United States and Pakistan and foster greater mutual understanding between Americans and Pakistanis. Among these resources is Pakistan's vibrant and eclectic arts community, whose domains of activity include visual art, film, theater, dance, music, literature, and storytelling.

As is increasingly the case worldwide, Pakistan's artists, musicians, filmmakers, and writers mostly live and work in urban areas. Yet 64% of Pakistan's population is rural (although this percentage is steadily decreasing as rural inhabitants migrate to cities, presently at an annual rate of 3%).<sup>1</sup> Demographic patterns articulate with language use. Economically elite urban dwellers tend to

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<sup>1</sup> CIA World Factbook: Pakistan, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html> (accessed April 19, 2010)

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be educated in private English-language schools, while the majority of school-age children are educated in either public or religious schools, where classes are conducted in Urdu. Although both English and Urdu are widely used in Pakistan, neither is the mother tongue of 92% of the population.<sup>2</sup> These statistics support the imperative of focusing cultural exchange initiatives on rural as well as urban populations, and on speakers of indigenous languages as well as English and Urdu.

### Historical Perspective

Founded in 1947 following the end of British colonialism and the partition of India, Pakistan has spent a significant part of its brief history under military rule. The country emerged in the context of conflict and negotiation among various indigenous parties in colonial India over what sort of state would follow independence.

As a result of the institution by the colonial government of religious and ethnic identities as the basis of society and politics, the “Muslims of India” emerged as a newly constituted minority with respect to the equally newly constituted majority of “Hindus.” In effect, the colonial state defined the Indian nation as essentially “Hindu,” a decision that would fundamentally shape indigenous politics. Within the new nation, Dalit, Sikh, and, in the south, Dravidian political parties contested this idea of India.

By the early 1940s, with the prospect of a strong, Hindu-dominated central state all but certain, the principal spokesman for Muslim political interests, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, articulated the “two-nation theory.” This theory postulated that the Muslims of India constituted a “nation,” just as Hindus did, and thus needed a separate and distinct homeland in which they would constitute a majority. Muslims, however, were spread out across the Indian Subcontinent, so that as the partition occurred, the new Muslim homeland was split between East Pakistan—present-day Bangladesh—and a western sector comprising what remained of the original, postpartition Pakistan. Meanwhile, an

almost equal number of Muslims stayed in independent India.

The legacy of British colonialism in Pakistan led to a highly centralized state structure, which was strengthened by the exigencies of military rule. At the same time, the new country’s ethnic, regional, and linguistic diversity almost immediately sparked secessionist movements, one of which resulted in the creation of independent Bangladesh from the territory of East Pakistan in 1971. The subdivision of Pakistan into two separate Muslim-majority nations prompted some political analysts to argue that Jinnah’s two-nation theory had been emphatically disproved, and that shared religion could no longer be presumed to offer sufficient grounds for the creation of a viable nation-state.

Other secessionist movements—for example, in Baluchistan and Sindh—have emerged throughout Pakistan’s history, all suppressed by the military. The persistent grievances of these regional groups reveal that shared religious identity is not a sufficient condition for the creation of a national community. The Pakistani establishment nevertheless clings to Islam as the overarching, unifying aspect of its citizenry (around 75% of Pakistani Muslims are Sunni and 25% are Shia).<sup>3</sup> Yet even among Pakistani Muslims, different interpretations of Islam have gained prominence in the decades following independence. As is the case throughout South Asia, a large majority of Pakistanis were until recently adherents of the Barelvi form of Islam, which is based on inherited tradition, with considerable latitude of interpretation and practice.

But the Iranian Revolution of 1979, followed in the same year by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, presaged three decades of regional instability, inciting religious as well as military responses. Pakistan, which shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan, has been drawn into both the religious and the military conflict zone. One indicator of this is the rapid rise among Pakistani Muslims of Wahhabism, a literalist form of Islamic practice named for the eighteenth-century

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<sup>2</sup> See statistics provided by the Population Census Organization of the Government of Pakistan, [http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/other\\_tables/pop\\_by\\_mother\\_tongue.pdf](http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/other_tables/pop_by_mother_tongue.pdf) (accessed April 19, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> For more details, see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); and Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State* (London: Penguin, 1983).

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Arab religious leader Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhâb. Under the military rule of General Zia ul-Haq (1977–1988), Wahhabi practices became institutionalized in Pakistan. General Zia presided over the creation of thousands of religious schools (madrassahs) that had little in common with more traditional forms of religious education that had long existed in South Asia and elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Pakistan's population of 165 million (2007 figures), of which an estimated 103 million (63%) are under the age of 25, suggests that youth will have a key role in determining the trajectory of Islam in the coming decades

### **Constraints on Cultural Expression**

In the domain of arts and culture, military rule led to the suppression of almost all forms of artistic expression, with varying degrees of severity depending on the period and the ruler. Nevertheless, certain art forms—television dramas, visual arts, classical and traditional music, fashion, and street theater—were able to develop and, in recent decades, even flourish despite strict censorship rules. As for film, neighboring India's prodigious cinematic tradition has found a ready market in Pakistan, thus limiting the development of Pakistan's own film industry. In recent years, a rising generation of young Pakistani filmmakers has begun to make its voice heard among both local and international audiences.

Television was a particularly vibrant and popular medium in the decades following independence, largely because it was one of the few venues for artistic expression that received state patronage. Censorship notwithstanding, especially during the years of General Zia's rule, PTV, Pakistan's state-run television station, enjoyed a large viewership. Later, much of the talent associated with television migrated to the nascent film industry. The contemporary arts scene also received a boost from the establishment of a few key teaching institutions, most notably the National College of the Arts in Lahore and the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi.

In larger cities, visual arts drew on the rich cultural heritage of the Mughal tradition, in particular miniatures and prints from pre-partition days. Ear-

ly prominent artists included Zahoor ul Akhlaque Shakir Ali, and Zubeida Agha who for a time dominated the art world. Painter, muralist, and calligrapher Sadequain Naqqash (1930–1987), who had no formal arts training, also became prominent in the 1970s, principally for illustrating the *ghazals* of the great Urdu-language poet Mirza Ghalib (1797–1869). Salima Hashmi and Meher Afroze, among others, established their names as artists, and finally, in the 1980s, the urban elite began patronizing the arts. Noor Jehan Bilgrami, one of the doyennes of the Pakistani fashion scene, together with other professional artists, architects, and designers, founded the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 1989.

In the case of street theater, the constraints imposed during the decade of military rule under General Zia acted, paradoxically, as a stimulus for new forms of creativity. A theatrical collective called Tehrik-e-Niswan (The Women's Movement), established by arts activist Sheema Kermani, along with Madiha Gauhar's Ajoka Theater, were pioneers in this regard. Both benefited from policies that prohibited discussion of a significant number of issues on television—in particular, issues related to politics in the broadest sense and women's issues. Among the latter, one of the most contentious restrictions was that women cover their heads at all times, even in highly improbable scenes, such as while lying in bed, washing up, and so on. Plays with even minor political content were banned from television as well as from performance venues such as theaters and auditoriums. As a way of sidestepping such restrictions, Kermani and Gauhar both started producing and directing overtly political plays in private homes, and subsequently in the street, though they had to confine themselves to less visible areas for fear of attracting the attention of state authorities. Ajoka Theater's first such play, *Jaloos* (Procession), dealt explicitly with the possibility of political rebellion. Kermani subsequently worked in remote urban areas—performing on the streets, in the outskirts of major cities, in slums, and in working-class areas—and for several years, these performances had a major following. After the Zia era, however, street theater became less popular as mainstream theaters, such as the Al Hamra in Lahore and the National Academy

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of Performing Arts in Karachi, began hosting major directors and plays on virtually all subjects.

### **The Cultural Scene in Pakistan**

Despite numerous constraints, the cultural scene in Pakistan is thriving, albeit in some artistic domains more than others. Most notably, in recent years, contemporary art has flourished, partly because of excellent institutions such as the National College of Arts and the Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture. A number of artists have broken onto the international arts scene, where they are addressing key issues that Pakistan has confronted in its short history: civil war, military dictatorship, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and, most recently, the war on terror.

English-language literature from Pakistan has also become far more visible internationally in recent years. Some of the most prominent titles include Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (a finalist for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction), Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*; and numerous books by Kamila Shamsie, including *Kartography* and, most recently, *Burnt Shadows*. Still unrepresented, however, are books by writers in regional languages such as Urdu, Sindhi, and Punjabi, all of which have rich literary traditions. Although some translations have been done of canonical figures such as poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz and short-story writer Sadat Hasan Manto, both of whom wrote principally in Urdu, a large number of key literary figures in vernacular languages remain unavailable in English.

Several major contributors to the worlds of dance and theater have been performing throughout Pakistan. Some of these are well established, such as Madiha

Gauhar's Ajoka Theater and traditional dancers such as Nighat Choudhary and Naheed Siddiqui, who have also performed abroad. Other traditions, such as *dastaangoi* (storytelling), are becoming popular in urban centers. Performers of *dastaangoi* from India were recently featured at the Asia Society in New York and elsewhere in the United States.

In the music world, a small institution in Lahore, Sanjan Nagar, run by an extraordinary visionary, Raza Kazim, has undertaken innovative work in different musical genres, including rock and classical music. Sanjan Nagar undertakes collaborative work with India as well as with various European countries, and is involved in designing new musical instruments.<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan's media have also developed in new directions in the last several years, a trend that began with General Pervez Musharraf's easing of restrictions on new television channels. Musharraf's action was very likely prompted by two factors: first, Pakistani television viewers' increasing reliance on Indian news channels—a result of skepticism about the veracity of Pakistan's own PTV news—and second, a realization that the proliferation of satellite networks made it all but impossible to enforce restrictions.<sup>5</sup> The erstwhile state television monopoly, PTV, has given way to multiple news, entertainment, and music channels, some of which are employing new media technologies in innovative and engaging ways. Such technologies lend themselves to international collaboration through online media.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the growth of new media technologies has affected the way news is reported, and the way young people, in particular, engage in social networking—as demonstrated by the role of Facebook in the recent environmental campaign in Islamabad.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://sanjannagar.wordpress.com/raza-kazim/> (accessed April 19, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> General Musharraf soon cracked down on the media just as swiftly as he had allowed it to develop. See, among numerous other articles, Khalid Jawed Khan, "Being Uncomfortable with Free Media," *Dawn* (June 12, 2007); and Moeed Pirzada, "Musharraf and the Media," *The Guardian* (November 19, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> On the increasing use of social networking sites in Pakistan, see Bina Shah, "The 'Green Revolution,'" August 4, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/14-the-green-revolution-zj-02> (accessed April 19, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> For coverage of a recent initiative by young Pakistanis (calling themselves "Responsible Citizens") in Lahore to collect garbage on the streets, see Sabrina Tavernese, "Young Pakistanis Take One Problem into Their Own Hands," *New York Times*, May 18, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/19/world/asia/19trash.html> (accessed April 19, 2010); and Jamal Shahid, "Proving to Be Responsible Citizens," August 10, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/metropolitan/14-proving-to-be-responsible-citizens-zj-01> (accessed April 19, 2010).

The film industry is also going through major changes in response to the lifting of a decades-old ban on screening films from India in public cinemas. Although some cultural critics argue that the growth of Bollywood will further dampen Pakistan's fledgling movie industry, many Pakistanis believe that the proximity of Bollywood's base in Mumbai will open the way for cross-border collaboration—indeed, this has already occurred—and will ultimately improve the quality of films produced in Pakistan. Film represents one of the key areas in which collaboration between Pakistan and the United States could be most fruitful, as this medium is popular in both countries, and can often reach wider audiences than either print or online media.

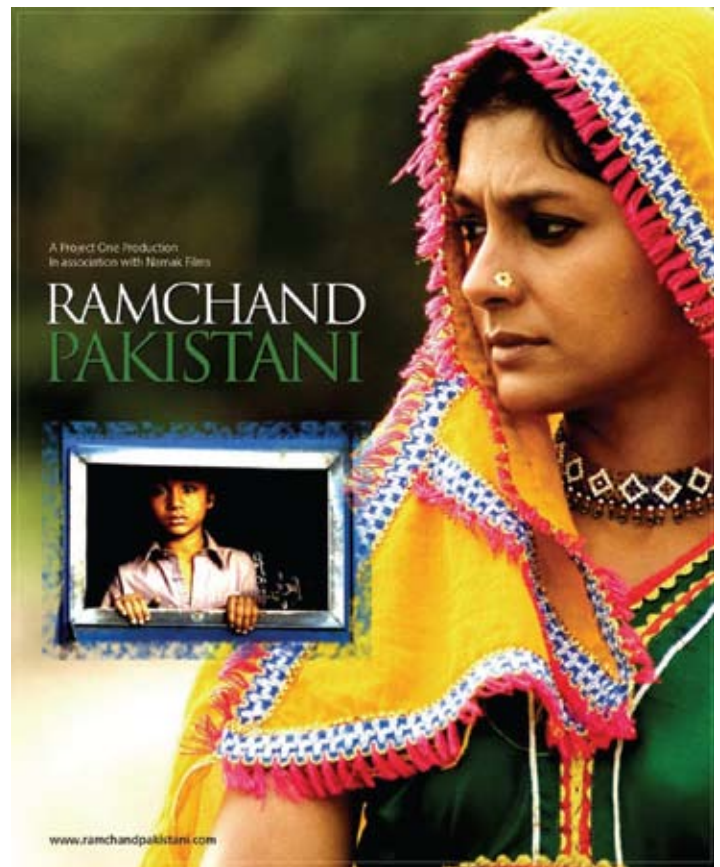
## CASE STUDIES

### Strengthening Cultural Connectivity Through Film: THE KARAFILM FESTIVAL

The KaraFilm Festival, held annually in Karachi, is one of a number of high-quality, ongoing cultural initiatives that could play an important role in the development of U.S.–Pakistani cultural relations. Founded in 2001 by a small group of young, aspiring film directors in Karachi, the festival began by screening 35 films—most of them from South Asia—over a period of three days. By 2006, the festival was screening almost 200 films from 50 countries over a 10-day period, with attendance estimated at around 45,000.<sup>8</sup>

Collaboration between KaraFilm and a U.S. festival could introduce Pakistani films to American audiences and bring independent American-made films to audiences in Pakistan. (Such reciprocity is already occurring—for example, Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* was screened at the 2003 KaraFilm Festival, and Pakistani director Mehreen Jabbar's well-received debut feature *Ramchand Pakistani* was shown at the 2007 Tribeca Film Festival.) Additionally, such an exchange would provide a forum for directors, producers, artists, and production specialists to meet and discuss collaborative projects, including, potentially, a U.S.–

Pakistan co-production. Mehreen Jabbar, for instance, lives part of the year in New York and part in Karachi. She was one of the key people involved in starting the KaraFilm Festival, and she is connected to many leading film industry figures in both Pakistan and India. Another potential collaborative film project—already



Poster for Mehreen Jabbar's directorial debut film, *Ramchand Pakistani*

under way—is Indian American director Mira Nair's adaptation of Mohsin Hamid's award-winning book *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which focuses on the issue of terrorism and its relationship to the United States. (The book consists of a monologue by a young, American-educated Pakistani man living in Lahore, addressed to an American whom he meets in a tea shop in the city.)

<sup>8</sup> As a result of political developments in 2007 and 2008, including the declaration of emergency and assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the festival was first postponed and then substantially curtailed; for this reason, the figures cited are from 2006.

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Daniyal Mueenuddin's highly acclaimed debut collection of short stories, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, offers ample opportunity for a Pakistani–American film adaptation. The author is himself Pakistani American, and lives in rural Punjab. Moreover, as several stories are set in rural Punjab, *In Other Rooms* could bridge the rural–urban divide by representing the lives of Pakistanis not usually visible, even in Pakistan.

The KaraFilm Festival's organizers are planning to start a film academy, the first such institution in Paki-

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“...there are virtually no screenwriting courses or classes offered in Pakistan, and a lot of very passionate people who want to be writers.”

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stan. The academy would provide a range of opportunities to American directors, actors, and producers, who could come to Pakistan to teach, develop projects, and work with local talent. In a recent exchange, Hasan Zaidi, head of the KaraFilm Festival, noted that “unlike other Western countries, the United States has been a marginal player in supporting Kara or Pakistani filmmakers.” Zaidi added, “Where Pakistani filmmakers would really gain is by being able to hire trained crew members from the United States for their own projects.” In his view, developing a resource base, distribution channels, and regular training programs would lead to actual project collaborations. The KaraFilm Festival is already working with a number of international festivals, including the Australia-based Asia Pacific Screen Awards, the International Federation of Film Societies, the British Film Institute, and the Himal South Asian Documentary Film Festival.

Zaidi's view is supported by Mehreen Jabbar, whose *Ramchand Pakistani* employed four crew members from the United States, and was filmed entirely on location in the Thar desert in Sindh, Pakistan. Jabbar suggested that collaboration between Pakistani and American

film producers should be “in the technical field, and use American technicians—sound engineers, cameramen, gaffers, and others—to work on projects in Pakistan.”

She added that American talent “can assist in technical training, and collaborate with those who want to set up a film school or academy in Pakistan.” Another useful strategy, she suggested, would be to provide Pakistani filmmakers with exposure to production and post-production facilities in the United States. Jabbar said that “acting workshops should be conducted in Pakistan or aspiring actors in Pakistan should be able to come to the United States to take acting classes.” In Pakistan, the only facility for teaching acting is the National Academy of Performing Arts, whose principal focus is theater, not film. She added that another area that “needs a lot of attention is script writing, as there are virtually no screenwriting courses or classes offered in Pakistan, and a lot of very passionate people who want to be writers. There can be projects in which both Pakistani and American talent work together both on the technical and artistic side.” Jabbar identified two reciprocal obstacles to Pakistani–American collaboration: the difficulty that Pakistanis face in getting visas to the United States, and the security fears that Americans have in traveling to Pakistan. Both of these challenges will need to be overcome in order for collaboration to develop.



<http://www.karafilmfest.com>

### **Cross-Cultural Education Through Literary Translation: WORDS WITHOUT BORDERS**

Words without Borders describes itself as an online magazine that “translates, publishes, and promotes the finest contemporary international literature.”<sup>9</sup> According to its website, it has published more than 1,000 pieces from 114 countries in 80 languages. In its June 2009 issue, Words without Borders featured “Writing from Pakistan,” a collection of English translations of Urdu-language fiction and nonfiction writing (<http://wordswithoutborders.org/issue/june-2009/>).

Words without Borders operates on a relatively small budget and pays its translators a modest honorarium. Yet the website is popular and often is able to acquire rights to the works of well-known contributors and at-

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://wordswithoutborders.org/about/>.

tract highly qualified translators. Currently, it is in the process of launching an education initiative to “expose students at both the high school and college levels to a broader spectrum of contemporary international literature.” The website notes, “We hope that in reaching out to students we can create a passion for international literature, a curiosity about other cultures, and help cultivate true world citizens.”<sup>10</sup> This is an especially worthy endeavor, as today, 50% of all the books in translation now published worldwide are translated from English, but only about 3% of all books published in the United States are works in translation.<sup>11</sup>



<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org>

### Empowering Women and Shifting Perceptions Through Theater: TEHRİK-E-NISWAN (THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT)

In 1979, a group of women led by renowned classical dancer Sheema Kermani formed Tehrik-e-Niswan (The Women’s Movement) in Karachi. Tehrik’s initial focus was organizing seminars and workshops and taking up issues such as violence against women. Since then, the organization has expanded its focus to address issues of conflict, war and peace, violence, and religious fundamentalism, with a particular focus on women’s issues. Tehrik’s work aims to:

- Support the movement for women’s rights
- Create awareness and change moral attitudes and values
- Fight obscurantism and all kinds of fundamentalism, especially religious fundamentalism
- Empower the oppressed so that they take control of their lives and try to bring about social change
- Create an atmosphere of peace and harmony

Within a year of its founding, Tehrik moved away from seminars to focus on cultural and creative activities such as theater and dance as a means of conveying its message. “Our society is largely illiterate and access to formal education is extremely restricted,” said Kermani.

“In a society such as this, lectures, seminars and papers have limited usefulness. Popular media have a far wider appeal.” The group’s first play, *Dard Kay Faasley* (Distances of Pain), was performed in 1981 for an all-female audience in a shopping center in one of the most populous areas of Karachi. Besides dance and theater, Tehrik also disseminates its message through powerful television dramas, music videos, and documentaries.

Tehrik-e-Niswan founder Sheema Kermani is a trained classical dancer who has been teaching and per-



A mobile theater play on the outskirts of Karachi

forming dance for more than 30 years. Kermani has conducted extensive research on the historical role of dance in Indus Valley civilization, culminating in four major works: a classical ballet, *The Song of Mohenjodaro*, which shows how dance was and is a part of Pakistan’s cultural heritage; *Aaj Rung Hai*, a tribute to Muslim musicians and dancers; a modern ballet, *Indus and Europa*; and *Raqs Karo*, a contemporary dance performance based on the poetry of feminist poet Fahmida Riaz that depicts the evolution of women through the ages.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://wordswithoutborders.org/about/>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepersent/index.php?s=about>.

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### Understanding the Need

In 1971, after finishing her studies in London, Kermani returned to Pakistan with the aim of undertaking a substantial project to fight discrimination against women in Pakistani society. Her own experience in the performing arts had made her realize the challenges that women faced in pursuing a career. She formed a group of like-minded friends and began to hold adult literacy classes for working-class women. Next, they set up training centers where they taught crafts such as stitching and sewing to women in an effort to empower them economically. The group also organized lectures, seminars, and conferences to disseminate information. However, within a year, Tehrik moved away from its seminar-lecture format toward cultural and creative ac-

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“In a society where there is conflict, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect the conflict and the decay. It must show the world as changeable—and help to change it.”

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tivities such as theater and dance as means of conveying its message. Kermani explained, “When we started creating theatrical performances, we discovered that we had started a dialogue with our audience. The response to the plays we were performing directed our attention toward seriously adopting the performing arts as a medium for our work and for conveying our message.” Since then, Tehrik’s emphasis has been theater arts. It has evolved into a cultural action group whose focus is theater related to women’s issues.

Tehrik’s plays typically integrate dialogue and narrative with dance and music, traditional storytelling techniques, and conventions borrowed from folk traditions. Tehrik-e-Niswan’s cast members include expert singers, dancers, musicians, and designers, all of whom bring a vibrant energy to the group’s productions. Tehrik-e-Niswan also engages well-known theater personalities from other countries as guest artists. It has organized training workshops as well as productions with

eminent artists from Bangladesh, India, and Germany. Tehrik generates income from broadcasting fees for productions shown on television, from the sale of tickets to some its productions, and from its staff’s resources.

One of Tehrik’s most successful initiatives is its Mobile Theater Program, which has presented plays in middle-class and low-income areas of Karachi since 1981. A team of performers travels to low-income areas at the request of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work specifically in these locations. Short performances (30–50 minutes) are offered free of charge; they are often based on real-life issues drawn from the lives of local residents. Productions are kept simple so that they may be performed conveniently in small spaces on short notice. Apart from their entertainment value, a strong emphasis is placed on the script writing and design of each production. The audiences for mobile plays in low-income areas are predominantly female, and consist of industrial workers or people doing small jobs in the service sector. Tehrik has consciously decided to focus on a limited number of communities that are visited on a regular basis, rather than make infrequent visits to a large number of communities. This approach has created a strong relationship with community audiences, which has led, in turn, to lively postperformance discussions between community members and actors.

