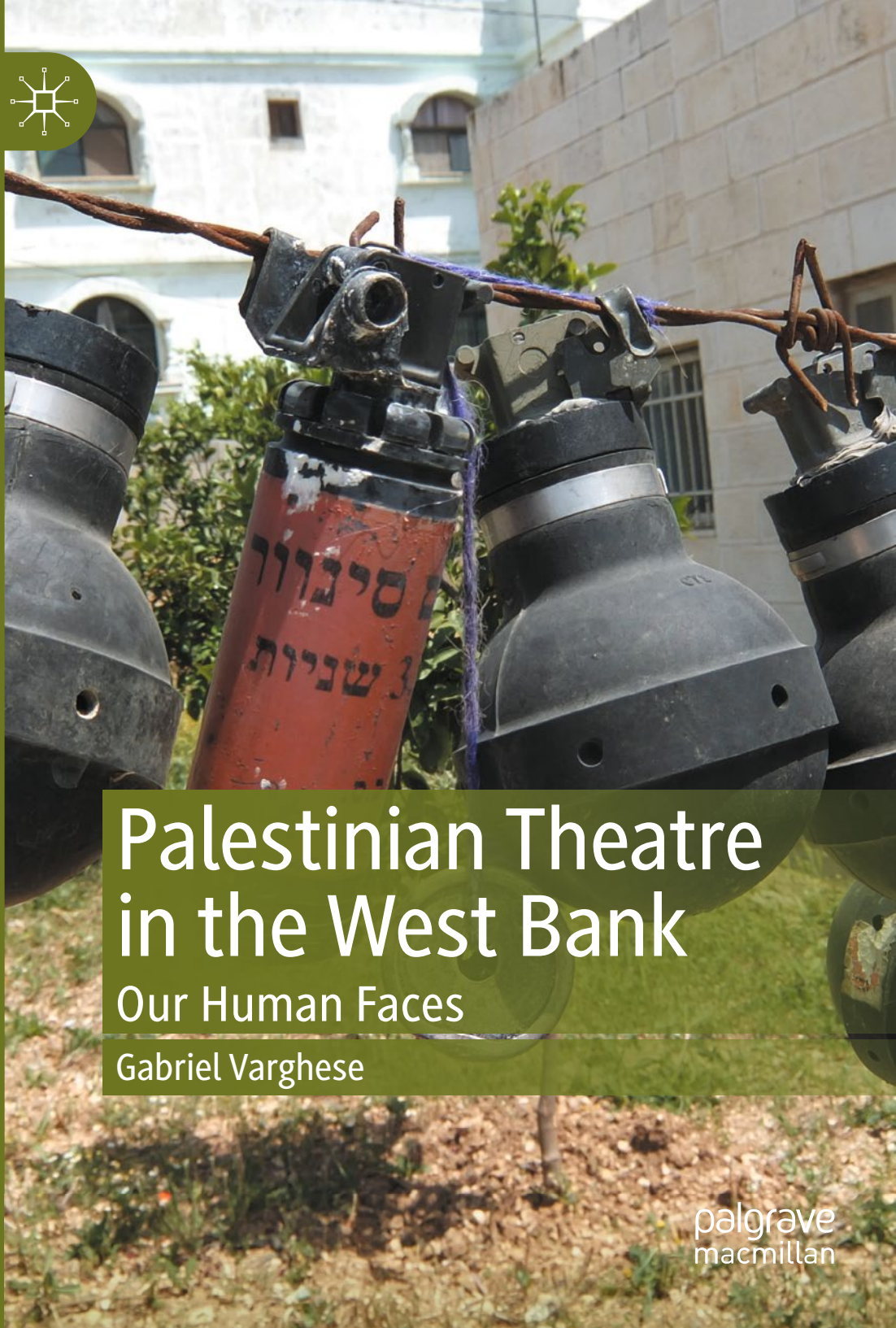

Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank

Our Human Faces

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The Kenyon Institute (Council for
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East Jerusalem, Palestine, State of

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Cover illustration: Israeli tear gas and pepper spray canisters found in a garden in the village of Nabi Saleh. Israeli occupation forces regularly launch these, and stun grenades, at unarmed, peaceful protestors. © Gabriel Varghese, 2013.

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for *Karenza, my first teacher,*
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It takes a village to produce a book. All shortcomings, though, are my own.

Contents

About the Author

Gabriel Varghese is an associate research fellow at the Kenyon Institute (Council for British Research in the Levant) in East Jerusalem. His research engages with anti-/post-/de-colonial theatre, performance and literature, and the questions they raise about social movements, dramaturgies of urban life, and regimes of gender, sexuality and race. He is also a playwright, theatre director, and co-artistic director of Sandpit Arts, an award-winning platform for producing film, music, and performance events.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

From 4 to 9 April 2016, over thirteen hundred people converged on the Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank. They arrived from across the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel, and as far afield as Europe and the United States. Most, if not all, had travelled for hours, taking long and tortuous routes across Palestine in order to cross Israeli-imposed checkpoints and avoid road closures. Despite these conditions, however, they had arrived to celebrate the tenth anniversary of The Freedom Theatre, a five-day festival of theatre, dance and circus performances, acting workshops, a visual arts exhibition, film screenings, music and poetry performances, and stand-up comedy. As well as reprising one of its own productions, the theatre invited other Palestinian companies and individual performers to present their own works. Parallel to these events, the theatre also organized a 'forum on cultural resistance,' the first of its kind to be held anywhere in Palestine.[1] Whereas performances took place either in the theatre or the public square, forum sessions were spread out between the community centre, the women's centre and the popular committee building (all in the refugee camp). Forum lectures ranged from 'women, theatre and resistance' and 'art under occupation' to 'culture confronting occupation' and the cultural boycott model. These lectures were followed by small group discussions during which participants could chew over the issues and ideas raised by the speakers and then feed their responses back to the forum. The participants came from a broad range of backgrounds. As well as the general public,

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some of them were local politicians and community workers; others were academics, political activists, and performers and actors. Yet, despite their diverse backgrounds and political positions, all of the participants agreed on one thing: the centrality of Palestinian cultural works, and theatre specifically, in resisting Israeli settler-colonialism.

For Western readers, it might seem bizarre that a theatre company would spearhead public discussions on resistance of any kind let alone resistance to the Israeli state. After all, much theatre programming in London, Berlin or New York, for example, has precious little to do with mobilizing audiences along political lines. In fact, argues Christopher Balme, as Western theatres have transitioned over the last few centuries from places of unruly gatherings to sites of art, entertainment and quiet contemplation, they have lost their 'publicness': the theatres Western audiences usually attend are essentially private spaces (Balme 2014, 3). In contrast, though, it is not uncommon to hear Palestinian theatre-makers argue that *their* theatres are not just 'public' spaces but, more importantly, they play a crucial role in the 'public sphere' itself. In other words, Palestinian theatre is not, simply, that which comments on the political affairs of the day. Rather, they insist, Palestinian theatre plays an active part in the broader project of Palestinian national liberation by contesting Zionist discourse, spotlighting Israeli state practices and reclaiming the very narrative on Palestine itself.

Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank attempts to unpack that claim. On the one hand, it narrates a history of Palestinian theatre in the West Bank since the first intifada (1987–93) to the present day in order to discuss the ways in which theatre-makers resist ongoing processes of colonial abjection. On the other hand, it argues for the important role Palestinian theatre and theatre-makers play in the formation of what I call an abject counterpublic. I shall explain what I mean by these terms in the relevant sections of this chapter, but the point here is that, throughout this book, I have been interested in the range of tactics theatre-makers use to 'talk back' to and bypass dominant power relations which direct or obstruct what is produced on the ground. What tactics, I ask, do theatre-makers use to disrupt, subvert and bypass the Zionist public sphere? What counter-discourse emerges from this site? How is such a counter-discourse articulated in performance spaces? And how does theatre, in the logistical sense, work against a dominant discourse of erasure as well as continue to operate under conditions of colonialism and occupation? The historical development of Palestinian theatre presents us with an account of abjection

both as a lived social process and as a political praxis by which theatre-makers, like other Palestinians, are subject to Israeli control but through which they contest, resist and reconfigure their abject subjectification. In such ways, this book argues, Palestinian theatre has played an integral role in the formation of an abject counterpublic, a physical and performative space in which Zionism and its effects come face to face with their discontents.

Abject Subjects

In her book *Revolting Subjects*, Imogen Tyler develops a theory of abjection as a lived social process embodying practices of power, subjugation and resistance in contemporary Britain (Tyler 2013, 4). Central to her thesis is the figure of the 'revolting subject' who is constituted in material and discursive practices as the social and political 'abject.' According to Tyler, social abjection refers to the condition in which certain subjects are excluded from society as 'human waste' (ibid., 27) and 'leech-like bodies' (ibid., 46) that both rob the state of its vital resources and infect the national body. Her theory identifies 'a constellation of embodied practices' (ibid.) that is implemented in order to achieve a 'disgust consensus' (ibid., 23) enabling the scapegoating of those constituted as 'national abjects' (ibid., 9). In addition, the manipulation of knowledge and media representations of such groups—for example, white, working-class, 'anti-social' youths (or 'chavs'), im-/migrants and asylum seekers (especially Muslims), Gypsies and Travellers, the 2011 rioters, and disability activists (Tyler's case studies)—provide the justificatory logic needed by the state to manufacture consensus and consent for a range of pernicious and punitive measures for the sake of what it identifies as the nation's hygiene (ibid., 38).

Underpinning Tyler's theory is her compelling problematization of Julia Kristeva's (1982) notion of abjection, which she extends (via Georges Bataille, Frantz Fanon, Jacques Rancière and Judith Butler) in order to argue that 'abjection is […] a mechanism of governance through aversion, which in Butler's terms might be *queered* through alternative citational practices' (Tyler 2013, 37, original emphasis). The first part of Tyler's proposition, that abjection is 'a mechanism of governance,' is familiar ground for anyone aware of the classed and racialized aversion and disgust that manifest in, for example, the then French president Nicolas Sarkozy's vow to use a Karcher, a high-pressure waterblast used to peel away

encrusted dirt, to cleanse the Parisian ghettos of *racailles* (variously translated as scum and thugs) during the French riots of 2005, or the '"broom-army" recruits' (ibid., 40) wearing T-shirts declaring that 'looters are scum' (ibid., 181) during the London riots of 2011.

However, it is the second part of Tyler's proposition, 'through aversion,' namely the idea of the revolting subject, that demonstrates the double meaning in her terms. Tyler's theory of social abjection, then, is about the revolt (or resistance) of those subjects whom the state constitutes and marginalizes as revolting (disgusting). By calling attention to the resistance emerging at these sites of abjection, Tyler reminds us of their limitations but also of their radical potential. At such sites, Tyler argues, national abjects draw upon their abject status in order to performatively assert a 'disidentification' with it whilst simultaneously embodying and introducing into public discourse alternative forms of 'commoning' (Tyler 2013, 173, 124). Yet, she demonstrates the limitations of such practices owing to the persistence of consensus. Thus, for example, despite the London riots being an expression of outrage against inequality and police racism and brutality, their aesthetic representation in the media served as evidence of the political consensus. In other words, 'the rioters became the abjects they had been told they were' (ibid., 204).

Tyler's theory of abjection also takes into consideration colonial and post-colonial practices. Following Anne McClintock (1995) and Frantz Fanon ([1961] 2001, [1952] 2008), she argues that 'abjection is useful for mapping the mechanisms of imperialist power relations' (Tyler 2013, 35). For McClintock, abjection is both a characteristic of colonized peoples and the boundary zones 'on the threshold of body and body politic' to which they were excluded (McClintock 1995, 72). McClintock also draws attention to how abjection manifests as both spatialized and embodied processes of subjectification, distinct and yet interdependent. These processes, she argues, are revealed in 'abject zones' (such as the occupied Palestinian territory), 'agents of abjection' (such as Israeli soldiers and border police), 'abjected groups' (such as Palestinians themselves), and 'political processes of abjection' (such as the mass removal of Palestinians during the Nakba and following the War of 1967) (ibid.).[2]

For Tyler, Fanon's writing offers both a diagnostic of abjection and also a methodology for resisting abjectionality. In *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 2008), Fanon's analysis of the psychological effects of racism on the colonial abject rests upon his central argument that processes of racialization have played a fundamental role in the dialectical relationship

between colonizer and colonized. According to Fanon, the 'lived experience' of someone constituted as 'black' is always mediated by a 'white' other. Put differently, there is no black essence because the 'Negro experience is not a whole, for there is not merely *one* Negro, there are *Negroes*' (Fanon 2008, 104, original emphases).[3] As a *lived* experience, Fanon argues, blackness is defined in situational and dialectical terms always at the behest of the white colonizer. Furthermore, since 'every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society' (ibid., 82) and '[t]he black man has no ontological basis in the face of the white man' (ibid., 83), those so constituted as 'black' are excluded from 'the self-other dynamics of subjectivity itself' which 'remains the prerogative of the white man' (Tyler 2013, 42).

We must, of course, be careful when applying the term abjection to Fanon because it is not one he used. However, his account of racism shares some commonalities with Julia Kristeva's discussion of abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva asserts that abjection is a mechanism by which those troubling and reprehensible aspects of self are expelled. To borrow Judith Butler's phrase, this self-constituting 'operation of repulsion' (Butler 1990, 170) induces hatred, disgust and horror of the other, the abject, but it also makes the other worthy of these reflex actions. Abjection, as such, is a border anxiety. It is the process by which the borders between self and other are created. The abject is that which the self attempts to expel but what continually 'hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution' (Gross 1990, 87). In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler demonstrates how abjection functions to produce zones of social life that are 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable' by the self but are yet 'densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject' (Butler 1993, 3). Such zones are inhabited by abject bodies who are marked as unfamiliar, as illegible, and yet their function is to circumscribe the domain of those citizens who do qualify as full subjects. As Butler writes:

> […] the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an 'expulsion' followed by a 'repulsion' that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race/sexuality axes of differentiation […] What constitutes through division the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control. (Butler 1990, 170)

Fanon asserts that colonial racism operates in a similar way. 'In Europe,' he argues, 'whether concretely or symbolically, the black man stands for the bad side of the [white man's] character' (Fanon 2008, 146). In other words, what the colonizer perceives as undesirable in himself is not simply externalized but actually transferred onto the colonized other. It is through this process of racialization and othering that 'white' and 'black' are constructed as mutually exclusive even though their constitution is relative to one another. What is expelled from the 'white' self—for example, notions of inferiority, laziness, stupidity, violence, effeminacy—are the impurities that would threaten its familiarity, coherence and stability, its privileged ability to act and move freely in 'inhabitable' space. The racialized colonial abject functions to define the boundary between the 'white' self and its 'black' other, between civilization and barbarism. This antagonism between self and other is determined by a categorical refusal to share social space.[4]

Fanon follows his diagnostic of colonial racism and processes of racialization with *Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 2001), written during Algeria's seven-year war of independence against France, in which he offers an account of resistance and political agency in sites of colonial abjection. Fanon's description of this 'Manicheistic world,' in which the colonizer 'makes history and is conscious of making it' and the 'native learns […] to stay in his place' (Fanon 2001, 40), asserts a form of abjection that completely negates the humanity of colonized people. The native, 'always presumed guilty' (ibid., 41), is simply regarded as waste to be cleared up. Yet, despite their status as colonial abjects, such populations occupy a central position in the political discourse because there is always antagonism and tension between the colonized subject's interpellation as abject and the fact that they continue to experience themselves as human nonetheless. This, Fanon argues, leads to existential reflection and, eventually, resistance. He says:

> […] the native's guilt is never a guilt he accepts; it is rather a kind of curse, a sort of sword of Damocles, for, in his innermost spirit, the native admits no accusation. He is overpowered but not tamed; he is treated as an inferior but he is not convinced of his inferiority. He is patiently waiting until the settler is off his guard to fly at him. The native's muscles are always tensed. You can't say that he is terrorized, or even apprehensive. He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of the hunter. (Fanon 2001, 41)

In similar ways, the status of Palestinians in the Zionist imaginary places them on the geographic and discursive border of Israeli society as colonized bodies whose illegibility must be maintained. To paraphrase Fanon (2008, 82–83), not only must the Palestinian be 'Palestinian,' he or she must be 'Palestinian' in relation to the Israeli Jew.[5] On the one hand, this process allows the state to generate the consensus and consent required to continue its discriminatory practices against Palestinians within its own territory, to carry out its settler-colonial practices in the West Bank, and to maintain Gaza as an open-air prison. On the other hand, this national abject is also the spectre against whom the state defines itself and its Jewish subjects. Abjection, thus, signifies the tension between exclusion and inclusion at the heart of Israeli politics. The abject/other is always present but never as a human being: physically, on the boundaries of Israeli-Jewish society, 'the threshold of body and body politic' (McClintock 1995, 72); and, politically, at its centre, as a nuisance or an infection to be controlled. Yet, as a site of resistance, abjection reveals that the state and its abjects are not stable but in continuous process, making and unmaking the borders of either.

The long-term aspiration of the Zionist project was the establishment of a Jewish state in historic Palestine and the demographic shifts required to assure Jewish dominance in the land. Indeed, as Nur Masalha (2011, 2, 19–86) has shown, early Zionist thinkers were not averse to using the word 'colonization' (in Hebrew, *hityashvut*) to describe their project, a term that was later changed to the more neutral-sounding term 'transfer' (*ha'avarah*) (ibid., 28).[6] In the years following the establishment of Israel in 1948, such aspirations manifested in the expulsion of Palestinians, state confiscation of their properties and the introduction of laws preventing their return. Further, from 1948 to 1966, Israel imposed a military regime over its own Palestinian citizenry. After the War of 1967, this transmuted into a civil system that continues to privilege Jews over Palestinians. Following the war, Israel's colonial ambitions were realized in the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the annexation of East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights (from Syria) and the Sinai (from Egypt).

In addition to these mechanisms of control, Palestinians' status as abjects is further legalized through a complex system of inclusions and exclusions depending on where they live. These experiences are also predicated upon their legal status as citizens of Israel, as 'permanent residents' of East Jerusalem, or as residents of the West Bank or Gaza where even the possession of a Palestinian passport does not confer citizenship of

'Palestine' let alone of Israel.[7] Emblematic of their abject status, Israel mandates different coloured identity cards to Palestinians living in these four sites—contrasted with the single identity card issued to Israeli Jews. As Helga Tawil-Souri (2011) points out, the materiality of these identity cards plays a crucial role in ordering social and political relationships between the Israeli subject/self and the Palestinian abject/other, as well as in denoting the points at which Palestinians are included in and excluded from the Israeli state. It is not, simply, that the Zionist worldview is held together by notions of Jewish supremacy in the 'land of Israel'; more specifically, Zionism's driving force since its earliest days has been anti-Palestinian solidarity: the desire to create a Jewish state encompassing a land cleansed of its Palestinian population. Yet, despite these realities, Israel continues to characterize itself as the 'only democracy in the Middle East.'

Seven decades after the establishment of Israel in 1948, and just over two decades after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, abjection continues to be the abiding feature of Palestinian life in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Not only do Palestinians refer to the events of 1948—the establishment of Israel; the subsequent expulsion of roughly half the Palestinian population from their homes; and the destruction and Judaization/de-Palestinization of hundreds of Palestinian villages during the 1948–49 War—as the Nakba, or 'catastrophe,' they also describe their present conditions of life under Israeli settler-colonialism as a continuation of these events. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Palestinians to insist that the Nakba is still happening. In other words, the Nakba is not simply a catastrophic event located in the distant past or in the collective memory of Palestinians. Rather, as Joseph Massad explains, it is 'pulsating with life and coursing through history by piling up more calamities on the Palestinian people' (Massad 2008).[8] Furthermore, he argues, the Nakba is an ongoing process of politicide: it is 'decidedly a history of the present' (ibid.).[9]

For Palestinians, four factors contribute to their status as colonial abjects. First, there is Zionism's ideological hegemony over the very discourse on Palestine and Palestinians, expressed in the various ways in which Israel attempts to control, obstruct and impede cultural significations of Palestinian existence, their connections to the land, and their national consciousness and aspirations. This is demonstrated by, for example, the bombing of Gaza's Said al-Mishal Establishment for Culture and Science in August 2018, one of the few venues in the besieged territory

housing performance and educational facilities for Palestinian dance, music and theatre. Second, there is Israel's political, military and security apparatus which has succeeded by various means in asserting its dominance over every aspect of Palestinian life not simply in the architecture of Israel's settler-colonial occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem—for example, the Separation Barrier (or 'apartheid wall'); the 127 government-sanctioned settlements, and the approximately 100 illegal outposts, with a collective population of almost 600,000 Israeli settlers; the extensive system of checkpoints, roadblocks and closures; Israeli surveillance strategies; and so on—but also in its highly mechanized and yet medieval blockade of Gaza, now in its thirteenth year, its annexation and Judaization/de-Palestinization of East Jerusalem, and the extensive array of laws specifically discriminating against Palestinian citizens of Israel.[10] Third, there is the increasing redundancy of the Palestinian Authority, which is widely perceived to be little more than Israel's sub-contractor in those areas of the West Bank still under its control, a reputation further tarnished by accusations of corruption, cronyism and nepotism (Amrov and Tartir 2014). Fourth, Palestine's economic dependence on foreign aid within a neoliberal development paradigm, which is now a characteristic of the years following the Oslo Accords, has contributed to both its de-development, or accelerated economic stagnation and dependence on aid, and the de-politicization and fragmentation of social formations.[11]

The most pernicious and pervading of these factors is the nexus between Zionist discourse and Israeli state practices. The former attempts to erase Palestinian presence on the land and, indeed, from history—encapsulated in the Zionist slogan, 'a land without a people [i.e. Palestine] for a people without a land [i.e. the Jews]' (Said 1980, 9; Khalidi 2010, 101; Masalha 1997). Meanwhile, the latter legitimates the racism at the core of Israel's foundation, and its application in all areas of Palestinian life: the economic, the political, and the cultural. As the film scholar Haim Bresheeth argues, not only does the Zionist narrative assert its authority over the land and the people but 'it also controls the story, the point of view, and the meta-narrative of *truth* and *memory*' (Bresheeth 2007, 165, original emphases). Furthermore, he argues, the Zionist narrative on Palestine is, fundamentally, one of 'erasure, denial, and active silencing' (ibid., 179).

Yet, Zionism's inflexible narrative of erasure is the very thing that has given Palestinian cultural works their grounding logic. This is why, according to anthropologist Ted Swedenburg, Palestinians in general, and not just politicians, artists and intellectuals, feel the urgent need to 'carefully

protect the memory of those symbols' (Swedenburg 1989, 268). Thus, any articulation of Palestinian culture, from weddings to Nakba Day commemorations, is also a counter-hegemonic act because it attempts to unravel Israel's foundational myth that Palestinians simply do not exist. For Palestinians, Edward Said argued in an interview with the journalist David Barsamian, their status as an 'invisible people' whose 'history has been occluded' means that even the most private expressions of their cultural identity carry heavy political burdens: 'aesthetics and politics are intertwined' (Said and Barsamian 2003, 20, 164).

Borders and Counterpublics

As a border-making process, abjection creates and marks the boundary between the national subject/self and the national abject/other. Typified by anxiety arising from the geographic and discursive proximity between subject and abject, this boundary delimits zones of social life as either liveable (by the national subject/self) or unliveable (by the national abject/other). Not only are national abjects perceived to be loitering around the far side of this border, but there is always the threat of their seeping back into the national body. Border anxiety, then, also arises from its being porous; the abject is neither out of sight nor out of mind.

This formulation of abjection as a border anxiety is fundamental to understanding how Zionist discourse and Israeli state practices, having expelled Palestinians to 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life, prevent their re-entry to the Zionist public sphere *as human beings*. Abjection is a process by which national others are marked as unfamiliar—as bodies that *do not* matter, to reverse the title of Butler's book—because they embody the opposite of that which the national subject considers itself to be. The Palestinian body is rendered unfamiliar in Zionist discourse because it is positioned as both a security and a demographic threat. As such, it is made to invoke horror, disgust and loathing in the Israeli national body which reactions then provide justification for an array of Israeli state practices aimed at disciplining and relegating the Palestinian body to the other side of the border dividing human from 'non-human.'

We can begin to understand how Zionism constructs the Palestinian body by returning to Fanon's concept of epidermalization. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon utilizes this pathological metaphor to characterize colonial racism as both perceptual and psychical (Fanon 2008, 4). Epidermalization is vital for understanding how the body of the racialized

abject/other is corporealized, with skin colour as a referent to racial difference and inferiority. For Fanon, epidermalization is the nexus between the 'historico-racial schema' (ibid., 84), the black subject's experiences of anti-black racism and its interpellating discourses, and the 'racial epidermal schema' (ibid., 84), the immediate manifest intelligibility and, yet, unfamiliarity of blackness through skin colour.

Epidermalization is important here as a racial lens because it clarifies the relationship between Palestinian abjection/othering and their subjectification. Palestinians cease to exist as human beings but, rather, they function as referents to violence and terrorism. In the colonial schema, Palestinians are an invented people whose collective memory and history solidify their bodily abjection. Any act of resistance on their part is put down as a threat to the integrity and universality of the Israeli national subject/self, and further instrumentalized in the processes of abjection that Palestinians have been resisting in the first place. The Palestinian body, thus rendered unfamiliar and dangerous, bears this abjection on the skin. Its discursive and aesthetic representations in the Zionist imaginary are central to the 'racial epidermal schema' by which it is interpellated as simultaneously intelligible and unfamiliar.

Such an interpellation can be seen in a video Israeli cabinet minister Naftali Bennett published on *YouTube* in early 2015 entitled 'Israel—fighting for your freedom.'[12] At the time the video was posted, Bennett was the leader of the right-wing religious Jewish Home party, and the minister for education, diaspora affairs, the economy, and religious services. He is Israel's current minister for defence. The video he uploaded is important not only because it was created by a government minister, but also because it demonstrates how the Israeli state implements processes of abjection and bordering. Set against a rousing crescendo of violins, the video contains all the elements of a studied performance: setting, gesture, costume, script and audience. As a predictable exercise in Israeli 'public diplomacy,' or *hasbara*, its affective properties lie in its intention to elicit empathy and support for Israel from a global audience.[13]

As the video opens, we see Bennett standing, facing the camera, on a rocky hill surrounded by greenery for miles around. On a hilltop in the distance behind him, neatly arranged houses stare down into the valley below. We are told this hill is located in 'Judea and Samaria' which, Bennett acknowledges as an aside, 'many call the West Bank.' This remark is offered parenthetically because it threatens the tidiness of the performance. Yet, it is needed for clarity. A viewer who is familiar with this set-

ting, and the ways in which the name 'Judea and Samaria' is used in Israeli public discourse to Judaize/de-Palestinize the West Bank, will know that the houses are an illegal settlement built on land confiscated from Palestinians. Such specificity, for Bennett, is not more important than the message that follows. Pointing behind him into the distance, he tells us that we are 'just nine miles' from the coastal city of Tel Aviv. To his left, he says, there is Hezbollah. Ahead of him, he says, pointing at the camera, lies ISIS. And, finally, to his right, there is Hamas. Bennett's gestures are plaintive, palms upturned; he is trying to perform honesty. He points in various directions, but there is no way the audience can be sure if the directions are as accurate as he claims. As well as sound, setting and movement, there is also costume. Wearing a kippah and an open-collar, tieless shirt, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, Bennett looks more like an uncle at a wedding than the leader of a right-wing political party and an army major on reserve.

Having laid these affective foundations, Bennett begins his monologue. 'Israel,' he says, 'is in the forefront of the global war on terror.' Lasting just over a minute, the script continues as follows:

> This is the frontline between the free and civilized world and radical Islam. We're stopping the wave of radical Islam from flowing from Iran and Iraq all the way to Europe. When we fight terror here, we're protecting London, Paris, and Madrid. If we give up this piece of land and hand it over to our enemies, my four children down there in Ra'anana [a city in central Israel] will be at harm's way [sic]. It's just one missile away from hitting them. To expect us to give up this land does not make sense. Your war for democracy starts here. Your war for freedom of speech starts right here. The war for dignity and freedom starts right here.

Bennett articulates a vision of the 'land of Israel' that is not much different from the one expounded by Theodor Herzl, the founding father of modern Zionism, more than a century ago. In his book, *The Jewish State*, the foundational text of political Zionism, Herzl imagines the future Israeli state to be 'a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism' (Herzl [1896] 1956, 36). He uses such militaristic vocabulary as 'rampart' and 'outpost,' pointing his readers to the colonial garrisons protecting the frontiers of Europe's empires. The reproduction of Palestinian space as, essentially, an opposition

between 'civilization' and 'barbarism' has been an oft-repeated Zionist trope. In a 2001 interview published in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak described Israel as the West's 'protective wall' and a 'vanguard of culture against barbarism.'[14] Bennett employs similarly militaristic language, positioning Europe as the crucible of 'the free and civilized world': Israel is 'the frontline,' he says. In reaching for what he considers to be the emblematic values of European civilization—democracy, liberty and dignity—Bennett attempts to establish Israel as the border between the 'civilized world' and the second term of his dialectic: radical Islam. In his reductive analysis, Israel is not simply *at* the frontline of keeping 'our [that is, Israel *and* Europe's] enemies' at bay. It *is* the frontline, the border, separating good from evil. Yet, Bennett reminds his audience, what has been excluded to this strange and dangerous hinterland threatens to seep back in: the abject/other is 'just one missile away.' Furthermore, Palestinians are not even worth naming in the video. Not only are they reduced to the signifier Hamas, already bracketed in with Hezbollah and ISIS, their absence from this script represents them as 'human waste' inhabiting an 'unliveable' zone beyond the civilized world.

That borders have played a major role in Palestinian history is an obvious point. As physical artefacts 'on the ground'—as walls, fences, checkpoints, identity cards and so forth—they have enabled and disabled a host of political, social and economic activities. However, as artefacts of dominant discursive practices, these borders exist as residual phenomena. In this sense, they are not simply fixed or stable constructions delimiting territory and the movement of people, capital and resources; rather, they are artefacts of Zionist ideology. As Dan Rabinowitz points out, Israel's 'obsession with psychological differentiation from the Arabs and [its] desire for a coherent Israeli identity emerge as aspects of one, ostensibly coherent national project' (Rabinowitz 2003, 217). As the foregoing discussion of Bennett's video shows, the proximity of the essentialized and invisibilized category 'Palestinian'—as a political grouping, as a culture and as social beings—plays a central role in Israel's settler-colonial project. Bordering, then, is not simply an event like the building of a wall; it is a process whose reiterations impede, fracture and distort everyday life. At the border between the Israeli subject/self and the Palestinian abject/other, anxiety lies inherent.

This border anxiety presents itself in Israel's repeated attempts to purify the Zionist public sphere through claims to territorial exclusivity, demographic homogeneity and perceived threats to national security (Falah and Newman 1995, 698). Euphemized as 'the Jewish character of the state,' Israel has pursued a series of policies to preserve Jewish demographic hegemony throughout 'the land of Israel.' The literal abjection of more than a million Palestinians, from the period of the Nakba until the War of 1967, allowed Israel to consolidate its self-image as a 'Jewish' state. Ethnic cleansing, however, was not enough to exclude 'Palestine' and 'Palestinians' from the public sphere. Until 1973, a host of laws was passed that transformed Palestinian refugees to absentees (the Absentees' Property Law of 1950) and then to infiltrators (the Prevention of Infiltration Law of 1954). All public displays of Palestinian national identity, even displaying the flag, were criminalized. Reinforcing these coercive practices, but primarily aimed at creating a Jewish majority, the Israeli parliament voted for the Law of Return in 1950 allowing anyone with Jewish ancestry to claim Israeli citizenship and right of settlement.

Yet, these repeated attempts to exclude Palestinians from the public sphere have not been wholly successful. Exclusion has not resulted in absence: the Palestinian abject/other is *always* present in Israeli politics and society. More interestingly, though, Palestinian activists have routinely attempted to disrupt the discriminatory logic of the Zionist public sphere, constituting what Nancy Fraser (1990) and Michael Warner (2005) refer to as subaltern counterpublics. The notion of counterpublics was first expressed by Fraser as a critique of Jürgen Habermas's monolithic definition of the eighteenth-century European bourgeois public sphere as an arena in which private individuals interact as *a public*, not only engaging in rational debate over matters of mutual concern but also holding the authorities accountable to Enlightenment society (Habermas 1989).

Comprising such spaces as the theatre, coffee houses, gentlemen's clubs, newspapers and journals where new ideas flowed freely, Habermas argues that the bourgeois public sphere emerged in Europe and the United States from the beginning of the eighteenth century to mediate between the private concerns of citizens and the interests of the state. This mediation necessitated overcoming individual interests and opinions in order to reach societal consensus. The bourgeois public sphere, he concludes, gave rise to a realm of public opinion opposing state power and powerful interests that were coming to shape bourgeois society. The emergence of such a public sphere presupposed freedoms of speech and assembly, a free press,

and the right to freely engage in political debate. Habermas also suggests that, following the democratic revolutions characterizing the eighteenth century, the bourgeois public sphere was institutionalized in the constitutions that were written during this period, guaranteeing in law a range of political rights, and the establishment of judicial systems that could arbitrate between individuals, groups and the state. The significance of Habermas's study is that of transformation, or how the bourgeois public sphere has mutated from a space of rational debate and consensus to one of mass cultural consumption dominated and directed by elite interests. For Habermas, this transformation began to occur as private interests acquired direct political influence or, for example, as financiers and businessmen started to gain control of the media. In this debased public sphere, he argues, public opinion is shaped by political, economic and media elites who manage public opinion as a form of social control. Public opinion in contemporary society, according to Habermas, actually represents the private interests of powerful groups thus creating a slippage between private and public spheres.

Habermas's study of the public sphere has been the subject of intense debate leading to revisions in his later writings as well as fostering further research on the public sphere itself. This critical reception of his work has, in fact, led to a considerably deeper understanding of the historical development of both the public sphere and democracy itself.[15] Habermas's critics have argued that he presents an idealized interpretation of the bourgeois public sphere when, in fact, certain groups were excluded from it and participation in rational public debate was, in fact, limited. Nancy Fraser, for example, argues that Habermas's conceptualization fails to account for the fact that participation in the public sphere was determined by status (white, middle- and upper-class males), which denied access to many people based on property qualifications, race and gender. Not only does Habermas's analysis idealize the bourgeois public sphere, Fraser says, but it fails to consider the co-existence of 'other, nonliberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres' (Fraser 1990, 61). Fraser insists that 'the bourgeois public was never *the* public' (ibid., original emphasis). Rather than one public sphere or a singular discourse about public affairs, Fraser argues, there have been a number of 'competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics,' which 'contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech' (ibid., 61). Fraser argues that,

throughout history, subordinated groups—what Tyler refers to as national abjects—have often asserted their own interests by organizing themselves into alternative, radical publics or, in her terms, subaltern counterpublics. As Fraser argues, it is in such 'parallel discursive arenas' that subaltern counterpublics devise and disseminate counter-discourses, transgressive reformulations of their identities, forceful articulations of their needs and interests, and carry out 'agitational activities directed toward wider publics' (ibid., 67, 68).

Similarly, in her study of the development of the African-American public sphere from the slavery era to the present, Catherine Squires argues that such 'parallel discursive arenas' serve as spaces in which subordinated groups can 'successfully critique the dominant society without having [their] own interests and identity compromised or silenced by the exclusionary power exercised by members of the dominant public' (Squires 2002, 450). This is why, she argues, such groups need to establish separate spaces in which to discuss their interests and aspirations. For enslaved Africans in the United States, these were enclave spaces such as slave quarters which, despite being monitored by overseers, were the very places in which slaves fostered resistance (ibid., 458). In the antebellum North, Squires writes, free black people responded to segregation by creating their own institutions and economies (ibid.). Palestinian society appears to oscillate between these extremes too. On the one hand, Palestinians must routinely navigate through Israel's military, security and surveillance apparatuses as well as various categories of occupied space; on the other, institution-building has been a major part of Palestinian resistance to colonial abjection.

In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner defines counterpublics as a relation among strangers that is self-organized 'by nothing other than the discourse itself' (Warner 2005, 67). This relation is formed through attention and the reflexive circulation of counter-hegemonic discourse that addresses both the individual and the bystander. Counterpublics constitute themselves through a 'conflictual relation to the dominant public' and are, therefore, conscious of their subjectification (ibid., 118). Warner argues that counterpublics give their members a sense of empowerment because they conduct themselves 'independently of state institutions, laws, formal frameworks of citizenship, or preexisting institutions such as the church' (ibid., 68). For both Fraser and Warner, publics and counterpublics are not mutually exclusive domains. Fraser, for example,

argues that counterpublics 'help expand discursive space' (Fraser 1990, 67); that is to say, they have a significant role to play in the production of active publics.

But what about populations that have been deliberately excluded from dominant public spheres? This book proposes another term—that of *abject* counterpublics where dominant and subordinated groups are, indeed, mutually exclusive. Abject counterpublics emerge in response to those processes of abjection, bordering and epidermalization precluding their entry from the dominant public sphere as human beings. In this sense, the existence of one (the Zionist public sphere) is predicated upon the erasure of the other (the Palestinian counterpublic) whose struggle is not only to 'expand discursive space' but, simply, to assert themselves as human beings. Abject counterpublics are aware of their expulsion from the dominant public sphere, or what Zionist ideologues conceive of as 'civilization.' Yet, as transgressive social formations, abject counterpublics re-constitute their abjection as sites of resistance, directing their gaze away from the dominant public sphere. Instead, such counterpublics build enclave spaces in order 'to create discursive strategies and gather oppositional resources' (Squires 2002, 458) before directing their gaze towards other public spheres deemed more powerful—in the case of Palestinian counterpublics, the world. Abject counterpublics recognize their place in the social totality, but they do not pay homage to it. More importantly than this, though, they do not seek to enter the dominant public sphere where their place is already taken up by a spectral figure of themselves.

