



## **Reconstituting Identity through Narrative: Practical initiatives in theatre to develop narratives of self and community**

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The goal of this presentation is to explore strategies for using theatre, writing and the arts in conflict and post-conflict zones to strengthen positive identity building. Theatre artists are often well-equipped to offer sensitive and aware interventions aimed at rebuilding the disrupted self and/or reinforcing communal cohesion in and among social groups. Working with communities or individuals in times of crisis, theatre practitioners in particular can call on resources which reweave threads that have been broken by stress and trauma. After identity has been stripped by (social) trauma, adjustment and healing are very difficult. To regenerate identity – of the individual and of the group, which often overlap – there is a need to re-master ones' narrative, the "story" of the self. Telling, expressing, bringing forward a coherent story, is the work of theatre; eliciting, and elucidating master narratives – the deep stories that define us - is made feasible by a theatrical context, which allows a safe space for exploration and re-articulation of identity. By creating the safe space of fiction, through workshops which employ creative writing, art, music and dramatic expression, we regenerate a sense of meaning and purpose, and the chaotic dissolution of self is healed.

This presentation examines various levels and applications of performance work with individuals and social groups who have undergone periods of rupture: I discuss workshops with prisoners, including an upcoming project with death row inmates; woman survivors of the Balkan wars, many of whom I interviewed and whose testimony forms part of my play Sarajevo Phoenix, and a theatre project focused on suicide among elders in Hispanic communities in Massachusetts; I also refer to earlier projects with Gypsy/Roma in Eastern Europe and with a broad spectrum of groups in Israel/Palestine. Description and analysis of these projects will be followed by a question-and-answer period.