

Solidaire: Practising solidarity

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Culture Caleidoscoop comes to you with the second issue of the journal. The theme of this issue, 'Solidaire: Practising solidarity', was inspired by Lora Krasteva's contribution in the first issue. Krasteva's piece – 'The civic role of cultural spaces in culture and immigration: Reflections from the Becoming [...] projects' – asks us to think about what solidarity means and the ways it emerges in the arts, culture, and heritage fields.¹ When we, the guest editor collective, first started to consider the theme of solidarity and discuss the theme with Krasteva, she mentioned that there is no English equivalent for the French verb *solidaire*, meaning to be in solidarity or to practise solidarity. The lack of an equivalent verb in English led us to question how solidarity might be understood differently around the world, as well as the contextual gaps and the potential impacts of the continued coloniality of the English language. Solidaire as a verb also implies an ongoing relationship, action, or practice. Solidarity is enacted in various ways in the arts, cultural, and heritage sectors, and the concept and its practices continue to evolve.

This editorial takes the form of a conversation between the guest editors, an international group of academics and practitioners working in the arts, culture, and heritage field: Siân Hunter Dodsworth, Elene Kadagidze, Aleena Karim, and Finn K. Strüder. This felt like the best form to show and embrace the complexity and variety of solidarity and how it is practised. In the following piece we discuss the theme of solidarity and how each of the first wave of contributions published has approached the theme in unique ways.

While the contributions explore solidarity in different areas of the world, different types of organisations, and on a more human level (concerned with people or individuals) as well as on an organisational and institutional level, together they make the frictions between practices of solidarity visible, and several common themes have emerged.

When we first began working on this theme, the world was a different place. Today is not the same day as yesterday and tomorrow is not the same day as today. Before we start discussing each of the contributions and the emerging themes, we as the guest editors feel it is important to position the publication of this issue within current ongoing global events that urge us to affirm a position of solidarity.

As community-engaged practitioners working in the cultural and heritage sectors across the Global North and Global South, we acknowledge the historical and ongoing role that arts and heritage play in erasing First Peoples, forcibly displaced peoples, and marginalised peoples. It is for this reason that we feel that *Culture Kaleidoscoop*, a platform that centres socially engaged practice, honesty, and criticality, and that 'promote[s] voices, perspectives, and ways of knowing that have traditionally been excluded or marginalised from the debate',² is the right space to share the following statement: *The members of the guest editor collective stand in solidarity with Palestine*.

This publication of the 'Solidaire: Practising Solidarity' volume arrives at a critical juncture: the ongoing genocide of Palestinians and attempted erasure of Palestine.³ Given that there are no contributions from Palestine, which we acknowledge is a significant gap considering recent incidents, we wish to make a statement of solidarity with children, women, elderly people, and all civilians who have lost their lives in Gaza and the West Bank. It is important to mention that the horror and destruction that we have seen in recent months is a continuation of violence suffered by the Palestinian people following decades of occupation by an apartheid state.⁴ Therefore, just as we stand with Palestine, we vehemently oppose settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, racism, Islamophobia, and genocide.

This volume emerges at a time when we are challenged to question theoretical and practical calls for decolonisation, our sense of humanity, and whose lives are valued over others. Current events demand that we deromanticise the notion of solidarity and take a stand when we see suffering and injustice taking place. We feel the relevance and urgency of this issue even more. In this issue we present a series of contributions that – in relation to their own context – reveal what this might look like.

Emerging themes

Siân Hunter Dodsworth: It's clear from the pieces that we use different language to represent solidarity across different sociopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts.

Finn K. Strüder: The ambiguity of language and its possible misuse is clear in a lot of the contributions to this issue and what they point at – that is, a lot of solidarity is hollow practice or performative. Each paper has a different level of reflection and criticism, but they all question the use of solidarity language to a degree.

It's interesting to see the range these present: there's this revolutionary paper from some of the team at the Centro de Investigación en Comunicación Comunitaria (CICC) in Mexico saying that the government is not necessarily on our side when it comes to solidarity practices, but also Gordillo Martorell's piece on the well-funded Museum of Communication in Switzerland, questioning solidarity as a museological practice, and again a text from Senra Hermana on eco-village volunteering in the EU questioning heritage volunteering and its class distinctions.

