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In theory, this book documents the experience through a collection of articles authored by the project members: commissioning institutions, actors and performance organizers in the different governorates and villages. This compilation creates a body of work for interested researchers as well as for the theatre community.

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**Editor's note by Salam Yousry**

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**Endnotes and definitions**

1. **Noon Creative Enterprise**: is a limited liability company registered in Egypt. Noon’s work is focused on supporting performing artists as well as using the performing arts as a tool for education, awareness and development. It is the organization creating and publishing this work.

2. **UNFPA**: United Nations Population Fund

3. **Y-PEER**: is a youth network of young people from more than seven hundred non-profit organizations and government agencies in more than fifty countries initiated by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). Y-PEER Interactive Theatre method is a technique taught to young people to create improvised interactive theatre pieces on social issues.

4. **Invisible Theatre**: a form of theatrical performance that is enacted in a place where people would not normally expect to see one (for example in the street or in a shopping center). It often happens that the performers attempting to disguise the fact that it is a performance. The term is coined by Augusto Boal.

5. **Mahatat for Contemporary Art**: is a Cairo-based social and cultural enterprise founded in 2011. Through contemporary art practices, Mahatat seeks to transform public spaces, create opportunities for exposure to the arts and offer needs-based learning experiences to artists, practitioners and entrepreneurs.

6. **Art of Transit**: Shaware3na was the launching project of Mahatat, and the Art of Transit was the first project of Shaware3na

7. **UNWomen**: The United Nations’ Organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.
Hara TV was born during very tumultuous times in Egypt, and the fact that it made it to life and roamed around Egypt was proof that despite all the challenges, when there is a will, there is a way. This production was the first production by Noon Creative Enterprise and its concept and final outcome embodies everything that Noon is about.

It was in 2011 when Egypt was still witnessing all the endless prospects of change. Despite the pain that came with what was happening then, there was still hope: hope to empower, hope to be empowered, and a determination, particularly by youth, to be part of all that was happening and to have a say in it. In this spirit, Hara TV was born.

We discussed the idea with the United National Population Fund (UNFPA). It was a very simple idea. We wanted to produce a play to encourage youth civic participation: that was the topic of the year. Back then, the sentiment was that “with so much hope and prospective, everyone now is interested to work with youth and on youth, particularly on peaceful and democratic means for participation in the public sphere in Egypt after decades of being isolated and alienated”. Great! We went ahead and recruited our actors. I started doing some research on levels of participation in Egypt: what are the reasons for lack of participation and took some notes. Nada Sabet, founding partner of Noon, started preparing for the play, looking for rehearsal spaces and prepping the actors.
To be honest, at first I thought this play was going to be heavily focused on politics.

I thought that with all the exercises, role playing and games, the end result would be a play that was about parliament and political participation; particularly participating in protests. I imagined something that reflected - in a way or another - the general mood that the country was going through. I was taken aback a bit with the outcome and topics selected, but after some thought, it felt right. At the end of the day, what is participation about? Why should people participate, and how do we first get involved in the public space? It all starts from issues that directly affect us: not macro-politics, but rather the little smaller day to day issues that we face every day. Changing our relationship with these issues, and becoming more vocal and active can only lead to change in our lives, to the better.

At a time when youth were being killed in football stadiums by thugs, or were being suffocated by tear gas in Tahrir Square, and the whole country was preparing for the first parliamentary elections in Egypt after the overthrow of Mubarak, we produced Hara TV with the same spirit of determination.

We succeeded to produce a play that allowed for interaction with audiences of different backgrounds and from different areas across the country. The discussions and debates that followed were breath taking, particularly in regards to the harassment of women and their rights.

I guess what really touched me the most was when we performed in a school in Fayoum. It was the first time for these teenagers to actually watch a performance. Like many conservative areas in the country, this school was in theory a mixed gender school but segregation was in place. The girls were standing on one side while the boys were allowed to be in the playground around us. After the performance, we opened the discussion, and slowly the girls came closer, and for less than an hour, segregation was not in place. This is what Hara TV is for me. It is a play that facilitates interaction, action, and participation.

In late 2011, amidst a charged political climate, filled with hope for a better future, Noon Creative Enterprise was registered and Hara TV was its very first project. A commission by UNFPA to create an interactive performance, based on Y-PEER’s Interactive Theatre Model, enabled Noon to launch Hara TV1: a performance that tackled youth civic participation and could be performed in seven different governorates.

I started by visiting multiple acting schools to cast a team of three actors. Rehearsals began in November 2011 with a team of five actors, and as I had anticipated, they finally boiled down to three actors. The title of the performance – Hara TV – was one we agreed on as a collective through voting. The opening night took place in Cairo on the 7th of December 2011, and for fourteen days, Hara TV travelled to Suez, Qalubia, Giza, El Minya, Fayoum and Alexandria, culminating in a total of fourteen performances.
Hara TV1 takes us through the journey of three characters – Rasha, Sara and Khaled – who bump into each other by coincidence in front of a burning stack of rubbish in the street, by the local bus stop. Their argument leads them to start their very own project for recycling rubbish.

The project succeeds and grows from a local level to become a project on a national level. Following this part of the performance, a discussion with the audience is initiated. This discussion explores how the characters met and developed their idea to benefit their community and themselves. The audience is then allowed to interact with the characters and ask them questions about their personalities, their interests, and how they discovered those interests. The discussion was facilitated by Nada Sabet and was directed in a manner that would lead to a discussion on participation, its obstacles and how to overcome them. Following this discussion, a five minute sketch that tackles the issue of sexual harassment was performed and ends with an open question on what could be done regarding that. The facilitator turns to the audience and explores with them ways in which communities could come together to overcome the issue of harassment.

The duration of the performance is ninety minutes. The overall process allows the audience members to brainstorm out loud to one another about issues concerning their communities and how they can come together to overcome these issues. The facilitator stresses throughout the debate that the issue in question is not necessarily rubbish or sexual harassment, even though they are prominent problems across Egypt, but rather it is the issue of how people can come together to find ways to deal with communal problems. Other issues related to youth that came out in the performance and discussion were how to deal with parents and negotiate boundaries, discovering dreams and ambitions, and immigration.
Once the commission with UNFPA had ended, I decided to go on tour and perform in private schools in Cairo as a viable means of income generation. A set fee was agreed upon for each actor per show, and we performed in a few schools.

However, our focus shifted and I decided to break the performance into separate scenes that could be adapted to different spaces and venues to push the discussions with audiences further.

**Invisible Theatre: On Sexual Harassment in the Metro**
The last scene on sexual harassment was performed as a stand-alone invisible theatre piece in the Cairo metro, first with Art of Transit with Mahatat and later as part of UNWomen’s campaign to end sexual harassment.

This format allowed us to interact directly with commuters for ten to fifteen minutes at a time in a single metro train carriage. The actors would enter from various doors and call each other to meet in the middle of the carriage. This sparked the curiosity of commuters and helped focus their attention on the scene. One of the characters, was very upset that she was harassed on the bus, and to add insult to injury, she was kicked out of the bus, and, accused of pickpocketing the harasser. As she retells her story to her friends, curious commuters are invited to share their opinions, and very quickly commuters are sharing their thoughts on the topic of sexual harassment, sharing stories from their lives, arguing together as well as consoling the harassed actress and offering solutions for the next time something of the sort happens.

**Boundries and Parenting on Coffee Shops**
The segment on pushing boundaries with parents was performed as a stand-alone at various coffee shops, engaging the men in discussions about acceptable boundaries and about supporting their daughters. This scene was originally to engage youth in discussions on the issue, but it worked well to engage parents, especially fathers chilling at coffee shops around Cairo.

Hara TV1 was performed for a total of four hundred and fifty performances over two years.

Performers of Hara TV1 Dina El-Sayed - Lobna Essam - Safaa Mohamady - Maha Monib - Hany Taher
We participated in developing the text collectively, openly, and with simplicity and this is the way I like to work. We did four hundred and fifty performances over the course of two years. That was the first time I perform a show with such frequency but I was generally pleased because I like to perform regularly. I also like improvisation; that was my motivation to participate in the project, next to performing in a place where there was a need for a type of theatre different from that offered on television.

