Theatre, Cultural Diversity and Inclusion

Conference E-Proceedings

2–3 November 2012
La Trobe University
City Campus

latrobe.edu.au/7
7ARAKAT CONFERENCE E-PROCEEDINGS: THEATRE, CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

2-3 November 2012
La Trobe University
Bundoora (Melbourne)

Edited by Hannah Schürholz and Rand T. Hazou
Layout by Darryl Ephraums

©La Trobe University
ISBN: 0-9871189-2-7

Cover artwork: Bansky, ‘The Floating Balloon Girl’
(Image provided by Getty Images, purchased by La Trobe University)

The papers published as part of 7araka Conference E-Proceedings have been peer-reviewed to Australia’s Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) standards. Each submission has been subject to two blind reviews, followed by acceptance, rejection or revision, and editing of accepted papers by colleagues from Australasia and overseas.

Copyright and moral rights on all articles appearing in this publication remains with the author. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of “7araka Conference E-Proceedings: Theatre, Cultural Diversity and Inclusion” may be reproduced by any process without permission of the author.

In cases where the author provides permission for their conference paper to be reproduced, the following acknowledgement should appear – This paper was originally published as AUTHOR (2012) “TITLE” in 7araka Conference E-Proceedings: Theatre, Cultural Diversity and Inclusion, ed. H. Schuerholz, D. and R. Hazou, La Trobe University, 2012.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of individual authors and not necessarily the ones of the editors or editorial advisors.
Introduction
RAND T. HAZOU and HANNAH SCHÜRHOLZ
Challenging Exclusion 3

Essays
ABDELFATTAH ABUSROUR
Theatre, Arts, Culture: Means of Beautiful Resistance 8

MICHAEL BALFOUR
Creative Ecologies: Multi-Arts Approaches to Resilience for newly arrived Refugees 14

PETRA BARGHOUTHI
Resilience and Creativity: The Fantasy of an Occupied Body and Discovering the Self through Drama and Movement 22

ASSAD ABDI
Playing Palestine: Staging Exile at the Sidetrack Theatre 26

SAMAH SABAWI
Exploring the Cultural Boycott of Israel 34

SAMER AL-SABER
Palestinian Theatre in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on Research Methods, Problems and Opportunities 42

Project Spaces
ALISSAR CHIDIAK
3arabi Mapping: A Survey of Arab Australian Contemporary Theatre Production 49

Poetry
ANKE MACLEAN
We begin with a Circle 59
INTRODUCTION

Rand T. Hazou
Hannah Schürholz

CHALLENGING EXCLUSION

The image that graces the cover of this Conference Proceedings and which was used in publicity for *The 7arakat Conference* is a photograph of a graffiti artwork entitled ‘The Floating Balloon Girl’ created by the UK street artist Banksy. In August 2005, Banksy travelled to the Occupied Palestinian territories where he painted nine images on the Israeli separation wall that divides Israel from the West Bank. The Israeli authorities justified construction of the separation wall, which is connected by a system of observation towers, as a security measure to prevent would-be suicide bombers from entering Israel. However, the wall penetrates deep into areas beyond the borders of the ‘Green Line’, annexing Palestinian land, denying Palestinian farmers access to fruit orchards and olive groves and severely restricting the rights of movement of local Palestinians.1 In 2004, Special Rapporteur to the UN Commission on Human Rights, Professor John Dugard, reported that the construction of the massive separation wall:

… violates important norms of international humanitarian law prohibiting the annexation of occupied territory, the establishment of settlements, the confiscation of private land and the forcible transfer of people. Human rights norms are likewise violated, particularly those affirming freedom of movement, the right to family life and the right to education and health care. (UNHCR 2006)

Readers of Banky’s website were reminded that the Israeli Separation Wall was condemned as ‘illegal under international law’ (Jones 2005). Indeed, on 4 July 2004 the separation wall and the ongoing Israeli settlements built on occupied Palestinian land were condemned as illegal by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2009: 40). Opposition to the separation wall was one of the features of the Israeli occupation that helped galvanise efforts behind the establishment of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Inspired by the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, BDS adopted a rights-based and non-violent approach to pressure the Israeli state to comply with international law and respect the rights of Palestinians by: ending its occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands (occupied in 1968) and dismantling the wall; recognising the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN Resolutions 194.2 The implications of BDS on cultural exchange and production are taken up by Samah Sabawi, a Palestinian/Australian playwright and activist, in her paper ‘Exploring the Cultural Boycott of Israel’. Sabawi examines the role

---

1 The ‘Green Line’ is the internationally recognised border separating Israel from the Occupied Palestinian Territories created following the ceasefire in 1949.

2 The UN General Assembly set forth the legal framework for resolving the Palestinian refugee issue in UN Resolution 194, which demands repatriation for those refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours, or compensation for those choosing not to return. This has become commonly referred to as the ‘right of return’.
of art in the Palestinian Israeli conflict and the ethics of the Palestinian Civil Society’s call for a cultural boycott of Israel. Sabawi unpacks reservations held by artists to participate in BDS and critically explores the emphasis some people place on the role of art in encouraging intercultural exchange. Sabawi discusses the implications of supporting cultural transactions that appear to ignore rather than challenge the economic, social, political and racial disparity between Israelis and Palestinians.

The ‘Floating Balloon Girl’ created by Banksy provides satirical and subversive commentary that gestures towards the possibility of overcoming the exclusions imposed by the Israeli barrier that violates the rights of Palestinians such as the freedom of movement. However, Banksy also recorded on his website how an old Palestinian man said his painting made the wall look beautiful. According to the anecdote, when Banksy thanked the Palestinian man for what he took as a compliment he was told: ‘We don’t want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall. Go home.’ (Jones 2005)

The image of the ‘Floating Balloon Girl’ and the story behind it seemed to articulate many of the considerations that the 7arakat Conference was interested in exploring. The 7arakat Conference explored practice, research and advocacy in the performing arts with a particular focus on Palestinian Theatre, Arab/ Australian Theatre, and Applied Theatre with refugee/migrant groups. The conference and the articles included in these proceedings explore the role of theatre, and artistic practice more generally, in engaging with various forms of exclusion: material, political, social and cultural. The various papers submitted for inclusion in these proceedings examine the role of artistic practice, both as radical intervention and as an inclusive practice.

In his essay ‘Palestinian theatre in the twentieth century: An Essay on Research Problems’, Samer Al-Saber explores some of the difficulties in conducting research into Palestinian theatre given the rupture in Palestinian cultural life that resulted from the Nakba, or catastrophe, that coincided with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In his essay, Samer asks a series of questions about the lack of organised archives, political allegiances of Palestinian artists, as well as the Israeli occupation and censorship laws that create difficulties in conducting ethnographic research on Palestinian theatre.

The role of theatre as a strategy of creative and non-violent resistance is also explored in the paper ‘Theatre, Arts, Culture: Means of Beautiful Resistance’ by Dr. Abdelfattah Abusrour. Abusrour is the General Director of Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Society (ACTS), which he established in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine in 1998. Alrowwad, which means ‘the pioneers’ in Arabic, focuses on work with the children and women of the camp. Underpinning this work is the strategy of ‘Beautiful Resistance’, in which theatre and artistic practice is used as a non-violent and creative means to resist the occupation, build human capacity and redress negative stereotypes of Palestinians. The strategy of ‘Beautiful Resistance’ underscores how much of the theatre produced in Palestine is conceived as both a resistant practice and as a peace-building tool.

The specificity of theatre praxis in Palestine and the implications of the Israeli occupation are also explored by Petra Barghouthi in her paper ‘Resilience and creativity: The fantasy of an occupied body and discovering the self through drama and movement’. In this paper, Barghouthi explores the impact of collective cultural and political circumstances on the physical experience of young Palestinian actors by emphasising the relationship between resilience and creativity in the Palestinian condition. Head of the Drama Academy in Ramallah, Barghouthi reflects on her work as a drama and movement therapist and a movement coach with young Palestinian actors in various cities and refugee camps, and shares some observations that motivated
her to develop specific physical training for Palestinian actors by combining therapeutic methods and theatre techniques that responded to the particular needs of her students.

The theme of ‘resilience’ is also explored in the paper ‘Creative Ecologies: Multi-Arts Approaches to Resilience for Newly Arrived Refugees’ by Professor Michael Balfour, Chair in Applied and Social Theatre at Griffith University. Drawing on examples from recent multi-arts projects with young people from refugee backgrounds, Balfour explores how resilience can often reside outside the traumatic stories of refugees, located in the energy, the creativity and the adapted traditions that participants bring with them as part of creative engagement in performance and arts-based work.

Palestinian playwright and activist in exile Assad Abdi further enhances this publication with his essay ‘Playing Palestine: Staging exile at the Sidetrack Theatre’, in which he critically engages with the difficulty of representing Palestine in the face of international audiences. His discussion circles around the production of his first play In Search of Rita (1994) at the Sidetrack Theatre in Sydney, and the elusive depiction of his home country and the state of exile in the character of Rita – a tormented, yet idolised woman. Abdi reflects upon his own difficulty of initially reconciling political activism with other artistic expression – theatre in particular. Combining his political interests and his need to articulate his ideas through art, he strikingly remarks, ‘Palestine was, and always will be, about much more than just politics’ (see Proceedings, 26). With this sentence he sets a firm foundation for the powerful continuation of his paper, which is not only grounded within personal experience and involvement, but also speaks to a more collective understanding of personal and collective growth, resistance, escape, love, freedom and hope for people who live in exile.

The interdisciplinary and practice-based nature of the conference was repeatedly confirmed by outstanding and moving musical performances and workshops, including Indigenous musician and storyteller Kutcha Edwards, singer, songwriter and educator Yousif Aziz, and the Image Theatre Workshop – one of the breakout sessions on the last day of the conference. In the context of this workshop, German-born Australian artist, teacher and storyteller Anke MacLean vividly captures the enriching atmosphere of the session in her poem ‘We began with a circle’ and further weaves the overarching creative spirit of the conference into her work, illuminating its significance within discussions on cultural diversity, inclusion and artistic exchange. In her idiosyncratic poetic style, she reviews the experience of actively partaking in image theatre, merging this perception with existential questions of self-discovery and rite-of-passage.

Responding to the theme of the conference and highlighting the importance of an ongoing engagement with the role of theatre and the arts in political and cultural debates, writer and artist Alissar Chidiac introduces us in her paper ‘3arabi Mapping: Arab Australian contemporary cultural production’ to her long-term 3arabi Project, which documents and critically reflects upon the growing body of Arab Australian contemporary art productions from the beginning of the 1990s until today. Its aims are directed towards the development of a steady support base and interaction with Arab Australian artists, creating strategies for critical reflection. This also includes the establishment of an ‘Arab-centred’ research methodology, new project partnerships and further interaction and linkages between community practice and academic research. This project contributes, as Chidiac explains, to creating ‘the potential architecture for the first Arab contemporary arts portal in Australia’ (see Proceedings, 50), and hence stands in close connection with the aims and achievements of the 7arakat Conference.
As conference convenor and editor of the 7arakat Conference and its e-proceedings, we would like to warmly thank all our contributors for their submissions. Your works represent the continuation of the conference’s dialogue about theatre and other art forms as alternative means of cultural, political and personal expression and criticism – a way of ‘Beautiful Resistance’ (Abusrour) that transgresses the surface of many walls of separation and deprivation.

Works Cited:


---

Dr. Rand T. Hazou
Conference Convenor
Theatre and Drama Program | La Trobe University | Bundoora Campus | 3086 VIC
T: 9479 2340 | M: +61 0407 042 552 | F: 61 3 9479 3037 | E: r.hazou@latrobe.edu.au

Rand Hazou is an Australian/Palestinian theatre academic and facilitator. He is a Lecturer and Research Associate in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University. In 2004 Rand was commissioned by the UNDP to travel to the Occupied Territories in Palestine to work as a theatre consultant running workshops for Palestinian youths. In 2009 Rand was awarded a PhD in Theatre and Drama at La Trobe University. His thesis examined the latest wave of political theatre in Australia dealing with Asylum Seekers and Refugees. His research interests include applied theatre, asylum and refugee theatre, and documentary and intermedial performance. His recent publications include; ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’ (2012), in Balfour, M. (ed.) Refugee Performance: Practical Encounters. Intellect Press, ‘Dys-Appearance and Compassion’ (2011) in Performing Ethos, and ‘Hypermediacy and Credibility in Documentary Theatre’ (2011) in Studies in Theatre and Performance. In 2011 Rand was awarded a Cultural Leadership Skills Development Grant from the Australia Council for the Arts to develop The 7arakat|Harakat Project, involving a series of theatre-related initiatives between Australia and Palestine. For more information visit: www.7arakat.com.au

Hannah Schürholz
Completed her M.A. at the University of Bonn, Germany, in 2007, focusing on Irish drama and Australian literature. She has recently been awarded her PhD from La Trobe University, Melbourne. During her candidature, Hannah worked on contemporary Australian fiction, the novels of Tim Winton in particular, aligning theories of self-harm, feminism and memory in her thesis ‘Body Pain(t): Tim Winton’s Women – Self-Harm, Memory and Femininity in Tim Winton’s Novels’. Focusing on a new project, Hannah continues to explore self-harm and death in Australian and other postcolonial narratives.

---

Dr. Hannah Schürholz
Research Assistant: The 7arakat Project
Editor: E-Proceedings, 7arakat Conference
English Program | La Trobe University | Bundoora Campus | 3086 VIC
M: +61 0415 314 226 | E: h.schurholz@latrobe.edu.au

Hannah Schürholz completed her M.A. at the University of Bonn, Germany, in 2007, focusing on Irish drama and Australian literature. She has recently been awarded her PhD from La Trobe University, Melbourne. During her candidature, Hannah worked on contemporary Australian fiction, the novels of Tim Winton in particular, aligning theories of self-harm, feminism and memory in her thesis ‘Body Pain(t): Tim Winton’s Women – Self-Harm, Memory and Femininity in Tim Winton’s Novels’. Focusing on a new project, Hannah continues to explore self-harm and death in Australian and other postcolonial narratives.
Abdelfattah Abusrour

THEATRE, ARTS, CULTURE: MEANS OF BEAUTIFUL RESISTANCE

It is a real pleasure for me to be, for the first time, here in Australia, and I would like to pay my respect for the indigenous people of this country with whom we can identify and share a common path of history.

My name is Abdelfattah Abdelkarim Hasan Ibrahim Mohamad Ahmad Mostafa Ibrahim Srour Abusrour. Among these ten generations, I am the only one who was born in a refugee camp on August 12th, 1963. My family originate from Beit Nateef, located about 17 km to the south west of Alquds (Jerusalem), which is one of 534 villages destroyed and occupied by Zionist bandits in October 1948. I was born and grew up in Aida refugee camp. Aida, like the opera of Verdi, but another tragedy, that is of Palestinian refugees in their own country. When I was a child, we still had some space in Aida camp where we used to create theatre plays and perform them in the fields around the camp… These fields are now imprisoned behind the illegal wall of separation surrounding Aida camp from the Eastern and Northern sides. These walls started as a barbwire fence in 2002 and were built in blocks of cement in 2005, as high as eight to twelve meters.

I was lucky to have a scholarship to continue my university education at Bethlehem University, where I got my Bachelor degree in Biology and then a scholarship to continue my Masters and PhD in Biological and Medical Engineering in France. When I arrived in France on the 29th of August 1985, it was an amazing experience to be outside the box – to feel the freedom and normality of life, to look at yourself from outside the box, and feel how others were looking at you. At that time we used to travel with Israeli travel documents, which stated our nationality as Jordanians. Until this day, Israel delivers this travel document to Palestinians in East Jerusalem, who are always considered as Jordanian temporary residents and not as actual citizens. If any Jerusalemite gets married to someone from the West Bank or elsewhere, and then leaves Jerusalem, he or she will lose both their resident status and their ID card is withdrawn. This ‘law’ applies only to Palestinians and not to Jewish Israeli settlers, for example. Anyway, I went to do my residency card ‘Carte de Sejour’ in France and I was delivered a residency card with the nationality ‘Jordanian Refugee under Israeli Mandate’. I wasn’t very happy with that, and I protested: ‘I am not a Jordanian who fled the dictatorship of Jordan to be in the Beautiful Democracy of Israel. I am a Palestinian Refugee under Israeli Occupation’. After a big discussion, the director asked me to come back the next day. The following day I was delivered a residency card with my nationality ‘to be determined’.