In the end, it is this dialogue that is of prime importance. The plays in Tehrik-e-Niswan’s repertoire focus on the marginalized lives of women, and question officially prescribed gender roles and a lopsided moral system. Kermani added that “Tehrik’s pioneering work of mobile theater has been very effective, very impacting and has successfully conveyed messages of human rights through entertainment. These projects have managed to create a dialogue on issues ranging from taboo subjects, like honor killing and reproductive health issues, to the effect of art and culture on people. Projects like ‘Women’s Development through Theater’ and ‘Campaign on Violence Against Women Through Mobile Theater’ have successfully created awareness about the status of women, and in many areas qualitative positive changes have been noticed.” Besides theater, Tehrik has also produced documentaries, music videos, television serials, and dance performances based on similar issues.

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Kermani believes that Tehrik's portfolio is an excellent example of how change can be effected through the power of arts and culture. The organization has been successful in integrating art and politics, with a special emphasis on women's rights. "In a society where there is conflict, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect the conflict and the decay. It must show the world as changeable—and help to change it. Whenever Tehrik sets out to produce a work of art, be it dance or drama, we keep in mind this world outlook, this ideology," she said.

"There is something in art that expresses an unchanging truth and has a liberating quality," said Kermani. She added that the women's movement in Pakistan can only be carried forward and succeed if it is seen as part of the overall fight against religious narrow-mindedness and bigotry. "Women are the most deeply affected by these rising trends. Since this is a cultural fight, it needs to be fought through cultural means. The work of bringing about a change in people's thinking and behavior through cultural interventions is very different from all other material development work. It is a process of changing minds and values, which works in imperceptible ways. It's very difficult to say actually at what point and in which manner cultural experiences affect people. The proof of their effectiveness lies in the undeniable fact that our mental attitudes are formed by the songs that we have heard, the plays or films we have seen, the poems or stories that we have read or been told. So what we are doing through our theater is re-examining those institutions that blindly perpetuate sexism, those attitudes, those responses, those ignorant convictions about woman's nature, and those religiously blind observations about her needs—that, petrified by custom, have determined women's position throughout the patriarchal centuries."

Kermani continues to incorporate dance into her theater work. "I believe that the way we stand, the way we use our spine, can help us cope with life." She believes that the kinds of values imposed on girls—of being inferior, considering one's body as something to be kept hidden—can be cast aside by dancing. "Dance gives confidence and is empowering. My involvement with trying to evolve a dance style of our own has the objective of coming up with a *living* dance, which has

a practical relevance for the emotional, mental and socio-cultural realities of our time, and which can have a creative interaction with the emotional and intellectual lives of today's individuals. It could be a tool in transforming their emotions and sensitivities, and raising the qualitative level of human life by making us better human beings."

### Way Forward

Tehrik is a powerful example of an organization that understands the benefits of using elements of traditional popular culture to address its target audience. Through theater and dance performances and post-performance discussions, Tehrik has seen firsthand the lasting impact that people-to-people interaction can have on an audience. This mobile theater model with sustained investment over a long duration can be used as a platform to counteract preconceived notions about the West. In the past, Tehrik has worked with various NGOs, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the Asia Foundation, and UNICEF, and has disseminated its educational messages through its witty scripts. Tehrik is not the only South Asian NGO to use the mobile theater model in community outreach efforts. Scripts, techniques, and even talent can be regionally exchanged. Finally, Tehrik's work to promote the cultural past of the Indus Valley Civilization through dance performances can be showcased not only in Pakistan, but also in other parts of the world.



<http://www.tehrik-e-niswan.org.pk/>

### Building Connectivity Through Contemporary Arts: VASL INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS' COLLECTIVE

The VASL International Artists' Collective describes itself as a "platform for contemporary Pakistani art and artists," and an "artist-led initiative that brings together local and international artists for a period of intensive exchange of ideas and art practice." VASL, which means "coming together" or "union" in Urdu, is part of a worldwide network of artists, visual arts organizations, and artist-led workshops organized under the aegis of the U.K.-based Triangle Arts Trust, which receives funding from the British Council, Commonwealth

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Foundation, Prince Claus Fund, and Ford Foundation, among other sponsors. Its activities include residencies for local and international artists, international artists' workshops, and a range of educational and community outreach initiatives and events. All of these activities promote VASL's overall mission to develop a forum for cultural exchange through art that links arts communities in Pakistan with international networks. In partic-

. . . The electronic media has a lot to offer but I believe it is always going to be personal contact that will actually reach out and touch someone."

Since its inception in 2001, VASL has grown steadily in scope and size, "evolving as a binder to the diverse face of Pakistani art," according to Naiza Khan, an internationally known Pakistani artist who was one of VASL's founders and presently serves as its co-coordinator. Educated at Oxford and the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Khan moved to Karachi in 1991, and realized that Pakistan lacked a forum in which artists could meet and work together. She recalled that very little information was available about opportunities for artists, and that what existed "was not offered in a democratic way." In 1999, Robert Loder, then director of the Triangle Arts Trust, came to Pakistan and met with Khan and a number of artists from Lahore and Karachi to discuss the model of worldwide workshops that Triangle had been instrumental in setting up. "The ingredients were quite simple," Khan recalled, "and each location had its own set of priorities. In Pakistan there was no such space that would screen without prejudice and accept artists on merit."

VASL began with modest funding, much of it provided by the ZVMG Rangoonwala Foundation, which has continued to support projects over the last eight years. VASL has also received funding from the Ford Foundation, but Khan noted that VASL "has always pushed efforts towards fundraising from within Pakistan, as we feel it is important to develop awareness and ownership for supporting culture and art within the society. Unfortunately, in the absence of a dedicated cultural funding body in Pakistan, and very little support from the government, we are often in dire straits. On top of that, the political and economic situation often means that donors within Pakistan cannot sustain the support they may like to offer. We are also competing for funding with other sectors such as healthcare and education, which often take priority over support for contemporary art activity and exchange programs."

Khan noted that even though Pakistan has a strong tradition in the visual arts, it suffers from a major vacuum in arts infrastructure. Before the VASL Residency Program was established, there was no sustained exchange program for artists, and few prospects for



**Artist Jamil Baloch installing his work at a VASL workshop**

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ular, VASL focuses on strengthening links with artists and arts organizations in other South Asian countries. During the first VASL workshop, which took place in January 2001, Walter d'Souza, an artist from India, commented on his experience: "Visited my neighbor for the first time in forty-three years, strange feelings, unbelievably fantastic, and a wild enriching experience

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emerging artists to travel to other countries to gain new experiences through art making. “During the last eight years, 67 Pakistani artists have benefited from different international workshops and residencies in the Triangle Network across the world. Also during this time, over 45 international artists have visited Pakistan for various VASL programs, from as far afield as St. Petersburg, Shanghai, and Indonesia. The ripple effect of these activities is evident in the collaborative projects that have been developed by participants.”

In all of its activities, VASL strives to broaden social understanding of the role that art can play in a multilayered social space. For example, the VASL Study Group is a platform for critical dialogue about art and current issues whose participants represent diverse professional backgrounds. VASL Lahore has organized two projects that opened the city to direct artistic intervention by young art college graduates. Twelve artists, individually and collaboratively, created works that intervened in public spaces and recorded the process and responses to their work. VASL’s annual Taaza Tareen (Fresh New Talent) Residency gives a younger cohort of emerging artists an opportunity to experiment outside the pressures of the art market, in a noncompetitive space.

VASL’s website offers a comprehensive platform for arts research and representation. More than 150 contemporary Pakistani artists have uploaded their work to the site. Khan believes that practice-led exchanges and the use of the Internet to develop new audiences not only will facilitate transnational dialogue, but also will deepen artists’ understanding of how they can “bring meaningful reflection to social and political realities” within the context of Pakistan.

Khan believes that VASL has helped develop a sense of community among artists that transcends the boundaries of class and location. “Despite the obstacles for the visual artist in our society, it has been tremendously empowering for us to work as a collective and define the path we take.” She noted that VASL’s impact is visible in the contemporary art scene, which has gained international recognition, in the way artists are teaching, and in the way art students are looking beyond their immediate locale. “In our own sense of self, our confidence in our art and art scene, we are equal,” said Khan.

VASL is not the only arts organization to address the challenge of building a thriving Pakistani artistic modernity. The Mauj Media Collective is a group that looks at the influence of new media on social dynamics, civil society, and networks. The Art Publishing Program of the Foundation for the Museum of Modern Art has produced a series of publications on contemporary Pakistani artists. Another project is the Citizens Archive of Pakistan, which is reexamining, recording, and archiving the history of Pakistan through a variety of media. Khan sees the role of VASL and its peer organizations as not only cultural, but also political. “Over the last few years, Pakistan has faced huge challenges,” she said. “The political and social realities are getting harder to work with and we are constantly shaping and redefining our identity amid the rising tide of intolerance and political incompetence. In the face of such turmoil every small step to create a cultural narrative of our complex reality becomes an act of resistance.”

### Way Forward

A platform such as VASL encourages cross-cultural collaborations. Over the last decade, through its international residency workshops and regional organizational links, VASL has built connectivity between artists in Pakistan and other nations, with the strongest links extending to artists elsewhere in South Asia. The same

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VASL has grown steadily in scope and size, “evolving as a binder to the diverse face of Pakistani art.”

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entrepreneurial savvy could build strong links between Pakistan’s contemporary arts community and artists in the United States. Khan believes that a long-term collaboration with a strongly committed U.S.-based arts foundation could make a contribution to normalizing perceptions of culture that have been skewed by political events, and to promoting connectivity beyond borders, religions, and ethnicities.

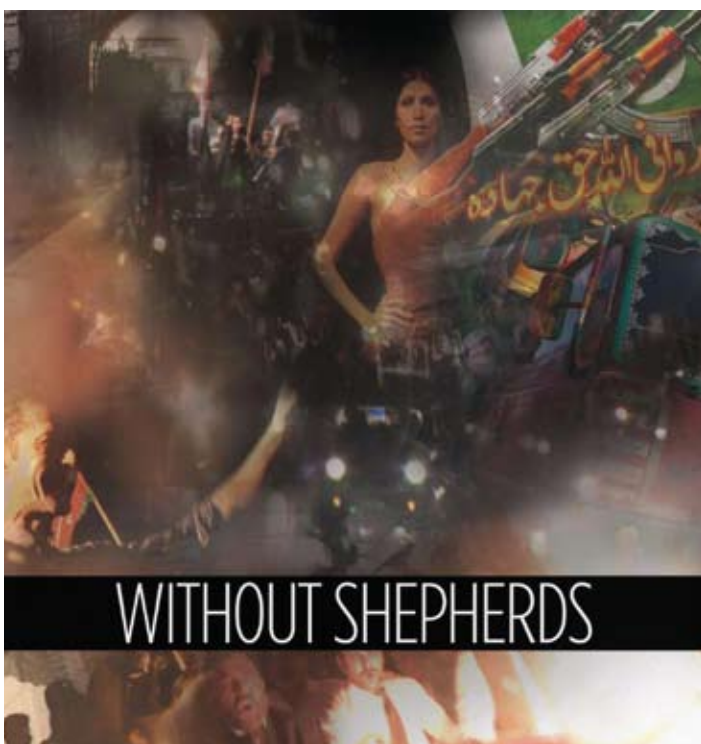


<http://www.VASLart.org>

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## Challenging Stereotypes Through Documentary Film: *WITHOUT SHEPHERDS*

*Without Shepherds* is a feature documentary conceived by Cary McClelland, a young American filmmaker who returned from his first visit to Pakistan and decided to take on the challenge of looking into the heart of this misunderstood country and showcasing it to the world. McClelland and his team partnered with top documentary filmmakers in Pakistan and traveled across the country with the aim of attaching human faces, endowed with compassion and intelligence, to the depersonalized images disseminated from what the mainstream news media regularly depict as “the most dangerous country in the world.”



A collage of video stills from the documentary film

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The feature looks head-on at the problems of Pakistan through the eyes of six Pakistanis from different walks of life. McClelland said that the film is about “a moment where things fall apart, and about people who try to piece things together. It is a chance for empathy—a record of how Pakistan sat at the center of the world and tried to find answers for all of us.”

McClelland eloquently described the sequence of events and reactions that led him to make *Without Shepherds*:

“I woke up one morning ten years ago to a world I no longer recognized—where my city was missing two buildings and friends had lost their fathers, and there were two new wars. And I felt sheltered and ashamed of how ignorant I was. As a New Yorker, it was easy to feel that the world was within arm’s reach inside the city, but all of the places discussed in the news felt like distant planets. If you asked me then about Pakistan, my instinctive impressions were laced with images of jihadists, military dictatorships, political and religious chaos, all set in foreboding terrain and darkly lit streets. From a distance, research added some shades of gray: something of a historical perspective, empathetic ideas about tribal culture, perhaps, and some compassion for the government and the various parties struggling to right the unsteady ship of the country’s democracy. And still, with each passing month, Pakistan’s presence in the headlines became all the more prominent and frequent. The country’s future would be reevaluated over and over with every new event. And diplomacy between the U.S. and Pakistan grew ever more delicate underneath this pressure. It became clear to me that if our countries’ futures would be built on anything more stable than the shifting whims of this moment’s political convenience, then we had to start tapping into a much deeper chord and human connection. . . . There must be a life there away from the so-called war on terror, a life outside of the *madrassahs*, and a day that begins with other thoughts and more pressing preoccupations than jihad. Even for militants, this must be so. *Without Shepherds* offers a rare opportunity to bridge that gap and give audiences worldwide a picture of the Pakistan that headline news does not represent: the real lives of diverse citizens caught in the currents of tremendous internal and external pressures. Our goal is to give audiences a real sense of how people run businesses, earn bread, travel, smile, study, sleep, eat, love, dance, protest, hide, ignore, and dream.”

*Without Shepherds* has been in the works for nearly two years, during which McClelland has spent most of his time in Pakistan. “This project was always going to have to be independently funded,” the director admitted,

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“because it bucks so many current trends in the commercial media.” Other hurdles included allaying potential investors’ concerns about working in Pakistan: the security climate, obtaining government permissions, and the availability of local media partners. McClelland discovered that, approached openly and honestly, the government was highly cooperative, an ample number of Pakistani partners were willing to join the project, and security issues could more often than not be overcome. “I came to Pakistan expecting to replicate experiences that I had had working in other countries with less sophisticated media pools,” McClelland recalled. “When we saw the amount of talent available, we suddenly got very excited about the kind of team we could build, and our ambitions for the project expanded. The amount of talent in Pakistan was part of the inspiration for the project getting this large, and full of so many characters.”

Though *Without Shepherds* has faced innumerable production challenges, McClelland and his team have been driven to complete it by their strong belief in the urgency of presenting a different side of Pakistan to the world. “We want to make a film that speaks much more broadly than just to this time and place,” said McClelland. “We want to offer a mirror to Western audiences. In the States, we are dealing with fundamentalism, with militants, with refugees and migrants, with old politics and new symbols, with generational misunderstandings, with regional divides, and with a rising fear of just getting by. Americans and Pakistanis alike are swimming in very powerful currents that bleed quickly through national borders to become global phenomena. In the film’s characters, we should see ourselves. Their fear is the same as ours, their hope the same, their pain, their anger, their dreams, their love the same. We focus on those things that are eternal and transcend boundaries, as opposed to the temporary things that may divide us today, but may disappear tomorrow. What is true for Pakistan and Pakistanis is true for America and Americans. Much of what is true today was true yesterday and will be true tomorrow. We are grappling with questions that never really go away, and this film deals with issues that will measure all of our triumphs, our tragedies, our pride and our shame. It will be a personal and intimate record of how Pakistan sat at the center of the world and tried to find some

answers for all of us.”

Producer Robert Profusek added, “People are always trying to match what they already have in mind about Pakistan, and when they see our film the images will not match up, as the intent of the film is to blow through those preconceived notions.” At the same time, team

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“We are grappling with questions that never really go away, and this film deals with issues that will measure all of our triumphs, our tragedies, our pride and our shame.”

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members said that while making the documentary, their goal was never to show Pakistan positively if that was not what they were experiencing. Rather, the goal was to show “how people in Pakistan are experiencing the issues Americans are concerned about.”

*Without Shepherds* will be a 90-minute feature edited from 450 hours of raw footage that follows six actual people over the course of two years. The film will be subtitled in English, as the documentary subjects speak in local languages that include, in addition to Urdu, Pushto, Sindhi, Saraiki, Baluchi, and Hindko. The main characters—all of whom “play” themselves—include the following:

- **A cricketer** who leaves the cricket pitch for politics, hoping that his sports stardom can build a new coalition of young, energetic, and principled voices. His new party must bring together moderates on both sides of the religious war that is tearing his country apart.
- **A truck driver** who is just trying to feed his family. In Pakistan, this becomes more difficult day by day as the economy continues to unravel.
- **Pakistan’s first supermodel**, who launches a new fashion channel to encourage women to reimagine their role in society and take bold steps outside the home and into public life.

- **A rocker** in a country where religion opposes music travels the country in search of a source of inspiration, and a voice that can fight back against the extremism and violence around him.
- **A female journalist** reporting from behind Taliban lines is fired for not submitting to the sexual advances of her colleagues. She is robbed of a career that she had used to shed light on the suffering in her country, and now searches for new outlets as an advocate and humanitarian.
- **An ex-Jihadi** who returns home from a decade fighting alongside the Taliban and has blood on his hands and heavy remorse in his chest. He dances between different jobs and different women, desperate to find some sense of purpose, and is thwarted by friends and family who cannot look beyond his past.

McClelland said that during the “casting” process, the characters self-selected themselves. “Somebody has the character in him, somebody has the alignment for it, and somebody trusts us enough to go down the road with us.” He admitted that he made a concerted effort to approach people who would contradict the image of “scary Pakistan” that is portrayed around the world. Asked whether participants—especially the women—were apprehensive about being part of the project, McClelland responded that the presence of several Pakistanis on the production team mitigated apprehensiveness about the project being “American-funded.”

### Way Forward

McClelland and his team are in discussion with universities and NGOs to create a conflict resolution curriculum to accompany the film. They plan to use their film to provoke discussion about conflict resolution, the role of the media, and political identity, both in the United States and in Pakistan and other Muslim countries. They also hope to use their website as a place to disseminate information about important cultural events in Pakistan and host discussions of current issues.



<http://www.withoutshepherds.com>

### Individuals Making a Difference: OMAR RAHIM—Pakistani American Founder of Soof Designs, Dancer/Choreographer/Actor

Omar Rahim offers an exceptional example of how talent, tenacity, and a few lucky breaks came together to build a multifaceted career that has made important contributions to strengthening cosmopolitanism and global cultural pluralism. In response to a request from the authors of “Making a Difference,” Rahim provided the following autobiographical narrative.

“To a great extent, my education and subsequent career can be viewed as a chain of varied yet interconnected cultural projects. As a high school student in New Hyde Park, New York, I took part in an innovative co-curricular performing arts and film program called STAC—Student Television Arts Company. I also managed to secure a scholarship to the David Howard Dance Center, then one of New York’s premier classical ballet studios, where I spent holidays training in classical ballet. Later, as an undergraduate at Wesleyan University, I majored in history, literature and philosophy while simultaneously studying dance, and wrote an honors thesis on the interplay of aesthetics and activism in the life and work of iconic Indian choreographer Chandralekha.

“After college, I spent three years as a dancer in Susan Marshall and Company, one of New York’s finest postmodern dance companies, but left in 2000 in order to spend more time in Pakistan. Realizing that a wealth of culture lay beyond the drawing rooms of the Westernized elite, I started traveling all over the Pakistani hinterlands. I thus discovered astonishing arts traditions that not only taught me about indigenous Pakistani aesthetics, but also provoked an entrepreneurial curiosity. I decided to try to market these uniquely Pakistani products in the United States and Europe, not only as a way to support myself, but also to present a facet of Pakistan to the West that is relatively unknown. Thus, Soof Designs was born.

“During the research and sourcing process for Soof Designs, I learned that decorative ceramics, quilting, and embroidery were woven into the ancient culture of Sindh and Pakistan. I realized that I had a responsibility not only to support the now impoverished artisans who make these stunning crafts by succeeding in my marketing effort, but to tell the stories of the culture that

gave birth to such beautiful traditions. Whereas art production in the West tends to favor the projection of the individual artist, such extraordinary Pakistani works of art have been made and continue to be made by thousands of anonymous artisans who produce through and for their community as their ancestors had before them. I endeavored to educate buyers so that they could respect and appreciate not just the products, but the history, tradition, and intention that lead to their creation. I was fortunate enough to receive press attention from the *New York Times* as well as from Oprah Winfrey's *O* magazine. I was one of a handful of entrepreneurs featured in a multimedia campaign for the small business initiative of the city of New York, and also received a small business award from Tim Zagat, founder of the *Zagat* guides. Soof Designs' *rillis* (traditional patchwork quilts) have retailed at Paul Smith, ABC Carpet and Home, Bloomingdale's and a handful of high-end boutiques all over the world.

"In 2008, I decided to renew my focus on my performing arts work. I choreographed and performed in the music video for a then-unknown musical group called Zeb and Haniya. The result was the video *Aitebar*, a groundbreaking project on many fronts. The first video in Pakistan to tell an entire story through modern dance, *Aitebar* catapulted Zeb and Haniya to national and international fame. Its treatment of the end of a love affair was also very casual and progressive, showing through contemporary movement a young woman resolving her sorrow and regret after leaving a partner. In a country that continues to struggle with misogynistic tribal customs like honor killings while producing bawdy and often vulgar (perhaps equally misogynistic) dances in the struggling film industry, the illustration of a self-empowered young woman dancing through the healing process on national television certainly left an imprint on popular cultural discourse in South Asia.

"I have been fortunate to live between two wonderful nations and to become a bridge between them. I have shared insights and experiences gained from my education in the States with educational, media and performing arts communities in Pakistan. And I have also been able to share with various communities in the United States some of the fascinating aspects of Pakistani culture and identity through its arts, craft and music. As

popular culture reaches millions of young people, we as artists have the ability to share ideas with a vast population that is hungry for stimulation and engagement. Artists with a heightened sense of political awareness also realize that we can impart life lessons to our audiences without seeming didactic. Just as Americans need to see Pakistanis as more than 'Islamic extremists,' so, too,



Omar performing in a music video for Zeb & Haniya

do Pakistanis need to see Americans as more than 'warmongers.' While there are challenges ahead, I believe that we can only move in one direction: that of greater contact and interaction between the creative communities of Pakistan and the United States. Artists, by virtue of our ability to affect cross-cultural discourse on a mass scale, can avert wars. If only we received a fraction of the support budgeted for those who fight them."



