

“Enacting Places of Change”

Interactive theatre
as an instrument for postwar peacebuilding in Lebanon



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Contents

1. Summary	2
2. Project description and results.....	2
2.1. Implementing Bodies	3
2.2. Course of the Workshop and Results	4
2.3. Course of the Performances and Results.....	8
2.4. Impact on the participants:	15
3. Lessons learned for the method of Forum Theatre for conflict Transformation.....	17
3.1. First Choice: The "traditional" method of Forum Theatre.....	17
3.2. Second Choice: Modifications of the Forum Theatre method in Lebanon	19
3.3. Third Choice: Evaluation the workshop and performances as learning sites.....	26
4. Conclusion.....	28
5. Preliminary Literature.....	30

Annex

Sample of the questionnaires to the audience and to the participants

Samples of Media Coverage and Documentary Film (DVD)

1. Summary

"Enacting Places of Change" is an action and research project to test and further develop a tool for relationship building between people belonging to formerly combating parties in a post-war setting. It consists of a workshop and performance series using a modified form of Forum Theatre, a methodology developed and fine-tuned by Augusto Boal from the *Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Certain modifications are necessary in order to adapt this method to the criteria for constructive conflict transformation outlined by Jean Paul Lederach as well as the lessons learned in Mary Anderson's "Reflecting on Peace Practice" approach. It heavily builds on the knowledge of local activists in a post-war setting to move a step forward in understanding the complex processes of post-war peace building.

2. Project description and results

"Enacting Places of change" is an action and research project implemented in collaboration between Ala Boued Amtar and sabisa - performing change e.V. in spring 2007 in Lebanon.

The aim of the project was to test and develop a modified Forum Theatre method which can be universally applied in reconciliatory activities. The idea is to expand the value of Forum Theatre in terms of developing modes of action to create change and

enable dialogical outreach into the community, so it can be integrated into the toolbox of conflict transformation practitioners.

To do so, it had to be implemented and tested, and this was done in the context of the politically very unstable, yet challenging post war Lebanon.

The innovation of the project is that it integrates contemporary conflict transformation knowledge with an established interactive method of social empowerment (Forum Theatre). It adapts the *workshop* format of Forum Theatre to the criteria for sustainable post-war peace building to bring youngsters from formerly conflicting parties together and to strengthen their relationships. Such an approach is new to conflict transformation training programmes. Further, it adapts the dialogical, non-verbal and interactive characteristics of the *forum presentation* into a potentially powerful mode of community outreach.

The project can be divided into four phases: The first phase was the preparation phase (July 2006 – Jan. 2007; extended due to the summer war); the second phase was the workshop phase (Feb.2007), the third phase was the performance phase (March 2007) and the last phase was the end evaluation (June 2008).

2.1. Implementing Bodies

Ala Boued Amtar (A Step Away):

A Step Away is an independent Lebanese NGO founded in 2000 by a group of young artists and social activists.

Nowadays, Lebanese artists have to face tremendous challenges imposed by the current precarious economy and lack of democracy in the Arab region. This situation has a negative impact on the cultural and artistic production in a country where culture provides both an asset and an opening to civilization: promising young people export their ideas and established artists lose hope due to lack of opportunities and financial support. In their mission statement they claim: "Believing that art has a major role in advancing society towards justice and democracy and willing to try to bring some positive change to this critical situation, a group of young people of different cultural and artistic backgrounds, have decided to create an institution, which main goals are the promotion of culture and the production of contemporary artistic works."

sabisa - performing change e.V.:

sabisa - performing change e.V. is a non-profit organisation based in Berlin, Germany. They employ creative media and the performing arts in projects for social transformation and community cultural development. *sabisa* organises international

exchange programmes, offers training in applied theatre and the performing arts and is actively involved in local educational, community and social change projects.

Through the application and development of artistic media as means of constructively dealing with conflicts and combating social exclusion and discrimination, they locate their work at the intersection of education, arts and the social sciences. Our main emphasis is the facilitation of critical and productive dialogue and exchange between the Global North and South. We consciously focus on making use of methodology and expertise developed in the Global South in our local context.

The work of *sabisa* is guided by participatory methodology, democratic principles and a strong belief in creative, dialogue-oriented approaches to social change. They combine experiences in theatre and art with our knowledge and education in the social sciences and liberal arts. They perceive their strength in the development, implementation and evaluation of interdisciplinary and innovative projects, which combine performing arts with social transformation.

2.2. Course of the Workshop and Results

- Dates of the workshop:

2007 February, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25
 March 2, 3, 4

- Political context - before and during workshop phase:

On July 12, 2006 the Israeli bombardiers entered the Lebanese airspace, declaring a destructive war on Lebanon, concentrated on the south and the southern suburbs of Beirut where the Lebanese party of Hezbollah is based with its institutions and arsenal. Nevertheless, all regions of the country got their share of the Israeli bombs which targeted roads, bridges, factories, houses, civilian cars and trucks. This war which lasted nearly a month came at a time when the political tensions in Lebanon were escalating between opposition and ruling parties after the assassination in a car blast of the prime minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, which led to the resignation of the cabinet, the withdrawal of the Syrian occupation forces from Lebanon and to new parliamentary elections (Spring 2005).

The July war deepened the political conflict and left the country in big disarray and huge economic losses. Furthermore, political assassinations and car blasts started to hit and destabilize the fragile security in the country.

Within this context, it was difficult to start the implementation of the Forum theatre workshops especially considering that most of participants were under 18 and were meant to be recruited from different parts of the country.

After several delays in the starting date, the organizers from both *A Step Away* and *sabisa* decided to initiate the work despite the security and political situation arguing that the crisis will most likely continue (it in fact even got worse later) and acknowledging that it is a great challenge to launch this experiment in a situation of conflict and test its results.

And so it was, seat belts were fastened and the project took off in February 2007.

Following the preparatory phase, the project consisted of a four three days workshop in Forum Theatre with young people, followed by four performances in different parts of the country.

- Workshop Site

The workshop was held in Beirut which was central to all participants coming from all Lebanese regions. It took place at the Social Centre of the Sisters of Charity in the Area of Achrafieh which had the needed space for work and a good in-house catering service with competitive prices in comparison with other places and businesses in Beirut. Participants were accommodated by the centre in nearby dormitories.

- Selection of participants

The target was to work with a group of young people aged between 17 and 22 years that represent the diversity of the Lebanese society. Therefore, 14 persons from diverse political, religious and economic backgrounds were recruited from the 7 governorates of Lebanon (South, Nabatieh, Beirut, Bekaa, North, Mount Lebanon, Beirut). The selection process was made in cooperation with schools and NGOs that nominated persons to participate in the project. The local project team conducted interviews which led to the final selection.

