

STAMBA - more than a project and deeper than only a meeting

by Amal Ibrahim

On Thursday October 31, 2013 Baghdad's creative centre for performing arts, the theater venue **Muntada Al Masrah** opened the doors to the **STAMBA** theater project. On the first day, the STAMBA theater play from Germany "**The Experience of Revolution**" directed by **Janet Stornowski** premiered.



The organisers of the project, the Germany-based NGO EMCUE and Al Noor Foundation for Culture and Media in Iraq, received honoured guests including: Mr. Hamed Al Rawi, Cultural Advisor in the Ministry of Culture, Republic of Iraq, a representative from the office of Mr. Fawzi Atroushi, Deputy of the Minister of Culture, who presented a bountiful flower bouquet to STAMBA's project coordinator, Ms. Hella Mewis; Mr. Mudhafar Al Rubaie, the Deputy of the Cultural Relations Directorate; and Mr. Jim Scarth, Head of the British Council in Iraq. The honoured Dr. Aqeel Al Mahdi was among the attendees, as well as representatives of the Embassies of France and Germany in Baghdad. The wellknown actress Alaa Hussein gave an opening speech to the audience, comprised of intellectuals, artists, art critics and the general public. Al Noor Foundation representatives also covered STAMBA's activities.



The Garden in Muntada Al Masrah overlooking the Tigris River served as a gathering place for the STAMBA guests and audience until the performance began at five o'clock in the evening. The play "**The Experience of Revolution**" (Play: Laura Palacios and Maximilian Meyer-Bretschneider, Dramaturge: Simon Kubisch) ended interactively into an open discussion with the audience, initiated by a question of the director Janet Stornowski to the audience. The lively discussion continued outside in the discussion corner.

Theater critics and the media in particular talked about the play, which centered on the adaption of Bertolt Brecht's teaching play "**The Measure**".

Janet Stornowski's play centered on Brecht's study of an ideology that aims for deep changes, and yet in spite of its principles faces many contradictions in the face of reality: "To feed on its own sons" was the metaphor discussed by Dr. Aqeel Mahdi during the panel discussion, who together with the New Manager of Al Horra TV Ms. Rafel Al Mahdi moderated the panel.

The show dealt with the experience of communism, discussing powerful movements that made dramatic changes on a global scale, and ultimately how the individual was expected to disappear into the collective. It portrays the killing of a member of the group because he acted on own personal convictions. "**The Experience of Revolution**" thus confronts the dilemma of which has priority, the individual or the collective action, if it can be justified in terms of helping those in need.





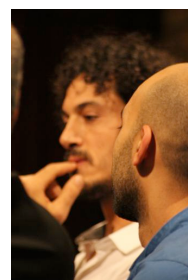
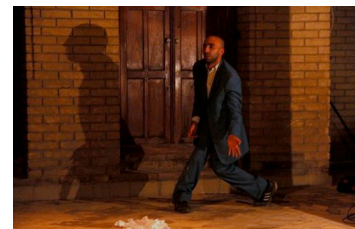


Second Day, STAMBA Egypt, November 1, 2013:
Muntada Al Masrah witnessed the Egyptian STAMBA performance "**Happiness of a Little Family**" an embodiment of a deep tragedy in the frame of a black comedy, which holds to a large extent the Arab region's reality. It was a shocking irony that was capable of penetrating things and words often censored.

The play was directed by the choreographer and director **Mohamed Shafik** and performed by the young actress and singer Nadah El Shazly and Mohamed Fouad, who transformed his flexible body through dance into the many contradictions of Arab society, which could be felt by audience as a kind of dramatized corporeal pain. Whereas the light designer Saber El Sayed contributed to the performance by using light effects that added a vital role to the play.

The audience, awe-struck by the performance, burst into applause and cries of appreciation at the play's end. The ensuing panel discussion was moderated by Dr. Aqeel Al Mahdi, an expert in theater and professor at the College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad. Together with the audience, he exchanged many opinions about the artistic and social aspects of the work. The play made use of German, English and Arabic song and texts that interacted with the actors who were trying to break the clichés that dominate the lives of so many in the Arab World. Nada's character tried to mend this pain with a dimension of feminism, which could possibly add balance to the couple's pain and regain control of both their lives...as expressed at the play's end through a long hug.

