

The “*Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena*” and the construction of a good life in Ticopó, Yucatán, Mexico

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Abstract

In the context of the field of Communication for development and social change, this paper aims to explore the relationship between theater and development in the case of the “Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena” (*Indigenous and peasant theater Laboratory*) (2004-2006) based on an Ex post facto research through focus interviews with the Mayan inhabitants of Canicab Ticopó Yucatan, Mexico. With this purpose, it is presented a tour in theoretical perspectives emphasizing edutainment to reach the proposal of Augusto Boal and non-pedagogical experiences in Latin American Theater. The theatrical practice of Maria Alicia Martinez Medrano and the mark left on its participants eight years after completion of the performance of the play *Seventh moments in the life of the Maya* is described. It is concluded that the exercise in staging at Ticopó helped to build emotional ties, recreational moments, intercultural contacts, travel, family life, cultural self-esteem, image and sensitivity towards building a “good life”.

Keywords: Theatre. Good life. Communication. Development. Mayan Culture.

Introduction

In 1997, the Rockefeller Foundation promoted a series of meetings with experts to reflect on the theme of Communication for social change, and these meetings led to recognize that in many countries there are exemplary processes of community experiences that promote social change in a participatory manner (GUMUCIO, 2001). Examples worthy of being mentioned are condensed in the book *Haciendo Olas* written by Alfonso Gumucio Dagron and edited by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2001. A sequel to that book, entitled *Antología de Comunicación para el Cambio Social* was published by Communication Consortium in Bolivia seven years later (GUMUCIO; TUFTE, 2008).

The first book written by Alfonso Gumucio seeks to explain a series of experiences that were successful in promoting social change through participatory approaches, that is, not with models that promote development as an exercise of public welfare, but projects that had emerged from communities or had been appropriated by them, and that would have enabled them to strengthen the values of democracy, culture and peace. Rather than coming from a globalized cultural imposition, they would respect and strengthen the identity of the groups involved. Among these case studies, popular theater frequently appears as an important element for development.

In this context, the present article aims to explore the relationship between theater and development based on the work of the “Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena” completed in Ticopó between 2004 and 2006. To that end, this article explains the various paradigms related with Communication for development and social change, briefly describes some experiences that use theater as a central strategy, reviews the concept of theater from the perspective of Augusto Boal and finally, analyzes the experience of the “Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena” completed in the town of Ticopó, in the Acancéh municipality of the state of Yucatan, Mexico.

Communication, development and social change

Alfonso Gumucio says that the “history of communication for development is also the history of development” (2013, p.25 – Our translation), and he is particularly concerned with the way the word “development” has been used in the economic and social context of international policies. Gumucio and Tufte identify the systematic use of Communication as a tool for “development” after the second World War (GUMUCIO; TUFTE, 2008), when the importance of rebuilding the world based on the consumption driven by American model of life is identified as a goal criteria for any country. To embrace development meant neglecting traditional ways and customs, in order to accept and incorporate modernity from the technological innovations that related human beings with their peers and their environment.

“Communication for Development” was intended to be a permanent effort of diffusion of these innovations, from those countries considered to be developed, to those which were not considered to be so, without attention to culture or to the ecological niches of each region. This idea resulted in policies that involved the training of specialized agents called “extensionists” who were meant to “bring progress” to the most remote regions of the planet, changing the customs and the ways of life of many people. Decisions regarding what was to be considered as development and as modernity, were made from the top, or from “the center”, and imposed on everyone else: “the periphery”. The most obvious example were agronomists who made use of interpersonal communication, but

also leaflets, posters, radio and audiovisual techniques, to persuade rural communities to change their practices.

