

# “YOU-ARE-ME”:

*A case study on social theatre’s potential to create space for intercultural dialogue in the context of Bologna, Italy*



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European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations (EMMIR)

Date of Delivery: 30th of June 2019

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feeling feels closer to truth than anything I have ever known.

– Alok V. Menon

# Abstract

In a time characterized by globalized migration patterns and consequential cultural diversity, intercultural conflicts, prejudice and xenophobia are potential threats to peaceful co-existence. However, research on the topic of intercultural dialogue is often vague, traditional and overly theoretical, despite a growing need for new and creative ways of facilitating dialogue amongst people ascribing to different identities. This dissertation aims to explore what an artistic and creative approach can contribute in this regard, and in the format of a case study, it asks: How can social theatre create space for intercultural dialogue in a multinational workshop in Bologna, Italy?

Guided by principles of participatory action and art-based methodologies, the 8-week workshop “YOU-ARE-ME” was held with a group of Bolognese inhabitants from 14 different countries. Data material was gathered through questionnaires, participatory observation in all drama exercises, and post-workshop individual interviews. The findings indicate that the method of social theatre could better the chances of dialogical moments with its influence on the participants notions of their similarities and differences, the communication amongst them and the role and importance of facilitation. Overall, social theatre could enable showcasing of human complexity and paradoxes, interpersonal bonding, empathy, vulnerability, individual development, storytelling, embodied expression and realization, and raw expression, as well as impacting group atmosphere and levels of comfort and discomfort. However, distinct limitations to the theatre approach were visible in the data, specifically concerning time, drama experience, power and facilitation. All in all, this study demonstrate how social theatre can be a fruitful approach to create space for dialogue with enough time, skill, scrutinization of power relations and proper facilitation. Furthermore, its findings point to the importance of including the role of facilitation and embodied realities and expression in future research on intercultural dialogue.

**KEY WORDS:** intercultural dialogue, social theatre, art-based research, participatory action research, migration, Italy

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation is made on the shoulders of many, and I am humbled by everyone who paved the way, stood at my side, and had my back throughout.

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Duduzile Ndlovu, of the African Center for Migration and Society at the University of Witwatersrand. Thank you for so openly and enthusiastically accepting my request without hesitation. You let me make a piece of work that is true to myself, whilst providing valuable guidance and advise along the way.

With a special mention to the university staff in Oldenburg, Stavanger, Johannesburg, and Mbarara for your support and assistance during this two-year process. And to the EMMIR team in general – I am so grateful to have had the privilege and opportunity of having studied at a program so academically open-minded, practically oriented and unafraid.

The utmost of gratitude goes out to those of you in Bologna. The resilient staff at Universo, I would have lost hope without you! Thank you to all participants, for your willingness to do your part for a world you believe in. And to Antonio, without you there would not have been a project. Thank you for your endless positivity, open mind, and open heart. Someday I hope to pay your selfless professionalism forward to someone young and hopeful in need of it.

I cannot neglect to mention my friends in Oslo. You are family, and I love and cherish you for keeping up with my absence and continuous couch crashing. Hanna and Lotta, you rescued me in a time I really needed it, making my research process much less lonely.

I am so grateful to my family, especially my parents, who aside from providing me with endless moral and emotional support in my life, have given me a set of skills and perspectives that have come to be increasingly valuable as I grow up. I thank you for trusting me in finding my ways, and for always reminding me to not take myself or my choices too seriously. You showed me how to live in a combination of heart, head and gut.

And finally, last but by no means least, my cohort 7 family. You have all taught me more about intercultural relations than I would ever get from the books. Truly, it has been a privilege working, traveling, and dancing alongside you, and I am honored to say I now have friends all over the world. Love and productivity!

Thank you!

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

In life, we encounter a multitude of experiences and sensations, some individual, some collective in nature, many of them emotional, others more rational. Our experiences are physical, mental, neurological and spiritual. We regard some as very personal, others not at all, and sometimes they feel like both. It is in the magnificent intersection between amongst these elements of life that the focus of this dissertation lies. Its two main thematic pillars; intercultural dialogue and social theatre, are understood here as both potential spaces and tools for simultaneously collective and individual experiences of transcending sensory connection and insight. By exploring how social theatre can create space for intercultural dialogue between people, an aim in this master thesis is to engage in bridging the gap between academia and the creative arts, actively using the qualities of each knowledge tradition to better understand the complex and multidimensional world we live in. With an 8-week workshop with participants from all around the world as a case study, this thesis makes the case that, within this specific context, framework and limitations, social theatre can better facilitate for moments of intercultural dialogue, depending on some important factors of influence.

That being said, I find it essential to reflect on an impossible, paradoxical irony that continuously came up throughout this research process. With an essential strength of these two themes being their potentially transcending quality, I found myself wondering: How can I explain the unexplainable? Do I even want to? Why would I try to describe something so complex about the human life, that it will ultimately lead to a simplified reframing confined into one hundred pages of academic text? I always ended up with the same answer: I won't. To justify myself I seek the help from the poet, thinker and modern-day philosopher Alok V. Menon that I have chosen to quote in the beginning of this thesis. *Feeling feels closer to truth than anything I have ever known*. This thesis is an academic piece of work, but a part of it is, in a sense, not. What I have come to think, or rather feel if you let me, is that there will always exist an element in life, specifically in the world of art, that surpasses all human rational and logical comprehension. There is something untouchable, something larger than life in artistic expression that I will not dare to smother or mold with diagrams, forms and analysis. Thankfully, the methodologies used in this dissertation with their contemporary academic methods, principles, and rationale allows for this assumption to exist while at the same time ensuring a high level of professional accountability. That being said, I am well aware that for some with more traditional views on academia, this thesis relies on a potentially unacademic assumption, strictly speaking. I assume, due to our common human nature, that the reader will understand and recognize themselves in these larger than life

moments. The feeling of becoming suddenly overwhelmed by emotion from a simple painting, when the sound of a gospel choir hit you in your guts, when a theatre play makes the hair in your neck rise for an hour straight, or the experience of drums in unison connecting you to all of your senses. I assume that in the search for truth and knowledge, unexplainable feelings have a role, and their marvelousness is what makes them important.

With that out in the open, other essential elements need to be accounted for to properly introduce this research. In this chapter, I will present the background and justification of this study, as well as its main research question and objectives and purpose. Additionally, limitations to the scope of the study, underlying assumptions and a few ethical considerations will be accounted for.

## **1.1 Background & Justification**

Migration is a human phenomenon which introduces multiple possibilities and challenges for individuals, communities and societies at large. Today, this multitude of effects is larger than ever before, as the globalization process typical for this day in time is "a multidimensional and multidirectional process involving accelerated and increased flows of virtually everything – capital, commodities, information, ideas, beliefs, people – along constantly evolving axes" (UNESCO, 2009:6). Many of these elements are connected to culture, and regardless of ones understanding of how fluid or rigid cultures may be, it is safe to say that interactions between people with different backgrounds, languages, practices and traditions result in positive and negative cultural exchanges, conceptions and encounters. This master thesis centers around the larger theme of intercultural relations and the intercultural co-existence resulting from today's migration processes. Multicultural encounters impact in different ways both migrants and members of a host community, and it is important to further understand what can be done for this co-existence to be peaceful and understanding, as multidirectional migration is a part of the human experience that will likely never cease to exist.

The encounter central for this thesis is that of a multicultural drama workshop which took place in the geographical context of Bologna, Italy in the beginning months of 2019. The choice of location is not coincidental, as Italy can be considered a geographical center for today's discussions on migration into Europe. Historically regarded an emigration country, Italy has in recent years experienced a shift in trends and has become a major receiver of immigrants (Monticelli, 1967:10). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the country was the third largest receiving country of migrants and refugees in 2018, only exceeded by its neighboring countries Spain and Greece (2019:5). Therefore, Italy finds itself in the midst of the so-called "refugee crisis", which in this thesis is understood as a discursive shift in recent years amongst European policy makers, media and general public,



rather than the common conception of an actual political and social crisis (De Genova & Tazzioli, 2016:3). This discourse perpetuates current trends and patterns of immigration into Europe through a heightened lens of securitization, chaos, threat and emergency (De Genova & Tazzioli, 2016: 5-9). Consequently, the depiction of migrants themselves have followed in the same footsteps, where descriptions of migrants, particularly those coming from the Global South, as “terrorists”, “law-breakers”, “potential rapists”, “culturally alien”, “perpetrators” are normalized (Parker, 2015: 5-10, De Genova & Tazzioli, 2016: 9,12, King, 2016:15-16). This discourse is also prevalent in the context of Italy, where racist rhetoric against immigration and immigrants is a prevalent feature on social media and in the political sphere (Orrù, 2015:115,121). From this rhetoric, tension and conflict between migrants and non-migrants, as well as amongst migrants belonging to different subcultures, are arguably more likely to happen. In fact, Italy saw a dramatic increase in hate crime and xenophobic attacks towards immigrants in 2018 (Tondo & Giuffrida, 2018). That being said, ever since a larger number of migrants started arriving in the country in 2015, a substantial portion of the population have counteracted this prominent rhetoric and attitudes with pro-immigration sentiments in both organized and individual ways (Zamponi, 2018:101-102). The city of Bologna is also historically seen as a left-wing city, with one of its nicknames being “the red”, referring to its affiliation with communism and left-wing politics (Heywood, 2015:855). That being said, Però accounts for an important tendency within this context, which is that there seems to exist a certain dualism and lack of consistency on the topic of immigration amongst the left-wing in the city, where inclusion and acceptance often only seem to reach a rhetorical level rather than a practical one (2005:852).

As mentioned above, growing diversity includes growing potential for conflict, as intercultural encounters take many forms and are influenced by multiple factors that exist on the micro, meso, and macro level. Because of this, scholars stress the need for new and different approaches to studying diversity, dialogue and co-existence (UNESCO, 2009:9,31). With this in mind, two central questions regarding the premise of this research need answering: *Why dialogue? And why theatre?*

As a term, dialogue will be further discussed and explained in the following chapter, but it is important to first clarify why it has been chosen as a focal point in this thesis. The most apparent motivation is connected to the above statement – research on dialogue is increasingly needed in a reality characterized by increasing diversity. Furthermore, an active choice has been made to focus on dialogue rather than the common concept of integration in studies on intercultural relations. In this research, the interest does not lie merely in how theatre can assist in the integration of non-Italians into the Italian society, but rather how theatre can serve in a more open intercultural encounter between different people. By doing so, I seek to avoid the connotations, insinuations and assumptions connected to the

integration term regarding prescribed roles of “insider” and “outsider”, as well as unequal responsibilities of conformability. The dialogue lens can therefore be said to provide another way of studying co-existence which to a lesser degree insinuate a desired end result of the encounter, other than it being peaceful and non-violent.

As for the justification of using art, in the format of social theatre, as a thematical focal point and data collection method, it can be said that this choice comes from a wish to build on recent developments within relevant study fields, where the role of art in societies and peace building efforts is increasingly being understood as valuable, worthy and relevant for academic research (Cohen, 2015:5, Wood, 2015:1). As will be further accounted for in the following chapters, social theatre and its artistic element hold many qualities that can prove beneficial in dialogical processes. However, through reviewing literature for this master thesis it may seem that there is a gap in the majority of research, where the actual process of exercising drama activities in itself is either taken for granted or missing as an object of study. Additionally, the focus in most of the literature lies on drama as individual therapy, storytelling, or empowerment, and is studied as specific communicative activities, but not necessarily within the framework of dialogue as it is defined in this dissertation. Furthermore, the choice on social theatre is connected to its embodied qualities and how this element is not specifically taken into account in most literature on dialogue. As Acarón states: “understanding embodied expression and movement in social sciences and peace related studies is in its initial stages” (2018:4).

## **1.2 Research Question, Hypothesis & Objectives**

With the already mentioned political and social tendencies regarding Italy’s relationship to migrants and migrations in mind, it is important to explore in new and creative ways how human relationships can be shaped for a more peaceful and understanding diverse society. A main hypothesis in this master thesis is that social theatre can possibly function as a unique and able facilitator, platform and/or creator of intercultural dialogue. Additionally, the focus of the research is limited to the area of Bologna, Italy. Therefore, the main guiding question for this research is the following:

*How can social theatre create space for intercultural dialogue in a multinational workshop in Bologna, Italy?*

The formulation of this question is intentionally done in such a way that it does not epistemologically consider a possibility where one can draw a definite conclusion of the link between theatre and dialogue. Specifically, by asking if theatre can *create space* for dialogue

rather than *facilitate* or *create* dialogue, the question avoids the false premise that a direct causality can be proven in this relatively small research project.

### **1.2.1 Purpose and objectives**

The purpose and objectives of this thesis has a dual but interchangeable nature. It is partly driven by academic pursuit, where a main purpose is to contribute to a broader academic movement which acknowledges the importance of including art and creativity when studying human life. A main element in this motivation is also to intentionally include the body as a central aspect of creative expression and lived experience in both the data collection and the analysis processes.

Additionally, this thesis is also motivated by the purpose and objectives of the workshop case study, as I from an ethical standpoint found it important to not only 'use' the participants for a research project, but to collectively create an enlightening experience for all parties involved. The overarching objective of the workshop was to attempt to facilitate intercultural dialogue between people from different nations and cultural backgrounds, that now reside in the same area of Italy. Additionally, three intermediate objectives were formulated together with the local partners involved:

- Provide and create a safe space for open communication, collaboration and expression between people who identify with different perceived distinct cultures
- Use dramatic expression as a tool for dialogue and test out the hypothesis that this form of expression can better facilitate genuine dialogue because of its unique qualities
- Encourage active participation amongst participants in the making of the thematic direction and aims of the workshop, thus ensuring a greater personal gain for the participants

This duality in the purpose and objectives, which includes both academic and social aims, demonstrates an aspiration to contribute to an academic branch where research is done responsibly with practical and productive outcomes, as well as a personal motivation to contribute in the many dialogue building efforts across the globe.

## **1.3 For the record**

### **1.3.1 Scope of the Study**

In addition to the already mentioned thematic and geographical limitations for this thesis it is necessary to elaborate on additional limits of its scope. It is the view of this author that some limitations are unavoidable, and that recognition and awareness of them is more important

than an attempt to conduct limitless research. In terms of the participant group there are multiple limitations that affected the process and outcome of the study.

Because I lack knowledge of the Italian language the workshop was conducted with continuous translations between English and Italian, done by the drama facilitator Antonio Graziano. This led to a limitation where migrants not specifically comfortable with either of these languages had a higher chance of being excluded from the research, though a couple of the participants actually fitted this description. Additionally, the methods used to access the participants put limitations on the research. As it will be accounted for in the methods chapter, participants were accessed through the local partners' networks, Facebook groups, and flyers and posters. Even if the chosen collection methods aimed to reach many different people, it can be said that people living outside Bologna city center, with little contact with the outside and/or online world were difficult to reach. Furthermore, the participants who joined the workshop all had a general willingness and wish to meet, interact and learn from each other. While a workshop between people specifically chosen for their unwillingness and prejudice would be quite interesting, this task would require more time, effort and resources than this research project had, as it would be an even more complicated and intricate process. Lastly, another limitation regarding the scope of this study is that it focused on a group of mostly strangers. This was an active methodological choice with the aim of giving a clearer view of perceptions and prejudice that were not personal from the beginning. This of course limits the possibilities of research to be done on already existing drama groups, which could have been beneficial in studying more complicated forms of theatre and drama.

### **1.3.2 Assumptions**

In addition to these practical limitations, this thesis includes some basic assumptions that in different ways have steered the course of the research. First of all, it works with an assumption that peaceful, non-violent and tolerant societies is something worth striving for. Additionally, it builds on an understanding that social change can be possible partly through interpersonal encounters and development. As DeTurk states, "communication at these levels allows for a measure of direct and immediate feedback that has the potential to challenge people's otherwise transparent and taken-for-granted assumptions. These individual-level changes, collectively, can provoke system-level change. This is the hope of intergroup dialogue" (2006:36). In relation to this, it is important to note that this thesis understands individual learning according to Mezirow's conceptualization, where it takes on two different forms:

[...] *instrumental learning*, in which people learn from engaging in task-orientated problem solving or learning from doing; and *communicative learning*, in which people learn from

understanding the meanings of what others communicate 'concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labour, autonomy, commitment and democracy' or learning by interpreting (as cited in Billbrough, 2013:63-64).

Lastly, an important assumption to clarify is the use of terms 'culture' in this thesis. Intercultural dialogue in itself insinuates and legitimizes the notion of cultural differences, and this insinuation is not something that should indulged in lightly. This research strives to simultaneously acknowledge and challenge the common "tendency to interpret cultures as homogeneous entities, as fixed, immutable blocks, instead of seeing them as heterogeneous, changing constructions, as well as to assume that people only identify with one particular culture or set of values at once" (Rodríguez-García, 2010:256). While the academic standpoint guiding this thesis challenges this common conception, it is also important to recognize and incorporate understandings from outside the academic bubble, which includes the participants own conceptions of culture and the political and discursive reality they find themselves in. Therefore, concepts such as culture, intercultural dialogue, and cultural differences are used in this thesis, but through a continuous critical lens. Neglecting the participants own perceptions would only reproduce the type of academic rhetoric that is detached from its research objects and would go against the guiding methodological principles for this dissertation, which will be accounted for later on.

### **1.3.3 Ethical considerations**

As in any research, there were multiple ethical considerations that had to be taken into account throughout the process. Power dynamics between researcher and the researched and individual's specific vulnerabilities were topics that infiltrated every stage in the planning and conduction of the workshop. Factors such as economic resources, language skills, skin color, gender, education level and the different roles in the workshop were all taken into account and critically reflected on. The aim was to always be aware of these issues, as abolishing them completely was not regarded a possible or realistic task.

Additionally, due to the vulnerability necessary for fruitful drama exercises and the potentially sensitive subject matters, I had an obligation as a researcher to make sure the drama exercises were conducted in a responsible and well thought out manner that minimized the risk of (re)-traumatizing or inflicting harm upon the participants. As Acarón states, "the world of the arts awakens the self, nurtures some, torments others, and guides many. The key is in the education, the background, the limits, and structures that sustain and promote security while at the same time allowing the individual to fly" (2011:247). This conviction influenced the motivation for finding a sufficiently skilled and professional drama instructor, a process that will be elaborated on further later in this thesis.

Lastly, as of any research done with particularly vulnerable groups of people, as migrants in the context of Italy can be regarded to be, an ethical responsibility lied upon me as a researcher to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to be anonymous in the presented research, and that all documents with their personal information were handled with care and confidentiality. None of the interviewees quoted in this work wanted to use a pseudonym, and the ones who did during the sessions are not named. Because of the language barriers, I was careful to ensure that all important information was provided in both Italian and English, in both written and oral form. I also put the lower age limit to 18 years old, as indulging minors in this research would have added an even more complicated layer of ethical responsibilities and concerns.

# Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

## 2.1 Dialogue

### 2.1.1 What is intercultural dialogue

Intercultural dialogue is a concept that has grown to be a much used, much discussed term in both the academic, political, and policy-making spheres. An issue connected to this is the common misuse or overuse of the term, where generalization and vagueness are widespread features (Feller & Ryan, 2012:354, Holmes, 2014:2). It is therefore important to discuss some of these common misconceptions, and how the term will be understood in this thesis.

Before delving into the technicalities of how intercultural dialogue is understood in this dissertation, we first explore a more existential approach. As Gurevitch affirms, in its essence, “dialogue begins with an other” (1989:161). Regarding *intercultural* dialogue, Witterborn elaborates this, by stating that cultural difference is regarded as a main “basis for engagement” “the assumption of an intercultural interaction presumes first that people identify as a cultural Other, and second, that this cultural Otherness is an ontological given” (2011:122). According to Gurevitch the otherness among individuals is essential as the dialogic connection between people materialize in the combination of two equally important ways that can be viewed as contradictory: the way of the common and the way of the strange. The way of the common involves that “participants gear themselves toward forming a shared world of meanings through which they connect with one another and assume mutual existence in a common and immediately understood world” (Gurevitch, 1989:161). The way of the strange on the other hand, “focuses on setting the other at a distance as an other who stands at her or his own separate center and cannot be reduced to common understanding” (Gurevitch, 1989:161). In other words, for dialogue to occur, both acknowledgement of conflict and commonality is necessary.

With this perspective as a starting point, it is useful to account for some common definitions being used when discussing the term. Several scholars operate from a linguistic basis, emphasizing verbal communication between two or more parties as the basis of dialogue (Wasserman,2001, Dessel, Rogge & Garlington, 2006, DeTurk, 2006). Furthermore, a specific definition present that is frequently used in the literature reviewed is the one formulated by the Council of Europe (2008):

Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or worldviews. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and

ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes. (As cited in Ganesh & Holmes, 2011:81)

As this definition shows, the contemporary term of dialogue involves more than merely communication between two or more people. The Council of Europe suggests that elements like acknowledgement of cultural differences, understanding, equality and freedom as important aims. Both accepted and critiqued, the definition in this context serves only as an entry point into a further discussion on the topic of defining dialogue. Additionally, Phipps adds an important element to dialogue that seems to be taken for granted or ignored in the rest of the literature reviewed. This involves how intercultural dialogue, according to the author, should not be understood as a spontaneous occasion, but as a framed and controlled setting:

Intercultural dialogue does not happen by assertion or through repetition and exhortation in policy documents. It happens because spaces and structures are created, and principles laid down which will enable it to be practiced. It does not happen because experts generate content based on difference. It requires spaces of equitable relations, imagination and where multiple identities and frames can be held together (2014:119).

