

Art in the Conflict Zone

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What role can arts and artists play in the Palestinian Israeli conflict?

On The National Level...

Our Motto Is: A Free and Creative Palestinian Individual

We believe that in order to achieve our national freedom we have to help our people to free themselves from within first... to be able to combat the personalization of the characteristics and manners of their oppressors.

Freedom can only happen when dialogue is established. In our work we establish dialogue among our society, in place of the imposed dominant monologues on us through politics. Dialogue, hence, is democracy.

In his book "Theatre of the Oppressed" Augusto Boal explains: "Dialogue is always dangerous because it creates discontinuity between one thought and another, between two opinions, or two possibilities, and between them infinity installs itself; so that all opinions are possible and all thoughts are permitted."

We believe that working with our community is our role and priority, through holding out a grotesque mirror that will spot out the socio-political maladies in our society in order to transcend them .

To accomplish change, our audience should be fully integrated in making the infinite choices found in a dialogue.

Bearing in mind what Aristotle said...

- Tell me and I will forget
- Show me and I will remember
- Involve me and I will comprehend

So in the Palestinian case, the question: 'To be or not to be' becomes irrelevant, and should be replaced by the quest: 'to be and what to become', since 'Becoming' is an act of transformation which brings change.

Theatre for example, is an art of transformation; so for transformation to happen, the oppressed should realize that he/she has a role in breaking the vicious circle of oppression, because oppression is a chain that entangles both the oppressed and the oppressor.

When Palestinians are subject to daily harassment, humiliation and devastation; their manners, behaviors, reactions, even their aesthetics, become a reflection of the subconsciously accumulated effect of oppression. Thus, internalizing the characteristics of the tyrant, make them tormenters themselves; especially upon weaker social segments like women and children.

Hence, violence arouses social illnesses, and political chaos.

Therefore liberating the oppressed from the state of reversiveness, through action orientation in place of re-action, is very essential.

On The International Level....

Palestinian artists tried different approaches to raise awareness in the world, through their diverse art forms; theatre, cinema, poetry, music and dance.

I will indicate here some major actions taken in the last few years.

- **'100 Artist for Palestine'** an initiative that I launched in a plenary meeting of IETM in 2002, was executed by the art organizations network in the WB. Whereby, in 2003, more than 60 European artists came to Palestine to eye-witness the brutality of the Israeli re-invasion of the POT. Various artistic work were written, devised and created about this experience by the internationals.
- As result a very import bond was created between the art organizations on both sides, and an important political awareness

among the public in Belgium and Europe was established, which led to a major break-through event, in 2008 Belgium celebrated Palestine – through arts and culture for a whole year, under a project called **MASSARAT**.

- ASHTAR Theatre launched in 2007 an International Theatre of the Oppressed Festival that lasted for two months under the title “**Building Bridges... Braking Barriers**”, where companies from 8 different countries came to Palestine for two weeks each, performed in all West Bank cities and East Jerusalem and saw the small country in the big prison. This year 2009 the second edition of the Int. TO festival was under the title: “**Raise Your Voice... Preserve Your Rights**”, celebrating Jerusalem Capital of the Arab Culture. Groups from different conflict and post-conflict countries attended. Among them, for the first time in Palestine, a group from South Africa and a group from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The festival this year lasted for 40 days and toured the whole of the West Bank.
- Now ASHTAR is launching a new international initiative called: “GAZA Mono-Logues” to raise the voices of the voiceless children of Gaza, those whom you have seen them but did not hear them.
- In 2004 large group of academic and cultural organizations launched, an appeal to the world to boycott Israel.

“Boycotting Israeli academic and cultural institutions is an urgently needed form of pressure against Israel that can bring about its compliance with international law and the requirements for a just peace.”

The Palestinian Campaign is inspired by the historic role played by people of conscience in the international community of scholars and intellectuals who have shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in their struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott.

This appeal was later joined by different international academics and universities, artists and art organizations from around the globe, as well as Israeli peace activists and renowned Jewish artists.

In an interview on AlterNet with the Israeli publisher Yael Lerer, she states: As an Israeli citizen, I need boycotts for two reasons. First, I

want the Israelis to feel more strongly that everything is not normal. It means nothing for many self-identified left-wing Israelis to say: 'it's awful, what's going on in Gaza and Hebron,' while continuing their daily lives like everything is fine. Second, because I lost hope of creating change from within, which I tried to do as an activist for many years.

Finally...

I tried to put in your hands some of the actions taken in the face of the naked reality; if you are interested... It's your time to act.