1 Our approach to editing the author’s contribution has been guided by the need to be faithful to the author’s intended meaning in order to mitigate problems of misrepresentation and allow Abusrour to have his work and his ideas presented in his own words. However, we have taken the decision to occasionally reword the respondent’s grammar or vocabulary to facilitate accessibility to his ideas while also attempting to maintain the authenticity and integrity of his voice.
the media talking about Palestinian terrorists. As terrorists we become flesh and blood, but as normal human beings it seems that we do not exist.

Who am I? Who are you? Who are we? And what impact are we making in this life? What heritage are we leaving to our children and the generations to come? I am a human being; I reclaim this humanity and I defend it. I am not born to be just a number on lists of martyrs, or handicapped for the rest of my life, or to perish in an Israeli prison. And I am not born with genes of hatred or violence. Nobody is born with genes of hatred or violence. We are human beings and we are equal partners in creating a change and leaving a heritage for our children and the generations to come that we can be proud of. So how can we show this other image of Palestine? How can we show this beauty, humanity and culture of a people who, despite living under occupation, didn’t bury their heritage and culture under this ugliness of occupation and its violence.

Though I was preparing my Masters and PhD degrees in Biological and Medical Engineering, my heart was also in theatre, painting and photography. And I did deepen my work in the arts, because I believe that theatre, art and culture are great means of self-expression. I returned to Palestine after nine years in France, thinking that Palestine was only waiting for me to save it. I came back because I believed in the importance of the return of every Palestinian as an act of resistance against the policy of ethnic cleansing that Israeli occupation has been practicing against us since 1948. I returned in 1994 and started working in biology to earn my living, while also volunteering in the arts to win my soul.

In 1998, with a group of friends, I founded Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Center in my parents’ house, based on a philosophy that I called: ‘Beautiful Resistance against the ugliness of occupation and its violence’, a way to show this other image of Palestine. I started with theatre, because for me theatre is one of the most amazing, powerful, civilised, non-violent and profound means of self-expression. It offers a way to tell your story – your version of your story and history – without compromises, and, consequently, it helps to build the peace within oneself before talking about peace with others.

What was shocking for me is that when our people were asked how they could tolerate what was going on in Palestine, the most frequent response was ‘we are used to it’. This is not a normal situation. It is not normal to be used to occupation, to humiliation, to oppression and violation and respond to it by saying, ‘I am fine with it’, or ‘I got used to it’. International communities talk about human rights, justice, freedom, equality, fraternity, peace, love... these are the values that we share as human beings, whether we are Muslims, Christians, Jewish, Buddhists, Hindu or Atheist - no matter who or what we are. These values are not elastic. They do not change with new social and political realities on the grounds of a leader’s dictation. These values form the essence of our humanity and the heritage we want to leave to our children and the generations to come. So, for me, everybody is a change maker, everyone shares a responsibility. Hence, no human being has the right to say, ‘I can’t do anything’, or, ‘it is too complicated or hopeless’. I say: ‘We don’t have this luxury of despair, but a steadfast hope that we can create a change and leave a heritage for our children and the generations to come that we can be proud of’. Everyone of us is important, everyone is responsible. We cannot just sit down complaining that every new day is worse than the previous one or that it is always the fault of others. We are partners in creating a future.
where every day that comes will be more beautiful than the day that goes, and we are active actors in creating this change. And what works better than theatre and the arts to generate this change, building hope in times of despair and creating role models among ourselves for the generations to come?

When I started Alrowwad, I said: ‘With or without money, we do it’. This message is for ourselves and many others to emphasise that we are not a humanitarian case. We do not need charity or pity. The Palestinian cause is not a humanitarian cause but a political one. People are not poor because they are lazy or don’t have resources. Palestinian people are put into poverty by the illegal occupation which deprives them of the right to live and circulate freely, to import, export, build etc. Even our breath is controlled by Israeli occupation. Through their checkpoints, barriers and separation laws, they even control who can fall in love with whom, who can marry, who can leave or enter the country. The phrase ‘with or without money, we do it’ shows that we don’t need charity or pity because this would be more humiliating than the occupation itself. Those who want to support us financially or otherwise should do it in a positive and constructive way – as partners in a supporting infrastructure, through programs and activities according to our priorities and needs. We want a partnership and not an act of charity. This is the only way to build a future together in which every new day will be more beautiful than the day before.

‘Beautiful Resistance’ is the way to be truthful to ourselves and to our values, to be independent without having to make compromises on the values that we share as human beings. ‘Beautiful Resistance’ helps us to be free of having to comply with the injustice around us, without having to obey to the silences, with no sales on human rights but with a revival of a rich heritage of non-armed struggle in which more than 99% of Palestinian people never carried a gun in their life. Palestinian women and men have been pioneers in non-armed struggle since 1882, even before Ghandhi and Martin Luther King. Still, there has been a deliberate intention of erasing this rich heritage of non-violent resistance.

‘Beautiful Resistance’ builds hope and gives the space to use theatre, art, culture and education as a means to build the peace within, so that our children and youths can grow up and remain alive to be educated, fall in love, have children and create miracles in their lives. And when the time comes, they should be the ones walking in our funerals and not the other way around. No parents in the world wish to bury their children. We all want them to grow up and think that they can change the world and create miracles without needing to carry a gun or shoot others. We want them to know and feel how important they are for our present and future, and how they can create such a beautiful change by building bridges of exchange and partnership with others, by meeting and interacting, touring with their performances in other countries and seeing what a normal life in free and peaceful countries is. They shall learn to break cultural stereotypes and exchange ideas with others, looking at each other as potential partners and not as potential enemies. We would like them to grow up and remain truthful to the values that we all share. So if they become diplomats or ministers or even presidents, they will not betray these values to win an election or please a donor.

As artists, we are the keepers of the gate, the guardians of values and builders of hope for communities in times of despair. We are change makers and provocators, who ask the hard questions and incite people to find their own answers. We challenge the system, the hypocrisy,
the complicit submission to the injustice and violation of rights and values. Defy this continuous brain washing that transforms citizens into inert consumers rather than policy makers and active citizens for beautiful change within their own communities! Are we so worthless that we do not deserve any time and energy from those in power to stop this ‘circus’ and unite people instead of always searching for the reasons that divide our tortured spirits? We as artists and theatre practitioners know better. We are aware of how our similarities can strengthen us, and how our differences can enrich us. These differences we have should fortify us and bring us together, rather than installing fear and marginalisation of the other.

As mentioned before, I started Alrowwad in my parents’ house in 1998 – in two rooms of sixteen square meters each. When Aida refugee camp was troubled by incursions and curfews, the camp’s centre turned into an emergency medical clinic because, until this day, there has never been an official clinic in Aida refugee camp. In those days, as part of our project, we started off with theatre, and then we added dance, photography and film (video) to be truthful and tell what we want to say. We wanted to show Palestine as we see it and as we wish to present it to the world. First working with children, we soon realised that for change to be long lasting, we had to involve the community, and especially women. No matter what men think, it is the women who make change in the world and they should be given possibilities to express themselves as well. That is why we created the first fitness program for women in a refugee camp to provide a safe space of physical expression for women to get rid of all the pressure and frustration in a beautiful and positive way. We started the first football team for girls in Aida refugee camp. When the illegal Wall of Separation was built around Aida camp in blocks of cement in 2005, we started the first outdoors film festival with projections on the Wall of Separation, as an act of awareness to people. We went beyond Aida camp and toured locally and internationally with our theatre and dance performances, with our painting and photography exhibitions. We worked with children, youths, and women of different age groups – the youngest being five years old. Furthermore, we worked with schools and kindergartens and created the first mobile Beautiful Resistance Program, which allowed us to tour in other villages, cities and refugee camps, teaching theatre, dance, music, photography and video, drawing and offering activities such as game libraries. In 2009, we started the Play Bus Program, touring with games that we manufacture and take them to different places in Palestine to give children the possibility to be children and actively play… with their families, teachers, friends or alone. Playing for the fun of it and trying to tackle some educational possibilities through the games.

With our theatre, we focused on the right to self-expression and telling one’s own story… this was challenging because we have a collective memory and way of speaking and it is very difficult for people to tell their own stories. To meet this challenge, we started working on improvisation with children. Our first production We are the children of the camp was based on these acts of improvisation, having children telling their stories, dreams and hopes. It became a play about the history of Palestine, addressing the Balfour declaration in 1917, the Nakba history of 1948, the leaving of home and becoming refugees. The play also talks about what happened to original villages, the villagers’ lives, dreams, hopes; life under occupation, checkpoints, the media, and the peace process. Since 2000, this play has toured
Furthermore, we also made a documentary play based on the testimonies and reports about the Sabra and Shatilla Massacres in 1982, called The Judgement. In 2006, we created Blame the Wolf – a production based on mixing folktales that deal with stereotypes and prejudices. The play has toured also locally and internationally in France, Belgium and the USA. In 2009 we created Handala, a theatre play that I adapted from the caricatures of the Palestinian artist Naji –Ali. The idea was to revive some of his characters and bring them to the stage. This play was performed in Palestine but toured also in France and Luxembourg in 2011. In 2010, Alrowwad produced the Gaza Monologues responding to an initiative by the Ashrar Theatre in Ramallah. In 2012, we produced Facts a theatre play by Canadian author Arthur Milner and directed by Samer Al-Saber. This play is the first production talking about the Palestinian city of Alkhalil ‘Hebron’ and the security coordination between Palestinians and Israelis. It tells the story of a Palestinian and an Israeli investigator examining a crime done to an American archaeologist in Hebron and the main suspect is a Jewish Israeli settler. There are plays of course that are created by children for both children and adults.

Theatre is such an amazing way to be human, share this humanity and defend the values that we share as human beings. It is never only about compromises, or balance or diplomacy. It is about change, creating role models and leading the way to interrogate and provoke – to ask the hard questions. We are committed to creating a change that we can be proud of. We cannot, must not, just sit down and complain, and we cannot just sit down and claim that nobody cares, leaving the work to others. We do what we have to do. If others decide to join in, that is great. To see other people not joining should, however, not be an excuse to turn away as well, to say that if nobody helps, then we will also close our doors and stop doing what we have to do.

Alrowwad provides a space of expression. It is not about dictating what people should or should not do. It is about providing a possibility and a choice. Hopefully, people can think of using a positive and constructive way to create a change and not think that the only way to make a change is to carry a gun and shoot everybody else, or explode oneself, or burn oneself as we have seen in recent demonstrations. We need each other to defend what is just and right, and demonstrate against injustice, occupation and dictatorship. Instead of crying ‘We die, we die so that Palestine or any other country can live’, they should be shouting as loudly as they can, ‘We live, we live so that Palestine and the world lives’. Alrowwad helps to create hope and life and is committed to continue working. Hopefully, all of you can partner with us to create a change where every new day that comes will be more beautiful than the day that goes, and we can be proud of leaving a heritage for all the generations to come.

I would like to thank La Trobe University and the Arts Council for supporting the 7arakat Conference. Dr. Rand Hazou, without you we wouldn’t be here…Thank you.
DR. ABDELFATTAH ABUSROUR was first trained in classical theatre at Paris Nord University in the 1980s. Co-founder of the Paris-Nord Theatre, he performed and co-wrote Salut c’est nous in 1990, and Nourrir de faim in 1993. With Naomi Wallace and Lisa Schlesinger, he co-wrote 21 Positions, commissioned by the Guthrie Theatre and performed at the New York’s Lincoln Center in 2008. With friends, he founded the Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Center for Children in the Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem in 1998. In 2006, he was the first Palestinian to be awarded an Ashoka Fellowship, followed by the Synergos Social Innovation Fellowship in 2011. In 2009, Abdelfattah Abusrour was elected President of Palestinian Theatre League. Abdelfattah has written, adapted and performed in many plays produced in Palestine. These productions include Waiting for the Rain, Staying Alive, and When Old Men Cry. He wrote and directed Tent, The Orphan, We Are the Children of the Camp, and Blame the Wolf, which toured Europe and the USA between 2003 and 2009. His short play Far Away from a Village Close By won the first prize in London’s 2006 Deir Yassin Remembered Festival. His most recent play, Handala, was adapted from the cartoons of Naji Al-Ali. It was initially performed in Palestine in 2011, before touring through France and Luxembourg. In 1993, Abdelfattah Abusrour was awarded a PhD in Biological and Medical Engineering in France.
Michael Balfour

CREATIVE ECOCOLOGIES: MULTI-ARTS APPROACHES TO RESILIENCE FOR NEWLY-ARRIVED REFUGEES

In May 2003, it was reported that a Kurdish asylum seeker, Abas Amini, had sewn up his lips, ears and eyelids as a way to protest the decision made by UK authorities to deport him back to Iran. The decision to give asylum to Amini, a poet, was given and then subsequently challenged by the Home Office. Several days later, an independent tribunal rejected the appeal and the Iranian national was allowed to stay in the United Kingdom. At a press conference, announcing the success of the tribunal, Amini’s interpreter read out a poem:

He sewed up his lips so that he could speak out.
He sewed up his eyes to make others see.
He sewed up his ears to make others hear.
You whose eyes, ears and mouths are free, see, hear and speak out.

The stitched face startles, as it brings us quite literally into an encounter with ‘the other’s’ psychological and physical pain. As Soguk (2006) notes, it is Amini’s recognition and reclamation of his body as ‘a hidden site’ of political-poetics that fuels the potency of the act:

Read against the literal background of his body as a canvas of torture, Amini’s poem has the effect of a political act in space already infused with power relations and meanings. … As an ‘event’ in space, his poem necessarily contains (emanates from and reflects) the traces of the material and metaphorical conditions of the social space Amini resides in but cannot unproblematically inhabit. … Thus, fundamentally his poem functions as a historical political act on life, recording what might otherwise be relegated to nonhistory (Soguk 2006, 390).

Political and performative events, or biopoetics as termed by Soguk (2006), such as Amini’s sewing of his eyes, ears and mouth, can act as violent disjunctions to normative representations of refugees. Amini’s body-as-a-poem presents a radical trauma to the present rationalisation of refugees, in that it disrupts and re-tells a powerful story of nonhistory, forces an encounter with the other that personalises the anguish without victimising the subject. Julia Kristeva quotes Khlebnikov to describe the potential efficacy of such an aesthetic: ‘Short [poetic] pieces are important when they serve as a break into the future, like a shooting star, leaving behind a trail of fire. They should move rapidly enough so that they pierce the present. … [They] set the present ablaze’ (Kristeva 1980, 61).

Unfortunately, Amini’s public act of self-mutilation is no longer a rare act, as marginalised
individuals attempt to make visible their histories, often in fatal ways. Soguk (2006) argues that the increase in corporeal interventions (immolation, suicide, riots, stitching of the body) are resorted to ‘in order to thwart the techniques of disappearance utilized by state apparatuses, which reduce their stories to statistics and then consign them to the labyrinths of governmentality’ (Soguk 2006, 391). He concludes that Amini’s action is a survival act:

It is only by radically altering the disposition of their bodies in relation to the spatial, political and governmental orders that refugees can reclaim their agency. In this context, sewing lips, ears, and eyelids becomes an effective available strategy by which to highlight the actual violence that the often-invisible politics of disappearance performs on refugees and asylum seekers. In this way, mutilation stops being a self-mutilation: It emerges as a violence pointing to the violence inflicted on refugees when their agency is taken away step by step, document after document, in detention centers, refugee houses, and court appearances. Step by step, a refugee is stitched voiceless, sightless, and soundless (Soguk 2006, 392).