"**Happiness of a Little Family**" by **Mohamed Shafik** was viewed as an illumination in contemporary Arab theater.



Third Day, STAMBA France, November 2, 2013:

On the 3rd day of the STAMBA project in Muntada Al Masrah the French performance **"Spring's Advantage"** was shown. Spring here is not that wonderful season in nature with birds and flowers, but rather the cliché of the so-called Arabic spring, which the Arab world recently witnessed. The director of the play **Nathalie Garraud** said that the play intended to break the widely held cliché in European society, particularly in France, about "The Arab in service", an idea whereby the Arabs should always be in service, whether in menial jobs or otherwise, to the dominant group, in this case the French. In the panel discussion, she said: "When I heard about STAMBA, the first cliché that came to mind as a French woman, which embarrassed me at the time, was this one about the Arabs always serving the French."

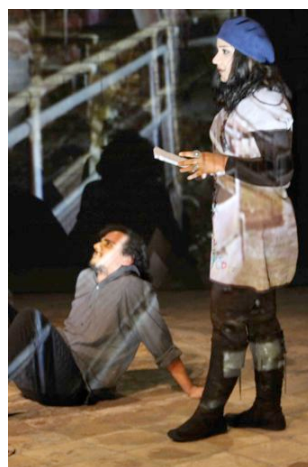


Director Nathalie Garraud made use of diverse multimedia elements to underline the meaning of the text and play performed by actors Mitsou Doudeau and Omar Abi Azar. The character played by Abi Azar had been chosen to stage scenes from Shakespeare's "Othello". Director Nathalie Garraud and writer Olivier Saccomano rewrote the original text to present this cultural stereotyping and typecasting, which makes its way even into the European intellectual and artistic spheres.



The discussion following the performance moderated by Iraqi writer Hamid Al Maliki focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the play. The reception of the audience was not as positive as had been hoped. As the subtitles were only made available in English, without the additional translation from French into Arabic, much of the play's nuance was not fully grasped by the audience. This resulting panel discussion thus dealt with more minor criticisms, rather than focusing on how the play incorporated

Shakespeare's texts to address the underlying cliché of "The Arab in service to the French". Nathalie Garraud said: "I never wanted to promote this idea. On the contrary, it's an attempt to address European thought patterns that really need a change of thinking on all levels."







Fourth Day, STAMBA Iraq, November 3, 2013:

On the fourth day of the international STAMBA project, Muntada Al Masrah staged the Iraqi performance **"Death of a Stubborn Citizen – Phobia, Again"** directed by **Yahya Ibrahim**, performed by Shayma Jaffar and Yaas Khdhaer and with scenography by Fallah Ibrahim. The presentation focused on the fear that has accompanied Iraqi society over the past sixty years. This was defined in part by the playing of the Iraqi national anthem, which divided the play's scenes, forming a reference point for the periods the Republic of Iraq has witnessed. The title of the play symbolizes the repetition of this phobia. Director Yahya Ibrahim said: "The cliché of fear takes center stage in this drama, but, the real cliché I wanted to break is the cliché of repetition. I do not like this cliché, as it is my belief that repetition kills life, the artistic as well as everyday life. So I thought to overcome my own cliché and break my own fear through this theatrical work."



The fourth day's performance concluded the four STAMBA theater plays that premiered in Baghdad from October 31 to November 3.

Immediately following the Iraqi play, an interactive panel discussion including STAMBA's project coordinator Hella Mewis and the four STAMBA theater directors: Mohamed Shafik from Egypt, Nathalie Garraud from France, Janet Stornowski from Germany and Yahya Ibrahim from Iraq. The discussion was moderated by renowned Iraqi writer Hamid Al Maliki and translated by Amal Ibrahim, president of Iraq-based Al Noor Foundation for Culture and the Media. The audience took part in the discussion, posing questions about artistic expression and the creative points of view of the four performances, as well as the intellectual messages of the play and their dealing with the theme of clichés.

The audience expressed their desire to see events like this developed on a larger scale and to include more countries and eventually to become a festival of its own, creating a bridge between social and philosophical convictions and artists in different countries. This hope, however, can only be attained through greater financial sponsorship for such kind of projects over the long-term.

