PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND DIALOGUE IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC AND LEBANON

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PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND DIALOGUE IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC AND LEBANON

Publication from the Executive Professional Master's Programme
on Psychosocial Support and Dialogue

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Foreword

More than 18 million civilians are affected by the Syrian conflict. Over 5 million Syrian citizens have been forced to flee the country, seeking refuge abroad, and particularly in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. This endless tragedy has now entered its sixth year.

There are people who were born in the refugee camps and never had the opportunity to live a normal life. The impact of the catastrophe is particularly harsh on children and young generations, and also on mothers, the elderly, the disabled and all the most vulnerable categories of civilians, who are always the first victims of conflicts and forced displacement.

It is on these vulnerable categories that the efforts of *Cooperazione Italian*a are mostly focused. Since the inception of the crisis, Italy has allocated significant resources (EUR 125 million) to help alleviate the sufferings of the civilian population. We have responded to the vibrant appeal by the UN Secretary-General to "leave no one behind", which means to prioritize in our action the support to the weakest and the most vulnerable, as well as the protection of human dignity. Pope Francis has chosen to dedicate the Extraordinary Year of Jubilee to the same values of solidarity and mercy.

We pursue these objectives mainly by targeting the basic needs of populations – food, health care and education – and also by financing social work in Lebanon and Jordan. We aim at providing the heads of families with an income and restoring their sense of dignity. We also provide the victims of the conflict with psychosocial support, with a view to gradually healing the wounds of violence and gender-based violence.

Besides its commitment to humanitarian assistance in situations of emergency, *Cooperazione Italiana* is very active in the area of development, as the latter allows for the accomplishment of two objectives. On the one hand, it contributes to strengthening Italy's political role in the Middle East, a key strategic area for international relations and security that has always occupied a central position in the country's external policy. On the other hand, it helps create the conditions for developing a local civil society, reinforcing the resilience of local populations and creating the most effective antidote to the risk of diffusion of radical and extremist ideologies in the Middle Eastern region. In particular, the focus of our present and future work is on the young generations, prioritizing education and professional training. At the same time, we pursue a continuous support to gender equality, being convinced that women's contribution can be decisive to the construction of a new Middle East.

Our focus on youth aims at ensuring that a Syrian "lost generation" does not result from the conflict. Allowing Syrian children to go to school is necessary to ensure that they can enjoy a safe and peaceful environment. Investing in education means giving the Syrian Arab Republic new hope in a peaceful future, as school is the best deterrent against the dangers

of violence and radicalization. This does not only entail the formal schooling system, but also the so-called "informal education", providing children with safe spaces where they can play, practise sports and take part in artistic laboratories. In this way, children have the possibility to cultivate their talents, pursue their passions and forget for a few hours the horrors of war. *Cooperazione Italiana* is very active in this field, particularly in Lebanon.

We will continue on this path until it will be necessary, until the light of reason will illuminate the darkness of this endless conflict. Our objective will remain the same: to leave no one behind.

We are not alone in this demanding effort, and this inspires us to continue our action with patience and dedication. We can count on thousands of volunteers and humanitarian workers, young men and women collaborating with us in the implementation of the many humanitarian assistance and development cooperation projects currently ongoing in the Syrian Arab Republic and in other countries of the region.

By supporting the master's degree programme in Psychosocial Support and Dialogue, from which this publication stems, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Italy has contributed to the training of Syrian and Lebanese professionals who will reinforce the pool of local experts committed to providing populations affected by conflict and migration with specialized psychosocial support.

Ambassador Pietro Sebastiani*
Rome, 23 August 2017

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*   H.E. Pietro Sebastiani is the former Director General for Development Cooperation at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. He is currently the Italian Ambassador at the Holy See.

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Preface

This publication is based on the two editions of the Executive Professional Master programme in Psychosocial Support and Dialogue and consists of a critical analysis of the fieldwork and research carried out by the students of the master's programme for the purpose of their final dissertations. The idea for this volume – which is a result of the joint efforts of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Mental Health, Psychosocial Response and Intercultural Communication Section and Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies – stems from the recognition of the current extreme difficulty of conducting field research in some of the areas touched by the students' analyses, which makes it particularly important to make the data and knowledge collected by the students available to scholars and practitioners in the relevant fields. The students' theses are critically assessed in this publication by three international experts in the fields of psychosocial support, arts-based interventions and conflict management, who read the findings through the lenses of the available literature.

In order to better illustrate the purpose and relevance of this publication, it is worth recalling how the idea for the Executive Master's programme emerged and which specific needs it aimed to address. In 2012 – in the aftermath of those events in the Syrian Arab Republic that initiated a complex crisis whose resolution is yet to be seen, and which has contributed to the display of increasing and paralysing limits of political, diplomatic, humanitarian and international law enforcement capacities and ethics – IOM started to respond to the emerging psychosocial needs of Syrians. At that point, amidst hopes that international humanitarian intervention or political negotiations could bring to a relatively fast solution to the conflict and due to the increasingly volatile security situation in the country, the vast majority of the humanitarian relief was directed to neighbouring countries where Syrians, affected by the conflict, political persecution and insecurity, were taking refuge in the millions. Another factor that limited international support inside the Syrian Arab Republic consisted the difficulties that international humanitarian workers were facing in getting access to the country first, and to the affected populations if and once allowed into the Syrian Arab Republic. In this context, IOM decided to implement its psychosocial support activities inside the Syrian Arab Republic with a programme focused on capacity-building and support of national psychosocial practitioners, and those humanitarian responders who had not left the country, and were providing help under dire circumstances, often without the necessary capacity to deal with the systemic complexity of the situation and the magnitude and novelty of the problems, while also being affected by the emotional, social and anthropological consequences of the breakdown of symbolic and relational structures of the Syrian society.

This decision had something to do with the way this initiative started, the already-mentioned series of practical impediments the Organization was facing in directly accessing the most affected populations, and a willingness to be close to the ones who were making a difference in the daily life of the majority of Syrians still living in the country. What initially prompted

IOM's engagement in this domain were indeed a series of consultative workshops the Head of IOM's Mental Health and Psychosocial Response (MHPSS) Section was able to conduct in Damascus some months into the beginning of the crisis with psychosocial practitioners, shelter managers and some other humanitarians that were already part of the IOM MHPSS network, and those mobilized by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This allowed the Organization to have a direct grasp of the needs of these professionals. More practically, IOM, as many other organizations, in addition to the general access problems previously mentioned, was facing difficulties in getting access to the most affected population with "soft" support interventions. Those interventions, such as the psychosocial support ones, require that helpers directly interact with affected populations, rather than the pure mass distribution of goods, and were less welcome and authorized by national authorities than others. Therefore, further capacitating and supporting those who were already providing assistance to their own populations under a multiplicity of official or informal hats and roles seemed to be the best strategy to support psychosocial interventions for those affected. Moreover, trying to be close to these colleagues and networks – following the first encounters and workshops – was considered as an ethical obligation by the team of the IOM MHPSS section. The resulting programme, funded by the Italian Cooperation, envisaged a series of different training paths of variable durations for various categories of psychosocial professionals in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as trainings in psychosocial skills to first responders.

In addition to being informative, the trainings were also spaces for relaxation, re-elaboration of the lived experiences in a collective fashion and peer exchanges. Among the different training initiatives, a one-year Executive Master's programme in Psychosocial Support and Dialogue was designed in collaboration with the Lebanese University and some Lebanese psychosocial support colleagues, and repeated for two generations of students. The idea of organizing an executive professional master's programme looking at the intersections between psychosocial support and dialogue in the context of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic was informed by different considerations. One was the attempt to promote a psychosocial approach that looked beyond clinical psychology and public health paradigms, to include the inputs that a wider spectrum of social and psychological sciences – including social and community psychology, linguistics, anthropology, ethnography, applied arts – can give to humanitarian action, especially in situations like the one that was unfolding in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the geopolitical, historical, anthropological, societal and individual emotional aspects were profoundly entangled. Indeed, the cultural, anthropological, political and societal breakdown the Syrian system was and is facing – and at the same time the identity and relational redefinitions that the Syrian influx was determining in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as in host countries such as Lebanon or the south of Turkey, and in the very perception of the migration phenomenon in Europe – could not and cannot be reduced to the pathological or negative emotional effects it has produced in some individuals, nor can these effects be addressed by professionals unable to read the wider context in which they have been manifesting.

The attempt to investigate the interrelation between psychosocial support and dialogue in practical and programmatic ways was also a way to act on the root causes of conflict, rather than limit the intervention on the effects that conflict could have on an individual's psyche, and to help professionals to be able to address, in their liminal fields of interventions – internally displaced persons (IDP) shelters, neighbourhoods, informal groups, churches and mosques, health centres, camps, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – not only the intrapersonal wounds but also the interpersonal ones, those between Syrians, in the ever-changing game of roles and identities; attributed, perceived or challenged; political, religious and personal that is taking place around this specific crisis.

Psychosocial support and dialogue according to the Syrian colleagues who are part of the consultative processes were to be considered two sides of the same coin. In addition, the same colleagues were reporting an increasing frustration towards paradigms of intervention that did not challenge the status quo of the conflict. They were speaking of an almost paralysing sense of uneasiness or helplessness, or even of complicity, that could only be won by the attempt, even if only perceived, to be doing something to help managing the conflict, at least at the small community level.

IOM has provided psychosocial support to migrants and crisis-affected communities since the late 1990s. From inception, IOM's capacity-building activities in the psychosocial domain have included the organization of executive master's, diploma or certificate courses on migration and psychosocial support for professionals in crisis-affected countries, such as Kosovo,[1] Serbia, Colombia, Libya, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. The course organized at the Lebanese University, although unique because tailored on the specific characteristics of the Syrian Arab Republic crisis, shared some practical and pedagogical similarities and two inspiring principles with the others. The first is a systemic approach, such as the aim to make the students capable of understanding the complex interactions between geopolitical, historical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, humanitarian, communitarian, cultural and subcultural systems of meaning in their psychosocial support work. The other is the consideration that psychosocial support is very culturally bound, and the comparative value of an international intervention in this specific domain lies in the technical skills it can bring to support the local resources, if, and only if the local resources find them useful for themselves and their work in the field. The course was, as a consequence, organized as a space of encounter and barters of knowledge, ethics and concepts between international experts, academics and field practitioners, whose objective was not to propose practices and models to reproduce, but to create a new, participatory and systemic narrative of psychosocial interventions in the Syrian Arab Republic. Local ownership, sustainability, community-based approach and multidisciplinarity are all outcomes of these two principles.

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[1]   References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

In terms of practicalities, the course was designed with the presidency of the Lebanese University, respecting the pedagogical requirements (number of hours of taught courses, fieldworks, assessments) for the relevant certification. Both editions took place every second weekend, to allow the participation of professionals active with the affected populations. The master's degree programme was free of charge, and the participants were selected through a competitive process among psychology, social work, education, applied arts, medical/psychiatry professionals and activists. Frontal lectures, interactive workshops, simulations and supervised fieldworks informed the pedagogical plan, in a process that made the students learn interactively and in a peer fashion in class first, and then to experience the learned competences in the protected space of workshops and simulations, and finally to put into practice the learned skills in the real world, initially under supervision.

The two editions of the courses were directed by Frederic Maatouk, but they were not identical, since the second edition was redesigned based on the evaluation of what worked best and some criticalities of the first edition. But they were both quite similar and organized in three interrelated pedagogical pillars and had the same objectives, which can be summarized below:

(a) Identify and conceptualize the threat to the psychological and social well-being created by displacement, migration and war;

(b) Understand and analyse psychosocial needs with respect to relevant psychological and cultural frameworks;

(c) Adopt a creative approach and applied arts to protect, strengthen and accompany the transformations of the community fabric;

(d) Adopt a creative approach, applied arts and conflict mediation tools to lower the effects of the conflict on a grass-root/small-communities level;

(e) Have an understanding of systemic, family and narrative approaches;

(f) Recognize the complexity of conflicts to develop conflict resolution and mediation skills;

(g) Develop a participatory approach to assess community needs to design intervention programmes that are sensitive to local circumstances; and

(h) Appreciate differences in conflict narratives and realize the importance of individual and group memories in diverse cultures.

The first pillar looked at concepts and practices of psychosocial support in conflict situations, through the presentation of international standards, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) pyramid of MHPSS intervention (Ola Ataya), counselling skills (Paula Khallas, Renos Papadopoulos), assessment skills (Ola Ataya, Rana Aoun) and systemic approaches to care, including a systemic understanding of disruptive events, and the co-construction of

therapeutic meanings (Renos Papadopoulos), as well as the systemic understanding of the concept of identity and its transformation (Guglielmo Schininà, Amal Ataya) and concepts of social psychology (Nissar Abu-jaoude).

The second pillar looked more in depth into the historical roots of the Syrian conflict (Frederic Maatouk and Dasoul Maher), general principles of conflict mediation, transformation and dialogue, including the consideration of the emotional elements of conflict and the impact of conflict on the deep culture and deep structure of a society (Tatsushi Arai), practices of conflict mediation and transformation, pacific coexistence, dialogue and integration at the small-community level (Oussama Safa) and theories and practices of reparation and transitional justice in the Middle East (Zeina el Helou) and in Chile (Elizabeth Lira), where a psychosocial component was included in the reparation and transitional justice efforts in a situation where the government was part of the conflict, as well as the agent of reparation – similar to what could have happened in the Syrian Arab Republic at that stage. In addition, a module on non-violent communication as a tool to organize workshops between people of different factions over a common set of communication tools (Souleyman Kassouha), and a module on oral history as a way to preserve complex and multifaceted memories and narratives of war (Andrea Brazzoduro, Laura Passerini) were included in this section.

The third pillar was dedicated to the use of culture and cultural activities in both the psychosocial and the conflict mediation processes and as a way to link them. The attention to cultural, creative and theatrical processes and tools was also due to a very practical reason. In the security situation created by the conflict, in many instances, counselling and talk therapies were not welcomed by authorities and found the clients reluctant engaging or not engaging, due to privacy and security considerations. The use of creative tools, and therefore of metaphors, allowed them to express the unspeakable in safe ways, and approach conflict transformation without the stillness given by the sedimentation of a language informed by dominant, polarizing narratives. Trainers for this section were as follows: (a) Guglielmo Schininà, who held workshops on the general principles of this work and on the model of the Complex Circle; (b) Adrian Jackson and Luc Opdebeek, who held workshops on various techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed; (c) Zeina Daccache, who led a workshop on dramatherapy; and (d) Marie-Adele Salem and Karim Dakrou, who investigated practices of the use of puppets and visual art as forms of psychosocial support. Finally, Ilaria Tucci – who, in her doctoral thesis for the Helsinki Peace Center, investigated the impact of theatrical models, including Schininà's Complex Circle in peacebuilding processes – provided a sound bridge between this pedagogical pillar and the one on conflict mediation.

The courses included guided fieldworks at the end, where the students could put in practice what they had elaborated together with their trainers during the taught part of the course. They could decide on which pillar to focus their work, although most fieldworks integrated elements from all pillars. The fact that students were mainly working inside the Syrian Arab Republic, under very challenging security and practical circumstances, created many difficulties in the implementation of the workshops that made the process even more interesting and

meaningful. Some students could not complete their work; others had to constantly readapt it to new situations. This created a learning field where the fieldwork reports resulted being of incredible interest, but not always academically up to high standards. The decision was therefore taken to ask an academic institution – the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa – in appointing a group of experts to analyse the body of all theses and derive their main themes, lessons learned and best practices, with an aim to provide useful practical and critical suggestions to psychosocial practitioners in the region and beyond.

The Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies is an autonomous, special-statute university that promotes education and research through undergraduate studies, master's and PhD programmes in the fields of social sciences (Economics and Management, Law, Political Science) and experimental and applied sciences (Agricultural Research, Engineering, Medical Studies). Most importantly, the research and training activities of the school, which has a long-standing history of collaboration with IOM, have a strong focus on human rights and conflict management. The International Training Programme for Conflict Management (ITPCM) of the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, for instance, offers institutional as well as on-demand training programmes for the personnel of international field missions, along with project assistance and other research/consultancy services, in areas such as the following: (a) peacekeeping; (b) humanitarian assistance; (c) election monitoring; (d) human rights promotion and protection; (e) psychosocial support in migration, emergency and displacement (in collaboration with IOM); (f) development and decentralized cooperation; and (g) post-conflict rehabilitation. The ITPCM, since its outset in 1995, has acquired direct experience in several areas of the world, including West Africa, the Horn of Africa, South-East Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies decided to partner with IOM in this publication in line with the school's mission to not only foster high-standard academic research, but also operationalize academic knowledge and make it available to practitioners working in the field. The school's specific contribution to the present publication consisted, first of all, in selecting its authors among some of the most experienced professionals in the relevant fields of expertise – that is, psychosocial support, arts-based interventions and conflict management. The school was also responsible for coordinating and supervising the drafting of the chapters to ensure consistency in their structure, contents and methodological approaches. The three authors of the publication were tasked with the overall analysis of more than 40 theses produced by the students of the two editions of the master's programme on Psychosocial Support and Dialogue. Each chapter of the present publication constitutes a self-standing and coherent reflection on the intervention approach concerned, supported by evidence that emerges from the fieldwork carried out by the students and that is systematized in their theses through quantitative and qualitative data. In each chapter, the authors elaborate a critical review of the theses that builds on the available scientific literature in the three distinct fields of psychosocial support, arts-based interventions and conflict management. The aim of the three studies is to assess the effectiveness and challenges characterizing the different approaches described in the theses, with specific

reference to the geographical and social contexts of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. The findings of the three chapters will allow practitioners and scholars working in relevant fields to benefit from the critical analysis built by the expert authors, and at the same time add value to the precious information and data collected by the master's students through their fieldwork in areas that continue to be of difficult access for researchers.

Chapter 1: Psychosocial support and dialogue in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic: Psychosocial support approaches in crisis-affected countries

Marie-Adele Salem

Abstract

Following the conflicts taking place in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2011, the affected population, whether displaced or not, is in need of psychosocial support interventions that take into consideration the contextual specificities. This chapter gives an overview of the wounds that the Syrian community is suffering from, as identified and analysed by 21 of the master's students (18 of which are Syrian and 4 are Lebanese), who took part in the two editions of the Psychosocial Support and Dialogue Professional Executive Master's course that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Lebanese University organized in 2014 and 2015 in Beirut. The papers describe as well the bridges that the students were aspiring to rebuild or strengthen throughout their studies or interventions based on the main psychosocial and dialogue concepts and approaches that they acquired during the master's course. In the last part of this chapter, the author elaborates additional recommendations to be considered while planning for future psychosocial interventions in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Keywords: *displacement, contextual specificities, wounds, bridges, psychosocial and dialogue concepts and approaches*

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. "The Mask Has Fallen"[2]

English	Arabic
The mask has fallen from the mask that covered the mask Brother, you have no brothers Friend, you have no friends You have no fortress, no water, no medicine, no sky, no blood and no sail You have no beyond and no before, Siege... No escape Pick up your dropped arm, and strike your enemy with it... No escape Pick me up as I drop beside you, and strike your enemy with me You are now free, free, and free You're dead and you're injured, are ammunition inside you Strike with them... No escape Our carnage, our names... our names, our carnage Siege your siege with madness, and madness and madness No one else but you in this open space for enemies and oblivion Make every barricade a country Those you love are gone, so either you be you Or you do not be...	سقط القناع.. عن القناع.. عن القناع.. لا إخوة لك يا أخي،،لأأصدقاء يا صديقي،،لا قلاع لا الماء عندك،لا الدواء , لا السماء, ولا الدماء .. ولا الشراع ولاالأمام ولا الوراء.. حاصر حصارك .. .لا مفرُّ ! سقطت ذراعك فالتقطها وسَقَطْتُ قربك،فالتقطني واضرب عدوك بي ،فأنت الآن : حرٌّ حرٌّ وحرٌّ قتلاك .. أو جرحاك فيك ذخيرة ! فاضرب بها ! اضرب عدوك..لا مفرّ أشلاؤنا أسماؤنا..أسماؤنا أشلاؤنا حاصر حصارك بالجنون سقط القناع،ولا أحد إلّاك في هذا المدى المفتوح للأعداء والنسيان فاجعل كل متراس بلد.... ذهب الذين تحبهم،ذهبوا..فإما أن تكون أو لا تكون

"The mask has fallen", an expression that was repeated in the master's students' theses, is also the title of a famous poem that Arab communities, affected by existential and political struggles, echo and sing. Despite the fact that the translation of the poem to English makes it lose some of its metaphorical meaning, the words and the metaphors of the poem illustrate the internal voices of individuals and communities struggling for their existence, and might explain in a culturally contextualized fashion the reasons of the main concepts that were discussed throughout the Psychosocial and Dialogue Executive Master's modules, such as identity loss, escalation, polarization of belonging, entrapment and basic human needs. Since 2011, "The masks have fallen" has become a common expression in the Syrian collective discourse when discussing changes that happened on the political, ethnic, sectarian, economic and social levels and how they are experienced, perceived or interpreted by individuals and communities.

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2   Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) is considered to be the national poet of the Palestinian Territories. His poems are known throughout the Arab world, and several of them have been put into music. *Sakata al Kinaa (The Mask Has Fallen)* was released and sang in 1994 by Lebanese soprano and UN Goodwill Ambassador Majida El Roumi.

Going through the Arabic fieldwork reports of IOM master's students and attempting to translate reliably the emotional charge emanating explicitly and implicitly between the lines made the author realize , more than ever, the Arabic terminology's richness when it comes to wars, honour, belonging and prompting dynamics and, on the other hand, its scarce and blurred lexis when it comes to expressing psychosocial well-being and resilience. Certainly, the international MHPSS interventions taking place in the Middle East and North Africa region have brought to new Arabic terminologies being added to this field's jargon. However, there might be a need to wait for decades before these newly acquired MHPSS terms become familiar in the Arabic lexis, and before they have the same impact – as the war-related prompting ones – when used with the affected communities throughout support interventions.

1.1.2. Chapter's overview

This chapter is a summary of 21 papers developed by 17 Syrian and 4 Lebanese students who took part of the Executive Professional Master's programme in Psychosocial Support and Dialogue, jointly organized by IOM and the Lebanese University in 2014 and 2015 in Beirut. Students were selected among those providing humanitarian assistance to affected Syrian communities in both the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. The master's programme comprised a supervised fieldwork and the writing of a fieldwork report. In the process of identifying the fieldworks to conduct, the students seem to have chosen situations that resonate with their current professional and/or personal concerns. In itself, this observation highlights the importance of the reports' diversity, because it gives an overview of the spectrum of personal, professional and contextual challenges that Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian MHPSS actors (working in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon) are facing in this complex context. Students focused their fieldworks on each of the pillars the course was organized in. This chapter analyses the theses dedicated to psychosocial support. Among these 21 theses, the main subjects analysed in this chapter are as follows:

- Psychosocial support to children and adolescents from displaced and host communities in the Syrian Arab Republic (Damascus, Malikiyah and Swaida) and Lebanon (7 fieldworks);

- Losses and identity crisis that individuals, families and communities are going through due to the current events in the Syrian Arab Republic (Damascus and Swaida) (6 fieldworks);

- Gender roles changes, the psychosocial needs of Syrian women and the effects of psychosocial support interventions on their lives, in the Syrian Arab Republic (Damascus, Latakiya, Yabroud, and Kalamoun) and Lebanon (5 fieldworks);

- Psychosocial support to Palestinian refugees living in Palestinian camps in the Syrian Arab Republic (1 fieldwork);

- Polarization between host Lebanese communities and Syrian displaced community (1 fieldwork); and

- Stigma around mental health in the Syrian Arab Republic (1 fieldwork).

The different analysed papers focused mainly on three themes: (a) giving an overview of the different wounds that the Syrian communities, in different geographical zones, whether displaced or not, are enduring since 2011; (b) analysing the different situations in reference to the psychosocial support and dialogue concepts and tools acquired in the master's programme; and (c) exploring means of building bridges between different groups affected by the war.

Similarly, this chapter will be structured in four axis:

(a) An overview of the different identified **wounds**, at the individual, family and community levels that are closely linked to the **contextual specificities** of the region, in addition to their impact on the humanitarian actors themselves who are also part of the Syrian community;

(b) An outline of the main **psychosocial support and dialogue concepts** on which the students based their analysis in reference to the material of the course;

(c) An overview of the **bridges** that were explored by the students of the master's programmes. Their main focus was on problematics, such as integration of children of refugee and displaced communities within hosting communities and support to women who endured several losses, including the loss of their social and family roles. This axis refers therefore to the direct impact of these interventions on the affected communities' quality of life; and

(d) A brief elaboration of **recommendations** to be taken into consideration while planning for future psychosocial and dialogue initiatives in the region and to foster sustainable change. These recommendations, elaborated by the author based on the Lebanese post-war psychosocial interventions experience, refer therefore to further analysis of cultural and contextual specificities.

1.2. The wounds

1.2.1. Loss and grief

The losses in the Syrian Arab Republic and the region take different forms, and students tried in their papers to explore them and understand their impact on the individual, family, community and social levels. The loss of identity, of belonging, of safety,[3] of existence and purpose, of social status, of family or social life, of jobs, of homes,[4] of roles, of past, present and future, of loved ones, of body limbs, in addition to the ambiguous losses of the disappeared are just some of the numerous losses[5] that the population has to grief. The accumulation of these wounds makes it difficult for individuals and families to go through the grieving stages and reach acceptance.[6] Moreover, in the case of loss of loved ones, rituals – through which grievers can usually express their sorrow, accept the losses and regain control over their daily life – are difficult to occur because of lack of security and other reasons.

"I can't collapse now; my family needs me"[7] seem to be a survival mechanism that freezes the sorrow, because other priorities, such as basic needs and safety, make "collapsing" a luxury. Among the different forms of losses, the disappearances, with their coat of ambiguity, seem to be the most agonizing for Syrian families nowadays,[8] and for humanitarian actors working with them. Grieving the disappeared, is, for the families, killing the hope that they are alive; reaching the acceptance phase becomes, for them, a symbolic murder of their own loved ones.

With the rising numbers of casualties in the Syrian Arab Republic, families express the fact that they have experienced so many losses, to the point where they feel numb and they don't know which loss to start grieving first. Other forms of grief regard losing their home country at large, which brings to losing a sense of containment and enwrapment. Human beings cannot tolerate ambiguity and tend to create certainty regardless of the amount of distortion involved in doing so. Under the painful influence of these losses, refugees and displaced populations tend to single out specific complaints as the only source of their unhappiness. Often, these complaints are legitimate, but they seem to acquire extraordinary and excessive significance, and overcharged with sorrow in a disproportional way. These may be focused on insufficiently attended needs connected with housing, schools, benefits and mostly physical medical symptoms.[9] Clients of the fieldworks mentioned that talking

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[3]   Hussein, 2014:13.
[4]   Al Nafra, 2015:8.
[5]   Samah, 2014:15.
[6]   Ibid., 3.
[7]   Expression shared by one of the master's students in 2015 during the module on art-based psychosocial interventions where students worked on the theme of loss and grief.
[8]   Samah, 2014:4.
[9]   Papadopoulos, 2002:18.

about their feelings to others is not an option since each family has its own losses and unspoken sorrows that make peer support not feasible. The majority carry their grief in their hearts and gather their courage and strength to focus on their daily life and satisfying their children's needs.[10]

1.2.2. Propagation of sorrow

[...] We were university colleagues. We had a plan: finish our studies, get done with the military service, travel and study or have an experience abroad, start a personal project, build a family, etc., but the wheel of life stopped when the revolution started. [...][11]

[...] You keep these choices inside of you; they become dreams. [...] We became a day-by-day living people. Some of us couldn't stand the blood and danger and left to continue their lives, but they seem to have difficulties in settling down. [...] What is happening in the country destroyed people from inside. The problem is not in the places they flee to; actually, it is in them. They can't flee the events in the country even if they try; they carry it with them wherever they go. [...][12]

War destructs homes, infrastructures, economies, cultural heritages and most of all, it destructs bridges, especially existential ones. Throughout the data analysis in the different fieldworks conducted by the students, and from the reports of oral history interviews, it is noticeable that the war's psychosocial impact reached multiple existential levels: the relations to one's self, the personal and collective identity, the relation to the other, the sense of belonging, the bridges between the past, the present and the future.

Refugees and displaced populations experience a sense of nostalgic disorientation[13] that obstructs individuals, families and communities from accepting or coping with a new reality – as safer as it might be – because they share a deep sense of yearning to restoring what was lost: the sense of home and the sense of belonging and security.

In addition to this nostalgic disorientation, survivors of war narrate to humanitarian workers, especially those in the health and psychosocial support sectors, about the extreme adversities they went through and, in some cases, they carry and show proofs of their experiences, such as scars, bullets, videos and pictures of dramatic deaths of their lost loved ones. The analytical function of the exhibition of the proofs might also be unconscious rather than unintentional. Survivors seem to have reached a state of numbness due to extreme sorrow, or might still be denying the unacceptable. Through their pattern, and

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[10]   Ibid., 29–30.
[11]   Omran, 2014:15.
[12]   Ibid., 30–31.
[13]   Papadopoulos, 2002:20.

through the reactions of the humanitarians, they seem to be yearning for someone to "feel" on their behalf what they cannot mourn anymore. Moreover, the humanitarian's reactions seem to be, in itself, proof that the adversity really happened. "Your dead and your injured are ammunitions within you" is the metaphor contained in the poem that opened this chapter, which perfectly illustrates this pattern.

1.2.3. Unhuman phenomena and humanitarian values

Accounts of captivity and slavery of women and children – including sexual slavery, dramatic conditions of early marriages, kidnapping for organ trafficking, savage treatment of cadavers, slaughtering and cannibalism[14] – are widespread in social media, and yet those are unconceivable phenomena to the point where one starts wondering if these news are true or constructed prompting tools. Dehumanizing the enemy is also part of extreme hostility and polarization. From an analytico-systemic perspective, it looks like in times of war, chaos and loss of individual and collective identities, regression and fixation to archaic practices and symbols of fear, aggression and power can substitute the pre-existing sociopolitical oppression and inherit and accentuate its function in communities. As if the more these minorities were marginalized and oppressed, the larger and deeper will be the reactive regression and its consequences.

The attempt to comprehend and process these phenomena through human sciences theories is, in a way, undervaluing the experiences of the survivors; these phenomena seem to constitute an impasse for the humanity at large.

Humanitarian actors in the region are sometimes torn between the impartial principles of their organization and their personal human values that cannot let them tolerate these acts of barbarism. Studies try to explain how humanitarian actors are affected in their relief work. The situation is even more complex whenever humanitarian actors belong to the affected community. In addition to their personal wounds, the details of the adversities and the extreme suffering that they witness while providing the support, they have to deal with the social challenges that their commitment to impartiality and humanity generate. Sometimes, their credibility, honesty and even nationalism is put at stake; they are judged by the society that expect them to belong to a party or might misinterpret their willingness to provide humanitarian support to "the enemy".[15] Being an MHPSS practitioner in the region can also be a dangerous role; in individual or group therapeutic settings, sensitive information can be shared, and this, in times of war, might put the professional as well as other participants at risk.[16]

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[14] Mousa, 2014:15–16.
[15] Mousa, 2014:13.
[16] Merhi, 2015:28.

1.3. Psychosocial support and dialogue concepts

The transformation in the perception of human suffering in the context of displacement in the Syrian war was clear in the way students analysed the subjects of their papers and the way they planned and conducted psychosocial interventions following the master's programmes. Their approaches shifted from the region's common pathologization and treatment of the individual, to trying to manage the impact of the war at the individual, family, community and social levels, while taking into consideration the various cultural and wider contextual specificities.

An important indicator of this shift is the appropriate reference to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the different fieldwork reports. PTSD and trauma are widely used by media, humanitarian actors and even by the affected community to describe psychological reactions in the context of war in the Syrian Arab Republic, which bring programmatic approaches focusing on the individual pathology, and in diagnostics and treatment. In the fieldworks, the term "wounds" seems to have replaced the improper use of PTSD, while the expression "building bridges" seems to have replaced the term "treatment" in the different papers. The transformation in the terms that students used while describing the psychosocial interventions they implemented is also an indicator of the transformation of their perceived role as humanitarian actors: "We worked with the group on" instead of "We worked on the group to", a common expression that psychosocial actors in the region would use, and "We facilitated the expression in a safe space" instead of "The victims trusted me to express".

The systemic shift in the perception and analysis of some subjects is evident from the organization of most fieldwork reports, whereas students often described the problem, their own motive behind the choice of the subject,[17] the system of service provision at large, the epistemology used to intervene, the wider sociopolitical context and/or the interaction between these different systemic elements. The main psychosocial and dialogue frameworks and concepts that students referred to in their theses and that played a role in this change of perception seem to be:

- The Adversity Grid;[18] and

- The concepts of polarization and impasse.[19]

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[17]   Farousi, 2015:5.
[18]   Papadopoulos, 2014.
[19]   Arai, 2014.

