



University of Arts in Belgrade

~ Center for Interdisciplinary Studies ~

and

UNIVERSITÉ **LUMIÈRE** LYON 2
UNIVERSITÉ DE LYON

~ Institut de la Communication ~

UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management

Master Thesis Title:

Engaged Theatre as a Tool for Mediation

Case Study

DAH Theatre Research Centre

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Belgrade, October, 2013

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the effect of engaged theatre on society, and whether this can serve as a tool for mediation.

The author has, through this thesis, examined what engaged theatre is based on, its purpose, the extent to which it can mediate between conflict sides, the nature of public engagement in the arts, and what engaged theatre means for citizens, artists, and policymakers.

The main aim of this research is to describe and analyse contemporary theatre practice, involvement, contribution and engagement in social issues through theatrical techniques. Beginning with a discussion of the history of theatre, the development of political theatre, and contemporary theatre practices, the author explains how engaged theatre has developed. Using examples from Argentina, Peru, Australia, the USA, India, Uganda, Palestine, the Netherlands, and Kosovo, the author demonstrates how engaged theatre can influence society. This research also aimed to identify, examine, and evaluate how artists deal with these facts, and what their mission is by working in theatres.

The author of this thesis gave the answers to these complex questions by examining and analysing the terms such as ‘public engagement’, ‘mediation’, ‘conflict transformation’, ‘reconciliation’ and ‘peacebuilding’, which are related to art and creative processes. The author had researched and reviewed different relevant examples from the world stage and presented them in the paper.

This was accomplished through different research methods. The methods used were based on qualitative research strategies (including desk research, field research, observation, and semi-structured interviews) and analysing the case study of the DAH Theatre Research Centre. The analysis of the latter focused on the creative and performing aspects of the group, considering performances and projects related to the topic, their significance and achievement in the area of engaged theatre, peace building and reconciliation.

Based on all gathered and analysed data, a set of recommendation was produced. These recommendations are steps that can be taken by policy makers, funders and cultural practitioners in both the art and culture, and justice and peace fields.

Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that theatre is a place where people can meet, share their challenges, and be creative. Theatre and art in general allow contradictions to live together. While theatre cannot give the 'correct' answer, it can raise the right questions; it can offer the possible solution for the crisis, but not the solution itself. It can also create a space where people can elaborate on their problems and try to act/react, giving the audience the opportunity to make decisions by themselves. Theatre also enables an opening of space for dialogue, even on forbidden topics, which can then help to transform the problem. Engaged theatre is based on the responsibility of the artist/s or cultural worker/s to react to a particular crisis or current critical social issues and problems, such as social injustice, inequality, intolerance, militarism, dictatorship, xenophobia, nationalism, racism, and so forth. Theatre must not be ignorant in the 21st century. Politically engaged artists take risks and, by telling the stories that people are not always ready to hear, hold up a mirror to reflect both the good and bad realities of our society. They are thus actively shaping the culture around us, as theatre raises people's social and political consciousness.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet exposé a pour objet d'étudier les effets du théâtre engagé sur la société, afin de vérifier si le théâtre engagé peut servir d'outil de médiation.

Avec cette thèse, l'auteur a examiné les bases qui fondent le théâtre engagé, ses objectifs, en se demandant si le théâtre engagé peut être un médiateur entre des partis en conflit, ce qu'apporte l'interaction avec le public, et sa portée signifiante pour les citoyens, les artistes, ou les législateurs.

Les données recueillies et analysées serviront à produire une série de recommandations, qui se présentent comme des mesures qui peuvent être prises par les législateurs, par les financiers et les praticiens culturels à la fois dans le domaine de la culture et des arts, mais aussi dans les domaines de la justice et des politiques pour la paix.

Sur la base des résultats de cette étude, nous pourrions conclure que le théâtre est le lieu où les gens peuvent se rencontrer, partager les difficultés, ou exprimer leur créativité. Le théâtre et

l'art en général permettent aux contradictions de vivre ensemble. Le théâtre ne peut pas donner une réponse toute faite, mais il permet de soulever des questions, d'offrir des possibilités de réponse à la crise, des pistes de réflexion. Il permet de créer un espace où les gens peuvent mettre en scène des problématiques sociales et essayer d'agir/réagir, d'offrir au public la possibilité de prendre des décisions par eux-mêmes, d'ouvrir un espace de dialogue, d'aborder même les sujets les plus difficiles, de transformer les problèmes. Le théâtre engagé est fondé sur la responsabilité de l'artiste ou du travailleur culturel de réagir à une situation critique ou à des questions sociales cruciales, aux problèmes actuels tels que l'injustice sociale, l'inégalité, l'intolérance, le militarisme, la dictature, la xénophobie, le nationalisme, le racisme, etc. Au 21ème siècle, le théâtre ne peut pas ignorer ces problématiques. Les artistes politiquement engagés prennent des risques, racontent des histoires que la société n'est parfois pas prête à entendre, et tiennent un miroir pour refléter les réalités, bonnes ou mauvaises, du monde actuel. Ils façonnent activement la culture qui nous entoure, usant du théâtre comme un moyen de sensibiliser la conscience sociale et politique des populations.

Dans le chapitre *Considérations Méthodologiques: Conception de la recherche et Analyse des données*, l'auteur a présenté l'objectif principal de la recherche, l'hypothèse de départ et la méthodologie appliquée pour mener à bien ce travail.

Le but principal de cet exposé sera de décrire et d'analyser la pratique contemporaine du théâtre, la participation, la contribution et l'engagement dans les questions sociales à travers des techniques théâtrales. A partir de l'histoire du théâtre, ses évolutions récentes, notamment le développement du théâtre politique, et les pratiques théâtrales contemporaines, l'auteur expliquera comment s'est développé le théâtre engagé.

Au cours des 20 dernières années, notre partie du monde, y compris les pays voisins (pays de l'ex-Yougoslavie) ont connu les souffrances de la guerre, de la violence et des conflits. De nombreux pays dans le monde ont connu des problèmes similaires dans leur histoire récente. A travers le monde, les artistes tentent de faire face aux mêmes problématiques.

Cette recherche tentera aussi d'examiner, d'identifier, et d'évaluer la manière dont les artistes traitent de ces faits et quelle est la mission qu'ils s'attribuent en travaillant dans les théâtres.

Il n'existe pas de définition universellement acceptée ou généralement suivie de l'engagement du public dans les salles. En fait, la majorité des œuvres examinées au cours de cette recherche s'abstiennent même de définir le terme. Le plus souvent, les chercheurs, les législateurs et les universitaires conçoivent des modèles divers afin de fournir un cadre à leur sujet. Ils différencient les notions de « publics » et « public », « participation » et « présence », « engagement » et « médiation », « consommateurs » et « citoyens ». D'autres examinent les modes de production et de participation, tels que la création, l'apprentissage, l'observation, etc.

Dans ce document, les notions telles que « engagement public », « médiation », « transformation des conflits », « réconciliation » et « paix » seront examinées. Toutes ces définitions sont étroitement liées à l'art et aux processus créatifs. L'auteur a étudié et examiné des exemples différents de la *scène mondiale* et les a présentées dans le papier comme des références pertinentes pour traiter la question.

En outre, plusieurs livres et articles ont été consultés pour cette étude, l'une des sources les plus pertinentes d'informations sur le sujet étant l'anthologie: *Jouer ensemble: La performance et la transformation créative de conflits: Volume I: Résistance et réconciliation dans les régions de la violence et Volume II: Bâtir des communautés justes et inclusives*, par Cynthia Cohen, Roberto Gutierrez Varea, Polly Walker O. Walker.

Hypothèse

Cet article examinera l'hypothèse générale qui stipule :

Le théâtre engagé est un outil puissant pour la médiation, la consolidation de la paix et la réconciliation.

L'hypothèse spécifique qui sera traitée dans la thèse est:

L'Engagement du théâtre a influé sur les changements sociaux.

Différentes méthodes de recherche ont été utilisées pour prouver ou désapprouver cette hypothèse. Ces méthodes sont basées sur une stratégie de recherche qualitative et grâce à une analyse de cas profonde et détaillée.

La recherche a été menée en trois phases, la première phase consistant en une recherche de sources, notamment la lecture et l'analyse des fondements théoriques des théâtres et artistes engagés, ainsi que différents exemples qui ont aidé à mieux comprendre l'interprétation en elle-même et à mieux appréhender le rôle du théâtre engagé aujourd'hui.

L'auteur a examiné les motivations qui poussent les artistes à traiter de ces sujets. Le théâtre du 21^{ème} siècle a-t-il un but qui dépasse la simple finalité de « l'art pour l'art »?

La deuxième phase a été l'observation et la recherche sur le terrain. L'auteur de cette thèse est un membre central d'une des troupes théâtrales les plus importantes du théâtre engagé en Serbie (examinée comme un cas d'étude pour cette thèse). En tournée avec la troupe, l'auteur a ainsi eu la chance de participer à de nombreux festivals en Serbie et à l'étranger, et d'observer le travail d'artistes compétents de tous horizons (Argentine, Suède, Colombie, Serbie, Etats-Unis, Danemark, Kosovo, ...). L'auteur a effectué des entrevues avec nombre de ces artistes, et pu observer différents types d'interprétation qui ont aidé à prouver l'hypothèse générale et l'hypothèse spécifique.

La troisième phase a consisté à l'analyse des données recueillies, afin d'aboutir à la production d'une série de propositions, basé sur ces données et les analyses conséquentes.

Dans le chapitre « Le théâtre engagé à travers l'histoire », l'auteur abordera des périodes importantes de l'histoire afin de confirmer le lien étroit entre l'art et la société, en partant du théâtre grec antique jusqu'à l'âge élisabéthain en Angleterre et l'œuvre de Shakespeare. Ce chapitre analysera également les racines du développement d'un théâtre politique. La définition du terme *agitprop* permettra de fournir une explication à la naissance du théâtre agit-prop, ou la conception du théâtre et du drame comme un moyen d'éducation politique et d'agitation, émergeant en Europe dans les années 1920 et considéré comme un théâtre gauchiste, hautement politisé. Les figures clés de l'époque seront étudiées, permettant d'aborder des sujets tels que la contribution de Bertolt Brecht, considéré comme le grand-père du théâtre politique, ou le travail d'Augusto Boal, aujourd'hui utilisé comme modèle d'un

théâtre se préoccupe des changements sociaux et la transformation du monde. D'autres artistes pertinents des mouvements d'avant-garde seront évoqués, afin d'établir leur manière de traiter les problèmes sociaux, considérant que les artistes, écrivains, compositeurs ou penseurs d'avant-garde se caractérisent bien souvent par des oeuvres opposées aux valeurs culturelles de l'opinion majoritaire et qui ont un aspect social ou politique extrêmement critique.

Les définitions de l'engagement du public dans le théâtre, la médiation et la réconciliation ont été étudiées et expliquées. Nous verrons comment différents chercheurs, législateurs et universitaires ont conçu divers modèles afin de pouvoir fournir un cadre d'étude solide. Nous tenterons également de présenter les distinctions entre les notions de « publics » et « public », de « participation » et « présence », d'« engagement » et « médiation », ou encore de « consommateurs » et « citoyens ». Enfin, nous dresserons un aperçu des différentes formes de médiation, éluciderons le rôle de l'artiste ou des organisations artistiques comme des « médiateurs » pour aider le public à comprendre l'art et étudierons les principes de création d'espaces d'actualisation grâce au pouvoir transformateur de l'art. Nous terminerons alors sur cette interrogation : qu'est-ce que signifie la réconciliation et quel type d'engagement elle devrait impliquer ?

Le chapitre « Transformer les conflits dans le monde » traite les notions de « transformation des conflits » et d'« expérience esthétique ». L'auteur s'intéressera aux liens entre la construction de la paix et la pratique artistique, et se demandera s'il est possible aux individus de garder en tête les troubles du monde réel tout en étant ouverts à la possibilité d'un monde meilleur. Nous parviendrons ainsi à établir le rôle unique de la performance, et de l'art et la culture en général, dans la consolidation de la paix. Les artistes, par le théâtre ou d'autres techniques traditionnelles ou contemporaines telles que les rituels, les contes ou l'activisme performatif, toutes formes d'expériences esthétiques, sont à la recherche de ressources pour reconnaître les vérités et créer un espace où l'histoire cachée peut être exprimée et les gens peuvent faire entendre leur voix. D'excellents exemples d'*art et de bouleversements* peuvent être trouvés partout dans le monde: en Argentine, en Australie, au Cambodge, en Inde, en Israël, aux Pays-Bas, en Palestine, au Pérou, en Serbie, en Afrique du Sud, au Ghana, au Sri Lanka, en Ouganda, aux Etats-Unis, ainsi que dans de nombreux d'autres pays. Mais l'auteur a choisi d'approfondir plusieurs exemples extraits de l'œuvre « Agir ensemble » par le biais d'interviews menés auprès des auteurs. Il est important de justifier ce choix par le fait que la plupart des artistes évoqués dans ces exemples ont grandement et personnellement inspiré et

influencé l'auteur dans son travail théâtral, tout autant que dans la rédaction de cet exposé. Des exemples venus d'Argentine, du Pérou, d'Australie, des Etats-Unis, d'Inde, de l'Ouganda, de Palestine, de Pays-Bas et du Kosovo permettront de démontrer comment le théâtre engagé peut influencer la société.

L'auteur a choisi d'analyser tout spécialement le Centre de recherche DAH Théâtre, en vertu de leur attitude forte, de leur travail de longue haleine depuis vingt deux ans dans la lutte contre la violence et la création artistique, ainsi que leur rôle important dans la société serbe.

DAH Théâtre est la seule troupe de théâtre professionnelle en Serbie qui a une longue tradition de spectacle engagé. L'auteur concentrera son analyse sur le processus de création et les performances du groupe : les spectacles et projets liés au thème de cette recherche, l'importance et les réalisations dans le domaine de théâtre engagé, la consolidation de la paix et de la réconciliation. L'auteur a analysé le genre de performances et de projets créés et les raisons de leur création : quel est le statut de DAH Théâtre en tant que théâtre et de membres en tant qu'individus et quel est son impact et sa contribution pour la société.

Afin de faire la différence et d'agir pour renforcer le travail de médiation, la consolidation de la paix et les changements sociaux, l'auteur donnera une série de recommandations fondées sur les chapitres précédents où la recherche fondamentale, la contribution de nombreux acteurs culturels à travers le monde, l'expérience tirée des observations et des entretiens menés pour cette recherche et ses conclusions ont été analysées. Ces recommandations seront, comme mentionné plus haut, des mesures qui peuvent être prises par les législateurs, les financiers et les praticiens culturels à la fois dans le domaine de la culture et des arts, mais aussi dans les domaines de la justice et des politiques pour la paix.

Dans le chapitre « Conclusion », il sera prouvé, sur la base des exemples examinés dans ce document, et par le biais de l'expérience personnelle, que les changements à travers l'art peuvent être constatés dans les individus, dans les relations humaines, dans les communautés, ainsi que dans certaines législations. Le théâtre engagé n'est pas suffisant pour changer la société. Cependant, il peut jouer un rôle essentiel dans la création d'espaces pour les thèmes sociaux pertinents qui doivent être mis sur la table et faire partie d'un dialogue social permanent. Mais par-dessus tout, le théâtre engagé offre une possibilité unique de trouver un

langage expressif pour exprimer des sujets difficiles et aborder des thèmes compliqués et complexes.

1. INTRODUCTION

*Theatre remains any society's sharpest way to hold a live debate with itself.
If it doesn't challenge, provoke or illuminate, it is not fulfilling its function.*

Peter Hall, *The Necessary Theatre*

The interplay of artistic activities with social engagement is not at all a modern phenomenon. Throughout history, human beings have used their creative powers to confront oppression. The shaman, often described as the pre-art artist, assumed the primary responsibility for healing and mediation by means of music, dance and symbolic imagery (Cleveland, 2008:7). Throughout history, artists have continued their association with these roles, addressing issues concerning current events and highlighting them to society itself, encouraging consciousness and social change.

Engaged theatre is based on the responsibility of artist/s or cultural worker/s to react to a particular crisis or current critical social issues and problems, such as social injustice, inequality, intolerance, militarism, dictatorship, xenophobia, nationalism, and racism.

Politically engaged artists take risks and, by telling the stories that people are not always ready to hear, hold up a mirror to reflect both the good and bad realities of our society. They are thus actively shaping the culture around us, as theatre raises people's social and political consciousness.

The author of this thesis, being a professional actress/performer, is herself involved in theatre (DAH Theatre, which will be analysed later on as the case study for this thesis), which deals with social issues and strives to analyse what the role and responsibility of artists and theatre in these transitional, turbulent and *dark times*. The author, therefore, believes that social

critical issues should be found on the stage because theatre is an ideal place for the telling of compelling stories about the complexities of the world in which we live.

2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

2.1. Main aim of the research

During the past 20 years, Serbia and the neighbouring countries of the former Yugoslavia have experienced the sufferings of violence and conflict. Many countries in the world have similar problems. Throughout the world, artists are trying to cope and deal with the same issues.

The main aim of this research is to describe and analyse contemporary theatre practice, involvement, contribution and engagement in social issues through theatrical techniques. This research also aims to identify, examine, and evaluate how artists deal with these facts and what their mission is by working in theatres. In what sense do they mediate between conflict countries? What is public engagement in the arts? What does it mean for citizens, artists, and policymakers respectively? Can theatre serve as a tool for mediation? What is mediation in the theatrical sense?

