



Beirut is a Middle Eastern city. It has seen events, people and experiences that have become part of its history and part of its understanding of itself. The city's artists and the city's emerging artists will locate themselves differently in this history some have embraced it, rejected it, challenged it.

The original concept for this proposed Community Cultural Development (CCD) 2004 project was to specifically continue a six week workshop process that I began in Beirut in 2003. Through a local (Sydney) artist discussion process, the decision was made to approach this continuation of work with an artistic collective front. This resulted in the establishing of the Left/Overs.

What is a Left/Over? It is an artist who doesn't mind, in fact seeks to be left out of the main menu of sanctioned artists. It is a people's artist who understands that there own art making complexities are pushed to new places through their engagement with artists or communities of people who are more on the margins than themselves.

As a collective of artists (Farzin Yekta, Khaled Sabsabi and Rose Nakad) carry thirty years of experience in working with young people in western Sydney. All three of us have worked as community artists, arts workers and youth workers and have a vast experience in working with young people from non English speaking backgrounds in various contexts: youth centers, prisons, courts, refuges, schools and after school tutoring centers and in community cultural development projects.

Over the years we have worked with different youth communities in western Sydney to explore class, racial and gender issues through a community cultural development processes and to train and skill young people. Currently I work with Miller Youth centre in South Western Sydney in a multimedia-training context. I was responsible for securing funding to build a multi media centre. This has been completed and the project now works with young artists to become trainers and cultural workers themselves.

Some of these trainers are young people who have a history of working with the three of us and are now seeking to become cultural workers.

Farzin runs the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre's mobile multi-media van, which was set-up by me in 2002 and now works all over western Sydney. A major component of his work is also about training young people to become video and filmmakers and workshops facilitators. Rose is currently still in Lebanon completing a radio project. She is currently employed by Burnside Uniting Care in Sydney and has just completed pioneering work as an Education and Cultural Support Worker with two medium to long-term refugees for young people.

While on my fellowship (Australia council for the Arts 2002-2004 CCD Fund) I was given opportunities by Shams (Beirut Theatre): an established and highly internationally regarded organisation and IAA International Arts Academy: an independent Beirut organisation / school for artists to develop an alternative hands on approach to the arts, to perform and attend a number of local / international workshops. This sparked the idea and the initial discussion between my self and Shams Beirut theatre for an artistic exchange and a multimedia cross performance, based on a CCD model with an open workshop and discussion forum. Both Shams and IAA are linked and have strong Beirut artist access networks and were successful in providing me with resources such as performance and workshop venues, promotion material, local audience, artist and youth participants, making the 2003-2004 workshops and performance a success.

Through this already recognized work in the newly emerging Western school of CCD practice in Beirut, the demand for the continuation and the establishment of new workshops in various art media forms was once again requested from me by Shams and IAA. The proposed 2004 continuation project idea would be again to engage with developing artists in Beirut to further their skills and to pick up where the previous work left off. The workshops were run in video art, music, sound design and writing. Each workshop explored different aspects of the art form depending on the interests of the participants.



The IAA group of students working during the workshop.

As with any CCD project there were challenges to overcome, these range from financial to culture challenges. Firstly the financial as money is always a problem and will continue to be, this project was proposed and submitted for funding to the Australia council for the arts in their skills and development fund prior to our departure. The submission wasn't successful and this meant that a decision had to be made by the artists involved a week before our exit, whether to go ahead with this project or not? The decision was simple, we rely on our selves and our pockets to carry out this work and this in return will test our abilities, skills and passion for such work.

Secondly the question of culture relevance, as a collective will our experiences of working with marginal communities located in the dominant western world and the ways that CCD is practised in this context in Australia be relevant or valuable to Lebanon and its different communities.

Thirdly will this experience give us new tools and new ideas - new cultural points to bring back and to share with the communities of people we work with here. As these new points of understanding are badly needed, especially in work with young Middle Eastern people, whose culture and habits have been exploited by commercially driven popular culture and reflected back as the truth of their identity.

Finally Australia and the Middle East are getting closer and closer. There are institutional, cultural and historical exchanges and an increasing geopolitical connection through global politics and trade. For me the resource of an alternative exchange of skills, ideas and practices between artists will be seriously initiated by this connection. The types of exchanges to be had there as an Australian trained community artist will resonate and be shared with artists in the region by all involved as Beirut is a regional centre of the artistic scene.

Keeping these questions and points in mind the Left/Over journey to Beirut begins, taking many years of experience/s as artists and community artists to another cultural and artistic place.

This difference means a tension - an agitated site from which to develop new ways of working to remain useful and relevant to the process.