<http://www.omarrahim.com/>

### Individuals Making a Difference: SAMINA QURAESHI— Illuminating a Faith of Many Paths: *Sacred Spaces: A Journey with the Sufis of the Indus*

In the fall of 2009, scholar, writer, and photographer Samina Quraeshi published *Sacred Spaces: A Journey with the Sufis of the Indus*, a creative response to the experience of pilgrimage to the Sufi shrines of the Indus Valley. The book's images evoke the music, dance, and acts of faith that animate these sacred spaces. The following is the author's account of what led her to this project.

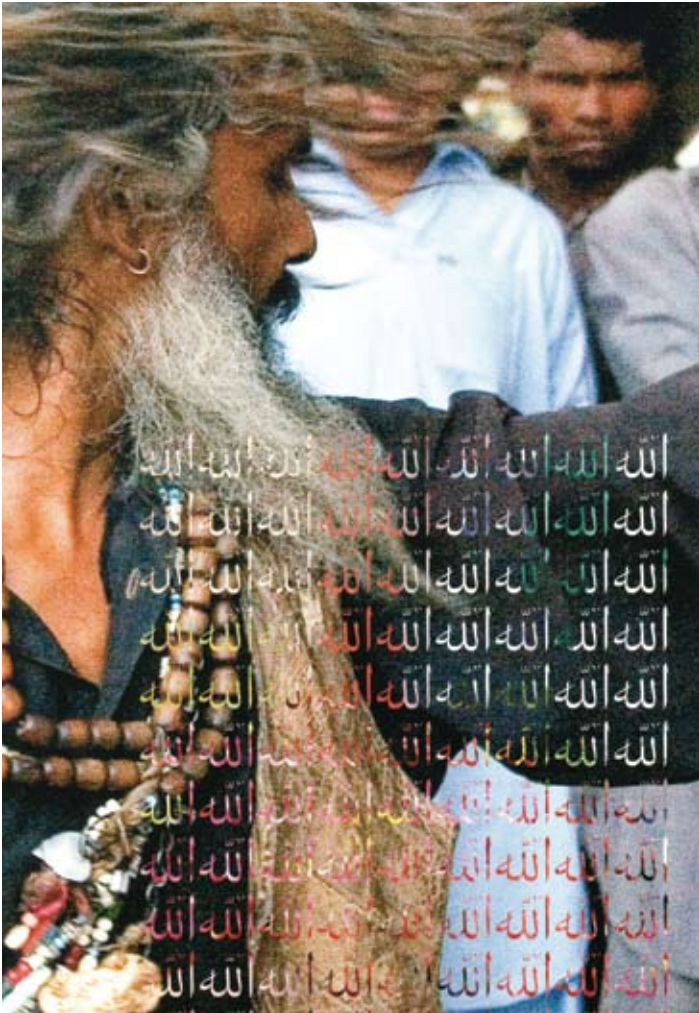
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“South Asia—comprising India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and neighboring countries—is home to one-third of the world’s Muslims today. Images of Islam are characterized by the sensationalism of the news media portraying violence and fear. These portray-

nomenon for me, and I was raised always to be open to new inputs. In the 1960s, Karachi was a vibrant city full of optimism and multicultural energy. There was great appreciation of religious and ethnic differences, all of which seemed perfectly natural. Our neighbors, who were Zoroastrians, invited us to join them in their celebrations of Navroze (a traditional New Year’s celebration linked to the vernal equinox). Our Christian friends opened their homes to us for lively parties at Christmas and Easter. A nearby family was Hindu, and we also kept in touch with some of the Jewish families that still lived in Karachi in those days. Pakistan today is very different from this memory. In Pakistan the astonishing complexities of faith and culture include traditions of great importance, yet there has been a rapid change in the society as a result of the war in Afghanistan, the long-standing dispute with India over Kashmir, and the population’s discontent. These changes have been gradual, and have evolved along with the rise of poverty, increasing lack of justice, and rapid growth of a lower and middle class that is being trained to believe that religion is the answer to all their ills. In the last three decades, Pakistan has witnessed drastic social and cultural transformations. Even my own family has shifted away from the gentle traditions of the Sufis to embrace a more unyielding version of Islam.

“I believe that society will change when people change their way of thinking. Exposure to the historical context of Islamic cultural development is the best way to counter the violent ways Islam is being redefined by fundamentalists to mean something it was never meant to mean. Both the West and Pakistan need to know that Islam is not about violence or intolerance. Most importantly, its many paths need to be communicated to the younger generation through improved curricula and multimedia initiatives.

“Among the places where the rhythms of local culture have continued to express themselves are the sacred shrines that punctuate the landscapes of both rural outposts and urban streets in Pakistan. The legacy of the great Sufi saints whose memory is preserved in and around these tombs remains central to South Asian Islam. These Sufi mystics brought Islam into the Subcontinent, and they taught a spirituality that centers on the mystical connection between the individual and the



**A Sufi mystic of the Indus**

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als become stereotypes. In the West, the voice of fundamentalist Islam comes to represent the entire Muslim world, collapsing diverse ethnic identities from Malay to Kashmiri to Moroccan into the image of an al-Qaeda suicide bomber. Missing from these sensationalist portrayals are all the elements of local culture and history that give each region its own particular values and traditions.

“Faith has always been a constantly evolving phe-

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Divine. Wandering *pirs*, *fakirs*, and dervishes blended local cultures and propagated egalitarian, charitable and tolerant views. Can this ancient tradition, with its underlying values of harmony, love and beauty, act as an antidote to the violent literalist interpretation of faith that has become popular today?

“My own exploration into the influences of the Sufi shrines began as an investigation into the changes happening in Pakistan. It began with a reflection on the past, and a journey through the land to listen and to learn. These travels culminated in a book project called *Sacred Spaces: a Journey with the Sufis of the Indus Valley*. The focus of the Sacred Spaces project is to trace the impact of Sufism on the cultural landscape of one region of South Asia. Sacred Spaces is not a documentary history or a treatise on Sufism. It is an appreciation of the centuries-old spiritual journey that is also a widespread movement that continues to influence many Muslims and non-Muslims to this day. The goal is to let the tradition speak for itself.

“The most significant and vital networks in South Asian Sufism do not relate to geography, practices, or intergenerational systems of patronage. Rather, they are what one might call ‘narrative networks’ that form the backbone of the Sufi tradition in South Asia. Narrative networks refer to the collectivity of interwoven stories that as a whole constitute the reverential capital of South Asian Sufism. The central element holding these narrative networks together is the telling and retelling of stories—stories that affirm, re-affirm and constantly shape the experiential dimensions of Sufi piety and identity. The process through which these stories are transmitted, internalized, and constituted as reservoirs of Sufi spiritual inspiration is at once dynamic and non-linear. Moreover, the manner in which the stories and narratives associated with a particular Sufi master are processed, argued over, and put on display invariably differs from one generation to the next. Each successive generation transforms and reshapes original narratives and memories based on their own needs, desires, rhetorical motivations, political conditions, and so forth. Thus the articulation of reverential piety in any given epoch says more about the conditions of the present than those of the recounted past.

“Here one must bear in mind that this phenom-

enon of intergenerational narrativity is not an apolitical exercise. Rather, narrative networks are characterized by a constant politics of memory that determines the dialectics between what is remembered and what is either forgotten or deemed ignorable. And even though some mystical narratives—especially those involving miracles—might come across as spurious and, hence, historically invalid to modern sensibilities, any serious attempt to capture the essence of the ideas of Muslim mystics must take these narratives seriously. More needs to be done to use these building blocks to construct a useful ‘narrative network’ that can enrich knowledge and expand understanding.

“*Sacred Spaces* in its full realization would be a series of books, exhibitions, lectures, film series, and musical performances with the mission to project an enlightened and tolerant view of Islam through the mystical poetry and music of South Asia. Imagined as a project for cultural exchange, its experiences will also be disseminated via the Internet. It would offer opportunities for artists, performers, writers, scholars and students

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“Exposure to the historical context of Islamic cultural development is the best way to counter the violent ways Islam is being redefined by fundamentalists to mean something it was never meant to mean.”

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to exchange views and discuss research. In the United States, these events could be organized at venues in cities with large South Asian populations such as New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston. In South Asia, cultural centers, museums, and educational institutions could provide venues for events. Thus far the project has made a simple beginning and, judging from the response, it is timely, much needed, and offers insights at a time when there is a paucity of multidimensional viewpoints.”



<http://www.saminaquraeshi.com/>

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## Individuals Making a Difference: ADNAN MALIK—Pakistani Filmmaker and Director

Filmmaker and director Adnan Malik recounted how he became engaged in the work of strengthening cross-cultural connectivity. “My journey as an ambassador between cultures began in the wake of the September 11th attacks. As one of a handful of Pakistanis and Muslims at Vassar College, the attacks were a sudden wake-up call to me to engage in my ‘identity.’” The following is Malik’s account of how he pursued this aim.

“My career goal continues to be to make Pakistan ‘contemporary.’ In the current global context, we are inundated with international media on all our screens, while at the same time we are undergoing increased religious polarization at a local level. I hope to help bridge this crisis of identity by fostering a sense of ownership

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“Bringing alive the magic of live recordings and performances, Coke Studio prides itself on providing a musical platform that bridges barriers, celebrates diversity, encourages unity, and instills a sense of Pakistani pride.”

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through my work on Pakistan’s dynamic folk and popular cultures.

“Electronic media are a vital source of communication and self-apprehension in Pakistan today. In the absence of a long-standing archival culture, much of our collective knowledge and sense of personal and national identity is garnered through visual media, such as television. The latter is especially poignant given the nation’s low literacy rate and divisive regional politics. At a macro level, my fascination with the media is related to developing an indigenous identity for Pakistan that is not structurally opposed to other religious and national identities, but is steeped in our own tradition of folk and popular culture. With an undergraduate degree in documentary filmmaking, I have worked for six

years towards such an end. That is, I have worked under several titles, and often simultaneously—as director, cinematographer, editor, and actor—all with the aim of creating analytical, historically entrenched, humanist content, which is at the same time visually pleasurable.

“In the lineage of my earlier works on Islam and sexuality (director, *Bijli*, and associate producer on *A Jihad For Love*), Pakistan’s sidelined cinema culture (director of Pakistan’s first feature-length documentary on cinema, *The Forgotten Song*), and class consciousness in the performing arts (*Social Circus*), I want to use this visual language to bring subjects and cultures that are considered ‘peripheral’ into the mainstream.

“My journey as an ambassador between cultures began in the wake of the September 11th attacks. As one of a handful of Pakistanis and Muslims at Vassar College, the attacks were a sudden wake-up call to me to engage in my ‘identity.’ My colleagues and friends started asking me questions that I myself had never really delved into. Distressed by the Western media’s coverage of the war on terror and more generally, of my part of the world, I returned to the streets of Karachi in December 2001, armed with a camera and an open mind. I was interested in humanizing the so-called Taliban, who had been homogenized and dehistoricized by the Western media. The resulting work was a multimedia project called *Deconstructing the Terrorist*, which included a photography exhibition on the Vassar campus that was well appreciated.

“Searching for another story that would help place me in both worlds, I sought out Bijli, a Muslim transgendered woman in New York City, in the summer of 2002. What resulted was a 16-minute documentary that was a finalist at the student academy awards in the United States as well as winner in the Best Short Film category at the KaraFilm Festival. *Bijli* is a film that straddles East and West and their different sensibilities. At its heart is a courageous individual who has carved out a unique and cherished identity for herself in a world that has been all too quick to label her as an ‘outsider.’ Defining herself as a woman stuck in a man’s body, Fayaaz (Bijli) has spent her life struggling between the polar tensions of male/female, East/West and Islamic faith/promiscuity. The film offers a glimpse into Fayaaz’s psyche as she navigates her way through a New York City life.

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“*Bhuli Hui Hoon Daastan*, or *The Forgotten Song*, is the first feature-length documentary on the demise of Pakistani cinema culture. I had moved back to Pakistan in March 2004, and although the government had given out over 60 television licenses and we were in the nascent stages of a veritable ‘media boom,’ it was still rare to find a trained ‘filmmaker’ in Pakistan. In my continuous journey to locate myself, and place myself in a context, I decided to figure out why our own cinema culture had died.

“My recent work includes working as an associate producer and cinematographer on the soon-to-be-released indie flick, *Slackistan*. It’s a feature film directed and written by Hammad Khan, and is a coming-of-age story based in our hometown of Islamabad. It’s a small, mumblecore, DIY-style film, which is looking to break through stereotypes and portray a lifestyle that many people outside the country may be unaware of.<sup>12</sup> The idea is to contribute to the discourse about Pakistan and show it as a place with multiple realities, not just the one portrayed by the mainstream media.

“I am also producer behind the scenes and associate video producer on the highly acclaimed musical platform Coke Studio, which has been viewed by millions of people around the world, and was the twenty-second most viewed channel on YouTube at one point last year. Coke Studio embodies a musical fusion of exciting elements and diverse influences that include traditional Eastern, modern Western, and regionally inspired music. Unexpected pairings of artists is what captivates viewers. Bringing alive the magic of live recordings and performances, Coke Studio prides itself on providing a musical platform that bridges barriers, celebrates diversity, encourages unity, and instills a sense of Pakistani pride. Coke Studio is another project that has really engaged with issues of identity and ‘Pakistaniness’ by exploring music from the Subcontinent. Pakistan has always been proud of its musical talent. Pakistani musicians such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan have been hailed as musical geniuses the world over, and now Coke Studio once again reminds Pakistanis of our nation’s rich musical heritage and talent. When so many things seem to be going wrong for Pakistan, Coke Studio gives us something to be proud of.”

“I strongly believe that films and television programming can be provocative and inclusive at the same time. The goal of my work is to educate and enlighten, to broaden perspectives, and to entertain. In the future,



**Strings performing live for Coke Studio**

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I plan to create fictional work that incorporates documentation and historic analysis of the relatively liberal decade of the 1970s, in Pakistan. My career is linked with Pakistan. It is just who I am. All my hopes, stories, and interests are linked to this country. I believe there is no better way to share my rich, untold heritage on the international stage than through the moving image. As a Pakistani filmmaker and a director, I hope to become an ambassador between my culture and the world.”



<http://www.cokestudio.com.pk/>

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<sup>12</sup> “Mumblecore” is an emerging film genre in which characters are realistically portrayed as they go through a personal crisis.



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# INDONESIA

## Overview

Indonesia is a country of superlatives: it is the world's third-largest democracy, and fourth most populous country (close to 250 million inhabitants). It has the world's largest Muslim population (about 85 percent of the total), and makes up the largest archipelago, with 17,000 islands stretching over three time zones.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Indonesia's rapidly growing economy—after China and India, it is the hottest in Asia—news about the country shows up frequently in reports by Bloomberg and the *Wall Street Journal*. It is touted as one of three stars in the emerging markets that are leading the way during the global economic crisis, with its own acronym: Chindonesia.<sup>2</sup> In the cultural realm, Indonesia's best known contemporary artists are beginning to take their place alongside Chinese and Indian artists in international auction houses.

For the most part, however, American mass media carry little news about Indonesia unless a hotel has been bombed or a terrorist plot uncovered; certainly, the average American knows little about the nation's culture and society. Yet choosing directions for potential arts and cultural exchanges requires a nuanced

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Indonesia, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See Arijit Ghosh, "Indonesia, Vying to Enter BRIC, Has Star Role in 'Chindonesia,'" Bloomberg, July 11, 2009, [http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aQN6xO\\_LfM4Y](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aQN6xO_LfM4Y) (accessed April 25, 2010); and Bernardo M. Villegas, "Indonesia as a Model Emerging Market," *Asian Tigers Investor Report*, October 1, 2009, [http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=144577635893](http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=144577635893) (accessed April 25, 2010).

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understanding of Indonesia as it is today—an understanding that disparities between “haves” and “have-nots” have grown along with the gross domestic product; that under-the-radar arts groups are building a thriving arts scene far away from the auction houses; and that academics and pundits can label Indonesia’s Islam as “tolerant or moderate” on the same day that dark portraits of fiery radical clerics preaching inflammatory sermons appear on television screens around the world.

### Historical Context of Islam in Indonesia

Observers of Indonesia are quick to point out that Islam there seems different from Islam in the Middle East. “The history of Islam in the Middle East was the history of conquest,” noted Imadun Rahmat, a prominent Muslim scholar, editor, and activist who is involved with the Indonesian Conference on Religions and Peace and the Interfaith Dialogue Society (Madia). “It is very different from the character of Islam in Indonesia, which was shaped by cultural encounters.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, when the first Muslim traders came to Indonesia in the ninth century, Hindu and Buddhist states had long been established in the archipelago, and animism was quite evident—and remains so. Many of the early Muslims were Sufis, who used indigenous art forms such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) and *topeng* (masked dance) to proselytize, inserting their religious messages into existing stories. By the end of the sixteenth century, Islam had become the most prominent religion on Java and Sumatra, and gradually it spread to other islands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the same time, the Dutch entered the archipelago as a trading partner under the aegis of the Dutch East Indies Company. Then, in 1800 the region was formally annexed by the Netherlands as a colony.

Indonesia has two major national Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, “awakening of the Ulama”) and Muhammadiyah (“followers of Muhammad”), which have a combined membership of 70 million and play a major role in how Islam is understood by a large share of Muslims in Indonesia. Founded

in 1926, NU is perhaps the world’s largest Muslim organization, embracing a philosophy similar to that of the early Sufi missionaries and drawing on local traditions, including performance, to reach its audience. Muhammadiyah generally prefers a more literal—some say rational—interpretation of Islam. Both groups are heavily involved in religious and social activities, running mosques, clinics, orphanages, schools, public libraries, and universities. While NU has customarily invited artists to participate in community programs, Muhammadiyah has been more circumspect. Still, both groups recognize the power of the arts to bring people together, to spread their message, and to create a sense of community.

In Indonesia, the “performing arts have always been used to spread Islam,” ethnomusicologist Wim van Zanten noted. “This has been accepted until this day in spite of some misgivings in orthodox Muslim circles. The discourse is rather about the *degree* of acceptability...” He added that “even the rather conservative MUI [Majalis Ulama Indonesia] stated that ‘to spread the faith may also be done via the medium of the arts.’”<sup>4</sup>

After independence, Indonesians, led by President Sukarno (1945–1965), found that artistic traditions not only were a powerful component of local identity, but also spoke to an emerging national consciousness. Beginning in the 1950s, the traditional performing arts were called on to represent the country both internationally and domestically.

Under President Suharto (1967–1998), performances and exhibitions needed official permission in order to be presented and were scrutinized to be sure they did not breach local religious or cultural mores. An official government decree known as SARA (an acronym for ethnic, racial, religious, and interethnic issues) was often employed to determine whether permission would be granted. Indonesians, as one scholar has noted, were “put in a passive position as the object of a . . . one-way communication system,” and when the government ceased to control the system in the post-Suharto era, they “were not used to participatory communication.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ida Indawati Khouw, “In Search of Mohammad Natsir’s Spirit in Islamic Revivalism,” *Jakarta Post*, August 3, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Wim van Zanten, “God Is Not Only in the Holy Scriptures, but Also in the Arts: Music, Cultural Policies and Islam in West Java, Indonesia,” paper presented at the Conference on Music in the World of Islam, Assilah, Morocco, August 8–13, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Mario Antonius Birowo, “Community Radio Movement in Indonesia: A Case Study of *Komunitas Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta Community Radio),” paper prepared for the Media Asia Research Group, Atma Jaya Yogyakarta University, Media Asia Research Group—Curtin University of Technology, <http://mediaasiaconference.humanities.curtin.edu.au> (accessed April 25, 2010).

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In response, some of the more conservative Islamic groups have advocated greater control of performances and exhibitions. In 2008, they successfully pushed an anti-pornography law through Parliament despite opposition from artists, women's groups, and non-Muslim minorities, who argued that the law criminalized traditional dance and art. "The law is wide open to interpretation and could even apply to voice, sound, poetry, works of art or literature," said Kadek Krishna Adidharma, one of many Balinese Hindus who see the law as an attempt by the Indonesian Muslim majority to impose their will on the rest of the country. "Anything that supposedly raises the libido could be prosecutable."<sup>6</sup>

"Islamic revivalism is a (contemporary) phenomena in almost all the Islamic world," explained Imadun Rahmat, author of *Arus Baru Islam Radikal. Transmisi Revivalisme Islam Timur Tengah ke Indonesia* (New Flow of Radical Islam: The Transmission of Middle Eastern Islamic Revivalism to Indonesia, published in 2005). "It is an expression of the wish of Muslims to return to Islam as the way of life, as an alternative to secularism." As part of a dynamic of resurgence affecting Muslims throughout the world beginning in the 1970s, Indonesian Islamic revivalism started to emerge in the 1980s, marked by the rise of more conformist styles of religious activity, restrictive marriage laws, the prevalent use of Islamic dress, the Islamization of family laws, and the emergence of Islamic political parties. Some orthodox advocates favor the implementation of religious law in daily life; "the most contemporary phenomenon is the formalization of sharia law," said Imadun.<sup>7</sup> "This has been . . . at the local level."

Still, *fatwas* (Islamic legal rulings) concerning the arts tend to be highly controversial, even within the Muslim community. In considering *fatwas* against artists, Bisri Effendi of the Desantara Institute of Culture suggested that "in fact there can be no certainty to a given *fatwa*, which is a judgment issued from a particular perspective." "If we aren't careful about this, I fear

we may illustrate the Prophet's *hadith*," warned Kyiai Wahab Zarkasyi, who is the head of a *pesantren* (Islamic school) in Lombok. "He who accuses another of being an unbeliever, unbelief will befall him."<sup>8</sup>

### Cultural Landscape

With some 300 ethnic groups, each with its own culture, language, and artistic traditions, Indonesia is diverse—arguably more culturally varied, some academics have pointed out, than the United States. Beyond ethnicity, there are divisions among rural and urban populations, adherents of different religions, members of different social and economic classes, and generations. While the arts practiced in rural villages tend to be based on traditional forms, in urban settings, contemporary and traditional arts live side by side.

Indonesia is demographically a young country: the median age is 27, and many youth, eager to break away from the previous generation, are creating their own subcultures that are linked by a variety of media. Questions about identity and globalization are important topics of current discourse, particularly in the cities.

Indonesia has experienced dramatic changes since the fall of President Suharto in 1998. Unlike other dictators, Suharto was not brought down by a bloody coup but rather by the economic crisis of 1997, which destabilized the country, and a concurrent push by the population for more open politics.

After three decades of authoritarian rule, there was an almost giddy rush toward democracy. A rash of new political parties formed, some based on religion; independent organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), many focused on artistic pursuits, sprang up. The Suharto-era stranglehold on public expression, in which newspapers were closed, theater productions banned, and cartoonists, poets, and puppet masters jailed, gave way to a plethora of new ventures in art, theater, publishing, and radio. Indonesian culture quickly decentralized, both by law and by popular demand.

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<sup>6</sup> Jason Tedjasukmana, "Indonesia's New Anti-Porn Agenda," *Time*, November 6, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1857090,00.html#ixzz0ccyRMgCw> (accessed April 25, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Ida Indawati Khouw, "In Search of Mohammad Natsir's Spirit in Islamic Revivalism."