Even though the practices and organisations discussed differ widely, there is this clear thread of decolonial thought and a growingly anticapitalist stance.

Siân: The themes that emerge through this issue move from inside to outside the institution; this distance and differing levels of privilege has something to do with the critique presented. The contributors also all question their experience of and role in solidarity.

Finn: About the contributors questioning their experience and role, Jimenez Ortiz et al.'s piece from Mexico brought this powerful sentence:

“La dirección política de la organización está a cargo de una Coordinación General conformada por las y los compañeros que han pronunciado abiertamente su interés de participar en los asuntos políticos y que han demostrado un compromiso, más allá del discurso, por el trabajo comunitario.”

Translation: “To give the reader more a sense of what this looks like in practice, we can describe the role of CICC's General Coordination; a group of compañeros who have openly expressed an interest in political matters and demonstrated a real commitment, beyond just words, to community work.”

I think that they formulate it so powerfully because of their distance to the cores of power. Each piece that is on the periphery – Jimenez Ortiz et al.'s 'Building intercultural communities through solidarity' and Stiti's piece, 'Landed at Brussels: An autoethnography of a migrant researcher beyond academia', can be seen as more 'on the periphery' – ranging to pieces that are closer to the centre; this positioning influences the critique apparent in the pieces.

Jimenez Ortiz et al.'s position and the knowledge it generates actually shines a light on the other pieces. It represents knowledges that have been emerging and have had more attention paid to them over the past few decades. These knowledges are starting to influence thought, which can be felt in all the pieces and their sense of urgency imbued in their understanding of solidarity.

Pieces coming from the centre, like Gordillo Martorell's and Senra Hermana's, have been influenced by this thinking and you can see the emergence of newer, more self-critical visions on and from the centre.

Siân: And that plays into a tension between knowledge production and institutions. Institutions can be barriers to solidarity, and the pieces written by contributors more closely integrated into institutions have shown how easy it is to run up against this tension when attempting to practise solidarity.

But the strength of the contributions is that they flesh out and challenge notions of solidarity through representing concrete actions rather than reflecting our conception of solidarity back to us. Ultimately what these contributions and *Culture Kaleidoscoop* (in bringing them together) do is promote an intertextual conversation that moves beyond each lived experience of solidarity to find fresh perspectives.

Aleena Karim: The contributions confirm that there are multidimensional interpretations of solidarity in varying contexts. Through this issue we hope to have provided professionals, practitioners, and academics a platform to share their perspective on solidarity. The fact that the contributors provide their individual perspectives on solidarity, clarifying what solidarity means for them as contributors, is welcomed and welcoming.

The submissions

'Building intercultural communities through solidarity: A Mexican case study' ***by Jimenez Ortiz et al.***

Finn: This piece illustrates very effectively how helping native cultural expression survive or promoting its further growth is much more than it might seem at first glance; it's about survival and the continuation of humanity. They materialise this urgency in a way that really lays bare the state of the world as neoliberal politics runs wild.

However, what feels refreshing is that there is an innate understanding in this piece that these communities should survive. It stays away from an instrumentalist view of culture as a justification for the basic human rights these communities should enjoy: there's no need to 'justify' why these communities are necessary.

Siân: The article looks at two case studies – community radios and a project that supports the artistic and cultural work of Indigenous peoples to find a place in existing urban (and predominantly white and non-Indigenous) art economies. The CICC's Zapatista thinking is a lens and framework through which to view reality. Its Indigenous, anticolonial, and anticapitalist interpretation of the world reveals the way artistic and cultural work in the Global South is inevitably bound up with urgent questions about how to counter capitalism, ecocide, linguisticide, and state and narco violence. This work is urgent and high risk and reveals how political and solidarity action are two sides of the same coin. In essence the article demonstrates that solidarity is an instrument for groups that find themselves in a perpetually marginalised position – an instrument to be used by Indigenous communities for survival and resistance, as well as to envisage an alternative future and, as the Zapatistas put it, 'a world in which many worlds fit', founded on social justice and ecological stability as well as difference and diversity.