After all in a highly driven globalisation world state with all its cultural competitiveness and capitalism, an artist has no choice but to remain relevant and useful. He or she can do this by adopting an old valid and common symbolic point of the region that is a mobile guerrilla type warfare art making approach. This means the artistic ability to create, fold, disappear, unfold and reappear where it is not expected. Thus creating successful and relevant Art, expression and resistance in a temporary free zone.

From the offset it is clear to see that Lebanon is not driven by a welfare model. Where experts come in to improve a community and feed them with the information and the dollars they need. There is no such thing as a welfare state in Lebanon and this has meant that areas of life like art making and CCD practices develop using different ideas.

Artwork is driven more by the idea that emerging artists of all class structure and nationalities work within the Beirut community of artists (ranging from the mainstream to the experimental, local to international) to develop their skills, reputation, agendas and artwork. They then join the world of "artists" and become part of an organic ongoing self-critical development process, where all artists are involved in.

What the collective offered and shared in were the ways that we facilitate workshops - the techniques we use to inspire and open up spaces of learning and skills development, the kinds of resources that we may use and the places we may look for these resources (eg the already existing resources among participants and their lives and communities), ways that people's knowledge and talents within a workshop environment can be developed and challenged, the way that equipment is used or taught and the way we conceptualise mastering of equipment and conceptual ideas at the same time and the way they materialise in rhythm with each other.



By joining a community of artists in Beirut I was exposed to a different way of understanding and conceptualizing art making in another society. Although the differences of place and cultural being amongst facilitators and participants were there, a common ground or a meeting place was created in order to provide a temporarily art work making space. There is no set or rigid formula in providing such a space and time, as each circumstance and participant is very different to the next. In this case I think my experiences and knowledge in working locally with different groups of people from different communities and the combination of some common views in alternativeness and opposition to the issues and concerns of the day did contribute to this (Free) art work zone. Other contributing factors were personal interests, sensibilities, memories, smells and sounds out of a common language, which are entwined with my Middle Easter ness.



The camp of Bourj el Barajneh near Beirut.

Also while on this trip there were new community links contacted and established they include Al Jana a registered NGO which involves local Palestinian communities in researching and recording their experiences in a cultural and creative learning processes. Al-Jana is committed to encouraging children to become researchers and makers of their own stories through their young photojournalist and young filmmakers programs. The other major organization contacted is *The Women's Humanitarian Organization (WHO)* in Bourj el Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp.

This connection needed to be made as the situation of Palestinian youth in Lebanon epitomizes a universal experience for any refugee young person. Limitations in everyday life, relationship with authorities, demonized youth representation in the media, unemployment and lack of literacy due to poor and over crowded schooling facilities are only some of the issues faced by young Palestinians in Lebanon. Although the situation is different these are some of the issues that young people of Non English speaking background in Western Sydney face and identify with.

This link of grassroots artists, organisations and people we worked with in Beirut are connected either directly or indirectly to different factions and communities and their work remains in dialogue with the concerns and the issues of the day. This approach of learning from each other and working in each other's contexts has opened up possibilities for new CCD practices and future projects both here and there.

The work and series of small pilot projects completed during this 2004 trip include:

- Workshop process with young people in Bourj el Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut out of which a short film *Ana Badee Shoo* was produced. This film was screened in the "International Film and Video Festival for Children and Young People" (*Cinewest*) in Sydney in September and in *Al - Jana's* biannual film festival, "Children on the Margin Create their World" in October in Beirut. (*WHO*)

- Also recorded the work of a young hip hop artist in Bourj el Barajneh and worked with him to develop his rhyming skills, create beats and music and record his work on CD format. (*WHO*)
- Presentation and information collective for NGO workers from refugee camps in Lebanon of ways to work creatively with young people in crisis and to create experimental artwork to express their own views and sensibilities at *Al-Jana* head quarters.
- Ran a series of workshops with young Lebanese artist in conceptualizing, writing scripts, shooting, editing and sound design out of which a short film, *BeirOut* was created. This film was also screened in Sydney. (*Al Shams and IAA*)
- Performance installation *Left/Overs*. (*Beirut theatre*)