STAMBA is organized by **German-based NGO EMCUE - Europe MENA Cultural Exchange** in cooperation with **Al Noor Foundation for Media and Culture in Iraq**. The intellectual aim of the project is to bring together Eastern and Western artists to address clichés in one location at a time and to discuss theatrical works on a social and artistic level. Hella Mewis, manager of the STAMBA project, said, "You can not overcome social structures without first creating an interactive and constructive dialogue. And, only the arts and especially theater can realize such deep aesthetical treatments."

The STAMBA project is a qualitative addition to the Iraqi cultural scene, especially as the performances at Muntada Al Masrah are part of the activities for **"Baghdad – Capital of Arab Culture 2013"**.

The prevailing eastern western syndrome was set into a different lime light. STAMBA received a very positive resonance and hopefully arouse in an endless debate with representative of the presented clichés.



GERMANY | ألمانيا**"THE EXPERIENCE OF REVOLUTION" | "تجربة الثورة"***Direction: Janet Stornowski*

Janet Stornowski criticises the propagation of from outside imposed and to be properly sighted ideologies. To believe that one could impose its ideology to another country and thus create a more peaceful world can only be a mistake and certainly the aim of these operations are not alone to bring peace, but to pursue their own interests and enforces.

عامل تنن تقد جانيت ستورنويسكي ال ايديولوجيات ال جاهزة التي تفرض من الخارج ليتم الت
معها كمسلمات. بكللمات اخرى هو التصور بامكانية خلق عالم اكثر امانا بفرض نظريات من خارج
البلدان

EGYPT | مصر — العراق**"HAPPINESS OF A LITTLE FAMILY" | "سعادة عائلة صغيرة"***Direction | Choreography | Text | Music: Mohamed Shafik*

Using prevailing views from contemporary Egyptian society, **Mohamed Shafik** argues that the whole human being is a cliché. The director will show, that experiences from the past influence the present life and the future. As the world is experiencing a huge change in all perspectives it is time to overcome existing borders and chains, to reach a better future.

يرى محمد شفيق أن الكائن البشري في المجتمع المصري المعاصر، ما هو سائد تقديماً من خلال
وسي عرض المخرج، بحكم تجارب وخبرات الماضي حياة الحاضر. بكلية هو محظ كل شيء هات
وكم يشهد العالم من تغغيرات في جميع وجهات النظر فقد أن الأوان للتعليق على. والمستقبل
. إلى مستقبل أفضل ووصولاً المصطنعة ما بين الشعوب القويود والحدود

FRANCE | فرنسا**"SPRING'S ADVANTAGE" | "فرصة الربيع"***Direction: Nathalie Garraud*

Nathalie Garraud intersects in her play for STAMBA the cliché of the "poor" who experiences harsh reality, the cliché of the "artist" and his struggle for individual expression, and the cliché of the "foreigner" who has to adapt his new live with the experiences of his old one.

ممن يعانون من "الفقر" ناتالي جارو في مسرحيتها المعقدة لسقامبا لكل شيء هات من تتعرض
"جنبي" ونضاله من أجل التعبير الفردي، وكل شيء هات عن ما هو "الفنان" واقع قاس، وصور عن
. على خبراته السابقة عتقاداً إن يتكيف مع حياته الجديدة الذي يجب

IRAQ | العراق**"DEATH OF A STUBBORN CITIZEN - PHOBIA, AGAIN" | "فوبيا... تكرار"***Direction: Yahya Ibrahim*

In his STAMBA performance, **Yahya Ibrahim** studies the problems and crises of the Iraqi state over the past 60 years. The play is an attempt to show how archaic thought patterns and recurring value models beyond the border of consciousness can destroy a country and its citizen. The play consists of a revalidation of life in a "civilized" country as part of the Iraqi state-building.

المشاكل والأزمات التي عانت منها الدولة يحكي إبراهيم يدرس، لمشروع ستامبا عمله الفني في
المسرحية محاولة لإظهار الكيفية التي تكون عليها. ن عام الماضي العراقية على مر السنين
ينتج ستنساختها وتكرارها وراء حدود الوعي وحجم ما إثار أليه أول ينميط التفكير القديمة وما أ
"محتضر" عادة الثقة بالحياة في بلد إلى المسرحية تدعو. ذلك من ضرر للبلاد ودمار لمواطنيها
كجزء من بناء الدولة العراقية

