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Mars - M10

Module 10 : Fieldwork report
Music in Beddawi, Refugee camp in Lebanon



- Music and Resilience Support -

Music And Resilience Support project organized a trip to Lebanon to make psychosocial music work and community music in several Palestinian refugee camps. I decided to join the group for my fieldwork and to take part in this incredible experience with them.

The MARS coordinators made it possible for the students to stay and work in the *Beit Atfal Assumoud* centers (the social centers funded by the UNWRA that are present in every refugee camp) by groups of two or three, spread over the country. Some of us worked as facilitators in Baalbek, some others in Saida, with the children and teenagers of the refugee camp of Ein el Hilweh. As for me, I spent the first week working in Beddawi, a refugee camp in North Lebanon near Tripoli, with my fellow facilitator Charlotte and coordinator Henry who had already worked there and who organizes most of the community music in Beddawi. Henry actually managed to organize a big concert at the end of the trip for all the groups - for both the children of Beddawi and Ein el Hilweh - and arranged all the repertoire and music pieces for it. So most of the activities we did were done in relation to the concert. In Beddawi, we worked with a group of kids (from approximately 6 to 12 years old) in the morning, and with a group of teenagers (from 13 to 17) in the afternoon. Both groups had about 20 children. In the second week, we took the group of teenagers to a summer camp in the mountains near Saida, where the group of teenagers from Ein el Hilweh joined us. In the summer camp, the groups gathered the teenagers of the two camps and therefore, for the following week, I worked with both teenagers from Beddawi and Ein el Hilweh.

My stay and work there somehow divided into these two parts : Beddawi and the summer camp. The places changed, the groups changed (partially), and the activities changed. I will therefore conveniently follow this division to try to explain *what* we did there, *why*, and *how*.

Beddawi

Beddawi is one of the biggest Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. As one can imagine, the conditions of living are tough enough there, the economic poverty is obvious, and the Palestinian refugees are deprived of their rights. Not only have they been expelled from their homes and been exposed to other traumatic events (cf. Sabra and Chatilah) but the Lebanese law of reciprocity forbids the Palestinian refugees to access several professions and strongly reduces their access to private property - many elements that separate them from current Lebanese citizens, and also from the Palestinian citizens.

Since 2011, Beddawi also hosts some Syrian refugees who have just escaped from the recent civil war. The situation and atmosphere in every camp is very tense : the site of Beddawi is only 1 km² and hosts more than 40000 refugees. In these conditions, the above mentioned problems crystallize severely and create a particularly conflictual environment. Most of the kids we were working with come from very difficult contexts and sometimes have a traumatic past.



However, for the past few years, the situation in the camp has improved and is much better than that one can encounter in the majority of the other camps. Some of the children we were working with in Beddawi would have special needs, but they were a minority. The general energy spread by the groups was good, and we could feel that the children were responding to our activities : except for a few of them who were more withdrawn and recalcitrant — above all in the group of the kids aged 6 to 12 — the vast majority of them were able to focus on what we proposed and didn't have too much difficulties for doing it. What's more, they seemed to have a lot of fun. This was one of the big differences compared with the groups of Ein El Hilweh, that I will comment later on.

This is the way we organized our days of work in Beddawi: in the morning, as already mentioned, we worked with the kids, and in the afternoon, with the teenagers. In the first hour in the morning, Charlotte and I ran some musical activities for the kids without any instruments. We organized some rhythmic and melodic games and taught them a few songs, canon singing and body percussion pieces. All of these activities were thought and

organized according to the several objectives we had for the group that we could sum up like this :

- working on the kids' capacity to focus and understand different rhythms
- working on their capacity to focus and understand melodies and scores
- working on the self-expression and creative potential of the kids, with both rhythm and sound
- working on their body coordination according to sound
- working on their capacity to listen to the others

As many skills that would pave the way to proper community music : these exercises and games are aimed at giving some tools for instrument playing or singing, and above all, for *collective* instrument playing.

The main difficulties we had consisted probably in finding some activities whose level would correspond to or match the entire group : accessible for all the members of the group — the activities had to be as much inclusive as possible so that no one would be left apart — but challenging enough to entertain the kids, above all the eldest ones (the difference between a 6 year old kid and a 12 year old is pretty big in terms of capacity of concentration, motricity, etc.). So we decided to alternate « easy » activities with more challenging ones, that sometimes were more laborious but, at the same time, maybe more interesting. During these more « difficult » activities, we had this agreement with Charlotte that when one of us was leading, the other one was checking that everybody had understood and was taking part in the game: working in pair, with a fellow facilitator, was a very appreciable data as far as inclusiveness is concerned.