1.3.1. The Adversity Grid

In every emergency, aid workers tend to oversimplify the complexity of the situation, which brings to confusion between the actual adversities and the way these adverse experiences are perceived. In this context, trauma is usually defined as a default harmful result of certain events. In reality, multiple factors affect the experience and responses to adversity. In their papers, students referred namely to the following:[20]

- The relational: The existence of support systems, whether familial or social, and the development of community support through local or international interventions was a resilience factor for individuals to survive adversities.[21]

- Gender: Women seemed to be the most vulnerable group at the beginning of the crisis; however, with the breakdown of the Syrian social system and the losses and gains it generated, the gender roles were shaken and transformed. Students worked on supporting women suffering from the losses and reinforcing the gains.[22]

- Meaning attribution: Political or religious ideologies are usually supportive factors that can help affected populations in dealing with their losses and wounds. However, in the current phase of the Syrian crisis, the students highlighted a sense of loss of meaning,[23] leading to further suffering and hopelessness.

- Hope and future prospects: The lack of hope and the fear of the future seem to be highly and negatively affecting the coping capacities of individuals, families and communities.[24]

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[20]   Papadopoulos, 2014.
[21]   Al Abdullah, 2015:40.
[22]   Merhi, 2015:17.
[23]   Omran, 2014:41.
[24]   Al Abdullah, 2015:40.

Table 1: The Adversity Grid[25]

Levels	Negative			Neutral	Positive
	Injury, wound			Resilience	Adversity-activated development
	Psychiatric disorder (PTSD)	Distressful psychological reactions	Ordinary human suffering		
Individual					
Family					
Community					
Society/culture					

Through the master's course, students were invited to be mindful of the totality and interconnectedness of individual, family and community's experiences and remember that the consequences of exposure to adversities are more than just "trauma" or "resilience"; each refugee, besides experiencing the negative psychological effects of the devastating events (ordinary human suffering or psychological disorders), also retains some existing strengths (resilience), as well as acquires new positive qualities (adversity-activated development). The Adversity Grid reminded students throughout their interventions that individual pathology is first of all rare, and when it appears, it is only a small element in the wider spectrum of responses to adversity that coexist with the pathology.[26] Students referred to the grid in order to analyse the different information they captured in their assessment interviews in preparation of their fieldwork.[27] Other students used the grid as a tool to inform their workshops and interventions with their clients, helping participants to identify the different forms in which they expressed their ordinary human sufferings. In addition, they supported the groups in identifying and valourizing the new acquired or developed positive elements in their lives: women expressed how their sorrow pushed them to more isolation, anger towards self and children, and psychosomatic symptoms, while the supportive networks they developed with their peers and the changes of their gender roles were identified as capacities that they never realized they could possess before the adversities.[28]

1.3.2. Polarization and the victim triangle

"Come back and save me" was the main message that Sham (Damascus) – the thousand-year-old puppet handcrafted by a young Syrian refugee during a puppetry psychosocial activity – screamed to the group. Sham also said that she is the "bride of all cities", and that

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[25] Papadopoulos, 2011:5.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Omran, 2014:38, 40.
[28] Jawhar, 2015:22–23.

her dream is to "live in peace", while the obstacle preventing her from realizing her dream was "all the world".

One of the most conspicuous effects of violence is polarization. Referring to a deepening division between "us" and "them", polarized relationships become harder to transform when they are supported by a collective moral judgement that makes "our side" good and "their side" evil, with deeply cultural, ideological, political and religious implications.[29] Clearly, in the students' papers, polarization seems to start secretly on an intrapersonal level, with the disorientation and confusion experienced by individuals who are asking themselves – but can't share it explicitly with others – if they are right or wrong about their positions and attitudes, or even if their groups' attitudes and positions are right or wrong after all these years of conflict that didn't lead to anything but more harm. This intrapersonal polarization led, in some cases, to an enlargement of how the conflict is perceived and the search for external actors to blame or to favour, contributing consequently to more polarization.

> I experienced social withdrawal. It was difficult for me to deal with the social tension around me. [...] People were telling me that since I am supporting the regime, I will not be part of the future of Syria [...] but what did this crisis do to our country? It made people eat each other's meat and sell each other. Human traffickers are spreading rumors and fear in the city, then they promise families that they will help them reach Europe in small boats. They exploit them; one family that I know lost 20 of its members. Here are the traders of this crisis; these people want it to never end [...] I don't know who to trust anymore, and to be honest, I think I can trust the foreign fighters who are supporting the cause more than my own country's citizens (Young Syrian woman interviewed by a master's student in Damascus).[30]

Polarization is also observed on different levels of interactions; the interpersonal, inter-familial, inter-ethnical, inter-sectorial and inter-geographical levels. The basic human needs – such as security and freedom – of each of the stakeholders involved in the conflict, and their respective pursuits of it appear to contradict one another in such a way that it drives the resulting conflict to the surface.[31]

> I can never accept them, I might even hurt them... Do they accept me? No! Never![32]

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[29]   Arai, 2014:9.
[30]   Omran, 2014:20, 22.
[31]   Arai, 2014:34.
[32]   Omran, 2014:41.

The culture of violence, diffused in refugee/displaced and host communities, is causing and justifying hostility and discrimination. With time, and due to multiple socioeconomic challenges that both communities have to confront, social polarization and violence were legitimized and became part of a culture that even parents and teachers transmit to children.[33] In some cases, organized groups of children from host communities verbally and physically attack groups of displaced children in schools and refuse to share their toys or pens with them while accusing them of being dirty carriers of diseases.[34] Numerous are the cases of refugees who have burned camps and shelters because they resent the services or the quality of food, or attacked volunteers they accuse of injustice or harm.

Polarization can be the cause of these events, but an entrapment in the victim, rescuer and perpetrator triangle[35] can also be a valid explanation. Considering refugees as victims of adversities is an inevitable outcome of the actual devastating and destructive events and circumstances they were unfortunately exposed to. However, victims and their rescuers can, because of secondary gains experienced by both parties, co-construct and indirectly participate in fossilizing a victim identity in the interactional field of organizational remits. This situation disempowers refugees and reinforces a "learned helplessness" that ignores other consequences of adversity such as resilience and adversity-activated development.[36] The entrapment in the victim, rescuer or perpetrator triangle leads to a continuous need for finding or creating new perpetrators to blame and therefore pushes refugees and survivors of adversities to further destroy interrelational bridges in the hosting community or country.

In some parts of the Syrian Arab Republic, the situation seems to be even more complex. Palestinian refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic had to flee their refugee camps to seek refuge in temporary shelters, and then they had to flee the shelters to neighbouring countries. For generations, these families showed resilience and capacities to cope with the different losses they experienced trans-generationally.[37] However, they now have to face again hostility and discrimination throughout their journey of displacement, even when they reach other Palestinian camps in the region.

In the north of the Syrian Arab Republic, more than 10,000 Kurdish Yazidi families fled Iraq and reached the Kurd part of the Syrian Arab Republic because of the terrorist attacks in their home country. Meanwhile, Muslim Iraqi families who were also targeted by the terrorists' armed group pursued refuge in the same Syrian hosting community. When both refugee communities were gathered in the same camp, in Malikiyah, and when children were enrolled in the same school, conflicts arose, because the Yazidis associated the

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33   Kchour, 2015:11.
34   Obeid, 2015:5.
35   Karpman, 1968.
36   Papadopoulos, 2014.
37   Sahli, 2014:8.

Arabic-speaking Muslims with the terrorist groups.[38] Children refused to play together and presented hostile behaviours towards each other, while parents and teachers were justifying the position.

The war in the Syrian Arab Republic and the presence of refugees in Lebanon are having deep impact on the demographical, economical, political and security instability in the country, and polarization reached also the Lebanese who are more than ever now divided towards their attitude on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. While part of the community is supportive, the other part is strongly supporting of the expulsion of refugees from Lebanese territories and the shutting of borders. This division became stronger with the widening of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the participation of Lebanese armed groups in the military actions on the Syrian territory. On the other hand, Syrians in Lebanon faced discrimination and exploitation; the boards of many Lebanese cities and villages restricted the movement of Syrian refugees.[39]

As expressed by the thousand-year-old puppet and the affected population at large, polarization in the Syrian Arab Republic went beyond the region's borders, and is justifying human and political accusations to the whole world for not stopping the blood shedding in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is safe to say that the international community also presents visible symptoms of polarization. With the multiplying terrorist attacks in different parts of the world, linked directly or indirectly, intentionally or not to the generalizing perception of refugees as terrorists, both refugee community and hosting countries are paying the price of this polarization.

1.3.3. The impasse or the point of no return

I can't accept a political solution for my country anymore. I am one of the 25 million Syrians who participated in this revolution, and I have to take the responsibility towards who trusted us. But I am taking a rest now, because I am a refugee too. [...] I fled not because of fear but because I am exhausted; I am in a disoriented period and need to renew my energy. I can't go back to Damascus, not even for an hour, because a barrier [is] erected between me and the people there; it is not an imagined one, but a barrier erected by the blood they shed. This is not because I became an extremist or a "stoned minded" person or because I cannot tolerate a different point of view, no, this is because of the losses, the displacement, the dead fathers, mothers, sons [...][40]

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[38] Mohamed, 2015:12.
[39] Kchour, 2015:28.
[40] Omran, 2014:28.

Looking at the conflict dynamics reveals that the situation went beyond the escalation and intensive hostility, the polarization, the widening and reached the stage of the impasse. Parties seem to be prisoners of their goal-seeking behaviour and attitude so persistently that they cannot move away from their stated positions and towards agreement.[41]

Activated by justified unmet basic human needs, this impasse seemed to have taken different forms from helplessness and withdrawal to extreme phenomena that students called "Satan in every human";[42] in all cases, from a systemic point of view, it surely has a meaning and a function. The meaning being "We reached the point of no return", repeated by the different groups involved in the conflict, gives this impasse the function of linking the aspirations in all its diversity, to the bitter reality that is common to all. The more the aspirations are far from being realized because of the escalating reality, the more the impasse is reinforced. Like an addiction to a drug, individuals and groups are aware of its self-destructive effect but can't survive the internal and external chaos without it.

> You try to resist but at the end, you become obsessed with worries, tension and confusion. [Ninety] 90 per cent of my friends suffered these things, which pushed us away from the real cause. We turned to sexual rebellions, drugs, alcohol. Our minds couldn't endure the situation; we lived around three months in a semi coma. We lived in small lazy groups smoking hashish, avoiding going out to avoid checkpoints where our friends were arrested and treated with violence. We stayed away from everyone just smoking hash.[43]

Individuals, families and groups chose to withdraw, hide and seek refuge in other countries. Their decision to stay physically safe didn't save their psychosocial well-being neither their inter-relational bonds. As if reaching a safe space where they can just let go of the fear of death puts them in confrontation with all the memories of adversities they went through, and as if the impact of their experiences – that they froze to survive – can now erode and express itself. Women who were raped in the Syrian Arab Republic were sometimes able to disclose their adversity to their husbands. In many cases, the husbands took the responsibility of saving and protecting them by fleeing the country to safer areas in the surrounding countries. However, it is following the settlement in safer areas that domestic violence is at times starting, even within couples, who never experienced it before.[44] Surrounding factors, such as host community's hostility, economic pressure and changes in roles within families, should also be taken into consideration, since they constitute additional sources of distress to deal with. Similarly, Syrian families who fled conflict zones and reached safe shelters in the Syrian Arab Republic have to face difficulties – in addition to the adverse experiences

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41   Mousa, 2014:15.
42   Mousa, 2014:15.
43   Omran, 2014:19.
44   Asleh, 2015:11.

they went through – in coping with their living conditions, lack of social opportunities, the scarce ensured survival needs and sometimes with unskilled or purely oppressive shelter management practices. Consequently, internal conflicts within or between families, as well as conflicts with shelter managers and host communities arise.[45]

Based on the qualitative analysis of the interviews they conducted, students referred to the "position, interest, basic human need" model in an attempt to further understand the impasse they were observing and the gaps that this situation is creating. The model is defined as what conflict parties explicitly state and do in order to exert their influence on other parties. Parties' interest is defined in those consciously articulated reasons justifying and underlying the parties' conflicting positions. The deepest layer constituting the roots of these positions and expressed interests in a conflict are the basic human needs defined as the most essential requirements of life, without which human beings cannot survive physically and/or mentally.

If interests represent what people want, for example, revenge against adversaries, basic human needs represent what they really need, for example, a desire to have everyone, including one's adversaries, honour the lives of the loved ones killed. Categories of needs include the following:

- Security, with emphasis on the ability and conditions needed to protect human lives;
- Welfare, which is realized by establishing access to food, water, shelter and other material resources and conditions to sustain human lives;
- Identity, which is expressed in such forms as religions, languages and historical narratives; and
- Freedom from political repression, military occupation and social constraints on movement.[46]

Under the chronic conditions of structural and cultural violence, people affected by violence become so used to being deprived of their needs that they are often unaware any longer of this deprivation. However, affected individuals can describe their deprivation by how they subjectively experience it. Conflicting parties' basic human needs can be identified by observing patterns of their behaviour in critical situations of life and death. Examples of such conflict-related behaviours include fleeing homes for survival, committing suicide out of despair and transmitting religious values and languages to future generations, despite existing obstacles.[47] Whether healthy or not, these behaviours can also take the form of systemic coping strategies, aiming to minimize the suffering inflicted by this uncontrollable situation.

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[45]   Hussein, 2014:10.
[46]   Arai, 2014:42.
[47]   Ibid.

1.4. The bridges – Responding in the present

1.4.1. Signs of hope

In their fieldwork, the students mostly applied one of the approaches presented during the master's programme: the present-future-past approach[48] for reconciliation. According to this approach:

> [...] adversaries with deep hatred are first encouraged to work out schemes of cooperation in order to meet their immediate needs of coexistence. They are then expected to continuously work together and gradually rebuild their relationships toward a non-violent future. Finally, after these steps are taken, they are encouraged to reconcile with their past grudges, building on the emerging sense of interdependence.[49]

The students implemented psychosocial strategies and interventions that fostered cooperation among different parties to meet their immediate needs of coexistence. Despite the wounds the conflict is creating in the Syrian Arab Republic, which take different forms, students highlighted and worked on reinforcing human bridges through their interventions, trying to overcome polarization, strengthen resilience and acknowledge and build upon adversity-activated development.

> My entourage wanted me to forget about war, I couldn't and this drove me away from them, I went to the "capital of Hanbalis[50] in Syria", Duma city. I am calling it this way because when I first went there, I knew it as the city of fundamentalists where religion rules. I heard a lot of stories about them and how they treat their women. I don't pray, I drink [...] when I arrived there, it was tensed. I was an outsider; they observed me, and I did the same. Then when the siege was imposed, food and water were banned. We got more common worries that made us forget about trivial things, such as appearances, religion, etc. We had a new aim in life: finding water and food to help others. A new relation began; we got to know each other and spoke frankly. They strengthened me with their deep faith, and I did the same with my indifference. Helping others united us [...][51]

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Arai, 2014:42.
[50] The Hanbali School is one of the four orthodox Sunni Islamic school of jurisprudence and considered as a strict traditionalist school.
[51] Omran, 2014:34.

Common basic human needs, such as safety, respect or recognition,[52] are genuinely helping people unite and overcome polarization and hostility. And it is probably because of this observation that some students found that the "present-future-past" approach of conflict resolution can be the most effective in the Syrian Arab Republic:

> Following this experience, I will never think of myself as an artist anymore. I am now a human activist; I have a moral duty to show people what I have witnessed [...] a moral duty towards the displaced, and this is the only thing I can offer them as a way of support. I should speak loudly.[53]

Finding a new identity and a new role following adversities and helplessness can help individuals and groups find a new existential meaning and a new purpose despite all the losses, and is surely considered an internal resource that can reinforce healthy coping strategies.

Overcoming polarization can also start by supporting survivors in regaining an active existential role. While in most hosting communities, refugees receive passively support and relief, examples of more effective and sustainable interventions arise as well: In south Lebanon, Syrian refugees, with the support of a local NGO and an activist journalist from the area, formed a community-based conflict mitigation and support committee. Their role is to support newcomers, especially the most vulnerable, and also intervene when conflicts rise between refugees and host community members or among the refugees.[54]

These signs of hope vary from one geographical zone to another, and have, however, a common denominator: the hope for a better present, a better tomorrow and the hope for peace and security for the generations to come.[55] IOM master's students gathered in Lebanon with the same hope. Discovering means of reconstructing or reinforcing the "bridges" was their main priority, especially as stated earlier, with problematics that resonate with them on the professional and personal levels.

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52 Arai, 2014:13.
53 Omran, 2014:36.
54 Kchour, 2015:19.
55 91% of the participants expressed this wish in a research questionnaire conducted by Elham Elias Mousa, master's student.

1.4.2. "Trees and stones are the same everywhere": Supporting the integration of displaced and refugee children in host communities

Four out of five Syrian children in Lebanon are out of school and are not receiving formal education. In addition, most children aged above 8 years old are financially supporting their families with dangerous forms of labour.[56] Sometimes, these children are given the responsibility to financially support their families because of security constraints or because adults, who are non-registered, fear to be arrested. In addition to the consequences of the changes of roles in their families that sees them becoming the breadwinners, and all the challenges they have to endure in their work life, these children face discrimination and hostility when enrolled in psychosocial activities along with their peers from the host communities. Through art, writing, drama and play, children of both communities were able to overcome their polarizations, developing their mutual empathy and noticing that they had much more in common than they thought they would. Several psychosocial interventions focused on child-to-child networks[57] and conflict resolution strategies through games, drama and art in order to support children and youth in finding common grounds and building interactional bridges.

"In my country, there is no me"[58] was the way in which a young Syrian refugee completed the sentence: "In my country, there is no [...]" during a writing workshop organized for Syrian and Lebanese youth. In these workshops, youth stated that after hearing one another, they were able to perceive the problems at stake from a different perspective; in their eyes, the responsibility for their daily problems is not only attributable to the other group.

Another illustration of psychosocial support and dialogue sessions where displaced and host children built human bridges took place in Swaida, Southern Syrian Arab Republic. In the session where they were invited to find elements of nature (stones, tree leaves and others) that reminded them of home and share with the group why they chose these symbols, their memories of their homes and lost homes, their bedrooms and stories about their favourite playgrounds made them realize that they had more in common than they thought.[59] The facilitator replicated the same programme with groups of children in different Syrian governorates: Aleppo, Damascus, Homs and Tartus.

Similarly, in northern Syrian Arab Republic with the Kurd and Arab children who fled Iraq, psychosocial support and dialogue workshops were difficult to organize at the beginning because of the hostility between the two groups and because the facilitator had to talk in

56 Kchour, 2015:7.
57 Ibrahim, 2014:22.
58 Ibid.
59 Obeid, 2015:17.

both Arabic and Kurdish in order for the children to be in the same group. Yet, after a while, following some psychosocial sessions where they were able to express in a safe way their losses and fears and current struggles through drawings and drama games, they started using each other's languages to ease the communication.[60]

The impact of such workshops was reported effective by teachers and parents, who, at the beginning of the intervention, were pessimistic with regards to children tolerating each other and playing together in the same group.

Most master's students who worked with children during their fieldworks realized that working with parents and teachers – who are also polarized – is necessary to ensure a more sustainable change in the children.

1.4.3. "Nothing should stop us": Supporting women through the changes in their role

Psychosocial programmes and activities focusing on livelihood are being implemented in most of the areas where displaced families live.

> The focus on supporting women is not a gender discrimination unfortunately; it is mainly due to the contextual reality. Women arrive with their children and men are not accompanying their families, because they are enrolled in the armed conflicts, because their fate is unknown, because they tried to seek refuge in neighbouring countries hoping to reunite with their families soon or because they were outside Syria before the war started and they couldn't come back for security reasons.[61]

> I am a Syrian mother, and while receiving and supporting the displaced women who arrived to Latakia, I couldn't but put myself in their places [...] if these women are supported and if we can help them feel that they are alone in their struggle, we have a chance to support further what is left of these families... women, despite the traditions, are the pillars of their families.[62]

Like in every emergency, roles of women are changing; traditionally, they are in charge of raising the children at home and taking care of the household shadowed by a husband, a father, a son who will ensure their protection and their livelihood.[63] Following the loss or absence of men in the family, women have two choices: either they collapse and drawn

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[60]   Mohamed, 2015:19.
[61]   Hajj Hassan, 2014:6.
[62]   Farousi, 2015:4.
[63]   Merhi, 2015:6.

themselves in grief, or they have to challenge the society's unmerciful judgement, their families' and their in-laws' pressure and stand up for their children with drastic changes in their identities, roles and lives.[64] Despite the fact that women who lost their "protector and bread provider" suffered from distress and preferred isolation in order to protect themselves from the judgemental society,[65] other interviews and psychosocial interventions revealed that women's masks of complete submissiveness in conservative parts of the Syrian Arab Republic seem to have fallen as well.

Oum Mohamad is 60 years old; after her husband's death, she witnessed the kidnapping of two of her sons and the birth of one of her sons' first child. She took the responsibility of her daughters-in-law and their children and reopened her son's grocery shop that she manages now on her own. In addition, she didn't give up on finding her sons and travels frequently to Damascus where she is hoping to have information regarding them.

Nohad, 42 years old, lost her husband and decided to take her four children outside of the Syrian Arab Republic to protect them. However, she was shot on the road and had to go back to her parents' home due to her severe injury. With the support, she was able to overcome the different adversities she went through and decided to be a taxi driver. She never imagined that a day will come where she will be working and surely not as a taxi driver; however, she proudly states that this is the great lesson that she wants her children to learn: "nothing in life should stop us".[66]

Building supportive social networks among women who lost their husbands or who are struggling with displacement and role changes was the objective of psychosocial support groups organized by the master's students. Thanks to these groups, women learned how their peers were able to overcome difficulties. Expressing their sorrow in a safe way helped them feel that they are not alone and that some of the sources of their distress can be manageable or controlled. It also made them realize that the difficult situation they are in is also a chance for more freedom of choice and self-development.[67]

1.5. Recommendations for future interventions

Master's students focused their theses mainly on the support to children, women and displaced families at large. Developing the capacities of humanitarian actors in the region to support affected groups is a critical need. Individuals should be encouraged to work together and gradually rebuild their relationships towards a non-violent future, before they

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[64]   Samah, 2014:9.
[65]   Ibid.
[66]   Hajj Hassan, 2014:18.
[67]   Jawhar, 2015:22.

can finally reconcile with their past wounds and grudges. Psychosocial support programmes that enable affected groups to transform and reconstruct the roles and identities they have lost or developed throughout the crisis and as a consequence of it can surely prepare the ground to initiate dialogue and therefore to more sustainable change. These groups should also be supported and encouraged to take the ownership of this transformative process and become the advocates of this change. In this respect, the master's programme was an attempt to equip a group of professionals, who are also part of the affected communities to initiate change. A few recommendations for future programming can be drawn from the thesis as already discussed above:

(a) The present-future-past approach: This focuses on the immediate needs of coexistence of affected communities throughout the interventions, then gradually encourages the rebuilding of relational bridges towards a non-violent future. Following these steps, activities that encourage communities in reconciling with their past grudges and building on the emerging sense of interdependence can be initiated.

(b) Systemic approach: Understanding how wounds are experienced form a systemic perspective on the individual, family and community levels and plan interventions accordingly.

(c) Working with specific target groups can only be effective if interventions with the surrounding context are also planned. For example, working with groups of children coming from different backgrounds on dialogue and finding common ground can only have a sustainable impact if a similar intervention is initiated with parents, teachers and other systems interacting with children.

In addition, few other recommendations can be added within the systemic framework of the master's programme, not looking at the fieldwork, but other identified best practices in the region.

1.5.1. Working with men and other neglected categories

Domestic violence, a problem that is pre-existing to the war, escalates throughout the journey of losses, distress and displacement. The causes of domestic violence are enrooted in the socioeducational patriarchal context at large (legal, economical, educational, social, religious and others) that commonly gives gender privileges to men. This general context generates implicit perceptions of gender roles that influence the choice of partners and the creation of couples, and then families, where engendered rules are set in stone: a man should work and protect the honour of the family; a woman should raise the children, obey her husband and take care of the household. Multiple factors affect the conventional distribution of gender roles during war times and following it. The losses of these roles and the changes that occur in the family constellations lead to violent manifestations that have the function of re-establishing power dynamic and equilibrium in gender roles (men lose their jobs, women are obliged to work, leading to men's sense of loss of power and therefore to potential

violence). With the rising orthodox feminist movements in the region, more harm can be created to couples and families' constellation if roots of domestic violence are not taken into consideration while planning the interventions. Supporting families affected by war can help in breaking the cycle of violence that is recurring trans-generationally. Families are at the basis of resilience and identity in the region. Humanitarian actors working on this problematic should, first of all, challenge their own gender attitudes and then strategize interventions that can recreate a healthy equilibrium within couples and families.

In addition, a training needs assessment conducted in 2016 with Syrian mental health professionals working within the Syrian Arab Republic[68] highlighted the need for capacity development programmes aimed at equipping them with specialized and focused mental health and psychosocial support strategies for both survivors and caregivers/families. The assessment identified few categories of concern:

(a) Children enrolled in armed conflicts;

(b) Survivors of worse forms of human rights violation (children and adults);

(c) Individuals who are suffering from amputations, mutilations and disability due to war; and

(d) Ex-combatants.

Finally, specialized mental health services are necessary in complex emergency settings, especially when wounds exceed the level of ordinary human suffering.[69] However, transformation and reconstruction of identities and roles can only be initiated and reinforced when a new collective meaning is given to the adversity, when survivors can experience healthy reintegration in their communities and when they have the opportunity of developing a new existential purpose – when they become advocates for change.

1.5.2. A cross-cultural transformative perspective

Masks or facades that protect the sense of belonging can also have the function of preserving the original values and the original identity. Psychoanalytical thoughts compare the psychological mechanism of humans to archeological sites; ruins are preserved by layers of soils and sediments until it is excavated to reveal the history and identity of populations. Resilience, values and traces of memories can be kept hidden and preserved by the unconscious – and sometimes by masks – until it is articulated through therapy or until it can be expressed following intense life experiences that reinforce the capacity for existential questioning, insight and self-awareness.

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[68] ABAAD, 2016.
[69] Papadopouolos, 2011.

Cultural heritage and its link to psychosocial well-being and dialogue

In the past six years of the Syrian war, damage or complete destruction has been caused to numerous cultural heritage sites, museums and historical buildings, including all six UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Syrian Arab Republic, not to mention the sites in Iraq.

In 2015, a training on the preservation of cultural heritage was conducted in the United Arab Emirates and gathered archaeologists and museum directors of the region. Throughout the training, participants described their battle to preserve the cultural heritage of their countries, how they were hiding in their own houses and basements what they were able to save from the sites or museums, even though they knew that their acts can put them and their families at risk of death. Their awareness of the magnitude of these losses and the helplessness they are experiencing while watching the attacks affected them "like a family who lost a child", as stated by a Syrian archaeologist. A link between the psychosocial impact of these losses on the collective-identity level made professionals realize furthermore the importance of their role in the restoration and safeguarding of the ruins. Throughout this training, a group decided to coordinate with psychosocial actors in their homeland and plan workshops where a symbolic reconstruction of the destroyed sites can take place. Their plan was to initiate a community-based campaign, collecting sites' pictures and using them in workshops aiming at documenting the oral history and the remembrance that the pictures would trigger. With all the adversities that communities have to endure in war times, one would think that such initiatives are not a priority. However, such workshops should be recommended, encouraged and supported in the region, especially when it is noticeable that cultural heritage can reunite, with pride of belonging, communities that were scattered by polarization.

Another example of working on memories and oral history archives following the Syrian war took place in Jordan's borders refugee camps. Elderly persons who didn't accept to leave their tents and take part of the community-based psychosocial activities, were encouraged to remember the oral history of their villages of origin and its archaeological and geographical milestones. Groups of children who were born in refugee camps and shelters – and who never had the chance to experience the "sense input"[70] of their areas of belonging – were gathered in the elderly's tents to discover, symbolically and through storytelling sessions, their roots' cultural heritage. In Arabic, the literal translation of the question "What is your family name" is "From which home are you". This etymological reflection tells a lot about the weight of the concepts of home[71] and belonging in the region's culture and should push

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[70] According to Papadopoulos (1987), identity is composed of three main elements interacting with each other and with the context: (a) the tangible elements (for example the country of origin, blood relations, profession and genes); (b) the intangible elements (values, ideologies, feelings); and (c) the sense input of the place we call home (the visual, auditory).

[71] Papadopoulos, 1987.

psychosocial actors to duplicate activities that can help affected communities in rebuilding symbolically their "homes" and consequently their collective and individual identities.

Metaphors, symbols and rituals: Cross-cultural tools for remembrance and transformation

Metaphors, symbols and rituals are tools that deliver "not only thoughts but feelings, not only facts but perspectives about facts, not only ideas but values. Grounding what we learn in sensory experience, metaphors, rituals, and stories gather listeners and tellers into the same circle of human connection".[72]

Expressing emotions and feelings while interacting with others in the Arab culture is far from being an explicit transaction. "It is like I am carrying a mountain on my shoulders" would mean overwhelmed; "I feel I have a slab on my chest" would refer to anxiety; "It broke my heart" would mean shamefulness; and "I am handcuffed" would refer to the feeling of helplessness. Emotions and feelings are commonly expressed through metaphors, and, furthermore, through chronic psychosomatic manifestations. A 50-year-old mother in Southern Lebanon lost her son who was a victim of a landmine. For months, she couldn't mourn him because he is supposed to be a martyr, a community symbol of pride. She was referred to the psychological support services because she was having uterus hemorrhages that couldn't be linked to any physiological problem. Working on understanding the metaphorical expression of her body helped her articulate her deep sorrow throughout the sessions; "My uterus is crying tears of blood over my lost loved son" was the last insight she expressed before her symptom stopped. It would be interesting to note that body mapping studies showing the bodily sensations associated with each emotion, and its location in the body, can prove the validity of these cultural transmitted metaphors, and the meaning of psychosomatic symptoms that arise when other means of communication are not functional.

As stated earlier in this chapter, the explicit expression of emotions and thoughts, especially when related to sensitive political topics in the region, can put the security of both the intervener and the individual/group in need for support, at risk. A Syrian psychotherapist working with survivors of torture shared the fact that, implicitly and throughout the support process, survivors try to protect her and the supportive space she is ensuring, from the truth, as expressing the details of their journeys will endanger both survivor and therapist. By itself, the latter should also justify the importance of promoting these tools and developing further culturally sensitive strategies of intervention that respect the security contextual specificities, especially when it is clear that this mode of interaction can last years after the war that is generating it is ceased.[73]

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[72] Le Baron, 2002, quoted in Arai, 2014:36.
[73] Sluzki, 2016.

Another cross-cultural aspect to consider, and that should be supported and developed, is ethno-therapy; working closely with traditional healers can surely prevent harmful practices and can reinforce the awareness regarding psychosocial support and mental health when needed. Communities have the cultural existential tendency to always find the explanation of one's suffering – psychological or physical – in external surrounding elements. Sickness, hardship in love life, failure and others are caused by para-mystical powers like "a bad eye", malevolent spirits and others. The protection and the cure can be done through traditional healing rituals. Syrian refugees and displaced communities, coming from rural sides of the Syrian Arab Republic, are seeking relief and well-being through these rituals that they trust, most of the times, more than the Western mental health interventions that are promoted in the region.

Rituals have the function of reinforcing collective identities and sense of belonging. In each culture, specific rituals accompany the major changes in life, such as rituals of birth, marriage or death. With the regional chaos and the loss of control and helplessness, personal, familial and collective rituals can help affected communities transform the adversities they endured, give it an existential meaning and regain control over the uncontrollable. Since wars and consequent losses are as old as religions in the human history, multiple healing rituals exist in each confession, especially in the region, to directly or indirectly accompany survivors in their sorrow. For example, *Salat el Ghaeb* or "prayer of the ascent" is a religious ritual that explicitly accompanies families in their mourning process when the body of their deceased is missing.[74] Other collective annual commemoration rituals of historical religious or political martyrs exist as well in the region and have the function of further supporting families in their mourning process, in addition to reinforcing the sense of belonging to a cause or certain group. The predominant ideological philosophy of dealing with human loss seem to affect highly the importance of these rituals and its effectiveness in reaching its function; the more the loss of loved ones is experienced as a community pride, the more these rituals are revered.