This process of disidentification has been explained by José Esteban Muñoz as 'a performative mode of tactical recognition' employed by subordinated groups (in his study, the racialized queer body) to resist 'the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus' (Muñoz 1999, 97). Judith Butler has described disidentification as an 'experience of misrecognition,' which she presents as the 'uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong' (Butler 1993, 219).[16] *Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank* traces the tactics employed by an abject counterpublic as it attempts to 're-epidermalize' itself as human. These tactics require the simultaneous acts of seeing and un-seeing hegemonic identifications existing at the border between the Palestinian abject/other and the Israeli subject/self. By employing these tactics, an abject counterpublic is able to assert a 'positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture' (Muñoz 1999, 31).

About This Book

Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank identifies the key theatre companies that are currently contributing to sustaining a vibrant theatre ecology in the West Bank: The Freedom Theatre in the Jenin refugee camp, Ashtar Theatre and Al-Kasabah Theatre in Ramallah, Al-Harah Theatre in Beit Jala, and Al-Rowwad in the Aida refugee camp. By 'key,' I mean that these companies have been able to establish their own theatrical buildings, which indicates a high degree of professionalization, that their works have been frequently and continuously produced, and that they have achieved prominence both locally and internationally. To a great extent, these companies are also shaping the direction of contemporary Palestinian theatre in the West Bank through their engagement with different theatrical forms, including original works, adaptations, experimental performances and applied theatre practices. In this book, I have tried to place their voices and intentions at the centre of my enquiry. My purpose is to offer a development of ideas about social abjection and counterpublic formation contextualized by a synthesis of practitioners' reflections. My hope is that this book demonstrates a way of retaining the centrality of practitioners' voices when researchers conduct fieldwork in locations where they are privileged outsiders.

It is also important to emphasize that the scope of this book is limited to the West Bank. Several practical considerations have influenced this decision. Lack of space would limit the attention that could be given to Palestinian theatre production in East Jerusalem, Gaza, Israel and the Diaspora. Palestinian theatre in these locations—although 'Diaspora' covers many geographic locations, from neighbouring Arab countries to the world at large—has emerged under different socio-political conditions and influences, and each would require separate studies to do them any justice. Entry into Gaza from both Israel and Egypt is severely restricted and closely monitored, making it impossible to carry out research there. Therefore, my concerns throughout this book have been heuristic, and it would be incorrect to say that this is a conclusive study. My hope is that this book will lay the foundations for future research in this field.

The book is divided into four chapters followed by an epilogue. The second chapter, 'Cultural Intifada, Beautiful Resistance,' discusses the historical development of Ashtar Theatre, Al-Kasaba Theatre, Al-Harah Theatre, The Freedom Theatre and Al-Rowwad. The contribution of these companies to theatrical activities since the end of the first intifada (1987–93) has shaped the direction of contemporary Palestinian theatre

in the West Bank. This chapter's title is taken from terms coined by two companies, The Freedom Theatre and Al-Rowwad, to describe their work. These terms point to the general trend among Palestinian theatre-makers to situate their creative work within the broader socio-political matrix of resistance to Israeli authority.

In Chap. 3, 'Aren't We Human?,' I argue that the formation of abject counterpublics is predicated upon a process by which theatre-makers (like other Palestinians) disidentify with the Zionist public sphere and its discourse of erasure, and seek out other public spheres ('the world'), which they deem to be more powerful. This practice attempts to circumvent the dominance of the Zionist public sphere through processes of international solidarity formation. By presenting this 'human face,' theatre-makers are able to assert a counter-narrative that defies Zionist discourse and Israeli state practices. The title of this chapter is taken from a question posed in Ashtar Theatre's production of *The Gaza Monologues*.

Chapter 4 'A Stage of One's Own,' asks what a feminist counterpublic might look like. Taking Al-Harah Theatre's production of *Shakespeare's Sisters* as a starting point to discuss the performance of gender in Palestinian theatre, this chapter looks at how Palestinian women theatre-makers attempt to unsettle the high value Palestinian society places on the patriarchal roles of wife and mother. In addition, this chapter argues that *Shakespeare's Sisters* functions at three discursive levels demonstrating that Palestinian counterpublics are also polyvalent formations. Firstly, *Shakespeare's Sisters* practices a form of border thinking drawing upon Palestinian and European epistemic practices to interrogate how Palestinian women have been represented in nationalist discourses. Secondly, it attempts to present the Palestinian 'homeplace' as a radical counter-space capable of disordering the centre-periphery dialectic structured by Israeli authority and Palestinian patriarchy. Thirdly, border thinking allows *Shakespeare's Sisters* to articulate its call for women's liberation in a way that is distinct from the discourse on women's rights framing international development.

The final chapter, 'Acting on the Pain of Others,' discusses collaborations between Palestinian and international theatre-makers. Since the 1990s, theatre companies in the West Bank have increasingly and actively sought out collaborative opportunities with theatre practitioners based, primarily, in the West. This chapter discusses two such productions. The first, *Our Sign is the Stone*, was produced by The Freedom Theatre in 2013, and toured five villages around the West Bank. Written and directed

by two British theatre-makers, the play attempted to document the experiences of the residents of the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh vis-à-vis settler and military violence. The second, *This Flesh is Mine*, was a co-production in 2014 between Ashtar Theatre and the UK-based theatre company Border Crossings. A radical adaptation of Homer's *Iliad*, the play was performed in Ramallah before completing a short run in London. Such collaborative relationships between privileged and abject groups, I argue, present theatre-makers and scholars with a potentially rewarding discussion about their advantages and limitations. This chapter discusses the benefits of collaborative practices between Palestinian theatre-makers and international practitioners, how they create ensembles when projects are bounded by financial, temporal and geographic constraints, and how such challenges can be overcome.

Notes

1. The Freedom Theatre, 'Annual Report 2016,' http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/annual-report-2016 (accessed November 11, 2018). For the festival and forum programme, see: The Freedom Theatre, 'TFT10,' http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/tft10 (accessed November 11, 2018).
2. Following the War of 1967, more than 300,000 Palestinians (over a quarter of the population) either fled or were expelled from their homes in the West Bank and Gaza, eventually settling in either Jordan or Egypt. See: Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001, pp. 328–29.
3. The original French title of Chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks*—'L'expérience vécue du Noir,' or 'The lived experience of the black man'—is often mistranslated into English as 'The fact of blackness.' Since 'blackness' is not an essence for Fanon, it follows that there cannot be a 'fact of blackness.'
4. In a paper on Fanon and Audre Lorde, the philosopher Shiloh Whitney calls attention to the prominence Fanon gives to the term 'negrophobia' in his account of colonial racism. In a section entitled 'Negrophobia as racializing horror,' she says: 'The Freudian analysis of phobia on which Fanon is drawing positions not shame [as read through his famous encounter with the child in Paris, and Sartre's theory of being-for-others] but *horror* as the characteristic phobic affect.' See: Shiloh Whitney, 'The Affective Forces of Racialization: Affects and Body Schemas in Fanon and Lorde,' *Knowledge Cultures*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2015, pp. 45–64 (46, original emphasis).
5. Fanon's original statement reads: 'For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.'

6. See, also: Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882–1948*, Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992; Nur Masalha, *A Land without a People: Israel, Transfer, and the Palestinians 1949–96*, London: Faber, 1997; and Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*, London: Pluto Press, 2000.
7. It should be noted that their status as 'permanent residents' does not confer Israeli citizenship on Palestinians living in Jerusalem nor does it allow them to vote in national elections. Despite its name, the residency permit can be revoked at any time. Figures compiled by the human rights organization B'Tselem indicate that Israel has revoked the residency status of thousands of Jerusalemite Palestinians since 1967, often deporting them to the West Bank. See: B'Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 'Revocation of Residency in Jerusalem,' January 1, 2011, http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/revocation_of_residency (accessed September 13, 2015); and B'Tselem, 'Statistics on the Revocation of Residency in Jerusalem,' January 11, 2011, http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/revocation_statistics (accessed September 13, 2015).
8. For more on the geographic, demographic and cultural transformation of Palestine since the nineteenth century, see: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (ed.), *The Transformation of Palestine: Essays on the Origin and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971; Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992; Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*, London: Zed Books, 2011; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Basheer Nijim and Bishara Muammar, *Towards the De-Arabization of Palestine/Israel, 1945–1977*, Dubuque, IA: Kendall & Hunt Publishing, 1984; and Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.
9. The term politicide is taken from: Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War Against the Palestinians*, New York: Verso, 2003. Kimmerling defines politicide as 'a process that has, as its ultimate goal, the dissolution of the Palestinian people's existence as a legitimate social, political and economic entity' (ibid., 3–4). Furthermore, he writes, '[p]oliticide is a process that covers a wide range of social, political and military activities whose goal is to destroy the political and national existence of a whole community of people and thus deny it the possibility of self-determination' (ibid., 4).

10. For a comprehensive database of such laws, see: Adalah—The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, 'Discriminatory Laws in Israel,' n.d., http://www.adalah.org/en/law/index (accessed September 13, 2015).
11. In the last three decades, a wealth of literature has been published on de-development and fragmentation in Palestine. On the de-development of the Palestinian economy, see: Sara Roy, *The Palestinian Economy and the Oslo Process: Decline and Fragmentation*, Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1998; Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development*, Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995; Mandy Turner and Omar Shweiki (eds), *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy: De-Development and Beyond*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Khalil Nakhleh, *The Myth of Palestinian Development: Political Aid and Sustainable Deceit*, East Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2004; Sara Roy, 'De-development Revisited: Palestinian Economy and Society since Oslo,' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1999, pp. 64–82; Sara Roy, 'The Gaza Strip: A Case of Economic De-development,' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1987, pp. 56–88; and Sara Roy, 'The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and Palestinian Socioeconomic Decline: A Place Denied,' *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2004, pp. 365–403. On the fragmentation of social formations, see: Rema Hammami, 'Palestinian NGOs since Oslo: From NGO Politics to Social Movements?' *Middle East Report*, no. 214, 2000, pp. 16–19, 27, 48; Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar, 'The Intifada and the Aid Industry: The Impact of the New Liberal Agenda on the Palestinian NGOs,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 23, nos. 1 and 2, 2003, pp. 205–14; Molly Kane, 'International NGOs and the Aid Industry: Constraints on International Solidarity,' *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 8, 2013, pp. 1505–15; and Sibille Merz, 'The "Missionaries of the New Era": Neoliberalism and NGOs in Palestine,' *Race & Class*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2012, pp. 50–66.
12. Naftali Bennett, 'Israel—Fighting for Your Freedom,' *YouTube*, February 17, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LmsI1viJsI (accessed August 19, 2015).
13. For more on *hasbara*, see: Gal Hadari and Asaf Turgeman, 'Public Diplomacy in Army Boots: The Chronic Failure of Israel's Hasbara,' *Israel Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2018, pp. 482–99; Giora Goodman, 'Explaining the Occupation: Israeli Hasbara and the Occupied Territories in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War,' *Journal of Israeli History, Politics, Society, Culture*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2017, pp. 71–93; and Miriyam Aouragh, 'Hasbara 2.0: Israel's Public Diplomacy in the Digital Age,' *Middle East Critique*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2016, pp. 271–97.

14. Interview with Ari Shavit, *Ha'aretz*, February 2, 2001. Ehud Barak's remarks are quoted in Jerome Slater, 'What Went Wrong?: The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process,' *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 116, no. 2, 2001, pp. 171–99 (180).
15. For a discussion of the initial critiques of Habermas's study, see: P. U. Hohendahl, 'Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture: Jürgen Habermas and His Critics,' *New German Critique*, no. 16, 1979, pp. 89–118. For a contemporary English-language discussion, see: C. Calhoun (ed), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. Habermas's response to these essays, entitled 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,' is contained in this volume (pp. 421–60).
16. This is part of a wider conversation Butler is having in relation to the work of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan's notion of *méconnaisance* or misrecognition.

CHAPTER 2

Cultural Intifada, Beautiful Resistance

There are five major companies currently working in the West Bank: Al-Kasaba Theatre and Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah; Al-Rowwad and The Freedom Theatre in the refugee camps of Aida and Jenin; and Al-Harah Theatre in Beit Jala. Each of them has achieved such dominance over the last twenty-five years that their works have shaped the flow and direction of Palestinian theatre in the West Bank. Despite the hostile conditions under which they must work, these companies have been at the forefront of a continuous flow of theatrical activities since the end of the first intifada. During this period, theatre-makers have produced work locally, but they have also achieved regional and international fame and recognition through partnerships, participation at festivals, and the establishment of professional and financial support networks around the world. Two of these companies, Ashtar and The Freedom Theatre, have also broadened their practices to include Playback Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed. By adopting the vocabulary of resistance to describe their work, evident in terms such as 'cultural intifada' and 'beautiful resistance,' theatre-makers explicitly assert the contribution the arts can make to the national liberation struggle. The chronological structure of this chapter (according to when each company was formed) should not be taken as implying an order of precedence. Rather than entering into the kind of discussion that would set companies in competition with each other, the theatre-makers I spoke to recognized each other's work as an important part of the broader struggle against Israeli settler-colonialism. Indeed, each of the companies

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discussed in this chapter is doing important work, albeit in different ways, with different resources, for different audiences, and in different contexts.

In order to understand the theatre that has emerged over the last three decades, it is important to look at the cultural developments taking place between the War of 1967, known as the Naksa or 'setback' in Arabic, and the first intifada or 'uprising' (1987–93) as foundational to what has come after. Important contemporary theatre-makers such as George Ibrahim, director of Al-Kasaba Theatre, were also active during this period. Others, such as Ashtar's Iman Aoun and Edward Muallem, first trained at Al-Hakawati Theatre founded in East Jerusalem in 1977. Furthermore, because the grounding logic of Palestinian theatre has always been the struggle for national liberation, theatre-makers continue to see themselves as part of a theatrical tradition connecting them to this period.

From Setback to Uprising

Following Israel's victory over the combined might of five Arab armies in the War of 1967, and its occupation of the whole of historic Palestine thereafter, the West Bank was governed by a military administration which, as well as resurrecting draconian laws from the Mandatory Period (1920–48), enacted a series of orders intended to suppress Palestinian social and political life such as censorship laws and limitations on freedom of expression and the right to assembly. With limited access to public funds for developing their own institutions and cultural organizations, Palestinians began to realize that relying on other Arab countries for their liberation was futile (Qumsiyeh 2011). The 1970s witnessed the emergence of a more mature national consciousness expressed by the concept of *sumud*, or 'steadfastness,' a culture of self-reliance by which Palestinians remained on the land and attempted to build and strengthen their own social and cultural institutions (ibid., 116). During this period, Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territory began to establish grassroots organizations, voluntary work committees and unions aimed at strengthening Palestinian society and fostering economic well-being.

Theatre-makers of the 1970s were also part of this process of renewed resistance to Israeli dominance. Between the War of 1967 and the start of the first intifada in 1987, theatrical activities in Palestine developed on an unprecedented scale (Nassar 2001, 2006, 2007; Snir 1995, 1999, 2005a, b). It was during this period that theatre became a key cultural site for resisting Israeli settler-colonialism, and theatre-makers saw themselves as

part of the national liberation movement.[1] Influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology of groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), established in 1967 and 1969 respectively, such theatre-makers also considered the Palestinian liberation struggle to be part of the global anti-colonial struggle characterizing this period in world history.[2]

For reasons of space, it is not possible to discuss all the theatre companies that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s that were influenced by leftist ideologies; however, four stand out for their contribution to the development of a professional Palestinian theatre scene.[3] Not only were these companies performatively interrogating Israeli settler-colonialism and questioning oppressive practices within Palestinian society, they were also presenting works that were experimental in form and daring in content. The first company, Balalin ('Balloons'), was formed in Jerusalem in 1971 by a group of actors under the leadership of the socialist director François Abu Salem.[4] Before its dissolution in 1974, Balalin produced many plays including *al-ʿAtma* (*The Darkness*), a Brechtian play examining the difficulties of creating theatre under military occupation, and *Qitʿat Hayat* (*A Slice of Life*), about the oppression of women in Palestinian society.[5] Balalin was a ground-breaking company, producing work in Palestinian Arabic, and touring towns and villages in Jerusalem and the West Bank. In its attempts to bring theatre closer to its audiences, the company's use of spoken Arabic was a signalling departure from the decades-long practice of writing and performing plays in classical Arabic.

Another company was Dababis ('Pins'), formed in 1973 in Ramallah by a group of twenty construction workers who were reputedly members of the PFLP (Nassar 2001, 67–68). Their performances were inspired by the troupe's commitment to workers' rights, women's rights and the anti-Zionist struggle. For example, *Da'ira al-Khawf al-Dababiyya* (*The Foggy Fear Circle*), influenced by Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, focused on the theme of exploitation by problematizing the role of the bourgeois intellectual in the liberation struggle.[6] Another play, *al-Haqq ʿala al-Haqq* (*The Truth is at Fault*), criticized the failures of the Ramallah municipality to provide public services such as a fire brigade. Perhaps its most controversial performance was *Khawaziq* (*Shafts*) in 1976. Produced in response to political discussions about establishing a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders—both the PFLP and DFLP were committed to a unitary, democratic state in which Jews and Arabs

would be equal citizens—the play attempted to question the best route to liberation: negotiations within a two-state framework, or a struggle to liberate the whole of historic Palestine. As well as dividing the actors themselves, *Khawaziq* earned the opposition of the Israeli military governor of the West Bank who refused to issue the permit required for public performances. In response, the troupe changed its title to '*Imara min Waraq* (*Paper Building*) and staged it in Jerusalem (Snir 2005a, 100). In 1977, relationships between the military administration and Dababis came to a head when soldiers raided the theatre's headquarters and confiscated actors' identity cards, scripts and equipment. Actors were arrested for being members of the PFLP, which was considered to be a seditious group. Dababis never recovered from this incident and disbanded shortly thereafter (Nassar 2001, 68). Yet, in just four years, the troupe had become one of the leading exponents of the theatrical movement, demonstrating how theatre-makers could also be part of the liberation struggle.

In 1977, Abu Salem joined with other theatre-makers to found Al-Hakawati Theatre ('The Storyteller'). Its name alluding to the ancient Arabic storytelling tradition, the development of Al-Hakawati Theatre marked an important process in the professionalization of Palestinian theatre. Drawing on different sources—Palestinian folklore and Arabic and Western performance traditions—but performing in Palestinian Arabic, Al-Hakawati Theatre was able to appeal to a broad range of audiences and gained the attention of intellectuals and professional critics (Snir 2005a, 132). The attendant problems of operating under military occupation and censorship required the company to experiment with different forms 'such as Chaplinesque tones, a Brechtian alienated, "poster theatre" style, accompanied by music, exaggerated makeup, large inconsistent movement and gestures, grandiloquent style blended with both traditional and contemporary symbols' (Nassar 2001, 71). Adopting Mnouchkine's approach to devising theatre—in which an event is improvised by one actor, which is then re-improvised by all the other members of the company to create something interpretively multi-layered and rich—Al-Hakawati Theatre produced plays through very close teamwork during long rehearsal sessions and workshops (Snir 2005a, 136–37).

Faced with Israeli censorship and the regular arrests and detention of writers, artists and theatre-makers, Al-Hakawati Theatre experimented with new ways of expressing its political message such as symbolism,

stylized language and coded imagery which would be understood by audiences but bypass censors. Theatre-makers would also perform plays set in the past as a tactic of critiquing contemporary events. The first play, *Bism al-Ab wa'l-Umm wa'l-Ibn* (*In the Name of the Father, the Mother and the Son*), performed in 1978, was produced in a circus style and examined Palestinian family life under Israeli occupation (Nassar 2001, 72). As external forces oppress the father, he oppresses the mother who then oppresses the son. The production prompted the literary critic Ghassan Abdallah to reflect upon how Palestinian 'society falls between the hammer of the occupation and the anvil of poverty, and economic, social and intellectual backwardness' (in Nassar 2001, 72). A year later, the company produced *Mahjub Mahjub* which became an instant success with more than 120 performances (Snir 2005a, 140). Influenced by Emile Habibi's tragicomic novel *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, published in 1970, the play's eponymous anti-hero decides to commit suicide at which point six of his friends play out the story of his life. Mahjub—meaning 'veiled,' so the title is a play on words: 'Veiled Mahjub' or 'Veiled by name, veiled by nature'—is the guileless collaborator who, as he watches the story of his life performed before him, realizes that he has never known his true self and, therefore, the real purpose of his life. In 1983, Al-Hakawati Theatre produced *Jalili Ya 'Ali* (*Ali, You Galilean*) about a young, unemployed Palestinian from Galilee who leaves his village to try his luck in Tel Aviv. Once there, he is befriended by an Israeli Jew who tells him that, if he really wants to get on, he should change his name to Eli and 'pass' himself off as an Israeli Jew. The play became a huge success due to its honest portrayal of the identity crisis facing many young Palestinian citizens of Israel.

In 1983, Al-Hakawati Theatre was awarded a grant of $100,000 from the Ford Foundation which enabled it to lease out the building of Al-Nuzha Cinema in East Jerusalem (Nassar 2001, 77; Snir 2005a, 145). After refurbishing the building—the main hall had a capacity for 400 spectators, a smaller hall could hold 150, and there were extra facilities for carrying out training activities in music, dance, painting and photography as well as hosting film screenings, art exhibitions, musical programmes and lectures—Al-Hakawati Theatre re-launched itself as the Palestinian National Theatre in May 1984. Until the first intifada, many theatre companies presented their work on Al-Hakawati Theatre's stage.[7] In 1984, the theatre produced *Alf Layla wa-Layla min Layali Rami al-Hijara* (*A Thousand and One Nights of a Stone Thrower*), later changed

by order of the Israeli censor to *Alf Layla wa-Layla fi Suq al-Lahhamin* (*A Thousand and One Nights in the Butchers' Market*) (Nassar 2001, 73; Snir 2005a, 151). Three years before the outbreak of the first intifada, this prophetic production demonstrated the extent to which Al-Hakawati Theatre was attuned to the national mood. The play's plot revolves around the confrontation between a Palestinian youth and an Israeli soldier who has stolen Aladdin's magic lamp. The battle that ensues is between a Palestinian David, armed with only his slingshot, and the full might of an Israeli Goliath. The production resulted in Abu Salem's arrest (Nassar 2001, 74).

Audiences could also perceive the pivotal role theatre-makers were playing for three reasons: the political and ideological positions of writers, directors and performers aligned with radical groups; the great lengths to which Israeli censors would go to suppress theatrical activities; and, of course, the performances themselves. Further, in the absence of press freedoms and an autonomous Palestinian broadcast media, theatre—whenever it managed to pass the censors—offered a practical way for disseminating ideas challenging the Zionist public sphere.[8] Performance spaces, too, were sites—albeit fragile because the authorities could close them down with or without notice—in which an abject counterpublic could gather to discuss public events, to regroup, and to seek and establish solidarities. Yet, as people's attentions shifted to what was happening on the streets during the years of the first intifada, the status of theatre in the national liberation struggle diminished. Against the daily realities of life during this period—the high number of Palestinian deaths as well as mass arrests, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, the closure of cities and towns and so forth—theatre came to be regarded as a frivolity (Daoud 1995).

The 1990s inaugurated a fundamental shift in the way theatre has come to be produced in Palestine. The period after the Oslo Accords (1993) ushered in a very different set of realities to those of the 1970s and 1980s: the institutionalization of the occupation within the two-state framework; a Palestinian government enthralled to Israel; and the emergence of a development paradigm that has resulted in the fragmentation of the resistance movement. With a government dependent on international aid and the fact that no structural support exists for developing and nurturing the arts sector, Palestinian theatre-makers have had to turn to international bodies for funding.

As such funding saturates the industry, the issue of agenda has become a thorny one for Palestinian practitioners and audiences. (I attend to the complicated issue of funding in the final chapter.) Indeed, it is not uncommon for audiences to ask, 'What's the agenda here?' or 'Who funded this?'[9] Palestinian audiences certainly understand that productions can be framed by the organizations funding them. Based on my own extensive conversations with Palestinian theatre-makers, between 2013 and 2015, it is not an exaggeration to say that practitioners want to make theatre that is as close to the public as possible, theatre that walks and talks with its audiences, that reflects on stage what is (or is not) being discussed elsewhere. On the other hand, the funders to whom practitioners *must* turn have very different agendas. Funders' concerns are not to do with Palestinian liberation but, rather, 'issues' framed as 'projects': women's rights, drugs awareness, sexual health, children's empowerment, co-existence with Israel, non-violence, and so forth. Whereas many of these issues matter to Palestinians, problems arise when funders approach them as singular projects without much attention to the wider political contexts from which they emerge. Of course, theatre-makers of the 1970s and 1980s were discussing social and cultural problems within Palestinian society; this, however, was always in the context of the national movement. For example, Al-Hakawati Theatre's first production, *Bism al-Ab wa'l-Umm wa'l-Ibn* (*In the Name of the Father, the Mother and the Son*) drew attention to the issue of domestic violence within Palestinian society without ignoring the wider matrix of Israeli power and how this impacts upon private spaces.

That contemporary theatre-makers must turn to external bodies to ensure they can carry on producing work means that funders' agendas will often determine which plays get produced. Caught in this bind, the companies discussed throughout this book use a number of tactics to navigate between their own agendas and those of funders. It is a fine balance to strike, satisfying funders without undermining the companies' own visions. And, as the theatre scholar Samer Al-Saber points out, a perceptive audience will always fill in the gaps between practitioners' intentions and funders' agendas.[10] Commenting on the absence of structural support from the Palestinian Authority for the arts sector, as well as Israel's complete control over Palestinian movement, which has served to isolate theatre-makers from each other and their audiences, an otherwise self-composed director told me, 'The political situation fucked up all our intentions.'[11] Though it is correct to assert that the broader political and

economic landscape has had a negative impact on theatre-making in the West Bank, this does not mean that theatre-makers have resigned their intentions to funders' agendas. As this chapter will demonstrate, theatre-makers use a range of tactics to overcome these predicaments. What stands out is their unyielding resilience and commitment to their work.

Al-Kasaba Theatre

George Ibrahim's Al-Kasaba Theatre ('The Fortress') was established as a dedicated theatre space in East Jerusalem in 1989 before transferring, nine years later, to a renovated cinema building in Ramallah. In 2000, the company started screening films and renamed itself Al-Kasaba Theatre & Cinematheque. However, as Ibrahim says, the company itself has worked under various names since the 1970s.[12] Always based in East Jerusalem but touring around the West Bank, the company began as the Theatre Arts Group in 1970. However, as Ibrahim's own political interests changed, the Theatre Arts Group reformed as Al-Shawk Theatre ('Spikes') in 1984. When his attention turned to more experimental works in 1986, the company reformed again as the Artistic Workshop Theatre. It is important to discuss this vibrant history because it demonstrates not only the evolution of Ibrahim's career and interests but it is also the foundation upon which Al-Kasaba Theatre has been able to develop as a mature, professionalized company.

The Theatre Arts Group was pioneered by a generation of performers who would go on to develop the seeds of a professional Palestinian theatre. In the early 1970s, however, the company was only semi-professional. Although they were able to raise some income from performances, company members still had to maintain other jobs. This meant that even though there were regular members, others would leave for more lucrative work elsewhere or, simply, to change careers. Furthermore, they had no permanent venue in which to rehearse or perform. Instead, rehearsals would take place in members' houses; and performances were staged in schools, community halls, refugee camps, villages and open spaces. Tickets were sold door to door or in local shops, Ibrahim says, and the funds raised were used to pay for posters or pamphlets.[13]

Unlike Balalin, Dababis and Al-Hakawati Theatre, the Theatre Arts Group's productions focused on entertainment and commercially viable plays rather than on politically engaged theatre. At the time, Ibrahim says, the aim was to develop an audience that would appreciate theatre

as a serious, professional activity rather than the leisurely pastime of a group of amateurs. There was also another reason. From the beginning, the Theatre Arts Group was adapting already published plays which meant the company could navigate past the Israeli censorship board. Even though Ibrahim would translate all the plays he adapted into Palestinian Arabic, including those written by Arab playwrights from neighbouring countries, the texts the company submitted for inspection were always the published versions, widely available in bookshops and libraries. For example, in 1971, the Theatre Arts Group produced *Thorns of Peace* by the Egyptian playwright Tawfiq Al-Hakim, about a family dispute in which the parents of two lovers try to prevent them from marrying. In the same year, the company also produced the eighteenth-century French playwright Marivaux's play *The Game of Love and Chance*, a romantic comedy in which two lovers trade places with their servants in order to see if the other is worthy of marriage. Politically neutral subjects such as these would have been approved by the censorship board.

From the mid-1970s, the group started to focus more and more on children's touring productions; they performed in schools, such as the Omariyya in East Jerusalem's Old City, to which Palestinian children from other schools would be bussed in. Ibrahim explains that this shift in focus arose from a realization that, in order to develop a theatre-going audience, they had to start by producing theatre for children and young people. This was an innovative idea at the time because, even though children's entertainment existed throughout Palestine, there was very little in the way of a theatre dedicated to them. The Theatre Arts Group's productions for children were largely musical adaptations of stories from the *Arabian Nights* (such as *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* in 1979), Arab folklore and European fairy tales (such as *Little Red Riding Hood* in 1980). The company also produced puppet shows such as *Adventures in Jerusalem* in 1973. Ibrahim himself would write and direct these plays, often acting in them as well. According to him, these performances were very popular with children and each play would run for weeks at a time.[14]

By 1986, Ibrahim's attention was turning to the political potential of theatre rather than its value as entertainment or as a commercial enterprise. This is not surprising given the theatrical and political climate in Jerusalem at the time. On the one hand, Abu Salem had opened the Palestinian National Theatre in 1984 which also served as a major platform for other companies and troupes from across the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel to share their work. Many of these companies were

producing highly political theatre that expressed their radical outlook. One of these was Sanabil's ('Spikes') 1985 play *al-Mahrajan* (*The Festival*) about a graduation ceremony at a village school which falls apart when residents argue over details such as who gets to sit in the front row. The play was really about the Arab League's internal disputes, and how its meetings were driven by member states' rivalries rather than their shared interests—a reason, according to *al-Mahrajan*, for the loss of Palestine.

On the other hand, the Theatre Arts Group's productions were becoming increasingly out of touch with the political mood of its audiences. The children who had been attending the company's shows in the 1970s were, by now, in their mid- to late-teens. It is possible that their everyday experiences of living under occupation meant that they were now turning to companies reflecting their social and political conditions and aspirations. It would have been one thing, for example, for such audiences to see an adaptation of Molière delivered in Palestinian Arabic—which was the sort of play the Theatre Arts Group was producing at the time—but quite another to see a play such as Al-Hakawati's *Alf Layla wa-Layla min Layali Rami al-Hijara* (*A Thousand and One Nights of a Stone Thrower*). Through word of mouth, audiences would have known that the former had passed the censor without any problem but the latter had had to change its title to something less controversial, and had scenes deleted to suit the interests of the state. Palestinian audiences favoured the works of radical writers and artists because they were so problematic for the authorities. By the mid-1980s, the Theatre Arts Group was starting to lose its audiences because its productions were seen as apolitical. Ibrahim, a shrewd businessman as well as a talented theatre director, attended the productions of other companies and could observe how audiences and critics were reacting to them.

In 1984 and 1986, Ibrahim established two theatre companies to address the needs of this changing climate. For five years, Al-Shawk Theatre and then the Artistic Workshop Theatre presented plays that spoke to the political climate of the time. Performed on the stage of Al-Hakawati Theatre, many of these productions were adaptations of published plays which made it far easier to evade censorship. (Again, only published texts were submitted to the censorship board.) For example, Max Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (*The Fire Raisers,* or *The Firebugs*), written and performed in the 1950s, a darkly comic account of travelling salesmen taking up residence in people's attics before burning the houses down, was produced in 1986. Frisch's play is a metaphor for

the rise of Nazism, but a Palestinian audience would have read the salesmen as Zionist invaders and the burned down houses as the lost homeland. An even more daring production of Jean-Paul Sartre's 1941 play *Morts sans sépultures* (*Men Without Shadows*) took place in 1988.[15] Set during World War II, the play tells of French resistance fighters captured and tortured by Vichy troops. Performed in the second year of the intifada, a play about occupation and collaboration would have resonated with its Palestinian audience. Yet, Ibrahim's production went even further by drawing on accounts given by Palestinian prisoners in Israeli military prisons, and with the actors playing resistance fighters speaking in Palestinian Arabic and those playing Vichy troops speaking in classical Arabic. According to Ibrahim, his production of *Morts sans sépultures* was highly praised by audiences and critics. 'It was a tribute to the first intifada,' he says proudly.[16]

The spirit of self-reliance and institution-building that was shaping the first intifada also influenced theatre practitioners. In 1989, Ibrahim says, the company decided to open a purpose-built theatre in East Jerusalem to accommodate the growing number of audiences. After renaming themselves as Al-Kasaba Theatre, the troupe rented a derelict restaurant and, with the help of volunteers and hired workers, transformed it themselves into a 100-seat auditorium. In 1991, the refurbished building opened and included an exhibition hall, a café, offices, a rehearsal room and dressing rooms.[17] The need for training actors was still a pressing concern, Ibrahim says. To address this, Al-Kasaba Theatre would invite international practitioners to deliver workshops and masterclasses. One of these people was Ariane Mnouchkine, founding director of the Paris-based company Théâtre du Soleil.[18]

As well as these classes, the company continued to produce adaptations and original plays. Some of these productions were marred by controversy. For example, during its first years, Al-Kasaba Theatre would engage in joint productions with Israeli-Jewish theatre-makers. One of these was *Romeo and Juliet*, a bilingual production with the Jerusalem-based Khan Theatre in which Jews were cast as Montagues and Palestinians as Capulets. The play opened in June 1994 and was co-directed by Fouad Awad (a Palestinian citizen of Israel) and Eran Baniel (an Israeli Jew). Unsurprisingly, the conflict raging outside the theatre kept disrupting the production.[19] Palestinian actors travelling from the West Bank were often denied entry into Jerusalem. The Jewish actors were apprehensive of travelling to the West Bank, which would have made it easier for the Palestinian actors to attend rehearsals. Baniel received death threats from Jewish groups accus-

ing him of promoting intermarriage. Although the play toured Europe, where it was well received, it drew the opprobrium of other Palestinian theatre-makers. Firstly, critics believed the production 'normalized' the conflict by ignoring the actual political and human rights issues at its heart, and reducing the realities of a brutal occupation to an ethno-religious conflict between Jews and Arabs. Secondly, the tour was sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of its international public diplomacy or *hasbara* programme, and Palestinian critics started to view its message of co-existence as nothing more than Zionist propaganda intended to elide the ongoing realities of colonial abjection. As a result, Palestinian cultural organizations, theatre companies and private individuals subjected Al-Kasaba Theatre to a boycott. Although the theatre eventually recovered, it has never again taken part in such partnerships.

In 1995, Al-Kasaba Theatre produced *Ramzy Abul Majd*, an adaptation of *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*. Written in 1972 by the South African playwrights Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, it was first performed in Cape Town before playing at the Royal Court Theatre and the Ambassadors in London in 1973 (where it collected the theatre critics' award for best play), and then transferred to the Edison Theatre in New York City in 1974 where it ran for 159 performances. *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* discusses the problems black people in apartheid-era South Africa faced when applying for travel and work permits. Sizwe Banzi cannot obtain a work permit to remain in Port Elizabeth and must return to his impoverished town within three days, effectively sentencing him and his family to poverty. When he and his friend Buntu find a work permit in an identity book belonging to a dead man, Sizwe decides to burn his own identity book and assume the dead man's identity.

Ramzy Abul Majd draws attention to similar problems facing Palestinians who must carry different coloured identity cards depending on where they live. Ramzy is from Gaza and carries an orange identity card, which means he cannot enter or work in Israel. Like Sizwe, however, Ramzy's fortunes change when he finds a blue identity card amongst the possessions of a dead Palestinian man.[20] Like the original, *Ramzy Abul Majd* toured internationally. In 1997, it was performed at the Royal Court Theatre as part of the London International Festival of Theatre, at the Arab World Institute Festival in Paris, at the Rabat Theatre Festival in Morocco and at the Amman International Theatre Festival in Jordan. The following year, it was performed at the Zurich International Festival in

Switzerland and, in 1999, at the International Festival of Carthage in Tunisia where it won an award for best acting.

Another adaptation was Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, which opened in 1995 and was reprised several times over the following six years. Translated into Palestinian Arabic, the play revolves around Laila who has just been released from a seven-year jail sentence in a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.[21] The play also performed at the International Festival of Carthage in 1995 and 2001, the Avignon Theatre Festival in France in 1997, the Amman International Theatre Festival in 1998 and 1999, and the Fez Festival of University Theatre in Morocco in 1998.

