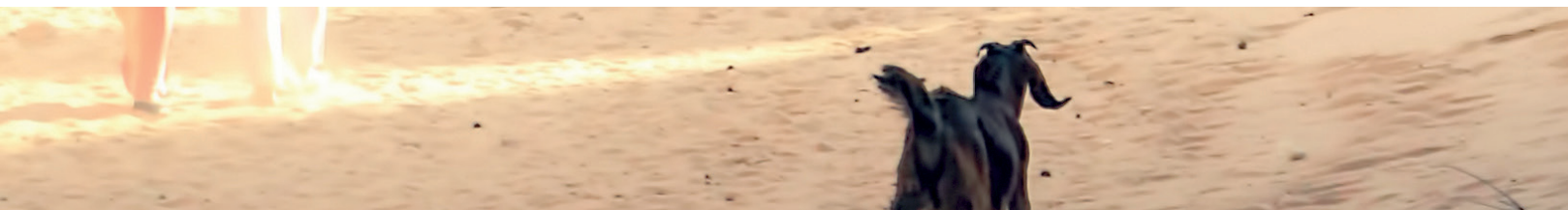




Spirals of Storytelling in Jordan

Dialogue, Peacebuilding and Performance



"This region is facing very difficult times. Hope and despair can be very close to each other, but they can also be very far apart. The creative arts and the humanities play a crucial role in innovation for the development of a society. With mind and heart we have to step forward and shape the future."

Prince Hassan Bin Talal
Public Lecture at the University of Jordan
Amman
30th September 2015





The Story

In August 2015, a group of students spent eight days in a storytelling workshop. Ten were from the University of Hamburg and ten from the University of Jordan. The method used was a participatory storytelling, pioneered by Augusto Boal¹ and adapted by Fadi Skeiker. Instead of a story having fixed form and then being performed, the storyline is developed in an interactive and ongoing process. The emphasis is on the growth of the story through its performance.

Somatic learning

Already in the early stages, when names were introduced, this became an opportunity to try out their sound and movement. The facilitator repeatedly reminded: "These are your names, these are your stories: be loud, be visible, express your feelings!" Encouraged to make bigger and better movements, their bodies act as thinking tools. The development of a story helps to organise ideas, and to test and refine these in the responses of others. It also is an opportunity to get into the stories of others, and to participate in the development of their thinking too. The shift from personal story to shared story is an important part of the exercise, in which the roles of performer and audience are constantly juxtaposed.

Autobiography inevitably ties in the political and the societal. On the first evening, there was a brief switch back to a typical university seminar format, while Johan Galtung's² definitions of

violence – direct, structural and cultural – were being introduced. Discussion followed in two groups: the Jordanian and the German. The intriguing thing about this exercise was that neither of the groups represented any kind of cultural or ethnic homogeneity. In the German group there were Turkish-Germans, Afghan-Germans, and a few German-Germans. The Jordanians were Syrian-Jordanians, Palestinian-Jordanians, and Jordanian-Jordanians. Personal experiences of multiple identification were exchanged, and found their way into gradually emerging fictional narratives. The analysis of their societies in relation to global issues fed into names, scenes, and ironical punch lines. Within a few days the stories had begun to take shape within three groups of participants. Each of the three drew on the life experiences of participants. At the same time, the interactions generated new stories. These came to have titles: Nalan's Show, Journey to Jerdany, and Difficulties Everywhere.

The shift, from the autobiographical to a plot for group performance, is usually a shift towards imagination and play. It is a chance to be someone else who is very different and to explore new ways of being oneself. Throughout such intense processes there are moments of courage as people step out beyond their own shadows. An emphasis introduced by co-facilitator Deema Dabis was the value of silence. This was very important in several ways. The silent morning walks in the desert were a time to experience its power and mystery. The periods of silence at regular intervals offered breathing space, and served as a moment for reorganising one's thinking.

