



# ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR ANY AUDIENCE (EXPANSIVE LIST) FOR USE WITH DOCUMENTARY, ANTHOLOGY, AND SHORT VIDEOS

### ACT 1: RESISTANCE

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word resistance?
2. What did the artists in Act 1 of the documentary mean when they used the term resistance?
3. In which performances did you see resistance demonstrated?
4. What is effective about performative modes of resistance?
5. What are the risks of engaging with resistance as an end in itself?
6. In contexts of brutal and extreme government oppression, what can performances contribute to peacebuilding?
7. When does resistance contribute to peacebuilding and when does it contribute to ongoing cycles of violence?
8. Roberto Varea says that 'the forces that are intent on imposing their power sever lines of connectivity, especially the connections between the present moment and the past.' In contrast, what kinds of connectivity does performance facilitate?
9. What are the resources of theatre and ritual that communities can use to minimize the risk of speaking openly in contexts of violence and suppression?
10. What kinds of power are manifested in peacebuilding performances? What are the effects of that power in different kinds of performance and in the context of different kinds of violence? How can this power be enhanced? What are the limitations of the power of performance?
11. In Chapter 4 of the first volume of the *Acting Together* anthology, Abeer Musleh quotes Abdelfatteh Abusrour defining "beautiful non-violent resistance" as the means to express both resistance to occupation, as well as love and hope. Under what conditions is creating beauty an act of resistance?
12. At what point would you consider violence to be justified? Compare the resistance Roberto describes in *Fuenteovejuna* with principled nonviolence.
13. In what ways might resistance be propositional (suggesting and embodying proposed changes) rather than oppositional (taking a stand against what already exists)? How do the stories in this act illustrate these concepts?
14. What aspects of your own identity contribute to your understanding of and responses to these performances?

discussion questions for any audience



# ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

## TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

### ACT 2: REHUMANIZATION

1. What do the pieces in this act say about the power of performance to build relationships across difference?
2. In what ways are artists vulnerable in peacebuilding performances, and what effects does that have on audiences/participants?
3. It is when we perceive people as less than human that we become able to commit acts of violence against them. How do performances highlighted in Act 2 interrupt cycles of dehumanization and violence?
4. John O'Neal talks about the arts as serving political movements. What can politically motivated performance contribute to peacebuilding?
5. In what ways can performances maintain the human face of both the victims and perpetrators of violence? How can they counteract the dehumanization of the propaganda that accompanies violence and oppression? (For an example in addition to those in the toolkit, please see "Hidden Fires" by Ruth Margraff, in Volume I of the *Acting Together* anthology.)
6. Why are people more able to confront painful memories through performance than they are at some other times?
7. Act 2 opens with a powerful story about how traditional ways of expressing identity (in this case through hair style) had been abandoned and reclaimed. How do performances of various kinds transform Ana Correa's relationship with her grandmother and with her own identity?
8. Ana Correa asserts that it is only through reclaiming her own roots that she is able to fully connect with others' humanity. Has this been your experience? Does her assertion ring true?
9. John O'Neal says of story circles: "We will be changed, you will be changed, the world will be changed." What needs to happen after the story circle for people to realize the full potential of these experiences?
10. John O'Neal describes his facilitation of story circles in a high school in New Orleans. What is your understanding of how story circles might rehumanize peoples' perceptions of each other?
11. How could the creation of story circles and hip-hop theatre be adapted for use in your communities? (For more examples, please see "Youth Leading Youth: Hip Hop and Hiplife Theatre in Ghana and South Africa," by Daniel Banks; and "Change the World as We Know It: Peace, Youth, and Performance" by Mary Ann Hunter, both in Volume II of the *Acting Together* anthology.)
12. How are young people affected by racism and xenophobia? How can young people become agents of change? How can they re-humanize themselves and their images of the other?
13. In Volume II of the *Acting Together* anthology, Jo Salas writes about how Playback Theatre has been used in schools to confront bullying. How could performances be crafted to strengthen respectful relationships among diverse young people in your communities?
14. In Volume II of the *Acting Together* anthology, Kate Gardner writes about an innovative international soap opera project, and how it created enduring and lifesaving ties among people in Brooklyn, New York and Kisumu, Kenya. How can peacebuilding performance strengthen ties among people living in different parts of the world, and help them perceive each other's full humanity?