In the end, CICC as an organisation is meant to 'blend into the background', as they take their lead from the Indigenous communities that they work with. However, they also recognise that their work forms part of a global solidarity movement, which aims to highlight the plight of oppressed and marginalised people everywhere.

Finn: As such they become facilitators for socially engaged practice. Again, while they avoid instrumentalism in the sense of a discursive response to capitalism

and neoliberalism, they instead engage it as a praxis-based instrument for survival, which really shows how these practices can be crucial when the stakes are high.

'Navigating identities and building support community through art: A beyond academia journey in Brussels' by Khaoula Stiti

Finn: This contribution is written in the centre but very much from a peripheral perspective, and while the author is engaging in their own forms of socially engaged practices and illustrates encounters with those practices as they are lived on the margins, it also helps highlight the failure of established or rather centred institutions.

You can really tell in this text that institutions will only take a baby step when they get pushed to the point of breaking.

We're still failing to truly hold these institutions accountable, which results in the people who are the most marginalised being the ones who suffer the most.

The author talks about the hypocrisy in the Belgian academic field, which can be seen in their rejection of her preferred methods of academic investigation. This reflects the field's longstanding Eurocentric beliefs about 'rationalism' and scientism.

Siân: And this shows the kind of loss of knowledge that we all suffer from as a result. The push to the periphery revealed in these contributions demonstrates that the periphery is the place where solidarity – and all types of reimaginings – best take place.

As academia pushed Stiti as a migrant researcher to the side, she found her own community, where spaces were being collectively reimagined, identities strengthened and reconfirmed.

Elene Kadagidze: Stiti talks about writing as a form of practising solidarity. It's worth noting here that practising solidarity often goes hand in hand with risk.

Finn: Thinking about this in relation to *Culture Kaleidoscoop* and this issue, we should acknowledge the labour and the solidarity being performed by the contributors.

'Solidarity and volunteering in cultural heritage: Sharing experiences of volunteering in Ecomuseo Villa Ficana from an emerging professional perspective' by Miguel Sentra Hermana

Finn: To me, this contribution is about opening up your eyes and seeing how the system works and what it means to be inside the system. Socially engaged practices aren't so much analysed in the sense of best practices, but rather there's a strong question of who is doing them and why, and whether it is worth it.

Siân: The article illustrates an awakening of someone who's self-admittedly in a privileged position. It touches on questions such as: what does it mean to volunteer versus to intern? What are the individual's goals versus those of the institution and the EU more widely? Doesn't everyone just want a stable, well-paid job rather than these precarious work situations?

Finn: Yes, it frames and shows that EU volunteering projects are international projects to build a sense of political identity: power is being exerted from the top down. That's not empowering the people who are doing the work but rather projecting onto the people (what the EU wants EU citizens to be). The view of socially engaged practice here suggests that these heritage conservation projects are almost ritualistic, performative practices of EU citizenship.

Siân: In essence the programme is trying to build a sense of shared belonging across the EU rather than a sense of solidarity towards the specific site or community, or even among the project participants. It feels as though this experience could have happened in any place in the EU. Socially engaged practice, and the arts and heritage more generally, is instrumentalised by the EU, and the author chooses to reflect on the interhuman effect of heritage being used in such a way. Maybe solidarity doesn't need to be about how long these monuments survive but about the connection that this enables between people and heritage, stories, and culture.

'Museums: Safeguarding our memories in perpetuity' by Hoyee Tse

Finn: That vein of questioning institutions, both those that are overtly political and those that are at times more covert like museums, and how they engage in socially engaged practices really peaks in this contribution. Here we see how solidarity is instrumentalised and appropriated by political power and through museums in a

way that truly shows how solidarity speech can be appropriated and even impose a calculated sense of solidarity in a top-down fashion.

Elene: It really shows the kind of genuine solidarity that is being erased in what is being said and what's happening. It encourages you to think about anti-solidarity. More so than simply performative acts of solidarity, what might it mean to ignore or hide certain parts of history?