Before going any further, it is important to emphasize that the dialogue term is not a universal truth. As Ganesh & Holms reminds us, what is to be understood as dialogue depends on the specific cultural context, and definitions and meanings of the dialogue term is to be viewed as a production within these geographical and cultural spaces. Therefore, the authors stress the necessity of an “ambiguity and definitional expansiveness” in the scholarly process concerning the term (2011: 82-84). This perspective functions as an underlying basis for the rest of the argumentation in this thesis.

#### 2.1.1.1 Genuine dialogue and its requisites

Due to the ongoing overuse of the dialogue term mentioned above, intercultural dialogue in this thesis will be understood as a very specific form of encounter. Rather than working with a set definition, some crucial elements of what can be called genuine dialogue will be accounted for. These elements are all recurring topics in the literature reviewed, which intentionally include literature of authors from both the academic and practitioner working spheres.

Perhaps the most important and recurring element, which is also present in the definition above, is the notion that dialogue differs from other forms of encounters in its respectful and understanding nature. It is not merely a reference to an intercultural encounter but requires an active qualification of the parties and their attitudes towards the encounter. In this sense, dialogue is to be understood as something inherently different from 'discussions', 'negotiations' or 'debates'. This understanding is further elaborated by the Norwegian dialogue practitioners Bryn, Eidsvåg and Skurdal, when they explain that dialogue differs from these three other forms of communication



because of its goals. According to these authors, the goal in a dialogue is to achieve understanding and listening rather than winning the argument, gaining knowledge or agreement, as shown in the figure 1 (as cited in Incerti-Théry, 2016:10).

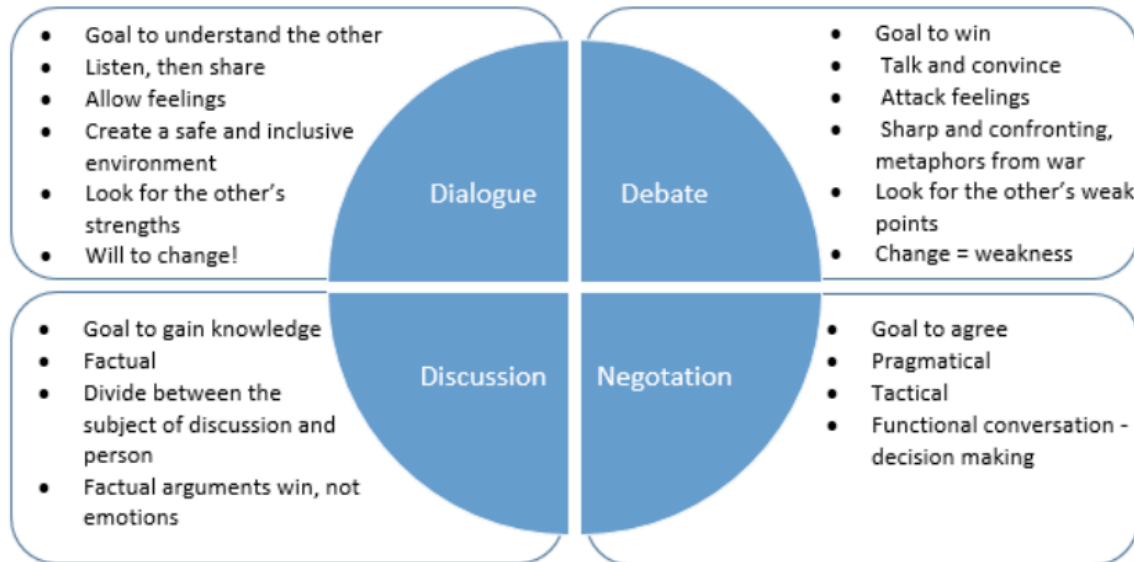


Figure 1. Forms of communication, drawn by Bryn & Hareide, developed by Incerti-Théry (2016)

Following this perception of understanding being the goal of dialogue, Ganesh and Holmes further support Gurevitch in their reflections on the need for an open definition that equally embrace consensus, conflict and collaboration as possible outcomes and/or elements of dialogue (2011:81). In this sense, the possibly strict understanding of dialogue as something inherently harmonious with an optimistic outcome is challenged.

An important aspect of this lies in the necessity for acknowledgment of difference during the dialogical process. Regardless of the academic or factual illegitimacy of people's' perceived cultural differences, it is important to take them seriously to achieve dialogue. As Jones points out: "genuine dialogue concerns bringing differences to the forefront and not minimizing or suppressing them in the name of equality and sameness" (1999:304). Witteborn reminds us that *the way* difference is navigated and addressed is crucial for the potential success of dialogue (2011:112). The author explains that in dialogue, there is a possibility for people to "develop awareness of difference as a persuasive and relational process and a self- and other-ascribed identity positioning, not an ontological given" (2011:123). Failing to address difference, especially in groups with diverse ethnicities, races and nationalities, can lead to a taken for granted establishment of notions of equality and sameness, which perhaps is not the case in terms of distribution of privileges and experiences of oppression. The tendency some majority group members (e.g. white people) have for enforcing utopic sameness as a dominant value in diverse groups, must be viewed in light of historically embedded sociopolitical power dynamics. A want to "start from scratch", meaning failing

to bring differences in lived oppressional experience to the light, is deeply connected to a neglect of the past and an unwillingness to acknowledge one's own benefiting from an oppressive world system (Jones, 1999: 310-13, Warren, 2008:292). In this sense, this tendency can obstruct the making of genuine dialogue, as Gurevitch explains:

When the effort to conduct a dialogue is based on this assumption of a common world, it not only creates understanding regarding that which is common, it also indicates to the dialogic partners that that their strangeness – that is, that which separates them from each other as others – cannot be noted or acknowledged in the dialogue, but instead must be glossed over according to the rules of understanding (1989:163)

Furthermore, it is essential that the acknowledgment of difference escape generalized labeling and forced upon group-identities, and rather happens through acknowledgment of the people involved as subjects (Witteborn, 2011:115-18). Highlighting difference through generalized labeling can lead to increased conflict, and be “a seed of alienation, opposition, and war” (Gurevitch, 1989:162). Gurevitch approaches this complicated matter through introducing the concept of “not understanding”. According to the author, the ability to not understand involves an active engagement which involves letting go of preconceived conceptions of one's other, debunking “what has been appropriated already as “understood” from an egocentric/ethnocentric perspective whereby one projects onto the other the identity of, for example, a sex object, vicious enemy, inferior or superior race, “the other (dark) side” of reason, truth and justice” (1989:162). By being able to not understand the other, one can “restore the other party's freedom as other to participate on an equal level as a free, independent party to a dialogue” (1989:162). Gurevitch points to two main components essential in the process of not understanding: the ability to realize how you in fact have perceived the other, as well as the capacity to see yourself how your other see you. Achieving this is, according to the author, necessary for genuine dialogue, where “shifting the center from the self toward the other and taking the other's role allows one to gain not only a new understanding of the other, but also a new understanding of the self” (1989:164).

This dialogical requisite of seeing people as individual subjects is mentioned by several other scholars. Witteborn builds on Buber's conceptualizations of I-Thou and I-It points in communication, and states that dialogue can only happen when the persons perceive each other “as unique, unquantifiable, and present beings”, and that politicized perceptions of others as objects is one crucial obstacle towards creating genuine dialogue (2011:111). This is supported in the 2009 report on dialogue and diversity from UNESCO, where they press that intercultural competencies for interactions are needed to create dialogue:

These abilities [intercultural competencies] are essentially communicative in nature, but they also involve reconfiguring our perspectives and understandings of the world; for it is

not so much cultures as people – individuals and groups, with their complexities and multiple allegiances – who are engaged in the process of dialogue (2009:9)

Following this, some fundamental abilities are specified: “Rather than knowledge of others, what determines the success of intercultural dialogue is the basic ability to listen, cognitive flexibility, empathy, humility and hospitality” (2009:10). This is further supported by many scholars, including Gurevitch, who emphasizes that listening and sharing is not enough if not done with the right terms. “Explanations offered to and for the other, exchanges of information, rituals of sharing, and manifestations of empathy are not necessarily conducive to real understanding and cannot resolve the core problem of the dialogue” (1989:165). The author argues that the essential element of listening to understand lies in the ability and the willingness to “give up information and explanations” you already hold about your other, so that you will meet them with the openness and curiosity that is required for genuine dialogue to take place (1989:164).

With all these different requisites in mind, a crucial reminder that should be present during the whole dialogical process, is the importance of existing power relations within the group. In any personal encounter there will always exist some form of power dynamics between the individuals, relating to e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, physical (in)abilities, religious identity, sexual orientation, and many more. This could be an argument for the impossibility of 'true' dialogue in practice, as one condition for successful intercultural dialogue:

[...] lies in the acknowledgement of the equal dignity of the participants. This presupposes recognition of – and respect for – diverse forms of knowledge and their modes of expression, the customs and traditions of participants, and efforts to establish a culture-neutral context for dialogue that enables communities to express themselves freely (UNESCO, 2009:10)

Connected to the topic of power, an interesting question is brought up in existing literature on the achievability of genuine dialogue. Some scholars say power dynamics need to be overcome to a certain degree in order for genuine dialogue to happen (Maoz, 2001:190, Ganesh & Holmes, 2011:84)). At the same time, several working definitions can be interpreted in the direction that power dynamics should be non-existent for dialogue to occur (Phipps, 2014:109). In this thesis, the approach taken on this issue builds on scholars that state that power dynamics exists and cannot be erased completely, and that they have to be openly confronted through constant critical awareness, willing and open listening, and empathy (Holmes, 2014:2, Jones, 1999:307).

### **2.1.2 A limitation of traditional understandings of dialogue**

Upon reviewing relevant literature in the field of dialogue, it became quite clear that the term normally refers to solely verbal expression and communication. With a few exceptions where

theatre or dance were methods in question, the authors took for granted that dialogue was verbal, with few exploring its expressive boundaries and potentials. As a consequence, language and words are often problematized (Jones, 1999:307, Phipps, 2014:110), but there lacks a deeper exploration of bodily communication and expression as part of the dialogical process. Several scholars pointed out the limits and inadequacy of verbal communication in adequately conveying our complete experiences and emotions (Gurevitch, 1989:162, Jones, 1999:307-308). As Lederach points out, his experience with dialogue on sensitive topics of conflict often does not go far with solely talking. "People talk at and then around things, and they go around and around again. So many things are said and then repeated" (2005:70).

Out of this realization, some scholars have begun exploring the importance of non-verbal expression and communication specifically in relation to the dialogical encounter. The body and embodied realities have become increasingly included in research, because, as Nicholson states: "just as spoken and written language carries social meanings, so does the body [...] The body is a discursive category, a site of struggle" (2005:59). One dialogue worker and scholar that has developed an understanding of the dialogue term outside its traditional framework is Steinar Bryn. He emphasizes that dialogue fundamentally concerns movement, both literally and figuratively. "Dialogue is movement. Dialogue is reaching out – the dialogical truth is often found on the bridge between parties in conflict" (as cited in Feller & Ryan, 2012:357). His inclusion of a literal understanding of movement is an interesting one, and something that is missing in most of the literature reviewed. Most of the scholars that have started to actively incorporate a focus on body and embodiment in this field write in the context of theatre or performance studies and will be accounted for further in the next chapter.

## **2.2 Art and Theatre**

In the previous sub-chapter, different requisites for genuine dialogue were accounted for. A perceived "other", acknowledgement of difference, understanding and the ability to not understand (which includes self-reflexivity and standing in the other's shoes), as well as the intercultural competencies mentioned by UNESCO, and the ability to create awareness and counteract existing power dynamics. In addition, I have briefly explored the relevance of the body and bodily movement as an instrument for dialogue. Without much effort it is perhaps easy to critique these elements and requisites as being too ambitious, and that real genuine dialogue, where participants are able to truly open up, leave previous notions and power dynamics behind, is unachievable. A hypothesis in this thesis, mentioned in the introduction, is that perhaps, if facilitated in a knowledgeable and conscious way, some of the techniques and activities involved in social theatre can create space for difference, for not understanding

and understanding, empathy, and the other mentioned intercultural competencies, in part through bodily engagement. Before explaining social theatre specifically, it is useful to go through some of the broader knowledge on the qualities of art, aesthetic expression, imagination and creativity in research on communication and expression.

### **2.2.1 Art, aesthetic experience, creativity, and imagination**

Much can be said on what function art has in societies, and what creativity, imagination, and the aesthetics contribute to both in life and in our study of it. Many point out that art touches upon and represents another side of the human experience than the rational, naturalistic and logical one that so often is the center of one's daily life. This transcending quality can be used in dialogical processes, as Lederach states; "the artistic process initially breaks beyond what can be rationally understood and then returns to a place of understanding that may analyze, think it through, and attach meaning to" (2005:160). Because of its unique reference points outside pure rationality, art have the capacity to humanize people, and therefore unite them in their shared artistic endeavor and beyond (Lederach, 2005:162). This is because, as Conçalves & Majhanovic explains, "[...] art masters and joins the languages of thought and emotion [...]", thus fabricating "[...] new possible worlds and realities (by encouraging reflection, changing minds, and inducing action and intervention)" (2016:vii,6). It is there, in this collective new reality that "[...] we connect to what it means to be human [...]", reaching a "[...] higher plane of understanding and a blurring of individual differences" (Jones as cited in O'Neill, 2008:13). In this sense, art allows individuals to identify with one another through creative production – connecting on a sensory level. O'Neill focuses on this process as a cognitive one, arguing that "[...] through the mimetic moment of cognition we can develop a critical perspective that includes "empathy" as sensuous knowing" (2008:9). According to Cohen's research, this quality can create space for capacities that are necessary for genuine dialogue, like "receptive listening, the ability to express oneself so others can hear, awareness of oneself in the context of environment, creativity, curiosity about the paradoxical nature of seemingly opposed circumstances, the habit of bringing contradictory elements into generative (as opposed to destructive) tension, and the capacity to trust and even to discern whether trust is warranted" (2015:6).

Fundamental to art is the aesthetic element, which involves expression, perception, experience and sensation. Cohen describes aesthetic experiences as "intensely felt human apprehensions of the world, engendered by engagement with nature and with certain human-made forms and processes" (2015:5). The aesthetic quality in any form of art is essential when attempting to understand the role of art in intercultural dialogue, because it provides people with a way of seeing and understanding the world differently, including to potentially "face and act on conditions that otherwise might be unbearable to confront" (Cohen, 2015:6).

Cohen emphasizes the multiple layers of aesthetic experiences, which again creates room for individual change or awareness in many forms and levels:

Aesthetic experiences engage the senses as well as the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual faculties to invite special qualities of embodied attention and response, such as disinterestedness, passionate commitment, receptivity, alertness, serenity, playfulness, and metacognitive awareness. These qualities of presence afford unique opportunities for individual and collective learning, empathy, imagination, and innovation, all of which are central to peacebuilding efforts (2015:6)

All of the elements mentioned in this quote are important to understand how aesthetic experiences hold unique qualities for dialogue. One of these is as presented above the component concerning playfulness, which can easily be brushed off as unscientific or immature. But as Lederach states, “there is no scientific evidence that seriousness leads to greater growth, maturity, or insight into the human condition than playfulness” (2005:160).

This connects to another essential element of art and artistic creation and expression, creativity, which is often mentioned in the literature in relation to the dialogical process. Feller & Ryan underlines the role creativity plays in psychological processes, and states that by functioning as a bridge between the subconscious and conscious mind, creativity helps people go deep into themselves, improves communication, helps when dealing with sensitive and difficult topics, and can lead to deep personal insight (2012: 360). This has also been proven from a neuroscientific point of view, where creative practices show to change the brain's perception and worldview (Feller & Ryan, 2012:360-361). This is supported further in social science, where fieldwork and years of experience has convinced Lederach that “the creative act brings into existence processes that have not existed before”, partly because “creativity moves beyond what exists toward something new and unexpected while rising from and speaking to the everyday” (2005:73,38). According to the author, creativity enables people to reach a level of adaptedness and responsiveness necessary for dialogue to occur (2005:73).

Closely linked to this is the element of imagination, which is by many scholars seen as imperative for dialogue (Cahill, 2006:67, Greene, 2011:2, Lederach, 2005:27). “Without imagination — the ability to enter alternative realities, to bring an ‘as if’ into being, to look at things as if they could be otherwise — we would be sentenced to perpetual literalness [...]” (Greene, 2011:2). Essential to the artistic and creative endeavor, imagination can also be understood as fantasy, which is described by Judith Butler as the “art of the articulation of the possible” (As cited in Cahill, 2006:67). Cahill points out that when fantasy is embodied its effects amplify, as she puts it: “it brings the elsewhere home” (2006:67). A result of creative imagination that is mentioned by several scholars in the literature is the metaphor and its potential powers. “A metaphor, however you define it, is what it does; and what it does most

remarkably is to reorient consciousness, to make us see differently, to give us an unexpected perspective of what lies around” (Greene, 2011:2). In the context of dialogue and conflict resolution, Lederach calls metaphors ‘living museums of conflict resources’: “They usually lead me toward an aesthetic appreciation of the context, the process, and the challenges of change” (2005:72).

Lastly, before delving into the specifics of theatre, it is important to note the connection Dennis draws between aesthetics and accountability. As everything else, art and aesthetic expression are not free from cultural assumptions and value hierarchies, and as Cohen states, “of course not all artistic works [...] build peace” (2015:6, Nicholson, 2005:70). Art has the potential to cause harm, trauma, to oppress and to discriminate. As Acarón states: “the world of the arts awakens the self, nurtures some, torments others, and guides many” (2011:247). Dennis builds on Amy Schuman when stating that aesthetics and accountability go hand in hand in terms of issues of representation, where a crucial balance exist between representations being able to transform experience and harmful and distortive representation (2008:213).

### **2.2.2 Theatre and its dialogue related qualities**

From the literature reviewed for this research, several documented qualities of theatre can be considered highly relevant in a dialogical process. The following chapter will go through some of the most prominent qualities discussed in the literature, with the aim of serving as a backdrop in the analysis of the data retrieved from this case study.

One of the most notable features of theatre relevant in a discussion of dialogue can be identified as its potential for individual realization or understanding. Many scholars point out how drama can be a fruitful tool for change and aha-moments, as it involves multiple ways of being and sensing – tapping into the emotional, cognitive, physical, sensory, imaginary, and creative elements of the human experience (O’Neill, 2008:9, Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008:3, Wood, 2015:2-3, Cahill, 2006:67). This quality is essential because, as Muijen and Brohm points out, truthful understanding of the world and how we live in it cannot be accessed merely through theory and rationality, but involves ethical, expressive, and aesthetic elements as well (2018:362). Nicholson highlights the simultaneous engagement theatre gives in and of both the inner and outer world, where ideas are seen in connection with and stimulated by “a heightened awareness of the worlds in which they find themselves” (2005:59). Furthermore, the author points out that this can occur because of the blurred and interwoven relationships between aspects like “identity, role, acting and performance” in theatre (2005:80). This possibility of understanding is further amplified by the shared and collective nature of theatre. Theatre is an intimate and revealing practice that happens between a collective of people, and this shared vulnerable and open atmosphere where it is

in a sense required of “[...] the individual to draw on, and thus reveal, both their capacity and their limitations, artistically, physically, culturally and socially” (Dennis, 2008:212). Kaptani & Yuval-Davis takes this concept of sharing further, stating that “[...] the identities constructed, communicated, authorized, contested and transformed [...]” in a theatrical group setting in “[...] cannot be analyzed either as individual or as collective identities but as interrelational processes of in-between ‘becomings’” (2008:9). The authors also argue that through this collective and reciprocal quality, difficult and sensitive issues that otherwise would not have been natural to bring to the forefront in an encounter can be dealt with more easily (2008:9). This strength can be seen in light of the potential theatre has for change, as it provides an opportunity to transform individuals perhaps strict opinions of one self, others and the world in which we live in. This is especially the case for the type of personal, improvisational and deep-digging theatre form that is used in this workshop, social theatre, which will be explained in greater detail later on. Cahill explains:

A mere duplication of reality, such as one often gets through a naturalistic drama, may not generate the possibility of change. Despite being a fiction, it may leave little room for creative departure. The norms and social rules may so govern the play that little room is given for divergence. However, when the dramatic play is framed in a more radical manner, as seen in anti-naturalistic dramatic forms, the genre invites a stretching or rupturing of the real, thus *requiring* as well as *enabling* the enactment of new possibilities (2006:67).