Some of Al-Kasaba Theatre's performances during this time were co-productions with international practitioners, a practice that has continued until the present. The 1998 production of *Sacco and Vanzetti*, about two Italian anarchists who attracted widespread public attention when a Massachusetts court found them guilty of murder in 1920, was produced with French technical staff who were also training Palestinians at the same time. The play completed a tour of France where it was performed twenty-three times.[22]

In 1998, Ibrahim had the ambitious plan of creating satellite theatres in 'every Palestinian city.'[23] That same year, Al-Kasaba Theatre was able to lease out the Jameel Cinema in Ramallah which had been lying vacant and unused for a decade. The refurbishment took two years to complete, and the theatre re-launched itself on 1 June 2000 as Al-Kasaba Theatre & Cinematheque and has been based in Ramallah ever since. The building includes workshop and rehearsal rooms, a conference hall, offices, kitchens, four dressing rooms, a dedicated box office and an exhibition gallery. There are also two auditoriums of 370- and 290-capacity in which performances and film screenings take place. The cinema presented new revenue streams for Al-Kasaba Theatre and, since 2006, it has hosted the annual Al-Kasaba International Film Festival, screening films, documentaries and animations from Arabic-speaking countries, Europe and the United States as well as hosting post-screening discussions with directors and actors.

Ibrahim states that it was the second intifada (2000–05) that prevented his dream of building satellite theatres around the West Bank from being realized.[24] The widespread violence, inter-factional conflicts, Israeli military retaliations and the closures of roads and cities proved to be insurmountable. During Israel's invasion of Ramallah in April 2002, soldiers

started targeting cultural institutions, including Al-Kasaba Theatre's premises, destroying books, archives and computers as well as covering seats with human excrement.[25] Considering, also, the financial implications of building satellite theatres, and with no recourse to funding from the Palestinian Authority or elsewhere, it was probably destined to remain an idea. For seven years, however, Al-Kasaba Theatre was running two theatre premises in East Jerusalem and Ramallah. This came to a halt in 2007 when Israeli control of movement between Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza made it impossible to maintain two theatre premises.[26] By that then, Palestinian travellers from the West Bank had to contend with the Separation Barrier (or 'apartheid wall'), an increased number of checkpoints, and an impossible system of travel permits. Gaza was completely sealed off except to aid workers, diplomats and politicians. The theatre in East Jerusalem closed down.

Since its inauguration, Al-Kasaba Theatre & Cinematheque has produced a number of highly successful plays which have toured regionally and internationally. In 2000, Ibrahim and Najib Ghallale adapted Elias Khoury's novel *Bab al-Shams* (*Gate of the Sun*), with Ghallale directing. Originally published in 1998, Khoury's novel takes place in the Palestinian refugee camp of Shatila in the Sabra neighbourhood of Beirut (Lebanon). It was here, between 16 and 18 September 1982, that Lebanese Phalangist militia, with Israeli complicity, massacred up to 3500 Palestinian civilians.[27] *Bab al-Shams* takes place in a makeshift hospital in Shatila where a man attempts to rouse his comatose friend by telling him stories about Palestine. Performed in the style of the *Arabian Nights*—that is, cycles of stories within stories with the actor Makram Khoury playing different roles—the production draws on eyewitness accounts, moving back and forth across time and place. In 2000, Al-Kasaba Theatre presented the adaptation at the Casablanca International Festival of University Theatre.

In 2001, the theatre produced two important plays, *Not About Pomegranates* and *Alive From Palestine*. Set during the second intifada, *Not About Pomegranates* was produced in partnership with the Royal Court Theatre. In April that year, the Royal Court sent the British playwright David Greig and the director Rufus Norris on a month-length residency to Ramallah. Greig and Norris worked with thirteen actors and produced a comic play about a Palestinian farmer who wants to take his pomegranates to market, but is prevented from doing so by Israeli checkpoints. The play premiered at Al-Kasaba Theatre in 2001, and received a staged reading at the Royal Court in 2002. In Ramallah, it was performed seventeen times before the theatre decided to bring the run to a premature

end. Greig comments that Al-Kasaba Theatre had to cancel many shows 'because of checkpoint closures and fear of attacks.'[28] In the end, it was dwindling audience figures that led to Al-Kasaba Theatre's decision. According to Greig, 'There wasn't really much appetite for a comedy about the intifada once the F16 attacks and the suicide bombs started.'[29]

If Sartre's *Morts sans sépultures* was Al-Kasaba Theatre's tribute to the first intifada, *Alive From Palestine* was its tribute to the second. I look at this production as a case study in the next chapter; however, it should be noted here that, as a series of monologues drawn entirely from eyewitness accounts of the second intifada collected between 2000 and 2001, it is a remarkable example of verbatim theatre. Between 2001 and 2009, the play performed across the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, Asia and the United States, making it Al-Kasaba Theatre's longest running and, according to Ibrahim, most successful play.[30] In June 2001, it performed at the Royal Court as part of the London International Festival of Theatre. Writing in *The Guardian*, the theatre critic Michael Billington gave the play a five-star rating and remarked that it 'shows how, even as a society's infrastructure collapses, people continue to tell each other stories to make sense of their lives.'[31] In July 2002, it returned to London to perform at the Young Vic. This time, Billington gave the production a four-star rating, and commented that it was 'detectably more sombre' than the previous year's performance.[32] That the tone of the performance would shift in this way is not surprising considering Israeli soldiers had raided and ransacked Al-Kasaba Theatre's premises just three months earlier, destroying computers and the auditorium. What is remarkable, however, is the company's resilience to continue with the tour despite the scale of the damage that the Israelis had caused.

Ashtar

Whereas the development of Al-Kasaba Theatre has been entwined with the development of George Ibrahim's professional practice and political outlook, the history of Ashtar for Theatre Productions and Training, to give the company its full name, began as a response to the experiences of Palestinians during the first intifada. Established in 1991 by artistic director Iman Aoun and general manager Edward Muallem, and named after the ancient Canaanite goddess of fertility, love and war, Ashtar was founded as an actor training programme for children and young people, the first of its kind in the occupied Palestinian territory. Aoun has a degree in social work as well as a diploma in psychodrama, a form of psychotherapy in

which patients attempt to recover and understand their experiences by acting out events from their lives. Her acting career began with amateur performances before she joined François Abu Salem's Al-Hakawati Theatre. Muallem had studied theatre at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and helped found Al-Hakawati Theatre in 1977 where he was not only an actor but also the company's accountant, stage builder and tour manager.

Abu Salem's belief in the social and political potential of theatre has had a long-lasting influence on Aoun and Muallem's professional practice, and how Ashtar emerged as a response to the continuous disruptions to education caused by the system of punitive measures Israel implemented to put down the first intifada. As well as closing schools and universities in the West Bank, the Israeli response to the intifada included closures of villages, towns and cities which prevented Palestinians from entering or leaving them; round-the-clock curfews prohibiting Palestinians from leaving their houses; cutting off power and water supplies from communities; and enforcing collective punishments, such as house demolitions and closing down public services. Furthermore, the first intifada also witnessed mass arrests, torture and executions of Palestinian activists and protestors. As a result of these acts of violence, a generation of Palestinian youth was left bearing the psychological impact of what they had witnessed and experienced. As Aoun explains, many of them had received little or no formal education or opportunities to develop creative and intellectual outlets for coming to terms with these experiences.[33]

Since 1995, Ashtar has been based in a theatre building in Ramallah. During the early years, however, its three-year actor training programme was held in schools in East Jerusalem and Ramallah. Aoun says that the central motivations for developing this programme were twofold. First, the company perceived a real need to develop a new generation of professional actors. Second, as a social worker and dramatherapist herself, Aoun could see the potential benefits of using theatre as a tool for getting children and young people to come to terms with their traumatic experiences during the first intifada. The success of the programme resulted in interest from more schools and, eventually, courses were being held across the West Bank and, until 1998, in Gaza. As well as using improvisation and devising techniques, the programme draws upon the plays of Arab and international writers by adapting them to the Palestinian context. Aoun says that, together with Forum Theatre (discussed below) and its professional productions, Ashtar's training programme is a pillar of the company's

work.[34] Not only has Ashtar offered actor training to students in private, public and refugee-camp schools, it has also trained teachers on how to use theatre and performance to enrich the school curriculum and to encourage students' creativity and well-being.

From 1997, Ashtar started adopting Forum Theatre methods developed by the Brazilian director Augusto Boal (2008, 102, 117–20) to encourage audiences to discuss political developments and social problems. Boal developed this interactive form as a way of empowering oppressed communities, or what he called *spect-actors*, to transform their conditions. A group of performers will present a short play in which characters encounter an issue of immediate concern to the audience. Then, the play is performed again but this time audience members are allowed to stop the performance and suggest alternative actions or even to replace any of the performers. These interventions are facilitated by a 'joker' who communicates between the audience and performers by asking questions or inviting audience members to get involved. The aim of Forum Theatre is to allow audiences to form solidarities by discussing, exploring and visualizing different alternatives and outcomes to their situations in such a way that they might apply them in their everyday lives. Ashtar is now a leading exponent of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, serving as the Middle East regional centre and helping to establish similar centres in Yemen and Iraq. Since 2007, the company has hosted five Theatre of the Oppressed festivals. These take place every second year and are held in Ramallah and Gaza. Practitioners from around the world attend the festival in Ramallah, and share their work and experiences with audiences across the West Bank.

Entitled 'United for a dignified life,' the most recent Theatre of the Oppressed festival took place in May 2015.[35] Participating companies included Al-Harah Theatre (discussed below) and four companies in total from Germany, Norway and Greece. As well as three plays by Ashtar, these companies presented their own plays that were developed using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. According to Ashtar's *Newsletter, January-May 2015*, multiple performances of each play took place in Ramallah, Bethlehem and East Jerusalem, reaching more than 2500 people. The play in Gaza, entitled *The Cage*, was about Israel's war on Gaza during the summer of 2014. According to the same newsletter, the play was staged eight times and received 'wide media coverage' ensuring that it reached 3000 people.[36] The newsletter also states that these festivals '[emphasize] the need to extend cultural bridges with the world.'[37] In a way that attempts to elicit solidarity from global publics, these relationships allow

theatre-makers to establish contact with international audiences who return to their home countries to take part in pro-Palestine activism.

According to Aoun, Ashtar's Forum Theatre practice allows it to reach out to communities in remote areas who are unable to attend performances at the venue in Ramallah due to travel restrictions, such as checkpoints and closures, imposed by Israel.[38] It has also helped Ashtar to create spaces in which socially taboo subjects can be discussed. Using this method, Ashtar developed the series *Abu Shaker's Affairs* which is performed annually around the West Bank. Essentially about the vicissitudes of fortune experienced by Abu Shaker and his family, each 'episode' in the series has dealt with issues as diverse as domestic violence and land confiscation. Themes such as these will often explore attendant issues like women's rights, poverty, patriarchy and the occupation itself. Each episode, Aoun says, goes through three stages of development.[39] The first consists of a review of any relevant literature on the topic and discussions with those affected by the issues raised, relevant organizations and experts. Then, performers will explore these findings to create an initial skeleton of the play. Once this is complete, they use improvisational methods to give the play a more definite form. Performances of *Abu Shaker's Affairs* usually take place with mixed-gender audiences; however, Aoun says, in villages where this is not possible due to cultural practices governing gender segregation, the company will perform separately for men and women.[40] The popularity and effectiveness of *Abu Shaker's Affairs* is also demonstrated by the fact that communities and grassroots organizations, including those in rural areas, will invite the company to return the following year.

Whereas it is unrealistic to expect long-term social transformation as a result of one performance, Ashtar's Forum Theatre has proved to be a powerful tool for allowing Palestinians to discuss the issues affecting their lives. By creating spaces in which taboo subjects can be discussed, people whose voices are otherwise marginalized or ignored find they can express themselves and be heard. The sharing of diverse opinions and arguments, Aoun says, is the cornerstone of Forum Theatre because it allows audiences to explore and visualize different ways of challenging oppression.[41] Teachers have also responded positively to Ashtar's Forum Theatre, describing how students' participation in performances often leads to more insightful classroom discussions than traditional teaching methods alone. By presenting subjects related to internal Palestinian social politics, Ashtar's Forum Theatre draws attention to issues that are often sub-

sumed within the broader struggle for national liberation. Whilst it is undeniable that oppressive practices within Palestinian society, such as child labour and violence against women, are conjunctionally structured and strengthened by the apparatus and architecture of Israeli settler-colonialism, Ashtar's Forum Theatre attempts to make clear that not only do Palestinians themselves play some role in sustaining these problems but they also have the agency to resist them, and that what can be imagined in a theatrical space can be practised elsewhere.

As well as its actor training programme and its Forum Theatre practice, Ashtar is also a professional theatre company performing locally, regionally and internationally. Many of these performances attempt to highlight the everyday living conditions of Palestinians under occupation. Some of these performances, like *Richard II* (which performed in the West Bank and at Shakespeare's Globe in London in 2012) and *This Flesh is Mine* (2014, discussed in more detail in the final chapter), have utilized more traditional forms of stagecraft and adaptation. Others, like *48 Minutes for Palestine* produced in 2010, have been more experimental in form. About a man and woman forced to live together in a cramped space, *48 Minutes for Palestine* lasts exactly forty-eight minutes—an allusion to the year of the Nakba—and unfolds without the performers uttering a single word. Instead, they use mime, facial expressions and other gestures and movements to express how the Nakba is an ongoing struggle for spatial autonomy and access to resources. Other performances have attempted to educate audiences on environmental issues. For example, *Sinbad and the Monster*, a children's play performed in schools around the West Bank in 2014, looked at the effects of pollution on the environment.

In 2012, Ashtar inaugurated its first biennial international youth festival which attracted fifty participants from the West Bank as well as from Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Sweden, Ukraine and the United States. Held over ten days in Ramallah, participants took part in actor training workshops, showcased their work and visited theatre companies in other West Bank cities, culminating in a joint performance before a public audience in Ramallah. For international participants, the festival also included political tours of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The 2014 festival attracted participants from Norway, Germany, Egypt, Romania and the United Kingdom, and ended with public performances on street protests and political prisoners, commedia

dell'arte, and monologues by female participants on self-image and sexual harassment. An important aspect of the youth festival is that it is organized by students enrolled on Ashtar's training programme, under Aoun's supervision. This allows them to take responsibility for planning, fundraising and marketing the festival as well as of organizing accommodation for international participants, transportation around the West Bank, and booking tours. Students are also able to use this opportunity to network with international practitioners.

Like other theatre companies in the West Bank, many of Ashtar's productions have toured internationally. As previously mentioned, *Richard II* was produced as part of the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival at Shakespeare's Globe in London. The festival, which was part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's World Shakespeare Festival, itself part of the United Kingdom's 2012 Cultural Olympiad, hosted thirty-seven companies from around the world producing Shakespeare's plays in their own languages. Directed by Conall Morrison, *Richard II* was translated into classical Arabic by Aoun (who played the Duchess of Gloucester) and Bayan Shbib (who played the Queen).

Aoun says that Ashtar had never heard of *Richard II* when the festival's director Tom Bird assigned them the play.[42] In fact, the company had wanted to produce *The Taming of the Shrew* because it would have allowed them to discuss gender issues in Palestine. Bird, however, felt that a play about a de-throned king would conjure up the Arab Spring for a London audience. In the post-show discussion held at Shakespeare's Globe, the actors described how they had deliberately avoided creating an allegory of Palestine by translating the play into classical Arabic rather than the Palestinian dialect.[43] In an interview with *The Electronic Intifada* published a week before opening performance, Aoun explained that their version of *Richard II* could be based 'anywhere there is political turmoil.'[44] Nor did the costumes and *mise-en-scène* point to a particular Arab country; *this* Richard II could have been any Arab leader. For example, in the scene depicting Bolingbroke's coup, the actors playing Bolingbroke, Northumberland and Ross are dressed as military dictators in army green uniforms and berets. In the same interview, Aoun said: '[The play] does not particularly say that this is happening here in Palestine or in a particular Arab city. We want the audience to concentrate and think.'[45] The play also performed at Jericho's Hisham Palace in April 2012, at Oxford's Creation Theatre in May 2012, and reprised in September 2012 at Al-Kasaba Theatre in Ramallah.

Al-Rowwad

Just as Aoun and Muallem established Ashtar as a response to the violence they were witnessing during the first intifada, Abdelfattah Abusrour set up Al-Rowwad ('The Pioneers') in the Aida refugee camp near the city of Bethlehem in 1998 as a response to the disillusion felt by Palestinians in the decade following the Oslo Accords. Abusrour had recently returned from his doctoral studies in Paris. Like many other Palestinians, he says, he believed the Oslo Accords would bring about a lasting peace and, eventually, Palestinian statehood.[46] However, after five years of abortive negotiations, increased construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, and Israeli intransigence on the 'final status' of East Jerusalem, and the right to return of Palestinian refugees, many Palestinians came to realize that peace was still only a pipe dream.[47] Asymmetric street battles between the camp's youths and Israeli soldiers, which often resulted in collective punishments, mass arrests and sometimes deaths, led Abusrour to develop a method of resistance that 'would not end in our children being killed.'[48] He terms this, which aims to counter Israeli violence and Palestinian despair with creativity and art. Abusrour admits that, in the early years, 'beautiful resistance' caused controversy among Palestinians who saw it as a rejection of the armed struggle and a betrayal of the martyrs. Winning the trust of locals was a slow process, he says, and it was only gained after they saw the fruits of his labour.[49]

Located on the northern outskirts of Bethlehem, and adjacent to the Separation Barrier (or 'apartheid wall'), the Aida refugee camp was established in 1950, and is currently home to almost five thousand Palestinian refugees (UN-OCHA 2008a, 1). Approximately 80 per cent of Aida's population is under the age of twenty-four (ibid., 1), and the overall unemployment rate for the entire population is almost 45 per cent (ibid., 4). The camp covers an area of less than one square kilometre, which means that residents face severe overcrowding. Educational facilities are also limited. The only girls school in the camp operates in shifts. Meanwhile, boys must attend schools in the neighbouring town of Beit Jala. In addition, there are no public recreational spaces such as parks and playgrounds. Buildings are riddled with bullet holes, attesting to Israeli incursions into the camp. Residents tell of frequent night raids in which family members, mainly young men, are dragged out of their homes and taken away by soldiers. As a form of crowd-control, the Israeli army also uses a liquid known as skunk water, which is sprayed from a water cannon atop military

trucks. Residents say that the liquid—its faecal odour hangs in the air for weeks afterwards—causes fainting, abdominal pain, severe skin irritation and, on some occasions, hospitalization.

Yet, Aida is a defiant place. On top of one gateway to the camp, residents have sculpted a giant key—a symbol of the refugees' longing for their original homes—with the words 'Not for sale' painted in Arabic and English. The Separation Barrier (or 'apartheid wall') has also been covered in politically inspired graffiti and murals. One of these depicts two Israeli soldiers arresting a Palestinian youth whom they have blindfolded. Next to these figures, the artist has sprayed the words, 'We can't live so we are waiting for death.'[50] Some of the houses in the camp are also covered in murals. Most of these are of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem or, simply, the words *Free Palestine*. One depicts the iconic image of Leila Khaled, who was responsible for two plane hijackings in 1969 and 1970, brandishing an AK-47 and wearing a red-and-white keffiyeh.[51]

Al-Rowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Society, which is the company's full name, is not just a theatre company or a cultural centre. It also responds to various community needs. Located in the middle of the camp, Al-Rowwad has always followed the approach that theatrical activities should be integrated with the provision of urgently needed services. During Israeli incursions, for example, the centre has served as a temporary clinic. It also provides educational opportunities for the camp's children, a gym for women, a football team for girls, a mobile playbus for toddlers and children, and vocational training in photography, filmmaking, computing, radio broadcasting, music production, and animation. Abusrour believes this integrated approach to be the best way to make a difference.[52]

At a public lecture given in the English city of Bristol in 2012, organized by the Bristol Palestine Film Festival, Abusrour explained that responding to the immediate needs of the community is a way of making life more liveable for the people of Aida. 'By doing this,' he said, 'we are empowering our community to become change-makers not just consumers.'[53] In other words, Al-Rowwad is *part* of the Aida community. Its connection to its environment is constant and intimate. This integration enhances the impact of its theatrical activities on people's lives. According to Abusrour, 'We are creating our own spaces for telling our own stories.'[54]

Al-Rowwad invites children and communities to practice theatre as a means of communication and negotiation. Through the creation and performance of plays, Al-Rowwad's students develop self-esteem, maturity,

acceptance of others, dialogue skills and the ability to work together. These profound, non-competitive interactions, Abusrour says, allow children and young people to see themselves as important parts of something bigger than themselves. This, he says, empowers them to discuss sensitive and challenging issues. Al-Rowwad's programmes encourage participants and audiences to question prevailing ideas and norms. In order to achieve this, Abusrour says, the centre needs to address the anger and violence *within* Palestinian society, a difficult thing to do when your community is under constant siege and experiencing such high levels of unemployment. By helping young people to identify and articulate their feelings and needs, Al-Rowwad introduces them to new ideas around the relationship between individual and community in which both can be simultaneously supported and developed.

According to Abusrour, 'beautiful resistance' is important for Palestinian children and youth because it helps them discover creative ways of resisting their everyday experiences of occupation, of life in the camp, and of the way they are stereotyped in the media as stone throwers and belligerents. In his Bristol lecture, for example, he stressed the importance of not accepting the 'victim narrative' but, rather, to 'live as human beings,' to be 'treated as partners and not as the recipients of charity.'[55] One expression of this is that Al-Rowwad does not embark on projects that have no relevance to the local community. Rather, the company focuses on those that 'really speak to the people.'[56] To illustrate this point, Abusrour used the example of when an international NGO made funds available through the Palestinian Ministry of Health and the Health Education Department for local theatre companies to produce plays raising awareness of HIV prevention. Although some other theatre companies responded to this call, Abusrour stressed that Al-Rowwad refused because 'there is no AIDS epidemic in Palestine' warranting such an awareness-raising campaign.[57] Rather than meeting the needs of local communities, he said, such a project would have been more attuned to the NGO's *global* agenda.

Al-Harah Theatre

Although established in 2005, the history of Al-Harah Theatre ('The Neigbourhood') goes back to the mid-1980s when a group of high school friends started an amateur acting troupe in their hometown of Beit Jala in the West Bank. There, they would write plays about political and social issues, and perform them in local schools, summer camps, and community

centres. By 1987, their performances had started to gain the interest of local audiences and, so, these friends decided to establish a theatre company called inad. Consisting of seven performers led by the founders, Raeda Ghazaleh and Khaled Masou, this was the first dedicated theatre company in the southern West Bank. This was also the year in which the first intifada began. So, *inad* seemed an appropriate name for it means 'stubbornness' in Arabic, in the sense that the act of establishing a theatre company at that time demonstrated tireless resistance to Israeli violence.

Until 1989, the company wrote, produced and toured plays for children and young people. As a result of the popularity of these performances, Ghazaleh and Masou realized they both needed formal training in order to develop and lead a professional theatre company. Whereas Masou headed to the University of Fine Arts in Santiago (Chile), Ghazaleh enrolled at the School of Visual Arts in Jerusalem. During this time, the company stopped producing plays, although individual members continued to take part in performances independently. After this hiatus, Ghazaleh persuaded her father to donate the family's old garage to Inad, which they then converted into a theatre. In the 1990s, Inad produced several original plays written by Masou and directed by Ghazaleh, including adaptations of plays and novels by leading Palestinian and Arab writers.

These productions propelled Inad to local acclaim. In 1995, Stephen Daldry, then artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre, and Elyse Dodgson, who pioneered the Royal Court Theatre's International Department, met with George Ibrahim in Ramallah. This visit eventually brought *Ramzy Abul Majd* to London, but it also allowed Ibrahim to introduce Daldry and Dodgson to the twenty-three-year-old Ghazaleh as a promising young director. This proved to be a significant moment in Ghazaleh's career. That same year, she was selected to attend a month-long directing workshop at the Royal Court after which Daldry invited her to assist him on Ron Hutchinson's award-winning 1984 play *Rat in the Skull*, set in a London police cell where RUC detective inspector Nelson (played by Tony Doyle) has been dispatched to interrogate a young IRA suspect called Roche (played by Rufus Sewell) and turn him informer. Ultimately, Nelson assaults Roche which, under the law at the time, would have allowed Roche to escape punishment. Told in flashback, the play is an investigation into why Nelson would assault an IRA suspect at the cost of seeing him walk free. Ghazaleh says she got the job after she cornered Daldry at a party in London.[58] At the time, she says, nobody

could fathom why he took her on especially as the play was already in production. She says,

> With time, I understood why he wanted me. Basically, he was working on a play about conflict [in Northern Ireland]. It was about people with their beliefs, and I don't think he knew a lot about that. He wanted somebody who [could offer] this kind of feedback.[59]

For a twenty-three-year-old director, Ghazaleh says, the experience of working with Daldry was life changing. She says that he would allow her to work directly with the actors on *Rat in the Skull* and to 'say whatever I think.'[60] His confidence in her ability was such that when, on the day before the show opened, she commented that his directing of the final scene, in particular of Sewell's physical movement, was 'wrong,' Daldry agreed to try out her suggestion. In the scene, in which Roche talks about an assassination attempt in flashback, Daldry had had Sewell deliver Roche's speech and then look frantically from the audience to Doyle (Nelson). Ghazaleh suggested that Roche should display more remorse at the execution, that he was only going along with the plan because he believed in the cause. Ghazaleh suggested that, after giving his instruction, Sewell should turn his back on Doyle so as not to witness the killing, that he should listen to the latter's racist joke and only turn around on the joke's punchline: 'I hope nothing's happened to him.' Ghazaleh's suggestion resolved some of the play's central emotional issues and, in that sense, she made a major contribution to the production.

A long-term impact of working with Daldry was the relationship it created between Inad and the Royal Court Theatre's International Department. In 1998, Ghazaleh helped organize a residential workshop for young Palestinian writers and directors in Bethlehem led by Elyse Dodgson, playwright Stephen Jeffreys, and director Phillipa Lloyd. Since then, the Royal Court Theatre has been able to team up with Palestinian theatres to deliver projects, workshops and exchange programmes throughout the West Bank with British and Palestinian writers and directors. The impact of these activities led Daldry to describe Ghazaleh as 'a potent force for developing Palestinian playwrights' (in Viner 2000, n.p.). As well as training young writers, directors and actors, Inad pioneered a mobile theatre for children which travelled to schools, refugee camps and villages during the Christmas and Ramadan holidays, and a 'silent theatre' group for deaf children using sign language.[61]

True to its name, Inad proved its 'stubbornness' during the second intifada when militants from the Fatah-affiliated Tanzim group used Beit Jala as a base for launching mortar and sniper attacks on the neighbouring illegal settlement of Gilo. The Israeli army retaliated by destroying buildings and vital infrastructure as well as killing innocent civilians. Even after the theatre building was shelled, Inad refused to suspend its activities. According to Marina Barham, who was general director of Inad at the time, the mobile theatre would travel along dirt tracks to avoid closures and checkpoints, sometimes being shot at by Israeli soldiers and settlers. She estimates that, in the first three months of the intifada, the mobile theatre performed for thirty thousand children and young people in the Bethlehem and Hebron areas in the southern West Bank.[62]

Despite these risks, however, Ghazaleh attempted to stage *Until When?*, a play about Beit Jala's experiences during the intifada, in 2001. However, she found it difficult to attract local audiences to the performance and the production was cancelled. It was not until October 2002 that a Beit Jala audience could finally bear to watch their own story—in the bombed out building of the theatre. By that time, *Until When?* had performed in Jordan, Egypt, Italy and France. In 2003, it performed at the Oval House Theatre, as part of the London International Festival of Theatre, and at the Aberystwyth Arts Centre in Wales.

Between 2004 and 2005, differences within the group led to eight of the nine members resigning and setting up Al-Harah Theatre.[63] Barham says that the new company's name, meaning 'the neighbourhood,' was chosen because it represents Beit Jala where

> families come from different little neighbourhoods. Stories come from neighbourhoods. Conflicts come from neighbourhoods. Intimate things happen in neighbourhoods. So we thought we should be called Al-Harah because we want to address issues related to the community. We want to be close to the community.[64]

In 2005, Al-Harah Theatre developed the children's play *Hanin al-Bahr* (*Longing for the Sea*) as a co-production with the Swedish Backa Theatre. Starring two Palestinian and three Swedish actors, *Hanin al-Bahr* is about a girl called Hanin who experiences grief and loneliness after the death of her grandfather. The play toured the West Bank for three months. In 2005, it performed thirty-one times in theatres and schools across Sweden and was the highest-selling play at Gothenburg's Backa

Theatre. At the 2005 International Theatre Festival for Children, organized by Ion Creangă Theatre in Bucharest (Romania), *Hanin al-Bahr* was awarded the prize for 'Best Children's Theatre Performance.' In January and February 2006, it toured the Egyptian cities of Cairo and Alexandria, and Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan.

In 2008, the company developed *Born in Bethlehem* which takes the form of a guided tour around Bethlehem with the audience in the position of tourists. The performance grew out of diaries Barham had kept during the second intifada as well as eyewitness accounts of life under occupation. The original idea was to create a promenade performance for tourists and pilgrims visiting Bethlehem. However, when they discovered the difficulties inherent in accessing this audience—since pilgrimage tours to Bethlehem are organized through the Israeli Ministry of Tourism which prevents pilgrims from meeting with Palestinians—they decided to focus on international audiences instead. The 'tour' includes a performance of the Nativity in which actors playing Mary and Joseph are obstructed by the Separation Barrier (or 'apartheid wall') and checkpoints as they attempt to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. *Born in Bethlehem* toured seven UK cities in April and May 2008, performing twelve times.

By and large, Al-Harah Theatre's productions attempt to deal with social issues within Palestinian society. *Making Senses* (2013), produced in partnership with the Swedish company Ögonblicksteatern, and directed by Ghazaleh, brought six Palestinian and Swedish actors together in a play about gender and disability in Sweden and Palestine. *Womb* (2014), directed by Ghazaleh, examines Palestinian women's reproductive rights. *Shakespeare's Sisters* (2014), a play about women's spatial autonomy in Palestinian society, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, was a co-production with the Italian company Teatro Dell'Argine.

In 2013, the company toured *Why?*, a play about a young man called Ahmad attempting to come to terms with contracting HIV. Directed by Ghazaleh, Al-Harah Theatre was responding to the very call-out Abusrour had so vehemently rejected. According to the World Health Organization, the occupied Palestinian territory comprise a 'low prevalence country' for HIV/AIDS, so incidents of transmission may be non-existent in towns like Beit Jala.[65] Yet, the play demonstrates the extent to which theatre companies must rely on external funding to continue their work, to pay staff and to maintain their premises. Sometimes, such choices come down to pragmatism.

The Freedom Theatre

Of the five companies discussed here, probably the most controversial is The Freedom Theatre based in the Jenin refugee camp. Although established in 2006, the roots of the theatre go back to the days of the first intifada, to the Israeli soldier-turned-peace activist Arna Mer. Born in 1929 in the town of Rosh Pinna, one of the earliest Zionist settlements to be established in Palestine in the late nineteenth century, Mer served in the elite Palmach brigade of the paramilitary group Haganah during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The next three decades saw a reversal in her identification with the Zionist project: in the 1950s, she married the Palestinian Christian Saliba Khamis, who was then secretary of the Communist Party, and was disowned by her family; and, following the War of 1967, she was arrested and imprisoned several times for protesting the occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. In *Arna's Children*, a documentary about her life and work in the Jenin refugee camp, directed by her son Juliano Mer-Khamis in 2004, Mer reflects on her time in the Palmach. 'I helped to drive out the Bedouin,' she says, staring straight at the camera. 'That is something I regret.'[66]

Perhaps it was this regret, coupled with her personal conflicts with her family and growing disaffection from Zionism, that led her to establish the Care and Learning project to advocate for Palestinian children held in Israeli military prisons during the first intifada (Right Livelihood Award 1993; Portis 2011). Between 1988 and 1990, the Israeli authorities closed down all schools in the West Bank and Gaza, and Mer saw the need to supplement the informal, home-based teaching developed by the Palestinian women's committees with regular, structured and well-resourced classes. Without an adequate venue, many of these classes took place in the streets with up to 300 children attending. By 1990, Care and Learning had opened three children's houses in Jenin city and another in the camp itself. A teacher with a degree in special education and art therapy, Mer's classes allowed the children to harness their own creativity in order to deal with trauma. In 1993, with money awarded to her as winner of the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize, Arna Mer and Juliano Mer-Khamis set up The Stone Theatre—named after the stones the children would throw at Israeli tanks—in the top floor of a house belonging to a family living in the camp. The theatre became a centre for educating children, for facilitating drama and art therapy workshops as well as a place for children and their families to socialize. When

Mer died of cancer in 1995, Juliano Mer-Khamis returned to Israel where he established himself as a mainstream film and stage actor. With no one to lead it, The Stone Theatre came to an end.

During the second intifada, the Jenin refugee camp became the site of intense violence. Dubbed 'the suicide bombers' capital,' the camp's militants included members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Tanzim.[67] In the first three years of the intifada alone, at least twenty-eight suicide bombers came from the camp (Rees 2002; Lee 2003). In April 2002, the Israeli army entered the camp and declared it a closed military zone, which allowed them to impose a round-the-clock curfew and prevent medical and humanitarian relief from reaching victims of the violence. This event became known as the 'battle of Jenin,' a ten-day campaign in which almost 150 homes were destroyed or partially demolished, and approximately 435 families were made homeless (UNRWA n.d.). The scale of the damage became apparent to me when, on an impromptu walk around the camp in April 2014, a friend pointed out how wide the streets are. 'There used to be houses and shops here,' she said. 'Now there's a square and posters of martyrs.'

During these military campaigns, the neighbourhood in which The Stone Theatre was located was reduced to rubble. Several of the children featured in *Arna's Children*, two of whom had taken part in suicide missions, were also killed in the fighting (Fox 2012). The disarray of the second intifada—contrasted with the highly organized, grassroots activism of the first intifada—resulted in widespread disillusionment amongst Palestinians with the Oslo peace process and their own ability to defend themselves and the land. Still living in the shadows of April 2002—almost everyone I met in the camp had lost a loved one or had spent time in an Israeli jail—and the regular disruptions to their daily lives, there appears to be little left worth fighting for. More than sixteen thousand registered refugees inhabit an area of less than half a square kilometre, and roughly 60 per cent of them are less than twenty-four years of age (UNRWA n.d.). Demonstrating the lack of basic infrastructure, the camp is served by just one health centre and two schools one of which runs double shifts. With a quarter of the residents unemployed, poverty levels here are very high. According to UN-OCHA's profile of the camp, almost half the population live in absolute poverty (UN-OCHA 2008b, 5). A friend in Jenin tells me, 'The people have lost their fighting spirit. They've given up. They only want jobs and food.'

Out of the rubble of the second intifada and the work of Mer, The Freedom Theatre was founded in 2006 by Juliano Mer-Khamis, Jonatan Stanczak and Zakaria Zubeidi. According to Stanczak, different yet complementary motivations brought the three men together.[68] Originally from Sweden and of Jewish heritage, Stanczak had been working as a nurse for a number of years as well as playing an active role in the Palestine Solidarity Association of Sweden. He says that the opportunity to work in Jenin brought together his political activism and his professional interest in children's health. Mer-Khamis had become increasingly 'fed up' of performing for mainstream Israeli audiences and was looking for a way to continue his mother's work in the camp. His mixed parentage and increasingly vocal support for Palestine meant that Israeli production companies and theatres were becoming less interested in employing him. Zubeidi, who had been the leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade during the second intifada and survived four Israeli assassination attempts, was beginning to commit himself to the concept of cultural resistance. In fact, Zubeidi had had a personal connection to Mer's work: it was in his family's house that The Stone Theatre had been established, and he himself had been part of the original troupe.

According to Stanczak, the realization that a different form of resistance other than armed resistance was needed emerged from the widespread disillusionment following the chaos of the second intifada resulting in its failure to provide a direction for the national movement as well as in the lack of unity and coordination among Palestinian factions themselves. As a professional actor, Mer-Khamis was the obvious person to lead the theatre as artistic director. Stanczak, who had supplied part of the start-up capital (whilst the rest came from screenings of *Arna's Children*), became its operations manager and, later, the managing director. Zubeidi, as a hero of the second intifada, provided the theatre with protection from critics in the camp. In fact, his support legitimated the theatre. As outsiders, Mer-Khamis and Stanczak might not have been able to do this without him.

The Freedom Theatre articulates the need for another method of resisting Israeli oppression by situating its activities within a form of resistance that it calls the 'cultural.' In interviews with Erin Mee before his murder in 2011, Mer-Khamis describes the theatre as bringing together artistic practices and political activism without asserting the superiority of the former or disavowing the importance of the latter. Further, he asserts, 'the

third intifada, the coming intifada, should be cultural, with poetry, music, theatre, cameras, and magazines' (in Mee 2011, 10; Mee 2012, 168).

According to Stanczak, the theatre's activities grew organically. He says that the founders never had a long-term strategic plan to begin with, but they realized very early on that they needed an actor training programme.[69] This, he says, began as workshops facilitated solely by Mer-Khamis, and led to small-scale performances. In the early days, attempts to bring in practitioners and trainers from other parts of the West Bank proved problematic because Jenin was still difficult to reach by public transport as well as being perceived as a dangerous place. There were still skirmishes taking place between the Israeli army and local fighters, and the 2006 violent conflict between Fatah and Hamas was taking its toll in the camp.

It was a chance recommendation in 2007 that brought Nabil Al-Raee, the present artistic director, in contact with Mer-Khamis. After directing *To Be or Not to Be*, about a group of boys who dream of travelling from the camp to the sea but are prevented from doing so by the realities of the occupation, Al-Raee was invited to work at the theatre as an actor trainer. He would go on to produce several plays for The Freedom Theatre as artistic consultant and director before replacing Mer-Khamis as artistic director in 2011.