The dependency theory that had its peak in the 1960s, revealed the pronounced injustice prevailing in trade between the United States and Latin America. The trade balance and the alleged dissemination of innovations produced a chronic deficit in Latin American countries, combined with the devastating impact that these innovations brought with them, and whose danger had been warned since 1974 in the Declaration of Cocoyoc (BELTRAN, 2005). All of this put in to question the diffusionist perspective of Communication for development and a new way of thinking emerged that considered the importance of disregarding capitalist demands in order to address development as seen from the participating communities and individuals. Important works in this transition were those such as Paulo Freire (1998) who strives for dialogue as a strategy for social change, and also thinkers such as Antonio Pasquali Greco in Venezuela, Mario Kaplun in Uruguay, Daniel Prieto Castillo in Argentina (BELTRAN, 2005), or even Luis Ramiro Beltran in Bolivia. The type of communication strategies derived from these proposals have the quality of being horizontal, participatory, alternative, dialogical, democratic, and in their most perfect expression, self-managed; and pursuant to distance them from the “developmental-modernizing” communication perspective, some authors such as Alfonso Gumucio (2001), prefer to use the term “Communication for social change”.

Of course, the perfect theoretical models do not exist in practice in a pure way. One example is the edu-entertainment, that Thomas Tufte (2008, p.1018 – Our translation) describes as:

The use of entertainment as a specific media practice, used to strategically communicate on issues of development, in a manner and for a purpose which can range from the social marketing of individual behavior in its most narrow definition, to the articulation of agendas in pursuit of social change, led by citizens and with a liberating effect.

Marketing or social marketing aims to change behavior by the positioning of ideas among recipients. The strategy is based on the same persuasive principles of advertising. One example is the insertion into soap operas, content related to family planning or nutritional care; or creating programs like Sesame Street. Edu-entertainment has a pedagogical purpose and there are a number of scenic experiences that have been built for this purpose.

Edu-entertainment frequently uses staging, particularly theater as a communication strategy. There are many experiences that have used theater for campaigns on health care, promotion of human rights, environmental education, but also, this practice has served as an exercise in ideological penetration in order to, covertly, gain access to communities and

change their ideology. So it was in America since the sixteenth century with the theater of evangelization and its subsequent editions (ITURRIAGA, 2004). In Mexico, after the years of the Mexican Revolution, the theater was also used by José Vasconcelos as a tool to impose Western Culture upon the native population as part of the so-called “cultural missions”.

In Mexico, in the seventies the “Conasupo Theater” was started, intending to present government programs to peasants farmers; however, even though the strategy was aimed at ideological penetration, its operators, an alumni group of the National Institute of Fine Arts, transformed the purpose of the experience changing the reflection for information: influenced by the thinking of Augusto Boal, at the end of the performance they engaged in open dialogue with the farmers. This allowed them to reformulate their extensionist proposals. The creators turned the plays and activities toward reflection on the problems of the actual communities through what would later be called Peasant Theater Workshops (Talleres de Teatro Campesino).

The non-pedagogical theater

Theater can be used effectively as a pedagogical strategy to teach something to someone but, as demonstrated by Augusto Boal, it can be much more than that. I cite two examples given by Alfonso Gumucio (2001):

Case 1

Honduras 1997 the troupe “La Fragua” (www.fragua.org), emerge as a Catholic initiative to support the disadvantaged social sectors of the country. In words of Jack Warner, Jesuit priest founder and director of “Teatro La Fragua”

The clear laughter of a four years old girl cuts through the darkness; a sense of oppression fades and adults join in laughter. The actors struggle to maintain their composure (...) A little girl was able to do it, at just four years old she revealed in all an impulse, she taught her parents, her superiors, a basic life lesson: laughter is the first rebellion against oppression, a wildly revolutionary act, a challenge to any authority stating that life must be suffering. This is raw, courageous and tough theater in a land beset by hurricanes, deforestation, corruption and poverty. (GUMUCIO, 2001, p.83-84 – Our translation)

How do you find an audience in a country where lack of education and years of foreign domination created a large cultural gap? How do you build a Honduran cultural identity? These were complex problems that the La Fragua group had to resolve to build their cultural practice. This group of folk theater, probably the most stable and durable in Latin America, was founded in Honduras in 1979. It was formed based on the Jesuit

thinking of Jack Warner, to “forge national identity through the expressions of the people” and “awaken creativity using popular theater” to find solutions to contemporary problems of that particular town. At first they were a dozen people dedicated more to the management of what the existence of the theater required, and to support the initiatives of various artists. The strategy launched by this group involved the staging of works by Latin American authors, presenting religious pieces such as “living gospel” and dramatic adaptations of stories, myths and folklore of Honduras.

