

Acting Together on the World Stage: Setting the Scene for Peace

Actuando Juntos: Trabajando por la Paz en el Escenario Mundial

Brandeis University
October 4-8, 2007

Presented by:

The Slifka Program in
Intercommunal Coexistence

Coexistence International

Theatre Without Borders

Summary of Public Events

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Overview

From October 4-8, 2007, the Slifka Program in Intercommunal Coexistence, Coexistence International (CI) at Brandeis University, and Theatre Without Borders convened a gathering of international theatre artists and coexistence scholar-practitioners on the Brandeis campus. The primary purpose of the gathering was to further work on an anthology, *Performance and Peacebuilding in Global Perspective*, which will be completed in 2008. In conjunction with this, the gathering included a series of public events including panels, open class sessions, workshops, and performances, which sought to demonstrate how performance can contribute to building relationships across differences. *Acting Together on the World Stage: Setting the Scene for Peace* connected theatre artists, coexistence practitioners, scholars, students, and the local community to explore the potential contributions of the arts to building peace and coexistence around the world.

Acting Together on the World Stage also brought to Brandeis two actors from Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, a distinguished independent theatre group from Peru and winner of that country's National Human Rights Award in 2000. In several different venues at Brandeis, Yuyachkani members Ana Correa and Augusto Casafranca performed works, shared documentaries, and discussed the contributions of Yuyachkani to reconciliation in post-conflict Peru. Yuyachkani's keynote performance of *Adios Ayacucho*, a work developed to accompany Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was followed by a symposium entitled *Art vs. Politics and Other False Dichotomies*. This panel brought together international theatre artists and cultural workers from Uganda, Serbia, the Netherlands, and the United States, to discuss the potential of politically or socially conscious art to heal communities and promote justice, and the struggle to maintain the integrity of art with overtly political purposes.

Coexistence International also hosted *Pieces of the Coexistence Puzzle: Part II*, a follow-up on an earlier event in March 2007 which brought together practitioners and scholars from coexistence and related fields such as development, human rights, and democracy-building, to talk about the potential for a complementary approach to peacebuilding. *Pieces of the Coexistence Puzzle: Part II* consisted of several problem-solving workshops that engaged artists, peacebuilding and coexistence experts, and sustainable development workers in conversations designed to explore creative and complementary approaches to particular problems. Topics ranged from improving inter-ethnic relations in post-war Serbia, to reducing violence in Sri Lanka, to strengthening immigrant communities in Waltham. A separate report on these workshops, which details action steps recommended by the participants, is available at www.coexistence.net.

Acting Together on the World Stage would not have been possible without the following supporters: International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life; Crown Center for Middle East Studies; Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences; StageSource - The Greater Boston Theatre Alliance; BUILD; Latin American and Latino Studies; Brandeis Interfaith Chaplaincy; MA in Coexistence and Conflict; Peace and Conflict Studies Program; Politics Department; Romance Studies; Graduate Student Affairs; MA in Cultural Production; Hebrew Department; MusicUnitesUs; Women and Gender Studies; University Seminars (USEMS); and the Theatre Department.

Thursday, October 4th

***“The Creative Use of the Object”
Workshop with Ana Correa of Yuyachkani
6:00 - 9:00 pm***

“The Creative Use of the Object” was a special workshop for Brandeis University theatre students and members of StageSource: The Greater Boston Theatre Alliance. The workshop was lead by Ana Correa of Yuyachkani, accompanied by a translator.

With approximately fifteen people in attendance, Correa explored the object as an extension of the body in theatre and performance. Using movement and group activities, Correa applied the premises and rules of physical training of actors, in order to know, manipulate, control, and engage in dialogue with different objects. Participants used different physical techniques meant to enrich the creative process prior to public performance, and open new roots, qualities of energy, sensations, and movements.

Participants started by lying on the floor in a semicircle, using slow, repetitive movements and heavy, rhythmic breathing to relax and gain awareness of their bodies. Next, the participants stood in a circle with hands linked. Correa guided the participants in standing absolutely still while looking forward at one spot. They then started the slow, repetitive movements again, extending their arms out into the air. Correa introduced herself, via the translator, by talking briefly about her background, work, and family. Each person then introduced themselves in turn, continuing the body movements by physically acting out the words each person was saying. Throughout the introductions, participants continued their physical manifestations of the brief life stories or experiences.

After the introductions were finished, Correa led the group in more movment, walking in different directions and interacting with the other participants through motion and touch. The participants were encouraged to use the entire space for the exercise, utilizing the whole “stage.” The next exercise was to reproduce this, but to try to interact without touching other participants. Through these exercises, participants were able to find creative ways of engaging each other. The workshop ended with more movement and breathing exercises, including holding poses on the floor and in a chair.

At the end of the workshop, participants expressed their feelings about this “special experience.” One student found the physical expression of participant’s stories to be especially moving. “Everyone had a different background,” she said, “but when everyone got up there all you saw was the humanity, the emotion. We all have the same joy, love, pain. I feel so connected because we used our bodies and our hearts.”