Over the last twelve years, the theatre has grown both in size and in output. At the time of writing, the staff consists of many more individuals, mostly Palestinians, with Stanczak serving as an associate advisor. Its core staff of thirteen Palestinians consists of, amongst other roles, an artistic director, a stage designer, a technician, a human resources manager and a social media coordinator. The associate team of six includes theatre practitioners, producers and fundraisers. Furthermore, its executive board boasts such luminaries as Noam Chomsky and Judith Butler, the Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury and the Israeli theatre scholar Avraham Oz. The theatre has also expanded the scope of its work to include art exhibitions and courses in dramatherapy, photography, filmmaking and creative writing. In 2015, The Freedom Theatre began a collaborative project with the radical Delhi-based street-theatre company Jana Natya Manch, the first such collaboration between a Palestinian and an Indian theatre company. For three months, acting students from The Freedom Theatre travelled to Delhi to create a collaborative play that toured ten Indian cities. Following this, a group of actors from Jana Natya Manch travelled to the West Bank where the play toured as part of the 2016 Freedom Ride. Regarding this

collaboration, Sudhanva Deshpande, a theatre director, actor, and long-standing member of Jana Natya Manch, has said:

> This is truly people-to-people contact, rather artist-to-artist. They sought us out, and we sought them out because we found inspiration in each other's work. This is third-world talking to third-world, without the first-world telling us who to talk to, or what to talk about.[70]

In another part of his interview with Mee, Mer-Khamis insists that the goal of national liberation goes hand in hand with tackling struggles within Palestinian society, that the latter cannot be deferred until Palestinians have achieved their freedom from Israeli hegemony (Mee 2011, 11). This principle is reflected in the theatre's repertoire of over twenty plays, all of which are commentaries on Palestinian society and culture, not just the occupation. Al-Raee's adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in 2009, for example, drew criticism for suggesting that the Palestinian Authority was complicit in Israeli settler-colonialism. In the final scene, for example, Hebrew-speaking soldiers appear to trade with Arabic-speaking pigs. This was too controversial for factions loyal to the Palestinian Authority who distributed leaflets denouncing the theatre as a plot by Israelis and foreigners to undermine the national movement. An arson attempt was also made on the theatre premises. In 2011, Mer-Khamis' musical adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* also drew severe criticism. About a girl who refuses to enter into an arranged marriage, the performance was an indictment of gender oppression, veiling and forced marriage in Palestinian society. This production was the first time a male and female actor, and teenagers at that, danced together on a public stage in Jenin. The Palestinian Ministry of Education described the play as immoral and banned it for school-age children. Despite this, however, the play completed a three-month run from January to March 2011.

Other productions have been more directly critical of the Israeli state. *Suicide Note from Palestine*, Al-Raee's 2013 adaptation of Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis* has its teenage protagonist Amal deliver a speech before the UN General Assembly which vehemently ignores her pleas for assistance against Israeli aggression. Yet the performance does not ignore conflicts within Palestinian society as Amal also represents the psychological trauma facing Palestinians of her generation. Gary English's 2013 adaptation of the South African play *The Island* replaces the unnamed prison on Robben Island with an unnamed Israeli military prison in order to present the

conditions in which Palestinian political prisoners are kept as well as to draw similarities with South Africans' struggle for freedom and justice. On the other hand, some productions have been problematic from the start. In March 2011, for example, the theatre began rehearsals on Frank Wedekind's 1906 play *Spring Awakening* about youth revolt, incest, homosexuality, suicide and abortion, to be produced by a German director who was teaching acting at the theatre at the time. By the end of the month, opposition to the play was so severe that the performance had to be cancelled. One member of staff told me that actors walked out of rehearsals, and anonymous leaflets were circulated around the camp threatening the theatre with violence.[71]

On 4 April 2011, a week after *Alice in Wonderland* had completed its run and less than a week after *Spring Awakening* was cancelled, Mer-Khamis was murdered outside the theatre building by a masked gunman who, to this day, remains at large. Mer-Khamis had already predicted his death in an interview he gave in 2008. He said that, were he to be killed, his murderer would be a 'fucked up Palestinian' accusing him of 'corrupting the youth of Islam.'[72] The prediction demonstrates that Mer-Khamis was deeply aware of how controversial the theatre's work was amongst local residents. As the theatre and its supporters mourned his death, right-wing Israeli journalists displayed an incredible level of schadenfreude. Summarizing the commentary, journalist Daniel Breslau quotes one Israeli as saying that Mer-Khamis had 'lived among snakes' and had, consequently, been killed by one of them. As if this racist, de-humanizing commentary were not enough, Breslau quotes a journalist at Israel's Channel 2 television station claiming that Mer-Khamis' murder 'demonstrates that opposite us stand human animals.'[73]

It is not improbable that these events are connected. Since its creation, the theatre has been under constant scrutiny and attack with accusations that it is corrupting the youth or that it is really a Zionist conspiracy to undermine local resistance.[74] The appearance of male and female actors dancing together on stage, such public criticisms of religious practices, and denunciations of Palestinian leaders as collaborators may have been considered justifications for Mer-Khamis' murder. For more than a year after this, Israeli forces continued to arrest and imprison students and staff including Al-Raee who was detained for forty days. Such actions, ostensibly under the guise of maintaining security, fit into the broader pattern of Israeli practices in the West Bank where even the most trivial cultural activity critiquing the occupation can be met with brutal reprisals: it is easier,

after all, to prevent transgressive practices from taking place than to engage with the issues they raise. Commenting on these arrests, a few years later, Stanczak declared:

> [The Israelis] thought we would break down when Juliano Mer-Khamis was assassinated, but we kept on and now they are trying to suffocate us slowly but surely by harassing our employees, members and supporters with various accusations, one more absurd than the other. (in Khalidi 2012, n.p.)

The response of The Freedom Theatre to Mer-Khamis' murder was to continue with its cultural intifada. In 2011 alone, the theatre produced three highly acclaimed plays: an original play entitled *Sho Kman—What Else?,* and adaptations of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* entitled *While Waiting*, which toured Europe and America. In the same year, the dramatherapist Ben Rivers set up the Freedom Ride which holds Playback Theatre events in villages, Bedouin communities and refugee camps across the West Bank. Despite the opposition the theatre faces from Israeli occupation forces and from within Palestinian society, Stanczak maintains that they are determined to continue their work.

The companies discussed in this chapter emerged after the first intifada, and have considered themselves to be part of a theatrical movement stretching back four decades. As the first intifada ended and the Oslo peace process ushered in new political and economic conditions for Palestinians, a sharp contrast can be discerned between the theatre companies of the present and those of the pre-intifada period. Whereas the theatre companies of the 1970s and 1980s had to rely mostly on core groups of volunteers, the post-Oslo theatre scene has experienced unprecedented levels of professionalization. In some sense, this turn towards a professional theatre has also meant that companies must navigate between their own political intentions and donors' agendas. Regardless, however, they still consider themselves to be a central part of the national liberation struggle and this can be seen in the content of their works.

Another key difference has been the increasing 'internationalization' of Palestinian theatre as companies collaborate with practitioners from abroad, participate in international festivals, and take productions on tour. Generally, the direction in which these partnerships occur has been towards Europe and America, indicating how the global flow of power and capital has also influenced Palestinian theatre practice. Palestinian theatre-makers

have had to navigate through an impossibly difficult terrain—not only in terms of the material conditions under which they are forced to work, but also as Palestinians contending with a form of colonialism predicated upon their abjection and erasure.

The unifying feature of Palestinian theatre has been this confrontation between the Zionist public sphere and a Palestinian abject counterpublic. The following chapters focus on case studies mapping how Palestinian theatre-makers reconstruct abjection as a site of resistance and counter-public formation. Not only does this process include the kinds of stories they tell each other and the world, but it also determines the relationships they form with international practitioners. What stands out is that this is a theatre that calls its audiences to action. As one of the actors in The Freedom Theatre's touring production of *Our Sign is the Stone* (discussed in the final chapter) said, 'We mustn't give up. Theatre is part of this resistance.'

Notes

1. Indeed, two key texts published during this period were Arabic-language studies of Palestinian theatre history in which the authors explicitly refer to it as a 'theatrical movement.' See: Muhammad Anis, *al-Haraka al-Masrahiyya fi al-Manatiq al-Muhtalla*, Haifa: Dar Galileo, 1979 (Arabic: 'The theatrical movement in the occupied territories'); and Muhammad Mahamid, *Masirat al-Haraka al-Masrahiyya fi al-Diffa al-Gharbiyya, 1967–1987*, Taybeh, Palestine: Markaz Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1989 (Arabic: 'The journeys of the theatrical movement in the West Bank, 1967–1987').
2. For more on Palestinian solidarity with Asian and African anti-colonial movements, see: Maha Nassar, '"My Struggle Embraces Every Struggle": Palestinians in Israel and Solidarity with Afro-Asian Liberation Movements,' *Arab Studies Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2014, pp. 74–101.
3. For a more detailed discussion of theatre in the 1970s and 1980s, see: Nassar, 2001, pp. 49–104; and Snir, 2005a, pp. 85–104.
4. Abu Salem was born in 1951 in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. His Hungarian father had been working as a physician since the Mandatory Period, and his mother was a French *émigrée*. Abu Salem trained at the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris under its legendary director Ariane Mnouchkine. He returned to Palestine in 1970, profoundly influenced by Mnouchkine's political outlook and theatrical vision, the outcome of the War of 1967, the 1968 student uprisings and general strikes in France, and

European writers and dramatists like Franz Kafka, Jean Genet and Bertolt Brecht. Although his original surname was Gaspard, 'Abu Salem' was given to him by other members of Balalin, and he adopted it for the rest of his life. He committed suicide in 2011. For more, see: Rania Jawad, 'Francois Abu Salem,' *Jadaliyya*, October 20, 2011, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2911/francois-abu-salem (accessed November 28, 2015).

5. For more detailed discussions of these plays, see: Nassar, 2001, pp. 91–104; Snir, 2005a, pp. 108–29; and Snir, 2005b, pp. 13–22. For the script of *al-'Atma*, see: The Balalin Company of Jerusalem, 'Darkness,' trans. Aida Bamia and Thomas G. Ezzy, in Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Roger Allen (eds), *Modern Arabic Drama*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 187–211.
6. On the profound influence of Brecht on Palestinian theatre-makers, see: Reuven Snir, 'Palestinian Theatre as a Junction of Cultures: The Case of Samih al-Qasim's *Qaraqash*,' *Journal of Theatre and Drama*, vol. 2, 1996, pp. 101–20; and Werner Ende, 'The Palestine Conflict as Reflected in Contemporary Arabic Literature,' in Gustav Stein and Udo Steinbach (eds), *The Contemporary Middle Eastern Scene: Basic and Major Trends*, Opladen, Germany: Leske & Budrich, 1979, pp. 154–67.
7. For the names of these companies, refer to: Nassar, 2001, pp. 82–83.
8. For more on censorship, see: Nassar, 2001, pp. 57–62; Snir, 2005a, pp. 91–97; and Slyomovics, 1991.
9. Based on a number of informal conversations with members of the Orient & Dance Theatre in Ramallah in April 2013. One of them said that she and her friends generally avoid Al-Kasaba Theatre and Ashtar Theatre because 'we don't know what's behind them,' referring to the theatres' revenue streams.
10. For more on this, see: Samer Al-Saber and Yana Taylor (2014) "Reflecting on Palestinian Theatre: A Resilient Theatre of Resistance." *Performance Paradigm*, vol. 10, pp. 94–103.
11. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 1, 2015.
12. Ibid. In this conversation, Ibrahim says: 'This theatre—I mean, the group of this theatre—was established in 1970 in Jerusalem.'
13. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 1, 2015.
14. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 10, 2014.
15. The Arabic title was *al-Mawt bi-la Qubur*, or 'Death Without Graves.' George Ibrahim, interview with author, June 30, 2014.
16. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 1, 2015.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 10, 2014.

20. For an infographic outlining how the identity cards system functions in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, see: Visualizing Palestine, *Identity Crisis: The Israeli ID System*, 2014, http://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/identity-crisis-the-israeli-id-system (accessed November 12, 2015).
21. It is interesting to note that the PFLP fighter Leila Khaled, who gained worldwide notoriety in the 1970s for her part in hijacking two airplanes, was also released from detention in a British jail in 1970 as part of a prisoner-hostage exchange deal between the British government and the PFLP. For a full cast list of the play and a blurb, see: Al-Kasaba Theatre & Cinematheque, *Death and the Maiden 1997*, http://www.alkasaba.org/details.php?id=6tjqnta1905yppi229ew2 (accessed July 2, 2015). For more information on the secret discussions between the PFLP and the British and Jordanian governments, see: The National Archives, 'New Year Releases 2001,' pp. 49–67, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/nyo_2001_pt2.pdf (accessed July 2, 2015). The document includes records from British Cabinet meetings (CAB 128/47, 164/75 and 164/795) and the Prime Minister's Office (PREM 15/202).
22. For a full cast list and blurb, see: Al-Kasaba Theatre & Cinematheque, *Saccho & Vanzetti 1998* [sic], http://www.alkasaba.org/details.php?id=438ez7a1879ytvve68jiw (accessed July 2, 2015).
23. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 1, 2015.
24. Ibid.
25. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 10, 2014.
26. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 1, 2015.
27. For more on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, see: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Eqbal Ahmad (eds), 'The Invasion of Lebanon' (Special issue), *Race & Class*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1983; Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985; Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; and Bayan N. Al-Hout, *Sabra and Shatila: September 1982*, London: Pluto Press, 2004.
28. David Greig, 'Welcome to the Fringe,' *Front Step*, August 2, 2014, http://www.front-step.co.uk/2014/08/02/welcome-to-the-fringe (accessed July 4, 2015).
29. Ibid.
30. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 10, 2014.
31. Michael Billington, 'Drama that Brings us the News,' *The Guardian*, June 30, 2001, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2001/jun/30/theatre.artsfeatures (accessed July 4, 2015).
32. Michael Billington, '*Alive From Palestine*,' *The Guardian*, July 24, 2002, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2002/jul/24/theatre.artsfeatures (accessed July 4, 2015).

33. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, June 3, 2015.
34. Ibid.
35. Ashtar Theatre, *Newsletter, January-May 2015*, 2015, Ramallah: Ashtar Theatre, http://masrah-theater.net/images/ashtar/2015/ashtar.newsletter.final.2015.pdf (accessed November 24, 2015).
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, June 3, 2015.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. A public panel discussion, which I attended, was held at Shakespeare's Globe in London on 4 April 2012 after the matinee performance. The panel consisted of Iman Aoun, Nicola Zreinah (playing Bolingbroke), George Ibrahim (Gloucester), the playwright Sonja Linden (artistic director of ice&fire, a theatre company focusing on human rights), and the writer and broadcaster Bidisha. It was chaired by Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, a founder of Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, and a member of Jews for Justice for Palestinians. The full discussion is available at: inminds, 'Palestinian Theatre Ashtar at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 4 May 2012,' *YouTube*, May 13, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiPjW7octrY (accessed June 29, 2015). (The date on the *YouTube* video is incorrect.)
44. Sarah Irving, 'Shakespeare in Palestine: Theater Director Speaks on Arabic Version of *Richard II*,' *The Electronic Intifada*, April 27, 2012, http://electronicintifada.net/content/shakespeare-palestine-theater-director-speaks-arabic-version-richard-ii/11218 (accessed November 24, 2015).
45. Ibid.
46. Abdelfattah Abusrour, interview with the author, May 26, 2015.
47. For more on the failure of the Oslo process, see: Edward W. Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, 2nd ed., London: Granta Books, 2002; Marwan Bishara, *Palestine/Israel: Peace or Apartheid: Occupation, Terrorism and the Future*, 2nd ed., London: Zed Books, 2002; and Sara Roy, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, London: Pluto Press, 2007.
48. Abdelfattah Abusrour, interview with the author, May 26, 2015.
49. Ibid.
50. For a photograph of the mural, see: Akkas, 'Part of the Apartheid Wall, Bethlehem,' *Flickr*, April 22, 2013, http://www.flickr.com/photos/akkasistan/9444657580/in/album-72157634943793398 (accessed June 25, 2015).

51. For a photograph of the mural, see: Akkas, 'Aida camp,' *Flickr*, April 22, 2013, http://www.flickr.com/photos/akkasistan/9444659490/in/album-72157634943793398 (accessed June 25, 2015).
52. Abdelfattah Abusrour, interview with author, May 26, 2015.
53. Abdelfattah Abusrour, 'Theatre and Conflict' (public lecture), Bristol Palestine Film Festival, Bristol, October 24, 2012.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Raeda Ghazaleh, interview with the author, May 19, 2014.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Marina Barham, interview with the author, April 23, 2013.
63. Ghazaleh and Barham were reluctant to go into detail about the nature of this conflict, and it would be incorrect and unfair to speculate here.
64. Marina Barham, interview with the author, April 23, 2013.
65. See: World Health Organization, 'Occupied Palestinian Territory: HIV/AIDS Tuberculosis Programme: Phase 2 of the Global Fund to Fight Tuberculosis, AIDS and Malaria (GFTAM) Round 7 in oPt,' n.d., http://www.emro.who.int/pse/programmes/hiv-aids-tb-programme.html (accessed November 12, 2015).
66. Juliano Mer-Khamis and Danniel Danniel, *Arna's Children: A Film*, Tel Aviv: Trabelsi Productions & First Hand Films, 2004.
67. See, for example: Israeli Defense Forces, 'Jenin: The Capital of Suicide Terrorists,' *circa* April 19, 2002, http://www.idf.il/english/news/jenin.stm (accessed September 3, 2013).
68. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, June 1, 2015.
69. Ibid.
70. The Freedom Theatre, 'The Freedom Jatha from Palestine to India and Back' n.d., http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/the-freedom-jatha-from-palestine-to-india-and-back (accessed November 12, 2015).
71. This information is based on informal conversations I had with staff at the theatre during fieldwork in April 2013.
72. Middle East News Watch, 'Juliano Mer-Khamis Predicted His Own Murder by Palestinians,' *YouTube*, April 7, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSPUxYMoKRs (accessed June 18, 2015).
73. Daniel Breslau, 'A Leftist has been Murdered: Attack the Left!,' *Kibush*, April 13, 2011, http://www.kibush.co.il/show_file.asp?num=46076 (accessed June 18, 2015).
74. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, June 1, 2015.

CHAPTER 3

Aren't We Human?

How might abjection, as a site of resistance, be performatively constituted as a counterpublic space? During interviews and informal conversations, Palestinian theatre-makers repeated again and again that their work is imperative because it 'humanizes' Palestinians and that it presents the 'human face' of Palestine to the world. For these theatre-makers, a performance is not simply a performance. It does something else simultaneously, and that is to create a space in which audiences are brought together through narratives of resistance to the 'historico-racial schema' and the 'racial epidermal schema' (Fanon 2008, 84) which Zionist discourse imposes upon Palestine and Palestinians. In rejecting these schema, Palestinian theatre-makers continually seek to expand their audiences or publics, not just locally and regionally but around the world. In order to explore this idea, this chapter discusses a number of plays and spanning over a decade—Al-Kasaba Theatre's *Alive from Palestine* (2001), Al-Rowwad's *We Are the Children of the Camp* (2006), Ashtar's *The Gaza Monologues* (2010), and The Freedom Theatre's Freedom Ride project (initiated in 2011).

G. Varghese, *Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank*,
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Alive from Palestine

On 12 October 2000, two weeks after the start of the second intifada, two Israeli soldiers, Vadim Nurzhitz and Yosef Avrahami, mistakenly entered Ramallah where they were picked up by Palestinian police and detained at a local police station. Their detention could not have happened at a worse time. Palestinian anger against Israeli violence was already at breaking point. Within the first two weeks of the intifada, Israeli forces had killed over a hundred Palestinian civilians. Less than a fortnight earlier, twelve-year-old Muhammad Al-Durrah had been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza as he and his father cowered behind a small concrete cylinder. Thousands attended his funeral. Within days, the footage of Muhammad's death, caught by a freelance cameraman, had been broadcast all over the world, turning him into an icon. Only days before this incident, the mutilated body of a Palestinian man had been found dumped on a roadside; his death was attributed to Israeli settlers (Bishara 2002, 33). And, just as Nurzhitz and Avrahami were being held at the Ramallah police station, people were leaving the funeral of a Palestinian teenager killed in clashes with Israeli soldiers.

When rumours began to spread that local police had intercepted two undercover Israeli agents, a thousand-strong mob gathered outside the station. What may have been intended as a protest rally took a more frightening turn when a splinter group stormed the building and, despite police efforts to stop them, killed the soldiers before setting one of them alight and throwing the other out of the window. The crowd then dragged the bodies to the central square where they began a victory celebration (Dor 2004, 124). The Israeli army's response was swift. Almost immediately, it launched a bombing campaign across the West Bank and Gaza, destroying the police station at which the lynching had taken place as well as several other buildings, including the Voice of Palestine radio station.

For a horrified Israeli public, the murder of Nurzhitz and Avrahami symbolized Palestinian barbarism. Palestinians were also horrified by the incident. For a population experiencing the effects of Israel's destruction of civilian infrastructure, these retaliatory attacks were interpreted as collective punishment for the crimes of a few (ibid., 128). In the days following the incident, many people gathered at the ruins of the police station to protest the attacks.

Among those people were George Ibrahim and actors from Al-Kasaba Theatre. They were joined by Palestinian performers from around the

West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israel. The company set up a stage next to the police station and invited the performers and members of the public to sing, recite poetry and speak about their experiences of the intifada. This proved so popular, Ibrahim says, that he decided to host a similar event at the theatre the following week. The stage, he says, 'was open to anyone to speak up, to sing, to dance.'[1] Overwhelmed by the level of audience participation, the theatre decided to host a similar event on a weekly basis. Ibrahim says that the actors would write and perform monologues based on the stories shared by the audience. These performances would open the events before audience members were invited to take the stage. Continuing for nine months, each event would provide the actors with an archive of stories for the following week's monologues. No two shows were alike. 'Hundreds of people came,' Ibrahim says. 'They used to book their tickets for the next two weeks.'[2]

This is the background to Al-Kasaba Theatre's *Alive from Palestine: Stories Under Occupation*. For almost a year, the theatre became an arena open for ordinary people to share and discuss their experiences and ideas. That all this was taking place inside the theatre building, despite Israel's continued aerial bombardment and ground invasion of the West Bank, demonstrates the remarkable resilience of Palestinian theatre-makers to retain theatrical spaces for the circulation of transgressive ideas and oppositional practices. For nine months, audiences were organizing themselves around a counter-discourse of shared experiences. The widespread violence of the second intifada created an ongoing need for spaces of healing where people could come together, verbalize their experiences, thoughts and emotions, and know that they would be heard. By sharing their stories, audience members were drawing comfort from the fact that they were not alone. Just as important, they were gathering the strength to go on facing their abject status by reminding each other that they were real people with real lives. This process of self-organizing allowed for the circulation of stories that challenged their representation elsewhere as 'human waste' only fit for collective punishment (Tyler 2013, 27). In other words, the audiences taking part in these events were actively engaged in a process to re-epidermalize themselves as human beings. This is why, so many people attended these events, and also why they kept returning.

In the summer of 2001, Al-Kasaba Theatre was invited to take part in the London International Festival of Theatre. At the time, Ibrahim recalls, the company was exhausted. 'Putting on a show like that every week for nine months is tiring,' he says.[3] However, the chance to perform at

London's Royal Court Theatre was an antidote to this fatigue.[4] By adapting the narratives, they had accumulated over the previous nine months into a play, for the first time the company was considering an audience beyond the local. To put it differently, the gaze of this abject counterpublic was now turning outward, bypassing the dominant Zionist public sphere and its exclusionary discourse to present its human face to an international audience. That same year, the play was performed at the thirteenth session of the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre, where it won the prize for best play, the first in a long list of similar awards. *Alive from Palestine* continued to tour around the world for almost a decade after these performances.[5]

Alive from Palestine is an enactment of resistance because it defies Zionist attempts to 'fix' Palestinians as violent and horrifying bodies. These discursive and aesthetic representations are so entrenched in Israeli society that any attempt by Palestinians, even Palestinian citizens of Israel, to assert themselves subjectively in that space is immediately obstructed by a host of antagonistic voices. Thus, the act of talking back to the dominant public must take the circuitous route of eliciting solidarity from publics elsewhere (Fraser 1990, 124). Since the Zionist public sphere refuses to see the human face of its Palestinian abject/other, Palestinians attempt to show that human face to those who are *already* perceived as human: the world. This process of disidentification is central to the formation of an abject counterpublic.

Alive from Palestine is a series of seventeen interwoven monologues told in Palestinian Arabic, performed by a cast of six actors playing multiple roles.[6] From the beginning, the performance alerts the audience to what Palestinians must struggle against to assert their human face: the proscenium stage is piled high with old newspapers. These feature prominently within the performance itself as actors read them, dance with them, throw them in the air, hide behind stacks of them or quarrel over them. The performance opens with Erik Satie's *Gnossienne No. 1*. The minimalism of the piano solo, performed without time signatures so it sounds like it could be playing on a loop, provides an unsettling underscore to the play because it is so utterly unlike the violence we witness on stage.

Throughout the performance, we are made to encounter situations in which violence has become a normalized and accepted part of everyday life. The monologues often blend humour with pathos—as when a man receives a phone call from his son in London. As the father shows more concern about those unremarkable aspects of his son's life ('Has [your

wife] cooked mulokhiyyeh like your sister Suad taught her?'), it is the son who attempts to steer him back to his realities in Palestine. The audience only hears the father's side of the conversation, but we can work out the son is asking about his uncle (to which the father replies: 'martyred'), his cousin ('shot in the eye'), and his brother ('I visit him in jail […] Four life sentences but he's fine'). When the son says that he can hear shooting, the father becomes agitated and replies, 'Don't go out. Look after yourself,' before he realizes his son is referring to the shooting he can hear over the phone.

Another monologue communicates the sorrow of parents losing their children. A father is going through his son's school bag. In it, he finds an apple, a sandwich, a pencil, and a sketchbook. He speaks to his son as though he were sitting in front of him, gently scolding him for wanting things the father cannot provide because the roadblocks prevent him from travelling to the shops. He mimics his son's voice as he recounts all the things he wanted: an apple, which are hard to obtain; a pencil so he can write a letter to Muhammad Al-Durrah, the little boy whose death had made him an icon of the intifada; and a sketchbook so he can draw pictures of his school surrounded by Israeli soldiers. As he continues going through the bag, the father finds the following rhyme written by his son.

> Once upon a time, there were children
> playing in the neighbourhood.
> A plane flew over
> and attacked them.
> Now there's no neighbourhood
> and no children playing.

Reading this, the father becomes agitated. He says that the things he did provide for his son are now of no use, so he will give them to the boy's younger brother. A moment of silence passes as the performer says in a very different voice: 'I'm sorry, son. I forgot you're my only child.' It is at this point that the audience realizes his son is dead. We are not told how he died but, from the broader context of the scene, we might assume that he was killed by one of the soldiers at his school. The apple and half-eaten sandwich were his lunch. The monologue also reminds us of those Israeli politicians who claim that Palestinians willingly sacrifice their children for ideological reasons. The father's conversation with his son shows us that Palestinians, like all people everywhere, are human beings who love their children too much to want them to die.

The final monologue presents us with the normality of violence. The full text of the speech is worth quoting here because it details aspects of everyday life under military occupation that would otherwise be unknown to an international audience. During the monologue preceding this, we witness a man being killed by an Israeli sniper. As the actors retreat behind the piles of newspaper, a woman remains on stage. She delivers the following lines before the lights fade and the performers fall dead to the sound of gunfire. The repetition of the word 'normal' alerts us, first, to how astonishing levels of violence eventually become so commonplace that to re-state their abnormality is itself a struggle or a shock. Secondly, the performer begins by reiterating the dominant discursive representation of Palestinian society as inherently violent before she describes how Palestinians themselves are victims of this violence.

> Someone dies. That's normal. [*She picks up a newspaper, and reads:*] 'Four citizens martyred and two hundred wounded.' That's four nil. [*She picks up another newspaper, and reads:*] 'Seven martyrs and thousands wounded.' Seven nil. [*She picks up another newspaper, and reads:*] 'Six martyrs and two settlers killed in Khedeirah.' Six two. [*She picks up another newspaper, and reads:*] 'Three martyrs and the shelling of Gaza and the West Bank goes on.' Three nil. [*She shrugs.*] Everything is normal. So you buy all these newspapers, and waste your time reading the news, and find nothing abnormal. Death has become normal, and so has bloodshed. Fear and despair are normal. The checkpoints are closed? It's normal. We'll go round the back. The back road's dug up? Normal. The drive that took half an hour takes two? Normal. They bombed us at night? Normal. We starve for two months? Normal. My brother got a bullet in his back? Normal. I can't go home? Normal. I'll sleep in the street. In the first days, the Arab nations woke up and we said, 'Now we'll be liberated!' What happened? Nothing. We became a normal news item. How did this happen? How did everything become normal? Three thousand martyred. Forty thousand wounded. That's normal? How many families is that? How many boys will get no more presents from their fathers for Eid? How many girls won't hear 'I love you' from their boyfriends anymore? Let's count. Three thousand martyrs and forty thousand wounded. Thousands of homes demolished. Sixty thousand hectares despoiled. Three—no, four—refugee camps bulldozed. Four hundred thousand with nothing to eat. And how many handicapped? That's a whole country destroyed. No. That's not normal.

By restoring a narrative that is ordinarily hidden from view, this monologue attempts to present the 'normality' or everydayness of Palestinian

suffering under Israeli colonialism. In doing so, Palestinians become much more than their discursive and aesthetic representations or, even worse, statistics and column inches in a newspaper. They are re-epidermalized as human beings worthy of empathy from other human beings. As Ibrahim says, 'The message is we are people like everybody else.'[7]

We Are the Children of the Camp

Performed by an ensemble of fifteen children in their early teens, *We Are the Children of the Camp* weaves together choreographed movements, dance sequences, songs, video footage and personal testimonies.[8] Running at about seventy-five minutes, *We Are the Children of the Camp* is probably Al-Rowwad's most well-known production as well as one of its earliest works. The performance was developed from Al-Rowwad's ongoing work with children and young people in the Aida refugee camp where the centre provides them with a safe space to congregate, play and learn new skills. In Al-Rowwad's theatre groups, children have an equal role in developing plays as well as in performing them. Performances are developed through an interactive process among the children and staff: a theme concerning participants' lives is invoked after which they work in groups to develop it into a story (Musleh 2011, 107).

In 2000, the centre developed *We Are the Children of the Camp* as a way for children to dramatize their experiences of living in a refugee camp. As well as this, the performance traces the history of Palestine from the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the Nakba (in which these children's grandparents became refugees), the various wars between Israel and the neighbouring Arab states, the first and second intifadas, the Oslo peace process and, ultimately, to the present day. *We Are the Children of the Camp* was first performed in the Aida refugee camp before touring Egypt, Denmark, Sweden, France, Belgium, and the United States.[9] In the years it has spent on tour, the performance has constantly evolved as the stories told reflect the experiences of the performers themselves. Although the historical scenes remain the same and provide a 'scaffold' for the performance, this open approach to production allows the children to present their own testimonies, to describe how they live as refugees under occupation, their experiences of checkpoints, of the second intifada, of Israeli military crackdowns in their neighbourhoods and raids on their homes, and of the deaths of friends and family.

As the lights go up, the audience sees an empty stage. Only a projection screen hangs from the back wall. Consisting of twelve scenes loosely connected by the historical narrative, the performance opens with the children playing. This playfulness is meant to evoke a pre-Nakba idyll because, directly as the children exit, there is a blackout and a voice reads out the Balfour Declaration in which the British government announced its support for the establishment of Israel. As the lights return, the children perform what their grandparents might have experienced during the Nakba. Dressed as fellahin, they run across the stage to the sound of gunshots. This is followed by a short scene depicting the Palestinian exodus: groups of children wander aimlessly around the stage carrying sacks, one of the girls stops to give birth. Overhead, a short video montage of actual news footage from the Nakba period is projected onto the screen. During this, the exiles are sitting on the stage as one of the performers in a T-shirt saying 'UN' hands out sleeping bags and food parcels. There is despair on everyone's face.

When the video ends, the children face the audience. They announce the names of the villages destroyed during the Nakba—the same villages from which their grandparents fled—and the names given to them by Israel. They chant the names of all the refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. 'Here we are,' they say, still facing the audience, 'exiles in our own country.' Then, they sing the following song, from which the performance derives its title, as though it were an anthem.

> We are the children of the camp
> We are the sons of refuge
> We are the children of exile
> We are the lovers of resistance
>
> We have been chased from our homes
> Our lands were taken
> We were forced to live in tents
> We become refugees
>
> They uprooted the olive trees
> They constructed colonies
> They thought that we have no history
> Or thought that we didn't exist
>
> They demolished all of our villages
> They put us in labyrinths
> They planted anger in us
> They considered us as insects

We may have a spring
Sun may rise again in our sky
We look to Jerusalem
Singing for freedom in our hearts

We will never forget
We will never forget
We will never forget
We will never forget

The song familiarizes its audience with those processes of colonial abjection by which history is erased ('They thought that we have no history'), the very existence of people as human beings is denied ('Or thought that we didn't exist') as they are re-ordered as non-human ('They considered us as insects'). However, it is also a declaration of defiance against Israeli settler-colonialism: they are 'lovers of resistance' hoping to see Jerusalem. These children, after all, are the descendants of people expelled from villages that lay in the vicinity of Jerusalem—villages that are only a few miles from the Aida refugee camp, near yet rendered far. From the rooftops of some of their houses, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is in clear view.

When the song ends, the children begin to list their rights: to be free, to return to their villages, to live where they want, to play and study, to have modern schools, to express themselves, to have 'a clean and green environment,' and to live like children. This is followed by personal testimonies about their schools: one girl mentions that she has no one to help her with homework because her mother was killed during the intifada; a boy says his family wants him to become a doctor; another says his parents only send him to school because it is safer than playing in the streets. These testimonies are followed by a short song in which the children ask their teachers to teach them their history: 'Tell me where my country is. Here; or on Mars?'

These moments in the performance echo what Abusrour has said time and again in interviews and articles on 'beautiful resistance.' For him, children are 'change-makers' who should not have to 'get used to' life under occupation. Like other residents of Aida, Abusrour remembers a time before the Israelis built the Separation Barrier (or 'apartheid wall'). On one of my visits to the West Bank, he showed me the fields where he used to play as a child. Nowadays, the Barrier cuts through these fields making them off-limits to the present generation of children. In what appears to be a clarification of 'beautiful resistance' that he has repeated many times,

Abusrour believes 'despair is a luxury' that Palestinians do not have; rather, each person is a 'partner' in creating a better future for the generations to come. This resistance is beautiful, he says, because it refuses to accept the 'ugliness' of Zionism's discourse on Palestine and Palestinians.[10] Gazing on the lost fields of his childhood, Abusrour still sees this beauty in the spaces around him—not just in how Palestinians strive to preserve and transmit every aspect of their culture, but also in the landscape itself.

In the next scene of *We Are the Children of the Camp*, the children declare that they are the 'intifada generation,' and mime throwing stones before they are gunned down. To the mournful sound of a lute, a video montage presents media images from the second intifada: Ariel Sharon's entry onto the al-Aqsa compound which sparked the intifada ('I come here with a message of peace,' he says); Palestinian youths throwing rocks at Israeli tanks as soldiers respond with beatings and tear gas; bombed out houses; the destruction of olive trees; the murder of Muhammad Al-Durrah; and the 'historic' handshake between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on the White House lawn.

When the montage ends and the lute stops playing, one of the boys gets up to inspect the bodies. Facing the audience, he tells them he is fourteen years old, and was caught throwing stones at an Israeli jeep—an incident in which his friend Aissa was killed by 'a single bullet.' Aissa used to be part of Al-Rowwad's troupe, the boy tells us. There is guilt in his voice as he recalls that he was the one who urged Aissa to take part in the stone throwing. 'I killed you, Aissa,' he says. Yet, as he stands there facing the audience, there is also defiance.

> We are human beings. Despite the occupation, I've decided to express myself through theatre to show the beauty we have within against the ugliness of the Israeli occupation that dominates us. We are a people who continually forgets to die.

These lines are reminiscent of what Abusrour perceives 'beautiful resistance' to look like; after all, he directed the performance. They demonstrate how theatre-making can become a healing process for children conditioned by processes of colonial abjection. Despite carrying the guilt of responsibility for his best friend's death, a child can still stand on a stage and declare to audiences around the world: 'We are human beings.' By constantly referring the audience to an historical narrative that runs coun-

ter to the Zionist discourse, and by alerting such audiences to their humanity, *We Are the Children of the Camp* attempts to outwit the Zionist public sphere from which Palestinians are excluded. It is, first and foremost, an address to Palestinian audiences whom such mechanisms of counter-discourse might transport from a space of abjection to a counterpublic space of resistance. By addressing international audiences, this act of re-writing the historical record confronts the 'historico-racial schema' that epidermalizes Palestinians as violent and barbaric, a stereotype so entrenched in the Western media that it is often used to reinforce political support for Israel.