- Outline of Exercises Done

A set of exercises aiming at harmonizing the group, enhancing the group dynamics and developing interaction between its members towards building a coherent team of work were done in the beginning and all through the workshop. Exercises included ice breakers, getting to know each other, cooperative games, relaxation exercises, communication, self expression. These exercises were combined with those "traditional" exercises used in Forum Theatre trainings (such as: Colombian hypnosis, forest of sounds, rhythm machine etc.)¹ These exercises are very much concerned with the training of the senses and awareness of the self within a group..

¹ For a detailed description of the exercises please refer to Boal, A.: Games for Actors and Non-Actors, London: Routledge 2002.

They involve theatrical and group work, employing basic skills such as listening exercises, body expression, communicating with voice, harmonious and synchronized communication, and extend to various acting and stage presence techniques.

- Selection process of the story and results:

Participants were divided in small working groups of 4 and 3 to start the selection process of a story which was to become the performance.

In the first stage, participants were asked to narrate stories to each other in their small groups, relating to events or situations of conflict that they experienced themselves or witnessed with persons close to them, and that could potentially become the theme of a performance. Then within the small group, three stories were selected and transformed into a performance to show and discuss in plenary session. The objective of making the groups propose three performances was to enhance the participatory process and give place for experimentation, testing and assessment of each one's strengths and skills.

The participatory process was crucial to rule out any feeling of exclusion by less extrovert persons. The result of the working groups showed that sectarianism was a common topic. The other topics tended to be variations of family relations and conflicts.

After discussing and assessing all the presented situations, participants were asked to rank in terms of relevance the stories and scenes they preferred to keep and develop for final performance. After selecting the stories that got the highest ranking, a discussion was launched involving the receptiveness of the audience of each of the selected stories and the possible impact and conflicts which the performance can generate in a very sensitive context where people easily get offended and chances of communication distorted. Notably, all the stories chosen were related to the theme of sectarianism.

The collective decision was to avoid stories of family murders and extremely tragic stories that can negatively provoke the audience and push them to extreme reactions. And since all stories were related to the larger theme, it was agreed to creatively merge all the different individual stories into one coherent story, which was to form the plot for the final performance.

In a plenary session one story was developed out of the selected stories. The main topic was concretized as: daily sectarian discrimination experienced by young people in society: in the family, in the bus, in the street, in university and in the media. The

remaining time of the workshop was given to develop and refine the mise-en-scène and the acting.

The process described above was led by the training experts of community theatre and conflict resolution, together with the researcher. All relevant situations of conflict and sectarian discrimination were deeply discussed and projected in the social, political and behavioral context. The discussions coupled with theatre as means of expression helped participants better understand the mechanism of discrimination and the consequences of sectarianism on individuals and society.

The methodology of using theatre exercises and interactive debates with a diverse group of people proved to be strong and powerful in building awareness and quickly breaking down walls, as it puts people in direct interaction with each other, through a debate-creation track where everybody shares and gets involved equivocally.

- Feedback from participants after workshop

Jimmy: "I overcame shyness, and I solved my problem with my body."

Assala: "I now accept more to discuss about sectarianism. The workshop helped me to face the problem and confront it rather than avoid it."

Georgette: "I was very hesitant about being able to act. Now I discovered that I have capabilities in acting."

"I did not know before the workshop that the problem of sectarianism was that serious and big. I learned a lot about it."

Farah: "I feel so enthusiastic and encouraged to work with this group and look forward to the public performances."

Carla: "I rarely mingled in the past with people from a different religion or confession. When I came here I felt the need to know each one's religion and confession to be able to know how to deal with every person. Now after the workshop, I really do not mind about knowing the religion of a person I do not know or meet for the first time."

Darine: "Everything was new for me. This is the first time I do such thing. I am usually shy. I like this experience, and I discovered that I am capable of acting and gained self-confidence. And, this is the first time I meet a person of the Druze confession."

Bassam: "In the beginning I was suspicious about the ability of the group of producing a play in a short period of time, especially with non-professional participants. Afterwards, I understood that we were climbing the ladder with a clear methodology. I also thought in the beginning that I was wasting (???) my time in this workshop with non- professional actors, and then I realized that I was learning a lot especially from participants."

Rami: "I did not know what to expect. In the beginning I was sure we'll never reach a play out of physical exercises, jumping and dancing... Then I saw the progress, and I realized how serious the work is. I learned a lot and discovered how important the group work is."

Pierre: "By nature I am not keen on talking in the group and I do not like repetition ... I am not an easy-talking person. When I first came to the workshop and discovered that no other persons from my school or the people I know are participating in the workshop, I had second thoughts about continuing especially when I discovered that there were girls older than me in the workshop. Fortunately I stayed because I learned many things and I liked the work."

Khaldoun: "I am a working person. I took a leave from my work to join the workshop because this kind of work and the issue of sectarianism are important for me."

Nathalie: "I was not sure that I would like the work. Now I feel completely involved and I am very enthusiastic."

2.3. Course of the Performances and Results

- General context of the performance

Four performances of the play were carried out after the workshop. It was difficult to take the responsibility of debating the issue of sectarianism publicly in the tense political environment of the country in 2007. Conflict issues can easily turn into uncontrollable turmoil that can affect the safety of the young performers. Therefore, the timing and venues of performances were carefully and thoughtfully selected with guarantees from local organizers that problems were less likely to happen.

Four geographically and socially diverse locations were selected to perform the play. The object was to test the impact of the work in four diverse environments.

- Places and dates of performances:

Al-Ain Village (North Bekaa): March 17, 2007

Beirut (the Capital): March 18, 2007

Al Kfayr village (South): March 24, 2007

Sheikh Taba village (North): March 25, 2007

2.3.1. Description and results of the four performances

- **Al- Ain**

Al-Ain is small village in Northern Bekaa (north-east Lebanon) with a population numbering 5000

The region of North Bekaa is considered among the economically most disadvantaged in Lebanon. The region is semi-desertified and State development policies are very weak if not completely absent.

The majority of the population in Northern Bekaa is Muslim Shiite. Muslim Sunnis and Christians form minorities. Politically, the Shiite Hezbollah party constitutes the overwhelming dominant party. The remaining less powerful parties are the Future Movement (Sunni), the Communist Party (non-sectarian), the Syrian National Social party (non-sectarian), Lebanese Forces and Kataeb parties (both Christian).

The population of Ain is composed of Shiites 65%, Sunnis 30% and Catholic Christians 5%. Political and inter-confessional tensions are obvious, and affected by the general situation of the country. Initiatives of human and social development were undertaken by a few local organizations and informal groups, promoting values of diversity, non-sectarian discrimination, tolerance and citizenship.

In Al-Ain like all Northern Bekaa, the population is rural, living on employment in the educational sector, the army and the police, subsistence and small scale farming and small local businesses (shops).