Friday, October 5th

“USEM: From Colonies to States”

Professor Eva Thorne

Open class session with Roberta Levitow and Charles Mulekwa

10:40 am – 12:00 pm

Presenters Roberta Levitow and Charles Mulekwa engaged the students of “From Colonies to States” in a discussion about the challenges of unintended consequences stemming from well-intentioned actions. Speaking particularly in the context of *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe’s powerful book about colonial Nigeria, Levitow and Mulekwa examined modern-day Western engagement with Africa in the form of aid, neocolonialism, and cultural exchange.

Roberta Levitow, founding member of Theatre Without Borders, explored the problems of potential harm that can come when a person tries to contribute to a foreign culture, even if that person has good intentions. In her theatre exchange work, Levitow admitted, she brings Western training and ideas about storytelling that are not necessarily appropriate to the local cultural and historical context. The key to “doing no harm” is to be knowledgeable and attentive to the alternative cultural reality through observation and relationship-building. Levitow suggested that having a local partner and an ongoing commitment to a particular place helps to ensure that efforts at cross-cultural interaction are appropriate and mutually beneficial.

Next, Charles Mulekwa, an award-winning playwright, spoke from the other side of the cultural divide about his experiences growing up in Uganda with the effects of Western influence. Mulekwa has struggled in his play-writing to reconcile these influences with the desire to present the Ugandan perspective. In addition, due to the unstable political situation in his country (which can be said to be partially due to the colonial legacy), there are restrictions placed on the artist in Uganda, which make it dangerous or difficult to confront the socio-political situation. However, it is imperative that local voices make up the majority of this confrontation of the status quo in Africa. The best way to tell an Ugandan story, for Mulekwa, was through Ugandan traditions, voices, and ways of thinking.

Both speakers warned the audience members to be aware of their own ignorance when dealing with another culture. Useful action starts with good intentions, but must also include careful thought about both intended and unintended consequences. This was not meant to put the audience off from cross-cultural exchange, however; Levitow ended by emphasizing that “the best thing you can do for your country is to leave it” in order to facilitate relationships and knowledge-sharing with the outside world.

“USEM: Trials of Truth, Power, and Justice”

Professor Eugene Sheppard

Open class session with Lee Perlman and Catherine Filloux

10:40 am – 12:00 pm

At the open session of “Trials of Truth, Power, and Justice,” playwright Catherine Filloux and coexistence expert/theatre director Lee Perlman spoke to a group of about twenty students and guests about issues of justice and human rights, and how theatre can contribute to a greater understanding of the legacies of abuse as well as foster long-term reconciliation.

The work of Catherine Filloux, a French-Algerian-American playwright, often explores themes of human rights and intercultural connection. At the open class session, Filloux read excerpts from two of her works: *Silence of God*, which explores the genocide in Cambodia under Pol Pot’s regime, and *Lemkin’s House*, about Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-American lawyer who invented the word genocide in 1944 and spent his life striving to have it recognized as an international crime. Filloux discussed with the audience implications for modern-day US involvement in condemning and halting genocide in other countries. Given the situation in Sudan and other places, Filloux wondered how much force an international treaty against genocide really has had and whether we can use politically-conscious arts to pressure leaders and “make the strong apologize” for complicity while these acts are going on.

Next, Lee Perlman, Director of Programs at the Abraham Fund Initiatives and Lecturer at Tel Aviv University, spoke about a “docudrama” theatrical production put on by a joint Jewish-Arab theatre in 2000. The play, called *In the Shadow of a Violent Past*, was a theatricalized version of a hypothetical post-peace agreement truth and reconciliation commission in Israel. Using both professional actors and real-life victims and perpetrators, the play allowed for dialogue between those on stage and those in the audience, much like a real reconciliation commission. Perlman demonstrated that this performance illustrated the seven elements of reconciliation: rehumanizing the “other,” sharing stories, mourning loss, empathizing with suffering, acknowledging injustice, letting go of bitterness, and imagining a new future. In this way, a theatre production such as this one offers opportunities for people on both sides of a divided society to communicate about painful experiences.

Students in the class discussed with the presenters this potential of “docudrama” and other theatrical productions to simulate official justice processes in a non-threatening way. Victims of human rights abuses could be more likely to relate to this format than that of official judicial processes. One audience member suggested that the success of a production should be measured by what it gives the audience to do rather than what the performance itself does. Theatrical productions which address issues of justice and reconciliation can give the audience a forum to rebuild relationships and establish trust through dialogue.

“Improvisation”

Professor Adrienne Krstansky

Open class session with Kate Gardner

10:40 am – 12:00 pm

Kate Gardner, the principal of WorldEnsemble, a studio for creative human interaction, led a workshop with students in Adrienne Krstansky’s theatre class “Improvisation.” Through a series of activities and conversations, participants explored ways to build on each other’s ideas and develop environments that foster experimentation, collaboration, and diverse communities.