On a less religious, yet equally sacred note, families of the disappeared in Lebanon are encouraged, through psychosocial support and art therapy, to commemorate the disappearance of their loved ones through collective yearly memorial rituals. In 2017, a public event titled "Empty chairs, waiting families" was organized by families with the support of international and local organizations. The exhibition came as a recognition not only to the suffering of the families of the missing, but also to their efforts to find a place for their missing in the war collective memory. Each chair was the creative work of a family, reflecting the individual personalities of their missing loved one, or their memory of it. The chairs were created following numerous psychosocial and art therapy sessions that allowed families to express their suffering, share it with others living in the same situation and transform it

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[74] *Salat el Ghaeb* in the Shia confession has its equivalent in other confessions. It is called *Al janaza* in Sunni confession or *Al jannaz* in Christianity.

into meaningful symbolic artwork. This collective work was also a chance for overcoming polarization, as it brought together families from all backgrounds and raised attention to their common cause.[75]

1.6. Conclusion

As stated by Renos Papadopoulos and Natale Losi during a master's programme in Psychosocial Animation in War-Torn Societies that was conducted in Lebanon in 2007, "the main victim of trauma is complexity". A systemic perspective should explain why dialogue, conflict resolution and peacebuilding are very complex and delicate aims to reach and sustain, and can't be planned prematurely or implemented without taking into consideration the systemic complexity of the situation. In order to prepare the ground for dialogue, psychosocial interventions in the region should have the function of accompanying individuals, within groups, within communities, in their symbolic grieving, remembrance and acceptance of ambivalence processes, rather than imposing a solution to heal their wounds. The Complex Circle Model (CCM)[76] can be a very effective model to achieve these objectives since it gives individuals within groups the opportunity to respect the existing differences, and fosters coordination and collaboration among group participants rather than assimilation of pre-existing solutions. Group members become actors and spectators of their own stories and diversities, create their own meaning and build bridges with the others away from the polarization of the humanitarian–therapeutic interventions and from the victim–saviour–perpetrator entrapping humanitarian triangle.[77]

Between the "pro", the "anti" and the "silent" parties struggling in the Syrian Arab Republic and the region nowadays, a new group emerged, like in all armed conflict emergencies – the "humanitarians". Members of this group, although struggling like the community it belongs to, had, through the support of the master's programme and its interveners – other "humanitarians" from around the world, to whom the author is also grateful to be a part of[78] – the opportunity to step out of the "siege" of war, reflect on it, build a geographically and disciplinarily diverse network and come back "home", "armed" with concepts, tools and approaches to reconstruct, from the ruins, the bridges between the past, the present and the future. This chapter was an attempt of giving a loyal overview of the process, while adding other axes of reflection and consideration based on a personal experience of the effect of civil war and humanitarian work. When masks fall, an opportunity for change, for insight, for development and growth and for overcoming historical polarization arise as

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[75]   Artichoke Studio and International Committee of the Red Cross, 2017.
[76]   Schininà, 2004.
[77]   Papadopoulos, 2014.
[78]   The author was one of the graduates of the IOM Executive Master's programme in Lebanon in 2007.

well. The "barricades that should become countries"[79] to belong to and to defend in war times can become historic milestones of lesson learned and therefore prevent the nuclear effect from being transmitted from one generation to another. From a systemic perspective, everything happens in the intersection of various systems that are in constant interaction between and with each other in a given context.[80] Wars happen in these intersections, but so does the journey of change, conflict resolution and peace, a long journey that the master's programme clearly aimed at empowering.

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Chapter 2: Psychosocial support and dialogue in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic: The role of art-based interventions

Alessandra Rossi Ghiglione

Abstract

The role of art-based interventions within psychosocial support programmes is rooted in the ancient connection between art and health. During the last century, contributions coming from psychology, anthropology and education have highlighted the role of the symbolic dimension in shaping human experiences and the contribution that art, and particularly theatre, can give to individual and collective health and well-being. In the fields of therapy and health promotion, a number of theatre practices have been elaborated in the last decades, including those clustered under the umbrella definition of social theatre, whose aim is to improve relationships with a focus on differences, and promote mental health and physical well-being at individual and community levels. According to the overall social theatre theoretical and methodological approach, this chapter analyses those fieldworks reported by the students of the master's degree programme, Psychosocial Support and Dialogue, which used art as a way to intervene with groups of children and women both among the Syrian refugees and their hosting communities in Lebanon. Activities included the use of narrative and visual art techniques from Drama Therapy, role playing and problem solving from Theatre of the Oppressed, games and relational exercises from social theatre.

Keywords: *art, psychosocial support, health promotion, social theatre, creative communication, social communication, needs assessment, emotional projection, diversity acceptance, intercultural dialogue, community-based approach, Syrian Arab Republic, refugees, war, conflict*

2.1. Between art and health: The origin of social theatre intervention in the psychosocial field

The relationship between art and health has ancient roots. In the ancient world, and still today in some contemporary cultures, *salus* referred to both health and salvation, and health care was interconnected in a way that today would be called interdisciplinary, with medicine and spirituality or rituals.[81] Particularly in the Ancient Greek culture, theatre was considered an effective health-care tool because of its strong ritualistic dimension by many, including the physician Hippocrates, who prescribed the vision of tragedies and comedies on the island of Kos to his patients. Theatre was in fact a ritual for the health care of the community, a place of catharsis for the collective pains and conflicts experienced by the community and, at the same time, the *agora* where different ideas and values could be discussed without risk. The subsequent specialization of individual arts – the art of medicine and the art of theatre – began during the Renaissance and is part of the process of demarcation between different forms of knowledge, which produced fundamental achievements towards the well-being of human beings, as well as towards the scientific and cultural development of human civilizations.

Today, however, the emerging needs for collective health care – both in ordinary life and in emergency contexts – continually push towards an interdisciplinary, and sometimes transdisciplinary, approach to intervention,[82] with a rapprochement between health care, culture and art.[83]

Already at the beginning of the 1900s – from medicine to the newly established field of psychology, and from sociology to anthropology – various disciplines started showing a growing attention towards the "human factor" (cultural and social) in health care. On the other hand, artists and men and women of culture promoted a new direct ethical and holistic engagement towards the well-being of individuals, groups and communities.

Thanks to studies and reflections coming from psychology and anthropology, the role of the symbolic dimension in shaping human experiences has become increasingly evident: human beings experience reality first hand; they relate to themselves and others; they feel, think and communicate through symbols, and these symbols are mainly of a cultural nature. The birth of art therapy and, with reference to theatre, the elaboration of Moreno's psychodrama,[84] and then Drama Therapy,[85] find their roots in the symbolic dimension offered by art in the process of healing human beings.[86]

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[81] Rossi Ghiglione, 2011.
[82] Pagliarino, 2017:101–115.
[83] Clift and Camic, 2015:3–9.
[84] Moreno, 1946 and 1980.
[85] Jennings, 1992 and 1997.
[86] Concerning the power of symbols and belief for health, see also recent studies on the placebo effect (Benedetti, 2012).

This shift in attention is not unrelated to the new understanding of the cultural and symbolic dimension of human beings in the area of educational theory, starting with the innovative approach of Maria Montessori and the founding of a form of pedagogy with the child at its centre.[87] From the 1950s to the 1960s, in the wake of Vygotskij's theories[88] – who was the first to identify the importance of play in cognitive learning – and thanks to Piaget's[89] studies on the role of play in childhood development, the psychopedagogical role of play in child's development and formation started to receive the right consideration.[90] In the United States, Italy and Europe, pedagogical practices proliferate, which place play, and a physical model of development made up of movement and freedom, at the centre of childhood education and well-being. Philosophical research on play as a key feature in every civilization, starting with Huizinga,[91] demonstrates how the spirit of play is one of the highest demonstration of a culture's societal development, as well as key to the moral development and intellectual evolution of individuals in a society. Playtime is viewed in its complexity: it links "the idea of limits, of freedom and of invention" in always variable combinations, in which the informing rule is determined by gratuitousness and pleasure. In this way, playing serves as training "for life" by overcoming obstacles and calling for "the mastery of oneself", "the audacity of risking" and "the prudence of calculation" – all fundamental educational factors.[92] "Oasis of joy" and "symbol of the world"[93] play has a health-care value in its capacity to develop behaviour that is both adaptable and innovative.[94] Theatre, with its symbolic and dramaturgical dimensions,[95] is a great facilitator of childhood learning since children in the space of the "as if" find ways to develop abstract thinking and, at the same time, re-elaborate experiences, even traumatic ones.[96] Theatre is play because of its collective nature and, for this reason, it is able to simultaneously activate emotional and cognitive elements, as well as

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[87]   Standing, 1998.
[88]   Vygotskij, 1972.
[89]   Piaget, 1972.
[90]   Winnicott, 1974; Bruner, Jolly and Sylva, 1981.
[91]   Huizinga, 1946.
[92]   Caillois, 1981 and 2001.
[93]   Fink, 1969 and 1991.
[94]   "Il gioco è il nostro più prezioso meccanismo adattivo. Lo spazio libero tra le parti della nostra vita e del nostro ambiente è quel che ci permette l'invenzione, l'avventura, il rischio. È lo spazio del possibile: siccome è libero, può essere occupato da tante cose diverse. È lo spazio della scelta: niente gli si adatta a puntino (altrimenti sarebbe già pieno), dunque saremo noi a decidere che cosa metterci. Ed è lo spazio in cui cercare noi stessi: la nostra differenza, la nostra originalità, il percorso esistenziale che ci ha fatto diversi da ogni altro." ["Play is our most precious mechanism for adapting. The free space between our lives and our environment is that which permits invention, adventure and risk. It's the space of the possible: since it is free, it can be filled by many different things. It is the space of choices; nothing need be adapted to perfection (otherwise it would already be full), so we will decide how to fill it. And it is the space within which to find ourselves: our differentness, our originality, the existential journey that rendered us different from anyone else."] (Bencivenga, 1995:70–1). Translated from Italian by the author of the present contribution.
[95]   Innocenti Malini and Gentile, 2016.
[96]   Bernardi and Cuminetti, 1998; Colombo and Innocenti Malini, 2017.

social ones, in a potent manner,[97] becoming an effective method for promoting particular life skills[98] that form the basis of a valid educational path in individuals and groups of peers for both adults and children. These range from empathy to relational skills, and from problem solving to communication.

The rapprochement between health and culture, between the art of medicine and the art of theatre, received a new input by the most recent changes of paradigm within the health disciplines, with the progressive questioning of the biomedical model in favour of the bio-psychosocial one, which frames human beings within a network of biological, psychological and social relations that influence health both separately and through complex reciprocal interactions. Already in 1946, the World Health Organization (WHO) in the preamble to the WHO Constitution affirms that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease and infirmity". With the publication of the Ottawa Charter[99] in 1986, the idea of health as a dynamic state determined by a plurality of factors was ratified with greater clarity. Along with factors that can't be modified – biological and genetic – there are numerous other health factors[100] that are modifiable and upon which it is possible to act both preventatively, with health promotion, and therapeutically. Theatre can indeed take action on two levels: (a) on an individual one, by strengthening knowledge of and capacity for health care; and (b) on a socioenvironmental level, favouring the creation of health-care opportunities based on a bottom-up approach, generated by the community itself, which is integrated into the local traditions.[101] The connections that link culture as well as theatre to health are also evident through the interactions between health and social, cultural and economic resources.

Social capital[102] – that is, all the social resources available to a person or a community – has a positive correlation with both the well-being of a person or a community and the life expectancy of an individual.[103] Evidence has also been gathered on the correlation between cultural capital,[104] in particular participation in cultural activities, and subjective well-being and life expectancy. Subjective well-being is in itself a mediator of good health outcomes.[105] In particular, when study participants are actively involved in cultural activities, i.e. organizers or catalysers, rather than simply audience, health outcomes are comparatively better.[106]

[97]   Gray, 2015.
[98]   World Health Organization (WHO), 1993.
[99]   WHO, 1986.
[100] Antonovsky, 1996.
[101] International Union for Health Promotion and Education and Canadian Consortium for Health Promotion Research, 2007.
[102] Putnam, 2004.
[103] Hyppä and Mäki, 2003.
[104] Throsby, 1999.
[105] Bygren, Konlaan and Johansson, 1996.
[106] Johansson, Konlaan and Bygren, 2001.

The newest discoveries in neuroscience, with particular reference to the role of mirror neurons[107] in learning and creating syntony, allow to understand what happens to a person when engaged in cultural experiences, in performances and creative activities, or somatic activities geared towards the perception of the self such as mindfulness.[108]

Today, the relationship between creative arts, health and well-being[109] is recognized, particularly in the form of arts therapies, in the public health domain. However, other models that are not directly related to therapy, and which focus on socialization and relationship building including drama, singing and dance prove increasingly effective in promoting well-being in crisis situations – being in therapeutic or humanitarian crises – and in health promotion. "The therapeutic potential of participation in artistic and creative activities is related to the overarching concept of active participation."[110] An additional value of creative and cultural activities in public health stands in the promotion of equal access and involvement[111] of all citizens and, in particular, those living in marginal conditions, poverty or who have a low literacy level. In fact, creative activities often use non-verbal language and, in many cases, significantly draw on cultural heritage and specific methods of communication – from singing to storytelling and from dance to music – which end up encouraging participation by putting participants' identity and cultural resources at the centre more than their educational background. In the context of the world's growing inequality[112] and its relationship with health,[113] the relevance of cultural and artistic factors in promoting health and contrasting inequality draws increasing interest, and it is the subject of several studies. The synergies between health, education and art disciplines are not unidirectional.

The world wars in the first half of the 1900s and, subsequently, the politico-cultural protests of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Europe, had an impact on artists and their sense of doing art. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of important theatre pedagogists[114] abandoned the commercial model of theatre and conducted andragogical[115] research, rendering the creative theatre process with actors as sources of research on what is human and the ethical qualities of the actor. The necessity for human beings to be able to live up to their times – in times of crisis and times of war – is particularly evident in the work

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[107]   Gallese, 2010 and 2013.
[108]   Siegel, 2007.
[109]   Clift and Camic, 2015.
[110]   Allen and Allen, 2015; Rossi Ghiglione, 2014a.
[111]   Istat, 2014; Dickman, Himmelstein and Woolhandler, 2017.
[112]   Alvaredo et al., 2018.
[113]   Costa et al., 2003.
[114]   Cruciani, 1985.
[115]   The concept of andragogy refers to adult learning. The word *andragogy* (from Greek origin: adult learning, opposite of pedagogy) was first used by German educator Alexander Knapp in 1883; then Malcolm Knowles developed the concept of andragogy as a theory of adult learning. See Malcolm Knowles' studies (Knowles, 1980).

of Jacques Copeau,[116] who was the first to try out a proto-model of community theatre and intercultural theatre with the Capiaus group, by bringing a series of young actors to work in the countryside and building a theatre that was connected to the existing community.[117]

In the 1950s, and subsequently with greater effect in the 1960s and 1970s, a theatre movement emerged in the United States, and then in Europe, which is made up of artists, intellectuals and pedagogists who chose to leave the theatres – both the physical spaces and the commercial production models – and engage with the communities in processes of social and political exchange and change. In this process, theatre artists started interacting with new communities. In Italy, by instance, an area of new engagement of theatre was represented by the psychiatric communities in a moment when system reforms in mental health policies brought the de-institutionalization of psychiatric patients, which in Italy was encapsulated by the Basaglia reform.[118] Other communities followed, including prisoners, the disabled, people facing discrimination due to race or sexual orientation, street children and abused women.[119] Alongside therapeutic models with a psychodramatic or drama-therapeutic approach, other forms of theatricality like theatre animation in France and Italy, and community-based theatre in Anglo-Saxon countries, draw in communities with a social rather than therapeutic objective. In the psychiatric milieu, as Schininà recounts: "[t]heatre animation/community based theatre, with its ability to create relationship, to include marginal groups, and to work on a group's creative self-representation for the purpose of social communication, was perceived as a useful instrument for empowering psychiatric patients and helping to erase the stigma that marked them".[120]

Within this same objective of sociopolitical change, one of the most successful methods of participatory theatre – currently used in health education,[121] mental health, psychosocial support and peacebuilding – was established in Latin America by Augusto Boal: the Theatre of the Oppressed.[122] Conceived as a tool for sociocultural action in response to specific situations of political oppression – such as those evident in Brazil and South America – in the 1970s and 1980s – the Theatre of the Oppressed was conceived by Boal himself as a series of creative actions that allow groups and communities to question the social imaginary and power dynamics in their society, promoting processes of change by representing and acting real situations of conflict and oppression generated by differences in power in social roles,

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[116] Aliverti, 1988; Cruciani, 1971.
[117] Aliverti, 1988:42. ["Nothing healthier than this work in common, this unanimous and anonymous effort leads us back to that idea of a confraternity, to that corporate spirit from which the highest masterpieces of the past came out."] Translated from Italian by the author of the present contribution.
[118] Basaglia, 2000.
[119] Bernardi and Cuminetti, 1998; Schininà, 2004a.
[120] Schininà, 2004a:21.
[121] Matricoti, 2010.
[122] Boal, 1996, 2002 and 2011.

to find a resolution in the protected space of theatre action.[123] During those years, theatre came into contact with other cultures. In Europe and the United States, artists entered extra-urban territories, rural and mountain areas, seeking new dialogue with agricultural communities, with their rituals and traditions, giving life to innovative experiences of celebrative dramaturgy and the re-founding of traditional rituals. In African and Asian theatre traditions, European experimental artists began to search for a sort of "precultural and transcultural dimension"[124]: languages, traditional expressive forms and training techniques were studied, exchanges through storytelling[125] took place, and the theatre myths and rituals of other countries were explored.

The search for a symbolic place where cultures could meet, and the awareness of the indissolubility of body and mind are two of the most relevant aspects of theatre productions in those years. Peter Brook's idea of theatre as a third culture,[126] that is, the culture of relationships, was examined more profoundly in a different way by Jerzy Grotowski[127] and Eugenio Barba respectively. In particular, they developed the idea of a theatre not so much as an artistic production with professional actors, but as an artistic encounter between the acting community and other communities through so-called community barters.[128] These experiences put a lot of emphasis on the process of building a production through actors' training and workshops. These psychophysical coaching of the actors and relational training of the group of actors constitute an important endowment to theatre interventions with vulnerable people or those in difficulty: in fact, a series of techniques that integrate the physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions have been developed in those training and are now widely used in psychosocial interventions through theatre and drama.

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[123] In the Forum Theatre format, the public is directly involved in the scene to propose hypotheses of solution to the conflict represented, thus leveraging the capacity for creative solution and personal responsibility in social action.

[124] Barba and Savarese, 1986; Ruffini, 1986.

[125] Heilpern, 1977; Brook, 1988.

[126] Brook, 1988:189.

[127] "L'attore mi interessa perché è un essere umano. Questo implica soprattutto due cose: in primo luogo, il mio incontro con un'altra persona, il contatto, un sentimento d'intesa reciproca e il turbamento creato dall'apertura verso un altro essere, dal nostro tentativo di comprensione: in breve il superamento della nostra solitudine. In secondo luogo, lo sforzo di capire noi stessi attraverso il comportamento di un altro uomo, riscoprendoci in lui." ["The actor interests me because he is a human being. This implies above all two things: first, my meeting with another person, the contact, a feeling of mutual understanding and the disturbance created by the opening towards another being, by our attempt at understanding. In short, the overcoming of our solitude. Secondly, the effort to understand ourselves through the behaviour of another man, rediscovering ourselves in him."] (Grotowski, 2006:150). Translated from Italian by the author of the present contribution.

[128] Barba, 1993. Eugenio Barba states: "The Theatre [...] is the craft and art of transforming what one looks at into something that regards us. Its raw material is relationship [...] The image of theatre that guides me is not that of an action that unifies, but that of a circle of encounters and barters. Various people gather around in action that binds them and allows them to debate, to discover a territory, a time, in which to exchange something." (Barba, 2001, quoted by Schininà, 2004b:32)

From these pioneering multiform experiences, a new form of social theatre emerged. It is about doing theatre in the wider social context with participants who are not professional actors or artists. It does not have a therapeutic aim, but it is about promoting health in a community and offering psychosocial support through effective principles and work practices in a multicultural context. The Social Theatre model, which constitutes a meta-model that refers to the didactic proposal from the Executive Professional Master's in Psychosocial Support and Dialogue, has its roots in these theatre movements of the 1900s, in which cultural and artistic experience melds with the tensions of social change.

2.2. Social theatre: Between art, health and diversity

2.2.1. Origin and theoretical background

> La nuova frontiera del teatro è la drammaturgia della cultura comunitaria e delle relazioni umane soprattutto là dove esistono difficoltà e drammi. Questo è il teatro sociale: la costruzione della persona e delle comunità attraverso attività performative.[129]

There are many ways of doing theatre in the social realm. Social theatre is a specific form and defined as a theatre that has its founding element in the active participation of citizens in all the phases of a theatrical creative process. It can be defined as:

> una pratica teatrale con metodologie specifiche in cui professionisti, esperti di teatro e di promozione del benessere delle persone, operano con gruppi e comunità di cittadini – spesso svantaggiati – e realizzano insieme percorsi teatrali, performance e progetti con valenze culturali, civili, artistiche e di benessere psicosociale.[130]

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[129]   ["The new frontier of theatre is the dramaturgy of communitarian culture and human relationships especially where there are difficulties and dramatic situations. This is social theatre: building people and communities through performative activities."] (Bernardi, 2004:13) Translated from Italian by the author of the present contribution.

[130]   Rossi Ghiglione in Gallina and Ponte di Pino, 2014:24. ["A theatre approach with specific methodologies in which professionals, theatre experts and people's well-being promoters operate with groups and communities of citizens – often disadvantaged – and together accomplish theatre, performance and project paths of cultural, civic, artistic and psychosocial well-being value."] Translated from Italian by the author of the present contribution.

Established at the end of the 1990s, social theatre[131] has its roots in past theatre movements and approaches – from theatre animation to celebrative dramaturgy, from community theatre to group theatre, and from political theatre to psychodrama and Drama Therapy.[132]

It is at the crossroads between professional theatre, which aims for an aesthetic production, applied theatre,[133] which strives for social and personal change, and Drama Therapy, which has healing as its goal. As Schininà states: "the main difference between social theatre and the majority of theatrical-therapeutic techniques is that social theatre does not seek catharsis but metaxis (pluralization). Its ultimate goal is to empower differences and to create solidarity, not to purify and normalise them".[134]

Social theatre strives for the well-being of the individual and the group within a non-therapeutic framework that however promotes health and well-being.[135] It engages with individuals and communities, asking them to respect their experiences and their past, being aware of their vulnerabilities and needs, but paying attention to the existing resources and development of innate abilities. Health research is done through a dialogue with the participants, which doesn't develop like a treatment relationship but more like a capacity-building process. The theoretical perspective is, in a broad sense, andragogic,[136] that is, it aims at the development and capacity-building of the person. On a methodological level, such interventions aim to activate the resources of the individuals and the relationships within the group, encouraging existing abilities to emerge, even hidden or residual ones, and create conditions for learning and change,[137] because the participants progressively develop coping, problem-solving and relational capacities. The "salutogenic" function of theatre is rooted in its ability to empower participants for change and promote their ability to take ownership for themselves. Through the socialization of diversity, social theatre works on the relational system of the group and the community, promoting the ability to accept and validate differences inherent to the group and the community itself, hence[138] promoting well-being and health.

Social theatre is a form of theatre with both a social and cultural aim, and both artistic dimension and social change are equally important and pursued. The participant is asked to strive for quality[139] in the theatre forms he or she uses to express, but being mindful of

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[131] Bernardi, 2004; Pontremoli, 2005.
[132] Zanlonghi, 2007.
[133] Nicholson, 2005; Thompson, 2009.
[134] Schininà, 2004a:24.
[135] Rossi Ghiglione, 2011.
[136] On theatre and human development as adult learning (andragogy) considerable reflections come from theatre director Peter Brook and his research into Gurdjeff's teachings (Brook, 1994 and 2001).
[137] Prochaska, Norcross and Diclemente, 1994.
[138] "The theatre has the ability to bring out those elements that unify human beings. It has also the potential to emphasize their differences and to bridge them" (Schininà, 2002:53).
[139] On the concept of theatrical quality, see Brook, 1988.

the limits that can emerge from the participant's abilities and his or her cultural identity. Since this search for quality produces a greater and deeper understanding of the self and the experience,[140] it also builds a deeper level of communication between different identities and, as such, contributes to a process of well-being and regeneration for the individual and the community.

The operative challenges faced in specific multicultural contexts of intervention – emergency contexts with displaced and refugees or those in suburban areas with a high level of intra- and intercultural conflicts – lead social theatre to take into consideration not only group activity but also the involvement of the larger community. Formats and tools aiming at development of multicultural and inclusive community of inhabitants have been specifically designed.[141]

2.2.2. The structure of a social theatre intervention with groups and communities

Through theoretical research, action research and the contributions of numerous authors,[142] operational procedures and guidelines[143] have been defined for a social theatre process, initially with particular reference to the model of a theatre workshop for groups with disadvantaged or fragile members, and subsequently to models of intervention geared to the community as a whole.

According to the social theatre model, a theatre intervention with a group follows some phases.[144] The first phase is group building and involves the following: (a) an assessment phase to identify the group's needs and creative resources, directly and also through stakeholders' interviews; (b) the contact and sharing approach, objectives and programme with the facilitator; (c) the contract with the group aimed at sharing rules, expectations and objectives; (d) creation of the group, which follows several steps: (i) participants get to know each other; (ii) participants and facilitators develop connections and trust; and (iii) participants acquire a shared creative language that still allows each and everyone in the group to maintain his or her specific modality of expression and identity. The creation of the group is the initial focus and doesn't end in the first phase of the activity, but continues throughout the intervention. The second phase involves expression and internal communication within the group, which is usually obtained exploring creatively a theme common to the participants' experiences. The third phase entails communication outside the group and involves the

140   Rossi Ghiglione, 2015.
141   Rossi Ghiglione, 2013, 2014a and 2014b.
142   A relevant contribution comes from the Catholic University of Milan and the University of Turin teams.
143   Rossi Ghiglione and Pagliarino, 2007.
144   Ibid.

following: (a) building the performance (or other forms of restitution to the community); (b) mobilizing and engaging the audience; and (c) presenting the performance. The last phase is the evaluation, and it is made up of the following: (a) feedback from the group and possible specific assessments; (b) feedback from the spectators; and (c) redesigning a possible continuation of the activity with the group and stakeholders.

The individual sessions of the theatre workshop follow a structure similar to the one promoted by certain schools of Drama Therapy with a contact, contract, warm-up, main activity, cool down and feedback. The activity is organized coherently between the different phases – each input proposed in each phase builds on and up prior and consequent expressive and communicative experiences. In addition, through a continuous dialogue with the group, the workshop trainer can modify the content, timing and approach of the planned activities if the group should require it at a certain moment in the process.[145] The theatre techniques used are derived from different theatre disciplines and can involve physical theatre and mime, actors training, dance, singing, storytelling and making objects. The creative process with the group can benefit from the contribution of community members with specific creative or sociocultural skills. The final performance is situated in a significant community space-time context and may include a cultural exchange and a community ritual. After the performance, an evaluation and new designing phase begins: the prosecution of the activity and the kind of activity is discussed with the group, community representatives and the client or other interested parties.

The model of intervention geared to the community as a whole includes working with a number of groups belonging to the community according to the phases described above. In the beginning of the intervention, it requires also a specific activity of mapping and networking in order to involve as many social actors as possible. Specific care is given to cultural diversity, cooperation among groups and ritual performances in the public space.[146]

2.3. Social theatre core concepts and psychosocial support

During the process of elaborating theory and fine-tuning good practices and guidelines, social theatre scholars, from the very beginning, have been in a continuous interdisciplinary dialogue with anthropologists, psychologists – from cognitive psychologists to development and community psychologists – sociologists, art therapists, formal and informal educators and, more recently, experts in medical humanities and neuroscience – particularly neuro-aesthetics.

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[145] Innocenti Malini, 2007.
[146] As a model of community intervention with theatre, see the methodology developed by Social Community Theatre Centre of University of Turin and applied both in audience development projects in Europe and in the Mental Health and Psychosocial programme in the Mediterranean area and in Africa.

Some key concepts of social theatre are particularly relevant to understand the theoretical and operative value of this model of intervention within the psychosocial support context.

2.3.1. The body: Awareness, organic unity and well-being

> Through doing movements you start to understand something that cannot be explained in logical terms. This is kind of understanding you don't find in books or through conversation: only through the body. Perhaps it is the understanding of what you are as basic human being.[147]

Theatre, like dance and other performing arts, poses human beings as a live and fundamental element of the work. The person in action – the word *drama* in Greek indicates an actual human action – reveals himself/herself live in front of other human beings, who react live in response. This is the very essence of theatre. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the new theatre research shifted the focus from the body of the actor on stage to the collective body of a group of actors – the theatre ensembles – who trained together to prepare for the performance.[148] This training consists of a collection of expressive and bodily techniques, fine-tuned by Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. In a social theatre process, these are used in the initial phases of work with a group. The exercises that comprise the training were originally conceived to strengthen the creativity of the actor and promote a "uncommon quality of presence", free her/him from personal habits and routines, and foster the use of a transcultural expressiveness searching and trying modes of expression from different cultures. They stimulate self-perception and body awareness, calling for an amalgamation of the physical and psychic dimensions and develop an awareness of the communicative possibilities of the body. The capacity to enact organic, expressive movements that are conscious and intentional contributes to health in various ways: for instance, it helps to learn how to invest physical energy according to the context and task required, thus preventing unnecessary waste of resources. It contributes to building a positive self-image and facilitates relationship building. In social theatre, expressive training informs the initial phases of a theatre workshop, facilitating contacts between the members of the group, self-awareness and emotional and relational well-being. Studies on the cognitive development of children[149] show that a well-managed body movement is also an integral part of emotional self-control and allows to act on the relationship between emotional blocks and skeletal-muscular

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[147] Yoshi Oida is an actor who worked with Peter Brook for many years, and his discipline masterfully combines the Western and Eastern knowledge that theatre has on human beings (Oida and Marshall, 1997:46).

[148] "The first thing the actor needs to learn is the geography of the body. [...] Learning the geography of the body is not simply a matter of doing exercises or acquiring new and interesting movement patterns. It involves active awareness. Look at how you stand normally. Every tiny zones (sic) of tension or imbalance affect (sic) not only your ease of movement and the way you look from the outside, but also the way you feel emotionally. Every tiny detail of the body corresponds to a different inner reality" (ibid., 14).

[149] Bruner, Jolly and Sylva, 1981.

blocks.[150] Those who learn how to move "well" through theatre and dance, based on their respective possibilities and reaching and surpassing the limits of their capacity[151] usually show a better mood, have better spatial and visual orientation and communicate better.[152] Appreciating the physical dimension of the voice – from conscious breathing to sounds emission – and elements of training fostering an organic relationship between physical and verbal communication are other elements of the bodily work undertaken in a social theatre workshop.

The body in theatre reveals different types of intelligence, including the relational and the emotional ones. The bodily work in social theatre resituates human beings in their mind–body–heart wholeness. Body awareness indeed brings often to emotional literacy, which in turn is the basis to develop empathy and the foundation of social skills.

As it has emerged in recent studies on mirror neurons,[153] tuning-in and emotional learning are by-products of the interaction between human bodies: watching the physical expression of emotions in the body of another individual, the spectator will experience neurologically the action carried out by the actor, as if he/she had done it personally. This will occur even more during the training phase of a social theatre workshop, which usually includes miming and other physical interaction not detached from emotional experiences. Exercises performed collectively – in a circle or in couples – put into play trust, emotional exchange, the relation between closeness and distance, and contribute to that process of building bonds between participants that is social theatre's contribution to the good health of individuals and communities everywhere and especially in situations of emergency and war.

2.3.2. The chorus: Diversity and trust in a group

Il teatro è fondamentale perché dipende soltanto da ciò che ogni essere umano possiede ovunque sia, in qualunque momento, in qualunque società, in ogni classe sociale: e cioè se stesso e gli altri. [...] L'esigenza di un gruppo quindi non nacque da un'idea astratta, ma da una semplice necessità. Verificavamo che più il gruppo poteva stare insieme, più il lavoro si arricchiva. Da qui giungemmo a una conclusione altrettanto semplice: in un gruppo, più una persona è diversa dall'altra, maggiore sono le possibilità di scambio.[154]

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[150] See research in somatics and particularly Moshe Feldenkrais' studies (Feldenkrais, 1991 and 2011).
[151] Fernandez-Argüelles et al., 2015; Merom et al., 2016.
[152] Mental Health Foundation, 2011; Newman, Curtis and Stephens, 2003.
[153] Rizzolati and Sinigaglia, 2006; Gallese, 2010 and 2013.
[154] ["Theatre is fundamental because it only depends on what every human being possesses wherever they may be, in any moment, in whichever society, in every social class: and that is on oneself and on others. [...] The need for a group, therefore, wasn't born of an abstract idea, but a simple necessity. We came to the conclusion that the more a group could stay together, the richer the work became. From this, we arrived at an equally simple conclusion: in a group, the more one person is different from another, the greater are the possibilities of exchange."] (Brook, 1990:170). Translated from Italian by the author of the present contribution.

Theatre is collective by nature and a cultural expression that cannot exist without the compresence of at least two individuals in the same space and time. The notion of chorality is at the foundation of theatre, and it refers to the intrinsic collective and social nature of theatre.[155] The originary Greek tragedy represents a constant dialogue between two subjects – the chorus and the protagonist, the hero, who does not constitute a couple, but in fact a unique, collective and pluralist entity. The plurality of bodies on the stage is also a plurality of points of view. The great film director Peter Brook observes how this vocation for plurality is embodied in the two greatest dramaturgies of the Western world – the Greek theatre and the Shakespearean theatre: in these plays, plurality, sometimes even conflicting points of view, is presented to the spectator without the judgement of the author. The function of theatre is exactly that of offering the vision of diverse points of view to the spectator and illustrating the consequences of the actions informed by these points of view.