We went to where our audiences were and stayed for discussions after the show. This was an assurance of the audiences' keenness for response and interaction, particularly in open spaces where I personally felt that those present, provided us with support as opposed to performing in closed spaces where I found myself nervous in the face of comments made by audience members.
Our second commission by UNFPA was of a bolder nature. It worked on extending youth civic participation to discuss discrimination, gender, relationships and domestic violence with them. This time fifty performances took place. This time we stuck to three characters and five colorful pieces of fabric as set pieces and props. The three characters changed to Sara, Amged and Kimo, as a whole new team was cast.

The performances began in September 2013. A total of twenty three performances took place in Alexandria, Cairo, El Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Al Gharbia, Aswan and Qena followed by an extension to the contract that allowed for twenty seven extra performances in Alexandria, Kafr el Sheikh, Hurghada, Assiut, El Minya and Cairo, reaching a total of sixty thousand audience members across ten governorates.

There was a plan to cut up the scenes and do private school visits, but due to the commissioning of Hara TV3 and other shows, Hara TV2 stopped being marketed and the team started focusing on Hara TV3: an interactive performance on Female Gential Mutilation (FGM).
Hara TV3 followed the same format of three actors creating a TV show, but this time the performance focused on one topic: Female Genital Mutilation. Exploring issues related to chastity, women’s rights, doctors versus midwives, law, religion as well as sexual and marital life, the discussion focused on ‘whether girls and boys are the same’, on what FGM is and the body parts removed and their function, as well as the effect of FGM on girls and women.

Hara TV3 started with a commission for one hundred and twenty performances that was later extended until a total of one hundred and eighty-three performances took place.
Ahmad el Sawy

Practicing in the rehearsals and the large number of performances in different destinations increased my competence as an actor; with that many shows, my mind was always present.

I participated in Hara TV2 and Hara TV3. I had previously worked with Nada Sabet and the next time I heard from her was an invitation to participate in Hara TV2. I was excited that she chose me and we agreed on a meeting to discuss a rehearsal schedule.

It wasn’t the first time for me to do improvisational and interactive theatre. The novelty was the traveling and the frequency of shows in different governorates and the model of the performance. I went through a sizeable development as an actor specially in my relationship with the audience. I felt more flexible in dealing with the audience. Each time we performed it felt as if it was the first time.

The project had an impact on me as an actor on the level of performance (performance tools and dealing with the audience); it also affected me financially. I had an extra role in Hara TV2 as the coordinator of the project in collaboration with Nada.

The way Nada works as a director was enjoyable, clear and simple. Nada is also flexible, fun and is open to developing the show and accommodating additions. Financial compensation was also important. I could have been a volunteer but it wouldn’t have allowed me to perform the same number of shows or to fulfill the entire timeline of the project.

What really left a mark on me was the traveling to the many governorates that I hadn’t visited before, meeting new people and of course trying different food.
I started my journey with Hara TV2 when Nada contacted me in May or June of 2013, I can’t be exact. She asked me if I wanted to work with her on the Hara TV2 performance. I inquired about the schedule and the pay. We agreed on a schedule of rehearsals and shows and the money.

I remember the first Hara TV2 show was in Taq’eeba in Shobra. We were in the street, an alley really, and we were supposed to perform while people watched us from their windows and balconies. Thank God we had microphones on as I was frightened because our first show was not in a closed space.

Once we broke the ice it went on from one show to the next, each one in very different circumstances. Many times I would be on the verge of objecting to the strange settings of the different performances because I’m afraid of an audience taken unawares (for the most part we would impose our presence), along with the physical proximity between the performers and the audience (our knees would be touching). We would call Nada and complain and her response would be that it would all work out.

Performing the shows at different places in different governorates was eye opening in many ways. It enriched my awareness of our Egyptian culture deeply as it exposed me to the spaces and the people. I became more open to understanding people who were closed-up upon themselves. I came to comprehend their faith in their ancestors and their roots and to understand that they have the right to guard their sense of identity which makes them special. I have also become gutsier and my voice louder. I feel for marginalized women and children in the general.

When Nada left for a few days she gave me the choice between solely performing the show (a half-hour act) or also leading the discussion afterward. Of course I chose the latter knowing how exhausting it was. I knew I had to create a buffer so as not to consume myself. I discovered that 70 % of the message comes across through conversation, that the show by itself is not enough. The audience always has a response, an opinion and a comment to make. When we engage in conversation we come to one of three: that we disagree, or we find a sense of gratitude towards us for clarifying something here or there, or that there’s a sense of confusion and the audience has more questions.

One time we were in Sohag performing for schoolchildren. The girls cried at a few comic bits (the midwife Omm Hassan), we felt disoriented, Sawy and I, and so we completed

We finished the Hara TV2 shows and Nada requested that we work on Hara TV3 and we all agreed of course under new conditions and a new contract. The new adventure began with enthusiasm that was based on acquired expertise. Hara TV2 was targeting children and teenagers who were generally dissatisfied. Hara TV3 was especially for women who were a more agreeable crowd; they had lower voices and they would laugh with less effort. They were bored of staying at home and the chores that come with that; for them, we were entertaining and we had a sense of humor. As a matter of fact, they were a perfect audience. They were moved even when they didn’t agree with us.

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the act in all seriousness because we couldn’t try and make them laugh in the face of such pain. It was clear that most of them had been subjected to female genital mutilation recently. What a catastrophe! That show was sad, silly and we felt small doing it.

That particular project trained me to work when I wasn’t ready, sleep-deprived, underfed and at odds with Samy or Sawy or both. I worked while sick and depressed, under all circumstances, and it worked out. I realized that it was a matter of choice not readiness per se. Being a female actor among two male actors provided reassurance for the women and the girls in the audience in my opinion, especially with such a sensitive issue. There was curiosity surrounding my traveling with the guys on my own. It popped up in the middle of conversation not during the shows: “Are you alone together? Where do you spend the night? Are you married? How old are you?” and so on.

Street Shows
I would sometimes feel nervous and worried especially in the beginning, and particularly in crowded areas where there were men in the audience who disapproved of the whole thing. Preparing for the show differs from one place to the next. When the audience knows that there’s a theatre crew coming, it makes things easier for us. If we are performing at a school, the age of the students makes a big difference and also the attendance of teachers who are worried about the content of the show. One time a male teacher waved at me to stop the scene I was doing, although he didn’t know the script beforehand. I kept going on regardless.

At the beginning I was unable to draw the line between my persona in the show and my real personality. So on occasion I would take comments personally. Eventually I stopped. I realized that we didn’t have to be convincing to everyone, but rather that we needed to allow discussion to take place.

Hara TV2 was easier for me as a performance because I took on roles that were unlike me age-wise, social status-wise, etc. But in Hara TV3, although I acted the role of someone my age who was married, like me, I found a bigger margin of comic relief and it was more fun.

This experience was enriching. It showed me the theatrical experience from a different perspective, away from the sanctity of a theatre that preserves the distance between audience and actor. I went out of my comfort zone and what I was used to; this gives me an edge over an actor who has not gone through the same experience.

Mohamad Sami Negm

During Hara TV2, I played a young man who was subjected to domestic violence, a common problem in our society, but I was opposed to opening a discussion with the audience. I thought that to be too direct, which is quite different from performing comic scenes that inspire the audience to think on its own after the show. Later on, in Hara TV3, I discovered that leading a discussion has its advantages which was vital to raising awareness about female genital mutilation. I realized that the conversation communicates a message in a way that adds to the show itself.

To develop the script, we would read tragic true stories which made me realize the depth of the content. When we performed in many places, we made the content travel further in order to reach a wider and more diverse audience. I think 80% of the audience was in agreement with the messages portrayed despite the differences between the shows, each with its own special audience. This dimension gave a freshness to each show along with the reception and the way we performed in order to be better aligned with our audience taking into account the age group, space and gender of the crowd. Women were an easier audience, men were intimidating. Fearing the street as a performance space is not always a real fear because sometimes people would be on our side.