The level of unemployment is high, healthcare services are poor, no universities or higher education institutions exist. Young generations seek to leave the village in search of jobs and better economic opportunities elsewhere.

Partner Organization:

"Al Ain Residents' Gathering for Development and Culture"

The founders of the organization are people from Al-Ain committed to cultural and social development of their community. They are a mixture of teachers, young

university students and owners of small businesses. Their aim is to promote the values of tolerance, dialogue, mutual understanding through culture and art.

Therefore, they organize a lot of debate forums, conferences, film projections, plays, summer camps for children and youth, cultural and art workshops, all aimed at the local community.

Place of the actual performance:

The performance took place at the *Modern Education School*, a primary and secondary school in private trusteeship but free of charge, with subsidies from the Ministry of Education. The school was founded by three entrepreneurs from Al-Ain with the aim of providing a good education level in a non-religious scholastic environment (no religious education, unlike other schools). Since it is a free of charge school, it is accessible to children from all social classes whose families want to provide a good education with no religious education.

Audience:

Approximately 120 persons attended the performance. They were invited by the partner local organization in the village. Many from neighboring villages also attended.

The organizers expected less attendance. Audience members were from all political, social and religious affiliations: pro-Hezbollah Shiites, pro-future movement Sunnites, leftists, cultural non-political groups, and members of youth organizations.

Observations and Evaluation

The performance was particularly interesting due to the diversity of the audience (people from diverse religious sects, diverse political orientations). Almost all the reactions, despite the diversity, admitted the suffering and injustice inflicted to the individuals due to sectarian discrimination. However, the proposed solutions varied between:

- Avoiding suffering and problems by accepting the reality and behaving in conformity with the sectarian rules arguing that the problem is structural in the society and it is destined to be so and individuals can do nothing about it; to
- facing the reality by taking action on an individual level to counter the unjust system.

In the evaluation sheets distributed after the performance all reactions were positive, rating the work between "good" and "excellent", and generally considering it as very useful.

The partner organization considered the play of very high impact because it portrayed a reality, from which many young people in the community suffered: the community is mixed, young people mingle, but love and marriage are subject to a

lot of difficulties, to the extent of being perceived as an impossibility. The performance touched these wounds deeply. The partner's representative highly valued the work and wished to have the performance take place in other neighboring villages. Proposals from representatives of other organizations from Ballbaeck city and the city of Hermel showed high interest of organizing a performance in their communities.

- **Beirut- Badaro Area**

Badaro is a calm middle class neighborhood of East Beirut. It was at the border line of the divided city during the civil war (1975-1990). The area has a certain level of religious mixture. Recently it became a focal point for many civil society organizations to establish their offices.

Performance Site and Partner organization

The performance was shown at the centre of the NGO "Mouvement Social", which is one of the largest development NGOs in Lebanon. "Mouvement Social" is a non-sectarian NGO without party affiliations, founded in 1975 by a charismatic Bishop named Grégoire Haddad who preached tolerance, non-sectarianism, non-violence and human rights. The NGO implements projects all over the country in areas of education, human rights, economic development on community based-level. It is also active in advocacy on national level.

The centre in Badaro is an interactive cultural and social space open for activities and meetings of civil society organizations and informal youth groups sharing the values of the "Mouvement Social".

Audience:

Roughly 40 persons attended the performance, most of which were volunteers of the NGO "Mouvement Social". They are all involved in social work and or active in their social surroundings. Most of them are young people with more or less a certain level of exposure to values of diversity and non-discrimination. They were religiously mixed and diverse.

Observations and Evaluation

Although most of the participants were exposed to the issue of sectarianism in the country and have experienced or have had the chance to discuss or tackle the issue before, they were surprised to discover the extent to which sectarian discrimination can get.

An overall mood of rejection and the feel to change the reality was dominant in the reactions of the audience.

The evaluation sheets reflected a high degree of appreciation and positive impact of the performance on the audience.

- **Al Kfayr**

Al Kfayr is a small rural village situated to the south east of Lebanon in the Hasbaya region. The village counts 2000 residents and is a mixture of Druze 50% and Christians 50%. Both communities live together, but no mixed marriages are possible. A kind of separation system exists between the Druze neighborhood and the Christian neighborhood, nevertheless there is a minimum of interaction and meeting places (social events, deaths, weddings, the public school of the village...). During the Civil war (1975-1990), the village, like all Hasbaya region and unlike other regions of Druze and Christian mixture, did not witness any violent conflicts between both communities, but tensions and feelings of separation, fear and hatred dominated, especially after the massacres between Druze and Christians in the Mountain and Shouf areas in (1982-1983).

The village has limited economic resources, the population lives from agriculture (olive trees and olive oil production), grazing and employment in educational institutions and public administrations (mostly police and army). Like almost all rural areas of the country, Al Kfayr suffers from neglect of the central government and lack of development plans and projects. The population is of a very modest economic level. Work opportunities are very limited and the young generation seeks employment in big cities.

Partner Organization:

"Youth Freedom Club Association"

A cultural association of young people of Al Kfayr. The association's activities are diverse: educational, artistic, sports and social. The funding comes mostly from private donors or local donor organizations.

Place of the actual performance:

The performance took place in the yard of "Al Kfayr's public Hall" which is a public space destined to public activities of the village and open to all groups and individuals. The hall was built with the money donated by a Member of Parliament from the region.

Audience:

Approximately 200 persons attended the show. The audience was particularly interesting since it gathered residents of the village from all ages: children, young and old, women and men. It was also remarkable that that persons from all social categories attended: peasants, university and school teachers, university and school students, housewives, as well as employees of the private and public sector, thus representative of almost all the demographic groups in the village.

It is worth noting that the performance was broadcasted live by a local cable television channel, thus reaching all the houses in the village. The performance

was afterwards broadcasted regularly over a week on the same cable TV channel.

The performance was a particular event for the organizing local association, as it was the first event of re-launching their activities after they were suspended for almost 15 years.

Observations and Evaluation

The fact to show a play about sectarianism in a small rural village of mixed Christian and Druze composition can in itself be seen as a "courageous happening". It is unusual to tackle the theme of sectarianism in general openly and in a public gathering of this nature, especially in relation to the issue of mixed marriages. The theme is rather a taboo and a source of conflict. So the fact by itself is a strong exposure and an advanced step. On the other hand, most of the persons who took the floor in the debate openly expressed their rejection of sectarianism, which is also a common and expected stance, to the extent of even becoming a cliché. So while the outward rejection of sectarianism was not a surprise in itself, its public utterance was of greater significance. When people talked about their non-objection to mixed marriage, even though they might not have been sincere, it turned out to be a very strong public statement in a society that usually rejects individuals who take such step.

The general feeling of the local organizers was that the event was a space of "oxygen", a forum of free expression especially for the new generation. There was a kind of general admiration by the villagers including the older audience members, which was reflected in congratulations for the good work and the hospitality extended to the team after the show.