From the perspective of social theatre, the capacity of theatre to "build a chorus", to build bridges between cultural, social and individual differences[156] – constitutes the greatest potential of theatre for social action. With this in mind, as Schininà observes, theatre proves to be very effective in emergency and conflict situations: "The value of theatre does not lie in its capacity to emphasize what unifies human beings, but rather in its potential to emphasize their differences and to create bridges between them. I believe that theatre should work at the limits and the borders – and not at the center – of what is defined as 'humanity'".[157]

Social theatre is group theatre in the sense that its first objective is to create a group within which the level of trust allows for the acceptance and free expression of diversities. Creating a safe space is the first step that a social theatre trainer must accomplish to permit different individuals build a healthy group where personal and social growth occurs.[158] Sharing rules, expectations and objectives, together with a non-judgemental approach, defines the social theatre space as a place where the participants are bearers of shared social rights and responsibilities. The creation of the group during the workshop comes about with a dynamic between the search for identity and the search for difference, and is characterized by a constant interaction between different and at times contradictory elements: closeness and distance, diversity and similarity, safety and risk. The objective is an integration of these complex elements. In this phase, which corresponds to the initial phase of the workshop, stimuli are progressively presented on two levels: from the one side, differences are socialized, on the other, relational life skills,[159] such as empathy and trust, are built among participants. The group is created over the course of the entire workshop until the performance: participants are constantly asked to make their personal differences public,

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[155] Apollonio, 1993; Dalla Palma, 2001a and 2001b.
[156] Bernardi, 1996.
[157] Schininà, 2004a:17.
[158] Bion, 1971.
[159] WHO, 1993.

including the physical and the personal identity-based ones, and also those differences tied to social roles and cultural identities. The socialization of differences, through the CCM,[160] is particularly relevant in the initial phase, when resistance to the other different then may be higher, and particularly in contexts in which cultural, social and other differences are exacerbated by an ongoing conflict or a war.

CCM is in fact a methodological framework, and it aims at creating a strong circle of relationships within the group of participants and between groups in the community. The specific strength of this model is that it allows individuals to express their diversity and encourages a deeper exploration of the self while simultaneously building linear relationships with others in the group. Participants change and are changed by others within this linear relationship while retaining their individuality. As Schininà writes: "The group becomes the place where diversity is respected and personal or collective relationships are recognized by everyone in the group. The process develops with problems being pluralized and the resources of every individual member being shared."[161] The ultimate goal of this approach is to utilize the exchanges and relationships that develop within the group to alter perceptions of a problem by including multiple voices.[162] This was one of the foundational principles of the social theatre movement to which the CCM belongs.[163] As Peter Brook eloquently explains, theatre is a particularly powerful tool because of the "theater's ability to create bridges between what is usually divided within and among individuals and communities, between the micro- and macro-cosmos, and finally between the visible and invisible".[164] Schininà highlights that this is critical in war-torn situations, such as the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, where the group rhetoric must be deconstructed and individual differences allowed to emerge before the reconstruction of a group that encompasses differences and is able to critique war rituals. This, he argues, is vital in laying the foundations for a long-term intercultural and inter-ethnic process.[165] This is related to the CCM's strength in breaking down or "transcending" the "triangle of abuse", which maintains polarized, angular positions of victims, perpetrators and saviours. The multiplicity of relationships allows this triangle to break down by building a circle. Tucci writes, "the triangle is a pyramid, symbol of hierarchy, inequality and oppression. Its angles visibly represent the impossibility of dialogue [...] Diametrically opposite, the circle is symbol of equity; place where relationships between peers happen, place of change and dialogue."[166] Such a model also helps to prevent top-down approaches where humanitarian actors act as saviours and participants are relegated to the role of victim, with a clear perpetrator identified. Rather, the circle encourages participation and peer-to-peer interaction.[167]

[160] Schininà, 2002:15.
[161] Schininà, 2004b.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Schininà, 2002.
[164] Schininà, 2004a.
[165] Schininà, 2002:63.
[166] Tucci, 2013.
[167] IOM, 2015.

The entire theatre process fosters the development of bonds and the construction of social capital, but this becomes a primary and precise objective in projects aimed towards the communities.[168] Created outside of reasons of necessity and obligation, the bonds that theatre develops are weak ones,[169] and for this reason, strongly significant. Weak bonds connect people without consideration to the specific familiar and even cultural origin of the bond. Scientific evidence in sociological research describes a positive correlation between weak bonds and growth in social capital. Both individuals and groups who rely on a large amount of social links are more likely to be healthy. Communities with a considerable amount of weak bonds are healthier and more inclusive, as people develop relationship on the basis of many transversal interests.[170]

2.3.3. Play and rites

> Il gioco [...] È lo spazio del possibile. [...] Ed è lo spazio in cui cercare noi stessi: la nostra differenza, la nostra originalità, il percorso esistenziale che ci ha fatto diversi da ogni altro.[171]

Theatre has a dual dimension; it is both play and a ritual. According to Victor Turner, it was established when the conservative and stabilizing function of rites, aimed at confirming existing values, disappeared, while societies began exploring different values and behaviours in a free manner through performative actions.[172] In the protected and fictional space of theatre – "unreal" but authentic – safety and freedom of expression are granted, which allows to discover, try, discuss and compare other values, thus opening a space for innovation and change. Theatre is not a compulsory rite and is not binding, but as every rite is a powerful form of interaction, generating new identities and promoting new behaviours. The final performance of a social theatre process is both an action that convenes the community, and a celebration and activation of the community itself.

The theatre rite allows the people acting on stage to publicly declare their own existence, calls the community to gather around proposed values and ideas, and activates social communications on the presented themes that builds on shared emotions[173] and creativity. The time and place of the performance are not secondary factors, since they affect the production and attribution of meaning in the rite. The ritualization of the structure of the workshop, with its phases, openings and closures, helps in building a group identity, creating a safe space and upholding boundaries.

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[168] Pagliarino, 2011.
[169] Granovetter, 1973; Amerio, 2000.
[170] International Union for Health Promotion and Education and Canadian Consortium for Health Promotion Research, 2007; Hyppä and Maki, 2003; Putnam, 2004.
[171] Bencivenga, 1995:70–71.
[172] Turner, 1986.
[173] On theatre as "contagion", see Artaud, 1968.

If the rite is the architectural structure of the theatre, play is the air that theatre breathes. The playful factor is essential to all creative arts and to theatre. Play in theatre is pleasant, has rules, takes place in a defined space and time and is free of evaluations or prescriptions. We play to have fun, but through playing, we learn a lot. In play and theatre, there is a component of cognitive development and learning that benefits adults and children alike. Play is also important for the well-being of adults[174] since it does not respond to the dominating logic of costs and benefits that is the milestone on which one's professional and personal life are being evaluated today. It allows thus to dismiss habitual framework of thinking and open up one's mind to alternatives, consider and undergo new experiences without fear, reduce the psychological pressure connected to efficiency in performance and reconnect one's emotional and rational skills. Acting "as if" in playing theatre is a powerful way for freeing imagination, creativity and physical and mental resources, and to explore the nexus between imagination and change, since it allows to imagine and experiment diverse situations and alternative behaviours from the real one. In this way, through theatre play, participants follow the phases of change that Prochaska[175] defines as contemplative and directional, without however, running any real risks.

2.3.4. Roles and stories

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role [...] It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.[176]

A game of identities and roles is in the core of the theatre play. Theatre displays on stage the dynamic of social performance studied by Goffman:[177] each individual is the bearer of a personal identity and many social roles (i.e. as parent, worker, citizen) that condition his or her behaviour, in many ways, including in terms of expectations and shared rules. Theatre, in the course of the centuries, have produced dramaturgies in which the characters develop their own personal collective paths obeying to or transgressing the power, social and political roles that are attributed to them by default in the societies in which they live. More generally, in theatre, the role, the mask, the character are all ways to explore the relationship between one's individual identity, public image, personal expectations and how they interact with the expectations society puts on an individual. In the "as if" of theatre, one can leave his or her usual role and take on and experiment with a different one. One can also re-experience his or her own life events, and see his or her own feelings and characteristics mirrored in the

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174 Colombo and Innocenti Malini, 2017.
175 Prochaska and Diclemente, 1982; Prochaska, Norcross and Diclemente, 1994.
176 Park, 1950:249, quoted in Goffman, 1956:11.
177 Goffman, 1956.

roles the actors are playing on stage. Exploring new possible actions in theatre paves the way to see possibilities for change in real life. The role not only indicates an identity, but it is always a task to act. Playing with roles – be it a mask or a character – allows the ones who play and the ones who watch to acknowledge how behaviour is not only the result of an individual choice but also of social and cultural demands, prescriptions and conditioning.

In this respect, role playing can be a powerful tool in establishing mutual acceptance and understanding in situations of conflict, since people are offered the possibility to take on a not habitual point of view and put themselves into someone else's shoes in a very concrete way by acting in specific situations. As a result of merging into someone else's concrete life, similarities may be discovered or at least acknowledgment of the underlying motivations of different behaviours may be achieved. Apart from roles, social theatre works a lot on stories and storytelling. The two elements are actually connected, because stories are made of interactions between different characters and roles. Role playing can be done with reference to real-life situations or stories belonging to the cultural context. Stories may be better used when direct reference to real life may be too painful to be made, or risks to emphasize conflicts. In social theatre, stories are a valuable tool in many ways. Many studies highlight how storytelling can contribute to well-being[178] and the particular value autobiographical storytelling has in health care.[179] Stories heal because they put together the thread of an existence perceived as fragmented and, at times, painfully senseless,[180] in a coherent structure that reconciles and makes sense. In theatre, storytelling is oral and not written, can be bodily and not oral, and happens in front of an audience. This particular relational dimension of storytelling in theatre is the most relevant aspect in contexts where one aims at building groups and reconcile existing, often conflictual, differences. Allowing individual stories to emerge within the dominant narratives dictated by the group one belongs to and the community is important in those situations, such as wars, where the collective dimension risks to overwhelm the individual expression; or the institutional narratives dominate and silence many of the individual narratives, if they are not in line with the collective values.[181]

[178] Bruner, 2002; White and Epstein, 1990; Skultans, 2004.
[179] Demetrio, 1995. See the great value given to story, story making and storytelling in drama therapy. On the role of patients' stories in narrative medicine, see Charon, 2006.
[180] Bateson, 1992.
[181] Lindemann Nelson, 2001.

2.4. Theatre and psychosocial support in the framework of the IOM Executive Professional Master's degree programme in Lebanon

The use of creative arts, and among those theatre, within mental health and psychosocial support,[182] educational and other humanitarian interventions has emerged since the end of the 1990s,[183] when the approach to the emotional needs of individuals in crisis situations shifted from a focus on trauma to a more holistic and less stigmatizing approach, and from a psychiatric approach to a more community and social support-based one.[184] Nowadays, the framework for the provision of mental health and psychosocial support in emergency is defined by the relevant guidelines of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The definition "mental health and psychosocial support" is used in this document to describe any form of local or international support that aims at protecting psychosocial well-being or strengthening it, and/or preventing and treating mental disorders.

The adjective "psychosocial" refers specifically to the interconnection between psychological and social processes and the fact that each one of them constantly interacts with the other and affects it. While the psychological dimension involves processes engaging mind, thoughts, emotions, feelings, memories, beliefs and behaviours, the social component encompasses relationships, family and social networks, social values and cultural practices. Mental health and psychosocial support addresses the needs of individuals, families and communities. It works on strengthening social networks and helps people learn how to protect themselves and others from the burden of psychological distress. It also enables them to engage in the process of recovery and improve their self-confidence by helping others to make peace with their losses and rebuild their lives. When people are involved in these activities, they are henceforth taking their first step to becoming effective in their own recovery.

In the design of the master's programme, the psychosocial support model was presented with reference to the theory of Renos Papadoulos,[185] and the conceptual elaboration developed by IOM,[186] with special attention paid to the following aspects: (a) anthropological reading of disruptive events and conflict; (b) questioning the victim–persecutor–rescuer triangle; and (c) systemic understanding of the consequences of disruptive events focusing not only on the suffering but also on resilience and resources, being them individual, collective or cultural. The interconnection between structural violence in society and violence directly

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[182] Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2007; Patel et al., 2014.
[183] IOM, 2000.
[184] IASC, 2007.
[185] Papadopoulos, 2002.
[186] IOM, n.d.

related to the war[187] and the theme of the relationship between psychosocial support and peacebuilding[188] are the general framework of the creative interventions analysed in this paper.

Within the context of art-based intervention, the following theatre approaches were taught in the master's programme: (a) Drama Therapy, and especially the Embodiment Projection and Role (EPR) Model by Sue Jennings;[189] (b) Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal;[190] and (c) CCM[191] by Guglielmo Schininà, as well as other practical tools derived by the application of puppetry to psychosocial support and other models of dramatherapy. Although they are different techniques and theories, they all fit into a theatre meta-model of intervention that has its roots in the theoretical framework and methodology of social theatre that was addressed in the previous paragraphs.[192] Sue Jennings' Drama Therapy approach focuses on the interactive nature of drama and theatre,[193] the importance of the therapeutic effect of stepping onto the stage and the theatre's specific power to change the way of watching and understanding life, and therefore on the symbolic and metaphoric nature of theatre.

> Theatre art enables us to find our place in a symbolic enacted world, as a part of a story that will present us with various choices and solutions; it will transform our experience. It is rather like looking through a kaleidoscope and shaking all bits of coloured paper to form new shapes and patterns without losing its essential form. [...] It is important to remember that the theatre experience enables us to go beyond ourselves into experiences that I think are metaphysical; the reality is that theatre not only takes us out our own day-to-day experience, but also shifts how we perceive and cluster our views of life itself.[194]

> The task of the drama therapist is to enable vulnerable people, as far is possible, to restore their internal states to a balanced equilibrium.[195]

Drama Therapy is based on core concepts. According to a drama therapeutic point of view, dealing with relationships, conflicts, themes and outcomes that touch upon one's own life experiences is more effective through theatre, because theatre allows to take

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[187] Arai, 2014.
[188] Galtung, 2000.
[189] Jennings, 2009.
[190] Boal, 1996, 2002 and 2011.
[191] See, for CCM model, presentation in paragraph 3.2 and references.
[192] Bernardi, Dragone and Schininà, 2002.
[193] "Drama, theatre and thereby dramatherapy are in themselves interactive processes that involve other people, so it is important that we reflect on our history not as just individuals but as individuals in relation to other people, in others word, the community" (Jennings, 2009:22).
[194] Ibid., 11–12.
[195] Ibid., 125.

distance from those experiences, events and emotions. If the experience is "dramatically distanced from our life", we are not just seeing a replication of our conflict. Enhancing the individual's capacity to distinguish everyday and dramatic reality and to be able to move in and out of each one appropriately is its real value. Understanding and managing the passage between everyday reality and dramatic reality is the specific skill of a drama therapist who "is not just making use of drama techniques but needs a wide range of skills and processes that have been practiced and refined".[196] Dramatic re-elaboration of life experiences is the principle leading a drama therapeutic intervention: creative activities then have the aim to help individuals in the group to live this staged experience and rereading of their own life. A drama therapeutic intervention is structured, like a ritual,[197] in sessions, and each session has an internal structure divided into segments: contact, a contract, a warm-up, a main activity, a cool down and feedback. Jennings' EPR model[198] guides the progression or pathway of each session and of the total sessions. Jennings argues that human beings' dramatic development happens in three stages: (a) embodiment (i.e. playing with the body, coping movements and others); (b) projection (i.e. external expression, such as drawing and playing with toys); and (c) role (i.e. impersonating characters). In order to be effective, sessions should follow this progression as well. However, the emphasis given to each of these segments may differ as the group moves through the sessions. During the master's programme, students were given examples of games[199] and references to the Jennings' approach.[200]

Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, which was referred to in the second chapter, is an articulated method of intervention with both groups and communities. In theatre workshops, through expressive and relational warm-ups and creative interactive activities, the participants who are non-professional actors are asked to bring out their own differences – beliefs, opinions and cultural traditions – around political and social issues of common interest, and to confront each other with their different points of view. Questioning situations and the role playing in the Theatre of the Oppressed are oriented towards problem solving in relation to social injustices linked to power identities and roles. In particular, in Theatre Forum, the group represents stories and situations that are expressions of social conflict, and the public is invited to intervene and substitute one or more characters on the set, as well as propose alternative solutions not through words but by reacting directly on the stage. Theatre, from this perspective, doesn't result in a catharsis but in pluralization, enhancing the individual and collective capacity to find creative solutions and take responsibility for social action.

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[196] Ibid., 134.
[197] "Drama Therapy sessions are ritualistic in their form and structure and usually start and end with familiar ritualized expression; this acts as a container for the exploration and risk taking within the session in which participants encounter material that is less familiar or unknown." (ibid., 126)
[198] Jennings, 1992.
[199] Among them, the Tree of Life exercise and the story of the Invisible Child were the most used by students in their fieldworks.
[200] IOM, 2015.

2.5. The challenges of the context: Between culture and emergencies

All art-based interventions, including theatre interventions, need to take into account the specific cultural context in which they take place. Any art-based intervention is indeed culturally defined in itself and implicitly promotes a cultural model of reference, sometimes in ways that are imperceptible to those who use it – both facilitators and participants. The way art-based interventions deal with topics, such as verbal and body language, the concept of imagination and the idea of rules and participation, are culture-specific and can have different impacts in different cultural contexts.

The Lebanese and Syrian cultural contexts are different between each other and respectively illustrated and discussed in an articulate manner by the students in their fieldwork reports. They focus on the following aspects: (a) Lebanon multicultural experience; (b) changes in traditional Syrian family and gender roles due to the Syrian war and multicultural contacts; (c) the challenge of a creative use of the body to individuals belonging to traditional cultural communities; and (d) the pedagogical model implicit in art-based intervention.

Lebanon has a long-standing multicultural experience, being a country that hosts more than 20 ethnic and religious groups, including Maronite Christians and Shia, Sunni and Druze Muslims. From 1948 after the war with Israel, the country has been the destination of refugees fleeing from the Palestinian Territories. With the Syrian crisis, more than 1 million Syrians have moved to Lebanon since the beginning of the war. The number is huge considering the population of Lebanon itself, which is 4.5 million people, and it impacts on the fragile equilibrium of Lebanon's well-known and complex multicultural and multireligious balance. In addition, social and economic stressors due to the recent world economic crisis were already impacting the Lebanese hosts with considerable effects on the quality of life of the population. Polarization between the Lebanese hosting community and Syrian refugees began to emerge and are increasing in daily life, including among children, based on both a perceived competition for resources and the recent history of the relations between the two countries.

The need for cultural understanding and diversity acceptance is relevant on many different levels, including with children and young people. The absence of opportunities and venues where Lebanese and Syrians can meet and interact makes it increasingly difficult to overcome prejudices on both sides and has an impact on dialogue. The long-lasting presence of the Syrian forces in Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war had deep impact on the majority of the population, who identified Syrians as perpetrators. This consideration did not end with the withdrawal of the Syrian army in 2005 and has made the integration of Syrians into the Lebanese society more difficult, since it is difficult for large parts of the population to see Syrians in the role of victims rather than perpetrators, as they were considered for many years. Moreover, some perceive a power asymmetry being practised by the humanitarian organizations and the Government of Lebanon that bring the refugees to be involuntary

dependent on their help, which can create social frustrations in both the refugees and their hosts. Refugees are struggling to fulfil their basic needs; in many instances, they depend on the humanitarian organizations and maintain an unclear legal status. For some students, these are considered forms of structural violence that are at the basis of the distress many Syrians are facing, which limits further their ability to be autonomous and self-sufficient. International NGOs are trying to mitigate the discrimination of refugees implementing social cohesion programmes and activities. With that perspective, art-based interventions – and more specifically, social theatre approaches with the CCM model – address the issue in many ways by promoting active participation in social experiences, promoting individual empowerment and creating extraordinary and liminal situations where people feel safe to meet, express and look for possible solutions to their shared problems through creative means.

The encounter between different cultures in the context of the displacement of refugees of the Syrian war concerns also the differences between family models and, in particular, the role of women in the family. In Lebanon, for instance, several Syrian refugee women come from diverse family cultures all characterized by a strongly patriarchal model, which combines protection and limits to the personal freedoms of women in the family. On the other side, other Syrian female refugees come from very progressive families that have always assigned a peer role to women.

In addition, displacement subverts traditional family and gender roles. Often, in displacement situations, women assume tasks and roles that are traditionally those of men in the family, including breadwinning, either because the men are absent, or because it is more difficult for them to find a job, or more dangerous for them to leave the house. Many refugee women from the Syrian Arab Republic began having a job, going out on their own and managing their own and their children's social welfare and health care and mastering the relations with the local and international humanitarian systems, becoming more autonomous in the process. The opportunities offered by the many different attitudes towards women and their roles existing in the Lebanese culture and within the refugee community has exposed many women to a variety of possibilities that challenged their own and their community's ideas of a woman's role and possibilities. Art-based activities implemented by the students can build on the possibilities that this variety creates. They can, in fact, allow Syrian women to creatively express their predicaments and emotions and to socialize them with their peers. In addition, creative and social theatre workshops can promote exchanges and encounters between Syrian and Lebanese women, allowing them to learn new skills and qualities through the exchange of good practices and problem-solving skills.

Another challenge was presented by the creative use of the body. The theatre paradigms and tools that were taught at the master's programme place a lot of emphasis on somatic practices of activation and expression and non-verbal communication. In these activities, the body is involved in exercises, movements and dances oriented towards self-awareness, the exploration of the expressive capabilities of the body and the building of trust through the

contact between bodies. In general, in these processes and workshops, the body appears naked, in the sense that it is freed by its social disguise, the everyday roles and the costumes. The exploration of the original expressive possibilities of the body is, in this framework, a way to attain personal and relational authenticity. However, this culture of the body, and practice of use of the body in much of social theatre, can conflict with the value attributed to the body in some traditional cultures. This was the case, according to the reports of Al Brihi, Dwayeb, Gello, Khalil and Moawi with the cultural perspective of many of the refugees involved, who were for the most part Muslims from rural areas of the Syrian Arab Republic. Students report difficulties in holding hands between male and female children, protective attitude of brothers towards sisters – with the brothers not allowing the trainer to touch their sisters – or female adolescents' resistance to physical training and exercises, except for traditional dances.

The need to adapt the model of intervention to the culture of the participants in relation to the use of the body was explored by the master's students in various ways: from giving more space to drawing, to making objects, singing and above all, utilizing role playing and simulations, improvising on given situations and in character. In this way, the body takes indeed centre stage, but "dressed for the occasion" with the role that the participant is acting, which safeguards it from being perceived as indiscrete or invasive. Bodies do move, but in the context of a fictitious or simulated story that justifies their use against the norm as the part of a character. Role playing hence assumes two values. One lies in the possibility to explore a problematic situation, try out solutions and socialize different points of view on the matter. The other lies in the fact that role playing makes it possible to use the body even in contexts where the public display or creative use of the body is not allowed, in a way that helps participants improve their perception and awareness of the self – through the body – and explore the essential non-verbal components of interpersonal communication.

In cultures in which words are a more appropriate communication tool than the body, the approach to creative workshops tends to be more didactic. This was evident in some of the fieldworks of the students, especially those with children, that resorted to more didactic structures. The request for discipline in terms of physical and verbal self-control, and the use of settings that are often static and don't permit movement – sitting and talking or sitting and drawing – belongs to a traditional didactic model that pedagogy has questioned in the 1900s, through innovative didactic and pedagogical theories and practices from both the West and Latin America.[201] In the same way, many of these new pedagogical approaches have validated the non-verbal modes of the arts in the name of an expressiveness that is less bound to the literacy of the participant. With these models, the possibility of access for more participants is evident, with it not being linked to the socioeducational level, as well as a general validation of the person and promotion of his/her active role in building shared meaning. The pedagogical abilities demonstrated by the participants to the various

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[201] Catarci, 2016.

fieldworks – and related in particular to models that promote the children's ownership, such as the child-to-child approach[202] and other participatory methods – indicate space for research in which it is necessary to move within the culture of reference. The space opened by the crisis allows new pedagogical practices to developed and contrast the social and health inequalities of the entire child population.

2.6. Theatre interventions with Syrian refugees and Lebanese host: Target groups and fieldworks' structure

Master's students' theses involving theatre intervention usually include a theoretical part at the beginning, which introduces the specific context of intervention and discusses the conceptual framework to which each fieldwork refers. The description of the fieldworks is usually more concise. In fact, the short time available for the fieldwork and the instability of the security situation – that in few instances prejudicated access for the beneficiaries to the venues where activities were taking place – allowed only a fragmented application of the planned interventions. In a few instances, the thesis presented the planned fieldwork but not its actual application.

The whole thesis, and specifically the fieldwork, is structured according to the type of beneficiaries to whom the theatre intervention is aimed.

Accordingly, the analysis that follows will specifically address the topics of theatre intervention with children and women, since fieldworks pertained mainly to these two categories of beneficiaries.

As it should be in a learning process, the fieldworks responded to a trial-and-error approach always accomplished with a great capacity for critical reading. This critical reading of the positive parts as well as the limits of the intervention make it possible to deduce a number of suggestions and hints.

2.6.1. Fieldwork with children: Promoting resilience and conflict transformation

In the garden opposite the building where I live, in the Al-'Abbasiyin neighbourhood in the Syrian capital of Damascus, you can hear the loud voices of a bunch of children. These voices get louder and simulate the sounds of the shots fired from rifles and machine guns every day in the arenas of armed clash in vast regions of the

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202 Ibrahim, 2014.

Syrian territories. A group of children aged between 10 and 14 hides behind the garden benches and trees, while another group, whose members carry Chinese-made plastic rifles and machine guns or pieces of wood that look like Russian-made Kalashnikov rifles, opposes them.

The battle started.

Suddenly, the confrontation began. Their small mouths produced the sounds of consecutive bursts that sounded like gunshots. Later on, these gunshot sounds became more intense. The confrontation between the children became closer, a face-to-face confrontation. Someone threw a hand grenade at his enemies. It was a ball that he made by pressing a number of papers together. In the meantime, a remote but powerful sound, the sound of real artillery and real shells, was heard. All the children stopped playing. Then, they drew innocent smiles on their faces and continued their clash to entertain themselves. After watching this recurrent scene, I went to the garden to talk to the children about their game.[203]

More than half of the master's fieldworks analysed for this chapter were aimed at children and adolescents. The students describe in great details the condition of refugee and internally displaced children and highlight the crucial nature of intervening timely at this age.[204] The age factor for children, linked with the dramatic situation of the war and the condition of displacement, can dangerously accelerate the process of adulthood on the one hand – responsabilization within the family, work and imitating adults[205] – and on the other hand, have an effect on the social competencies in a phase of life in which the interrelations of the individual within a group have an important evolutive relevance.[206]

The condition of Syrian children is documented by students with a focus on war violence, cultural violence, domestic violence and displacement violence.

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[203] Wassouf, 2014.

[204] "It has been the fourth year of the conflict in Syria and exodus of Syrians to neighbouring countries. As for the general situation, this conflict has generated psychosocial problems on all levels, especially or mostly for Syrian refugees primarily the youth in the host community (Lebanon in this case); the majority haven't had access to education, have confronted severe social tensions, and have suffered from potential unemployment which has affected their productivity. Some adolescents have acknowledged both isolation and insecurity, and are subject to exploitation of labor. People having experienced the great existential difficulty – abandonment, violence, war, tragedy, and death – are often marked with this wound for a long period of time or even for a lifetime." (Moawi, 2014).

[205] Wassouf, 2014.

[206] "They are children from the age of (11) years to the age of (13) years. This age group has been selected because it is an important stage of education, and there are many conflicts between children with each other and with others; it is also the ideal time to help children change and modify their lifestyles and possess skills, tools and mechanisms to develop their potentials and abilities; in addition, they feel that they need to belong to a group that feels that they want to discuss their ideas and problems." (Moukarzel, 2014)

In particular, students analyse domestic violence (physical and psychological) against children. Although present before the war in the Syrian Arab Republic,[207] direct and indirect family violence worsened with the displacement. Children suffer like adults for the loss of their home[208] and the forced removal from the context of family life. In addition to this, they are subject to the tensions and drastic changes that occur within a displaced family, and which often manifest themselves in reduced family care – both parents working, no relatives supporting the family – or lack of social care, such as the absence of educational centres and social/educational activities. In other instances, they are subject to domestic abuse and violence, often due to changes in roles and responsibilities – for example the need for the woman to work – which create tensions and sometimes also violence.[209] Domestic violence and the various forms of abuse that children face have a strong impact on them, also in terms of behavioural development and, in turn, their level of aggressiveness. Within the host community, children can be the subjects of derision and physical and psychological aggression on the part of their peers in the host community.[210] The limits on freedom of movement, the lack of possibilities to access appropriate spaces for play (such as parks and educational centres) and the risk involved in walking through urban spaces are other causes of suffering. Life within collective shelters is very hard – because of lack of privacy and helplessness – and aggressive behaviour is common towards children and families.[211]

The fieldworks targeted male and female children and mainly adolescents aged 11 to 13. Most of the participants involved were Syrian refugees living in shelters, identified at educational centres or through humanitarian organizations both in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. In some cases, both Syrian and Lebanese children were involved in activities aimed at conflict transformation.[212] The majority of the interventions aimed at psychosocial support, with a focus on assessing needs, promoting skills and resilience[213] and supporting non-violent communication. In one case, the intervention focused specifically

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[207] Younis Ahmed Rehab, Rural-family characteristics and its relationship with parental violence against the child, quoted in Al Brihi, 2015.

[208] Papadopoulos, 2002.

[209] El Dirani, 2015.

[210] Focus groups done by the psychologist of Caritas Migrant Center with 180 Lebanese in all regions on September 2014 reported by Maureen Mahfuz, who refers in her thesis: "Lots of mothers were preventing their children from going out to play because they were afraid they got beaten from the children in the neighbourhood. The tension is seen on all levels and everywhere even at schools and between kids. Lots of Syrian students are facing discrimination and bad behaviour from teachers who tell them bad words, mistreat them or even ignore them. 'The teacher doesn't explain to me whenever I ask her something.' The Syrian students are also having problems with their classmates, who – in lots of places – are mistreating them, beating them and bullying them; 'Lebanese students tell us bad words, this is the Syrian, Syrian "andabouri" – bad word in Arabic – they also beat us or wait for us outside the school to beat us as well.'" (Mahfuz, 2015)

[211] Gello's thesis offers a detailed overview of adolescents' life in a shelter and its aggressive atmosphere that challenges the intervention in many ways.

[212] Mahfuz, 2015.

[213] Mowai, with specific reference to the Cyrulnik theory (Cyrulnik and Malaguti, 2005).

on domestic violence[214] and abuse.[215] Almost all refer to the general art-based intervention theories introduced at the master's degree programme, with specific references to the three art-based models: the EPR model by Jennings (concerning the progression of the whole intervention), the Drama Therapy Model (concerning the internal progression of each session) and the CCM model (as a transversal concept promoting diversity promotion and diversity acceptance). References to peacebuilding theories[216] and practices of conflict transformation and alternative educative models, such as the child-to-child model,[217] are also introduced by the students.

The design of fieldworks with children is mainly as follows: (a) needs assessment (done both with caregivers/parents or educational/psychological caregivers where applicable); (b) core intervention with a target group organized in weekly sessions (average of eight sessions); and (c) final assessment and possible referral to the other caregivers. The core intervention moves through the contact and contract part in the beginning, to playful activities involving a progression of physical games, drawing, storytelling, making crafts, role-playing games and performing. Most of the interventions end with a final performance done by children in front of their parents and sometimes other community members or caregivers. The entire design – particularly the overall structure of the intervention – is coherent with the Social Theatre model.

Examples of theatre fieldworks are described below; they illustrate a variety of structures and approaches to social theatre intervention with children.

Al Brihi's fieldwork addressed children (8–12 years old) and used drawings, puppet theatre and image theatre. It was aimed at children subject to domestic violence within displaced families and had the following declared goals: (a) detecting domestic violence; (b) assessing cases; and (c) enabling dialogue within the family. It was a four-day intervention with a group of displaced families in Latakia province. After the completion of the fieldwork, the author included a critical review, highlighting some errors, difficulties and gaps. Taking advantage of it, the author worked out a new plan for the future, aiming both at children and fathers, that was not however implemented.

The whole fieldwork was discussed in the thesis: positive results were acknowledged concerning psychological support and emotional discharge, creating bridges of communication, building trust among children and creating an atmosphere of expression and entertainment. The fieldwork confirmed prior assessments of specialists at the centre on the violence suffered by the majority of the children. Improvements on the format of intervention were

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[214] Al Brihi, 2015.
[215] El Dirani, 2015.
[216] Tucci, 2013.
[217] Ibrahim, 2014.

made by the student with specific reference to group building among children and impact on parent–children violent relationship.