The class first viewed scenes from the cross-cultural community performance project, “BrooKenya!”, which was produced/directed by Gardner. The video clips gave students a taste of the collaboration with 150 people from Brooklyn, New York City; Kisumu, Kenya; and Lima, Peru. The students asked many questions about how this grassroots intercontinental soap opera was created and how the relationships that developed continue to have impact in the communities, including the development of a groundbreaking school in Kenya.

Gardner talked about how her creative approach is very similar to the structure of comedy improvisation, which achieves a high level of coherent group creativity with just a handful of agreements. The most critical rule of “yes, and...”—in which everyone agrees to accept whatever idea anyone offers and then adds to it—was demonstrated in a lively round of theatre games enthusiastically played by this class of experienced improvisers.

At the conclusion of the class, participants attended the outdoor performance of *Rosa Cuchillo* by Ana Correa of Yuyachkani.

“Rosa Cuchillo”

Performance by Ana Correa of Yuyachkani

Followed by discussion with the artist

Ana Correa of Yuyachkani performed (in Spanish) her one-woman production of *Rosa Cuchillo* on the Great Lawn of the Shapiro Campus Center. This play is one of a series of three performances that Yuyachkani developed as part of its accompaniment of Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Students from the classes “War and Possibilities of Peace” and “Making Culture” were joined by other Brandeis students, faculty, and staff for this moving rendition of the journey of a woman who, in her afterlife, searches for her son who had been “disappeared” during the conflict.

Following the performance of Rosa Cuchillo, audience members viewed *Alma Viva*, a documentary about Yuyachkani's work with indigenous communities in Peru. The audience then asked Correa questions about the documentary and performance. When Correa was asked to elaborate on the meaning of the piece, she said her mission was to “communicate to the people that there is a way to reconnect with the bodies of lost ones. This woman, Rosa, died while searching for her son, but she finds him in the world above, and she comes to tell us that we are all ill with loss of memory. Her dance is a way of telling us we can flower again.” The play is meant to convey a feeling of hope and “to evoke a connection between people.”

(The following is a translation of the Rosa Cuchillo script)

When I was alive, people called me Rosa Huanca. My parents died because there was an earthquake when I was very young, and men came to molest me. Then I said to myself, “It will be best to live up in the mountain, in my small plot (chacrita).” I have heard that if someone draws a cross in the ground, and “plants” a knife, it will help protect you from the bad spirits and wishes...the wishes of men. So, I did it.



However, one night, one of my master's sons came and abused me. I took a knife, I defended myself...and he ran away in fear. When he was drunk in the “chicheria” he talked to others, and because of that, never again was I called Rosa Huanca, I then became “Rosa Cuchillo (Knife).”

After a year, I met a good, working man named Dionisio. I had a beautiful and strong, healthy baby. Liborio was his name. But when “el Liborio,” was young the war had begun, mamitay. Papay, you know of it? And you, sir? And you, miss?

One day the soldiers came into our village, and took all the young men and women, accusing them. When we returned to our village we ran to the police station. And they said, “Manan, no, we don't know anything.” The “sinchis,” we ran to the “sinchis.” (counter-insurgency police) “Manan, no, that was not ours...” Then we said to ourselves, “Let's go to the military quarters.” We cried for four or five days, standing up in front of the bars of the quarters. Finally, a young captain came, and looking to me, he said, “Terrorist, your son surely must be a terrorist, a ‘terruco.’ Get out of here or you will be shot too.” With other mothers of the village, when someone said to us that there are bodies of young people thrown on the road, dead, who no one had rescued out of fear, we went to observe, looking for our own children.

Without money to pay for a truck ride to return home, we crossed the mountains on foot. And I said to myself while walking, “my Liborio probably escaped, my Liborio is probably injured somewhere,” and I began to call out to him “Liborio, Liborio.” The echo of the mountains answered me.

Once a day, someone told me, “You must go to Infiernillo.” And when we went there, “Ay, ay ay, ay...mamitay!!!” Men and women’s bodies, death, very young people among them, with their small hands, tied at their backs, they were children, they were babies. I died as I began to turn up their bodies. “De pena,” I said to myself, that even dead, I would continue looking for my son.



Suddenly, “shasssssss” I appeared in the highest place in my village, and I understood everything. Putting my hand on my breast, then to the soil, I kissed her, lovingly, saying to her, “good bye happiness and.... goodbye....goodbye....”

In that instant I heard a voice calling me, “Rosa, Rosa Cuchillo.”

Looking back I saw my “allhuchay,” my little dog Huayra that I cared for when I was a little girl. A puma killed him to eat one of my sheep. “Huayra.” “Don’t be afraid Rosa, I came for you,” he said. “Have you seen my Liborio?” “Yes. He crossed this road before you. Come on, we have to cross the ‘Wañuy Mayu,’ the rough river of black waters that separates the living from the dead.”