The author of this thesis will try to provide some answers to these complex questions, and also to compare and see how artists from the same field think and work on these topics in different contexts around the world.

2.2. Subject of the research and theoretical framework

There is no universally accepted or generally followed definition of public engagement in the arts. In fact, the majority of works reviewed for this paper refrain from attempting to define the term. More often, researchers, policymakers and academics design various models

through which to frame the subject. They look at whether it is about ‘audiences’ or the ‘public’, about ‘participation’ or ‘attendance’, about ‘engagement’ or ‘mediation’, or about ‘consumers’ or ‘citizens’. Others look at modes of production and participation, such as creating, learning, observing, etc.

In this paper, terms such as ‘public engagement’, ‘mediation’, ‘conflict transformation’, ‘reconciliation’ and ‘peacebuilding’ are examined. All these definitions are related to art and creative processes. The author has researched and reviewed different relevant examples from the world stage and presented them in the paper.

In addition to many other books and articles, a relevant source of information regarding the topic is the book *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict, Volume I: Resistance and Reconciliation in Regions of Violence* and *Volume II: Building Just and Inclusive Communities*, by Cynthia Cohen, Roberto Gutierrez Varea, Polly O. Walker.

2.3. Research hypothesis

This paper examined the general hypothesis that states:

Engaged theatre is a powerful tool for mediation, peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The specific hypothesis that was examined in the thesis is:

Theatre engagement influences social changes.

2.4. Research methodology

Various research methods, drawn from qualitative techniques and including deep case study analysis, have been used to prove or disprove the hypotheses.

A fundamental basis of qualitative methodology is the hermeneutical principle that a particular object, event or phenomenon (e.g. an arts piece) can be understood only within the whole to which it belongs; in other words, the social and historical context of their creation is significant (Branković, 2007) Therefore, the author examined those aspects as well, in order to be able to analyse and present the current situation of engaged theatre as a tool for mediation.

The research was conducted in three phases. The first phase consisted of desk research, i.e. reading and analysing the theoretical background about engaged theatres and artists, as well as different case studies, which aided the understanding both of 'interpretation' itself and the role of engaged theatre today.

Engaged theatre deals with current social issues. Theatre is the place where people can meet, share their challenges, and be creative. Theatre and art in general allow contradictions to live together. Today, more than ever, theatre is in crisis, not only because of global economic instability, but also because of the denial of who is responsible. While theatre cannot give the 'correct' answer to a particular problem, it can raise the questions; it can offer possible solutions to the crisis, but is not the solution itself. It can create a space where people can elaborate on the problems they face and try to act/react, giving the audience the opportunity to make decisions by themselves, to open space for dialogue even on forbidden topics, and ultimately to help transform the problem. Theatre must not be ignorant in the 21st century.

The author examined why artists have the urge to deal with these things. What are they driven by? Does theatre have a higher purpose in the 21st century than 'l'art pour l'art'?

The second phase consisted of observation and field research. The author of this thesis is a core member of one of the most significant theatre troupes of engaged theatre in Serbia. In June they toured with their performance, *Crossing the Line*, in Denmark at the ODIN Theatre, for the Transit Festival¹. The main topic of the Festival was 'Risk, Crisis, Invention'. The author had a great opportunity to be part of the symposium whose main topics were 'Risk, Crisis, Invention – building knowledge: experience between past and future,' and 'giving form: art between fiction and reality', where she could observe the work of relevant artists

¹TRANSIT is an international theatre festival and meeting organised at Odin Teatret, Holstebro, Denmark, founded in 1991, directed by Julia Varley.

such as Eugenio Barba (director and founder of ODIN Theatre), Julia Varley (actor and director, UK/Denmark), and conduct semi-directive interviews with the some of today's most eminent artists such as Ana Woolf (actor and director, Argentina), Petra Lindblom (actress, Sweden), Patricia Ariza (human rights activist and director, Colombia), and Roberto Gutierrez Varea (Chair of Performing Arts Department, University of San Francisco, director and co-editor of the anthology, *Acting Together*, Argentina/USA).

While touring with the same performance in Kosovo, the author conducted a semi-directive interview with Zana Krasniqi (director and founder of the First Human Rights Festival in Kosovo - *Femme Fatale*). The author conducted the same interviews in Serbia with national artists such as Marko Pejović (co-founder of the First Engaged Theatre Festival in Serbia) and Zoe Gudović (activist and performer), and observed various models of interpretation which helped to prove both the general hypothesis and the second, specific one.

Since all the mentioned artists play a significant role in their societies and work in the field of engaged theatre, the interview topics were as concrete, direct, and open as possible. The interview consisted of questions strongly connected to the hypothesis, such as: can theatre make a real change in society or is it not enough? What is the connection or relationship between politics and art? What specifically about engaged theatre enables it to mediate between conflict sides? Can it mediate at all? What is the difference between engaged theatre and mainstream theatre? Does theatre have the power to shape and sometimes coerce public opinion and public behaviours?

The third phase consisted of analysing gathered data, based on which a set of recommendations was produced.

The case study that the author observed, studied and analysed was the DAH Theatre Research Centre. This case study was chosen given DAH's significant role in Serbian society.

The author focused her analysis on the creative and performing aspects of the group, considering performances and projects related to the topic, their significance and achievement in the area of engaged theatre, peacebuilding and reconciliation. The focus was on what kind of performances and projects they create and why; what their status is as a theatre and as individuals in their own country; and their impact and contribution to society.

The analysis consisted of desk research, i.e. reading and analysing the theoretical background of the group, press releases, programmes, and critiques given by relevant theatre critics. This also involved observation of their previous work, as well as personal participation in performances and projects relevant for the topic. Semi-structured interviews using the previously mentioned questions were conducted with the co-founder of DAH Theatre, Dijana Milošević, as well as the actresses and core members, Sanja Krsmanović Tasić and Maja Vujović.

Throughout this case study, the author tried to prove that engaged theatre is a powerful tool for conflict mediation, and provided recommendations and proposals based on the research.

3. ENGAGED THEATRE THROUGHOUT HISTORY

3.1. Theatre as a Transitory Art

The impulse towards theatre is universal. It has occurred wherever human society has developed: in Europe, Asia, throughout Africa, America, and so on.

The earliest information about the origin of theatre comes from wall paintings, decorations, artefacts and hieroglyphics that show the importance of successful hunts, seasonal changes, life cycles, and stories of the gods. From these can be seen the necessity of passing along the experiences of the old to the young through art, storytelling, and dramatizing events.

Theatre emerged from myth, ritual, and ceremony. Early societies perceived connections between certain actions performed by the group or leaders in the group and the desired results of the whole society. These actions moved from habit to tradition, and then on to ceremony and ritual. The formulation of these actions, and their consequent repetition and rehearsal, created the foundations for theatre.

According to the mythologist Joseph Campbell², rituals are related to three basic concerns: pleasure, power, and duty. Power – influencing and controlling events – was often the intention of rituals such as ceremonies to guarantee a successful crop or to please the gods. Usually societies had rituals that glorified supernatural powers, victories, and heroes. Often supernatural forms would be represented using costumes and masks. Rituals that were practiced as duty to the gods also brought entertainment and pleasure.

These rituals were accompanied by myths that entered the storytelling tradition, gaining a life of their own life beyond the original rites. This new life allowed the myths to move towards entertainment and the aesthetic. As societies grew more complex, these stories began to be acted out under non-ritualistic conditions. As this occurred, the first steps towards theatre as an autonomous activity were taken.

Through these rituals, leaders, or actors of sorts, emerged. These acting/leadership roles were often filled by elders and priests. In addition, the beginnings of acting spaces or auditoriums developed as a result of more elaborate rituals.

The earliest example of ceremony and ritual evolving towards theatre comes from ancient Egypt. The ‘Pyramid texts’ dating from 2800 to 2400 B.C., contain dramas sending the dead pharaoh off to the underworld. These dramas also present the continuity of life and the pharaoh's power. There is also the Memphite Drama, recounting the story of the death and resurrection of the god Osiris, and the coronation of his son Horus. The most important Egyptian drama was the Abydos Passion play. Like the Memphite drama, the Abydos Passion play concerns the story of Osiris. The paramount Egyptian myth, this drama was enacted at the most sacred place in Egypt, Abydos – the burial site of Osiris. Performed annually from 2500 to 550 B.C. and full of spectacle, this Passion play is the first of its kind ever recorded, and is considered to be the first example of theatre.

These rituals had the purpose of integrating and fusing the individual with his/her community, of mediating through words, music and movement to form an integral whole.

In India, theatre became well established nearly 2000 years ago. In Greece, a fully developed theatre had emerged even earlier, almost 2500 years ago.

² Joseph John Campbell (1904 –1987) was an American mythologist, writer and lecturer, best known for his work in comparative mythology and comparative religion. <http://www.jcf.org/new/index.php?categoryid=11>

Wherever theatre has become a separate art form, it has had essential qualities: an action or a story (the play) is presented by one group (the performers) to another group (the audience). Theatre is thus a unique experience – a shared event that includes both those who perform and those who observe. When the audience comes to witness a performance, an exchange takes place between performers and spectators; the two groups engage in a form of communication or a celebration. At its best, theatre affords members of the audience an opportunity to be transported outside themselves, or to look deep inside themselves.

A theatre performance changes from moment to moment as the audience encounters a series of shifting impressions. It is an adventure through which the audience passes, with each instant being a direct, immediate experience. This is one special quality of theatre – immediacy. The playwright Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) called it the ‘perpetual present tense’ – contained in the present is the fresh remembrance of the past and the anticipation of what is to come.

3.2. Theatre and Society

Art frequently challenges society and is sometimes on the leading edge of history, appearing to forecast the future. More often, such art simply recognizes what is already present in society but has not yet surfaced.

Art is a mirror of its age, revealing the prevailing attitudes, underlying assumptions, and deep-seated beliefs of a particular group of people. Art may question society’s views or reaffirm them, but it cannot escape them. Every work of art first emerges at a given time and place, and can never be adequately understood unless the conditions surrounding its birth are also understood.

A study of theatre in significant periods of history confirms the close link between art and society. In ancient Greece, for example, in the city-state of Athens, theatre was part of the broader culture that included festivals, religious rituals, politics, law, athletics, music and poetry. In particular, participation in the city-state's many festivals as an audience member, or even as a participant in the theatrical productions, was an important part of citizenship.

In the history of theatre, there is a long tradition of performances addressing issues of current events and being central to society itself, encouraging consciousness and social change. The ritualistic and social significance of the earliest Greek performances in central arenas or amphitheatres brought relevance to many controversial topics. The political satire performed by the comic poets at the theatres had considerable influence on public opinion in the Athenian democracy.

Aristophanes (447-385 BC) was thought to be one of the greatest of all comic dramatists of his day, and one of the earliest recorded writers of political satire. His plays are an unequalled source of information about politics, personalities, morality, literature, and everyday life in Athens.

Many of Aristophanes' plays satirized the well-known citizens of Athens and their conduct in the Peloponnesian War. Four of his plays are passionate calls for peace. One of them, *Lysistrata*, revolves around the women of Athens, who decide to withhold sex from their husbands until the men outlaw war. The play was written out of the poet's grief over the thousands of Athenians who had recently lost their lives in the terrible defeat at Syracuse. The play is maybe sentimental, but the sentiment is still relevant today. In March 2003, participants in all 50 states in the USA and on six continents held readings of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* as a protest against the possible war with Iraq.

Another example of the strong link between theatre and society – one which stands in contrast to the classical Greek period – is the Elizabethan age³ in England. Under Elizabeth's rule, England was in full bloom and expanding on all fronts. These characteristics were reflected in the drama of the period. From medieval drama, in which only religious themes were allowed to be performed, the Elizabethans inherited stage practices that made it possible to shift rapidly from place to place and from one time period to another. Using these techniques, among others, Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and their contemporaries wrote plays that were quite different from the drama of the Greeks. Rather than being restrictive, the plays were expansive in terms of the number of locations, characters and action, and could cover a period of many years. There was no hesitancy about showing murder and bloodshed on stage.

One of the best playwrights of the Elizabethan period, considered by some to be the greatest

³ Queen Elizabeth I, reigned from 1558 to 1603

playwright of all times, is William Shakespeare (1564-1616), who can also be called an author of political theatre. His history plays and tragedies repeatedly examine the essence of political leadership and lust for power. Shakespeare is fascinated by politics, charting the world of secular power with an avid curiosity, and showing a very highly developed sense of the workings of bureaucracy and power. No one who has brushed against the world of realpolitik in any government of any colour could fail to recognise Polonius, and other characters such as Elsinore. The world of bugged hotel rooms, the ever-present secret police, the smug strutting arrogance of the Party's apparatchiks, the friends who lower their voices and look about them before speaking, the fear of prison, the familiarity with those who have experienced it, the swaggering display of the privileges of the nomenclature, these all belong to the world that Hamlet finds so 'out of joint'.

In the book, *Shakespeare's Politics*, Professor Allan Bloom⁴ takes the classical view that the political shapes man's consciousness. Bloom considers Shakespeare to be a profoundly political Renaissance dramatist and argues that Shakespeare's ideas and beliefs need to be recognized in today's society as a source for the serious study of moral and political problems.

In considering the link between theatre and society, it is worth noting that in both Greek and Elizabethan theatre, despite important female characters in dramas themselves, there were no female playwrights or performers. This was a result of the place women were accorded in these two cultures. In classical Greek theatre, the themes reflected the political necessity for order and control and were intended to serve a didactic purpose, ensuring the continuation of democratic government. Women were excluded from all political role and thus could not participate in theatre's creative process. There is some evidence that women did act in wandering mime troupes, however they were considered to be of low moral character. This unfortunate label was to remain attached to women performers for hundreds of years and is at least partly responsible for an exclusionary attitude which eliminated the contribution of women from legitimate theatre activity.

In Elizabethan England, despite the presence of a powerful female monarch, theatre practices continued to reflect long standing prejudices against women. While, during the reign of

⁴ *Shakespeare's Politics* (1964), by Allan Bloom, an American philosopher, classicist, and academician with Harry V. Jaffa, is an analysis of four Shakespeare plays guided by the premise that political philosophy provides a necessary perspective on the problems of Shakespeare's heroes.

Elizabeth, actors were raised above ‘vagabond’ status, actresses were still considered to be of low moral character – a result of medieval and Puritan thinking. Women were excluded from performing on the legitimate stage, and female roles were played by young boys who did much to affect feminine beauty and grace. It was like that until 1660 when women were first allowed to appear on the stage of licensed theatres in England.

Historically, the creators of theatre have intended to serve different purposes. As previously mentioned, there have been times when the purpose of a theatre event was religious, such as in the medieval period. At other times, theatre served a civic function. In the seventeenth century, theatre served the purpose of entertaining royalty as part of a celebration. For example, in France, Moliere wrote several plays as part of entertainment or presentation before King Louis XIV at Versailles. Throughout history, some playwrights have written primarily to entertain their audience, while others have written with a more serious purpose in mind, such as to call attention to injustice, make a statement against war, or to raise moral and philosophical questions.

Moving to a more contemporary period, as society developed, theatre developed with it. This development involved bringing the cultures together, and instigating challenges to long-held beliefs, motifs still reflected in today’s theatre. It can be said that contemporary theatre is ‘eclectic’. This means that it gives us the opportunity to have many kinds of theatrical experience.

In understanding a theatre event, it is important to understand the social context in which it occurs. A theatre event can entertain, offer an escape, provoke thought, inspire, educate, challenge and delight. Often several of these purposes are combined.

In the current research, only engaged theatre, or theatre that deals with social issues in order to inspire social change, will be examined.

3.3. Recent History and the Development of Political Theatre

Recalling recent history, we will find in Soviet Russia the term ‘political theatre’, which was

referred to as *agitprop theatre* after the Soviet term 'agitprop'. The term describes stage plays, pamphlets, motion pictures and other art forms with an explicitly political message. It is a term derived from the words 'Agitation' and 'Propaganda'. 'Agitation' meant urging people to do what Soviet leaders expected them to do. 'Propaganda' referred to the dissemination of any kind of beneficial knowledge. In other words, propaganda was supposed to act on the mind, while agitation acted on emotions.

The term *agitprop* gave rise to agitprop theatre that denotes theatre and drama used as a means of political education and agitation; in other words, a highly politicized leftist theatre that originated in 1920s Europe. As one commentator states, 'it is a militant form of art intended to emotionally and ideologically mobilize its audience to take particular action vis-à-vis an urgent social situation' (Cohen-Cruz, 1998:13).

Agitprop theatre serves as a political instrument and aims to make its didactic political messages easily comprehensible. The Soviets developed theatre as a weapon in the revolutionary struggle, since the regular means of propaganda radio and newspaper proved insufficient in gaining support across the vast and impoverished country. It was mostly amateur theatre that dealt with the daily issues of health, sanitation, literacy, and the current military situation, often using elements of folklore. The aesthetic forms of agitprop theatre were simple, with minimal props and mobile scenery, intending to cancel ambiguities and bring meaning closer to the audience's understanding. The performances usually developed as collective creations staged in non-designated theatrical spaces such as pubs and clubs, and on wagons and platforms.

Between 1918 and 1924, a popular form of agitprop was 'theatre on wheels', where artists traveled through Russia in so-called agitprop trains decorated with drawings and caricatures in the manner of propaganda placards and equipped with a theatre wagon, where actors performed revolutionary melodramas and agitation plays.

