

**THEATRICAL PRACTICES OF RESISTANCE TO SPACIO-CIDE IN
PALESTINE, 2011-12**

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Abstract

This study examines Palestinian theatre practices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem within their spatial contexts, analysing how theatre responds to its geopolitical environment as an act of cultural resistance. It argues that space in Palestine is not monolithic, and is subjected to three main structural forces – the Israeli military occupation, international neoliberal humanitarian regime and the Palestinian Authority – which influence Palestinian space at different levels depending on the specific location. As there are multiple spaces in Palestine, I use a number of complementary theories to explain each site, utilizing Sari Hanafi's composite theoretical framework of 'spacio-cide' as an 'umbrella' theory, the different components of which are applied to the relevant space whilst bearing in mind its overall conceptualisation. I suggest that the 'urbicidal' policies of the Israeli military executed during the second intifada is no longer a relevant theoretical framework, particularly for the main urban sites; however, contentious areas exist in a 'post-urbicidal' state. I argue that Palestinian theatre practices respond to the particular spatial condition in which it is being performed.

I analyse three particular spaces in Palestine: the mainstream non-refugee urban space which is under the international humanitarian regime; the refugee camp located within the 'state of exception'; and the site of extreme contention, which is located at the peripheries of Palestine, and which is being subjected to 'post-urbicidal' actions by the Israelis. I examine a number of plays and theatre practices in relation to these spaces, to argue that Palestinian cultural resistance through theatre is a tactic through which Palestinians can challenge the conditions under which they live, whilst promoting the continuation of non-violent resistance and Palestinian culture.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memories of Francois Abu Salim and Juliano Mer Khamis: two great pioneers of contemporary Palestinian theatre.

The Author

The author first completed her BA (Hons) in Drama at the University of Manchester (2005; 1st Class), during which time she became interested in political and Applied theatres, especially in relation to the most recent Iraq and Afghanistan wars. She took a module in Applied Theatre with Refugee Communities, and directed fellow undergraduates in Steven Berkoff's *Agamemnon* as a critique of the then-current Iraq war for her final year project (which received an overall mark of 76). Following her graduation, she worked for over a year as a Marketing and Communications Assistant for a regional development agency (SEEDA), before embarking on an MA in International Relations (University of Sussex; 2007; Credit - 84%).

After spending the summer of 2008 volunteering with al-Harah theatre company in Beit Jala, Palestine, the author commenced her PhD, fully funded by CASAW (Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World), which included eight months of intensive Arabic language training (both formal and colloquial) at the University of Edinburgh, and four months at the University of Damascus, Syria. She continued her language training through attending undergraduate Arabic modules at the University of Manchester from 2009, in addition to a further six months at al-Quds University and the Palestinian Arabic Institute in East Jerusalem. During the summer of 2010, the author spent ten weeks in Amman, Jordan, volunteering with al-Balad theatre company, working with a group of local children to create a performance as part of their summer programme.

For her fieldwork, the author spent around a year living in East Jerusalem and regularly commuting to the West Bank in order to attend theatrical performances and conduct her research. During this time, she was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel (2011-12), and also resided at the Kenyon Institute, East Jerusalem. She received a Foundation Grant from the Funds for Women Graduates organisation for her 'writing-up' year.

The author has so far published an article and book reviews, and is currently working on a number of journal articles based on her PhD for future publication. She continues to be interested in theatrical practices occurring within conflict areas, and how theatrical performances respond to their spatial conditions.

Chapter One: Introduction – Resistance and Space in Palestinian Theatre Practices

Rationale

Contemporary Palestinian theatre practices in the West Bank occur as a series of non-violent resistance tactics against multiple, interlinked structural forces which greatly impact upon the Palestinian lived experience. This dissertation analyses how Palestinian theatrical productions and performances, responds to the changing landscape and spatial configuration of and within the West Bank, in relation to the Israeli occupation and methods of control over this territory and the population contained within it. It is my contention that the Palestinians attempt to undermine the Israeli military spatial practices through cultural practices inspired by *sumud* (steadfastness) and creative expressions of Palestinian nationalism in the face of repression. Therefore, theatre is a cultural practice forged by the Palestinians as a countermeasure to the Israeli attempts to de-legitimize and erase their physical presence.

As Gay McAuley proposes, the theatrical event is a social one, formed from “a dynamic process of communication in which the spectators are vitally implicated, one that forms part of a series of interconnected processes of socially situated signification and communication, for theatre exists within a culture that it helps to construct, and it is the product of a specific work process.”¹ Based upon this, I examine how Palestinian theatre – and its practitioners – responds to the changing geopolitical environment of the West Bank under occupation, and the modified social conditions which have resulted from the implementation of the Oslo Accords (1993 and 1995), and the effects of the second intifada (2000-05). I inspect how the implementation of the international humanitarian regime and concurrent formation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank have altered the socio-spatial realities of the Palestinian experience, and how theatre practices have addressed these.

¹ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p7

How then, does Palestinian theatre in the West Bank respond to, interact with, and challenge the increasing Israeli encroachment upon Palestinian territory, the contracting of liveable space, the restrictions upon movement and denial of basic human rights? How does Palestinian theatre use the space in which it is confined to promote Palestinian identity, to resist the occupation, and to encourage non-violent resistance in an intense and antagonistic environment? I put forward a hypothesis that Palestinian theatre, performed within a cultural atmosphere of non-violent resistance, engages in three modes of opposition to attempt to counter these structural changes, relating to their local spatial context. Firstly, within the urban, non-refugee camp areas, theatre practices as resistance engage with the international humanitarian regime, working within the mainstream 'theatre for development' model, which seeks to promote internal advancement on issues such as gender equality and human rights. Therefore, theatrical productions are concerned with increasing individual participants' sense of self and creating a 'safe space' for self-expression and relief from the daily sufferance of living under occupation. Although these plays contain political themes relating to the occupation, they cannot be seen as a direct challenge to the causes of their oppression, due to the de-politicising boundaries imposed by the international agencies' funding guidelines which prohibit inciting action against the occupation itself. Although theatre companies are necessarily deferential to this regime in order to ensure the continuation of their activities, there has been rebellion against the political ramifications of this cooperation, as it is perceived as encouraging the normalisation of the occupation and the further institutionalisation of the humanitarian regime. As such, some theatres in the main urban sites in Palestine are beginning to explicitly denounce the existence of this system, and are producing theatre whose content is a direct attack upon its very structure.