Although referring to a performance setting, it can be argued that this quality too manifests during creation or exploration of theatre scenes. Additionally, the capacity for change is further amplified when referring to what Cahill calls ‘problem-solving approaches’ in drama, present in Forum Theatre for example. The author warns against leaving the dramatic scene or exploration at the ‘problem-identification’ phase, as this “can lead to passivity and resignation” and “disempowering, inadvertently generating a sense of an inevitable outcome” (2006:68). That being said, it is important to include Nicholson’s skepticism in the discussion on potential transformation through drama, where she warns against an overly idealistic conviction that drama leads to transformation. Therefore, the author argues for the concept of ‘transportation’, which refers to individual and separate moments of being “taken somewhere” and temporarily transformed. Through multiple and consistent moments of transportation, transformation may occur, but theatre is for Nicholson first and foremost about visiting other perspectives. She quotes the British theatre director Tim Etchells when she writes that “performance is about ‘going into another world and coming back with gifts’”(2005:12-13).

Furthermore, based on the above account of the dialogue term and the importance of acknowledging and using the concept of difference to one's benefit, another relevant quality theatre researchers point out is its ability to ‘make strange’ in a safe manner (Van Erven &



Gardner, 2011:35). Following Gurevitch's concept of 'not-understanding' discussed in the previous chapter, Van Erven & Gardner state that theatre can create room for "the kind of paradoxical interactions [...] that are necessary to build tolerant relationships" between people with various differences (2011:35). Elaborating on this point they specify that "the language of communal art-making allows people to hold in one hand contradictory viewpoints and feelings, rather than locking people into dualistic, adversarial debates or superficial reconciliations" (2011:34). This open attitude is what allows for difference to be handled in a fruitful and respectful manner. Jennings further elaborates on this ability to 'make strange' through arguing for what she calls 'dramatic distance': "The paradox of dramatic distancing is that it causes us to come closer to ourselves and indeed makes us get in touch with profound areas of experience that are not accessible in other ways... One of the reasons that theatre is so important is that it enables us to see things more clearly because it can encapsulate our lives as a whole in a manageable form" (1992:241,244). Schininà sums it up as follows:

[...] the value of theatre does not lie in its capacity to emphasize what unifies human beings, but rather in its potential to emphasize their differences and to create bridges between them. [...] If we concentrate on the unifying factors, we create elites who do not act in history; we position them as somehow existing "above" or removed from the social and relational dynamics of identity formation. If we work on the differences among and within all people, we might be able to turn conflicts into peaceful contrasts and exchanges — into ways of relating. (2004:17-18)

A quality that perhaps most notably differentiates theatre from most other art forms, at least in its level of activity, and which is relevant when talking about dialogue is its embodied element. Nicholson states that "on an entirely practical level, drama is composed of material elements, of bodies and voices in space, and the physical embodiment of knowledge and understanding is integral to the art form itself" (2005:56-57). This quality should not be undermined, as it plays an integral role in the connection between theatre and dialogue, enabling participants to "feel more real" through acting out a character: "[...] theatre provides active embodiment of the narratives within a dialogical space created for action, reflection and 'becoming'" (Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2006:3). Importantly, the body is to be viewed as a carrier of sociopolitical connotations. Nicholson emphasizes this by saying that "there is an intimacy about bodies, and how people feel about touching each other or using their bodies expressively is fraught with complications, particularly as the body is representative of wider cultural and social values" (2005:59). The complexity our bodies hold can also be seen in as a strength in the dramatical dialogical process, as it can merge the gap between 'me' and 'them', 'then' and 'now' and 'fiction' and 'reality' – "when we immerse ourselves in the experience of being alive in the body then meaning becomes something lived rather than examined" (Grainger, 1990:169). In her discussion on Judith Butler's concept of fantasy, Cahill further elaborates this point by saying that:

Drama is a medium through which the fantasy can be embodied. This enactment of possibility may be at the heart of the transformative power of drama. If, as Butler (1999) argues, identity is a performative act located in 'doing' rather than in 'being', then by playing in the fiction we also engage in identity work. Through 'doing' ourselves (and each other) differently in the drama, we get to stretch our identities to encompass new possibilities in being. (2006:67)

The element of embodiment leads us to another proclaimed quality of theatre, that of contesting or potentially disabling existing power dynamics. The process of empowerment is by some scholars seen as deeply embodied, where power is "rehearsed and practiced within the body" (Mtukwa, 2013:275). Cahill supports this when stating that "drama becomes a useful means through which to examine the web of relations within which power is created, conferred, exerted and resisted" (2006:68). It is well documented and researched that theatre may be a vehicle for enhancing individuals' sense of power, agency and confidence (Thompson & Schechner, 2004:12, Nicholson, 2005:3,167, Mtukwa, 2013:277, Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008:5). O'Neill's discussion on Winnicott's concept of 'potential space' is relevant here, as it is viewed as a safe zone for expression (2008:9), which furthermore can stimulate a potential space for equal contribution and communication. Despite these sentiments, a question remains as of to which degree theatre can help create practical and tangible shifts in power dynamics, and not only a sense of this change. As Nicholson points out, drama and theatre are in no way exempt from power relations, including favoritism of distinct cultural, social and existential values and norms (2005:70, 81-82).

## **2.3 Embodiment and Movement theory**

In the context of drama and dialogue, incorporation of embodied realities and experiences are essential for a more adequate understanding of the complexities within theatre based dialogical processes. A major asset to an incorporation of bodily expression, truth and knowing is that it pushes the researcher, the researched and the reader to move beyond the common preference for instrumental rationality for understanding life (O'Neill, 2008:8). In this sense, in relation to dialogue it is relevant to explore if bodily drama expression can connect people on another non-rational level, through new means of communication and self-insight, which again can lead to dialogue. To do this it is necessary to account for established knowledge regarding embodiment and movement in the academic field.

### **2.3.1 The body and embodied expression**

The human body is an integral part of our existence, and holds truths, knowledge and meaning. As Venables and Manderson states, bodies are our "portable human capital", simultaneously influencing and depending on social practices, hierarchies, norms, structures,

values and beliefs (2015:299, Nicholson, 2005:59). The body is inescapable, and failing to recognize its role in social encounters prevents us from acquiring fundamental academic knowledge of how we interact with each other and ourselves.

A common notion of the body in the Western world is that it exists in a parallel and oppositional relationship with the mind or with emotions (Acarón, 2011:248, Svinland, Martinsen & Råheim, 2007:27-28). This gap has led to a tendency where many distance themselves from the bodily sensations and component of everyday life, thus “[...] the body remains a mystery for some people, a demon for others to run away from or ignore, or simply a means of getting from here to there” (Acarón, 2011:245-246). Boal (1992) also acknowledged this, and it was for him a source of motivation in his developing of Theatre of the Oppressed:

In the body's battle with the world, the senses suffer. And we start to feel very little of what we touch, to listen to very little of what we hear and to see very little of what we look at. We feel, listen and see according to our specialty; the body adapts itself to the job it has to do (Boal, 1992:49)

But, as Acarón argues, our bodies are an integral part of our existence, and awareness and inclusion of it is existentially important both for individuals and scholars in the process of self-understanding and knowledge gain. She states:

The body speaks constantly, many times much like a parrot, speaking the language of rhythm, tension, pain, relief, and pleasure. It encompasses a world that both fascinates and terrorizes, because it is still full of questions that we do not know how to hear or answer. However, the body remains a constant in our lives, with modifications because of age, life situations, or sickness (2011:246).

Therefore, our embodied realities and experiences are relevant in terms of consciousness, knowledge expression and communication. In the literature reviewed, scholars agree upon a notion that the body holds certain forms of knowledge which is unique in its sensory nature (Cohen, 2015:6, Acarón, 2015:2, Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008:5-6). As Cohen states, nonverbal communication “can be especially helpful when adversaries do not share a spoken language and linguistic issues fuel conflict” (2015:6). Acarón stresses the importance of memory storing within human bodies, arguing that a neglect of this capacity will give a simplistic and flawed understanding of our human experiences (2015:2). This notion is supported by Cohen who states that “in cases of dislocation, and of traumatic events that defy linguistic expression, memories sometimes can be accessed and meaning can be shaped through non-narrative forms” (2015:6). A key point regarding the strength of bodily communication and expression is its potential to bring paradoxical and complex realities and

views into the light, where symbolism and metaphors can help create a fuller representation of a subject (Acarón, 2015:10, Acarón, 2018:19).

### **2.3.2 Movement theory**

One of the most integral ways the body communicates and exist in the world is through movement. Fundamentally, movement can be defined as muscles releasing energy through “motor activities, gestures, and nonverbal language” (Acarón, 2018:2). Although often taken for granted by individuals and scholars as well, “body movement is inherent in all life, essential not only for bodily functioning but also for communicating internal worlds to external worlds” (Acarón, 2018:2).

In relation to dialogue and intercultural communication, a focus on movement is meaningful because of its relation to our mind and its perceptions, values, wishes and attitudes. As Svindal, Martinsen & Råheim argues, movements and attitude exist in a mutually dependent relationship, where “[...] our stance, attitude and our norms carry and support our movements, emotional reactions and our spontaneously” (translated from Norwegian by this author, 2007:25). Depending on the context and immediate surroundings, a person's movement and attitude is negotiated and balanced through unfolding and withholding, through conscious and unconscious demonstrations of attitude through bodily moves (Svindal, Martinsen & Råheim, 2007:25). Research shows that the processes of changing views and perceptions “are interdisciplinary; embodiment; decision- making; non-violence; movement informed by multidimensional ways of knowing: not only the somatic, emotional, intuitive and imaginative, but also cognitive (Acarón, 2018:1-2). Relevant for dialogue research is Aarons emphasis on how the body can be used as an instrument to cultivate human understanding, connection and empathy, where she states that “movement-based decisions” are notably essential in “every peaceable and violent action”, (2018:18,19). As mentioned earlier in this chapter an integral element to achieve dialogue is self-awareness and self-insight. An inclusion of movement as an element in dialogue can also be beneficial regarding this matter, as “it is in the tension between attitude and movement we can understand how we adjust our emotions” (translated from Norwegian by this author, Svinland, Martinsen & Råheim, 2007:25). Lastly, in the context of dialogue, movement and physical activities can in its simplicity help create specific atmospheres within a group. Depending on the desired group dynamic and the topic of the encounter, activities involving movement can create space for this to occur. In their research in a theatre setting, involving a group of strangers, Kaptani & Yuval-Davis emphasize the role movement had in creating a group space for positivity and trust: “the mere act of physical movement within the group, transformed by the theatrical safe space of action, often had a profoundly positive effect - of

collective laughter, recognition and release - which countered the possibility of feeling helpless and disempowered” (2008:5).

### 2.3.2.1 Accessible insights through a movement lens

From the reviewed literature on movement, that collectively can be classified under a branch of movement theory, some recurrent topics emerge. According to the scholars, an academic lens on bodily movement can help bring forth key insights in the mapping of human experience and interaction, and these insights will be accounted for in the following section.

Firstly, a point several scholars make is how bodily movement can help illuminate multilayered expressions, meanings and knowledge. From a theatrical stance, Nicholson describes this as a process of ‘unfixing’, emphasizing how because performance in practice is embodied collaboration, it encompasses and portrays several different meanings (2005:80). Working within the field of artistic movement therapy, Acarón points out how drama and dance because of their embodied nature navigate “[...] different dimensions of symbolism and abstraction” (2015:6). She furthermore argues that deep fundamental insight is accessible through drama, as it involves “[...] unmasking, expanding, clarifying” of issues being explored (2015:12). Peoples positionality and perception of issues are some of the things that can be better explored through a movement-based approach, and techniques involving role-play and projection can assist accessing and listening to deeper feelings and underlying attitude (2015:12). Even if movement cannot explain and access everything the body holds, it still is expressed to a large degree through its immediate and spontaneous reactions (Acarón, 2015:6, Svinland, Martinsen & Råheim, 2007:24). According to Svinland, Martinsen & Råheim, movements that are spontaneous in nature often express internalized attitudes, values and memories, because they are embodied throughout one’s childhood and adult life (2007:25). Furthermore, their emphasis on spontaneity is relevant to the dialogical process, as they state that: when attitude is dealt with in such a way that it allows for spontaneity, emotion and movement, impressions and opinions can be let go of and new ones can emerge (translated from Norwegian by this author, 2007:27). Everything accessible through the body can be both conscious and unconscious, and as Acarón states, drama can be a tool to let this inner world emerge: “psychodrama and DMT [Dance Movement Therapy] allow for different levels of abstraction from raw, non- verbal access to emotions without needing words, to being able to extrapolate roles and actions” (Acarón, 2015:7, Acarón 2018:3).

Additionally, movement can enhance access, portrayal and self-reflection to a person's degree of proximity and distance towards an issue, feeling or situation. Acarón tells of her experience with repetition and re-enactment as fruitful ways to achieve this (2015:5,12). Ironically, repeated sequences of movements can often create a level of

distance towards the subject, which is beneficial in a dialogical setting. As Svinland, Martinsen & Råheim argues, distance is necessary to deal with conflictual material and issues, losing perspective to our own norms and values can make it easier to judge the norms of others or lose sight of the real conflict (2007:27).

Lastly, it is important to note that movement and embodied expression and interpretation is something highly cultural. As Acarón points out: “although movement is universal, the interpretation of movement is not” (2018:4). Not only can movements mean different things depending on culture and characteristics like age, ability and subcultural belonging, different bodies are often ranked and differentiated in relation to cultural norms, hierarchies and systems of power (Acarón:2018:4, Nicholson, 2005:59). Additionally, how we relate to our bodies is also sometimes dependent on our cultural background and personal upbringing. As Nicholson states: “there is an intimacy about bodies, and how people feel about touching each other or using their bodies expressively is fraught with complications” (2005:59). Therefore, it is crucial to stress the importance of individualized sensitivity and care while organizing and facilitating activities with bodily expression and communication, which include “awareness of issues about personal space, physical contact and appropriate boundaries” (Nicholson, 2005:59). Only when facilitated in a safe and inclusive collective space can the mentioned benefits from the movement-based approach be accessed.

# Chapter 3: Methodology & Methods

## 3.1 Methodology

With the question “How can social theatre create space for intercultural dialogue in a multinational workshop in Bologna, Italy?” in mind, specific methodologies and methods were chosen for a comprehensive and responsible research. With a qualitative approach, two main methodologies were chosen early on and influenced the rest of the process. These methodologies, participatory action research (PAR) and art-based research (ABR), were not used in a rigid sense, but served more as guiding tools providing principles for conduction. To better understand the rest of the research process, a short introduction has to be made of the two.

### 3.1.1 Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is commonly understood as "community- and organization-based research projects that are conducted by local participants and university-based researchers and seek to transform social inequalities (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012:331). Research using this methodology is always done through a "'bottom-up' approach that focuses on a process of 'sequential reflection and action carried out with and by local people rather than on them'" (Cornwell & Jewkes as cited by Oliviera, 2016:262). A key component is therefore the relationship between researcher and the researched, which aims to be more equal, collaborative and open than traditional dynamics between these roles, and where the different parties' wishes and interests regarding the research are equally valued (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012:333). As Cahill explains, “researchers choose this methodology because they see the need to step beyond the colonial tradition in which the outsider (and ‘expert’) visits the site, defines the problem and provides the solution, thus positioning themselves as provider and the people as recipients” (2006:63).

Furthermore, PAR is grounded in an epistemological base which opposes and challenges the traditional ideal of academic neutrality and objectivity, and presupposes a political, social and economic "reality that facilitates and constraints all social relations" (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012: 333). This reality is also understood as a deciding factor in meaning making and knowledge production. As Bilbrough states: “action research has roots in phenomenology and postmodernism, which validate experience as a valid way of knowing” (2013:63). In other words, knowledge is seen as something embedded in practice, working from an understanding that “individuals and groups (primarily of adults) gain knowledge and make meaning from their direct, lived experience; positing that people learn from reflection, processing, challenging, and understanding what they personally do or experience” (Bilbrough, 2013:63).

Lastly, several scholars link PAR to the process and exercises of drama and theatre, pointing out the compatibility of the processes common to them both (Chivadikwa, 2013:109). As Cahill states: “there is a considerable synchrony between the methodology of participatory action research and approaches commonly used in process drama. Both traditions are centrally concerned with dialogue, praxis, participatory exploration and transformation” (2006:62).

### **3.1.2 Art-based Research**

Even if PAR have similarities in process, aims and conceptual understandings with parts of theatre, more needs to be said of the specific methodological considerations when using drama as a tool for data collection.

A basic methodological standpoint in ABR involves the understanding of art and creative expression as a unique and useful gateway into aspects of the human world. In ABR, art is seen as a method to gain and showcase knowledge, which can be kinesthetic, sensory and imaginary (Leavy, 2017:4-5). In this way, ABR can access a deeper understanding of human life, as common academic practices “[...] do not deal well with the sensory, emotional, and kinesthetic aspects of lived experience [...]” (O’Neill, 2008:2). Specifically, gathering data through the artform of social theatre gives potential for more adequate understandings of “voices and unvoiced perspectives” regarding important identifying markers in interactions such as “idea, text, position, intersectionality (visible and otherwise), agency”, to mention a few (Powers & Duffy, 2015:64). Marín points out how social theatre can create safe spaces for expression, where “the participants respond as if they are participating in an interactive theatre workshop, not like they are being examined under a microscope” (2007:87).

Additionally, an essential strength of ABR as a guiding methodology is its clear recognition of the role of the body in human experience, and how it is an important factor shaping, changing and limiting a person's life (Leavy, 2017a:5-6). As Leavy explains, “this approach has the potential to bring forth data that would not emerge with written or verbal communication alone” (2017b:20). An inclusion of embodied communication, expression and realities is important to acquire deeper understanding in human emotion. As Barone & Eisner points out, “the arts are vehicles designed to reveal what someone can feel about some aspects of life”, and a key asset to ABR is its potential for learning more about “how others feel” rather than to gain “a literal description of a state of affairs” (2012:7). This element of ABR can prove particularly fruitful when studying the topic of intercultural dialogue, which as shown in the previous chapter, is closely linked to emotion. Additionally, ABR’s applicability to the topic of intercultural dialogue is further strengthened by a main aim of the methodology, which is to “create an expressive form that will enable an individual to secure an empathic participation in the lives of others and in the situations studied” (Barone & Eisner, 2012:6).



The ABR methodology was also chosen in this thesis due to another of its underlying principles regarding purpose. Because of its epistemological base, ABR does not prescribe to a claim of scientific, comprehensive 'truth'. As Barone & Eisner explains "the purpose of arts-based research is to raise significant questions and engender conversations rather than to proffer final meanings" (2012:166). A main motivation is to shed light on elements of human life and experience that can be easily overlooked, often more narrow perspectives or realities that can help explain a larger picture in combination (Barone & Eisner, 2012:3,166).

All in all, when it comes to theatre as the art form in question, Cahill summarizes the benefits of a methodology based in theatre in that it provides

[...] the architecture of the enquiry. They shape the communicative space which supports the collective nature of the process; house the diagnostic and reflective dialogue; engage players with envisioning the possibility of change; and engineer pragmatic engagement with the actions that could bring forth this change. The players gain insights into the situations that they face in both their personal and institutional worlds and engage in identity work as they reassess their sense of themselves and others. The process builds the sense of solidarity, connectedness and purpose that is associated with agency and empowerment (2006:64).

The specific artform used in this research is social theatre, and it is important to explain what it entails also due to its guiding principles. Historically, social theatre concerns a form of theatre that emerged in the 90's after a longer process where institution of "'the theatre' ceased to exist as a single entity", and theatre expression in the West disseminated into multiple forms and specificities (Thompson & Schechner, 2004:12, Schininà, 2004:19,22). As Schininà explains, this turn away from the traditional conservative understanding of theatre "would give back to the theatre its fundamental role and heritage of political intervention, peaceful redefinition of the rules of the society, cultural discussion, and social therapy" (2004:19). In an attempt to define social theatre, it can be said that it concerns theatre "with specific social agendas; theatre where aesthetics is not the ruling objective; theatre outside the realm of commerce, which drives Broadway/the West End, and the cult of the new, which dominates the avantgarde" (Thompson & Schechner, 2004:12). In practice, this means that social theatre very often is done with non-actors and in non-typical settings. Thompson & Schechner emphasizes that social theatre often engages individuals from "vulnerable, disadvantaged, and marginalized communities" (2004:12).

As a method of data collection, theatre has several unique benefits to it. As Cahill explains: "the drama-based method can be used to generate a richer picture than data collection approaches that favour rational or mono-vocal explanations of behavior" which furthermore "offers a methodology that enables people to work together across the boundaries associated with age, institutions and status in order to build change in social and systemic practices" (2006:70-71). Theatre also as mentioned earlier provides a platform for obtaining data concerning embodied practices and experiences (Acarón, 2015:6). As Kaptani

& Yuval-Davis state, “theatre provides active embodiment of the narratives within a dialogical space created for action, reflection and ‘becoming’” (2008:3). Additionally, Dennis highlights how social theatre provides insights through its improvisational component, where improvisation is to be understood “as a translation that engages with all the imperfections of human communication and interaction” (2008:215). In the sessions, theatrical images and scenes were viewed as “raw data” available for analysis, where the verbal reactions and reflections of the audience served as a connected collection method (Marin, 2007:87).