One of the most popular forms of the Soviet agitprop theatre was the *Living Newspaper* that appeared during the Russian Civil War and reached its peak between 1923 and 1928. In the mid 1920s the *Blue Blouses*, named after the standard industrial workers' uniform, was among the most popular kinds of agitprop theatre. The aesthetic of the *Blue Blouses* was close to

Meyerhold's⁵ acting technique of biomechanics and Eisenstein's montage of attractions. The *Blue Blouses* also incorporated popular forms of cabaret, operetta, and fairground, both to reach its propaganda goals and to experiment with different theatrical forms.

Through the International Communist Movement, agitprop theatre spread to Europe, Scandinavia, and America. Germany had a particularly strong agitprop movement which built on the tradition of German cabaret, and influenced the political theater of Erwin Piscator⁶ and Bertolt Brecht. In the contemporary context, performances of the *San Francisco Mime Troupe*, the *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, and other types of guerilla theatre reflect ongoing agitprop forms and strategies.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), as one of the most important figures of 20th-century theatre, is considered to be the grandfather of political theatre. Brecht's earliest work was heavily influenced by German Expressionism, but it was his preoccupation with Marxism and the idea that man and society could be intellectually analysed that led him to develop his theory of 'epic theatre'.

Strictly speaking, 'epic' is an Aristotelian term for a form of narrative that is 'not tied to time', while a 'tragedy' is bound by the unities of time and place. Brecht offered a challenge to Aristotle's ancient approach to theatre as a spectator activity.

One of the goals of Epic Theatre according to Brecht is for the audience to always be aware that it is watching a play: 'it is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from [epic theatre]: the engendering of illusion' (Willet, 1974:122)

Brecht sought to stimulate the minds of his audience, integrating economics and politics into his plays, in the hope that those watching would respond with intellect, not emotion. Narrative, montage, self-contained scenes and rational argument were used to create a shock of realization in the spectator. To create a distancing effect, Brecht promoted acting and staging that would merely demonstrate what was being portrayed, thus giving the audience a more objective perspective on the action. His idea was to make the audience feel detached

⁵ Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold (1874–1940) was a Russian and Soviet theatre director, actor and theatrical producer. His provocative experiments dealing with physical being and symbolism in an unconventional theatre setting made him one of the seminal forces in modern international theatre.

⁶ Erwin Friedrich Maximilian Piscator (1893–1966) was a German theatre director and producer.

from the action of the play so that they do not become immersed in the fictional reality of the stage or become overly empathetic of the characters involved. Flooding the theatre with bright lights (not just the stage), having actors play multiple characters and rearrange the set in full view of the audience, and 'breaking the fourth wall' by speaking to the audience, Brecht's Epic Theatre was a reaction against popular forms of theatre, particularly the naturalistic approach pioneered by Constantin Stanislavski⁷. Stanislavski attempted to create real human behaviour in acting on stage through the techniques of Stanislavski's system, and to absorb the audience completely in the fictional world of the play. Brecht saw Stanislavski's methodology as producing escapism; in contrast, he wanted his audience to have a clear mind and pure insight on what was happening in the society around them at that very moment.

As Eyre and Wright describe him, 'he [Brecht] was a brilliant man of the theatre, highly receptive to the avant-garde of his day, quick to improve it and somewhat too precipitate to turn it into theory. He was a communist: not a left-winger, not a liberal, nor a humanitarian. From his twenties onwards, he thought and worked in terms of Marxist dialectic and he really wasn't kidding.'⁸

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Brecht was revered by left-leaning theatricals as a sage whose slightest notes could be relied on as a guide to morality, politics and life itself. In the 1990s, the collapse of faith in Marxism put a stop to that, but nevertheless his plays (or some of them) have quietly entered the theatrical mainstream.

According to the Brechtian paradigm, theatrical mediation makes [spectators] conscious of the social situation that gives rise to it and desirous of acting in order to transform it. According to Artaud's logic, it makes them abandon their position as spectators: rather than being placed in front of a spectacle, they are surrounded by the performance, drawn into the circle of action that restores their collective energy. In both cases, theatre is presented as a mediation striving for its own abolition. (Ranciere, 2007:274)

⁷ Constantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski (1863–1938) was a Russian actor and theatre director. The eponymous Stanislavski method or simply "acting method" has had a pervasive influence especially in the period after World War II.

⁸ <http://www.pbs.org/now/arts/politicaltheater.html>

Certainly, Brecht's attack on the illusive theatre influenced, directly or indirectly, the theatre of every Western country.

Brecht's aesthetics have influenced political playwrights throughout the world. Augusto Boal⁹ developed the Brechtian form of *Lehrstücke*¹⁰ in his internationally acclaimed 'Theatre of the Oppressed', with its now widespread and acknowledged techniques of 'Forum Theatre' and 'Invisible Theatre' to further social change. The Theatre of the Oppressed, established in the early 1970s by Brazilian director and Workers' Party activist Augusto Boal, is a participatory theatre that fosters democratic and cooperative forms of interaction among participants. Theatre is emphasized not as a spectacle but rather as a language accessible to all. More specifically, it is a rehearsal theatre designed for people who want to learn ways of fighting back against oppression in their daily lives.

In what Boal calls 'Forum Theatre', the actors begin with a dramatic situation from everyday life and try to find solutions. Audience members are urged to intervene by stopping the action, coming on stage to replace actors, and enacting their own ideas. Bridging the separation between actor (the one who acts) and spectator (the one who observes but is not permitted to intervene in the theatrical situation), the Theatre of the Oppressed is practiced by 'spect-actors' who have the opportunity to both act and observe, and who engage in self-empowering processes of dialogue that help foster critical thinking. The theatrical act is thus experienced as conscious intervention, as a rehearsal for social action rooted in a collective analysis of shared problems.

Based on Forum Theatre, Augusto Boal developed another form of theatre – 'Invisible Theatre'. This transforms public space into a public stage, creating 'theatrical' situations in public places in such a way that the public is unaware that a spectacle is being acted out. Passers-by are drawn into a discourse about social oppression, and urged to take immediate action that might affect the scenario being played out. Boal's explorations were all efforts to transform the 'monologue' of the traditional performance into a 'dialogue' between the

⁹ Augusto Boal was a Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician. He was the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, a theatrical form originally used in radical popular education movements (Wikipedia).

¹⁰ The core principle exploring the possibilities of learning through acting, playing roles, adopting postures and attitudes etc. and hence no longer having a divide between actors and audience. Brecht himself translated the term as *learning-play* (Steinweg, 1976:140).

audience and the stage. He believed that dialogue is the most common and healthy dynamic between humans.

Today, Boal's work is one of the most applied forms of theatre for social change and transformation in the world. Boal's work in this area has contributed to the emergence of the 'Theatre for Development' movement across the world. It is a broad term used to describe a variety of ways in which theatre has been used in international development work. In particular, it refers to performances that are widely accessible to ordinary people; that are participatory and interactive; and that aim to raise awareness and disseminate information to the public about health issues, legal issues, human rights issues, and other challenges communities are facing.

In the 1960s, playwrights such as Peter Weiss adopted a more 'documentary' approach towards political theatre, following the example of Erwin Piscator in the twenties. Weiss wrote plays closely based on historical documents, such as the proceedings of the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt.

Less radical versions of political theatre have become established within the mainstream modern repertory, such as the realist dramas of Arthur Miller (*The Crucible* and *All My Sons*), which probe the behaviour of human beings as social and political animals.

A new form of political theatre emerged in the twentieth century with feminist author like Caryl Churchill. She is an English dramatist, known for her use of non-naturalistic techniques and feminist themes, dramatisation of the abuses of power, and exploration of sexual politics who often make use of the non-realistic techniques previously detailed.

During the 1960s and 1970s, new theatres emerged addressing women's issues. These theatres went beyond producing feminist plays, seeking also to give women opportunities and work experience in all areas of theatrical production, which had up until then been dominated by men. One of the most significant women's networks in theatre is the Magdalena Project, founded in 1986 by Jill Greenhalgh (Lecturer in Performance Studies at Aberystwyth University, Wales) and Julia Varly (actress, director, writer, core member of Odin Teatret, Denmark).

According to Janelle Reinelt, both Brecht's and feminists' theatre emphasize the possibilities of change, and the notion that history is not an inevitable narrative. Feminism is and Brecht

was historically involved in striving to create art that would ‘destroy’ the political and artistic status quo (Reinelt, 2012:283).

During this period, one of the most significant phenomena in theatre – the avant-garde theatre movement – also emerged. The American avant-garde theatre came into being under the strong influence of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty poetics and the Polish Laboratory Theatre headed by Jerzy Grotowski¹¹ and his Poor Theatre, in an environment ready for a new kind of aesthetic, social and political involvement, and vital enough to produce positive feedback on the European avant-garde (Ćosić, 2001:166). All authors belonging to this movement were interested in the man as a social and psychological being. The most significant groups of this movement were The Living Theatre, founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck, the Performance Group by Richard Schechner, the Open Theatre by Joseph Chaikin, the Bread and Puppet Theatre by Peter Schumann, the San Francisco Mime Troupe by R.G. Davis, and the Wooster Group founded by Elizabeth LeCompte, as well as directors such as Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman.

These groups were questioning long-held beliefs about theatre. Two parallel research streams were created. One was focused on the study of social and political circumstances in which an individual survives and deals with the social issues at hand, with the aim of not only having a critical attitude and opinion, but also an active effort to achieve significant social change. The second was focused on the introspective analysis of human beings in order to reach out to sources of experience in the human race. In other words, both streams felt that the mainstream theatre based mostly on Stanislavski’s ‘Method’ was no longer relevant to the problems of the present and that new forms needed to be found to match new challenges. On the other hand, they wanted to go back in history and explore the traditions of rituals to scrape off the many layers of formality and convention that had accumulated through the centuries, and to rediscover the roots of theatre. These two impulses led to similar results and, from the experiments of this radical theatre movement, several significant innovations from traditional theatre practice were developed, such as emphasis on ‘nonverbal theatre’, a reliance on improvisation or a scenario and materials developed by performers (devised theatre), an interest in ritual and ceremony, and stress on the importance of the physical environment of theatre, including the spatial relationship of the performers to the audience.

¹¹ **Jerzy Grotowski** (1933 – 1999) was a Polish theatre director and innovator of experimental theatre, the "theatre laboratory" and "poor theatre" concept: the Theatre that values the body of the actor and its relation with the spectator and does away with costumes, decor and music.

The Living Theatre, created by Judith Malina and her husband Julian Beck in 1947, which had its peak in the 1960s during the Vietnam War, is a primary example of politically oriented and avant-garde performance art in the United States.

Scholars link these groups and productions together with terms like experimental, radical, alternative, etc., in order to investigate the materiality, ideologies, and resulting artistic and cultural significance of avant-garde performances in the 1960s and 70s. These groups were dealing with the concepts of ownership and authority, within individual performance works as well as within the methodological philosophy that is collective creation, and created work that assembled contemporary conceptions of the political as responsive to a unique time and place.

The avant-garde's preoccupation with the global capitalist market, neoliberal economies and what Guy Debord¹² called *The Society of the Spectacle* have made contemporary critics speculate on the possibility of a meaningful avant-garde today. In his book, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord asserts that:

As a negative movement which seeks the supersession of art in a historical society where history is not yet lived, art in the epoch of its dissolution is simultaneously an art of change and the pure expression of impossible change. The more grandiose its reach, the more its true realization is beyond it. This art is perforce avant-garde, and it is not. Its avant-garde is its disappearance. (Debord,1967:49)

Richard Schechner in his article, *The Conservative Avant-Garde*, demonstrates how completely the avant-garde is embedded within institutional structures today. In his analyses of avant-garde performance, he asserts that today an avant-garde is more a 'niche-garde':

It is not in advance of anything. 'Niche-garde' because groups, artists, and works advertise, occupy, and operate as clearly marked and well-known brands. The younger groups fall into line behind their forebears in the familiar pattern of both tradition and marketing: take a lot, change a little, and make something old look excitingly new. (Schechner, 2010:895)

¹² **Guy Ernest Debord** (1931 – 1994) was a French Marxist theorist, writer, filmmaker, a canonical and controversial figure particularly among European scholars of radical politics and modern art.

Nevertheless, many artists had aligned themselves with the avant-garde movement and still continue to do so, because the concept of avant-garde refers primarily to artists, writers, composers and thinkers whose work is opposed to mainstream cultural values and often has a trenchant social or political edge.

All the discussed theatre practitioners and theatre reformers were trying to cope with the social issues of their time and place through art, inventing and applying various techniques.

4. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIATION

There is no universally accepted or generally followed definition of ‘public engagement’ in theatres. In fact, the majority of works reviewed for this paper refrain from attempting to define the term. More often, researchers, policymakers and academics design various models through which to frame the subject. They look at whether it is about ‘audiences’ or the ‘public’, about ‘participation’ or ‘attendance’, about ‘engagement’ or ‘mediation’, or about ‘consumers’ or ‘citizens’. Others look at the modes of production and participation such as creating, learning, observing, etc.

In the United States, English Canada, United Kingdom and other English-speaking countries, the terminology is generally focused around the idea of arts participation or audience engagement, while in Quebec and France there is a greater usage of terms such as ‘democratization of culture’, ‘cultural citizenship’ and ‘cultural mediation.’ Other European countries use a mix of both (Brown, 2010).

The term ‘public engagement’ arises from a broader discourse about democracy, civic responsibility and social capital. It has been adopted in recent years by the arts community in European countries to encompass a number of ideas around the relationship between art, artist and citizen.

Furthermore, the range of definitions about engagement in the arts is paralleled by the

complexity of definitions related to arts and culture. The definition in UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity broadly sets out the anthropological view of culture:

‘Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.’ (UNESCO, 2001)

The relationship between arts and culture is complex. The legitimacy of a communal cultural life is broadly accepted, as outlined in the UNESCO definition, but not necessarily the legitimacy of an artistic life, which is often seen as a divertissement or entertainment rather than an integral part of individual and community well-being.

The focus of this paper is on specialized artistic pursuits and the theatre arts which deal with society, and how the sector works to build its capacity to foster greater public engagement.

4.1. Public Engagement

The following are definitions of some of the common terms used to describe public engagement:

- **Arts Engagement** – ‘[is] the entire spectrum of ways that people can be involved in the arts’ (Brown, 2010).
- **Arts participation** – ‘broadly accepted to imply multiple modes of engagement – including attendance, interactivity through the electronic media, arts learning, and arts creation (McCarthy et al., 2001; NEA, 1995) – and a broader scope of contexts and settings’ (Brown et al., 2008; Brown & Novack, 2011).
- **Audience engagement** – ‘is both educational and participatory. It is about creating opportunities for audiences to interact physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually with the form beyond the role of being an observer. It is about

empowering audiences to better appreciate and connect with the meaning and impact of the art experience' (Brown, 2008).

- **Cultural democracy** – '[wherein] governments provide citizens with the tools and infrastructure to understand the cultures of the past and create the cultures of the present' (Holden, 2008).

4.2. Mediation

- **Cultural mediation** – 'approach (es) aimed at creating new ties between citizens and culture. The term covers a wide body of practices ranging from audience development actions to participatory and community art' (Culture pour tous, translated) (LaFotrune 2012).

Cultural mediation is understood to include a variety of actions that include audience enrichment aimed at deepening the public understanding of and relationship to art forms and art works, as well as activities meant to develop each individual's own sense of self and community through shared and inclusive art making processes. It provides artists, arts organizations and the public with new means to build shared experiences and aesthetic understanding. Cultural mediation also embraces a wide variety of professional practices, in keeping with the tendency for cultural mediators to be drawn to approaches that integrate the public's sensibilities and the community's realities' (Ibid, translated).

- **Mediation** – 'intervening in an intercultural dialogue via artistic activism, programs of socio-cultural animation and media projects. It can also signify the translation of values, ideas and messages generated in different cultural and artistic forms to a language known to some social group or wider public' (Šešić, Dragojević, 2004).

The central problem for any mediation is to attempt to analyse what is possible and what is limited by a given medium, in this case art/theatre performance. The purpose of mediation is to create the pre-conditions for mutual understanding, exchange information, artefacts, and

values. Or, in other words, to explore how the medium can be used to reconcile, renew and regenerate broken relations.