Aimed at a similar target – youth survivors of abuse – El Dirani's fieldwork had a different perspective, as it focused on "empowering survivors of abuse by shifting their role's perception from being victims to being survivors/actors through realizing their present capacity and ability in transforming past injuries into a chance for change and growth, thus creating a future of their own wish".[218] The workshop organized in 13 sessions, was divided into two phases. In the first phase, the sessions were facilitated for two groups: boys and girls. Sessions 2 to 9 focused on establishing safe space, building up groups, acting exercises, awareness and concentration skills, and preparing for a short show. In the second phase, three joint sessions between boys and girls were held in order to organize the performance. The show was staged in front of the centre's young residents and staff for the first time; it was also played in front of visitors from the World Bank. The approach referred to the CCM model and EPR model, and the techniques used were Image Theatre from the Theatre of the Oppressed and Drama Therapy exercises for check-in and evaluation.

Close to El Dirani's approach is Hassan's fieldwork, which involved 12 Syrian children (9–12 years old) in an educational centre. The eight-session workshop aimed at "finding a safe place for displaced children to express their feelings and needs and to develop their abilities". As in the other fieldworks, each work session was organized according to the Drama Therapy, the CCM and the EPR model, and developed according to five progressive steps: the communication/the contract, the warm-up, the main activity, the cool down/ the feedback and the closure. Session 7 focused on enhancing children's self-confidence and positive thinking, while in the last session, participants did a role-playing activity with reference to a story.

Mafouz's thesis about "Conflicts transformation with Syrian and Lebanese children using EPR" focused on discrimination between children and was developed according to the following structure: assessment phase in the beginning (pre-test with questionnaires to parents and questions to children) and six-day intervention, plus a two-day rehearsal and final performance in front of the parents. The fieldwork involved 12 children (10–13 years old), who were half-Lebanese (four boys and two girls) and half-Syrian (four boys and two girls). The intervention was structured according to Jennings' EPR model: two days focusing on embodiment, two days on projection and two days on role playing. The two role-playing sessions moved from simple playing exercises, such as telling sentences with diverse feelings, to role-playing scenes. During these activities, the two Lebanese and Syrian groups were mixed up and then played many roles and stories. Eventually, the facilitator and the children wrote one single story with many characters; the children then made a puppet for each character, and they performed the story with puppets in front of their parents at the

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[218] El Dirani, 2015.

community centre. After the performance, a final session with children aimed at greetings, final feelings sharing and post-test (questionnaire assessment).

In a small shelter in Damascus, workshop sessions with 12 female and male children (11–14 years old) were developed by Gello. The activity focused on children's aggressiveness in the attempt of transforming it into a positive social attitude. The workshop was very challenging because of the adolescents' resistance to theatre activities and the group's aggressiveness towards one female participant.

Addressed to Syrian refugees (11–16 years old), Mowai's fieldwork focused on enhancing their resilience with exercises aiming at self-expression and skills awareness, including EPR and specific exercises from social theatre training (exercises of respiration, check-in and check-out exercises).

In the perspective of conflict resolution among children (11–13 years old), Moukarzel's proposal of fieldwork refers to dialogue education and learning theories, with specific attention to Freire's pedagogy. The activity was accurately planned to be divided in three parts and aimed at group building, children's rights awareness and developing children's skills in conflict resolution. Along with group discussion and dialogue, EPR techniques were used in the proposal.

2.6.2. Fieldwork with girls: Working on gender issues and polarization

A fieldwork with 13 girls in a refugee centre in Damascus was very interesting.[219] The fieldwork was developed by Khalil in five sessions of two hours each. The first session focused on trust- and group-building games and the relationship between girls based on embodiment. The contract was stipulated in this session, and a creative pre-assessment was conducted. The second session aimed, through a series of exercises, at group building, self-expression, communication and warm-up exercises. The third session focused on embodiment and some projection. The fourth session worked on introducing image work, solidarity and expressing problems based on projection and on some role playing. The fifth session was based on role playing, working on solidarity and problem solving.

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[219] "It was interesting to work with within this center, because of the amount and types of problems of which these girls are suffering. What was remarkable was the presence of five girls married early, two divorced, and two with husbands under 18 years old, and it was very difficult to work closely with these girls because of social customs and traditions that bind them, which took the research towards a completely different direction. The change of path through this research will be clarified when talking about the target group, and that led to address a number of questions regarding the extent of vulnerability of teenage girls' category to the reality experienced within the center, and vulnerability to polarization, biases and prejudices that play a major role in the construction of human relations" (Khalil, 2015).

The participants, aged 14 to 17, were characterized by a premature transition into adulthood; half of the girls were already married, 2 were divorced and only 6 still attended school. The girls were accommodated by the needs to contrast gender-based violence and develop the capacity to use problem-solving skills, and separated by the different ethnic backgrounds – Arab and Kurd – whose polarization impeded the formation of support networks between them. The art-based intervention aimed to address these primary needs.[220] Proposing unusual activities, in fact, promoted a different and new polarization between girls across the board.

> In general, the session was good, but it was a new and unfamiliar activity for the girls. It could have been better, if the researcher had decreased the number of activities and included more fun, which may break the barriers, and facilitate a gradual engagement. It was clear that the girls split into two groups not on the basis of ethnic or cultural differences, but more according to objectives in relation to the sessions (education versus having fun, etc.), and on the basis of rejection of any behaviour out of ordinary (exaggerated laughter). There was no rejection or split based on age difference.[221]

Moreover, traditional expressive forms, like traditional dance, were of particular importance in overcoming the polarization, since they reproposed an inclusive model of interactions known to most of them.[222] Relational games allowed girls to explore the theme of leadership and helped them socialize.[223] The polarizations linked to structural violence can always represent themselves. Indeed, when a part of the participants was transferred to another, this had a new negative impact on the relationships within the group.[224] Representing this

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[220] "But through in-depth work within the shelter, the researcher noticed polarization, biases, and prejudices that play a substantial role in the relations between residents, which in turn plays a major role in the girls' relationships with each other and in the deepening of their problems. Thus, the research began to take a different direction to work with girls, starting from the challenges they face, by creating a safe space and working to build trust among them, and then working to resolve their problems through the image theater" (ibid.).

[221] Ibid.

[222] "This charged atmosphere decreased once the session has started, especially after doing the dancing activity as requested by girls, which broke a lot of barriers especially with the girl who refused to enter at the beginning of this session and who expressed in the first session during the pre-test on trust that she does not trust anyone of the girls and feels rejected by them. So here, the other girls were encouraging her to dance because she is talented, and they gave her a lot of self-confidence by asking her to teach them how to dance the way she does" (ibid.).

[223] "Most of the girls expressed their inability to control their lives through the exercise of Colombian hypnosis that allowed them to test the feeling of control and power, and this is one of the common issues that bring them together" (ibid.).

[224] "At the end of this session, there was contradictory messages from the girls, as they showed sadness because one of them may leave the shelter as a result of routine movements, and at the same time, some of the attitudes that emerged during the session does not correspond to the solidarity they have shown in the beginning. Here, probably the deep structure reveals itself indicating a rooted pattern of relations of which the affected persons are not aware, in spite of its widespread and sustainable impact on the social behaviour" (ibid.).

and other instances through the body and discussing them only subsequently, as by instance with image theatre, allowed to build the group progressively, and a mutual recognition between all participants.

2.6.3. Working with women: Supporting women communication and intercultural dialogue

Students described several reasons why they had targeted women in their fieldworks, which included the losses they endured, and the fact that the way a woman deals with a loss has an effect not only on herself, but also on the entire family. Aspects of culture and social considerations, according to the students could add to a woman's pain:

> The way society sees these women, regardless of their different stories, might be one of the most important issues that have been noticed during this session. Society as a whole, or probably our eastern society in general and the Syrian society in particular, see the woman who lost a breadwinner or a dear one as being a person with no provider and protector anymore, which means a woman that anyone can have. This puts even more pressure on the woman than the pain she already feels. [...][225]

In displacement, women endure a big change in their daily life: new roles and new skills are required of them; they are often left alone – and this may be a very new condition in a patriarchal culture such as the rural Syrian one – and they are forced to take on jobs that require them to interact in the public space with people out of their close circles. These new life conditions affect them emotionally and even more socially: they actually have to embark on a new social life in which they may encounter negative feelings and uncertainty.

The art-based fieldworks aimed at "transform[ing] the complex problem of the change in identity for women into a positive factor that can even contribute in resolving a conflict in a particular community".[226] Women's groups can become active agents of change within their local communities in finding points of convergence and rapprochement; thus, they can transform an existing conflict or reduce a future one.

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[225] Ibid.
[226] Fendi, 2015.

On the other hand, as Fendi points out in her thesis:

> Intervention to help an individual understand the changes in his or her identity may be a way of supporting this individual by developing his/her abilities to be an active member of his or her society. Moreover, it will help the individual realize that this change is natural and may be positive in terms of the interaction of this new identity with others, [...] the individual is the most qualified to recognize the magnitude of suffering because he she has experienced it.[227]

Working on recognizing individual strengths at an emotional and cognitive level through art-based interventions is important in a society where even the experience of loss has specific social meanings.

> The society is the most important factor for the woman who experienced a loss, as the society is the one that decides whether or not this woman deserves this appreciation or whether or not she has the right to show her grief. This social differentiation among women who experience loss, related to political reasons, might trigger a conflict of a different kind, which must be prevented and limited before its emergence.
>
> Therefore, the change occurring to identity due to loss is a double-edged sword: it is either a loss that is appreciated by society and that results in sympathy that positively affect the new identity of the person, making her sometimes more active within her community, or a loss that is not appreciated by the society, but considered as a blame or a sin that carries hatred and stigma into the new identity.[228]

Three fieldworks aiming at women are particularly interesting in their different focuses: (a) assessing and working on the change war losses brought into the identity;[229] (b) using psychosocial support activities based on the CCM to restore a sense of well-being among Syrian women;[230] and (c) enhancing dialogue and social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian women in a resource centre.[231]

Fendi's fieldwork was a six-session workshop involving nine women (18 to 50 years old), who experienced the loss of a dear and important person in their lives, and it aimed at enabling them to express their feelings, become aware of the change in their identity and enhance personal strengths and mutual support. Verbal interaction and writing in these workshops

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Fendi, 2015.
[230] Khouri, 2015.
[231] Hussein, 2015.

played a stronger role than in those with children. During the first phase (sessions 1 to 3), the focus was on letting feelings and experiences emerge. The second session focused on storytelling about significant others they lost and about themselves at the present, encouraging more verbal interactions within the group. The third session was dedicated to storytelling, focusing on characters from popular and traditional novels relevant to the women's present lives.

After these sessions, Fendi changed the workshop's plan – switching from telling stories of loss to assessing positive experience in the present – by focusing on the skills women were using in their daily life: the tree of life exercise was performed in this perspective.[232] During the following sessions, women went back to storytelling about positive aspects of their lives; relaxing exercises were additionally proposed by the facilitator to support them. Eventually in the last phase, the workshop moved to physical storytelling about skills and dreams, and participants suggested each other's ideas to fulfil personal desires. In the final session, participants discussed how they could contribute to solving conflicts within the community and ended by writing messages to people from the community. In the closing activity, each participant focused on their own identity card, which reported about their many skills at present.

Impacting on well-being was the aim of Khouri's fieldwork: it involved eight women in their 20s and 30s from the informal settlement of Hay el Gharbeh in Beirut, Lebanon. The 14 weekly sessions focused on improving the women's sense of safety and security, as this was identified by participants as the most pressing need. The project consisted of 12 sessions of one and a half hours each, plus a half-day outing in nature and a concluding forum theatre event. The sessions were held at the Tahaddi Education Center in the multipurpose room. The implementation of the activities referred to the master's teachings, with specific reference to CCM, EPR and Theatre of the Oppressed. Physical activities were more widely used than in Fendi's fieldwork.

Hussein's fieldwork targeted 12 women (20 to 30 years old), 6 Lebanese and 6 Syrian survivors of gender-based violence, belonging to different confessions and political affiliations. The main aim of the workshop was searching for common grounds to build mutual trust and "strive to foster a superordinate identity that accommodates and transcends identity-based divisions."[233] The implementation of the workshop followed the master's teachings with

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[232] "It is based on a mechanism that allows the beneficiary to appreciate the inherent characteristics by mentioning the roots of the family or places and the extent of the individual's attachment to the land and history. This is one of the most important tasks that helps raise the sense of self and value before focusing on all the positive events that happened in the beneficiary's life and the people who positively affected her identity and the formation of her personality as well as the people who presently support her financially and morally, which might help raise self-confidence and look positively at her abilities and potentials which we might be able to take advantage of after negative feelings might have taken over for a while" (ibid.).

[233] Hussein, 2015.

reference to the CCM, EPR and image theatre. Specific reference to the use of metaphors included inviting participants to find a metaphor that described the whole process of the workshop. Participants chose the metaphor of the "pearl necklace" and added pearls to it at the end of each session: pearls stood for the degree of comfort and the number of ideas each session gave them.

2.7. Key aspects in social theatre intervention with Lebanese hosts and Syrian refugees

Master's students' fieldworks are pioneer experiences in applying social theatre frameworks of intervention in psychosocial support to a variety of target population within the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. Most of the fieldworks were accurately discussed within the theses themselves, and some students, taking advantage of the positive and negative aspects of the fieldwork, revised their design or designed further developments of it.

Out of their findings and critical considerations, some key aspects of a social theatre activity can be highlighted, which may be relevant for best practices to be implemented in the same and in analogous contexts too.

Adapting the cultural model of social theatre and its techniques to the specific cultural context. Students were aware of the specific cultural challenges to the art-based model of intervention they were using. Since all the techniques and approaches taught in the master's programme come from Western European culture, a great deal of attention was placed on adapting them to the different cultural contexts with regards to the relationship with the body, the individual–group rapport and reference to imaginative modes. In specific contexts, this implied significantly reducing the dimension of physical contact between boys and girls where there were brothers and sisters and the brothers didn't permit their sisters to touch and be touched by others;[234] or more generally, a natural cultural harmony between the trainer and the participants meant placing greater importance on the oral narration dimension.

Accurate needs assessment. Conducted both with the direct and indirect caregivers of the children – the representatives in the centres where they operate, parents and relatives – as well as with the children themselves, it is a basic activity that clarifies how to proceed in the general design and specific technical choices (an aspect that was developed less by the students). The tools utilized with all target groups varied from the use of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with adults, to performing direct observation of children during their regular recreational activities, to asking questions and drawing with the children. The

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[234] El Dirani, 2015.

children responded in a positive manner especially to tools that didn't require writing and didn't imply requests for a lot of information.

Building a safe space. Strongly desired, it is guaranteed by the trainer both in the search for an appropriate space for the activity – a factor acquired with great difficulty given the complex nature of finding spaces that are physically separate and dedicated – as well as, and more importantly on an educational level, the space dedicated to creating the contract. The children are asked to identify together – through verbal discussion and games – the rules for living together healthily based on respect for space, time and others. Clearly stating these rules at the beginning of the activities constitutes an initial form of socialization, regarding differences, and gives an active role to children and youth in building the way to do activities together, thus developing an initial ownership of the process. On the part of the trainers, the preoccupation for discipline – maybe tied to a traditional pedagogical cultural model – and a related fear of too much freedom of movement, do not negate the value of this shared forming of rules, to which the authors return often over the course of the first sessions and to which, bit by bit, the children refer to, autonomously reprimanding one another to follow them. In some cases, acquiring these rules is so internalized that the children evoke these rules with adults as well, who casually interrupt or disturb the activities. Building a safe space can be developed effectively also by working for an environment in terms of affection into the warm-up phases, which is reminiscent of a familial dimension.[235] In these cases, warm-up activities carry a thick experiential content and illustrate the needs that are important to take on in the main activity. The particular reference to home – a fundamental theme in the identity of refugees[236] – provokes an emotional ambivalence between nostalgia, fear and a sense of warmth which, once it has emerged, can be elaborated upon with successive activities that capture the emotional tone (irony, laughter and others) with which the children narrate their experiences.

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[235] "(Warm-up before starting the main activity), and then the facilitator asked the children to search for an object or material similar to their original environment or where they belong in order to create a safe space for them. The children brought varied things: leaves, stones, and some brought soil. Every child told his narrative related to the thing that he has chosen. It was remarkable that there were some common narratives in the majority, as the thing that they have brought reminds them of home and the place where they used to play. Only one child brought something different that reminds him of his father, and this was a wooden stick, and while his was telling his story, the child said with a laugh: "I remember that my father had this stick to beat me." After his words, the majority of the children started recounting the same memories, while laughing and trying to make fun. Some of them said: "My mother hit me when I open the refrigerator to eat, so I started eating without her knowledge (strong laughter)". Some said: "My mother hit me when she is angry, without any reason, but I love her despite this". And some of them started to remember TV programmes for children, and they are the younger ones in the group. (From here, the facilitator directed his work process in a way that is likely to learn more about the house and the family of these children). And thus, children shared their stories and their experiences which enhanced the trust between them and contributed to creating a safe space that allows the child to express himself" (El Dirani, 2015).
[236] Papadopoulos, 2002.

Playful dimension. In social theatre, the playful dimension is, from one point of view, a preliminary methodological pathway to other activities, and it is important that it be maintained as a level of action during the entire progression of creative proposals. Art-based interventions are appropriate for children's psychosocial support in many ways, but primarily because they can reach the child by means that are familiar in the childhood age – playing. Literature has studied in detail the primary role of playing in a child's psychosocial and cognitive development, as presented in the first chapter, and recent research focuses on the crucial role of playing for refugee children, with specific regard to the Syrian war.[237] Very sensitive to the educational and pedagogical dimension, all fieldworks clearly focused on offering a playful experience. Students always underlined the non-mandatory dimension of the activities proposed – letting participants be free in fully taking part in it or just observing it, or even accepting that some of the participants would leave and come back to the workshop later on. Non-performative stress was given to activities' outcome in either evaluation in terms of appropriateness or aesthetics. When addressing sensitive topics during role playing or in forum theatre, the playful dimension was underlined: the idea of exploring alternatives to the routines, as well as finding operative solutions were both stressed, thus building on imagination and fun. Among the interesting experiences, the outdoor trip involved women participants and their children in the fieldwork of Khouri. Even though it isn't a creative activity in terms of the techniques utilized, it is a playful activity indeed that furnishes a free and creative context for relating and of great value for women who have children that have had serene contexts and open socialization taken away from them.

Group communication and group cooperation. Building group communication is a key element of social theatre intervention. It is part of the wider group building that the CCM model pursues through the socialization of differences among participants. Many students' interventions focused on promoting group communication through oral sharing about feelings, experiences and needs. Nevertheless, the most significant improvements were acquired during warm-up group activities (such as Boal training exercises and cooking among women[238]) or sometimes during informal group activities (such as playing football with children): physically doing or making something together promoted improvement of

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[237] Cook, 2017.

[238] When working with women, warm-up can take unusual forms, but can be very effective in referring back to typically feminine skills as Fendi experimented. "The session began with a simple dialogue about their cooking skills and cuisine. Every woman prepared some sweets, and they started competing to see which one of them makes tastier biscuits. In the kitchen, the beneficiaries showed other aspects of their personality that may be significant in their awareness of their identities as mothers, sisters and daughters. Every woman showed the different way of making biscuits, each according to her culture and amount of ingredients, which varied according to the environment and the region she came from. It was the safe place for them, and this observation emerged when each of them began to mention the region she comes from and her religious and sectarian affiliation cheerfully and with a sense of humor. The beneficiaries finally reached an agreement on specific ingredients for the biscuit dough, and they put them in the oven and waited to taste." (Fendi, 2015).

non-verbal group communication, which turned out to be an asset in group communication. Concerning group cooperation, the more effective experiences are those involving participants who produced something that belongs to all of them; forum theatre and creating a final performance achieved outstanding results both with children and adults.

Projection and emotions. All the interventions broadly use projection activities and different relevant techniques – from drawing to making objects and storytelling. These activities permit the collection of lots of information about the identity and needs of the participants at the beginning of each intervention, but they are also delicate to handle due to the type of emotions they provoke on an individual level, and because they may not, in and of themselves, create a system of bonds and acceptance in the group. Like with children, it is also important for adults that the projection activity be preceded by a solid construction of trust in the group and an equally effective activation of a positive perception of the self and one's capabilities. Due to these considerations, students redesigned their intervention and balanced the projection activities with physical and relational games, which shifted the participants into a positive emotional environment and permitted a discharge of emotions.[239] Every activity, even the ones on projection, is thought of as part of a process that constantly produces positive experiences and develops coping resources.

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[239] "Then each child introduced his puppet from behind the curtain (age, name, dream, who help her to achieve that dream, what is her relationship to the person who made her) which allowed him to project something of himself on this story. Most of the stories told by children were linked to their homes and their memories, and aviation and weapons. One example is what has been said by one of them, after the introduction of the name of his puppet Helmi, he said: 'My dream is to become an army officer to kill all those who are destroying our homes, and my father will help me because he has big muscles.' Most children were unable to express their relationship with the doll. After the storytelling, manifestations of agitation and violence increased, especially when the child (A) of seven years old, the youngest of children, starts hitting everyone in a strange way (we were not able to control her actions so we asked her if she would like to go play in the nearby park and she agreed to do so, then we asked from one of the helpers in the center to take her to the garden and play with her, in order for us to be able to complete the day. The story was chosen to stimulate the imagination of children, especially if they have violence; through the story and the presence of violence within its events which can move a sense of desire for expression. Some of them decided to get away and sit aside without a word and refused to start making a house for the puppet (we asked them if they would like to help us, or prefer to make the house; their answer was that they were not happy, and they want to stay in their places. Then children designed of a small community using the houses and it was closer to the community in which they live, and they put the puppet and the house in a spot that is suitable for them in this community, which reflected their position in the community in which they live. Then children shared their feelings, and what [is] interesting is the strong desire of the children for expressing in words, as they sat quietly listening to every child. After that, we played basketball from a distance (this game was a response to the behaviour of children when they were throwing the clay, so we wanted to satisfy this desire by turning it into a game)" (El Dirani, 2015).

Storytelling and role playing. These are the creative proposals that have proved to be the most effective, as they allow both children and adults to externally project, as well as give a form and a way to elaborate their experiences. Children and adolescents who exhibit resistance to projection activities that use drawing, writing or building objects are always at ease when they are invited to recount orally, and especially, to interpret the characters in the Drama Therapy fables – The Invisible Child[240] – proposed in much of the fieldwork.[241] Familiarity with oral narration and stories is certainly a trait specific to the Arab culture;[242] in fact, narration is – in contrast to other expressive forms – a transcultural method that all cultures call upon at different levels, starting with mythology and fairy tales. Studies highlight the positive health outcomes of the use of narration.[243] In particular, it offers children a series of characters with which to play different emotional parts of the self and a system of social roles with which to compare themselves.[244] The role of narratives is very strong in a positive reframing of one's own memories, even when they refer to a tragic moment in one's life.[245] Narration is a powerful technique that must be managed with particular attention when the participant is asked to focus on negative factors of his or her own life.[246] A key point in the activities with women was in fact moving from projection to role playing. Adult women, using the body without words to tell their story or embody their thoughts, live a more playful dimension, as if they could be freer and more childish through this less-structured language. At the same time, however, role plays that concretely refer to concrete problems and focus on finding real and necessary solutions in everyday life, produces a sense

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240 Jennings, 2009.
241 "The role appeared in the last sessions more clearly; the children played roles and characters that differs from their original characters (the father role, the mother role...). It is worth mentioning that the children who played the characters of kids in the play showed a new personality and a new attitude. The girls who played the roles of 'the forest family' kids practiced discrimination and violence against the invisible child and they conveyed the situation as they experienced it. In the play, there were three scenarios of the invisible child (he disappeared because of the war, he disappeared due to beating, he disappeared because he was molested). The child who played the role of the father was the same child who put his father in the bag of things that worry me" (Hajj Hassan, 2015).
242 Herzog, 2012.
243 See paragraph 3.4 and its footnotes.
244 Colombo and Innocenti Malini, 2017.
245 "The exercise in this main activity depended on telling a short story and using it to mimic a personality they love or wished to be when they were young. A short story that includes a description of an entire day that this woman lived before losing the person she lost. One of them chose to be a news anchor (Samar) and the other preferred to speak only as a third person (Salima). The women began to narrate the events of a full day of 24 hours when the person they lost was still present. Each one chose a character to narrate the events through this character. The session was dominated by a pleasant and cheerful atmosphere, although the character mentioned in [the] story was the reason of a tragedy for these women, but it is good to say that using this method to narrate the events eased their emotional memory" (Fendi, 2015).
246 "What was supposed to happen during the third session was telling stories of loss, but it was noticed that if this was done before giving beneficiaries a dose of hope and positivity, the stories of loss may be a factor that would increase the negativity. Thus, the plan was changed, and an activity that helped the beneficiaries see the positive side of this change in identity and their importance within the community as individuals who have suffered and overcame their suffering was adopted" (ibid.).

of immediate and expendable utility to playing and fun. From here, a greater reciprocal engagement emerges, both on the level of trust that is born from common fun and also on the level of being proactive in mutual help and problem solving.[247]

For all target groups, combining play or role playing with narration was very important; such playfulness allows participants to sustain eventual negative emotions that a memory brings with it. Moreover, the game that physically activates the body, frees energy and emotions and balances the more static dimension of verbal narration in which the body is fixed and gives little contribution to the story. Moreover, role playing and staging stories offered the participants the possibility of an embodiment in which body language and words were used together. Cultural resistance to embodiment games based on imagination – which emerges above all in fieldworks with adolescents – was overcome by asking to represent real or imaginary characters in stories. The characters allow for a game between free interpretation, imagination and references to reality that can be more effective with children who are not used to substantive freedom in the use of the body.

Developing non-violent communication. This is perhaps one of the most important aspects developed in the fieldworks, especially considering the specific context of conflict that has had a strong impact on the modes of communication and even the way children and youth played.[248] Aggressiveness is often present in both self-expression and the way children interact in a group, whether only among Syrians, or in mixed Syrian–Lebanese groups. The fieldwork ranged between a theatre model and the use of techniques specific to dialogue and peacebuilding,[249] whose effect is magnified when integrated into educational games and theatre games. The playful element of having fun favours release of energies and the easing of emotional tension, while cooperation is inherent in most theatre games. In some cases, aggressiveness is directed towards a member of the group who considered a scapegoat even within the community. In these cases, the capacity of the trainer to step in and promote the gradual socialization of differences through narratives and games is important in reducing aggressiveness and promoting an initial destigmatization.[250]

Developing diversity acceptance. This objective seems to be more easily obtained with children, and with more time available, with adolescents and women. Reconciliation between groups of different cultures isn't always obtainable through the intervention, but

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[247] "After all the beneficiaries showed their skills and abilities, they were asked to write on a paper what they think might help others to fulfil their wishes. Each of them stood in the middle of the room, one after the other, and confronted the beneficiary she wanted to tell her what to do to achieve her dream. They also acted the suggestion or the idea throughout the game (using no words). There was an atmosphere of fun and laughter in the session, but the beneficiaries were surprised by how easy the solution that could achieve their dreams was" (ibid.).

[248] Wassouf, 2014.

[249] Moukarzel, 2014.

[250] Gello, 2014.

creative activities – with inherent components of play and active cooperation – are able to create a dimension of acceptance within the group.[251] In adults, the techniques of the image theatre and forum theatre are very effective in socializing differences. The CCM proved to be fundamental in the work with women and adults: diversity among adults is more rooted and in contexts of conflict, the polarization between adults is greater than among children. Utilizing such a model was vital for the success of many interventions as the aim was not only to help women to strengthen their coping skills and adapt to their situation, but also create a forum through which they could raise their voices externally in response to the difficult and unjust conditions they are facing. Particularly effective in the various fieldworks with adults of both genders was the use of staging problematic real-life situations, such as in forum theatre and other techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed. This was particularly true in multicultural groups, encompassing both Syrian refugees and Lebanese hosts in Lebanon.[252] These activities allowed the representation of daily life problems and their staging, and required participants to test possible solutions to daily problems on the stage. In this process, participants were able to discover that the intentions of the ones acting on stage were similar or connected with one's own intentions, to socialize safely different points of view, and to discover similarities. It also prompted the group members to put themselves in each other's shoes, starting a process of mutual acceptance.

The final realization of a performance also plays a key role in promoting group cohesion, which is called upon to collaborate towards a productive objective that is situated between play and reality. Staging the performance is a challenge and a responsibility, a moment of self-affirmation and also the affirmation of a group identity: everyone has their part, but the performance belongs to everyone.[253] This is completely embedded in the Social Theatre model, which proposes that the passage from the internal expression and representation phase of the group to communicating it externally through the performance as obligatory.

2.8. Additional recommendations for theatre intervention in psychosocial support

The master's students' creative intervention gained very positive results in terms of enhancing participants' personal skills and promoting social and intercultural acceptance. Reading through the master's students' fieldwork experiences and their own critical reading of it, some recommendations emerge as relevant to approach refugees with creative interventions and theatre interventions in particular.

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251 Mahfuz, 2015.
252 See fieldwork by Kchour (2015) targeting 16 young people (8 Lebanese and 8 Syrian between 16–25 years old) who worked with the aim of overcoming polarization through forum theatre, writing workshop, puppet theatre and storytelling and more problematic by Miriam Balhas (2015), who developed a theatre training with Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian actors.
253 Ibid.

2.8.1. Structural aspects: Time, team, skills

The experiences carried out were, on the whole, positive beginnings to processes that need longer interventions and more integrated in the general system of mental health and psychosocial support. Time is indeed a crucial factor in complex regeneration processes. The link to medical, educational and social care resources of the entire system bolsters the single action of a creative intervention. Intervening as a multiprofessional team that combines solid theatre skills, as well as psychosocial and possibly anthropological skills, allows for a more aware and effective management of the creative intervention that mobilizes many intra- and interpersonal dynamics. Co-training the interventions provides benefits by allowing for play while organically being an activator and observer. One of the most important skills of a trainer is flexibility.[254] Sometimes what has been defined in the trainer's workplan has to be modified because the group reacts to a proposal in an unexpected manner and, as often happens, needs more time to go through the emotional and relational experience proposed in the exercise to benefit from it. Many students ascertained it is better to reduce the number of exercises and leave more time to realize each one in all its phases, including collecting the verbal and non-verbal feedback that the participants provide during the exercise. This proves to be even truer for initial sessions in which the change of perspective requested by unusual activities is very high. Flexibility is necessary on the part of the trainer in order not to lose the connection with the group. It is the dialogue with the group that guides the organization of the creative stimuli in each session. Sometimes, in fact, children express a greater desire to play ball than carry out the proposed activity; accommodating the proposal is useful to prevent losing contact with the needs of the group in that moment. Relieving tensions with physical play can be positively utilized to go back with a different energy and willingness towards other types of activities. At times, the context can intervene in an unexpected and important manner and modify a workplan. As in the case of a group of girls who participated in an activity conducted by Khalil in the Damascus refugee centre, the news of the transfer of a part of the IDPs to another centre strongly influenced the atmosphere of the participants, who were afraid of losing contact with people who were close to them, and repolarized relations between them, despite the feeling of trust that had been developed in the previous sessions. In these cases, recognizing and giving space to the needs of the participants and imagining a new activity that starts from this need would build the group in a more organic fashion.

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[254] "In the sixth session, two members of the group handled the warm-up. A girl in the group suggested that they play the Red Light, Green Light (Statues) game. After the group approved the game, the girl explained the way to play it and conducted it. One of the boys in the group plucked up courage and suggested to repeat the Balthazar said game. Also, after the group approved the game, he took the initiative and started to execute it. [...] Even my role as a moderator was transformed; I was no longer at the top of the pyramid. I became gradually within a circle where everyone participated in a cooperative way. This change was obvious in the sixth session when two participants expressed their desire to conduct two games (the Red Light, Green Light game and the Balthazar said game). The whole group welcomed this initiative, and the members of the group executed the warm-up stage. Besides, the communication among the children became circular, which means that one person communicated with everyone and not only with the people he knew as it was the case in the beginning" (Hajj Hassan, 2015).

2.8.2. One main principle: Replacing negative experiences with positive ones

As it was presented in the first chapter, creative activities have a recognized value in promoting well-being and health care and, in the framework of psychosocial support, they can contribute to a salutogenic process based on empowerment of the capacities of individual and collective health, and on the creation of opportunities for health. Therefore, focusing on replacing negative experiences with positive ones is the main overall principle for any creative intervention. This can be achieved better by stressing two points: fun and strengths.

Having fun in the activities is crucial: participants need to be involved in games and exercises that belong to the play culture that was addressed in the first paragraph. Having fun is a key step in motivation for the activity and openness towards others.[255] As a matter of fact, in adult culture, and particularly in certain cultures, play is looked at suspiciously, as if it were a distraction instead of a useful human experience that allows learning and well-being. All the fieldworks demonstrate that when participants were involved in activities, and in an environment that is playful and fun, they felt better and participated with greater interest. Working with games that aim at **assessing strengths**[256] **and personal skills** is the way to maintain a truly positive attitude within the activity. It doesn't mean ignoring the presence of suffering, but continually shifting the participants towards using their own resources and thus becoming aware of them. It is easier for a person to discover one's personal resources in creative activities as the activities are not based on his/her rational awareness.