Secondly, theatre practices existing within exceptional spaces - namely the refugee camp and sites of extreme contention – produce theatre within a defined theatrical space for political agitation and incitement for action against the occupation. Within this strain exist two sub-sets of methods to embody cultural resistance: firstly, by creating the conditions for social change through the space of the

theatrical performance, via the formation of an alternative space in which ideals of equality and liberation are performed as a rehearsal for the imagined future state; secondly, by directly confronting specific issues of injustice within spaces undergoing the more explicit and violent actions resulting from the Israeli occupation in an attempt to transform the site into one of active political non-violent resistance. Both these types display a clear refusal to engage with the standard humanitarian regime rhetoric, whereby theatre practitioners will source alternative funding streams and produce theatre which is more politically engaging and agitating for its audience. The third mode is theatre which promotes the actualisation of individual freedom as a pre-condition for national liberation, regardless of the social conservatism of the culture in which it is practicing. It too rejects both the international humanitarian regime and Israeli occupation and exhibits a fervent demand for political change at the structural level; however, it also protests the internal dynamics of conservative Palestinian society in addition to the extrinsic powers exerting control upon it.

Palestinian theatre does not exist as a purely indigenous form; it is neither funded by the PA, nor from other internal sources. Palestinian theatre practitioners form part of the globalised elite who have frequent and in-depth interactions with Western theatre-makers, be it within Palestinian space, or outside, through collaborative theatre productions. Palestinian theatre is that which Hala Khamis Nasser defines as being “hybrid”, for it has historically and contemporarily adopted and adapted Western theatre practices in combination with local theatrical traditions.² Indeed, the international flavour of Palestinian theatre was born with the professional theatre movement within Palestine following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It is my contention that Palestinian theatre from its professional inception in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has never been a fully local endeavour, and that joint workings and projects with the international community of theatre-makers has been a constant marker on Palestinian theatre

² Khamis Nasser, H. (2006), ‘Stories from under Occupation: Performing the Palestinian Experience’, *Theatre Journal*, 58:1, 15-37, p16

over the past half century. Within today's highly globalised world, the intervention of foreign influences on Palestinian theatre practices within Palestinian spaces cannot be ignored.

Context

Palestine as a space has been subjected to claims of ownership from numerous international, regional, and local parties. Due to the Israeli-defined differentiations and separations of the territory of the West Bank and East Jerusalem during the research period in 2011-12, space within Palestine cannot be defined by one all-encompassing theory, for it is not a single monolithic area. It has been necessary to apply different theoretical perspectives in order to understand this complex and multifarious space in relation to where it is situated. As a result, I utilize a synthesis of complementary theories, primarily based upon the notion of 'spacio-cide', the multifaceted Israeli policy of 'space annihilation' of Palestinian territory in the West Bank, which displays "deliberate exterminatory logic of the space" in order to displace and disenfranchise the Palestinian population.³ I examine each performance space as a 'micro-site', in relation to its immediate locales, whilst remaining aware of the overarching structural configurations at play. It became apparent during my fieldwork that there are multiple, interlinked and competing structural power forces at play within the West Bank, which exist as a response to the overarching Israeli military occupation. The physical presence of Israelis - be it armed 'civilian' settlers residing within specific sites in the West Bank or the Israeli state military, located within the security infrastructure embedded within the road networks throughout this territory – is a constant reminder that Palestinians remain living under occupation. At the structural level, omnipresent and overarching control resides within the Israeli state military, for they are the sovereign power which all other power and social systems exist in relation to, and are subsumed by. Underneath this primary power structure lies the international humanitarian

³ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory: Colonization, Separation, and State of Exception', *Current Sociology*, 61:2, 190-205, p193

regime, which has come into being since the advent of the Oslo Accords, and whose headquarters are mostly situated within the urban centres of East Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem. The mass influx of humanitarian aid workers, in particular from Western countries, since 1993 has replaced the 'development' regime of the Israeli Civil Administration operating in the West Bank prior to 1987 and the outbreak of the first intifada.⁴

The international humanitarian regime is ubiquitous throughout the West Bank, but its activities are focused on the urban sites, contributing to social and economic 'development', and funding mass construction projects. The existence of this regime has led to a professionalization of Palestinian civil society, which has appeared to outwardly modify its values and practices in order to be acceptable to the international community, and thus improve its success in obtaining funding for activities.⁵ This has resulted in a shift from overtly political actions based upon the desired outcome of Palestinian national independence and an overthrowing of 'Zionism', to a focus on 'internal development' as per the objectives of international NGOs. Therefore, projects in the West Bank are concerned with reaching and encouraging participation from 'marginalised' and 'disenfranchised' groups, especially women and youth. Although the international regime is necessary to financially support the basic existence of Palestinians in the West Bank, the enforced adherence to external agendas has resulted in economic dependence upon these humanitarian institutions, whilst the occupation remains intact.⁶

The PA, structurally located below the Israeli military and humanitarian regimes, and concomitantly existing in deference to them, is a force in that it administers the

⁴ Challand, B. (2008), 'The Evolution of Western Aid for Palestinian Civil Society: Bypassing Local Knowledge and Resources', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44:3, 397-417, pp408-409

⁵ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), 'The New Palestinian Globalized Elite', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 24, p21-22