There are numerous instruments and methods of mediation, such as engaged theatre performances, street theatres, fairs, projects, murals and sculptures in the public space, as well as debates, series of interviews, etc. They can be preceded or followed by numerous workshops in which the facilitators provide direct contact, information exchange and a space for conflicting opinions concerning common problems to be heard. In the process of mediation, clear forms of diffusion of culture, such as exhibits, plays and film productions, are not enough; they need to be combined and expanded by workshops, animation actions, debates, round tables, barbers or, for example, participatory theatre forms such as Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed – Forum theatre or Invisible theatre. (Dragičević-Šešić and Dragojević, 2004)

According to Milena Dragičević-Šešić and Sanjin Dragojević, there are several forms of intercultural mediation:

a) Mediation directed towards the broadest population groups

‘The goal is to promote the ideas of social and intercultural tolerance of an open society, frequently using media that are most present in public life, such as local and regional radio and TV networks, billboards and artistic interventions in the public space.’ (Ibid.)

b) Mediation directed towards establishing dialogue and cultural exchange in a situation of discontinued inter-ethnic links in the region

‘The goal is to link NGO activists, intellectuals and artists who, in different environments, belong to complementary intellectual and artistic circles and are also bonded by a common interest directed towards surpassing prejudices, hate, isolation and all other obstacles.’ (Ibid.)

c) Mediation directed towards dispelling inter-ethnic and ideological prejudices and exclusions

‘War and conflicts have brought an issue of both the Fukajama's theory of “the end of

history”, which predicted that the victory of liberal developmental and democratic paradigm has been completed, and that nothing important of global proportions, in historical sense, will be happening, as well as the Huntington theory on the conflict of civilizations, which suggests that, on the global level, between them exist unsurpassable gaps and that these are the source of constant tensions and conflicts. A great number of intellectuals and artists, in both the region and in the world, intended to, through their projects, bring into question both these theories and the enrooted prejudices on the conflicts of cultures and ideologies, as well as to subject the assumptions and images on world domination and division of powers to re-examination.’ (Ibid.)

d) Mediation between different cultural models

‘In this case, mediation is directed towards the linking of individuals and groups that belong to and generally represent one of three dominant cultural models. On the one hand, there are individuals who in an active and therefore creative way, contribute to increasing the total *fundus* of the so-called elite forms of art and culture, or are related to their reception. On the other hand, there are individuals and groups to whom forms of mass culture are the most important (film, popular music, video creativity, comic books, fashion, etc.), while the third group consists of those who still, to a greater or lesser extent, remain linked to the forms of so-called traditional culture (folk celebrations, folklore creativity, people's habits, traditions, and so on). The final goal is communication and special linkages between individuals and groups around shared contents for which, at least potentially, each one of them feels acquaintance and familiarity.’ (Ibid.)

e) Therapeutic forms of mediation

‘Therapeutic forms of mediation are most frequently directed toward individuals who have certain health, psychological, emotional problems, damage and developmental delay. Sometimes, these are difficult traumas and disturbances caused by external factors: war, broken home, social and material imperilment, different forms of physical, psychological, sexual violence or abuse.’ (Ibid.)

f) Mediation related to special needs groups

‘Mediation related to special needs groups intends to integrate into the local community different and extremely marginalized or invisible groups, such as groups with a physical or psychological handicap, by the process of sociocultural animation and gradually give them a possibility to incorporate into broader social action.’ (Ibid.)

g) Mediation related to groups with minority and specific identities

‘Mediation related to groups with minority and specific identities has the goal of indicating to the public authorities and the public as a whole, that there exist population groups of which there is no knowledge, or for which there is no desire to be known and, which are (actively or passively) denied the right to any form of support system and affirmation and therefore, are denied basic human and cultural rights.’ (Ibid.)

h) Mediation related to geographically marginalized or isolated groups

‘Mediation related to geographically marginalized groups has the goal of including often also socially endangered groups of citizens into the social and cultural life of the wider community. This is usually done through art projects of community art, or through socio-cultural animation programs – today most often performed under the name: Art for Social Change.’ (Ibid.)

All these definitions talk about the various forms of mediation, as well as the role of the artist or artistic organisations as ‘mediators’ in assisting the public in understanding art and creating the space for actualization through the transformative power of art, which will be analysed later on in this paper. The special focus of the current research is on the *mediation directed towards dispelling inter-ethnic and ideological prejudices and exclusions* through diverse examples of engaged theatres working in inter-ethnic and war zones.

4.3. Reconciliation

There are many communities and nations in the world where the relationships between neighbours and citizens have been severely damaged by war, ethnic violence, dispossession,

oppression and discrimination. In many of these settings, reconciliation is needed.

Professor of conflict studies at Eastern Mennonite University's Conflict Transformation Program Hizkias Assefa¹³ defines reconciliation as 'the restoration of broken relationships or the coming together of those who have been alienated and separated from one another by conflict, to create a community again.' He observes that the process of reconciliation is not always possible or appropriate (Assefa, 2004, Brandeis Institute). For example, when one or both parties are unwilling to reconcile, or when one party is unwilling to give up a major power imbalance to become equal partners in social and political repair.

Reconciliation can be a slow and complex process. As Charles Villa-Vicencio a leading global authority in matters related to transitional justice and reconciliation¹⁴ comments:

It is not a sudden act of moral insight. It is a process of learning. It is the beginning of a new way of living. It involves different attitudes towards, and relationships with, those from whom one often continues to be estranged. It is a relationship that places dialogue and reciprocity at the centre of the struggle to be fully human, suggesting that people are incomplete to the extent that they are alienated from one another. (2001:6)

Villa-Vicencio warns against having a tight definition of reconciliation and reducing the process of reconciliation to a neat set of rules. He further comments:

There are no simple 'how to' steps involved. It includes serendipity, imagination, risk and the exploration of what it means to 'start again'. It involves grace. It is a celebration of the human spirit. It is about making what seems impossible possible. It is about the complex business of real people engaging one another in the quest for life. It is an art rather than a science. (2001:2)

Adopting a similarly explorative definition of reconciliation, Cynthia Cohen¹⁵ a Director of the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at the Brandeis University, Massachusetts, USA describes the processes and tasks that reconciliation can involve. She describes:

¹³ <http://www.emu.edu/personnel/people/show/assefah>

¹⁴ <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/charles-villa-vicencio>

A set of deep processes designed to transform relationships of hatred and mistrust into relationships of trust and trustworthiness. These processes involve former enemies acknowledging each other's humanity, empathising with each other's suffering, addressing and redressing past injustice and sometimes expressing remorse, granting forgiveness and offering reparations. Reconciliation reflects a shift in attention away from blaming the other to taking responsibility for the attitudes and actions of one's self and one's own community. (Cohen, 2004: 6)

She suggests that reconciliation involves engagement in at least some of the following tasks, not necessarily taken in this order:

1. Appreciating each other's humanity and respecting each other's culture;
2. Telling and listening to each other's stories and developing more complex narratives and more nuanced understandings of identity;
3. Acknowledging harms, telling truths and mourning losses;
4. Empathizing with each other's suffering;
5. Acknowledging and redressing injustices;
6. Expressing remorse, repenting, apologizing; letting go of bitterness, forgiving;
7. Imagining and substantiating a new future; including agreements about how future conflicts will be engaged constructively. (Cohen, 2004: 6)

The current research aims to examine how theatre can contribute to accomplishing all of the above mentioned tasks and processes.

¹⁵ <http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/about/bios/ccohen.html>

5. TRANSFORMING CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD

Imagine the dark glow of dozen of cell phones held aloft by members of an audience in a Liberian refugee camp in Ghana. As they wait for the electricity in the hall to come back on, the glow illuminates the stage, where a circle of young people are rapping and rhyming, finding a rhythm to support their stories. Halfway around the world in Australia, similar rhythms support new relationships among Aboriginal youth, immigrants from the Solomon Islands, and refugees from southern Sudan. Imagine a plaza in Belgrade or Buenos Aires, where uniformed men with weapons monitor the scene. Women are bearing signs and speaking words that challenge the government's denial of its crimes, but something about the performative power of their actions prevents the soldiers from lifting their weapons. Imagine theatres in Cambodia, in the Netherlands, in India, in Peru. Audience members remain after performances for hours, telling stories and facing truths that, until that moment, had been unspeakable. Imagine spaces in Uganda and Sri Lanka, where new plays as well as adaptations of traditional rituals and Western tragedies allow citizens to circumvent or defy government censorship, in order to speak with each other. Imagine a makeshift stage in an impoverished Gaza community centre, where a theatre troupe performs a story about the family conflicted over the arranged marriage of a young daughter. Women from the audience take over actors' roles, shaping new resolutions to the conflict. And imagine a theatre fifty miles up the coast in Jaffa, where a future Truth and Reconciliation Committee hearing is performed by Israelis and Palestinians, actors and citizens. Imagine students in the United States, in New Orleans and New York, sharing stories in circles and on stage, young people finding the courage to challenge the racism and bullying that diminish their lives and threaten their survival. Imagine Aboriginal community elders in Australia, dancing, singing and speaking together with the descendants of the very Settlers who massacred their ancestors and decimated their culture. They perform hundreds of rituals that restore respect for indigenous people's ways of knowing, forging a path that leads to a public ceremony of apology from the country's Prime Minister. (Cohen, Varea and Walker, 2011:2)

It is maybe hard to imagine that all those performances really happened, but they did, as well as the atrocities that provoked the artists to craft them. In this way, artists around the world contribute to the transformation of violent conflict, supporting their communities to creatively resist abuses of power and to become more just, inclusive and peaceful. Their performances

speaking truths in the face of denial, restoring dignity in the face of violation, and building bridges of understanding and respect where the relationships have been broken. Politically engaged artists take risks, telling the stories people are not always ready to hear, and holding up a mirror to reflect both the good and bad realities of our society, trying to transform conflicts, and to embody and give shape to the memories and aspirations necessary for justice and for healing.

5.1. Conflict Transformation through Art

According to Cynthia Cohen, transforming conflict in situations of sustained, direct and systematic violence poses enormous challenge. The word ‘transformation’ implies fundamental change. However, change in itself can be neutral, whereas the term ‘transformation’ refers to a shift toward a more balanced, nuanced, complex, vital change of elements such as relationships, institutions, narratives, and infrastructure, as well as an increase in people’s ability to make meaning of the world around them and to grow (Cohen, 2011:10).

The term ‘conflict’ defines a difference between two or more parties that impact on them in significant ways. Conflict can be based on differences in values, power or access to needed or desired resources. Furthermore, the term ‘conflict transformation’ derives from these two terms and addresses human conflict through nonviolent approaches that increase mutual understanding and respect. Conflict transformation is flexible, both in structure and process, and views peace as a continuously evolving and developing quality of relationship, rather than a finite outcome. The framework of conflict transformation is used to describe the work of building just and lasting peace. Peace is not understood as the absence of conflict, but as the presence of the conditions that give rise to human security¹⁶ and that allow for communities to prosper.

‘Peacebuilding’, an interchangeable term with conflict transformation, is an effort to channel ‘the energy directed by conflict in constructive, nonviolent directions. Its aim is to utilize

¹⁶ The concept of “human security” places human beings at the core of concerns about safety. An introduction to this perspective can be found in a lecture by Sadako Ogata, the co-chair of the United Nation’s first Commission on Human Security, accessible at: www.humansecurity-chs.org/newsandevents/payne.html

conflictual processes for generative and positive change.’(Clements, 1997) Or, as Coexistence International envisions it, peacebuilding is working towards ‘a world where diversity is embraced for its positive potential, respect for persons is a core value, interdependence between different groups is recognized, equality is actively pursued, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete.’¹⁷ Peacebuilding practitioner and scholar, John Paul Lederach¹⁸, argues for the importance of artfulness and creativity – alongside technical and analytic skills – in the process of transforming conflict. Lederach was among the first in the peacebuilding field to write about the connection between peacebuilding and artistic practise. In his book, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, he describes the capacity required for the creative transformation of conflict as ‘moral imagination’. This capacity allows individuals to simultaneously stay grounded in the troubles of the real world and also be open to the possibilities of a better one. It is developed through the practice of four disciplines, or four principles, which are helpful in understanding why performance – and art and culture in general – has a unique role to play in peacebuilding.

The four disciplines/principles by Lederach:

- **Making relationships central and acknowledging interdependence**

This discipline requires ‘individuals and communities to imagine themselves in a web of relationships even with their enemies... The centrality of relationship... recognizes that the well-being of our grandchildren is directly tied to the well-being of our enemy.’ (Lederach, 2005:61)

- **Paradoxical curiosity**

This is the practice of holding ‘together seemingly contradictory truths in order to locate a greater truth’, coupled with ‘careful inquiry that reaches beyond accepted meaning’, and finding ‘the home of meaning in the experience of people.’ Listening to people is central to coming to understand the various truths that exist in a conflict-torn society. Often there will be entirely

¹⁷ For more information about Coexistence International visit:
<http://heller.brandeis.edu/academic/coex/faculty/ci-history.html>

¹⁸ <http://kroc.nd.edu/facultystaff/faculty/john-paul-lederach>

contradictory stories/truths, and the tricky part here is to be able to hold those two stories together in order to reach a 'greater truth'. (Ibid.)

- **Providing space for the creative act**

This discipline 'finds its clearest expression'. The goal of the creative act is to push us into other 'avenues of inquiry and ideas' in order to try to re-examine how we think of the world, how we are placed in the world, and identifying what may be possible. (Ibid.)

- **Risk-taking**

The fourth discipline is about taking chances, about risk. As Lederach says, 'To risk is to step into the unknown without any guarantee of success or even safety... Violence is known; peace is mystery. By its very nature, therefore, peacebuilding requires a journey guided by the imagination of risk.' The moral imagination 'does not just think outside the box; it is willing to take the risk to live outside the box.' (Ibid.)

Lederach asserts that these four disciplines are as important to peacebuilding as the intellectual ideas and technical skills often learned in peace and conflict studies programmes. 'Building constructive social change in the setting of deep-rooted conflict requires both learned skills and the art of the creative process.' (Ibid.)

Those processes can only be learned if one:

Explores the creative process itself, not as a tangential inquiry, but as the wellspring that feeds the building of peace. In other words, we must venture into the mostly uncharted territory of the artist's way as applied to social change, the canvases and poetics of human relationships, imagination and discovery, and ultimately the mystery of vocation for those who take up such a journey. (Ibid.)

5.2. Theatre as an Aesthetic Experience

All around the world, artists from different fields are trying to ‘take up such a journey’; by engaging people in embodied, collaborative and temporal ‘aesthetic experience’, performances generate (for artists, witnesses and participants) unique opportunities for reflection, learning and imagination. According to Cohen the term ‘aesthetic’ is used to describe ‘the resonant interplay between expressive forms of all cultures and those who witness and/or participate in them.’ She claims that there are several different aspects of ‘aesthetic experience’ or aesthetic interaction which can be composed of artfully expressive forms, such as songs, images, gestures, and objects:

Firstly, aesthetic experiences involve people in forms that are bounded in space and time. Secondly, aesthetic experiences engage people on multiple levels at the same time – sensory, cognitive, emotional, and often spiritual – so that all of these dimensions are involved simultaneously in constructing meaning and framing questions. Thirdly, aesthetic experiences engage people with forms that are able to acknowledge and mediate certain tensions, including those between innovation and tradition, the individual and the collective. Because of these defining features, an aesthetic experience is one in which an enlivening sense of reciprocity arises between the perceivers/participants and the forms with which they are engaging.” (Cohen,1997)

Artists, through theatre and other traditional or contemporary techniques such as rituals, storytelling or performative activism, all framed as aesthetic experiences, are in search of recourses to acknowledge truths and create space where suppressed history can be expressed and people can make their voices heard.

Great examples of ‘art and upheaval’ can be found all around the world – in Argentina, Australia, Cambodia, India, Israel, the Netherlands, Palestine, Peru, Serbia, South Africa, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Uganda, USA, as well as in many other countries. The current author has chosen to write about those examples based on the book *Acting Together*, interviews with some of its authors, and the fact that most of the artists who have worked on this book are the people who have greatly inspired and influenced the author’s own work in theatre and for this paper.

Argentina and Peru

In Denmark, at the Transit Festival organized by ODIN Teatret, the author had chance to talk with the Argentine scholar and theatre director, Roberto Gutiérrez Varea, about how Latin American artists and activists are helping communities to build peace in the repercussion of state-sponsored repression and terror. Varea introduced the acclaimed and well known theatre collective *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani* from Peru and the Argentinean initiative *Teatropor la Identidad* or Theater for Identity (TxI). For both *Yuyachkani* and TxI, theatre is about what Varea calls ‘the performance of collective resistance, memory and of an inclusive shared truth. Artists respond to the communal needs for memorial, for mourning, and for expression, and in doing so create work of the highest aesthetic quality.’ (Interview, 2013)

In the second half of the 20th century, both Argentina and Peru saw authoritarian rulers come to power and wreak havoc on the people. In both countries, those who opposed (or *allegedly* opposed) the dictatorship were labelled ‘subversive terrorists’ and were targeted by the government. Both regimes suspended civil rights and abducted thousands of people who were tortured, executed, or became *desaparecidos*, simply never heard from again. In Argentina, there were an estimated 30,000 people dead or ‘disappeared’. In Peru, the number was almost 70,000, the majority of whom were indigenous, Quechua speaking people from poor and marginalized communities.

When democracy was reinstated (1983 in Argentina and 2001 in Peru), both countries established official commissions to gather testimony about the atrocities, uncover the truth about the crimes committed, and seek justice. In both countries, theatre became a bridge between commission officials, human rights workers, and the people who had experienced the worst violence.

In the late 1970s, women across Argentina responded to the abduction of their children and grandchildren by organizing groups such as *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers and Grandmothers of the disappeared). These groups sought to discover the fate of their missing relatives, to reunite them (or their remains) with their families, and to resist the violent practices of dictatorship. According to Varea, ‘these groups also pioneered the use of theatrical or ritual means by common citizens to carry their message of pain,

outrage, and civil disobedience to authoritarian rule.’ (Interview, 2013) Their silent weekly demonstrations on public plazas are known throughout the world.

More than thirty years after their founding, the Grandmothers are still looking for their children’s children, who had been abducted as babies or were born into captivity. In 2000, the Grandmothers invited theatre artists to create plays to reach out to the grandchildren – now adults – who might be uncertain about their true identities. The response to this invitation turned into a multi-city festival of plays called Theatre for Identity (TxI). TxI is a unique and successful collaboration between human rights activists and artists. The festival is an annual event, reaching thousands of spectators each year.