This message is carried into the following scene when the children read out political buzzwords from the newspapers they are holding: 'the road map,' 'negotiations,' 'democracy,' 'no partner,' 'terrorism,' 'peace process,' and so forth. These quickly turn into the kind of news the children might wish to see conveyed to the world: 'murders continue,' 'unemployment,' 'the liberation of prisoners,' 'the return of the refugees,' and 'the Palestinian state.' Then, one of them says, 'The peace proposal is sponsored by Coca Cola,' before everyone tears up the newspapers they are holding—a symbolic rejection of both a political framework that has given the occupation its life force, and a dominant discourse that seeks only Palestinian erasure and abjection. By doing so, the children re-constitute themselves as full human beings not as fixed, racialized bodies reproduced through stereotype.

In one of the final scenes, we encounter the children at a checkpoint. The scene conveys the dilemmas Palestinians face when encountering physical borders reinforcing their status as abject/other. Two of the children, dressed as soldiers in black and wearing sunglasses, prevent the others from crossing the stage. This scene is performed without words; the gestures are enough to convey the brutality of the situation. These are also gestures with which the children are very familiar. The first boy who attempts to cross is made to lift up his T-shirt to show he is not carrying any bombs or weapons. The 'soldier' makes him do this with just a wave of his hand. As the boy is allowed to cross—marked as 'safe'—the 'soldier' gives him a kick while another slaps him across the face. Another child shows her travel permit only to be sent back. Two more children, playing a pregnant woman and her husband, are also sent back. As the scene continues, she gives birth in a corner of the stage.

Such acts are not far from the children's lived experiences of the checkpoint. The harassment and physical abuse of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers have been widely reported by human rights organizations, journalists and researchers.[11] If abjection is a border-making process, then it is at the checkpoints along the 'apartheid wall'—as well as at airports and other crossings—that border anxiety is most acutely felt. It is at this physical, eight-metre high wall—or 'rampart' or 'outpost' or 'frontline'—that Palestinian identity is most urgently contested. It is here that they are re-constituted as abject/other through their experiences of humiliation and harassment at the hands of Israeli soldiers and border police.

Yet, as Rashid Khalidi argues in his account of contemporary Palestinian identity formation, this 'condition of shared anxiety at the frontier, the checkpoint and the crossing point proves that [Palestinians] are a people, if nothing else does' (Khalidi 2010, 5) because such borders are the loci of 'the quintessential Palestinian experience' of, I would add, abjection (ibid., 1). Samira Kawash clarifies the role of checkpoints in 'put[ting] identity on trial' (Kawash 2003, 46). It is at the 'non-place' of the border, she argues, that the re-ordering of Palestinians as non-existent 'comes most starkly into relief' (ibid.). By questioning and re-formulating the dominant historical narrative, *We Are the Children of the Camp* relentlessly interrogates the hegemony of the Zionist public sphere. News footage and personal testimonies provide a counter-discourse that disidentifies with Palestinian abjection by reconstituting it as a site for resistance, not simply as a category of exclusion.

The Gaza Monologues

Ashtar's presence in Gaza began in 1994 when the company started delivering its three-year actor training programme to students there. At the time, there were no restrictions on travelling in and out of Gaza so the company—still based in Jerusalem—was able to maintain physical contact with local students and practitioners. When the Palestinian National Authority was established in 1995 as the interim self-governing body over Gaza and Areas A and B of the West Bank, Israel began to increase travel restrictions in and out of Gaza for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and the West Bank. Despite the difficulties posed by these restrictions, however, Ashtar's work in Gaza continued. By 1998, Israel's control over movement in and out of Gaza was so extensive that the company, then relocated to Ramallah, could no longer maintain physical contact with the

students. From then on, contact has taken place over Skype or by email or phone. Despite these restrictions, however, thirteen students graduated from the programme in 1998, and went on to form the Ashtar Theatre Laboratory in Gaza.

In May 2010, Ashtar initiated *The Gaza Monologues* project, a year after Israel's three-week war on Gaza, which had lasted from December 2008 to January 2009, killing approximately 1391 Palestinians.[12] Iman Aoun says the project grew out of workshops the Laboratory had already been facilitating throughout 2009.[13] These workshops introduced children and young people to Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Jacob Moreno's psychodramatic methods in order to help them deal with post-war trauma.[14] So, when the project began, the Laboratory's trainer Ali Abu Yaseen was able to adapt the previous workshops for a group of thirty-one teenagers aged between fourteen and seventeen, consisting of fifteen boys and sixteen girls. The participants' task was to write monologues about their experiences of the war and the ongoing blockade.[15] The entire process—involving training the participants in Theatre of the Oppressed and psychodrama, drafting and re-drafting monologues, and rehearsing and performing them—lasted four months.[16] By bringing together Moreno and Boal, utilizing such methods as the soliloquy technique and Forum Theatre, these workshops allowed participants to engage in practices aimed at both self-healing (psychodrama) and social change (Theatre of the Oppressed) (Shaath 2010, 20–26).

On 17 October 2010, *The Gaza Monologues* opened on a beach on the Gazan coast. At 11 a.m., the workshop participants sent their monologues out into the Mediterranean Sea as paper boats. The enormous publicity surrounding the project allowed Ashtar to enlist theatre companies from thirty-three countries to stage their own adaptations of the teenagers' monologues at exactly the same time. At 7 p.m., as the members of the original workshop performed their monologues in Gaza, companies across the West Bank and Jerusalem performed their own adaptations. They were joined by more than 1500 young people from across the world performing or reading the monologues in their own languages (Shaath 2010, 14). According to theatre scholar Rania Jawad, the scale of the publicity meant that young people in many more countries than had originally been planned took part in the event. 'Internationally,' she writes, 'youth in over fifty cities and thirty countries have performed [*The Gaza Monologues*], translating and carrying the Palestinian youths' voices to local audiences' (Jawad 2014, 32). As new companies became aware of its existence, *The*

Gaza Monologues continued to be performed for months afterwards. On 29 November 2010, on the United Nations International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, twenty-six young performers representing twenty-one of the original partner countries performed *The Gaza Monologues* at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. Two performances took place that day, with each performer delivering their monologue in their own language.[17]

Due to the nature of its production, no two performances of *The Gaza Monologues* are alike. Individual theatre companies were given the liberty of performing the monologues according to their own resources and creative visions. The performance I discuss here, which I attended, took place at Ashtar in Ramallah on 22 June 2014, the second day of the company's International Youth Festival. In the audience, there were young people from around the world who had come to Ramallah to take part in the festival. As well as members of the general public, there were also local and international theatre-makers. It was performed in Ashtar's small studio space, which created an intimate albeit claustrophobic atmosphere. This production of *The Gaza Monologues* was performed by four graduates of Ashtar's actor training programme, two male and two female.[18] Due to the Festival's busy schedule, Aoun tells me, the performance presented only eight of the thirty-one monologues.[19]

Apart from the screen hanging from the back wall, onto which English subtitles are projected, the performance space is empty. Props, lighting and sound have been kept to a minimum. The performance begins with bodies engulfed in a white sheet. Evoking the living conditions of the besieged Palestinians of Gaza, the performers try to escape this lack of cover, pushing and pulling in opposite directions, going about in circles, but they cannot. In the end, they tumble down, defeated by their efforts.

The monologues speak of widespread poverty, food shortages, the destruction of buildings, power cuts, and the death of friends and family members. More than this, however, the monologues present us with teenagers trying to make sense of their experiences. Sometimes, this sense-making process takes the form of humour as when fifteen-year-old Muhammad Qasem tells us about his grandmother searching for her false teeth as the building next door was being bombed: '[…] the world was on fire and we all thought we would die […] [S]he was afraid that when she died, people would find out she had no teeth' (Ashtar Theatre 2010, 37).

Other times, it takes the form of anger and resentment. For example, seventeen-year-old Tamer Najem mentions that he first heard of his uncle's

death as a news item on Al Jazeera. The global media, he says, 'were focused on Gaza […] so they have work' (ibid., 19). In another monologue, sixteen-year-old Ashraf Sossi attempts to make sense of the violence as a way of coming to terms with death (ibid., 11–12). He tells us that his brother died when an Israeli rocket hit a passing car. For three months, he says, he would visit his brother's grave just to talk to him. For Ashraf, this was also a coming-of-age moment: it was the first time he had ever seen his father cry. For fourteen-year-old Yasmeen Ja'rour, the process of sense-making takes place in the absence of childhood, in an area of land that has become a '*biiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiig* prison' (ibid., 45).

Yet, to whom is this sense-making addressed? As a psychodramatic process, the performative address is an exercise by which the speaker undergoes some degree of self-healing. Indeed, Nadel Shaath's (2010) report discusses the effectiveness of *The Gaza Monologues* in helping participants overcome post-traumatic stress disorder and depression following the war. On the other hand, Ashtar's use of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed during the workshops, the publicity surrounding *The Gaza Monologues*, and the scale of its reproduction suggest that *as a performance* the address was intentionally directed at a much wider audience: the world itself. In her monologue, fifteen-year-old Sujoud Abu Hussein describes how utterly alone the Gazans felt.[20] During the war, she says, 'the whole world was in one valley and we were in the other' (Ashtar Theatre 2010, 29). A little later, she asks: '[W]hy are we like that, out of the whole world? […] What are we to the world, aren't we human?' (ibid., 30). Sujoud's monologue summarizes the Palestinian condition as one of abjection to an 'uninhabitable' space where they cease to exist as human beings. Yet, her appeal is to the world as her rhetorical question—'aren't we human?'—attempts to recall Palestinians from the far side of this border, which (in Gaza's case at least) is both a physical and a discursive one.

The publicity surrounding *The Gaza Monologues* also made repeated references to the world. 'The whole world was watching,' the website says, yet Palestinian suffering was falling on 'the world's deaf ears.' Aoun herself described the project as 'a loud artistic cry to the world' (in Jawad 2014, 32).[21] In our interviews, Aoun also characterized Ashtar's intentions as a desire 'to show the world we are human beings' as well as 'to show the world how we are living everyday with the occupation.'[22] These references, and the global circulation of *The Gaza Monologues*, point to the characteristics of abject counterpublicity to which I have been referring throughout this book. Firstly, not only are theatre-makers aware of

their status as abject/other—as Zionism's 'human waste'—they are continually attempting to re-epidermalize themselves as human beings. This process takes place at the level of the abject/other: re-epidermalization is a process by which abject populations re-constitute themselves as human *for themselves*. All of the performances discussed in this chapter were, first and foremost, produced for Palestinian audiences. After all, *The Gaza Monologues* was performed in Gaza City, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Tulkaram, Hebron, Jenin and Jerusalem, amongst other cities. The circulation of this counter-discourse is really to facilitate group solidarity and resistance, protect and transmit culture and memory, and express empathy and solidarity. As the Zionist public sphere attempts to erase Palestinian existence, through those racialized discourses that legitimate Israeli state practices, re-epidermalization is crucial to the formation of an abject counterpublic.

Secondly, re-epidermalization takes place at the level of the world. By circumventing the Zionist public sphere, the abject counterpublic seeks to address, through a counter-discourse of its own humanity, a public sphere deemed more powerful. By disidentifying with the dominance of the 'sign' beneath which it is made to stand (Butler 1993, 219), the abject counterpublic attempts to resist its interpellation as 'human waste.' Through this 'self-organized' address to the world—what Warner has referred to as a relation among strangers that is self-organized 'by nothing other than the discourse itself' (Warner 2005, 67)—Palestinian theatre-makers seek to mobilize wider participation in their struggle for freedom from people they consider are able to influence global policy such as the audiences attending the performance at the United Nations (ibid., 67, 74).

The Freedom Ride

The Freedom Ride was initiated in December 2011 by dramatherapist and Playback Theatre trainer Ben Rivers, one of a number of international practioners to be employed at The Freedom Theatre. Inspired by the Freedom Riders of the African American civil rights movement, the Freedom Ride brings together performers trained in Playback Theatre and solidarity activists from the West Bank, Jerusalem, Israel, and around the world. Since 2011, the Freedom Ride has held annual Playback Theatre events in villages, Bedouin communities and refugee camps in the West Bank, and with audiences in Gaza via video conference (Rivers 2013a, 160). The March 2015 itinerary, for example, which lasted twelve days, consisted of two cities and two villages in Area A of the West Bank, the Aida refugee

camp, East Jerusalem, and six villages in the Jordan Valley, and three more in the South Hebron Hills in Area C. It indicates the kind of route the Freedom Ride takes every year through 'sites of popular struggle against the Israeli occupation and its deleterious practices' (ibid., 159).[23]

Whereas the Freedom Riders of the 1960s sought to disrupt racial segregation laws in America's Deep South, the Freedom Ride attempts to challenge Israel's control over Palestinian movement and space, as well as to call attention to land confiscation, house demolitions, military and settler violence, the expansion of illegal settlements, and the theft of Palestinian resources such as water. The Freedom Ride organizes Playback Theatre events in partnership with Palestinian human rights organizations, civil society and community groups, village councils, and 'popular struggle' committees. For example, the Freedom Ride of March 2015 was coordinated with a number of village-based 'popular' committees as well as with Jordan Valley Solidarity and Grassroots Jerusalem.[24] Rivers says that such partnerships have allowed the Freedom Ride to evolve the scope of its activities in unexpected ways (Rivers 2013a, 160). The 2016 Freedom Ride, for example, organized seminars and teach-ins, community discussion meetings, music events, guided walks, and construction activities, and solidarity stays in sites where house demolitions and settler violence are frequent (Rivers 2015b).

As a distinct form of applied theatre, Playback Theatre was developed by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in New York in the mid-1970s. Fox, who had been trained in improvisation, oral storytelling and psychodrama, envisaged a 'grassroots theatre in which ordinary people would make theatre on the spot from the true stories of other ordinary people' (Salas 2011, 93). Today, Playback Theatre events take place all over the world and in many different contexts and settings (Rivers 2013a, 161; 2015b, 19).[25] It has also been used in conflict resolution (Hutt and Hosking 2004), as an educational tool, and as a 'frame for healing' (Salas 2000, 445).

A Playback Theatre event usually lasts seventy-five minutes. Those organized by the Freedom Ride often open with performances of folk and patriotic songs in Palestinian Arabic. According to Rivers, this allows the performers to build a 'rapport' with audiences 'by framing the performance of testimony in terms that are immediately accessible to the assembled participants' (Rivers 2013a, 160). In addition, Freedom Ride performers are Palestinians and have personal experiences of the occupation themselves. This, Rivers says, gives them 'an intimate understanding of the psychological and socio-political context of the stories they encounter' (ibid., 160). That performers are Palestinians, and not international prac-

titioners, also helps to build trust and respect among audiences in sites of colonial abjection.

During Playback Theatre events, the facilitator will sit to one side of the performance space. They introduce the event and invite individual members of the audience ('tellers') to come forward and share their stories. Factual details and emotional states are drawn out through a non-judgemental, empathic dialogue between the facilitator and the teller (Rivers 2015b, 157). The performers, who are present in the performance space itself, listen attentively to these stories. When instructed to do so by the facilitator, who utters the words 'Let's watch!' (Rivers 2015a, 78), the performers begin 'translating the literal/verbal telling into theatrical language' (Dennis 2008, 212). These short, improvised performances are usually accompanied by live music. Performers will avoid naturalistic acting. Staging is simple and there are hardly any props. As Playback Theatre draws upon the alienation effect (or *Verfremdungseffekt* in the original German) developed by Brecht as well as Boal's Forum Theatre in order to encourage critical responses from the audience, its intention is not simply to repeat stories but to *re-enact* them in order to inspire others to share their stories (Floodgate 2006, 9–10). At the end of each performance, the facilitator will thank the teller before asking them whether or not the 'translation' was accurate. Tellers are often quick to correct any inconsistencies or inaccuracies between the story and performance. Also, other audience members will add their own stories during discussions and subsequent tellings. In this way, a conversation develops between tellers, facilitators, performers and audiences as well as between the stories/re-enactments themselves. According to Rivers, the intention of a Playback Theatre event is

> to honour, as closely as possible, the original narrative presented by the teller. Inevitably, though, the performer's own subjectivity influences the interpretation and enactment of the story. Thus, the teller will often see their story from another point of view, something that can generate insight and perspective.[26]

In one account of a Playback Theatre event, which took place in Al-Tuwani, a village in the South Hebron Hills, Rivers recounts the story told by Sawsan about the demolition of her house.

> It was November 24th, 2011, at 10:00 a.m. That's when it happened. The army demolished the mosque and then they came to demolish my house also. I objected and said: 'How can you just tear down a house over our heads?' I asked if they had a demolition order. But the soldiers didn't answer. Instead they started trying to push me out of their way. I pushed back and shouted at them saying that there should be some kind of warning before they come and demolish. The soldiers appeared surprised by my strong opposition. But what do they think? That they're going to come and demolish my house and I will give them a cup of coffee too? (Rivers 2015b, 161)

Rivers points out that Sawsan was 'subsequently pepper sprayed, detained, handcuffed, blindfolded and then transferred to a detention facility where she was interrogated for many hours' (ibid., 161). After five days, she was tried before a military court and fined 5000 shekels (just over $1400). During another Playback Theatre event, again in Al-Tuwani, Rivers recalls the story of the elderly Um Saber who spoke of how she was attacked by settlers.

> One day, while I was looking after the sheep, a settler approached and started shouting at me, telling me that I should leave immediately and that I was trespassing on land that was not mine. When I ignored him, he started throwing stones at me, and advancing in my direction. I had been beaten up by these settlers before and so I was afraid. I threw stones back and when he reached me, I began to ward him off with my stick. Other settlers, noticing the interaction, came to join him and very soon I was facing several young men. They grabbed my stick and began to beat me. (Rivers 2015a, 79)

As can be seen from these descriptions, a story told at a Playback Theatre event primarily circulates at the level of personal memory, emotion and experience. The role of the teller is to retrieve events, details and emotions before expressing these in a narrative form to the facilitator who must ask questions in order to determine the accuracy of the story. That the facilitator will later ask the teller to comment on whether or not they could see their story in the re-enactment underscores the centrality of the personal to the formation of abject counterpublics. Such articulations of the personal dominate the abject counterpublic sphere. Counterpublic formation relies on the retrieval and circulation of personal testimony as oppositional practice, as a counter-discourse of resistance to dominant narratives, stereotype, exclusion, and so forth. Whereas in *Alive from Palestine*, *We Are the Children of the Camp* and *The Gaza Monologues*, such

articulations presented the 'human face' of Palestinians to global and local audiences, during the Freedom Ride events they function to create safe spaces in which an abject counterpublic can gather for comfort and healing. Here, the process of re-epidermalization also facilitates resistance. In his discussion of these events, Rivers insists that tellers do not simply repeat their experiences in order to 'inform.' They do so for the purpose of 'urging those present to engage in collective action against the injustice' (Rivers 2015b, 162).

This is in contrast to the logocentric discourse permeating the dominant public sphere in which, according to Habermas, private citizens engage in *rational debate* about public matters. Habermas's notion of the public sphere is one in which political differences are mediated through reason alone, in which only matters of mutual concern are worthy of public debate. Such a sphere has no place for personal memory, emotion, and experience. Yet, for those who are rendered as 'human waste,' as abject/other, the personal becomes foundational to their re-epidermalization as human beings. The processes by which memory, emotion and experience are articulated are the same processes by which abject populations resist expulsion from the national body. Rational debate is not, and never has been, the only way in which people respond to issues of mutual concern. And, often, what concerns subordinated groups is barely noticed by those in positions of power or privilege. In such spaces, emotions such as collective and individual anger, sadness, fear and togetherness can also be effective tools in mobilizing and organizing subordinated groups.

In her study of counterpublics in the United States, Phyllis Mentzell Ryder goes even further to argue that they are often characterized by 'a rhetoric of anger' (Ryder 2007, 521). She identifies this rhetoric as an alternative mode of political expression to the rational discourse of the dominant public sphere, which hinders subordinated groups from challenging its dominance. She says that

> the appeal to decorum is also the means by which the dominant culture shrugs off the much more pointed and discomforting challenge of 'unsolicited oppositional discourse.' Such a challenge is dismissed as rude precisely because it positions us in an uncomfortable position. This is especially true if the author of the oppositional discourse expresses any anger. (ibid.)

Yet, in a context where the relation between the national subject/self and its abject/other is marked by repeated attempts at erasure, the articulation of memory, emotion and experience plays a pivotal role in the

formation of an abject counterpublic. By expelling Palestinian collective memory, emotion and experience to border zones, the Zionist public sphere delimits the boundaries of public discourse. In this way, Palestinians are prevented from emerging in that sphere as full human beings. Rather than seeing such articulations as restricting the reproduction and circulation of unruly ideas and practices, abject counterpublics often see them as a demonstration of resistance and solidarity.

In situations where the collective memory of the national subject/self works to legitimate repressive state practices—as in, for example, the idea of an exclusivist and redemptive 'return' of Jews to Israel—the articulation by Palestinians of a geographic counter-memory works to disrupt the dominance of the Zionist public sphere. When, for example, Palestinians such as the performers of *We Are the Children of the Camp* recall the names of those villages that were destroyed or Judaized/de-Palestinized during the Nakba, they are resisting a discourse that has sought to erase them from history. For decades before the declassification of Israeli government archives, such a counter-history had resided in the personal memories and experiences of Palestinians that were then passed down as stories and material artefacts to the children and grandchildren of the expelled. In articulating the personal, Palestinians call attention to their abjection and, at the same time, disidentify with the very processes by which they are rendered abject.[27]

The inclusion of the personal in the formation of an abject counterpublic also disrupts the dominant public sphere's claims to objectivity and neutrality. Habermasian notions of public discourse position interlocutors as private individuals temporarily brought together to negotiate matters of mutual and self-interest. Yet, the Freedom Ride's emphasis on interaction, reciprocity and communality between teller, facilitator, performers and audiences challenges these notions. By publicizing the personal and working against 'the privatisation of personal pain and distress' (Nash and Rowe 2000, 18), Playback Theatre events underscore the shared experiences and relationships of participants as well as their commitments to the larger group. For example, Rivers quotes one audience member's reaction to Sawsan's story:

> Sawsan's story was about the brutality of occupation and Israel's policy to expel us from our land. At the same time, her story was about our steadfastness [*sumud*]—that no matter what is being done to us we will struggle and resist. We will stay here and nothing will shake us! (Rivers 2015b, 162)

The circulation of the personal as counter-discourse can also signify the role marginalized groups within abject populations can play in popular struggles. A male member of the audience responded to the same story as follows:

> [Sawsan's] story was very powerful for me because it was a woman who was speaking. Through her story we were reminded that Palestinian resistance is not only for men, it's for women, for all the people. The resistance is for everybody. Everybody should resist the occupation no matter what. (Rivers 2013b, 16)

Playback Theatre events can also foster relations of mutuality between abject counterpublics in different sites of abjection. For example, when a Palestinian from the South Hebron Hills attended a Freedom Ride event in the Jordan Valley, they

> realized that the people there are like us and that they have similar stories. At the same time, I learned that the problems facing people there are different to ours. For example, here in the South Hebron Hills, we are threatened more by settlers than by the army, whereas there, it is the soldiers that cause more suffering […] It was important to be with the people in the Jordan Valley and to learn about their lives. It gave me a push—more of a push towards resistance. (Rivers 2015b, 162)

The need to talk back to these processes of colonial abjection, bordering and epidermalization is one commonly expressed by Palestinian theatre-makers as the imperative driving their work. One way they express this is through the circulation of personal testimonials, counter-memories of rootedness to the land, which seek to repudiate exclusivist claims to a perceived Jewish homeland at the expense of Palestinian human rights. At the same time, however, the *staging* of these testimonials challenges Zionism's attempts to fix Palestinians as barbaric, non-human bodies. As the theatre-makers discussed in this chapter assert, public performances in sites of colonial abjection inspire resilience, solidarity and resistance amongst those who experience injustice first hand. Performance spaces such as these are also safe spaces to which abject counterpublics can turn for comfort, empathy and healing. These spaces are also mobile, demonstrating that such performances are further intended to inspire, console and show solidarity for Palestinians living in similar conditions all over the West Bank. Finally, as Palestinian theatre continues to establish itself on

the global stage, these performances are also intended for audiences around the world. *To show the world we are human beings*, in the words of Iman Aoun, would suggest that these performances are not just commentaries on political events and acts of colonial brutality. They are also intended to shape public opinion. By calling global publics to attention, and by seeking to mobilize local, regional and international solidarity for the Palestinian cause, theatre-makers are also declaring the interconnections between the arts and their struggle for freedom from Israeli domination.

Notes

1. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 10, 2014.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. For a list of festivals at which *Alive from Palestine* has been performed, see: http://www.alkasaba.org/details.php?id=grjhdua1554yhpn15e10r (accessed August 31, 2015).
6. What I describe here is a DVD recording of the performance that took place at Theatre Tram in Tokyo on 26 February 2004, as part of the Tokyo International Arts Festival. The performance ran from 25 to 29 February 2004. The DVD was given to me by George Ibrahim. The blurb on the back of the DVD cover reads: 'A selection of Monologues [about] how Palestinians and their stories has become just news item for the rest of the world. Whilst for us, it is our life, our humanity and our existence as Human living, dying, crying, laughing, and struggling for a normal existence free from occupation' (original typography).
7. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, June 10, 2014.
8. The performance I discuss here took place at the Théâtre de l'Epée de Bois in Paris on 25 June 2005, which I watched on a DVD given to me by Abdelfattah Abusrour. The performance was organized by the Paris chapter of The Friends of Al-Rowwad, a worldwide network of associations supporting Al-Rowwad through fundraising and publicity initiatives.
9. Abdelfattah Abusrour, interview with the author, April 23, 2013.
10. Abdelfattah Abusrour, interviews with the author, April 23, 2013; June 26, 2014; and July 8, 2014. Identical phrases were also used in the public lecture he delivered in Bristol on 24 October 2012.
11. See, for example: B'Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 'Checkpoints, Physical Obstructions, and Forbidden Roads,' January 16, 2011 (updated on May 20, 2015),

http://www.btselem.org/freedom_of_movement/checkpoints_and_forbidden_roads (accessed September 2, 2015); Said Zeedani, 'A Palestinian Perspective on Checkpoints: The Economic, Social, and Psychological Impacts of Checkpoints on Palestinians,' *The Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2007, http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=980 (accessed September 2, 2015); and Daniel Tepper, 'In Photos: Palestinian Workers' Everyday Nightmare at Israeli Checkpoints,' *The Electronic Intifada*, July 9, 2013, http://electronicintifada.net/content/photos-palestinian-workers-everyday-nightmare-israeli-checkpoints/12597 (accessed September 2, 2015). The following video, uploaded to *YouTube*, captures the treatment of Palestinians at checkpoints. At 5:03, one of the soldiers says: 'Animals. Animals. Like the Discovery Channel. All of Ramallah is a jungle. There are monkeys, dogs, gorillas. The problem is that the animals are locked they can't come out. We're humans. They're animals. They aren't human, we are. That's the difference between [them and us].' See: excitedsynapses, 'Shocking Clip: Israeli Checkpoint Cruelty,' *YouTube*, August 12, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QorJMPtz1F (accessed September 2, 2015).

12. For more on the war, including lists of casualties and effects, see: UN-OCHA, 'Gaza Humanitarian Situation Report,' January 2, 2009, http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_situation_report_2009_01_02_english.pdf (accessed September 3, 2015); and B'Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 'Fatalities during Operation Cast Lead,' n.d., http://www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/during-cast-lead/by-date-of-event (accessed September 3, 2015).
13. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, July 10, 2014.
14. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, July 10, 2014. For more on psychodrama, see: José Luis Pio-Abreu and Christina Villares-Oliveira, 'How does Psychodrama Work?: How Theatre is Embedded in the Psychodramatic Method,' in Clark Baim, Jorge Burmeister, and Manuela Maciel (eds), *Psychodrama: Advances in Theory and Practice*, Hove: Routledge, 2007, pp. 127–38.
15. Israel's land, sea and air blockade on Gaza have been in place since 2007. After sealing off the border between itself and Gaza, Israel implemented strict controls on the movement of people and construction material into and out of Gaza. Farmers are prohibited from accessing lands close to the border, and fishing activities along the coast are also strictly controlled. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), Israel has 'locked in' 1.8 million Palestinians, causing a humanitarian crisis. By May 2015, these measures had reduced Gaza's GDP by 50 per cent. Whilst the general unemployment

rate stands at 43 per cent, youth unemployment has exceeded 60 per cent. According to UN-OCHA, Israel has 'undermined Gaza's economy,' causing widespread food insecurity and dependence on aid. See: UN-OCHA, *The Gaza Strip: The Humanitarian Impact of the Blockade*, July 2015, http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_blockade_factsheet_july_2015_english.pdf (accessed September 3, 2015).

16. Aoun says that she directed the rehearsals via video since the blockade prevented her from travelling to Gaza. She met the workshop participants for the first time when they performed *The Gaza Monologues* at the North Wall Arts Centre in Oxford on 22 July 2011. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, July 10, 2014.
17. Blogging on the Theatre Without Borders website, Roberta Levitow (who co-founded Theatre Without Borders) lists these countries as Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, Greece, Palestine, Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Gambia, Trinidad and the United States. See: Roberta Levitow, '*The Gaza Monologues* at the UN,' November 21, 2010, http://www.theatrewithoutborders.com/the-gaza-monologues-at-the-un (accessed September 5, 2015). To clarify, the Palestinian performers came from the West Bank due to travel restrictions imposed on the Gazan performers.
18. For the full performance, see: Ashtar Theatre, 'Ashtar Theatre—*The Gaza Monologues* Play June 2014,' *YouTube*, July 22, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXRGK0Y2KdE (accessed September 5, 2015). The performance lasts around thirty-five minutes and was directed by Mohammed Eid. I was unable to locate a recording of the original Gaza performance.
19. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, July 10, 2014.
20. Sujoud's monologue was not included in the performance I attended.
21. Jawad quotes from *The Gaza Monologues* microsite which, since the time of her writing, has expired. I was unable to locate another source for these references.
22. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, July 10, 2014.
23. For the full itinerary, see: The Freedom Bus, *Freedom Ride: Join the Annual Freedom Ride in Occupied Palestine*, n.d., http://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/freedom-ride-2 (accessed September 6, 2015).
24. See: The Freedom Bus, 'Freedom Ride: Join the Annual Freedom Ride in Occupied Palestine,' n.d., http://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/freedom-ride-2 (accessed September 6, 2015). Grassroots Jerusalem is a networking platform for eighty Palestinian organizations representing over forty communities in Jerusalem. For more information, see: http://www.grassrootsalquds.net (accessed September 6, 2015). Likewise, Jordan

Valley Solidarity is a network of community groups across the Jordan Valley. For more information, see: http://www.jordanvalleysolidarity.org (accessed September 6, 2015).

25. For more on Playback Theatre, see: Jonathan Fox, *Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment and Tradition in the Nonscripted Theatre*, New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing, 1994; Jonathan Fox and Heinrich Dauber (eds.), *Gathering Voices: Essays on Playback Theatre*, New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing, 1999; and Jo Salas, *Improvising Real Life: Personal Story in Playback Theatre*, New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing, 2013.
26. Ben Rivers, email to the author, November 10, 2015.
27. For studies on the reproduction of memory in Palestine, see, for example: Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*, London: Zed Books, 2012; Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod (eds.), *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007; Susan Slyomovics, *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998; Lori A. Allen, 'The Polyvalent Politics of Martyr Commemorations in the Palestinian Intifada,' *History & Memory*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2006, pp. 107–38; Jonathan D. Greenberg, 'Generations of Memory: Remembering Partition in India/Pakistan and Israel/Palestine,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2005, pp. 89–110; and Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, pp. 175–92.

CHAPTER 4

A Stage of One's Own

Al-Harah Theatre's touring production of *Shakespeare's Sisters* began in March 2013 as a research project on Palestinian attitudes towards single, divorced and widowed women aged over thirty. This was followed by a series of theatre workshops with a group of women from Beit Jala in the West Bank. The testimonials recovered from the research and workshops were used to guide and inform the development of the script. *Shakespeare's Sisters* is an attempt by women theatre-makers to question the high value Palestinian society places on the patriarchal roles of wife and mother. Performed by an ensemble cast of four actors (three women and one man), *Shakespeare's Sisters* tells the story of an encounter between Samira, a single woman living alone, and Nisma, a much younger woman running away from an engagement her parents have arranged for her. Samira allows Nisma to hide out in her apartment and, as the two women become friends, they realize the need to create a space in which local women can meet, share their problems, and seek help and solidarity from each other. They call this group Shakespeare's Sisters. By the end of the play, Samira and Nisma emerge as stronger women: Samira embraces her singlehood as something personally fulfilling; Nisma returns to her family assertive enough to end the engagement. As well as discussing issues around marriage, *Shakespeare's Sisters* draws attention to women's experiences of abjection and violence, and the centrality of women's spatial autonomy to their empowerment. By exploring how Palestinian women's subjectivities

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and interests are refracted by the ways in which the gendered female body is socially constructed and performatively constituted, this chapter argues that *Shakespeare's Sisters* functions at three levels. Firstly, it interrogates the ways in which the category of 'woman' has been constructed in the Palestinian nationalist discourse. Secondly, it presents the Palestinian homeplace as a radical counter-space capable of disordering the centre-periphery dialectic structured by Palestinian patriarchy. Thirdly, *Shakespeare's Sisters* practices a form of border thinking that allows it to draw upon Palestinian and European epistemic practices to articulate its call for women's liberation. As with anti-colonial movements in other parts of the world, Palestinian women have often had to privilege the goal of national liberation over their own struggles. One way they have attempted to overcome this barrier has been to align the movement for women's liberation with the national liberation struggle itself. As this chapter will show, Palestinian women have employed a range of tactics to achieve this alignment. Their use of theatre as a means of drawing attention to their struggles is one of these tactics. As well as indicating that counterpublic spaces are continually in process, *Shakespeare's Sisters* demonstrates that women's counterpublic formation is fraught with tension.[1]

Shakespeare's Sisters

Raeda Ghazaleh, artistic director of Al-Harah Theatre, says that the intention to produce *Shakespeare's Sisters* arose from her awareness of the experiences of older, single Palestinian women who, no matter how highly educated and well-employed they may be, are still prevented from living independently of their families.[2] Due to social norms on what constitutes correct behaviour for unmarried women, Ghazaleh says, such women remain at home well into their thirties and beyond. Having exceeded the age at which Palestinian women are expected to marry, Ghazaleh argues, these older single women are often reduced to living lonely lives as 'spinster aunts' and/or the principal carers of elderly parents. When she mentioned this subject to her colleagues, it turned out that everyone knew at least one woman in a similar position. As these conversations developed, the company realized the importance of disseminating the issues women face in theatrical form, especially since the topic is not one often discussed in Palestinian society.

From March to June 2013, the theatre commissioned Rima Ghrayeb, a researcher at Bethlehem University, to carry out research on Palestinian attitudes towards single, divorced, and widowed women aged over thirty. The aim of this project was to collect testimonials from women around the West Bank, which would then be adapted into a script for a touring production. In the introduction to her subsequent report, published by Al-Harah Theatre, Ghrayeb (2013) states that her principle interest in the topic was her awareness of how 'Palestinian women […] sacrific[e] their time and comfort in order to keep their families happy' (ibid., 1). Although unmarried men also experience family pressures to marry, these are often expressed in terms of duty such as producing children. Even so, the sexual and moral integrity of an unmarried son is rarely questioned. On the other hand, women's behaviour is almost always expressed as a matter of honour. In addition, pressures placed on unmarried women often arise from the need to control women's sexual behaviour, to avoid scandal and gossip, and to preserve the family's honour and social status. In patriarchal societies, women's social roles often move from daughter and/or sister to wife and, then, mother. So, modalities of womanhood that do not fulfil these roles are often perceived as morally transgressive. As Ghrayeb suggests, attempting to live as easy lives as possible often means that unmarried Palestinian women must navigate against or balance out their own interests against those of their families.

Ghrayeb conducted interviews and focus groups with women from diverse economic backgrounds living in cities, villages and refugee camps. Ghazaleh remarks on the initial difficulties the company faced in establishing contact and trust with women. She says that many were mistrustful at being approached 'suddenly' by people they did not know. Hence, they were often apprehensive about discussing their personal lives.[3] To assuage such fears, Al-Harah Theatre approached non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development, the National Association of Working Women, and World Vision to facilitate contact with local women's groups (Ghrayeb 2013, 3). This route, Ghrayeb writes, paved the way for more personal exchanges based on trust. The need to establish trust was also discussed by Ghazaleh. In a society where women are often restricted from discussing their private affairs in public and/or with strangers, many of the women who were initially approached worried about their private stories 'getting out.'[4]

The testimonials Ghrayeb recovered tell the stories of single, widowed and divorced women living in abusive conditions. Social practices regulating the behaviour of single women, even when their families had allowed them to access higher education or employment, mean that prospective brides are not only expected to remain virgins until marriage but also to behave modestly at all times. The situation was much worse for those single women who had been prevented from attending universities or from working. They remained financially dependent on their families. In both situations, however, Ghrayeb found that the families of single women regulated their activities, where they could go and whom they could visit. In the case of widows, Ghrayeb found some who had been reduced to poverty following the deaths of their husbands. In cases where widows sought employment to support their children, Ghrayeb states, they were often censured by their extended families (Ghrayeb 2013, 15, 17). The divorced women Ghrayeb interviewed mentioned they were denied access to their children by the families of their former husbands, often as revenge or punishment. At the same time, these women were often blamed by their own families for the perceived loss of honour resulting from divorce. As divorced women are often expected to return to their parents' homes, these women mentioned how their families saw them as an extra financial burden. In cases where families could not afford to take care of them, divorced women were simply abandoned. When brides are expected to be virgins, and divorce results in the loss of honour, divorced women face many obstacles to re-marriage.

