

Zivilcourage

The German project DOMINO uses Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to fight racism and exclusion

Zivilcourage – what's this? *Zivilcourage* could be translated as "civil courage" or "courage of the citizen" and is used in German to denote the courage to act publicly against oppression. *Zivilcourage* is about daily-life solidarity with those whose rights are not being respected. *Zivilcourage* is about not remaining silent when someone is being threatened or physically attacked on the train, when Nazi youth culture starts dominating whole regions or when refugees are being treated like third-class citizens. Which is what happens a lot in Germany these days, also in the Eastern German region of Halle/Merseburg where DOMINO started in 2002.

A train compartment. Five passengers are inside, reading newspapers, having conversations. Suddenly three police officers open the door: passport control. But it is just one passenger they are interested in: the only black person in the compartment. He does not want to accept this and starts to argue with them: "Why do you only control me?" Another passenger wants to interfere and talk to the policemen but is stopped by her friend. The others react with approval or just with indifference. The tone of the policemen turns very unfriendly and they threaten to take the black passenger with them. He finally gives up and hands over his passport. Two officers stay close to him while the third takes his mobile phone and checks the dates: there is nothing against him. "Why didn't you give it to us before?", they say and give him back his passport.

An everyday-life experience in the life of a refugee from the DOMINO Action Theatre group. Everyday-life experiences from the group members form the basis of the development of Forum Theatre scenes like this one. The young unemployed man who is being excluded by his peers, the attack on an immigrant in the train station in front of several bystanders or the 18-year-old who presents his new – black – girlfriend to his parents who react with complete ignorance – it is the aim of Forum Theatre not to accept the world as it is, but to look for possibilities of change, together with the audience. The spect-actors intervene into the scene, take over roles and show their ideas – often, and this is an interesting feature of Forum Theatre work on the issue of *Zivilcourage*, not in the role of the oppressed person, but in the role of the "allies", who support the protagonist.

The Action Theatre Group produces public performances to mobilise and sensitise for the issue of *Zivilcourage* and is just one of various elements of the DOMINO project. *DOMINO – Zivilcourage im Rampenlicht* (*DOMINO – Zivilcourage in the limelight*) was initiated at the beginning of 2002 by the university teacher Bettina Brandi and the theatre practitioner Katharina Lammers – after participating in a Rainbow of Desire workshop by Augusto Boal. The basic DOMINO idea is to use emancipatory theatre techniques to work on the topic of *Zivilcourage* DOMINO focuses on the work with multipliers: teachers, social workers, students – people who work with young people. For them DOMINO organises trainings and practical support

in order to enable them to use the new methods in their practical work. DOMINO organises theatre dialogues and events like the first DOMINO Street Theatre Day in September 2002, where various groups of young people showed their personal perspectives on life in Halle and Merseburg through the medium of theatre.

DOMINO is based on impulses and ideas from different parts of the world. The first international DOMINO event was a workshop series in June 2002 with the participation of Manjul Bharadwaj from India, Ernesto Cloma from the Philippines, Matt Hargrave from England, Lisa Kolb-Mzalouet and Michael Wrentschur from Austria, Roberto Mazzini from Italy and Rike and Frank Reiniger from Germany. Keith Johnstone will come to Halle in May 2003. And DOMINO is very much indebted to the work of Augusto Boal and the CTO-Rio. Till Baumann, one of the DOMINO jokers, had the chance to spend several months at the CTO in 1999. Four people from DOMINO participated in the training Bárbara Santos conducted in Berlin in July 2002. And one of the major DOMINO events in 2002 was the week with Augusto Boal and Julián Boal in October 2002, when Boal gave his first workshop in Eastern Germany. Both Boals had been invited to present techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed. During two two-day-workshops multipliers from the region Halle/Merseburg and some participants from other parts of Germany had the chance to get to know and practise different exercises and games, Image Theatre, Forum Theatre and (in one of the workshops) techniques from the Rainbow of Desire. Boal also participated in a DOMINO conference on Theatre of the Oppressed and civil society in Eastern Germany.

Meanwhile a new passenger has entered the train compartment: a student from the audience in the canteen of a secondary school in Halle. She answered when the joker of the Forum Theatre performance was asking the spect-actors for ideas to change the situation shown in the scene. Now she is interfering loudly in the discussion in the train compartment, complaining to the police officers about the discrimination of the black passenger and carrying away other passengers who also stand up and participate in the discussions. More students are coming from the audience to the stage, becoming more passengers and interfering in the situation. Until the policemen cannot control the turmoil anymore and leave the compartment – under the thunderous applause of the audience.

Till Baumann
Katharina Lammers