1 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. Fadi Skeiker, "Performing Liminal Citizenship: Using Applied Theatre Techniques to Civically Engage International Students", *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 2:2, 2011, pp. 12 - 19.

2 Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 27: 3. (Aug., 1990), pp. 291 - 305.

Travelling stages

The stage becomes a safe place to talk about important issues. Storytelling is about performance and audience interaction. While they learn articulation, timing, positioning and movement, a lot of thinking and communication takes place. They practice, over and over again: how to move, how to act and how to be a convincing storyteller. In this somatic learning a story is developed during its telling! And its narrator is interchangeably actor, director and audience. The story is, in the end, communal in production and presentation. This generates feelings of commitment, moments of creativity, and the shared pride of achievement. Having worked hard, having done crazy things together, having witnessed each other's growth, all contribute to a sense of camaraderie.

When the aims and procedures were being introduced at the beginning of the workshop, the idea of 'arts-based learning' was explained. As a supplement to discursive ways of thinking and interacting, the creative arts offer a place where art becomes a way of researching the world and oneself. The aim of the workshop was to produce and perform stories, but it was made clear from the start that the process was important. Held in tension with this was the insistence on producing at one's artistic best. Precisely because there is a passionate emphasis on artistic quality, the collateral learning, personal and collective, takes on a special quality. Art can be considered as research, but it must still be art and not be superficial.

In participatory storytelling, rehearsal is there from the beginning and serves to introduce new ideas. As a scene is enacted, the experience is used to create alternatives. The distinction between performers and audiences is fluid. Although the goal of performing for an audience in Amman served as a motivational goal, its coffee shop venue reinforced the message that each of the venues on the way was important. Each rehearsal was treated as a performance in its own right. Venues shifted from the Amman Desert Camp, to the historic city of Petra, and finally to Amman, where the stories continued to be played out in coffee shops, at the university, and on the street.

The venue for the final meeting was an auditorium at the University of Jordan. This was an occasion for reflection. Twenty process photos had been printed out in A4-format. Photo-elicitation is a research method, which uses photographs both as a reminder of past experience and as a means of distancing and interpretation. Yellow paper and pairs of scissors were made available to produce thinking bubbles, which could be glued on. Blue paper was reserved for more general interpretations of the pictures. Even when deliberately humorous, the contributions were the result of critical analysis.

The process of the workshop was in three distinct stages, none of which was ever finally completed: research, performance, and reflection. The metaphor of a spiral best expresses how the three aspects were repeated and expanded, over and over again.





"Stories have always been an integral part of human existence. The way they are told can either greatly confine us or open us up to new perspectives and dimensions of reality. Sharing and telling our individual stories and life experiences can be a way to expand the collective and individual narrative, to make public conversations that need to be had and issues that need to be reexamined. Underlying all this is the reality of how deeply interconnected we all are. It is in this diversity and authenticity of story telling that we learn to empathize and feel with each other."

Deema Dabis







"The name story of each participant lays the ground to introduce the 'self' with all of its social/cultural/ and religious complexities while leaving a margin to introduce the personal characteristics of each participant. Participatory storytelling is used to allow participants to both share their collective stories as a group and listen to other participants' stories. Collective stories are used to deepen the understanding of 'us' as a group and getting to know the 'other' as a group."

Fadi Skeiker







“Reflection is a deliberate act of stepping back in order to observe ourselves better. By becoming researchers of our own experience, we see ourselves differently and practice new ways of interpreting our situation. Learning occurs when we reflect on experience.”

Gordon Mitchell





"Der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Wortes Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt."

"A human being only plays when in the full meaning of the word s/he is a human, and s/he is only completely human when playing."

Friedrich Schiller, 1759 – 1805







Nalan's Show

Nalan: Hello everybody! Merhaba ve hoşgeldiniz!
Nasılsınız? Let me introduce to you my talk
show 'Talk with Nalan' and my topic today
is 'Thaqafta al Eyb' - 'Cultural Shame'.

(applause)

So now, let's start with my first guest, he is
from Oxford University, Professor Mr. Pablo
Picasso!