Between June and September 2013, the theatre began a series of weekly workshops with ten women, led by actress and dramatherapist Hanin Tarabay. The purpose of these workshops was to build on Ghrayeb's findings by working with a group of women over a much longer period of time. The theatre's intention was that the testimonials shared by the workshop participants would help shape the play itself. Indeed, some of the actors who would eventually perform in *Shakespeare's Sisters* attended the workshops to gain insights into their own characters or to discuss character development. As the workshops progressed, however, and the women began to relax in each other's company, these sessions turned into a therapeutic intervention in their own right.[5] The participants would look forward to seeing each other and sharing their stories. Although performers continued to attend the workshops whenever they needed, the participants themselves agreed that the purpose of the group was not to support the development of the play but, rather, to meet their own needs.

The workshop participants were mainly university educated, professional women in their late twenties to early forties who were unmarried, widowed or divorced. During the first workshops, Tarabay told me, the main obstacle was that the women felt guilty for prioritizing the group over their families.[6] One woman, for example, mentioned that attending the workshops was the first time she had ever done anything solely for herself. Tarabay's initial task was to convince the women that there was nothing selfish about this. Using various techniques—such as Playback Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed practices, listening circles, and meditation—Tarabay attempted to bring the group's focus onto their personal narratives. This was not easy, she says, and the workshops had to begin with group- and trust-building games in order to create a space in which participants could discuss their lives without fear of these stories being shared outside the group.[7]

These activities developed into games in which participants discussed their internal conflicts. In one game, for example, Woman A would name a desire she had (e.g. 'I want to be in a sexual relationship') while the other women would respond with inner voices or conflicts around this desire (e.g. 'You're too old for that').[8] Then, Woman A would choose the voice closest to the one in her head. At the end of this exercise, each member of the group would get to choose and watch another member performing her inner voice.

The rehearsal process, which began in November 2013, was not a smooth ride. Initially, the theatre had invited Pietro Floridia, artistic director of the Italian company Teatro dell'Argine, to write and direct the play. However, after airport security checks revealed he would be working in the West Bank, Floridia was deported back to Italy, and banned from entering Israel for five years. Undeterred by this setback, however, the theatre decided to conduct the first six weeks of rehearsals on Skype. The final week of rehearsals with Floridia actually took place in Amman (Jordan) where the play opened. That it was easier for Floridia to meet the company in Jordan, rather than at the theatre itself, indicates how much control Israel is prepared to assert in restricting or obstructing arts productions in the occupied Palestinian territory. The choice not to abandon the production was motivated by the collaborative nature of the process—Floridia would write and edit drafts of the play in constant dialogue with the company who were free to discard scenes and devise new ones of their own—and the prior trust the theatre had established with him during their collaboration, in 2008, on Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In one of our interviews,

Ghazaleh insisted that it was this dialogic approach to collaboration that allowed the company to claim shared ownership of the play. When I suggested that an Italian man directing a play about the experiences of Palestinian women contrasted with its women-centred approach, she replied that, at every stage of writing and rehearsal, the performers were able to impose cuts, edits and alternative scenes. She also mentioned that the performers would often attend the workshops to seek advice from the participants, and that Floridia would privilege these suggestions over his own ideas.[9]

In December 2013, *Shakespeare's Sisters* began its tour with a performance at the National Centre for Culture and Arts in Amman where the company had been rehearsing. Between January and May 2014, twenty-one performances took place across the West Bank, performing in cities, villages and refugee camps. The tour also included two performances at the Palestinian National Theatre in East Jerusalem, and one at Oyoun Theatre in Majdal Shams (in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights). In August 2015, the play was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe.[10] Palestinian audiences' reception of *Shakespeare's Sisters* was generally positive, mirroring responses elsewhere. Ghazaleh recounted how, 'even' in more conservative cities like Jenin and Hebron, both women and men remained after the show to discuss what they had seen, and to voice their own experiences.[11] In Jenin, she said, one young man expressed his excitement that such stories were being told on stage—even though he admitted that 'he's afraid about the reaction.'[12]

In a place as conservative as the Jenin, such fears about public reactions are justified: performances transgressing social norms can have fatal consequences for those involved. In Hebron, Ghazaleh said, some women thought the stories were 'over the top,' only to be corrected by others who referred them to their own experiences.[13] When the company performed at Birzeit University, the male principal delivered a post-performance speech reflecting on the failures of the university itself to implement gender equality. One aspect of this, Ghazaleh said, was that the seating arrangement in the auditorium had placed female students at the back and male students at the front. Such post-show discussions illustrate the role theatre can play in the Palestinian women's movement by facilitating public discussions on women's rights. In places like Jenin, they highlight how much more work there is left to be done for the Palestinian

women's movement. In Hebron, the discussion appears to have taken place amongst women themselves. The incident at Birzeit University demonstrates the ability of theatre to change minds.

Such responses, Ghazaleh believes, confirm the role theatre can play in creating safe spaces for women to gather and for disseminating women's issues. This is demonstrated by the ways in which the real life experiences of the women interviewed by Ghrayeb, and the participation of the women in Tarabay's workshops shaped the script of *Shakespeare's Sisters*. Such productions, Ghazaleh argues, can help give voice to and validate women's experiences when they are silenced by dominant cultures.[14] Indeed, productions like *Shakespeare's Sisters* provide a space in which women can analyse their situations, form solidarities and be entertained without the sexism that is normalized elsewhere. Performances in which women are central figures, instead of characters supporting a male lead, disrupt dominant constructions of 'woman.' They allow for different ways in which women can be perceived by both female and male audiences. In societies where women's narratives are often censored, a performance like *Shakespeare's Sisters* is a rare event and probably the first time audiences ever encounter such stories in public spaces.

Mothers, Lovers, and Rebellious Women

Despite these positive responses, it was the reaction to the performance at the police academy in Jericho that the company found most shocking. According to Ghazaleh, the police were simply unable to believe the narrative of the play, and they dismissed the testimonials and research as fabrications. Ghazaleh remembers one audience member as saying plays like *Shakespeare's Sisters* 'shouldn't be allowed.' She says, 'They accused us of wanting to make Palestinian women rebellious.'[15]

The suggestion that certain modalities of womanhood are 'rebellious' illustrates how processes of abjection attempt to reinstate gender norms. The immediate way in which patriarchy intervenes in the lives of Palestinian women through an ideology of honour and shame provides opportunities for dominant groups to enforce social laws structuring women's aspirations, behaviour, dress, and sexual identities and practices whilst censuring and/or punishing those who fail to abide by these standards (see, for

example, Baxter 2007). The positive portrayal of 'rebellious' women in *Shakespeare's Sisters* must be read against these processes. One way of doing this would be to situate *Shakespeare's Sisters* against dominant representations of the land of Palestine as a woman, and of Palestinian women as placeholders of the Palestinian nation. As in other forms of nationalism—such as the female personification of the British Isles as Britannia, of India as mother, or of the French republic as Marianne—the image of the nation as a feminine body depends for its representational efficacy upon a bricolage of symbols organized around constructions of masculinity and femininity, gender relations, and notions of female sexuality (Parker et al. 1992, 6). Thus, the gendered female body functions as a representational system enabling people to 'imagine' and lay claim to a shared past and present, an extended community, a repertoire of traditions, a common territory or homeland, and a collective national goal.

Extending these arguments, feminist scholars have attempted to reclaim the centrality of gender to any discussion of nationalism. Nira Yuval-Davis, for example, discusses how gender and nation intersect, constructing 'individuals' subjectivities and social lives, and the social and political projects of nations and states' (Yuval-Davis 1997, 22). Nationalisms are already gendered projects predicated upon exclusive constructions of 'male' and 'female' participation. These constructions acquire normative status as when, for example, women are re-cast as demarcating the boundaries of a nation through their biological role as mothers (i.e. reproducing the nation from which expectation emerge social and legal restrictions on marriage and sex), and their social role as nurturers (i.e. preserving the uniqueness of the nation by transmitting its national culture to the next generation, often within the framework of the heteronormative family grouping). Anne McClintock argues that, despite its claim to produce national unity, nationalism has often been responsible for reproducing the 'sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*' (McClintock 1995, 61, original emphasis). Joane Nagel suggests a connection between nationhood and the construction of 'patriotic manhood' and 'exalted motherhood' (Nagel 1998, 242). These, she argues, are central icons in nationalist discourses and movements, which relegate women and the feminized nation to symbolic roles as endangered objects to be defended.

In the Palestinian national discourse, this representational system has often been contradictory. On the one hand, 'Palestine' is expressed as the mother of a nation of heroic martyrs; on the other, a lover whose honour the (male) Palestinian must strive to defend. This idealized female, domes-

ticated as well as eroticized, functions as the metaphor of a pure homeland whose 'rape' by Zionist invaders has resulted in not just the 'loss of female virginity but also of male virility' (Amireh 2003, 751, 752). Yet, it is through this ambivalent representation, and upon this gendered landscape, that the nationalist narrative articulates its goal.

For Palestinian nationalist poets, novelists and artists, the tendency to depict Palestine as a woman gained widespread currency during the Mandatory Period (Katz 2003, 83). For example, in his poem 'I Love You More,' Abu Salma (the pen name of Abdul Kareem Al-Karmi) re-imagines love for homeland as eclipsing all other love: 'The more I fight for you, the more I love you! / […] Oh Palestine! Nothing more beautiful, more precious, more pure!' (in Jayyusi 1992, 97). In 'We Shall Return,' he promises Palestine that 'her' exiled children will 'return and kiss the moist ground, / love flowering on our lips' (ibid., 96). In 'Joy,' Muhammad Al-Dhahir invokes the capacity of an immortal homeland to nurture and sustain 'her' martyrs: 'She is my only homeland / The only vessel containing my blood […] / My time will end / my blood will cease / but she will never end' (ibid., 161). And in 'A Lover from Palestine,' Mahmoud Darwish presents his male narrator as the lover of a feminized Palestine: 'Her name, Palestinian, / […] Her kerchief, her feet and body, Palestinian, / […] Her voice, Palestinian, / Her birth and her death, Palestinian' (in Elmessiri 1982, 127).

The official documents of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) also make space for this metaphor. In his essay on gender and Palestinian nationalism, Joseph Massad (1995) explores the processes by which constructions of masculinity and femininity entered the political literature. By analyzing the vocabulary of three key documents—the Palestinian National Charter of 1964, the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of 1988, and the joint official communiqués of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) that the PLO issued during the first intifada—Massad is able to map the discursive construction of the nation, which then confirms and constitutes the ideological roles of Palestinian men and women.

The identification of Palestine as a mother, and of Palestinians as her children, is evident in the Charter where the Zionist conquest of Palestine is described as 'a rape of the land' (Massad 1995, 470). In his 1974 address to the UN General Assembly, Yasser Arafat returned to this metaphor in order to celebrate the 'honour' inherent in the liberation struggle (ibid., 473). Yet, while the Charter assigns Palestinian mothers the role of

biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, it is the Palestinian father who can pass on 'citizenship,' that is legal membership within the nation-state: '[…] *everyone who is born of an Arab Palestinian father* after [1947]—whether inside Palestine or outside it—is a Palestinian' (ibid., 472, original emphasis). Massad positions this rhetoric within the Nakba narrative: '[…] while the land as mother was responsible for the reproduction of Palestinians until 1947, the rape disqualified her from this role. It is now fathers who reproduce the nation. *Territory was replaced by paternity*' (ibid., 472, original emphasis). As Suad Joseph argues, citizenship is not a neutral process. Rather, it is a 'highly gendered enterprise' resulting in women's experience of citizenship not only as gendered bodies but also through their class, race, ethnicity, religion and subnational patrilineal loyalties based on religious and kinship affiliations (Joseph 1999, 3, 11). Whereas Palestinian women remain static in these official documents—simply, the 'guardians of our life and our survival and keepers of our eternal flame' (Massad 1995, 474)—it is Palestinian men who actually fight for the motherland's honour.

In his survey of the communiqués, Massad also notes the androsexist and heteronormative tendency framing the UNLU's perception of Palestine and Palestinian women. Communiqué No. 5, for example, views Palestinian women through the prism of female fertility. Women, it declares, are the soil that brings 'manhood, respect and dignity' to life. Men, on the other hand, are assigned the more active role of '*makers* of glory, respect and dignity' (ibid., 474, emphasis in original). Communiqué No. 29 repeats the trope of Palestine as lover and bride, celebrating the Declaration of Independence as a wedding feast at which the martyr's mother ululates twice: first, as her son sets out to fight; second, as the state itself is declared (ibid., 474). These tropes are also repeated in other communiqués. The Palestinian man is summoned as the virile nationalist agent; the Palestinian woman, as the reproducer of the nation's heroes. Massad makes the further point that, whereas the communiqués view the land itself as feminine, they perceive the nation as masculine. Communiqué No. 24, for example, insists that it was 'Gaza's sons' who 'confront[ed] with *their bodies* the occupier's machines.' Communiqué No. 8 compares the Palestinian nation to a 'giant [which] has *erected* itself and will not *bow*.' Indeed, Communiqué No. 10 exhorts the nation to 'rise as one man' (ibid., 479, original emphases).

Following Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), Massad also argues that nationalist agency, like gender, is constituted performatively (Massad

1995, 478). For Butler, both sex and gender are culturally constructed, and gender itself is performative; that is to say, it is a contingent category 'performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler 1990, 25); or, gender is a speech act that brings into being the very thing it names: a 'man,' or a 'woman.' Gender is not something one is, but something one does—a 'doing' rather than a 'being.' This does not mean that the subject is free to choose which gender they will enact. The 'script' is already pre-determined 'within a highly rigid regulatory frame' (ibid., 33). Agency, rather, is constructed through action, repetition, signification and re-signification. Massad develops this line of thought to argue that the ideological intentions of the gendered categories of male and female are 'performatively produced' by the metaphor of Palestine as a woman: the Palestinian man is brought into being both as a devoted and valiant son and as a committed lover; the Palestinian woman, as dutiful mother and chaste beloved. 'Given that nationalism, like all political positions, is perforce performative,' he says, 'nationalist agency proves to be performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results' (Massad 1995, 478).

The proliferation of the metaphor of Palestine as a woman operates alongside the ideology of honour and shame, which Diane Baxter defines as a 'set of expectations' (Baxter 2007, 746) regulating how men and women must behave in the world. Since it is heroic sons and lovers who embrace martyrdom for a symbolic mother or beloved who is constant and steadfast, the women they leave behind must be worthy of such sacrifice. The women interviewed by Ghrayeb suggest that worthiness often translates to a set of behaviours allowing men to direct their lives whilst the women themselves are responsible for serving the interests of the family. According to Suad Joseph, such relationships assume fluid boundaries between constituents whose identities, rather than being 'bounded, separate, or autonomous,' are marked out 'in familial terms, and kin idioms [such as "sister"] and relationships pervade public and private spheres' (Joseph 1999, 12). Baxter also argues that the intersubjective experience of honour and shame bears down especially on the male figure. Whilst chaste women are celebrated and rebellious women are rendered abject, it is primarily the *male* figure who experiences any honour or shame depending on his success or failure to guide, censure or punish his womenfolk. For example, one widow whom Ghrayeb interviewed started crying as she described the abuse her son was receiving because she had started working (Ghrayeb 2013, 17). Ghrayeb also describes how the widows of martyrs

are exalted as heroes in their own right. Yet, their status is undergirded by the honour accorded to their dead husbands whose sacrifice they must live up to. Such women are often expected to remain unmarried no matter how young they may be. Were the widow of a martyr to re-marry, Ghrayeb says, 'she would be regarded as if she had betrayed all martyrs' (ibid., 17).

Shakespeare's Sisters talks back to these dominant practices by presenting women who are conscious of their aspirations and determined to achieve them. The central narrative of the performance begins when Samira, a staid university professor who lives by herself, finds her home invaded one night by Nisma, a dressmaker running away from an engagement to a man 'who will never stand up to his father.'[16] The two women function as counterpoints to each other, both in age and personality. Whereas the much younger Nisma moves around on stage as a woman comfortable in her body, Samira's body language is closed. She takes small steps, and has trouble staring people in the face. Following their initial encounter, after which Samira allows Nisma to hide out in her apartment, the women realize they have much to learn from each other. Even though she is assertive enough to run away from home, Nisma is yet to develop a mind open to the diverse ways in which women can 'be' in the world. For example, she reacts in disbelief when she realizes that, not only is Samira unmarried, but she lives independently of her family. On the other hand, the highly educated Samira responds to Nisma's revelation that she dropped out of school by trying to 'improve' her, engaging her in conversations about the great women of history. Yet, in reference to the stories related during Tarabay's workshops, Samira is deeply lonely. Although she wants to be in a relationship, she believes she is too old to find love. Instead, she uses her academic interests and achievements to evade and displace these feelings. According to Ghazaleh, these contrasting characteristics allow Nisma and Samira to teach each other how to connect with their bodies.[17] At the same time, the performance avoids categorizing women as normal or abnormal based on their life choices. Rather than accept their abject status as 'rebellious' women, Nisma and Samira demonstrate that it is possible to practise different modalities of womanhood.

In a later scene with the university's president, Samira's position is even more precarious. The president says people know there is someone else living with her, implying that she has taken a lover. When she denies this, he accuses her of bringing the university's reputation into disrepute, and threatening social stability. When colleagues turn up at Samira's house to

verify the rumours—'We've seen silhouettes of people at the window'—only Nisma is at home. Taking the silhouettes as evidence of Samira's illicit lifestyle, they search the apartment for evidence of their assumptions. Nisma pretends to be Samira's maid and explains that dressmaking is Samira's latest hobby, and the silhouettes were caused by the mannequins. The embarrassment on the colleagues' faces elicits wry, perhaps victorious, laughter from the audience.

At the end of the play, Nisma and Samira have developed into stronger women. Samira's transformation affects the university's president. The question of illicit behaviour settled, he confesses his love for her. Indeed, he says, he knew 'all along' that the rumours were untrue and, where other men feel threatened by strong women, he himself is not 'like that.' Of course, men who make claims to exceptionality are very rarely exceptional, and Samira rejects his advances. Nisma, too, has changed: she decides to return to her family, but not before successfully annulling her engagement. As they return to their respective lives, they no longer feel obliged to defend their choices against society's formulations of womanhood. Although this dénouement is not surprising, Nisma and Samira demonstrate that the choices they make are complex, and call for a careful navigation of different aspects of their personal and social lives.

The performance was also bounded by video interviews of locals' reactions to the women's support group Nisma has set up in Samira's apartment. Whilst neighbourhood women celebrate the group, the men are suspicious of this space from which they are excluded. The only man with anything positive to say—'They encouraged my wife to join a gym, and now she's lost five kilos.'—demonstrates how male desire structures and directs women's presence and autonomy. Samira alludes to this when she tells Nisma about the myth of Pygmalion. Most familiar from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion is a sculptor who takes a vow of celibacy after seeing the behaviour of a group of women whom Venus has turned into prostitutes for rejecting her divinity. His vow leads him to create an ivory statue of a woman of such flawless beauty that he falls in love with her, and names her Galatea. Venus takes pity on Pygmalion, and brings the statue to life so they can marry. Galatea's life, then, is a boon granted to her *maker*. Her sexual purity and aesthetic qualities have no other purpose in Ovid's narrative, but to mirror Pygmalion's gaze. In her book *A Room of One's Own*, which is referenced in various ways in *Shakespeare's Sisters*, Virginia Woolf describes the narcissism structuring how men view women who have 'all these centuries [served] as looking glasses possessing the

magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size' (Woolf 2012, 52). As Pygmalion's 'self-object,' Galatea is the embodiment of his fantasy of the perfect woman and, therefore, the enlarged manifestation of his own masculinity. Even her name is not her own.

Shakespeare's Sisters articulates ways in which Palestinian women construct alternative modalities of being in the world despite the structural relations imposed upon them. That Palestinian women theatre-makers should interrogate patriarchal practices in their work seems inevitable. However, what is remarkable about *Shakespeare's Sisters* is that by presenting 'rebellious' women in normative roles—it is always the antagonistic characters who must defend their positions, and whose schemes are foiled—the performance attempts to politically re-imagine and practise the key question of *who we can be and still be Palestinian women*. In a sense, Samira and Nisma *are* 'rebellious' women because they refuse to conform to gendered notions of how they should behave or what they should do with their lives. They are not, however, horrifying figures. By challenging these processes, they are still able to articulate their rights as Palestinian women, and claim their place in Palestinian society.

Homeplace as Radical Space

Critics of the Habermasian public sphere have argued that it is a realm of exclusion based on hegemonic notions of citizenship that normalize a particular social group (white, male, middle class, heterosexual) as neutral, objective and universal. Nancy Fraser (1990) and Michael Warner (2005), for example, have called attention to the absence of gender, sexuality, race, and class consciousness in Habermas' formulation. Other scholars have extended this analysis to include the question of diversity *within* counterpublic spheres. Robert Asen, for example, argues that counterpublics should be viewed as heterogeneous collectives composed of individuals with simultaneous interests and aspirations (Asen 2000, 439). Similarly, Iris Young argues that any discussion of counterpublics should take account of members' different social relationships with one another rather than simply focusing on singular identities. 'In a relational conception,' she says, 'what constitutes the group is the relation in which it stands to others. […] Class, gender, and race are some of the most far reaching and enduring structural relations of hierarchy and inequality in modern societies' (Young 1997, 389–90).

As *Shakespeare's Sisters* suggests, such counterpublic spaces are fraught with contradiction because they are in constant flux. It is not a fixed space entered into by diverse social groups who abandon group interests in favour of the singular aim of destabilizing the Zionist public sphere. Yet, the very processes rendering women as 'rebellious' have also produced an abundance of methods by which they are able to challenge their oppression. Theatre, especially touring theatre, is an important tool in this resistance because it is a space in which transgressive ideas can be disseminated in performative ways. It is in theatres that strangers are brought together to build relations with each other, and practitioners interrogate present realities, or imagine better futures, and *show* them to audiences. It is also where audiences are made to confront transgressive ideas and practices. In her *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan discusses theatre in similar terms. '[A]udiences are compelled to gather with others,' she says, 'to see people perform live, hoping, perhaps, for moments of transformation that might let them reconsider the world outside the theatre, from its micro to its macro arrangements' (Dolan 2005, 36). For women attending a performance led by women and about women's issues, that performative enactment of 'a common, different future' (ibid.), what Dolan refers to as 'the utopian performative' throughout her book, is essential to retrieving a sense of self-esteem, confidence and solidarity. Part of that process, of course, lies in the way such performances place women's stories centre stage.

The importance of *Shakespeare's Sisters* lies, also, in the way it challenges women's gendered representation in the liberation discourse—not by calling attention to the representations themselves but by, simply, presenting women in different roles. But it also exemplifies how Palestinian women negotiate and re-formulate private spaces, particularly the homeplace, in order to develop mechanisms for challenging misogynistic practices within Palestinian society. In arguing for the radicality of the Palestinian homeplace, I am not suggesting that it is an elastic space possessing an infinite capacity to absorb the daily shocks of life under a settler-colonial occupation; nor that it is an insular, unitary construct; nor, indeed, that there is a dichotomy between public and private spaces where the violence of the former is thwarted by the safety of the latter. In colonized spaces, the two always intersect, slipping into one another so that their boundaries are permanently uncertain and unsettled. Thanks to the work of hundreds of 'witnesses' on the ground—amongst others, local residents, journalists, human rights organizations, UN agencies, international solidarity activists

and academic and other researchers—we are no longer unaware of the daily invasions of Israeli military forces into Palestinian homes: night-time raids, house demolitions, door-to-door interrogations and arrests, the detention of entire households in single rooms, and so forth. Yet, these private spaces play an important role in counterpublic formation. Jane Mansbridge has argued that subordinate groups require 'deliberative enclaves of resistance' where they 'can rework their ideas and their strategies, gathering their forces and deciding in a more protected space in what way or whether to continue the battle' (Mansbridge 1996, 47). However, as Catherine R. Squires points out, subordinate groups do not have the luxury to choose such spaces for themselves. Rather, they are often 'forced into enclaves' where they must 'create discursive strategies and gather oppositional forces' (Squires 2002, 458). The Palestinian homeplace is not *only* a space in which oppression is normalized: it is also an important space for imparting the ethos of national resistance, and for reproducing 'rebellious' subjectivities.

At the beginning of *Shakespeare's Sisters*, Samira and Nisma discuss Virginia Woolf's imaginary but paradigmatic female poet-playwright Judith Shakespeare, William's 'extraordinarily gifted' sister who is just 'as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world' (Woolf 2012, 61). Woolf speculates that, unlike her brother who gets to attend the local grammar school before embarking on his theatrical career in London, Judith must remain at home where she reads the books her brother leaves lying around (ibid.). Despite this, Woolf says, Judith secretly persists in her desire for learning, reading and writing before hiding or burning what she writes (ibid.). When it is time for her to marry, Judith protests at the engagement only to be beaten or emotionally blackmailed by her father. In the end, she runs away to London. Unlike William, however, English laws prevent Judith from working in theatre, and she soon finds that her only future lies in prostitution. When the actor-manager Nick Greene—a character from Woolf's *Orlando* who, there, remarks that an actress is as unnatural as a dancing dog (Woolf 2012, 66)—takes advantage of her vulnerability and leaves her pregnant, Judith commits suicide. Her life, Woolf suggests, is so inconsequential that she lies buried at 'some crossroads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle' (ibid., 62). When Samira mentions William Shakespeare, Nisma interrupts her: 'I bet if *he* had a sister, she'd be stuck at home cooking and cleaning.' Her response to this discovery of Judith is to set up a women-only group

in Samira's apartment where local women can meet to discuss and find solutions to their problems. Taking cue from Woolf's argument that women require financial and spatial independence from men in order to be able to express themselves autonomously (ibid., 29)—Woolf's narrator, after all, is unable to speak of the queerness of Radclyffe Hall without first confirming there are no men in the audience (ibid., 85)—Nisma calls this group Shakespeare's Sisters, referring to Judith rather than William.

One scene serves as an example of this. As Nisma sits in the corner sewing a dress, an actor enters the stage. Tightly hugging a mannequin, she gives voice to the experiences of three women taken from Ghrayeb's interviews: the first woman divorced her husband, and is now prevented by his family from seeing her children; the second raised her two younger brothers after their parents died only to be abandoned when they grew up, graduated from university and found jobs; the third, a teenager, is pregnant after years of sexual abuse by her uncle who threatens to tell everyone she has been 'sleeping around' if she reveals what he has done. Having reached that point in the storyline, the actress performing these stories gets lost in her narration. Her embrace of the mannequin turns into a drumbeat. As she hits the mannequin again and again, her action turns into punches. Nisma, realizing the girl is trying to abort the pregnancy, rushes to stop her. She resolves the situation by telling the girl that a lawyer also attends the group, and will take up all these cases.

Shakespeare's Sisters is careful to remind us that this women-only space is fragile for, just as Nisma is helping these women, the stage is invaded by a male relative of someone who attends the group. He accuses Nisma of spreading dangerous ideas, of corrupting the local women, and he demands that she close the group. When Nisma refuses, the man attempts to destroy the mannequins which are not only her livelihood but had, a moment earlier, stood in for Palestinian women. A stylized struggle between Nisma and the man takes place and, eventually, the mannequins are saved, and the man is forced off the stage. This is a very different Nisma to the one we met at the start of the play. Then, she was running away from a marriage she did not want. Now, she is a woman defending a space she has helped create.

In their attempts to develop a consciousness separate from dominant practices, Nisma and Samira turn not to the patriarchal centre but, rather, the counter-spaces women have created. To appreciate the significance of Nisma's embrace of the homeplace as a space of resistance, one must also

consider the important position of the homeplace as that in which Palestinians are first introduced to their history and cultural identity. In her ethnographic study of the strategies Palestinian women develop for protecting the homeplace, based on interviews she conducted with almost 300 women and girls affected by Israel's military actions in the West Bank during the second intifada, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2005) describes how internal displacement and the destruction of homes can also produce different forms of agency and resistance. Although she does not describe these spaces as counterpublic, Shalhoub-Kevorkian begins her study by reiterating Israel's policy of 'no safe havens' for Palestinians in the occupied territories before describing how women have attempted 'to recreate home spaces for their families that are not only physical, but also psychological and social' (ibid., 135).

Although the women Shalhoub-Kevorkian interviewed believe their families are never safe 'at home or outside it' (ibid., 132), they still describe the homeplace as one of 'unity, love, care, and hope' (ibid., 120). Amid the detritus left by the Israeli army's incursions into the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002, for example, women

> invent[ed] sleeping spaces for their children and neighbors […] turn[ed] a half-demolished room into a home […] Nahil [sat] on the remains of her balcony, looking at the scene of the destruction of the camp, while she held two pots in her lap and prepared dinner for the family. (ibid., 129–30)

These women are not simply responding to Israel's 'no safe haven' policy by making do with what little remains; they are responding with a practice (recreating and/or maintaining the homeplace) that reproduces resistant subjectivities. In a society struggling under the double-weight of Israeli hegemony and a government widely considered to be collaborationist, the homeplace remains a volatile one but it is also highly politicized because it is where Palestinians return to for support, strength and nourishment.

How do these observations resonate in *Shakespeare's Sisters* where the women's counter-space remains undercover? Michel de Certeau's distinction between place or *lieu*, a central location excluding the co-existence of 'other' things, and space or *espace*, a socially constructed field 'actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it' (de Certeau 1984, 117), is important here. Whereas *lieu* is stable—'each [is] situated in its own "proper" and distinct location'—*espace* is polyvalent. Here, de Certeau is

not concerned so much with the 'strategies' or 'calculus of force-relationships' employed by dominant groups in order to claim territory and define what is 'proper' (ibid., xix) as he is with the 'tactics' of subordinated groups to subvert those places. In other words, his focus is on how such subordinated groups re-imagine space in order to reconfigure what has been created by dominant groups. A tactic is characterized as 'an art of the weak' existing 'within enemy territory,' and 'organized by the law of a foreign power' for which reason it is incapable of 'viewing the adversary within a district, visible, and objectifiable space' (ibid., 37). Tactics are also characterized as 'trickery' and the 'trickster' must employ wit and *legerdemain*—as when Nisma pretends to be Samira's maid—in order to take the hegemonic centre by surprise. From the standpoint of the 'weak,' de Certeau argues, 'a tactic is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power' (ibid., 38, original emphasis). In other words, all spaces—even spaces of resistance—are constituents of power because they are constructed in reference to it. These tactics may not confront the dominant order directly, let alone attempt to radically alter it. Rather, they are victories intended to make life more liveable. Just as the women in Shalhoub-Kevorkian's study respond to Israeli aggression with practices centred around the homeplace, the women in *Shakespeare's Sisters* respond to patriarchal practices by creating a 'safe haven' from which they can help one another achieve personal victories. As Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues:

> Some forms of feminism see political efficacy only in affirming the strength of the individual woman. It is my belief, however, that the women's ways of challenging various systems of domination in the name of security reasoning strengthen their commitment against injustice. They refuse to let the West culturalize their acts as merely the nurturing instincts of the less civilized, less liberated Arab woman. Nurturers they are, and I do not think any of them would wish to refuse the label, but if feminism accepts that the personal is political, then why can't acts of nurturing, particularly collective nurturing in the face of disaster, also be political acts? (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2005, 136)

What is compelling about *Shakespeare's Sisters*' critique of misogyny within Palestinian society, articulated as a struggle for spatial autonomy, is that it emerged from the company's own knowledge and experience of women navigating between personal aspirations and social expectations.

In order to articulate this critique, the affective strategy employed in *Shakespeare's Sisters* is its performative expression of what spatial autonomy might look like. By representing this struggle as one between a patriarchal centre and a women-centred periphery, *Shakespeare's Sisters* weaves together narratives of women's everyday experiences and their navigational tactics. The self-help group created by Nisma reflects how Tarabay's workshops turned into an autonomous space in which participants could give voice to intimate desires they felt unable to express elsewhere. Further, the workshop participants reshaped the meaning and purpose of their meetings to suit their own needs rather than on developing the play, which the theatre recognized as valid.

By performatively arguing for spatial autonomy, *Shakespeare's Sisters* hinges on the women's construction of individual and collective agency capable of altering their immediate circumstances. A modality of womanhood bypassing marriage and childbearing is here characterized as something women might find fulfilling. Instead of deferring their struggle to the centre, Nisma and Samira embrace their marginality by creating a women-only space. This is a marginality that, as the African-American feminist scholar bell hooks describes in her account of the homeplace of her childhood, 'nourishes one's capacity to resist' (hooks 1990, 150). For hooks, the homeplace is a safe haven where 'black women globally, especially black women in white supremacist societies' create a shared 'community of resistance' against the outside 'culture of white supremacy' (ibid., 42).

Considering that Palestinian identity is produced according to processes of abjection and racialization, the marginality of the Palestinian abject/other is significantly oppositional. The homeplace, therefore, is a legitimate location from which to produce knowledge and to confront injustice. It is in this space that the women who attend Shakespeare's Sisters can create a counter-language obstructing the patriarchal centre. It is also why the women who attended Tarabay's workshops turned the public space of the theatre into their own private space by privileging their own needs above those of the company. *Shakespeare's Sisters* pushes the discussion about women's rights into a different space where the answers to women's struggles are not mediated through a centre-periphery dialectic but, rather, from the radical space of the margin itself.

Border Thinking

As well as its interrogation of women's gendered representation in the nationalist discourse, and its performative appeal for women's spatial autonomy, *Shakespeare's Sisters* is an attempt to imagine women's liberation from a Palestinian position. Al-Harah Theatre produced the play from the sense that the myriad ways in which gendered oppression shape the lives of Palestinian women was an important issue to explore and share. This sense of importance first emerged from the company's own knowledge of how patriarchal practices structure women's lives, which was then supported by the field research and the drama workshops. As Ghazaleh points out, Al-Harah Theatre received no external funding for *Shakespeare's Sisters*. Rather, the support provided by World Vision, the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development and the National Association of Working Women was only to facilitate contact with women at the research stage.[18] In this section, I argue that *Shakespeare's Sisters* also operates at a third level where it practices what Walter D. Mignolo has called border epistemology or border thinking, a way of thinking that allows subordinated groups to produce knowledge by drawing on both local and colonial epistemic practices. Key to this discussion of border thinking is also the question of the role and efficacy of theatre in such 'NGO-ized' contexts as Palestine.

According to Walter D. Mignolo (2000, 2002, 2011), the discursive regimes driving international development can be traced to the European imperialist projects of the nineteenth century. The division of the world into developed and undeveloped nations reflects the ways in which imperialists manufactured colonial difference: essentializing categories such as race, gender, caste and culture; transforming colonized peoples in accordance with the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment; and categorizing them as dialectically inferior to the 'developed' nations of the West. In the heyday of European imperialism, the colonized would have been in need of 'civilization,' which it was the 'burden' of the white man—administrators, scholars, and Christian missionaries—to deliver. According to Mignolo, these forms of direct control have evolved into mechanisms of coloniality that operate through the rhetoric of modernity. It is not without reason that the cadres of development workers deployed across the 'third world' have been called 'missionaries of the new era' (Merz 2012, 64n2); the vocabulary has changed, for sure, but the discourse remains the same.

In response to this, Mignolo proposes what he calls border thinking as an epistemic response to the colonial difference. In *Local Histories/Global Designs*, he argues that the border's porous nature implies that colonized peoples, cultures and knowledges, whilst expelled to zones of abjection, are simultaneously able to exist on both sides. It is in the border, he argues, that 'knowledge from a subaltern perspective is […] conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system' (Mignolo 2000, 11) where it 'foreground[s] the force and creativity of knowledges subalternized during a long process of colonization' (ibid., 13) in order to destabilize the hegemonic forms of knowledge governing relationships between Western and non-Western nations. Mignolo suggests that border thinking creates new macro-narratives that do not belong purely to one or the other. It is this aspect of border thinking that allows it to reside in and emerge from conditions of double consciousness (ibid., 87) because it requires that colonized groups simultaneously 'inhabit' two languages that are in tension with each other (ibid., 245). Border thinking is not, then, a simple rejection of Eurocentric forms of knowledge since it originates from conditions of modernity and coloniality. Rather, it implies an epistemic response that recovers and practices subaltern knowledges thereby disrupting the hegemony of European cultures as *the* centres of knowledge production. 'Postcolonial theorizing as a particular enactment of the subaltern reason,' he argues, referring to the thinking processes that colonized peoples have had to enact in order to navigate through their conditions, 'coexists with colonialism itself as a constant move and force toward autonomy and liberation in every order of life' (ibid., 100).

Mignolo's discussion of colonial difference resonates with the vexed question of Arab women's rights and empowerment. In her book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, Lila Abu-Lughod argues that since 9/11 the issue of Arab and Muslim women's emancipation has become the 'new common sense' (Abu-Lughod 2013, 54). Discussions on women's rights, she argues, have acquired a central place in the logic underpinning the 'war on terror,' and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq; that is, to liberate Arab and Muslim women from the shackles of a militant Islamic patriarchy. This 'new common sense' has found its political voice in an extensive array of local and global policies, think tanks and initiatives, and conferences on topics ranging from veiling to female genital mutilation. She also reminds us that the issue of Muslim women's rights has received wide circulation across the world, in media outlets, government policies, international development frameworks, and in classrooms.