All of the responses of the audience about the performance in the evaluation sheets ranged from "good" to "excellent". All comments emphasized that sectarianism is bad. However, many comments admitted that the process of getting out of sectarianism and traditions is lengthy and that the change might not take place even in the generation to come.

The partner organization in Al kfayr informed that the echo of the play reached all families and that it was a subject of debate and discussion for over 2 weeks.

- **Sheikh Taba- Akkar**

The district of Akkar which has a majority of Muslim Sunnis, is known for its extreme poverty, and is considered to be one of the poorest areas of Lebanon. Despite the fertile coastal plain and the abundance of water, Akkar is very poor

due to the heavy presence of agricultural feudalism where most lands are owned by a few rich people. Akkar has historically suffered from the neglect of the central government and the lack of social and economical development plans. After the end of the civil war in 1990, the poor Sunni towns and villages of Akkar witnessed the presence of radical Sunni groups which established their networks and recruited poor young people. Sunni families in the area are known to be big in numbers (an average family has 8-10 children). Many young men of Akkar enroll in the Lebanese army and the police, which are the major employing institutions for the residents of the area.

Sheikh Taba is a small village in the northern district of Akkar. The village is mostly Christian Orthodox. The village has no natural or agricultural resources, most residents live from diverse employments in education or companies in neighboring towns.

Partner Organization and performance venue:

The performance took place at the *National Orthodox School*, a private school founded in 1984 and owned by the Orthodox Archbishop of Akkar. It is considered to be one of the best schools in Akkar, providing a good level of education. Its clientele comes from all surrounding villages of Akkar and students are religiously mixed, totaling around 2000.

Audience:

Almost 60 persons attended the performance. Most of them were Christians, mostly consisting of teachers at the schools, pupils and their families.

Observations and Evaluation

It was the only performance out the four performances where the majority of audience was of one religion/confession, namely Christian Orthodox. The debate with the audience was mostly centered around the issue of religiously mixed marriages and its consequences in society and its impact on mixed families. Almost all the persons that participated in the debate admitted the importance and need to promote tolerance, diversity and non-sectarian discrimination. However, opinions diverged when the issue of religiously mixed marriages was discussed. Everybody accepted the fact that mixed marriages can happen and are allowed to happen but not everybody agreed that mixed marriages could be a success and that differences and social pressure would inevitably lead to failure. Nevertheless, all the examples of known cases of mixed marriage in Akkar, which were numerous, turned out to be very successful and that families and couples were living in harmony.

Although most audience members were persons exposed to difference, and did mingle with the Sunnis of the area and accept the fact, the debate in public by itself was new to them, which made it very exciting and sometimes very energetic.

What was particular is that many of those who participated in the debate reflected their personal experiences and or referred to concrete examples in their social surroundings.

2.4. Impact on the participants:

Assala: Student in social assistance at Lebanese University. She was selected by interview through the development NGO "Mouvement Social" where she volunteers. She is from Northern Bekaa (East-North of Lebanon). For her as someone who works a lot with disadvantaged children, the experience opened her eyes to the great potentials of this kind of work in education with marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

Bassam: Student in acting and theatre at the Lebanese University. He was selected in the interview process. He is from Shouf region (Center). Being a student in theatre, the method was new to him and added a substantial experience to his knowledge.

Carla: Social worker. She works with the NGO Caritas Lebanon in the migrant workers program. She cooperated with *A Step Away* previously. She is from Zouk (center).

The project was the first opportunity for her to become friends with persons from different religions. She became convinced about the importance of religiously mixed marriages.

Chafic: High School Student. He is deaf and mute. Socially active with diverse social and cultural NGOs. He has a lot of acting skills and experience. He participated previously in *A Step Away's* activities. He is from South Beirut.

He discovered that he can act in a talking play despite his disability. The experience made him discover acting skills in him that he previously ignored. The regional performances were of great exposure to him because they were of interactive nature. The project asserted him that dealing positively with differences and living together with our differences are possible.

Darine: Social worker. She works with youth in difficulty in Northern Lebanon. She was recruited upon interview through "Safadi Foundation" a philanthropic organization based in North Lebanon. She is from Tripoli (North Lebanon).

That was the first time she met with people from the Druze confession. She discovered her capacity to work and deal with persons from different religious and social backgrounds.

Farah: Student of Arabic literature at the "Lebanese University". She is socially active and cooperates with "A Step Away". She is from Saida (South Lebanon).

This was her second experience of working in a confessionally diverse group. It was for her an intense experience of interaction and dialogue in a diverse context. The Forum theatre was a revelation for her as a powerful means of expression. She discovered skills of acting in her.

Georgette: High School Student. She was recommended by her school, *National Orthodox School-Akkar* which regularly cooperates with *A Step Away*. She is from Bayno- Akkar (North Lebanon).

The workshop made her discover that she is sectarian and that she discriminates and that she was hiding behind non-sectarianism.

She learned to accept difference and deal positively with it and acquired the means to do so. Acting and theatre was a powerful tool for her to discover herself and her attitudes and behavior. The project also helped her see sectarianism around her, at school, in her village and social surrounding. She also discovered that there is something that can be done to face sectarianism.

The experience helped her overcome her shy side and express herself better. She also discovered the importance and means of good and successful team work. She also gained confidence in the possibility of making a difference in the sectarian reality in Lebanon especially through the performances and the interaction with the audiences.

Jimmy: student in education at the Lebanese University. She was recruited by interview. She is from Becharre (North Lebanon).

The project was her first experience with working with persons from different confessions. She discovered her ability in acting and the work helped her overcome her timidity. She discovered how powerful this kind of theatre is to deal with social issues.

Juliette: student in Arabic Literature at the Lebanese University. Recruited through the NGO "YMCA" where she volunteers in youth work. She is from Ablah, Bekaa (east-center of Lebanon).

She discovered her ability in dealing with differences. She learned to put aside prejudices and get to know people further before judging them. Acting and interacting with audiences from different social environments was a great exposure to her.

Khaldoun: High school Student. Recruited through the interview process. He is from Hasbaya (South-East of Lebanon).

The project revealed to him how much sectarianism deeply affects the society and he discovered that he was not alone in refusing discrimination and being prone to it and rejecting it. He gained more self-confidence in expressing his anti-sectarian views.

Nathalie: Social Worker with the NGO "Mouvement Social". Has previously collaborated with "A Step Away". She is from Tripoli (North Lebanon).

It was her first exposure to people from the Druze sect as well as persons from the Shiite sect. The project made her gain a better understanding of stereotyping in society. She also learned to accept differences and deal with it positively. She discovered through the workshop that she has discriminatory behaviors and that she generally avoids dealing with people with different opinions. She felt freed from fearing the difference and learned to express freely her thoughts.