(applause)

What do you want to tell us?

Professor Pablo:

Buenos días! Bueno, en primer lugar, muchas
gracias por la invitación.

Nalan: Okay, aha!

Professor Pablo:

Thank you for having me here tonight.

Nalan: You are welcome, honey.

Professor Pablo:

Today is about the topic cultural shame, this
is a social phenomena, and you can find it in
all cultures, in all our minds...

Nalan: Okay, thank you very much! So my next guest is
my German girl, what do you want to tell us?

German woman:

I want to talk with you about the role of a
women in society.

Nalan: Aha, okay, yes!

German Woman:

I live in a very small village in Germany and I
have two little children.

Nalan: Oh how sweet, oho!

German Woman:

Yes, and me, as a women, I stay at home. And I
cook, I clean, I look after my children,...
I don't work.



Nalan: Okay, thank you, so my next guests, the family Al-Fatih, what do you want to tell us?

Tala Al-Khateeb:

Hello, my name is Tala Al-Khateeb, it is Khateeb, Al-Khateeb, so maybe you know me already, I am a really successful lawyer, and just a few month ago, me and my husband...

Professor Pablo:

What is your name?

Tala Al-Khateeb:

Tala Al-Khateeb. You can google me. Yes, a few months ago, we got a little baby, just like you (making a gesture towards the German Woman) and because my career is going so well and we don't want to follow this cultural shame, we decided that my husband will stay at home and take care of the baby.

Nalan: (interrupting)

What? He is just a houseman?

(giggling)

Tala Al-Khateeb: (shocked) What?

Nalan: (laughing at the husband)

You are just a houseman? (walks over over to the German Woman) Tell us about this now!

German Woman:

Your poor children! You have to give them the love of a mother!

Tala Al-Khateeb:

I think, he is a lovely person, and I am pretty sure, he can also do this job! Just because society does not want it does not mean, we should not do it.

German Woman:

You should ask him, you decide everything alone!

Tala Al-Khateeb:

No, we decide together!





Nalan: (walks over to the professor)
What do you say to this?

Professor Pablo:
Let us not fight, okay. I wrote a book about this subject...

Nalan: Oh show me.... oh buy this everyone, buy it, whohoo

Professor Pablo:
What I wanted to say, I found out, that I am right, I'm right. And I recommend you to buy and read this book, it is very important...

Nalan: My next guest..

Mohammad:

Thank you Nalan, first I want to say that I am a really big fan of you and thank you for giving me the chance to share my experience. I left my homeland, because I did not find a job there which suits me. So I moved to Germany and I worked as a mechanic and I get a high salary there.

Nalan: Okay, so what do you want to say to this man, who is just a houseman? What do you want to say to him?

Mohammad:

He is not a man.

Nalan: He is not a man, yes!

(guests argue amongst each other)

Okay, thank you, that's it.

(Poses at front of stage)

I want to see you again next week!

(turns to the studio guests)

You can go now!

(guests show their anger)







Journey to Jerdany

Hosein: (singing) I got a VISA, I got a VISA!
(nearly cleaner ignored)

Hosein: (sits down next to a woman) Hello, how are you?

Anna: Good. But not as good as you. Why are you so excited?

Hosein: I got a VISA, I will go to Germany!

Anna: Germany? Oh, that is just where I come from. I would not be excited about it.

Hosein: Why not?

Anna: You know, in Germany it is all about work and money. Nobody cares about you and what you really want. I had a job, I had my family, I had an apartment, but all this did not make me happy. So I decided to leave Germany and go to Jordan.

Hosein: Wait, wait, let me understand, you had a life in Germany, a job, a family, a house, and you were still not happy?

Old Man: Anna, Anna! Here you are!

Anna: Oh, my dad is coming. Dad, what are you doing here?

Hosein: Oh, your dad is in Germany?

Old Man:

Anna, I know life is difficult, but you know, Germany is your home. Me and your mom, we are old people, we miss you, we love you. Please come back home.