I hugged my Huayra, and went into the river. We crossed to the other side and a “Punku” (door) was open in front of us. It was the entrance to the “Uhgu Pacha,” the underworld, a place that will be open to every one in a particular way, a place impossible to return from. There I found men and women, half human, half animals. I asked them for my Liborio. I helped some of them, others helped me, and others made me run scared.



“He is before you Rosa,” Huayra said to me. “Now you must continue. You must cross the “Kollur May” the river of white and milky waters that cross the stars and the “luceros.” And that we did. In the middle of the river I felt joyfulness, looking at myself, and I saw myself as you are looking at me now. When I came to the other side of the river, another “Punku” was open to me. It was the door of the “Hanan Pacha,” the Highest of Earth, and I observed a white pigeon flying over the horizon. From deep inside came a very white light. Then I saw the “Great Capac,” the “Wiracocha” God of Creation, coming toward me, with his arms open and from his breast came my Liborio, and just in that moment, I could embrace and kiss him with infinite happiness. Now, I come back because it is time. I am visiting villages, towns, fairs, those places where people meet. I want to say to you, that my people are still sick with sorrow and being forgotten.

“USEM: The United States and Africa”

Open class session with Daniel Banks

12:00 – 1:30 pm

Approximately twenty people, including students in Professor Ibrahim Sundiata’s “USEM: The United States and Africa,” listened as Professor Daniel Banks, of the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, spoke about the emergence of hip-hop theatre in Africa and the ways that this genre of performance supports young people to reconstruct their identities as peacemakers. Banks engaged the students in a dialogue about cultural heritage and the interaction between America and Africa in both past and present.

The session began with the students talking about the challenges they have faced in learning about and discussing Africa and its relationship to the US. One student found that, especially in high school, there was a racist element to learning about Africa as one country, rather than many; and that classes typically focused on negative images of AIDS, civil war, malaria, and poverty. Another student felt that, in the name of political correctness and avoiding racist undertones, people frequently were unable to talk openly about the continent. Banks encouraged students to use the class session to develop a “better language” for discussing these difficult topics in the future.

Banks then discussed three theoretical frames for thinking about the African Diaspora. The first was from Nigerian playwright/activist Wole Soyinka. Soyinka introduced the concept of “saline consciousness,” which is a perception that, contrary to all historical evidence, Africa stops wherever salt water touches its shores. Soyinka insisted that the isolationist notion of Africa was false and that, instead, there was a historical circuit of exchange between Africa and the Americas. Expanding on this, social theorist Paul Gilroy introduced the notion of the “Black Atlantic.” The “Black Atlantic” is a model of looking at modernity through the lens of Africa and realizing that the modern world in the US and elsewhere was built by a labor force that was enslaved and imported from the African continent. Adding to this, Joseph Roach introduced a “circum-Atlantic” notion, which implies that the interaction was a two-way exchange. Banks discussed these three theories in order to encourage the students to “shift the lens” through which they had been taught to see the connection between the two continents.

In the same way, collective wisdom about hip-hop is generally based on what we see and hear in the media. As Banks put it, we are often taught to think as if there is one center and that everything else is in the margin. However, if you are considering something on the margins, such as Africa or hip-hop, a useful way to think about it is to dislodge the center and make the margin the new focus. Banks proceeded to re-focus on the margins by discussing the early history of hip-hop culture in the South Bronx. In the early days of hip-hop, one DJ named Afrika Bambaataa, who was a former gang member, created the Universal Zulu Nation, which was a collection of socially and politically aware hip-hop artists who would channel their aggression and frustration into performance battles rather than gang-banging. Banks pointed out that even the name Zulu Nation had African roots. The activist origins of hip-hop were exported around the world through Universal Zulu Nation chapters, and that was what was originally best associated with hip-hop before the rap record industry took over. So Banks re-framed this marginal hip-hop culture as a global grassroots youth activist movement stemming from artistic and musical expression.

While the US led the way in formulating hip-hop, there is a strong presence of the culture and music today in many African countries. In Ghana, there are three forms of hip-hop: American hip-hop, Ghanaian hip-hop, and a uniquely Ghanaian invention called “hip-life,” which is performed in local languages and, more recently, has incorporated live instruments. Reggie Rockstone, the creator of the term “hip-life,” says that hip-hop is based on an African tradition of freestyling, which is spontaneous poetry set to a rhythmic pattern. “You can say that American hip-hop is an evolution of an African tradition.” Or, as Banks told the class, it is just one example of a cultural tradition and a political movement that is circum-Atlantic.

Banks’ work in Ghana and South Africa, and in the United States, has been to teach hip-hop theatre to students in order to engage youth in a contemporary way of telling stories through theatrical production. Through this discussion of hip-hop and hip-hop theatre, Banks hoped to give the students of “The United States and Africa” a new vocabulary with which to create meaningful interaction between two cultures so that the shift can be made from the margin to many centers.