⁶ See for a further discussion: Abdo, N. (2010), 'Imperialism, the State, and NGOs: Middle Eastern Contexts and Contestations', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 30:2, 238-249; Khalidi, R. & Samour, S. (2011), 'Neoliberalism as Liberation: The Statehood Program and the Remaking of the Palestinian National Movement', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40:2, 6-25; Le More, A. (2005), 'Killing with Kindness: Funding the Demise of a Palestinian State', *International Affairs*, 81:5, p981-999.

population, but is reliant upon the international community for funding, and is perceived by many Palestinians – including a number of those interviewed during my fieldwork - as corrupt and ineffectual. Although the NGOs in Palestine operate outside of the government, they are constrained by legal and bureaucratic measures which regulate their activities.⁷ As such, the PA cannot be dismissed when considering power structures within Palestine. The final level within this structural analysis is grassroots activism, existing primarily at the local level, and reacting to the specific socio-political environment in which it is situated. This is not to say that popular movements are of less importance for research because they are placed at the bottom of the structure, but this is reflective of their low capabilities in terms of producing outcomes. These grassroots organisations include the theatre companies which I examine in this study, but also include numerous cultural and political groups which have been established throughout the West Bank. These activist organisations primarily operate in resistance to the more powerful regimes, ostensibly against the Israeli occupation. This means that they must cooperate with the humanitarian institutions and PA in order to gain funding and function without undue interference. These grassroots organisations additionally exist as local sovereigns within their own defined, localised spaces, such as the refugee camp or city district in which they are based. As local sovereigns, they hold authority within their specific site in which they carry out their activities, but they are nevertheless in a subservient position to the more powerful structural elements at play.

In order to understand the spatial manipulations occurring within the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a result of the Israeli occupation, my initial (pre-fieldwork) research led me to consider the theoretical framework of ‘urbicide’, which was applied to the violent conflict of the second intifada (2000-05). Martin Coward suggests that ‘urbicide’, a term formed from the collocation of ‘urban’ and ‘-cide’, “refers both to the destruction of the built environment that comprises the fabric of the urban as well as to the destruction of the way of life specific to such material

⁷ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, Berkeley: University of London Press. See in particular Chapter 7: *Outsourcing the Occupation*.

conditions”.⁸ Stephen Graham has utilised the term ‘urbicide’ to describe Israeli military strategies used within the conflict, whereby the dual-process of the destruction of the Palestinian means of existence (economic, social and cultural), in conjunction with the construction of Israeli-Jewish settlements and supporting infrastructure, in addition to increasing restrictions on Palestinian movement through the erection of the ‘security’ barrier and checkpoints, serves to fragment and therefore undermine Palestinian civil and political life in the West Bank, thereby constituting ‘urbicidal’ practices.⁹ For Graham, the conflict over the contested territory of the West Bank “manifests itself most clearly in the adaptation, construction and obliteration of landscape and built environment”.¹⁰

However, after embarking upon my fieldwork, I discovered that ‘urbicide’ was no longer applicable to the situation in the main urban sites of the West Bank, albeit that the collective emotional and infrastructural scars remain to the present day. Instead, it appears that the physical manifestations of the conflict as shown through militarised violence against the Palestinian civilian (and therefore unarmed) population, has moved away from the urban sites, and is instead located on peripheral sites of extreme contention – namely Palestinian villages in Area ‘C’ which are situated near to the Separation Wall and/or Jewish-Israeli settlements. This is not to say that Palestinians living within Areas ‘A’ and ‘B’ have become liberated from the oppressions of the occupation; indeed, all Palestinians resident in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are subjected to the nefarious realities of occupation. However, space in Palestine is not monolithic, and the experiences of Palestinian urbanites differ greatly from that of rural Palestinians living within extreme sites of contention. Furthermore, there are immense discrepancies between Palestinians residing in East Jerusalem, to those in refugee camps in the West Bank, as well as greatly contested spaces, such as the Old City of Hebron. Therefore, it is necessary to draw upon multiple – albeit complimentary –

⁸ Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*, Oxon: Routledge, p38

⁹ Graham, S. (2002), ‘Bulldozers and Bombs: The Latest Palestinian-Israeli Conflict as Asymmetric Urbicide’, *Antipode*, 34:4, 642-649, p643

¹⁰ Graham, S. (2004), ‘Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer in the Occupied Territories’, in *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics*, [Ed. Stephen Graham], London: Blackwell, p8

theoretical perspectives in order to fully encapsulate the realities of living under occupation within different localities in Palestine.

It is my contention that Palestinians living within the urban sites of Area 'A' in the West Bank are located within a 'post-urbicidal' situation, whereby the significant 'development' projects and policies of the international community has resulted in a mass construction effort within the main urban spaces of the West Bank, in contrast to the under-developed and overly suffering rural peripheries – where the practices of 'urbicide' has been transported to, and imposed on by the Israeli government. As a result, although the 'urban' of 'urbicide' may no longer be applicable, the essence of 'urbicidal' practices can be ascertained as occurring within rural sites. Coward himself acknowledges that 'urbicide' as a theory may face the charge of "valorising an urban existence over a supposedly 'rural' one", whereby a dichotomised relationship positioning the 'urban' as 'civilised' and inherently superior to the 'rural' way of life may serve to obscure the mechanisms of, and rationale for, the destruction of the city and the urban way of life. Additionally, a myopic focus upon the city may ignore the destruction and conflicts occurring in the rural, through demonising non-urban dwellers as being 'backwards'.¹¹

For Coward, the "logic of urbicide" resides within the desire to destroy the heterogeneity of urbanity, as depicted and represented through its buildings. Therefore, this heterogeneous existence as defined through multiplicity of existence, is not defined through the physical size or population count of the site, or indeed how 'developed' it is in relation to the 'modern' world, but instead this logic is relational to "the destruction of buildings in order to destroy a certain existential quality constituted by those buildings".¹² Although it may appear somewhat strange to apply the definition of 'urban' to a small village on the peripheries of the West Bank, far from the main urban centres, it can be said, as Coward does, that: "So long as 'urban' is taken to refer to a specific existential quality constituted by

¹¹ Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide*, p37; 49-50

¹² Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide*, p52

buildings, then 'urbicide' is a viable concept for identifying a distinct form of political violence (destruction of heterogeneity through destruction of the buildings that comprise its condition of possibility), regardless of whether such violence occurs in a city, town, village or farm."¹³ Indeed, it could be suggested that the policies implemented in the West Bank is an Israeli desire for homogeneity, for the exclusive 'Jewish-only' settlements and road networks are based upon a paradoxical denial of the existence of Palestinians and a fear of violent actions from Palestinians themselves.