<sup>8</sup> Bisri Effendi, "Religion and Art," trans. Marc Perlman, in *Perjalanan Kesenian Indonesia Sejak Kemerdekaan: Perubahan dalam Pelaksanaan, Isi, dan Profesi* [The course of Indonesian art since independence: Changes in implementation, content and the profession], ed. Philip Yampolsky (Jakarta: Equinox, 2006), 276–82.

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Today, Indonesia supports a strong and vibrant arts scene. National and regional arts institutes and festivals have increased in variety and importance. In both the not-for-profit and the private sectors, television stations, film production companies, and art galleries have multiplied in number, audience, and impact. Contemporary artists in a range of disciplines have found new forms of expression that draw on a

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“Sermon-filled soap operas, rock music played by veiled women, and Muslim magazines, newspapers, comics, and Internet portals saturate Indonesia’s mediascape.”

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mixture of old and new, national and local, traditional and contemporary, including artist Eko Nugroho’s graphic comic imagery, Selamat Gundono’s inventive puppetry, the Javanese hip-hop/gamelan mix of Taufiq Ismael, the powerful dances of Hartati (with choreography rooted in her Minangkabau heritage), and works by Jeko Siempo that draw on his Papuan cultural traditions.

In cities with predominantly Muslim populations—Jakarta, Makasar, Bandung, Medan—the arts often reflect or are influenced by Islam. Indeed, “Islamic concepts, sounds, images, gestures, and ideals abound in contemporary and popular culture, including film, music, television, radio, comics, fashion, magazines, and cyberspace. Sermon-filled soap operas; rock music played by veiled women; Muslim-oriented magazines, newspapers, comics and internet portals, all saturate Indonesia’s mediascape.”<sup>9</sup> Many popular expressive forms are directly informed by Islam, such as *Nashid* (religious songs/poetry) and Qur’anic chant competitions, or espouse Islamic messages, such as the songs of Ahmad Dhani, whose rock music draws from Western and Indonesian genres. In the last two decades, mass-

mediated forms of Islam targeting largely urbanized populations have played a key role in the “Islamization” of Indonesia.

However, in contrast to Malaysia, where Islam is officially recognized as the state religion, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. Its founding principles, called *Pancasila*, include a belief in one god, and religious tolerance is seen as the cornerstone of relations among the different faiths. The country’s national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or “Unity in Diversity,” captures the aspiration, if not always the reality.

As in the United States, Indonesia’s arts communities are diverse—secular, religious, traditional, popular, avant-garde—and all are part of a vibrant mix. Moreover, the identity of individual artists is often fluid, inclusive, and multifaceted, adapting to varied situations and contexts.

Nonprofits and NGOs, previously limited in scope by the government, have been asserting themselves in the past decade, promoting the arts among the young, both at school and in the community. Ratna Riantiarno, a respected Jakarta-based actress and arts organizer, runs programs geared at involving students in the arts. In one initiative, instructors teach traditional dances from various regions in public, private, and religious schools, and end the course with a recital in one of the city’s upscale shopping malls. Riantiarno noted that at first, Islamic schools tended to choose only dances from Muslim regions, but as word spread about interesting dance traditions from other areas, students started asking for dances from Papua, Bali, and the Christian Batak regions of Sumatra.

Young Indonesians are better educated than their parents—more than 90 percent of the population over 15 years of age can read and write—and many spend much of their time in the digital domain. In fact, Jakarta is one of the world’s top 30 cities for blog postings and comments, part of what *Business Week* called “The Blog Belt.”<sup>10</sup> Decentralization and concurrent access to new technologies have opened new vistas for young creative artists. Like their American counterparts, they utilize social media, including Facebook, YouTube, websites,

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew N. Weintraub, ed., *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> “The Future of Tech—Global Youth,” *Business Week*, July 2, 2007, [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07\\_27/b4041402.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_27/b4041402.htm) (accessed April 25, 2010).

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blogs, and text messaging (many in both English and Indonesian). Internet cafés abound, and cellular phones proliferate across the archipelago.

In the decade since Suharto's fall, the arts in Indonesia have blossomed. Entrepreneurs have found a willing public for scores of art galleries. The film industry is now showing renewed life. Here, as in other arts, Islamic themes are evident: for example, the film *Laskar Pelangi* (Rainbow Warriors), the story of dedicated teachers at an Islamic school and their students, broke all previous box office records, with 4.7 million viewers since it opened in 2008. The commercial success of pop groups such as Ungu, Gigi, or Dewa, selling a million copies of their albums while conveying messages of Islamic teaching, has inspired non-Islamic-oriented artists to release religiously themed collections, particularly during Ramadan. And, as in the United States, the arts have brought new textures to daily life in Indonesia's growing urban centers.

Whether in Central Java, Bali, North Sumatra, Sulawesi, or Jakarta, live performance has always had an important and visible role in Indonesian culture. Performance forms, styles, and genres are as diverse as cultures, but Indonesians share an appreciation of performance, which is often a group activity, bringing together large audiences. Many kinds of performance have arisen from ritual or formal court contexts. Some performance traditions, such as Javanese *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppetry, can easily attract audiences of 5,000 or more if the puppeteer (*dalang*) is well known. Puppetry in Indonesia is a major theatrical form that invokes great respect and demands great skill.

Nearly all Indonesian ethnic groups have rich dance forms such as the Cirebon (West Javanese) masked dance or *topeng*, the Minangkabau (West Sumatran) *randai*, and Bugis (Sulawesi) *pakarena*. Musical forms are equally diverse, ranging from the large-scale *gamelan* ensembles (bronze orchestras of metallophones and gongs) of Java, to the intimate *saluang* (bamboo flute) of the Minangkabau. Indonesian performance traditions characteristically integrate music, story, and dance into forms of presentation that today would be described as multimedia. This performance heritage has provided a rich base from which many

contemporary artists have created new work.

For a time, beginning in the 1950s, an idea emerged that Indonesia should have its own unified artistic identity, a national image created from a mix of local voices. At the time of independence, there was an urgent push to create a "national" culture from an amalgam of regional cultural and artistic voices—a hybrid of the various arts forms from across the archipelago. In the 1960s, when artists such as poet-playwright Rendra and choreographer Sardono returned from exchange visits to the West, they emphasized a return to Indonesia's own diverse heritage rather than imitation of the West. They recognized the traditional arts as a source for innovation, believing that tradition is dynamic and ever changing, providing a solid base for the contemporary development of art that is at heart Indonesian.

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Many Indonesian performance traditions integrate music, story, and dance into forms of presentation that would be described today as multimedia.

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Over the last 10 years, music, dance, and theater have continued to grow at an unprecedented rate. Popular bands such as Dewa and Krakatau and singer Iwan Fals have sold millions of CDs and drawn large stadium crowds. *Dangdut* groups have also continued to be popular, mixing secular and spiritual messages. Rhoma Irama, who for more than 30 years has been known as the "king of *dangdut*," and his group Soneta think of their music as *dakwa*, "testifying" or proselytizing the message of Islam to a mass public.<sup>11</sup> Hip-hop and DJ mixes have also become part of the popular music world of Indonesia today, as Jakarta's recent SoulNation festival made abundantly clear. A particularly interesting phenomenon is the music group Debu, American nationals who sing Islamic texts in Indonesian or Arabic. They have become a surprising new icon of a very different America. One young Indonesian in Jogjakarta

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<sup>11</sup> Speech given at the conference on "Islam and Popular Culture in Southeast Asia," University of Pittsburgh, 2008.

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described his mother's surprise and delight with Debu: "Imagine this from decadent America; look, Islam is even helping in America."<sup>12</sup>

In addition to commercial work produced for large markets, small independent groups are presenting new productions of dance, music, *wayang*, and theater in small venues, on street corners, and even in shopping malls, particularly in urban settings. Frequently their work appears on YouTube, Facebook, or other websites,

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**“The dynamic of grassroots people developing their own media and preserving their own culture can be seen as an effort against the cultural hegemony of mainstream media.”**

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and is discussed avidly on blogs. The arts management organization Kelola has played a major role in encouraging the creation of new work by offering modest commissioning and production grants as well as by disseminating newly created work across arts networks across the country.

In recent years, there has been a boom in the production of contemporary visual art, and a corresponding increase in the number of commercial galleries. Indonesian artists are finally beginning to garner international recognition. Work by the Jogjakarta-based painter, muralist, video artist, and handmade zine maker Eko Nugroho has been exhibited in Paris, Berlin, Helsinki, and New York. Record prices for Indonesian contemporary art were set in 2009 when a painting by I Nyoman Masriadi brought in almost US\$7 million at a Sotheby's auction in Hong Kong, beating the auction house's top presale estimate. At the same auction, paintings by members of the Jogjakarta artist collective Kelompok Jendela (Window Group), Yunizar and Handiwirman Sahputra, sold for more than \$50,000.

Broadcast media has long been an important component of Indonesia's communication strategy. The government-owned channel TVRI (Televisi Republik Indonesia), with its complete monopoly during the Suharto regime, promoted traditional arts extensively in an effort to educate Indonesians about the diverse cultures in the archipelago, as well as—in the words of a former director general of culture—to “tie the nation together.” Since the fall of Suharto, private television has grown prodigiously, and nowadays competition is intense for a large listener base, as 85% of Indonesia's landmass is reached by radio broadcast, and more than 55% of the population listens to the radio daily.

More interesting is the growth of local or community radio. Thousands of low-power community radio stations have sprung up across the nation, many of them creating their own shows about local culture and news. Jogjakarta alone has 34 community radio stations, while in West Java Province, there are 400.<sup>13</sup>

According to Mario Antonius Birowo, a professor at Atma Jaya University in Jogjakarta, “The dynamic of grassroots people in developing their own media and preserving their own culture can be seen as an effort against the cultural hegemony of mainstream media.” Meanwhile, the Indonesian film industry has been revived in the post-Suharto or *Reformasi* era in quantity, quality, and revenue. Almost 10 times as many films were produced in 2008 as in 2000, while 2009 marked the first time in many years that Indonesian films attracted more than 55 percent of the film-going market.<sup>14</sup> The film industry, while still small, is growing, and, according to Indonesian minister of tourism Jero Wacik, it is becoming a strategic part of the nation's economy: Indonesia has about 1,200 film producers today, compared with 704 in 2007.<sup>15</sup> “The reformation era in our country opened many doors for the film industry,” said filmmaker Riri Riza, director of *Laskar Pelangi* (Rainbow Warriors), at the Asian Hot Shot Film Festival 2009. Riri is one of a number of young Indonesian directors whose works are gaining audiences both at home and abroad. He noted

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Muhammad Zamzam Fauzanafi, Jogjakarta, December 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Birowo, “Community Radio Movement in Indonesia.”

<sup>14</sup> Triwik Kurniasari, “Cinema Comes Out of the Dark Ages,” *Jakarta Post*, December 27, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> “Indonesian Film Industry Expected to Continue Improving,” *Jakarta Post*, September 7, 2009.

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that restrictions have loosened, “yet we still face lots of problems.” According to filmmakers, these include the uncertainty of censorship, flawed legislation, lack of training facilities, limited screens and exhibitors, and the absence of a national film funding organization.<sup>16</sup>

## CASE STUDIES

### Celebrating Diversity and Promoting Peaceful Coexistence Through Educational Strategies: ISLAM MULTIKULTURAL

Yayah Khisbiyah is a member of the psychology faculty at Muhammadiyah University in Surakarta. In 2000, Khisbiyah founded the Center for Cultural Studies and Social Change, which focuses on using religion and education to promote tolerance, respect, and pluralism. The central theme of all of the activities of this organization is Muslim tolerance and appreciation for multiculturalism, known as “Islam Multikultural” or IMK. For several years now, Khisbiyah and her team have been aiming to promote IMK in educational institutes in Indonesia. The IMK project, Khisbiyah explained, is an effort at conflict prevention. “IMK . . . is aimed at reclaiming the authentic messages of Islam for celebrating diversity and promoting peaceful co-existence through educational strategies; . . . messages that have been shoved under the carpet in light of the current heightened ideological and political tensions represented by formulations such as ‘Islam versus The West’ or ‘Islam versus non-believer.’”<sup>17</sup>

For this project, the city of Solo was chosen as the main venue. In Solo, as in many cities in Indonesia, there is minimal interaction between communities of different ethnicities and religions. To push this program forward, Khisbiyah’s team uses secular traditions of music, dance, and theater in Islamic schools as a means of introducing children to the richness of local culture without evaluating it for its religious content. They call this teaching project PAS—*Pendidikan Apresiasi Seni*, or Education of Art Appreciation. Yayah

explained the rationale of the PAS project: “I see the arts of Indonesia as functioning in two complementary ways: as a source of personal, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual enrichment, delight, and challenge, and as a symbol of cultural diversity. The basic justification



Children playing *gamelan* after school

for the PAS project is that traditional and local arts exhibit the greatest diversity, with each other and with the international arts disseminated through global media. In particular, for Muslim communities that are reluctant to celebrate diversity, dealing with the local and traditional arts means necessarily dealing with difference, and familiarity with those arts leads students logically to question attitudes of intolerance towards the cultures that produce them.”

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<sup>16</sup> Meninaputri W, “Stripping Film Industry to Its Bare Essentials,” *Jakarta Post*, February 1, 2009; and “Mourning the Passage of Indonesia’s Film Bill,” *Dalih Sembiring*, September 8, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Yayah Khisbiyah, New York, April 2010.

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By law, all Indonesian students—from the primary to the university level, in private and public institutions—are obliged to take religious education courses (*Pelajaran Agama*). This religious education does not expose students to different religions, but merely involves learning about one’s own religion. For example, Muslim students study Islamic law and learn Arabic, and Christian students study the salvation pre-

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Local cultures are disparaged as “un-Islamic” because they are “polluted” by pre-Islamic influences from Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism. Conservative Muslims oppose the arts because they find in them elements that are incompatible with their understanding of Muslim doctrines.

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cepts through Jesus. With such a system, Indonesian Islamic schools have become a political and ideological battleground, dominated by conservative Muslim groups. These groups are assumed to be a minority, but Khisbiyah believes that they have a louder voice than those of the silent moderate Muslim majority. The main religious teaching offered is the rote memorization of the Qur’an, accompanied by additional messages of intolerance toward nonbelievers and infidels (referring to non-Muslims).

Khisbiyah believes that these teachings contribute to the escalation of sectarian and communal conflicts in Indonesia. Furthermore, because prevailing Muslim attitudes identify Islam with Arabia, many Indonesian Muslims have little appreciation and respect for the diversity of local cultures, customs, and artistic traditions. Local cultures are disparaged as “un-Islamic” because they are “polluted” by pre-Islamic influences from Hinduism, Buddhism, and pagan beliefs. Conservative Muslims oppose the arts because they find in

them elements that are incompatible with their understanding of Muslim doctrines. According to Khisbiyah, conservative Muslims regard attractive costumes, body movements, and women’s voices as seductive, and thus sinful, and they believe that the arts distract Muslims from the remembrance, worship, and love of God. Khisbiyah added, “Many religious leaders say bluntly that the best thing to do with local culture and traditional arts is *dibasmi secara arif*, which means literally to “destroy them wisely” (“wisely” here means without violence). For Khisbiyah, what is most dangerous is the belief among conservative Muslims that anything Arabic is Islamic. “Islam came into Indonesia through the arts and spread Islam very peacefully as the Islamic teachings were integrated into local arts. . . . (I)n the current times, if this pattern of shunning local arts and culture coupled with cultural exports coming in from the West continues, then it is definitely a dismal future for Indonesian local arts. There are some Muslim conservative communities that do not want to interact with other religious communities, as they believe it can corrupt their faith and make it impure.”

Khisbiyah believes that one of the strongest strategies is to fight such misconceptions by reasoning from within Islam. Khisbiyah explained that Islam provides the basis for understanding pluralism and multiculturalism within its own teachings and values, as found in the Qur’an and the Sunnah (accounts of the life of the Prophet). “As a universal religion addressed to all of humankind, Islam teaches its followers to become tolerant, open-minded global citizens who act conscientiously and responsibly to the planet earth and humanity.” Over the last few decades, respect for diversity and pluralism has not developed properly. Khisbiyah believes that religious intolerance of cultural diversity contributes to heightened tensions and segregation among religious groups. She added, “This attitude has cut members of religious communities off from their own multicultural identities and alienates them from an enriching joy of celebrating diversity.” Khisbiyah uses Islamic sources to bridge the gap because she feels that this is an inclusive way of starting a dialogue with conservatives. “We hope to include them in the discussion and push our points forward.”

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### PAS Project in Schools

Khisbiyah and her team have been working with Muhammadiyah schools to advance their PAS project. Muhammadiyah is the second-largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. It runs some 12,000 schools (kindergarten through high school), including 165 tertiary schools.

PAS targets primary-level students, as Khisbiyah explained: “These children are still in formative years; it’s the foundation for future character development. This project represents a long-term investment in human resources development as well as long-term conflict prevention.” Designed as an extracurricular activity, PAS aims to cultivate appreciation for local identities and diversity through arts and cultural activities, focusing on local secular traditions of music, dance, and theater. From three primary schools in Solo, the project has expanded to sixteen. The program meets three hours a week after school hours. In addition to working with children, the PAS project also targets the community surrounding the schools, consisting of parents, teachers, community leaders, and relevant institutions in the educational system, from the local to the national level.

Khisbiyah hopes that this project eventually will expand throughout Indonesia and other Islamic-majority countries. “Our societies are experiencing increasing intergroup frictions and reciprocal demonization that could lead to violent conflicts,” she noted. When asked why she chose the arts as a medium to open this discussion, she said, “Our experience shows that through art—be it theater, literature, or fine arts—boundaries between communities blur . . . Art reaches out to people and provides people with a common platform to meet on.”

Although initially parents and school administrators resisted the program, now they admit that children who participate are achieving better academic scores. “Their psychology is much more relaxed and they can learn better and focus better on other educational things,” one teacher explained.

### Empowering Voices: Transforming Youth Through Video Production: KAMPUNG HALAMAN

Founded in April 2006, Kampung Halaman is a non-profit organization that fosters the use of popular audiovisual media in community-based programs, particularly targeting youth ages 17–25, to pursue transformation toward a better society. The organization came about when Dian Herdiany, an anthropologist, and Muhammad Zamzam Fauzanafi, a visual anthropologist, brought together a group of idealistic young filmmakers to create a project using video. This project aimed to work with ordinary people on a more participatory level. Herdiany had started an earlier initiative, In-Docs (Indonesian documentary film), for young filmmakers to create short documentary films. After the earthquake in Jogjakarta in 2006, she created Kampung Halaman to give young people video cam-



A young boy directing his first film

eras to use in their own communities. Initial financial support for this project came from the Ford Foundation, UNICEF, the Tifa Foundation, Samsung, and the British Council. The positive impact of the program inspired her and like-minded colleagues to continue, and to expand, their work.

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<sup>17</sup> See Kampung Halaman Youth’s Community Media website at <http://www.kampunghalaman.org/index.php/en/about-us> (accessed April 25, 2010).

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As the organization's website suggests, Kampung Halaman believes that "youth should become the most important members of the communities in this world, as they are the keys to the success of the regeneration process." The website adds that "contemporary processes of social change are influenced not only by the distribution and exchange of goods/money and the transfer of people, but also by the exchange of images and imagination brokered by the media, particularly by audio-visual media, such as film and television." Young Indonesians are most influenced by film and television shows that are "produced in 'other' places and by 'other' people who have their own agenda (particularly economic). [These] often confuse and encourage viewers to build dreams that are not realistic, distancing them from their actual environment, effacing their sensitivity and attachment to their own communities, and in the end, rendering them powerless."<sup>18</sup>

According to Fauzanafi, the organization hopes to identify problems that youth are facing today—in fact, to understand youth as potential agents of change, and to identify them as crucial "social capital" in the communities where they live, thus empowering them to participate in and improve the conditions of their community. He further explained, "Kampung Halaman uses video to make change. We don't work with video, we work with people, and video helps to facilitate the conversations and further spread the message to other communities." Kampung Halaman's programs include the following:

- **Youth Media Community Lab.** In every community lab, Kampung Halaman has worked for two years to support youth groups and to strengthen their role in their communities. Activities include participatory research and video making, video screenings and discussions, monitoring and training for local youth leaders, and working with local media centers.
- **Video Community Database and Network** includes a DVD and catalogue, *Dengar!*, which highlights selected community videos, and Depot Video, a mobile community video digitizing network for public and university libraries.

- **PV Forum** is an annual networking meeting for community video activists and institutions.
- **Indonesian Youth Media Camp** is an annual media training workshop for youth leaders.
- **Jalan Remaja 1208** acts as a vehicle for advocacy on social issues from a youth perspective. It allows youths from different communities to share their works and blog about them. This initiative has helped build island-to-island connections. Participants are introduced to simple stop-motion animation using photography and drawing that is then transformed into a video. Issues examined include globalization, employment for youth, education, poverty, and equity. They also look at regional issues in border areas such as Riau (a province of Indonesia that borders Singapore and Malaysia). The youth identify and define the parameters and then make these topics relevant to their local surroundings.

Respect for and recognition of cultural, religious, and ethnic differences are among the core principles of Kampung Halaman. Pluralism and multiculturalism are the primary issues addressed in the media that the students produce. In fact, Kampung Halaman has a special program on multiculturalism among youth in Indonesia, called *me, myself, and my video* (in collaboration with Miles Productions and supported by the British Council), and a *Documentary for Diversity* (supported by the Tifa Foundation).

Fauzanafi explained that the videos made by the youths—even though they are shot with a strong aesthetic and visual quality—are not as important as the discussions they promote: "In Indonesia, the sense of community is such a high priority that sometimes individualism is perceived as a negative attribute, particularly if it seems self-serving or egotistical and at the expense of the common good. Working together on video, we explore how we each interpret ideas and explore our deeper values. In this way, we can approach not only shared problems but share possible solutions. The nuances of language, culture, religion and concept are important to understand."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Kampung Halaman Youth's Community Media website at <http://www.kampunghalaman.org/index.php/en/about-us> (accessed April 25, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Muhammad Zamzam Fauzanafi, Cicilia Maharani, and Dian Herdiany conducted by Rachel Cooper, November 30, 2009. All quotations in this section are from the interview.

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Besides these local initiatives, Kampung Halaman has gone beyond Indonesian borders to participate in youth festivals in Seoul, Yunnan, Germany (Unreal Asia Children's Festival), and the United States.

Several years ago, staff members traveled to the United States to work with the groundbreaking regional arts and education center Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky, in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains. During a two-week workshop, they traveled through Appalachia, going from one small town to the next. "They saw a very different side of America and for the first time understood that they too shared a culture of poverty. It was an important realization of how they were connected in ways they had not understood before," said Fauzanafi. They made a collaborative film with a group of American counterparts and did a radio show with call-ins. Appalshop members then went to Indonesia (the work can be seen on Kampung Halaman's website). "It's important to have this kind of multi-year project during which relationships and ideas can emerge, develop and be shared." Personal relationships emerged, some quite deep that continue to the present.