The presentations were made and are still made in squares, churches and schoolyards favoring audiences such as poor and illiterate workers who do not have access to sources of official culture and who would otherwise never have a chance to go to the theater. The guiding principle being: “If the people can not go to the theater, then the theater must go to the people”. The members of the group referred to that in the small towns they visit, “they always find the most enthusiastic audiences and the most respectful treatment”. The group is also active in artistic training and obtained a permanent space that had previously been the clubhouse for a banana company. They operate on 50% clerical funds and the rest is produced by the box office and local contributions. Jesuit support provides the group with not only human and material resources, but also a source of public legitimacy in a society where the majority of private and public institutions are characterized by inefficiency and corruption. La Fragua places special emphasis on pantomime, gestures, movement, rhythm, dance and music considering that images matter much more than speeches when it comes to illiterate populations such as that of Honduras.

Case 2

El Alto, Bolivia, Teatro Trono was composed of children and street youth. It was born at Christmas 1989 in the Center of Diagnosis and Therapy for Boys, where many of its creators met. The persistent work of young people in their artistic initiative made possible the consolidation of the organization COMPA, dedicated to the promotion of culture for children and youth on the street, that in addition to the theater also organized a film club, a library, a literary group and traveling photographic exhibitions (GUMUCIO 2001, p.138-139).

The works presented by Teatro Trono are the product of collective creation. Some of their titles are: *El meón*, *Vida de perro*, *Así es la vida*, *La leyenda de la hoja de coca*, *De burros y flores*, *Hecho bolsa*. It is not hard to imagine the content of the works: *Dog's Life* shows the miserable life of street children; *El meón* ridicules the bureaucracy of government institutions caring for children in the street, and so forth. The collective constructions of the group touched on themes such as children's rights, drug trafficking, gender equality, leadership etc.

Although Teatro Trono was internationally successful and presented at various locations in America and Europe, perhaps the most important success refers to the lives of

its participants: children who joined the group radically changed their life circumstances when they moved their street experience to the theater, and left it there (GUMUCIO, 2001, p.140). The methodology the group follows seeks to awaken the creative talent and critical sense of children and adolescents. They begin with a stage of research at the Community level, the definition of characters based on real people, creating credible “heroes” of great strength, capable of fighting for their community and confronting government authorities.

Sensible Thought

For Augusto Boal life is aesthetic; from start to finish it is accompanied by “sensible thought” and the theater is the perfect place to think, understand, share, discuss. Boal makes a typology of popular theater which says that popular theater must necessarily show the people’s perspective. In this regard the examples highlighted above are popular theater, but, in the case of Teatro Trono, it is not necessarily a “pedagogical” theater and the recipients are not necessarily popular sectors.

[...] A show is ‘popular’ when it assumes the perspective of the people in the analysis of the social microcosm that appears within it – the social relations of the characters, etc. even if it is performed for a single viewer, even if it is a rehearsal before a single spectator, even in the case of a rehearsal before an empty room, and even if the audience is not the people (BOAL, 1985, p.33 – Our translation).

So, as the popular theater has had non-popular audiences, Boal stresses the importance of offering popular shows to all kinds of public. He adds that the bourgeois audience consists mostly of the petty bourgeoisie who, influenced by mass media, think and aspire to a bourgeois way of life without enjoying the benefits of it, so their political beliefs are modifiable.