In Peru in 2001, after a brutal civil war in which indigenous Peruvians were caught in the crossfire between a government that assumed dictatorial powers and revolutionary guerrillas, the transitional government of Peru established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to begin the process of building peace. The TRC’s goal was to establish facts and responsibilities regarding the attacks and disappearances that had taken place. In order to help accomplish this, the TRC sought assistance from a theatre company, *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani*.

Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani played a crucial role in supporting these victims and survivors, and preparing them to tell their stories. According to Varea, ‘*Yuyachkani* [was] famous for productions that combined the political theatre aesthetics of Bertolt Brecht and the anthropological theatre approach of Eugenio Barba with rigorously researched adaptations of the *performative* forms of indigenous Peruvian culture.’ Over several decades, *Yuyachkani* had built up trust with Andean communities through performances that represented their difficulties and drew on their cultural forms. Their goal was to inform the population about the TRC’s mission and its imminent arrival. Through vigils, marches, installations, rituals and performances, *Yuyachkani*’s artists helped prepare villagers to share their painful stories with each other and with the TRC.

‘The acting of the healing play,’ says Varea, ‘*re-presents* the violent interruption, offering a community a context in which to place it within the flow of the larger story. Performance *creates* a complex but accessible language to speak the seemingly unspeakable.’

Yuyachkani and TxI have both used performance to reach out to people who have experienced violence, trauma, and loss — to give voice and shape to their experiences, their grief, and their hopes.

TxI has contributed to justice in a very concrete way: through the festival, the Grandmothers have already reunited 96 out of approximately 500 abducted children with their families. In a broader sense, TxI has also inspired Argentines to seek the truth and to participate in redefining their nation. Each year, the TxI festivals emphasize the communal nature of self-reflection, of identity building, and of ethical action — all elements of peacebuilding. TxI has helped people to realize ‘that the question of identity is not just for those looking to be reunited with their families, but indeed, it is a national issue.’ (Varea, 2011)

In Peru, *Yuyachkani* has made a significant link between marginalized, victimized people and official efforts at national peacebuilding. Dr. Salomón Lerner Febres, the president of Peru’s TRC, notes the ways in which *Yuyachkani*’s aesthetic forms have been uniquely able to help the victims and survivors of violence begin to heal. According to him:

Their work draws on ancient rituals dealing with reconciliation, healing, and justice that seek solutions in a symbolic way, but that address very real circumstances in [people’s] lives... In most of the villages in rural Peru victims and perpetrators have to live with each other. I believe that art can be a kind of catalyst, to help us express the inexpressible. These are experiences at the same time so painful and so personal, and in addition, [experienced] by people who still likely live in fear and pain, that finding the right language to allow them to speak up is critical. (Cohen, Varea, Walker, 2011)

How theatre in the form of a ritual can acknowledge historical and contemporary conflicts, and transform and strengthen the relationships marked by enmity and injustice, can also be seen in Australia and the USA.

In both Australia and the United States, the relationship between indigenous people and the descendants of settlers are often characterized by alienation and mistrust, and injustices against indigenous people continue to this day. Peacebuilding scholar and practitioner Polly

Walker¹⁹ describes two rituals, one in Australia and one in the USA, both of which bring together the descendants, the perpetrators and their communities to commemorate and face the past, and to commit to building a more just and peaceful future.

In the town of Twisp, Washington, USA in 1886, the United States Army banished the Methow people out of the valley in which they lived. Since 2000, the Methow and other indigenous peoples, along with settler descendants and other area residents, have been holding a powwow²⁰ in that valley. One of their purposes, as Walker says, is to ‘celebrate the symbolic “coming home” of the Methow.’ (Walker, 2011) During these meetings, rituals are performed to mark the births and deaths of the previous year in which native and settler people engage their bodies, minds and spirits in the formation of a new community. Participants are encouraged to sustain their commitment to the community — to healing and reconciliation — long after the powwow is over. The participants are encouraged to speak about what happened at that place long time ago.

In 1838, thirty-eight Wirrayaraay people, including old men, women, and children were massacred by white stockmen along a road toward Myall Creek in Australia. Every year since 2000, Aboriginal people and settler descendants, including some of the descendants of both the victims and the perpetrators of the massacre, have walked along the route that led to the massacre site performing Aboriginal mourning rituals, including the cleansing process describing the tragic history, acknowledging the injustices taking place against Aboriginal people, and committing to continued work toward justice and reconciliation.

These two examples demonstrate how the positive impacts of rituals can help people build more honest relationships because, according to conflict-resolution scholar Michelle LeBaron²¹ they touch the ‘unconscious parts of the self where identities breathe, and meaning is made’. Michelle LeBaron writes that rituals provide the safety to enable a transition ‘from one identity to another, from one way of understanding a situation or relationship to another.

¹⁹ <http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/actingtogether/casestudies/walker/bio-polly.html>

²⁰ A **powwow** is a gathering of North America's Native people. It is a specific type of event where both Native American/First Nations and non-Native American/First Nations people meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honour Native American/First Nations culture.

²¹ <http://www.mediate.com/people/personprofile.cfm?aid=104>

This safety emerges because rituals are times outside ordinary time, when usual patterns of communication are suspended.’ (Ibid.)

These rituals and ceremonies have facilitated conflict transformation at the interpersonal level by providing symbolic embodied ways for people to come together across differences. They were part of a movement that laid the groundwork for the 2009 official government apology to the members of Australia’s ‘Stolen Generations’.

According to Walker, ‘ceremonies empower people in a number of ways, enhancing their capacities for engaging in positive social change.’

In both the USA and Australia, the colonization process included systematic suppression and degradation of indigenous practices, traditions, and beliefs. By creating reconciliation processes that draw on these practices, traditions, and beliefs, participants are reversing the effects of violence done to indigenous people. These processes are also helping to develop participants’ ability to see the world through the eyes of another culture as well as one’s own.

India

Hidden Fires is a performance written by well-known Indian playwright Manjula Padmanabhan which addresses the February 2002 Gujarat massacres in India perpetrated by Hindu extremists and resulting in the killing of approximately 2,000 Muslims, the burning of thousands of Muslim homes, the public rape of hundreds of women, and the displacement of more than 200,000 Muslims, many of whom are still living in refugee camps. The producer of the play and artist Naveen Kishore founded Peace Works, a volunteer cross-caste initiative of the Seagull Foundation for the Arts, to actively confront the prejudices and complacency he saw in his own Hindu community after the massacre. Kishore was inspired by his belief that the arts foster open-mindedness, curiosity, flexible thinking, and resistance to stereotypes, all capacities that promote peacebuilding. Kishore inaugurated the project by producing the play, *Hidden Fires* by Manjula Padmanabhan. The initiative included sending artists to schools to perform the play and holding workshops on issues like identity, prejudice, the politics of violence, and how history is written and rewritten.

The five monologues which comprise the play vary in aesthetics in addressing the pathology of hatred between Hindu and Muslim populations. In one monologue, a Hinduman describes extinguishing the lives, or ‘hidden fires’ of Muslims who are faceless, sub-human threats. Another illustrates a young anchorwoman's smiling refusal to challenge the government's insistence that the situation is not serious. The monologue *Points* refers indirectly to the riots in describing the denial of all sectors of a municipality to acknowledge rampant brutality. It thus extends the play's reach into a universal challenge to all audiences to examine their culpability in the aftermath of violent acts.

Ruth Margraff²², an American writer and artist, gives moving excerpts from several of these pieces and describes the play's purpose:

Through subtle references, the play seeks to engage with and disrupt the hidden hatreds and abuses of power that led to the Gujarat atrocities. The monologues raise questions about the nature of invisible collective identities, misperceptions about “self” and “other” and the devastating effects of stereotypes and prejudice. Hindu audiences are forced to probe their own secret attitudes toward their country-men and women and toward the 2002 massacres. When it was first performed, just a year after the violence, *Hidden Fires* hit hard, challenging audiences to call their own actions into question, and to move forward eschewing violence and embracing peace.

Margraff also expresses a belief in the effectiveness of this challenging work:

On a basic level, *Hidden Fires* provided a forum for Hindu artists and audiences to explore and express their identities as distinct from the identities of the silent and passive Hindu majority, complicit with the extremist state, police, and media. The actors were able to express, and the audiences to witness, identity as fluid and complex, not bound or defined by ethnic, religious, or political affiliations. What is revealed in the process is the agency and choice each person has about her identities and actions. So that, for example, a Hindu policeman choosing not to react to an ethnic riot raging across the street might become more aware of the fact that he is making a choice, that he has the agency to resist.

²² <http://www.ruthmargraff.com/>

Kishore states that:

Justice often doesn't happen at all. What happens is a kind of fragile peace. I don't know if forgiveness happens but there is a process which stems from a desire for peace. There's no specific point that can ceremoniously pinpoint the moment when the healing takes place. The healing is left smouldering underneath. (Ibid.)

The current author has met two members of the Indian street theatre called The Jana Natya Manch. It is India's best-known radical street theatre group. Founded in 1973, the group has done about 8500 performances of its 90-odd streets and proscenium in over 140 towns, cities and villages of India. Their work is mostly based on the methodology of Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed. Their first play, *Machine*, with lyrical, stylized dialogues depicted the exploitation of industrial labour. Janam has played a significant role in popularizing street theatre as a form of voicing anger and public opinion. It has composed and performed plays on price rises, elections, communalism, economic policy, unemployment, trade union rights, globalization, women's rights, the education system, etc. Some of its best-known street plays are *Hatyare*, *Samrathko Nahi Dosh Gosain*, *Aurat*, *Raja ka Baja*, *Apaharan BhaichareKa*, *Halla Bol*, *Mat Banto Insaan Ko*, *Sangharsh Kareng Jitenge*, *Andhera Aaftaab Mangega*, *Jinhe Yakeen Nahin Tha*, *Aartanaad*, *Rahul Boxer*, *Nahin Qabul*, *Voh Bol Uthi* and *YehDil Mange More Guruji*.²³

This form of theatre has become a vital cultural tool for workers, revolutionaries and social activists. Street theatre addresses topical events and social phenomena, taking them straight to peoples' places of work and residence.

²³ Jana MatyaManch, official website ,<http://www.jananatyamanch.org/>

Uganda

In Uganda, the violence committed by the colonial powers included the degradation and suppression of indigenous culture and performative practices. As part of their Anglification project, the British built Uganda's National Theatre, a grand forum for showcasing western culture. Ugandan artists were forbidden from staging performances there until after independence was won. Independence came in 1962, but dreams of peace and prosperity in Uganda were not realized. Since independence, Uganda has been ruled by a series of dictators, and war has touched almost every region in the country. Most recently, a war between the Ugandan military and a rebel army has ravaged the Northern region, killing tens of thousands of people and displacing millions. For more than twenty years, both sides have brutalized the civilian population, abducting children, brainwashing them into soldiers, and committing egregious violence against anyone who gets in their way.

Throughout the post-colonial period, theatre artists have been brave truth-tellers and critics of the status quo. In the first few decades after independence, many playwrights and performers were threatened, exiled, or killed because of their outspoken work. The National Theatre has at last become a forum for indigenous artists to support the struggles of the people. Playwright and scholar Charles Mulekwa²⁴ asserted that 'this monumental cultural landmark has been both a theatre of oppression and a theatre of the oppressed; it has been both a site of violence and injustice, and a force for justice and peace.' (Ibid.)

Alex Mukulu's epic play, *Thirty Years of Bananas*, was written for the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Uganda's independence and performed at the National Theatre. The play is a razor-sharp critique of the 'madness' (i.e. 'bananas') that had plagued the country for three decades. Through a series of non-linear narratives, the play tells the story of how the dream of independence was corrupted by authoritarian regimes and war. *Bananas* is set in a number of public places, including a market, a football stadium, and a museum. At each stop, something about the excesses and abuses of power is revealed. In *Bananas*, the nation's leaders are caricatured and mocked.

²⁴ <http://iwp.uiowa.edu/writers/charles-mulekwa>

The second performance presented in the book *Acting Together* is the Okello Kelo Sam's play *Forged in Fire*. The central themes of the play are the displacement, disruption, and longing caused by war. The play is a semi-autobiographical story about a man (also named Okello) from Northern Uganda who marries a woman from Central Uganda and settles his family there because the North is being torn apart by war. Throughout the action of the play, the main character's internal struggle is revealed: he longs to return home, but he cannot. He is anxious to perform a sacred and fundamentally important ritual — to bury the umbilical cord of his child in his homeland — but it is not safe for him to do so. As Mulekwa explains: 'The national boundaries instituted during colonialism are so insignificant that Okello feels virtually lost in this central region of Uganda. "I am in a foreign land," he says.'

Both plays contribute to peace by validating the experiences of those who have suffered and simultaneously challenging them to take responsibility for their future. Mukulu's *Bananas* asks its audience plainly: 'what have you done for your country?'

Forged in Fire was a more intimate and modest production. Okello wanted to bring to life for western audiences — who might be able to influence their own communities and leaders to take action — the effects of war on ordinary people in Northern Uganda. This, Mulekwa says, 'is so important because it's so easy to distance ourselves from the brutality of war when we hear it described in terms of numbers of casualties.' (Ibid.)

Mulekwa asserts that the most powerful role that theatre can play in peacebuilding is to ask the question, 'what does it look like and feel like to be living in war?' 'These questions,' he says, 'help us examine the human condition. When we see our own condition on stage, it becomes less terrifying, less impossible to discuss...we can step back and think about it with a little bit of distance, and we can begin to imagine what ought to be done.' (Ibid.)

Palestine

When the state of Israel was created in 1948, 75% of the indigenous Palestinian population was displaced; many Palestinians became refugees in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and elsewhere. In the 1967 war between Israel and neighbouring Arab states, Israel occupied two territories –

the West Bank and Gaza – that had been under Jordanian and Egyptian rule, respectively. The Palestinians living in these territories have been living under military occupation ever since. The impact of the events of 1948, which Palestinians call the *Nakba* (the Catastrophe), cannot be overstated. Families were broken up, land was lost and stolen, and 531 Palestinian villages were destroyed or resettled. The *Nakba* completely destroyed the economic, social, and cultural life of Palestine, and the enduring occupation and violence in the region has left little opportunity for Palestinians to rebuild.

In the 1970s and 80s many theatre companies sprang up in Palestine, with most of their work focused entirely on political goals: to inspire national unity and to mobilize people in resisting the occupation. Today, theatre in Palestine is still inspired by the political and social realities on the ground. Two significant organizations that are using theatre to contribute to peacebuilding in Palestine are Al-Rowwad and Ashtar.

Al-Rowwad is a community centre situated right in the middle of the Aida refugee camp. It serves a population that has long endured military occupation and poverty. Al-Rowwad teaches the children of the camp theatre skills, with the aim of nourishing their humanity and their capacities for constructive action in the world.

Each year, Al-Rowwad produces a play called *We the Children of the Camp*. While the basic structure of the play is the same each year — tracing the history of Palestine from the early 20th century to the present — the content changes each year based on the experiences, desires, and abilities of the children. Al-Rowwad staff help the children to articulate their priorities and to shape their ideas and experiences into material for the play. Students who participate in this process year after year become more comfortable sharing their opinions, talking about traumatic experiences, and expressing themselves in front of their peers and their community. Al-Rowwad's emphasis in this process is on developing young people's artistic, interpersonal, and *intra*-personal skills, rather than on delivering a product or message. The director of the organization commented that:

These children have the talent and the force to express themselves in a beautiful, nonviolent, civilized, and humane manner.... We want our children to find the peace within themselves in order to be able to deal with the world around them in a positive

and constructive way, to prepare a better future for themselves and for the generations to come. (Ibid.)

The second organisation, Ashtar, has been a professional performing and training institution since 1991. It was founded ‘on the notion that drama can help people develop life skills, including expression, creativity, emotional and psychological stability, awareness of surroundings, and tolerance.’

In 1997, Ashtar worked with the Theatre of the Oppressed and learned the approach to liberation theatre developed by Augusto Boal. Ashtar began to use the forum theatre performance method, in which audiences can interrupt and interact with the performers, affecting the outcomes of a play. Using this method, Ashtar began to produce an annual play called *Abu Shaker's Affairs*. The play is always based around the same character, but the themes vary each year, reflecting the most relevant and pressing issues in Palestine at the time. Over the years, the play has addressed such controversial issues as ‘honour’ killings, early marriage, the absence within families of democracy and equality, and Palestinian collaboration with the Israeli forces. This is consistent with Ashtar’s mission, which is, in part, to explore the places ‘where society has introduced prohibitions and taboos inducing heavy silence over matters.’

During performances of *Abu Shaker's Affairs*, audience members are able to intervene in the drama by raising questions, making suggestions and engaging in dialogue with the artists and with each other. Palestinian youth worker and scholar Abeer Musleh writes that ‘with all the discussion and debate that happens during performances,’ Ashtar’s artistic director sees the forum theatre process:

As a way of ‘giving society the tools to be democratic.’ [The director] adds that the goal of Ashtar is to help community members take ‘a critical look upon the society’ and ask themselves, ‘What do I (as an individual) want in my community and what can I do?’

Ashtar emphasizes that Palestinians must resist and overcome oppression within their own society while also resisting the Israeli occupation.