The Context

Many of the ideas in this paper have been constructed through a sustained engagement with refugee issues over the last four years. A creative team from Griffith University has been working with Multilink Community Services in Logan City in South East Queensland as part of an Australian Research Council Linkage project. Logan is a culturally diverse community; its people coming from approximately 170 different ethnic identities, speaking more than fifty different languages and practicing their unique cultures. Logan has been said to not be multicultural, but inter-cultural, with no designated areas where people live. This is compared to places like Brisbane, where culturally distinctive suburbs emerge, such as Sunnybank for Asian settlers and their families, and perhaps Inala, where mainly Vietnamese migrants, Aboriginal people and Pacific Islanders live.

We have developed a number of different programs focused on the work with new refugee individuals and groups in the first two years of settlement in Australia. This has involved work in primary and secondary schools, using process drama and exploring cultural competency, youth and unaccompanied minors at TAFE. One of our key findings has been that theatre workers need to be careful not to construct naïve models of the arts as social intervention, but perhaps pay more attention to the ways in which the arts reveal resilience that already exists in groups. Playfulness as an important imperative in the work, and the process itself, seem to be more about resourcing the resilience rather than constructing it.

Background

In 2006, there were 9.9 million refugees worldwide, as defined by the United Nations 1951 Convention, and 32.9 million persons of concern (United Nations High Commissioner for refugees [UNHCR] 2007). In 2006, Australia admitted 13,400 humanitarian entrants from a range of (mainly) war-affected regions (UNCHR 2007). Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) reveals that outcomes for humanitarian entrants are 65% poorer than for other groups of migrants across a range of economic, social and wellbeing indicators (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009). The LSIA also indicates that outcomes
for humanitarian entrants have deteriorated in recent years. These entrants are finding it more difficult to establish themselves than their earlier counterparts and, in particular, are experiencing lower levels of employment, lower workforce participation rates, lower levels of income, and more health problems and psychological distress (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009).

Within the field of refugee studies, there is now a growing body of research that aims to illuminate the resilience of particular refugee communities and individuals. These studies enable an understanding of the coping strategies and forms of strength that allow diasporic groups to thrive.

**Resilience**

In 2011 the number of people forcibly displaced worldwide reached 43.7 million people, the highest number in fifteen years (United Nations High Commission for Refugees 2011). The statistics show a rise of internally displaced people (IDP) – up to 27.5 million at the end of 2010. The UNHCR says that by the end of 2010, three quarters of the world’s refugees were residing in a country neighbouring their own.

The settlement experience for many refugees can be a very difficult time, with feelings of homesickness, isolation and culture shock, compounding people’s abilities to start a new life in a new country. Many refugees have experienced extremely difficult pasts, high levels of poverty, low levels of formal education, suffered from the effects of torture and trauma and have low levels or no knowledge of English. Their day-to-day existence before arriving in a new country may have been in a refugee camp (where the average stay can be as long as ten years). Many may have never rented a house, paid a bill, gone to work or have had any concept of engaging with institutions, such as banks, real estate agents or government departments. The significant settlement issues include high unemployment, housing issues, English language barriers, the effects of trauma and general health issues. In Australia, for example, data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) reveals that outcomes for humanitarian entrants are sixty-five per cent poorer than for other groups of migrants, across a range of economic, social and wellbeing indicators (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009). The LSIA also indicated that outcomes for humanitarian entrants have deteriorated in recent years. These entrants are finding it more difficult to establish themselves than their earlier counterparts and, in particular, are experiencing lower levels of employment, lower workforce participation rates, lower levels of income and more health problems and psychological distress (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009).

Depending on the country that refugees are sent to, they might receive support from government or non-government agencies to help with the process of adaptation and settlement. These programs vary enormously in scope and range, and are characterised by ‘diversity’ rather than a ‘single logically consistent effort’ (Haines 1985, 7). There is a growing body of research that has indicated the need for refugee programs that are culturally appropriate and community based, with any intervention being dedicated to the key principle that it must reflect the priorities of the refugee community itself (Miller and Rasco 2004). Linked to this is research that aims to illuminate the resilience of particular refugee communities and individuals, to highlight culturally embodied perspectives and to examine the coping strategies...
and forms of strength that allow new settlers to thrive.

A study conducted by Ungar (2007) notes a shift in focus in Western conceptualisations of resilience from individual characteristics. They describe how, ‘a second “wave” of resilience research focused on protective factors and processes and how more recent work has introduced a more ecological interpretation of resilience. The focus in research has shifted from ‘protective factors’ toward protective ‘processes’, trying to understand how different factors are involved in both promoting well-being and protecting against risk.

Learning more about culturally determined indicators of resilience is critical in this view, since resilience in this context depends on the ‘capacity of the environment to provide access to health enhancing resources in culturally relevant ways’ (Ungar 2007, 288).

While individually, cultural and contextual variation in patterns of settlement and adaptation are understudied, a few themes emerge from the literature to guide the development of further research and interventions designed to enhance refugees in the early stages of resettlement. Such programs should:

- Be concerned with the mobilisation of social and cultural capital with refugee communities (Ugmar et al. 2007; Peisker & Tilbury 2003)
- Recognise the role of the host society to provide culturally appropriate health enhancing resources and influencing successful refugee resettlement (Ungar et al 2007; Correa-Velez et al. 2010)
- Be open to culturally embodied views of integration (Ward 2010, Sonderegger & Barret 2004; Murray, Davidson, & R. D. Schweitze 2010)
- Embrace an ecological view of refugee resilience and work to engage whole communities in programs that emphasise personal growth (Murray 2010; Betancourst 2008; Ungar 2007)
- Promote refugee agency and potential for transformative renewal (Papadopoulous 2007)
- Create opportunities and enhance the capacity for refugees to connect with others (Silove 1999; ager 2008; Goodman 2008)
- Facilitate processes that support identity negotiations (Silove 1999; Ward 2008; McPherson 2010, Collie et al. 2010; Goodman 2004)
- Support the capacity of refugees to generate hope and make meaning out of their experiences in culturally relevant ways (Marlowe 2010; Silove 1999; Peisker & Tilbury 2003; Goodman 2004; Khawaja et al. 2008)

What does this mean for performance?

One aspect of this resilience resides in the way individuals and groups have explored performance and arts-based work to define and redefine cultural identities. In some performances the source of resilience can be seen to reside outside the trauma story, located in the energy, the creativity and the adapted traditions that participants bring with them, along with their dreams and aspirations for the future.

- Conceiving of projects within an ecology (positive and negative)
- Active engagement and entanglement with the ecology (institutions, family/community, outsider stakeholders)
- Resourcing resilience (revealing, reinforcing)
- Exploring the possibility of theatre, importance of hybrid forms, content and
approach. Hybrid multi-arts (drama, art, poetry, digital story-making, dance, hip-hop, film making) can strengthen local ecologies of practice, through developing ‘braided’ arts processes that engage with participants in diverse aesthetic ways. The paper will posit that these kinds of artistic expressions may open up new areas of knowledge, and indicate the possibilities for working outside the paradigm of trauma and ‘bureaucratic’ performances.

As much as we may search for it, desire it, wish to depend on it, there are no definitive answers. Refugee-related performance work draws from the intricate and subjective tangle of human experience and meaning-making. So although we know that refugees frequently begin their new life in a place of permanent settlement, having survived extremely traumatic experiences, we also know that there are enormous variations in the reported rates of psychopathology (Fawzi et al. 1997). In some contexts early symptoms of distress may be suppressed (Goodman 2004; Beiser 2009), and in others mental health may deteriorate sharply, immediately following resettlement with symptoms of depression and an elevated risk of PTSD persisting for more than a decade (Tran et al. 2007). All of these studies recommend remaining alert to such symptoms, while honouring a survivor’s own ‘timetable to healing’.

These ecologies of hope are fragile and vulnerable. Creative artists working with refugee groups post settlement need to be highly attuned to the nuances and silences that exist. The focus and content of drama-based group work cannot afford to make any assumption; the settlement process is one of forgetting as much as remembering. To be identified and asked about defining stories is not always empowering. As important is the preoccupation with the here and now, the lived experiences and the day-to-day realities of making and sustaining new constructions of home.

Drama-based group work, where the emphasis is on opening up spaces for dialogue, building relationships and enhancing a sense of agency within participants, is a practice that may, therefore, be particularly well aligned with strength-based approaches to settlement support. It also has the potential to link with more recent research into cross-cultural and ecological concepts of wellbeing and resilience. Having finally arrived in a country of permanent settlement, performance work can provide a sanctified space for refugees to seek meaning, restoration and reconnection. Theatre can provide a forum and a medium for addressing four key recovery goals, identified with a framework for recovery developed by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Kaplan 1998) and adopted by the UNHCR (2002): Restoring safety, restoring attachments and social connections to others, restoring meaning in life and restoring dignity.

These kinds of artistic expressions can open up new areas of knowledge, and indicate potentially powerful directions for future research and exploration. They indicate the possibilities for working outside the paradigm of trauma and PTSD, and for creeping up on the paradox at the heart of refugee performance work. Where performance work functions as a form of inquiry and activism that prioritises the subjective perspectives of refugees themselves, it can lead to a deeper appreciation of the phenomenon itself.

Refugee performance work speaks to the existential core questions about what makes any of us capable of transcending trauma and social
dislocation. What it takes to remake ourselves, our communities, our cultures in the aftermath of unspeakable violence, and what makes us capable of creatively employing new symbols and metaphors, new embodied artistic representations of human experience and creativity. Finally, we may see suspended in those fleeting moments, what capability we have in reworking our definitions and transforming the world just a little.

Works Cited


Murray, K. E., Davidson, G. R., and Schweitzer, R. D. ‘Review of Refugee Mental Health Interventions


Documents


In this paper, I try to explore the effect of the cultural and political circumstances on the physical experience of a group of young Palestinian student actors, aged eighteen to thirty, whom I trained in physical theatre in the context of their three-year-Bachelor degree in Theater Making at The Drama Academy – a joint project between Al-Kasaba Theatre in Ramallah (Palestine) and Folkwang University for Art in Germany. My main argument follows Phil Jones, who draws a connection between oppression and fantasy: ‘The oppressed person tries to suffuse his/her reality with fantasy. It’s a way of being – wanting to satisfy a need within a fantasy which cannot be dealt with in reality’ (Jones 2004). Therefore, I suppose, within a dramatic context this reliance on fantasy could produce a specific physicality and actions. Over the past seven years, working as a drama and movement therapist and a movement coach with young Palestinian actors and non-actors in different cities and refugee camp, such as the Jenin Refugee Camp in the North of the West Bank and Qalandia Refugee Camp near Jerusalem, I found out that this fantasy has a strong connection to people’s resilience and creativity. I had to develop a specific physical training program for these young actors, combining therapeutic methods and theatre techniques in order to create an atmosphere for self-discovery and growth.

My students in the Drama Academy in Ramallah performed a few classic theatre pieces of Shakespeare and others in addition to some modern scripts. Directors tried to find a connection between the theme of the play and individual/group experiences. In this context the following questions arise: Is this the theatre that young actors need in order to be fully creative and that would help them to produce new theatre movements in order to reflect upon their reality? Is it another form of compliance that the oppressed society always demands? What kind of theatre do young Palestinian actors need to liberate themselves? What could be the role of the body in this approach - taking into account the cultural and political circumstances of the physical experience?

Using a theoretical debate on creativity and resilience, supported by specific theories of human development and drama therapy, I shall explain some of my techniques as drama therapist and movement coach, combining theatre and therapy methods.

Resilience is defined by the BICE (International Catholic Child Bureau, 2012) as ‘the capacity of a person to do well facing difficult conditions in life.’ Donald Winnicott (2005), a theorist in the field of psychology and human development, refers to creativity as ‘a coloring of the whole attitude to external reality.’ He states that ‘It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrast with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation’ (2005, 87). He adds: ‘Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth
living.’ (2005, 87) And in the extreme case there is a relative failure in the establishment of personal capacity for creative living; this is recognised as illness in psychiatric terms.

But creative desire can be looked at as a thing in itself, something that, of course, is necessary if an artist is to produce a work of art, but also as something that is present when anyone – baby, child, adolescent, adult, old man or woman – looks at the world in a healthy way, and deliberately and consciously acts their part within it. Living under very difficult political, economical and social circumstances, the oppressed person – exemplary of the Palestinian condition – must use his or her creativity to adapt to the circumstances, and this adaptation may take the form of fantasy.

In order to make theatre, actors need to use their imagination to re-create other realities, but living in a fantasy prevents them to recognise themselves. As a result, they lack the means to make choices or find artistic alternatives based on the imagination. Here I am trying to distinguish between imagination and fantasy. I believe that the word imagination is the notion we need in order to be creatively productive and aware of who we are, and what we are doing right now, while fantasy is a form of unconscious production that a person develops by using the capacity of being creative in order to create an illusion. In this new, alternative world the person imagining does not recognise the self, and this lack contains destructiveness in regards to the person’s capacity of self-growth.

The term ‘imagination’ describes the ability to form new images and sensations when they are not perceived through sight, hearing, or other senses. It is a fundamental faculty through which people make sense of the world, and it also plays a key role in learning processes. A basic training that revolves around imagination includes listening to storytelling, in which the exactness of the chosen words is the fundamental factor to evoke worlds. People’s imagination may function according to their moods and spirits, which can be good or bad, depending on the situation. Some people start imagining in a state of tension in order to calm themselves. It is about the ability and the process of inventing partial or complete personal realms within the mind, made from elements derived from sense perceptions of the shared world outside (see Jung 1962).

In relation to the imagination, fantasy is the term used to depict the capacity or activity to imagine the impossible. But the human capacity to create a fantasy as one alternative way of living, shows that, as Winnicott says, ‘creativity is not something that can be destroyed utterly’ (2005, 91). And he explains:

> when one reads of individuals dominated at home, or spending their lives in concentration camps or under lifelong discrimination because of political circumstances, one first of all feels that it is only a few of the victims who remain creative. These, of course, are the ones that suffer. It appears at first as if all the others who exist (not live) in such pathological communities have so far given up hope, that they no longer suffer, and they must have lost the characteristic that makes them human, so that they no longer see the world creatively. (91)

Furthermore, Winnicott highlights the fact that the human faculty for creativity and individuality can ultimately not be destroyed:

> One has to allow for the possibility that there cannot be a complete destruction of human individual’s capacity for creative living and that, even in the most extreme case of compliance and the establishment of a false personality,
hidden away somewhere there exists a secret life that is satisfactory because of its being creative or original to that human being.

Palestinian students who come to the Drama Academy in Ramallah want to become actors. Most of them have a ‘fantastic’ self-image of who they are. As oppressed individuals, they use their capacity of being creative to transform their reality through an extreme level of imagination into their own fantasy. It is not compliance any more; it is a big solid bubble of an illusion ‘called fantasy’ that the students retreat to in order to protect themselves. It is the utmost desire to be a civilised human rather than turning into a violent creature.

For example, there is the story of the 18-year-old girl who lives in Jenin Refugee Camp in the north of West Bank. In 2003, she witnessed the Israeli Army invading the camp and demolishing houses over people’s heads. People were living with their beloved’s dead bodies for almost two weeks. During one of our sessions, this girl improvised a character where she expressed her fantasy of wanting to become an astronaut. It is the fantasy of creating another space of being.

When I asked her what she really wanted to become in real life, she insisted that she would become a space woman. This fantasy of a person’s self-image is acting out as a total reality and has no question of becoming a false personality; hence, the self is hidden somewhere in the bubble of fantasy. This image manifests itself in the body: she is light, sustained and disorientated. She does not recognise the present time. She lives in space. This girl does not act the role. She lives it. But in order to become an actor she must know herself first in order to play different roles.

Throughout my experience as a movement coach, I found it challenging to train students to use their bodies and play characters without going through a process of self-realisation. I had to develop and adapt a specific physical training for them, combining therapeutic methods and theatre techniques in order to create an atmosphere of self-discovery and growth. Major attributes of this technique are identification of self-image, projection, distance, and emotional embodiment. Living in a fantasy blocks the sensations of the body. Sensations are the main tools for using the imagination. In the fantasy world, the body produces repetitive movements and gestures that only reproduce a self-perceived image.