Bteich, R., Reich. H. 2009: "Enacting Places of Change. Interactive Theatre as an instrument for postwar peacebuilding in Lebanon" in: <http://www.sabisa.de>

Nour: Student in social assistance at "Lebanese University". She was selected upon interview through the development NGO "Mouvement Social" where she volunteers. She is from South Lebanon. The use of theatre as means of interaction on a sensitive subject was enriching and challenging for her. She is someone who always interacted with persons of diverse religions with some being close friends to her.

Pierre: High School Student. Selected upon interview through his school in Beirut. He is from Bhamdoun. (mountains of central Lebanon). He admitted it was a useful and unique experience for him. The project was his first in-depth interaction with persons from different religion.

Rami: student of Law at "Lebanese University". Has previously participated in "A Step Away's" activities. He is from Hasbaya (South-East of Lebanon). He discovered his ability to work and deal with people from different religions. The work made him discover and understand the negative impact of sectarianism on people's life and the society. He also discovered his acting capabilities.

3. Lessons learned for the method of Forum Theatre for conflict Transformation

"The most important criteria for action research is the awareness of the choices made."
BRADBURY and REASON²

3.1. First Choice: The "traditional" method of Forum Theatre

The main method of the action and research project was Forum Theatre, a participatory interactive method used very differently all over the world. This method constitutes a tool that fosters change and offers insights about social structures in a participatory, holistic manner and provides a space for interactive group discussions. However, it had to be modified in certain ways to face the challenges brought about by the specific aim to contribute to the process of post-war peace building. To explain the necessary modifications, a short outline of the "traditional" use is necessary. With the term: "traditional" method of Forum Theatre we refer to a generalised type of process manifested in various workshops from trainers of the Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed (CTO) and exemplified in AUGUSTO BOALS canonical handbook: "Games for Actors and Non-Actors" (2002 first edition). Boal developed a systematisation of the theatrical process, offering a step-by-step plan starting from the identification of the storyline, group constitution, script writing to the performance of its presentation and involvement of the audience in what is called the forum.

² Bradbury, H., Reason, P. 2001: Handbook of Action Research, London, p.12

Four main characteristics of the traditional method of Forum Theatre can be identified:

- Firstly, it is theatre with lay persons, however working on the assumption that lay persons are as authentic as professional actors.
- Secondly, this authenticity is achieved by enacting truly experienced stories narrated by participants, making them into protagonists of their own lives. They are identified by discovering stories of the participants, where they have been feeling some kind of oppression. In this situation their desire could not be expressed, identified, they did not know how to react and how to create a change. The underlying assumption is that change will never be brought about by the so-called "oppressor"³ but needs to be driven by the oppressed (protagonists).
- Thirdly, the developed theatrical piece is presented in a forum, i.e. the story is depicted up to a certain point of crisis, after which the audience intervenes and offers different scenarios and ways of transforming the crisis. Every intervention is debated upon and discussed in the forum and this allows for a personal story to exhibit larger socio-political dimensions. A central aim of Forum Theatre is to stimulate, enrich and prepare both actors as well as spectators, to find alternatives and modes of action in real life. It is this characteristic that gave rise to the term "spect-actor" coined by Boal to represent the spectator as an active element in dramaturgical terms. The spectator capable of enacting a liberating moment during a forum session is empowered with the desire to act this moment out in reality, and not only within the fictive reality of the stage (Boal 1989: 68f).
- Fourthly, the discussion is facilitated by an intermediary, the so-called "joker". In Forum Theatre, the joker occupies a space in-between the audience and the actors, animating the audience to move from being spectators to become actors. The joker is not a director of a play, but a figure that encourages the questioning of and debate on people's perceptions and interpretations of the crisis on the stage, as well as possibilities of change. By means of the forum discussion, the presentation develops from an individual case (the scene) to a situation of general relevance to the entire community (social reality).

The whole process can roughly be divided into two phases: a workshop phase, where the script is developed and enacted and the phase of its presentation to a wider audience.

³ a term used in the Brazilian context, which, however, I prefer to substitute with "antagonist".

While the method has proven its relevance in very different cultural settings to create an awareness of unjust situations, empowering those perceiving themselves as oppressed and creating a space for developing visions and actions for change, it has yet to prove its capacities as a tool in post-war peace building.

Forum Theatre is "elicitive"⁴ in methodology. The guiding principle is to work towards empowerment and awareness raising, departing from the given context, knowledge and experience of the participants. The methods were strongly influenced by the concepts and pedagogical insights of Paolo Freire.⁵ Here we find a striking correlation to the claims made by Jean Paul Lederach in his work on conflict transformation training (Lederach 1995b). The elicitive approach can claim some universal validity, while also recognizing differences in socio-cultural settings and contexts. Being elicitive and participatory are necessary conditions in order for the method to be meaningfully incorporated into a peace building project. However, emphasis on participation in a process alone is not a guarantee for its validity in the complex process of peace building. Without extreme care, theatre projects that dig up narratives, experiences and remembrances can blame, enact revenge, and foster animosity as much as they can develop dialogue or respect (Thompson 2004)⁶.

The aim of the project was to irritate, to create change, but not to destabilize the social or emotional lives of the participants or the audience. It sought to work with full respect for the emotional and physical integrity of the persons involved. Destabilization and provocation had to be avoided. Thus the traditional Forum theatre method was chosen as an orientation. However, it was altered in fundamental ways to serve the aim of relationship building and reaching out into the community in a post war context in a constructive way.

3.2. Second Choice: Modifications of the Forum Theatre method in Lebanon

The hypothesis guiding the proposed action and research project was that the specific methods applied by Forum Theatre are suitable when used in a modified form (as outlined in the project proposal June 2007). The objective was to test and

⁴ Here we are referring to the "elicitive approach" (from: "to elicit") of Jean Paul Lederach, which understands training as a process that emerges from already-existing, local knowledge about managing conflict, taking the people in the setting as key resources and not as recipients. Lederach, J.P. 1995b: *Preparing For Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, New York.

⁵ Paolo Freire is the founder of what has come to be known as liberation pedagogy. See Freire 1972 (1994).

⁶Thompson, J. 2004: *Digging Up Stories: An Archaeology of Theatre in War*, in: TDR: The Drama Review, Volume 48, Number 3 (T 183), Fall 2004, pp. 150-164

develop a modified Forum Theatre method which can be universally applied in after war peace building processes. Thereby we did not do so in a purely theoretical manner. Rather, we wanted to prove its meaningfulness by way of its practical implementation in the concrete context of present day Lebanon. In DOING, we wanted to expand the value of Forum Theatre as an instrument for the toolbox of conflict transformation practitioners, enabling relationship building in divided societies and offering a dialogical outreach into the community. Therefore it had to prove its validity in the specific context of post war Lebanon.

