

MODULE 10
Field work report
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Beddawi Palestinian Camp
North Lebanon

Geo-politico-social context

Beddawi Camp is one of the 12 official camps where Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon. Established by UNRWA in 1955, it is located on a hill in north Lebanon, 5 km north of Tripoli, over an area of 1 square km. It hosts most probably some 20,000 Palestinians, including a number of those recently arrived from Syria

In Lebanon, some 495,985 Palestine refugees are registered with UNRWA. However, it is estimated that the actual number of Palestinians who still reside in the country ranges between 260,000 and 280,000, while the other have, in the meantime, left the country, mainly for Gulf countries and Europe.

The main influx of Palestinian refugees arrived in Lebanon following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, others arrived in 1956 following the Suez Crisis, in 1967 as a result of the Six Day War and in 1970 and 1971 after being expelled from Jordan. It is estimated that 63% of them live in one of the 12 official Palestinian refugee camps¹, better described as “concrete ghettos ringed by checkpoints and, in some cases, blast walls and barbed wire”², where, by longstanding convention, Lebanese authorities have no jurisdiction inside. The remaining live outside the camps mainly in the so-called Palestinian gatherings³ while a slight minority live in other areas of the country more integrated with Lebanese.

A new wave of Palestinian refugees was caused by the Syrian crisis, forcing dozens of thousands of Palestinians previously hosted in Syria to seek shelter in Lebanon: to date this group of refugees, estimated in the number of nearly 32,000 persons, is mainly hosted by the Palestinian communities already resident in Lebanon.

Because of quite complex reasons, Palestinians have been always prevented to be integrated in the Lebanese society on the basis of an alleged contradiction between the “assimilation” to Lebanese and the Right of Return to Palestine. Therefore, Palestinians live de-facto segregated from the rest of the country, as an alien group to the Lebanese society and are severely discriminated by the Lebanese law. To some extent, they are “tolerated” by the Lebanese society but they keep carry on the stigma caused by the civil war and are frequently accused of providing protection within the Camps to terrorist groups, and criminals.

Palestinian are thus deprived from civil rights and suffer discrimination in nearly every aspect of daily life: they have restrictions on accessing the Lebanese labour market as well as social, health and education services for which they depend on UNRWA. They are prohibited from working in most of the professions, from medicine to transportation: outside the Camps they can work in the jobs they are allowed to do in the private sector, often the least attractive jobs with poor pay, or else they work

¹ See Chaaban, J., Salti, N., Ghattas, H., Irani, A., Ismail, T., Batlouni, L. (2016), “*Survey on the Socioeconomic Status of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon 2015*”.

² Philip Issa (2017), “*For Palestinians in Lebanon, 69 years of despair*”, Retrieved July 29, 2017, from <https://www.apnews.com/3730da831b5b43f68dfacbb888291340>

³ The gatherings are defined as those areas outside the camps that include a minimum of 25 Palestinian households that live in close proximity and identify as a distinct group living in a geographically identified area. Ref. to: Ugland, O. (2003), “*Difficult past, uncertain future: Living conditions among Palestinian refugees in camps and gatherings in Lebanon*”, cited in Chaaban, J., Salti, N., Ghattas, H., Irani, A., Ismail, T., Batlouni, L. (2016), *Op. cit.*

illegally for salaries way below the norm and without the same labour rights as Lebanese citizens. Moreover, because of restrictions on ownership, their properties are bought under Lebanese names, leaving them vulnerable to embezzlement and expropriation⁴.

Field work background information

My intervention was realized in the framework of the project “Music and Resilience” implemented by Prima Materia with the local partner, the National Institution of Social Care and Vocational training (NISCVT), better known as Beit Atfal Assumoud. NISCVT is a humanitarian, non-sectarian and non-governmental organization that provides services for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and other disadvantaged people with other nationalities living in the camps or close to them. NISCVT runs ten health/social/cultural centres inside different Palestinian camps, in which several projects are implemented to address the needs of the most disadvantaged groups of children, youth and women. The project “Music and Resilience”, in particular provides support both for Community Music and Music Therapy service provided by NISCVT.

Aims of intervention

The aim of the intervention was to put into practice the knowledge and techniques gained through MARS course. In the same time, the intervention was also expected to provide practical support to the Community Music project with the objective to train the children for the final concert to be held on July 15 in Saida (South Lebanon).

Timeline and work plan

My field work lasted nine days, from July 7 to 15 (a total of seven working days). In particular, my intervention was directed at two main kinds of activities. During the mornings, from 9:00 to 12:00, I have been participating as facilitator (along with two or three colleagues) to the activities of the Community Music project, dealing with a group of nearly thirty children to whom we have been proposing musical games as well as activities such as learning the songs and the dance to be performed at the final concert. In the afternoons, from 14:00 to 15:00, I have been running music therapy sessions with 4 children, who had been previously identified by the Centre. For the first 2 sessions, I partnered with the Responsible of the music therapy service within the Centre. Then the other five sessions were run jointly by me and my colleague Elisabetta Cerocchi.