The Technique

1. Training the sensations is the first step in this journey. During the first year of study, our program focuses on the world of the students’ sensations.
2. Students must identify their own self-image through body awareness exercises.
3. By sculpting the image onto another student, they project this image onto another body.
4. The student steps back from their sculpture. They must find physical and psychological distance.
5. From this neutral position, they may make one physical change on the sculpture. This is the beginning of a dialogue between the student and his/her self-image.
6. After a few changes, the student observes the final product and embodies the new self-image.
7. The partner/sculpture tells a story about the original student in their new image.
8. Finally, the original student performs the story.
In conclusion, the techniques that are described above and that I have applied within my work as a theatre and movement coach have contributed to creating a platform for students to re-define and re-orient themselves. They have learned to express the different facets of their own selves, to accept and voice their trauma through their bodies and transform themselves through their stories.

Works Cited


Winnicott, Donald W. Playing and Reality. New York: Routledge Classics, 2005

PETRA BARGHOUTHI received her MA in Drama and Movement Therapy from the Central School of Speech and Drama, London, and holds a B.A in Journalism and Mass Communication from Al Yarmouk University, Jordan. As a performer she has worked with the Al-Hakawati Theatre and the First Ramallah Troup, Ramallah, and was employed as assistant director on the joint theatre-dance production of Hussein Barghouthis Sahat Alward. She has worked as a drama and movement therapist in several psychiatric hospitals, such as The Royal Hospital in London, and with the Freedom Theatre in the Jenin Refugee Camp. She was also a project manager and trainer in an inclusive art education program with Sakakini Cultural Center and the Palestinian Ministry of Education. Petra is currently the manger and movement instructor for the Drama Academy in Ramallah and Folkwang University. For Al-Kasaba Petra has assisted on several productions in her capacity as movement coach and choreographer including Antigone (2009) and most recently A Midsummer Nights Dream (2011) which toured internationally to Essen, Germany.
Assad Abdi

PLAYING PALESTINE: STAGING EXILE AT THE SIDETRACK THEATRE

In the 1994 theatre production *In Search of Rita: A Traveller in Transit* the protagonist Rita was asked, ‘With enemies like you, who needs friends?’ Beyond a mere reversal of the common adage ‘with friends like you, who needs enemies’, the line was purposely used to call into question the politically fraught position Palestine has found itself in throughout history. Further still, the question posed a deeper philosophical enquiry into what identification with Palestine means and entails.

As the protagonist of the play, Rita was purposely conceived as elusive and indefinable. This presented a problem for audiences who were anticipating a clear ideological perspective or transparent symbolism when coming to see the play. This attitude was understandable, given the events of recent years, including the first intifada, the Gulf War and the Oslo Accord. Yet, for me as a Palestinian playwright living in exile, I felt, or rather knew, that the representation of Palestine could never be straightforward. For this reason, when I had the opportunity to present *In Search of Rita* (my first play) at the Sidetrack Theatre in Sydney, I resisted the temptation to present a straightforward depiction of Palestine and the Palestinian experience. That is to say a ‘realistic’ or didactic depiction of occupation, the history of the revolutionary struggle and life in the face of Israeli aggression.

This refusal of simple representation was most clear in the character of Rita herself. Rita stood as something of an ambiguous character, who, amongst other things, was a symbol of Palestine. Despite the long history of Palestine being represented as a woman in Palestinian art, theatre, music, literature and film, this sat uncomfortably for many. As a consequence, I was at the time repeatedly asked, ‘Why is Palestine a woman?’ My reply then remains much the same as it does now. Which is to say, of course Palestine is a woman. As a homeland, nation and place, Palestine has been abused for years and indeed centuries. It has been much idolised, yet, at the same time, resented and tormented. Prostituted by almost all Arab regimes, it arguably stands to reason that Palestine is represented as a brutalised yet idolised woman.

In a sense, there was great irony in the decision to represent Palestine elusively in my first play. When I wrote the play a few years prior, I was heavily engaged in political activism by way of my role as spokesperson for both the Palestinian and Arabic communities during the Gulf War. For this reason, I was faced with what felt like a tremendous conflict: Why engage in what I deemed to be bourgeois art when the struggle for Palestine was at its peak. It took me a while to reconcile my political activism and the need to express oneself in a different artistic form. This decision, although perhaps subconscious, was informed by the knowledge that Palestine was, and always will be, about much more than just politics.

Directed by Don Mamouney at Sidetrack and funded by the Australia Council for the Arts, *In Search of Rita* presented the opportunity to explore the personal and collective identification with Palestine beyond the headlines that I
was engrossed in just a few years prior. This exploration of the personal and collective experience of Palestinian exile was evident in the description used for the play in its marketing:

An exile’s journey: A play where Rita becomes the homeland; where the homeland becomes the lover, a suitcase; and a traveller in transit. Rita, on a universal level, represents a revolution abused; a homeland betrayed and besieged; a city raped. On a personal level, Rita is a lover lost in a lost city. Yet the minute he finds her, that is the minute her loss becomes permanent: “The journey of the exile must always continue.” His suitcase is filled with a book, a red scarf and a brick of a wall. Where is the Exit?: “It’s where - you rehash old thoughts, and want to re-enter, and the exit prevents you.” (Abdi 1994)

In the play I spoke of Rita as being ‘a prisoner-of-thought’, who could at anytime stand for the homeland, the lover, the exile and the traveller in perpetual transit. Within this context, Rita was written into the play with the words ‘she, too, strives to be free’. The word ‘too’ in this description was a clear reference to both myself as the writer and the reader/audience. Marking the slippage between personal and collective, Rita represented many of us living in exile, prisoners of our thoughts, battling, struggling, loving, fearing, resisting and escaping.

Significantly, Rita was the only character in the play to have a name. The other main character was known as ‘A’ and his alter ego was called ‘B’. ‘A’ and ‘B’ were in constant conflict throughout the play. ‘A’ was the pathetic romantic lover that was so taken by the tragedy of exile and mesmerised by his own tragic life that he failed to see the woods for the trees. Conversely, ‘B’ was the voice of a joker who never stopped poking fun at and belittling ‘A’. Although all characters traced the relationship toward a representation of Palestine, the word ‘Palestine’ did not once appear throughout the play. Instead, it was Rita who stood for the country, the lover and the lost self. Significantly, this had the effect of drawing a line of connection to the audience to think of Rita as being much more than just a symbol of the Palestinian motherland. This was clearly evidenced by one Australian author, David Sale, who attended the show and subsequently remarked ‘we all need a Rita in our lives’.

Despite Rita’s ability to stand as a signifier with a multitude of meanings, the primary aim behind her character was to let her stand as a mirror of the state of exile where Palestinians found themselves at the time. Rita was never to be found, nor to be seen or touched. For this reason, ‘A’ was shown in the play searching all cities around the world, traversing oceans and continents in Search of Rita. During these travels ‘A’ would only find a red scarf covered in Rita’s sweat and a piece of the wall that appeared everywhere he would travel. ‘A’s obsession meant that he would find a little of Rita in every woman he encountered. Yet, in spite of this, his quest for Rita meant he could never form a solid attachment to anyone he met.

When Rita finally identified herself to him she went on to touch ‘A’ with her hand; however ‘A’ was too caught up with his own blinding pathos to notice. This blindness induced his alter ego ‘B’ to emerge, who then began to plead with Rita to stay and not to leave. Blindfolded on stage, ‘A’ finally recognised Rita and pleaded with her to stay. He told her how far and wide he searched for her and how impotent he felt without her, declaring that ‘my love an olive tree, small yet its roots penetrate the earth deep’. Despite the pleas
of ‘A’, Rita chose to reject his love, explaining to him that ‘your love will remain stranded in a one way street’. ‘A’ went on to curse love and whoever invented the notion of love and went on his way concluding the play saying ‘when will I stop writing on your wall… when…’

The exchange between Rita and the characters ‘A’ and ‘B’ makes clear just how loaded with symbolism In Search of Rita was as a play. For audiences familiar with the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, Rita was the lover that was depicted in the famous poem Rita and the Rifle that Marcel Khalife made famous through his music to audiences around the world. Although the word ‘Palestine’ did not appear in the play, Jerusalem was named as a single reference within the song that ended the piece with the common cry heard at the time ‘when…’

Perhaps if In Search of Rita was staged now, a more obvious reference to Palestine might have dawned on the audience. In a perverse twist of historical irony, the stage itself was at the time dominated by a huge wall. This wall was intended as a symbolic staging of exile and the inaccessibility of Palestine for those living in exile. Yet, in less than a decade, the virtual wall that existed for all exiles was to become a physical reality when the Israeli government imposed the Apartheid Wall.

The wall was but one example of the ambiguous symbols used in the play that were a concern to many involved in its production. Notable in this group was director Don Mamouney, who admitted to me later that he had great doubts about the whole play and whether it would work at all. Almost two decades on, I still feel indebted to Don for having faith that the play would come together, despite the fact that the symbolism of the work only made full sense to him on opening night. The ambiguity of In Search of Rita was problematic because many were personally invested in the play, given that it was the first full piece of Palestinian theatre in Australia.

Prior to In Search of Rita there were many references to Palestine and Palestinians in theatre, most notably in the acclaimed Sidetrack Theatre productions Refugees and Kin. Kin was a play that mapped the stories of three families – one of which was the story of a Palestinian father and his daughter. Although none of the actors were Palestinians, they managed with little training to pronounce Arabic words in a typical Palestinian dialect. Their success can be measured by the response of a Palestinian friend who attended the play and was upset with two of the actors for denying their Palestinian origins. This friend’s discontent came because they were convinced that anyone who would say ‘Ahhhh welllllaaa’ (like Arafat used to do) must obviously be a Palestinian from the Galilee!

The success of plays like Refugees, Kin and In Search of Rita meant that Sidetrack Theatre continued to draw upon themes and issues pertaining to the Arab world. This came as a consequence of Sidetrack Theatre’s prioritisation of political issues, but also because of its emphasis on community and cultural diversity. It was, however, not until 2005 that Sidetrack produced a second major play dealing with the issue of Palestine.

When in 2004 Don Mamouney and I were considering works for the company’s next season, I suggested we look at producing a play based on Mahmoud Darwish’s novel Memory for Forgetfulness (1995). The novel was written by Darwish after the devastation of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon – an event that caused the exile of the PLO to Tunisia and the exile of much of the Palestinian population to far away shores. The novella itself
proved to be rather difficult to adapt to the stage. In retrospect, this was not surprising. The staging of the play centred on a main character stuck in his room, trying to make it to the kitchen to make his cup of coffee whilst the Israeli shelling of Beirut during the invasion was taking place. This was, of course, a difficult task. It was made even more complicated by the fact that the main character was supposed to be prevented from moving an inch. Though Darwish’s novel takes us on a journey of history and provides immense insight into the psychological effects of war, the translation of this to the stage was at the time a task we deemed too difficult.

We decided to shelve *Memory for Forgetfulness*, opting instead to produce what turned out to be an even harder novel to translate – *The Pessoptimist* by the renowned Palestinian writer Emile Habibi. The novel was made famous by the Palestinian Hakawati Theatre, which had produced a one man touring show, starring Mohammad Bakri. The novel was also translated into many languages and won the Israeli Literature Award, despite some Israelis wishing they could have banned it. Instead of the loud, direct tone of other writings that denounce aggression and glorify resistance, Habibi managed to accomplish the same with wit, irony, sarcasm, double meaning, paradoxes, and puns. No doubt, Emile Habibi understood a long time ago that a sense of dark humour reveals things that didactic representation cannot.

When Sidetrack produced *The Pessoptimist*, the play took on the title *The Pessoptimist – Saeed, the Donkey and the Israeli Big Man*. The lead actor, Paul Barakat, played Saeed wonderfully. The strength of his acting meant that he was able to capture the essence of the anti-hero Saeed, the play’s Pessoptimist. Those familiar with the novel recognise the meaning of the title ‘Pessoptimist’ – a character who is both a pessimist and a fatalist, accepting that things will always be bad for him and his people but who remains optimistic, thanking God that every day was not as bad as it could have been.

In a 2007 paper delivered by Associate Professor Tom Burvill, Saeed’s role in the play was described with tremendous accuracy.

Saeed is a comic hero, a fool, in fact, who recounts the secrets of his life in the state of Israel in the form of a letter to an unnamed friend. This he does after he is safely settled somewhere in outer space in the company of an extra-terrestrial being who had come to Saeed’s rescue as he sat on top of a precarious stake, unable to move in any direction. Now, in the safety of his new home, Saeed can speak freely for the first time and the story he recounts is a heart-rending tale of defeat and rebellion, death and regeneration, terror and communal loyalty; in short, of various aspects of a life lived constantly on the point of crisis.

(Burvill 2007)

Burvill delivered his paper at the Australian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies Annual Conference, which had the theme ‘Extreme States: Issues of Scale – Political, Performative, Emotional’. Given the conference’s theme, Burvill’s choice to look at *The Pessoptimist* was a telling one. *The Pessoptimist* is a story of a Palestinian in an ‘extreme state’. It is also a story of Palestinians who, subjected to this ‘extreme state’, have been trained by history to expect the worst but to be thankful for the blessings of each day.

The most significant aspect of Saeed however, could be said to be the fact that he appears (as a consequence of his idiocy) to be a traitor to the Palestinian cause. Although he eventually
comes to understand the error of his ways, Saeed’s character marks a departure in the typical representation of Palestinians as heroic and revolutionary. Although Saeed maintained his sumud (steadfastness), it was only with a comedy of errors that he came to understand the dignity of his people.

Narrating his own story, Saeed was the primary voice in the production. In an attempt to uncover the subtleties of Habibi’s original text, we decided to use the back of the stage as a video projection. As the producer of the video projection, I was faced with the dilemma of how to use the video to compliment and not conflict with the stage. Despite this understanding, I found myself drowning the stage with images in a way that violently contradicted and conflicted with what was on stage. Despite the intensity of the visual projections, the reception of it was positive. In the words of Associate Professor Ahmad Shboul, the video projection said what Habibi wanted to say in the novel but did not.

The complexity and multiple dimensions of the story of The Pessoptimist meant that, yet again, Sidetrack Theatre had chosen a Palestinian play that refused straightforward or heroic representation of Palestine and the Palestinian experience. Where In Search of Rita had figured Palestine as a woman, The Pessoptimist depicted its Palestinian hero as both a coward and collaborator. For many in the audience this proved too much to bear. Although many loved the play, they failed to appreciate the irony, and could not stomach the idea of the main character being the fool.

Despite this, the play was received very well by Al Jazeera and other international and local media (see ‘Pessoptimist and Political Theatre’). It was, however, largely ignored by the rest of the mainstream media in Australia. However, The Australian newspaper gave it a rave review, and Real Time Arts in particular presented a very perceptive review of the play as well, highlighting its political motivations and the complexity of Saeed’s character.

The bizarre fusion of optimism and its opposite yields an unexpectedly delirious pragmatism with actor Paul Barakat excelling as Saeed, the expert playing direct to the audience: a fool for the times, but never divine…The Pessoptimist is grimly engrossing and bleakly comic, never blinking at horror nor backing away from complexities beyond its protagonist’s grasp. If Saeed is the product of inexorable forces, a man trapped in the middle, the production nonetheless leaves us in no doubt that these forces are not equal and that Saeed is ultimately another victim of Israel. (Gallasch 2005)

Staging Palestine in exile at the Sidetrack Theatre with both In Search of Rita and The Pessoptimist came essentially because as exiles here in Australia, Palestine was for us an immediate reality and home, albeit one that was far away. Although we might be said to have built a virtual wall around us as a product of being in exile, we continued to look at Palestine as the forbidden fruit of Eden, or perhaps more accurately, the orange of Jaffa.

Despite the tyranny of distance, we all maintained what and who we are. In his essay Reflections on Exile, Edward Said used the musical theory of contrapuntal notes to explain how an exile may lead two lives, where, even though they are prohibited from their homeland, they are never psychologically removed from home (Said 2002). Following the events of Oslo (1 & 2), many of us in exile bitterly discovered that the further
away from home we are, the closer we actually are to it. For many the journey ‘back’ to Palestine, lead to an understanding that Palestine was unattainable even when your feet walk upon her land and your eyes finally gaze upon her shores.