Some of the modifications could be identified as necessary right from the beginning and could thus be planned in advanced. Some, however, did not prove their meaningfulness, and had to be altered during the process. Yet others could only be identified retrospectively, stemming from the experience in conducting the workshop and the performances in those particular settings.

Corresponding to the preparatory and performance phases of the project, I would like to outline the necessary modifications to the method, which have proven their validity during the practical encounter.

3.2.1. Approved modifications of the Workshop Phase

- **Conscious and Careful Selection of Participants**

Generally not much emphasis is given in Forum theatre projects to a selection of appropriate participants prior to the commencement of the project. Openness for anyone who wants to join, is seen as a positive attribute of a successful Forum theatre project. In our project, on the contrary, our hypothesis was that the selection of participants must be done with great care. In retrospect, this proved to be true. It constituted an important issue, which cannot be done based on formal criteria alone, but moreover demands a good knowledge of "who is who" within the conflict setting.

The implementing organisation "A Step Away" is locally well rooted with good ties into different sections of the Lebanese society. Their members have been working in the field of relationship-building between and across the various confessions and political associations.

This meant that they not only followed formal criteria, like the same number of participants from each of the various factions (e.g. "Muslims" and "Christians"), for this statistical approach would not do justice to the complexity of group alliances in the conflict setting. Although a balanced number of members of Sunni, Shia, Druze, Christian Orthodox and Maronites was sought, this was not the only criteria for selection. Within each of the groups so much difference does exist, that a much more profound knowledge about the particular person, her attitudes, experiences and

socio-economical background was required. Other criteria, e.g. "openness or caginess towards the other", "experience with the other", and the governing attitudes of her milieu had to be taken into consideration within the selection process. In doing so, one was facing a dilemma: on the one side the aspiration to reach out into the community, work with unknown people, while on the other side, detailed knowledge about the participant was needed to balance the group process and to guarantee some kind of contact afterwards for sustainability of the work.

That being said, the specific participant selection criteria identified by "A Step Away" were suitable to the specific place and time of the project implementation, given an environment of strong political tensions between two major groups. However, the task of developing the appropriate criteria for the selection of participants, interviewing relevant persons, consulting with partners and other institutions, and reaching out in various forms into the community to gain knowledge about possible participants does need space and time to be conducted thoroughly. This has to be acknowledged within any Forum theatre project working in the realm of peace building. The selection process has to be seen as an integral part of the whole project, and not only as a necessary precondition that may be fulfilled in an arbitrary manner. As such it has to be given adequate attention in the planning and in the funding of a Forum theatre project as an instrument for peace building.

- **Content of the Workshop: choice of exercises and of the storyline**
- Combination with other training modules

The core of the action and research project consisted of one workshop using Forum Theatre as its main component, targeting participants from different regions of the country and with different confessional and political backgrounds. Despite their sectarian and political differences, the youth share a common position, by way of growing up in the same social-political system and sharing a cultural codex. Different to the traditional form of Forum theatre, much emphasis was given to the work of relationship building WITHIN the group. While the method of Forum theatre does offer a lot of practical tools to create group cohesion, it is not prepared to work with fundamental differences within the group. Rather the method assumes homogeneity in terms of socio-political strata (e.g. a forum theatre group consisting of domestic servants, illegal migrants etc., all encountering similar problems). It does not offer extra space specifically for dealing with differences within the group. Thus, as an instrument for relationship building, we combined it with other exercises derived from anti bias and anti- discrimination work (such as exercises on status) as well as from conflict management trainings (such as exercises on perspectives and communication). This proved to be useful for processing the group developments. The various methods shed a different light on the social set-up of the workshop participant group and helped to reflect on the existing social conflicts. Here the

process profited from the knowledge and experience the members of *A Step Away* have in dealing with aspects of stereotyping and prejudices, through their training experience in multi-confessional groups.⁷

In addition to those exercises, other exercises of theatre training were inserted in the project format. Some of them consisted of physical workouts, others exercises for improvisation and presentation. The physical workouts and theatre-based trainings were facilitated in such a way that everybody was challenged to transgress his/her perceived limits and inner cowardice. Besides the training for the aesthetic production of the play, they served to bring the group together and create a common experience of challenge, exhaustion and success. On the other hand, they strengthened the self awareness and self esteem of each individual in a profound way (see survey of participants).

- Emphasis on shared casual time

In addition to the variety of training modules, processing the various exercises was given a lot of time and space. Further, great attention was given to the time between the exercises, the so-called breaks. Usually the group sat together to have lunch and dinner, which was specially prepared for the group within the kitchen of the training place. Also the tea and coffee break was enriched with sweets, cookies and dried fruits. Time was given to the participants to chat and share, mobile numbers exchanged and questions raised and discussed in a friendly surrounding. In the evening other cultural activities were organised. Thus, besides the time spent together during the day, the group went out to witness other ongoing cultural activities in Beirut centre.

- Context-sensitive choice of the Workshop Site

In the classical form of Forum theatre not much thought is given to the workshop location. In this case, the workshop set-up was based on the format of the summer camps aiming at relationship building, following the established practice of *A Step Away* for several years. Due to the war in Summer 2007 this format could not be implemented. However, it was done in a similar spirit, over four weekends in February and March 2007.

- Selection and Staging of the Story for the Performance

One major difference of the workshop content can be detected in the modus vivendi of the development of the script of the story. This refers to the choice of the story on

⁷ See the organization's website: www.astepaway.org for a portrayal of the summer camp and other activities.

the one hand, and to its staging on the other. In the traditional Forum theatre practice, the story is chosen in a more or less linear process starting by the division of the group into pairs, where each one should tell the other one story where he or she has experienced some oppression, ending with two stories, to whom the greatest number of participants can relate to in one form or the other. This time stories were chosen in a similar process and staged by the participants. However, the process of choosing a story did not stop with this first selection procedure. On the contrary, the floor to discover more and other stories was opened up! Only the general topic, the phenomena of sectarianism was extracted and further work restricted to this topic. The participants were given as take-home assignments the task to collect more stories about small encounters and events within their daily lives where they experienced sectarianisms. This opening up was a necessary step to move away from stereotyped narrations towards the exploration of real experiences. Rather than selecting one story for enactment, which is the usual Forum Theatre process, three stories were taken and artistically interwoven in the process of staging.