This 'new common sense,' as she calls it, is reiterated in the discourse driving the international development regime. The relationship between 'developed' and 'undeveloped' reflects the mechanisms of coloniality that Mignolo describes as operating through the rhetoric of modernity. In Palestine, this can be observed by tracing the ways in which the Palestinian women's movement has transformed in the post-Oslo period from a grassroots social movement to the projects-based activities of women's NGOs. In historical context, the mobilization of Palestinian women in the national liberation movement was considered essential to anti-colonial resistance. By the 1980s, hundreds of charitable societies, committees and unions addressing women's varied interests and concerns had been established throughout the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza.

Much has been written about the contribution of women to the national struggle, in particular the first intifada, so I will not attempt a lengthy summary here.[19] Suffice it, however, to point out their rootedness in their communities through de-centralized structures. So, when the intifada started, these popular committees and localized organizations were able to organize, sustain and direct it. According to Souad Dajani (1994), it was the role these organizations played during the first intifada that institutionalized the involvement of women in the national struggle. As well as taking part in armed resistance, women worked to mobilize their neighbourhoods, to offset food shortages by organizing for their collection and storage, to establish neighbourhood patrols, to develop alternative economies to challenge Palestinian dependency on Israeli products, to provide healthcare and medical assistance to casualties, and so on (ibid., 43).

As these practices show, women's rights activists have used a range of tactics to align their own struggles with the nationalist project. Rather than campaign for their liberation as a separate movement, Palestinian women *performed* their autonomy through a range of embodied practices. This is not to say that such an alignment has been a simple task. As Frances S. Hasso points out, one of the things women activists often struggled against was that the nationalist project was seen as more legitimate whereas gender inequality was 'viewed as a "natural" hierarchy whose challenge threatened core social values and potentially the very national "community" itself' (Hasso 1998, 449). One way women attempted to overcome this barrier was to work 'within the limits set by a patriarchal gender so that families, especially men, would not be threatened by women's political and other activities outside of their home' (ibid.). By distancing themselves from an explicit Western feminist agenda, with its suggestion of a

Western-centric approach, women's rights activists often adopted 'less separatist and confrontational terms such as *tahrir al-mar'a* (women's liberation) which sit more easily within Palestinian society' (Ball 2013, 49).

The transition from grassroots activism to NGOs resulted largely from the entry of the international development regime into Palestinian society in the decade following the Oslo Accords. In her discussion of the transformation of the Palestinian women's movement, Islah Jad (2004) has referred to this transition as a process of NGO-ization, referring to the professionalized methods adopted by these NGOs such as their projects-based approach, their dependence on international funding, which requires knowledge of English and the recruitment of people with the skills to submit polished funding applications and reports, and the prioritization of donor agendas over local interests.[20] Positioned at some distance from their 'beneficiaries' and 'stakeholders,' and even further from the goal of national liberation, NGOs have replicated the social welfare functions of a state where there is none. NGO-ization has led to the fragmentation of the national resistance movement demonstrated, ultimately, in the disarray of the second intifada (Merz 2012).

As an example of applied theatre, *Shakespeare's Sisters* alerts us to the fact that, in NGO-ized contexts, such theatre must navigate through a difficult terrain in order to assert its message. In these contexts, applied theatre and theatre for development are tools in the constitution of new subjectivities because they seek to educate audiences on liberal values that bring them closer to preconceived notions of modernity. This is made all the more powerful because theatre claims to be in close proximity to spectators' lives, and to represent their everyday nuances, practices and rhythms. Yet, in NGO-ized contexts, the danger inherent in such theatre-making is twofold. First, this 'issues-based' approach often ignores the structural adjustments required for long-term, meaningful social change; in this case, the apparatus of Israel's settler-colonial occupation of Palestine. Second, the forms of subjectivities created by these processes must be questioned as some Palestinian theatre-makers themselves have done. For example, Abdelfattah Abusrour, director of Al-Rowwad, has mentioned how Palestinians are 'trained' by NGOs 'not to use the word occupation' (in Wickstrom 2012, 51) as though the development regime's stated goal of strengthening Palestinian society can be achieved by encouraging a politically neutral subjectivity.

Whereas a superficial reading of *Shakespeare's Sisters* might conclude that the play affirms colonial difference by resorting to a developmental agenda on women's rights and empowerment, what it actually does is present a critique of both patriarchal practices and colonial difference carefully attuned to the social and cultural contexts in which it was produced. To do this, *Shakespeare's Sisters* practices a form of border thinking that criticizes Palestinian patriarchal practices without expressing this as an explicitly feminist critique. The play is able to do this by employing what Deniz Kandiyoti has identified as 'patriarchal bargains.' Kandiyoti suggests that women living under 'classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti 1988, 278) use 'coping mechanisms' in order 'to maximize security and optimize life options' (ibid., 274).[21] Just as patriarchy operates differently in different contexts, she argues, women's agency also operates differently. Women's accommodation to male dominance produces different patriarchal bargains, which are not always about asserting absolute notions of rights and choices. In one scene, for example, a smartly dressed Samira sits in her office downstage while two colleagues engage in the following conversation.

WOMAN: When a woman reaches forty, she shouldn't dress like she's twenty.
MAN: Has she forgotten her age? Maybe she needs to check her identity card.
WOMAN: [*mock sigh*] Maybe she's in love.
MAN: Love! At *her* age?

In this short scene, the stage blocking invites the audience to dislike these characters for, in order to reach the audience, what they say must first pass through Samira's reactions. By placing a female character in this provocative role, the play cleverly demonstrates how, in its attempts to obstruct female solidarity formation, masculinity often succeeds in conditioning women to discipline other women. Although there is no explanation of why Samira's female colleague would take part in this, the Palestinian women I spoke with about this scene understood the power dynamic driving this conversation as the two-way process inherent in women's disciplining of other women.

Kandiyoti's theory would suggest that Samira's female colleague is attempting to assert her right to the space of the university by demonstrating that she adheres to notions of female modesty which makes her worthy of honour. In this scene, Samira is also bargaining with patriarchy except

that her transaction is with the audience she is facing and not her colleagues standing behind her. From the omniscient perspective of the audience, we know that her accusers are wrong and that, even in the private space of her home, she is innocent of any sexual impropriety. In that sense, the audience is being shown that she and her modality of womanhood are worthy of honour. The kind of border thinking demonstrated in *Shakespeare's Sisters* bypasses developmental slogans about women's rights and empowerment to ground its performative logic in practices local audiences would recognize and understand as both progressive and indigenously constructed.

This chapter has suggested that Al-Harah Theatre's *Shakespeare's Sisters* is an interrogation of the social construction and representation of 'woman' in the Palestinian nationalist discourse. By drawing on Palestinian and European epistemic practices to call attention to women's struggles for spatial autonomy, the play also presents the Palestinian homeplace as a radical counter-space of creative resistance. In addition, *Shakespeare's Sisters* also presents the theatre itself as a space in which practitioners and audiences can performatively articulate transgressive ideas. *Shakespeare's Sisters* also shows how issues-based theatrical projects can remain closely aligned with and attentive to the needs of the people for whom they speak. For example, in her report, Ghrayeb mentions that the women she interviewed were excited that their stories would provide the basis for a touring theatre production. Many of them also expressed interest in reading her report (Ghrayeb 2013, 5). Such interest probably underscores the need for safe spaces in which women can gather, articulate their experiences, and learn from and support each other. As Ghrayeb states in the concluding section of her report, these support networks are central to nurturing women's autonomy and awareness of their rights (ibid., 22). Al-Harah Theatre's practice, I have also argued, shows that the Palestinian counter-public sphere is a polyvalent space albeit one in which women enact measured tactics to articulate their interests. Yet, I have also suggested, such spaces are tense as female constituents must navigate through multiple levels of discourse in order to access them. Border thinking, as both a discursive practice and a lived tactic, creates important opportunities for manoeuvring through this difficult terrain because it shifts the terms of the conversation on rights and empowerment as well as its content. This allowed *Shakespeare's Sisters* to articulate the possibility of 'other' transgressive spaces and identities produced by abjection.

Notes

1. This chapter is derived in part from an article published in *Studies in Theatre and Performance*. See: Gabriel Varghese, 'A Stage of One's Own: Gendered Spaces in Palestinian Performance,' *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2017, pp. 301–15.
2. Raeda Ghazaleh, interview with the author, May 19, 2014.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Hanin Tarabay, interview with the author, October 26, 2014.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Raeda Ghazaleh, interview with the author, June 12, 2014.
10. In Amman, the company performed at the National Centre for Culture and Arts. The West Bank tour covered Ramallah, Hebron, Jenin, Bethlehem, Jericho, Nablus, the Dheisheh refugee camp, Birzeit University, and the village of Bani Nu'im. Majdal Shams is a town in the Golan Heights, which Israel annexed from Syria during the War of 1967. The Edinburgh Fringe performance took place at the Out of the Blue Drill Hall. I attended the performance at Dar al-Nadwa in Bethlehem on 6 May 2014.
11. Raeda Ghazaleh, interview with the author, May 19, 2014.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Raeda Ghazaleh, interview with the author, June 12, 2014.
16. All quotes are from the performance.
17. Raeda Ghazaleh, interview with the author, June 12, 2014.
18. Ibid.
19. See, for example: Nahla Abdo, *Family, Women and Social Change in the Middle East: The Palestinian Case*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1987; Nahla Abdo, 'Women and the Intifada: Gender, Class and National Liberation,' *Race & Class*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1991, pp. 19–34; Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson, 'Palestinian Women: Building Barricades and Breaking Barriers,' in *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation*, eds. Zachary Lochman and Joel Beinin, Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989, pp. 155–69; Islah Jad, 'From Salons to Popular Committees: Palestinian Women, 1919–1980,' in *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*, eds. Jamal R. Nassar and Roger Heacock, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990, pp. 125–43; Philippa Strum, *The Women Are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books,

1992; and Lisa Taraki, 'The Islamic Resistance Movement in the Palestinian Uprising,' in *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation*, eds. Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinin, Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989, pp. 171–82.

20. See, for example: Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar, 'The Intifada and the Aid Industry: The Impact of the New Liberal Agenda on the Palestinian NGOs,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 23, nos. 1 and 2, 2003, pp. 205–14; Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar, 'The New Palestinian Globalized Elite,' *Jerusalem Quarterly*, vol. 24, 2005, pp. 13–32; Islah Jad, 'The NGO-isation of Arab Women's Movements,' *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2004, pp. 34–42; Islah Jad, 'NGOs: Between Buzzwords and Social Movements,' *Development in Practice*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2007, pp. 622–29; and Islah Jad, 'The Demobilization of the Palestinian Women's Movement in Palestine: From Empowered Active Militants to Powerless and Stateless "Citizens",' *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 8, 2008, pp. 94–111.
21. Kandiyoti defines 'classic patriarchy' as a system in which women are directly subordinated by men through the operations of the patrilocally extended family. In such families, women bargain and receive power as mothers of their sons, as mothers-in-law (over their daughters-in-law), and through power within kinship structures. She argues that the 'clearest instance of classic patriarchy may be found in a geographical area that includes North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey, Pakistan and Iran), and South and East Asia (specifically, India and China)' (Kandiyoti 1988, 278).

CHAPTER 5

Acting on the Pain of Others

With the rise of the international solidarity movement since the end of the second intifada (2000–05), collaboration between Palestinian theatre-makers and international practitioners has become an abiding feature of theatre-making in the West Bank. Over the last three decades, all the companies discussed in this book have managed to establish professional relationships with individual artists and theatre companies from Western countries. By looking at two plays produced by The Freedom Theatre and Ashtar, this chapter discusses the politics and ethics of theatrical collaboration between partners based in two very different locations. The processes by which these two companies negotiated a collaborative practice with their international partners demonstrate the obstacles theatre-makers face when, in the context of a national liberation struggle, the stakes for one side of the partnership are far higher than for the other. When such relationships are pre-determined by the power dynamics at the centre of the Palestine-Israel conflict, the lack of local structural support for the arts, and the global flow of cultural and economic capital, collaborations between local and international practitioners illustrate how theatre-makers can 'talk back' to this continuum of power in order to assert their own interests. What are the processes, challenges and benefits of such collaborative relationships? What draws Palestinian theatre-makers to seek out these opportunities? What factors determine these relations? What dynamics help or hinder them? How do theatre-makers attempt to address these challenges? And how are ensembles created and sustained when

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collaborative relations between internationals and Palestinians are inherently bound by time and geography?[1]

The first play, *Our Sign is the Stone*, was produced by The Freedom Theatre in April 2013. It was written and directed by a mother-daughter team (hereafter, 'the Director' and the 'the Playwright'), both from the UK.[2] This collaboration resulted from the friendship the Director had established with Juliano Mer-Khamis as well as her longstanding work at The Freedom Theatre, which has included facilitating directing workshops in the acting school.[3] The second play, *This Flesh is Mine*, was a co-production between Ashtar and the London-based company Border Crossings in May 2014. Border Crossings has an established reputation for collaborating with practitioners around the world.[4] *This Flesh is Mine* was an adaptation of Homer's *Iliad* written by Brian Woolland and directed by Michael Walling, the artistic director of Border Crossings.

That so many collaborative relationships are forged with practitioners based in Western countries indicates the extent to which the global flow of capital structures how and with whom Palestinian theatre-makers can create such partnerships. However, as this chapter will show, to say that funding is the only, or even the main, consideration elides a host of other reasons for which Palestinian theatre-makers initiate such relations. Indeed, such a view would deny Palestinians and their international collaborators a degree of integrity to their work as well as autonomy in choosing such relations. By looking at the benefits of these collaborative relations, this chapter explores the methods and tactics Palestinian theatre-makers use to foreground their own interests in such relations. This is not to say, however, that the broader issues at stake, and how companies attempt to reconcile them, are not important. After all, a power imbalance always precedes collaborations of this kind. In the case of *Our Sign is the Stone*, my research was aided by my own involvement in the project as stage manager. I was brought onto the project by the Director two days before the first workshop, when the original stage manager was no longer available. (All actors and members of the production team were aware of my status as researcher.) Thus, my reflections are based on numerous informal conversations with other participants during the rehearsal period as well as on my personal notes written during the rehearsal and run.

Benefits of Collaboration

Both Iman Aoun, artistic director of Ashtar Theatre, and Émile Saba, who performed with Aoun in *This Flesh is Mine*, assert that their theatrical work is not simply to produce 'entertainment' but rather that it is framed by their political commitment to the Palestinian struggle.[5] Similarly, Jonatan Stanczak, co-founder of The Freedom Theatre, describes how their activities and collaborations with international practitioners take place within the context of the 'cultural intifada.' The aim, as he puts it, is to encourage participants and audiences to join the struggle.[6]

Furthermore, part of the struggle for *theatres* is that international funders often stipulate that partnerships between companies be formed with practitioners from donor countries themselves. Stanczak explained this as one of the barriers The Freedom Theatre faces in building relationships with practitioners in the global south with whom, it may be argued, they have far more in common historically and politically. He says that, at the planning stage of *Our Sign is the Stone*, the theatre had intended to tour the play in South Africa where there are commonalities between Palestinian experiences of Israeli colonial abjection and black South African experiences of white domination during the apartheid era. Although the theatre approached the British Council, the South African embassy and other potential partners for financial and logistical support, plans to tour in South Africa were eventually cancelled. Stanczak says this was because 'money wasn't available' before pointing out that this is 'often the case for south-south partnerships, compared to north-south where there's plenty [of funding].'[7]

As well as the question of finance, the framework of collaboration or 'participation' often fails to consider the privileged position—class, wealth and, importantly, the freedom of movement—from which international practitioners benefit in contrast to the communities with which they work. Jonothan Neelands argues that this privilege is not simply an 'ethnographic problem of representation' but also a 'political problem of action' (Neelands 2007, 309). Jamil S. Ahmed critiques the position of the privileged practitioner as that of 'an invisible subject' (Ahmed 2004, 97) directing the project's existence. Indeed, in the development of *This Flesh is Mine*, one can see the hand of funding bodies determining where and with whom this play could be developed.

Certainly, international collaborations are driven by powerful bodies. The theatre-makers with whom I spoke acknowledged the damaging effects of this on the cultural industries in Palestine. At the same time, they

would point out the dearth of local revenue streams for fostering and developing local artists and practitioners. In such an ill-disposed climate, international donors and practitioners are important partners in ensuring that theatres are able to deliver their programming and activities. For example, George Ibrahim said, 'Our government [the Palestinian Authority] is a charity case. We have to rely on outside support.'[8] For Ibrahim, any categorical rejection of financial assistance from international donors would place Palestinian theatre companies in an impossible and precarious situation: nothing would be produced; theatres would face closure; local practitioners would be unemployed; and, indeed, the Palestinian theatre scene would undergo a process of 'de-professionalization,' a return to those days in which amateur troupes dominated the scene and practitioners would regularly leave the profession in search of secure and steady incomes elsewhere.

One tactic Palestinian theatre-makers employ is to know, from the outset, exactly what they need and want from their partners as well as ensuring that potential partners have an understanding of the Palestinian context. Stanczak says that, in the early days of The Freedom Theatre, the company would encourage international practitioners to travel to Jenin on a voluntary basis and assist them in developing the theatre's infrastructure. These volunteers were not only performance practitioners but also technical personnel whose role was to work on productions and to train Palestinians. The long-term aim, he says, was always to develop a local 'theatre community' in a place that has little experience of professional theatre practices. This level of self-awareness, he says, enables The Freedom Theatre to direct its relationships with international collaborators and ensure that they are based on equality; otherwise, Stanczak says, it would be easy for theatre companies in Palestine to lose sight of their own interests and priorities.[9]

Another tactic some Palestinian theatre-makers employ is in the area of practitioner training. Aoun, who is an actor trainer herself, states that working with international practitioners is a platform to learn new skills and techniques.[10] In the absence of the necessary infrastructure to support the professional development of actors and performers, theatre companies must turn to international acting schools for support. For example, from 2009 to 2018, Al-Kasaba Theatre established the Drama Academy with funding from the Mercator Foundation and the Federal Foreign Office of Germany. In 2013, the academy received further financial support from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development and the

Welfare Association. After a rigorous audition process, students were admitted to the three-year undergraduate degree for which they received training in acting, voice, movement, stage combat, text analysis, and theatre history. This degree was accredited by the German Folkwang University of the Arts; however, the Drama Academy's permanent and visiting faculties consisted of sixteen Palestinian practitioners and five European practitioners (one of whom was based in the West Bank).[11]

The Freedom Theatre has also established its own three-year actor training programme where students receive training in similar fields from local and international tutors. Recently, the programme has expanded to include training in acrobatics, improvisation, playwriting, dramaturgy, costume and set design, production and stage management.[12] As well as this programme, The Freedom Theatre has a long history of inviting international practitioners to deliver short courses, workshops and master classes. From April to May 2013, for example, the Amsterdam-based Theatre Hotel Courage (formerly, Teatro Punto) delivered workshops in mask-making and commedia dell'arte which culminated in performances of *Courage, Ouda, Courage* in Jenin and Amsterdam.

In Beit Jala, Al-Harah Theatre has recently established the Performing Arts Training Center supported by the following Swedish cultural organizations: Intercult, the Swedish Institute, the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. PARC, as it is known, delivers a two-year programme in which students can specialize in lighting, sound, costume, scenography, production, stage management, or arts administration.[13] Though still in its infancy, the programme demonstrates how Palestinian practitioners reach out to international practitioners and organizations in order to deliver their programmes and activities.

Not only do these partnerships play an immediate role in developing professional and highly skilled theatre companies, they are also important in building international solidarity for the Palestinian struggle. Stanczak describes how, after the murder of Juliano Mer-Khamis, The Freedom Theatre experienced an extended period of harassment from the Israeli army and the Palestinian Authority. In the months that followed, several members of the theatre's staff, the artistic director Nabil Al-Raee and students were arrested and detained by Israeli forces. The army vandalized the theatre. Stanczak describes how the intervention of international practitioners guided the theatre through this traumatic period, not just in the provision of logistical assistance but also by providing

staff and students with emotional support.[14] During that period, The Freedom Theatre relied on an extensive group of international practitioners to help it re-assert its vision and diversify its activities. Not only did the theatre produce three plays (*Sho Kman—What Else?*, Pinter's *The Caretaker*, and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*), it also conducted tours of Europe and the United States, continued with its actor training programme, and started the Freedom Ride project for Playback Theatre. Stanczak says that none of these achievements would have been possible without the support of their international partners.[15] Such collaborations are vital if theatres are to continue after periods of crisis, which further necessitates networking, fundraising and multilingual skills.

Processes of Collaboration

Our Sign is the Stone

The Palestinian village of Nabi Saleh is located in Area B of the West Bank. Under the Oslo Accords, the West Bank is divided into three administrative areas. In Area A (comprising 18 per cent of the West Bank), the Palestinian Authority exercises full civil and security control subject to Israeli intervention. In Area B (comprising 22 per cent), the Palestinian Authority exercises civil control whilst Israel retains exclusive security control with limited cooperation from the Palestinian police. Area C (comprising 60 per cent) is under full Israeli civil and security control. Palestinians have access to less than 1 per cent of this area. The remaining land is heavily restricted or completely off-bounds to them.[16] To make matters worse, the illegal Jewish settlement of Halamish cuts across the village. Peace Now, an Israeli NGO, describes the inhabitants of Halamish as Jews who 'live in settlements for ideological reasons, to settle the Land of Israel and prevent implementation of a two-state solution.'[17]

Since its establishment in 1977, Halamish has grown to cover approximately 190 acres of both common and private land, appropriated from Nabi Saleh and the neighbouring village of Deir Nizam. The boundary of Nabi Saleh is intersected by a Jewish-only bypass road connecting settlements in the West Bank with the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. Road 465, as it is called, further separates Nabi Saleh's residential area in the north from Halamish in the south (Tabar and Bari 2011, 9). Over the years, residents have attempted different ways to defend and regain their land. In 1978, they filed a legal complaint which was upheld by the Israeli High Court.

However, like so many other rulings related to land appropriation, this decision was never enforced, and the steady confiscation of Palestinian lands continues.

Since December 2009, villagers have held weekly, peaceful demonstrations against the expansion of Halamish. These demonstrations are attended by Palestinians from neighbouring villages as well as Israeli and international solidarity activists. The Israeli military's response has been to declare the village a closed military zone on Fridays when the demonstrations take place. Such actions give Israeli soldiers vast powers to suppress protests and to arrest and detain participants. In addition, curfews are imposed on residents and enforced by soldiers who are deployed across the northern area of the village boundary. As well as controlling movement in and out of the residential area, soldiers will go from house to house arresting Israeli and international activists (see, for example, B'Tselem 2011; Tabar and Bari 2011; Ryan 2013).

Despite these acts of violence, however, the demonstrations usually begin in the early afternoon following the Friday prayers. A procession of men, women and children will attempt to walk to 'Ayn al-Qaws, carrying signs and chanting slogans. 'Ayn al-Qaws is a natural spring located within the village boundary but outside the residential area. In July 2008, the spring and the privately owned land surrounding it were expropriated by settlers from Halamish. The following February, they started to develop the area into a park, and renamed it Mi'yan Maeer in Hebrew. Since the beginning of 2010, the Israeli army has prevented Palestinians from visiting the spring whilst allowing settlers free access (B'Tselem 2011, 7–8).

During these protests, the army prevents demonstrators from reaching the spring, dispersing them with tear gas, stun grenades, skunk water, live ammunition, and rubber-coated metal bullets. Witnesses recount that demonstrators have only ever been able to reach the spring once. This was on 29 June 2012, and was reported in the press the following day.[18] Most demonstrators will fall back but others will respond by throwing stones. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem has reported that Israeli forces use tear gas 'excessively' during protests in Nabi Saleh (B'Tselem 2011, 21). In one afternoon, for example, 150 tear gas canisters were fired by soldiers not just directly at protestors but also from close range (ibid.). Moreover, say Natalie Tabar and Lauren Bari, soldiers not only prevent paramedics from reaching victims of tear gas, but will also take advantage of their condition to arrest and detain them (Tabar and Bari 2011, 12).

Citing Israel's State Attorney's Office, B'Tselem argues that firing tear gas canisters directly at and in close range of civilians is forbidden under Israeli law (B'Tselem 2011, 20n19).

This is what happened to twenty-eight-year-old Mustafa Tamimi, a resident of Nabi Saleh whose death becomes the focal point of *Our Sign is the Stone*. Eyewitnesses relate that Mustafa was standing less than ten metres from a military jeep when an Israeli soldier fired a tear gas canister into his face. Their accounts also agree that paramedics and relatives were prevented from reaching him for several minutes. Mustafa's death distinguishes Nabi Saleh from other villages where similar protests take place because this was the first time someone was actually killed while protesting.[19] In a small village where so many people share the same surname, the death of one person is felt by all.

In October 2012, Manal Tamimi, a member of the Nabi Saleh Popular Struggle Committee, invited The Freedom Theatre to produce a play about these protests. That Manal felt able to entrust the theatre with this task was the result of the relationship established between The Freedom Theatre and Nabi Saleh where the dramatherapist Ben Rivers had spent the preceding year organizing Playback Theatre events. Integral to Manal's proposal was that the play be performed in other West Bank villages in order to show them how Nabi Saleh was resisting the occupation as well as to galvanize them into action.[20] This desire to share their experiences with others, and thereby influence them to carry out their own acts of resistance, is often repeated by Palestinians. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Bassem Tamimi, who co-ordinates the Nabi Saleh Popular Struggle Committee, said, 'We need to nationalize the resistance. We want as many people as possible to see [*Our Sign is the Stone*]. I hope our experience is learned across Palestine and it ignites a third intifada as strong as the first one' (Ehrenreich 2013, n.p.).

On 4 May 2013, residents of Nabi Saleh gathered in the village hall to watch *Our Sign is the Stone*. This was the first in an eight-day tour of the West Bank villages of Al-Walaja, Arabeh, Faquaa, and Qusra. In September and October 2013, *Our Sign is the Stone* toured again, this time to ten villages and two refugee camps in the West Bank.[21] I attended the first performance in the village hall, a rectangular structure with no theatrical lighting or sound system. One end was turned into the performance space while the other was filled with chairs. Told in seven, episodic scenes bounded by a prologue and an epilogue spoken by the storyteller (*hakawati*), the performance of *Our Sign is the Stone* lasts roughly

forty-five minutes, and is performed by six actors (four male and two female) playing multiple characters.[22] The frame story—or, more accurately, the optic through which we view Nabi Saleh in this play—is the journey of thirteen-year-old Hasan who is fed up of the melancholia he sees around him, of his parents' permanent sadness, and of the absence of everyday joy in the village. Through the play, he progresses from rejecting the resistance, to sympathizing with it, to enlisting himself within its ranks. In this way, he functions as a Palestinian Everyman embodying the frustration and anger of life under occupation. The performance is interwoven with real events that the Playwright recovered from interviews, news reports, and video footage. Loosely based on Brecht's *The Mother*, written in 1930–31 and first performed in 1932, the Playwright also utilizes poetry, songs, and direct addresses to the audience.

Hasan's political awakening takes place within the broader context of life in the shadows of Halamish so that, at points, his character is lost in the bigger story the Playwright is trying to tell. Although the performance begins and ends with Hasan, his character arc often stands separate from the narrative arc of the play itself. As the audience is led through scenes in which villagers are plotting a demonstration, in which an exasperated Western journalist insists that Israeli soldiers have feelings too, in which performers re-tell villagers' experiences of water shortage, the effects of tear gas and so forth, Hasan almost always reappears to 'cover' scene changes, and remind us that he is still part of the story. There is only one scene in which Hasan is inserted into the narrative of Nabi Saleh: when tear gas is fired into a building, Hasan is one of the children who must be dropped from a window to safety below. The Playwright juxtaposes her invented character's entry into the resistance movement with the real life murder of Mustafa Tamimi: an entire scene is devoted to Mustafa's death and funeral, accompanied by a choral lament and ululation that left the audience in tears. This juxtaposition made me wonder whose tale the Playwright was actually telling, and, since Hasan's journey often feels like a device, the means by which the play invites the audience to enter the narrative field of Nabi Saleh, I felt that a far greater story had either been told in summary or as a series of episodes.

Indeed, there is much in *Our Sign is the Stone* that points to *The Mother*, Brecht's most explicitly revolutionary play. Maxim Gorky's 1905 novel, from which it was adapted, was a response to the impact of the revolution in Russia that year. Gorky's friend, Anatoly Lunacharsky, who was the People's Commissar for Enlightenment for the decade following

the 1917 revolution, referred to the novel as a *Lehrbuch* or 'learning book' for the working class, a novel that would ignite a revolutionary spirit in its readers (Brecht 1997, 380). By 1932, the year *The Mother* premiered in Berlin, Brecht had already developed a body of plays known as *Lehrstücke*, or 'learning plays.' For Brecht, the *Lehrstücke* allowed actors and audiences to develop and acquire new political attitudes, and his *The Mother* falls in this category. *The Mother* tells of the process by which Pavel Vlassova's mother, Pelagaea, is radicalized into the revolutionary movement. In Brecht's adaptation, this process is complete when Pelagaea attends a protest in 1905. As Russian forces attack protestors, and kill a man who is carrying the revolutionary flag, it is Pelagaea who picks it up.

These references re-appear in *Our Sign is the Stone*. For example, in the scene depicting the demonstration at which Mustafa is killed, the actor who plays him carries the Palestinian flag. As he falls, it drops to the ground, and Hasan picks it up. As an affective strategy, this action succeeds in rousing the audience, many of whom knew Mustafa personally, to join in with the choral lament. Not much, I think, would have been lost without the thread of Hasan's journey. The 'story' of Nabi Saleh, told through the performers' re-enactment of interviews and real-life events, would have been sufficient to drive *Our Sign is the Stone*. The play, then, expects its audience to identify with both fact (Mustafa's death) and fiction (Hassan's journey). Yet, at the end, I was left desiring less of the latter, and a much more detailed engagement with the former.

Despite these contentions, however, *Our Sign is the Stone* is clever in the way it reflects the central role women have taken in planning and organizing the Nabi Saleh protests. Often, the Playwright gives the best speeches to the two female performers. In the scene portraying the demonstration at which Mustafa was killed, it is the women of the play who get the audience's applause. One of them describes the pride she felt when she saw the Palestinian flag being raised. It is, she says, 'the symbol of all we have lost and everything we have to fight for […] [T]he flag that can never be conquered.' In the following scene, a male villager is being interviewed by a foreign journalist who asserts that the conflict is 'complex' and then asks, 'Don't [the Israeli soldiers] have feelings too?' Again, it is the women who respond.

> I am so sick of hearing that word. It is not *complex*. There is no choice left to us. Our land has been stolen from us. Our freedom of movement has

> been stolen from us. Our resources have been stolen from us. Our history has been denied. Our children have been persecuted. Our society has been cut and divided into pieces by checkpoints, walls, roadblocks and settlements. We have nothing to lose. What we are asking for here is not a miracle. We want our rights as human beings. We want international law to be recognized. We want a future for our children. Our generation has already lost the fight, now we struggle for the youth.[23]

To more applause from the audience, another woman adds:

> Our youth gave their lives to our cause. If we stopped now, we would not even be able to speak their names. Our martyrs lie in the ground we walk on. We must remember them, honour them, and live for them. How 'complex' is that? Too 'complex' for *you* to understand?

Yet, the play retreats from these powerful voices because, in the very next moment, Hasan enters the performance space carrying his football. He faces the audience before delivering an Arabic rendition of Brecht's *Und ich dachte immer*. 'You will perish,' he says, 'if you don't defend yourself.' The practical purpose of this recitation is to 'cover' the scene change that is taking place behind Hasan. Yet, I was left wondering whether the subjective Palestinian voice had not also been 'covered.' What, for example, might Hasan have said had the Playwright not resorted to Brecht's poetry? What if she had simply 'allowed' Hasan to speak in his own voice?

The performance ends as it began, with the storyteller (*hakawati*). This time, instead of the prayer mat she uses in the opening scene, she lays the Palestinian flag on the ground before her. And, instead of a village whose idyll is disrupted one morning by the destruction of olive trees, she relates the story of a boy who dared to confront a soldier. Meanwhile, Hasan is standing upstage listening intently, holding a stone this time and not his football. When the *hakawati* finishes, she turns to look at him. He gives her the stone, and she places it reverently on the flag, as though it were something sacred. Hasan's political journey, like that of the youths who fend off soldiers' gunfire with stones, is completed through this invocation of the centrality of the stone as a symbol of Palestinian resistance. Like the youths of the intifada, Hasan is now also a 'stone thrower.' The symbols holding *Our Sign is the Stone* together are deeply embedded in this narrative of Palestinian resistance.

Our Sign is the Stone was produced over a five-week period: two weeks of research and writing, one week of devising, and the final two weeks in rehearsal. In March 2013, the Playwright spent a week living in Nabi Saleh with Manal Tamimi whose support was so crucial to writing the play that, she says, 'in many ways Manal is the co-author of this project.'[24] During this time, she conducted informal interviews with both children and adults in their homes. These took place in Arabic with Manal translating. As well as these interviews, the Playwright also read press reports about Nabi Saleh, watched videos of the weekly protests shot by the villagers themselves, and attended one of the weekly meetings of the popular resistance committee.

Whereas, in *The Mother*, the parent is politicized by her child, in *Our Sign is the Stone* the child follows his parents. This, the Playwright says, was influenced by her discussions with Manal.

> I told Manal about [*The Mother*'s] narrative and she laughed. 'In Nabi Saleh it is the other way around,' she said, 'it is the parents who are political, and the children follow.'[25]

Second, the Playwright used real-life incidents to situate Hasan's personal journey within the broader story of Nabi Saleh: a night-time raid on a house by Israeli soldiers; the tear gas attack on a building that resulted in children having to jump out of a window in order to escape; the participation of international solidarity activists at the weekly protests; and the 'stories of suffering [collected] from many different villagers' which were recounted in a series of direct addresses to the audience, and performed to a drumbeat.[26]

Rehearsals began at The Freedom Theatre with the Director leading a workshop on Nabi Saleh and the play which, at this point, the performers had not read. Rehearsals took place in both English and Arabic, with the Director speaking in English, and the performers translating for each other; although, in general, all of the performers could speak English to varying degrees of fluency. The first week consisted of movement exercises, blocking the play, and establishing what the performance might eventually look like. There were three elements of the play—the storyteller, the singer, and the live musical accompaniment—that the Playwright intentionally left for the company to develop.[27] The atmosphere in the rehearsal room, then, was open to dialogue, experimentation, and, most

importantly, to trial and error. This first week was crucial in shaping the final text of the play. It was during this time that the company agreed on the staging, improvised the storyteller's opening and closing speeches, composed songs and music, and choreographed the protest scenes. At the end of the week, the play text was translated into Arabic, and sent to Manal for inspection. It was only after she had read and approved the script that formal rehearsals began.

Our Sign is the Stone involved both writing and devising rather than the more traditional relationship in which a group of actors attempts to realize a writer's vision under the supervision of a director. The Playwright explains that she 'never felt ownership' of *Our Sign is the Stone* because the script that emerged from the first week of rehearsals and the performance were very different to what she had written and imagined.[28] For example, parts of the script were left unwritten so that the *hakawati* and the singer could workshop their monologues and songs during the devising period without the Playwright specifying what that content should be. In the end, the initial text provided a framework in which the Director and performers could contribute and develop their own ideas, with the Director giving the performance its final shape. By freeing the text in this way, the Playwright says, the entire company could 'have some ownership of the project's outcome [and] make their own mark upon it.'[29]

This Flesh is Mine

I attended the preview performance of *This Flesh is Mine* at Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah on 8 May 2015, just before its week-long run at Testbed1 in South London. The audience was small, not more than a hundred, and consisted mainly of students from Birzeit University (where Border Crossings had facilitated a writing workshop earlier that day), professional and student actors, and other artistic practitioners. Gathered in the foyer of the theatre, the atmosphere pulsating with anticipation, it was clear people knew each other. This was not a general audience walking in from the streets, but a selection of those educated (and, often, Western educated), upper and middle class 'Ramallawis' who frequent the city's cultural circuit, and are part of a social elite who have the language skills to access a

play like *This Flesh is Mine*. Michael Walling acknowledges that the audience may have been 'a bit of an in-crowd,' and that the play did not 'touch as many lives as we would want to.'[30] Not only did the play, then, circumscribe its Palestinian audience because of its short run (just two performances), but the fact that it was in English, without Arabic surtitles, would have excluded audiences even more. Further, that audiences from outlying areas would have had to travel through different categories of occupied space to get to the performance would also have been a hindrance. In our discussion, Walling acknowledged that any future performance in the West Bank would have to take these factors into consideration.[31]

The performance itself takes place as a promenade, with theatre staff ushering audiences between scenes through the theatre's claustrophobic foyer, the central studio (the largest of the performance spaces), and the black box studio. This attempt at transforming the theatre building into a scenographic space had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the act of moving back and forth between three spaces—rooms within rooms, in fact—endangered the narrative flow of the performance. First, there was the external voice of the theatre usher; then, a small degree of confusion about where to go next; followed by time spent finding somewhere to sit or stand. This criticism is peripheral, however, because the promenade, as opposed to a static stage, actually facilitated a more dynamic relationship between audience, performers, and performance. Depending on their proximity to the performers, or by simply changing their positions, or by moving from sitting to standing, audiences could gain different perspectives on the narrative as well as the subtler nuances of the performance itself.