I joined Hara TV at the end of 2013. It was a good experience for me because it was my first time to come into contact with such a different type of audience as we moved from one place to the next while keeping a certain closeness of interaction. I used to think it would be boring with that many shows but that’s not how it turned out. Even on the days where there were multiple performances, each show would have its own flavor, its own form, although the script was the same. We sometimes performed up to four shows a day. Due to our mobility and the different audiences we encountered, every show felt as if we were performing anew and the energy was continually recharged. It was the traveling to different governorates and the different audiences that left the most impression on me. I did not take on other roles besides being an actor on board this project. I did however, on occasion, take the camera and record the conversations that took place. I was also a photo editor for the publication, ”Re-act” that was put together on the feedback of the audiences of Hara TV2.
This is a first-of-its-kind type of initiative, where the teams of Hara TV 1, 2 and 3 lead a discussion about important social issues. The most important of such issues, one that is unsettling to many women and girls in different villages and hamlets, is female genital mutilation (FGM). Art – particularly interactive theatre – comes into the social tug and pull between shallow religiosity on one hand and customs and traditions on the other to bring into being a live conversation and an exchange of experience about FGM among those performing the show and the target audience. This critical edge is the signature of Hara TV and it is a consequence of choosing interactive theatre, which formed the discussions that took place and marked the success of the team and the sponsoring institution of the show.

This is what also broke the rigidity stipulated by customs and traditions and the faulty understanding of religion which goes between the binaries of the religious and the sacrilegious. The show allowed women and girls in Upper Egypt to express themselves freely, fulfilling the fundamentals of the show, which spoke for women’s rights, the first right being a girl or a woman’s right to her own body, her right to protect it against violations no matter who the perpetrator is.

The show revealed the extent of the shortcomings of the Ministry of Health in treating the problem despite collaborations with civil society. Numbers of victims of FGM continue to soar. The expected outcome of these campaigns was to control the phenomenon, but only the opposite took place because managing the crisis, combating and addressing it and measuring the efficiency of such interventions is done poorly.

Hara TV3 came in and permeated Upper Egypt in search of girls who were hopeful about the future and enabled them to understand their rights in order to eventually denounce the phenomenon and to create support measures and societal dialogue. Hara TV has succeeded, to a great extent, in positively influencing the scene which turned the young girls in Upper Egypt into activists, fighting for their own rights.

The most prominent feature of Hara TV is the selection of team members which instantly shows Nada Sabet’s success as team manager and director. The cast have presence and the communication skills to connect with the audience through their sense of humor and their unique performances which engaged the viewers and target audience members with the characters they played. Because of the affection the audience felt for the actors themselves and their continuing role in the discussions after the shows. They also accomplished rapport with the girls after the performances. Many of the girls and the supervisors still ask about the Hara TV team and any prospects for their return. The children inquire about the actors demonstrating their attachment to both the cast and the cause. In Kom Boha village, and as a consequence to Hara TV’s multiple visits, the Al Amal group was formed as a collective of young men and women under the age of fifteen. They act as a pressure group in the face of female genital mutilation and criminalize violators of women’s and girls’ bodies.

The successes accomplished by Hara TV are the reaped fruits of continuous work under good coordination before the shows, tireless communication, rapid movement between the destinations on their program, punctuality and a readiness to travel to the margins of villages on the periphery of small towns that are in-turn on the margins of big cities. This readiness was extraordinary: the extent of it was the moments when the team would commute between plantations covering vast distances to reach girls in the heart of the countryside. Some journeys amounted to more than thirty kilometers from the center of a town. There were instances when the crew would perform multiple times on the same day to satisfy the ongoing need for such performances.

The success of the experience attests to Upper Egypt’s dire need for such shows under the same initiative and by the same crew because it builds long-term communication.

Hara TV Retells the Dreams of Girls and Women in the South
Shaaban el Manfaloty
Head of Artistic Activities at Ahmed Baha al Din Cultural Center. Shaaban has been instrumental in scheduling and booking performances for Hara TV2 and Hara TV3 in Assiut. He has supported Hara TV3 in performing in more than 40 different places through his own professional networks.
Akmal Gamal
NGO Assistant Coordinator, National Population Council, Family Empowerment & FGM Program. Akmal has supported the performances of Hara TV3 through the network of NGO’s working with the National Population Program as well as their contacts in Beni Suef, El Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Qena, Port Said, El Monofia, Fayoum and Luxor.

The goals accomplished through the execution of interactive theatre activities to combat FGM in villages in Upper and Lower Egypt:

1- Efficient communication of anti-female genital mutilation (FGM) and anti-early marriage messages and the establishment of the importance of creative and appealing methods of learning

For over three years efforts have been spent on awareness against female genital mutilation through activities carried out in the villages and districts in the governorates covered by the project, working with different age groups: school children, college students, men and women, young and old, in a multiplicity of ways. Interactive theatre was one of the new and creative methods used, not only to communicate messages and correct information, but also as a way to discuss with the attendees the degree of conviction, acceptance and rejection of such messages which provided an insight into the magnitude of the efforts made to raise awareness through the performances.

2- Changing perceptions of art in general and theatre in particular

Most country folk believe that attending cinematic or theatrical performances is unwanted or indecent and in some cases even sacrilegious. Attending a play diminishes such convictions where a concerned type of theatre is presented to them conveying content relevant to their lives. They also find themselves participants in analyzing the material at hand which promotes critical awareness of media messages in television and social media, as a way to better select content that is relevant and to reject that which does not speak to reason and knowledge accumulation. This constitutes an invitation to use reason in the acceptance or rejection of messages without solely relying on traditional beliefs.

3- Changing popular perceptions of actors

There are many preconceptions surrounding actors especially in Upper Egypt. Perhaps no one in Hara TV’s audience members had met a professional actor prior to their encounter with the performance. By meeting a theatre crew that performs a certain type of theatre, there’s a chance that such preconceived notions would change especially after dealing and engaging with the cast and crew in conversations and discussions about violence against women, which the majority of women in Upper Egypt suffer from.

4- Providing theatre and music training for participants

Showcasing performances among colleagues and family members promotes awareness of other issues such as violence against children (domestic and in school violence). The scope of this goes beyond attending the shows and benefiting from the content of the performances, it also offers an opportunity to learn about art, theatre, creative writing and acting that incorporates many messages whereby a complete theatre crew is developed, one that is able to perform content relevant to the cause or to other causes of concern to the community.
Workshops: Art Workshops for School Children in Assiut and Sohag

After being asked to perform in schools for young children and generally feeling that the show was not really for young girls as topics like marital relationships are not suitable for their age, I suggested we use a more hands-on approach with the younger children.

Thus, a three day dance, music and theatre workshop that ended with a performance was piloted with eight groups of school children (four in Assiut and four in Sohag).

A total of seventy five children were chosen to participate, per school (twenty five per discipline). Each group met three days in a row for a total of nine hours, culminating in a final hour of show and tell where each group of twenty five children performed to the larger group, which was made up of the rest of the seventy five children as well as parents, teachers and siblings.

Ahmad El Sawy - Singing Workshop Instructor
I accomplished a personal goal as a trainer, to a great degree, through raising awareness about female genital mutilation by using art. We worked on teaching the participants new skills like collective songwriting, composing and singing.

I believe the desired awareness was met along with the participants' acquiring a new skill and the result of all that was the performance at the end of the workshop.

Eight workshops produced eight songs. By time I was able to find the appropriate tools to produce songs. As different as the participants may be, the common denominator was that everyone enjoyed singing and performing songs in the company of one another. My role wasn’t to raise awareness per se; I focused on producing the songs.

Sherin Hegazy - Dance Workshop Instructor
I did not directly discuss female genital mutilation. There’s important groundwork that needed to be addressed prior to FGM, like the relationship one has with his/her own body and understanding it. For example, we did a personal memory sweep of the whole body without reservation because all body parts are equal. Of course they were shy in front of each other and this varied whether the workshop was mixed or gender segregated.