Overall, the complementary theories of Sari Hanafi's 'Spacio-cide', Eyal Weizman's 'Politics of Verticality', Jeff Halper's 'Matrix of Control', and Neve Gordon's 'Policy of Separation' are together an extremely useful diagnostic tool for explaining the situation at the time of research and writing, in relation to the spatial configurations of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Eyal Weizman has termed Israel's participation in the conflict 'the Politics of Verticality', whereby Israel engages in a "three-dimensional orchestration of territorial configurations to maintain, and deepen, Israel's geopolitical advantage", above, below, and on the surface.¹⁴ Indeed, it is this three-dimensional nature of the conflict which has led to Weizman to state that "the frontiers of the Occupied Territories are not rigid and fixed at all; rather they are elastic, and in constant transformation. The linear border... has splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border-synonyms – 'separation walls', 'barriers', 'blockades', 'closures', 'road blocks', 'checkpoints', 'sterile areas', 'special security zones', 'closed military areas' and 'killing zones' – that shrink and expand the territory at will."¹⁵ The elasticity of space, whereby Israel consistently pushes the frontiers of its borders further into Palestinian territory, results in this space becoming imbued with Palestinian resistance activities, for space itself becomes "the medium that each of their actions seeks to challenge, transform or appropriate."¹⁶ I shall engage

¹³ Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide*, p53

¹⁴ Graham, S. (2004), 'Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer in the Occupied Territories', p197

¹⁵ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, London: Verso, p6

¹⁶ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p7

in a more detailed discussion of these theories in relation to Palestinian theatre practices in subsequent chapters.

Although this study focuses on Palestinian theatre, it has been necessary to spatially delineate the different sections of the territories of Israel proper from the West Bank (and Gaza Strip). Although this may appear to be colluding with the Israeli-imposed territorial differentiations, the reality on the ground is that these spaces have been physically separated through such mechanisms as the Separation Wall and checkpoints. East Jerusalem has been rendered a distinct space away from the West Bank through its annexation by Israel and the construction of the Separation Wall around it, in addition to the prohibition of West Bankers from entering Jerusalem without a valid permit. Therefore, whilst I do allude to theatrical performances in East Jerusalem within this thesis, and consider this to be one of the main Palestinian urban and cultural sites, due to its dislocation from the West Bank, it has not been possible to focus as much attention on this space as on the other urban centres of the West Bank. Additionally, issues between the management of the Palestinian National Theatre/El-Hakawati and its primary international funding body at the time of research in 2011-12, in addition to the death of the PNT founder, Francois Abu Salim in 2011, resulted in a rupture of activities specific to that time period, and therefore would not be wholly reflective of the PNT's theatrical endeavours. Therefore, the relative absence of the PNT from this study depicts the problematic power relationship between Palestinian theatre practitioners and the INGOs, which can have wide-reaching, detrimental effects upon theatre activities. I decided that although I would not exclude productions at the PNT, I would not specifically focus on this theatre as a space. Nevertheless, it is important to note 'urbicidal' occurrences happening within East Jerusalem, and especially in Sheikh Jarrah, where the theatre is located and which is subject to an embedded Jewish-Israeli settler presence, along with numerous house demolitions and a failure to invest in proper infrastructure for the Palestinian population.¹⁷

¹⁷ The problems faced by Palestinians resident in Jerusalem have been extensively chronicled elsewhere. See for example: B'tselem, *A Wall in Jerusalem: Obstacles to Human Rights in the Holy City*, Summer 2006, accessed online on 31st November 2012 at:

Theatre as Resistance within a Conflict Setting

The Israeli-Palestinian territorial conflict occurs in three dimensions.¹⁸ Theatre, itself a multi-dimensional space, can be considered to be an ideal medium through which to represent and negotiate these spatial configurations, and how the space in which the theatrical performance occurs influences and shapes it in relation to the themes and issues presented. This study examines how these spaces, exemplified through the three-dimensional space of the theatre (both as a physical construction – including, but not limited to buildings - and as a performance), comprise the forging of a space of resistance through the activity of creating and enacting performance within a contested, ‘post-urbicidal’ space. This ‘post-urbicidal’ space therefore is formed from a space which has been subjected to Israeli occupation, with all the reconfigurations of territory and manipulations of space which this entails, both physically and symbolically.

The concept of cultural resistance within a conflict setting is linked primarily to that of non-violent activities; or as Mazin B. Qumsiyeh describes it as a result of the inability to accurately and definitively translate ‘non-violent resistance’ into colloquial Palestinian Arabic, ‘popular resistance’. According to Qumsiyeh, this ‘popular resistance, *muqawama sha’biya*, originates from the Arabic word ‘sha’b’ (people) and therefore can be directly linked to resistance of and for the people, which serves to illuminate the “complex and empowering acts of popular resistance practiced in Palestine that cannot count as armed resistance”.¹⁹ Qumsiyeh’s research demonstrates that non-violent, ‘popular’ resistance has had a long history in Palestine, from the advent of Zionist immigration in the late 1800’s, through the

www.btselem.org/download/200607_A_Wall_in_Jerusalem.pdf and Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, *No Home, No Homeland: A New Normative Framework for Examining the Practice of Administrative Home Demolitions in East Jerusalem*, December 2011, accessed online on 31st November 2012 at: [http://www.icahd.org/sites/default/files/No%20Home%20No%20Homeland%20V2.0%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.icahd.org/sites/default/files/No%20Home%20No%20Homeland%20V2.0%20(3).pdf)