This was the understanding and reality I faced as part of my first trip ‘back’ home, where I was meant to investigate the theatre and art scene in Palestine. This trip happened to coincide with the Lebanon war of 2006 and my experiences at that time were central to the production of Sidetrack’s third play dealing with Palestine, *Checkpoint Zero*.

The original script of *Checkpoint Zero* that I presented to Artistic Director Don Mamouney was rejected on the grounds that he could not see how a love story between a Palestinian and an Israeli could go anywhere. Instead, Don felt that *Checkpoint Zero* would benefit from being shown within a ‘doco-drama’ presentation. However, after much work and consideration, the doco-drama style was deemed unsuitable. Instead, the play went back to presenting the tense and seemingly impossible relationship between a Palestinian student called Hani and an Israeli soldier named Sivan. Their relationship was depicted as one made in hell. This was all the more disturbing given that the play drew upon real anonymous accounts by Israeli soldiers about the way they deal with Palestinians in the occupied territories.

As a contemporary performance work, *Checkpoint Zero* took these real accounts and fused them with a love story to explore the delicate but nevertheless real vein of hope for peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Hani and Sivan were at the centre of the glimmer of hope presented in the play, despite their relationship developing when Sivan interrogated Hani at the Bethlehem checkpoint that he passed everyday to reach his classes in Jerusalem. Although their relationship begins in antagonism, Sivan and Hani soon discover that they have a common ground and they develop a mutual respect that suggests that a younger generation may one day look beyond the bloody conflict toward a peaceful future (see ‘Pessoptimist and Political Theatre’).

For Don Mamouney, the play was seen as being of great significance because it marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba in Australia, allowing for a contemporary exploration of the effects of the history of the conflict for an Australian audience. In his exegesis of the play, Mamouney explained that,

> [T]oday Palestinians live under an apartheid-like regime imposed by the Israeli colonizers. The daily life of Palestinians is one of constant restriction, frustration, humiliation and hardship; at every step their ability to carry out even the most mundane activities are thwarted by closures, curfews and checkpoints backed up by a Kafkaesque labyrinthine bureaucratic system.

In researching the work we have been careful to draw on both Jewish and Palestinian sources. The show is by intent a plea for a new way of imagining the future of Palestine/Israel. Not as two separate ethnic states but as a modern multi-ethnic, multi-religious country able to sustain and support both Palestinians and Jews. Perhaps the first step is to be able to imagine the possibility. (Mamouney 2008)

In spite of the rigorous research that informed the play and the deliberate choice to draw upon both Jewish and Palestinian sources, *Checkpoint Zero* also drew its own friendly fire. Some on the Jewish left who had come to see the play refused to believe that the situation was as bad as depicted
in the production. It was only after some visited Palestine for themselves and physically crossed Israeli checkpoints that they came to appreciate the representation in the play. No doubt, these trips revealed the sad truth that reality is stranger than fiction when it comes to Israel/Palestine.

Significantly, Checkpoint Zero’s opening night consisted of a sizeable Jewish audience that came due to advertisements placed in the Jewish press. A reviewer from the Jewish News also attended but the paper did not mention the play at all, despite an ad having been placed in the very same paper. For us at Sidetrack, this silence was interpreted as a positive review. This was because we understood the Jewish News’ silence as recognition that the paper failed to find anything within the play that they could brand within a predictable negative light.

Regrettably, however, my suspicion is that in one sense Checkpoint Zero marked the end of the Sidetrack Theatre Company. Sidetrack lost its funding in the same year as the play due to a ‘restructure’ of arts funding that came as the consequence of a purported lack of funds. Importantly, this loss of funding came even after the Liberal Howard government injected a large sum of money into the arts, just prior to their loss in the election. The review and restructure of funding managed to arguably target a handful of theatre companies that were considered to produce ‘hot potato’ political theatre. In its importance, this issue deserves more space for detailed research and discussion than can be given at this point in the context of this paper.

Palestine was, and will continue to be seen like a ‘hot potato’ issue for many individuals and organisations. The courage of Don Mamouney and the Sidetrack Theatre was notable because the company did not shy away from the political controversy its works dealing with Palestine might stir. Sidetrack reinforced an important point for us dealing with the representation of Palestine here in Australia. Namely, that as exiles it is important that we understand that we have the choice to utilise the vehicles of culture and art in our struggle. This in turn makes it more difficult to dismiss our stories and experiences as simple propaganda.

For over a decade now there’s been a surge of cultural and artistic representation dealing with Palestine. This Palestinian cultural renaissance demands that Israel take stock of itself and realise its own current position: it is they who are increasingly becoming the political ‘hot potato’.

In this shifting cultural and political landscape, the popularity and significance of the Palestinian arts have helped to expose Palestinians as the new David. With art as our stone, we will continue to rage against the Israeli Goliath that struggles to muddy our story, shroud our experiences, and silence our voices.

Works Cited


Having studied Communications at the UTS, ASSAD ABDI has worked in the media as producer and freelancer, in the community development field as well as the public sector and in the arts. Born in exile in Beirut to Palestinian parents, Assad has been a political and human rights activist for many years. Co-founding community, cultural and political groups he acted as a community spokesperson over a long period. Abdi is also a recognised playwright and video artist, having worked most notably with Sidetrack Theatre for over two decades.
International artists find themselves standing at a crossroad between their desire to support all forms of artistic expression, Israeli or otherwise, and the Palestinian civil society’s call to support a cultural boycott of all Israeli state sponsored forms of art. Some argue art and culture are apolitical and boycotting them is an infringement on freedom of expression. They insist that art is a language of peace and building bridges. Others argue that culture and art are in fact political and can serve as tools of political propaganda and repression. They highlight the responsibility of artists to affect change by raising awareness about political and social issues. In this paper, I will set out to explore the relationship between the culture and politics within the Palestinian Israeli conflict, while examining the arguments for and against the Palestinian Civil Society’s call for a cultural boycott of Israel.

**Boycott Divestment and Sanctions – BDS**

Confronting a failed peace process and a disappearing Palestinian state, and inspired by the South African movement to end apartheid, Palestinian civil society in 2005 set out to build a rights based grassroots movement that adopts a non-violent form of resistance based on international law and the universal declarations of human rights. They called on people of good conscience around the world to apply boycotts, divestments and sanctions on Israel until Israel ends its occupation of Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem, and fulfills its obligations under international law toward the Palestinian refugees, granting full equality to the Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel. Endorsed by 170 Palestinian political parties, organisations, trade unions and movements representing Palestinians in the Occupied Territory, inside Israel’s 1948 boundaries, as well as in Diaspora, the 2005 BDS call represents the voice of the majority of Palestinian civil society and its three demands articulate a unified Palestinian vision that cannot be dismissed. The BDS call is now endorsed by hundreds of leading international human rights activists, including prominent figures such as Stephane Hessel (2010), co-author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Holocaust survivor.

**The Palestinian Campaign for Cultural and Academic Boycott of Israel (PCABI)**

In 2006 the majority of Palestinian cultural workers, including most filmmakers and artists along with hundreds of international cultural workers and artists issued a unified statement in support of BDS. Today the list of artists who have publically joined the cultural boycott and have cancelled performances in Israel includes celebrities from around the world like Pink Floyd’s Roger Waters, Annie Lennox, Brian Eno, Devendra Banhart, Tommy Sands, Carlos Santana, Elvis Costello, Gil Scott-Heron amongst many others. The list also includes some incredible writers like Eduardo Galeano, Arundhati Roy and Alice Walker, as well as accomplished filmmakers
such as Ken Loach and Jean-Luc Godard. However, not all artists respond favourably to the boycott call. Some still choose to perform in Israel like pop icons Elton John, Madonna and Lady Gaga to name a few. These artists insist that performing in Israel is about promoting peaceful co-existence by bringing people together. They maintain that cultural events such as concerts are apolitical and should remain so. They complain that the boycotts single out Israel unfairly and that artists – according to Elton John – should not ‘cherry-pick’ their conscious (‘Elton John performs in Israel’). They also argue that boycotts are a blunt instrument that amounts to collective punishment of the Israeli people.

Is culture apolitical?

In order to understand the relationship between culture and politics within the Palestinian Israeli context it is important to review the history of Palestinian culture and the political challenges it has faced throughout the years of the Palestinian struggle for freedom.

In an article that appeared in Haaretz (15 May 2012) commemorating Nakba, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi described Palestinian society prior to Israel’s establishment in 1948 as highly developed commercially, artistically and culturally. Its economic development was one of the highest in the Arab World and its high school enrolment was second highest with 379 private schools as early as 1914, and dozens of bookstores. In fact, Ashrawi wrote that between the years 1911 and 1948 Palestine had at least 161 newspapers, magazines and other publications and a vibrant cultural scene with cinemas, live theatres and musical concerts both by local artists as well as visiting giants like Egyptian icon Om Kalthoum and the Lebanese singer Farid Alatrash.

All of this was disrupted in 1948 when Israel was established on the ruins of Palestinian villages. Since then Palestinian culture became the target of a systematic and deliberate attempt at erasure by the Israeli authorities. For example, a story which broke out only this year on Al Jazeera titled ‘The Great Book Robbery’ uncovered how during the process of establishing the state of Israel, librarians from Israel’s National Library accompanied the Israeli army into Palestinian homes after their residents were driven out and systematically took all the books that were left in these houses. The books included priceless volumes of Palestinian Arab and Muslim literature, including poetry, works of history, art and fiction. Thousands of these books were destroyed but some were added to the library’s collection and remain till this day in the Israeli National Library, designated, abandoned property – of course totally disregarding the fact that this property does belong to a people who were forced to leave and never permitted to return to their homes or to be reunited with any of their assets, including their books.

Another example of the politicisation of culture in the Palestinian Israeli context is how British and then Israeli authorities often targeted not only Palestinian political leaders, but also artists and intellectuals, imprisoning them, banishing them into exile, and even assassinating them. Amongst the artists and intellectuals assassinated by Israel were writer Ghassan Kanafani (Abukhalil 2012) and poet and intellectual Wael Zuaiter (Jacir 2007). Also of great significance to this discussion is how during Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Israeli forces looted and confiscated the accumulated national archives of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which included valuable and rare collections of films and other Palestinian cultural artifacts.
Israel’s attack on Palestinian culture continues today and takes many different shapes and forms. Palestinian artists in the occupied and besieged West Bank and Gaza suffer the same fate as all other Palestinians living under occupation. They are discriminated against, their movement is restricted, and their most basic human rights are denied. Israel does not distinguish between culture and politics. In 2005, when Former deputy director general of the Israeli foreign ministry, Nissim Ben-Sheetrit, launched the ‘Brand Israel’ campaign, he admitted ‘We are seeing culture as a hasbara tool of the first rank, and I do not differentiate between hasbara and culture’ (Ben-Ami 2005). This was abundantly clear in the aftermath of Israel’s three-week bombardment of Gaza during the winter of 2008-2009. As the world witnessed in shock the incredible devastation and human suffering of an imprisoned 1.5 million people, mostly refugees and half under the age of 18, Israel brushed off all criticism, blaming the outrage over its actions on bad public relations. Its solution to improve its image, as revealed in a New York Times article (Bronner 2009), was not to address its record of violations, but to grant an extra $2 million from the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s budget to improve its image through ‘cultural and information diplomacy’. Arye Mekel, the ministry’s deputy director general for cultural affairs, was quoted in the article saying, ‘We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibits…This way you show Israel’s prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war’ (Bronner 2009).

Mekel’s quote is a perfect illustration of how, if you dig beneath the surface, you’ll find that many Israeli state-sponsored events that may seem to be simply cultural and for pure entertainment purposes are in fact driving political agendas and whitewashing crimes similar to those committed in Gaza. In fact, Israel goes so far in its manipulation of cultural events that it has made it a condition for artists who receive state funding to sign a contract stipulating they commit to ‘promote the policy interests of the State of Israel via culture and art, including contributing to creating a positive image for Israel’ (Laor 2008). In other words, Israeli artists who are sponsored by the Israeli state are required to support the policies of the state in public and to remain silent on Israel’s discrimination and atrocities against the Palestinians. This was confirmed when Israeli pop music artist Idan Raichel admitted in an interview published on Australia-il.com (2008) the nature of the relationship between the state and its sponsored artists: ‘We certainly see ourselves as ambassadors of Israel in the world, cultural ambassadors, hasbara ambassadors, also in regards to the political conflict’.

**Can cultural events bring people together?**

Having established that culture in the Israeli Palestinian context is not apolitical and cannot be seen in isolation of the political environment, I’d like to move on to address the second argument made by opponents of the cultural boycotts, who favour performing in Israel as a way to ‘bring people together’ and to promote ‘co-existence’ through joint Palestinian Israeli cultural projects.

First of all, let’s look at the benefit of the joint cultural projects. Will these joint projects pursue an agenda for justice and equality or will they bring two unequal sides together – an occupied and an occupier – and promote an illusion of symmetry? Projects that don’t aim to end Israel’s occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people only promote the normalisation of the
status quo. That is why increasingly more and more Palestinian artists are turning away from these joint ventures, often refusing to accept badly needed funds and the promise of fame and success, because they recognise that the price for participation – normalising oppression – is too high to accept.

Secondly, the idea that a concert in Israel can bring Palestinians and Israelis together is absurd when one considers that millions of Palestinians who live under Israel's military control are prevented by Israel's apartheid policies from attending. To clarify, when concerts are held in Israel, Palestinians in the West Bank do not enjoy the same access to them as Jewish settlers living on land confiscated from Palestinians in the West Bank. In fact, even when cultural events take place inside the Occupied Territories, for example in Ramallah, Palestinians in other enclaves and Bantustans within the Occupied Territories or those who live in Gaza, or Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenships – are often not allowed to attend due to the hundreds of Israeli checkpoints in the Occupied Territories and tricky permit systems, all designed to fragment and control Palestinian society.

Israel's system of apartheid and segregation touches every aspect of Palestinian life and excludes Palestinians from many opportunities that are afforded to them as Jewish settlers. This issue of exclusion was at the center of the controversy at the Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre as international and local artists expressed dismay at The Globe for inviting Israel's national theatre Habima to participate in the ‘Globe to Globe’ festival. A protest letter which appeared in The Guardian (29 March 2012) and was signed by an impressive number of celebrities, including first artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe, Mark Rylance, Trevor Griffiths, Sonja Linden, and Emma Thompson, pointed to the fact that ‘...by inviting Habima, the Globe is associating itself with policies of exclusion practiced by the Israeli state and endorsed by its national theatre company’.

International artists have an ethical responsibility to address this issue of exclusion and discrimination, which is central to the reality of the conflict. The real questions artists need to ask themselves are: Do we want to promote a culture where we feel comfortable performing before an audience that is selected by way of racial privilege? Do we want to engage with Israeli artists who have committed by way of signing a legal contract to whitewash Israel's system of discrimination and oppression? How can we accept the claim that concerts or cultural events can 'bring people together' when these events often work to promote and to support an existing system of discrimination designed to keep the people apart?

Protecting artistic freedom of expression

Israel has argued that the cultural boycott infringes on artistic freedom. While it is true that Israeli artists are free to express and share their art with the world, Palestinian artists face tremendous challenges with stifling travel restrictions, arbitrary detention, political repression and various roadblocks that get in the way of them holding rehearsals, exhibiting their work or even performing the simplest tasks, which becomes quite impossible under occupation.

Today, Palestinian artists and theatre makers are caught in an intricate and multi-layered system of oppression. Take for example the Freedom Theatre in Jenin and the tremendous challenges they face. A Human Rights Watch report this year (27 July 2012) accused Israel and its perceived security arm the Palestinian
Authority of ‘trampling on the rights of Freedom Theater’s staff,’ adding that ‘[a] theater should be able to offer critical and provocative work without fearing that its staff will be arrested and abused.’ The HRW statement referred to Israel’s ongoing system of arbitrary arrests and detention and called for an investigation into allegations of mistreatment, raising the concern that since the murder of its director and co-founder, Juliano Mer-Khamis, in April 2011, the Israeli occupation forces have ‘repeatedly raided the theater and beaten and arbitrarily arrested employees’.