When segregated they don’t worry too much about how they may appear which made the work easier in the workshop.

The word ‘dance’ in itself is accompanied with reservations, almost like barbed wire. The issue at hand is related to self-confidence not just to shyness. That’s why they train in a closed space and then they perform in front of an audience.

The differences between the groups showed in their direction of the performance and the type of dance they chose (refined dancing, wedding-like dancing, and belly-dancing). The audience was especially encouraging and cheered for the girls.

On the first day, all the groups do a body orientation warm-up: identifying the body’s dimensions and capabilities. If the group is constituted of those who are twelve years old or older, I also work with them on identifying the body in space. Every participant receives a paper the size of his/her body, and then they lie down on it while another participant outlines their figure. After everyone is in possession of an outline of his/her body, I ask them to take fifteen minutes to contemplate their own outline and remember three incidents that happened to corresponding body parts, any event, be it painful,
happy or special. They then record the incident on the outline in the form of information such as where the event took place, the date, their age, the occasion and so on. For example: a mark on the palm, I fell off of a bike, two years ago.

I then ask each participant to take a couple of minutes to demonstrate on the outline the recorded events loudly and clearly.

For example, one of the girls raised her arms throughout her narrative. She said that she took money from her father and went out with her mother and bought a nice pair of sandals. She was so happy she slept through the night hugging the sandals. The hero of the story is the girl's arms not her feet where the sandals ended up. That was her choice and that's the idea, to treat the body and its parts as independent personas.

The next day I ask each participant to demonstrate a move featuring one of the body parts that s/he referred to the day before so that we then turn these movements into dance. We then memorize all the moves demonstrated by the group members and we choreograph a sequence of moves to music that we choose collectively. We then repeat the routines and develop them.

On the third day, we revise the dance or choreography cultivated in the past couple of days and each group performs (theatre and song) the material produced in front of the others.

Nada Sabet - Theatre Workshop Instructor

The theatre workshops tackled FGM directly. In most of the groups, prior workshops and talks had taken place, where information on FGM, its effects and hazards had been discussed with the children. The theatre workshop allowed all the participants to digest the topic and restate it in their own words. The first day we mostly did icebreakers and got comfortable with facts about FGM. The session usually ended with the participants being split into groups and deciding on the angle of their scene. Participants were encouraged to make up a story with the same number of characters as the group and write it up.

Stories ranged from; a girl dying at the hands of FGM, to parents changing their minds just before it was too late, to older siblings and cousins standing up for younger girls in the family. In some cases, the whole group worked on one story, culminating in an all inclusive play with multiple scenes and characters. In other cases each group presented their own skit independently. In the second session we worked on how to build characters using body, movement and sound, then put it all together and rehearsed.

Rehearsals involved practicing in groups then showing the rest of the group and learning to constructively critique peers until we were ready to perform on the last hour of the third session. For many it was their first theatre experience, yet it was the most sought after workshop.
On Interactive Theatre and Marginalized Communities
Adel Abdel Wahab

Interactive Theatre is a form of theatre that opens up a social issue for discussion with the audience: it adopts a minimalist aesthetic and is direct in dealing with its subject matter. It has many schools, the most important of which is ‘Forum Theatre’ from Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. Interactive theatre, in all its schools, is an application of theatre for development, also known as Theatre for Change. Interactive theatre is primarily concerned with engaging the audiences with a cause or an issue that appertains to the specified group of spectators. Hara TV is the name to a series of theatre performances by Noon Creative Enterprise directed by Nada Sabet. I have pondered long at the choice of this title. In my opinion, it is the key to understanding the form and feel of the theatrical experience at hand.

What importance does the name Hara TV bear? How do we categorize this experience? Do we categorize it as ‘local interactive theatre’ or ‘theatre for change/development’? How did Hara TV build on already established forms of interactive theatre? Finally, how did it create a special model of interaction between artists and audiences which can be categorized as Egyptian, as locally-made? One of the performances of the Hara TV series was about female genital mutilation in Egypt (FGM), namely Hara TV3. That show was performed over a hundred times as it toured many destinations throughout Egypt, namely villages in Upper Egypt and the Delta. It is a form of theatre performed in broad daylight, in the open, and at times in a closed room in a meager youth center. This performance was performed many, many times, with all the performances taking place in a fast pace, similar to the pace in which gypsies would chase nativities from one village to the next, and the nativities – the *Mawalid* – in villages differ greatly from those in the city. The journey made by the cast of Hara TV was akin to that of caravan actors or health convoys which, in its nature, created fresh motives every time for the cast.

Going back to the title of the show and the relationship it bears to the issue tackled in the show, to the audience and the social parameter, we find that ‘Hara’ answers a human need in all societies: a space for local social dialogue. This space can take forms other than theatre: communal radio and social media pages of villages and small and remote communities for example. In Egypt such forms of communication are not implemented.
on a large scale, and if implemented, will differ pending each medium. Communal radio around the world is created through local individual initiatives and usually provides a particular service, for example to give information and advice on economic activities like agriculture or fishing in specific communities. On occasion, certain limited discussions are confined by the nature of the medium itself, such as the radio/internet as there’s a spatial and a temporal lag in both mediums making theatre the only form where the dialogue happens at the same time and space as the happening taking place. Theatre is therefore the most important medium for social dialogue because it offers space for sensitive moments of human communication and conflict. Therefore, if we tie Hara TV to the context mentioned above (on local spaces as places for discussion and interaction), noting that FGM is the overarching topic in the performances in a society ruled by patriarchal ideologies that are inherited, preserved and that are becoming more rigid amidst the political and economic circumstances, female expression is regarded at times as a taboo especially when this expression is connected to such a sensitive topic concerning women’s bodies: an issue safe guarded by customs and traditions of a religious nature.

Hara TV stood with the cause in the setting aforementioned and came to meet the community’s need to express itself directly without temporal or spatial gaps. Attaching the concept ‘TV’ to the title of the project invoked television, which is an important object of modernity that controls the tempo of life in these simple and marginalized contexts. ‘TV’ is the community’s eye that watches the Other; it’s also a favored medium of entertainment as well as a learning tool. Coupled with hara (the alley), the show goes on to discuss both ideas. As previously mentioned, the performance needs to be direct, simple and intensive for the purpose of stirring up a discussion with the audience. It is common for the acting to be stereotypical in order for the message to be efficiently communicated through the words and body language of the actors. Furthermore, the storyline must be clear and the audience must perceive the chosen language of the show as easy. Hara TV has successfully accomplished that, along with incorporating some comic relief through impersonating specific characters or the reversal of gender roles in the instances where a female actor takes on the role of a man and vice versa. This was possible by not confining the performance to a single form of theatre and through creating a safe space for discussion after the show that mimicked a family gathering at weddings or funerals. In the discussion following the performance however, a central issue is raised leading to a tug-of-war between the commentators through invoking sensibilities, disclosures and the sharing of examples. The biggest accomplishment was the ability of such discussions to break many of the common stereotypes as well as to break the general contention of how limited the outreach of theatre can be nowadays.

I first became aware of Noon Creative Enterprise in the summer of 2015 during a research visit to Cairo to look into what I viewed as a renaissance of Applied Theatre practices that seemed to have sprung in post-revolution Egypt. The work of this modest theatre company has been in progress since 2011 following the events of the January uprising in Cairo, where the founder and artistic director of the company, Nada Sabet, created Hara TV. What I write here is not a summary of the company’s work, nor its evolution. I offer the perspective of a practitioner, scholar, and researcher of Applied Theatre; I situate this work within the larger scope of similar initiatives taking place both in Egypt and around the world.