(Anna and her father freeze, Omar walks in)

Omar: (to Hosein) Man, what are you doing, I heard you are leaving for Germany? Don't do that. You know, I just came from there, man, and it is nothing there!

Hosein: Oh Omar, is it you? Long time no see my friend! How have you been?

Omar: Hosein, it is you! How have you been? I missed





you man! You know I was in Germany, and it is not how you think. I did not find a job and I lost all my money.

Tourist man: (enters whirling and chanting)

This is Tourist Maaan - Tourist Man.

(Everyone sings "Tourist man, Tourist man Can do whatever the tourist can't, Tourist man, tourist man, Tourist maaaaan")

Do you have a problem with your wife? Are you frustrated with your life? The best thing you can do is, go to a wonderful place called... Jerdaaany - Jerdany! This is a place with wonderful mountains and beautiful sunsets. Beautiful people with wonderful mindsets. So, what are you waiting for? Let us all go to Jerdany! (whirling)

Mhh! Business is bad these days. I need some nice tourists. Like a new love, a honeymoon couple, you know. (turns around, sees Anna and her father, makes them stand up)
Honeymoon couple!

Anna: No, he is my dad, watch out, he is old!

Tourist Man:

Listen, I think Jerdany is gonna be a great place for him, and we can give him 15% senior citizenship discount. Well I think I better give him 25% special discount, you know why, cause we have special discount for dying people!

(turns to Old Man) So young man, what is your problem?

Old Man: Young man? Me? (chuckles then points to Lisa)

She is my problem.

Tourist Man: (pulls Lisa forward)

Then why don't you send her to Jerdany?

(Anna and her father freeze; he turns away to Hosein and Omar)

All right, more tourists - ah, there you are, a new couple!



Hosein: Dude, listen, I know you are seeing rainbows, but we are not couples.

Omar: We are just best friends!

Tourist Man:

Aha, rainbows, couples, just good friends, that's how it starts! So let's go to Jerdaany!

Tourist Man: (turns to Omar) So what is your problem?

Omar: I need a job. I went to Germany, but found no job whatsoever

Tourist Man: A job? In Jerdany we have all kinds of jobs! You can be an astronaut, a vet, a doctor, a tourist man like me, we have all kinds of jobs.

Omar: (smiling) cool!

Tourist Man: (turning to Hosein)

And what is your problem?

Hosein: I need a job, I need a car, I need love, I need a life!

Tourist Man: Oh no worries! In Jerdany we've got jobs, cars and a wife plus free wifi!

(Tourist Man noticing cleaner) Have you got any problems?

Cleaner: No problems!

Tourist Man: (to Lisa) Beautiful lady, what do you want?

Lisa: I just want love and happiness.

Tourist Man:

She just wants love and happiness! This is what Jerdany is all about!

Tourist Man: So, ladies and gentlemen, if you have a problem, do not fear, because Tourist Man is here - Tourist Maaan, Tourist Man. Old man, you can go home now.

Old Man: My dear Anna. I will miss you. You can come home, whenever you want. My door is always open for you. (leaves the stage)

Tourist Man: Let's all go to Jerdany now!

Anna: But before, let's take a Selfie!

Tourist Man: Let's all say 'Jerdaaaaniiy'.





Difficulties Everywhere

Secretary: (In the manager's office)

These are the applications for the job.

Manager: (going through the papers)

Where are their photographs?

Secretary:

At the end

Manager:

She looks beautiful. But, not as beautiful as you. (secretary smiles and he continues looking through the papers)

Oh, we've got a problem here. She wears Hijab
Reject her and accept this girl. (pointing)

Secretary: (walks out and speaks to Abby, an applicant with Hijab)

I am sorry

(returning CV, and then turning to an applicant without Hijab)

Welcome to the company!

Abby:(at family dinner)

Dad, I need to tell you something. I am planning to move to Germany! I need to find a job, and here, I get rejected all the time. I want to go and live with my friends there.