And beyond that, the poetry of Boal proposes a spectator who acts and an actor who actuates. He states that the dominant cultures have attempted to institute “their” culture as “the” culture, therefore the bourgeois theater is described as “cultured”, while the work of the popular classes has been classified as folk-lore (knowledge of the people). He says that, since what most characterizes the ruling class is leisure, their culture is a culture of leisure, and everything that is not tied to its context, including what might be the work culture, is considered lower status. Therefore he invites us to take on popular culture as “the” culture, the only culture, and deny the values of the culture of the ruling class, “or at least attribute to it a status of burg-lore (knowledge of the bourgeoisie) or oligo-lore (oligarchy). The values of the culture of the ruling classes can be rescued, but only after proceeding to their destruction” (BOAL, 1985, p.121). So, Boal encourages us to destroy

the model of bourgeois theater in favor of authentic expressions, returning the means of theatrical production to the people.

At first, theater was dithyrambic singing: free people singing outdoors. The carnival. The party [...] Afterward, the ruling classes took over the theater and built their partitions. First, they divided the people, separating actors from audience: people who do and people who watch: the party is over! Second, between actors they separated the protagonists from the masses: the coercive indoctrination began! [...] The oppressed people are freed. And again they take over the theater. We must tear down the walls. (BOAL, 1989, p.13 – Our translation).

Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena

Influenced also by the thought of Boal, Maria Alicia Martinez Medrano founded the *Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena*, or rather the laboratories of indigenous and peasant theater, among which I will refer to the experience “Seven moments in the life of the Mayans”. In the discourse of the author, Maria Alicia Martinez Medrano, the show represented a strategy to raise respect for indigenous people showing the world who they are. To the Ministry of Tourism, it probably meant a strategy, like others, to make the visit to Yucatan more attractive to tourists. The show began to take shape in 2003 and concluded in 2005. The narration that follows was built from the perspective of residents of Ticopó and Canicab, two towns near the city of Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, who were interviewed ten years after having participated in the “Seven moments” show¹.

The villagers of Canicab recall that one day a dance teacher came to the community and invited all the children, youth and adults “out” (as they say) to learn the *jarana* (a typical dance of the region). The teacher set up in what they call their city hall of the town and began working daily with two groups, one for children and another group for adults: first one step, then another, then another and so on up to ten in the case of children, and sixteen in the case of the adults. After learning the steps came the choreography of plays like *Los aires yucatecos*, the *Baile de las cintas*, *El cochinito*. Once the dance was mastered, surprise!, they were invited to present in the nearby town of Ticopó. There was a truck to pick them up on Saturdays at 3:30 pm and would bring them back at 11 at night, and so they continued, every Saturday, for two seasons.

¹ I want to thank to Mariana, Lupita, Lucely, Alejandra, Cecilia, Isela, Alma, and Rosenda and her husband who with their testimony, helped to make visible the past. I also want to thank to Sandra Karina Guevara Ángeles, Angel Vladimir Mendoza Osorio and Ana Alejandra Leal Mena who conducted the interviews that make up this work during the XXIII Summer Scientific Research of the Mexican Academy of Sciences.

In Ticopó the experience was different. Carolina Cardenas herself, then Secretary of Tourism of the State of Yucatán, came to the community with a video of the on stage activity that was being presented in X'océn (a town in eastern Yucatán). She explained what the project was and asked if they would participate. She said that the work would be called *Siete momentos en la vida de los mayas*. An agreement was made with the ejido and they were granted a land loan for ten years, where the stage and bleachers for the audience would sit. And the construction began on a couple of cottages with thatched roof, the structure of a church, a well and a corral. In Ticopó there were now three groups rehearsing: one for children, one youth and one adults; and there were two teachers who took charge of teaching the *jarana*.

For the same purpose, there was also a teacher in the nearby town of Sac Chich and two teachers in the village of Seye, who when brought all together formed the 470 dancers that Maria Alicia Martinez Medrano had intended to participate in the show.

The inhabitants of these five communities participated in different ways according to their abilities, ages and gender roles. The men were the ones who assembled the outdoor theater and were responsible for keeping facilities up to date, but they also danced, carried the coffin across the stage and were part of the festivities and associations represented on stage. Some women and young children crossed the stage with their bowls of corn dough either in their hands or on the head; they sat around a three-stone fire near a Mayan house, lit the fire and began to make *tortillas* by hand.