At first glance one could easily mistake the work carried out by this theatre company for being too light and fickle, where the devised pieces seem to favor comedy and slapstick over tackling the underbelly of the issues they claim to be addressing: gender inequality, violence against women, and most importantly, female genital mutilation (FGM). When I interviewed Nada Sabet, a graduate of the American University in Cairo who double-majored in Theatre and Psychology (class of 2005), I began to understand the very deliberate and thoughtful method through which she approaches the theatre work she creates (pers. comm. December 22 2015). What follows is a summary and analysis of what I gleaned from our conversation.

The loose staging of the devised pieces mirrors the chaos and haphazardness that is part of the community setting where most of these performances take place. There is a deliberate avoidance to stage these pieces through employing the rigor, discipline, and aesthetic often found in works by established theatre companies. This mirroring is a well-thought out decision to eliminate the alienation that is likely to exist between the community and the theatre performance should it employ these high aesthetic
values. Sabet prides on this approach, which makes it possible for the space to embrace all that the community comes with: their children who could be disruptive during performances, cell phones going off, women breast-feeding, etc. Sabet believes that people are typically more prepared to embrace the issues brought up in performances when a safe and accepting space is created. Such an approach also avoids the rhetoric of preaching or talking at people; a method that is often seen as a trap that undermines Applied Theatre initiatives that aim to inform and provoke social change.

Comedy to elicit laughter is used as a tool to “seduce the audience” (Nada Sabet pers. comm. December 22 2015). On the issue of seduction and provocation Adrian Jackson (2009) writes “[t]he theatre must provoke if the target is truly to move people beyond normative conventions, which keep the spectator passive, the citizen obedient (44).” But before provocation can take place, the delicate skill of seduction must be employed “[t]he experience has to be seductive enough to warrant participation. And to make the experience truly seductive, the art must be good enough […] for the circumstances you find yourselves in, with the resources you have at hand (Jackson 44).” Sabet’s approach is to seduce through lightness, humor, and comedy, all of which are forms employed by popular mainstream theatre performances that people in remote areas, where Sabet’s company take their work, are so used to seeing through media and television. This clever tool to appeal to the audience through familiarity is Sabet’s method of seducing them to enter into the space of dialogue, and questioning the often taboo topics of FGM and domestic abuse (amongst others).

Once the seduction has taken place, the performances tend to start very carefully and cautiously to infuse the work with the topics the company really wants to address. Even though the performances typically last only 20 minutes, the talkback facilitated by Sabet takes about an hour. The work never tries to shame anyone for having an opinion about a topic at hand, for example FGM, nor does it try to depict one way or another as being the right way for things to go. This, again, is one of Sabet’s clever tactics to provide a space for accepting the views of people who strongly believe in FGM, or for those who have undergone the surgical procedure. The intent is to enable people to air their thoughts and beliefs out in the open, so that a discussion might take place amongst those in the audience (often people will have opposing views and might end up continuing their conversation beyond the experience of the performance). This diplomacy in approach is most refreshing in our relatively new field, as artists try to navigate a terrain often fraught with the top-down approach of outside agencies using theatre and the arts as a means to transmit messages to the communities they are working with.

From an ethical standpoint, this diplomacy speaks to the respect for the community that Sabet’s work is emblematic of. This respect also comes with trust that the community is intelligent enough to make use of the information that was shared with them through the post-performance conversation. Audience members often ask for pamphlets that might educate husbands and elders in the family about topics such as FGM; some even ask for the contact of a healthcare professional who might advise them on the matter. This is a huge step towards creating change in environments where western medicine is seen as a relatively new and alien approach, which is trumped by the more traditional approach that claims to follow religious beliefs and practices on the matter.

The work of the company is so diverse and flexible that it can be seen in city theatre spaces, as well as in more remote communities where a small platform on the corner of a street will be used as the stage. Sabet uses professional actors because she believes that not only would their training equip them to improvise with on-the-spot situations that arise and must be included in the performance as a means to further remove the divide between performers and audience, but she believes that actors must withstand the precarious situations that are a possibility of doing this sort of work. Sabet trains her actors to have stamina, where they are not fazed by situations where the environment for a typical performance to take place might be compromised.

I witnessed this in a video recording of a performance staged in a town called “El-Assema El-Serryea” (The Secret Capital City). A local contact had invited Sabet and her group to perform in the outdoors just outside a local school, where they timed the show to start just as school-aged children and youth were leaving the grounds ready to head home.

Despite the valiant efforts of the company members, and Sabet’s presence as a figure of authority with her actors, to ask for some discipline from the audience, the youth were oblivious to their presence, and they continued to talk over the action of the show. In that moment I felt that a mob mentality might take over, putting the safety of the actors and crew in jeopardy. That performance had to be stopped when the actress stated that she couldn’t hear herself talk. The footage then shows the company sitting at a coffee shop, taking a break, and getting ready to perform again, in the same town. The perseverance of the company through precarious situations, such as the above-
described one, is a rare quality, and one that is often essential in doing community-based work that is able to reach a wide spectrum of audiences. Sabet often relies on being invited by an insider from the community, to act as the host for the show. She recognizes that in doing so she is riding on the hospitality of the community that is common in remote areas, and which includes particular manners and traditions such as accepting guests, not interrupting them until they are finished talking, and never offending them or rejecting them. Sabet calls this “borrowing someone’s power,” that ‘someone’ being the insider who has ties to the village, and who expects from the attendees to respect his guests. If it weren’t for that hospitality the community might never sit through a performance, nor approve of exploring such topics.

When I first spoke to Sabet in June of 2015, it had been over ten years since we last worked together. I shared with her my research into the new wave of Applied Theatre initiatives, which I connected to the Egyptian society’s uprising in 2011, and which I hypothesized paved the way for people to seek out true and honest artistic experiences that unmasked the reality of their lived experiences. Although initially resistant to that notion, pointing out that the work had already started pre-revolution but only gained momentum after the uprising, in our most recent conversation Sabet agreed that the revolution and the events that ensued afterwards had given people permission to begin to question social norms, and to learn about the active role they can take to change what they don’t like.

This is a privilege and a skill that people in the western world can take for granted, but for the people of Egypt, and especially those who live in remote areas, it is a new and challenging skill, but one that they are becoming more savvy at utilizing. Hence, the work of Sabet and her company come as a way of meeting the people where they are, and of acknowledging their journey, and the small but significant steps that they are making towards social awareness and change.


Khetan Al-Enath... Ila Matta? (Until when FGM? Make me laugh and I will tell you…)  
Marta Agosti

From 2010 to 2012, Marta Agosti was the UNFPA-UNICEF FGM/C trust fund coordinator. During these years she focused on bringing together health practitioners, national institutions and civil society to work on a joint framework of action to deliver meaningful community mobilization activities to the affected audiences as well as capacity building on social norms approach for the abandonment of FGM/C. A social anthropologist and researcher, she has more than seven years of experience working on gender based violence, human rights and development programs.

Although efforts to eliminate the centenary practice of female genital mutilation, khetan as it is known among Egyptians, are not new ones, the dream that people would totally abandon this practice may be closer than we think.

Blue! Green! Pink! White! Black! Several pieces of fabric held by hands – sometimes they are tied together through a chair – are the only prop that Noon Creative Enterprise’s cast needs to deploy the universe surrounding el khetan in the 183 villages that Hara TV3 has visited since 2014. The audience members, women of all ages, from adults to little girls, sit packed in the room looking at each other trying to hide nervous uncontrolled giggles. They know what they are here for.

Firm, funny and fast as thunder, Noon’s cast storms into the room. Men performing the roles of women, women performing male doctors; the husband, the in-laws, the mother and the daughter are all summoned to go on stage through impersonations. The audience breaks into laughter. They let go of their guard and allow the magic to start. As another collective laugh breaks in the air, a myth about FGM gets smashed: “If we do not cut her, she will grew a penis,” someone affirms during the discussion. “Fellas!! Aren’t we ridiculous?” Noon reminds us that laughing together allows for the community to bond together in order to sustain change.

The path that has brought Noon Creative Enterprise to be able to openly perform an interactive theatre piece in a 183 Egyptian villages was long and full of struggles.