Saturday, October 6th

***“Storytelling and
Gender Justice in Waltham”
Workshop with Ana Correa
and Augusto Casafranca
3:00 - 5:30 pm***



The workshop on “Storytelling and Gender Justice in Waltham” brought together approximately twenty-five Latina women from the Waltham community (many of whom had never been to the Brandeis University campus before), along with around ten other participants from Brandeis and Waltham community organizations, such as REACH Beyond Domestic Violence. The members of the Yuyachkani theatre group created a safe space for the participants and led them in partner work and vocal and physical games in order to build a sense of community and help the participants to relax and open up.

Ana Correa, of Yuyachkani, led the women in different physical activities that helped to relax the body and create a group dynamic. The participants imitated each other, jumped around, sang, and led each other around blindfolded in order to build trust. While the women played these “games,” their children were taken care of by volunteer Brandeis students. This allowed the participants to have some leisure time, get to know other women in their community, and to smile, sit, and laugh with each other. The women expressed gratitude to Yuyachkani for creating a safe, trusting environment where they could forget their problems and just play for awhile. In addition, the workshop was conducted in Spanish to increase the comfort level and sense of shared community between the women, many of whom were recent immigrants.

After the workshop, there was a second performance by Ana Correa of *Rosa Cuchillo*, which was enjoyed by an audience of approximately 150 people, including the women from the local Latina community, Brandeis students, and participants in the theatre and peacebuilding conference. The performance was followed by a community conversation, led by Mark Auslander and Fernando Rosenberg, about the implications of the play in terms of gender empowerment, storytelling, and reconciliation in Peru and Waltham.

Sunday, October 7th

“Pieces of the Coexistence Puzzle: Part II”

10:00 am - 2:30 pm

Six problem-solving workshops were convened in which theatre artists, coexistence/peacebuilding practitioners, policymakers, and sustainable development workers met together to think creatively about a problem in a particular community or conflict region, bringing together the theoretical and practical perspectives of their various disciplines. The groups generated action steps and/or recommendations that participants could act upon in order to improve conditions in a particular region or in relation to a particular problem.

The workshops explored the following regions/topics:

- Inter-ethnic relations in post-war Serbia
- Safety among immigrant communities in Waltham, MA
- Improving understanding between Tamil and Sinhalese artists in Sri Lanka
- Iranian-US-Israeli relations (Diaspora focus)
- Transitional justice efforts in West Africa
- Creativity, social development, and peacebuilding in East Africa

A detailed report, including group recommendations, is available at www.coexistence.net



“Adios Ayacucho”

Performance by Augusto Casafranca, musical accompaniment by Ana Correa

Followed by a discussion with the artists

3:30 - 5:00 pm

Adios Ayacucho tells the story of Alfonso Canepa, a farmworker from the Southern Peruvian Andes, who was disappeared and killed during the 1980s. Canepa returns from the other world and begins a journey to Lima, the capital city, looking for his bones so that he can rest in peace. On his journey, Canepa befriends a Qolla, a comic Andean dancer, who lends him his body and his voice so that Canepa can tell his story.

According to the Andean custom, the family of the deceased lays their relative's clothing in wake for eight days after the death as a final farewell ritual and so that the spirit of the departed can leave this world more rapidly. Therefore, the play is set around a platform supporting several pieces of Canepa's clothing. In the last twenty years of violence in Peru, this ritual was transformed into the only way to bid farewell to the souls of the departed when their bodies had been disappeared by the military.



As the play begins, the Qolla approaches the clothes laid out in mourning and, in trying to steal the shoes of the departed one, is possessed by its spirit. Canepa's spirit then tells how the police tortured him and threw his mutilated body into a ravine. The police took with them some of his bones, and Canepa vows to go to Lima to recover the rest of his body so that he can be buried in peace. He hides himself in a milk cart which moves through the streets of his home past friends and relatives who are despairing over his “disappearance.”

Canepa continues his journey to Lima along the Ayacucho road by hiding in a truck full of fruits and potatoes. Neither the truck drivers nor a military patrol which stops them recognize Canepa's body, and so he is able to journey on, seeing images of death and despair everywhere along the road: young boys being led to their death, mothers searching mass graves for the bodies of their loved ones, and hysterical mobs running from soldiers. Canepa begins to dictate a letter to the President, denouncing the violence generated by the State and demanding his bones to complete his body. As

Canepa continues his journey, the truck is stopped by a group of guerillas, who commandeer the cargo. The woman leading the guerillas sees Canepa and says, “You see? That’s what you get for being a reformer: you’re neither dead nor alive.” She then invites him to join the insurgency. Canepa chooses instead to continue to Lima to recover his bones.

Finally, Alfonso Canepa arrives in Lima. The city is full of children, beggars, relatives of the dead, madmen, and lunatics. Canepa decides to disguise himself as a mad beggar. The President is about to make a speech in the city on the need for Christian charity. Canepa gets close to the President and tries to slip the letter to him but is beaten and searched by his guards. A young boy saves Canepa by pretending he is his father. Canepa notices his letter, crumpled and unopened, lying on the floor. In despair, Canepa leads the boy into a cathedral which houses the remains of Francisco Pizarro, the great Conquistador and founder of Lima. With the boy’s help, Canepa removes the lid from Pizarro’s sarcophagus and takes the bones he needs from Pizarro’s body. He gives what he doesn’t need to the boy to sell in the market. The boy promises “when I am President, I will look for your bones.” Canepa at last is at peace and feels himself ascending from the earth “as a pillar of stone and fire.”