Musleh asserts that an important part of peacebuilding in Palestine is resistance to occupation and oppression. She indicates that, while people from other places might hear ‘resistance’ as a solely military word, for Palestinians the word also has another meaning. It also refers, she writes, to:

The process of building healthy and effective individuals and communities, maintaining a rich culture, and developing the social, political, and economic infrastructure required for independent statehood — all in the face of forces that seek to thwart these efforts. For many Palestinians, an important part of resisting the injustices they face is educating their own people, particularly the youth, building their self-esteem, and helping them to see themselves not as passive victims but as active citizens. (Ibid.)

The director of Al-Rowwad talks about his work as nurturing a ‘beautiful nonviolent resistance’ among Palestinian youth. He helps young people get beyond political slogans and stereotypes, and into their personal stories and feelings. Ashtar similarly empowers people to explore their own feelings and experiences, and to take constructive action in their lives. Both groups, according to Musleh, ‘are offering Palestinians non-violent ways of resisting occupation and oppression — ways that increase the humanity and agency of Palestinians rather than harming them and perpetuating suffering.’ (Ibid.)

The previous examples have focused on theatres in conflict regions; this section offers some good examples of theatres and artistic projects that explore cross-cultural dialogue, also as a tool for mediation.

The Father's Project was developed in Laakkwartier in The Hague, a largely working class community experiencing socio-economic issues and demographic changes due to immigration primarily from Muslim countries. The play was staged at the Father's Centre, ‘Adam’, an initiative founded to provide support and skills to men struggling with divorce, job loss, homelessness, and socio-cultural adjustment.

Theatre director Marlies Hautvast created the play, titled *In the Name of the Fathers*, from personal stories gathered from interviews and group discussions with the men at the centre. When production for the play began, thirteen men of different cultures and backgrounds signed on as actors. Eugene Van Erven²⁵ explains that, during the one-year development period, ‘a sophisticated inter- and intra-cultural dialogue formed the foundation for a unique collaboration between professional artists and artistically untrained participants.’

The distilled content from these interviews and dialogues was then transferred to the rehearsal space, which became a safe arena to honestly discuss experiences regarding taboo subjects such as incest, and physical and sexual abuse. The programme used improvisation to develop themes which then entered into the play. This enabled the performance to facilitate further dialogues in which the performers tackled prominent cultural prejudices. On stage, cultural ‘others’ would display familiar patterns of behaviour recognized by all. Performing these moments required the performance member to drop simplistic views of amorphous ethnic groups for a more complex view of the individual.

The story of Turkish immigrant, Bilal, is one example. Although he feared his community’s reaction, Bilal felt safe enough within the context of the play to discuss abandoning his practice of Islam. After the performance, his family was surprisingly empathetic; his father-in-law told him, ‘I never knew you were having such a hard time back then. You almost make me weep.’

Van Erven analyses what he sees to be strong and lasting effects in the community because of the aesthetic and ethical quality of the artistic process, from the initial interviews to the professionally produced play. Benefits include the deeper reflection the participants experienced regarding the confidence they gained by performing, the audiences’ appreciation of how the play’s themes resonated with the specificity of their experiences, and the manner in which a true coexistence emerged not by negating difference but by allowing the time and consciousness-raising activities to respectfully engage it.

The second project was the *BrooKenya!* Theatre project an international soap opera staged in two disparate cities: Brooklyn, NY, USA; and Kisumu, Kenya. The production explored

²⁵ <http://www.theatrestudies.nl/erven.html>

many themes within the two communities including family life, racial identity, and poverty. It highlighted the possibility of expansion of the worldviews of the two communities beyond their borders, an act that participants in the project hoped would bridge the gap of distance and culture to develop a new paradigm from existing sociocultural norms to a more universal understanding of human experience.

The project *BrooKenya!* created an avenue for intense social interaction where people appreciated and built with their differences. According to the actors, they were deeply moved by how people from different backgrounds so easily built relationships across ethnic, political and religious divides. Performing together, for them, seemed to give them the freedom to be something other than what they were defined to be, allowing them to create an immediate sense of community that transcended social segregation.

Eugen van Erven and Kate Gardner, the international community-based theatre artists from America, explore powerful examples of community theatre processes, highlighting ‘community art-making and peacebuilding’, ‘cross cultural dialogue and development’, and ‘aesthetics and assessment’. These artists discuss their work in relation to several social thinkers including, Lev Vygotsky who saw creative imagination as necessary for effective social functioning, and Jean Paul Lederach who developed the concept of a ‘moral imagination’. According to them, *BrooKenya!* and *In the Name of the Fathers* prove clear examples of the moral imagination by providing an arena for citizens to remain grounded in present reality while engaging their creative imaginations to perceive and work towards an improved future. The resulting atmosphere supports citizens to believe in their power to transform ‘what is’ into ‘what is possible’.

These are just a very few examples of the many ways in which artists and cultural workers contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

All kinds of art forms can evoke aesthetic experiences, but performance is arguably unique. Performances engage the imagination with the power of stories. Working in the field of engaged art requires a willingness to take risks, to gather strength and at the same time to be vulnerable. This space needs and cultivates the capacity for ‘presence’, as Roberto Gutierrez Varea says, ‘to what is going on with us, between us and around us.’ This ‘presence’ is the

main matter of moral imagination. The four disciplines presented in previous chapter – cultivating spaces for creative acts, taking risks in the direction of vulnerability and complexity – are all defining elements of well-crafted performances. The engagement of these elements in the service of the creative transformation of conflict depends on which issues from the community and societies are brought into the performance space.

Performances can form a space where stories can be told and revised, where issues can be named and reframed, where ethical assumptions can be examined and reconsidered, and where hidden feelings and ideas can be acknowledged by the community. These transformations can make a significant contribution to peace. In particular, peacebuilding performances both assume and inspire people to stop being passive or frozen in fear, thus encouraging a community with the power to involve, to strengthen its skills, to take action. Through performance, communities can re-examine and renew relationships, construct and revise shared history and identities.

For example, the Indian performance previously discussed demonstrates the encouragement of community to listen, to see the characters as human, and to reflect on their own stereotypes and actions. This kind of performance helps people to see members of the ‘enemy’ as humans. Likewise, in the example of *BrooKenya!* Theatre, the project helped people not only to empathize but also to imagine and begin to create a new future with others, despite geographic distance, economic disparities and cultural difference.

These examples also reflect the fact that engaged theatre is not just a matter of reaction to current issues - it is also about facing past injustices. Performances play a role in calling attention to injustice, strengthening social movements and encouraging communities to struggle for their economic, cultural and political rights. To give another example, the playwright Charls Mulekwa points out how a performance in Uganda brought a sense of paradox to the ethical questions surrounding justice and responsibility. According to him, the play *Thirty Years of Bananas* is the play that risked telling the truths about corrupt and violent postcolonial leaders, and ‘subtly and simultaneously held to account the Uganda citizenry for its complicity and naivety in bringing to power leaders who would become dictators.’ (Ibid.)

Similarly, *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani*’s performances illustrate that the symbolic world of theatre offers a quality of justice that would be beyond the reach of any court of law. According to them, ‘in the imagined world of performance, a mother can embrace her

deceased child for one last time, and the peasant hacked to death in a civil war can gather up his bones, so he can finally be buried with dignity.’ (Ibid.) For members of communities brutalized in war, these symbolic performances might address a yearning for justice with more visceral satisfaction and offer more healing than a formal trial or even public ceremonies of acknowledgment. Today, this group plays a vital role on Peru’s social stage because of the decades of work they have invested in mediating between indigenous communities and leaders. They have engaged a wide range of performative methods: participatory workshops, community rituals, and works produced in collaboration with community people, as well as highly refined artistic productions. This range of approaches allows *Yuyachkani* to reach into people’s experiences and into their communities, and at the same time serves as a bridge between groups in Peru’s highly stratified social structure.

Another example of engaged theatre can be found in Kosovo. The history of this part of Europe is very complex. There are constant conflicts and disputes between Serbian and Albanian citizens. Zana Krasniqi, director of the Artpolis theatre group and founder of the First Human Rights Festival in Kosovo – *Femme Fatale* – in the interview with the author explains her experience of the process of dealing with the past:

Artpolis artists and artists from Ghetto Theatre group were part of a laboratory process in creating a performance that tackles the topic of dealing with the past in Kosovo. We were engaged in a joint process of creating a unique performance in two languages that was later presented for Albanian and Serbian communities living in Kosovo, and was followed by discussions with Young audiences. The performance was used as a medium to bring up challenging issues such as: interethnic relations, missing people, war victims etc, and during these discussions we found out that most of the young people in Kosovo from one community (either Albanian or Serbian) have never met another young person from the other community, although the entire Kosovo population is around 2 million people.

She also stated that during their collaboration she had witnessed not only a change in attitudes among artists themselves, but also the challenging of the perceptions of the audience:

We have witnessed this impact during our post performance discussions with the audience especially using Forum Theatre as a tool, but also during joint projects

between Albanian and Serbian artists and youth from Kosovo who used theatre as a medium of communication and joint work.

She further alleges that, in a big number of cases, theatre artists have played a significant role in changing public opinion and behaviours:

Well-known artists, such as Augusto Boal or Dario Fo, played an important role not only in their countries but also on a global level, whilst in Kosovo an inspiring artist who had a similar impact was Faruk Begolli, who turned Theatre Dodona into a symbol of peaceful resistance and inspiration during 1990-99. (Interview 2013)

All these performances and artists from all around the world are in the same continuous pursuit of a new hopeful environment through their works. In this pursuit, it can be seen that performances are powerful events that can be crafted to engage people with the issues that confront their communities. Further evidence of performance's power can be found in the theatres of colonial, dictatorial, and paramilitary regimes, which seek to keep theatres dark, to silence artists' voices, and to constrain the range of permitted expression. If performances were not powerful, it is unlikely that illegitimate authorities would bother to repress them.

In democratic societies there are many other players besides the artists. Educators, activists, community leaders, peacebuilding scholars, cultural managers, policy makers, and so forth – they all have a major role to play in extending the contributions of performances as a tool of mediation. The challenge there is to support the creativity, efforts and the performances' potential to have a greater impact on societies' problems.

6. CASE STUDY: DAH THEATRE RESEARCH CENTRE

*In the contemporary world, destruction and violence can only be opposed
by the creation of sense
(motto of DAH Theatre)*

The author has chosen to analyse DAH Theatre for their strong attitude and twenty two years' long work of opposing violence and creating art. DAH Theatre is the only professional theatre group in Serbia that has had such a long tradition of engaged performances.

DAH Theatre is a Belgrade-based, contemporary, engaged, independent professional theatre devoted to the development of contemporary theatre at both national and international levels. Its main mission is to challenge current society, and oppose violence and mediate conflict sides through performing arts. Its topics and interests mostly deal with past and present issues of the society we are living in. DAH presents its point of view through creativity, with the aim of emphasizing and pointing out important and sometimes painful issues strongly opposing violence of any kind. This is not an entertainment-focused theatre; rather, its performances aim to make their audience think about social/psychological problems in our society. They are not politically oriented and influenced, but they are politically engaged and active. Social issues are very complex, and DAH Theatre is dealing with them in a very sophisticated way.

*Breath (DAH) is spirit, movement of air, wind. Hermes- Mercury, God of the Winds, is called
sihopompos- guide of the souls, because he escorted them to the other world.*

Jan Kott (Stone Brook)

*Breath: Life, Soul, Life-Force, Spiritus Mundi, Spiritual Power, inhalation and exhalation
symbolize the alternation of the rhythm of life and death, the manifestation and repetitive
absorption in space.*

Jean Campbell Cooper (The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols)

For the creators of DAH Theatre, ‘breath’ also means to breathe in, to gather strength, to persevere, to be spiritual, to honour the spirit of life – warmth, movement, creation.²⁶

Context

When the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began to come apart in the 1990s, and each of its six republics - Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro - began to press for independence, it became clear that Yugoslavia’s years of relative peace and prosperity had masked deep-seated conflicts between ethnic groups going back to at least World War II. National leaders began to use these conflicts to manipulate the people and maintain their control. Each group drew inward, while fear and hatred of ‘the others’ was stoked. In this period, many people were killed, exiled, and left without any property or home. In Serbia, there was a major economic, social, and moral fall.

There was no independent theatre movement in Belgrade (the capital of Serbia and the former capital of Yugoslavia) prior to 1991. Under the communist party that had ruled Yugoslavia, theatre was primarily state-sponsored and state-approved. However, due to the crisis of the socialist-nationalist regime of Slobodan Milošević and factors such as sanctions, the diminishing of the middle class, the spread of poverty and civil demonstrations, the alternative theatre scene began to emerge. The local scene included many theatre groups and artists in the field of performing arts such as the Omen Theatre, Plavo Pozorište, Mimart, Ister, Torpedo, Craft Teatar, Pozorište Šešira, Signum, Erg Status (Boris Čakširan), director Ivana Vujić, Dušica Knežević, and others.²⁷ The most significant, persistent and enduring in the field of engaged theatre was, and still is, the DAH Theatre.

In 1991, as Serbia was perpetrating war with its neighbours but denying that it was doing so, two directors, Dijana Milošević and her colleague Jadranka Anđelić, founded DAH Theatre. They began making work that challenged the silence and denial that had spread over the country, and that provided hope, truth, beauty, and a sense of community. ‘While the war was spreading through what was left of Yugoslavia,’ Dijana Milošević says, ‘and while my

²⁶ <http://www.dahteatarcentar.com/aboutus.html>

²⁷ Archives of the Centre for New Theatre and Dance in Belgrade (CENPI)

country changed its shape and its name, we realized that the only way to oppose destruction is to create.’

They had created the company with the intention of making non-political art for small audiences interested in alternative theatre. They were inspired by Odin Teatret and their commitment to the art of exploration and creation. But the war had started, and it was inevitable that they face that fact, in particular the following questions: ‘what is the role and meaning of theatre? What are the responsibilities and duties of artists in times of darkness, violence and human suffering?’²⁸ In order to confront the epidemic of denial that had infected Belgrade, they had to find the answers to these questions. They knew that their anti-war message would have to be both unambiguous in intent and publicly presented. This meant that it had to be heard by many people, ‘common people’, which in turn meant that it had to be taken to the streets.

DAH's first performance, *This Babylonian Confusion*, was based on the songs of Bertold Brecht. The play, with lines like ‘when those above / talk about peace / simple folks know / there’s going to be the war,’ had a clear anti-war message. When interviewed, Dijana Milošević stated that: ‘by using this Brecht poem in public we wanted to openly speak about something everybody knew was happening but no one could talk about. It created space for the truth to be heard.’

This Babylonian Confusion was set outdoors, in one of the main squares of the city, and was seen by hundreds of people. It was an unpredictable and very dangerous context. In the review of the performance, Dubravka Knežević wrote: ‘when DAH Theatre went into the street, one third of their audience of ordinary passers-by were wearing various kinds of uniforms and many were armed to the teeth.’ They knew it would be unsafe, but they had to take that risk because they had to use their privilege of having a public voice. Milošević said that many people came after the performance to thank them because they had finally heard publicly something they knew and felt to be true, but that was officially denied and forbidden to mention. What was important was that the actual change, in people, really had happened:

²⁸ http://www.dahteatarcentar_eng/aboutus.com/

While opposition on the streets was taking over the role of theatre, Belgrade's institutional theatres – safe behind their shields almost three years of war – were not able to get out of a vicious circle of lethargy. What they did not want to do, could not do, or were afraid to do, was done by a small, alternative, experimental theatre group. A group of young theatre professionals, (...) the company DAH Theatre, is determined to oppose the destruction and political insanity through theatrical creation. (Knežević,1998:59)

One of the DAH's actresses, Maja Vujović explains:

While we were rehearsing, we spent every break talking about what was going on in that moment in our country, in Slovenia, Croatia... We wanted to go out and speak to the audience. [...] we wanted to have a connection with them, to respond to the time in which we were living. We went out with Bertolt Brecht's poems and actually, that performance marked the horoscope of DAH Teatar forever. [...] it started with a big need, an artistic need to say something that is bothering you. (Research interview)

Throughout time, great theatre masters have said that the first steps of a theatre group determine its destiny. This performance absolutely determined the destiny of DAH Theatre, forming the main postulates of its practice:

The forming of DAH Theatre and its cry of creation coincided with the fall of ex-Yugoslavia and the general destruction that followed. Theatre directors Jadranka Anđelić and Dijana Milošević, together with the actress Maja Vujović, decided, perhaps subconsciously, to oppose the destruction with creation, to create, in the midst of a world falling apart, a micro cosmos of theatre. (Knežević, 1995)

Throughout 1994, the war continued to rage on various fronts. Out of questioning the sense of being artists in this terrible moment, the ruins of many lives, and the ruins of the devastated countries, the performance *The Legend of the End of the World* emerged. The short description of the performance states that it is 'based upon researching the myths of creation and re-creation, as well as the traditions which preserve knowledge about the death and meaning of life – from the standpoint of three contemporary women who evoke archetypes

from the past.²⁹ The authors of the play recite a terrible litany of human destruction through the ages, trying to find a way to create new life from the wreckage that surrounds them.