## **3.2 Methods**

### **3.2.1 Research Design & Context**

The preliminary stages of the research consisted of choosing a format and a context for the study. I decided a fruitful approach to the research question, which at that time was not contextual, was to carry out a case study in the form of a workshop or production, so that I would be able to observe and experience the drama activities in practice. A case study approach seemed fitting as it can be regarded a “versatile form of qualitative inquiry most suitable for a comprehensive, holistic, and in-depth investigation of a complex issue (phenomena, event, situation, organization, program individual or group) in context, where the boundary between the context and issue is unclear and contains many variables” (Harrison et al., 2017:12). Additionally, a case study was chosen because of its emphasis on including the participants understanding and perspectives (Harrison et al., 2017:8).

Furthermore, the choice of a context was influenced by both intent and chance. I knew I wanted to carry out the research in an area with access to individuals with many different nationalities, and that it should be a group of strangers and not an already existing multicultural theatre company. As the aim of the research was to explore how theatre could be a method to create space for intercultural dialogue, it would make less sense if the participants all knew each other beforehand. After emailing several organizations and institutions that worked within the field of migration and integration, and arts and theatre, I ended up choosing an organization based in Bologna, Italy; Associazione Interculturale Universo, from hereon referred to as Universo. This non-profit aims to generate and support various social initiatives for and between people from different cultures and countries, and I arranged to work with them for three months to organize and create a theatre workshop within their reach. The collaboration with this organization did not go as smoothly as first anticipated, and upon arrival I understood that the organization could not provide the project with a drama teacher. Therefore, this local partner ended up providing me with a location to hold the workshop as well as their network, and due to communication problems we were no longer provided with a space after 6 weeks of the workshop, which resulted in me terminating the collaboration early.

A few weeks into my stay in Bologna I was working zealously to find a drama instructor and met some members of the local theatre community at a dialogue conference by chance, one of them being Antonio Graziano. Initially hoping he would know someone in need of experience willing to volunteer with the project for free, he agreed to join in and become the facilitator. From thereon, Antonio and I developed a good partnership in planning and executing the workshop, and I functioned as a main organizer with him being in charge of the creative content of the workshop. In early meetings I presented my initial ideas and wishes, and Antonio gave feedback and practical knowledge concerning implementation. Here, the PAR methodology served as a guiding tool, where I made sure Antonio had a lot of influence in the theatre method and registration forms. Additionally, Antonio contributed not only with useful language skills and knowledge about the context of Bologna and Italy, his practical experience in drama facilitation for Italians, had given him consequential knowledge on their common cultural norms, values and communication styles in a drama setting. Additionally, it was crucial that he held enough experience and formal knowledge to ensure that the workshop activities themselves were responsibly carried out with a low risk of conflicting harm or negative effects on the participants, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like power, privilege and the perceived worth of different cultures. As Schininà points out, “trainers are or should be skilled professionals able to consider in depth all the social, psychological, relational, and theatrical implications of their interactions with the group and the context” (2004:23).

In the end, the workshop ended up stretching over 8 weeks in February and March 2019 and was titled “YOU-ARE-ME: Social Theatre for Intercultural Dialogue”. Through a continuous process with Antonio, several choices were made in terms of which frames we would place around it. As it was advertised in the flyer (see picture 1) the workshop was conducted in English and Italian, and was open for everyone over 18, regardless of their previous level of experience with drama and theatre. Additionally, the workshop utilized gift economy, a socio-politically principled method which views the interaction as an exchange of gifts, where in this case the participants would get the experience of the drama workshop and could choose to give something in return either in the form of money or other services or goods.

As for the content of the sessions, the drama facilitator and local partner Antonio Graziano had complete creative freedom, being very aware of the methodological and ethical principles of the research. Trained in Theatre of the Oppressed, Playback Theatre and Psychodrama, techniques that are all essential to the practice of social theatre, he suggested to utilize them all throughout the workshop, as some of their principles, goals and components correlate with elements of a dialogical processes. As Schininà state, social theatre the potential to ““support self-esteem,” “build confidence,” “manage anger,” “heal sociopsychological wounds,” “create new approaches to learning,” “promote participatory community development,” and/or “can operate constructively in the face of all kinds of traumatic experiences.”” (2004:12).

**JOIN THE 8 WEEK WORKSHOP**

**ASSOCIAZIONE INTERCULTURALE UNIVERSO**

# YOU-ARE-ME

## Social Theatre for Intercultural Dialogue

Explore cultural diversity, power, and 'us' and 'them' dynamics through different drama techniques in a multicultural group of people from different countries!

🕒 **Tuesdays 20.30 - 22.30 pm**  
 📅 **5th of February to 26th of March**  
 📍 **Via Cencetti 3, Bologna**

ITALLY TODAY IS EXPERIENCING INCREASING DIVERSITY AND POLITICAL TENSION. IN THIS REALITY IT IS IMPORTANT TO CREATE INTERCULTURAL MEETINGS AND SPACES FOR DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING ACROSS CULTURES

JOIN US IN TAKING A STEP TOWARDS A WORLD OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND APPRECIATION FOR DIVERSITY

**THIS WORKSHOP IS**

- in English and Italian
- for those over 18 years old
- for everyone – no drama experience needed
- part of an interesting research project on intercultural dialogue
- using gift economy: free and aware donations are welcomed from those able to give

**Antonio Graziano** (Italy) is the facilitator for this workshop. He is a biologist, school teacher, social theater facilitator and spiritual researcher. Antonio was trained in Theater of the Oppressed, Playback Theater and Psychodrama in Latin America, Europe and Africa. His totem animal is Butterfly, symbol of transformation. He carries his daily life between the wisdom of the mountains and the fire of the city.

**Siri Syverud Thorsen** (Norway) is the main organizer, researcher and a participant in this workshop. She is currently finishing a masters degree in Migration and Intercultural Relations, with a focus on drama as a tool in integration, co-existence and intercultural dialogue. She first got interested in theatre in her childhood which resulted to her doing theatre specialization in her high school education.

To sign up or ask questions: [siri.th@hotmail.com](mailto:siri.th@hotmail.com)

Picture 1. The English version of the flyer distributed during the participant selection process.

Specifically, Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of theatre developed by Augusto Boal, where theatre is viewed as a political endeavor, where the themes of power and oppression are challenged and dealt with through specific activities (Nicholson, 2005:25-27). In addition to using many of its warm-up games and trust-building exercises, image theatre and forum theatre were utilized by Antonio in most of the sessions. Image theatre is a form of improvisational drama exercise where “the bodies of the participants, without verbalization at the initial stages, are used to create representations of different concepts while making the images” (Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008:5). The strength of this type of theatre is that “images enable the manifestations of emotions and memory which words might conceal. Images of concepts such as ‘community’, or ‘London’, could reveal the multi-perspectival and contradictory perceptions of the participants” (Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008:6). Boal himself explains the relevance of the element of silence as follows: “the interdiction of words is necessary to enable all the participants to really see the image. Image is a language; if it is translated into words, all its possible interpretations are reduced to a single one: the polysemy of the image is destroyed. But it is precisely in this polysemy that the richness

of this language resides” (1995:77). Kaptani & Yuval-Davis further emphasizes how image theatre can be valuable for giving space for complexity to surface:

Rather than producing narratives of either linear biographies or attitude surveys, the dramatized illustrative moments produced by the participants highlight and encapsulate central ‘generative’ themes which may concern issues relating to the micro, mezzo and/or macro levels of their social locations, experiences and identity practices (2008:9-10).

Forum theatre is a form of dramatic play where a scene, often involving social issues, is played out multiple times, where the audience after the first showing have a chance to interrupt the course of events to change the outcome for the oppressed role (Boal, 1992:241-244). Normally, the forum process contains multiple set stages and specific assigned roles, but in the case of this workshop the format was used loosely as a starting point since it was more a practice than a performance. The explorations of forum theatre during the workshop were also influenced by playback theatre, another closely linked form of theatre which is not attributed to Boal. Playback theatre is another form of socially aware performance, where the audience give a story from their life to a set of actors and they improvise it on the spot to create awareness, insight and empowerment (Dennis, 2008:212). The elements that were built from playback theatre was the improvisational nature, which is not often the case in forum theatre, and that the participants own stories were shared and used as starting points for the explorations.

The structure of the workshop was characterized by loosely defined topics for every session, relying on a high degree of flexibility and improvisation from Antonio’s side depending on the specific atmosphere in the group. The first two sessions were set to indulge in the topic of “ME & ME”, getting to know each other and build some trust whilst at the same time exploring what intercultural dialogue actually meant for the participants, and their personal stance on related topics. The two next sessions would have the focus of “ME & THE OTHER”, indulging more specifically into the relationships and dynamics in the specific group as well as what Antonio chose to call ‘blocks of dialogue’. These two sessions focused more on conflict and tension in the dialogical process. The conflicts and blocks related to dialogue was developed further as topics for the next three sessions (one session was cancelled due to last minute lack of space). These last three sessions were times where we also delved deeper into the specific methods of forum theatre and playback theatre, trying out longer scenes where participants had the opportunity to stop the scenes and embody roles and change the outcome of the scene. Collectively as a group we discussed the possibility of preparing a performance in the end but decided not to.

### **3.2.2 Participant Selection**

As this case study's main topic was intercultural dialogue, the participant group and its composition was essential. In the preparatory stage of the workshop, a worry concerned the balance of participants nationality, and that there was a chance it could end up very uneven, e.g. with the large majority being Italian nationals with just a few migrant participants. Although there could be interesting findings resulting from this group dynamic, I was concerned that the minority in the group could more easily feel insecure, out of place or powerless, depending on their own perception of potential cultural differences and/or power relations in relation to the Italians. Scholars have previously strived for symmetry in this sense in attempts to ensure that preexisting power differences won't be too prominent in the encounter (Maoz, 2001:191). Additionally, it is interesting to note that the initial aim for the participant group was that it would preferably consist of a quite even divide between Italian born nationals and migrants specifically from countries outside Europe. This aim was presumably due to my own sociopolitical background and the following assumptions about which parts of the world are traditionally considered "far apart" culturally.

These initial reflections were in some ways the backdrop when beginning the process of recruiting participants. The recruitment was done through multiple networks in an attempt to gather participants from different communities in Bologna. Through the two local partners, it was possible to reach a complex group of people, including migrants in different communities as well as members of the creative theatre community in Bologna. Specifically, participants were gathered through online promotion in relevant Facebook groups such as "Refugees Welcome Bologna" and two different groups for Erasmus students in Bologna. Posters and flyers were also distributed at three different venues with events targeted for different brackets of the migrant community in the city, at the Universo office, in the University area, and through e-mails to specific persons and organizations in Antonio's and Universo's network.

In the end, because of the degrees of access into different networks in Bologna, the group resulted in being more diverse than first intended. Instead of a binary division between migrants from non-Western countries and Italians, the group consisted of many other migrants, from other European countries as well as a few Asian ones and one South-American. The inclusion of these participants avoided a construction and fixation of an antagonism between two group brackets. In this way, the variety of the group served as a buffer against unnecessary and inflicted "us" versus "them" perceptions concerning solely the migrant/non-migrant relationship. In other words, "us" versus "them" dynamics were hard to avoid all together, but with a greater diversity within the group this dynamic could take many forms and not be limited and constructed to migrant versus Italian. As it will be shown later on in this thesis, this factor proved to be beneficial in the dialogical process.

The size of the group varied from every session and was a topic of concern. The initial idea was to have a group of approximately 10-15 participants, as too large of a group could create difficulties in building trust and relationships and too small of a group could make it harder, as it was expected that every participant would not attend every time and that some would withdraw from the workshop. However, based on Antonio's previous experience of how common it is that people fall off during longer workshops, we decided to aim towards a larger group, and ended up accepting everyone who signed up. The size and composition of the group varied greatly throughout the workshop period, especially in the first few weeks. All together a total of 32 people signed up, where about two thirds were women and one third men, ranging from the ages of 18-50. Nineteen of them were of Italian nationality, the others came from Germany, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Moldova, Peru, Indonesia, Iraq/Kurdistan, Guinea, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Morocco. Several of these 32, especially many of the Italians, attended only once or twice, which resulted in a core group consisting of between 7-14 participants from a varied mixture of countries. These were also the basis for selecting interviewees after the workshop had finished.

### **3.2.3 Specific data collection methods**

As this thesis revolves around a case study, a decision was made to use a mixed methods approach, as case studies most often seek to gain knowledge of complex issues and situations, and this approach can "provide a more synergistic and comprehensive view of the issues being studied" (Harrison et al, 2017:12). Specifically, four main methods of data collection were used: two simple questionnaires, participant observations, the activities of social theatre, and individual interviews. Out of these four the last three were the most substantial, as they generated most of the data for analysis. The specificities of the social theatre method have already been presented; thus, the three remaining methods will now be accounted for.

#### **3.2.3.1 Questionnaires: registration and mid-workshop**

Two separate questionnaires were used as guiding tools throughout the process, as well as a way to ensure the involvement of the participants. They were not meant to measure the complete experience and reflections of the participants, as the format of questionnaires "fall short of illustrating how participants are affected by their active involvement" in art-based projects (van Erven & Gardner, 2011:41). Both of the questionnaires were electronic through google forms, and I also carried with me printed out copies in the Universo office and to relevant events. Therefore, the forms were more accessible for individuals with access to the internet or that were familiar to the online platform, and who felt comfortable enough in English or Italian to answer in written form. One printed copy was filled in, and due to time restrictions in the moment, I concentrated more on getting the persons contact information for further sharing of information.

The first questionnaire functioned partly as a registration form and partly as a guiding tool setting the thematic basis to build the workshop and interviews on. The questions were both practical, concerning name, age, contact information, country of origin etc., and reflexive (see appendix 1). Feedback from the drama facilitator was also a motivating factor for using this type of registration form, as his experience suggested that this format would create a higher chance of gaining participants who were to some degree committed, as they would take the time to fill out the form rather than merely showing up on the day. Additionally, the registration form gave me an opportunity to evaluate the group composition that was forming and consequently mobilize my efforts to reach the types of networks and sub-groups that I felt were “lacking” in numbers.

The other questionnaire was a mid-workshop evaluation, where participants were encouraged to give feedback, thoughts and suggestions to me, which I then would bring forth anonymously to Antonio (see appendix 2). This questionnaire was not part of the initial plan for data collection, but grew out of a need, as my observations indicated that because of shifting and unstable group compositions and the still evolving group dynamics could perhaps prevent some from sharing their ideas and feedback during the sessions. Furthermore, as the group had grown to be over 30 people, a questionnaire seemed as a good way to gather thoughts, as many were not present every session and there was no clarity as to who would come back again and who would not. In this way, the people responding to the questionnaire could be viewed as being to some degree invested in the workshop, and the number of these participants assisted me in further organizing the rest of the workshop and preparing for individual interviews. The questions in this mid-process questionnaire were reflexive in nature, designed to be open but with specific focuses and target topics. The last question was reserved for additional comments and suggestions to ensure that the participants could speak their mind even if the questions did not fit their interest or concern. Unfortunately, only two participants responded to the questionnaire, which can illustrate a lack of involvement in the workshop and a lack of interest in the development of it. Some people sincerely said they had plans of doing it, but that they forgot, which shows that the workshop probably was not important enough to actively participate in that sense. Therefore, the questionnaire gave little insight into the development of the workshop.

### 3.2.3.2 Participant observations

One of the main methods of data collection in this thesis was participant observations. In the preliminary stage of the research, a non-participatory format was considered due to a wish to minimize my impact on the potential dialogical situations. With that said, drama exercises and creative expression can make one feel quite vulnerable and a researcher sitting watching and taking notes in a corner would not help the atmosphere and trust building in the room. This decision was also made based on Baileys account of four “inherent advantages” in using participant observation: the possibility to collect non-verbal behavior, one’s attendance in actual



occurring situations, the possibility for intimate relationships between the observer and the observed, and the openness and susceptibility of the method (1994:243-4). As for the first advantage mentioned, participatory observation was intentionally chosen due to the fact that social theatre is such a deeply embodied practice. As Jorgensen states, this method enables the researcher to observe

[...] not only the physically observable environment but also its primary reality as humanly meaningful experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities. Through participation, in other words, it is possible to observe and gather many forms of data that often are inaccessible from the standpoint of a nonparticipating external observer (2015:1)

Because of this, it could be argued that without experiencing the bodily sensations of the drama exercises oneself, knowledge obtained through non-participatory observations would have significant flaws. Although not able to catch the individual sensations and experiences each participant will have, the researcher can through participation better comprehend and relate to verbal accounts of the same situations.

These academic reflections resulted in a decision to observe and participate, which in practice meant that I functioned as a normal participant in the sessions, with no tasks other than to introduce the workshop and gather consent forms (see appendix 5). The element of participation also helped me with gaining trust amongst the participants, which is essential in this kind of research. As Jorgensen states, “people who do not know you or trust you are not likely to be cooperative in providing much data, especially truthful information about the deepest meanings and inner workings of their daily lives” (2015:10).

### 3.2.3.3 Semi-structured post-workshop interviews

After gathering observations from the 8 sessions, post-workshop interviews were conducted to enrich the first findings from the already accumulated data. The initial idea of conducting interviews before the workshop as well was abandoned because of limitations in time and resources, as well as the possibility of influencing participants negatively. As Witterborn reminds us, one should be careful to not define and reinforce differences amongst the study objects in beforehand, as it can affect the potential for dialogue (2011:123).

The aim of these individual interviews was to supply, clarify and elaborate on topics that unfolded in the workshop and the following situations that came from activities concerned with these topics. These verbal accounts and comments were also useful to see if there were large discrepancies between what was done in the workshops and what was said in the interviews. Additionally, they were used as a way to make sure I as a researcher did not rely on solely my own interpretation of a situation or scene, as movements and expression contain culturally embedded meanings and differences. As Kaptani & Yuval-

Davis state: “any authoritative interpretation of non-verbal behavior which would not be mediated by the descriptions and explanations of the participants of what they did and or saw others doing, would be presumptuous” (2008:6).

All in all, nine participants were interviewed through eight separate interviews, most during the last week of the workshop with two exceptions a few weeks before and a few weeks after its ending. One of the interviews ended up being conducted in written form over WhatsApp due to the personal preferences of the interviewee. The format of the interviews was semi-structured and mostly individual, with one exception of an interview done with two participants together upon their request. Semi-structured interviews, according to Schensul et al: “[...] combine the flexibility of an unstructured, open-ended interview with directionality and agenda of the survey instrument, to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level” (149:1999). Therefore, the questions asked in the interviews were pre-formulated in an interview guide (see appendix 3), with an open-ended structure and possibility of diversion if needed. When creating the guide, I followed Cohen, Manion & Morrison's recommendation of asking questions of various natures, including questions regarding descriptions, experience, knowledge, feeling, sensory experiences and personal background, as well as contrast questions (2007:359). Furthermore, the developing of the guide was done with inspiration from Kvale's list of the key characteristics of qualitative research interviews:

- Engage, understand and interpret the key feature of the lifeworlds of the participants.
  - Use natural language to gather and understand qualitative knowledge
  - Be able to reveal and explore the nuanced descriptions of the lifeworlds of the participants. Elicit descriptions of specific situations and actions, rather than generalities.
  - Adopt a deliberate openness to new data and phenomena, rather than being too pre structured.
  - Focus on specific ideas and themes, i.e. have direction, but avoid being too tightly structured.
  - Accept the ambiguity and contradictions of situations where they occur in participants, if this is a fair reflection of the ambiguous and contradictory situation in which they find themselves
  - Accept that the interview may provoke new insights and changes in the participants themselves
  - Regard interviews as an interpersonal encounter, with all that this entails.
  - Be a positive and enriching experience for all participants
- (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007:355)

In preparing the interviews, I created an additional consent form (see appendix 4) specifically concerning the interview setting. As for choosing the settings of the interviews, I tried to be as flexible and open as possible, only having in mind sound environments of the places the interviews suggested. The choice of interviewees was dependent on a few factors within my restricted time and resources. I decided to only interview participants who had attended

regularly, meaning more than half of the sessions. Additionally, it proved difficult to find a fitting translator, so a couple participants with very limited English skills were ruled out. Furthermore, it was important to make sure the group of participants were somewhat representative of the diversity in the larger group in terms of nationalities, age and gender. Therefore, out of the nine, seven were women and two were men, coming from Italy, Sweden, Morocco, Nigeria, Spain, Germany, Indonesia and Peru.

### **3.2.4 Data processing**

From these different collection methods, a substantial amount of data was retrieved. Audio recording, photography and some filming were used in the workshop sessions, which enabled transcribing immediately afterwards. Interviews were taped and transcribed as well.

As this research includes large amounts of drama-based data, it is important to clarify what guided its analysis, as theatre always entail multi-layered meanings (Nicholson, 2005:80). When analyzing this material, the contributions of Kaptani & Yuval-Davis and Cahill were of great assistance. Specifically, Cahill's understanding of image work was helpful, as it is regarded an activity where a researcher can extract core emerging themes, specifically through what the participants "distil the essential elements of their selected problem and focus on the issues rather than on details of narrative, personality or character" (2006:65). The author further emphasizes the need for a space for reflexivity and discussion in the group regarding the images, which serves as a means for the researcher to gain deeper insights into the participants representation, reaction and interpretations (2006:66). Kaptani & Yuval-Davis on the other hand focus on playback theatre and how it can be viewed through an analytical lens. According to them, this form of theatre can be viewed in the same fashion as how Cahill views image work, specifically as "illustrative narratives that can be used to highlight some of the important generative themes of the research participants" (2008:5).