Following the performance, the artists of Yuyachkani took questions from the audience. Augusto Casafranca spoke about the journey of building the character of Alfonso Canepa using his own experiences and emotions. Ana Correa told the audience how her musical accompaniment spontaneously got incorporated into the production and became integral to drawing the shape of the character’s journey. Correa used both indigenous instruments and European instruments played in an indigenous fashion to add a ritual feeling to the piece. Both Correa’s accompaniment and Casafranca’s performance were meant to embody the story of so many disappeared people and so many survivors in Peru. The artists felt that, though this is a Peruvian story, it touches audiences wherever they perform it because the themes and unresolved questions that it involves are universal.



“Art vs. Politics and Other False Dichotomies”

Symposium with Dijana Milosevic, John O’Neal, Charles Mulekwa, and Eugene van Erven, moderated by Roberta Levitow

5:30 - 7:00 pm

The “Art vs. Politics” symposium featured theatre artists and researchers from a range of backgrounds, who tackled the question of whether art and politics are (or should be) mutually exclusive. Reflecting on their experiences, the panelists spoke about the common goals and practices shared by practitioners of politics or peacebuilding, and those writing, directing, or taking part in theatrical productions.

The symposium began with Eugene van Erven, who is a senior lecturer at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, and who has been researching theatre and social change for almost three decades. Currently, Dr. van Erven is conducting original research into community theatre productions designed to address relations between the Muslim immigrant community and non-Muslim neighbors in cities in the Netherlands. Van Erven was very much in favor of any ways “in which art can contribute on the local level to a better world.” While in university during the 1960s and ‘70s, van Erven discovered the political theatre emerging from the anti-war and student movements. Inspired by this, he decided to investigate the ways in which theatre and the arts operated under very constrained or heavily political circumstances in various Asian countries at the time. Van Erven discovered the enormous power of theatre artists who use their art to mobilize the people as well as express artistic aesthetics. Upon returning to the Netherlands, van Erven became involved in local community theatre, focusing on local political and social issues revolving around ethnic tensions and anti-Muslim sentiment. Van Erven’s company staged small vignettes in living rooms with local people, allowing those from different backgrounds to interact with each other and confront their stereotypes of their neighbors. Van Erven sees this project as a small act which can allow for dialogue and interaction on the local level and perhaps reverberate to a larger change in the world.

The next panelist to speak was John O’Neal, an actor, director, and civil rights leader from New Orleans, and founder of June Bug Productions. O’Neal’s work has clearly illustrated the convergence of high-quality artistic production with socio-political issues of race, justice, and community. Currently, O’Neal also guides “Uprooted: The Katrina Project,” a theatrical project at the forefront of rebuilding communities in the aftermath of the Katrina disaster. O’Neal saw no conflict or competition between the worlds of art and politics, but rather saw a choice for artists: whether they would choose to engage with the people and subject matter that can help influence the shape of the future, or whether they would choose to forsake the future and attempt to “get what they can out of the situation.” Throughout history, O’Neal believes, artists have not been responsible for social or political upheavals, but they have, in part, formulated the way in which subsequent generations think about that period. In terrible circumstances, the greatest energy for change comes from the grassroots. O’Neal sees artists as part of this movement for change. “Politics,” he said “is just a process by which we collectively make decisions about our common interest.” All citizens - artists

included - have the same responsibility to put themselves in the center of that process.

Charles Mulekwa, an award-winning playwright, actor, and director from Uganda, spoke briefly about his own experience in becoming a politically aware artist. Mulekwa started by saying that he doesn't consider himself a political writer and did not indeed set out to become that, but that politics "grew up on" him. Mulekwa joined theatre in school in order to have fun and make people



laugh. But growing up in Uganda, his life was "not about laughter at all." When Mulekwa began writing, he wrote social plays about romance and family. However, his personal experiences with violence and repression soon manifested in his work. In Mulekwa's first political play, called *Where the Power Lies*, he tried to remind the people that the power was with them, and not with the government that they put in power. After the

play was performed, Mulekwa was politely made aware that the government was watching him. However, he continued writing plays about the issues closest to him, including political ones. "I think it is a form of irresponsibility," Mulekwa said, to write only about trivial matters when you and the people around you are facing larger problems.