Finn: And it's being conducted through the institution that is a museum, a European imperial construct. It really ends up highlighting the question: how much can we trust such institutions to be actors of solidarity? It also shows how we cannot trust narratives just because they use the language of solidarity. The Chinese government has adopted the decolonial narrative as a geopolitical tool, while acting in a very colonial way.

Siân: It comes back to the illusion that many museums still hold on to – that they're somehow apolitical. It is high time to leave this mindset behind.

“You need our eyes to see us”: Exploring children's solidarity mindset and performance in a museum context' by Jose Antonio Gordillo Martorell

Finn: The sentiment of socially engaged practice is very much present in this contribution: you can feel it in the author's choice of words and who they choose to centre. Which is really a refreshing thing, because this is being produced in such a central Western place – it shouldn't be taken for granted. That is, there are such obvious decolonial implications in the context of giving children a voice, because they have to deal with the future so they have to decide on it.

There seems to be again an intertextual link with Jimenez Ortiz et al.'s piece, which challenges the fancy speech and questions what people are doing rather than what they're saying.

Elene: I feel like there's a lingering perspective that still exists that children are not usually expected to have opinions and, if they do, then their opinions aren't respected. Unlike adults, who can see the nuance of complicated themes like solidarity, younger children still see things as black and white, good and bad.

Siân: This research calls out adults' conceptions of solidarity.

Conclusion and final thoughts

Elene: To tie it back to *Culture Kaleidoscoop*'s aims and scope, solidarity can be a form of socially engaged practice; socially engaged practice implies solidarity. To be socially engaged, you have to be working with communities, communicating in a nonhierarchical way.

Siân: Absolutely, if solidarity is done well, there should be a shift towards groups on the periphery being able to occupy spaces that they have traditionally been excluded from and start to bring about change within those spaces. Performative solidarity or socially engaged practice would reinforce inequalities, divisions among groups of people.

Finn: There is a spectrum of solidarity throughout these pieces. We see a case in which a very socially engaged standpoint generates solidarity through examples of what happens when all socially engaged practice or solidarity falls to the side and a voice for society is imposed on it and creates a false narrative of solidarity. We are confronted by how important it is to give young people a voice and how volunteering projects have become a privilege for the few. What can socially engaged practice lead to? And what can happen when we misuse the notion of the social in the arts and heritage fields?

Elene: The arts, culture, and heritage sector, which frequently works together with communities to develop projects on topics that affect our everyday lives, is in a unique position to practise solidarity in a meaningful way. And although it's not a straightforward process and requires a lot of work, it's important to recognise the value of working together, continuous learning, and remaining open to diverse perspectives.

We thank the contributors to the issue for offering their perspectives on such a multifaceted topic and remind the *Culture Kaleidoscoop* readers that the calls for contributions stay open indefinitely for all the issues of the journal, allowing new submissions to be accepted at any time after the publication of the issues.

Notes

- 1 Krasteva, Lora. 'The civic role of cultural spaces in culture and immigration: Reflections from the Becoming [...] projects'. *Culture Kaleidoscoop* 1 (2022). DOI 10.57031/culcal.v1i1.12138.

- 2 Point 6 in the Culture Kaleidoscoop Manifesto: <https://www.culturekaleidoscoop.com/about/manifesto>, accessed 17 February 2024.
- 3 International experts and academics are engaged in urgent discussions about what language to use in defining the mass killings of civilians in Gaza and the West Bank since early October 2023 (and even before recent events). We, the guest editor collective, are in agreement with political scientist and historian Ilan Pappé; human rights lawyer and former UN human rights official Craig Mokhiber, who has declared the assault on Gaza as a 'Text-book case of genocide'; and academic in modern genocide Raz Segal, who has described Israel's assault on Gaza as evidence of 'intent to commit genocide'. See: Ilan Pappé, 'Genocide in Gaza', in *The Plight of the Palestinians: A Long History of Destruction*, ed. William Cook (n.p.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp. 201–205, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230107922_26; "Text-Book Case of Genocide": Top U.N. Official Craig Mokhiber Resigns, Denounces Israeli Assault on Gaza', *Democracy Now!*, 23 November 2023, <https://www.democracynow.org/2023/11/23/dissenters>; "A Textbook Case of Genocide": Israeli Holocaust Scholar Raz Segal Decries Israel's Assault on Gaza', *Democracy Now!*, 16 October 2023, https://www.democracynow.org/2023/10/16/raz_segal_textbook_case_of_genocide.