Although the creator of the show, Maria Alicia Martinez Medrano, intended to show the daily life and rituals of the Maya of Yucatan from a series of pictures that closed with the voice “from the Mayan people, receive these blessings and bread, this is who we Mayans are and we are here”; for the performers it was a representation rooted in the past: what the “old ones” did, and so they told:

We look for our corn dough in a bowl, which back then there wasn't plastic, and look for a pan for the dough and then we would light our wood, and we'd put the pan and on and that was it, done, and we wouldn't suppose to made *tortillas* with plastic, we would do it with banana leaves, but since it was a little afar, you couldn't see, so we made them on plastic².

It was a beautiful experience because really, well no, you can't really imagine what it was like... you're going to imagine... they used the lec³ to make *tortillas*, we didn't, what would you use the lec for⁴.

² Isela interview granted on July 30th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

³ *Lec* is the name for gourd; a dry fruit, round hole where the food can be saved.

⁴ Mariana interview granted on August 24th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

To participate meant, somehow, remember your grandparents' practices. Interestingly a fundamental part of the show ended up being the "*tortillas*". Apparently no one who has been there forgets, or we don't forget, this detail of the show. Personally, I remember the *Siete momentos* as a multi-sensory spectacle: one could easily be distracted from the dairy, by the sunset, by the green, blue and pink tones of the world of the mayab, for the clean aroma filled with the field, the grass, the wood, the corn; plunging at times into the tranquility and nostalgia, feeling the breeze gently brushing the skin, and in this party of the senses taste was not lacking, the *tortillas*, which for the creator could be part of the show, but for the Mayans the meaning was another.

Mrs. Isela for example, whose image taken from the show still appears as part of the design on a box of matches, was paid for her participation with the same as most others: a sandwich, a soft drink and sometimes, a chocolate; I say "most others" because there were some participants who did come to receive financial remuneration, and I pause here to emphasize that the show was not a "business" even if there was a fee involved, it is difficult to think that a show where there are three times more actors than public and in general that any true cultural exercise, could be [considered business]. *Siete momentos* looked more like the town's annual festivities, a social process that involves sharing, distributing and inviting. So, Mrs. Isela, who was part of the show, would go to buy a kilo of corn dough, "it wasn't much", she says, maybe "five pesos", and together with other women, "some have already died", says Isela, they would head to the theater to set up their block, cooking and inviting the people who came to "visit" to share their *tortillas* which they paid with their money. To Mrs. Isela and other women, those who attended the show were not an audience they were "visitors", not tourists, not foreigners, they were "visitors":

With that we would sit down, and we'd light the fire, to start making *tortillas* by hand. We'd sit, the bowl, the bench, the trays, and then once we finished the *tortillas*... it was only a bit, not much, like one kilo for each bowl, and then after that, we waited for them to be done, and we'd leave with our trays, you know, to hand them out to the people. And that's how we handed them out to everyone (to the explicit question of whether they were given the corn dough she responds) I, for example, I buy like one kilo, I think at that time a kilo cost about five pesos, I'd buy a kilo, others would also buy a kilo, and then we'd pass them out to the people who came to visit⁵.

And to receive visitors one must get dressed up: Mrs. Isela, initially borrowed her sister's *hipil* (traditional dress of Mayan women) to participate and immediately began to

⁵ Isela interview granted on July 30th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

embroider her own, in order to go, as one should, to receive visitors. Some participants, especially those who danced on stage, were gifted their wardrobe: young and adult women who danced received their *terno* (evening dress of Mayan women) and their shawl, the boys their linen and *huaraches*, the girls their *hipil*, shawl and *huaraches*, though, I was told, the girls wanted heeled shoes more like those of the young girls and adult women dancing. And it is said that some women like Celia and Adelina, still have their *hipil* and shawls tucked away with affection.