Israel’s occupation and system of discrimination infringes daily on the Palestinian artists’ freedom of expression. So the question here is should Israeli state sponsored artists’ freedom of expression override that of the Palestinians? There is Hypocrisy to the Israeli claim that it does. In 1984 Enuga S. Reddy, then director of the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, responded to similar criticism about the cultural boycott of South Africa; the following is an excerpt of his press briefing published on the PACBI website:

It is rather strange, to say the least, that the South African regime which denies all freedoms ... to the African majority ... should become a defender of the freedom of artists and sportsmen of the world. We have a list of people who have performed in South Africa because of ignorance of the situation or the lure of money or unconcern over racism. They need to be persuaded to stop entertaining apartheid, to stop profiting from apartheid money and to stop serving the propaganda purposes of the apartheid regime.

Profiting from the occupation

But profiting from apartheid and serving its propaganda purposes is precisely what artists do when they cross what the Palestinian solidarity movement now calls ‘the world’s largest picket line’ (Billet 2012). Take for example Madonna’s Israel Peace Concert during which Madonna told her fans in Tel Aviv’s Ramat Gan stadium, ‘It’s easy to say I want peace in the world, but it’s another thing to do it’. Her recipe for peace was simple; she told her fans that ‘[i]f we rise above our egos and our titles and the names of our countries and names of our religions, if we can rise above all that, and treat everyone around us, every human being with dignity and respect, we will have peace’ (Steinberg and Bronstein 2012).

But the reality is that Madonna’s peace speech was lost on the Palestinians, who were denied access to her ‘peace concert’ and who remain locked up behind Israel’s high walls and barbed wires.

More significant is the fact that Madonna’s so-called ‘peace concert’, which gave lip service to peace, in fact was successful in promoting tourism in Israel, bringing in 4,000 tourists with some fans paying up to NIS 5,000 for VIP tickets and accommodation packages (Domke and Halutz 2012). So in reality, the concert was great for Israel, its economy, its image and its institutions but did not do much for the cause of working toward creating a real environment for a peace with justice.

Singling out Israel

Some argue that boycotts single out Israel unfairly and that artists – as Elton John said – should not ‘cherry pick’ their conscious (Daily Mail 19 June 2010). Some Israeli artists feel that there is a sense of prejudice, as was expressed by Habima’s artistic Director Ilan Ronen:
We come to the Globe along with 37 countries and languages. And this is the only theatre, and the only language, that should be boycotted? Everything is OK in those other countries – no problem at all? Artists should not boycott other artists... I think, as an artist, that this is wrong. We should have a dialogue with everybody. We should discuss and disagree. (Tonkin 2012)

But Palestinians have every right to single Israel out for occupying and oppressing them, and to call for the help and the solidarity of the international community in a non-violent, peaceful form of resistance that is anchored in human rights and progressive liberal values. Ronen's assertion that Israeli artists are unfairly singled out is also misleading. Unlike South African academic and cultural boycott, which was actually a ‘blanket’ boycott, BDS does not target individual Israeli academics, writers or artists. Israeli artists are welcome to cooperate with Palestinian artists as long as the projects they are working on together do not whitewash Israel’s occupation, ignore the inequality and discrimination against Palestinians or work to promote Israel’s softer side, while the state continues its gross violations of the human rights of the Palestinians. Israeli artists who receive Israeli state funding are in fact under contractual duties, as illustrated earlier, to do just that.

**Boycotts raise awareness**

As this debate continues, it is important to note that even when artists choose not to abide by the boycott call, the controversy that surrounds their performances or their participation in Israeli sponsored events at times within itself serves to educate and raise awareness around the issues and creates opportunities for discussions and for constructive dialogue about what is going on in Israel/Palestine.

This was apparent here in Melbourne when the Boycott fever caught on with the Melbourne International Film Festival in 2010. At the time, the makers of the film *Son of Babylon*, having realised that the Melbourne Film Festival was sponsored by Israel, tried to boycott the event. The film’s director Mohamed Al-Daradji and producers Isabelle Stead and Aria Al-Daradji demanded the film, a Palestinian co-production, not to be shown in protest against Israel’s ‘illegal crimes against humanity’ (Quinn 2010). The festival director Richard Moore declined the request and the film was shown as scheduled. However, this incident created waves of media coverage as most major news outlets and tens of bloggers around the world weighed in their opinion. The controversy opened the gates to debate and discussions around Israeli actions and the ethics of the boycott movement. This was a refreshing change given that before the Boycott calls, Israel was only in the spotlight when a major event took place; often a suicide bombing, rocket attacks wars or massive bombardments.

Palestinian Civil Society’s call for a cultural boycott of Israel is a legitimate non-violent form of resistance that aims to put international pressure on the state of Israel in order to end its occupation and discrimination policies against the Palestinian people. Neither Palestinians nor Israelis believe that culture is apolitical. Israel’s assault on Palestinian culture is well documented and its targeting of Palestinian cultural figures has been denounced by various human rights groups. Israel uses culture as a branding tool to promote its softer side and to whitewash its violations of the Palestinian people’s basic human rights. Palestinians also view their art and their culture through the prism of their struggle for freedom, justice and equality. From erasure to resistance, Palestinian culture today is
an expression of the Palestinian people’s story with all its dimensions, including the political. For Palestinians art is a form of resistance; theatre is political mutiny, dance is rebellion, and singing is liberation.

Works Cited


‘Fact Sheet: Palestinian Culture: 64 Years Under Israeli Assault.’ The Institute for Middle East Understanding [IMEU], 2 August 2012. Web. 4 October 2012.


Quinn, Karl. ‘Festival threatened over Israel link.’ The Age, 4 August 2010. Web. 2 March 2011.

Steinberg, Jessica, and Dani Bronstein. ‘Madonna kept Tel Aviv crowd waiting “until she got her Gummi Bears”.’ The Times of Israel, 4 June 2012. Web. 5 August 2012.


SAMAH SABAWI is a writer, political analyst, commentator, author and playwright. She is co-author of the book Journey to Peace in Palestine and writer and producer of the plays Cries from the Land and Three Wishes. Sabawi is currently in the process of working on her third play Tales of a City by the Sea – a love story set against the backdrop of Israel’s bombardment of Gaza in 2008-2009. Sabawi is a policy advisor to the Palestinian policy network AlShabaka and former public advocate for Australians for Palestine. Her past work experience include holding the position of Executive Director and Media Spokesperson for the National Council on Canada Arab Relations (NCCAR) and working as Subject Matter Expert (SME) on various countries in the Middle East’s cultural and political landscape for the Canadian Foreign Service Institute’s Center for Intercultural Learning.
When embarking on a mission to study Palestinian theatre, researchers may face a number of difficulties associated with their own discipline and methodology. This paper surveys a number of the most common research problems in the study of Palestinian theatre. Since scholarship on Palestine is inseparable from the long and complex history of the land, the specific time period and location of the study, from antiquity until the present, will determine its own set of historical problems. In the twentieth century, research problems include the events of 1948, the absence of organised archives in stable institutions, Palestinian internal politics, the feasibility of oral history and ethnography as reliable methodologies for foreign researchers, and the pervasive influence of the Israeli government and military on all aspects of Palestinian life. While the problems outlined may not necessarily apply only to Palestine, they are some of the issues that may challenge scholars in the study of Palestinian theatre.

The emergence of modern national consciousness presents a unique set of problems for Palestinians, whose national aspirations were truncated by the creation of the State of Israel (Khalidi 1997). In the histories of modern Palestine, including theatrical narratives, the catastrophe of 1948 or what Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, acts as a definitive turning point. The loss of the Palestinian homeland, the fragmentation of Palestine’s institutions, and the separation of its theatre artists into a world diaspora prevented the sufficient documentation of Palestinian theatre in the first half of the twentieth century in any significant detail. Thus, existing theatrical narratives on the period remain superficial, and the deep connections between pre-1948 and post-1948 Palestinian theatre have yet to be established. This problem presents a tremendous gap in scholarship on the theatre in particular, but on most cultural production in general.

Broadly, Palestinian theatre can best be defined as any theatrical or performance work created by Palestinians and informed on some level by the Palestinian experience. After 1948, Palestinians were separated into various sites in Arab countries, within the new geographic realities of the Occupied Territories, and in the diaspora. As a result, scholars constantly attempt to successfully integrate all parts of the Palestinian people without having detailed scholarship on the realities of each site and time period. Due to the absence of a Palestinian theatre
master narrative to advance, critique, or support, a researcher may conflate or disconnect events that may otherwise have strong or weak connections. Suggesting a path, Palestinian theatre scholar Hala Nassar notes ‘the acute need for a historical account of Palestinian theatre history’ (2001: 268) and provides some avenues of research including theatrical activities of Palestinian refugees and the attempt to locate lost scripts.

Palestinian theatre artists often speak of the absence of accessible organised archives and readily available primary sources. The problem stems primarily from the demographic decentralisation of Palestinians and the absence of a state, which caused a major rupture in the development of all aspects of Palestinian life in 1948. How does the pre-1948 personal archive of a Palestinian living in Jordan inform the theatrical works of artists living in Jerusalem, Ramallah or Haifa today? What is the relationship between the personal histories of three Palestinians, one in a Syrian refugee camp, another in the Galilee, and a third in Jerusalem, all bearing the same last name? How should the shared history and culture between all Palestinians be represented in a book entitled ‘Palestinian Theatre’ while taking into account their divergent identities as caused by their host states and varied living conditions? And even if these histories could all be narrated under the umbrella of the Palestinian identity, how could it be possible to research all the dimensions of this identity in theatrical scholarship when we must confront the absence of centralised archives and source materials?

The bibliographies of the few major scholarly studies on Palestinian theatre demonstrate that the researchers went on treasure hunts to collect their materials. Their sources of archival material can be organised into three categories: (1) the public newspaper and magazine archives such as Al-Jadid, Al-Tibad, Al-Fajr and Al-Bayader; (2) the personal archives of theatre artists; and (3) the collective archive of theatre companies. In addition, a number of theatre practitioners have documented a period based on their own personal experiences, such as Nasri Al-Jozy, Mohammad Mahamid, Radi Shahadeh, and Mohammad Anis. These sources act as personal reports on each artist’s activities, while simultaneously reporting on the work of their contemporaries within the same geographic area or theatre company. But not all archives are equal and most are not truly representative of the work of the artists themselves. Furthermore, the presence of an archive suggests that a particular artist had the means of time, available space, safe environment, and the training to create it, a privilege that very few Palestinian artists have under occupation. Based on my own interviews with many Palestinian theatre makers, the task of archiving did not seem important at the time the productions were mounted. But even in the presence of a personal

---

4 For example, the historical accounts by Nassar (2001) and Snir (2005) draw on and make connections to political histories (macro-narratives).

5 Based on interviews, meetings, and discussions I conducted, August 2010-Feb 2011. My purpose in this paper is to outline general issues rather than documenting specific historical events or opinions.

6 For general methodological questions concerning theatre historiography, see Postlewait’s twelve cruxes in The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography.

7 Al-Mallah was probably the first scholar to review early newspaper archives. Nassar (2001; 2006) built on his work. Snir expertly and faithfully collected available materials but seemed to be limited in his reach within the Palestinian communities he published on (1995; 2005). Shinar (1987) used very few sources for his chapter on Palestinian theatre.
archive, some have questioned the reliability of journalistic representation of cultural production in general, as well as the absence of training in theatrical criticism.

The most important sources of the historical record remain the theatre makers and cultural producers of the past and the present. To document their oral history, everyday living conditions and working experiences, recent scholars incorporated ethnographic research methodologies.\(^8\) Since most previously conducted scholarly interviews remain unpublished, new researchers reinvent the wheel with every new study. The ethnographic approach also poses a number of difficulties, especially in terms of time, cost, and access limitations. Travel presents a major difficulty to researchers through, within and outside Israeli/Palestinian borders. Palestinians are distributed in difficult access areas that often undergo quick political changes and regularly experience dangerous crises, turning fieldwork locations into inaccessible and unsafe zones. For example, in the last few years, both Syria (since 2011) and Lebanon (2006) experienced large-scale wars. The events of the Arab Spring influence the daily lives of residents and visitors of the Middle East on a daily basis. Despite Jordan’s stability, the shadow of Black September haunts the country. The air raids and the siege of Gaza (2009) rendered it completely isolated and inaccessible. Finally, safety and accessibility in West Bank cities and checkpoints depend largely on the unpredictable news of the day.\(^9\)

Aside from the political unrest, the reliance on ethnographic techniques for the collection of oral history has its own difficulties as a methodology.\(^10\) The history of Palestinian theatre prior to 1948 is at risk, as researchers must race against time to interview subjects while their memories are intact and they are still alive. How can the researcher find and gain access to these individuals? Which language may be used for the interviews and how well versed should the researcher be in the subject’s language and culture? How should we determine the reliability of the stories when the personal and shared memories starkly conflict with the existing Western journalistic and academic sources? In a politically charged environment, how do a subject’s former and current political philosophy contribute to the task remembering and recalling the past?

Historically, Palestinians often resorted to the support of political factions in order to survive under occupation and as a minority in Israel.\(^11\) Hypothetically, a constantly changing political landscape may suggest evolution, growth, compromises, and transformations in personal political thought and activity. As a matter of survival and due to the hegemonic conditions of each period – past and present – potential subjects may not openly declare intellectual leaning or official membership to a particular party, despite its effect on artistic content, modus operandi, and aesthetic in any given historical period.\(^12\) How does awareness

---

8 Since the beginning of my fieldwork in 2009, I met several scholars who employed ethnography at least in part, including Rania Jawad, Elin Nicholson, and Rima Ghrayeb. Hala Khamis Nassar also cites interviews as a resource for her dissertation (2001), as did Mahamid (1989).

9 On the question and method of ethnography, see D. Soyini Madison’s excellent book *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*.

10 See Gwyn Prins’ excellent essay on Oral History in Peter Burke’s *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (2001).

11 For example, Palestinians in Israel used the Communist Party as a platform because it was the only party that recognised their heritage.

12 The most obvious evidence of this problem is the decision to accept or reject USAID funding because of current local politics or the controls/requirements embedded in the contracts. This also applies to local
of internal Palestinian politics affect research design? How is it possible to avoid over-compensating for this phenomenon? The power shifts and multilayered allegiances in the politics of the Arab Spring suggest that when a political faction loses influence in one area, public figures often abandon their open support for its philosophy. Although the current division between Hamas and Fatah illustrates this dilemma through the presence of two operating governments in the West Bank and Gaza, this issue has been present in some capacity since the 1970s. How might oral history change when a former PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) or Communist Party affiliated member apply for employment or funding (if any existed) in a Fatah controlled Palestinian Authority government in the West Bank? What compromises are required, if any?

Palestinian cultural production has been established as a major avenue of political resistance, particularly in its tradition of poetry. The post-1948 theatrical movement has self-identified as a political actor (Mahamid 13, ‘Interviews’). However, not all artists identify themselves as members of one single faction of resistance. The various political allegiances, which naturally promote specific aesthetic approaches, have caused rifts within theatre companies, between artists and administrators, and at times between theatre companies. How might these personal and political divisions produce hidden or open biases in the discussion and recollection of past productions? In a culture that depends on word of mouth to transmit information under occupation, rumors and gossip can influence the public’s perception of the work and, in some ways, of the theatre maker as a public figure. Since all the theatre artists agree on the theatre’s role as an integral part of the Palestinian struggle but may disagree on the methods to achieve it, they may develop personal perspectives on the more ‘nationalist’ allies and the less ‘nationalist’ adversaries, despite their frequent work together on the same productions. As with all memorial reconstructions, these possible biases must be crosschecked by the researcher through corroborating ethnographic and non-ethnographic sources.

Another strategy to ascertain the reliability of the ethnographic evidence is to double-check it against official governmental sources. In this case, the official Israeli point of view becomes of utmost importance. When they discuss the difficulties of mounting productions, Palestinian theatre artists often refer to military laws and policies, particularly under the occupation. Some official sources are public, such as the military laws under which the West Bank was governed. Recently, Birzeit University published these laws on its website. In spite of their clear bias, Israeli newspapers in English and Hebrew provide an excellent alternative source for reports on political and cultural matters. A Hebrew speaker may develop a major research project on the reception of Palestine related cultural production in Hebrew news outlets such as Haaretz, Jerusalem Post, and Maariv to name a few.