Detailed discussion of a significant moment

As a significant moment of my field work, I have chosen to report my closing session of music therapy. The reason for choosing this moment is that, despite the positive progress shown by the children during this session, I felt not completely satisfied because the session did not go the way I was expecting and that, combined with the fact that – being the final session - that I would have not seen the children again, brought me some questioning.

Before going into details, some background information about my music therapy intervention

a. Children background

Music therapy activities were run for a group of four children: two boys, **Ahmad** and **Tareq**, both 11 years old, and two girls, **Layla**, 10 years old and **Amira**, 7 years old. I chose not ask detailed clinical information about them but, in any case, through a short briefing with the responsible of the music therapy service in the Centre, I came to know that Ahmad, Tareq and Amira, the three of them, had recently (from 4 to 6 months) lost their father. Tareq had arrived from Syria with the recent flows of refugees. For all the children learning disabilities and behavioural disorders (not better specified) were also mentioned. As for Layla, she is currently attending a school for children with special needs.

⁴Ref. to: Philip Issa (2017), *op. cit.*, <https://www.apnews.com/3730da831b5b43f68dfacbb888291340>

b. Instrumentarium:

The instrumentarium of the session included: two guitars (a standard one and a ¾-size), a chromatic metallophone, a logdrum (F pentatonic), a duff, a pair of bongos, a recorder, a hank drum (made from a propane gas bottle). On the last two sessions, we added a big double-headed drum (~20") that we used as shared instrument. Moreover, since the second day we had introduced the use of a small soft ball.

c. Previous sessions

The previous sessions had shown very positive progress for all the children with observable changes, for instance in the capacity to keep eye contact, to keep focused on the activity, again in the level of engagement and of interaction with the adults and between themselves as well as the capacity to use voice intonation as well as the instrument as a communication tool. The last session (the 6th) had been, in any case, more chaotic than the previous ones, probably because of the many activities proposed by us (e.g. the use of puppetry) and had showed an unusual level of agitation and aggression that had been expressed, in particular by Layla and Tareq, through the game and through the music. Elisabetta and I had long time discussed after the session, whether it was more appropriate to contain and control this agitation and aggression not knowing what it was representing for them and how the other children were living it. That even more now that we were almost arrived to the end of our field work. Therefore, I approached the closing session with some doubts and, in a way, almost with the need to see that all the children were "fine" after the last session.

d. Objectives of the closing session

The objectives that Elisabetta and I agreed for the final session were moving in the direction of giving children a closure in the sense of capitalizing the progress shown in the previous session and therefore working on the adaptability, on the different *nuances* of expression, on the sense of rhythm, as well as on the relation and the collaboration between themselves in order to foster the sense of group. We would have not proposed new activities and be very careful not to open "doors" which then would have been very difficult to close.

e. Last session synthetic description

At the time of the session, only Layla had arrived. As we were usually doing when children were not showing up on time, I asked the social worker to check with their families if they were really coming or not: I was therefore informed that while Amira was apparently on her way, Tareq was not going to come because he was on a trip with his family – they knew since the morning. As for Ahmad, they had no news and they weren't able to contact his family.

At 14:20, being Layla still waiting, we decided not to wait anymore and to start the session with her. In fact, Amira joined us some five minutes later when we were playing the first activity.

Activity proposed:

- i) Game with ball - launching each other a small ball while calling the name of the person to whom you are launching. The implicit rule is that the one who receives should then – when passing the ball to another – answer to the call that he has received by repeating or further elaborating the style. In the first part names are pronounced with different dynamics (loud/low), intonation, pitches, rhythm (fast/slower). In the second part, names are replaced by syllables / onomatopoeic sounds (for example Pa, Ba, Be, Pa, Pu, Ta, Fa, etc.) and then progressively we introduce short melodic phrases. In the third phase, the ball is removed and we use our hands as a mediator to pass the sounds to the other.
- ii) (Pairs) Choose an instrument to share – Divided in pairs (Layla and Elisabetta, Amira and I), each pair choose an instrument in a cooperative way and then they play it together in the centre of the circle, while the other pair is listening.
- iii) (Group) Sharing of a central drum – the group is sitting in circle and playing all together (with the hands) a big double-headed drum lying in the centre of the circle.

- iv) Closing ritual – we sing together a greeting song: the first verse is for thanking and greeting everybody, then the following verses, to thank and greet each one of the participant by mentioning his/her name.

f. Brief analysis of the session

The session was less fragmented and more focused maybe because of the more intimate atmosphere produced by the reduced number of children. The two participants showed big progress in the capacity of using their voice with different pitches, dynamics and rhythms, by using our names in first (that was also a way to reaffirm the identity, being acknowledged by the others, bring the member of the group close to each other), then by adding an intonation, then syllables, then melodies. In particular, they showed a capacity to modulate the dynamics and this attainment was particularly significant for Layla who until the previous session had showed a difficulty in this sense with a “preference” for playing very loud, enough to harm the instrument or to hurt herself.