Another important aspect remembered by those who participated in the experience is that it was, as in the town's annual festivities, a place that was open to all members of the family: during the presentation of the *gremio* on stage, women made *tortillas* to share, the dance of the *vaqueria*, the procession with the dead, the bull game, all made possible the participation on stage of mothers, fathers and children of all ages, brothers and sisters. Some dancing, another representing their ancestors, others enjoying just being-there and being part of the celebration. I share two comments:

I made *tortillas*, my sister made *tortillas*, and my mom made *tortillas* too. We were a family that participated there. Meanwhile, the others danced. Then they'd do the whole planting of the ceiba tree, very nice. To begin, they would come playing a little music, carrying the ceibo. They go into the little house and plant the tree, and then they start dancing (...) I think because my daughter was about 9 years old. She also participated in the *jarana* dance there, she did, however we did not, I was just the one that made *tortillas*, and you know, even the men would come out⁶.

My son was about two years old, and I put on his clothes and would leave him standing there⁷.

As for me, it helped that the three of them would dance, and my husband would go too. So it benefited me in that because I didn't have to be taking care of everyone, and I didn't have my husband telling me no. He shared the same experience with me⁸.

We'd go to the dances: my two boys and my girl, we all danced. The only one who didn't learn was my husband⁹.

Indeed, the participation of adult men was more restricted, many of them limited themselves to arranging the stage, perhaps because they didn't see themselves as potential actors, or perhaps for "embarrassment" as some of them commented to us. But the experience

⁶ Isela interview granted on July 30th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

⁷ Lupita interview granted on August 24th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

⁸ Lucely interview granted on August 24th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

⁹ Alma interview granted on August 24th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

not only served as a place to share culture with family, it even formed new families, as was the case with one of the *jarana* teachers that married a young woman from Ticopó. They consolidated their family to X'océn and continued there with their on-stage activity. The theater also enabled the inhabitants of these localities to live with people from other communities and other generations.

Like I said at the beginning we were like classmates, but we didn't get along, but then after we started dancing, you start to hang out with the other kids, with some that are older than you and others who are younger than you¹⁰.

This coexistence generated confidence internally in the community and facilitated that the girls, for example, could attend the *vaqueria* dance festivals in the neighboring villages, accompanied by the same young people with whom they shared the stage. And it's important to note that without a doubt, having learned to dance *jarana*, they say, was the most significant part of the experience. They enjoyed themselves and it enabled them to become active participants of the traditional Yucatecan dance festivals called *vaquerias*. Before the presence of the teachers from the *Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena*, the only ones that could learn to dance *jarana* were those who could travel to Merida (at least 28 kilometers away) to receive classes.

Another of the most significant memories linked to the *Siete momentos* was the opportunity to learn about other cultures and other regions. The participants in Ticopó remember fondly the visit of the Apaches, and the overall pleasant experience of having traveled: Merida, Teya, X'océn, Chichimilá, Chuburna Puerto, Chichen Itza, Mexico City, New York, Iceland. Not all 470 people traveled, but only those who were more committed to the show. On the trip to Iceland two people from each community were invited for a total of eight participants.

It's just that at that time it was difficult, because going two weeks or three weeks from here to there, he'd lose his job, but it was his chance. I said 'go and I'll cover the expenses during those three weeks' and you'll look for another job¹¹ ...

Traveling not only represented an opportunity to see other places, but also to spend time with fellow townspeople and people from elsewhere in Mexico, in particular with people from Hidalgo, Sinaloa, Tabasco and Oaxaca. But beyond traveling, participating in the *Siete momentos en la vida de los mayas*, was also, for the young people of the towns, a distraction, a "chore"; while some participated, others enjoyed watching it. Those who did not participate went to witness the event over and over and over again.

¹⁰ Alejandra interview granted on July 23th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

¹¹ Rosenda interview granted on August 28th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

There is that, in the evenings, even though they already saw it, they go again on Saturday, there they are... Here people say, if they already saw it, there's no point coming back to see it, but they do go see it again, they really, really, really like it¹².