In 1972, the famous writer and activist Nawal el Saddawi lost her job as general director of public health for the Egyptian Ministry of Health as result of the publication ‘Women...
Five years after the law was passed, in June 2013, Sohair al-Bata’a’s death reached international attention on the struggle to accelerate the abandonment of FGM. The ‘Cairo Declaration for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation’ was set to renew the demand that FGM/C has no basis in the core Islamic Sharia or any of its partial provisions. Finally, the Al Azhar Supreme Council for Islamic Research published a statement explaining that FGM/C has no basis in the core Islamic Sharia or any of its partial provisions. Also, the Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa issued a ‘Fatwa’ condemning FGM/C and promised that the doctor, despite the prison sentence against him, still operates in the area. National and international organizations have renovated their calls for justice. The death of both Bodour and Sohair exemplify the many struggles surrounding FGM.

Firstly, el khetan (FGM), as an unnamable taboo in society, had to be broken. Secondly, institutions had to be pressured to react to modify the legal framework surrounding the practice. However, community support in favor of the practice – whose total prevalence is over 90% – is widespread and has only recently started to decline. EDHS 2014 statistics suggest that 56% of girls between 1 – 19 years may be expected to be ‘circumcised’. If this happens to be true, there will be a steady decline in the proportion of young women who will be circumcised in Egypt, from 70% among girls currently aged 18 – 19 to around 50% among girls currently under age the age of 5.

Nevertheless, this rocky yet triumphant journey has had its own sad milestones. June 14th is Egypt’s National Anti-FGM Day: this day honors 12-year-old Bodour Shaker, from El Minya, who died on the same date in 2007 during the procedure. The engagement of the authorities to ban FGM has slowly grown as grass roots organizations, civil society, international platforms and national and international media have worked hard so as not to forget the memory of its victims. Bodour’s death prompted the Ministry of Health’s ministerial decree (271), which closed a loophole in the previous 1996 decree by banning everyone, including health professionals, from performing Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C) in governmental or non-governmental hospitals and clinics. A year later, the Egyptian Parliament agreed to criminalize FGM/C in the Penal Code. Also, the Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa issued a ‘Fatwa’ condemning FGM/C and Al Azhar Supreme Council for Islamic Research published a statement explaining that FGM/C has no basis in the core Islamic Sharia or any of its partial provisions. Finally, the ‘Cairo Declaration for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation’ was set to renew the international attention on the struggle to accelerate the abandonment of FGM.

Five years after the law was passed, in June 2013, Sohair al-Bata’a’s death reached the news. For the first time in Egyptian courts, the medical doctor and the family were prosecuted for practicing and performing FGM. Unfortunately the doctor, despite the prison sentence against him, still operates in the area. National and international organizations have renovated their calls for justice. The death of both Bodour and Sohair exemplify the many struggles surrounding FGM.

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However, another important factor is that more than 50% of the women believe that female ‘circumcision’ is required by religion; also every 6 in 10 women believe that the practice should continue, and almost 50% of the women thought that men preferred it this way.

All the following points are essential to address so as to frame a strategy solely about the protection of women and children’s rights: community mobilization for change, women’s rights education, support offered to the families that openly want to denounce the practice of FGM and end it, access to information on the health hazards that may occur as a result of the procedure, support from religious leaders to clearly communicate that the practice has no religious background as well as the engagement of media and community leaders to disseminate and render visible and accessible support. With this purpose, Noon Creative Enterprise was commissioned by UNFPA to be the love-bone that can bring communities together to create a space where they can discuss the practice based on actual facts.

The UNFPA-led trust fund to accelerate change has been working towards the total abolishment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting since 2007 in collaboration with national and civil society organizations. The focus of this joint program is to accelerate change and push social dynamics towards abandonment of the practice within seventeen practicing countries: Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritrea, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Gambia.
and Uganda. The approach is to gain the support of an initial core group, which decides to abandon FGM/C and mobilizes a sufficient number of people to facilitate a tipping point and thereby create a social shift away from the practice as the social norm. Noon Creative Enterprise proposes a positive engagement with FGM.

Their engagement does not look into finding, blaming and punishing as a strategy. They propose ‘love and fun as a context: the very stage on which we act out the dramas of health and life and death [1]’. As such their engagement is not based on laughing about FGM; it rather laughs at the many wrong facts, myths and misconceptions that communities hold onto to maintain the practice. Making those facts into a public and collective laughing matter, communities become accomplices in the change movement. Civil society efforts and community mobilization are at the core of the campaigns for the abandonment of FGM and women’s rights in Egypt. Moreover, the FGM abandonment program is also the entry point through which we tackle a very much-needed comprehensive and holistic approach to the sexual and reproductive health needs as well as the rights of women and adolescents.

Make them laugh and change will arrive sooner than we expect!

[1] Humour and love: the origination of clown therapy by Patch Adams
In June 2014, I accompanied the Noon troupe to three shows of Hara TV3, and saw how each performance space generated different conversations among audiences and with the troupe. The actors were from Alexandria and Cairo, but from middle class worlds that are very different from the marginal communities to whom they performed. As an anthropologist from Bombay, India, I too was shocked by the piles of garbage, ubiquitous mosquitoes, and other features of the abandoned Cairo neighborhoods euphemistically called “informal areas.” However, when we stepped into the women’s cooperative where I first attended a show of Hara TV3, it was clear that audience members did not fit the image of downtrodden women in development literature. We had an audience of about twenty women, many of them young mothers, in stylish outfits and colorful headscarves, and lively opinions.

The show was framed to generate conversation. Nada set the stage with a small standing banner and introduction to the show, noting that there would be a discussion afterwards. The actors swiftly donned their minimal costumes: lengths of cloth draped over their street clothes as women’s veils and cloaks, and a few accessories. Audience members smiled expectantly, and children relegated to the hallway outside peeked in hopefully. Everyone seemed glad to be watching a performance rather than to be listening to a dull lecture. Hara TV3 was styled as a set of rehearsals for a television show and punctuated by “advertisements” for a women’s helpline. It was far funnier than I had expected a show about ‘female circumcision’ to be. Mohamed, one of the actors, dressed in drag as a sexist mother-in-law hoping her grandchild would be a boy, and other characters similarly found comedy in the harassment and double standards that Egyptian girls encountered throughout their lives. Even supposedly modern doctors who performed circumcision were satirized in a hilarious performance by an actor in a lab coat, cartoonish glasses, and a lisp. As audience members laughed along, it seemed they were on the same line with the theatre troupe’s framing of circumcision as part of a larger matrix of sexism in Egypt. Standards of social morality appeared as a cover-up for patriarchal self-interest in many of the scenes.

Through the response to the show, I would have thought everyone in the audience (except two unsmiling older women who left) agreed with the anti-circumcision message. Intriguingly, however, several women voiced ambivalence during the question-and-answer session. Clearly, a carnivalesque performance that poked fun at patriarchal older women was easier to laugh at than to use as justification for pushing back against female circumcision.

When Nada asked audience members about their opinions on the stories in the show, most of them sided with the anti-circumcision characters. Yet, when she asked about their own families, they acknowledged ‘being over-protective of [their] daughter(s]’ ‘because I’m afraid for her’ while admitting ‘I leave my son to his own devices.’ One woman, who agreed with the logic of the anti-FGM argument, said, ‘I wish I could be like those women [in the skits]’. In other words, the message felt right, but acting upon it was difficult. The young mothers in attendance felt bound by social rules, no matter how much they may laugh at these in the space of the skit show. ‘I have a boy and girl, and treat them the same at home,’ one woman declared proudly. ‘Treating them the same will not change society,’ a cynical neighbor responded.

Using skits to talk about female circumcision in Hara TV3 opened up a valuable space for social debate beyond the binary of pro and anti-circumcision. Not less importantly, it also showed that discussion between social workers and their audiences could be more equitable. The dramatists of Noon learned how their audiences spoke, felt, and acted about female circumcision, because their skits had opened up the terrain of response beyond agreement and disagreement. Audiences were instead evaluating characters’ discourse, actions, and values. The mode of comedy made the stakes of the discussion seem less serious, and the idea of social change consequently more feasible.