The categorization of the data material was done inductively, where categories and codes emerged from reoccurring topics in the data. Being a thematic analysis, this process was characterized by sorting, constructing and reconstructing, and negotiating "types, features, characteristics, classes and patterns", common in most qualitative research (Jorgensen, 2015:10). This resulted in a list of main categories, with 2-7 codes within them, and quotes and observations from the workshop and the interviews were assembled according to relevance. A surprise during this process was how quickly it became clear which themes were most prevalent. This was perhaps due to the amount of data concerning the main findings, and it proved very beneficial to rely on many different methods of data collection rather than one or two. My personal experience being a participant in the workshop was also very helpful in having the language to adequately describe activities where bodily sensations played a big role. Additionally, this helped me minimize rigid conclusions from

words retrieved from the image work activities, as my experience gave insight into how the process was sometimes very coincidental. Importantly, I was careful not to assume participants experiences, and I always made sure to ask for their interpretations and reflections if I had analyzed a situation a certain way.

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The following three chapters will present the three main findings of this case study. These three, notions of sameness and difference, communication and facilitation, are all essential in answering what the method of social theatre did for intercultural dialogue. Amongst, within, and across these three main findings, ten specific qualities of theatre emerged, which are in different ways relevant to the three findings. Therefore, the three findings will be presented one by one, with the first section of each finding focusing on explaining the finding, its elements and its importance. The second part of each chapter presents and discusses on the various qualities of theatre that proved important to the finding in question

Before embarking on these chapters, is important to stress that these findings, even if presented individually and separately, exist in an intertwined web of experiences, expressions, and interpretations. They should therefore to a large degree be considered collectively when understanding the role of theatre in a process of dialogue. Furthermore, these findings are not meant for generalizing convictions, as they are merely results from one case study within a specific context in a specific time frame. That being said, they provide valuable insight into the elements of a theatrical process that can potentially benefit, but also harm an attempt on intercultural dialogue.

# Chapter 4: Notions of sameness and difference

As it turns out, in the contextual frame of a workshop centered on the theme of interculturality, notions of difference and sameness were present in the registration form, in the participant observations and drama exercises, and in the interviews done after the completion of the workshop. Although not only specifically related to the actual method of theatre, this finding is essential to better understand the participants' relation to each other, thus the very basis for creating dialogue amongst people from different cultural backgrounds. It is also relevant because, as it will be presented, theatre had an impact on these notions during the sessions and in reflections afterwards among interviewees.

## 4.1 Notions present in the workshop sessions

An overall finding was the general acknowledgement of the existence of cultural differences. In the registration forms, several participants listed differences in culture, values and beliefs as a main problem regarding diversity, and interestingly "stereotypes" was also mentioned. Often, culture and nationality were used interchangeably when referring to relevant differences, and none of the participants problematized the concept of culture during the workshop. That being said, Eva, a Spanish participant reflected in the post-workshop interview on the layers of the term:

The culture is always there, because the culture is not like when you think of the word culture and you think like stereotypes, like "pizza", "Italian". No. Culture is all the life experience that raised you in a concrete place in a concrete time, in an history period (personal communication, March 27, 2019).

Interestingly, Eva was one of the participants with a degree in social science, and jokingly referred to this in the interview, that she saw the world in a specific way because of her academic background in sociology. It is hard to know to if this factor had an impact on her answers compared to the others, but nevertheless it is worth noting, especially since she brought it up on its own.

The layers of the culture-term are also relevant because a few participants, Eva included, showed a complex and almost paradoxical understanding of cultural differences, where they simultaneously acknowledged their potential pitfalls and perceived "truths". Specifically, stereotypes regarding culture was seen as something that was based in reality, but that could have negative implications and effects on those they concerned. When discussing an exercise from the first workshop session, where we were instructed to figure out where we were from and create an illustrative map in the room by placing ourselves from

North to South, one of the German participants, Ramona, noted: "It's like.. I think there is a lot of truth in this, that you say... ehm.. The people from the North are like this, the people from the South are different, the stereotype. There is a lot of truth in it" (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Eva supported this with a similar conviction: "I have realized that these stereotypes are true, and not true. At first, I thought they are shit, the stereotypes. But no, (laughs), there is a reason" (personal communication, March 27, 2019). This mindful space for complexities and paradoxical realities is in line with Van Erven & Gardner's argument that theatre can create room for "the kind of paradoxical interactions [...] that are necessary to build tolerant relationships" between people with various differences (2011:35).

In a sense, stereotypes became a source of laughter in the workshop, an easy entryway for discussing cultural specificities and development of a sense of common understanding and acceptance. In the mapping activity mentioned above, the groups that formed in the South, in the middle and in the North were then instructed to create small scenes based on how they understood themselves as a group. All decided to play on their stereotype to different degrees, showing commonality in an obviously simplified and characteristic form. The group from the South, which was composed of all the African participants, a Kurdish Iraqi and a Peruvian, as well as the southern Italians, chose to sit in front of a fire making tea or coffee, arguing with each other, sleeping and enjoying the social company. The middle group, composed of all Italians, played on common Italian stereotypes like loud and expressive talking, guided tours of Catholic statues and chaotic group dynamics. The Northern group, which was composed of one northern Italian, two Germans, a Swede, and myself from Norway, played on the perception of a colder and more private social culture, but where sharing of alcohol in the end made us outgoing, talking and dancing with each other. All of these scenes welcomed a lot of recognitional laughter from the ones watching. It seemed like this recognition of our differences, but also similarities across national borders, created a good backdrop for the rest of the session, which included going deeper into the complex content of intercultural dialogue. As Ramona reflected upon in her interview about this activity:

Eh, that it fits well and that you could really see well the difference between Northern people and Southern people. In everyday life, sometimes you ehm.. put a little bit, you cover it a little bit, because you say, 'yeah we have to work together and it's not so important'. But, ehm, maybe it is (laughs), and then you, if you hide it it's not good. Cause maybe then you get prejudices more easily? (personal communication, March 14, 2019)

From the data many specific similarities and differences were pointed out regarding nationality, education level, gender, sexuality, age, and intimacy boundaries. In some sense,

this way of understanding differences transcended a binary idea of cultures, by giving room for complexities. This way, the diversity of the group occasionally became a force of strengthened commonalities. In other words, by regarding each other as whole and complicated, taking into account the specificity of their gender, age, sexuality and such, one could argue that the participants avoided viewing each other in a strict and simplified manner. Difference and sameness, unity and division became in some sense interwoven, as Eva accounts for:

In a place, with all these people different, can be so much different, and at the same time, so much unity. Like the, breaking the prejudices. Like, wow. That was... Like... You're in Italy, no? And you think "I'm in Italy". And you think "Ok Italians, pizza, chivo, and the other thing... yes this is Italy". Italy doesn't exist! (laughs). Italy is Spain, it's Norwagia, it's Africa, a lot. It's... And this was like a representation for me, of the Italian society in a pickle [*particular*] space. (personal communication, March 27, 2019).

An Italian participant, Alessandra, touched upon this as well when comparing the workshop experience to her intercultural classroom setting, where she said her role as a teacher and the students' role as learners prevented them in indulging in genuine dialogue. According to her, the workshop space held fewer strict roles: "yeah, it was easier to listen to a person. So, not, yeah. Not to a student or to a refugee, I don't know. It was only a person, it wasn't something.." (personal communication, March 26, 2019). The strength in this complex perception of difference and sameness can be linked to Witteborn's (2011) arguments presented in the conceptual framework regarding requisites of genuine dialogue. As cited in the chapter, the author notes that dialogue is only possible when persons involved perceive each other "as unique, unquantifiable, and present beings", which is partly achieved through not labeling each other as one thing (2011:111). Additionally, these findings relate to Schininà's conviction that "[...] the value of theatre does not lie in its capacity to emphasize what unifies human beings, but rather in its potential to emphasize their differences and to create bridges between them" (2004:17). Without drawing absolute causal links between the theatre method and this result, it seems from the data material that specific theatre exercises like the ones mentioned above served as catalysts for the complex notions amongst some of the participants.

That being said, difference was also simplified and generalized by many. There existed a taken for granted attitude of cultural differences, and some accounted of feeling estranged to other cultures, particularly the "African". This was evident when discussing topics such as intimacy boundaries, gender roles, and violence. Alessandra brought up her own thought process from an activity involving close physical touch in her interview. After noticing that Antonio, the facilitator, reminded everyone to be respectful in their handling of the other's bodies, she wondered how 'these men from other culture' regarded the situation,

separating her own perceived free notion of body and sexuality with that of the African male participants (personal communication, March 26, 2019). This was also evident in Eva's interview, where she several times brought up her own discomfort with her experience with what she labeled as black men and their objectification of her. Interestingly, these issues were not brought up in the workshop sessions and can be interpreted as a sign of a certain level of discomfort in discussing this topic, something Eva also attested to in her interview. This exceptionalism regarding African men and their perceived sexual culture should be viewed through a decolonial lens and is a clear example of generalization of a whole continent. The method of theatre did not generate an escape from these simplified and categorical notions for the men belonging to this group, clearly showing the method's limitation regarding existing power dynamics.

Generalized notions of gender differences were also brought up to a certain degree after a forum theatre scene where a conflict between a cheating boyfriend and a woman was played out. The second round, Fabio, an Italian participant took over the role of the boyfriend from a female one, Barbara, and several women in the audience reacted to his approach, which was characterized by condescending talk and avoidance of his previous cheating. In the discussion after the scene, when asked if there was anything different happening this second time, one female participant responded:

yes, it is completely different because he is a man (several people laugh). This is a.... As a man other than an actor he is a man, so he using a lot of bad energy, irony irony.

Antonio: What else? This is interesting.

Eva: So, he is imposing more, she [Barbara] was always like this (folds her hands), like praying like she was looking painful. He is looking like (ups his chest), you know.

Barbara: he minimized all his stuff, nothing happened.  
(participant observation, February 26, 2019)

In this exchange it was clear from the women discussing that they strongly felt a difference between Barbara acting as the boyfriend and Fabio's interpretation of the role. His attitude and choice of actions were explained through his gender, and other factors such as personality, social background and sexuality were not accounted for, not to mention how this approach could have been merely a creative choice more than something rooted in reality. As Fabio's response to this discussion in the situation was merely laughter, it is difficult to ascertain anything, nevertheless it is interesting to observe the taken for granted attitude in the discussion. Just as Witterborn's (2011) ideal of not working with strict labels was exemplified above, this is a situation where the method did not overcome generalized labeling, and these participants continued to view each other using strict gendered labels



based on generalizations and taken for granted characteristics. This illustrates an unstableness in the method of social theatre, signaling how other factors also are important when attempting to create dialogue.

Furthermore, an interesting aspect regarding sameness and power visible in many interviews concerned equality. Several interviewees stated with confidence that they felt everyone in the group were equal and had equal opportunity to speak. It is worth noting that these were all non-Italians and from outside Europe. Eva was one of the only ones with a somewhat critical perspective towards the group dynamics, stating that:

Ok, like this phrase that [says].. 'we are not equal, but we have to have the same rights'. There has to be the equality, but we are individual, we are not equal. So this is very present in this. Because.. we have all the chance to express. [...] so there was this space, but obviously we're not equal as persons. And is this person that has this experience that made her been very shy and she doesn't want to participate, and this man as a married, class blabla. He has the power of taking his space. So these relations, as in life, as in society, happened. But.. so we cannot be equal.. but we had this opportunity to express (personal communication, March 27, 2019).

Despite this near consensus on equality from the participants interviewed, the participant observation showed clear situations where multidimensional and intersectional status hierarchies infiltrated the encounters in the workshop, regarding gender, nationalities, age and (dis)abilities. Additionally, the interviewees also tell of situations where they felt a loss of power. Ramona experienced this this in a physical way, where she recounted the game where she was blocked, and described how she felt weaker than her partner. She said this made her feeling momentarily small and doubtful, especially because he was not as gentle in his blocking as Antonio instructed us to be. Lucia, the participant from Peru, also recounted a sense of loss of power in a different way when doing an exercise where we were told to keep eye contact with one person while the group moved around in the room. She described this as a challenge for her normal intimacy boundaries: "I feel a bit like exhibited..." (personal communication, March 28, 2019). Additionally, Yahya, the Moroccan participant, had another experience where he was set to play the role of a child in a scene during the last session. Even if he did not feel the impact to be personal, he said in the discussion afterwards that he saw now how it felt to be a child, with no power, feeling very weak and vulnerable to whoever wanted to pull him in one direction.

Lastly, a main element in this finding was the sense of connectedness and fellowship in the group resulting in their common wish, belief and action in meeting across cultures with a goal of understanding. This commonality was both regarded as a positive aspect and a few times something worthy of critical thought. Prince, a Nigerian participant, stated that he felt very comfortable because of the open atmosphere in the group: "yeah yeah, we were

positive. So [inaudible], we are trying to make the world good, so there was not any negative vibes in the air, so..” (personal communication, March 28, 2019). He also mentioned he felt we all had one common motive in mind, which was to bridge intercultural gaps. As mentioned, this was also the topic of critique during some of the activities in the workshop. During an image theatre activity, where we all were asked to create statues representing different sides of intercultural dialogue, one male Italian participant chose to sit far away from the others facing the wall, in a hunched and protective position (see picture 2). When discussing the statues and their meanings after, he said:

What I think is that we are not representing society because we all have something in common, we all want dialogue, otherwise we wouldn't be here. So, like I decided to represent the parts of the society that is not represented here. The part that fear dialogue, that doesn't want to. They are not interested, they believe that their reality is the only reality, they cannot exit from their view, they don't want to interact, they don't want to share. And actually, it is a big part of our society, especially now in our political situation. That's what I decided to be like this, to represent this part (participant observation, February 12, 2019).



**Picture 2:** One participant chose to embody conflict in the image of dialogue

## 4.2 Qualities of social theatre

In addition to these presented elements concerned with describing the notions of sameness and difference that existed in the group, other findings more related to the method of theatre

were found in the data material. During analysis, several themes emerged that concerned theatre and its effects, but in different ways could be connected to the notions of difference and sameness that existed in the group.

#### **4.2.1 Showing complexity**

The first one of these, which can be viewed in extension to the already mentioned contradicting and complex understanding of cultural stereotypes, is how the social theatre method created space for complexity and multilayered meanings. Because of this space, the climate for discussions related to the topic of sameness and difference were made possible. Interviewees mentioned especially that image theatre, in the form of statue work, was particularly valuable in this regard, where they brought up a large web of descriptive words which were further on used to create scenes and explored in discussions. Ramona said that these images woke up her creativity and made her reflect on new ways to view a topic (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Eva mentioned how theatre made her aware of paradoxes and layers in certain issues (personal communication, March 27, 2019). The method also showed complexities by its element of role embodiment, as Prince reflected on after a scene in the last session. Playing the part of a rich man in his country of birth Nigeria, he put himself in the shoes of his “other” for the first time and realized some complexities in a group of people he before would have regarded as simply evil: “But we can't say he is bad actually... Because me, before... I normally say he is bad, I express myself acting it out now I realize that he is not bad he just made bad decisions” (participant observation, March 26, 2019). A female Italian participant had a similar experience in the same scene playing a catholic refugee woman, where she felt for herself the layers of intersectionality. In reflections after the scene she shared her emotions around trying to connect with one of the other characters because they were both catholic, but she was anti-refugee, then another Nigerian but he was rich, and then a third because they were both poor, but she was a white Italian. She said she felt she was living in a “fragmented feeling”, not knowing where to fit in.

#### **4.2.2 Discovering each other**

The method of theatre showed to be beneficial in creating bonds between the participants, and many said it assisted greatly in the process of getting to know each other, thus potentially impacting their understandings of perceived differences and similarities. Several participants were of the opinion that the kind of activities done in social theatre provided a better platform for bonding than other, less creative, encounters, such as being co-workers. The activities also sometimes required participants to share information about themselves for it to be done successfully, such as where they were from, what they liked to eat, what their dreams were, different stories from their life, and so on. For Ramona, creativity was

something she felt supported the bonding to a degree, saying: "So if you are more creative you come up with new ideas and you... and the others can get to know you and your thoughts and your culture even better" (personal communication, March 14, 2019). This is in line with what Feller & Ryan argues in their work, which concerns how creativity plays an integral role in one's ability to communicate in a dialogical manner, where self-insight, listening and sharing are essential components (2012:360). Eva mentioned how her own prejudices about certain nationalities and ages were challenged because of the theatre activities we did together. The directness of theatre was essential for Alessandra, stating that: "I think it is something very useful because it is something really direct because it is your body.. involved. So, you are like, ehm, you are getting in touch straight... with other people. It is something very, yeah, very direct" (personal communication, March 26, 2019). For Yahya theatre helped specifically with comfort and communication with the others, which then again proved beneficial in the process of getting to know each other: "But it was nice doing these exercises, weird at first but when you get used to it.. it was nice. Also, like communication.. You get familiar with the other person.. And it was feeling nice" (personal communication, March 28, 2019). His comments also demonstrate one of the limitations of the method, which was that it to some degree depended on sufficient time to be fruitful. He also shared that he felt increasingly comfortable and confident both for every session he attended, as well as for every session as the time went on, which was echoed by a few other participants as well.

#### **4.2.3 Empathy**

Closely linked to the element of discovering each other is another distinct quality of the theatre method, which is its ability to evoke empathy for others, which again could potentially lead to a change in one's perception of differences and similarities amongst each other. Some participants told they felt it was easier to relate to different sentiments and cultures by acting out different roles, emphasizing the importance of feeling. Yahya summarized this sentiment in his interview, stating that it was a powerful feeling when you have to "change into another person" and that he felt by putting himself in the place of others he could better try "to understand, trying to feel. It's about feeling" (personal communication, March 28, 2019). Prince also mentioned this aspect: "just like.. the the affection is there. You felt it, you felt it yourself. It is not like you working together.. Acting, being there at the same time, acting the same thing" (personal communication, March 28, 2019). This finding is important in relation to the possibility of creating dialogue, as empathy is mentioned as essential in a dialogical encounter (UNESCO, 2009:10). As mentioned earlier, in this thesis, the goal of understanding is seen as something separating dialogue with other forms of communication, such as discussion and deliberation, and in this sense, empathy is also highly relevant (Incerti-Théry, 2016:10). Following this understanding, social theatre can therefore be a

useful tool in dialogue processes, as heightened empathy seemed to be connected to the theatre activities.

#### **4.2.4 Individual change and development**

One of the claims that the reviewed literature makes is that theatre has the potential to change minds and practices in people, and it is therefore relevant to explore further if this was the case in this case study. It is important to note that there was never a specific aim to compare answers participants gave before and after or early on and later on, merely because there is no sufficient and acceptable way to measure this in this type of research, where absolute causal conclusions are not achievable nor particularly desired. Nevertheless, it is interesting to look into what kind of reflections the participants made about what they took from the workshop, bearing in mind that their statements merely reflect their own perceptions of this matter more than anything else.

Several participants reported on moments of self-insight because of the drama exercises. One said she started reflecting on past experiences and relationships from a scene about restriction and over-protection, saying that: “I can take this impression and remember it and maybe I can ehm... benefit from it in the future, maybe in conflicts” (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Several stated some activities made them more aware of their own boundaries and limits, while some said it helped them to see conflicts from the perspectives of others. This supports the conviction presented by Dennis in the literature review, which concerns how theatre enables individuals “[...] to draw on, and thus reveal, both their capacity and their limitations, artistically, physically, culturally and socially” (2008:212). One participant said for instance that being in direct creative contact with male African immigrants made her more aware of her own stereotypes, and that “it broke some of my thinking” (personal communication, March 27, 2019). Alessandra said she took knowledge gained in the workshop to her teaching job, specifically about how to be open to people even if you think they can’t give you anything new. For Indah, a participant from Indonesia, the playback theatre session with Hamed’s story became a source of insight into new and gentler ways to deal with difference in opinion by seeing different people tackle the same situation. Several of the interviewees stated that they learned a lot during the workshop but were vague when describing this in more detail. One thing some mentioned specifically was how they felt they acquired more knowledge in how to communicate in a dialogical manner, and also the different ways of communicating through the body, as Lucia expressed, saying: “I think for myself I take that, always the, again to, to manage, to have the idea that dialogue and communication it's with all my body. Not only with my words” (personal communication, March 28, 2019). Notably, this process showed to be very much influenced

by Antonio's facilitation skills, as he often times made us reflect during and after an exercise on our actions, reactions and interpretations.

In the reviewed literature, there are quite a few statements regarding the ability theatre has to potentially change and develop both participants and audiences. Judging from the data, this element of the case study is loosely brought up and difficult to summarize. Additionally, the reflections from participants don't necessarily say anything about real and applied changes in behavior, they merely serve as an insight into how the participants view themselves. Nevertheless, this finding supports Feller & Ryan's notions of how creative practices are valuable for accumulating deep self-insight and reaching the unconscious parts of oneself (2012:360). Furthermore, using Nicholson's (2005) concept of transportation rather than transformation, it can be argued that participants experienced moments of transportation, of seeing with a new set of glasses if you will. What these moments of transportation potentially lead to lies outside the resources of this small case study.