¹⁸ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p13

¹⁹ Qumsiyeh, M. B. (2011), *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*, London: Pluto, p11

British Mandate era of the 1920's and 30's, and following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, an event which resulted in around 750,000 Palestinians being expelled from their homeland. In particular, he acknowledges that 'popular resistance' as an effective strategy of defiance against oppression is not something passive, but rather actions which can carry as much threat to personal and collective security when facing an industrialised military force as armed resistance.²⁰ Within the Palestinian context, this is primarily committed through organised rebellions, enacted through political organisations and movements promoting liberation and human rights, as well as infrastructural state-building projects, both social and economic, and actions of protest, such as strikes and demonstrations.²¹ Additionally, the adherence to *sumud* (steadfastness) whilst undergoing extreme suffering "is considered an active form of willingness to sacrifice oneself in order to achieve justice."²²

Theatre in Palestine is, as Reuven Snir declares, "a political instrument used to raise the level of national consciousness, to incite resistance and revolution, to record the trials and experiences of the nation as a whole, and to prepare for and envision a better future."²³ Theatre in Palestine therefore exists as a multi-purpose tool for resisting the occupation and empowering both the performers and its audiences. The theatre space itself is both reflective of, and challenging to, the geopolitical conditions in which it is operating. This interrelating between the space of the theatre, and the conflict zone in which they are present, has been acknowledged by James Thompson *et al*, who state that: "War zones themselves are highly performative places where simple statements of identity and survival can become performative acts with dangerous social effects."²⁴ Indeed, theatre practices within sites of conflict are enmeshed within the social processes of the conflict itself, and thus exist as a response to this abnormal situation, utilizing the arts in order to

²⁰ Qumsiyeh, M. B. (2011), *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, p28-9

²¹ Qumsiyeh, M. B. (2011), *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, p30

²² Qumsiyeh, M. B. (2011), *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, p11

²³ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, p177-8

²⁴ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, London: Seagull Books, p2

“counter, resist or cope with war while acknowledging the systems in which they are embedded.”²⁵

James Thompson et al highlight the ways in which theatre practices respond to conflict. Although Thomason’s work focuses upon performances created during active warfare, two concepts can be applied to contemporary ‘post-urbicidal’ Palestine. Firstly, creating something beautiful as a response to “the extreme ugliness of a war zone”, which has been termed ‘beautiful resistance’ by Al-Rowwad theatre in ‘Aida refugee camp’.²⁶ Although this terminology is highly contested within Palestinian theatrical circles, there does appear to be an overwhelming desire to use the arts in general as a form of resistance through demonstrating that Palestinians, despite their suffering and poor quality of life, have the ability to produce high-quality artistic performances of a variety of forms. This includes not only theatre, but also multimedia and photography projects, traditional Palestinian music and dance, such as the ‘*oud* and *dabka*, which serves not only as a reaffirmation of extant Palestinian culture, but also as a rebellion against the ‘bare life’ conditions imposed upon them by the Israeli military and humanitarian regime. Secondly, the representation of young people as a “multiple signifier”, that of victim, survivor, and embodiment of a potential future without conflict.²⁷ This is especially relevant given the omnipresence of the humanitarian regime in Palestine, which although provides necessary assistance, is also accused of complicity with the Israeli authorities, and of producing normalisation of the occupation. Additionally, the ubiquity of international NGOs in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, particularly since the Oslo Accords, and especially following the end of the second intifada in 2005, has seen a change in the way civil society organisations operate, with an increase in the professionalization of Palestinian NGOs and bureaucratisation in line with the funding demands of international agencies.

²⁵ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p8

²⁶ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p26-7

²⁷ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p27-8

Just as space differs in Palestine dependent upon its classification into Area 'A', 'B', or 'C', its proximity to Israeli security apparatus such as the Separation Wall and settlements, and the local culture existing within each site, so too does theatre differ from site to site in relation to the space in which it is performed. Thus, although the overarching mechanisms of occupation, the international humanitarian regime and the Palestinian Authority exist as sovereigns within Palestinian space, so too are they in competition with local sovereigns. Palestinian theatre can serve to either complement these local sovereigns, visibly oppose them and attempt to produce an alternative local sovereignty, or it can subtly challenge local customs and traditions, whilst adhering to cultural sensitivities, particularly in the more conservative areas in Palestine. These categories, like the space itself, are not completely fixed, and there can be a blurring of boundaries between them. Theatre performances are accepted by the vast majority of Palestinians as an increasingly popular form of non-violent resistance when they criticise the external forces – the Israeli occupation and the international humanitarianism – and promote Palestinian self-determination. What appears to be less accepted are productions which seek to challenge firmly established cultural traditions, particularly in relation to gender. Theatre companies which seek to confront gender inequality and the deeply patriarchal structure of Palestinian society, particularly the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, have faced immense opposition, and even violence against theatre staff members as well as attacks on the theatre itself. Theatres with more localised origins, such as Ashtar in Ramallah and Al-Harah in Beit Jala, voice their criticisms of Palestinian society with more nuances, which is deemed more acceptable to the communities to which they perform.

It is not entirely possible to conclusively evaluate the efficacy of theatre productions as a form of cultural resistance, against both the external and the internal forces which they are opposing. This is because Palestinian theatre in its current professionalised form is still in an infant stage, and therefore is still developing its creative skills and competencies. Therefore, I am not attempting to propose conclusive statements regarding Palestinian theatre's effectiveness as a

form of cultural resistance, but rather to analyse how theatre as a cultural practices engages with and remonstrates the limitations of the space it operates within.

