

ASSOCIAZIONE PRIMA MATERIA



Beirut, Sunday 10th May

Dear all,

just got back in the Tariq El Jedida flat, after today's music therapy seminar for the Assumoud team, conducted by Mercedes Pavlicevic. Rebecca, Dario and Stefania (Dario's sister) are visiting Chatila refugee camp with Mohamad, alisa "Abu Arghileh". Beside me is Ayham, our Syrian friend, a survivor of horrendous tortures in a Damascus prison for his humanitarian voluntary support for the Syrian orphans of the city, innocent victims of the Régime. He has been clandestine in Lebanon for the last 8 months, without documents or recognition. During my stay here, he was called to the Swedish Consulate, subjected to an interview verifying the declaration he had made to the UNHCR, and finally accepted as a political asylum seeker in Sweden, to where he will travel in a few months' time, once the paperwork has been completed. My timely presence here enabled me to celebrate with him the recuperation of his dignity as a member of the human race, and above all, the end of the deep fear of being picked up by the Syrian Intelligence, which is everywhere in Lebanon.

Those of you who follow Prima Materia in fb will have seen some photos of my work with Sonbola in the Syrian refugee camps in Marej, Bekaa Valley. This time, for the first time, I spent 2 mornings in the camp schools, where the teachers I am training in psycho-social music education methods work. In absurd conditions – totally inadequate space for the number of children, intollerable heat already in May (let alone July), a disgusting smell of sewers (which are inexistent in the camps) – we played, sang and constructed musical instruments from recycled materials, but above all we laughed and joked, discovering each other. How extraordinary the intensity with which I re-experience the miracle of music as a reassuring, but also stimulating and provocative environment! Leaving the camp is hard; the teacher's intervention is necessary to discourage the interminable hugs and kisses between me and the children. In the end, I have to force myself to turn my back on the children's faces, with their big, dark eyes, wanting to know more ...

The 2 afternoons in Marej were devoted to supervision for the Sonbola teachers. I was delighted to discover that they are practising all of my teachings, with intelligent applications and adaptations to their particular context. They are certainly showing the pragmatic capacity to work in support of the children and to help them to elaborate the trauma of these terrible months and years, to build an embryonic form of resilience. In contrast, the small newborn Syrian NGOs are still in deep waters, struggling to acquire even a minimum understanding not only of how to work together, but also of how to negotiate the tortuous bureaucracy of the United Nations and of their host country.

On fb Prima Materia you can see some photos of our wonderful team participating in the NISCVT Annual Conference last Friday and Saturday. The Italian contingent, extended to include Ayham as 3rd photographer, after Dario and Stefania, and Mercedes, who adopted her Italian family with great enthusiasm, was well received as the most entertaining group, the noisiest, and (I assure you this is true, and said by a very elegant Lebanese lady) the best dressed – can you imagine, knowing us ...!

Stefania, Mercedes and I are leaving tomorrow; Rebecca and Dario are staying for another 2 days for coordination meetings for the Community Music project, in Beirut, where at last we have a central coordinator, and in Beddawi (North) and Saida (South).

This evening we are headed for our favourite café, Café Hassan, on the sea, pointing towards the West, towards Italy, where I have invited our many friends for my last evening. I suspect we will take over the small café with a hybrid group of Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, English, South-Africans, Italians, Japanese, Indonesians, ... a good slice of the world ... a significant moment to digest my leaving, until my return, insha'allah.

Deborah and the PM M&R team