

SUMMER CAMP – BEIRUT 2004

Beyond the Borders



Magic!

What a strange feeling to leave the Summer camp, torn between the conviction of having experienced something strong and the doubt of being too naïve.

The conviction lasts...doubt as well. Here comes magic...

Tempted to understand/learn...to play it again somewhere else. Also fear to destroy the immaterial. One doesn't dissect a rose, love even less.

Maybe we could simply keep it a secret. Maybe we could simply mention that there is a secret. You have to come and see it, testify that the journey is worth it, full stop.

But we can lift the curtain, let's be seductive...

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Behind the curtain was a magic place, at the border of...what was it again? Beirut...place of all borders.

There was a group of responsible men and women, willing to let go of the coat of appearances, not to be businessmen, lawyers, psychoanalysts, consultants, ...but...simply human beings!

There was a will to exchange real life experience, not necessarily built on a speech.

So...

So, what 's left is the intimate perception that the new age, or whatever name we want to give to this era that is opening for us. The passage from the world of words and methods, spires, minarets, skyscrapers, everything we believe are our roots to this simple understanding of the intimate human nature.

So there it is, the discovery...that the essential is so close.



Wednesday, September 22nd
PEOPLE AND BORDERS

“Only in times of great tensions, change can occur”

Someone had a dream

So here we are. We have gathered this morning in the amazing setting of the American University of Beirut. There are about thirty people in the circle where we start our day. I only know a few of them, though some of us must have met before during previous summer camps. A sad but beautiful song by the Algerian singer ‘Saoud Massi’ fills the room. After some warm welcoming words Sahar introduces herself. She organized this summer camp and will be our guide for the next days. “I lived in Beirut”, she explains. “My family had to move to Switzerland. When we wanted to go back, we couldn’t because of the war... since then I had the dream to do something for my country, so the best gift I could offer to Lebanon is to organize this summer camp.”

Borders are everywhere, also in our head

Sahar, Jean, Bertrand and David are leading the exercises. This is the first: "Start to work with your partner. Explain to each other why you're here, listen to one another without interrupting and then tell your team members what struck you most. Afterwards, explain to the whole group what unites us, people. Here are some of the answers: "We all have barriers, but we are ready to deal with them", "We want to learn about borders and how to overcome them", "We must know our history and where we are going. The process in between is not free of mistakes, but we shouldn't be afraid to make them", "This is the era of the heart, of great changes and new ideas. We should be careful not to build in new structures, barriers and constraints that will block us again".

In the afternoon, our subject is 'borders'. What do borders mean for each of us? Again, we share our stories in the teams. Nearly all of us have experienced how painful it can be to be confronted with a social, linguistic, cultural, political or religious border. Fear can be a border or habits we can't get rid off. And some of the times, we realize, the border is in our own head. Each village is asked now to build a 'body statue' expressing the theme of this day.

The rebuilding of Beirut

The day closes with a film on the rebuilding of Beirut. Afterwards, a bus drives us into town. We visit the rebuilding company 'Solidere', learn about the future plans and projects and walk around in the restored part of town. In the evening, dinner is offered to us by the Lebanese Government. We all enjoy the food and the good company and look forward to continue our journey in this remarkable city, with all these fantastic people

Thursday, September 23rd

RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS AND RECONCILIATION

“A common vision, strong leadership and focused energy can lead us towards rebirth”

Life isn't about territory

The day starts with a television movie by Gerald Fox. In 1999 the brilliant Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim and his friend Edward Said, an American-Palestine social philosopher, created an orchestra project called the “East-Western Divan Workshop”. Young talented people from all over the Middle East can participate, Jews as well as Arabs. The aim of the workshop is to combine the study of music with an intercultural dialogue and reflection on the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Said, who died a few weeks after the film was recorded, comments: “For Barenboim, obstacles are there to toy with under the way. He can make this project work because he has so much human energy.” Barenboim, who had the occasion to play music for 50 years of his life says he's glad to be able to give something back to society. Realizing that open mindedness, communication and respect can overcome differences, the movie leaves us all speechless for minutes.

The grammar of images

The teams now come up with names for their villages: Creatopia, Village of Hope, Atlantis, Uni-Verse and Tir Na Nòg (Land of Youth and Innocence). Each village presents an opening ceremony. Shoji Shiba, taking the movie on Barenboim as a starting point, tells us about ‘The Grammar of Images’. Symbols, comparisons and periphery give us important messages and create a better and deeper understanding of reality. The conductor standing among his students in the orchestra is a symbol of communication; a comparison can be created by putting two scenes one immediately after the other; close ups, for instance of the hands and faces of the students, give the spectator important additional information on what is happening.