discussion questions for any audience



# ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

## TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

### ACT 3: RECONCILIATION

1. What aspects of performances in Act 3 contribute to reconciliation?
2. What might reconciliation look like in your community?
3. If you were planning a performance linked with reconciliation, what might shape your decisions on whether to use theatre, ritual, or a combination of both?
4. If you were a member of a theatre ensemble which had been asked to work with a truth commission, which “do no harm” principles would you draw on to shape the collaboration? Explain why you believe these to be important in peacebuilding.
5. If you were working in one of the regions featured in Act 3 of the documentary, what could you do in your professional capacity to extend the reach of these performances?
6. How would you work with people and institutions to extend the reach of ritual and ceremony, for example in regard to the apology of the Australian government to the Stolen Generations?
7. If the more powerful group in a conflict has very little understanding of the ways of knowing of an oppressed people, how can their understanding and respect be facilitated to minimize the continuation of the structural violence?
8. How do performances create spaces where the horrors of violent conflict can be engaged in ways that don't re-traumatize?
9. Augusto Casafra says that there was a mutual reconciliation between him and members of the community who witnessed his performance in the plaza. What breach or separation was being healed? What do you think was symbolized by his offering of the flowers, candles, and dry leaves, and by the way these gifts were received by people in the audience?
10. Ana Correa shares an evocative description of the similarity between artists' preparation for their work and shamans' ritual preparations for connecting with the gods. How do artists prepare themselves for the transformative exchanges of energy that occur between artists and audience members/ritual participants? Why is this preparation important?

*discussion questions for any audience*



# ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

## TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

### GENERAL COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of peacebuilding performance are you aware of in your own region? How are these performances similar and different from the cases in Volumes I and II of this anthology?
2. What makes the creative process itself important in peacebuilding?
3. In what different settings do peacebuilding performances take place – in the examples in the documentary and anthology, and in other examples you are aware of? What differences do these settings make – in the transformation of conflict and the meanings expressed?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the artistry required for artist-based performances, community-based performance and ceremony?
5. How does the language of story contribute to peacebuilding? How do stories embodied through performance differ in significant ways from other forms of story?
6. How do artists incorporate the transformative power of ritual into theatre performances?
7. What are the strengths and limitations of performance in decreasing violence against people's ways of knowing? What examples of decreasing epistemic violence are highlighted in the documentary or described in the anthology?
8. In what ways does peacebuilding performance contribute to preserving or recreating the human face of those who have suffered and died in violence?
9. How does attending to the aesthetic dimensions of political protests and street demonstrations enhance their transformative power?

### COMPLEX QUESTIONS REQUIRING ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

1. According to the work of Victor Turner, liminal space contributes to experimentation and plural reflexivity. How do the performances in the documentary engage with the potential of liminality for the purposes of peacebuilding?
2. What sense of justice animates each performance in the documentary? What types of restorative/transformational justice are made possible in these performances that are not easily accomplished through more conventional justice modalities?
3. What are the risks and benefits of artists working in collaboration with governments and other official bodies? How could these risks be minimized?
4. In some cases, peacebuilding performances can both contribute to the transformation of conflict AND perpetuate the dynamics of violence. Do you find this to be true of any examples in this anthology? How do the case studies in the documentary and anthology measure up against the principles outlined in the toolkit resource "Minimizing the Risk of Doing Harm?"
5. What kinds of power are manifested in peacebuilding performances? What are the effects of that power in different kinds of performance and in the context of different kinds of violence? How can this power be enhanced? What are the limitations of the power of performance?
6. In contexts of brutal and extreme government oppression, what can performances contribute to peacebuilding?
7. What resources of theatre and ritual can communities use to minimize the risk of speaking openly in contexts of violence and suppression?

*discussion questions for any audience*



# ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

## TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

8. In what ways can performance transform the people directly involved, (including audience members/participants)?
9. What kinds of transformations do performances engender, and how?
10. In what ways does performance create a space where the horrors of violent conflict can be engaged in ways that don't re-traumatize?
11. In what ways can performances be crafted to create spaces where people are deeply attuned to themselves, each other and their social, political, cultural and natural environments?
12. How are the ways of knowing embodied in and facilitated through performance well-suited to peacebuilding?
13. How can performances engage respectfully with different ways of knowing?
14. How do different artists create connections between their creative acts, the audience/participants, and the urgent issues their communities are facing?
15. What different performative approaches could help transform guilt to responsibility? And why might this transformation be important in peacebuilding?
16. In peacebuilding, what is the importance of acknowledgment of suffering and the complicity of one's people in it?
17. How can strong parties be supported to acknowledge their complicity and their part in violence?
18. How does fear of terrorism threaten the civil and political rights of human communities? And in what ways might peacebuilding performance deal effectively with fears and propaganda?

### ETHICAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the strengths and limitations of approaching art as a "tool" for change? How might you reconcile the tensions between the aesthetic imperatives of art and the use of performance as a tool for social change?
2. What are the risks of focusing on aesthetic aspects of performance to the exclusion of understanding the historical context?
3. Some artists who bear witness to violence and suffering exploit their observations for personal or professional gain. How do the artists featured in this documentary address this tension? When this tension arises in your work/field, how do you/others address it?
4. How do the various cases in the anthology – or other cases you are aware of – balance attention to suffering with acknowledging resilience, creativity, humor and joy?
5. What harms might be caused by performances being presented/facilitated prematurely, without sufficient attention to community sensibilities?
6. Artists working in regions of violence absorb many painful stories and memories. They also have a number of ways of maintaining resilience and healing their own trauma. How might practitioners of peacebuilding performance take care of themselves and maintain their resilience in similar situations?

*discussion questions for any audience*



# ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

## TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

### QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE AND SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

1. What are the various ways in which dimensions of a conflict enter into the transformative space of performance?
2. What different kinds of impacts do performances have on the people who witness them?
3. How do audience and participants' responses contribute to the transformative power of performance?
5. What are the various ways in which transformations accomplished in the space of performance re-enter and transform the world of "everyday life"?
6. To what degree do the *processes* of creating peacebuilding performance need to embody the principles of peace and justice. For example, how might it be important to engage with Lederach's four basic principles of moral imagination in the creation of performances?
  - Imagine ourselves in relationship with our enemies
  - Engage with paradoxical curiosity, embracing complexity and avoiding dualistic polarity
  - Believe in and pursue the creative act
  - Be willing to risk moving beyond known violence into the mystery of peace.

Note: A framework for describing and assessing peacebuilding performances, and answers to questions like those listed above, can be found in Volume II of the *Acting Together* anthology in Chapter 6.

### QUESTIONS ABOUT GENDER, WAR, PEACE, AND PERFORMANCE

1. The United Nation's official website for addressing issues of gender ([www.womenwarpeace.org](http://www.womenwarpeace.org)) begins as follows: "War has always impacted men and women in different ways, but possibly never more so than in contemporary conflicts." Choose a story of peacebuilding performance from the *Acting Together* collection and describe how it depicts the impact of violence and oppression on women and on men. Are the impacts similar or different from your experiences in your own region of the world?
2. The UN website continues, "In contemporary war, as much as 90% of casualties are civilians, most of whom are women and children. Women in war-torn societies can face specific and devastating forms of sexual violence, which are sometimes deployed systematically to achieve military or political objectives." Watch the video **Performances Addressing Gender-Based Violence**. What does the story of Kay Punku suggest about the potential of performance practices to support healing, to avoid re-traumatization, and to challenge a culture of impunity? How might this example inform practice in regions of the world where you live and work?
3. Watch the short video **Community-Based Theatre Challenging Gender-Based Violence and Xenophobia**, and read "Performing Cross Cultural Conversations: Creating New Kinships Through Community Theatre" in Volume II of the *Acting Together* anthology. What does the story of "In the Name of the Father" suggest about the impact of war, migration and domestic abuse on men? What does it suggest about the potential of performance practices to open avenues of dialogue across differences and reduce isolation? How do stereotypical notions of masculinity emerge from and contribute to a culture of violence?

discussion questions for any audience



## ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

### TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

4. Considering examples from the *Acting Together* collection, and from your own experiences, how can performances promote social and political equality between women and men? How can they transform the constructions of gender that contribute to a culture of violence? (Suggested resources: toolkit video “Theatre and Building Capacities for Democracy,” and anthology chapters 3, 4, 5 and 7 in Volume I, and chapters 3 and 4 in Volume II.)
5. Both women and men are effective leaders in the peacebuilding performance field. Women are nearly absent, however, in official peace processes. What could governmental and intergovernmental agencies learn from the peacebuilding performance field about the potential for mobilizing women’s leadership? Is this important? Why?
6. Every case study in the anthology, and every story in the documentary and toolkit, can be explored through the lens of gender. Taken as a whole, what do the examples of peacebuilding performance in the *Acting Together* collection say about the gendered nature of war, oppression and peacebuilding? How does your own practice take gender into account? Are there any examples or lessons from the *Acting Together* project that could strengthen your work?

discussion questions for any audience