#### **4.2.5 Telling and sharing stories**

Another finding connected to the method of theatre, which is relevant to the participants' notions of similarity and difference, is how it facilitated storytelling and sharing of different narratives. Stories and scenes with a specific chain of events were important elements in many activities, and they were intentionally set to derive from the participants' own lives and experiences, following the principles of playback theatre (Dennis, 2008:212). Stories varied between fictional, metaphorical, imagined, and lived, and came both as starting points from Antonio, as well as from the participants while creating scenes or during closing discussions. Prince was someone putting great emphasis to this aspect in his interview and felt on a personal level that the workshop was a space for him as a refugee to "let people understand [what] our life has been like" (personal communication, March 28, 2019). For him, stories were necessary to create empathy, and sharing glimpses of his reality was an empowering act. Without describing himself as voiceless, he additionally stated that theatre could give voice to the voiceless, which was also mentioned by Eva, specifically regarding racial minorities in Europe. She furthermore told how she was surprised by the level of discussion and talking in the workshop, and said she felt it was very important in this context.

Part of the relevance of storytelling and sharing was to experience and observe the dynamics between different stories, how they were presented and negotiated, as well as how they were interpreted by others. Through acting out different narratives and life stories side by side one could grasp complexities and relationships, in addition to becoming aware of which stories you resonated with and which ones you didn't. Power played a part in these processes, influencing for example which stories were taken up for further discussion. In her interview, Eva gave an example of this when explaining her frustration with the general

heteronormative mindset in the group, visible by the overlooking of topics and issues regarding sexuality. Sexuality was a word she brought up in a discussion on the potential blocks for dialogue, but it was never democratically chosen to work on, and she felt it was avoided because of its sensitive nature:

Yeah, it's because, like something that you always have to fight to put it on the table. Always. You have this.. like, with the gay thing.. [...] You have the prejudice that you are heterosexual, so you have to fucking scream that you're gay because, so that the people will get aware. And for me this is like aah... open conflict. And I don't know even how to solve it.. Here. Like.. It's good for me that I am learning to live with heterosexual people (laughs) (personal communication, March 27, 2019).

A large part of the process of telling stories was connected to the body and the mere physical element of storytelling. The importance of the body will be discussed further in the next chapter, but it is important to note how the body played into this finding, as it seems to have an impact on notions of sameness and difference as well. First of all, different bodies created different potential for storytelling, and it is safe to say that the participants' individual bodily characteristics such as skin color, abilities, age, gender expression etc. affected this. Furthermore, the embodiment of storytelling was mentioned by several as adding a layer of 'realness' or emotional connection to the stories, which made them more relatable and harder to forget. In her interview, Lucia brought this up while reflecting on an exercise where we embodied the roles of an aggressor and a defender: "Those feelings were really alive, I don't know. I mean, those emotions that you really saw in the other people, of course, it was a theatre, but you saw that many represent as well that they want to attack you" (personal communication, March 28, 2019). Personally, I had a similar experience while working together with Prince where I was supposed to embody a border officer refusing his entry into Italy. The mere acting out of the role, the actions and the words felt real and necessarily uncomfortable. Eva, having some experience with theatre, had several reflections on the topic. One of them was that theatre was regarded by her as a method to bridge her rationality and her emotions, a place for them to co-exist. For her, this rational and emotional space was a way for self-improvement and self-awareness, which she believed was an integral part of dialogue.

In regard to the literature, this finding seems to support the conviction that the embodied element of theatre is of great importance to its overall benefits. As Grainger states: "when we immerse ourselves in the experience of being alive in the body then meaning becomes something lived rather than examined" (1990:169). The emotional element detected in this category additionally goes in line with the understanding of dialogue presented by Bryn, Eidsvåg and Skurdal where it differs from for example debate in that it allows feelings rather than attacks them (as cited in Incerti-Théry, 2016:10). That being said,

an important distinction is made by Cahill between drama that concerns 'problem-solving' or merely 'problem-identification'. According to the author, the method of theatre is of little use in creating change or positive impact if the storytelling never leaves the identification phase for an exploration of how to solve the problem. In this case, the embodied element can work against one's interest and serve as "disempowering, inadvertently generating a sense of an inevitable outcome" (2006:68). In other words, sharing stories merely for the sake of sharing stories may not be enough to create dialogue and lasting understanding. On the other hand, by transporting oneself into other's stories, one can according to Nicholson (2005) build up a deeper insight that can result in real change. In this case study, the data shows instances of storytelling on its own, as well as instances where 'problem-solving' drama activities like forum theatre and playback theatre were applied to explore different ways of dealing with conflict. Therefore, the data shows how multifaceted and complex the method of theatre is, and how it can be used to serve different purposes.

### **4.3 Summarizing reflections**

All in all, when viewing these findings together with the existing literature reviewed for this research, it can be said that notions of difference and sameness to some degree seemed to function in a fruitful and valuable way for the dialogical process. Difference was an essential part of the participants motivations and focus and served a role in the wish to achieve understanding. The data partly shows that in the workshop, there were instances where some participants viewed each other as unique subjects. However, there were also situations showing the opposite, where objectification and generalization played a role in the participants perceptions of each other. Interestingly, many participants characterized the relationship between them as equal, but field notes and interviews revealed many instances of power dynamics infiltrating the sessions. Collectively, the group had an overall sense of fellowship in their motivations for joining the workshop, and this motivation is according to the literature presented an important factor in creating dialogue. As mentioned earlier, dialogue can be characterized partly in its willing and intentional nature, which are elements that were present in the group in this case study. Different qualities of theatre, specifically regarding its ability to make space for complex realities and meanings, to create situations for potential bonding, empathetic interaction, storytelling, self-insight and transportation, also affected the groups notions of sameness and difference in various ways. However, the method was somewhat limited by factors like time, power, and facilitation, which to different degrees shaped the potential for these effects. With these paradoxical and multidimensional findings in mind, one could argue that notions of difference and sameness contributed to specific dialogical moments between specific people rather than a continuous dialogical encounter.



# Chapter 5: Communication

Communication is the general theme of the second group of findings. Integral to the theatre method in many ways, communication was a major element in the workshop both in theory and in practice, for Antonio as facilitator and for the participants. 'Communication' in this chapter includes therefore both insights into *what* was communicated as well as *how* it was communicated. As in the last chapter, the data material concerning communication in itself will be presented, which specifically relates to understandings of the dialogue term, language, non-verbal communication, and positive communication culture. In addition, several qualities of theatre that concerned the method, but in many ways related to the topic of communication, will then be accounted for.

## 5.1 Communication in the workshop

First of all, it is necessary to present what was found regarding the participants understanding of dialogue and what it entails, should be and means to them. Trust, empathy, acceptance, horizontality, openness, respect and shared language were all things mentioned by participants as important for creating dialogue. In all interviews, dialogue was talked about in very fluid, big, and idealistic terms, and there existed an understanding amongst most interviewees that the broader goals mentioned above were possible to achieve in their complete form. That being said, the format of image theatre provided a more nuanced insight into the participants understandings of the term. During one activity where we were instructed to create statues representing dialogue, followed by single word interpretations of these statues, a complex web of elements showed itself, illustrated here by a word cloud presented to the participants the following session (see picture 3).

In the fourth session, after concentrating on trust exercises and exploring the meaning of dialogue, Antonio introduced the topic of dialogue blocks, where the participants were invited to collectively write down what they thought could potentially prevent dialogue from happening. The words that came out in this exercise was: age, control, life stories, religion, education/values, language, physical differences, clothes, gender/sexuality, money, space, skin color. Additionally, through acting out scenes with difference as a topic, it became clear that inability to listen was a main block to dialogue, either because the participants themselves failed to listen to each other or their roles did. In other words, inability to listen functioned as a block for dialogue both in reality and in made-up, imaginary worlds. An example of this was from the last session, where many differing roles were included in the same scene; a catholic strict woman with anti-refugee



words flow more freely and naturally. This shows how language limitations has an effect on the level of one's own engagement in theatre exercises, and that theatre, although embodied, often depends on some degree of a shared language to harvest it's fruits. During the sessions we relied heavily on the continuous interpreting role of Antonio, who attempted to explain everything in English and Italian. Issues were particularly present in smaller group works, where Antonio was not always present, which will be further discussed in the next chapter concerning the importance of facilitation. Several times some participants were more or less left out of decision making when creating scenes because they were in the linguistic minority. Observation showed that efforts often were made to accommodate everyone, but that limits in time often stood in the way of complete inclusion, and that someone ended up taking charge of the process to finish exercises and planning. Lucia also attested to this in her interview, saying she felt that sometimes in small groups, one person's idea was decided upon too quickly, mentioning how lack of time was another reason for this in addition to power. Yahya also brought up language barriers through recounting one instance in the workshop where he was the only non-Italian speaking person. He felt he could do little more than to observe and play the role of a child: "yeah there is always a problem of language. Yeah if there is like no language between us, we can't have a communication. Like it happened last time. They were just speaking Italian and.." (personal communication, March 28, 2019). That being said, several participants mentioned how theatre as a method had helped when language fell short. Ramona told she was quite surprised that the group worked so well together in spite of these barriers, and Yahya expressed how he felt theatre improved the communication overall. Prince, who is mostly English speaking, was grateful he had a space to speak and practice English, as many Italians he encountered outside the workshop preferred their language, which he sometimes struggled with. Another more positive outlook on the element of language, was that throughout the sessions it seemed that the uncertainty most participants had with either of the two languages created scenarios where almost all had to go through experiences of vulnerability and confusion. Some observations suggest that this could at times help level the dynamics in the group, prohibiting inexorable power dynamics regarding language skill and comfort levels. In a sense, the fact that most participants at some point had to step out of their comfort zone regarding language proficiency could seem to improve the overall atmosphere of the group, where mistakes and misunderstandings from both linguistic sides were catalysts for laughter and lightness.

Another finding regarding communication concerns the type of communication culture that existed in the workshop. Insight into this is important to further investigate to what degree dialogue could or did occur, as the way of communication plays a big role in achieving this. Participant observations and interviews revealed also here a conglomeration of differing experiences, but with a general mentioning of positive attributes to the overall

communication style. The topic of openness was repeatedly mentioned by many as a characteristic of the communication. Ramona was one remarking this, saying in her interview about the communication atmosphere: "It was very open, and very.... not tolerant, but more than this. So, everyone was accepted and there were no rules, no doubts, no... and no restrictions. So, everyone was open minded" (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Field notes also supports these notions, with multiple instances of exchanges with a large degree of open mindedness, willingness and flexibility amongst the participants. They often asked opinions of those not so active in a conversation, treated each other's input with respect and sincerity, and a "yes-atmosphere" permeated most of the activities. Even if some individuals acted less open than others, the ones who did were in the majority and naturally steered the communication culture in that direction. Other adjectives that were used to describe this positive communication style were relaxed, true, spontaneous and centered on listening. In connection to the possibility of making space for dialogue, this finding indicates that a basis for dialogue in terms of communication culture was established in the workshop to a degree. As shown in the reviewed literature, dialogue requires a type of communication style characterized by "the basic ability to listen, cognitive flexibility, empathy, humility and hospitality" (UNESCO, 2009:10), as well as goal of understanding and a safe and inclusive environment (Incerti-Théry, 2016:10). That being said, as the data shows instances of communication which did not meet these criteria, it can be said that the communication culture still relied heavily on facilitation and the specific participants involved.

Another main element in the communication was how a lot of it was non-verbal. Naturally, using the theatre format bodily expression and interpretation was a major part of the way in which the group communicated, and other factors in this embodied element will be discussed more in detail further down in this chapter. From acting out scenes and playing games, it became clear how much we used our bodies to communicate, especially so due to the specific language barriers in the group. Several discussions after exercises revolved around how much it was possible to understand for the ones who didn't speak the language that was used in the scene, and almost always the consensus was that so much could be interpreted just by looks given, body language, movements or lack of movements and so on. Yahya mentioned how complicated and difficult subjects could be more easily communicated through his body, as the grey areas and details did not have to be expressed specifically. He reflected upon the layers of embodied communication, how he after the workshop was more aware of not only how to "speak with your body", but also how you can give the right "message that you want" and to also understand others through your own body (personal communication, March 28, 2019). This was something Barbara touched upon as well, telling that for her, sometimes she felt she could describe something much better with her body than with her words. Body language was something brought up by several, including Lucia,

who shared that she felt she gained more insights into the ways we communicate unconsciously through the body, and that she also appreciated how in the workshop she was pushed to explore a new way of transmitting meaning:

But challenged yourself to make, to do, to try to express in... with your body, with your gestures, with your voice.. To do something different, you know? That is another way of communication that you have totally different discourse that you are talking and talking and making, just discussing about theoretic things. Maybe unconsciously it comes as well, many expressions that you ... you have inside and thoughts.. Associations, associations with topics (personal communication, March 28, 2019).

For Hanna, the Swedish participant, the body played an essential role in creating the type of communication she wished for in the workshop. When being asked about the method of theatre she responded:

Ehm... and it really brought a lot of... it brought a lot to the table, like communicative wise.. If we were like standing up or moving around while talking, like it really didn't work as soon as we were sitting down or trying to do something serious, quote on quote. I... it ... mm.. It brought a lot to the positive energy and neg... I thought it was much easier for everyone to...to feel comfortable.. ehh.. when doing.. communicating their thoughts more spontaneously (personal communication, May 1, 2019).

Another element of the non-verbal communication that took place in the workshop was what I came to describe in my field notes as “being in the zone together”. Occasionally, through the method of theatre and often with the help of relaxing background music, the participants collectively created moments of a synergy of silent attentiveness, expression, listening and group feeling. Yahya described it as a fluidity in the communication, stating that he felt theatre as a method enabled this fluidity. These instances would happen mostly during trust building exercises and other activities that required a great deal of both concentration and collaboration, and were often characterized by playful, unconcentrated fun with glimpses and minutes of deep listening and attentiveness. In these moments, the group was on high alert, watching each other's moves, aware of their own tasks and roles while at the same time taking part in a bigger collective rhythm. Field notes revealed that these moments were easier to achieve on days where a substantial portion of the group were people with drama experience, as it seemed they assisted in collectively keeping up the concentration and drive. One of these moments were during an exercise led by Hamed, where he introduced a growing number of objects that were to be passed around in the same order across the participant circle. With the objects coming in, larger in number and faster in order there was a lot of laughter and mistakes made. That being said, with continuous reminders from Antonio to keep on going and to concentrate, moments came where all the objects passed smoothly between the group and there was a feeling of electricity in the air. Another activity involving

this communicative “zone” was one where we stood in a circle and transformed a chair in the middle into other objects by acting out what it now was. Not only did this activity rely on our ability to imitate meaning and to interpret it based on non-verbal expression, it also required attentiveness and group feeling so that two people did not go into the circle at the same time. Antonio incited this need by insisting on a certain level of tempo, rhythm and silence during the activity, which forced the group to feel the others and actively sense if the circle was ready for your own entry. Feeling was a concept some participants used to describe instances like these activities. The sensations were expressed as something hard to describe and were mentioned by some as spontaneous in nature. Yahya tried to explain it through describing it as energy: “So for me it made me feel like it's really moving that energy, you can feel it. And it makes you connected to the other persons in the circle. So, you get like... like you know them and you don't at the same time” (personal communication, March 28, 2019). This sensory and transcending element can be interpreted as an example of Cohen’s description of the unique qualities of art and aesthetic experiences. When arguing for why they are relevant for peacebuilding, the author states, as cited in the chapter on conceptual framework:

Aesthetic experiences engage the senses as well as the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual faculties to invite special qualities of embodied attention and response, such as disinterestedness, passionate commitment, receptivity, alertness, serenity, playfulness, and metacognitive awareness. These qualities of presence afford unique opportunities for individual and collective learning, empathy, imagination, and innovation, all of which are central to peacebuilding efforts (2015:6)

Despite a good portion of data showing signs of positive communication culture and multidimensional forms of communication, it is important to note that the picture is not that one-sided. Several limits to the communication was pointed out by participants as well as clearly visible in the field notes. First of all, from interviews and participatory observation it was clear that some topics were not discussed, and that the level of communication around certain issues remained on a more superficial and comfortable level. In the interview with Eva we reflected around our similar experience with withholding thoughts and suggestions around the topic of gender and sexuality. Gender was something we were both eager to explore out of personal interest, but never felt comfortable enough to really delve into it when choosing topics of conflict. In my case I felt too aware and embarrassed about common stereotypes related to gender issues from an intercultural perspective to bring it up, as I didn’t wish to contribute to the common conception that cultural diversity leads to conflicts regarding feminism and female empowerment. From my own experience in Norway the discourse often centers around immigrant men presumably “lagging behind” in their view on gender equality, and this led me to feel discomfort with the possibility of bringing it up. I

personally felt that regardless of the positive impact the drama approach had, it was not enough for me to put it out on the table. Eva expressed a similar view in terms of gender issues, as was someone identifying as lesbian even more frustrated with a feeling of disregard for the topic of sexuality. In her interview she said: "Like, gender, ok people talk of gender, but their sexuality... Never everyone talks about this! Not in the workshop. I hate it. So, for me this was... Because we are talking about conflict, and this is an important conflict" (personal communication, March 27, 2019). She told her reasons for not bringing it up was not enough comfort and sense of trust in the group, where she was unsure of what people would think if they knew of her sexuality. Connected to this is another weakness apparent in the data, which is a feeling that some issues were not dealt with deep enough, and that a lot of difficult subjects were handled with too much lightness. Prince was one of the participants with this impression, stating that he missed experiences where we fundamentally delved into the topics at hand and with each other's culture. From participant observation it would seem that part of this issue was connected to time, as there were instances where we ran out of time right when we were starting to dig deeper. A time this took place was during the last session, when we after having played out two scenes about several cultural conflicts discussed our roles and insights afterwards. Due to language issues, one of the participants who were not comfortable in either English or Italian ended up playing a bus driver, and in effect not being that active in the scene. Prince brought this up, saying that he felt the role of the bus driver was out of the picture and irrelevant for the play. His tone reflected a sense of injustice, perhaps because the participant playing the bus driver was his friend that he often assisted with language in daily life. Instead of digging deeper into what made this role be so passive, and how the participant ended up in this role, the conversation ended at Prince's remarks, only getting a few nervous laughs and short brushed of comments in response. As nothing else was said, it is difficult to know what lies behind Prince's frustration, if it in any way was connected to biases and power dynamics in the group. Nevertheless, it is one of the examples of instances where uncomfortable questions were not given a more hands on approach. Lastly, another limitation in the communication of the workshop was the fact that it relied strongly on facilitation to achieve the desired communication culture, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Facilitation as a topic will be discussed in detail further along in this chapter, but it is important to mention that it played a role under this finding as well. On a practical level, facilitation was heavily necessary for translation purposes as a way to bridge existing language barriers. On a communicative level it showed itself important to create and manage spaces of active listening, inclusion and respect. Several times Antonio was needed to quiet down interrupting talking, give people the chance to have the floor, or to encourage everyone to concentrate, listen, analyze other's arguments etc. This responsibility also meant that

weaker facilitation could prohibit good communication or dialogical instances from happening. Hanna brought this up in her interview while reflecting on a playback scene we did with a personal story of racism from Hamed. Hamed ended up playing himself in the scene, and consequently being the receiver of all racist comments, the other participants were told by him that the ones in the real-life event had said. It ended up fruitful and interesting, but also visibly difficult for Hamed, who was quite tired and silent after. Hanna felt it was not done in the most sensitive way, saying: I didn't feel that that was a good way to communicate, it was rather the opposite.. eh.. And I kind of feel bad for not saying something at that moment..." (personal communication, May 1, 2019). With a playback scene being so heavily rigged and structured, other facilitation choices, such as making Hamed watch others play out himself would have protected him from reliving the situation once again. In the end the scene, which was something almost every interviewee mentioned as a memorable moment afterwards, ended up using the same power dynamics as the ones who were originally in Hamed's racist encounter in the first place, reinforcing his blackness and victim role rather than giving him and the audience an empowered insight on the issue.

## **5.2 Qualities of social theatre**

### **5.2.1 The body and embodied movement**

As already mentioned, the method of theatre includes a large embodied element, where the body and its movements is essential for communication and expression. As shown earlier in this chapter, it is a main component in the communication in the group, but it is also in itself such a focal point in the method of theatre that it is necessary to delve deeper into what it entails for the dialogical process in relation to communication.