The people of Ticopó tell us that when new municipal authorities came to office they were expecting the theater would give economic benefits that they never saw, so they repudiated the contract and called back the ejido lands. Thus, after two seasons, the *Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena* returned to X'ocen, leaving the inhabitants of Ticopó and Canicab, that would rush to meet the "visitors" on Saturday afternoons, with fond memories of enjoyment, discipline, family life, and intergenerational as well as intercultural experiences, and of another opportunity to learn and share. I quote some of the comments:

We liked to go to dance, even though there was no payment. If you enjoy it because it's something different, of course, because it was nice there, because you got to hang out with everybody, and on top of that you were doing what you like doing, no one was obligating you, you went out of enjoyment. For us it was really hard to get used to not going. Because we had been rehearsing for three years. We danced, they applauded, and they even went to record us, the teachers would record us, and it's something different¹³.

When they told us that they weren't going to do it anymore, well, the truth is I was very sad, because yeah, I saw there... in the theater as much as you... for the kids and for the older ones, we were starting to make an effort, and above all with the discipline, because I saw how the teachers kept trying... at this hour they're working with the kids. From six to seven was for the young adults or pubescent, as they say. And 8 to 9, for adults¹⁴.

Conclusion

Following the proposal of Boal, the theater does not necessarily have to respond to the claims that identify it as a type of artistic production that separates the public from the actors, and where the former is passive. From the perspective of the participants the kind of theater that took place in Ticopó in the first decade of the 21st century, identified the public as a visitor, that is to say, a person who comes to your home to meet you and share with you. The actors, in this case, rather than act, they celebrated and enjoyed the activity. This theater also represented to the participants a link with their ancestors and a form of social memory.

¹² Isela interview granted on July 30th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

¹³ Rosenda interview granted on August 28th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

¹⁴ Maria Adelina interview granted on July 27th, 2013 to Karina Guevara, Vladimir Osorio y Alejandra Leal. Our translation.

The incorrect questions to ask in this exercise, we might say, coming from the globalized capitalist paradigm of the contemporary world could be related to: How much money was made? How was the money split up?, Who profited most?. Or to take it a little further: Are they using the Mayans as tourist merchandise? Well, at the end of this work I hope I have been able to show that those were the wrong questions to ask, under the mistaken logic of my misguided structural condition. The questions have to do with: If this was such a successful experience, then why is it that when someone from the village itself wants to organize an activity, participation is so low or null?, Why do some artists want fame and fortune before the possibility of giving, self-giving, as seen with the inhabitants of these localities?, What other kinds of artistic practices might allow for the whole family to get involved, as in the theater of Ticopó?, Are Western arts helping to build a good, decent and happy life, or are they seeking prominence, fame and insatiable wealth?, Why do the state and national authorities on culture decide to leave the Mayan people aside with marginal resources and not promote artistic practices in each locality; instead spending millions of pesos to bring famous international shows to only be enjoyed by very few? The type of exercise performed on stage in Ticopó was far from serving the starring role of an artist or the economic success of a company, but it helped to build in the communities involved strong bonds, recreational moments, intercultural experiences, travel, quality family time, self-esteem, image and sensible thinking, on the road to building a good life.

Ethnographic Note

Ticopó is located 28 kilometers east of Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. Access to the function involved a journey of about half an hour that was possible to do by buses contracted by the Ministry of Tourism of Yucatán for this purpose. The show, which lasted about 70 minutes, was offered every Saturday for about two years at a cost of 120 pesos for the general public and free of charge to people of Mayan origin. In this assembly people were involved both locally and from nearby villages, ranging in age from four to 93 years old. The show *Siete momentos en la vida de los mayas* was built from a series of pictures purporting to show the daily life and rituals of the Mayans. At first, the life of the Mayan people in their daily work is recounted. After this, the place where the event would take place was blessed and thanks were given. Then the planting of the maize was prepared according to ritual. In the fourth moment, a ceiba tree is planted in the center of the stage and an offering is made. This is followed by the dance of the pig's head, the *Jarana*, and as the seventh and final moment, the *vaqueria*. The show ends with a voice that says "from the Mayan people, receive these blessings and bread, this is who we Mayans are and we are here". (See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPSf7Bn_4PM).

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