In a current project, "Traditional Art and Youth," Fauzanafi hopes to put students at the center of the question of culture in order to engage them more deeply. "Usually young people become a target or an object, and are taught to preserve the place of the traditional art by a senior artist, by older people or by the government," he said. To achieve this more personal approach, he started by having youths interview each other about what they did not like about traditional arts. "In Jogjakarta, many of them stated that actually they didn't like *wayang* (traditional Indonesian shadow puppetry)." Fauzanafi filmed the young people expressing their feelings about *wayang* using the puppets, "as if it was a *wayang* performance about not liking *wayang*." Once they shot the first video, they watched it together, and Fauzanafi then videotaped their responses to their experience using the puppets to tell their own stories. Interestingly, some had more positive feelings about their tradition when they could use it actively, stating, "Oh,

you know, maybe *wayang* is not so bad."

The local communities that Kampung Halaman has been working with have already started to recognize that young people are important to society. The youths, on the other hand, have realized the power of speaking up and utilizing the media to highlight their concerns using creative and artistic means. Some participants have taken up leadership roles in their communities. Kampung Halaman has also inspired other local nongovernmental organizations to use creative media as tools for community-based education and empowerment. The same is true for professionals from the creative field—after seeing Kampung Halaman's work, they have been inspired to work with local communities.



<http://www.kampunghalaman.org/>

### Creating Supportive Networks and Building Strong Relationships: KELOLA

Kelola is an arts service organization that helps Indonesian artists professionalize their work and that creates networks connecting artists and arts organizations across the country. Since the late 1990s, more than 900 participants have attended scores of workshops on a range of topics, such as technical skills, arts management, and artistic development. Kelola



Contemporary shadows puppets made by Eko Nugroho – Jogjakarta

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also helps individual artists and groups raise funds from the government, foundations, and corporations for specific projects. Perhaps the most important aspect of Kelola's mission is mentoring: the organization gives artists the tools they need to negotiate the often-daunting process of getting a piece from concept to final production.

Amna Kusumo, founder and executive director of Kelola, recognized the need for such an organization

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**“Even though ‘arts management’ has been used as a term since the seventies in the United States, in Indonesia people didn’t talk about arts management until the eighties.”**

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after working for Sardono, one of Indonesia's premier choreographers, who started touring his work internationally in the 1980s. “[T]here was a lot of administrative work to be done, but Sardono was not good at those things, so I helped him out.”<sup>20</sup> Although other Indonesian businesses—hotels, retail stores, real estate development companies, banks—had trained managers, there were virtually no arts managers. The local context of the nation's performing arts—dance, music, theater, and puppetry—had not required a strong management system or a sense of professionalism.

### **Understanding the Need**

“Even though ‘arts management’ has been used as a term since the seventies in the United States, in Indonesia people didn’t talk about arts management until the eighties,” Kusumo explained. “Even artists usually did not think they needed a manager.”

Before Kelola came into existence, Indonesian artists were on their own as far as budgeting, accounting, grant writing, and all of the other essential details necessary for an artistic idea to become a reality. Kusumo realized that Indonesians had to consider the entire arts

infrastructure if they were to build effective and sustainable arts institutions. Kusumo added that “if you have a good producer and manager, you can get funding and work. So our initial concern was, how could we help build the capacity of managers?”

The Asian Cultural Council and the Ford Foundation funded the first phase of creating this organization with a grant in 1996. Rhoda Grauer, an experienced arts manager from the United States, worked with Kusumo during the first two years as the organization got off the ground. They started by conducting a survey of arts and cultural organizations throughout Indonesia in order to understand the needs of the country's artists. Through these in-depth discussions, the model for Kelola training was developed. The first arts management workshop was launched in February 1999, in which the module was tried and then revised. Soon, Kelola was giving workshops in management all over the country.

Kusumo underscored that the work undertaken by Kelola has helped many young talents face the challenges of the performing arts sector and has encouraged them to continue working in the creative arts field. “Indonesia has a very rich cultural heritage and so much to offer. If we don’t do something about this situation, that culture will be lost—just like Indonesia has lost many of its tropical rainforests. Thirty-five years ago, many environmentalists started warning that the cutting of trees has to stop, if not the rainforests would be lost. But nobody paid attention, including the government and now they are almost gone. I think Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage is just like that. If we don’t do something about it, it will be gone in 25 years.”

### **Sharing Information**

Over the years, Kelola has offered a series of workshops to build capacities for artists. Rachel Cooper, director of cultural programs and performing arts for the Asia Society, has participated in a number of these workshops: “Kelola has created a national network of artists and arts groups which has helped to create supportive relationships and address the sense of isolation that many artists feel. It strives to create a sense of commu-

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<sup>20</sup> Presenter Interview: Amna Kusumo (Kelola), Japan Foundation, April 28, 2008, [http://www.performingarts.jp/E/pre\\_interview/0804/1.html](http://www.performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/0804/1.html) (accessed April 25, 2010); interviewed by Rachel Cooper, December 2008. Many of the quotations in this section come from this interview.

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nity among the artists, not only during the workshops but throughout the year,” she said

Typically, these workshops last one week (48 training hours), so that participants get a solid grounding. Kusumo is less impressed with one-off workshops: “The U.S. is bringing ODC Dance Company and has offered a two-hour workshop but we’re reluctant to take it on. What impact will it have in such a short time frame? Yet it requires nearly the same amount of work as doing a two-week workshop, where impact is much more tangible.”<sup>21</sup>

Kelola’s programs provide Indonesian art practitioners with opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, and to broaden their network of contacts within nationwide and international arts communities. Workshops cover the following areas:

- **Arts management:** Professionals work with Kusumo to teach basic skills in a lab setting. People from all over Indonesia apply, and a maximum of 24 people are invited to the workshops, at which they receive basic instruction on proposal writing, budgeting, bookkeeping, and reporting. “One of the good things that has come out of these workshops is that people coming from different regions get to know each other,” noted Kusumo. “A lot of networking goes on. Through the workshops we get to know people all over the country. . . . Now people will call and ask us ‘I would like to go to this city. Do you know anybody in the area that we can work with?’”
- **Technical training:** Kelola has contracted with professionals such as Jennifer Tipton—a Tony Award–winning lighting designer and a professor at the Yale School of Drama—to run workshops in which they teach lighting theory and provide practical experience. In one workshop, lighting designers taught Indonesians how to use lighting within the context of their creative work. Western experts helped the Indonesians analyze the realities of their local theaters and how best to use the available technology creatively. At the same time, they gave the Indonesians skills to work with more complex technology so that they could design lighting for foreign stages when their groups travel abroad.

- **Artistic development:** Senior dance artists from other countries in Asia, including Lin Hwai-Min (Taiwan), Astad Deboo (India), and Papa Tarahumara (Japan), conducted workshops for young Indonesian choreographers. The sessions focused on the basics of choreography using traditional dance forms to create new work. During the 45-day collaboration with Papa Tarahumara, dancers in Solo created a piece that was brought to Jakarta’s 1,000-seat Graha Bhakti Budaya. They gave two performances: one ticketed and one exclusively for high school students—both sold out. The event was covered by press from around the country. These international artists also

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Kelola’s programs provide Indonesian art practitioners with opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, and to broaden their network of contacts with the nationwide and international arts communities.

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helped Indonesians reflect on their own traditions: “Choreographer Astad Deboo from India, for instance, started in ballet but found real resonance in looking at his own traditions and that work was much more interesting for our audiences,” Kusumo noted. “It was that kind of thinking that I wanted to share with choreographers here. Because they often look outside of themselves rather than within. And what is the most outside is American pop culture, which is fine if they decide to do that, I am not against that but they should know the bigger picture. What you choose is what you choose but don’t choose without knowing.”

- **International residencies:** The program offers fellowships for Indonesian artists or arts managers to do a residency in the United States or Australia for two to six months. Participants have included visual artists, filmmakers, and curators.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Rachel Cooper, Jakarta, November 27, 2009.

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- **Mentoring and grant making:** Although Kelola does not act as a manager for any group, it does help young choreographers mount their works through the provision of small grants. Typically, these mentoring efforts are thematic. In one instance, for example, the theme was women, and in this, Kelola worked with women choreographers, helping them choose a concept, apply for funds from local and international sources, and rehearse and produce new works.

Kusumo notes that one important aspect of Kelola's mission is to provide Indonesian artists with information about performing and grant opportunities.

### Impact of the Organization

Kelola's impact has multiplied as Indonesians who have been trained by Kelola have begun to train other groups in their own communities. "People who came for stage management training went back to Sumatra and Makassar and taught their classes to people there," Kusumo said. Individual performers also benefit: "For example, after a workshop, Lin Hwai Min from Cloud Gate Theatre invited three dancers to be with Cloud Gate, and one is now in the company. Lin is committed to mentoring him so he will become a choreographer."<sup>22</sup>

Kusumo has extended the impact of Kelola in Asia. Thanks to a grant from the Asian Cultural Council, she visited several countries, including Cambodia, where she worked with art groups on technical workshops. Kelola has also coordinated Indonesian tours for Japanese companies such as Byakkosha and Sankai.

Kelola has now gained enough legitimacy and visibility to become an effective advocate for the arts. Funding, however, is a distinct problem, as the Ford Foundation has cut back its arts grants. It continues to be supported by Hivos, the Asian Cultural Council, and the Asialink Centre (affiliated with University of Melbourne), and has collaborated with the Goethe Institute, Japan Foundation, and Lembaga Indonesia Prancis. Currently, Kusumo is trying to gain more support from Indonesian donors.



<http://www.kelola.or.id/>

### Individuals for Cultural Exchange: Spreading Knowledge and Respect, One Artist at a Time: ASIAN CULTURAL COUNCIL

In 1960, John D. Rockefeller III noted, "The fostering of cultural relations can be a form of insurance for the future of this dangerous but exciting world." Three years later, the John D. Rockefeller III Fund was established to provide grants to individuals for cultural exchanges between Asia and the United States. The support of individuals, Rockefeller believed, would have a long-term impact by nurturing international understanding and, as a result, improving international relations. Now known as the Asian Cultural Council (ACC), the organization has provided grant assistance to close to 6,000 Asian and American artists, scholars, and specialists. Currently, the ACC makes approximately 100 grants a year in traditional and contemporary arts, including archaeology, architecture, dance, music, museology, fine arts, theater, and video. Its annual budget is met by a combination of endowment income and contributions from foundations, corporations, and individual donors.

The ACC supports cultural exchanges between Asia and the United States in the performing and visual arts, primarily by providing individual fellowship grants that allow Asian awardees to travel to the United States and Americans to travel to Asia for study, research, travel, and creative work. Grants are also awarded to arts organizations and educational institutions for specific projects of particular significance to Asian-American cultural exchange. In addition, the council awards grants that support regional exchange activities within Asia. The ACC is active in an extensive area of Asia ranging from Afghanistan eastward to Japan. Because of funding limitations, it currently gives priority to applicants from East and Southeast Asia.

The ACC arranges programs tailored specifically to the needs and professional objectives of each grantee. ACC staff members advise grant recipients on cultural resources and activities, prepare itineraries, schedule meetings with arts specialists, and encourage grantees to explore interdisciplinary relationships among the arts in both Asian and American contexts. The ACC thus functions both as a grant-making foundation and as a service organization.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Rachel Cooper, Jakarta, December 3, 2009.

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Ralph Samuelson, former director of the ACC and a senior advisor to the organization, described the work of the foundation: “What’s important about this model is the focus on supporting individuals, the careful se-

lection process that seeks people who are the best, not only in terms of talent and future potential but also in terms of their ability to interact with the world around them. And then not just giving money, but a full support system, so they have a meaningful experience, and finally encouragement and support so that person can return home, and continue their work. If you look at the ripple effects from that one exchange fellowship model, you can understand how important and far reaching this work is, that it has deep underpinnings that affect America, and affect these countries in Asia where people have come and gone.”<sup>23</sup>

no support system for “people working in the arts, especially those regions of Asia that are less economically advanced. . . . We hear people say ‘I’m lonely,’ ‘I’m fighting to do this work by myself.’ If we can connect them with someone else in their own country, or in a neighboring country who is having that same lonely experience, they can really help each other.”

Jennifer Goodale, executive director of the ACC, says that “technology and the Internet are giving us a new opportunity to nurture those connections so they can thrive in new broader ways. The experiences of our grantees have been so transformative they have had an effect that continues on to later grantees. There is a unique thread that runs through the cultures and across cultures. With so many years we do have a substantial network across Asia and the United States.”

In 1975, Rockefeller said, “Traditionally, Americans have viewed international relations in political and economic terms, with comparatively little attention given to the cultural dimension. The result is that our world outlook has tended to be bound by our own culture instead of being broadened by sensitivity to other cultures. Through knowledge and respect for other cultures we come to respect and appreciate the peoples themselves. In turn, this provides a more effective setting for carrying out political and economic affairs.” The work of the ACC is continuing to spread that knowledge and respect.



<http://www.asianculturalcouncil.org>

### **Teaching to Know, Learning to Understand: Building Knowledge of Arts and Culture Through School Curricula: LEMBAGA PENDIDIKAN SENI NUSANTARA**

Lembaga Pendidikan Seni Nusantara (LPSN) is a nonprofit organization that was established in 2002 by artists, researchers, and arts educators. Its focus is to create an arts curriculum and teaching materials for public and private secondary schools based on and directed toward an understanding of the pluralistic



**ACC grantee Mugiyono Kasido performs Kabar Kabur (rumors)**

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Rachel Cooper, New York, March, 2010.

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nature of the arts in the diverse cultural regions of Indonesia. The organization believes that by taking a culture-specific approach, an understanding of the plurality of cultures can be achieved.

Over the past seven years, LPSN has produced teaching materials on 10 topics consisting of books and audiovisual materials, and it has piloted the curriculum in 906 schools in 12 provinces. LPSN holds teacher training sessions in these provinces each semester, training 1,300 arts teachers who, in turn, reach more than 100,000 students.

Endo Suanda is the founder of this organization, and presently serves as director of LPSN. He is an ethnomusicologist and a respected expert in the *gamelan* music and *topeng* masked dance of Indonesia, and has lectured, taught, and performed throughout the world.

### Understanding the Need

Suanda realized that the existing education system was not suited to the study of Indonesian arts. The standard national curriculum in the arts, before LPSN began its work, was focused on classifications of Western classical art—music, dance, theater, and visual arts—and the aesthetic values used to evaluate such forms. This system did not encompass the study of folk arts, festivals, *wayang*, and the variety of arts that exist in Indonesia. Another impetus behind LPSN is that fundamentalism,

which has been on the rise in Indonesia, is influencing not only politics but also the public sphere in general. Suanda explained further: “One of the basic principles that drive fundamentalist thinking is the belief in one truth and the desire to define ‘correctness’ in attitude,

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The LPSN arts curriculum program is focused on building knowledge of diverse art forms and cultural values so that students can see, understand, and respect difference.

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behavior and belief. In the education system developed during the New Order regime, and still followed by many educators in Indonesia there is an underlying attitude and effort towards ‘one correctness’ or ‘THE’ right answer. . . . Personally, for many years I have protested against the domination of what are considered to be the correct perspectives or value systems, such as the domination of urban over village, modern over traditional, or palace over village.”

### The Curriculum

The LPSN arts curriculum program is focused on building knowledge of diverse art forms and cultural values so that students can see, understand, and respect difference that exists in other ethnic groups, religions, and social classes (as well as among different individuals). Suanda believes that such knowledge will help people achieve greater understanding and defuse conflicts. The organization’s methodology can be called “appreciation” in its broadest sense, as it involves the entire spectrum of the arts—taking not only a cognitive approach, but also affective and psycho-motor approaches. It is suited for general schools and intercurricular situations. The LPSN curriculum looks at the arts in an interconnected fashion with other social sectors, such as customs, economy, technology, beliefs, environment, and politics. The curricu-



Lembaga Pendidikan Seni Nusantara Dance workshop with Eko Supriyanto

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lum also takes a participatory approach, which does not stress material that is dictated to students or doctrines that teachers try to inculcate in students, but rather lessons that are presented in an enjoyable way so that the ideas can be understood. The curriculum is structured in a way that does not encourage simply memorization of information, but allows understanding that is as realistic as possible to grow. To this end, the books that are prepared are accompanied by audiovisual packets for each topic. The objective of this curriculum, Suanda explained, is to change the approach from “teaching to know” to “learning to understand.”

The program is presented in modules that include textiles, masks, stringed instruments, gongs, dance for performance, communal dance, habitats, and writing systems and calligraphy. Each topic is taught in various ways: reading materials for students, complete with illustrations and photographs; teacher explanations; practical experience; audiovisual examples; demonstrations by artists; and opportunities to attend performances and exhibitions, experiential workshops, and student-teacher jamborees that include student debates and cultural field trips.

Suanda emphasized, “This approach not only enhances the aesthetic perceptions of the students, but also develops a broad and pluralistic cultural perspective. It strengthens the formation of character/personality, sense of responsibility, and awareness as well as pride in being an Indonesian citizen. By promoting this kind of learning, Indonesia will be enriched by citizens who understand, enjoy and appreciate the diversity of cultures in Indonesia; know about the geographical spread of those cultural elements; and understand the various roles and functions of arts in Indonesia, besides appreciating art as the expression of an individual or a community.”

Talking about the use of the arts as a foundation for this curriculum, Suanda said, “It is much easier and less threatening to use arts rather than religion as an entry point to understanding difference. With LPSN I’ve had the experience of introducing our curriculum and ideas to teachers in *pesantren* in several regions in Indonesia. These teachers often believe in ‘one truth’ as it comes to us through the ‘voice of God.’ For us at LPSN, it has been a process of discovering different

techniques and means of communicating ‘new’ ideas. In teaching about dance, for example, I would talk to them about consciousness and unconsciousness, how a really skilled dancer reaches a level in which he or she is no longer ‘fully conscious’ of how they execute movements. I relate this to their experiences of riding a bicycle, playing ball, or martial arts. This is easy to grasp, yet for religious teachers phenomena such as trance or the rituals inherent in many traditional art forms are considered to be contrary to religious teachings. Stimulating people to question is a beginning. Learning consists of gaining more and more experience with questioning and eventually being able to see and appreciate multiple realities.”

### Impact of the Organization

According to Suanda, prior to 2001, *Seni Nusantara*, or “arts from across the archipelago,” was not discussed. “Although we have never claimed that the impact is directly from our work, since we began to introduce this concept, the national education system—in which arts education used to entail learning Western music notation and playing the recorder or Western style perspective in drawing—has changed to a focus on

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“I’d like to encourage people to appreciate other cultural forms not by exoticizing them as strange and different, but by trying to know them better.”

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*Nusantara* arts.” He added that more and more teachers are comfortable teaching using a multidisciplinary approach to the arts and employing the LPSN materials. Teachers are also more open to student creativity and interests—for example, students not only play music, but also make instruments and conduct simple research in their cultural environment. Students are now writing about and discussing cultural issues as part of their arts classes.

On a personal front, Suanda said that the LPSN’s work in spreading ideas, developing materials, and lead-

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ing intensive teacher training has helped him develop more ways to present the material and more teaching methodologies in this field. He added, “I have found my patience has grown as has my ability to work with ‘difference.’ I now have experience and methods to work with people who in the past I would have considered impossible, such as with *pesantren* teachers who were completely against arts practices. Watching how teachers have been able to find their own means and answers has really reinforced my belief in other people’s potential, often over my own. When facing groups of educators and difficult issues come up, it is satisfying to see teachers debate amongst themselves and answer the questions that previously were only directed at me.”

Suanda believes that since the inception of LPSN, much more discussion is taking place nationwide about the diverse nature of Indonesian society and the importance of cultural understanding. The organization’s next step is to manage and utilize data; thus, LPSN is working hard to develop an archive system and eventually an online encyclopedia of local Indonesian cultures. This will further its work of knowledge building and help to increase the public’s interest in the phenomenon of pluralism. “There has been too much talk of rich cultural heritage without the data to back it up. Now government departments (of culture and arts), arts institutes, and organizations are actively seeking out our assistance to create viable systems for collecting, archiving and making data accessible to the public. People’s interest in data, in this view, is an awakening of interest towards pluralistic realities.”

The arts, Suanda emphasized, have been a means to increase understanding and to promote greater cooperation between communities and regions with differences, especially when they are used for knowledge building, with the belief that the arts are full of expressions of cultural values (environment, social, political, and religious), not just individual expressions. “Many cultural-artistic products have been shared across ethnic and religious boundaries since ancient times—and that is why our principal teaching methodologies are grounded in facts or cultural realities.” Moreover, cultural practices, he explained, do not always follow fixed or rigid norms or dogmatic-religious teachings. “The creative realm/sphere of a person is fluid, unpredictable, defined by complex

elements of the natural and social environment, as well as by ‘unknown’ inspiration or ‘voices.’”

Suanda gave the example of bringing Rizaldi Siagian to play both composed and improvised pieces on the *gambus* instrument in a *pesantren*. “Interestingly, most of the Islamic teachers and students were impressed and enjoyed the improvisational piece more, as they described that they felt like they were ‘hypnotized’ to ‘travel’ to the uncertainty. In the discussion, Rizaldi explained that the ‘piece’ indeed came from the unknown, it was the voices of God transformed by his hands and soul—the strict Islamic perspective precisely forbids this power of music as ‘poison,’ weakening the belief in the Almighty.” More obvious examples, he said, are LPSN materials on *topeng* and gong that have been accepted and are now taught in religious schools in regions where such practices previously were forbidden (e.g., West Sumatra, West and East Java, Lombok, Sulawesi); students and teachers with Hindu, Christian, and Muslim backgrounds from various cultural areas are now working together to make masks, puppets, calligraphy, and so on.

Suanda hopes that through these initiatives, LPSN will convince the younger generation that Indonesia’s diversity is something to be proud of and to respect, and that it is a source of strength and wealth for the country.

### Way Forward

Suanda believes that the methods for understanding and appreciating difference surely can be stretched a step further to include cross-cultural understanding between Indonesia and the United States. “We are currently looking at the possibility of translating select LPSN teaching materials and ideas for a teacher and student exchange programs, initially together with the Southeast Asia Center of the University of Washington.” Other possibilities for sharing data and information that he sees developing from LPSN’s work would be access to documentary videos and field research undertaken by teachers and students in LPSN programs of arts and cultural phenomena in their regions. He added that in pursuit of promoting understanding of cultural diversity, he would like people in the United States to see that Indonesia is not one entity—nor, indeed, is the United States. This, he said, would entail efforts to understand complexity as opposed to reductionist, essentialist views of culture.

“I’d like to encourage people to appreciate other cultural forms not by exoticizing them as strange and different, but by trying to know them better. I suppose one of my personal biases in my approach to the arts has always been ‘anti-grandness’ and that has led me to want to expose the power in simple things—in contrast to the current, strong global trend to define the ownership of cultural artifacts, such as the effort promoted by WIPO (UNESCO), which mostly views culture from economic (if not political) interests, rather than in its humanistic meaning of how we share living in the world.”

### Widening Access to Different Voices Through Translations: LONTAR FOUNDATION

Throughout history, the world’s cultures have been shaped by the exchange of ideas—something that is possible only through translation. In this era of globalization, translation has an even more important role to play in the preservation, transmission, and dissemination of cultural values. Today, however, many non-English-speaking countries are being left behind, and Indonesia, the world’s fourth-largest country, whose sailors once pioneered routes across the oceans, is not a transmitter of new ideas but a recipient of foreign values, many positive, but others much less so.