A Brief History of Palestinian Theatre as Non-Violent Resistance

As Hala Khamis Nassar has noted, there are immense difficulties in studying the history of Palestinian theatre, due to the lack of records available, as a result of the various wars and suppressions endured by the Palestinians. This is also true of the post-1967 period, and therefore it becomes severely problematic to locate Palestinian theatre within a framework of system of categorization through which to analyze local theatre activities or to grade the quality of the productions and scripts, as so few are extant. Nassar suggests that this is due to four primary reasons: firstly, the transience of theatre troupes, especially those created in the early and mid-1970s, whereby a troupe's inception was not a guarantee of its success or its longevity; secondly, of those troupes who did survive beyond the 1970s, theatre activities and public performances were stifled by the mid-1980s, as a result of the deteriorating conditions within the occupied Palestinian territories; thirdly, those practitioners involved in theatre activities faced substantial difficulties, and accordingly dissolved old troupes and re-started anew, were subjected to arrests and detention for their pursuits, or withdrew from these endeavours altogether; fourthly, the lacuna of published dramatic texts marks a severe shortage of valid primary resources from which to base our assertion on.²⁸ Despite this, and the absence of a plethora of scholarly work on Palestinian theatre, some conclusions can be drawn from the available material, particularly when based in its socio-cultural and political context.

Palestinian theatre has formed part of the non-violent resistance movement since the early twentieth century, and has continually been a response to external

²⁸ Khamis Nassar, H. (2007), 'Palestine', in *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, [Eds. Gabrielle H. Cody & Evert Sprinchorn; 2007], New York: Columbia University Press, 1029-1035, p1033

structural forces exerting control over Palestinian territory. Theatrical performance in various guises has existed in the Arab world, including Palestine, for centuries;²⁹ however it was during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries with an influx of European missionaries into Palestine that theatre in the Western sense became popularised. Additionally, there is evidence of cultural interactions occurring between Palestinians and Arab theatre troupes from neighbouring countries.³⁰ Although there is scarce data available, it can be said that theatre during the British Mandatory period (1920-1948) responded to the political events on the ground, and although faced major difficulties, such as the lack of suitable theatre venues, stifling censorship from the British authorities, and political instability resulting from increasing competition between Palestinians and Jewish settlers, developments were made within the creative and cultural fields of expression.³¹ Palestinian awareness of the transformation of the territory, and what this would mean for their desired political independence was profound, and resonated throughout society, reflected through new social institutions and cultural initiatives, including amateur theatre productions.³²

Theatrical productions during the Mandatory period occurred primarily within the major urban sites of Palestine, particularly Haifa, Jaffa and Jerusalem, albeit being mostly European translations, and performances confined to the immediate urban location.³³ Additionally, although the cultural scene saw the reappearance of the professional al-Hakawati (the storyteller), and the Arab theatrical traditions of the Shadow Plays (Khayal al-Zill) and Magic Box/Box of Wonders (Sunduq al-‘Ajab) storytelling convention, theatre in its Westernised form remained embryonic.³⁴ Despite the overwhelming cultural preference for Palestinian poetry to disseminate

²⁹ See for a detailed discussion on historical theatrical and semi-theatrical performance styles in the Arab world: Amine, K. (2006), ‘Theatre in the Arab World: A Difficult Birth’, *Theatre Research International*, 31:2, 145-162; Bell, J. (2005), ‘Islamic Performance and the Problem of Drama’, *TDR*, 49:4, 5-10; Carlson, M. (2003), ‘Theatre Festivals in the Arab World’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 13:4, 42-47

³⁰ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, Thesis (PhD), Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, p15-7

³¹ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, pp37-8

³² Khamis Nassar, H. (2007), ‘Palestine’, in *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, p1030

³³ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, p34

³⁴ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions* p20-1

national-political awareness and calls for resistance, Palestinian theatre did become increasingly politicised during the 1930's, although it was a minor voice compared to the plethora of poetry produced.³⁵ However, professional theatre troupes and works were only able to work within non-professional spaces, such as literary and other clubs, or educational institutions, and were limited to the larger urban spaces, such as Haifa, Jaffa and Jerusalem.³⁶

The dislocation of the Palestinian populace from their homeland during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and the creation of over 500,000 refugees who fled to neighbouring countries had a disastrous effect initially upon Palestinian cultural activities, especially for the first decade of exile. Theatre activities within the West Bank, particularly the refugee camps, were "almost totally absent",³⁷ and literary and intellectual outputs were "propagandistic third-rate literature published by mouthpieces of the oppressive regimes or writers, leaving the underground movement isolated and making it impossible to reach a significant audience."³⁸ The victory by Israel in the 1967 war led not only to a three-fold multiplication of territory now under Israeli control, but resulted in an internalised Palestinian nationalism, as Palestinians realised that the Arab world would not be able to defeat the Israelis, and therefore, a new period of enhanced self-reliance emerged from the ashes of the Pan-Arab dream. Palestinians living in Israel were physically and culturally reconciled with their brethren in the now Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip as the entire territory of Mandatory Palestine was reunited. The impact of this was so great, that Reuven Snir asserts that: "The erasure by Israel of the border between the two large segments of Palestinian people paradoxically proved to be the major stimulus for the revival of Palestinian culture in general and for the emergence of professional Palestinian theatre in particular".³⁹

³⁵ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, p33-4

³⁶ Khamis Nassar, H. (2007), 'Palestine', in *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, p1032