This Flesh is Mine, a radical adaptation of *The Iliad*, unfolds over two acts consisting of eleven and ten scenes respectively. Whereas each act is roughly of equal length, scenes themselves vary considerably with some feeling more like vignettes. The first act is situated in the ancient world before a 'booming explosion' (Woolland 2014a, 38) brings us into the modern world of the second act. Dark lighting and menacing soundscapes create the foreboding atmosphere of a besieged city almost destroyed by a decade-long war. Visually, there is little to situate the play in either Troy or Palestine. However, in keeping with its contemporary setting, the second act has Achilles dressed in modern army fatigues, carrying a revolver, and using a mobile phone. Performed by six actors (two female and four male of which three were Palestinian and three were British) in multiple roles, the play begins in the foyer of Ashtar Theatre, with a quarrel between Achilles and

Agamemnon over Briseis, the former's war-prize and concubine. Whereas *The Iliad* presents Briseis as a marginal character, even though her kidnapping drives its plot, this version places her at the centre of the text. We learn more about her through her own monologues, her frenzied arguments with the ghosts of her father and brother (video images projected onto a white screen), in which she appears to be having a nervous breakdown, and her dialogues with Achilles and Hecuba. As this strand of the narrative develops into the modern world of the second act, the performance becomes less about Achilles' loss of honour to Agamemnon, and more about whether or not Briseis will accept his offer of safety in exile. Yet, *This Flesh is Mine* is also as much about the despair of the ageing king and queen of Troy, Priam and Hecuba, and the vainglory of their son Hector who is intent on defeating Achilles. At the end of the first act, when Hector is killed in battle, Priam must humble himself to Achilles for the return of his son's mutilated body. (I will have more to say about these characters later.)

In an interview with *The Guardian* in 2014, Walling explained that the title of the play is intended to draw attention to 'the politics of the body and living inside this experience' of war.[32] That experience, as I have discussed elsewhere in this book, is also inscribed upon the bodies of its victims as, primarily, political violence and structural oppression delimit the boundaries between the national body as subject/self and the colonized body as abject/other. In a performance where Trojans stand in for Palestinians and Achaeans for Israelis, the play's constant invocation of the body alerts us to the 'historico-racial schema' (Fanon 2008, 84) that fixes colonized bodies as both unintelligible, expendable, and unsafe. The question of who 'owns' whose body is a recurring motif throughout the play, and how characters refer to their own and each other's bodies signifies ownership, autonomy, selfhood, and presence. They also signify who gets to be included in the national body, and who is excluded to those 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life.

These inclusions and exclusions are repeated throughout the play. For example, in the opening scene, between Achilles and Agamemnon, Achilles insists that Briseis' 'flesh is mine' (Woolland 2014a, 10). As a great warrior who represents the national body, Achilles is not declaring Briseis' inclusion within that body as a full subject. Rather, he is asserting the authority of his own body, as national subject/self, over her body, as colonial abject/other. For all his avowals of love, and his promises to rescue her to the safety of the metropolis, she is still only war booty and

hinterland. It is in a barely lit performance space that we first encounter Briseis, in the second scene of the play. A dim spotlight shines upon her, and she lists all those parts of her body—feet, legs, arms, eyes—that belong to her. As she delivers this list, writhing on the floor with ever more anguish and urgency, we realize that her status as other has driven her mad. Yet, by retaining the capacity to recognize herself, she is still able to resist that categorization. In another scene, between Phoenix and Achilles, Phoenix asserts a continuous, unified, and legible identity between those bodies constituting the national subject/self when he appeals to Achilles to return to battle. Holding his pupil's arm, he says, 'This flesh as good as mine' (ibid., 19). In a different way, the Trojan prince Hector invokes his own body when Hecuba tries to persuade him not to fight Achilles. He tells her that he is unable to 'speak of this body as my own' (ibid., 22) until the Achaeans have been defeated. Ultimately, Hector is killed, and Priam must abase his own body before Achilles to retrieve his son's corpse. Hector may have believed that, by fighting Achilles, he would be able to 'speak' his body into being. Yet, in death, it is his corpse that reveals the illegibility of his human face. Towards the end of the first act, Hecuba attempts to assert her body in almost the same manner as Briseis. As the old queen walks among the graves of her children, she wonders what sort of mother she has become. She lists various parts of her body—legs, feet, arms, breasts, eyes—as if trying to find somewhere to locate her selfhood as '[m]other to a brood of ghosts' (ibid., 28). In these scenes, the bodies of Briseis, Hector, Priam and Hecuba function within the wider matrix of a 'racial epidermal schema' (Fanon 2008, 84) that treats colonized bodies as simultaneously intelligible and unfamiliar through their categorization as abject/other.

The question, then, is: Who is the subject of the play's title? For the company to arrive at an answer to this complicated question, the production required a rigorous, collaborative process that made space for multiple and contradictory voices. Unlike *Our Sign is the Stone*, the development of *This Flesh is Mine* evolved over a much longer period (six years), involving three stages of development. The first of these was in 2007 when playwright Brian Woolland, who is also a practitioner of drama in education, was invited by the Panhellenic Association of Teaching Drama to deliver a series of workshops to Greek teachers in Athens exploring how *The Iliad* can be used to empower teenagers, and how participatory theatre can feed into theatrical performance (Woolland 2014b). These experiences led to the initial idea for a theatrical

adaptation of the poem, which Woolland first proposed to Walling in 2008 (Woolland 2014c). However, it was not until 2013 that Border Crossings was able to secure financial support from the British Council, and embark upon the second stage of development (ibid.).

The second stage involved a week of workshops with Zoukak Theater in Beirut (Lebanon), which was intended to culminate in a co-production of the final play. Through a process of discussions and improvisations, in which sketches of moments from *The Iliad* provided workshop participants with stimuli for group work, a narrative structure for the eventual script began to emerge. Woolland stresses that he and Walling intentionally arrived in Beirut with sketches rather than a script in order to create an open workshop that would encourage participants to develop their own ideas, thoughts and questions (Woolland 2014b). For example, the participants grounded their improvisations in their experiences of the Lebanese civil war, which meant that Priam's attempt to reconcile with Achilles towards the end of *The Iliad* would have elided the complexities of sectarian violence, rendering the play problematic for a Lebanese audience. Border Crossings' approach, then, allowed the play to emerge 'in response to [participants'] contributions' (ibid.). When Zoukak Theater was no longer able to take part in the project, Border Crossings invited Ashtar Theatre to participate in a co-production.[33] This would mark the third stage in the development of *This Flesh is Mine*, giving it its final form, narrative and structure.

A co-production with Ashtar had been an early intention of Border Crossings.[34] According to Walling, the cycles of violence and revenge in *The Iliad* and the Achaean siege of Troy resonated with the violence of the Palestine-Israel conflict and, specifically, Israel's blockade of Gaza. An attempt was made to establish a partnership with Ashtar through the European Commission's cooperation programme with non-European, or 'third,' countries. However, because the programme requires the participation of *three* eligible European countries *as well as* the 'third country,' and, according to Walling, the project 'only made sense as a bilateral partnership,' this bid fell through. One fruitful outcome, however, was that the partnership between Ashtar Theatre and Border Crossings had now been established.[35]

It was while workshopping in Beirut that Border Crossings was able to secure funding from the Anna Lindh Foundation for the planned co-production with Zoukak Theater. When Zoukak withdrew from the project, Walling says, Border Crossings found itself 'exactly where we'd wanted

to be in the first place,' that is, in partnership with Ashtar.[36] This route to Palestine, Walling insists, was 'hugely beneficial' to the play's development.[37] For example, their engagement with Zoukak Theater provided Woolland and Walling with a deeper understanding of internecine conflict than they might otherwise have been able to access, and the drafts of the script Woolland wrote following these workshops paved the way for a more fruitful collaboration between Border Crossings and Ashtar. This was important because, when rehearsals began in Ramallah, two obstacles had to be resolved: firstly, Briseis' decision to embrace exile needed to be clarified; secondly, and more importantly, they had to decide whether or not to retain Helen as a character.

In *The Iliad*, Briseis is a concubine given to Achilles after his conquest of Lyrnessus during the Trojan War. When Agamemnon appropriates her as compensation for the loss of his own concubine, Achilles withdraws from the battle in protest, thus tipping the war in favour of the Trojans. Briseis' role is central to Homer's narrative, as she ignites the feud between Achilles and Agamemnon. Yet, as colonized artefact, her character is positioned at the boundaries of the narrative, never allowed to enter it as a prominent character. She appears in only a few scenes where she is objectified as war-prize, the concubine of her family's murderer, and little more than chattel to be exchanged between gods and men alike. At the start of *The Iliad*, Briseis and Achilles have already fallen in love. Through Patroclus, Achilles promises that after the war he will take her to Greece where they will marry. Deeply comforted by this, Briseis accepts his promise.

Briseis' readiness to leave Troy, which Woolland had already written into the rehearsal draft, was questioned by the Palestinian actors especially Razan Alazzeh (who played Briseis in the Ramallah production) and Iman Aoun (who played Hecuba). Although they accepted the truthfulness of her desire, Alazzeh and Aoun believed Briseis' choice had to be challenged in a play in which Troy resonates with Palestine. According to Woolland, it was crucial that the narrative 'dramatise the psychological, social and political struggles surrounding the issue of voluntary exile' (Woolland 2014c). Walling states that the conversations in the rehearsal room became preoccupied with the issue of forced migration and 'why it's important for Palestinian people to stay' in Palestine.[38] So, in the performance text, when Hecuba enters Achilles' camp and persuades Briseis not to leave Troy, it is not simply that she is convincing her to stay in a war zone thus endangering her life. Rather, as Walling explains, the discussions that led to Woolland re-writing the final scene were about how the acceptance of

the life of a refugee might be at the expense of losing one's homeland, culture, and identity. Briseis' decision to remain in Troy despite the hardships she would have to endure evokes the practice of *sumud* (steadfastness or resilience), a form of resistance in which Palestinians remain on their land, against all odds, and in defiance of Israeli settler-colonialism. Woolland insists that the Palestinian context 'enhanced' his characterization of Briseis by taking into account *sumud*, allowing her to embody contradictory desires and positions.[39]

The dramaturgical and political questions posed by the character of Helen, however, were much more difficult to resolve. Woolland says that he knew very early in the process that Helen's corporeal presence on stage would be problematic. He adds that, even though his intention was to avoid allegory, he could see there were 'close parallels' between the Achaeans' use of Helen in war propaganda and, for example, 'the Bush/Blair alliance using the threat of Saddam Hussein having Weapons of Mass Destruction as their justification for invading Iraq' (Woolland 2014c).

One attempt to resolve this problem emerged from his reading of Euripides' tragi-comedy, *Helen*, which tells a variant of the original myth—that the Helen who causes the Trojan War is actually an *eidolon*, or spirit-image, whilst the real Helen had been transported to Egypt by the gods many years earlier. For Woolland, the parallels between Euripides' condemnation of unjust warfare and 'the hypocrisy of leaders who invoke phantom causes to justify militarism' offered a way to reanimate ancient mythology for modern audiences (Woolland 2014c). In light of this, he decided to preserve Helen as a character in *This Flesh is Mine* and, indeed, in an early rehearsal draft, Helen and Briseis are played by the same actor. Not only would this have driven the narrative tension of the play towards its conclusion, he writes, but it would also have allowed for an exploration of how these women resist 'the identities created for them by possessive men' (ibid.). Their journeys, then, would have been from victimhood (as objects of desire contested by Menelaus and Paris, and Achilles and Agamemnon) to agency (thus unravelling Achaean propaganda).

However, as a result of the rehearsal process, discussions with the Palestinian actors and his own presence in Ramallah, Woolland began to realize that his solutions to these dramaturgical concerns were 'disingenuous' (ibid.). The Palestinian actors, he says, began to see Helen's presence on stage as *politically* problematic. Iman Aoun, for instance, describes how discussions about Helen kept re-emerging throughout the four-week rehearsal period. 'It wasn't an easy task because we kept going back to it,'

she says. 'You go page by page and then you go back to the same issue: "And what about Helen?"'[40]

Aoun describes how the question of Helen's inclusion in the play was wrapped up in discussions about what her presence on stage would signify politically since, in *The Iliad*, her kidnapping provides the Achaeans with the pretext they need to attack and occupy Troy. In addition to this, as Woolland acknowledges, the involvement of a Palestinian company in the production means that audiences will always identify the Achaean siege of Troy with the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Helen with the land of Palestine itself (Woolland 2014c). For the Palestinian actors, Aoun explains, the inclusion of an embodied Helen would have rendered them complicit in the Zionist narrative: that the Palestinians had stolen something when, in fact, they were the dispossessed. As the actor Émile Saba (who played Hector and Patroclus in the Ramallah performance) points out, the presence of Helen in the Trojan camp would have been equivalent to justifying Israel's treatment of Palestinians and their continued abjection. This, he believes, would have led audiences to raise serious questions about Ashtar's political commitments.[41]

In the end, these tensions were resolved by omitting Helen as an embodied character, thus presenting her in the play's narrative through her absence, and how other characters talk about her. In a performance lasting well over an hour, Helen is mentioned just eleven times by the Achaean characters. The single instance in which a Trojan character refers to her is when Hecuba responds to an Achaean soldier asking her about the whereabouts of Helen following the sacking of Troy. She says, 'Helen has brought us nothing but blood and death. This hell on earth is Helen […] If I knew where Helen was I'd take you myself. If my legs had been blown off I'd still find a way' (Woolland 2014a, 78). The decision to omit Helen made the performance I attended compelling because it integrated the political but not at the expense of the play's artistic qualities. Such adjustments to the script required major structural changes such as losing or re-writing entire scenes. An example of this was that the companies realized the script's original dénouement—in which the Trojan king Priam humbles himself before Achilles, kisses his hand, and pleads for the return of Hector's body—would have been wholly unsuitable in a Palestinian context. The presentation of a Trojan, standing in for Palestinians, humbling himself in such a manner before an Achaean, standing in for Israelis, would not have directed audiences to the nobility with which Homer accents Priam's act. Rather, it would have rendered the 'Palestinian' Priam

as grovelling, obsequious and submissive to the Zionist narrative over homeland which lies at the core of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Although that scene is still present at the end of the first act, the sight of a king grovelling before his oppressor now serves as an oblique reminder of the Palestinian Authority's entrenched relationship with Israel. The play now ends with Hecuba convincing Briseis to stay in Troy—in other words, to practice *sumud*—followed by Achilles' death in a car bomb explosion offstage. Making these decisions was difficult, as Woolland says.[42] They necessitated a process involving open dialogue in which the entire group felt able to express their doubts and hesitance, and the confidence that such expressions would be respected.

Creating Ensembles

In the preceding discussion of the collaborative processes underpinning *Our Sign is the Stone* and *This Flesh is Mine*, what emerges is the importance of establishing shared languages facilitating open dialogue between writers, directors and performers especially in the context of international collaborations. Although shared languages are crucial to open dialogue, neither precedes the other. Instead, they are ways of making thoughts and ideas mutually recognizable. Shared languages and open dialogue augment and strengthen each other because creating open dialogue requires ensembles to establish shared languages but, in order to establish shared languages, ensembles require open dialogue.

By shared languages, I refer to the ways in which a group forges common aesthetic, methodological and political vocabularies in order to encourage and maintain meaningful collaborations. Whereas I use the term aesthetic language to refer to the material developed in the rehearsal room through performance-based tasks—that is to say, the play itself—I use methodological language to refer to the rehearsal processes and structures a group might use in order to develop that material. Although these terms might also be called product and process, it is important to acknowledge that, in rehearsal, they overlap. Finally, by political language, I refer to the vocabulary a group might use to 'read' and discuss the wider sociopolitical contexts in which the aesthetic and methodological languages meet.

Different practitioners and scholars have used variations of these terminologies to discuss the need for a shared language. For example, Tim Etchells, artistic director of the British experimental theatre company

Forced Entertainment, has described collaboration as 'simply finding the process of developing new words for the strange situations in which a group can find itself' (Etchells 1999, 62). Theatre scholar Alex Mermikides uses the term 'consensus' to discuss the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold and Jerzy Grotowski, arguing that consensus can be 'easy to achieve because the group shares the same values' (Mermikides 2010, 156). Since theatre is always a collaborative practice—not just between writer, director and actors, but also between the creative personnel who participate in the production—establishing these shared languages facilitates the dialogism that is so crucial to theatre-making.

One way of developing a shared methodological language is through starting each rehearsal with the same warm-up. For example, the Director (of *Our Sign is the Stone*) would start each day with movement exercises that would focus the group on the connection they have to the space in the room as well as their relationship with each other.[43] One such exercise involved actors walking silently around the space at varying speeds. Then, they would repeat the exercise but this time they would chant 'Nabi Saleh' before encircling one actor. This would be repeated until every actor had had a turn at being encircled. At the end of each exercise, the actors would return to either side of the room. Exercises like this focus on mutual respect for everyone in the room, and facilitate a way of working that embraces openness and fosters an awareness of other bodies. They also allow actors to feel comfortable in each other's presence so that they can develop intuitive collaboration during rehearsals. The ritual of starting each session with a warm-up exercise allowed the group to establish a routine that became part of a shared methodological language, which then contributed to a shared aesthetic vocabulary.

But the dangers of creating a shared methodological language should not be overlooked because, as Mermikides points out, in attempting to create consensus, the group may also display 'a willingness to submit to the director' (Mermikides 2010, 156). She explains that 'too much [consensus] may hinder the opportunity for innovation and novelty, and risk what the business world would call "groupthink"' (ibid., 158). The risk inherent in not developing a shared language, then, is the danger that a limited vocabulary might produce work that is stale. Over the course of rehearsing *Our Sign is the Stone*, I doubt this would have become an issue because the ensemble itself was made up of actors with strong personalities, different experiences and vocabularies of their own, which they were prepared to express and defend. In the case of *This Flesh is Mine*, the most

important development in the aesthetic language occurred when the writer's ideas were challenged by the actors. What is interesting about this process is that the group turned to a shared political (rather than methodological) language in order to resolve questions and differences about the aesthetic language.

The importance of forging a shared political language in the context of Palestinian theatre cannot be overstated. Both Woolland and Walling state in their interviews that being in Ramallah and witnessing the occupation first hand shaped how they responded to discussions in the rehearsal room. Walling mentions how the British actors' readiness to witness their Palestinian colleagues' experiences informed his own process as director. Specifically, he mentions how the experience of going through Qalandiya checkpoint gave him an embodied reference point to listen to how the Palestinian actors were responding to the play. This is echoed by Saba who mentions how discussions became increasingly nuanced the more time the British team had spent in Palestine because they started to establish interconnections between the aesthetic and political languages through their own experiences of moving through occupied spaces. He says,

> The thing is that, if you want to talk about something, you have to experience it first. You have to go there. If I want to write [a play] about Palestine, and I've never been to Palestine, and all I know about it is what I've heard through the media, from books or from people, I shouldn't write [a play] about it […] You have to come and you have to see [for yourself].[44]

This thought was also expressed by Stanczak who said that establishing a long-term presence in Jenin is essential to collaborative projects.[45] International partners are expected to commit to working with The Freedom Theatre for a consecutive period of three months, or to maintain regular visits. Generally, he says, the theatre will not work with anyone until there has been a face-to-face meeting, typically in Jenin. Again, the point of maintaining such relations is to establish a shared political language, which can only happen when collaborators are in close proximity. He says, 'Ultimately, we want people to join us in our struggle by using cultural resistance.'[46]

Aoun, too, states that every co-production between Ashtar and international artists begins with discussions about what a Palestinian company might bring to such a relationship. These discussions, she says, are not just about the artistic concept driving performances but also artists' 'political

background.'[47] According to all the theatre-makers I spoke to, constructing a shared political language is a crucial step in establishing relationships based on mutual trust in which participants feel able to contribute to or challenge the aesthetic language. Furthermore, in contexts where what gets produced is driven by issues of international funding, and where such funding comes from foreign donors who have little experience of conditions on the ground, establishing a shared political language with international partners determines whether such relationships succeed or fail.

Challenges of Collaboration

Audiences for *Our Sign is the Stone* were generally very pleased with the performance. Based on informal conversations I had with actors who participated in both tours, audience attendance was consistently high, and the play was very well received. For example, comments by audience members posted in Arabic on one actor's personal Facebook wall, dated 6 October 2013, expressed how the play 'is an accurate representation of our reality,' that it 'speaks to our hearts,' and that 'it motivates us to continue our resistance.' Furthermore, Ben Rivers asserts that 'nobody' he spoke to objected to the fact that the Playwright and the Director were not Palestinian.[48] However, one important criticism residents of Nabi Saleh had concerned the research process, and the amount of time the Playwright had spent in the village. Manal explains that the Playwright stayed with her for a week.[49] Although, during this time, she was able to interview some residents, to take long walks around the village and to attend a protest meeting, some residents felt that, had she spent a longer period of time in residence, she would have gained a deeper sense of the village's daily rhythms as well as the opportunity to interview a greater number of people about how political events have affected their lives. These criticisms were expressed, not because residents felt more stories needed to be included in the play, or that the play needed a Palestinian writer, but that the Playwright herself would have benefited from spending more time with local residents. For example, the immediate family of Mustafa Tamimi were not interviewed. This was a serious omission on the Playwright's part, which means there are ethical issues around the use of Mustafa's story. After all, the narrative of his death is a critical point in *Our Sign is the Stone*. (How would British audiences, for example, have reacted to *The Colour of Justice* had Richard Norton-Taylor not interviewed Stephen Lawrence's family?) In order to produce her narrative, the Playwright reconstructed Mustafa's death from

video footage and news reports, and in the forceful words of Liz Tomlin 'the very process of mediation threatens to consume its own content; the staging comes to replace that which is staged' (Tomlin 2013, 144). Without the crucial process of interviewing Mustafa's family, the script is simply a patchwork of news material, as understood and dramatized by the Playwright. The distance between what is real and what is represented is even greater when one considers that the script must pass through the Playwright, the Director, and the actors before it reaches the audience amongst whom, ironically, were members of Mustafa's family.

These problems indicate the constraints under which creative teams must work as well as how much time *any* theatre can reasonably allocate to developing a production. Clearly, setting aside just two weeks to research and write a play about the experiences of people living in sites of colonial abjection will invite criticism from the very people whose experiences are being represented. Generally, the period between commissioning and producing a play—from initial idea to opening night—is over a year because time is required to test ideas, to develop a process, and to experiment with form and content. Usually, deadlines and timescales develop out of these considerations, and any theatre that wishes to produce work engaging with external collaborators and local communities must be attuned to these concerns. Inevitably, decisions about time are linked to decisions about finance and budgeting. Whereas Border Crossings was successful in securing external funding for *This Flesh is Mine*, which meant that more time could be allocated to developing the script, *Our Sign is the Stone* was produced on a very limited budget meaning that the project had a much shorter lifespan, and fewer resources at its disposal.

Other challenges theatres face include what Stanczak calls 'the power balance between the two parties.'[50] This issue has been discussed by a number of scholars with regard to the ways in which the 'politics of solidarity relies on and reifies the same power structures it aims to take apart' (Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2008, 113; see also: Landy 2014; Seitz 2003). In the theatre, Stanczak says, imbalances are most acute when the perception of international collaborators is that of master-teacher, and of local theatre-makers as disciple-student. For The Freedom Theatre, these concerns are not resolved simply by negotiating, allocating and managing roles and responsibilities within the collaborative relationship; although this does play a part (see below). For Stanczak, they are resolved by the manner in which the theatre defines itself. First, he says, it is important for the theatre to have a strong self-identity and sense of direction as an

organization because they influence what expectations the theatre can have of collaborators. Second, the theatre must assess the fruitfulness of potential collaborations through extended discussions and meetings with potential partners. This is not just to establish a political language but also because many of the internationals who express a willingness to work with The Freedom Theatre present themselves 'as professors and super professors.'[51] Sometimes, these discussions take place on Skype; however, the theatre's usual practice is to invite artists for a preliminary visit to Jenin where the two parties can get to know each other. Although this might be a productive way to assess the commitment and skills of international artists, Stanczak acknowledges that it can also be problematic. He says, 'You have someone sitting in Canada and you're telling that person, "Buy a $1500 flight ticket so we can meet and talk about it". [… This can be] a killing factor for many volunteers.'[52] Third, in the case of The Freedom Theatre, international artists are paired up with more advanced students who already have some grounding in the discipline they are studying (not just actor training, but also scenography, lighting, stage management, etc.). This pedagogical background ensures that students are confident enough to engage with international artists as critical partners rather than as 'disciples.'

Financial disagreements can also result in resentment and the impossibility of future collaborations. Ultimately, this can have disastrous consequences for theatres' overall programming. Stanczak discusses one such project in which The Freedom Theatre partnered with a Palestinian company based in Israel for a funding bid of €100,000. At the final stage of the application process, he says, the partnership collapsed because neither side could agree on differences in salaries between members based in the Jenin refugee camp and the partner organization. He says that, when one side of a partnership is paid a higher salary, to account for differences in living costs between Israel and the West Bank, it is difficult to maintain a sense of equality as well as to motivate local staff.[53]

Aoun identifies a number of qualities she believes collaborators should demonstrate in order to create fruitful co-productions. The ability to listen to each other is the key ingredient, she says.[54] Furthermore, mutual respect between collaborators also eases tensions and disagreements over artistic approaches. These suggestions resonate with Walling for whom the decisive factor in ensuring a healthy collaborative relationship lies in the director's ability to create 'an equal and open collaborative space.'[55] Part of his role, he says, was to navigate his way through a 'complex nexus' of

statuses in the rehearsal room—not least that one of the actors under his direction, Aoun herself, is also the artistic director of Ashtar under whom the other Palestinian actors had trained. He says,

> I had to respect Iman's position as an artistic leader in her own right (and somebody with an extraordinary depth of knowledge about Palestine and a passion for the cause), at the same time as empowering the younger actors to feel like equal partners in the process.[56]

Aoun also mentions how collaborators' personal ambitions and opinions about themselves can hinder effective collaboration. This occurred, she says, during a project between Ashtar and theatre-makers from Jordan and Tunisia in which four directors were working to produce a single play. Even though the division and allocation of roles was discussed at the beginning, Aoun explains that the partners each considered themselves to be 'the director.' (Aoun's own role in the project was that of producer.) Difficulties were exacerbated further by the fact that they interpreted their allocated roles, such as dramaturg or choreographer, as a reduction in status. In the end, equilibrium was restored through open dialogue and re-establishing common ground, or a methodological language. For Aoun, the ability to listen to each other in order to create common languages is complemented by the ability to embrace silence. As she says, 'Sometimes we have to stop negotiating, debating, take a step back, and let things resonate. In the silence, many things fall or rise because it's part of the new space we create and step into.'[57]

The involvement of international practitioners in the Palestinian theatre scene presents Palestinian theatre-makers with both logistical and discursive challenges. The extensive range of collaborations is a phenomenon that has become most pronounced recently and for many reasons, not least that theatre in Palestine is being produced in the interstices of a settler-colonial occupation, and in the absence of structural support from the Palestinian Authority. Theatre-makers' navigational tactics allow them to elicit a range of positive outcomes for their own benefit, from actor training to solidarity formation. By studying the processes that shaped *Our Sign is the Stone* and *This Flesh is Mine*, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate why Palestinian theatre-makers establish international relationships, how they address the challenges with which such relationships present themselves, and how they employ diverse tactics to disrupt the inherent power imbalances. The guiding logic behind such relationships

appears to be theatre-makers' commitment to the 'cultural resistance' because, as Aoun asserts, Palestinian theatre-makers' aesthetic practices would mean little without their political commitments. 'Otherwise,' she asks, 'why are we doing it?'[58]

Notes

1. An abridged version of this chapter was published as: Gabriel Varghese, 'Homer in Palestine,' in *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre*, ed. Kara Reilly, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 231–46.
2. At their request, I refer to them as the Director and the Playwright.
3. The Director, email to the author, February 10, 2015.
4. For information on Border Crossings' previous works, see: Border Crossings, 'Past Productions,' https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work (accessed February 11, 2020).
5. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, February 20, 2015; and, Émile Saba, interview with the author, February 15, 2015.
6. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
7. Jonatan Stanczak, email to the author, February 16, 2015 (original typography).
8. George Ibrahim, interview with the author, July 14, 2014.
9. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
10. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
11. For more information on the Drama Academy, see: Folkwang University of the Arts, 'Drama Academy Ramallah 2009 to 2018,' n.d., https://www.folkwang-uni.de/en/home/theater/intl-cooperations/drama-academy-ramallah (accessed February 11, 2020); and Qantara.de, 'Drama School in the West Bank: Theatre of Hope,' n.d., https://en.qantara.de/content/drama-school-in-the-west-bank-theatre-of-hope (accessed February 11, 2020).
12. For more information, see: http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/what-we-do/theatre/theatre-school (accessed November 18, 2015).
13. For more information, see: Al-Harah Theater, 'About PARC,' n.d., https://www.alharah.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92&Itemid=329 (accessed February 11, 2020).
14. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
15. Ibid.
16. See, for example: The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), 'Map 3: Defining the Palestinian Bantustan. Element #1: West Bank Areas A, B and C,' n.d., https://icahd.org/map3/ (accessed February 11, 2020); and B'Tselem, 'Acting the Landlord: Israel's Policy in Area C, the West Bank,' June 2013, https://www.btselem.org/download/201306_area_c_report_eng.pdf (accessed February 11, 2020).

17. For more information on Israeli settlement, see: Peace Now, 'West Bank Settlements—Facts and Figures,' June 1, 2009, https://peacenow.org.il/en/west-bank-settlements-facts-and-figures (accessed February 11, 2020). A full list of West Bank settlements can be downloaded from this website. Figures are given in square metres. Population figures are for 2009.
18. See, for example: 'For first time, weekly Nabi Saleh protest reaches destination: its own spring,' *+972 Mag*, June 30, 2012, http://972mag.com/for-first-time-friday-nabi-saleh-protest-reaches-destination-its-own-spring/49702 (accessed March 26, 2015). The use of violence is not restricted to adults but has also been targeted at children. See, for example: International Solidarity Movement, 'VIDEO: Children assaulted and 3 women arrested at Nabi Saleh demonstration,' March 21, 2015, http://palsolidarity.org/2015/03/video-children-assaulted-and-3-women-arrested-at-nabi-saleh-demonstration (accessed March 26, 2015); Maan News Agency, 'Teen Hurt as Israeli Forces Suppress West Bank Demos,' January 30, 2015, http://www.maannews.com/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?id=757721 (accessed March 26, 2015).
19. For more on Mustafa Tamimi's death, see for example: Popular Struggle Coordination Committee, 'Critically Injured Mustafa Tamimi of Nabi Saleh Dies of His Wounds,' *International Solidarity Movement*, December 9, 2011, https://palsolidarity.org/2011/12/west-bank-protester-dies-of-his-wounds/ (accessed February 11, 2020); Lina Alsaafin, 'No Miracle Yesterday in Nabi Saleh: Mustafa Tamimi Murdered,' *The Electronic Intifada*, December 10, 2011, http://electronicintifada.net/content/no-miracle-yesterday-nabi-saleh-mustafa-tamimi-murdered/10678 (accessed 26 March 2015); Haggai Matar, 'Mustafa Tamimi: A Murder Captured on Camera,' *+972 Magazine*, December 11, 2011, http://972mag.com/mustafa-tamimi-a-murder-captured-on-camera/29459 (accessed March 26, 2015). For more on Nabi Saleh and its weekly protests, see the community website: http://nabisalehsolidarity.wordpress.com (accessed March 26, 2015).
20. Manal Tamimi, interview with the author, February 12, 2015.
21. This tour included the refugee camps of Balata in Nablus and Al-Aroub near Hebron as well as the villages of Nabi Saleh, Kufr Qaddum, Al-Jab'a, Fasa'il, Ni'lin, Budrus, Deir Abu Masha'al, Al-Ma'asarah, Beit Ummar and Atwani.
22. For the Nabi Saleh performance, see: Bilal Tamimi, 'Nabi Saleh Play: *The Stone is Our Sign*' (Arabic), *YouTube*, May 5, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7POt7bdOEk (accessed March 27, 2015). The video is edited with footage from the real events referenced in Scenes 3 and 4 as well as the storyteller's final speech.
23. All quotations are taken from the English-language rehearsal copy of *Our Sign is the Stone* as written by the Playwright.
24. The Playwright, email to the author, September 5, 2013.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. The Playwright, email to the author, January 27, 2015.
29. The Playwright, email to the author, September 5, 2013.
30. Michael Walling, interview with the author, February 11, 2015.
31. Ibid.
32. Michael Walling quoted in Ellie Violet Bramley, '*This Flesh is Mine*: Homer, Car Bombs and Jack Bauer,' *The Guardian*, May 23, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/may/23/this-flesh-is-mine-border-crossing (accessed April 29, 2015).
33. Michael Walling, email to author, February 24, 2015.
34. Michael Walling, interview with author, February 11, 2015.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Michael Walling, interview with the author, February 11, 2015. Due to other commitments, Woolland was only able to be present in Ramallah for the fourth and final week of rehearsals. Instead, the conversations with him took place on Skype.
39. Brian Woolland, email to the author, March 2, 2015.
40. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
41. Émile Saba, interview with the author, February 15, 2015.
42. Brian Woolland, interview with the author, February 17, 2015.
43. Here, I draw from my own rehearsal notes dated April 14, 2013.
44. Émile Saba, interview with the author, February 15, 2015.
45. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
46. Ibid.
47. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
48. Ben Rivers, email to the author, October 13, 2013. The assertion of 'nobody' is based on face-to-face interviews with audience members after every performance of *Our Sign is the Stone*. Rivers conducted these interviews with the help of a translator.
49. Manal Tamimi, interview with the author, February 12, 2015.
50. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Jonatan Stanczak, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
54. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
55. Michael Walling, email to the author, February 20, 2015.
56. Ibid.
57. Iman Aoun, interview with the author, February 20, 2015.
58. Ibid.

Epilogue

Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank has explored the various tactics Palestinian theatre-makers employ to circumvent the Zionist public sphere. Theatre practices in Palestine, I have argued, demonstrate that colonial abjection is not only a category of exclusion but, concurrently, a site of resistance. The tactics employed by theatre-makers attempt to resist abjection as both a discursive configuration (how Palestinians are represented in Zionist ideology) and as a lived experience (the everyday conditions of life under a settler-colonial occupation). Palestinian theatre interrogates—and negates—Zionism's discourse of erasure *because* these are spaces in which transgressive narratives and ideas can be performatively disseminated to many different audiences in diverse localities. Through a process of disidentification, the counter-discourses emerging in these performance spaces both unsettle the authority of the dominant public sphere, and are central to the formation of an abject counterpublic.

This book has also explored Palestinian theatre-makers claims to be part of a theatrical *movement* within the broader struggle for national liberation. Whilst theatre for the sake of entertainment has existed, and continues to exist, those with the broadest appeal have been performances that challenge Israeli settler-colonialism. By recalling Palestinian stories to the centre of social life, in defiance of Zionism's attempts to make Palestine disappear, and by repeatedly asserting their 'human face,' theatre-makers attempt to unravel the colonial schema by which Palestinians are epidermalized as human waste to be expelled to unliveable zones. In *We are the Children of the Camp*, performers did this by referring the audience to the

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names of destroyed and Judaised/de-Palestinised villages in order to express Palestinians' connection to the land, and their subsequent dispossession and disenfranchisement. The counter-narratives presented in *Alive from Palestine*, *The Gaza Monologues* and on the Freedom Ride are personal stories of life during the second intifada, the Gaza War of 2008–2009, and in sites of popular struggle against Israeli settler-colonialism respectively. Such works show us the important role theatre can play in sites of abjection not just as spaces of healing but also as spaces in which resistant identities are formed.

Another tactic Palestinian theatre-makers have used is to bypass the Zionist public sphere altogether. This tactic is expressed as an appeal for solidarity from global publics deemed to be more powerful. All the theatre-makers discussed in this book expressed this idea in different ways one of which has been in terms of the benefits gained through collaborative partnerships with international practitioners. As the Israeli state continues to obstruct the 'cultural intifada,' theatre-makers themselves have sought out international partnerships as a rallying cry for greater solidarity (El Zein et al. 2018). This has not only been at the discursive level where partners return to their home countries to narrate what they have witnessed, but it has also been more practical with internationals supporting Palestinians in producing plays, training performers and personnel, and offering logistical and financial support to maintain theatre companies and premises. Such acts are not without their problems, but they do show that theatre is a crucial site of exchange in the international solidarity movement.

Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank has also attempted to look at how abject counterpublics might also be polyvalent spaces in which constituents are able to question oppressive practices within Palestinian society. *Shakespeare's Sisters*, for example, interrogates women's representation in the nationalist discourse as well as argues for women's spatial autonomy within Palestinian society. 'Border thinking,' or the ability to draw on both Palestinian and non-Palestinian systems of knowledge, allowed the play to 'speak' in ways that Palestinian audiences would understand as both progressive and indigenously constructed rather than, simply, a reiteration of the international development regime's discourse on women's rights and empowerment. For abject counterpublics, such tactics play a crucial role in developing, articulating and defending autonomous subjectivities.

Finally, this book is an attempt to offer the first account of Palestinian theatre in the West Bank after the Oslo Accords since the research conducted by Hala Nassar (2001) and Reuven Snir (2005a) on Palestinian

theatre from the late nineteenth century to the first intifada. Yet, I insist that this book is not a conclusive study of what is still a neglected area of study. Both theatre-making and resistance are ongoing processes often occurring in response to ever-changing circumstances on the ground. Whilst this book suggests a conceptual framework situating Palestinian theatre within the broader landscape of anti-colonial resistance, the claims made by such a framework both enable and require further interdisciplinary exploration. *Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank* demonstrates that there is still much work to be done. This work remains a modest contribution to that work.

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