First of all, from the data material it is clear that the body proved to be valuable for exploring different and new ways of understanding a topic or dynamics. This was evident in all the image work that was done, where creating still statues not only once or twice, but perhaps twelve times on the same word expanded our own common perceptions. Personally, I experienced this during participant observation in one of the last sessions, where Antonio kept an exercise going quite long, and I found myself "empty" of interpretations. Through continuous movement and exploring different bodily postures, I was again filled with several more ways of creating images on topics like "religion" or "money" in relation to cultural conflicts. For me the body became a tool to go beyond the first, perhaps superficial, images that easily came to mind. Another instance where the body was integral in exploring topics was in an activity in the second session also mentioned in the previous chapter, where we were asked to create images of statues presenting different sides of dialogue. The first four people coming on "stage" presented a positive and harmonic picture, where they were all



positioned towards each other, some seemingly in conversations, others listening gleefully with their hands-on each other's shoulders. For a moment it seemed the audience was sufficiently pleased with this representation, as no one else stepped forward to join the image. Then one Italian participant came up and broke the peaceful portrait by placing himself far away with his back towards everyone, sitting on the floor facing a wall with arms crossed. In discussions after, he told everyone he wanted to represent "others in society" that were afraid of the unknown, and that this was also part of dialogue, which resulted in fruitful discussions on this view. Another exercise mentioned by both Eva and Ramona as an eye-opening situation was in the first session when we were instructed to place ourselves throughout the room based on where in the world we were from, south representing one end and north the other.

Furthermore, another element that was mentioned was how the body induced emotional reactions and experiences. Some participants felt that during activities where we used movements, dance and rhythmic sequences, they experienced emotional sensations and were to a large degree in touch with their feelings. Eva tried to describe this in her interview, saying:

Yeah, I think it is what we have talked about moving the body. And moving emotions with the body. Like creating space of, because like when you just talk.. ehm... like when you talk you don't move your emotions so much, you're more rational (personal communication, March 27, 2019).

Personally, this was something that resonated with my experience in the workshop. An activity that stood out was one where we were instructed to embody different modes of being, from defender, on alert, to attacker. We went around in the room with drums playing in the background, and without physical touch we interacted with each other from different modes. This was an interesting exercise because the movement and physical embodiment of the different ways of being created awareness around the choice to be in different modes and the distinctions between them. With that said, for me the exercise was even more valuable for how it both brought out and regenerated embodied knowledge of what these modes does to you physically and what it feels like to jump in front of another person who is trying to protect themselves, while you yourself want are in an attacking posture. Regarding this, Ramona chose to emphasize the way acting out something "feels more real" than just talking about it and continued: "It's more intense and you express yourself with all you have, with your voice, with your body and with objects also" (personal communication, March 14, 2019).

Connected to this emotional element is a finding that concerns how the body helped participants get in touch with themselves and their inner sentiments and values. Some

interviewees described how they felt that the drama exercises facilitated a holistic approach to dealing with topics concerning intercultural dialogue. “Nothing was excluded” is how Ramona put it: “we worked with the mind and with the body and with the soul, and with everything” (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Eva felt the method connected her emotional and rational sides, and Barbara was of the opinion that her bodily expressions almost came out of her without her mind’s control, that often in the exercises the body expressed something long before her words could. Lucia felt she got in touch with her unconscious mind through many of the exercises, that her inner self came to the forefront with the help of her body. For Eva the insight came in the form of being aware of what she reacted to spontaneously, as well as sorting out which topics created strong reactions within her and which didn’t: “it’s cool.. this theatre to help you to be conscious of your limits.. to face it”(personal communication, March 27, 2019). During participant observation I also became very aware of myself, especially my own assumptions and prejudices. One of the many times this occurred was during one exercise, where we were challenged to act out spontaneously roles like “parent”, “child”, “rich”, “poor”, “refugee”, and “policeman”. It was interesting to take note of what instant characterizations came out, and which versions came later from a need to explore diverse interpretations of these labels.

Another finding regarding the body was on the topic of intimacy and physical touch, which from the data seems both important and something that requires a great deal of sensitivity and awareness from a facilitation standpoint. First of all, it shows from the field notes that natural physical touch like bumping into each other, collective physical clumsiness and physical contact during some exercises generated laughter and a larger sense of relaxation amongst participants. This was most evident when the touch was accidental, exaggerated or playful, and it seemed more slow-moving and gentle physical activities were object for more awkwardness. Several participants pointed out how they felt it was essential that the group met physically and were pushed to indulge in physical encounters. Alessandra was of the conviction that it was a necessary part of creating dialogue, and Eva stated it was important for her overcoming prejudice that she was in physical contact with people different from her. For Hanna, it was a surprise how much it played a role in her ability to communicate, relax and open up. Importantly, she stressed that the physical aspect should be natural and organic, which she often felt was the case. With this in mind it was also clear that intimacy boundaries were something important to be aware of, and a few participants also mentioned that they had felt somewhat uncomfortable doing some of the physical exercises, especially early on in the workshop, and this is supported by participant observations showing nervous laughter, uncertainty and hesitation during some exercises. With that said, it seems like most of these instances needed some warming up, and the group ended up with an overall sense of ease by completion. With that said it is important to

also note that boundaries and preferences with physical touch are personal, and that the group atmosphere fails to accurately include every individual experience.

Lastly, several participants brought up the element of movement specifically in the interviews. Sometimes, movement was a metaphorical catalyst for understanding connections and relations, like with the exercise where we placed ourselves in the room based on our nationality, or when one Italian participant sat far away with his back towards the others to show the fear in dialogue. Sometimes it was a stress releaser and a concentrator, where moving and walking around made us stop thinking about the last exercise and making space in our head for a new one. Some participants pointed out how essential they felt “the flow” was, the flow of changing from one statue to the next, walking in the same tempo as a group, creating a kind of dance in pairs to show conflict. Movement seemed to be a form of release, as Yahya put it: “and you just feel it and... live it... And release it” (personal communication, March 28, 2019). Barbara mentioned how moving in modes of attack and defense created many sensations and aha-moments. Hanna talked a lot about movement in her interview, and said that for her it was essential to the process:

I realized how extremely important it is ehh.. at least for me, that it was so important to move around. And you could see how much easier it was for us to communicate if we were naturally moving around or naturally like touching each other without it being forces. Ehm... and it really brought a lot of... it brought a lot to the table, like communicative wise.. If we were like standing up or moving around while talking, like it really didn't work as soon as we were sitting down or trying to do something serious, quote on quote. I... it ... mm.. It brought a lot to the positive energy and neg... I thought it was much easier for everyone to...to feel comfortable.. ehh.. when doing.. communicating their thoughts more spontaneously, eh.. yeah (personal communication, May 1, 2019).

These findings are interesting when viewed with the conceptual framework in mind. First of all, it supports the idea that bodily expression and experiences are of great value to understanding human interaction and behavior. The notion of bodily knowledge is also relevant to the findings in this research, as the data several times show examples where there seemed to be a real sensation amongst participants, including myself. Additionally, Steinar Bryn’s statement that dialogue is movement (Feller & Ryan, 2012:357) can here be understood in a literal sense, where movement was an important contributor to the dialogical space. The connection between movement and mind were also shown, and the data testified to what Acarón calls “movement informed by multidimensional ways of knowing” (2018:2): emotions, conscious and unconscious values, wishes, attitudes, cognitive reflexes, spontaneous reactions, and sentiments. Additionally, movement was essential in creating wanted group atmospheres in the room, like Kaptani & Yuval-Davis attest to in their work (2008:5). Regarding insights that can occur through bodily movement, the data shows that indeed, movement helped participants view topics from different perspectives, as well as

creating awareness around one's own positionality and perceptions. It is important to bear in mind Acarón's reminder that cultural context is essential to understanding movement, and that it therefore is possible to interpret movement completely wrong. With that said, it was a conscious decision in this research to limit the interpretation of the meanings of movements and focus more on what could be said on the importance of its existence.

### **5.2.2 Play**

Another important finding concerning the method of theatre and communication was that of play and fun. From the data, three main findings under this category were distinctively mentioned. The first was how play helped participants relax and be comfortable. Generally, field notes from every session showed how childish and presumably mindless games always evoked laughter, smiles and release of group tension. This was also often the case when mistakes were made in these types of warm up games, and with tasks that required a lot of concentration and practice repetition, it seemed laughter and playfulness actually helped the group complete it in the long run. One example of this was during the fifth session, where Antonio initiated an activity where we collectively were supposed to silently "mold" an invisible object into something so that everyone in the circle understood what it was without speaking to each other. This proved to be a difficult task, and in the beginning the atmosphere was characterized by reservation and minimal creative expression. However, when some of the men started to joke around about the heavy weight of the invisible object, exaggeratedly pushing, panting and struggling, the exercise was suddenly manageable, and we completed it successfully and with a lot of laughter in the end. Several of the interviewees mentioned that the playful nature of the theatre exercises made them at ease and mentioned that they had a lot of fun and felt mostly easygoing. Barbara emphasized how theatre made everyone loosen up and not take themselves so seriously, which Yahya confirmed: "You're having fun with the other person. It's like being a child again. Like, when I was a child we don't give like.. We don't give.. ehm.. How you say... I don't want to say 'give a fuck' (laughs), something like that" (personal communication, March 28, 2019). For Lucia, the way games helped with stress release was worth mentioning:

I think that, it is, energizer is good. I like it a lot that we begin always with an energizer, with a kind of game. To get distressed. Normally, when we are coming to a session and we don't know each other. We always are like... we have a bit like untrust or shyness. And that helped a lot (personal communication, March 28, 2019).

Additionally, the playfulness showed signs of facilitating personal connections and bonding. Naturally, one would imagine that laughter and games would make the participants get to know each other more, and this was something some of the ones interviewed attested to. Through easing the communication, the atmosphere and the comfort levels in the group,

games and play made it easier to get to know each other. This was also due to the fact that some of the games explicitly concerned personal information about the participants, like where they were from, what they like to eat and so on. Interestingly, one participant, Yahya, mentioned that paradoxically the games helped with getting to know each other also because individual characteristics did not feel that important for him. "Yeah you don't care about the other person from where he is, which culture he is, you're just playing around. With him.." (personal communication, March 28, 2019).

Lastly, it was also mentioned that games and play were beneficial for creating awareness or space for awareness. Barbara reflected on this in her interview, saying that by exploring topics that could be quite serious in a fun and easygoing way, it was easier to learn, open up and listen. This can be confirmed by the participant observation, where field notes show that several times, after what seemed to be a fun and light game, Antonio challenged us to think about how this could be related to dialogue, which sometimes resulted in big realizations. One of these situations were after a blocking exercise, where we were instructed to walk around in pairs and perform a rehearsed sequence of movements and the other to lightly block the person's body so that the sequence halted. This was at the time fun and challenging but became an exercise of great insight on the different forms of conflict, where we discussed how some conflicts were aggressive and loud, somewhere almost invisible, some could be danced around, some silenced you and some made you defensive. This exercise was one I personally took great note of and was also mentioned by other interviewees as an eye-opener.

Comparing these findings to the literature, one sentiment seems particularly relevant. As Lederach states "there is no scientific evidence that seriousness leads to greater growth, maturity, or insight into the human condition than playfulness" (2005:160). Play and fun was an integral part of creating space for potential dialogical communication and can be linked to the already accounted for value of imagination and creativity in this matter. As Greene and Feller & Ryan all argue, imagination and creativity create space for envisioning other realities, life experiences and ways of being, which again is essential in dialogical communication (2011:2, 2012:360).

### **5.2.3 Raw expression**

Another finding relating to the qualities of theatre which also affected the communication in the group was that several participants felt that the theatre approach enabled them to express themselves in what I have chosen to characterize as a "raw" manner. Descriptions of "letting go", "talking freely", "spontaneous and creative expression" all had in common a raw nature, where things were expressed from a deep place in oneself. Yahya emphasized how this for him was connected to a sense of not overthinking: "Because if it wasn't like theatre and like just having fun without thinking

too much to .. to talk, and to explain like yourself about this theme" (personal communication, March 28, 2019). This was also a sentiment present with Barbara, who in her interview stated she felt it was a major strength in theatre that she could "let herself go", find her inner child and not be so stuck up and rigid, something she felt was missing in her normal daily expression (personal communication, March 29, 2019). This child metaphor was used by other participants as well, including Eva who stated that she could reconnect with the openness of a child in the theatre world. The topic of letting go was also discussed after an exercise where we paired up guided each other around the room while the other was "blind". "In my life I control everything and in theatre I can let go", one participant stated before we all indulged in a discussion on whether or not letting go was a requisite of dialogue (participant observation, February 12, 2019). Alessandra focused more on how the expression felt freer to her because she did not feel she occupied a role in while doing theatre: "you don't have a role. So, you cannot hide behind your role, and it is something more direct" (personal communication, March 26, 2019). That being said, data collected from the participant observation showed that this was not necessarily always the case for others, as roles of "teacher", "student", "leader", "follower" were inhabited to different degrees by everyone. Additionally, a limitation of this quality of theatre was how drama experience and time influenced the participants ability to "let go". As Yahya stated in his interview: "Like to have, to have information how to speak with your body you need a little bit of experience.." (personal communication, March 28, 2019). He furthermore told that he felt it was easier with time to express himself creatively because he was more familiar with the way of doing theatre, and that with confidence came freedom. Juxtaposing this finding with the literature reviewed, it can be said that the method of theatre served as a tool for the type of expression that is important for dialogue to occur. Specifically, dialogue is dependent on a space that is equitable and respectful enough for people to give sincere expressions and communicate in a truthful manner.

### **5.3 Summarizing reflections**

Compared to the theoretical framework, these data show that communication in a dialogical process is intricate and complicated, with many pitfalls as well as moments of enthusiasm and understanding. As described in the chapter on theory, genuine dialogue is dependent on a type of communicative approach which concerns listening and an open attitude towards the other. It can be said that the workshop space held this type of attitude as an underlying basis, and that moments of understanding and active listening took place. At the same time, the communication in the group and amongst specific participants were not without flaws, and the communication can be regarded as somewhat unstable in terms of its dialogical potential. The non-verbal element of the communication supports the claim that the understanding of the dialogue term also needs to include this type of expression to a larger degree, as the data showed how essential this form of communication was during the

sessions. Interestingly, it was also an element commonly emphasized by the participants themselves, and throughout the workshop many reported that they became increasingly aware of their own and others presentation to the group. However, the data presented above shows that non-verbal communication and expression could only go so far, and that talking, and discussion constituted a large part of what created dialogical instances. Therefore, one should stress the role of language and translation when discussing international dialogical processes, which I saw little of in the reviewed literature. In addition, playfulness and raw expression were integral parts of what the participants considered the method of theatre to bring to the process, as well as how bodily expression and movement contributed to broader insight into topics and themselves, emotional connectedness and comfortable and uncomfortable intimate encounters. Time, power and experience in drama showed to be limitations influencing how well the theatre approach worked, and continuous facilitation from Antonio showed to be essential to create the desired communication culture. Overall, the communication in this workshop was as rich, multidimensional and unstable as the people themselves, and it was therefore greatly important with meticulous mediation and facilitation, which is the focus of the coming chapter.

# Chapter 6: Facilitation

Facilitation is the last of the main findings, which was the topic of an unexpectedly large volume of data. Key topics concerned the importance of facilitation, participants' perceptions of what constituted good facilitation, and the strengths and weaknesses of a framed setting. As in the previous two chapters, some specific qualities of theatre proved relevant for the way in which facilitation took place during the workshop, which will be presented further down in this chapter.

## 6.1 The effects of facilitation

First of all, it was clear how important facilitation was for dialogical instances to occur, and for participants to fully enjoy many of the theatre exercises, and one participant suggested that a few more would have been beneficial to the dialogical process. Several participants mentioned Antonio as a driving force for their individual level of comfort, guts, good communication and reflection. Eva mentioned how he was pivotal in creating the right atmosphere and “energy” in the group. She compared him to other drama instructors she had worked with before, and said she felt Antonio to a larger degree made sure everyone was included, that he made it less intimidating to come forth by going in the front as an example in the beginning of exercises, that he redirected conversations when they were starting to move to far away from the topic, and that he was calm, precise and clear in his instructions. Several of these points were further backed by other participants, who also mentioned how they appreciated his translation work. In addition, Eva pointed out how she felt he had a crucial role in letting everyone be heard, which is also discussed in detail in the chapter on communication:

Because.. we have all the chance to express, because this leader allows us to spoke, to express, to, to, even to be the leaders ourselves. The leaders of ourselves, of the process we are living, of the relations with each other (personal communication, March 27, 2019).

This importance of facilitation was also present to a large degree in the participant observations, where there were multiple situations where Antonio played a crucial part in making space for listening and open mindedness, creating a relaxed atmosphere, managing time, explaining guiding principles for both games and dialogue, summing up discussions and uniting the group, reminding everyone of intentions and motivations behind exercises, and by starting first to show an example of vulnerability. Several of these situations improved after Antonio's interference, and would, if left not facilitated, not have led to a space of with the level of openness, free expression, inclusion and knowledge that they ended up being.



One other element to this finding was my own experience in seeing a need for facilitation in smaller groups when Antonio was not always present, and a few times I ended up carefully guiding some group dynamics because of this. This need was mostly related to time management, staying on topic and making sure everyone had their time to speak and come with suggestions. This need for facilitation also connected to another limitation in the method concerning drama experience. Several times I observed that my previous drama background helped to present our stories in more coherent or comprehensible ways, and I used this carefully in smaller groups where Antonio was not there to guide. One of these situations occurred during the fifth session, where me and two others were planning a scene revolving differences in parenting based on our own lives. I sensed that the others were thinking all three of us could act out different small scenarios at the same time during the scene, so I suggested instead that we'd freeze at different times, giving the audience a chance to focus on each actor separately for a few seconds. We ended up doing this, and it would most likely have been hard to understand clearly the different roles, dynamics and the situation of the scene had we not, making it hard to achieve dialogical moments. Furthermore, I observed that common power dynamics such as gender, but also level of drama experience, influenced who spoke and took charge of preparing a scene or steering the direction of an activity, and for dialogical instances to occur these dynamics needed to be weakened or at least managed by a mediator.

In their accounts of Antonio's facilitation, they also shared what they thought good facilitation constituted of. As mentioned above, this included a horizontal approach, open mindedness, professionalism, ability to create comfort, going first and setting example, and showing vulnerability. In addition, they stressed that it was important to be able to improvise as a leader and read the group, to see every individual, as well as having pedagogical skills and knowledge to navigate group dynamics and present exercises or new topics in an organized and sufficiently sensitive manner. Eva also mentioned while comparing Antonio to other drama teachers that she felt he was much more open and non-judgmental, and that this really helped with not being so hesitant to try a new activity or show vulnerability.

Lastly, the topic of facilitation was visible in the data in a less personal manner, through a focus on how the setting of encounter was framed and guided, and not like "real life". This was both regarded in positive and negative terms, always with an overall general awareness of how this context differed from the outside world. This was mentioned after certain exercises in the sessions, where discussions on how well the group represented overall society occurred a few times. In these discussions, there existed sentiments of frustration over the fact that everyone in the group for example was generally pro-immigration, but this was at the same time taken for granted by the participant raising the issue. Another participant then responded by saying she felt the group and the

representation they had made in the exercise fitted well, and she admitted to having feelings of fear and uncertainty regarding intercultural issues from time to time. Furthermore, the framed setting seemed to build motivations or meaning for some participants. Ramona for example was quite specific in how she felt that, exactly because this was a closed off drama workshop, she could express herself more freely without that much fear of being judged. In addition, this steered her in that she felt she was “supposed to express” in the sessions, supposed to push herself and go out of her comfort zone, something that was also mentioned by Lucia. This seemed to be a factor in her motivation for her actions and willingness to listen and be open to new perspectives, something she perhaps would not have been the case in a more “normal” and less structures context. Pushing oneself was also mentioned by Eva, who appreciated the fact that the setting was framed: “yes because also we listened each other. We were fucking forced to listen. Like, it is important sometimes that there are people that doesn't know how to listen” (personal communication, March 27, 2019). Hanna expressed that she felt intercultural dialogues had to be done in a structured and organized context. On the question of what she thought intercultural dialogue is or should be, she responded: “I associate it with like a forced concept of exchange, it's not really a spontaneous meeting” (personal communication, May 1, 2019).

In regard to the reviewed literature, this finding came as mentioned earlier somewhat as a surprise. Almost nowhere in the carefully selected literature on dialogue in this thesis is there sufficient mention of the facilitator role. A substantial amount of what is written on how to achieve dialogue concerns the ones participating in it, and it seems as though the framework and mediation surrounding dialogical encounters are taken for granted or neglected in the conceptualization of the term. Only one of the many works reviewed in this research concerned with dialogue mentions explicitly the need for an organized and structured frame for dialogue to occur, where Phipps reminds us:

Intercultural dialogue does not happen by assertion or through repetition and exhortation in policy documents. It happens because spaces and structures are created, and principles laid down which will enable it to be practiced. It does not happen because experts generate content based on difference. It requires spaces of equitable relations, imagination and where multiple identities and frames can be held together (2014:119).

From the data gathered here it is clear that this is the case in this particular context, where the workshop at times provided a space for “equitable relations, imagination and where multiple identities and frames can be held together” as it says in the quote. Without Antonio’s continuous guidance, clarification, challenging and encouragement, it is likely that power dynamics, weak communication skills or unconscious behavior would have halted the dialogical process.

When it comes to the literature on art and theatre, the situation is a lot better. Reflections and advice on how to best frame the social theatre for a fruitful process are common, like how Cahill reflects around the benefits of creating non-naturalistic drama for creating new realities (2006:67). Sometimes, the literature is written specifically to target facilitators, like Augusto Boal's *Games for Non-Actors* (1992) and is therefore full of advice and perspectives on this role. When writing specifically about social theatre, Schininà give important insights into all the levels an instructor needs to have practical skill and knowledge of, namely "social, psychological, relational, and theatrical" (2004:23), which is supported by the data presented above.