³⁷ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p56

³⁸ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, p40

³⁹ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p85

From 1967, Palestinian resistance consisted of both nonviolent and armed resistance against the Israeli occupation, which increased throughout the period up to the first Intifada in 1987, in particular in response to the expanding settlement network within the occupied Palestinian territories (oPts). Indeed, it can be said that “resistance grew and expanded in proportion to political marginalization, economic deprivation and attempts to impose a local pliant leadership on the Palestinians”.⁴⁰ Palestinian theatre in the period of 1967-1987 had a two-pronged objective: firstly, as part of the nonviolent resistance movement, to provide an avenue for Palestinian cultural expression as a display of nationalism in the face of Israeli oppression; secondly, to fill the void left by the retreated Egyptian and Jordanian governmental presence in the oPts. Particularly from the 1970s, amateur theatre within university settings appears to be greatly interlinked with the general cultural resistance movement. Palestinian universities in urban sites, such as Ramallah, East Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nablus, were all established around this time, became “hotbeds of activism” by all the different Palestinian factions, secular and Islamic.⁴¹ Despite the Israeli ‘Civil Administration’, Palestinian theatre, both amateur and professional, came to the fore, a successful medium utilized to resist the occupation and retain Palestinian culture.⁴² Amateur troupes existed throughout the major Palestinian urban sites and also in the refugee camps, influenced by the political circumstances in which they existed, and producing popular plays with a “revolutionary orientation”.⁴³ Although other Palestinian cities in the West Bank became increasingly important for theatrical activities, in particular Ramallah, East Jerusalem remained the “undisputed capital of Palestinian culture”.⁴⁴

The 1970’s heralded a significant era in the development of professional Palestinian theatre, with the complete convergence of theatre for the dual-purpose of cultural resistance and nation-building. Although theatre troupes faced severe obstacles

⁴⁰ Qumsiyeh, M. B. (2011), *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, p122

⁴¹ Qumsiyeh, M. B. (2011), *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, p120-1

⁴² Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, p84

⁴³ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, p80

⁴⁴ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p87; 103; Khamis Nasser, H. (2007), ‘Palestine’, in: *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, p1033

from the Israeli authorities, including censorship on performance content and constraints on performing in the oPts due to the perceived possibility of threatening state security, internal issues also arose within Palestinian society, such as a marked lack of popular knowledge of and interest in theatre, and economic and social disquiet.⁴⁵ Despite these problems, the theatrical work undertaken by Palestinian theatre troupes during this period helped increase awareness of the potential for theatre as an instrument of empowerment and consciousness-raising regarding Palestinian liberation, and achieved more support from the late 1970's onwards.⁴⁶ This in particular was accomplished by "embracing cultural hybridity, using patchwork as a strategy for survival", whereby Palestinian theatre intertwined theatrical practices and traditions from both the West and the Arab world.⁴⁷ This "cultural hybridity" commencing from the professionalization of Palestinian theatre, has been utilised in order to "claim lost territories and space, to reconstruct the historic memory of their homeland, and to construct a vision of their future community."⁴⁸

The troupe most credited for this renaissance in popular performance is al-Balalin (The Balloons), the precursor to the eminent al-Hakawati theatre, based in East Jerusalem. Building on the success of its inaugural performance in 1972, al-Balalin achieved popularity through reconfiguring the methods through which theatre was delivered, with a focus on using *'ammiyya*, the local Palestinian dialect as opposed to the formal and literary *fousha*. Through "canonizing the colloquial" and reinvigorating the traditional *hakawati* (storyteller), al-Balalin managed to connect with their local audience and reveal the potency of theatre's potential to serve as a tool for cultural resistance.⁴⁹ The re-forming of al-Balalin as al-Hakawati theatre in 1977 "marked an eminent phase in the professionalization of Palestinian theatre"⁵⁰ and the affirmation of the link between organised cultural expressions and nation-formation. Indeed, it has been alleged that the work of al-Hakawati "contributed

⁴⁵ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p95

⁴⁶ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p95; 102-3

⁴⁷ Khamis Nasser, H. (2006) 'Stories from under Occupation', p16-17; 18

⁴⁸ Khamis Nasser, H. (2006) 'Stories from under Occupation', p20

⁴⁹ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p106-7

⁵⁰ Khamis Nasser, H. (2007), 'Palestine', in: *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, p1033

perhaps more than any other cultural activity in the Occupied Territories, to the forming of a Palestinian political and cultural national consciousness and to the process of Palestinian nation-building.”⁵¹

The professionalization process begun in the 1970s and continuing throughout the 1980’s enabled the developing Palestinian theatre movement to incorporate itself within the non-violent and civil resistance of the first intifada, in spite of the increasingly difficult conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities in which it found itself. Indeed, the intertwining of political awareness and cultural resistance can be seen from the visionary al-Hakawati play *Alf Layla w-Layla min Layali Rami al-Hijara* (1001 Nights of the Nights of a Stone-Thrower; 1982), which “predicted the *intifada* long before it actually broke out”.⁵² Within this highly satirical production, the violent encounters between young stone-throwing Palestinian males and the inefficient yet proud Israeli military, depicting how the occupation serves to persecute and demean Palestinians.⁵³ The eventual Palestinian victory over their oppressors signifies a fervent desire for national liberation, articulated through the premise that theatrical activities could form part of this achievement. Indeed, it has been suggested that this play as part of the Palestinian cultural and literary canon contributed to the mythologizing of ‘*Atfal al-Hijara*, the brave youth fighting the heavily armed Israeli military with stones.’⁵⁴

The intifada at first stifled Palestinian creative enterprises, especially for al-Hakawati, as East Jerusalem was isolated from the oPts through the Israeli imposition of curfews and roadblocks stymying audiences from the oPts from entering East Jerusalem.⁵⁵ However, the theatricality and performative nature of the intifada itself, with numerous street demonstrations, “the spread of a popular verbal culture” including performances of songs and stories,⁵⁶ rendered theatrical practices within theatre buildings somewhat redundant when contrasted to the

⁵¹ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p130

⁵² Urian, D. (1995), ‘Theatre and the Intifada’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 3:2, 207-220, p214

⁵³ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p151-3

⁵⁴ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p157

⁵⁵ Khamis Nasser, H. (2007), ‘Palestine’, in: *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, p1034

⁵⁶ Urian, D. (1995), ‘Theatre and the Intifada’, p214

activities occurring on the ground. As Snir articulates, in relation to the reality of the intifada, “the artistic framework seemed to be slight indeed in the face of the demonstrations of the masses, the stone throwers, the dozens of Palestinian killed and wounded and the thousands in prison.”⁵⁷ As the intifada progressed, Palestinian theatre makers, especially al-Hakatwati, who had disbanded and reformed as *al-Masrah al-Watani al-Filistini* (The Palestinian National Theatre), utilised the space of al-Hakawati theatre building by hosting politically-inspired events, including theatrical productions by amateur and professional troupes, in addition to other cultural performances.⁵⁸