In other venues Hara TV3 found a more skeptical audience. When the troupe traveled to a village near Port Said, for instance, the identity politics of actors and audience proved divisive. The show was at a local state-owned Youth Center, where audiences attended social work programs reluctantly, often in return for small stipends. About a hundred people packed the outdoor hall when we arrived at the Center, its large open windows letting in just enough breeze to make up for the lack of electricity. Women and some men of all ages, several rowdy boys, and plenty of teenage girls, provided a raucous and frequently inattentive audience.

I was struck by the gender politics of this audience. Mothers humored boys who jumped and shouted, while the girls sat decorously. A stern older woman walked around and waved a large stick, shouting for order, but the hall remained noisy throughout the show. The lines could hardly be heard in the back, where I was seated. It seemed that this audience did not consider female circumcision a matter for women to discuss, as they had in the Cairo women’s cooperative. The general lack of interest in debate about circumcision made for a briefer talkback session, with many in the audience eager to escape the hot hall.
Hara TV3’s innovative project for making comic theatre about the social life of female circumcision revealed many possibilities, and some limitations, of this style of development work. The range of characters in the show, and the use of drag to mix up gender and class roles, opened up more fertile grounds of conversation than classic development pedagogy about the wrongs of traditional practices. However, the skit worked better with an audience of young mothers than with a village audience with clear gendered and generational hierarchies. The interactive dramaturgy of Hara TV3 allowed audiences to enable transformed social worlds more effectively when it targeted groups who already desired change.
UNFPA supports using art for development as well as the promotion of theatre education through workshops conducted by the Y-Peer theatre trainings. We look for innovative methods to engage young people and promote youth-adult partnerships, and theatre is a great tool to do so.

Theatre is a way to reach out to beneficiaries, as it can attract a wide range of audiences. It can also expand the reach of the message to a younger cohort, unlike the more traditional method of spreading messages through lectures. There are similar projects that use theatre that have been developed in Lebanon and Palestine through Y-Peer and UNFPA support. UNFPA has supported the development and endorsement of the Y-Peer Theatre Manual to ensure quality standards.

On Hara TV1
UNFPA was part of the team that supported the Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE 2010). One of the results deducted from the SYPE was that youth civic participation was very low. Particularly in the context of the Revolution in 2011, UNFPA sought to capitalize on the engagement of youth and the celebration of the Year of the Volunteer to address the issue of low civic participation. This lead to our first collaboration with Noon and the commissioning of Hara TV1 on youth civic participation.

On Hara TV2
We were pleased with the results of Hara TV1 and wanted to expand its focus to become more on sexual and reproductive health and rights, which includes topics like family planning, early marriage, and protection from gender based violence. These topics can be considered sensitive at times. Thus, using formats that are more colloquial and familiar to people, rather than formal ones, was a good way to start discussing these topics and using theatre allowed us to do that.

Noon developed the performance in collaboration with UNFPA in a creative, funny and engaging way that touched on various subjects and allowed for the further discussion of these topics. Noon also capitalized on the Y-Peer network in all the different governorates.

This activity was part of a larger intervention of connecting with the network to discuss and disseminate information and resources.

Watching the dress rehearsal, I was anxious and curious and had no idea what to expect. I remember that I left feeling very happy with the final product as I found it very engaging and thought provoking. It did not talk down to audiences. It was accessible and relatable to our beneficiaries. The performers were really engaging and I like that the performance opened a safe space for discussion afterwards.

The challenge now is to continue working after the performances to ensure further engagement with the audience so it is not just a single intervention. Behavior change is a long process and collecting data can be a challenge. Perhaps the way forward is developing a package to better document attitudes and to follow up with audiences.

After Hara TV2
Ahmed Malah and I wanted to share the production with other agencies as well as others in our office as a good practice example. We specifically discussed FGM as a topic that would benefit from the work Noon did with Hara TV2.

There are a lot of challenges facing young people, and it’s important for us to think outside of the box to help address some of them. We want our work to be more dynamic and relevant to people’s lives, and we want to use non-traditional formats to allow for more engagement. I am happy to work with local organizations and to harness local talent. ‘Interactive’ means learning, and absorbing; young people are a large cohort of the population and I’m happy to see us working in creative ways to inspire and engage them.
The language of development practitioners is difficult to use and is not very appealing with audiences outside the field. We use big words like feminism, the role of women, and discrimination against women. These are all words the layperson does not connect with.

I fell in love with the scene from Hara TV2 on the life cycle of a woman, because it explains the gender roles in our society perfectly, very subtly, allowing audiences to connect with the performers as they can see their own lives falling into that performed cycle, without having to use any developmental jargon. That is why I was interested in the project of Hara TV and I specifically asked for that scene to be included in Hara TV3. It manages to explain sensitive and important issues without using sophisticated terminology that people may not understand. It uses a simple and attractive discourse as well as humor and wit that allows for the performance to easily touch people.

The Hara TV3 contract was our first professional theatrical contract and the start of our cooperation with Noon Creative Enterprise. We have used theatre through Y-PEER previously but this product was different from the work we did with the Y-PEER Network. Noon Creative Enterprise uses theatre in order to discuss issues of community participation. Their theatre approach depends on comedy and is able to communicate with any audience, especially grassroots audiences, and that is why it is innovative. When we started collaborating in 2014, we faced a great challenge in small villages, where people were not receptive to our message and were a little defensive. They didn't feel that fighting FGM is a priority and also, the format of a seminar is very formal and doesn't allow audiences to ask personal questions or engage personally with the speakers. What we were looking for in the Project Hara TV3 was to change people's priorities since they didn't consider it important to discuss FGM, especially in public conferences and seminars. Hara TV3 came to achieve this through opening a real discussion about a topic that people don't see as vital, and which they also consider as a sensitive and unbroachable subject.

Contrary to my expectations, I found the people more progressive then I had imagined them to be. They were receptive and open to discuss a sensitive issue like the impact of FGM on marital and sexual relationships. They were also eager to know how FGM affects their relationships. This also led audience members to rethink proprieties. It was an eye opener for us. They were rethinking the issue of FGM as something that hinders one's ability to lead a normal life. This also changed our attitudes towards the discourse regarding FGM and our vision of our work as we had always thought that FGM is too sensitive a topic to tackle openly. However, we ultimately found out – thanks to Hara TV3 – that this is not true at all, and that we can openly discuss it.

We wanted to integrate Hara TV3 in our gender based violence programs. We want to take it a notch up and see how people can act on it and react to it. People asked questions after watching the show. Now we want to see about mobilizing people to refuse this harmful practice. We aspired to build a movement that takes action against and rejects such practices, as well as practical resistance to such practices through reporting gender based violence. This should help reverse women's acceptance of such practices. I see a big role for Hara TV3 in motivating the community to change these practices. This is a community movement that encourages Egyptian men and women to take positive and effective actions to stop Gender-based violence and not only FGM.

UNFPA works in 17 different countries through joint programs with UNICEF wherever there is prevalence and a government attempt to end Gender-based violence and an interest from our side in spreading this experience. However, Hara TV3 is based on the Egyptian context and always refers to jokes and scenes from Egyptian movies. These references may be relevant to the audience in North Africa as the culture and language are similar. However, FGM is not practiced in such countries.

We find that the context is different in each country, and successful work has to emanate from the realities of each context.

It's really hard to monitor and evaluate. We asked about the audience's feedback and received a number of requests for more services and for a means for answering their questions. It's all qualitative. It is very hard to make a quantitative evaluation of the impact because you are contributing to people changing their habits. When there is a change, it's hard to trace it back to the performance or any single intervention. It's a buildup of information, which makes the evaluation of the impact of anti-FGM work peculiar in general.
Closing Remarks by Nada Sabet

In their essence the Hara TV performances were an artistic project about creating safe spaces for dialogue, allowing audiences – young and old, male and female – to share varying opinions without arguing, to explore, in a collective format that allows deep and critical analysis to take place, topics that are very common yet considered social taboos. Hara TV has challenged gender stereotypes by allowing men to play women roles and women to play male roles as three actors play many characters in serious slapstick, allowing the team to push acceptable boundaries using humor to make clear and bold statements.