Certain specific aspects of social theatre work should be considered to build a positive experience for the participants.

Physical activity. Physical activity undoubtedly has benefits for health, and also to a person's mood and general well-being. Children live life and learn in a much more physical/sensorial way than adults. Their way of expressing themselves is much more physical than verbal, and the verbal complexity may require a lot of mental resources, thus increasing the general request for self-control. The level of self-control – both of movements and emotions – required of a war-affected child is in itself a big burden. Physical games, singing, playing and

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[255] "In general, the session was good but it was new and unfamiliar activities for girls. It could have been better if the researcher decreased the number of activities and included more of fun, which may break the barriers so that he can engage them gradually" (Khalil, 2015).

[256] "The session carried on and every participant made his own flower that holds his name and positive qualities. The characteristics of each flower were explained within two-person groups and 10 members presented their flowers with the group. A discussion that included everyone took place: Was it difficult to find five positive qualities? Did you find common positive qualities with any other member of the group? Does anyone want to add any other positive qualities that he did not have the time to write? After that, every member planted the flower in the place that give him comfort" (Hajj Hassan, 2015).

others create the possibility for the child to have, first and foremost, a sensory feeling of freedom which, at the same time, elevates and balances his/her level of physical energy. But for adults too, enjoying has a lot to do with producing energy and freeing energy. Physical activities remind adults of the experiences of childhood and produce emotional discharge. On a social level, contact activities and embodiment activities were able to create better conditions of trust within the group.

The strategic role of the warming up. The warm-up phase in the different fieldworks created the condition for initial engagement of the participants, and also defined an emotional and relational atmosphere that continued to develop as activities progressed. In this phase, the role of the body and play are of notable importance. Some games, like the Scarf Game[257] and Walking the Weather, allow also to assess the emotions participants bring with them and start processing them. The same can be accomplished through breathing exercises.[258] But this aspect of emotional assessment is in any case secondary to the principal function of the warm-up, which is mobilizing physical and emotional resources. During the warm-up, the trainer will propose a change in the level of the experience, activate an alteration in the level of energy and concentration and lead the participants into the logic of the game and of symbolic expression. The warm-up has, therefore, an important liminal function in making the group move from a habit of experience – personal and relational – to a new model of experience founded on play and symbols.

Ownership. When participation becomes ownership of the activity, an important change has taken place in the dynamic between the trainer and the group, and within and between participants. The process of ownership arises from the beginning: sharing contents of work is much more engaging than discussing only the rules. A contract with participants – and with children too – has a primary objective of sharing why, or better, for what reason people engage in the creative process: sharing the meaning and taking into account the expectations.[259] With children, the need for rules becomes greater if a child is asked to sustain activities involving verbal discussion or, in any case, that require strong self-control. Evidence shows that the verbal indications of "good behaviour" given to children prove to be barely effective. The proper pedagogical strategies to social theatre are the ones that

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[257] The Scarf Game: Each individual in the group picks a scarf, which, in his opinion, resembles his current situation, and puts it in any place he wants. Then, he explains why he picked it and put in this place. For reference to these games, see the thesis of Daccache and Assaf (2015).

[258] "The management of emotions plays an essential role as we stated, hence the importance of the exercises of respiration. The objective of the exercises of respiration is the warm-up, the maintenance and the enhancement of the concentration and the management of the stress and the tension. The respiration reflects our emotional state, and at the same time, the respiratory activity is the best way to connect with our body. During this exercise and throughout the activity of relaxation, two young adolescents in a group of eleven couldn't concentrate and couldn't inhale the air correctly to exhale. This means that most of them have the behavior to manage their emotions, stress and the experiences they have gone through. Thus, they contributed to enhance the resilience process" (Moawi, 2014).

[259] El Dirani, 2015.

employ active play as a means for controlling behaviour. The child will indeed have a greater chance to learn how to listen, respect time and others and manage his/her behaviour in relation to others. In play, which is also fun, self-control comes at the same time as the development of self-confidence, leadership skills and, most of all, cooperative interactions.

Group building a key element. Students acknowledge the need to dedicate more time, particularly at the beginning, to group building. As for children, group building is even more necessary as it is an essential part of creating a safe space, where the child can feel comfortable in expressing his/her specific identity (and needs) in social interactions. Group building, on the one hand, has to do with respect and trust within a group and, on the other, with expression of each individual's diversity. The accurate balance of the two is much easier to reach through theatre training – involving body training and expressive training – and educational games, rather than through projection activities, which are more individually based.

2.9. Moving from group intervention to community-based intervention: Further steps to be taken

It turned out that the facilitator cannot work with a child on the restoration of his/her self-image and feelings when he/she is still facing violence in his/her everyday life if no one is working with his/her family at the same time, through a process and not just an awareness session, and then creating a common space to work on a process between parents and their children in order to mitigate violence and transform the relationship between parents and children. If the child only expresses his/her feelings about the violence he/she faced, this is not enough to solve the problem. The processes should follow the complex circle model.[260]

Creative arts and theatre are effective approaches to support refugees, IDPs and people who have experienced crisis. The IOM Master's students' fieldworks, although conducted over a limited period of time, were able to achieve positive results and offer precious considerations on the prospect of contextualizing a social theatre approach to the specific context of the Lebanese–Syrian displacement situation. Their main positive outcomes were at the individual and group levels. It may be a first step, but a further step has to be made to promote a long-lasting healthy effect. The community has to be included in the intervention, even if the focus may be primarily on groups. The final performance stemming from a series of workshops is already in itself a ritual moment that can be thought of not only as a group activity, but as an activity to construct positive relationships between the group of participants and the surrounding community. The students demonstrated a great deal of

260 El Dirani, 2015.

awareness of the ritualistic function of the performance, both in reconnecting links within the family, as well as the intercultural potential the theatre ritual can have in linking people from different communities and groups.[261] It is possible nonetheless to conceive the whole theatre intervention, involving the community from the very beginning, as what happened in the Balkans and in Libya in IOM mental health and psychosocial support projects using theatre tools.[262] There are many ways to realize the social and community theatre approach: from involving community members with precise creative abilities in the workshop process, to creating moments of exchange and celebration in which various parts of the community are invited and met. In all these experiences, theatre intervention recreates a safe haven for diversity, acceptance and intercultural dialogue in the heart of the community, which is nowadays, in effect, one of the main contributions that art can offer to health promotion and peace.

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[261] "It was useful that the sessions are concluded by presenting Forum Theater that includes several scenes for related problems that are common between the group. These scenes can be presented for the mothers of the girls trying to create a space for dialogue and maybe awareness and building a relationship between the mothers and the girls that can help them overcome part of the problems they are facing." (Khalil, 2015).

[262] See the interventions conducted in the early 2000s by Schininà in the Balkans (Schininà, 2004b) and the interventions conducted by the Social Community Theatre Centre in Multakana Centre in Tripoli, Libya (www.socialcommunitytheatre.com)

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    2015   The Use of Creative Approaches (Image Theater) in Solving Problems in a Sample of One of the Girls in the Accommodation Centers in the Province of Damascus. Executive Master thesis, Lebanese University, Beirut.

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Moawi, M.

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Wassouf, A.
    2014   The Role of the Crisis in Changing the Children's Play Culture. Executive Master thesis, Lebanese University, Beirut.

Chapter 3: Psychosocial support and dialogue in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic: Conflict mediation approaches

Oussama Safa

Abstract

This chapter reviews a number of master's thesis as part of the joint IOM–Lebanese University Executive Master's programme, which combined psychosocial support with mediation. The chapter begins with a literature review of sources that connect peacebuilding and mediation practice with psychosocial support to establish what seems to be a natural link between both fields. It proceeds to review the theses that were submitted as part of the required fieldwork for graduation. The findings indicate a general understanding of the concepts shared in the Executive Master's and a strong willingness by students to apply what they learned in their respective fields. While the quality of the theses varies across students and in geographical areas (Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic), there have been some serious attempts to utilize useful concepts and techniques in psychosocial support and mediation to generate acceptable and workable results. The programme of study has undoubtedly equipped students with a strong background to further test and apply the learned techniques.

Keywords: *Peacebuilding, truth and memory, mediation, healing, trauma, reconciliation, victimization, resilience, coping, empowerment, process, forgiveness, integrated approach, psychosocial support, theory of change, conflict management, conflict prevention, social change, conflict transformation, conflict resolution.*

3.1. Introduction

The Syrian war that began in 2011 has produced, at the time of writing, one of the worst refugee crises that the world has known since the Second World War. The issues that accompanied the refugees at the community and individual levels proliferated at a rapid pace in neighbouring countries where the Syrian population sought refuge. This chapter examines a few field projects that have attempted to create tools to deal with the psychosocial effects of the refugees in one of the neighbouring countries and to stave off fallouts from adversarial and conflicting relationships between host communities and refugees, refugees themselves and other constituencies directly related to them.

The study builds on the premise that psychosocial work, if merged with a sister field such as that of mediation and conflict resolution, would go a long way in not only providing tools for well-being at the individual level, but also for peace in an otherwise hostile community. Blending both fields as some of the theses have done is no easy undertaking. The available literature in the field remains timid as to how and through what processes both fields intersect. There have been a few attempts at understanding the relationship between the psychosocial effects of interpersonal issues and how they impact choices at the intrapersonal and intercommunal levels. Aside from clinical, empirical studies – which this chapter does not explore – there has been scant evidence on how efforts at successful mediation and conflict resolution come up short due to unresolved psychosocial issues.

From a practitioner point of view, the link is clear. Successful conflict resolution between two or more parties – be they individuals or as a community – will be incomplete without dealing with wounds resulting from a trauma that these parties have endured. The inverse is equally true. Successful healing, increased resilience and an expanded ability to cope with severe change and hostility would need a peaceful environment to happen interrupted. Thus, and as some of the theses examined in this chapter argue, there is an organic link between the field of psychosocial support and mediation, which subscribes to the larger field of peacebuilding.

3.2. Literature review

The following is a literature review that is limited in scope and focus to shed light on major conceptual definitions that represent the intersection between the fields of mediation and peacebuilding and that of psychosocial interventions in situations of conflict and post-violence. It will try to establish that the link between both fields – at least at the practice level – is more natural and spontaneous than most experts would like to admit. In conducting peacebuilding work, the focus is on transformation of feelings, relationships, perceptions and building trust with the "other". This is precisely the ultimate objective of the psychosocial support tools for coping, widening resilience and helping people recover from violence-induced trauma and heal. The review is not intended to cover the various aspects and

theories of conflict resolution; nor does it include psychosocial support work at large in the aftermath of natural disasters and various traumas.

The master's programme – which is the subject of this chapter – is a major attempt to highlight this natural link and call attention to it by engaging psychosocial support experts in peacebuilding work and vice versa. This was also done by establishing a strong entry point that is both normative and experience based in the sense that the majority of the students were already experienced in their respective fields and operating in established organizations where they had access to data, population and fieldwork. They were also working in unstable environments either inside the Syrian Arab Republic and/or Lebanon. Hence, the lessons gleaned from their experiences reflect practical learning that can be very valuable in advancing the call for a joint field of psychosocial support and peacebuilding. At the outset, however, it is important to establish some conceptual definitions and examine how the existing literature approaches these issues.

3.2.1. Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a relatively new field that has culminated over half a century of peacemaking and peace enforcement and meant to indicate the process by which nations – society and State institutions – recover from war, rebuild themselves and prevent the relapse into violence by concentrating on long-term measures. Peacebuilding involves such techniques and processes as mediation, negotiation, conciliation, national dialogues and consensus building. The pillars of peacebuilding are anchored in the ability of societies to transcend their victimhood through various vehicles of reconciliation and rebuild themselves in ways that are able to deal with the past with a reasonable level of satisfaction and move on. The nature of peacebuilding and its tools, particularly mediation, is forward looking and rarely dwells on the past. Communities and individuals get together to build a new future having supposedly learned from the past.

There are several functional definitions of peacebuilding that can serve to delineate the principles upon which the fields rests. Before delving into these definitions, it is important to note that some advocates of the peacebuilding field see the concept as all-encompassing to include the peace agreement, ceasefire, advocacy, humanitarian relief, mediation, dialogue, reconciliation and development processes. But for reasons of subject focus, the discussion is restricted to a narrower view of peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding was first defined by the United Nations to mean:

> a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. This consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.[263]

The UN then expanded the definition to include post-conflict peacebuilding that needs to address "support to basic safety and security; political processes; provision of basic services; restoration of core government functions; and economic revitalization".[264]

In its understanding of peacebuilding, the UN focuses on the macro level by giving priority to State building, institutional re-emergence and political processes. While there are efforts and a special focus to address the gender dimension of peacebuilding, the main onus remains on rebuilding the organs of the State, ensuring the proper functioning of institutions and the return to normalcy of economic activities. This approach goes in sync with the adoption and implementation of peace agreements and the launching of a political process, but it stops short of factoring into the definition of the people dimension or the aspect of participation in crafting the peace agreement or in influencing its development.

Famous theoreticians of peacebuilding provide different conceptual definitions that are meant to view the issue with a different lens. Johan Galtung sees peacebuilding as:

> [T]he process of creating self-supporting structures that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur. Conflict resolution mechanisms should be built into the structure and be present there as a reservoir for the system itself to draw upon, just as a healthy body has the ability to generate its own antibodies and does not need ad hoc administration of medicine.[265]

Advocates of the conflict transformation school, such as the famous scholar/practitioner Jean Paul Lederach, sees peacebuilding as more of a comprehensive and inclusive concept that transcends peace agreements to:

> [...] encompass, generate, and sustain the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct.[266]

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263 Boutros-Ghali, 1995.
264 UN Peacebuilding Fund, n.d.
265 Galtung, 1976:303.
266 Lederach, 1997:75.

A proponent of the conflict transformation school, Lederach calls for an integrated approach to peacebuilding that considers the multidimensional nature of the human suffering and relies on broad social participation. For any peacebuilding to be sustainable and effective, it must be transformative at the relational, personal and community levels. That transformation would have to happen from hostile relations to peaceful coexistence. The conflict transformation school intersects with Galtung's three Rs approach where peacebuilding would have to rest on the foundations of short-, mid- to long-term activities, which are otherwise called Resolution, Reconstruction and Reconciliation.[267] In resolution, the post-violence process would have to address all unresolved and outstanding issues. In reconstruction, there needs to be a major effort to reconstruct not just the destroyed cities but also people's faith, livelihoods and confidence. Finally, in reconciliation is where the long-term work of trauma healing is needed. In this sense, Galtung was one of the first peacebuilders to have appreciated the importance of blending psychosocial support with peacebuilding.

Conflict transformation is a school of thought that builds on conflict resolution, conflict management and conflict prevention. Conflict resolution builds on the concept that assumes that human beings are rational in the pursuit of their interests, and hence, conflicts should be solvable if joint interests are found. Conflict management moves from the premise that unsolvable conflicts may be manageable by limiting the damage, hurt and expenses that they inflict. While not reaching peace, management focuses on efforts to keep the status quo of no violence, no peace until a settlement time has come. Lastly, conflict prevention assumes that the most cost-effective way of solving a conflict is stopping it from happening by monitoring early warning signs and acting upon them.[268] In all these schools/approaches, except in conflict transformation, the psychosocial dimension is rarely visible. Instead, the focus is on deep-seated interests and procedural steps such as an inclusive negotiation.
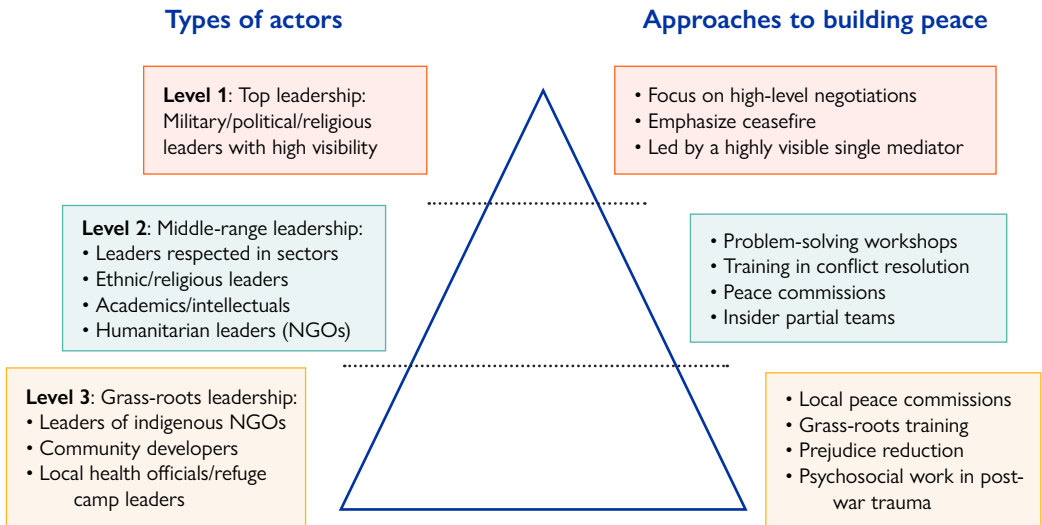
In coming back to peacebuilding, it is important to note that building peace can be undertaken at various levels in society, the elite, the middle-level leaders and the grass roots. The following figure illustrates the concept of multilevel and multidimensional peacebuilding.

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267 Galtung, 1998.
268 Pandit, 2012:18.

3.2.2. Actors and approaches to peacebuilding[269]

Figure 1: Actors and approaches to peacebuilding

Types of actors	Approaches to building peace
Level 1: Top leadership: Military/political/religious leaders with high visibility	• Focus on high-level negotiations • Emphasize ceasefire • Led by a highly visible single mediator
Level 2: Middle-range leadership: • Leaders respected in sectors • Ethnic/religious leaders • Academics/intellectuals • Humanitarian leaders (NGOs)	• Problem-solving workshops • Training in conflict resolution • Peace commissions • Insider partial teams
Level 3: Grass-roots leadership: • Leaders of indigenous NGOs • Community developers • Local health officials/refuge camp leaders	• Local peace commissions • Grass-roots training • Prejudice reduction • Psychosocial work in post-war trauma

Lederach contends that for effective peacebuilding to happen, it should be conducted at various levels simultaneously and using the multidimensional approach of activities. These activities would need to blend a short-term and a longer-term approach and cover relational, personal and structural issues that would need to support a sustainable process of building peace. In this framework, Lederach articulates explicitly the need for including psychosocial support tools, such as trauma healing in any peacebuilding process.

3.2.3. Psychosocial support

Delving into the wide world of psychosocial support is beyond the scope and coverage of this paper. For functional purposes, this section will cover certain aspects of psychosocial support insofar as they are relevant to mediation and post-conflict peacebuilding. In general, psychosocial support is the process of helping individuals – particularly children – families and communities improve or restore their well-being, especially in times of duress, such as violence, war, natural disasters and where shocks and trauma have been registered. Similar to peacebuilding, psychosocial support is not a straightforward affair and will require a certain set of conditions to be conducted. psychosocial support blends the psychological issues of mental health, emotional well-being and acceptable behavioural norms with social interactions with others and the perception of one's self in society – hence the term *psychosocial*.

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[269]   Lederach, 1997:80.

> The term "psychosocial" denotes the inter-connection between psychological and social processes and the fact that each continually interacts with and influences the other. In this document, the composite term mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is used to describe any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder.[270]

Psychosocial support work is governed by a few guiding principles including the following: (a) human rights and equity; (b) participation; (c) do-no-harm; (d) building on available resources and capacities; (e) integrated support systems; and (f) multilayered support.[271]

The International Federation of the Red Cross defines psychosocial support as

> [...] a process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families and communities enabling families to bounce back from the impact of crises and helping them to deal with such events in the future. By respecting the independence, dignity and coping mechanisms of individuals and communities, psychosocial support promotes the restoration of social cohesion and infrastructure.[272]

In this definition, the concepts of resilience and coping are mentioned as necessary vehicles to restore normalcy for individuals and societies alike. These are also necessary to re-establish social cohesion in the aftermath of conflict and piece together the shattered social infrastructure that is necessary to support recovery.

In peacebuilding, reconciliation and healing are necessary rites of passage if societies were to enjoy the fruits of peace. However, healing and moving on rarely happens without a combination of coping mechanisms and a modicum of resilience that allows people to surmount the injuries and rebuild trust and confidence in themselves first, and then in others. Here, the link between efforts to build peace and ensure post-war healing and resilience is evident. The need for an integrated approach that gathers peacebuilding and psychosocial support in sequence cannot be overstated. This point has also been made by several practitioners and researchers.

Building resilience, as one tool of psychosocial support, is similar to boosting the immune system of a community or individual in the midst of increasing exposure to violence and trauma.[273] While this work happens at the individual and communal levels, cementing it further will require systemic changes and institutional support that can only come through

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[270] IASC Reference Group for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, 2010.
[271] IASC, 2007.
[272] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), 2009.
[273] Jütersonke and Kartas, 2012.

serious and credible peacebuilding work. In this sense, resilience and psychosocial support at large is the *sine qua non* of building peace. Resilience increases the ability of the community to resist relapsing into war and violence.[274]

Critics of the peacebuilding approach have advanced the notion that peacebuilding as a field overly relies on contextual conflict analysis to inform and guide intervention strategies, and by doing so, the focus is always on understanding and diagnosing weaknesses. This narrow focus of conflict analysis almost always is too generic and misses the presence of resilient forces in society that are often present even in the most adverse conditions.[275] This has led to the encouragement of a new trend to conduct conflict analysis in tandem with "resilience assessment".[276] Understanding a society's resilience and predisposition for coping and resisting violence can go a long way in rendering peacebuilding as a transformative process rather than an instrument of stability.

The importance of highlighting pockets of resilience in society while working on building peace is driven home by practitioners in the field of conflict sensitivity and do-no-harm approach. In this approach, there is central focus on dividers and connectors in a community.[277] The former illustrates what polarizes and divides a community – also called negative resilience;[278] the latter identifies possible points of connection that bring people together. The connectors can be considered the aspects of resilience that ensures social cohesion and a necessary infrastructure for peace that can be tapped into when conducting peacebuilding work. The do-no-harm approach also uses a similar terminology by emphasizing the concept of "capacities for peace", which in essence is trying to identify resilient parties that would form the nucleus of peacebuilding.[279]

Peacebuilding practitioners have long cherished a set of assumptions about the pathways to building sustainable peace for all. These assumptions include the fact that creating new institutions, implementing peace agreements and the cessation of hostilities will lead to a lasting peace. These assumptions have almost become a generic prescription to put all peace processes on the right track. But without proper reconciliation and healing processes, peacebuilding will remain a vulnerable undertaking that is prone to reversibility at any given time. This is in addition to the fact that peacebuilding faces sometimes cultural barriers to being implemented in a full and non-competitive matter.

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[274] Menkhaus, 2013.
[275] Interpeace, 2016.
[276] Ibid.
[277] International Alert, 2004.
[278] Interpeace, 2016.
[279] CDA Collaborative, n.d.

There are several process characteristics that are shared between both fields of peacebuilding and psychosocial support, but there are also various points of diversion. Both processes are non-linear in nature and prone to setbacks and reversibility. In peacebuilding, the work is done top-down and also bottom-up. However, the top-down approach, often times represented by the governing elites' priorities and the implementation of a political agreement, is most likely to be imposed on the population with minimal participation. This does not guarantee that the agreement will be acceptable by the public, nor that the communities that suffered the most would adopt the imposed political process. Consequently, the bottom-up peacebuilding may not be as effective or as conclusive as it would be hoped for. Communities that do not agree with an imposed political settlement will have a hard time reconciling and moving on. In psychosocial support, effective work is done at the individual and community levels and hence is more appropriate with a bottom-up approach, which, if taken slowly and in stages, can lead to effective results of trauma recovery, healing and hence reconciliation. In both cases, healing and reconciliation, two pillars of psychosocial support and peacebuilding respectively, is a complex, drawn-out and easily reversible process that is highly emotional and often fraught by fragility.

Similar to peacebuilding, psychosocial support uses a structured process of activities guided by what is known as the IASC's principles, illustrated below. The IASC principles consist of a multilayered approach that begins with basic services and security, then moves into community and family support, then focused, non-specialized support and, finally, specialized services. The types of intervention are structured in a way that responds to the gravity and seriousness of the situation and how much support is required.

If the peacebuilding and psychosocial support pyramids are to be compared, the first noticeable characteristic is that most of the IASC principles of intervention and activities would happen at the level of communities, grass roots and moderately at that of the middle leadership. The interaction between the psychosocial support pyramid layers and the base of the peacebuilding pyramid is horizontal and process-based in a temporal way. At the bottom of the peacebuilding pyramid, building resilience and social cohesion happens sequentially where the need is to establish safety first, then acknowledgement of the hurt and finally reconnection with society.[280] The need for building resilience in stages is also confirmed by other researchers and experts who emphasize the fact that at the community level, victims often would interact with the perpetrators, which may delay healing and reconciliation and impede the building of resilience and social cohesion. To this effect, stages are needed to give people time and allow them to go through the mourning cycles and then plugging back into normal life.[281]

[280] Lambourne and Gitau, 2013:30.
[281] Parent, 2011:381.

Another shared dilemma between both peacebuilding and psychosocial support is the question of actors and "who" will be conducting peacebuilding and psychosocial support in post-violence setting. The question of actors brings in the dimension of legitimacy and cultural sensitivity. First, in both fields of psychosocial support and peacebuilding, the actor would have to be a neutral third party who is capable of being inclusive and dealing with all parties in an objective and even-handed manner. International organizations are usually a good candidate for this work, although they might run into the issue of cultural understanding and inadvertently heighten conflict sensitivities.[282] A very famous example of well-intentioned actors inadvertently increasing sensitivities and hence impeding peacebuilding and healing is in the Bosnian-Croat city of Moştar. The historical bridge of Moştar that linked the city's Croat and Muslim parts was the destination of tourists from all over the world. During the Bosnian war in 1994, the Croats who saw the bridge as a remnant of Ottoman domination blew it up and destroyed what the Bosnian Muslims had regarded as an icon of Muslim Ottoman architecture. Following the peace agreement, an international NGO raised funds and rebuilt the bridge to its past glory, except that the project became a divisive affair in Moştar and threatened to derail peacebuilding and healing efforts. The reason for this is that the NGO, inadvertently, had commissioned a Turkish company to build the bridge, a fact that upset the Croats who considered it an insult.

Only recently has the peacebuilding community begun to give enough attention to the need for psychosocial support activities to go in tandem with activities designed to build peace. A growing body of knowledge and evidence from the field testify to the need to develop a joint approach that sequences psychosocial support and peacebuilding in such a way that responds to people's needs and aspirations in times of post-violence recovery. Reconciliation is an intrinsic part of building peace and in order for reconciliation to advance smoothly, there needs to be resilience that would allow individuals and communities to cope and eventually heal the wounds and trauma of war. Only then can sustainable peace be achieved.

Studying the Rwandan peacebuilding experience has led to the conclusion that "Psychosocial services should [...] be seen as an integral part of a holistic approach to peacebuilding that addresses individual psychological and community relational needs in addition to physical needs".[283] Similarly, lessons from Bosnia point to the same conclusion that "psychosocial, trauma-informed peacebuilding processes are shown to provide insight into the importance of integrating emotional, psychological and identity factors (inherent within complex and ongoing conflicts) with economic development and actions for political change [peacebuilding]".[284] This is also confirmed with experiences from Colombia in Latin America, where some studies point to the fact that "in social psychology it is clear that the peaceful

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[282] Hart and Colo, 2014:76.
[283] Lambourne and Gitau, 2013:33.
[284] Hart and Colo, 2014:81.

solution of a violent conflict is chimera without an understanding of the psychosocial processes involved in it".[285]

Peacebuilders have always wrongly operated on the assumption that a well-executed peace process that sees repatriation of the displaced, a return to reasonable normalcy, accompanied with a moderate reconciliation process, often driven by the State is enough for societies to heal. They maintain that by focusing on the institutional framework of peace and bringing back social services, economic development and acceptable power-sharing, communities will have no choice but to move on and take part of the "New Deal". Recent experiences from post-war Lebanon, Bosnia and Yemen following the national dialogue refute these assumptions. First, there is no guarantee that a peace agreement will be implemented in a straightforward fashion and that people will find participatory mechanisms to influence change. As stated earlier, peacebuilding is not a linear process and can entail serious setbacks. Additionally, as in the three countries mentioned, the political agreement was imposed by outside forces or political elites and in both cases, did not generate enough traction in society to gain acceptability and be anchored in existing social structures. Inversely, focusing on reconciliation processes, often with some transitional justice tools such as a truth commission, is hardly enough for societies to reach full circle without the adequate political institutions that foster freedom, human rights and participation. The experience of the Instance of Equity and Reconciliation in Morocco is a poignant example of how reconciliation with the past stops short if not accompanied by commensurate political reforms increasing the degree of freedom and political participation.

There is a growing body of evidence pointing to the fact that while public reconciliation and transitional justice tools may strengthen societal bonds and solidify social networks, they worsen individual mental health.[286] The same is argued when it comes to peacebuilding since the latter focuses on social and political structures; it often ignores individual well-being.[287]

Peacebuilding and psychosocial support need to work together in an integrated, transformative approach and rely on existing cultural modes of expression such as community rituals of forgiveness, storytelling and open public meetings, and move away from rigid, prescribed structures. In Rwanda, the *gacaca* system, which consists of an existing ritual of public hearing, was utilized to deal with past abuse. Storytelling workshops were the norm in Bosnia when it came to discussing and sharing past hurt. Only when a process so intimate and emotional as reconciliation and healing is anchored in the local culture will it have the intended effectiveness for which it was designed. It must also be kept in mind that peacebuilding and trauma healing is not an event, but a journey that can be painful and frustrating to which people may react with different levels of readiness.

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[285] Sacipa-Rodriguez and Montero, 2014:111.
[286] Cilliers, Dube and Siddiqi, 2016:789.
[287] Laplante, 2011:6.

Practitioners in both fields have not resolved the question of "when" is the best time to launch peacebuilding and psychosocial support efforts. Is it immediately after violence when the wounds and memories of abuse are raw? Is it better to wait until some safety has been accorded and some space allowed? Or is it better to operate on the long term when the memories are still there but distant enough not to risk a relapse into violence? Each argument has its merit, but here as well is an opportunity to blend peace work with that of healing, recovery and reconciliation. Establishing a safe space and reasonable levels of security is of utmost importance in the aftermath of violence, following which deeper issues can be invoked and dealt with.

An integrated approach to psychosocial support and peacebuilding would entail various intertwined stages and layers and would occur in a sequence whereby participants feel ready, able and encouraged to work on their issue. Below is a proposed cycle that would sum up the needed phases of a blended approach including psychosocial support and peacebuilding:

Figure 2: Possible phases of an integrated approach to psychosocial support and peacebuilding

1. Memory work
2. Resilience and dealing with victimization
3. Building, coping, empathy and empowerment
4. Encouraging forgiveness and facing the other
5. Transforming attitudes and relations; trust and peace
6. Desired political and social change

Figure 2 features six stages in a cyclical rather than a linear format that captures the work needed to arrive at a state of sustainable peace and true political change. None of these stages is straightforward or independent, and each will require deep processing, adaptation and application before moving on to the next one. There is a strong likelihood that stages interact with each other throughout the cycle. The stages should be overseen by neutral third parties who are able to offer counselling when needed and can mediate conflicts at any given time.

3.2.4. Mediation

Mediation is a peacebuilding process whereby a neutral,

> [...] mutually acceptable third party, who has no authority to make binding decisions for disputants, intervenes in a conflict or dispute to assist involved parties to improve their relationships, enhance communications, and use effective problem solving and negotiation procedures to reach voluntary and mutually acceptable understandings or agreements on contested issues.[288]

The ultimate purpose of mediation is to have parties – with the help of a mediator – face each other, their grievances and reach a settlement based on their joint interests. In recent years, peacebuilding mediators have developed what is now known as transformative mediation, which consists of helping the parties reach an agreement that goes beyond their joint interests and is based on their deep-seated needs. Called transformative mediation, this approach focuses solely on transforming relationships and the empowerment and recognition of the parties' needs.[289] Burgess expands that

> Empowerment, according to Bush and Folger, means enabling the parties to define their own issues and to seek solutions on their own. Recognition means enabling the parties to see and understand the other person's point of view – to understand how they define the problem and why they seek the solution that they do.[290]

Transformative and other approaches of mediation that are not focused on problem-solving move away from the priority of finding an agreement, to focus on rebuilding trust, interaction and eventually a positive relationship between the parties. Peacebuilding utilizes these approaches to foster growth and healing and see conflict as an opportunity rather than a problem that requires solution. During these mediations, mediators focus on the process and on empowering the parties to recognize each other and develop mutual understandings that lead to empathy, which is another transformative concept in mediation.

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[288] Moore, 2014:8.
[289] Bush and Folger, 2004.
[290] Burgess, 1997.