It is clear that DAH Theatre continued in its pursuit for sense and hope, as the following reviews illustrate:

In one enigmatically beautiful image, they pour out bags of salt to form a massive hieroglyph round a miniature town square, itself harbouring their treasured photographs. It's an image of desolation, isolation, yet somehow of hope, and out of the anguish emerges a forceful plea for life. (Fisher, 1995)

This is DAH Theatre performing *The Legend about the End of the world*, an exotic mix of mythological storytelling and primal dance-theatre. Many of the themes reflect the confusion and madness of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the troupe's home. (Scott, 1996)

It is a theatre forcefully driven by the desire to sustain and re-create life out of the ruins of a society that has allowed itself to be suffocated' (Malpede, 1996).

Some scholars argue that politically engaged theatre, or engaged art in general, usually lacks an aesthetic aspect. Those who support such theories usually stand at one of two extremes: aestheticism (*l'art pour l'art*) or radical utilitarianism and didacticism. (Đorđević). In DAH Theatre's case, it is important to notice not only that they had been posing intriguing questions, and challenging the public opinion, but also that they were doing it in a highly professional aesthetic manner. Although their topics were political and engaged, they did not lack excellence in their performing and directing skills.

At the same time, they were focused on social topics and issues, as well as on developing of artistic disciplines as specific new forms of performing based on new, contemporary methodologies. According to Dijana Milošević, a performance has to have integrity and excellence in order to resonate with audience. She states that 'it is important to have the passion and ideas to share, but the execution of those ideas is equally important.' In fact, Milošević asserts that what allows DAH to make such emotionally, socially, and politically

²⁹ http://www.dahteatarcentar.com/predstave/legendaokrajusveta_eng.html

indicted work in such a difficult environment is the ‘commitment and artistry of the actors.’
As another review reiterates:

The Legend about the End of the World is a remarkably honest performance for which we feel a great need today. In the treatment, the "shaping" of the scenes and story, the authors of *The Legend About the End of the World* combine scenic movement and verbal speech; the interaction of these elements provide the performance with a greater and total significance. The fascinating energy and ability of the three actresses Maja Mitić, Sanja Krsmanović and Valentina Milivojević has incorporated itself in a remarkably honest, and by all means true, performance that we need greatly here and now; also because maybe, for a moment, it brings us back to ourselves. (Milosavljević, 1995)

In the interview with Dijana Milošević, she points out that from the very beginning she witnessed the profound effect of theatre on people, and that this was what made her stay in the country. One of DAH Theatre’s mottos is the quotation from B. Brecht’s poem. ‘will there be singing in dark times? Yes, there will be singing about dark times.’ As she goes on to say, ‘we have chosen this path, it could have been another one. It was not acceptable for me to create some easy comedies in the moment when one hundred kilometres from Belgrade someone was getting killed in our name.’ She further claims that one of the most important things is to acknowledge the victims: ‘it is the first step in healing and transformations.’

The war finally ended in 1996, but the turmoil in Kosovo continued. Fear, anger and sadness all influenced DAH’s work, but there was no giving up; in fact, their work became even stronger. Their agonies had taught them that they could rise above victimhood – they had the power to generate their own ‘light in the darkest times’. In the performance *The Helen Keller Case*, with courage, determination and imagination they had rediscovered a sense of the future. This performance talks about Helen Keller, the famous American deaf and blind writer and fighter for human rights; the story emphasises the need for communication, the need for the touch of the ‘other’. In the interview with the actress Maja Vujović, she recalls that in her working demonstration, *Inner Mandala*, she talked about this performance as if it was a country – Helen Keller was a metaphor for Serbia in the nineties – blind and deaf, but still had to find her way out of the darkness and silence.

By the end of the 1990s, no significant political changes had happened in Serbia, and the situation worsened – the NATO bombing began in 1999. Dijana Milošević recalls:

We were so confused, angry and desperate. All these years of working against destruction, and here we were the targets. It was dangerous and unreal – insane, but we kept on working. We needed to be doing something more powerful than the bombing.

Out of this ‘insanity’, a new performance was born – *Documents of Time*. In this play, two old ladies are the carriers of knowledge and memory. They represent the struggle to understand the situation. The sentence with which the performance ends is written by the already mentioned Helen Keller at the end of one century and the beginning of another:

This century, this wonderful century is coming to its end. And right in front of us I see the gate of the new one, on which in letters of light are written these words: this is the way to wisdom, light and happiness.

DAH Theatre members believed that this performance was responsible for making them ‘sane and alive’, and taking them forward to better times. Dijana Milošević said: ‘in performing that piece, I found I was able to forgive and understand the world.’

Since the dictatorship of Slobodan Milošević (no relation to Dijana) fell in 2000, DAH has taken up the role of continuing to pose difficult questions and create the spaces that are necessary for the country to move forward into democracy, responsibility, and peace. As Maja Vujović states:

DAH Theatre is a place where I have no limits. My shelter is there, as well as my power. My salvation, because by accepting the responsibility on what and how we work, our thoughts, memories and longings return to their real origin, and in that way we transform ourselves into better human beings. As an artist, I chose to correspond with the time I live in, but the cruel circumstances of my country increased that responsibility, and that responsibility through time became a healing one. In the performance *The Maps of Forbidden Remembrance*³⁰ we ask ourselves: how long a

³⁰ Coproduction with 7 Stages Theatre from Atlanta, USA, 2001

vigil does historical violence impose on us? How far can or should my personal responsibility extend for injustice I did not commit? Searching for that answer in theatre has a healing power by itself.

In this performance, they created a scene where they were listing the names of people who disappeared during the war in Bosnia in Srebrenica and in Russia under Stalin, and included the list of slaves in USA, missing people in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship, and Albanian and Serbian people killed in 1999 in Serbia and Kosovo. Some people could not stand hearing these facts, but for some it was the strongest moment in the performance. For DAH artists it was based on the understanding that through these actions they have to create balance in the world they live in.

After seeing the performance, the director of Mostar Youth Theatre from Bosnia, Sead Đulić, commented that a single scene devoted to the Srebrenica issue by a Serbian group meant more than a whole play about it performed by a Bosnian group. DAH Theatre performed this play in different countries (Serbia, Bosnia, USA), and in all of those countries it served for peacebuilding. This performance mediated more than any other. In Serbia it meant that the hidden history was revealed, a voice given to those otherwise silent. In Bosnia, where the atrocities were the worst, the audience could hear the other side; by acknowledging the victims and injustice, the performance publicly helped the audience in the healing process. In the USA the performance informed people about the tragedy and inspired similar processes of facing the past. This showed that theatre can be a place to tell the truth, give testimony and take responsibility.

Besides other projects and performances done in collaboration with different artists and artistic groups, DAH Theatre always expresses its poetics connected to the position of an individual in dark times and history. Their next project relevant to this study was *In/Visible City*.

Following the surge of Serbian nationalism in the 1990s, incidents of ethnic intolerance and racism increased. It was in this context that DAH Theatre created a theatrical action called *In/Visible City*, addressing the disappearance of the city's diversity. The action was performed as a pilot project on Belgrade's public buses in 2005.

The main goal of the project *In/Visible City* was to make the multi-ethnic structure of the cities in Serbia and the richness of different ethnic cultures more visible. To re-discover what has become hidden, even though it has been part of our culture for centuries. Through the performances on public buses, that "told" the multi ethnic history of the cities, through cultural exchange-barters and round-tables about inter-ethnic tolerance, through a documentary film about the project and the travels of DAH Theatre Research Centre around Serbia, we wanted to contribute to the normalization of relationships between different ethnic communities. We want to contribute to the development of a civil society that is based on tolerance. Through these activities we remind our audience that our culture, history, state and everyday life is inter-weaved with the influence of different cultures and that the cities in which we live today have been created by the work and creativity of the citizens that lived there, regardless of their ethnic origin. The positive reactions of the audience and public affirmed that this action was much needed by the citizens of Serbia.³¹

Performers (actors, dancers, musicians) were 'strange passengers' on the buses, characters from various ethnic groups. An actor playing the role of 'tour guide' led the passengers along the route, bringing their attention to the multi-ethnic history interwoven also in the contemporary life of the city. And they succeeded in their intention – the performance jarred people out of their daily routine and brought them back to a time when public buses were places in which people of different backgrounds mingled without any concern that something bad may happen.

As Europe was facing the same problems with social exclusion and discrimination and violence against racial and ethnical minorities, DAH Theatre decided to bring this Action from the local and national to a more European level, especially after success of the international pilot project in Norway in 2007-2008. The cooperation between four theatres (DAH Theatre from Serbia, Teatret OM from Denmark, Prodigal Theatre from UK and Art Media from Republic of Macedonia) began in early 2009 after the success of the first *In/Visible City* in 2005 in Belgrade, and of the second *In/Visible City* in five cities in Serbia in 2008 (winning the ERSTE Foundation Award in 2009).

³¹ http://www.dahteatarcentar.com/predstave/nevidljivi/nevidljivi_grad_eng.html

The main aims of the project remained the same: to raise public awareness about the rights of minorities, tolerance and equality by using a theatre event in public transport; to empower minority groups to defend their rights and cultural identity, and encourage them to express themselves in the most creative way; and to provoke public dialogue about the rights of the ethnic minorities. In addition, the education of young people in tolerance and ethnic minority rights, achieved by offering them tools which are close to their spirit – theatre (dance, music, multimedia performances, etc) and art / culture in general – was an important segment of the project. Moreover, with the text of the performance they could gather information from discussions on the round tables in which local and international actors, creative people and human rights and minority organisations were involved.

The current author of this research was one of the performers in this project and was thus able to observe audience reactions on the spot. From their reactions (crying, smiling, dancing, and singing together with the performers), it could be concluded that they did not just enjoy it deeply, but were moved to say ‘what did they do to us,’ referring to the atrocities of war – they were deeply moved by the insight that nationalism is one of the roots of violence in Serbian society.

In Europe the reactions were almost the same. The audience was eager to hear the stories about their neighbours, participated in the performances, and had been very active in round table discussions asserting that EU countries are facing the same issues. This demonstrated that theatre has the power to educate people about ‘the other’, and that it can serve as a tool for mediation.

Using different starting points for the development of their performances and different spaces (theatres, museums, libraries, buses, plazas, other public spaces) to perform in, DAH Theatre is able to reach diverse sectors in the Serbian population, in part also through collaboration with different artists from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and international colleagues around the world, and in part with activist groups such as Woman in Black³². These collaborations have lasted for two decades, during which time they have crafted street performances and theatrical plays to raise awareness about gender inequality, human rights, militarism and nationalism in Serbian society.

³² Women in Black is a women's anti-war movement with an estimated 10,000 activists around the world. The first group was formed by Israeli women in Jerusalem in 1988. In Serbia they were founded in 1991.

The performance *Crossing the Line* is one of the many results of their collaborations, and is one of the best examples of mediation. This performance is based on the book *Women's Side of War*, edited by the Women in Black organization (2007). The book is a collection of women's authentic testimonies about wars that had happened on the soil of the former Yugoslavia from 1991 till 1999. The book consists of testimonies, statements, letters and memories that show the specific suffering of women in war, as well as their courage and strength in overcoming the trauma of war and establishing a normal life. The book also highlights the importance of solidarity with women across borders and divisions.

The main goal of this performance was to establish a process of dealing with the past. One of the techniques employed to achieve this was to reach the audience not only on a verbal but, primarily, on an emotional and psychological level, and to stimulate women to start speaking and through the confession of their own sufferings to recognize the sufferings of others. Other aims included developing solidarity and gaining insight into the essence of violence in war; being more active in the democratic processes; and participating in building righteous and long-lasting peace.³³

When DAH Theatre was invited by Women in Black to create the performance based on the book, they immediately accepted. When they applied for grant funding for the project from the Serbian Ministry of Culture, they were rejected with the words: 'it is too early to talk about these issues.' This did not stop them and they continued their work on this play without sufficient subsidies, believing that the stories from the book ought to be heard.

According to the critic Nenad Obradović:

The performance *Crossing the Line* was announced as a possibility of women to speak about their own sufferings and anxiety that they have lived through during the war, whose consequences they are still enduring. The performance does not only succeed in that, but with its performative effect activates the spectator to rethink the *harsh theme* of confronting the past that is still an undergoing process. If we can consider that it started at all. (Obradović, 2010)

³³ http://www.dahteatarcentar.com/predstave/prelazeci_liniju_eng.html

Obradović asserts that this performance was created with number of scenic symbols and sub-dramatic rituals, by which it creates, in the Brechtian sense, a tense relationship with the audience while trying to cast a light on the dark side of women's suffering and their hidden emotional atrocities. As the director Milošević herself described, the performance was an impulse to 'transform darkness or the terrible image into clear physical and spiritual distress on the scene.'

This performance courageously and without any restraints faces the social indifference. Obradović claims:

That it is not just a chronicle of personal suffering but goes deeper and further, placing the artist in its midst and asking him/her to define him/herself. That is visible in every step of the magnificent and intimate interpretations of actresses Sanje Krsmanović Tasić, Ivane Milenović, Maje Vujović. The actresses notably, tragically, with readiness and critically, speak out the text with a lot of personal feeling (relation character-actor) but also with a lot of defiance towards the audience (relation actor-audience member). (Ibid.)

The actress Maja Vujović testifies 'my personal is always political, because I as an artist use also my social/political being in creating material for the performance'.

Obradović discuss several questions in this performance – the question of forgiveness, open wounds of the past, process of healing, the moment in which 'the victim is eye to eye with its hangman' claiming that, somewhere on its margins, this performance faces this question. The stories of the performance of the play *Crossing the Line* are just one little part of the women's side of war, and according to him:

Even though we are not yet ready to publicly hear their testimonies and to publicly feel ashamed because of the silence and ignoring, it seems we are not yet ready to live with ourselves. Still, as Hannah Arendth states: 'From all, the best will be the ones that know that, as long as we live, whatever happens, we are condemned to live with ourselves. (Ibid.)

Some local reviewers, such as Isaković (2009), were concerned that the 'constant repetition of theories of survivors, while necessary for facing the past and re-examining responsibility, at the same time runs the risk of annulling them, making them monotonous so they lose the real

voices of the women survivors.’ Milošević, however, believes that ‘live words presented through performance have a much stronger impact on the audience’ and that the real words of the women are what captures the audience’s attention. She also believes that one of the main features of this production is that it:

Only tells the facts without political accusations, so even the extreme nationalists were silent because we took the stories of women from all of the former Yugoslavia: from Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia. That was very important because it was a sort of equalising, not in the sense that we all suffered the same, but that a victim is a victim, regardless of his/her nationality.

In the interview with the actress Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, she refers to the words of her character Plotnikov from the performance *Travellers* in 1999, that reappeared again in *Maps of Forbidden Remembrance* in 2001: ‘the only way to heal the wound is to talk about how it was made.’ She poses the questions:

How can we go on if we don’t talk about this? If we do not find a common ground, if we do not find ‘humanity’ again in our relationship? Because it is so easy to judge and it is so easy to just forget and bury, and the biggest thing is, because of this not talking about what happened before, during, and after the Second World War, in Bosnia, in Croatia, we had no idea that these things, these wounds were still so deep and that they would just explode in our faces. But then when all this started to happen I realized there was more to it and nobody actually talked about it, dealt with it in the right way. So this was why it was so horrific in the nineties.

The most negative reactions DAH faced were accusations that because the majority of the stories were about Bosnian Muslim women, they gave more voice to ‘Bosnian victims’. DAH replied that the play was not ‘a set of scales, so we did not have a kilo of stories from each region and that most of the stories are from Bosnia because the worst crimes happened there.’

Milošević does not think public exhibitions of emotion, such as crying during the play, are the main indicator of success as some directors might claim. However, the strong emotional reactions of the public are important because they may be the first steps towards reconciliation and healing. By using the women’s own words, DAH broke down the distance

between observers and participants and enabled an emotional connection between them. DAH also expected rational self-reflection and a critical view of the performance from the audience; in order to facilitate this, the director and actors held ‘conversations’ with the audience after each performance. These conversations were based on both the performance and the book, and were moderated by a facilitator from the troupe. After the discussion the floor was open for members of the audience to share their war-time experiences, and some women spoke out about these for the first time. The fact that these women survivors felt comfortable and safe enough to do this in public after all these years is testament to another of the play’s important achievements. In this respect, *Crossing the Lines* has helped these women to realise that they are not the only ones who experienced pain.

This performance clearly created a ‘safe space’, a crucial element in mediation and peacebuilding. According to Roberto Varea:

The safe space in relation to conflict is the inclusive place where, 'because it is art/theatre' defences can be lowered to allow us to listen to 'the enemy' and have 'the enemy' listen to us, which, in a profound way, means allowing for a 'common humanity, a common human experience' to be seen on 'the other' by both sides. A 'safe space' can be built to 'express the inexpressible' to find a language to discuss and address matters that no other human engagement would allow. (Varea, 2013)

Olivera Simić, a human rights lawyer from Griffith University, Australia, asserted that:

Watching this performance is of significance for the law. Not only is it a witnessing of a testimony that otherwise would not be heard in a country where there is no truth and reconciliation commission, and whose justice system is slow and largely hidden from the public eye, it is also an invitation to speak out. By improvising a truth commission on stage, DAH and its verbatim theatre allowed women in the audience to testify about the violence committed against them. The theatre provided a safe space in which these universal yet unique stories could be told and in which any ex-Yugoslav woman can recognise herself, reflect and re-visit her war time experiences. *Crossing the Lines* gives human face and voice to all women who have suffered the horror of war. By allowing members of the audience to recognise the pain of ‘the other’ as their own pain, and to empathise with ‘the other’, the performance plays a role in transitional

justice processes, reconciliation and healing. I believe that such a form of theatrical expression can do what conventional legal forms cannot. It offers a woman the necessary time and space to express herself as she wants to by embodying her experience through the full and free expression of her body and voice and by permitting her to tell her story from beginning to end. (Simić, 2010)

Since its premiere in 2009, this performance was carried out in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovakia, USA, Kosovo and Denmark, in more than 30 cities and over a hundred times. In all these countries it had a different, but at the same time equal, impact on people. For example, it resonated with the USA audience on violence upon women in general. In the interview with Dijana Milošević, she states that: ‘after the performance many people approached us in the USA from different communities, speaking about domestic violence, child abuse, violence happening in their own homes, and all of that was initiated by the stories by the women from our region.’ She also commented that the home of artists is the world:

We are from this region and our responsibility comes with that to speak about what happened here, but also I feel the United States also very much like my home, and people in the United States or in Europe should not forget many things either.