Declarations that current events in Gaza are genocide in the making have been made by academic Jason Stanley and the UN's special rapporteurs on human rights, who, in calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, issued a statement saying: 'We remain convinced that the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide [...] The time for action is now. Israel's allies also bear responsibility and must act now to prevent its disastrous course of action'. See: Jason Stanley, 'My life has been defined by genocide of Jewish people. I look on Gaza with concern', *The Guardian*, 11 November 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/11/my-life-has-been-defined-by-genocide-of-jewish-people-i-look-on-gaza-with-concern>; Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups as part of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, 'Gaza is "running out of time" UN experts warn, demanding a ceasefire to prevent genocide', OHCHR, 2 November 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/gaza-running-out-time-un-experts-warn-demanding-ceasefire-prevent-genocide>.

Finally, the preeminent Holocaust academic Omer Bartov has stated that 'Israeli leaders and generals have made terrifying pronouncements that indicate a genocidal intent [...] which can easily tip into genocidal action'. 'What I believe as a historian of genocide', *New York Times*, 10 November 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/10/opinion/israel-gaza-genocide-war.html>.

For more information on what constitutes genocidal activity and behaviour, please see Bartov's *New York Times* article and Nicole Rafter's book *The Crime of All Crimes: Towards a Criminology of Genocide* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

- 4 For more on the term 'apartheid' and how it refers to the occupied Palestinian territories, see the following recent reports from major human rights organisations: B'Tselem, 'A regime of Jewish

supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid', 2021 [currently available at <https://www.unjppi.org/btselem-this-is-apartheid.html> while B'Tselem's website is down]; Amnesty International, 'Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity', 1 February 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/02/israels-apartheid-against-palestinians-a-cruel-system-of-domination-and-a-crime-against-humanity/>; and Human Rights Watch, 'A threshold crossed: Israeli authorities and the crimes of apartheid and persecution', 27 April 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>.

About the guest editors

Siân Rosa Hunter Dodsworth is an evaluator, researcher and educator based in the UK and Mexico. Her collaborations with communities frequently explore the role of artistic, cultural and heritage practice in the construction of collective resistance, political memory and identity. Siân is an experienced museum professional and anthropologist, specialising in co-curation and co-production as part of social justice initiatives. She is a founder of Cards on the Table, a game that helps people think and talk critically about working together enabling them to express doubts, fears and hopes in an open way – and maybe become better collaborators as a result.

Elene Kadagidze is a Georgian researcher, art historian, and educator. She is currently working on a research project about reasserting the importance of sensory learning in university education. She has always been fascinated with the way we embody the spaces we're in, the way our senses are developed over time, and how they're more involved in our lives than we give them credit for. Her interest in the theme of solidarity stems from her strong belief in the importance of community building and support. Standing in solidarity with each other will help us form strong connections and will provide us with a chance to help each other out on a deeper level.

Aleena Karim is Faculty in English, Forman Christian College University, Pakistan. She is PhD candidate in Film Studies at LUCAS, Leiden University, Member of the PhD Council LEO at Leiden University and Research Fellow at NICA (Netherlands Institute of Cultural Analysis). Her research interests lie in Russian and Soviet films and literature, Comparative literature, Critical Theory, Critical Thinking and Academic Writing.

Finn K. Struder, an art and heritage researcher and curator based in Berlin, specialises in education, queering, and democratisation of cultural spaces. As a curator for education, Finn develops museum tools, fosters democratic practices, and is currently immersed in research exploring the ethical and political dimensions of “technology as biopolitics” in the cultural sphere, with a focus on posthuman potentialities.