Perhaps the closest mediation approach to psychosocial support is the restorative justice mediators who are also called victim-offender mediators. Restorative justice is defined as "a process where all the stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm. With crime, restorative justice is about the idea that because crime hurts, justice should heal".[291] Instead of using a structured negotiation approach, restorative justice mediators see that "Hatreds [...] must be healed from the bottom up as well as from the top down. So while the restorative diplomacy of professional diplomats is important, we constantly make the mistake of neglecting de-professionalized restorative justice for the victims of war".[292]

Mediation paradigms are divided into the Structuralist Approach and the Social Psychological one. The former relies on using incentives, carrot and stick techniques and other forms of persuasion to reach a settlement. The Structuralist Approach is mostly used in international diplomacy, high stakes negotiations such as labour union disputes and similar settings.[293] The Social Psychological Approach utilizes communication workshops to develop interactions and maximize the time that the parties spend together.[294] The latter approach to mediation is dialogue based and works on people's needs, which is similar to restorative justice. While peacebuilders utilize usually a blend of approaches, they tend to favour the social psychological one as the main pathway to reconciliation.

Additionally, the master's courses covered cultural and systemic peacebuilding by covering such topics as deep culture (embedded beliefs deep in people) and deep structure (such as an entrenched system we live in). The focus of the module was on how to transform the intersect of deep culture and deep structure of violence to replace them with a culture and a system for peace.[295]

From what transpires, it is very clear that not only is there a shared connection between peacebuilding work and psychosocial support, but there are shared concerns as well. Peace mediators focus less on solving a problem and coming up with an agreement than on fixing relationships and building trust. In psychosocial support, dealing with trauma, increasing resilience and reconnecting in society through new relationships is key to a successful outcome. Both angles of intervention address the participants' needs and emphasize the development of the individuals' agency and independence to become functional members of society. Practitioners in both fields have long operated in parallel; it is about time that they operate in tandem.

291 Braithwaite, 2004:28.
292 Ibid., 29.
293 Crocker, Hampson and Aall, 1999:20.
294 Ibid., 22.
295 Arai, 2014.

3.3. Definition of the chapter's geographical scope

Until 2013, Afghanistan occupied the first place as the worst refugee and humanitarian disaster of the twenty-first century. The worsening of the Syrian war and the rapid, spiralling deterioration of the situation in the country has surpassed the magnitude of the Afghan disaster. The Syrian war has led half of the population to seek a safe haven away from their homes. Today, about 4.8 million Syrians live in neighbouring countries, among whom, more than 1 million seeking refuge in Lebanon,[296] the main focus of this chapter. The theses examined below cover the refugee population in Lebanon and their relationship with the host community. They also cover a number of field studies conducted with displaced Syrians inside the Syrian Arab Republic.

3.4. Definition of the chapter's thematic scope

The chapter is based on 11 master's theses that were produced as part of an Executive Master's Programme in Psychosocial Support and Dialogue organized in 2014 between the Lebanese University and IOM in Beirut. The programme included Syrian and Lebanese students who were involved with NGOs or ongoing initiatives and decided to seek a graduate degree with practical applications. Six of the theses that form the crux of this study blend both the psychosocial support and peacebuilding approaches in their fieldwork; the remaining five focus on peacebuilding techniques with some reflections on psychosocial support and the implications of that on their work.

Some of the studies are based on scientific and quantifiable evidence – where that was available – but the majority of the theses is based on anecdotal or field-based observation. Clearly, some of the students who worked in Lebanon had better access to data and subjects of the study, whereas their counterparts in the Syrian Arab Republic faced some obstacles and inconsistencies in access and data collection. The demographic profiles of the studies vary between children, women or adults in general. In the next section of this chapter, there is an attempt – where possible – to shed light on the work that has taken some of the above highlights into consideration.

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[296] Mercy Corps, 2017.

3.5. Critical analyses based on the field-research findings and the relevant literature

The following section will attempt to discuss and critically analyse the theses submitted in the framework of the Master's programme on Psychosocial Support and Dialogue in 2014. While many facts on the ground where the research took place have changed, lessons may still be drawn to serve in programming future interventions.

3.5.1. A dialogue with special needs

This is an attempt

to explore the role of Syrian youth, which constitutes the majority of Syrian society, in resolving the conflict and how it can participate in building peace in society, what initiatives have been taken to resolve the conflict and what is the reality of dialogue in this crisis and how to spread the culture of dialogue and negotiation.[297]

The study's declared objectives are threefold: "to assess the reality of dialogue and negotiation through working groups with local associations and organizations working in this field as well as the media and by studying some youth initiatives and dialogue processes".[298] The study also intends to "create a cadre of trained and qualified interlocutors, negotiators and mediators to deliver quality programmes through training", and "create a network of negotiators and mediators with its own independent legal structure and establish its implementation programmes in cooperation with local communities and organizations working on the ground and also with the government".[299] This is a tall order of things to examine and study in the short time available for the study and deduce some useful lessons.

The research problematic centres around exploring the role of trained Syrian youth in dialogue and conflict resolution. It relies on the conflict resolution tools reviewed during the master's courses, particularly the definition of conflict, its dynamics of escalation and various conflict resolution schools of thought. The author also briefly reviewed a few concepts of peacebuilding, particularly Galtung's 3R theory of Resolution, Reconstruction and Reconciliation. Since the thesis is about dialogue initiatives, the author dwells on the definition of dialogue, its stages, criteria for participation and importance as a vehicle for resolving conflicts and building peace.

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[297] Tohme, 2015.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.

The basic premise of the research is to explore whether through dialogue and peaceful negotiation means there can be a solution to the Syrian crisis, particularly among the youth. To this end, the author used focus groups and semi-structured interviews to analyse a few of "the most notable of these [dialogue] initiatives, which are available to study their challenges, outputs and methods".[300] By investigating the dialogue initiatives, the author hoped to explore whether the research can answer if "the youth dialogue is the best way to achieve social peace and what are the outcomes and challenges that have been encountered during these youth initiatives".[301]

The study focuses on two dialogue initiatives that took place in Damascus and then spread to other provinces. Both initiatives, however, are run by outfits that are loyal or close to the regime and do not necessarily represent a convening power that is objective and legitimate in the eyes of the Syrian society at large. The organizers of the dialogue are the Syria Trust for Development and the National Federation of Syrian students, both of which operate close to the incumbent political powers. The first dialogue initiative called dardashat (Arabic for chats) included 421 participants; however, it is not clear based on what criteria they were chosen or whether they represented the various political affiliations in the country. From the analysis of the results of the dialogue that the author included, it is clear that some participants worried about guaranteeing their freedom of speech and about being able to express themselves freely while guaranteeing their safety. This is an indicator that at least some of the people present in the dialogue perhaps did not see themselves as loyal to one side and were worried about their safety.

The described dialogues, according to the author, utilized trained facilitators/mediators who proposed a structure with codes of conduct for the dialogue. Utilizing a facilitator to run a dialogue is a process that is fairly popular in peacebuilding circles. It is unclear, however, if these were trained facilitators or people who just acted on the spur of the moment. The dialogue discussed such issues as the future of governance, rule of law and fighting corruption, all of which are core issues of peacebuilding. Again, it is unclear how deeply these issues were discussed or what conclusions they reached. From the evaluation of the focus groups and in the interviews, the author indicates that the youth participating in the dialogue were frustrated that their dialogue decisions were not published or had no prospects of going beyond mere discussions. Additionally, in both initiatives, the participants in the dialogue wondered about the next steps in the dialogue and what would come next without receiving any plausible answers.

The second dialogue initiative, called a Youth Agenda, seemed to have included a much larger number of participants and discussed similar issues to the other initiative but with an additional question on citizenship. The evaluation of this initiative did not differ from the

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[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.

previous one in the sense that participants were also frustrated with the fact that there was no continuity for the dialogue, and that the questions discussed were too broad and general and did not delve deeply into existential issues, nor did it reach convincing conclusions. The author used these dialogue initiatives to explore the possibility of establishing a culture of dialogue and mediation in the Syrian Arab Republic. Both initiatives, however, come up short on conclusive evidence whether dialogue can be freely and seriously used to solve political issues in the Syrian context. Furthermore, while the author concludes with a proposal on establishing an association of youth mediators, the current events and those that surrounded the dialogue initiatives at the time of writing do not make it clear whether this would be possible or even effective.

The discussed dialogue initiatives in the research do not provide enough evidence as to whether such initiatives would be effective or even desirable in the circumstances prevailing to lead to building peace or become a step in the direction of healing and reconciliation. In fact, the author evaluated existing dialogue initiatives that seemed to have concluded or paused at the time of writing and suffered from lack of funding and continuity. The issue of sustainability and the fact that these dialogues – though run by trained facilitators – do not seem to be anchored in Syrian society nor did they come as part of a peace project speak little to their effectiveness and future outlook. On the positive side, the fact that initiating dialogue amidst continued violence and involving young people in them is usually a good idea and might serve to build what can later be termed an "infrastructure for peace" that would be necessary to launch peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives.

Successful dialogue initiatives, no matter how micro level they are, require a few conditions to be successful. First, the convening power must be credible, objective and even-handed. The facilitating team should be well-trained and experienced. The dialogue needs to happen in a conducive environment and with an end result in sight, a clear and well-defined agenda and milestones. Finally, there needs to be a strong political will that backs up the dialogue, which also needs to be representative of the eclectic make-up of society. In the dialogue initiatives that Tohme has evaluated, several of the pre-conditions of success were not met and the dialogue initiatives discussed a generic set of issues that was most likely unrealistic in the political context in which it was operating. The author's proposal to establish a mediation group, however, can be a useful undertaking if it meets a number of predetermined conditions that would allow it to succeed. Tohme's study does not mention any of these conditions.

3.5.2. Adaptation of the peace deal workshops

In her work, the researcher Aoun utilizes concepts derived directly from the master's programme to adapt existing peace deal workshops utilized by the organization War Child Holland to build peace and provide psychosocial support to refugee and host communities in Lebanon. Her ultimate objective is to present a:

> [Y]outh-sensitized conflict prevention and peace building program [...] to use such constructive techniques to improve their lives and hence the conditions of the communities in which they reside. The program would present a menu of choice pertaining to life skills aimed to transform youth attitudes from confrontational and hostile interactions into friendly, constructive and collaborative relationships.[302]

Following a thorough review of the literature on conflict resolution programmes for youth and how they can be adapted into war environments and post-war setting, Aoun sets out to restructure the peace deals, which consist of various toolkits for different audiences (such as parents, youth and girls) and aim to empower children to become "agents of peace and change" in their communities by equipping them with peace skills and coping mechanisms. Aoun also identifies the impact of the master's programme on influencing her thinking to restructure the deal toolkits. The master's programme opened up the way for the author to understand such tools as the CCM, conflict resolution techniques and arts in conflict and how she can integrate these tools in her work.

Aoun's research questions include the following: "Will the new programme provide a better conflict understanding? Will it provide better conflict resolution skills and tools? What impact will it improve at the individual conflict level? What impact will it provide at the communal conflict level? And finally, will the new Peace Deal promote a peace culture?" Moving from here, the author goes into detailing and critically reviewing the contents of the sessions of the existing deal toolkits to end with Limitations and Suggestions on how to restructure, modify and improve the deal programme. To this end, Aoun proposes that the new deal be titled:

> Peace Deal: Let's begin with me, let's begin with us, and let's spread peace to the world. The ultimate goal of the new peace package is to achieve a substantial positive change within the individual, to be extrapolated to the community. The workshop will not try to improve a social cohesion among Lebanese/Syrian participants; but will build for a new foundation of a peace culture that will promote acceptance, non-judgement, empathy and empower the youth to refute rooted stereotypes and violent behavior [...].[303]

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[302] Aoun, 2014.
[303] Ibid.

Her methodical research uses the theory and applications learned in the master's course to test and apply them in the new proposed package. The result is a restructured peace package toolkit that can be applied with expectedly different results. Inspired by the CCM, the Theater of the Oppressed and the EPR Model – all of which were presented during the master's programme – Aoun sets out to restructure and reorganize the deal toolkit. In the process, she utilizes the Conflict Circle, the stages of conflict escalation and non-violent communication to reorganize and redesign the deal training process. In doing so, Aoun has directly utilized the material and knowledge gained from the master's programme to develop an innovative approach that deals with new challenges stemming from war, displacement and violence. Additionally, the interplay that she displays in the material utilized is a consummate example of how to utilize psychosocial support tools for peacebuilding and vice versa; the result is a quintessential blend of both fields to the benefit of needy beneficiaries.

Aoun's redesigned programme is built around the experiential learning model that validates the experiences of participants and empowers them with new tools along with the opportunity to experience them and reflect on them during the training. Importantly, her proposed toolkit is not just a training, but goes beyond that to induce the deal participant into crafting their own peace plan that goes beyond the workshop to concrete applications. In this respect, deal programmes transcended the fact that they were offering skill-building capacity into providing participants with avenues to apply their skills. The programme was redesigned to ensure that the training targets an attitudinal change in participants by setting up a process that begins with identifying a personal goal for each trainee, developing a trajectory on how to work on achieving that goal, finishing up with a peace plan and participating in "on-site coaching" to be implemented by the psychosocial support and peacebuilding experts. The coaching part was designed to ensure that the trainees were given the help needed in order to overcome challenges and implement what they learned. In this sense, Aoun attempted to ensure that "once [the skills are] converted to a peace mind set they [participants] will be able to reach out to their communities, spread messages of peace in their environment and become agents of change".[304]

While Aoun's proposed programme targets personal improvements in people and ensures that the individual's agency is rebuilt and allowed to grow, the implementation – as she describes in her study – was not without challenges. Among the first challenges that the author faced was the ability to convince a cynical youth that "peace" as a concept is good for them and the community and that if this is applied, it might yield good results. This cynicism made it hard at times to convince young people to engage in the peace deal training and commit to it. Another challenge, as the author puts it, was the fact that this work was being slowed down against a forbidding cultural environment where entrenched values and beliefs were associated with existing conflicts. This has slowed down and at times prevented a shift in the mindset of people from just a training workshop. Third, the programme development

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[304] Aoun, 2014.

was happening amidst severe societal polarization and increasing hostility towards refugees that made the work of facilitators more difficult in convincing participants to see new alternatives to discrimination and violence.

In her study, Aoun sees the above challenges as incentives to restructure the programme in such a way that responds to each and every one of them and ultimately leads to catalysing the formation of a culture of peace. To this end, Aoun designates a section of her restructured deal programme to work on the skill sets required of deal facilitators, complete with training baseline studies and monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure that the objectives of each training session are met. Aoun's expanding and promoting the training methodology into a more interactive, stimulating one, having resort to participants' experiences in the training, and turning the workshop into a real-life simulation will inevitably enhance effectiveness and applicability of the training.[305] The follow-up and on-site coaching will then cement the knowledge acquired by participants during the training. It is in this approach that the restructured peace deals, which include both psychosocial support and peacebuilding initiatives, will have a higher chance of responding to a dire need of engaging participants on all levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural interactions.

Aoun's study provided an example of weaving into a single capacity-building programme major concepts, skills and knowledge on both psychosocial support and peacebuilding. The resulting toolkit is one of the very rare ones in the field that tries to audaciously introduce these blended concepts in an environment of rapidly changing events, increasing challenges and hostilities and generally uncooperative stakeholders. The fact, however, that the programme is implemented in the context of ongoing work of an international organization provides it with the necessary lifeline and opportunity for success. The efforts of the author are commendable and worthy of revisiting to see the impact that the redesigned programmes has had.

3.5.3. Conflict resolution in crises: Refugee shelters in Lebanon as a model

This study by Amani Kibrit seeks to shed light on the importance of solving interpersonal conflict in shelters as a way to provide psychosocial support to Syrian refugee families living in Lebanese shelters where the number of conflicts has multiplied since the advent of Syrian refugees. The research is based on one shelter in specific as a representative sample of similar problems in other shelters across Lebanon. Through this study, the author seeks to identify the types of conflict experienced at refugee shelters, propose a resolution methodology and advance the idea of establishing a conflict resolution unit within shelters

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[305] Aoun, 2014.

so that it could respond to emerging conflict and provide resolution services. In her study, she asserts that this is highly needed, since shelter staff are busy with securing basic services and hence are unable to lend the required attention to conflicts that have been hampering their work.

The author focuses mainly on conflict resolution issues; however, she also includes a psychosocial support dimension by rewording the research problem as an effort to identify the impact of conflicts on the families and their daily lives, the impact of disputes on the ability of people to seek psychosocial support help and the effect of ongoing disputes on the relationships between family members. Using analytical description and relying on field interviews and focus groups, Kibrit bases her research with a family of 20 people in a refugee shelter in Mount Lebanon that has 3 staff (also part of the information collection).

Kibrit's literature review reveals a thorough understanding of the tools explained during the master's courses, especially when it comes to the concepts and definitions of conflict, escalation model, types of conflicts and their dynamics, the various schools of thought and the needed skills, such as communication and active listening. Kibrit also sheds light on the multiple processes used in resolving conflicts, such as mediation, negotiation and others and the benefits of each. The review is an important stepping stone to link the need for a conflict resolution unit proposed later to the theory and its application. The author's literature review ends with a discussion on the importance of sheltering and how policies and services at shelters must include psychosocial support and special assistance to refugees who would be going through terrible psychological issues.

In her review, Kibrit establishes a natural link between psychosocial support and peacebuilding by providing a convincing argument on the need to instill conflict resolution mechanisms in the midst of social services – including psychosocial support – in refugee shelters. Conflicts at shelters like these are often a forgotten dimension and assumed to resolve themselves with the provision of assistance. Conflicts, if left unresolved in situations of duress, not only can make things worse and lead to additional psychosocial disturbances, but can also empty all services of their meanings and severely mitigate their effectiveness. Hence, the idea of combining both peacebuilding and psychosocial support is key to ensuring complementarity of services while keeping adverse effects in check.

The author makes her case and the need very clear through the subsequent review of major issues surrounding the growing number of Syrian refugees, the worsening displaced problem and the burden that this has placed on the Lebanese authorities, communities, international organizations operating in Lebanon and local NGOs. In this regard, the author notes that with the increase of the humanitarian catastrophe (through the constant influx of refugees in 2014), there was a noticeable decrease in funding and in the quality and number of services provided by local NGOs. Amidst all of this, services of humanitarian and immediate assistance nature were on the rise, particularly the need for psychosocial services with refugees and host communities. What was also clear from the author's review was that the

need for working on conflict issues and opening up of communication channels was also increasing.

In a separate section, the research points out the types and intensity of conflicts diagnosed and researched by the author through interviews and information collection from one refugee shelter, which is the subject of the study. In the examples, the author lists interpersonal and inter-family conflicts, the sort that not only would require a mediation intervention but also work on rebuilding relationships that brings in a psychosocial dimension. In addition to listing the types of conflicts that happen at the shelter, the author delves deeper into the effects of these conflicts on the quality, consistency and reputation of the shelter services. In fact, in many instances, conflicts escalate to threaten the interruption of services and even the intervention of the municipal security forces to restore order.

The author builds on existing conflict resolution mechanisms that suffer from limited effectiveness in the shelter. Until the time of research, the conflicts that happened were handled by the director of the shelter who would seat parties together and attempt to find a solution. In more severe conflicts, an alliance of charity organizations or a local religious cleric would intervene to find a solution. All these interventions, according to the author, were done in a primitive way with not much training or procedural consistency by the interveners. The author notes additional challenges, such as the conflicts happening at night when the shelter director is not present to intervene, or the inability of the director – who is a male – to intervene with conflicts that involve wives and females due to customary practices in conservative milieus that prevent male–female interactions.

The author's interviews on the types of conflicts, their impact and the way they had been hitherto handled leads her to conclude that proposing the establishment of a conflict resolution unit would contribute to reducing the tension, institutionalize stabilization mechanisms and ensure a better coexistence between refugee families in the shelter. The unit, as proposed, would also reduce the burden of the administration office and ensure that services would be restored to their expected quality. The proposed unit by the author sounds like a credible alternative to control the spread of conflicts and ensure that refugees in the shelter are living in peace. Kibrit's unit would include a triumvirate composed of a mediator, a psychosocial support expert and a well-respected person from the refugee families who enjoys enough credibility and can secure people's buy-in for the mediation.

The unit seems like a novel and effective idea if the required training, funding and acceptability can be found in the shelter. It would then become a pilot project that would be replicated in other shelters across the country, especially that its staff would operate on call round-the-clock. While Kibrit's plan for the unit is carefully laid out in convincing details, she does not clarify how this unit will be borne or who would take the required decision to create it. In her interviews, she does not come to a conclusive evidence that parties would resort to the unit in case of conflict, nor who would train its mediators and how would its troika of staff would work together. Still, the idea is commendable for its novelty, and the author

has shown how to use the tools learned in the master's course to apply them in a way that adds value to the work being done in the field. Kibrit has also managed to naturally blend conflict resolution and mediation techniques with psychosocial services.

3.5.4. Rebuilding social cohesion through peacebuilding and dialogue techniques: Experimental study in a social centre in Damascus suburbs

Rim Nohaili's study aims to:

monitor the reality of conflicts in community centres in Damascus suburbs; revive social cohesion and focus on "rebuilding of persons" through the development of a tolerant social space in which the parties can coexist on common ground without violence and through the use of the education programme based on the participatory learning cycle; and enable the host society and the affected community to build awareness about the effects of conflict and to prevent violence.[306]

To respond to these objectives, the author sets out to study the impact of extracurricular education on social cohesion, and the impact of the awareness-building programme on the effects of conflict and the prevention of violence on the host society and the affected community.

Similar to Kibrit's study, Nohaili's study examines the state of refugee shelters in the Syrian Arab Republic only to reveal a more severe situation of IDPs overcrowding underequipped shelters and suffering from bitter conflicts. She describes neighbourhoods with extreme polarization and lack of interaction between host communities and IDPs. In her study, Nohaili designs a process of mediation intervention developed specifically for host community and IDPs at a refugee shelter in Damascus, with the aim of raising awareness and imparting to participants skills that will help them in managing existing conflicts and reducing tensions. In doing so, the author relies on the tools and concepts gained in the master's course, particularly the stages of conflict, mediation and the skills of communication.

Nohaili's research and extracurricular session design is an example of utilizing conflict resolution skills and techniques for psychosocial purposes focusing on restoring social cohesion. The project is pretty specific and concentrated in one refugee shelter, tested on a random sample of the population of various age groups. While this programme design is made for adults, Nohaili tested another activity with teenagers by having them work on a joint agricultural production to encourage collaboration – a core peacebuilding concept

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[306] Nohaili, 2014.

– and ensure that the young participants transcend momentary conflicts and engage in meaningful collaborative activities.

In her study, the author relied on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the experiential learning methodology, which she details in her writing, revealing a keen understanding of what it entails and how to use it in times of crises such as in the Syrian Arab Republic. The activities implemented in her study and the resulting project included such activities as self-discovery exercises between participants of both host and displaced, revealing – according to the author's immediate evaluation – strong commonalities and shared concerns. The author's training was embedded in an existing programme to raise awareness on the effects of violence and reduce the incidence of conflict whereby participants get introduced to various ways of avoiding violence and understanding the importance of and eventually adopting positive behaviour. The programme that the author utilizes consists of seven sessions that work on self-discovery, discovery of the other, empathy and dialogue, among other concepts. The programme is another example on the natural link between psychosocial support and peacebuilding techniques to be utilized in such cases as the ongoing war in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The author experimented with two additional exercises – one on hurt and the other on empathy – to underscore her point that avoiding hurting others is as important as showing empathy and expecting the same from others towards us. In her concluding remarks, she states that:

> it is very important to create a social experience based on the healing and coexistence of the host society and the affected community by reconciling and forgiving through activities that enable participants to remember the past, focus on the present and work for the future and thus protect people by learning and developing consciousness.[307]

Her research also reveals that:

> transition from rituals, customs, traditions and values to new habits and values adversely affect [people's] adaptation and development in their current reality, which in turn leads to violence and increased conflict between communities. When people begin to gain awareness and critical understanding of their own self, they more accurately reflect the problems of life, and as their consciousness grows, their self-esteem, respect and appreciation of their traditions improve.[308]

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[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid.

Nohaili's activities were focused mostly on peacebuilding and also infusing them with psychosocial support. Her conclusions, however, strike more of psychosocial lessons for refugee and host communities. It is hard to generalize lessons from Nohaili's work; it was a pilot test with a random sample in one shelter in an ongoing war. It is however encouraging to see that both peacebuilding and psychosocial support can be utilized interchangeably to advance social cohesion and coexistence.

3.5.5. Suggested curriculum for children conflict resolution education

The author, Moukarzel, bases her study on the premise that:

[R]egardless of the controversy over the effectiveness of the programmes offered to mitigate or erase the effects of conflict on children, one thing for sure is that an appropriate intervention contributes to a high degree to a healthy upbringing and the creation of exceptional opportunities to avoid or mitigate developmental disorders in children which is beneficial to individuals and communities in the long run.[309]

In this spirit, the gist of this study is a manual to raise awareness with children and train them on conflict resolution.

Moukarzel assumes that:

[Th]e inclusion of PSS activities within conflict resolution intervention plans and programmes highlights the importance of creating a constructive environment so that conflict can become an opportunity for constructive negotiation and the promotion of social and emotional development of children and the reinforcement of communication skills and effective listening through training of conflict-affected children.[310]

Hence, her study aims at developing the necessary tools to teach children effective communication and listening techniques, conflict resolution skills and promote their sense of respect, human rights and empathy.

Using both Fereire's theory and the Game Theory, Moukarzel bases her training manual design on interactive gaming for children, utilizing tools and concepts gained during the

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[309] Moukarzel, 2014.
[310] Ibid.

master's courses. The author weaves into her methodology a third element based on child's rights. In addition to peacebuilding and psychosocial support, her research and subsequent training methodology includes human rights, particularly child's rights. Moukarzel contends that including children's rights in the training reinforces the child's identity and his/her conception of one's self and hence increases awareness and self-confidence. The training design reflects three major categories of sessions, awareness of rights, concepts such as tolerance, respect and forgiveness and conflict resolution in a natural flow.

Moukarzel's manual is based on 9 sessions of 90 minutes each for children between 11 and 13 years of age. The first part is devoted to building a group spirit, the second part is on awareness raising on children's rights, and the third consists of four consecutive sessions of conflict resolution. In her training design, Moukarzel relies on group discussions as a technique that fosters children's rights by giving them the ability to exercise their rights and engage in meaningful discussions. She also bases her methods on the EPR technique of embodiment, projection and role-playing, which is very effective in children. A third concept utilized by the author is based on homework where children are allowed to think about their experiences on their own and report back in the next session.

The manual activities and exercises flow logically and start from simple techniques of building the group spirit, to understanding children's rights all the way to defining conflict and ending with the creation of a culture of peace. The progression of the activities with each exercise containing several objectives seems well ordered and organized for the children to assimilate. Unfortunately, the manual in the research has not been tested. Its activities, however, are based on games and group activities that children love to engage in and enjoy. The activities, though tied to experiential debriefing questions, do not end by asking participants to project the learning on their daily lives, which is a fundamental principle in game theory and experiential learning. Additionally, using games such as the fire exercise may not be well received by children who have experienced trauma and do not like to simulate fire in a training format. It has been the experience of this author that such exercises may be counter-productive and lead children to tune out of the training.

Moukarzel does not clarify if the manual is intended for children in crises or any given audience of children. In reviewing the training activities, it would be unrealistic to dwell too much on children's rights for an audience living in highly stressful conditions. Again, this issue may not be conclusively determined since the manual has not been tested. In conclusion, Moukarzel is another example of a student putting into practice information and learning deduced from the Executive Master's programme. Her manual offers another needed training tool at the service of young children experiencing conflicts.

3.5.6. The changing role of women and the role of women in peace processes: Field study on the role of women in the Syrian crisis

It is always a good idea to direct attention to the role of women in peace processes during war and what they can bring to the negotiation table. Experiences from Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Guatemala and elsewhere provide brilliant examples on the positive role that women can play to promote peace and support peace processes. In several studies on the subject, women have constituted infrastructures for peace where they have been the focus of various efforts to reach out to distant communities. Additionally, women in times of conflicts often become the only group who is capable of operating across dividing lines and dealing with several sides of the conflict without risking arrests or targeting. The study conducted by Al Hanash is designed to understand and reflect on the role of Syrian women during the war in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Al Hanash poses a simple yet meaningful question about how the role of Syrian women has changed since the onset of the war and what roles Syrian women can play in the ongoing peace negotiations. In her paper, Al Hanash states that her study is:

> [T]o highlight the most important features of the change to the role of Syrian women during the crisis. Perhaps we can reach some suggestions and recommend effective solutions that would reduce the suffering of Syrian women in the context of changing roles to which the Syrian women did not adapt. This research may also highlight the clear and important role that women have played during the events in bringing about the peace process, negotiation and reconciliation between the parties to the conflict.[311]

The author's stated objectives, which she hoped to reach by following the analytical description method, are to "recognize the change in the roles of Syrian women during the crisis; describe the changes in the roles of Syrian women in the crisis; publicize groups of women active in the field of women's rights; and recognize the positive roles of women in the peace process".[312] Utilizing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Al Hanash attempts to establish that the needs of Syrian women have been altered dramatically due to the war and the disruption in security, livelihoods and identity, among others. Relying on live testimony by women who have endured or seen violence, the author establishes at the beginning that the role of Syrian women has seen various changes and iterations. Yet despite all of this, many interviewed women in the study still retain hope that there will be improvements in the role of women.

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[311] Al Hanash, 2014.
[312] Ibid.

Al Hanash conducted a field study of about 300 women through focus groups held at shelters and at the location of the association where she works. The women were not chosen according to sampling criteria, but it seems that they were gathered to develop a joint declaration and decide on a series of workshops to build the capacity of participants in women's rights. Particularly, they were there to "compile the results of the focus groups to draft in a consolidated working paper for presentation at a meeting of women representatives from other governorates and agree on the Syrian women's Charter".[313] The author also describes a project that includes activities to promote the status of women, care for single mothers and train them in occupations that match their abilities and offer them and their children educational programmes and psychosocial support activities.

The author does not clarify the connection between her intended field study and the project of training and awareness raising described in her study. In that project, the author describes training workshops on women's rights as a generic activity with focus on what seems to be a prescription of cookie-cutter approach to the issue. The workshop was held in order to prepare Syrian women to participate in peace talks in Europe. A total of three workshops were held with Syrian women who came up with a unified position paper to submit to the peace negotiations in Geneva. The study provides no further details of the activities, except a listing of supposedly what the participating women asked for at the workshops. The unified position paper is included in the research and contains the demands of Syrian women that were announced ahead of the Geneva peace talks in 2014.

This research is a plain description of Syrian women's activities ahead of the Geneva peace talks. While the content reflects a growing role for Syrian women and Syrian civil society in general, it does not seem to be the work of the researcher alone but a collaborative effort. Nor did it answer the objectives stated earlier in the research other than indicating a few roles played by a number of Syrian women to craft a unified position paper. Of course, there is no belittling the role of Syrian women during the war, but for this particular research, the study does not advance an added value, nor does it indicate that the various tools and concepts given at the master's programme were employed in the investigation of the role of Syrian women.

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[313]   Ibid.

3.5.7. The reciprocal impact of the use of peacebuilding activities and psychosocial support programme activities on increasing social effectiveness and sustainability of the support programmes in place in the Syrian Arab Republic (The example of the city of Tartus)

The author of this study, Wafaa Hayek, has utilized lessons gained in the master's programme to provide an incisive analysis into changing dynamics of Syrian society in the city of Tartus. Her thesis is a direct and pronounced effort to study the effectiveness and impact of the combination of psychosocial support and peacebuilding on the Tartus society from a very critical and inquisitive perspective. Herself an NGO worker, Hayek utilized her access to the work of civil society, her intimate knowledge of programming and the needs of donors to review the effectiveness of peacebuilding and psychosocial support activities. In so doing, Hayek has effortlessly established the natural link between both fields of activities. Her approach is highly critical of international organizations to the point that it seemed to be drifting away from objective analysis into personal opinion unsupported by evidence.

Seeing that the violence in Syrian society is taking on structural hues and becoming embedded in the culture of many Syrians, Hayek studies the work of international organizations whom she says relied on local organizations that were already weak and suffering from lack of capacities and that became donor-driven and hence sacrificed quality of programmes for the sake of quantity of beneficiaries. Hayek was also critical of the fact that many organizations seemed to be operating without establishing a proper contextual analysis or understanding of the intricacies and various layers of the ongoing war, hence in a way doing more harm than good. Again, these seem to be critical observations but without quantifiable field evidence.

> It is worth recapping the researcher's questions here, which included:
>
> Have the existing psychosocial support approaches been adopted, based on an analysis of the conflict and its impact on the displaced community and the host community, thus employing programmes suited to mitigate these problems? What are the prevailing patterns of violence in the society subjected to the research? How are individual identity and collective identity affected by manifestations of social violence? Is there a relationship between these identities and community activism? Can the inclusion of peacebuilding activities within psychosocial support programmes reduce polarization and build bridges? Can psychosocial support activities help to reduce bias and restore humanism? Can the inclusion of peacebuilding activities in psychosocial support programmes increase the effectiveness and sustainability of these programmes through active social participation?[314]

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[314] Al Hayek, 2014.