Mother: What, are you silly? You stay here!

Abby: Why?

Mother: You are a woman! You need to find a husband and get married!

Abby: Mom, I don't want to get married, I want to work.

Mother: (to the father) Ali, stop this nonsense or I'll kill myself!

Father: (to Abby) Okay, so, why do you want to go to Germany? Do you really think this is the best for you?

Mother: Ali, don't allow her to do this!





Father: Who will look after you?

Abby: I will look after myself. I will be fine dad!

Father: Are you sure? Okay, do what's best for you!

Abby: (in Germany with three friends)

This is beautiful, wow, amazing! (suddenly, interrupted by angry people with banners) What is that?

First Friend:

This is disgusting!

Second Friend:

This is PEGIDA, a movement against Islam.

Third friend:

Just ignore them!

(All come on stage, Germans moving around the demonstrators, humming a German anti-war song '99 Luftballons'. Jordanians are encircling the four friends, humming a famous levantine love song 'Bint Ash-Shalabiyya'. Then the Jordanians and the Germans turn around, face each other and look into each other's eyes, as the scene slowly comes to an end.)



1 This is a song by the German band Nena, released in 1983. It tells the story of 99 children's balloons, released near the border between two countries. At first they are mistaken for UFOs, and an irritated general orders that they be shot down. Over the border, this is interpreted as a hostile act. So starts a war, which lasts for 99 years.





It began as a peace building seminar, using storytelling as a method. The outcome was three collective stories – sad, smart, funny and thoughtful. And in the process, cross-cultural friendships were established. What happened? We gathered a group of German and Jordanian university students, equal in status, age, occupation, and command of English. All were intensely interested in encountering people from the other culture. We took them to a rocky desert in southern Jordan. Deema Dabis and Fadi Skeiker worked with the students' emotions and personal stories, encouraging them to dig deep, explore their feelings, and express their thoughts. Gordon Mitchell introduced a theory of violence and encouraged personal storytelling. I hosted sharing circles and brought in questions of identity, belief and religion. Stories were written down and told, people listened to each other and asked questions. Identity, society, culture, religion and justice were reflected upon together. Trust and understanding grew.

"ستتشكل الحالة الحوارية كناتج طبيعي و تلقائي من
معرفة 'الذات' و معرفة 'الآخر'."

"Dialogue evolves naturally and spontaneously as
an outcome of knowing the 'self' and the 'other'."

Fadi Skeiker









Lisa Adolf
Layla Ajeeb
Haleema Al-Aide
Abeer Al-Aide
Sonja Böhle
Manar Mohammad Bilal
Ise Gainza-Felten
Bashar Kalha
Zahra Meiwandi
Dalia Obaidat
Abazar Paikar
Pablo Quevedo Cabero
Omar Rayyan
Ali Saider
Mohammad Sawalha
Omar Thiabat
Sadiq Rahman
Madina Rahimi
Nalan Serdar
Nazan Serdar



Planning and Research
Hamida Behr

Facilitation
Assoc. Prof. Fadi Skeiker
Deema Dabis
Prof. Gordon Mitchell

Organization
Melika Quteishat
Cornelia Knoll

Layout
Melika Quteishat

Photography and video
Ren Shallman

Additional photography
Manar Mohammad Bilal
Sadiq Rahman

Blog
<http://blogs.epb.uni-hamburg.de/artpeaceproject/home-english/>

Video
<https://vimeo.com/138092882>

Thanks to
Ammarin Bedouin Camp
Linda Khoury - Fann Wa Chai

Contact
Prof. Gordon Mitchell
gordon.mitchell@uni-hamburg.de

Hamida Behr M.A.
hamida.behr@uni-hamburg.de

Impressum
The Art Peace Project
Universität Hamburg
Fakultät für Erziehungswissenschaft
Von-Melle-Park 8

20146 Hamburg
© **University of Hamburg, 2015**



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