The most interesting activity we did was a rhythmic game called « Don't play this rhythm back » that Charlotte brought and led. We did it during 3 consecutive sessions. This game works as some sort of rhythmic « Simon says » : The person who is leading has to play different rhythms clapping his/her hands within a 4/4 bar; the whole group has to repeat it, except for one rhythm (crochet-crochet-rest-crochet-crochet-crochet-crochet) that has been shown to the kids at the beginning of the game and that they have to remember. Before starting the game, Charlotte and I demonstrated how it worked, to make sure the group had understood. But when we started, none of the kids would remember the rhythms, and some of them didn't even understand. Charlotte and I started to think that the game was maybe too complicated and panic a little bit inside. Prior to implementing the game, we hadn't realized how difficult this game was in terms of concentration and understanding of the rhythm. But we just kept on trying to have the group understand. So we showed an other example, we explained again what was the rhythm that they didn't have to repeat, and after three or four rounds, the kids started to catch it progressively.

At the end of the session, we could feel that the kids were just starting to understand the game, what made us think maybe it was worth trying it once again on the next day in spite of the difficulties, instead of just dropping it. So on the second day, we had to show back the rhythm several time to make sure the kids remembered it. After a few rounds, they started to get it and even seemed to have fun with it. When we asked if someone wanted to lead, several kids proposed themselves, and did it — sometimes wrong — but they seemed to progressively appropriate it. On the third day, most of the group seemed to dominate it and had fun doing it. So even if we had a hard time at the beginning and that the process of understanding was long, we finally had the feeling that we had done some good work through this activity insofar as most of the group had mobilized a high degree of concentration that would really serve their understanding of general rhythmic in a long term.

After this special hour in the morning, we had one hour instrument classes in small groups of 5-6 children from the same group as before : the group of the violins that went with Henry, the group of the flutes with Charlotte and the guitars and pianos with me. During that time, we worked on the pieces we would play in the next hour for the big rehearsal. We made them play very simple things, often just a simplified melody or a very basic basse line, but our objective was to have them playing altogether, in the right rhythmic pattern. In the last hour, Henry was leading the big rehearsal meanwhile Charlotte and I were helping along our respective groups to follow on the rehearsal. The

last part of the rehearsal was dedicated to singing: during the concert, the kids would do the singing, while the teenagers would play the instrumental part.



In the afternoon, we had to prepare the teenagers for the concert, a work that we dealt with more in depth during the summer camp in the second week altogether with the group of Ein el Hilweh and that I will therefore explain in my second part.

The summer camp

On the Monday morning of the second week, we took the bus to the mountains with the group of the teenagers. There, we stood in an old monastery where the coordinators of the Assomoud centers of both Beddawi and Ein el Hilweh had organized the summer camp. There we met with the group of the teenagers of Saida and their facilitator, Camilo. The groups brought their instruments from both camps. The activities were all focused on the final concert, so they were mainly instrumental.

Here is our original workplan :

- from 8 to 9:30 a.m. : section rehearsal on a first piece
- Morning : - from 9:30 to 11 a.m : section rehearsal on a second piece
- from 11 to 12:30 : general rehearsal of the two pieces

LUNCH - BREAK

- afternoon : - from 5 to 6 p.m. : section rehearsal on a third piece

- from 6 to 7:30 : general rehearsal of the third piece

DINNER - SINGING, DABKE AND OTHER EVENING ACTIVITIES

At first, we thought it would be better to have most of the work done in the morning as far as its usually easier to maintain the student's attention, and to give them a big break after lunch so that they could rest and make other activities to have a real break before the afternoon rehearsal. But on the second day, we could already realize that this plan was lacking real resting slots (not only the 10 minutes between two rehearsals) and that the unbalance between the morning and the afternoon was not a good idea. The morning was way to heavy so we decided to take off one hour that we relocated in the afternoon at 4 p.m. We also decided to have a 30 minute break between every session. Having shorter sessions and more breaks really helped us keeping the groups focus on the music.