This can be interpreted as an aesthetic choice. However, our evaluative hypothesis is that it stands for a deep respect towards the legacy of war, which manifests itself in an atmosphere of suspicion and danger. The disclosure of one personal experience in the public sphere, which the staging of one personal story would be, might do more harm than good, in terms of helping to generate change, if it is not done with great awareness about the danger it might cause for the integrity of the participant whose story is chosen. Asking for too many details can all too easily be perceived as an aggression against that person, as it could fall into the trap of laying something bare, which is not yet to be displayed. Tenderness is required, particularly in times of crises and instability, where the integrity of a person is easily hurt. In situations of conflict, stories are not disembodied discourses adopted or dismissed with ease. In the format of Forum theatre a story is presented, while at the same time the question is raised as to how the protagonist could have acted differently to generate a more preferable outcome. This can be seen as a personal critique or a disregard of the experience on which the story is based. In dismissing a story you are in danger of attacking the integrity of the teller, as the stories are deeply interwoven in the practices of the day-to-day lives of the people helping to explain the constraints, fears and pains and managing them. While this is true for any context, in times of social instability complete narratives are nurtured and provide comfort in unpredictable, unstable situations.

Thus it was necessary to first of all guarantee the emotional safety of each of the participants not only during the workshop phase, but also on stage. During the workshop phase this was done, through the extra modules of reflection, casual time spent together and intensive contact amongst the participants. During the performance, however, safety was guaranteed in the way the story was presented and staged. On the one hand there was no actor with an outstanding leading part. This is another difference to the standard format of Forum theatre, which highlights

the viewpoint of the figure identified as the protagonist. Rather, several short sequences were presented with 8 out of 14 more or less comparably important roles. On the other hand, emphasis was given to everybody's involvement in performing. During most of the time, the whole group was on stage performing the story together. This created a strong awareness of the group and melted them together.

Another aspect which informed the selection and staging of the story lies within the respect towards the imagined audience. Particularly in this context, the question of what can be presented in what manner, so that the performance does not intensify sectarian feelings, but rather allows them to be questioned, was crucial for the whole process.

The enactment of a story through its telling can create moments of discomfort, yet even be perceived as an insult to some people, as it might touch very sensitive issues of the listeners. Thus, respect and tenderness is not valid in relation to the participants of the workshop alone, but also towards the audience. It did not share the whole group process, but was requested to engage with the question of sectarianism in those times of crisis. Irritations are often the initiators of change. However, there is a fine line between irritation and provocation not to be transgressed. They have to be embedded in a process, which does not undermine the feeling of trust and security of the audience, so that they annoy but not attack and provoke. Offering different stories, which do not display the details but rather glimpses of each, demanded from the audience to complete them, using their own knowledge and experiences of events similar to the presented stories. The dramaturgical strategy of employing multiple stories did allow the audience a choice of which aspect of sectarianism they considered to be most relevant or calling for their engagement.

At the same time the presentation of several stories interwoven into one large dramaturgical setting implied that each true story shared by an individual in the group was set into a wider context. This established the fact that an experience of oppression had a larger, societal dimension to it. This served to prevent one story to be charged with high emotions, which might have polarized the audience. Rather, it generated an idea of the omnipresence of the very issue of sectarianism, and displayed a commonality between all the people involved, audience and actors alike: the problems generated by sectarianism.

- Challenge of dualistic portrayal

Traditional Forum theatre tends to portray conflicts in a presentation of a conflict where the antagonist called the "oppressor" is opposed to the protagonist, the

"oppressed".⁸ The binary perception underlying this portrayal had to be challenged (Thompson 2005) by bringing to the forefront the diverse personae of the characters, to enable empathy. The choice of several interconnected stories did justice to this simplification of complicated social conflicts. Further, the antagonists, were portrayed in such a way that the social pressure that led them to behave in certain ways also become clear. (e.g. rather than depicting the land lord as unjust per se, it was shown that she was in fact pressurised by her neighbour; the reactions of the girls in the scenes were shown in the light of the social pressure they faced from their friends, or by the fear of what their friends would say if they would state their interest in guys from another confession.)

3.2.2. Approved modification related to the Performance

The 12-day workshop was followed by four performances, spread over a period of three weeks. The challenge for the inter-confessional group was to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the audience using the frame of one story of conflict and crisis, allowing the spectators to become actors. The dialogical aspect is one of the great advantages of the medium, compared to the one-way dissemination of other performing arts.

- Selected sites for performances

As opposed to traditional Forum theatre, the performance sites were specifically chosen with certain criteria in mind. As the spectators have not participated in the whole group process, the performance could not simply be presented in front of any random audience.

To reduce the risk of the creation of an event, which is contra-productive for the reconciliatory process, the performances were presented to an invited audience consisting of youth from different regions, who have been working with partner organizations of *A Step Away*. The interactive structure of the performance and the inter-confessional composition of the group doing the presentation made such considerations imperative.

- Using common cultural capital

The performance made use of shared cultural products such as music and dance. However, the criteria for choosing these are not only its performative value or its advantages as a way of integrating people's talents. The songs, dances or musical pieces had to be selected and used in the light of the attitudes of group members

⁸ Augusto Boal himself has since developed his approach in terms of a more sophisticated and self-reflexive portrayal of antagonist and protagonist (see for e.g. Boal 1995).

towards them, since cultural products play an important role in the signification, legitimization and domination of certain social practices.

3.3. *Third Choice: Evaluation the workshop and performances as learning sites*

The Forum theatre method had to be altered substantially to become a meaningful tool. However, done in this way it did have an impact in an unexpected way.

- **Evaluation**

Some results were traced in the evaluation after each performance by the audience. The audience was asked to answer some questions in written form after each performance. However, those answers were all very positive, which made us question the appropriateness of this method. Was it that only those answered who were touched by the performance? Was this form not appropriate to get constructive critique? However, it became obvious that this form is not really discovering contradiction or allowing for the articulation of critique.

The feedback and evaluation rounds we did after each week end, as well as after the performances were more important for our planning process, concerning the group process. However, after the whole project each of the participants gave us their feedback which made visible some of the results

The other written evaluation was done after the whole process by the participants. This did bring to forefront inner developments from the participants (see above). During the process, the participant became aware of how omnipresent sectarianism is within their daily lives. This was not said, but realised by re-acting daily situations.

The whole impact, however, on the participants and the audience can not be systematically grasps. As the outcome of the paper sheets have shown, other forms of feedback, like the informal meetings afterwards, informal personal talks to people etc. did reveal much more about the impact, than the evaluation sheet. Moreover, we do challenge the statement, that the value of a project has to be proven by conducting written surveys in which the impact is measured high.

In contrast, we do believe that the process as such reveals its meaningfulness, if it is seen as a learning site for both: the participants as well as the activists.

- **Learning site: Play and Performance**

Yet not only the evaluations brought things to the forefront, but also the performance itself can be seen as a tool, which clarified the underlying issues of conflict. Seen as a tool for conflict mapping it gave depth to an easily stated problem: the problem of sectarianism. While it is more or less easy to find a consensus in stating that sectarianism is a serious problem for a sustainable peace, conferences on this issue do not allow or assist in detecting the personal responsibility for the continuation and materialisation of the mechanisms of sectarianism.