Sidewalk bookstalls in Senin and other areas of Jakarta are filled with translations from Arabic with titles such as *The Happy Jihadist* and *Paradise Is for Martyrs*. Paid for by funding from fundamentalist Middle Eastern religious organizations, very few of these titles are likely to have been “peer reviewed.” Although Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority nation in the world, is home to numerous brilliant Muslim thinkers, works in Indonesian are typically not “going the other way”—that is, they are not being translated into Arabic, English, German, and other languages. Indonesian authors have things to say to the world, but their voices are not being heard.

### Re-creating a Two-Way Street

It was to re-create a two-way path of communication between Indonesia and other countries that the Lontar Foundation was established in 1987. Since then, Lontar has worked with more than 300 authors and 100 translators to produce approximately 100 books in English, encompassing a wide range of literary works: more than

a dozen novels, 90 stage plays, 200 short stories, 1,000 poems, 80 essays, and 75 other kinds of nonfiction work. Many of these can be found in university libraries throughout the world.

One book of particular relevance to this discussion is *Illuminations: The Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, which features several of Indonesia’s 11 rich and ancient writing traditions. For example, the Old Javanese *Ramayana kakawin*, dating from 898, contains 2,770



Book cover of one of Lontar Foundation's recent publications

stanzas. (By comparison, the Old English heroic epic *Beowulf*, with 3,128 lines, has a fixed creation date of sometime before 1000.) In fact, the longest known literary work in the world is *I La Galigo*, the classic

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Bugis poem, with the equivalent of 6,000 folio pages of text. Until Lontar published *Illuminations*, even the scholarly community had little inkling of Indonesia's remarkable literary heritage.

Another important publication, *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama*, examines the work of Indonesian playwrights. Published in early 2010, and containing translations of 34 Indonesian plays spanning the twentieth century, the anthology has already been hailed as an invaluable gift to Indonesian literary scholarship, offering theater groups in the United States and elsewhere a chance to study and perform Indonesian plays in English.

Indonesian writers often tackle controversial issues, and Lontar lets those voices be heard through its *Menagerie* series—each volume contains short stories, poetry, and essays devoted to a particular topic. *Menagerie 5*, for instance, featured writing by Indonesian political exiles and former political prisoners; *Menagerie 7*, stories by or about “People Like Us”—gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people; and *Menagerie 8*, the work of emerging women writers.

Also in 2010, Lontar will launch a new series titled

*Incident*, by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, which deals with human rights abuse in East Timor. If funding permits, Lontar plans to publish 50 books in this series within the next three years.

Documentary film series, many of which have been shown at foreign film festivals, complement these literary works. Thus far, Lontar has produced 24 documentary films on Indonesian writers and more than 30 films on oral literature and performance traditions.

Through both its publications and documentary film programs, Lontar has, over the years, laid the groundwork necessary for the teaching of Indonesian literature anywhere in the world where the medium of instruction is English. The range of its work makes evident the multifaceted nature of Indonesian culture—not just the one-sided and stereotypical view seen in most television and news coverage.

### Challenges to the Publication of Translations

The challenges faced by Lontar—and almost any other publisher focusing on the translation of non-English texts into English—are numerous and daunting. While a detailed list of these “challenges” would be quite long, here we list just three:

- 1. Lack of profitability:** Today, the cost of printing, author's royalties, and distribution amounts to 90% or more of a book's retail price, leaving publishers less than 10% to cover all other costs. With translation fees accounting for up to 10% of the cost of a book, few publishers can afford to publish translations.
- 2. Incommensurate recompense:** The production process involved in the translation and publication of even a relatively short work—200 to 250 pages—generally takes a year or more. Typically, however, translators are paid no more than a few thousand dollars for a book-length work, making it impossible for even the most skilled Indonesian-to-English translator to survive on the income from translation work.
- 3. Lack of skilled translators:** Partially as a result of the first two factors—but also because of the lack of incentive to study foreign languages at an advanced level in Western academic institutions—there is an extremely

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The range of Lontar's work makes evident the multifaceted nature of Indonesian culture—not just the one-sided and stereotypical view seen in most television and news coverage.

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*The Modern Library of Indonesia.* Comprising previously published and never before published works, the series will highlight old and new literary “classics”—prose works that define the cultural history of Indonesia as a nation. A few examples include *The Family Room*, by Lily Yulianti Farid, which explores relations between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia; *In a Jakarta Prison*, by Sujinah, which presents real-life stories of women inmates; and *Jazz, Perfume and the*

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small pool of skilled translators who can be relied on to produce accurate and mellifluous translations.

### Getting the Word(s) Out

Given the foregoing challenges, what can be done to stimulate a freer and faster exchange of information between cultures, to promote translation, and to propagate cross-cultural knowledge?

One way is through the use of print-on-demand (POD) technology, which makes it possible for a publisher to significantly reduce overall publication costs and to disseminate books internationally at a cost much lower than ever before. Although the use of POD technology does not alleviate the financial burden of pre-production costs, by not having to warehouse excess stock and ship books around the world, huge savings are possible.

Given the existing publishing model, the use of POD technology is only part of the solution. Subsidies for the publication of translations remain essential. These might take several forms:

- **Publication subsidies:** Subsidies can offer incentives to publishers who are willing to invest the extra time needed to publish “exotic-language” books (especially books such as those Lontar produces, which will never produce profits large enough to offset production costs).
- **Translation grants:** What most translators lack are free time, financial support, and quiet space. Grants for translators who are working on significant works would greatly speed up the production process.
- **Translation awards:** The role of the translator is both sorely ignored and underrated by literary critics and university academic committees alike, and there is great need to bolster the view of translation as a reputable and admirable profession.

### Complementary Ventures

To re-create a true two-way street in communications between the West and Indonesia, support for a number of other complementary ventures should be considered. These include the following:

- **Digital libraries and online journals:** Funding for organizations to create, upgrade, and maintain

websites, digital libraries, or online journals that focus on translation is essential. As printed journals fold because of rising printing and distribution costs, virtual journals must offset this loss. More and more people today obtain their information from the Internet. A virtual literary journal such as the one Lontar plans to produce—titled *I-Lit*, an acronym for “Indonesian Literature in Translation”—could greatly enhance understanding of Indonesian culture.

- **Film/video subtitling:** Film and video are arguably the most popular media in the world. As with the written word, however, film traffic is pretty much a one-way street. This is unfortunate because moving images of real people can do more to dispel stereotypes than almost anything else. Concerted efforts to subtitle and disseminate a body of film work from “exotic” cultures have, in the past, been sporadic at best. This should change. In the case of Indonesia, Lontar has collected scripts for more than 100 Indonesian films.
- **Visitor programs and travel grants:** Cultural exchange programs are one of the most cost-effective ways of generating positive information about the host country. Existing cultural exchange programs should be expanded and new ones started, especially for writers and translators who are often overlooked by funding agencies.



<http://www.lontar.org/>

### JOGJAKARTA: Epicenter for Cultural Activities

Jogjakarta occupies a special spot on Indonesia’s art and cultural map. One of the centers for traditional arts in the country, Jogjakarta is also a major center of modern and contemporary art. Since 1960, it has been home to schools and universities focused on the arts: the Academy of Film and Drama (Asdrafi, now part of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts), Fine Arts College (ASRI), and the University of Gadjah Mada. In the glorious period of performing arts between the late 1960s and the mid-1990s, young theater directors and choreographers, such as Seni Sono, Purna Budaya,

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and Societet Militer, mounted experiments in performing art spaces that sprang up near campuses, creating a thriving arts community that was home to performing artists, including Rendra, Teguh Karya Putu Wijaya, and Umar Kayam. Many of Indonesia's visual artists also studied here, at one time or another: Nyoman Masriadi, Handiwirman Saputra, Anusapati, Nindityo Adipurnomo, Joko Pekik, Eko Nugroho, and Rudi Mantofani, to name a few.

The reformation era, which began in 1998, opened a door to freedom of expression and issues that had been considered subversive under the New Order. These issues were actively debated and explored in public through art, performance, music, and forums. Gradually, political issues regarding the state took a back seat to questions about the politics of identity, postmodernism, and globalization; tradition and modernity were still in focus, but now as a hybrid.

Some activists started to establish their identities as professional artists: Marzuki, Arahmaiani, FX Harsono, Herry Dono, S Teddy D, and many others. Agustinus Kuswidananto, for instance, developed forms of performance art, accompanied by new media arts (video and sound installations). Many leaders in theater and film also developed their skills here.

The University of Gadjah Mada, which is known for its many intellectuals, art critics, and researchers, is also based in this culturally vibrant city. There are a number of alternative art spaces and communities that are professionally run and can be found all over the city. Some examples include the following:

- **Cemeti Art House** (founded 1988) is known as the first contemporary alternative art space in Indonesia. Started in the living room of a rented house, Mella Jaarsma (Dutch) and Nindityo Adipurnomo opened up a new phase in the Indonesian visual art scene by promoting young artists and innovative artistic approaches. The organization regularly exhibits art works and organizes an artists-in-residency program, workshops, artist's talks and discussions, and some site-specific projects. Many well-known Indonesian artists today started their careers exhibiting in this space and broadened their networks by joining international projects mounted by this organization.

- **Kedai Kebun Forum** started as a restaurant, and graduated to become an alternative space for visual art exhibitions and performances. This space was founded by a husband-and-wife team of activist artists, Agung Kurniawan and Yustina Neni.
- **Teater Garasi** (founded 1993) is a theater group that started off as a campus-based organization. Today, Teater Garasi is recognized for its good management and ability to get international funding. It introduces a new kind of theater form for audiences, combining body theater, experimental text, and music, with an emphasis on visual elements. The series *Waktu Batu* (Age Stone, 2001–2004) brought the theater international recognition. The organization runs a workshop, actors school, and knowledge development programs.
- **Yayasan Bagong Kussudiarjo** (founded 2006) is a new group that focuses on theater, dance, and music based on local or traditional content, such as contemporary puppets, contemporary *gamelan*, and folk theater. It also organizes workshops for theater teachers and local art practitioners.
- **Lembaga Indonesia Prancis** (mid-1990s) is a branch of the French Cultural Center and has been involved in collaborations between Jogja and French artists. The organization also sends young Indonesian artists to attend international festivals in France.

As a dynamic place for cultural activities, Jogjakarta also has a long tradition of festivals and international collaborations—Festival Kesenian Jogjakarta, the Asia Three Festival, the Jogjakarta Biennale, the Bedog Arts Festival, and Ngayojazz are just a few. Some interesting collaborations that have taken place in the recent past include KITA (an international art project to celebrate 50 years of diplomacy between Indonesian and Japan), the Landing Soon Program (Indonesian Dutch artists), and South Projects (artists from Southern countries).

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# SUPPLEMENTARY CASE STUDIES

## INDIA

### Overview

India, the world's largest democracy and the second most populous country in the world, is experiencing explosive economic growth and becoming a major global power. These advances, however, are offset by complex and costly economic, social, and political challenges—among them, the stubborn persistence of widespread poverty, whose impact is felt in many aspects of the nation's life. The coalition government, led since 2004 by the secular Congress Party, is overwhelmed. While addressing the formidable infrastructure issues that affect India's economy, it must also strive to prevent deep religious and cultural fault lines—in particular, between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority populations—from fracturing social stability.

In the face of India's daunting social and economic challenges, artists, educators, social workers, and grassroots activists—some supported by corporations and government, and others supported by civil society organizations—have mounted a diverse array of initiatives that draw on the power of arts, culture, and education to resolve conflicts and strengthen links among diverse social and religious communities. The following are case studies of several such initiatives that provide exceptional models of cultural development work.

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## Cultural Landscape

India's storied diversity and illustrious heritage emanate from a distinctive intermingling of races, languages, religions, and cultures. Here, it is possible to observe the phenomenon of ancient, medieval, and modern cultural practices coexisting side by side in communities throughout the country. The breadth and diversity of handmade culture is on display in India's extraordinary crafts, architecture, and performing arts (music, dance, and theater). Alongside them, film, literature, and poetry add to the rich artistic creativity for which the Subcontinent is renowned. Yet this diversity is a double-edged sword, for cultural differences may also be socially divisive. Indeed, cultural difference takes an ominous turn when politically or religiously motivated violence disrupts communities and wreaks havoc on the lives of minorities—in particular, Muslims, Hindu lower castes, and the impoverished.

India's arts provide broadly understood symbolic systems that can remind communities and peoples of commonalities and change thinking in a way that may begin a process of social transformation. The vast trove of mythic stories, with their easily recognizable themes and characters that cross communal and generational boundaries when brought to life through the arts—recitation, theater, film, music, dance—may serve the interests of conflict resolution and reconciliation in polarized communities. Embedded, easily recognized traditional symbols provide a foundation from which to underscore values, and may serve as a springboard for learning life skills and expanding knowledge even as they strengthen connections between people.

The case studies presented in this section share a core set of integrated principles:

- Collaborations cut across communities and cultures.
- Localized, community-based artistic and educational projects help to enhance social cohesion and preserve cultural diversity against dilution from majority cultures or global monoculture.
- Creative *andolans*, or campaigns, use inventive artistic means to broadcast issues devised by artists, social activists, and the government.

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## CASE STUDIES

### Revitalizing Communities with Stories and Storytelling: KATHA

Katha, which means “story” in Sanskrit and Hindi, was founded by writer and educator Geeta Dharmarajan. Aware of the power of storytelling, Dharmarajan set up a nonprofit organization to use storytelling as a way of drawing attention to social injustice and economic poverty in urban India. Quality education for children and an innovative program that hones children's reading ability are at the core of Katha's work. The organization's mission hinges on a single, powerful idea: that children can help their communities get out of poverty. Katha's aim is to transform every child into a community leader through education, using the power of storytelling to get its message across.

Dharmarajan elaborated on this concept: “We meet our goals with the building of imagination in children and adults through storytelling that benchmarks alternative education, and empowerment of women and children living on the margins of society. Unearthing stories from oral and written traditions across India and the Subcontinent, preserving and passing them on as potent instruments of social change, we have looked at translation as a nondivisive tool for the country as a whole and have worked towards breaking age-old gender, cultural and social stereotypes.”

At present, Katha is helping to bring positive change to children and their mothers living in 72 slum and street communities throughout Delhi and in the tribal villages of Arunachal Pradesh. Over the last decade, 50,000 children have received quality schooling, opening a path toward college and well-paying jobs. Katha's dedicated team brings enhanced reading skills to children living in slums. Katha's core educational programs include children's book publishing, a reading campaign, women's vocational skills training, a story and poetry translation program, and a film studies program, among others. It has established 96 schools in Delhi's slum communities in partnership with the government and communities; these schools serve more than 200,000 children through early childhood education, a core reading campaign, and skills training.

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Beginning in 1990, Katha undertook an initiative in the slum communities of Delhi and Arunachal Pradesh centered on skills training programs for slum-dwelling women. Its goal was to provide a means for the women to earn an income so that their children would be freed from having to work and could join a school. Today, these programs have helped more than 250,000 adults and 7,000 children transform their lives for the better.

Another very successful initiative of the organization is *Tamasha* (Spectacle), a road show school-on-wheels that takes education to more than 1,000 street children and child workers. By 2012, the organization expects to have reached approximately 2.4 million children through storytelling and reading. Essential to the programs are the unconventional cross-disciplinary storytellers handpicked from artists, professional storytellers, and retired citizens who serve as volunteers.

In 1995, Katha started using computers in its schools. In 2001, Katha launched its InfoTech and E-Commerce School (KITES), which introduced students of all ages—preschoolers through high school students—to computer software and hardware. KITES students have gone on to develop programs, working with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Indian Institute of Technology, and other prestigious institutions. Technology is also put to use in the teacher training and simulation games of the Katha School of Entrepreneurship; in these games, students are organized into mock boards of directors that make decisions for the organization. Another example is the K-SMS (Katha-SMS network), which was started in 2009. K-SMS is a short messaging system that is used to send out questions to students. The first student to submit a correct answer is rewarded with an extra 30 minutes of instruction with a teacher of his or her choice. This initiative is used mainly for students who are in grades 10 and 12, and are preparing for their school-leaving certificate exams.

After the 1992 Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat, “culturelinking” through stories became one of Katha’s main initiatives. Horizontal culturelinking refers to the use of translations to link people living in different linguistic regions through elements of their shared cultures. Vertical culturelinking works toward enhanc-

ing understanding among people who belong to different social strata, and helps deepen mutual understanding among castes, classes, and social groups within a single culture. Dharmarajan noted that “in India today, problems between people of different linguistic and geographic communities have increased. This initiative helps enhance the sense of self-worth of individual students in the classroom.” Dharmarajan hopes that this



**Children enjoying their lunch break**

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initiative will lead to a sharing of values and a knowledgeable appreciation of India’s diversity and richness. She added, “This is especially important in India, with her very large child and youth population. The workforce in 2026 is going to be made up of today’s kindergarteners, coming from across many divides. We have a lot of unresolved issues and challenges that keep all of

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us together, thinking, synergizing, acting.” In addition, she said, “Culturelinking is an intergenerational gift. We view all learning, including children’s literature and the making of books for them, as building awareness of diversity. It is this collective understanding that makes Katha successful, I think.”

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**“In contrast to formal education processes where one absorbs and executes only through the mind, stories provide true mind and heart education.”**

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Katha’s success is based on clearly identified needs—the literacy and skills gap among the poor—and the best creative means—storytelling parsed in different ways and applied to various disciplines—through which to address them. Its programs apply the power of stories and mythology, which are commonly used to impart cultural values and shape thinking. Once individuals build their literacy and artistic or technical skills, and their earning capacity improves, they have the option to share their knowledge with their peer group by educating them, thereby contributing to the community’s value chain. This mentoring method strengthens community connections while expanding the knowledge base with simplicity and creativity.

Dharmarajan does not see Katha’s idea as revolutionary. “Over the years we have known how storytelling enables dynamic transformations of frozen spaces. In contrast to formal education processes where one absorbs and executes only through the mind, stories provide true mind and heart education. Our mission is to revitalize communities with stories and storytelling. And as we look toward the future, we are excited. It seems like we have not even scratched the surface of the story. Under the ever-changing moon, the ever-expanding universe, we in Katha look with awe at the capacity of the story to transform.”



<http://katha.org>

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## **Using Artistic Projects as Social Currency for Community Building: ACT NOW FOR HARMONY AND DEMOCRACY**

Muslim social activist Shabnam Hashmi has worked for more than 20 years to combat communalism in India. After the 2002 carnage in Gujarat perpetrated against Muslims, Hashmi understood the need for an organization to systematically counter fascist propaganda, and created the nongovernmental organization Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD) in March of 2003. Working voluntarily, without compensation and with limited funds, Hashmi, who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, has emerged as a frontrunner in using the arts effectively for social change. ANHAD works with artists and institutions, and employs technology to reach out inexpensively to promote harmony, secularism, and justice through social mobilization, defense of civil liberties, and cultural action. Cultural action is conceived as intervention in daily life practices through popular and folk culture, syncretic systems of faith, and the building of communities invested in pluralism, while challenging hatred, obscurantism, and superstition.

Wherever possible, ANHAD undertakes grassroots activities with the support and collaboration of other organizations. Where collaboration is impossible, ANHAD initiates projects on its own through volunteers. To counteract prejudice and negativity, Hashmi believes, “The foremost strategy has to be highlighting the compositeness of our culture—its pluralism and interdependence.” The organization accomplishes this, she said, by “organizing workshops, seminars, music concerts, art, music, dance appreciation sessions, poetry and language appreciation classes, exhibitions, cultural exchanges, and media campaigns.”

ANHAD’s performance programs draw on multi-genre artists ranging from street, folk, and Sufi shrine-based musicians to big-name Bollywood actors. The organization’s core activity remains street theater, a popular tradition in India that serves as a circular platform for educating, communicating social messages, and interacting closely with a wide spectrum of people to move them from spectators to citizen activists. Often, ANHAD’s street theater programs are performed in makeshift public spaces in markets, in parks, or in front

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of a house or office. ANHAD builds on this premise to work with troubled populations, particularly young people. In October of 2009, it invited iconic Indian film and theater actor Naseeruddin Shah to travel to Srinagar, Kashmir, to volunteer at a theater workshop with college-aged youth. A strong believer in ANHAD's mission and approach, Shah said he was encouraged by the outcome and will continue collaborating with the organization on future programs.

Keeping local cultural landscapes and contexts in mind, Hashmi carefully chooses the best medium through which to communicate with her audience. In some instances, relying on local traditions and languages, she uses puppetry to demonstrate social messages—for example, to draw attention to child marriage among girls. “In a village where women’s literacy is very low and child marriages take place, girls and women can be shown in roles outside the four walls,” said Hashmi. She explained how the story can be told through an actress playing the role of “an educated woman who goes and files a police report and gets an abusive man arrested. Only when the woman is educated can she fight for her and her family’s rights, and show that her place is not only within the four walls of her house.”

Indigenous musical forms are used to appeal to local populations. In remote areas of Kashmir, ANHAD has successfully used a traditional genre of Kashmiri folk theater called *bhand* to mount performances in village squares. *Bhand* satirizes social situations through dance, music, and clowning. According to Hashmi, ANHAD works with Kashmiri *bhand* artists to provide a platform for traditional *bhands* to be performed. Such performances underscore the fact that religious clerics cannot ban music and dance. Hashmi added, “It requires courage and political will to perform *bhand*, and helps preserve a dying cultural form.”

To build community bonds, Hashmi uses traditional visual arts, poetry, and language appreciation exercises to communicate Indian history and highlight the role of Muslims in India’s movement to push the colonizing British out of India. Hashmi described a simple exercise that she uses to illustrate how intertwined Muslim and Hindu cultures are in Gujarat: “[I] ask Gujaratis to speak ten sentences without using a single Persian word, making them understand how even their own language would cease to

exist if they remove all the Persian and Urdu words.”

In the realm of visual arts, one of ANHAD’s most successful campaigns has been its umbrella painting competition for children throughout India. The ubiquitous umbrella provides needed relief from the tropical sun during the long hot months and the heavy mon-



**Children participating in the umbrella painting competition**

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soons. Intent on developing activities that engage young people in spreading awareness and encouraging harmony, ANHAD invited children to enter a competition in which they painted their own art on umbrellas alongside uplifting, fellowship-building messages. ANHAD knew that it had achieved its goal when older generations acknowledged being moved by the unique and colorful umbrellas and the thought-provoking messages. Since then, ANHAD has used the umbrella competition on a regular basis to communicate important messages.

ANHAD is an all-consuming effort that is substantially underfunded. It relies on the passion and commitment of its founder and a core group of dedicated volunteers. It employs inexpensive technology to get word out about its initiatives—for example, through text messaging and by using volunteers to send out viral messages through social networking sites. Hashmi believes that both small and large arts initiatives can make a definite impact on public opinion and help to create large-scale shifts in thinking. She stated, “I think

both are very important. It is important to use every means possible at very small scale as well as organizing mass scale using new media and technology.”