From this comparison it can be said that in the intersections of theatre and dialogue, the literature is somewhat diverging in terms of addressing the role of facilitation. With the practical advice and insights developed over years of social theatre work, perhaps the literature concerning social theatre reviewed for this thesis can serve as a necessary guide to how dialogue can be attempted through a drama approach. From the findings it can be said that regardless, scholars occupied with the topic of dialogue, perhaps especially those doing research on more traditional forms of dialogue, need to account for the role of facilitation to a better degree than what was found in the literature review.

## 6.2 Qualities of social theatre

### 6.2.1 Comfort & Discomfort

As already mentioned, one aspect of the theatre approach is that it sometimes requires intimacy and physical touch. In addition, the dialogical process includes moments of emotional intimacy and vulnerability. These components, sometimes necessary to achieve trust and empathy, can be potentially uncomfortable or comfortable for participants, depending on the way it is facilitated, their previous experiences, time, and what the group dynamic is like. Therefore, facilitation was a topic coming up in interviews and fieldnotes concerning comfort and discomfort and is relevant when trying to understand the limits and capabilities of theatre as a method for dialogue.

First of all, the overall message from the interviewees about the group atmosphere was that it was generally good, categorized as relaxed, fun, and safe. It is important to note here that even if I reminded every interviewee that they could be completely honest with me and that the workshop "wasn't mine" per se, it is not unlikely that some of them still associated me with being the organizer of the workshop and took this into account when responding to my questions. Ramona replied that:

Yeah it was really good, it was really well made. So, I felt very safe in that environment and also I felt that the others felt comfortable. More or less.. It was very open, and very.... not tolerant, but more than this. So, everyone was accepted and there were no rules, no doubts, no... and no restrictions. So, everyone was open minded (personal communication, March 14, 2019).

The content of this quote was to different degrees echoed in the other interviewed, some also providing additional insight into the complexities of the atmosphere. Prince told that he felt sometimes not everyone was ready to share personal stuff, but that it also could be valuable to just sit and listen as well. Yahya felt the atmosphere was equal and comfortable, but that the trust was more unstable. Alessandra reflected on that she thought it showed from the scene where Hamed shared his story on racism that the group was open and safe. She also brought up a point that experience in drama was relevant in this regard, stating that she herself was very comfortable in the workshop even if she regarded herself as a shy person because: "For me it's like a language that I know. So, I felt at ease with it" (personal communication, March 26, 2019). This comment further supports the limitation to the theatre approach mentioned earlier concerning the benefits of drama experience. Furthermore, a great variety in levels of comfort and discomfort was visible also in the participant observations, which additionally can be connected to the constant changes in group compositions in every session. There were several instances where people were careful, shy, reluctant or silent, and also many where the same ones were loud with a lot of laughter and big movements.

It seemed as intimate, personal and physical exercises were most prone to creating feelings of discomfort amongst the participants. Yahya, Lucia and Ramona all mentioned that they had moments of discomfort from exercises like blocking the other and keeping eye contact with one person while moving around. Yahya said he mostly felt this way because of a worry to do something that made others uncomfortable, or that he didn't like the sensation of preventing others from moving. Lucia also mentioned something similar about not liking the feeling of attacking others or defending herself from attacks, because of how real it felt. For Ramona it was important to say that for her it really much depended on the individual she was working with, that: "with some people you can build up more trust and with some not" (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Yahya also stressed the individuality of comfort and discomfort, saying that he learned more about how for others to be comfortable with him, he needs to show them that he is comfortable.

A last finding to this category concerns what it is that created comfort in this particular workshop. From observations it seemed that comfort often came in numbers. Being alone, vulnerable and exposed, be it on the "stage", in the circle during an exercise, waiting for the session to start, people seemed more comfortable together. This was also the case in that

more comfortable behavior was registered when groups were more than just two people, as working in couples could really feel unstable depending on your relationship with your partner. Additionally, it seemed that some comfort came from being pushed out of the comfort zone in a sensitive manner, as to show that exercises weren't that scary after all. One example of this was in the second session where we worked in pairs and switched back and forth between guiding a "blind" person and being guided when "blind". In the discussions afterwards, reflections on how important it was to lose control and "let go" for dialogue to occur were shared, and the exercises felt like an important part of creating comfort and group atmosphere in the early stages of the workshop. Additionally, interviewees mentioned things like "becoming friends" and "accepting each other" as factors that created comfort for them. In addition, several participants mentioned that the facilitator Antonio played a big role in making them comfortable, something that is discussed in more detail in the subchapter regarding facilitation. Lastly, Yahya brought up the indescribable feeling of being "in the zone" as a group collectively as something that created comfort for him, electric moments of cooperation and full body listening: "it makes you connected to the other persons in the circle. So, you get like... like you know them and you don't at the same time. But like.. you can feel a little bit comfortable with them, without speaking" (personal communication, March 28, 2019).

Considered with the reviewed literature in mind, these findings suggest that drama can be beneficial in creating moments of intimacy and vulnerability, but that the process is dependent on sensitive and aware facilitation. This argument can be supported by sentiments like the one from Schininà (2004) who stresses the importance of facilitators having sufficient skills and insights into how social theatre can affect participants negatively as well as positively. Acarón (2011) are one of the other authors in the reviewed literature touching upon this element, reminding us that art certainly has potential to harm and torment individuals. Furthermore, in this case study, it seemed that a certain level of discomfort was fruitful in pushing participants to unfamiliar emotional, relational, and self-reflexive territory, which resonates with parts of the literature, e.g. Cohen's mentioning of how art can be a method to confront difficult realities or topics (2015:6).

### **6.2.2 The body and embodied movement**

Another element of the theatre method which also concerned the topic of facilitation is embodied expression and the body. Not only connected to intimacy boundaries and physical touch, the bodily component was also affected by facilitation in other ways. Specifically, the data shows that Antonio used movement and bodily release to create certain atmospheres, focus our attention, and assisting us in concentration or active listening. In between most of the activities we did, he instructed us to walk around in the room in our own tempo for a few

minutes, allowing us to silently reflect on the ended activity and from there empty our minds for a new one. It also helped in picking up the energy in the room and served as an energizer after stretches of sitting down or indulging in discussions. Hanna attested to this, mentioning how movement for her brought a lot of positive energy into the group, and that she was surprised by how essential it was for the dialogical process. Lucia felt that games with a lot of movement were important to build the right atmosphere for dialogue, stating that:

I think that it is energizer is good. I like it a lot that we begin always with an energizer, with a kind of game. To get distressed. Normally, when we are coming to a session and we don't know each other. We always are like... we have a bit like untrust or shyness. And that helped a lot (personal communication, March 28, 2019).

As Kaptani & Yuval-Davis describe, movement can be very beneficial in creating wanted atmospheres and for mental, emotional and physical release (2008:5). This conviction is to a large degree supported in the findings of this case study. In relation to the process of dialogue, Svinland, Martinsen & Råheim's account of distance is relevant. Specifically, the repeated walking and movement sequences actively used by Antonio can be understood as a way of creating a distance to a subject, something that has proven beneficial in the dialogical process. As the authors argues, distance to a topic can help individuals deal with conflictual material and issues and assist in seeing something with a larger, less personal lens (2007:27).

### **6.3 Summarizing reflections**

All in all, it can be said that in this case study facilitation showed to be of high importance to the process of dialogue within a social theatre approach. Extensive fieldnotes, personal participatory experiences and multiple interviews with participants all pointed toward the topic, where it was seen as important for creating comfort, equitable and open relations, good communication, courage, and reflection. The participants notions of what constituted good facilitation and how they saw strengths and weaknesses of a framed setting was also important elements of this finding. The method of theatre also in turn affected facilitation, as it negotiated and hosted experiences of vulnerability and intimacy, comfort and discomfort, and contributed with the benefits of bodily expression and movement. In addition, the literature on social theatre and art within both the academic and the practitioners field served as guiding tools for attempting to make space for dialogue, which included critical reflections and insights into the role of the facilitator and its responsibilities.

## Chapter 7: Concluding remarks

How can social theatre create space for intercultural dialogue? This was the main question guiding this whole research process, which led to a workshop case study with a multinational group of people in Bologna, Italy. Data was collected through different methods; questionnaires, participant observation, enacting social theatre and post-workshop interviews, and three main findings emerged from analyzing the material. They concerned the participants notions of similarities and differences between each other, the communication in the group and the importance of facilitation. All of these main categories were characterized by a certain level of instability and personal variations. Additionally, they all indicated that social theatre could be a fruitful tool for moments of transportation to other realities, perspectives and experiences.

In the case of the notions of sameness and difference amongst group participants, it was clear that there were multilayered and sometimes contradictory. Stereotypes were often referred to in interviews and uses in drama activities, and were most commonly connected to categories on nationality, education level, gender, sexuality, and age. Some of them reduced chances of dialogical moments due to their generalizing and simplistic nature. Others seemed to enhance the possibility for dialogue, as there were instances where participants managed to regard each other as unique subjects, in addition to seeing the strengths in ones differences. Stereotypes were also used as a comedic springboard for exploration of individual commonalities, differences and paradoxes. Additionally, the group also seemed to gain a greater sense of community due to their common wish for dialogue and intercultural understanding. Different qualities of social theatre showed to have an effect on the participants perceptions of their similarities and differences. The method made it possible to highlight complexities and paradoxes within these notions, in addition to facilitate interpersonal bonding, empathetic interaction, storytelling, and self-insight.

The category of communication also possessed this same complexity and instability, where dialogical communication proved to be an intricate matter with many layers. Moments of understanding, active listening and open communication took place, but the same can be said for instances where someone talked over, took charge or neglected to listen to other participants. The embodied element was an important factor to the communication, as many pointed out the relevance of movement, touch and bodily expression for their ability to access each other and themselves. Several gained insight into the importance of body language in dialogue as a direct consequence of embodied activities. That being said, verbal expression was essential to create fruitful dialogical moments, and from this it was clear how important translation and language skills were in a multinational group. In addition to providing a platform for active embodied expression, social theatre as a method had an

impact on the communication in other ways. Specifically, its playful nature and potential for raw expression gave participants an outlet to “let go” and “find their inner child”.

The topic of facilitation was the third main finding, where it showed to be essential to the dialogical process within the social theatre framework. The data showed that several integral parts of dialogue, like comfort level, equitability, open communication, personal sense of courage and level of reflection were all dependent on facilitation to a certain degree. Additionally, the method of social theatre affected facilitation because it generated situations and collective activities characterized by exploring levels of comfort discomfort, intimacy and vulnerability. Additionally, the embodied nature of social theatre created a heightened need for responsible facilitation, and its defined approach and specific techniques provided tools and guidance for the facilitator.

These findings all to some degree supports the main hypothesis of this thesis, which is that social theatre has the possibility to create space for intercultural dialogue in different ways. That being said, the fruitfulness of the theatre approach relied on some shared limitations present throughout the data material. First of all, a substantial amount of fieldnotes and interviews revealed how important time was for these effects to occur, especially for creating the necessary trust, relaxed atmosphere and confidence beneficial when doing drama exercises. Following this logic, parts of the data material also suggested that some experience in the techniques and approaches of drama showed to be beneficial, as it was easier to create meaningful and substantial dialogical moments in groups where at least a few of the members had previous drama experience. Additionally, it was clear from the analysis that different power dynamics were prevalent within the workshop space, and that social theatre served more as a potential tool for challenging them and bringing them to light than to eliminate them. Even if this was the case in some instances, the data also showed how sensitive power relations regarding race and gender sometimes remained in the outskirts of the workshop, suggesting that the method of theatre was not enough to bring them to the forefront of discussions and scenes. Lastly, as already mentioned, the fruitfulness of social theatre showed to be very much dependent on facilitation, something affecting all three findings. With these limitations in mind, it can be said that in situations with enough time, skill, scrutinization of power relations and facilitation, social theatre can be a valuable tool for creating space for intercultural dialogue to occur.

As mentioned previously in this dissertation, this research was a relatively small-scale dive into the intersection of social theatre and intercultural dialogue. The findings accounted for above are the ones most prevalent and reoccurring in the data material that emerged from this specific and contextual case study. They give interesting insights into the concept of intercultural dialogue, the strengths and weaknesses of social theatre in general, and also what social theatre can do for dialogue. Some findings are reinforcing existing arguments in



the literature, others are calling attention to gaps and weaknesses in the reviewed scholarly work. Therefore, a few reflections can be made on possible future research in this line of study.

First of all, a main area of improvement for research done on intercultural dialogue, regardless of its various methods and formats, concerns the role of facilitation. When working with an understanding of dialogue as a framed and guided setting, it is important to include critical reflections and research on the facilitator role, as well as the facilitated setting, including the overall space, room and atmosphere. A great deal of literature exists within the field of theatre studies on this subject, and scholars outside this field working with the topic of intercultural dialogue could benefit considerably from it. As shown in this research, facilitation was a prevalent feature in all data collected and was both a main finding in itself and a main potential limitation of the theatre approach.

Secondly, another interesting path for future research relates to the role of group composition and difference. The unexpected bonus of the unplanned diversity in this workshop's group proved very beneficial to the dialogical process, where extreme binary antagonism's between e.g. local Italians and North African refugees were avoided because of a larger span in the intergroup differences, and because this span was explored and brought to everyone's attention. With this in mind, it could be very interesting to study further the effects of group composition on dialogue, by for example contrasting and comparing different groups consisting of different compositions. A main argument in the reviewed literature on dialogue is that the concept of difference should not be minimized and neglected in dialogical processes, but little is said on the actual practical constitution of difference within respective groups. The findings from this study, which suggests that the large variety in the group assisted the participants in viewing each other as complex, individual subjects rather than simplified members of one group category, indicate that perhaps a way towards genuine dialogue is more intergroup difference and not less.

Lastly, the role of the body and bodily expression and movement showed in this case study to be highly influential in many aspects of the dialogical process. As mentioned above, components essential for dialogue, like communication, atmosphere, self-insight, concentration and trust was affected greatly by the embodied nature of social theatre. The body proved to be beneficial for deeply felt experiences of transportation to other realities, perceptions and life stories. It also affected how the participants viewed and negatively generalized each other. These findings demonstrate the importance of including embodied experiences, perspectives and knowledge in all research done on intercultural dialogue, even in dialogical encounters with less active bodily involvement. Body language and different bodily realities are integral parts of these types of encounters, and more research should be done where this is taken into account.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I reflected on the ironic paradox of my task; explaining and describing something partly existing outside logical rational within the framework of an academic paper. Throughout this process, I have strived to meet expected standards for this type of academic research while at the same time protecting and respecting the multidimensional richness and mystery that sometimes is present in art and in human connection. The epistemological and ontological perspectives deriving from the methodologies used in this research, has enabled a responsible and honest study of the intersection where social theatre and intercultural dialogue meet. That being said, I find great comfort in accepting that some of the most important realizations, insights and acquisitions of knowledge from this case study is not found in their entirety in this dissertation. Parts of them will always remain as personal moments of magic enclosed in the workshop space. One participant told of a puzzling feeling on her way back home after a session, some recounted surprising physical reactions, emotional realizations and out of body experiences. By absorbing these moments into our bodies and minds, consciously and unconsciously, we will be shaped and guided by them. Essential for the understanding of our lives, these individual transcending elements play a crucial role in illuminating the full range of the human experience.

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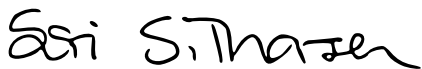


## Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted is my own and that all passages and ideas that are not mine have been fully and properly acknowledged. I am aware that I will fail the entire dissertation should I include passages and ideas from other sources and present them as if they were my own.

NAME: Siri Syverud Thorsen

DATE: 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2019


SIGNATURE: 

## Appendixes

Note: All documents were also provided in an Italian version

### APPENDIX 1: Registration form

**REGISTRATION FORM:**  
**YOU-ARE-ME Social Theatre for Intercultural Dialogue**



NAME	
AGE	NATIONALITY
LANGUAGES I SPEAK	
TLF	E-MAIL

Do you have any experience with drama or theatre?

What is a main problem regarding intercultural dialogue or diversity that you have faced or observed?

What is your motivation to join this workshop?

What do you hope to get out of this drama workshop?

## APPENDIX 2: Mid-Workshop Survey

### Mid-workshop survey

Thank you so much for participating in the YOU-ARE-ME workshop and for contributing! We are now half way! I am conducting this survey to make sure you all have the chance to contribute to the direction of the workshop and to better understand your needs and wishes. Your answers will be used to decide and change the next four weeks.

*Important:*

These answers are strictly confidential, and will only be viewed in full by Siri. I will share your answers with Antonio anonymously. Please answer honestly, as your opinions will give valuable information, and will be the deciding factor for the remaining part of the workshop.

**How would you describe your experience in the workshops so far?**

Good                      Not good/bad                      Bad

Explain why you say so?

**Were there some specific activities you enjoyed in particular? Why?**

**Were there some you did not enjoy? Why?**

**Did the workshop meet your expectations so far?**

yes     no     don't know

Explain why you say so?

**Do you find it easy to participate and talk during the workshop? Is there something that could be done to make it easier?**

**What would you like more of in the next four sessions?**

**What would you like less of in the next four sessions?**

**Do you wish to create a small and informal street performance at the end of the workshop? If so, do you have any wishes or suggestion?**

**Additional thoughts, opinions, suggestions**

## **APPENDIX 3: Interview Guide**

### **Interview Guide**

post-workshop semi-structured interviews with participants

#### **Before**

Explain the purpose of the interview.

Address terms of confidentiality.

Explain the format of the interview.

Indicate how long the interview usually takes.

Allow interviewee to clarify any doubts about the interview.

So, we just finished 8 weeks of this theatre workshop. Can you share with me some thoughts about your experience overall?

#### **Part 1 - intercultural dialogue**

So the general theme of this workshop was intercultural dialogue. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what that expression mean to you?

Did you have any previous experiences with intercultural encounters? Can you think of any things they had in common?

As we have explored in the workshop, intercultural encounters can be quite complicated and difficult. What do you think are the elements of an ideal intercultural dialogue?

#### **Part 2 - the workshop**

How was the workshop experience compared to what you expected it to be like?

Are there some specific situations or activities that you remember in particular from the workshop? [if they answer positive ask about if there was something they didn't like and vice versa]

How did you find using theatre as a method to try and create dialogue?

How do you think it would have been different if we did not use theatre as a method in our intercultural encounter?

Was there something that surprised you during the workshop?

Did you find it easy to participate and talk during the workshop?

Did you feel that you discovered something new about yourself during the workshop? [...]  
What about discovering something new about others?

## APPENDIX 4: Interview Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM (Interview following the YOU-ARE-ME workshop)

Master thesis research on "Theatre as a potential form of dialogue amongst nationals and foreign born immigrants in Bologna, Italy"

I hereby give my consent to Siri Syverud Thorsen, a researcher/research student in the master program European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations enrolled in the University of Stavanger whose signature appears below, to write down and record my answers in this interview.

I was informed that the interview will take between 1-2 hours and that I am free to end it at given time.

- I wish to remain anonymous through usage of a pseudonym in the final study and potential presentations of the research      Yes .....      No .....
- I agree that my answers in the mid-workshop survey form can be used in the research
- I agree that the researcher may use direct quotes in the final thesis
- I agree that the interview will be audio recorded. The only person that will listen to these recordings is the researcher Siri Syverud Thorsen
- I agree that the information my interview will provide may be used anonymously by other researchers following this study
- I agree that the results of this research may also be presented in workshops or conferences

My participation in this study is voluntary, and I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time. If i choose to withdraw from the study the material concerning me will be deleted and physical documents shredded.

#### Participant

Name .....

Signature .....

Place/date .....

#### Researcher

Name .....

Signature .....

Place/date .....

**APPENDIX 5: Workshop Consent Form**

**CONSENT FORM**  
(Participant observation of drama workshop)

Master thesis research on “Theatre as a potential form of dialogue amongst nationals and foreign born immigrants in Bologna, Italy”

I hereby give my consent to Siri Syverud Thorsen, a researcher/research student in the master program European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations enrolled in the University of Stavanger whose signature appears below, to observe and record my participation in the drama workshop YOU-ARE-ME as part of a study of drama and intercultural dialogue.

I was informed that the study participation will take approximately two month starting on 05.02.18 and ending on 27.03.18.

- I wish to remain anonymous through usage of a pseudonym in the final study and potential presentations of the research      Yes .....      No .....
- I agree that my answers in the registration form can be used (anonymously) in the research
- I agree that the researcher may use (anonymous) quotes in the final thesis
- I agree that the workshop may be audio recorded. The only person that will listen to these recordings is the researcher Siri Syverud Thorsen
- I agree that the researcher may take photos during the workshop  
Including showing of my face      Yes .....      No .....
- I agree that the information my participation will provide may be used anonymously by other researchers following this study
- I agree that the results of this research may also be presented in workshops or conferences

My participation in this study is voluntary, and I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time. If i choose to withdraw from the study the material concerning me will be deleted and physical documents shredded.

**Participant .....**

**Place/date.....**

**Researcher.....**

**Place/date.....**