The performance showed some characteristics of sectarianism, which are not obviously related to this phenomenon.

1. It helped to realize that sectarianism is omnipresent in daily life, and manifests itself in a subtle way through daily social interactions. While this may sound like a very simple statement, the experienced realization for the participants was profound.
2. There exists a social norm, which condemns sectarianism. However, as much as this is verbally reiterated in discussions, official statements, or conversations, this does not hold validity for the actual guidance of action. Although not directly verbalised, the individual feels compelled to orient his/her actions in line with confessional thinking for social security reasons. It is seen as the REALITY, albeit unfortunate and regrettable, but as "bigger than us" (2nd spect-actor in Kfair).
3. The media were depicted as institutions that fuel and manifest confessional identities. They serve to in fact sharpen the sectarian divide, and this showed the media as a tool incapable of being a bridge building outreach. Because most major media institutions have political/sectarian affiliations on the one hand and are profit-oriented on the other, they don't want to disturb the socio-political status quo.
4. The interactive performance allowed to see and accept that sectarianism is situated *within* oneself. This allowed for a heightened consciousness of how sectarianism guides daily actions, even if the confessional orientation is rejected on the outside. While this statement again appears to be trivial, the experience of it had a profound effect.

Furthermore, some strategies to encounter the social pressure behind confessional behaviour and thinking could be identified:

1. The discrimination was encountered by using the *strategy of irony* (2nd intervention in Ain) and of ignoring discriminatory remarks or gestures outright

Bteich, R., Reich. H. 2009: "Enacting Places of Change. Interactive Theatre as an instrument for postwar peacebuilding in Lebanon" in: <http://www.sabisa.de>

- (5th intervention Beirut). The latter in fact made use of the unwritten law that sectarianism should not be stated or practiced directly.
2. The strategy of *verbalisation* of the irritation and sadness of the interaction upon sectarian considerations (2nd intervention Kfair) was used.
 3. The problem was tackled at first within the *personal relationship* (4th intervention in Ain; 2nd intervention in Beirut, 1st intervention in Kfair). This allowed for a profound discussion about the influence of the social milieu (performance Ain, performance Beirut, performance Kfair).
 4. The rigidity of the structures was experienced in such a way that the impossibility of altering the structures (3rd and 4th intervention in Beirut) and the necessity to *create a "third space"* (4th intervention Beirut) was raised.

4. Conclusion

The action and research has proven that Forum theatre cannot be used in peace building work, if implemented in its traditional way. It is much too rigid, and not flexible enough for the needs, fears and vulnerabilities of the participants and the audience within times of crises. However, if it is seen as a point of departure for a group process, which is then altered in accordance with the needs of the participants and combined with knowledge and respect towards the needs of the audience, it can be a fruitful tool for relationship building.

Further, the action and research project led to the hypothesis that the structure of a theatre performance is particularly useful for the initiation of peaceful change in war-torn societies. This is due to the specific space that emerges from theatre, and theatrical training.

In terms of the workshop, the physical exercises allow for the experience of personal integrity. The body is the place to start with. Strengthening the awareness of the body in relation to behaviour and social interaction does allow a reflection process to take place, which begins from a deep respect of one's own self. Guaranteeing a safe place surrounding the body is the smallest unit to start with generating a feeling of safety and security. At the same time, the method of Forum Theatre is based on stressing the principle of participation. This includes participating with one's physical body in various image exercises as well as raising one's voice to speak up loud in front of a group and audience. Moreover, it stresses the importance of sharing experiences with others and demands the participation of the group members in the identification of the storyline. While participation cannot be forced on everybody within the group, everybody has to make one choice: "do I share my story or not?"

The same is true for the performance, where the audience has to decide whether to

raise one's voice and show one's idea on stage or not. This creates an atmosphere of engagement and involvement, fostering sharing and participation. The performative interaction creates a specific place of discussion. The Forum separates an area, the stage from the rest, the audience space. This division is more than only separating two areas, as it creates a space, where essentially different rules are valid. The stage is a place "out of law", statements, actions and interactions are subject to completely different social sanctions than the actions outside. War-torn societies carry the legacy of extreme pain, injustice and hurt. Due to the experiences of war, the fear of being personally attacked and humiliated is high. Protecting one's personal dignity is always of enormous importance. The space created by theatre, enables a distinction between the experience observed or acted on stage as opposed to the experience of daily encounters. This again allows the persons involved to take "a step away" from the presented story and reflect upon it without the immediate need for defence.

The added value of Forum Theatre in the framework of conflict transformation training can be summarized with the following arguments:

- It carries the potential to carve out and shape "places of envisioned change", which are shared by the participants of the workshop, and trains the participants in solving conflicts non-violently. It does so by using methods not purely depending on language, but integrating images, sounds, gestures and body movements. In doing this it creates an awareness about patterns of behaviour in daily lives, which lead to unwanted results, but are followed unconsciously. In putting undesired experiences on the stage, it offers the opportunity to take a step back and reflect upon habitual practices with undesired results.
- The possibility of change might be experienced through audience interventions in the forum. The forum provides a space to try out different forms of behaviour, without the fear of sanctions. At the same time it allows participants to distance themselves from the presented stories, indicated in the double-bind of the English term "to act", which carries the tension between "doing" as well as "pretending to do".
- It has the capacity of reaching out to a wider audience in a dialogical way. It does not stop at the interpersonal level of change, but it has the potential to influence the structural level.⁹ Certainly, this must be undertaken with great caution in a post-war setting, demanding some modifications of the traditional

⁹ Augusto Boal has proven that theatre can reach out onto a structural level through his experiments with legislative theatre, see Boal 1998.

Bteich, R., Reich. H. 2009: "Enacting Places of Change. Interactive Theatre as an instrument for postwar peacebuilding in Lebanon" in: <http://www.sabisa.de>
method. The possibility of effective outreach is in my view a particular additional value to other conflict management training modules. Structural change and relationship building can be seen as central features characterizing projects of conflict transformation (Ropers 2000b; Reich 2005).

JUDITH SQUIRE has mentioned the need within a participatory social-political structure to have a public sphere, in which politics are not discussed in an essential way (Squires 1994¹⁰). She differentiates between an ontic approach on the one hand, where the person appearing in the public sphere represents himself, or his community. On the other hand, there is a public forum, where the person appearing in public perceives himself as representing something, a political programme, a party or idea. The crucial aspect is the need for a common public space, in which the person who raises his voice does not represent himself. Theatre allows this space to be created. This is given by the SPACE constructed through the a priori agreement between audience and actors. This does not change by the fact of interaction between actors and spectators or spectators becoming actors. Rather, the space enables social actions to be observed and heightened awareness of how they take shape, while at the same providing protection to everybody involved in the process, not allowing the ontic to be at stake.

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