The person in the patient

Lucy Scott-Moncrieff gives us a presentation of her experience as a legal aid lawyer, defending persons in mental health institutes and preparing their reintegration case in court. She explains how she tries to overcome the constraints, not only in the practice of her work, but also in her own company in London. Lucy was able to successfully manage change in her company. As a lawyer, she challenged legislation and was able to change the law system at certain points. On the basis of that success lies the ability and will to always see the person in the patient she's dealing with.

Looking for key factors towards rebirth

After lunch, we listen to a speech of John Alderdice on the situation in Northern Ireland, read to us by Christopher Cordess. Then Tom Evans of the Northern Ireland Assembly describes the important steps and various facts about the situation in Northern Ireland and the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and unionists.

Now that we have different views on conflict resolution and problem solving – the reconstruction of Beirut, the intercultural orchestra project by Barenboim, Lucy's experience and the Northern Ireland situation – we work in the villages and try to identify what we see as key factors towards success in the process of rebirth. A common vision, a strong, courageous or charismatic leadership, passion and commitment, focused energy, respect, the optimal use of resources and the determination of people to change, are some examples of what the villages came up with.

The afternoon ends with another documentary by Gerald Fox "The truth and reconciliation", on the upcoming movie by John Boorman "Country of my skull: guilt, sorrow and the limits of forgiveness in the new South Africa."

To close the day and to introduce the day of tomorrow Sahar and Bridget read some poetry by the Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran.

Friday, September 24th

POETRY

“You can’t decide to be a poet, it’s your heart that decides for you”

There is a poet in each of us

The group leaves at eight in the morning to travel out of the city. The beautiful and peaceful Mir Amin Palace (in Beiteddine, Shouf), with breathtaking views, is our first stop. People feel the need to walk around and explore. Then the bus drives us to the Beit Eddin Palace where we meet the poet, mister Akl. “I was born a poet, I didn’t become one. You can be in a state of poetry without writing even one word. When the words are ready, they come out... Poetry gave me victory over death. In fact, the poet is the teacher of hope”, he tells us. During a guided tour in the astonishing palace we each get the afternoon, a place that suits us and is quiet enough to write our own poem... So we look in ourselves and write down what is there. Two days ago we were a group of people not knowing one another very well and look what’s happening now: we are ready to share poems in our villages and talk about how it feels to write them.

Do you feel the energy of the age-old trees?

We head for the Barouk Cedar Forest in the mountains, a reserve with 24 different species of trees and 500 different plants. After a short walk in this peculiar, quiet forest, Sahar is guiding us for some energy exercises. Then we follow the Lebanese in their habit to come together and read poems. So we sit around a huge tree and read the poems we brought, each in our own language. After this very special moment of peace and togetherness, it’s time to share the specialties we brought.





Saturday, September 25th
SPIRITUALITY AND CHANGE

*“Now I understand
what globalization is all about”*

War isn't the right answer to terrorism

The last day of the summer camp starts in the presence of the Jesuit priest Samir He was born in Egypt and now lives and teaches in Lebanon. Father Samir is a professor in oriental theology and runs the Centre for Arab-Christian Documentation and Research. He explains us the backgrounds of the Lebanese war and the situation in Lebanon today. Lebanon is a young country, small in size and in number of people. Many Lebanese are refugees. “In former times a lot of different people moved to this region to seek protection in the mountains”, father Samir explains. “Lebanese don't have a strong feeling of citizenship. The separate groups, which made Lebanon, have always looked for outside supporters, which makes the situation more complex still.” The 75-95 war was triggered by the issue of the Palestinians. But in fact this war consisted of many different wars. If we want a lasting peace, we should apply the principles of democracy, personal liberty and equality, which are present in the constitution.

The future of Lebanon depends highly on countries like Syria, USA and on Europe and the United Nations. On the question on how violent Islam is, father Samir answers that Coran is both violent and not violent. “The question is how you interpret it. What Osama Bin Laden is saying is somewhere in the Coran... the opposite as well.” However, war is never the right answer to terrorism. Strong countries have a responsibility to those who are handicapped. We should help terrorists to change themselves.

Something good, something bad

Shoji Shiba starts a workshop on 'how to manage change'. Shoji is inviting us to make our own model to express change, taking the results of the exercise of the 'key factors towards rebirth' as a starting point. Wolfgang Kaerkes reads his story of the lonesome wolf. Hassan Ghaziri expresses his views and hopes on change as well.

We brainstorm about suggestions for the next camp and during the closing ceremony they are handed over to Tiia Tammaru and to Wolfgang. Tiia is organizing a 'Winter Camp' in Estonia, in Puhajarve, January 22-24, 2005. Before we leave, we tell each other one positive and one negative item and also one wish about this Summer Camp. Sahar has a last story which learns us that if we really believe in something, it will happen.

So, goodbye to all and many, many thanks to everyone who helped to make this wonderful experience come true.





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