The final speaker was Dijana Milosevic, artistic director of Dah Teatar in Serbia, which was formed by Milosevic and four other women in 1991. As they were preparing for their first production, Serbian forces began moving into Bosnia. The members of Dah refocused their efforts to protest the war. Dah's work has since included a cross-community collaboration with a theatre in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as performances challenging the legacy of atrocities committed by the Serbian government. Milosevic began by discussing the etymology of the word politics. Politics comes from Greek, and one of the meanings is "to be present." When thinking about politics and art, Milosevic said, "one of the first things we should speak about is how to be present or the burning desire to be present." Art and politics are synchronous because "politics influences the smallest items of our lives." Theatre and politics both have the unique power to embrace the multiple and complex realities of life. But Milosevic also cautioned against the "dark examples" of art and politics converging, with examples of Serbian war criminals who in their pre-war lives were artists, writers, or directors.

The panelists and audience picked up on this last thread during the question and answer portion. Participants agreed that neither politics or art are necessarily moral or intrinsically benign, and that both are capable of working in negative ways. This is particularly problematic when art is funded by the government rather than working from the grassroots level. Artists must be careful to find a balance between getting funds for a production at any cost, and making sure to create something meaningful with their art. "At the end of the day," Mulekwa said, "it is up to the individual to decide which lines they cross and which lines they won't." In this respect, the panelists agreed, the artist is not unique. Every profession and individual faces such temptations, challenges, and choices. The main solution is for the artist (or others) to use the resources he or she has and to make the complicated choices about how to use other institutional forces for the best possible result, both ethically and artistically.

Monday, October 8th

“Women and Gender in Culture and Society”

Professor Harleen Singh

***Open class session with Aida Nasrallah, Catherine Filloux,
and Eugene van Erven***

2:10 – 3:30 pm

The key topic in the open session of “Women and Gender in Culture and Society” was how art, particularly theatre, can help to deal with and understand issues of gender. Dr. Eugene van Erven, senior lecturer at Utrecht University; Aida Nasrallah, Palestinian-Israeli artist and poet; and Catherine Filloux, French-Algerian-American playwright, spoke to an audience of approximately 80 people, including students and guests, about their experiences of gender in artistic productions.

Dr. van Erven began the discussion with a presentation about community theatre in a working-class urban area in the Netherlands. *In the Name of the Fathers* was a theatre project that took place in a community center for local Dutch and immigrant men, mainly from Muslim countries. The project consisted of conversations, improvisation exercises, and eventually a scripted play, which explored issues of father-son relationships, incest, religion, physical violence, and life as an immigrant, among others. Through this process and the community conversations which followed each performance, the project opened up a cross-cultural dialogue about gender roles and family/community dynamics. Van Erven stressed that the first purpose of theatre work is to make good art, but that the secondary purpose can be to contribute to a process of dialogue that can open up difficult topics for conversation.

Aida Nasrallah talked about the difficulties faced by an Arabic woman inside Israel: first, that of being a woman in a conservative community, and second, that of being an Arab under the Israeli regime. Nasrallah did not begin to publish her writing until she was 39 years old, because she was afraid. Her writing criticizes many aspects of the society in which she lives, and tries to give voice to the pain of the women in her community. She read an excerpt from one of her plays, which illustrates the mundane but ultimately significant aspects of a relationship between an Arab woman and Jewish man. In the play, the two characters argue about the necessity of certain religious practices. The argument is not serious, but the implication is that these differences will ultimately overtake their relationship. Nasrallah told the audience that it was important in her writing, and through theatre in general, to speak for those who cannot express their own pain in order to share that experience.

Next, Catherine Filloux spoke about *Eyes of the Heart*, her play about the phenomenon of psychosomatic blindness in Cambodian refugee women who had witnessed traumatic events during the genocide. Filloux thought of “remembering as a revolutionary act” which was a double-edged sword: on one level, remembering can re-traumatize people who have survived violence, but on the

other, there is a need to remember in order to prevent this violence from happening again. Filloux also talked about another play, which examined an honor killing of a young girl in Turkey. In this play, Filloux tried to understand what dishonor meant in this other culture, particularly in gendered terms.

The speakers and participants in the class explored these issues of gender and parenthood/family dynamics by looking at the experiences of both men and women. This concept was key to an understanding of gender across cultural and ethnic boundaries. Students discussed the various productions that were presented, asking about the local participation and reactions among the community. In each case, the issues portrayed on stage led to audience discussion, and sometimes even disagreement. Even the disagreements, however, were constructive because they opened a door to dialogue about gender and other issues that was previously closed in the communities.

“Dialogue and Mediation”

Professor Theodore Johnson

Open class session with Kevin Clements

2:10 – 5:00 pm

In Professor Johnson’s “Dialogue and Mediation” class, students of the MA Program in Coexistence and Conflict and outside guests heard from Kevin Clements, a well-known peacebuilding practitioner, about the importance of combining Western and traditional local concepts when promoting democratic governance in fragile states.