Palestinian theatre artists often tell complex stories about their encounters with the forces of the occupation, such as those occasions when the occupation forces arrested them in rehearsal, during performances, or immediately after a

---

13 During the formative period of modern Palestinian theatre after 1967, internal conflicts caused the division of many pioneering theatre troupes including Baladin, Sundaq Al-Ajab, The Palestinian Theatre Troupe and Al-Hakawati.

performance. The reasons of the arrests often remain unarticulated by the Israeli establishment. For example, one record from an Arabic newspaper simply mentions that several actors were arrested for belonging to an enemy organisation, but no specific details are given. Another famous mass arrest, which continues to be discussed today, took place at the rehearsal of the PFLP associated Dababees Troupe. The Israeli authorities detained the actors, then raided and destroyed their headquarters. By enacting arrests in rehearsal, the occupation forces corroborate the artists’ assessment of Palestinian theatre as a significant venue of outlawed resistance.

In documenting and corroborating this oral history, many questions require detailed investigation. What is the relationship between a theatrical production and a concurrent arrest? What role did the personal activism of the actors play in this event? How did the military authorities perceive the activities of a particular theatre company? How did Palestinian theatre’s existential battle against censorship shape the living conditions of the artists and the cultural artifacts they produced?

The State of Israel maintained a censorship office until 1991 under the official name ‘the council for the critique of films and plays’ (Ben Zvi 1996: 48). Under the auspices of self-defense against anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiments, the censorship council actively prevented many Palestinian plays from being produced. After 1967, censorship in the Occupied Territories, except East Jerusalem, functioned under the supervision of the military governor of each zone. Inspectors would be sent to the site of a rehearsal or showing to review the performance. The military governor required theatre companies to submit an application for a permit, which was often denied. In occupied East Jerusalem, censorship operated under Israeli civil law; therefore, theatrical performances did not require military approved permits.

Scholarly research on the subject of censorship presents a particular challenge because Palestinian theatre artists operated in East Jerusalem as part of the occupied West Bank, while Israel considered East Jerusalem part of the West Jerusalem Municipality. The same location was, and continues to be, operated on using two completely different mindsets. East Jerusalemites were governed under civil laws while the Israeli military governed the remainder of the Occupied Territories. Different laws and institutions governed and served the ‘same’ Palestinians. For each play, the struggle against the Israeli authorities may have two completely separate records – one under the military censorship and the other under West Jerusalem’s civil council on censorship. Under the latter, bureaucracy dictates the process for evaluating and censoring the plays, which may leave a traceable record for an experienced researcher with skill and access. However, in the Occupied Territories, the military governor was the sole decision maker. Due to the absence of a declared bureaucratic process, the memorial recollection or records of former military governors may be the only official Israeli source, which presents new sets of problems in terms of the military’s reliability, goals, regulations, and ethics.

15 Seen in the personal archive of artist Hussam Abu Eisheh. The date and name of the publication was not on the article.

16 See Anis and Mahamid for mentions of these occasions in Arabic. For a brief mention of the Dababees incident, see Snir 1999, p. 60.

17 See footnote 4 in Ben-Zvi (1996). The censorship body is also sometimes known as the Censorship Council of Films and Plays.

18 Nassar refers to this phenomenon as ‘colonial civil rule,’ see Nassar 2001, p. 63.
Works Cited


SAMER AL-SABER is a PhD candidate in Theatre History and Criticism at the University of Washington. He holds an MFA in directing from the University of Calgary. He works regularly as a freelance artist and consultant. His directing credits include Tom Stoppard’s *The Real Thing*, Paul Rudnick’s *Jeffrey*, Carol Shields’ *Departures and Arrivals*, Noel Coward’s *Private Lives*, Diane Samuels’ *The True Life Fiction of Mata Hari*, David Auburn’s *Proof*, Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Arthur Milner’s *Facts*. His academic work is concerned with the cultural and political history of the Middle East and the Palestine/Israel conflict. He is writing a cultural history of theatrical activities in Jerusalem for his dissertation. His recent practical work includes theatre productions and performance workshops in Arabic and English.
Alissar Chidiac

3ARABI MAPPING: A SURVEY OF ARAB AUSTRALIAN CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL PRODUCTION

This paper aims to contribute to the 7arakat Project by sharing the early stages of the documentation of the 3arabi Project that was initiated by Alissar Chidiac in 2005. The 7arakat Conference in 2012 was a unique opportunity to contribute to the broader conference themes of Arab Australian and Palestinian Australian Theatre, thereby contextualising the 7arakat vision within an awareness of the significant movement of theatre work and cultural action that occurred in Sydney throughout the 1990s.

Pronounced ‘arabi’, the project title 3arabi is a phonetic transliteration of the word meaning ‘Arabic’, where the symbol ‘3’ is identified with the Arabic letter – ‘ayn / ع

Alissar Chidiac’s earliest performance work in the early 1980s had no connection to her Arabic self or language, and her earliest work in community arts and cultural development did not specifically connect with Arabic speaking communities. However, from 1991 she experienced significant shifts and integrations, and she became actively part of a hub of Arab Australian contemporary artists. It became an appropriate style to integrate Arabic words and sounds into the vernacular of creative work, sometimes taking on a deeper personal and political significance, as Arabs and the Arabic language became increasingly racialised – and sometimes vilified.

The ongoing body of Arab Australian cultural production work has been relatively undocumented and transient – and even unknown to younger generations of Arab Australian artists. There is a need to document and critique this work, not only as part of contemporary Australian cultures, but also as part of the international cultural work of Arab Diasporas.

This paper aims to contribute to the beginnings of such documentation. What follows is a background to the 3arabi Mapping Project and its contribution to the 7arakat Conference, followed by an addendum, which is a select survey of Sydney-based Arab Australian contemporary theatre production in the 1990s.

Background to the 3arabi Mapping Project

Alissar Chidiac was awarded a two-year Fellowship from Australia Council for the Arts (Community Partnerships) in 2005 to develop her project: 3arabi - Mapping Arab Australian Contemporary Cultural Production. The overall project aims to document and critically reflect on the body of Arab Australian contemporary arts production that grew from 1991. The project evolved through various phases of reflection, action research, discussion, collaboration and production, with UTS Shopfront as major partner, and Information and Cultural Exchange as associate partner. Activities were undertaken from 2006 to 2008 and included organising and documenting a series of focus groups, video interviews and online discussions with Arab artists from Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane, as well as publishing edited transcripts of several key discussions. Two UTS undergraduate
students joined the team and surveyed relevant research and looked at models of information management. An IT team also began developing a prototype for a database/portal for Arab Australian artists.

3arabi Mapping is a non-academic project, whose ongoing aims include: setting foundations of mapping Arab contemporary cultural production in Australia; developing support and interaction with Arab Australian artists; developing strategies for critical reflection – including working towards an ‘Arab-centred’ research methodology (including approaches to focus groups, interviews and writing); developing new project partnerships and further linkages between community practice and academic research; collecting and archiving original material and documentation; documenting research and making it publicly accessible; and creating the potential architecture for the first Arab contemporary arts portal in Australia.

Note:
1. Australia Council Fellowships have a focus on engagement and professional development – they are non-academic and specifically do not allow simultaneous academic accreditation.
2. Apart from the 3arabi Mapping website, there has been no other publication of outcomes of the 3arabi Project.

7arakat Conference, November 2012

The previous 3arabi Mapping project blog was updated in 2012 specifically for the 7arakat Conference – with the support of media artist Maissa Alameddine – tailored to the Conference with a select focus on Arab Australian theatre: http://3arabimapping.com/

Future development of this website will include excerpts from recorded discussions with select Arab Australian performance makers, recorded in 2006 and 2008, including:

- Cafe Hakawati - Death Defying Theatre’s groundbreaking work with Arab Australian communities in Western Sydney in 1991.
- TAQA Theatre - the Sydney-based performance group who created five innovative theatre productions throughout the 1990s.
- Veto Theatre - Saleh Saqqaf’s one-person productions in the 1990s.
- The emergence of cutting-edge Queer Arab performance work in Australia.

The website includes brief notes about Sydney-based Palestinian Australian theatre – three plays written and creatively developed by Assad Abdi and produced by Sidetrack Theatre:

- In Search of Rita: a Traveller in Transit – 1994 (This is possibly the first Palestinian play written in Australia)
- The Pessoptimist: Saeed, the Donkey and the Israeli Big Man – 2005
- Checkpoint Zero – 2008

As a provocateur for one of the break out sessions at the 7arakat Conference, Alissar Chidiac posed the following critical questions for discussion:
The 7arakat within...

Let’s talk about the 7arakat within:

What are critical questions we ask ourselves in the process of making cultural work in 21st century Australia? … In making art around Palestine? Around Arabness? Around Muslimness? (And not conflating all of these dimensions together!)

Are we burdened by binaries of belonging? … ‘Exclusion/Inclusion’ … what do we really want to belong to? Apart from dollars, do we seriously want to share white colonial settler Orientalist landscapes of imagination?

What are the visceral ruptures within us that make us want to do this work?

Let’s talk about the ‘politics of listening’:

The ‘permission to narrate’… is more than speaking out. Who is listening? What are the acoustics of power?

Even within our ‘own’ communities—within-communities, who listens to our broken languages and accents, to our hidden stories?

How do we create critical spaces for our audiences towards our work, to shift how they listen to our stories?

Do we know how to listen to them ourselves? What is the honest 7arakat within?

3. Let’s talk about ‘self-determined imaginations’:

Do we limit our imaginations through the sense of wajeb/duty to retell urgently expected narratives … and always from the beginning?

Do we censor ourselves? Have we been poisoned by the censorships that we have already negotiated and that we always anticipate?

Is it possible to determine our own imaginations? To invent our own icons? What are our narratives and desires, if we can just consciously take a leap away from…?

During this break out session, Alissar Chidiac gave a brief overview of the development of Arab Australian contemporary theatre in Sydney during the 1990s, highlighting a confluence of the work of:

- The Multicultural Theatre Alliance
- Death Defying Theatre
- TAQA Theatre

Here is an overview of the various projects documented:

TAQA Theatre

1991-1999: five Arab Australian contemporary performance productions included:

- Gibran Khalil Gibran - 1999
- Writing with the Hip - 1996
- Curves, lines, dots and accents … or writing with the hip - 1993
- … and they called her Silence - 1992
- Al Qamareya (The Moongate) – 1991

SAFA’s The Politics of Belly Dancing: a Choreopoem - 1994

The text was written by Paula Abood and performed by an ensemble of Arab women artists in theatre productions in Sydney and Canberra.

Veto Theatre

Saleh Saqqaf created a series of one-person theatre productions, including The Man Who Lost His Shadow.
Death Defying Theatre (now Urban Theatre Projects)

Developed projects in Western Sydney, multilingual productions included:

- *Café Hakawati* – 1991, a ground-breaking community theatre process and production in Auburn, developed with local Arab Australian communities during the ‘first Gulf War’ / the invasion of Iraq in 1991.

Auburn Poets and Writers Group

Through ‘The Listening Project’ (an inter-disciplinary and inter-university research project) there has been a growing interest in ‘the politics of listening’, articulating a shift from the more traditional perspectives on ‘the politics of speaking out’. Reference: http://www.thelisteningproject.net/

Performance poetry is a fundamental element of making theatre. Creating critical spaces for audiences to listen in different ways was a strong motivation in Alissar Chidiac’s facilitation and artistic direction of Auburn Poets and Writers Group. Dramatic forms of multilingual performance poetry were developed over a five-year period with writers in Western Sydney. New writing was creatively inspired by a range of methodologies, including working interactively with other art forms in a range of sites. Multilingual ensemble work produced for successive Sydney Writers’ Festival (SWF) events included:

- SWF 2006, *Writing on Gravestones*, contemporary Iraqi poetry of four poets in Arabic and English.
- SWF 2007, *Ruminations*, a performance in Farsi, Dari, Turkish, Arabic and English of the poetry of Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi.
- SWF 2010, *Zalzala: Inner Quakes and After Shocks*, where APWG went under the skin of culture shock

Addendum

3arabi Mapping: A select survey of Sydney-based Arab Australian contemporary theatre production in the 1990s

The timeline below was documented for the 7arakat Conference and includes details and quotes from original programmes, posters and fliers from various Arab Australian productions – as well as from activities reflecting the broader context of cultural activity over the decade. Images of select documentation are available at: http://3arabimapping.com/

Note: Alissar Chidiac has a personal archive of documentation and ephemera of Arab Australian contemporary cultural production.

1991

Death Defying Theatre Ltd (now Urban Theatre Projects)

*Café Hakawati*
A groundbreaking community theatre process and production in Auburn, developed with local Arab Australian communities during the ‘first Gulf War’.

Death Defying Theatre developed projects in Western Sydney and beyond; conducted metropolitan, regional and inter-state school tours; developed projects in local detention centres; held performances and multilingual productions in suburban and Sydney theatres.

1991

TAQA Theatre

‘TAQA Theatre was founded in late 1990 with the aim of developing innovative, contemporary Australian theatre with a strong Arab Australian perspective. TAQA’s first production, *Al Qamareya (The Moongate)*, performed in Sydney, Canberra and Wollongong throughout 1991, was one of the first bilingual theatrical representations of Arab Australian experience.’

*Al Qamareya (The Moongate)*

Written by Barry Gamba and TAQA Theatre

Directed by Mishline Jammal, TAQA founder

Cast:
Alissar (Eliza) Chidiac
Mishline Jammal
Alissar Gazal
Saleh Saqqaf
Nicole Zabbal

Ismail Abdi

Composer, Labib Jammal
Lighting Designer, Ian Bowie

1991

*Upstaged*

*The First Multicultural Theatre Festival Festival ’91*

Multicultural Theatre Alliance

‘… first major activity as the Multicultural Theatre Alliance which we formed in Sydney in 1990 when over twenty theatre companies came together to share experiences and to find common ground.’

Participating companies included:
- Actovivo
- Dulaang Bayan-Sydney
- Hellenic Theatrical Group
- Intransit
- Kooch Theatre Group
- Latin American Live
- MAG (Sydney Korean Theatre Group)
- Sydney Hungarian Theatre Group
- Takeaway
- TAQA Theatre Company
- Triquinuela

1992

Death Defying Theatre Ltd (now Urban Theatre Projects)

*Blood Orange*

1992-1994 – community theatre production in Fairfield; school tours in Sydney, Adelaide,
Brisbane; season at the Adelaide Fringe Festival; a multilingual show performed in English, Arabic, Italian and Vietnamese.

1992

TAQA Theatre

... and they called her Silence

‘In 1992, TAQA presented: ... and they called her Silence exploring ritual, culture and sensuality. It was first performed at the 2nd Multicultural Theatre Festival and later in Periodical as a double feature with ‘Triquinuela’ [Latino women’s theatre group].’

Group devised by TAQA in 1992:

Ismail Abdi
Alissar (Eliza) Chidiac
Barry Gamba
Alissar Gazal
Elizabeth Jabour
Nicole Zabbal

Design:
Martha Jabour

Set & Costume Construction:
Martha Jabour
Fiona Murphy
Ismail Abdi

Choreography:
Najet El Shaikh

Script archived

1992

Veto Theatre

The Man Who Lost His Shadow

Written and performed by Saleh Saqqaf

Director, Mishline Jammal
Choreographer, Julie Fletcher

1992

Australian Accents

2nd Multicultural Theatre Festival 1992

Multicultural Theatre Alliance
August – September 1992

Seventeen performing companies included:

Kooris in Theatre (English)
Take Away Theatre (Greek & English)
Veto Theatre (English)
United Cultural Arts Group (Turkish & English)
New Kurdish Theatre Group (Kurdish)
Australian Chinese Performing Artists’ Association (Mandarin, Cantonese & English)
Acto Vivo (Spanish & English subtitles)
Bochinche (Spanish & English)
Hellenic Theatre Group (English / Greek
Australian Theatre Company)
Kapuccino Company (Italian & English)
Theatre’s People (English / Spanish Australian Theatre Company)
Dulaang Bayan-Sydney (Tagalog & English)
Triquinuela (Spanish & English)
TAQA (Arabic & English)
Balai Ensemble (Asia Pacific)
East Timor Cultural Centre (Tetum)
Kooch (Persian)
1993

TAQA Theatre

*Curves, Lines, Dots and Accents … or Writing with the Hip*

Performance Forum at the 3rd Multicultural Theatre Festival

Ismail Abdi
Alissar (Eliza) Chidiac
Alissar Gazal
Elizabeth Jabour
Saleh Saqqaf
Barry Gamba

1993

Al Sharek

*A Glimpse of the Spaces*

Performance Forum at the 3rd Multicultural Theatre Festival

Director, Mishline Jammal
Playwright, Chadia Gedeon
Composer, Labib Jammal
Choreographer, Victoria Harbutt

Cast:
Nicole Antaki
Esam Hato
Mishline Jammal
Saleh Saqqaf

Production/Documentation, Eva Gerencer

Performed as a completed piece in a public season in 1994.