Hashmi and her volunteers use creative artistic projects as social currency for community building that addresses civil society challenges. Their person-to-person approach crosses India’s abiding class divisions and helps break down social barriers while providing access to new perspectives, knowledge, and skills.



<http://www.anhadin.net/>

### Evoking the Spiritual and Sociopolitical Resonance of Kabir’s Poetry: THE KABIR PROJECT

“The Kabir Project is important because Kabir, more than any other poet-singer in India, transcends boundaries. He is someone Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs feel open to. The project brings a new kind of spirituality that goes beyond boundaries and borders. Kabir is the only one who so forcefully says that your god is not in the temples and not in the mosque; that your god is there, where human beings come together. The Kabir Project is the beginning of something that could revive Kabir and bring his energy. I think no one else has that energy.”

—Siddhartha

Founder, Fireflies Sacred Music Festival, Bangalore

The Kabir Project is named after the fifteenth-century North Indian mystic, weaver, and poet who belonged to the Sufi-Bhakti movement and is loved by all religious communities in India. The project, founded in 2003 by filmmaker Shabnam Virmani, invokes the humanistic philosophy exemplified by Kabir, which crossed Hindu and Muslim religious lines, and draws on an interdisciplinary approach and environment of creativity to develop individual potential. Since 2002, the project has been housed at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technolo-

gy in Bangalore, where Virmani is an artist in residence.

The Kabir Project brings together the experiences of a series of ongoing journeys in search of Kabir in our contemporary world. These journeys inquire into the spiritual and sociopolitical resonances of Kabir’s poetry through songs, images, and conversations.

Multidisciplinary programs traverse the wide and diverse landscape of social, religious, and musical traditions through which Kabir moved. These programs aim to offer an experience of how Kabir’s poetry intersects with ideas of cultural identity, secularism, nationalism, religion, death, impermanence, and traditional knowledge systems. The core inspiration of the project is music, and through the power of song, Kabir comes alive in four documentary films, 10 CDs, and a series of poetry books.

Apart from the films, CDs, and books, the true spirit of the Kabir Project lies in the *taana-banna* (warp and weft) of social networks and friendships built over the years among the singers, scholars, activists, artists, illustrators, students, music lovers, and lay people who have come together in student events, festivals, workshops, and other exchanges. Folksingers Prahlad Tipanya, a Hindu, and Mukhtiyar Ali, a Muslim, along with many others, have become good friends, giving the project its soul force.<sup>1</sup>



The Kabir Festival in Gujarat

<sup>1</sup> Performances by Prahlad Tipanya and Mukhtiyar Ali are available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPLbOL7OakU&feature=related> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LQyGwUXIPQ> (accessed April 20, 2010).

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Virmani and the Kabir Project are regularly featured at the Fireflies Sacred Music Festival in Bangalore. In 2009, Virmani joined musicians onstage to sing Kabir's poetry.<sup>2</sup> The project is growing rapidly, with cultural groups, educational, social, and community-based institutions and individuals taking the initiative to organize festivals, workshops, and interactive events that include films, folk song performances, live music concerts, and discussions.

In the next phase of the project, a multimedia web space will feature the music, poetry, and ideas of Kabir. This space will be created with the help of folksingers, and will be linked to innovative social experiments designed to revitalize the Kabir oral tradition at the village level. Exploratory workshops are being held with teachers and educators to brainstorm ways to bring the ideas and values of Kabir into the classroom through curriculum enrichment programs.



<http://www.kabirproject.org>

### Raising Awareness about Kashmir Through Rock-and-Roll Songwriting: ZEROBRIDGE

Zerobridge is a New York-based indie/alternative rock band formed in 2001 by two Kashmiri American musician brothers whose parents emigrated from the disputed territory. Lead singer, guitarist, and songwriter Mubashir Mohi-ud-Din (known as Din), and his drummer brother, Mohsin (Mo), grew up in Maryland. Their band takes its name from one of eight bridges spanning the Jhelum River, which flows through the ancient city of Srinagar, Kashmir's capital. The bridge, located at a well-known scenic point, is a sentimental place for anyone who is familiar with Srinagar. "Sadly," Mubashir said, "the bridge is now covered with barbed wire." Just across the bridge, after passing through military checkpoints and the barbed wire fences, is a beloved café called the Zero Inn—a place where the brothers, family, and friends gather when they reunite in Kashmir.

Zerobridge has been featured regularly on MTV, where Mohsin had been a guest VJ for the music channel MTV-U. When not playing music, Mohsin is a hu-

man rights activist who has worked for Human Rights First and the Kashmir People's Tribunal, written for the *Huffington Post*,<sup>3</sup> and spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar in Morocco, where he lived and worked with underprivileged children, teaching them music, film,



Zerobridge band members

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and photography under his own program, called the Lollipops Crown Arts and Music Initiative.<sup>4</sup>

For Mubashir, who is the front man for Zerobridge, music has always been a primary mode of self-expression. Through songwriting, it has also become an outlet for activism.

Growing up in and around the suburbs of Washington, D.C., Mubashir remembers feeling disdain on the part of both the South Asian community and the

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<sup>2</sup> For a video of Shabnam Virmani's performance, see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_AyLp1td38](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_AyLp1td38) (accessed April 20, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mohsin-mohiud-din> (accessed April 20, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> See Mohsin's blog, *Tales from Maroc*, at <http://dangerville.wordpress.com>; and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTD4mpnt-Qk> (accessed April 20, 2010).

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Muslim community at the local mosques for his passion about music, and in particular, rock and roll:

“I felt heat from both sides. On the one hand within the South Asian community, pursuing anything in the arts was seen as lowly or financially unviable. It’s ironic, considering how much South Asian culture is steeped in the arts. For the Islamic community playing music or being a musician had negative moral implica-

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“There is a quiet fire spreading in the youth population of the Muslim World because of the toxic combination of helplessness and humiliation that only the free space of music and art, and reformed education systems can cool.”

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tions. To them rock ‘n roll and music in general was too sexual, too passionate, and perceived as encouraging bad or loose morals. Sometimes those two perspectives crossed over. But for me none of that mattered. The art of song is the lens through which I see the world. Music humbles and disciplines me, gives me a great sense of order and purpose, along with providing me with a great sense of spiritual satisfaction. The feeling is really indescribable. Like any other art, it’s about the creative pursuit of truth and beauty in a world where those two things are very hard to come by. So in that sense music can never be in conflict with my faith.”

Human rights have always been a focal point for the brothers. Like many Kashmiris, they have been affected personally by the tragedy of loss and the deteriorating circumstances that have plagued the valley for the last 20 years. Mohsin said, “There have been a series of different moments that have influenced me to get involved in human rights work. One of those was when Indian security forces in Kashmir murdered our father’s sister. I was ten years old when this happened.” Both Mohsin and Mubashir believe that at times the Kashmiri Amer-

ican community is disconnected from the reality on the ground in Kashmir, and that the international community is indifferent to the conditions under which people are living in the Kashmir Valley. “For me, personally, our visits to Kashmir woke me up to the inequalities that exist in our world, between rich and poor, between the educated and the illiterate, between politics and the actual needs of the people. I also realized that in terms of the Muslim community, most of the Muslim world lives under extreme poverty, illiteracy and war,” said Mohsin.

Mubashir began writing political songs for Zerobridge to express his feelings about what he and his brother had witnessed a few years ago, during one of their many trips to Kashmir. Mubashir was stirred more than ever by what he saw and heard of the brutality of the Indian security forces toward ordinary Kashmiris. For the band’s first record, *The Basement Tapes*, which was released in 2003, songs such as “Suffering Moses,” “Refugee Citizen,” “Nothing Doing,” “In Exile,” and “Dedicated to the Haters of Song” were written against the political backdrop of 9/11, at a time when India and Pakistan were on the brink of war. “I couldn’t help but write about what I saw,” Mubashir said, “but even then, we still felt like outsiders. I tried to be true to what we experienced while remaining aware that we were removed from it.” A song titled “The Shake” was written some time later as a direct attack on Islamic extremists, and includes menacing lyrics such as, “you’re a liar / just another hypocrite / with the name of God / you kill all the innocent / you read them scriptures / and sell all that heroin.”

Raising awareness about the Kashmir issue has been a personal mission for the brothers. In March of 2009, Zerobridge helped establish a major online campaign through MTV Iggy, a subsidiary of MTV, to bring the issues surrounding Kashmir to a broader audience. Human rights activists, prominent literary figures, journalists, artists, and ordinary Kashmiris lent their voices to the campaign, while Zerobridge was featured with live performances, videos, and interviews.<sup>5</sup>

Through their music, Mubashir and Mohsin hope to play a role in establishing stronger ties between the West and the Islamic world. They passionately believe

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.mtviggy.com/video/iggy-music-zero-bridge-havre-de-grace>.

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that art is an important vehicle for such discourse. “Muslims are becoming their own fiction. There is a quiet fire spreading in the youth population of the Muslim World because of the toxic combination of helplessness and humiliation that only the free space of music and art, and reformed education systems can cool,” said Mohsin. But as Mubashir made clear, “At the end of the day Zerobridge is and always will be just a rock ’n roll band. The songs in our catalogue, which happen to be ‘topical’ or relevant to the current state of the world, come from a very personal place. Our primary goal is simple: We want to be the greatest rock ’n roll band on the planet, right up there with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Clash, and U2. If we can inspire and inform people, and change some hearts and minds in the process, then we’re doing our job.”



<http://www.myspace.com/zerobridge>

## MALAYSIA

Like many postcolonial nations, Malaysia has sought ways to transform colonial-era multiculturalism, dominated by the polarizing opposition of indigenous and immigrant populations, into a more dynamic and egalitarian multiculturalism characterized by a spirit of social, cultural, and religious tolerance. Such postcolonial multiculturalism aims to support political stability within the framework of a cohesive national identity that offers representation to diverse cultural voices.

Malaysia became an independent nation in 1957, ending three centuries of British colonial rule. In 1969, the country was beset by race riots, which brought heavy loss of life, property, and foreign investment. In the period of political uncertainty that followed, the Malaysian government implemented a New Economic Policy with the aim of reducing social inequality between minority groups and the majority indigenous population. One aspect of the New Economic Policy was the National Cultural Policy, launched in 1971, whose aim was to steer the country and its people toward socially and culturally engineered programs of national unity. The National Culture Policy was guided by three principles:

- National culture must be based on indigenous Malay culture.

- Suitable elements from other cultures may be accepted as part of national culture.
- Islam is an important component in the molding of national culture.

This policy remained the guide for the formation of a national culture until Mahathir Mohammad, the fourth Malaysian prime minister, introduced the Bangsa Malaysia (Malaysian Nation) policy to create an inclusive national identity for all inhabitants of Malaysia. The policy espoused by Mahathir challenged the National Culture Policy by enabling a broad range of people to identify with the country, speak Bahasa Malaysia (the Malay language), and accept the Constitution. Although this new policy was later contested by members of Mahathir’s government, and lost traction in society at large, its influence remains strong.

The Bangsa Malaysia policy stimulated two distinct domains of cultural performance in Malaysia: one satisfying the idealism of the National Culture Policy and one refusing to comply with the policy, and left to be nourished by the supporting communities. The former is associated with the cultural expression of the majority Malay and indigenous communities; the latter is allied with a coalition of minority communities. The fact that one of the guiding principles of the National Culture Policy is that Islam should be an important component in national culture does not necessarily privilege the expressive culture of indigenous communities. Those communities deemed to have pre-Islamic origins or to be related to pre-Islamic traditions face restrictions, or are banned. For example, Malay performing arts such as the hobbyhorse dance (*kuda kepang*), traditional dance theater (*mak yong*), and shadow puppet theater (*wayang kulit*)—all rooted in pre-Islamic traditions—are severely restricted. While these restrictions may hinder the progress and survival of older traditional dance and theater forms of the Muslim Malays, contemporary artists and social activists continue to survive on the margins, where they are mostly left alone to experiment with multicultural and intercultural themes.

Meanwhile, the division of cultural expression into what is permissible and what is nonpermissible according to the National Culture Policy remains legally uncontested. Noncompliance, however, is a matter of interest

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to the state, not the people, and the existence of officially “nonpermissible” forms of expression does not prevent cross-cultural activities among the diverse ethnic communities in Malaysia. On the contrary, cross-cultural appropriations of musical styles, dance movements, and dramatic texts continue to drive intercultural experiments among younger artists who share cultural aspirations that are quite different from those of the curators

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learned to maneuver around and beyond the constraints of the National Culture Policy and the shifting idiosyncratic rule associated with city hall or urban council performance permits. They have learned to perform outside officialdom and to interact with fellow artists, audiences, and patrons in fringe spaces, exclusive clubs, or even university lecture halls. They are the new and emerging leaders of Malaysian multiculturalism, pursuing intercultural experiments within the niches of their specialized performance areas.

### **Performing Multiculturalism: THE KUALA LUMPUR FRINGE FESTIVAL**

The Kuala Lumpur Fringe Festival was founded in 2008 by Zulkifli Mohamad, a Malaysian dancer, arts manager, curator, and writer who has merged his educational background in management with lifelong training and performance experience in dance and theater. Mohamad founded the Kuala Lumpur Fringe Festival to develop and promote new artistic work and ideas in the cultural context of contemporary Malaysia. Following is his account of the genesis of the festival.

“The idea of bringing together different people who work in creative fields started when I returned to Malaysia in 2004 and noticed a pattern of disconnected subcultures in the country’s arts scene. For instance, the Kuala Lumpur dance theater community is divided into Malay-, Chinese-, Indian- and English-speaking audiences and operators. In the same way, the Malay theater and traditional dance scene is controlled by Malay cultural officers in the public sector, while English theater and modern dance is controlled by English-speaking operators in the private sector. The Malay theater scene focuses on big musicals that are similar to Broadway productions. These Malay musicals have their roots in *mak yong*<sup>6</sup> and *bangsawan*.<sup>7</sup> Istana Budaya has also brought Western musicals to Malaysia, at least one every year, most of the time a production from Australia. When they got the idea from academics that musical [theater] has our own roots, they started doing

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The policy espoused by Mahathir challenged the National Culture Policy by enabling a broad range of people to identify with the country, speak Bahasa Malaysia (the Malay language), and accept the Constitution.

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of the National Culture Policy. Contemporary Muslim artists in Malaysia commonly venture beyond their traditional paradigms to reach out to a larger audience that embraces multiculturalism and globalization.

Advocacy of multicultural identities and cross-cultural practices among younger artists has become more visible in Malaysia since the 1990s. Urbane and cosmopolitan, these younger artists—most of whom were born from the 1970s on—highlight a divide between older politicians and cultural activists who went through the tumultuous 1969 riots and a younger generation of Malaysians who have not experienced the socioeconomic disruptions that led to the New Economic Policy and the National Culture Policy of the 1970s. Ingrained in the minds of these younger Malaysians, however, is the political hegemony of the privileged majority over the restless but economically dynamic subaltern minorities. They have come to accept this state of affairs and have

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<sup>6</sup> *Mak yong* is traditional sung theater. It is considered the most authentic and representative of the Malay performing arts because it is mostly untouched by external sources. Although most traditional Malay dances were influenced by India, Java, and other parts of Southeast Asia, *mak yong*'s singing and musical repertoire is unique. Most stories performed in *mak yong* are derived from Kelantan mythology. At the moment, *mak yong* is banned in Malaysia

<sup>7</sup> *Bangsawan* is traditional Malay opera. As in other musical theater forms, actors must be able to sing, dance, and act. *Bangsawan* is similar to Western opera in that certain characters are played during performance, and the stories drawn from diverse sources, such as Indian, Western, Islamic, Chinese, Indonesian, and Malay literature.

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Malay musicals. Mainly the stories are based on Malay patriotism, nationalism and leadership from the first prime minister to ministers. This year they are doing one based on Mahathir Mohamad, and various nationalistic productions, rather than small creative contemporary projects.

“My first project after my return was aimed at addressing the lack of connectedness among artists and artistic domains. *Tanah Serend Ah Sekebun Bunga* consisted of an ensemble of various traditional and contemporary forms—*wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theater) *mak yong* (traditional sung theater), *kuda kepang* (a ritual folk form), dance theater, storytelling, and martial arts performed by various artists. In 2004, I also created Svranabhumi Studio, which was selected to present the dance theater work *Aku Binatang Jalan* (I Am a Demon) at Istana Budaya National Theatre. In 2005, Svranabhumi Studio co-produced *LALAK* (*screaming for attention!*), a laboratory series of dance theater, presenting solo and group work by five Malay choreographers who came to me saying that they felt ignored by the English-speaking world and the national theater scene in the country and needed help in taking their work to audiences. Hence we created this series.”

In 2005 and 2006, the studio presented dance works internationally in Bangkok, the United Kingdom, and Singapore. “Contemporary dance, theater, and music are hard to come by in Malaysia—especially works by independent artists. Government-sponsored spaces such as the Istana Budaya, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, Malaysian Tourism Centre, and Dewan Filharmonik Hall, are only interested in popular performances such as musical theater and music concerts of Western orchestras. Seeing this, we decided to launch the Kuala Lumpur Fringe Festival, a small arts festival that would help develop and promote new works and ideas in the fields of creative writing, theater, dance, performance art, video, film, visual arts, installation art, and book publishing. The aim of this project is to promote tradition-based contemporary dance, musical theater, and new work in the form of solo and

monologue performance art (small scale, easier to produce), dancer-choreographer pieces, and issue-based art, in contrast to the more popular commercial and mass-produced work that is prevalent in Malaysia.

“In July 2008, we held the first KL Fringe Festival featuring theater, short film, and music over the course of three weekends. Our efforts managed to gather about 100 people per night. The dance portion of KL Fringe Festival took place in November 2008 and featured seven Butoh artists who were en route from Paris to Tokyo. The performance was aptly called ‘Butoh Caravan Paris-Tokyo.’

“After experiencing this first festival, we decided to focus the next year’s Fringe Festival exclusively on dance-theater, since we realized that other independent organizations were producing similar events in the do-



**Zubin Mohamad and Zainab Awang at KL Fringe 2009 – “Between Mak Yong and Manora,” a text-based work in Kelantanese dialect.**

main of theater and film. We called our event CETUS (erupt) Dance Theatre, and it featured seven dancer-choreographers during two evenings. We were able to include one artist from the United States, Ananya Chatterjea, the artistic director of Women in Motion, a company of South Asian women doing political theater, who also did a talk series for audiences during the festival. The event was a success and we managed to get a lot

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of media coverage. The dance theater works presented at the Fringe represented various ethnicities in Malaysia as well as various artistic genres, from Malay *mak yong* to Indian Odissi dance, jazz, and *Butoh*.<sup>8</sup>

“For the KL Fringe Dance Festival 2010, we decided to coordinate with the World Dance Day celebration. An opportunity turned up when a new arts center in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur offered their space. We decided to do proper stage programming with seven choreographers presenting their works. The next KL Fringe Festival has commissioned seven plays for the upcoming KL Fringe Theater in July, 2010. The main challenge we face continues to be a struggle for space collaboration. We keep trying to find cheap rental or free space. Most of the artists who perform in the festival work with us for free. Most of our publicity is done via social networking sites, blogs and text messages via mobile phones.

“The Festival gives opportunities to artists to work with other creative people from their fields who they might have never even heard of before. The performing arts world in Malaysia is much divided. People are separated by race, ethnicity, and language and the different genres of dance. The Fringe festival aims to break away all these layers and bring out a whole new perspective on how performing arts of Malaysia can be viewed and merged. Also, since the unavailability of cash is always an issue, artists usually perform for free. In return, the festival guarantees them video footage and printed copies of images for their portfolios.

“Selection of works for the KL Fringe Festival has been informed by active participation in Malaysia’s non-commercial and non-mainstream arts world, where we strive to follow the development of new work and new talent. The exciting part about this hard work is that the social resonance of the KL Fringe Festival can now be felt more broadly in the creative arts field in Malaysia. In the past few years we have seen that other organizations have started initiating short play and dance festivals. There has been an increased interest in the underground and indie art scene, which in turn has become even more vibrant and electrifying.”

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## AFGHANISTAN

### Individuals Making a Difference: TAMIM SAMEE—Founder, Afghan Contemporary Art Prize

Tamim Samee returned to his native Afghanistan in 2002 to participate in the process of rebuilding the country following the ouster of the Taliban. With expertise in computer science and telecommunications, he launched several successful companies in Afghanistan, and has developed a variety of entrepreneurial ventures that support the revitalization of Afghan commerce and culture. Among these is the Afghanistan Contemporary Art Prize, which he established in 2008 with the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, a nongovernmental organization that aims to revive Afghanistan’s traditional crafts and regenerate an important historic area of Kabul’s old city known for its rich cultural heritage. The Contemporary Art Prize is one of several projects that the Turquoise Mountain Foundation supports in the arena of contemporary arts. The following is Samee’s account of how the idea for the prize came about, and how it has developed since its inception.

“The idea to create Afghanistan’s first contemporary art prize emerged from a search for answers to a series of questions. These questions emerged from my own study of Afghan history, and of the sophisticated cultural achievements of the peoples and civilizations whose legacy has come down to us. Observing this rich history, I asked myself whether there are vestiges of past civilizations in the contemporary people of Afghanistan; whether, after continuous trauma, Afghans are still able to create original art and offer a unique vision of their culture in today’s global scene; whether, in a country where possibly the very first oil painting was rendered in Bamiyan’s monasteries, the same people are able to innovate now.

“After I returned to Afghanistan, in 2002, I saw abundant indications that contemporary Afghans had not lost their artistic spirit and talents, but that art had simply shifted to furtive corners to avoid discovery during the years of war and Taliban rule, when art was

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<sup>8</sup> *Butoh*, meaning “stamping dance,” breaks away from the “perfect” upright bodies of Western dance by distorting the body and moving in a more organic way. It employs white painted bodies; the slow movements and contorted postures evoke images of stillness, decay, ecstasy, fear, and desperation. Its origins have been attributed to Japanese dance legends Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno.

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labeled as *haram*, and artists were publicly punished. Given appropriate outlets for artists, I hoped that art could once again flourish.

“During the Taliban era, caretakers at the National Museum created fake walls to hide precious cultural antiquities. At the National Gallery of Art, curators painted inoffensive scenes of nature over potentially risqué oil paintings in the collection to save them from the Taliban’s nightly bonfires. Clearly a deep understanding of the value of art remained.

“Following the establishment of the new Afghan government, the proliferation of new media and abundance of training programs for technical skills in media production, along with the latest software, had already produced promising indigenous filmmakers and photographers around the country. Short films by Alka and Roya Sadat, two young sisters from Herat, were making the rounds of film festivals in Europe and Asia. Collaborations between Afghan and international filmmakers were producing excellent results. *Osama*, a film made in Afghanistan, won major awards in Cannes (AFCAE Award, Cannes Junior Award, Golden Camera–Special Mention) in 2003, as well as the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2004. In visual arts, the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan was established in 2004 to encourage young artists to collaborate and support dialogue among visual artists. Works produced by the center were being exhibited at group shows in Europe and North America. Given the newly found freedom of expression and the variety of creative outlets for post-Taliban urbanites, especially women, to engage in learning and professions of their choice, the revival of arts and culture came as no surprise. The Contemporary Art Prize became a way to channel this new energy into a process wherein the younger generation of Afghans could come to the surface, find one another, and collaborate on work that could speak of their experiences and their aspirations.