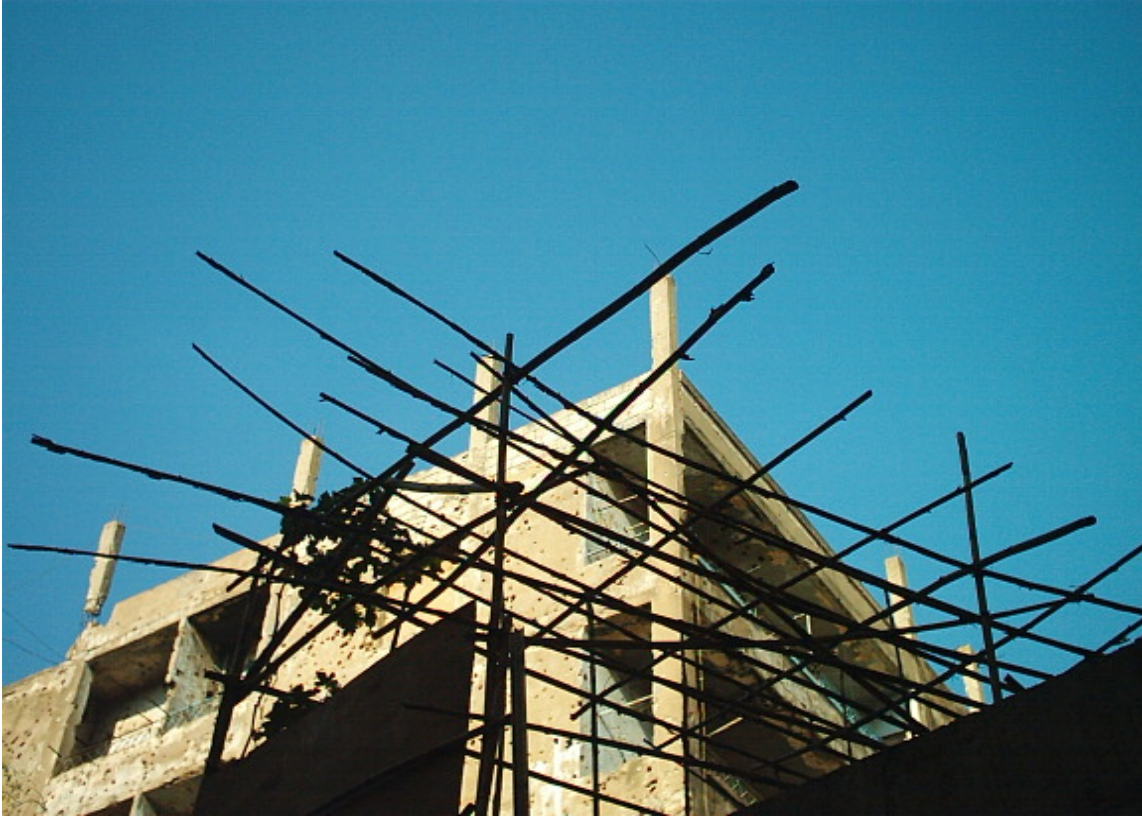
I believe this work has created a solid foundation and framework for more extensive and long-term work in the near future. The idea for work would be to continue to train young people conceptually and technically in new media areas. Which will result in participants learning skills that they can use to express the many concerns and issues that are part of the struggle of being a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon. In addition there will be a new element to this future project, which will focus on new ways of speaking about a long term and historical situations. Through the encouragement of critically looking at a variety of media - such as publications, radio, films and TV programs.

This will raise the awareness and the need to produce media, which is reflective of the particular ideas opinions and sensibilities of young refugees in Lebanon. This will also aid in avoiding the situation where young people produce imitations instead of developing their own voice through writing, image and sound. Resulting in opening up possibilities of critically analyzing the way their own images are created and manipulated in the media - as young people, as Palestinians and as refugees.



The skills attained and the produced works in different exploited media formats of E magazines, sound design pieces, radio programs and Doco-drama TV episodes, will then be taken back by the participants to their own communities and organizations and be used in their cultural work, advocacy work and reporting and accountability procedures (especially documentation).

Finally the project proposed would seek to use resources that are relevant to the communities of people that it intends to work with i.e. contemporary Palestinian literature, filmmaking and music. This will expectantly have the effect of connecting people to a vibrant Palestinian Diaspora and assist in the building of community pride and identity in a situation where people often find their identity under attack.



Al-Jana will be seeking funds to finance the purchasing of the equipment needed to undertake such a project. Also remaining true to real community cultural development principles we have all agreed that this vital equipment infrastructure as well as the skills and training infrastructure commenced will remain the property of the camps after the project is completed. It is envisaged that this project will need a year to effectively achieve its aims.

I conclude by stating that no matter the time or the place and what we are led to believe, in relation to personal comfort, security, threat, control and artistic expression. Community cultural activism needs to create and maintain an alternative social presence. This presence must remain independent and not be influenced by past and present political agendas of glories and conquests.

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