To answer the above questions, the author utilizes a three-pronged research approach based on comparative analysis with other countries that have witnessed psychosocial interventions: an analytical descriptive approach and a case study approach. A thorough review of the literature presented in the master's thesis reveals a keen understanding of the interplay between psychosocial support and peacebuilding models and their applied concepts and techniques. The study was done over seven months and included several visits to shelters and refugee camps in the city of Tartus. The author interviewed government representatives, local civil society organizations and representatives from the refugee population. It is worthy to note that the author states that her personal interest in the research started when she was a volunteer and observed that the psychosocial support activities undertaken lacked effectiveness with a population whose identity was changing.

Based on her observations and clearly in a restrictive environment where only five associations were permitted by the State to operate and provide psychosocial support, the author is quick to conclude that:

> Corruption associated with the work of many local associations many of whom were formed during the war or whose activities have been amplified in the wake of increased funding and not by the existence of preconceived work experiences. This is one of the social growth opportunities created by the crisis, but at the same time these associations have no experience. The worst is that they have no particular development vision for the society in which they operate, and often they simply apply a specific programme in accordance with a specific convention with a certain agency.[315]

No evidence, however, substantiates this claim of corruption nor does Hayek offer an interpretation of what she understands as corruption. Her critical review is important, and it is needed to review objectively existing initiatives; however, it would have been more convincing to provide evidence and link these conclusions to concrete findings that corroborate them.

In a narrative style, Hayek recounts her observation of deep-seated polarization in the Syrian Tartus society where the study is conducted. This polarization, she states, is seen along sectarian lines, socioeconomic lines, sociogeographical lines, as well as host–refugee lines. In her words, the host community "acts in the spirit of the winner" when dealing with the displaced and refugees. Amidst all of this, the author states that the organizations operating in the area deal with women and children with preconceived programmes without giving enough attention to the men who are important players.

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[315] Ibid.

In her observation of the work of associations, the author berates the use of psychosocial support activities without the combination of understanding conflict and working on finding solutions. To this end, she states that:

> [A]s a result of the existence of strong polarisation associated with cultural and structural violence, ongoing war and a dangerous security situation do not allow attempts to formulate the reality of the war from a personal perspective of individuals but only from a generalized national collective will. This renders psychosocial support programs a minor approach without analysing the factors, consequences and impact of conflict on existing societal structures, how they interact with each other and try to maintain a safe outlet for groups and individuals. Associations that provide psychosocial support programmes are aware of the indicators of collective interaction and the importance of building the social network surrounding individuals. That would constitute the first protection and support factor for the affected groups, and the use of peace-building activities at the grassroots and intermediate levels ensures that there is a nucleus for subsequent action that can activate all levels.[316]

The above is a very important and thorough observation on the prevailing dynamics where peacebuilding or psychosocial support activities come up short of complementing each other and reflect a partial understanding of the needs of the refugee and host communities. In this observation as well, the author displays profound understanding of the kinds of mixed-approach interventions needed in a city like Tartus where divisive fault lines run very deep.

Hayek suggests the use of theatre and facilitated dialogue as complimentary activities to psychosocial support since "[s]elf-supporting activities provided in a time-frame parallel to the continuation of the conflict, cannot achieve efficiency and sustainability if they cannot create a secure space for the expression even if it is a virtual space".[317] Interestingly, the author advances a diagram that illustrates the interplay between psychosocial support and peacebuilding activities, emphasizing that only when there is a safe, peaceful environment will psychosocial support activities take place full steam.

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[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid.

PSS

Professional, various psychosocial support activities

Recreational activities and vital activities related to basic needs/formation of working groups as a nucleus for peacebuilding-specific interventions (use of support to pave the ground for peace)	Provide psychosocial support programmes based on reconstruction, dealing with memories of the past, collectively expressing, reshaping meaning (interaction between psychosocial support and peacebuilding within community effectiveness)
Non-violent communication, building group work within associations, training on impartiality (Building networks)	Creating community-based initiative groups, promoting beneficiary initiatives, social activities that promote the survival of the social network are effective and supportive (Use community to activate support)
Weak, recreational	**Peacebuilding**
Polarization, no trust	**Availability of safe space**

The author concludes that:

[P]sychological support programs alone cannot achieve a change of bias. It is possible to create an atmosphere of acceptance, so I re-emphasise the need to work together in accordance with the temporal context, and to achieve results at the level of building confidence and bridges, so that the programme is based on sensitivity for each stage. For this I find it important to use the Social Theatre and the puppet theatre as an approach that would combine the activities of the two programmes in a way that ensures that the group is built according to the Complex Circle.[318]

In the end, Hayek has attempted to look at the interplay between psychosocial support and peacebuilding in providing assistance to the polarized society of the city of Tartus. While she makes suggestions for blending psychosocial support and peacebuilding activities, she does so based on field observations and anecdotal evidence. Her research in the way she chose to analyse and narrate it answers her earlier queries on how effective both psychosocial support and peacebuilding have been, but it does not do that in a scientific empirical study, rather with observations of a society in flux with refugees in and out of the area. The provided model above is a useful illustration of how and when to use the best

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[318] Ibid.

mixed techniques of psychosocial support and peacebuilding. The model can serve as a useful tool that is worthy of expansion and development.

3.5.8. Overcoming polarization between refugees and host communities in Lebanon

Kchour, the author of this study, proposes to use art and creative activities to bring refugees and host communities to overcome polarization and violence. In her study, she investigates "the causes and impacts of the polarization between the refugees and the host communities in Lebanon; how to avoid violent conflicts between them; and the best methods to ensure social cohesion among the groups".[319] Basically, her aim is to transform hostilities between both groups by using psychosocial support interventions, such as art and other creative mediums.

Kchour conducted a survey and a few focus group discussions to study the polarization issue between Lebanese hosts and Syrian refugees. The focus groups are hardly representative and provide barely any conclusive evidence as to what causes polarization between both communities. The same can be said of the questionnaire, which was filled out by random project participants with no respect for sampling or protocols of qualitative research. The information resulting from the focus groups and the questionnaire can be labelled as results of interviews with social workers involved with refugees and host communities. This study interestingly brings in an oft-forgotten dimension of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon – the Palestinian refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic.

In the information that the author collected, she was able to establish "competition over incompatible interests" as the main driver of conflict and hence, apply the textbook definition of conflict drivers. Additionally, the author frames her work and the information given by interviewees in terms of basic needs and the subsequent discussion reveals a good grasp of the human needs theory of conflict and how competition fuels conflict. Concretely, the author places competition over paid jobs, donor and State assistance and scarce resources as being driven by a zero-sum mentality where each party sees its basic needs of safety, income, decent life and identity threatened by the other. Additionally, the author succeeded in identifying different values, religious beliefs and ideology as the main causes of a value-based conflict between both communities that complicates the situation further. The deteriorating situation has also caused mutual perceptions of threat and stereotypes to form on both sides. This is a classical escalation of conflict where no action is being taken to stabilize the situation, and no efforts are deployed to repair communication between the parties.

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[319] Kchour, 2015.

In this study, the researcher dwells on the concept of polarization that was not addressed before by other students who studied conflict at the Executive Master's programme. By polarization, it is meant the separation and division within a community along conflict lines. In studying the causes for polarization, the author relied on the information taken from the survey and the focus groups, as well as the analysis of the discourse of political figures in Lebanon, including a decision by a number of municipalities to restrict the freedom of assembly of Syrian refugees. This is a classic case of collective blame, whereby responsibility for a few isolated violence incidents is easily pinned on the larger society to which the perpetrators belong.

Stigmatized and labelled as "terrorists" and other similar slurs, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, according to the author, began showing signs of distress and psychological problems. This is in addition to outward hostility between them and the host community. Kchour makes a convincing case linking adversarial relationships (conflict and hostility) with psychosocial issues (isolation, victimization and trauma). The decision by local authorities to restrict the movements of refugees at night was taken as a measure of prevention and not in response to an increase in violence. It served to confirm the stereotypes against refugees and put an official stamp on the attitudes of discrimination against them.

The author rightly points out the vicious cyclical nature of polarization whereby it leads to a culture of violence anchored across generations. Simply put, when stereotyping and stigmatizing is practised with impunity and encouraged by parents, teachers, officials and the like, it becomes legitimate behaviour that warrants no action to combat it. Using this angle, the author argues for peace programming between both communities whereby through peace activities, people will overcome discrimination and ensure joint collaboration. Kchour demonstrates good grasp of the tools of the master's courses by applying the peacebuilding pyramid and the basic needs one to address the situation of the refugees and host community from a conflict transformation perspective. To this end, she suggests that efforts of peacebuilding are done at the three levels of society and in strong collaboration between the leadership of both communities. This is a valid assertion, particularly since the crisis and the resulting stressors pervade the Lebanese society and has occupied headlines for a very long time. In a small country like Lebanon where the number of refugees totals a quarter of the population, peacebuilding at the three levels of intervention – elite, middle level and grass roots – becomes a necessity.

While in her peacebuilding discussion, the author stopped at suggesting a process, in her psychosocial support discussion, she actually details application of three art techniques, forum theatre with youth; creative writing with children; and puppetry with youth forum theatre where she led workshops with representatives of refugees and host communities. From a practitioner's point of view, these are interesting endeavours since not too many initiatives have gone as far as using psychosocial support art interventions for peacebuilding purposes in the context of refugee-host communities in Lebanon, working on real issues. The results, as she describes them, were interesting in the sense that they yielded some tangible, immediate results.

In the writing activity with children, the author talks about "instant change was remarked between the beginning of the workshop and its end".[320] This was noticeable through increased interactions, relaxed and intimate atmosphere and different mingling after the workshops. The author attributes this transformation due to "the fact that they shared their feelings, laughs, fears and dreams. And they discovered the common ground between each other".[321] The author continues to say that the objectives of the intervention were achieved in the immediate evaluation, and that the activity served to:

> [E]nlighten children on the common dreams and ideas that they share; bring the children together to overcome their differences and the ideas of discrimination and racism; and develop feelings of responsibility and support among the young participants recruited in the activities towards the kids from both communities (refugees and host), who will share their lived experience with their friends.[322]

Of course, these results and evaluations need to be taken with a grain of salt. First, it is the author who conceived, conducted and then evaluated the experience. Questions of objectivity and bias would have to be raised here. Additionally, the activities were evaluated in the immediate aftermath that did not leave the children enough space to experience the impact over time. In the workshop, an ideal reality is created that is not necessarily similar to the real life that the children had to go back to following the workshops. Hence, it cannot be known for sure how the impact on children was displayed until consistent application and evaluation overtime have been done.

For the other two youth activities, the author registered improvements in the relationship following the second theatre activity as she noted less tension and more willingness to share and be open. Also in the immediate aftermath, the author observed that participants were mingling more than before and comfortable with each other. The focus groups conducted after the event – again by the same author of the activities – neither refuted nor corroborated the claim that there were some improvements. While all focus group participants said that they enjoyed themselves, they spoke about the theatre clarifying the picture for them but not necessarily bringing them closer to the "other". The author's claim that "the three implemented activities succeeded in their goal, which was bringing Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens together through dialogue to overcome polarization and to focus on fulfilling their Basic Human needs",[323] may need some revision and deeper scrutiny to ensure that this is a correct and realistic reading of the situation.

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[320] Ibid.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid.

The author is right to conclude that:

> In parallel to these activities it is recommended to have psychological follow up to the beneficiaries of the activities, and to encourage group therapy for families because individuals are affected by their family, who are the main part of the structural culture they are living in especially that the families may have broken down due to the current situation.[324]

By this, she means that unless it is a holistic approach that involves the youth, their families and caregivers as well as other influential stakeholders in their lives, it will be difficult to have serious change and a meaningful impact beyond the immediate feeling of gratification in intervention activities.

Kchour's study is a useful attempt to explore the realm of a mixed approach with various audiences of refugees. Such efforts need to continue over time to yield a serious impact and enough lessons learned.

3.5.9. The crisis of identity in Syrian society during the current war

The researcher Mousa's objectives in her study is to:

> [I]nvestigate in depth the issue of identity and the theories that surround it, and to test those theories in an effort to track the current transformations and dynamics in the Syrian society, and to build on them to explore prospects for possible solutions in the future.[325]

In her endeavour, Mousa narrates the changes in Syrian identity without any evidence-based or normative efforts to prove her point besides mere observations that treat the issue in a journalistic and sometimes superficial way. In explaining the reasons for her study, she claims that she noticed "weird" behaviour of people that goes against their original identities. Other similar broad assertions are made throughout the text to explain in details the changes in identity in Syrian society.

The study's theoretical review of identity and its characteristics, elements and composite formation makes for a more interesting read. In this part, the researcher reflects a good grasp of the work on identity as presented in the master's programme. In this section, though unsupported by qualitative or quantitative evidence, the researcher attempts successfully to critically review the changes in Syrian identity while applying the theoretical framework of

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[324] Ibid.
[325] Mousa, 2014.

the master's classes. Her rightful characterization of the formation of "Us" versus "Them" identity – typical in a divided society – seems like a very logical analysis that captures the severe changes in Syrian identity during the war. The same goes for her discussion of the multiple identity phenomenon, which she observes – and is also reported by other researchers in this chapter – in her society. However, instead of dwelling on these concepts and providing concrete examples to back up her observations, the author moves on to a short and hasty discussion of various theories from ethnocentrism to social psychology and psychoanalysis in an effort to over-interpret her observations of Syrian society. The result is an exaggerated, overcrowded repetitive emphasis on displaying theoretical knowledge while leaving the reader hungry for deeper and more evidence-based explanations of societal phenomena happening in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The author's effort to link the theory to changing identities is not matched with the same vigour when discussing definitions and concepts of conflict. In that section, the researcher uses simply a few definitions of conflict to say that this is what is happening in the Syrian Arab Republic. The conflict discussion is mixed with a shallow discussion on deep culture and cultural peace where she concludes that:

> [A]ny future peace initiative must begin with the level of rebuilding the relationship on a sound footing and work towards the achievement of cultural peace primarily, with its support for peace to promote justice and sustainability and avoid a destructive regression in the future, and this is an action that requires sincere, painstaking and tireless efforts that lasts for years, maybe generations.[326]

It is not clear how that conclusion was reached and on what basis. The study contains a short survey of 33 people unclearly chosen to reflect on such questions as "Who am I?" to explore identity issues. In the results, the respondents show a change in perspective and possibly the adoption of a new identity. Of course, the sample and the questions are hardly enough to generalize conclusions about the entire Syrian society, as the author claims. In one of her interpretations for the questionnaire, she says:

> [I]n the research results, we find that what was characteristic of individuals, and what they considered to be distinctive characteristics of their identities, from ambition, diligence, love of the other, and love for life and fun, have changed. They were replaced by new characteristics whose common factor is fear, caution and pessimism, and thus we conclude that the Syrians suffer from a true identity crisis, affecting their reading of life [...][327]

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[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.

This was another hasty conclusion that lacks a convincing backup and a credible evidence. The study is overall interesting in the perspective that it takes and which focuses on identity and the changing characteristics of how the Syrians see themselves. Parts of the study are worthy of exploring more thoroughly insofar as they utilize tools and concepts acquired during the master's programme and attempt to conclude with interpretations and generalizations on the sociopolitical situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. The researcher also lays out a road map of how to get out of the Syrian conflict and find solutions relying on the conflict tools and understanding of stages of conflict discussed during the master's programme. The road map that consists of calling for a cultural revolution, engaging in conflict transformation on identity lines and addressing the issue of deep culture comes out of context and is detached from the reality in which the study was anchored.

3.5.10. Effective communication and its impact on conflict resolution

This research is based on an actual mediation case study in which the researcher, Khawanda, attempts to intervene to resolve the conflict that is essentially an office dispute and in the process utilizes the tools he acquired during the master's programme. The research is based on a case study of applied skills where theory meets practice, and the author then draws the necessary conclusion, reflecting on the need to build a culture of mediation and conduct further research on conflict and possible ways of resolution. The practical part of the mediation is pretty short and describes a straightforward mediation preceded by tedious review and listing of the material seen during the master's programme.

The study does not use the case study as an opportunity to reflect on peace practice and whether mediation as a dispute resolution process can be adopted in the Syrian Arab Republic or Arab society in general. Nor does the study reflect on any challenges encountered or might be encountered in working on instilling formal dispute resolution mechanisms. It would have been interesting in hindsight if the researcher took the time to compare his short-lived experience in mediation with existing traditional and tribal mediation rituals in Arab societies.

3.5.11. The social structure of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic: Roots engagement and involvement in conflict-effects-proposed solutions

Utilizing a field survey, the study moves from the premise that the real confrontations in the Syrian Arab Republic were not triggered on March 2011, but much earlier. The research objectives become an effort to get to the roots of the crisis and understand its background and stages of evolution. The researcher, Al Jundi, also

uses some of the tools acquired in the master's programme, such as transitional justice and conflict resolution, in addition to existing peace initiatives and studies conducted by international organizations. Interestingly, the researcher in this thesis speaks explicitly about challenges in accessing consistent and reliable data, and that even international organizations had differing numbers and data on the same issue. Other challenges include the security situation and the difficulty in accessing needed areas, as well as the shortness of time devoted to the research.

The researcher takes an interesting approach in her thesis by reviewing the political history of the Syrian Arab Republic since the advent of the Baath regime and the struggle for power. In trying to establish the foundations for the roots of the Syrian crisis, the author observes that:

> [P]olicies for the management of cultural diversity in society were not based on citizen relations and state-citizen interactions and were not working sufficiently to create peaceful coexistence systems between the social, religious or national components. Recent events have demonstrated the fragility of civil peace, which has not been based on the true coexistence of different components of society or on a culture of genuine stability and peace, but rather on the installation [...] this security situation has not achieved a culture of civil peace that has automatically rejected all calls or justifications for violence [...] here we recall the role played by the culture of fear, corruption and loyalty to the power hierarchy in the rapid spread of violence at the expense of the peaceful resolution of the crisis through the restoration of the rule of law and the activation of citizenship.[328]

The author also discusses the socioeconomic roots for the crisis and accuses the State's imbalanced development policies that have created poverty, caused migration from rural to urban centres and saw the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. She observes that:

> [T]he negative effects of development policies began showing in 2004, with the introduction of social market economy which requires for success in comparison to the experiences of other states that applied it, political and economic freedom, equality of opportunity, transparency [...] So, in these cases, it was not surprising that the proportion of poor people (below the poverty line) was higher than the national poverty line, from 11.4 per cent, representing 2.043 million people in 2004, to 12.3 per cent in 2007.[329]

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[328] Al Jundi, 2014.
[329] Ibid.

Al Jundi delves deeper into the socioeconomic roots of the crisis and how, along with failed policies led to the conflagration of events and the descent into war with skirmishes beginning in the city of Daraa, which is one of the poorest areas in the country.

The author conducted a survey of 15 random individuals to explore their views on solutions to the Syrian war. Expectedly, all respondents answered that they are supportive of an immediate start of the political negotiations and the search for a peaceful solution. The polarization, however, was apparent in discussing the results. The author found a major discrepancy between supporters of the regime who favoured using the Government's proposed reforms at the beginning of the war and the opposition who vouched for drastic reforms away from the cosmetic initiatives of the Government. The third group, the neutrals, insisted on beginning negotiations with no preconditions.

The questions, though not scientifically representative of the population, revealed interesting schisms between the two groups of opposition and regime supporters with the neutrals providing a different opinion. While all respondents agreed on the ultimate objective to end the war, each of them had a different vision for it. The same goes for the political process where the regime supporters favoured a transition under the current leadership, whereas the opposition favoured a new leadership altogether. The survey in the study also touched on the need to conduct confidence-building measures, the future of the Syrian Arab Republic and the gravity of the humanitarian problem befalling the Syrians. In all these questions, the author highlights important and wide gulfs between the various sides.

The study also includes a useful critical review of existing initiatives to solve the war in the Syrian Arab Republic. The review clearly outlines the challenges that face these initiatives when it comes to implementation on the ground. In interviews with activists, the author paints a dark picture of the future of negotiations and the probability of them failing, at the time of writing in 2014. What Al Jundi did in her study is utilize the tools of the master's course and attempt to critically review the particulars of the Syrian conflict. In doing so, she provided an assessment of existing initiatives, ongoing negotiations and analysed people's mood regarding the unfolding of events. She places her assessment in a theoretical overview of the conflict transformation and peacebuilding frameworks and reflects profoundly on issues of transitional justice.

The author advances a complete plan for establishing a transitional justice process in the Syrian Arab Republic with its preparatory and implementation stages. The proposed plan was developed taking into consideration the Syrian context and the role of society and external powers. It includes a thorough understanding on the various aspects needed for recovery in a context like the Syrian Arab Republic, such as the revision of history textbooks, damage reparation and other similar vehicles of reconciliation.

In her critical review of existing peace initiatives, Al Jundi outlines the formation of a new group in May 2014 that was about to see the light, called Peacebuilding Consulting Unit:

> [...] formed by a group of Syrian independent and active figures within the institutions and networks of Syrian civil society aspiring to contribute to the realization of the aspirations of the Syrian people to build their democratic, just and pluralist state [...] away from any outside interference, and that a peaceful political solution is the only possible way to preserve unity.[330]

The initiative is revealed in the study for the first, and its final outcome is of course unknown. But in its founding declaration, it insists on acting solely as a mediator to contribute to the following: (a) transforming the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic from armed conflict to political and peaceful conflict; (b) liberating national will; (c) promoting solutions that meet the priorities and needs of the Syrian society and national reconciliation; and (d) separating the internal Syrian conflict from regional and international conflicts.

The author concludes with a peace plan of her own based on the critical review of all existing initiatives and in an effort to learn the lessons from the weaknesses of existent work. Her plan builds on what has been done and aims to group declarations and progress in negotiations in an acceptable formula and present it for negotiation to all stakeholders. The author's initiative is based on supporting civil society in becoming the main impetus in the negotiations and the main actor in bringing people together. The study concludes with the call for a national dialogue to launch a new peace process.

Despite having the right intentions, the proposed peace plan offers no novelty and in its description, does not deal with potential challenges of legitimacy and acceptability. In the midst of severe violence, it is hard to find a meaningful role for civil society to play while the guns have not fallen silent; hence, the plan needs to be grounded in reality.

3.6. Conclusion

It has been three years since the studies have been submitted, and since then so much has changed, yet so many things remain constant in the Syrian Arab Republic. The violence in the Syrian Arab Republic and the refugee problem in Lebanon have continued to make headlines around the world and the pressing needs for greater peacebuilding and psychosocial support interventions have not abated. There have been several civil society initiatives in both the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to provide peace work and psychosocial assistance while donor resources have shrunk. In their research articles, students of the master's course have

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[330] Al Jundi, 2014.

provided avant-gardist research and proposal on possible avenues to address the plight of Syrians and Lebanese suffering from the burden of violence and war. The variety of topics and field studies undertaken reflected a genuine desire to learn and apply close-up the skills, concept and methodologies acquired during the courses. This also speaks of the rich variety of the curriculum that was offered and the fact that it catered to all specialties from hard-core mediation, to children entertainment, art therapy, psychotherapy and a larger gamut of specialties. Even within the peacebuilding thematic focus, participants found a wide number of themes to tackle and include in the research.

In all the theses, even the ones that were written as a reflection on the situation, the objective was to provide a functional output based on field observations that could serve as a useful product for interventions. These outputs came out with large disparities insofar as quality is concerned, but the passion and the genuine desire to help was there. Additionally, it is noticeable that in the papers, most of the students attempted to blend the fields of psychosocial support and peacebuilding in their work, particularly when it came to developing manuals and training toolkits. The mixed approach in many of the cases came to the students as a natural outgrowth of both fields without heed to the existing tensions between both fields (Aoun, Nohaili and Moukarzel). The final product is a sincere effort to devise joint training programmes that will be very useful in the fields of psychosocial support and peacebuilding for many years to come.

As stated earlier, both fields of psychosocial support and peacebuilding operate in parallel, but in the studies submitted for review, this division is seldom apparent, and it seems that activists in both fields operate in sync. At least four cases (Hayek, Mossa, Al Jundi and Al Hanash) offered observations and interpretations of changing dynamics and trends in Syrian society. Three students (Tohme, Kibrit and Al Jundi) advanced the idea of establishing intervention units and institutionalizing the practice of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Two students (Khawanda and Kchour) used specific case studies to illustrate their conclusions.

While the students are driven by a sincere and honest determination to add value and offer useful projects, it is very hard to judge the final effectiveness of their work or whether it has been applied consistently over time and the results it yielded. However, since all the students are affiliated with an organization operating in the field, one can assume that at least some of the outputs have been applied. In a number of the studies where participants conducted a training, they evaluated themselves immediately after the activity, which does not offer much of quantifiable feedback. In fact, it led in certain cases to hasty unsubstantiated conclusions.

In several papers, there were some noticeable weaknesses in the style, research methods, literature review or assumptions. In many instances, the writing was more journalistic than academic with superficial analysis of otherwise serious and complex phenomena. The students appeared as if they wanted to embark on an academic quantifiable research – by discussing assumptions, research questions, problematics and others —but veered off in more analytical description. The literature review in at least 7 of the 11 studies reviewed

for this chapter stuck to the details of what was delivered in class during the master's programme, with no serious efforts to widen the scope of the sources and review relevant literature from outside the realm of the teachings. None of the research shortcomings, however, can be attributed to the students' fault. What is admirable is the use of surveys and focus groups to generate field evidence, though the yielded results were not entirely scientific and quantifiable in the academic sense.

The master's course has equipped a number of field operators, activists, doctors and teachers in serious skills and knowledge about a wide variety of concepts and skills that can be very useful in the context in which these people operate. This is a great value added to work of civil society in the Arab region. The courses have brought enriching and creative concepts and has contributed to bringing closer the fields of peacebuilding and psychosocial support.

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General Conclusion

The students of the two editions of the Master's Psychosocial Support and Dialogue carried out their research, not without significant logistical difficulties, in the context of one of the most dramatic crises of our time. The Syrian Arab Republic has been defined as a "complex emergency",[331] meaning, in IASC's definition, "a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing United Nations country program".[332] A complex emergency typically entails extensive violence and loss of life, massive displacements and widespread damage to societies and economies.[333] In such scenarios, the delivery of the necessary large-scale humanitarian assistance is hindered by political and military constraints, while humanitarian relief workers face serious security risks.[334] In the Syrian Arab Republic, almost 3 million people live in areas that are not regularly accessible for humanitarian actors. Of these, more than 400 thousand still lived in besieged areas in 2017.[335] Over 6 million people are internally displaced in the Syrian Arab Republic, while 5 million refugees are hosted in the region.[336] According to the European Civil Protection Humanitarian Aid Operations, "Lebanon has taken in 1.5 million Syrians and Palestine refugees from Syria, accounting for 30% of Lebanon's population – the highest concentration per capita of refugees in the world."[337] The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, of whom more than half live in extreme poverty, has worsened in 2017.[338]

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[331] IFRC, Emergency appeal – Syria: Complex Emergency, Revised Appeal no. MDRSY003, July 2012, revised May 2016. Available from http://adore.ifrc.org/Download.aspx?FileId=131598; USAID, Syria – Complex Emergency, Factsheet no. 2, 1 March 2017. Available from www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/03.01.17_-_USG_Syria_Complex_Emergency_Fact_Sheet_2.pdf

[332] IASC, 10th Meeting, December 1994, quoted in: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *OCHA Orientation Handbook on Complex Emergencies*, August 1999. Available from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA%C2%A0ORIENTATION%20HANDBOOK.pdf

[333] Ibid.

[334] Ibid.

[335] OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018 – Syrian Arab Republic (2017). p. 4. Available from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2018_syr_hno_english.pdf

[336] Ibid., 11; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Flash update: Syrian refugee & IDP returns, 30 June 2017. Available from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/58330.pdf

[337] European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Lebanon 2018, last updated 06/04/2018. Available from https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/lebanon_syrian_crisis_en.pdf

[338] UNHCR, "Survey finds Syrian refugees in Lebanon became poorer, more vulnerable in 2017", News briefing, 9 January 2018. Available from www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/1/5a548d174/survey-finds-syrian-refugees-lebanon-poorer-vulnerable-2017.html

The impact on the livelihoods and life prospects of the affected populations is hardly quantifiable. The daily life of children, who make up over 40 per cent of people in need in the Syrian Arab Republic,[339] has been disrupted by the crisis. Children and adolescents have been exposed to high levels of violence and profound psychological distress, some have been recruited in combat roles by armed actors,[340] and many struggle to identify prospects of education and employment for their future.[341] Access to education has been severely affected by the lack of security and the persisting deliberate attacks on school's facilities, as well as by the use of school premises for other purposes (e.g. as shelters for IDPs).[342] There is widespread evidence of high emotional risks both among the people living in the Syrian Arab Republic and the refugees hosted in neighbouring countries.[343] In these contexts, the need for psychosocial support of affected communities is closely linked to the urgency of avoiding a "lost generation", as the main humanitarian assistance organizations have recognized,[344] and laying the foundations for social healing and reconstruction in the years to come.

The chapters of this publication have well highlighted how psychosocial support, conflict mediation and arts-based interventions are, at the same time, vitally needed, for present and future generations in this crisis-affected region, and faced with significant logistical, security and cultural obstacles. The financial element must be added to this picture, in that mental health and psychosocial support service provision heavily relies, both in the Syrian Arab Republic and in refugee-hosting neighbouring countries, on international assistance, which is, however, inferior to the assessed needs and is likely to progressively shrink.[345] Against this backdrop, the challenge for the master's students, themselves citizens of the two focus countries, was to develop and, to some extent, test creative approaches under each of the three pillars of the master's programme with a view to contributing to the design of effective interventions, making use of a large variety of tools. Notwithstanding the constraints imposed by the context in which the fieldwork was carried out, the expert authors of the present publication acknowledge the added value of these students' works, which lay some useful bricks that could serve as a basis for further and still much-needed reflections

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[339] OCHA, 2017:10.

[340] Ibid., 41.

[341] Ibid., 10.

[342] Ibid., 9, 18.

[343] International Medical Corps, Addressing Regional Mental Health Needs and Gaps in the Context of the Syria Crisis (International Medical Corps, Los Angeles and Washington, 2015). Available from https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Syria-Crisis-Addressing-Mental-Health.pdf; WHO, Fact sheets on sustainable development goals: health targets – Mental Health (WHO Regional Office for Europe, Denmark), p. 3. Available from www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/348011/Factsheet-SDG-Mental-health-UPDATE-02-05-2018.pdf; WHO, "Addressing the silent impact of war: WHO expands mental health care services across Syria", 27 March 2017. Available from www.emro.who.int/syr/syria-news/who-expands-mental-health-care-services-across-syria.html

[344] No Lost Generation, About NLG. Available from http://nolostgeneration.org/page/about-nlg

[345] International Medical Corps, 2015:10.

by professionals from the relevant fields. Ultimately, the *fil rouge* characterizing the three expert contributions to this study is the necessity to "build bridges", an expression often recurring in the students' theses.[346] One bridge needs to be built, in Salem's words, between the "humanitarians" and individuals within groups and communities, moving away "from the polarisation of the humanitarian-therapeutic interventions and from the victim-savior-perpetrator entrapping humanitarian triangle", an objective that the CCM pursues.[347] Another bridge must and can be built, as highlighted by Safa in his analysis, between psychosocial support and peacebuilding interventions.[348] Safa agrees with the master's students on the desirability of integrated approaches recognizing that the psychosocial support tools aimed at strengthening resilience and helping people recover from violence-induced distress have many objectives in common with peacebuilding work, which focuses "on transformation of feelings, relationships, perceptions' at the relational, personal and community levels".[349] Finally, as Rossi Ghiglione effectively shows, it is crucial to build bridges, through arts-based interventions, between the negative experiences suffered by the affected populations in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon and the capacities of individuals. Becoming aware of personal strengths and skills can put in motion "salutogenic processes" based on personal empowerment and even, through community-based approaches, positively affect the wider community, thus ultimately contributing to the promotion of peace.[350] The editors believe that the lessons learned, the critical considerations and main themes identified by each of the authors in the fieldworks they analysed, referring to the areas of psychosocial support with a systemic approach, of conflict mediation at the small-proxy level and of the use of creative and cultural processes for social and personal healing can indeed contribute to critically and technically substantiate and support psychosocial support initiatives taking place around the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and in relatable situations of protracted and complex conflict. In this respect, this publication is not to be considered as a display or report of what was done, as much as a tool to support humanitarians, both those designing interventions and those responding at the grass-root level, who are working in situations of unprecedented ethical, political, logistical and technical complexity.

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Andrea de Guttry

Chiara Macchi

Guglielmo Schininà

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[346] Salem, chap. 1, para. 3.
[347] Salem, chap. 1, para. 8.
[348] For a precise explanation of how the term "peacebuilding" is defined for the purpose of this publication, see Safa, chap. 3.
[349] Ibid., para. 2.
[350] Rossi Ghiglione, chap. 2, para. 8.2.

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