As another critic observed:

The performance *Crossing the Line* is the one and only truly politically engaged performance that we have had the chance to see in Serbian Theatre since October 5, 2000 (Paković, 2011).

DAH Theatre members always start from their own personal wounds. They always start from the personal burning desire to explore certain topics, to say something, to stop the silence, to make it public, to address, to try to initiate change. They do not sit and talk to find a topic related to social justice; rather, they discuss the issue that concerns them personally in the society they live in. They question topics such as xenophobia, nationalism, genocide, missing people, rape, war, social injustice, human rights, and gender inequality. They are socially

extremely aware, but the ideas start from their personal obsession. They strongly believe that theatre has the power to change first ourselves, to change our communities and that the artists have the power of public voice, which is ‘an incredible privilege, and with that goes a huge responsibility.’

According to the actress Krsmanović Tasić:

At DAH Theatre performances one does not expect to be entertained, but moved, and provoked. It requires an engagement on their part, but also gives them a deep satisfaction and impact that stays within them for a long time. We, as artists activists, perform the work of ancient bridge builders, connecting banks of opposed lands, trying to find a channel for communication to begin, being in the forefront of it all. But unlike these builders, our stones are made of our words and actions, and the thing that binds them is our quest for truth and a better world.

Milošević states that, beside the main goal of DAH’s performances, which is to make people think about a particular issue, the performance also has to have:

A spiritual dimension that can bring also healing, because without it, then we would be doing the same job as people who are dealing with the law and the justice, and the courts. But our mission is to remind, not to let people forget, to keep the memory alive, to bring this spiritual dimension into the picture because without it, it is impossible to live.

Krsmanović Tasić said:

We are transforming together the space where we are performing a “theatre ritual”. And in this way as in ancient times, something is changed. If through our interrelation of energy and through the messages and information that we are giving the audience through our performance that we always try to, that we are on a high artistic and skills level, so that audience will not judge the skills and judge how we are performing but just take it directly into their... as we usually say, into their stomach. Because we want people to perceive with their “guts” that what we are doing is much more than intellectually. There is this semiotic and intellectual part that is important. I really feel

it changes in the atmosphere and something changes, even if we provoke some people to start talking about their own personal problem or story, or injustice. For me that was a huge step because sometimes this way of doing art opens people on many levels.

For Maja Vujović, an important segment in theatre is giving people their space. For example, performing *Crossing the Line* in Bosnia in front of the women whose texts were used in the performance itself was the most significant experience for the actresses. According to Vujović, 'it's not only art, it really goes to the phrase *art for social change*.' From the tour experiences she claims that:

As actors we could really give the space to these woman, we gave them power, we gave a political context and we really uncovered something; plus, after the performance when we met those women, and talked and hugged each other, we made peace because she is a Muslim and we are Serbs and we were in the war and somebody from our side killed somebody from her family; then on the human level, acknowledging her tragedy, we could make a bridge.

Milošević summarizes the many ways in which theatre can contribute to peacebuilding:

Theatre helps remove barriers between people and nudges them to face the truth and overcome harsh experiences...Theatre can answer people's need to understand the moment they live in, and it can help them meet the fear, anger, prejudice, pain, and suffering in safe surroundings. It can remind people of the suffering of others. It can influence people profoundly without political pressure and propaganda. It can give the energy of life manifested in the dancing, singing body of an actor. It can make people smile together again.

DAH Theatre has been the recipient of numerous awards, as well as a couple of very significant awards for political theatre and achievements in this field: the Otto Rene Castillo Awards, established in 1998 to recognize and support the ongoing development of political theatre internationally for a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting human development through the use of performance, on and off stage. In 2009 they received the ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration, and then in 2011 the Jelena Šantić

Foundation presented an award to DAH Theatre Research Centre for its activities and achievements in the scope of social values – tolerance and preservation of peace.

‘On the international front, Cynthia Cohen cites Serbia’s DAH Teatar and Peru’s four-decade-old Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani as prime examples of theatrical peace-building’ (Horwitz, 2013).

The project *In/Visible City* and the performance *Crossing the Line* were the crucial moments for the author of this thesis. They not only inspired the author’s further devotion to the arts, but also changed her perspective of the possibility and potential of theatre. By participating in these projects, the author was able to observe the audience’s reaction and talk with them after the performance, seeing the change in them on the spot. It was a life changing experience which inspired the author to devote herself to culture and art.

Based on all these examples examined in this paper, and from the author’s personal experience of working in engaged theatre, it can be said that the changes through art can be seen in individuals, in relationships, in communities, and even in some policies in laws, which shift due to strategically planned performances. While engaged theatre is not enough to change society, it nonetheless plays a vital role in creating the spaces for relevant social themes to be put ‘on the table’ and to be part of an ongoing social dialogue. It also plays a critical role in finding an expressive language for otherwise difficult, complicated and complex matters that are not easily addressed by other mediums.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is said that theatre is not enough to create social change, but that it can deeply influence the public and public opinion that are inaccessible by other means. This paper has argued that engaged theatre can significantly contribute to the transformation of conflict and support communities in dealing with the traumatic past. In order to make a difference and to act to strengthen work towards mediation, peacebuilding and social change, the author has set a

series of recommendations based on the current research, analysing considering relevant theoretical debates, the contribution of many cultural practitioners worldwide, and the experience drawn from the observations and interviews conducted for this research.

These recommendations are steps that can be taken by policy makers, funders and cultural practitioners in both the art and culture, and justice and peace fields:

1. Strengthen the emerging field of conflict transformation performances through the development of centres where conferences can be organized and literature on these topics can be provided; where performances can be documented and shared; where critical self-reflection is supported; where evaluation methods can be tested; and where artists and cultural practitioners can be educated and trained.
2. Support the creation and production of performances that contribute to social change, peace and justice through grants and exchanges among artists and cultural workers from communities in conflict; encourage collaboration between practitioners working in the field of transitional justice, human rights, mediation, economic development, gender equity, youth development, etc., and artists, supporting international cultural exchange.
3. Encourage arts and culture groups to involve activists and activist groups in activities, such as in developing dissemination strategies for performance programmes, or facilitating pre- and post-performance dialogues.
4. Bring artists and cultural workers together in planning peacebuilding strategies and funding priorities; involve cultural leaders from relevant communities in the planning and designing of initiatives.
5. Create or support cultural productions and institutions that directly or indirectly contribute to nonviolent resistance and reconciliation, i.e. those who are trying to influence social change through performances, symposia, panels, training related to the moral imagination, social justice, culture and the arts.

6. Engage students, scholars, educators, artists, critics and cultural leaders in exploring the concept and disciplines of mediation by organizing workshops, readings, conferences, performances with round tables or panel discussions, films, international exchanges, and festivals.
7. Support local, regional, national and international tours of exemplary peacebuilding performances that serve better understanding and mediation between conflict sides.

8. CONCLUSION

The theatre is the finest medium of intercourse between nations. It reveals their most cherished aspirations. If only these aspirations were revealed more often ... the nations would shake hands, and lift their caps, instead of training guns on each other.

Konstantin Stanislavski

The medium of theatre, like other art forms, has never received any considerable measure of attention from government and its agencies, perhaps because it is considered an ‘unserious business’ and a ‘time waster’, and therefore not capable of engendering development. Given these negative perceptions of the theatre, especially alternative theatre groups, it is difficult to conceive of it as capable of generating any form of development, both for the individual and the society. However, the functions and manifestation of theatre in our society today have taken on a very radical dimension, such that the entertainment value has received a ‘de-emphasis’. The role of theatre now is to serve a more constructive purpose: one that will contribute to social and revolutionary change in society. According to some scholars drama/theatre is one of the agents of socio-political change. Drama’s impact is also direct and more immediate than other forms of expression.

The functionality of theatre is no longer in doubt, as many people have come to realize the potency of theatre. It has the power to influence thought and opinion, and can serve as a popular and effective means of political propagation, economic empowerment and culture diffusion. In fact, according to Zulu Sofola, the first published female Nigerian playwright

and dramatist³⁴, theatre is a ‘medium through which the soul of man reaches out beyond itself to transform’. The medium of theatre as a communicative art has a very high correlation with development. It can act as a stimulant or tranquilizer for people to understand their individual self and to channel their potentials towards a collective social development. As a tranquilizer, theatre can function to bring about peace and calm in conflict situations.

From the examples described in this paper, it becomes clear that the role of theatre in modern times has gone beyond entertainment alone; its role now is conditioned by social forces, and not mere aesthetic diversion. It is at the service of life, and contributes to the development of the society in much the same way as does the engineer and the economist. If advocated and explored to its fullness, the nature of theatre can create the awareness that conflict is antithetical to societal progress and development, by helping people to understand the relevant issues through metaphorical communication and by providing a communal experience, which relates the individual to groups, and the groups to the forces controlling the society. In this way, the theatre through performance can utilize the abundant ethno-cultural materials contained in song, dance and music to meet the challenges in ethnic struggles.

The theatre as an alternative conflict resolution mechanism employs the democratic methods of conflict mediation and remediation. These methods create the desired consciousness and engender the awareness that may enlist people in the process of identifying the remote and immediate cause of the conflicts, analysing their needs and making choices that would best suit them. Engaged theatre in resolving conflict can help people to hold effective discussions and work out strategies for dealing with the socio-economic and political conditions that affect them. It is a platform by the people, and for the people, which helps in stimulating a process of community or group problem solving and actions. In the words of Paulo Freire³⁵, ‘theatre can bring the community together, building community cohesiveness, raising important issues... creating a forum for discussion of these problems and stimulating group action.’ (Freire, 1972:14)

It has been advocated in conflict resolution and management strategy that a grand alliance and coalition of ethnic groups be encouraged, based on the argument that this would create

³⁴ <http://zulusofola.com/>

³⁵ **Paulo Reglus Neves Freire**, (1921 – 1997) was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who was a leading advocate of critical pedagogy. He is best known for his influential work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which is considered one of the foundational texts of the critical pedagogy movement.

improved interpersonal relationships. It is here, again, that theatre can act as a cohesive force that can relate the individual to the group, and thus towards a collective positive attitude that can engender peace and development.

The argument for theatre as a medium for conflict resolution in conflict regions is one that places it as a tool for remedial, non-formal education to ‘conscientize the people’ (using the words of Augusto Boal), and make them aware of their potential of channelling their individual energies collectively towards addressing the numerous problems they are faced with, and not pick up arms that will cause further destruction to lives and properties. Specifically, performances are used to stimulate the awareness among the contending forces that lasting solutions to their problems can be achieved through constructive dialogue, understanding and trust in their ethnic struggle.

However, in spite of the fact that the medium of theatre can communicate and if not cause, then make a significant pressure towards change in the society of a nation, particularly in conflict management and resolution, the government and other concerned parties must live up to the agreements reached, if further peace is not to be breached. One can notice that dealing with the past, for example, in the context of the former Yugoslavia remains intractable because of the refusal of the authorities to implement decisions and policies that will affect people’s lives.

Conflict is a social condition, which generates tension in society. In whatever form it takes, whether as religious or inter-ethnic conflict, the nature of resolution and management can help to define and shape its consequences on the people and society. When not properly managed, it could degenerate into full-blown violence that can lead to a disruption of the socio-economic structure of the state. Conflict in any society can stagnate the economy and hinder growth. It is therefore fundamental that, for long lasting peace, unity, harmony and progress, issues capable of generating conflict must be identified, analyzed and managed using the best models of conflict resolution. It can here be argued that, for any development action to be effective, an understanding of the conditions for harmony and peace should first be explored and exploited, and all issues relating to conflict and development addressed, bearing in mind the interest of the people (for development is about people). It is in this regard that the theatre can play a significant role in conflict mediation and remediation. Throughout history, art as subversion has played different roles in social processes, due to the diverse contexts in which it developed as well as the forms of artistic expressions and methods used. ‘Art precedes

social upheaval by articulating the essence of social and political issues. It speaks about and in the name of the oppressed and forgotten – people, races, classes, generations.’ (Dragičević-Šešić)

It is evident from this discourse that theatre can help to objectify the various programmes in conflict management. The theatre in its active form can help to stimulate and sustain the participation of the people along developmental lines. It is hoped that the functional importance which the theatre has assumed in recent times will be sustained through the involvement of government and public institutions, on account of its relevance and interventionist role in the development of society.

Theatre can help people celebrate their strengths and maybe build their self-confidence... But above all, it can be the way people find their voice, their solidarity and their collective determination.

John McGrath³⁶

³⁶ John McGrath, (1935 –2002) was a British playwright, theatre theorist and founder of the Scottish popular agitprop theatre company ‘7:84’

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The University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies -
<http://kroc.nd.edu/facultystaff/faculty/john-paul-lederach/>

United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security - [www.humansecurity-
chs.org/newsandevents/payne.html/](http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/newsandevents/payne.html/)

Utrecht University Theatre Studies - <http://www.theatrestudies.nl/erven.html/>

Wikipedia - <http://www.wikipedia.org/>

Zulu Sofola - <http://zulusofola.com/>

BIOGRAPHY

IVANA MILENOVIĆ POPOVIĆ

Date of birth: July the 1st, 1981 in Belgrade

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PROFFESIONAL STATUS

Independent Artist/Actress - Member of Association of Dramatic Artists of Serbia

Actress and Program Coordinator of DAH Theatre Research Centre

WORK EXPERIENCE (Management and Arts)

DAH Teatar Research Centre, Marulićeva 8, Belgrade

- 2012-2013 EU IPA project *Empowering Young Women to Monitor Government Commitments in Gender Equality*, World vision.org
Project Coordinator;
- 2012 PR management
- 2011-2012 Theatre Festival *Passing the Flame*
Organization;
- 2011 WEB designer
Design, maintaining, uploading and editing of website;
- 2010 Institute for Actors and Directors
Coordinator and logistic manager;
- 2008 Member
Actress and Program Coordinator;
- 2005-2008 Collaborator: Actress and Dancer

Center for Artistic Dance, Marulićeva 8, Belgrade

2004-2008 Permanent co-worker with the Centre for Artistic Dance

DRM Theatre (The Diverse Mindship), Borivoja Stevanovića 15, BGD

2003-2006 Organizer and actress

DAH Theatre Performances

- 2013 *Presence of Absence*; directed by Dijana Milošević
- 2012 *Dreams and Obstacles*; directed by Dijana Milošević
- 2011/12 *In/Visible City*; collaboration with Teatret OM (Denmark), ArtMedia (The Republic of Macedonia), Prodigal Theatre (United Kingdom) and Voix Polyphoniques (France);
- 2011 *Tender, Tender, Tenderly*, directed by Dijana Milošević;
- 2010 *The Nastasijević Code*; directed by Dijana Milošević;
- 2009 *The Legacy of the Nastasijević family* – performance as a part of the Festival of A Writer: The Secrets of Momčilo Nastasijević ;
- 2009 *Crossing the Line*; directed by Dijana Milošević;
- 2008 Participated in the project *Sence of Place* in production of Grenlandfree Theatre, Porsgrunn, Norway;
- 2008 *In/Visible City* in collaboration with Grenlandfree Theatre, Porsgrunn, Norway; directed by Dijana Milošević;
- 2008 *In/Visible Neighbours*; directed by Dijana Milošević;
- 2007 *In Search of the City* - Collaboration between DAH Teatar and fragment theatre from Switzerland; directed by Dijana Milošević
- 2006 *Guide Through an Alternative History of Belgrade* directed by Dijana Milošević;
- 2005 *In/Visible City*; directed by Dijana Milošević;

Since 2003 performed in many other performances and short movies by various directors.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- 2012 Currently enrolled in UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management MA Interdisciplinary Study Program, University of Arts Belgrade;
- 2006 Graduated at the Philological Faculty, Group for Slovakian Language and Literature, University of Belgrade;
- 2000 Graduated XI Gymnasium in Belgrade;
- 1996 Graduated ballet school “Lujó Davičó” in Belgrade;

Courses

- 2006 Course in management, marketing and public relations organised by the non-government organisations network in association with the Youth Exchange Europe (YEU);

Languages

Mother tongue: Serbian

- 2009 German language - level B1, course held by the Goethe Institute in Belgrade;
- 2006 Slovakian language - level C1, graduated at the Philological Faculty, Belgrade;
- 2006 French language - level A2, course held by the Centre Culturel Francais, Belgrade;
- 2004 English language - level C1, course held by the Faculty of Philology;

Other

- Daily use of good technical knowledge (Windows, Word, Excel, Internet, Dreamweaver);
- Clean driving license (since 2001.)

References

Available on request.