During the section rehearsal, Henry took the violins and ouds, Camilo the wind instruments, Charlotte and I were sharing the pianos and xylophones. We had a few problems, of a different nature, for example, some of the students had forgotten their music at home and there was no photocopying machine in the monastery. But the most difficult thing to manage for me was maybe the very big heterogeneity, above all in the group from Ein el Hilweh. In the piano and xylophone group, we had two extreme cases. In Saida, the students used to work in pairs. So we had one pair on the piano (a boy and a girl) who were extremely focused, serious and autonomous, and who were getting on very well and helping each other. On the other hand, on the xylophone, we had a very difficult pair: a boy and a girl, who both had special needs, and who had trouble doing the part we had prepared for them, and, above all, who were not getting on well at all. The girl kept on bullying the boy who was having more difficulties and telling him he didn't understand anything. So Charlotte and I tried to take them apart for a few minutes, so that the tension calmed down, and worked with them a bit separately. We changed their parts, making it as simple as possible, and then tried to bring them together again, and to work together, the four of us. What we did helped the situation because at the end, both of them could play their parts and they stopped quarrelling — at least in front of us — but what was a problem was that we had to leave alone the other groups, who also needed help.

In spite of all of these difficulties, Henry led very energetically the general rehearsals, which was a very good way to overcome these small problems and gave no time to develop bad dynamics into the group : the group had to be reactive and supportive for one another, otherwise, it would get lost in the rehearsal. So even though it made it

sometimes hard to have the students understand what they had to do or correct something that was wrong, this very quick rhythm was very helpful because it triggered off the solidarity of the group : if one understood something, he/she would help those who didn't. Then, the members of the group were actually doing the same job as the facilitators themselves, which can be read as proof of the good functioning of our work.



Reflection on personal dynamics and self learning

During my stay in Lebanon, I discovered a lot about myself, working and, above all, getting to know these people who have such a different life from mine. As for work, I especially learnt a lot with the group of kids we had to run with Charlotte, doing non instrumental music activities. Even if I usually work with young people, in my current job — as a teacher in public secondary schools — or in some other community music associations, I am more used to working with big groups of teenagers but within a school context, or with very small groups (of 5 or 6 maximum) in my psychosocial music work. Besides, in the associations I have worked with, my job was mostly about teaching instruments and helping the section and general rehearsal, but it was almost only instrumental.

Therefore, it was basically the first time I did this kind of non instrumental music activities with a big group and with this age category (6 to 12 years old), which was a big

discovery for me. Even if I had a lot of ideas of activities I wanted to try out, I first got a bit anxious when I found myself in the middle of the big circle showing some body percussion piece to the group, or singing alone in front of them to teach them some two voices songs and canons. But if at the beginning there was always a short moment of panic, I finally always recovered myself when focusing on what the group was doing : seeing the difficulties of the group for doing the activity sometimes made me worry at the beginning, but then, it finally made it easier for me, because it helped me focus on how to solve these difficulties so that the group could make it — basically, it made me focus on my job as a facilitator.

I'm usually not the kind of facilitator who naturally embodies the position of the leader, guiding firmly the groups s/he is working with. I normally feel much more comfortable showing my groups that I'm at the same level as them, showing I'm here because I know some technical things about music that can help them, but that humanly, I'm just like them : with the same potential reactions and questions and fears. When working as community music facilitator, I conceive my job as helping the groups with their musical parts and accompanying them, so as to make them as comfortable as possible by showing them I am as human as them : that I know these fears, that I have been there before, but that I just learnt how to domesticate them and that it is possible to get over it. But with a group of 20 or 25 kids of that kind of age, doing some non instrumental activities, I felt we had to act like a real « leading-facilitator », because in this case, it was probably the most comforting attitude for the kids. So I also learnt a lot about myself, and about how I could also experiment some new ways of facilitating, and not only because I had to: I finally had a really good time doing it, and understood that, in some context, it could be very useful and productive.

As for myself, at a personal level, getting to know these places, this culture, and above all, the people I met in Beddawi and in the summer camp, the kids, the teenagers, and also the adult coordinators was an incredible discovery that definitely blew my mind. Being able to communicate, and more than that, to become friends with these people who has such a different life from mine, and who belong to this particular culture of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon — which is not insignificant to me, being a French sephardic jewish girl, with family living in Israel — was a life-changing experience. Being able to see this reality, with my own eyes, and knowing for real this people who had lived the worst of history, in relation to the birth of the Israeli state, was, psychologically, not easy for me. But I could feel this need of knowing this « other » I heard so much about all my life without never meeting them, to put an end with every kind of prejudices that could have stood in

my way to confirm that they were *people*, just as me. I had no idea of what I would find there, and still have no idea of how to interpret what I finally found. But at the end of the experience, the outcome is that I met wonderful people there, with whom I could connect incredibly easily, whom I felt culturally so far away but so close to me at the same time — this kind of oxymoronic encounter that makes you feel joy and sadness, despair and hope at the same time, very hard to describe, but that fills up your heart with love. So, MARS, thank you for giving me the opportunity to live this incredible experience.