Dr. Clements spoke about the problem of working with developing countries to develop capable, effective, and legitimate state institutions in situations of poverty, inequality, corruption, and structural instability. To start, he defined “failed or failing states” as those in which a government does not have effective control of its territory, is not perceived as legitimate by a significant portion of the population, does not provide basic security or public services to its citizens, and lacks a monopoly on the use of force. These states are particularly vulnerable to violence. Therefore, the development of stable and effective infrastructure is especially important to stem coexistence issues in the society. Clements’ suggested solution was to enhance good governance in the state, but with a particular focus on appreciation of non-state sources of order, stability, and development. “Hybridity” or hybrid political orders means to combine state institutions with customary institutions and traditional forms of social cohesion. In many failed or failing states, the formal government has not yet permeated the whole of society, and traditional non-state institutions such as extended families, clans, religious groups, village communities, elders, chiefs, healers, etc. have as much, if not more, capacity and legitimacy as the state. It is therefore in a state’s interest to reach out to these institutions and adapt to opportunity and community strengths in order to share the burden of governance and to combine the people’s community identities with their identity as citizens of a modern nation. In other words, states can “fill the gap between formal institutions and local communities to enable the state to become an agent of development across the whole country.” States can utilize a bottom-up strategy which builds

on indigenous sources of strength, resilience, and accountability. In this way, the political system can evolve organically, rather than being based solely on the Western model.

This hybridity between local/traditional and modern state institutions touched on an overarching theme of the conference: the importance of engaging with customary traditions and structures when trying to build peace and stability within a country experiencing violence or coexistence issues. Whether from the peacebuilding field or from theatre and the arts, practitioners working in developing countries must be aware of local norms, customs, and values in order to avoid exacerbating tensions between groups. Artists and peacebuilders must also acknowledge the strength of traditional structures and art forms in order to create initiatives that speak to the population and engage them in familiar modes of reconciliation. Similarly, when creating democratization and good governance initiatives, practitioners must learn to appreciate the unique strengths of particular communities, rather than trying to bring in external modes and values, which may not be perceived as effective or legitimate. As Clements emphasized in his presentation, initiatives are most effective when they are constructed within local contexts.

“Israeli Theatre”

Professor Bracha Azoulay

Open class session with Lee Perlman and Aida Nasrallah

3:40 – 5:00 pm

Lee Perlman, lecturer at Tel Aviv University and Director of Programs at the Abraham Fund Initiatives, teamed with Aida Nasrallah, Palestinian-Israeli artist and poet, to address the students of “Israeli Theatre.” The class was conducted entirely in Hebrew. Perlman and Nasrallah introduced the students to a little-known Israeli play called *Enemy in the Room*, which is about the relationship between an Israeli therapist and his Palestinian patient. Through this play, the presenters discussed ideas of “eneminess” and meanings of identity.

The presenters guided students through a reading of select scenes from *Enemy in the Room*. In the first scene, Amir, an Arabic Psychology student, goes to see Yehoash, an older Jewish psychologist, for treatment. Amir argues with Yehoash to give him treatment for free; he argues that Yehoash owes him because his aggression and isolation are due to the way he is treated by the Jews. Yehoash argues that Amir needs to learn the difference between “social discrimination and personal issues and relationships” and that he cannot give him free treatment because of this. In the next scene, Amir is again arguing with his therapist about Yehoash being unable to relate to Amir’s experience. Yehoash asks if Amir would rather be treated in Arabic, or by a European therapist. In later scenes, Yehoash confronts Amir about his aggression and asserts that he can only blame himself for pushing away other people, not his socio-political situation. In a moment of tension the doctor turns the accusations around on Amir:

Amir: With all your smart bombs and your developed technology, you try to hit a car and demolish a whole neighborhood... “Oops! Sorry, we made a mistake!”...do you even care, Doctor?

Yehoash: People like you bomb people like me in buses, your turn. People like me occupy territories of people like you, my turn. People like you shoot and kill people on the road while they were only trying to get back home safely, your turn. People like me make closures that cause substantial poverty and hunger, my turn. Do you want me to pursue the game?

Perlman and Nasrallah then discussed the implications of the play with the students. Nasrallah began by discussing the issue of language as a part of identity. In the play, Amir suggests that if he could speak his own language, he would express himself better. Nasrallah asked the class, who conduct themselves in Hebrew, what they thought the connection was between language and a homeland. For some, the connection was hard to make as English is their first language but they are speaking Hebrew in the class and also connect to that on some level. Nasrallah also asked students to reflect on the sentence from the play that “Hatred comes from fear.” Fear of “the Other” can lead to hatred. One student thought that fear in the US is based on stereotypes perpetuated by the media and others, whether of Muslims or other groups. The best way to overcome this fear before it turns to hatred is to actually meet the Other and move past misunderstanding. Another student agreed and added that fear is often a tool used by politicians to sustain tension and conflict for reasons of power and personal gain. One student also posited that fear stems from laziness. Nasrallah agreed that it is sometimes easier to generalize and say that one group is an enemy and therefore all bad. “To love the ‘other’ and understand him requires a lot of strength.” she said. “ Understanding him means looking at his wounds. It also requires that I look inside myself and acknowledge what I did to him.” In *Enemy in the Room*, the doctor is acquainted with someone who shakes up his conventional thought by confronting him with collective responsibility and making him realize that the suffering on both sides is perpetuated for the wrong reasons.



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