We used humor as our key into people’s hearts, allowing taboo topics to float over the radar and difficult points in the discussion to be stated in a playful and light atmosphere. This allowed all those with different viewpoints to laugh together thus breaking the ice as well as diving into difficult and critical areas without the use of lecturing. At the same time this was done in a manner very different from the present TV style of tragic dramas, especially associated with FGM combating programs.

Easy, Transferable: The Power of Lightness

Hara TV is not only ‘light’ because of humor, but also because it allows for easy and extensive movement and is adaptable to all spaces, big and small, allowing us to go places where there is no water or electricity for instance. A team of five, three actors, myself (director and facilitator) and Sally (production and administration) acted as the core team for Hara TV1. We were then accompanied by Yara Mekawi who was documenting the performances through film and photography. Hara TV2 followed the same light format, this time we had three actors, myself and the production and administration was split between myself, Ahmed El Sawi (also an actor in the project) as well as a volunteer, Sondos Mohammed, and we were accompanied by our in-house film maker, photographer and editor Josef El Deek. This format worked well but we felt that the production and administration were better handled by one-person working full time. Therefore in Hara TV3 the cast and crew were kept to only three actors, myself as facilitator and director, Ayman as administrator and photographer and independent filmmakers were invited to document at various stages within the project.

This small core team format allowed us to work together extensively and to travel in small buses all over Egypt at minimal cost. Also the use of minimal technology, and

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The UNFPA Joint Program on FGM started collaborating with Noon in 2014 through an interactive play called Hara TV3. The use of interactive theatre on an issue as sensitive as FGM has proven to be an excellent medium to tackle this subject and open a safe space for discussion.

Hara TV3 opens doors through humor; through humor, a barrier is broken allowing the audience to relate to what is going on and feel that they are in a safe space to discuss topics that would generally be regarded as taboo such as sexuality and marital problems. Breaking taboos and opening spaces for discussion is essential to end the practice of FGM, especially when targeting youth and young parents.
working without a set has allowed us to fit everything in a tiny bag that we could carry along. This has made it possible to perform up to 4 shows a day and to travel to places that have never experienced live theatre. With minimal or almost no setup time, we were able to adapt to performance spaces of all shapes and sizes for audiences ranging from fifteen to fifteen hundred members.

**Borrowing Power**

Through Hara TV, we have challenged many preconceived notions on what is possible for theatre makers and audiences, whether through topics, the use of humor, or audience numbers reached and ease of organizing performances. It has been a gradual process, we have taken small steps, one at a time.

We have worked with multiple networks who have happily allowed us to work with their members and who have made recommendations for us beyond the scope of their networks. We have tapped into student networks as well as NGO, government and donor networks to connect with a diverse pool of NGOs, schools, youth centers, universities and cultural spaces in all of Upper Egypt (from Giza to Aswan), the Canal area, the Delta, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean governorates. These networks, organizations, institutions, initiatives, clubs and most of all people who have generously given us their time, expertise and lent us their power in their local communities and beyond, have allowed six hundred and eighty performances to take place over four years in nineteen governorates. They have been with us for four years, performing, interacting and engaging with audiences of women, men, youth and children. Now that we have tapped into that generous wealth, we are now thinking of ways to continuously engage and work with this vast group of supportive people, who have tapped into their own craving for theatre and are demanding more performances and more work. We would like to deliver more, without draining our own resources (namely the team and our health) or making promises we cannot keep as expectations increase and the fear of forgetting or abandoning these various parties we have come to collaborate with becomes more evident.

Trying to keep tours to less than two weeks at a time, without repeating governorates, is not always possible, as things have happened organically a lot of the time. However, with that flexibility we have tried to keep tours to a max of fourteen days at a time, to allow the team to recuperate and to not wear ourselves out completely. I find ten days exactly right, fourteen being the limit and anything less than ten being more or less easy. This ten to fourteen day span has made it possible for the team to plan the rest of their work, as most are hired per project and do other artistic work throughout the year. Also, this helped to bulk travel costs and maximize the use of time during tour, opening ourselves up for a maximum of four performances a day, with a preference for an average of three per day.

Time and flexibility and working with a vast network means tapping into a different understanding of time and preparation. The team has learnt to be flexible to accommodate schedules that change many times a day as fixers struggle with their own contacts and with other factors such as the general social climate in small villages. Some fixers are more connected to the community and better able to gather audiences, some are better with paper work and some struggle to get things ready around the agreed upon time.

Unlike Cairo, most of Egypt is more flexible with time preferences and punctuality. Sometimes we have had to wait for audiences to gather and many times we have arrived to halls and rooms packed with audiences who have been kept waiting for a long time.

Our second challenge has to do with looking for ways to explain the monetary cycle of this project as the audience members have thought on many occasions that this work is free or voluntary, as they have not paid to watch it. In an attempt to clarify matters, we have adopted a policy where the hosting organization is responsible for having audiences ready as well as taking care of any paperwork necessary at no monetary exchange between Noon Creative Enterprise and the hosting organization. This means that Noon will cover its own costs (transportation, accommodation, fees, etc.) and the hosting organization is responsible for all hosting costs if any (hall rental, equipment and staff time). This retains the monetary integrity of the work and the balance in partnership.

If, however, the hosting organization is paying directly for the performance, an extra set fee per performance is paid to Noon. In most cases however, the hosting organization is different than the inviting organization, and money-wise it is a complicated system pending the deal between hosting and inviting institutions.

Now that we have a system in place we feel more confident in exploring different ways through which the monetary value of the work can be explained to audiences, hosts as well as other bodies within the worlds of development, education and the arts, which is one reason for putting together this publication.

Another idea, that has yet to mature, is asking audiences for nominal fees that increase per
year, thus cultivating a culture of paying for performances that could shift the monopoly of the donor driven format. In all honesty, we have not started this and it is yet to be thought out. Our final challenge is how to remain healthy on the road; not an easy one to tackle, one has to admit, but it is a challenge that I have found myself thinking of more and more lately as I watch my own body start to react to the pressure of dirty accommodation, manic touring cycles, bumpy roads and changing dietary routines and regimes. This is definitely a topic that is slowly crawling up my priority list. I have asked our administration personnel to create a regular eating schedule and to fit that into our scheduling for the next tour. I am not sure if this will affect our flexibility in touring positively or negatively but I have a hunch that if our bodies are on clear, regular cycles, our minds and souls might indeed be happier, more alert and less exhausted on the long run.

**Now, how does one document all this without being boring?**

A mix of documenting processes have been used by Noon over the years to experiment and try out changing mediums of documentation, the last of which is this book and a line-up of more publications in the future. From experience, I find that short videos work best online; videos of the whole performance are the strangest to watch as video recordings distort real timing. This is something I do one time only just to have the full show on tape, and I generally shy away from showing it although NGOs and other curious organizations are very eager to watch it. The circumstances we perform in are any filmmaker’s nightmare: poor lighting and echoing acoustics. However, I find that taking photographs to document the happening has been of use for financial reporting as well as for Facebook and other social media channels. But most of the time, the photographs are in poor quality as it is too costly to hire a professional photographer for every single show. However, asking other filmmakers to step in and give their take on things has been interesting, as it removes the burden of having to document for the sake of documentation and adds perspective to the final product allowing different voices to comment, observe and react to our work. Asking press, media and TV can also be useful if reporters are engaged and interested as a way to both document and place the work within wider contexts. Unfortunately, I find that foreign media are more interested and more thorough in telling the story than local media. That said, I hope this publication has managed to somehow document and add insight to the rational behind a series of interactive theatre plays and their touring in Egypt between 2011 and 2015. I hope that this insight is useful to development, theatre, research, education, arts and policy personnel.