On the instruments, they seemed to show an awareness of the sound as communication tool. Very interesting, in this sense, the fact that, at the end of the second activity, both of them ended their improvisation by saying “I’m done”. In this sense, if the language of Layla seemed more conscious and personal, Amira’s language appeared still a bit stereotyped. In any case, during the improvisations in pairs, both of them played with the adult. That seemed to show less rigidity in their attitude, as well as more engagement (at the beginning of the session, Layla got closer to Elisabetta and me) and participation, as well as capacity to share.

Reflection on personal dynamics and self-learning

The reason for choosing this particular moment of my field work is not necessarily related with the content of the session itself, but rather with the feeling and questioning that was around this closing session, and around the therapy as a whole. I will share here two reflexions and some questioning about this.

The first is related specifically to this last session and that had not gone the way I would probably expected. Actually, I was not exactly ready to deal with the absence of two children (in fact three at the beginning of the session). I had given for granted that we would have been all together. The absence of Ahmed and Tareq was unforeseen but, in any case, it was not an impossible event, especially in that context where, generally (not only for the music therapy), it was quite normal for children to arrive late or even not to show up without preventing the staff: Ahmed for instance had been already absent twice from the beginning of the therapy. In any case, their absence obliged me to abdicate my expectations and probably my personal need for the closing session to be a harmonious moment where we would have been “playing all together to say goodbye”, especially after the session of the previous day and the discussions with Elisabetta.

At first, from one side I felt worried about not having “properly” closed the therapy with Tareq and Ahmed; from the other, I was worried about how Layla would have felt being the only child in the session (I didn’t know yet if Amira was arriving or not).

For the first question, my concerns were probably simply unjustified since Ahmed and Tareq had in fact closed their therapy by themselves: my apprehension was rather referred to myself and to my regret for not being able to say them goodbye.

For the second questions, which was more related to the effect of their absence on the dynamics of the group, the development of the session gave me directly an answer: since the very beginning, Layla did not show any visible sign of awe for the fact of being alone. On the contrary, she seemed to appreciate this opportunity and the increased attention that we were able to devote to her: for instance, when we were already sitting to start the session, she moved her position to get closer to me and Elisabetta. The same for Amira who, when she joined the session, did not show to be troubled by the absence (which were in any case verbalized during the session).

In fact, despite of my concerns and doubts, eventually the session was indeed positive, in the sense that it showed observable changes in the attitude and in the expression of both Layla and Amira, maybe even more than in all the previous session, especially for Layla. Did that happen because of the increased attention we were able to give them? Did that happen because it was the last session? I don't have answers about that and probably does not matter at all.

The second reflexion is, in reality, a development of the first one and relates to the closure of the therapy in general, and in particular to the difficulty I felt during the days following the end of the field work to detach myself from it and from the persons I had been dealing with.

That feeling was probably even stronger because the music therapy sessions (actually the field work as a whole) had been a very powerful experience, also by reason of its intensity: we were meeting every day for nearly 1 hour. This obviously created, affection and feelings towards the children which is natural and "sane". In any case, after the field work, my first need was to distance myself a bit, by taking a "rest": not talking about the experience, not writing the reports, etc. Only after some days, thanks to a distance-group-supervision session, I could elaborate more on my experience and on my feelings.

For example, the feeling that I couldn't, or wasn't able, to properly "close" the therapy or again the frustration for having interrupted the work in the middle of the process. I felt, in a way, to have used and betrayed the children, because - eventually - who had really benefited from the therapy was me, since I needed to do that for my field work. Once my work was over, I left: therefore, some guiltiness was added to frustration. A part of me was asking myself: "And now, what they will be going now? Are they missing the music therapy?"

All of that brought me to ask myself a question that it was already somewhere in my mind before starting the field work. What is the point of having a five-day therapy? Was it worth or not? And for who? Honestly the supervision helped me in better focusing on the issue and to find some answers, whereas available.

In fact, as a first thing, the therapy had been closed and completed, and there was no doubt on it. It was so, simply because the sessions were over. And therefore, there was nothing left open. That was the reality. As I was told during the supervision session, in that kind of context children have an extraordinary capacity of resilience and they are, in a way, very used to things that do not go as they would like. So most probably they haven't been so much affected by the end of the therapy (and in any case, since the therapy is closed that is out of my control). Indeed, the one affected by the end of the therapy was me and my worries were first of all projective: the end of a therapy (as the end of any important personal experience) represents a mourning and therefore it entails a grieving process.

In this sense, a lesson learnt from this experience is that what is really important is to BE with the children and live the time of the session with them. Making plans is useless. The therapy begins with the session and end with the end of the session. Therefore, each session should be considered and lived as the last one.

Finally, about the question if it has been worth or not, a possible answer that I was given in supervision, is that in any case we had offered to these children some moments of game and levity, within a protected space, possibly out of their daily problems. Maybe that wasn't really enough to help them in their daily life (we don't know) but in any case, through the music therapy, we might have disseminated some positive seed in their neurons. And that is definitely something worth.