1993

*Broad Accents*

*Cross Cultural Collaborations*
3rd Multicultural Theatre Festival 1993

Multicultural Theatre Alliance
November 1993

Fourteen performing companies included:
Koories in Theatre (Wiridjuiri & English)
Australian Chinese Performing Artists’ Association
Hellenic Theatre Inc (Greek & English)
Triquinuela (Spanish & English)
Al Sharek (Arabic & English)
Ira Hal Seidenstein
Dulaang Bayan-Sydney (Tagalog, Spanish & English)
Kappuccino Kompany
Actovivo (Spanish & English subtitles)
Balai Ensemble (Cantonese, Tagalog, Indonesian & English)
Intransitheatre (English, Spanish & Italian)
Frederick Miragliotta
TAQA Theatre (Arabic & English)
Monkey On Your Back (Spanish, German & English)

Four play readings at the NSW Writers Centre included:

*In Search of Rita: A Traveller in Transit* by Assad Abdi

*The Politics of Belly Dancing* by Paula Abood

1993

*International Popular Theatre Exchange*
Sydney
Including:

*Blood Orange* by Death Defying Theatre

*The Man Who Lost His Shadow* by VETO Theatre (Saleh Saqqaf)

1994

Death Defying Theatre Ltd (now Urban Theatre Projects)

*Eye of the Law*

Included schools tours and a season at Performance Space.

1994

SAFA’s

*The Politics of Belly Dancing: a Choreopoem*

Written by Paula Abood
Directed by Jane Packham, Paula Abood

Produced at The Performance Space, Redfern, September 1994 and at The National Festival of Australian Theatre, Canberra, October 1994

Choreographer/performer:
Isabel Sukkar

Performers:
Alissar (Eliza) Chidiac
Alissar Gazal
Maha Hindi
Elizabeth Jabour

Designer:
Martha Jabour

Sound design:
Nadya Stani

1994

*In Search of Rita: a traveller in transit*

Written by Assad Abdi in 1991

Produced at Sidetrack Theatre
Directed by Don Mamouney

Script archived

Performed by:
Maha Hindi
Joel Markham
Ari Ehrlich
Tony Helou
Deborah Pollard

1994

*Multicultural Theatre Alliance*

*Lines of Descent*

Performance Masterclasses 1994

Ritual Workshops 1994

‘The Origins of Performance Practice’
Including:

*Hakawati* (Arabic) Storytelling, with Saleh Saqqaf
Middle Eastern Dance, with Najet El Shaikh

1995
March Play Readings
Multicultural Theatre Alliance

Including:

Madness by Paula Abood

Freda by Rose Nakad

1996

TAQA Theatre

Writing with the Hip

‘Presented in 1996 as part of Carnivale, following a developmental period and presentation that began in 1993. Writing With The Hip took the movement and phonetics of Arabic calligraphy as its starting point, and created a performance that examined the artists’ individual relationships to the Arabic language. The Sydney Morning Herald called it ‘an exciting and fascinating insight into a space of cultural collision... Challenging, but kind of wonderful.’

Belvoir Street Theatre, 6–15 September, 1996

Written and devised by TAQA Theatre with additional texts by Alissar (Eliza) Chidiac

Cast and Crew:
Alissar Gazal – Performer
Elizabeth Jabour – Performer
Saleh Saqqaf – Performer
Barry Gamba – Dramaturg
Khaled Sabsabi – Original Score / Sound Design
Ismail Abdi – Percussion & Vocal Arrangements
Fiona Munro – Choreographer
Martha Jabour & Sarah Goffman – Set Design

1999

TAQA Theatre

Gibran Khalil Gibran

February 1999: on site performance production in the burned-out ruins of St Patrick’s Cathedral, Parramatta.

Original text by:
Alissar Chidiac
Alissar Gazal
Elizabeth Jabour
Paula Abood

Text arrangement:
Paula Abood

Directors:
Barry Gamba
Paula Abood

Dramaturg:
Barry Gamba

Performers:
Alissar Chidiac
Alissar Gazal
Ismail Abdi
Elizabeth Jabour

Voice:
Saleh Saqqaf

Sound Artist:
Khaled Sabsabi

Administrator / Publicist:
Mouna Zaylah

Production Manager:
Karl Johnson  

**Queer Arab performance work**

*Club Arak*

*Middle Eastern Flavoured Dance For Queers of All Colour: Prepare to Sweat*

The earlier years of the relatively underground, Queer Arab dance parties (over the last decade in Sydney) included innovative performances that were creatively developed for one-off shows at Club Arak. The stage would be cleared around midnight to captivate a massive audience – it would often be a cutting-edge political/cultural/sensual ten-minute piece, performed in-between sets of high-energy dance music.

*Individual Queer Arab performance artists*

Developed radical performance pieces for various Sydney club venues

**2005 – 2010**

*Auburn Poets and Writers Group*

Auburn Community Development Network

Performance events for Sydney Writers’ Festivals (SWF):

*Writing on Gravestones*

SWF 2006

Contemporary Iraqi Poetry of four poets in Arabic and English

*Ruminations*

SWF 2007

A performance in Farsi, Dari, Turkish, Arabic and English of the poetry of Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi

*Exploring Multilingual Spaces*

SWF 2008

Including the launch of self-publication of Auburn Letters

*Zalzala: Inner Quakes and After Shocks*

SWF 2010

APWG goes under the skin of culture shock.
Anke MacLean

'WE BEGIN WITH A CIRCLE' – A REFLECTION ON THE IMAGE THEATRE WORKSHOP AT THE 7ARAKAT CONFERENCE

I. The Winding of the Mainspring

We begin with a circle in the round -
Each figure like the minute marks
On a clock-face.

I am late,
And the circle shifts, kindly
Makes room for me
In the way a clock-face
May not.

We begin with a circle
And are directed to use the middle distance
To twist our inner eyes
To look behind ourselves,
Winding some intrinsic mainspring in our-selves
Further and further
Into the past or…
Into limitations or…
Into an abyss that might
Gazes back into us with dilating pupils

We play games of eyes-tight-shut
And shuffling-steps
Muffled giggles willingly
Find echoes in our
Self-imposed darkness –
For that is the game.
We allow and disallow
Each other experiences.

‘Will they be big or small?’ whispers choice,
Beginning a tick – ticking in the background.

We shape our bodies
And they are read
And responded to
To be read anew.

We make offers,
We play within a sea of generosity.
What we allow and what we choose is valid.

I perch on the second-hand,
Working fast,
Mindful, perhaps,
Of what has been learnt
Little conscious thought,
No pauses,
Spinning through barriers
And much to say,
Racing against time.

II. The Balance Wheel

And, lastly, holding hands,
We make a promise
To remake the circle
Once more.

Once it is all over
We promise
To remake the circle

III. The Oscillation

The doors open and the circle widens,
Embraces…

And everything so far leads
To a single, imperfect reflection
Caught in Amber

Of a struggle I witness daily between
Bodies, minds, choices, limitations and circumstance
They stand unattached, disconnected
Lost within a system built only for them
barely alongside them
and never with them.

In my mind I know they scream in languages
We read without thought
But do not listen to.

‘Will they understand’ whispers doubt,
adding to the tick-ticking a deeper timbre,
a heart beat questioning itself.

I ask myself why I chose some of the minute marks
But not all in this living illustration,
Does it matter?
Does it count?
Does a clock-work know that only
Some of its time is
Significant today?
Does it care?

And yet, and yet…
Here, in this place,
with these collective senses,
this image – of the lost,
the listless, the barely breathing

Are read…
Are listened to…
Are responded to…

As the breath
Of five women chosen
Almost blindly
In the need to tell and understand,
While their muscles, tensions,
Flesh and blood
Resist and struggle
To keep and hold
It is that effort
That gives the image value
That echoes, mimics experiences in me…

IV. The Balance Spring

Multiple voices are filled with generosity,
They delicately gift me, perhaps us, perhaps all with:
  questions,
  observations,
  attention,
  laughter and
  thoughtful play

Listening, observing, playful voices
  Explain, examine, suggest that the five figures are:

  Hope, the clown or
  Someone grieving, delivering bad news or
  Pure objectivity as helper, carer
  An elderly person in a wheelchair or
  A warning of an army coming over the hill

But no, they were three stages
Of the same person
But no, there were four, five, six different stories to be told of each of the five…

The struggle is in the lack of connections,
  the loss of eye contact
  the ‘not listening’
  ‘not touching’
  the negative spaces in it…

The question is asked:
Who is this One?
  She wants everything.
    She wants inclusivity and she wants art and she wants love and she
    wants action and she…
  She has ideals and is naïve…
  She is the clown,
    she is the government,
    she is the government clown,
she is the artist,
she has offers,
    ideas,
    is a good person,
    is too open,
    too ready,
she doesn’t see the full picture…

She has her back to it…
She can’t know.

Who is Two?
She is burdened, carrying weight,
She is in exile,
She seeks asylum,
She turns her back to show what she really feels,
She is hiding from the past, hiding identity,
She is in-dwelling, doesn’t fit into what is around her,
She knows shame,
She is ashamed.

Who is Three?
She is the ‘good daughter’,
    probably the first born, not the last
    I know for I am middle-born.
She is reading the paper.
She is pushing the chair.
She cares.
She doesn’t care.
She does care
She is doing a job
To do the job she needs not to care but to do.
She is taking her to a home.
She is the guard.
She is on guard.
She is guarded.

Who is Four?
She is the mother, the grandmother, she is elderly, she is old.
She is loved.
She is not loved.
She has cerebral palsy.
She has had a stroke.
She is a victim.
But no, she is a dance teacher.
In fact, she is the dance teacher,
but she is a bit older
and all of the others are dancers,
dancing her dance,
she is saying that she can
show you the hands,
but her feet hurt,
so she is going to sit down for a bit…
but she is still teaching
the dance that everyone else is
dancing because
it is a good dance…

Who is Five?
She is pointing out,
looking out,
a check point,
a warning,
stay away.
She is the guard,
She is a boy,
she is outward looking,
she sees the future.

And lastly – revelation, then transformation…

Each actor is each permitted to speak.

'I want everything.'
'I want to slap her.'
'I want to relax. I want to be free.'
'I want to do the right thing.'
'I want to go back to before.'

And then they may take one step and…

In that moment of action,
In one move of the second hand
In one breath
My breath is stopped as:
The scene explodes with potential action
Comes to glorious life
Is filled with the new choices
Of characters imbued by the generous narrative
Tendered so openly before
And I am allowed to dream of new possibilities
    new insights,
    fresh oscillations.

One – I have more to give, I have more. Can’t you see?
Two – Watch out! I warned you! This must be shared!
Three – I’m going and will you be ok?
Four – See? My hands. See me healing!
Five – Let me out, let us be free!

I know
I will ache when I go back
To my little group of damaged minds
And whole hearts tomorrow.

Perhaps that ache, that growing-pain
Will be the fuel I need to travel us
A little further, to keep time
With minutes and hours
To share them with each other
May be enough.

    And yet,
    and yet…

V. Winding Down

We never remade the circle…
We never came together again
Held hands again.
We never remade the circle
Again

    Please,
    May we remake the circle?
    We made a promise.
    Please?

I’d like to say thank you.
ANKE MACLEAN is an artist, storyteller and educator, born in Munich, Germany and grew up in Adelaide, Australia. Her degrees in Arts and Education are from the University of Adelaide. She is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Community Cultural Development at the Victorian College of Arts. Until recently Anke was based in regional Queensland. While in Mackay, Anke worked for the multi-arts company ‘Crossroad Arts’, where she participated in the creative development of projects, performed in various productions, such as *Street of Teapots*, *redbag*, *Kleine Kinder*, composed music as a teaching artist for public performances in Sarina and Moranbah; facilitated young emerging artists through Starburst (Youth Arts Queensland) and ran children’s holiday projects for and with a variety of communities, including Children of Deaf Adults (CODA). She received the 2010 Reeves Staff Recognition Award for her work as the ‘Closing the Gap’ teacher at Beaconsfield State School, where she designed research models, developed performance events to celebrate and welcome diverse communities, and facilitated Drumbeat (an accredited Holyoakes program). While in Melbourne, Anke has been involved in the Melbourne Fringe Festival 2011, Mudfest 2011, and has recently worked as a storyteller in the Merlynton Diverse Voices Festival, 2012.
7arakat Conference:
Special Thanks

The editors would like to thank Prof. Tim Murray - Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Alex John, Louise McFarland, Michael Wills, Alix Austin, Rebecca Norris, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University. Thank you also to Loretta Calverley, Kim Baston, and the Theatre and Drama Program at La Trobe. Our gratitude is also extended to Prof. Norie Neumark, Hugh Davies, Natalie Pirotta, Stephen Abblittt, and the Centre for Creative Arts. A very special thanks to Ian Armet, Margaret Purdam, Jess Baker, and the Media Centre, La Trobe University.

Thank you also to Chief Executive Officer Jill Morgan, Claudia Escobar, Deshani Wickremasinghe, Sebastian Avila Castro, Anthony Rodriguez Jiménez, and Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV). We are also indebted to Nasser Mashni, Sonja Karkar and Australians for Palestine.

The editors would also like to extend our special thanks to Ambassador Izzat Abdulhadi – Head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, for all his efforts and support.

Special thanks also to key individuals for their support including: Polash Larson, Nicole Beyer, Elin Webb, Nicholas Rowe, Michael Balfour, Shahin Shafaei, Alissar Chidiac, Samah Sabawi, and Steve Payne.

Special Thanks to Siew-Peng Condon, Nicholas Cowley, Owen Dalton, and Wayne Hannan for organisational assistance and support.

Finally, we extend a very heart-felt gratitude to the invited Palestinian Speakers: Dr. Abdelfattah Abusrour, Iman Aoun, Samer Al-Saber, Petra Barghouthi.

Thank you to our Sponsors: Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV), the Centre for Creative Arts at La Trobe University, the Diversity in Australian Theatre Alliance (DATA), Australians for Palestine (AFP), and the Australian Government through the Council for Australian-Arab Relations (CAAR). Through support of the 7arakat Project, the conference is also assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.
La Trobe University City Campus
215 Franklin Street, Melbourne

Conference Convenor
Dr. Rand T. Hazou
Theatre and Drama Program, La Trobe University,
Bundoora Campus, Victoria 3086
T +61 3 9479 2340
M +61 0407 042 552
F +61 3 9479 3037
E r.hazou@latrobe.edu.au

Conference Information
Officer and Emergency Contact
Dr. Hannah Schürholz
English Program, La Trobe University,
Bundoora Campus, Victoria 3086
M +61 0415 314 226
E h.schurholz@latrobe.edu.au

La Trobe City Campus Contact and Security
215 Franklin Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000
T +61 3 9285 5100

Sponsors
The conference is supported by Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV), the Centre for Creative Arts at La Trobe University, the Diversity in Australian Theatre Alliance (DATA), Australians for Palestine (AFP), and the Australian Government through the Council for Australian-Arab Relations (CAAR). Through support of the 7arakat Project, the conference is also assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Conference E-Proceedings publication is indebted to the support of the Centre for Creative Arts and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University.