“From the start, the art prize challenged many taboos. It attempted to push the boundaries and, ever so slowly, reveal, or even define, new creative territory for

artists. New freedoms notwithstanding, Afghan society is by and large conservative, and activities that create interaction among women and men who are not closely related are viewed with suspicion. Imagine how families must have felt about allowing their daughters to work in collaboration with young men on ‘eccentric’ new forms of art! Old-school painters who had dominated the market with paintings of women in blue *burkhas* walking down an ancient alley, or scenes of *buzkashi*, Afghanistan’s adrenalin-filled version of polo, playing with the carcass of a dead calf, did not offer space and legitimacy to any artistic genre that veered to the expressionistic or abstract. Painters and the few sculptors were valued more for their kitsch-like representational skills, and for its part, the public seemed indifferent to any form of artistic expression that challenged norms of style and content.

“Aware of the potentially huge impact of a national



Visitors enjoying the art exhibition

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art prize, the founders worked carefully to define key principles before announcing guidelines for the competition. These principles were as follows:

- The competition was open to both male and female artists. Judging was to be based solely on the quality of the art.

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- To encourage younger artists, an upper age limit of 35 was placed on entrants.
  - Entrants were encouraged to work in modern forms while using indigenous and ancient sources of inspiration, for example, miniature painting, reliefs found in coins and archeological objects in the Kabul Museum, calligraphy, poetry, and folklore. The aim was to develop an Afghan art that unmistakably reflected Afghan origins and sensibilities.
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“From the start, the art prize challenged many taboos. It attempted to push the boundaries and, ever so slowly, reveal, or even define, new creative territory for artists.”

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- All artistic media were acceptable, and multi-media collaborations were particularly encouraged. Painting, photography, sculpture, film, computer-crafted art, installation, and any other forms defined by the artists were welcome.
- Information about the prize was to be disseminated across the country in order to reach as many aspiring and unknown artists as possible.
- Emerging artists were to be informed of developments in regional and international art and introduced to new techniques and materials while maintaining an Afghan artistic perspective and promoting indigenous techniques to their highest standards.

“The Afghanistan Contemporary Art Prize is now moving into its third successive year. The competition process is intentionally simple so that it can be easily replicated without significant costs or international expertise. A new poster for each year’s competition is disseminated across the country to reach far-flung provinces and distant budding artists. Television

commercials and radio ads are run for several weeks on popular programs, not only to encourage artists to come forward, but to also create a buzz for the prize, and to elevate its importance in the cultural landscape. Substantial submission time is allowed in light of the realities of communications in Afghanistan. There is virtually no working postal system and access to Internet and e-mail is extremely expensive and, even then, extremely slow. The art prize team helps new artists create narratives about their work, and digitally documents each submission.

“Prizewinners are selected through a two-stage process. First, 10 finalists are selected, and the winners are then selected from among the finalists. The 10 qualifying artists are offered workshops that run for two intensive weeks and feature a varied diet of art-related subjects that includes lectures, collaboration time with specifically invited Afghan and international artists, introduction to art movements, and discussion of first-rate art from collections around the world. Sessions are enhanced by hands-on time with new materials and techniques. In order to advance to the final selection process, artists are asked to take time off from their normal routines to attend the workshops. Following the workshops artists are given four to six weeks to create at least one new original work to submit for the final selection. Each artist is required to display a minimum of five pieces. Since resources are limited in Afghanistan, artists are offered studio space or access to electronics and material to realize the work they plan to submit. The process is intense and challenging, but the first place prize is \$2,000, second is \$1,000, and third place is \$500, which are considerable sums. Funding for the prizes, workshops, and materials is provided by the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, Tamim Samee, British Council, and Art Action.

“An independent jury of Afghans and internationals connected to the arts is appointed each year and meets in Kabul to select the winning artists in both stages of the selection process. Each individual jury develops its own selection criteria. Unanimous decisions are required, and any disputes must be resolved and documented before announcements of winners are made. The award ceremonies are by invitation and opened by the minister of culture. The award team

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ensures maximum presence and coverage from both domestic and international media. The last two award ceremonies have been held in Bagh-e-Babur (Babur Gardens), in Kabul, where Emperor Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, presided over his empire from his summer capital. The 10 finalists work with a curator to install their work in their own dedicated gallery space. The jury makes its final decision based on each artist's presentation and the new piece created specifically for the prize.

"The last two years have met with considerable success. Despite the founders' initial anxieties, the number of submissions has been far higher than expected—nearly 100 artists have submitted each year, and most of the work has been promising and engaging. That artists saw value in participating in the process was eminently gratifying. Each year thousands of Afghans have visited the gallery. Schoolchildren of all ages come for field trips and their faces exude their delight in seeing the new. The experience for them cannot be duplicated anywhere else in Afghanistan.

"In the last two years, 8 female and 12 male finalists were selected, and overall, there were a high number of female participants. All 10 artists selected as finalists in 2008 reflected the present-day tensions of the Afghan condition and provided unique prisms through which to understand it. In both 2008 and 2009, the top awards were won by female artists with astounding works. The 2008 award went to Sabha Shams for her piece called *World*, which examines the current global challenges with a narrative of symbols and neatly drawn cornucopia of graphic images and collages. Arranged as a storyboard on a large red velvet canvas, the piece invites viewers to create their own stories and interpretations. The 2009 jury selected Shinkai Stanikzai as the winner for her work *Chel-Dokhtaran*, which means "40 girls." Ms. Stanikzai reached deep into Afghan women's folklore and illustrated the legend of 40 young women whose stories of brave acts are still passed on from generation to generation. While borrowing from the legend, Ms. Stanikzai created a contemporary installation depicting 40 stories of 40 contemporary women in Afghanistan on digitally produced calendar sheets. Borrowing from a legend in one story in which women committed mass suicide in a deep well to pro-

test injustices, the contemporary installation displayed the mouth of a well on which a video projected an ink well from which a scribe endlessly wrote Afghan female names. Gentle sounds of water added an ironic note to this sophisticated work.

"The variety of art in the last two years indicates that artists have already ventured into new media. Of the 20 finalists, 10 were painters and the others were

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**"The variety of art in the last two years indicates that artists have already ventured into new media."**

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photographers, installation artists, filmmakers, and even a claymation artist. Mr. —, a 24-year-old who works for the leading private television channel, created a stunning clay animation film depicting the process of recruiting a suicide bomber. A self-taught artist, he used spare time at the television studio to painstakingly create moving images that make complex stories accessible to mass audiences.

"In addition to artists from Kabul, participation came from around the country and from more rural provinces. Mr. Zadran, from Paktia, the neighboring Afghan province to Pakistan's now notorious South Waziristan, had worked for 20 years in his basement on his whimsical sculptures and throne-like sculptural chairs, enduring ridicule from his friends and fellow villagers. He successfully made it to the top-10 round of year one, and now says his engagement in the Contemporary Art Prize 'gave me respect from my people, who no longer call me crazy' for making these objects.

"Modern art is making inroads in Afghanistan, and with a distinctly Afghan flavor. While transporting his tall sculpture in the form of a male human figure to Bagh-e-Babur, artist Amin was stopped by the Kabul police and threatened with arrest unless he confessed whose body he was carrying under the white cast. Not ever having seen a life-size human sculpture, the police apparently could not understand the intention of the art, and insisted that the cast be broken open to reveal the hidden body."

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## Way Forward

In a place where security does not exist, where war seems to rage unimpeded, where a medieval existence meets the twenty-first century, and where the average lifespan is only in the mid-40s, does art have a place? Should we not attend first to more pressing priorities, compared to which art seems nonessential and even excessive? The brief history of Afghanistan's Contemporary Art Prize suggests that the answer to all these questions is no—art also plays a vital role in healing and building hope. While economic and social development can build hard

assets—roads, schoolrooms, wells, and hospitals—it cannot breathe life and meaning into them. We must also take measures to care for the soul of a nation. As Gandhi said, “A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people.” In Afghanistan, young people need ways to feel that they are contributing to building their nation. Through the Afghan Contemporary Art Prize, young Afghans who feel disenfranchised by the chaotic frenzy of nation building can project their voices and teach us about their aspirations for the future of their country.

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# CONCLUSION

## **SIX CORE PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTING CULTURES**

The case studies and personal profiles assembled in “Making a Difference” testify to the dynamism and robust imagination of artists and activists in Asia and the United States who are drawing on the power of art to effect progressive social change. Their varied strategies and tactics speak to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the communities they serve, and reflect differences in the political, social, and economic conditions in which they pursue their work. These differences are the result of recent events as well as the residue of colonial histories and geographies, and exist along a continuum that encompasses broad geocultural regions, individual nations, and subnational regional cultures.

In each of the three major regions profiled in the report—Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia—particular social and political fault zones emerge as crucial sites of cultural activism. In Indonesia, many of the arts and culture activities profiled in the case studies are striving to facilitate cultural dialogue among different schools of Islamic practice and belief within the country. These activities are designed to challenge new calls for Islamic “purity” in cultural expression at the expense of venerable syncretic traditions that draw on non-Islamic or, indeed,

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pre-Islamic elements of spiritual and expressive culture in dance, theater, and music. By contrast, in post-Soviet Central Asia, where Islamists have no official voice in mainstream cultural politics, ethnonationalist expressions of monocultural heritage face off against proponents of artistic cosmopolitanism and aesthetic pluralism. In South Asia, the stubborn persistence of caste and class distinctions and abiding tensions between Hindus and Muslims stir social and political tensions in India, while in Pakistan and Afghanistan, continuing conflict between Islamists and proponents of secular democracy rooted in liberal Western-style social life impede progress toward peace and stability.

The same social and political forces that have led to regionally distinctive expressions of Islam's cultural dimension in Central, South, and Southeast Asia have also led to starkly different environments for cultural entrepreneurship. In Central Asia, for example, the legacy of monopolistic state-sponsored cultural patronage, which reached its apogee during the Soviet era but continues in a diminished form in the Soviet successor nations, hinders the development of autonomous cultural entrepreneurship. Even in nations such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, where civil society is active, arts and culture NGOs suffer from a paucity of experienced administrators, effective strategies, and, most of all, a dearth of successful models of nonstate cultural manage-

the autonomous cultural sector, but in the decade since Suharto's fall, cultural entrepreneurship has flourished despite recurring social movements that advocate for constraints on particular forms of cultural expression.

Regional contrasts notwithstanding, all of the projects and initiatives profiled in the case studies share one fundamental feature. In every case, their strategies and tactics underscore the imperative of building cultural connectivity that is rooted in a nuanced understanding of local cultural landscapes: the interplay of state and nonstate actors; the *dramatis personae* of local, regional, and international cultural stakeholders; the identification of funding sources to support institutional capacity building; the demarcation of areas of contested taste and sensibility in expressive culture—most importantly, in artistic performance and representation; the topography of state cultural policies and the way constructs of national cultural heritage interact with the forces of cosmopolitan modernity.

“Building connectivity from the ground up” is just one of the common principles to emerge from the case studies and profiles. These principles, in turn, suggest strategies for working toward the desired outcomes. Both the principles and their attendant strategies are applicable to the work of a broad spectrum of interested parties: nongovernmental organizations seeking to initiate or expand their own projects; donor organizations active in economic, social, and cultural development; policy makers charged with considering the role of culture in public diplomacy initiatives; academic institutions seeking to enrich international studies programs; and entrepreneurial individuals with a passion to make a difference. Six core principles and strategies for connecting cultures are summarized here. Much more could be said about each of them. The report's authors hope that these synoptic presentations can contribute to further discussion and debate—not only about principles and strategies, but also about tactics for implementation.

1. Knowledge and accurate information are crucial to strengthening cross-cultural understanding. The arts offer a powerful domain in which individuals and communities can acquire knowledge about the achievements, values, and aspirations of other cultures.

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In every case, the strategy and tactics of these projects underscore the imperative of building cultural connectivity that is rooted in a nuanced understanding of local cultural landscapes.

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ment. By contrast, in South Asia, the legacy of Gandhi's teachings on self-reliance, self-governance, and decentralization reverberates in our own time in the region's vibrant NGO movement—as alive in the countryside as it is in the cities. In Indonesia, limitations on cultural expression imposed during the Suharto regime constrained

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**Strategy:** Create strong cultural contextualization for cross-cultural arts projects, such as documentary films, translations of texts, lecture-demonstrations, and debates, that contribute to nuanced cultural translation. Not all forms of cultural knowledge are equally translatable—indeed, some may be highly resistant to translation. Cultural translation is the purview of curators, and curatorial expertise in a broad range of artistic languages that can serve as potential intercultural connectors is essential to facilitating meaningful cross-cultural communication.

2. Cross-cultural collaborations should be formulated in a way that creates parity and equity between and among collaborators.

**Strategy:** Build programs from the ground up, rather than the top down, with frequent consultation, sharing of information, and consensus building about tactics. Cross-cultural initiatives whose participants work within a symmetrical framework of cultural authority and respect will be most likely to establish the kind of productive dialogue that leads to new insights and ideas. In the domain of global cultural politics, collaborations based on parity and equity offer an alternative to the “coercive conditionality” that is all too common in international development initiatives, and that can infect cultural exchange initiatives as well.<sup>1</sup> Cross-cultural collaborations make a significant contribution to building international understanding merely by indicating interest in other cultures for their own sake, rather than for their value as potential markets, or for purposes of international security cooperation.

3. Successful cultural initiatives and advocacy work need sustained investment over a long duration.

**Strategy:** Invest in building relationships with a minimum five- to seven-year time frame, focusing on support for creative work as well as organizational capacity building. Capacity building can take different forms: expanding audiences, reaching out to underrepresented groups, strengthening governance, developing management and curatorial skills, and nurturing institutional

partnerships and collaborations. All of these capacities are rooted in human resources—in the growth of knowledge, skill, and experience within a dedicated core group of cultural operators. While sustainability is the mantra of economic development theory, entrepreneurial cultural initiatives face particular challenges

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“Building connectivity from the ground up” is just one of the common principles that emerge from the case studies and profiles.

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in becoming self-sustaining unless they operate in the arena of popular culture. Investors in cultural capital need to be prepared to conceptualize “recoupment” not in monetary terms, but in terms of the growing capacity of initiatives they have supported to help effect social change.

4. Powerful forces for social change are linked to the invention of new technologies, such as the printing press, the Internet, cell phones, and digital media.

**Strategy:** Exploit new communications technologies to promote connectivity. Several of the most powerful and far-reaching tools of global cultural connectivity—particularly among youth populations—are less than a decade old (e.g., Facebook, created in 2003; YouTube, founded in 2005). The World Wide Web has existed for a little over two decades; the developments in computer networking that made the Internet possible took place only in the 1960s and 1970s. The ability of new communications tools to spur collective action that can lead to social change has become a leitmotif of communications studies and related fields.<sup>2</sup> While digital mediation is not a substitute for live artistic performance (see principle no. 6), its powerful ability to multiply and disseminate knowledge and information makes it an invaluable tool of any strategy for enhancing intercultural connectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> The expression “coercive conditionality” is borrowed from postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha; see *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), xvi.

<sup>2</sup> For a lucid introduction to these ideas, see Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

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5. Rather than viewing cultural production as a mechanism for “monetizing” creativity, culture should be viewed as a unique form of social currency that serves as a positive force in building community.

**Strategy:** Explore new forms of noncommercial cultural dissemination and sharing that challenge conventional models of cultural ownership. One example is the Creative Commons model, which offers writers, musicians, and other creators of cultural content a way to retain ownership of their work while making it available for appropriation by other creators through free licensing.<sup>3</sup> Creative Commons was an inspiration of the Internet age, yet analogous alternatives to prevailing Western conventions of exclusive rights over proprietary cultural content have long existed among traditional and indigenous cultures, with their varied understanding of authorship, cultural property rights, and artistic agency. In traditional cultural settings, expansive public domains of freely available cultural content provide the raw material for creativity and innovation: epic tales, traditional design patterns and motifs, folk songs, dance forms, and so on. International cultural initiatives can strive to learn more about how the social transmission of these remarkable cultural properties has stimulated aesthetic pluralism while strengthening the bonds of community.

6. Direct people-to-people connectivity retains an abiding power in the age of the Internet and digital mediation. Events that bring together artists and audiences from different cultures create a *frisson*—difficult to replicate in mediated forms—that can open new, potentially transformative modes of perception.

**Strategy:** Invest in programs built on promoting direct, personal experience of high-quality artistic performance, ideally accompanied by cultural interpretation that renders performance accessible to nonspecialists. This strategy and the principle to which it is linked cannot be emphasized strongly enough. However ideal the reproduction of sound and image through digitally

mediated forms, these digital reproductions remain a simulacrum of an original performance event and its attendant inspiration—inspiration that can produce a strong visceral response. Music critic Alex Ross described the phenomenon of the “musical chill,” which he characterized as the “ambiguous tremor of otherness that runs through the body when, for whatever reason, a particular sound overwhelms the reasoning mind.” Transformative experiences of “musical chill,” as well as other kinds of artistic “chill,” are most likely to occur in the conditions of live performance, where the physical, emotional, and moral power of art can be experienced most directly.

Policy reports, white papers, and research studies supported by foundations and academic institutions that examine the role of the arts in international affairs have repeatedly recommended many of the same kinds of measures: new working groups, task forces, and conferences; the establishment of a government office to oversee new initiatives; public–private partnerships; and, invariably, an increase in both government and private-sector funding for cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy. Such measures are well intended, and surely would contribute to strengthening the infrastructure needed to support international cultural programs. Yet, arguably more important than new initiatives and increased funding are better coordination and more interactivity among organizations already engaged in cultural exchange and development activities. By pooling resources, sharing information and expertise, and establishing common cause, nongovernmental organizations can exponentially increase their effectiveness.

As this report has made clear, many programs and projects already in place are bringing vision and vitality to the work of building cross-cultural connectivity. Frequently, the principal obstacle they face is a lack of the specific kinds of expertise needed to transform raw enthusiasm into savvy organizational strategies and tactics. Infrastructural capacity building for the international cultural exchange field could be significantly enhanced through the creation of graduate training programs that combine rigorous study in an arts-related humanities field—art history and criticism, musicology and ethno-

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<sup>3</sup> See Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Alex Ross, “Endless Mahler,” *The New Yorker*, June 8–15, 2009, p. 117.

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musicology, the history of architecture, cultural preservation studies, and so on—with applied work in strategic cultural development. The aim of such programs would be to train a future generation of specialists to address the global challenges of cultural translation that are a by-product of postmodernity: how to export one culture’s artistic creativity to a radically different cultural context in a way that preserves core meanings and symbols; how to break free of the polished templates of “national cultural heritage” to explore the rough edges of

living tradition; how to engage with the forces of cultural fusion and hybridity that can energize artistic work, yet too often result in formal incoherence or artistic cliché; and, for artists, how to connect to global networks of collaboration and exchange while remaining rooted in a sense of place and tradition. These are only a few of the many questions that cross-cultural bridge builders of the future will need to address as they work to strengthen connectivity between the United States and Asian Muslim communities through the power of art.

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# APPENDICES

## CONTRIBUTORS

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Theodore Levin, Arthur R. Virgin Professor of Music at Dartmouth College, studies music and culture in Central Asia and Siberia. He is the author of *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia (and Queens, New York)* and, with Valentina Süzükei, of *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond*, which received the 2007 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award's Béla Bartók Prize for excellence in ethnomusicology. As an advocate for music and musicians from other cultures, he has produced recordings, curated concerts and festivals, and contributed to international arts initiatives. During an extended leave from Dartmouth, he served as the first executive director of the Silk Road Project, founded by cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and currently serves as Senior Project Consultant to the Aga Khan Music Initiative in Central Asia, and as chair of the Arts and Culture Program sub-board of the Open Society Foundations. Levin is a *magna cum laude* graduate of Amherst College, and received his PhD in music from Princeton University.

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Rachel Cooper has been at the Asia Society since 1993, where she is Director for Cultural Programs and Performing Arts. She has extensive experience in the presentation of traditional and contemporary Asian performing arts. Current special projects include a three-year project, "Creative Voices of Islam in Asia." She was co-organizer of "Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas," a 10-day festival mounted in partnership with the Brooklyn Academy of Music and New York University Center for Dialogues. She directed the Festival of Indonesia in Performance, which brought more than 300 artists from Indonesia to venues across the United States. She lived in Indonesia from 1983 to 1989.

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Ayesha Ozair Sikander is a graduate of the Media, Culture, and Communication Department of New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Her research interests include Islam in the media and the South Asian media landscape. She curated the first Pakistani independent film festival in San Francisco, "Karachi Kamera," and, since 2003, has been running a microcredit project in Karachi, Pakistan, that focuses on empowering local artisans. Presently, she works in the Cultural Programs Department at the Asia Society in New York.

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Suzanne Charlé is a writer and editor whose work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Nation*, and many other periodicals. While living in Indonesia, she wrote for the *Times* and contributed stories to NPR. She also wrote a cultural guide book on Bali and was the co-editor and writer of *Indonesia in the Soeharto Years*, published by Lontar Press. A resident of New York, Charlé has consulted for a number of institutions, including the Asia Society, the Ford Foundation, and the Bank of America Foundation, where she was the managing editor and director for a series of traveling art exhibitions.

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Zeyba Rahman is a global cultural entrepreneur and President of Jungli Billi. Currently, she is Senior Advisor to the Iowa University International Writing Program's "Peace Works: Writers in e-Motion" project in the Middle East and North Africa, and Project Director for the interactive, traveling museum exhibition "Muslim Worlds," with international and U.S.-based partners. From 2007 to 2009, she was Senior Project Advisor for "Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas." From 1997 to 2007, she served as a Director of Morocco's Fes Festival of World Sacred Music and the companion Giving a Soul to Globalization Forum.

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Nermeen Shaikh is the author of *The Present as History: Critical Perspectives on Global Power* (Columbia University Press, 2008; translated into Japanese and Korean, 2009) and serves on the editorial board of the journal *Development*. She has worked for Al-Jazeera English (Washington), the Asia Society (New York), the International Institute for Environment and Development (London), and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (Islamabad).

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Raziya Syrdybaeva graduated in 1995 from the Kyrgyz National Conservatory in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where she studied both Western and Central Asian music and musicology. Since 2005, she has served as Director of the Center Ustatshakirt, a Bishkek-based nongovernmental organization whose mission is to support the revitalization and further development of Kyrgyz music. Within Kyrgyzstan, she is active as a cultural entrepreneur, concert producer, orchestra manager, and cultural development specialist.

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Mohd Anis Md Nor is Professor of Ethnochoreology and Ethnomusicology at the Cultural Centre (School of Performing Arts), University of Malaya, in Kuala Lumpur. He is the curator for the Zapin International Dance Festival and the International Malay Performing Arts for the State Government of Johor in Malaysia, and was the 2007 William Allan Neilson Distinguished Professor of Music, Dance and Theatre at Smith College. He was appointed to the Advisory Committee of the Islamic World Arts Initiative supported by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art in 2004–2005.

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