Dan Urian has suggested that theatre during the intifada years constituted little more than “a propaganda tool” in order to depict “the political views of the [Palestinian] collective and the injustice or errors of those who object to their views.”⁵⁹ Indeed, in Urian’s opinion, Palestinian theatre at this time was consisted of pieces which were “short, direct and ‘open’, lacking any full dramatic design.”⁶⁰ However, this has been disputed by Palestinian theatre practitioners active at the time, such as Francois Abu Salem of al-Hakawati, who countered this assertion with: “We are not propagandists, we merely stress the contradictions in our situation”.⁶¹ Indeed, as Susan Slyomovics stated:

Much of Palestinian theatre production in Israel and the Occupied Territories confirms the daily experiences and observations of audiences: boundaries blur between performance onstage and the street theatre of the intifada. Both theatre and everyday life during the intifada are fragmented, open ended, works-in-progress deeply rooted

⁵⁷ Snir, R. (1995), ‘Palestinian Theatre: Historical Development and Contemporary Distinctive Identity’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 3:2, 29-73, p48

⁵⁸ Khamis Nasser, H. (2007), ‘Palestine’, in: *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, p1034

⁵⁹ Urian, D. (1995), ‘Theatre and the Intifada’, p214

⁶⁰ Urian, D. (1995), ‘Theatre and the Intifada’, p219

⁶¹ Quoted in: Slyomovics, S. (1991), “‘To Put One’s Fingers in the Bleeding Wound’: Palestinian Theatre Under Israeli Censorship”, *TDR*, 35:2, 18-38, p31

in the stone-filled landscape and the topography of such local sites as the city of Jerusalem.⁶²

As a result, it seems somewhat disingenuous to distinguish between the highly politically charged atmosphere of the intifada years, and the cultural representation of it. The upheavals and repressive measures of the first intifada at first greatly disrupted theatre practices in East Jerusalem and the oPts, before theatre practitioners' adaptations to the situation resulted in a blossoming of politically-aware and educational theatre activities which responded to the political environment in which it found itself located.

The signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, allegedly to remove the Israeli occupation from the oPts and result in the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, led to the reorganisation of the oPts, which Neve Gordon depicts thus: "transfer all responsibilities (but not all authority) relating to the management of the population to the Palestinians themselves while preserving control of Palestinian space."⁶³ The territory of the West Bank was reconfigured into three separate areas, which eventually as a result of numerous modifications, was divided as follows: Area 'A' was comprised of 17.2% of the West Bank, formed of eleven different 'clusters', whilst Area 'B' was 23.8% and 120 'clusters' whereas Area 'C' formed a single block over 59% of the land.⁶⁴ Israel introduced policies of internal closures, enforced through military checkpoints, within the spaces of the West Bank, thereby regulating Palestinian movement between these different clusters, to Israel proper and between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in addition to external travel.⁶⁵ Israel's shift from a 'Principle of Colonization' to the 'Principle of Separation' (see theoretical chapter for further details) and the burgeoning of international non-governmental organisations resulted in a concomitant rearrangement in theatrical practices.

⁶² Slyomovics, S. (1991), "To Put One's Fingers in the Bleeding Wound", p20

⁶³ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p173

⁶⁴ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p178

⁶⁵ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p179-180

As the proliferation of international and Palestinian NGOs increased during the 1990's and beyond changed the organising principles of civil society institutions to reflect the values of their external funding agencies, so too did Palestinian theatre companies as part of this movement adapt to meet the socio-political changes in the oPts. This can be seen through the focus on children's theatre during this period, as numerous theatre festivals, including puppet theatre, for children thrived, especially in the West Bank urban centres of Ramallah, Bethlehem and Nablus, in addition to East Jerusalem.⁶⁶ It could be suggested from this shift away from the highly politicised theatre being produced during the 1970's and 80's to the arguably more depoliticised children's theatre, fits into the rationale of the 'apolitical' humanitarian regime which has been operating in Palestine following the Oslo Accords.

Although professional theatre during the 1990's remained centred in East Jerusalem, a number of companies, including Theatre Day Productions and Ashtar theatres expanded their activities by establishing a second branch in Ramallah, the de facto 'capital' of the West Bank, in order to access a wider Palestinian audience dislocated from Jerusalem.⁶⁷ However, during this period, professional theatres also began to come into existence in the West Bank, such as in Bethlehem (al-Harah), Jenin (The Stone Theatre, precursor to The Freedom Theatre), and Ramallah (al-Kasaba and 'Ashtar). Theatre with and for children increased in popularity, with theatres specifically for young people emerging in Bethlehem and Beit Jala (al-Rowwad in 'Aida Camp, 'Inad, with the founding members of al-Harah Theatre, in Beit Jala), and Hebron (Theatre Day Productions; also present in Gaza City). However, as a result of the permit regime and closures, theatre companies found numerous obstacles in their attempts to perform outside their local environs, reflecting the fragmentation and isolation of Palestinian cities and places from each other due to the Oslo Accords.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Snir, R. (2005), *Palestinian Theatre*, p170

⁶⁷ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories from under Occupation', p19

⁶⁸ *ibid*

The outbreak of the second intifada in 2000 led to Israeli military reinvasion of the oPts, and intense armed conflict, with both Israelis and Palestinians committing atrocities in the other's civilian spaces. Palestinian suicide bombing and Israel's 'Operation Defensive Shield' caused mass fatalities and immense suffering, particularly during 2002. Palestinians in the oPts were subjected to blanket curfews, airforce and tank assaults, prolonged containment with movement between spaces prohibited, and a destruction of infrastructure and the means of existence.⁶⁹ The construction of the 'Separation Wall' commenced in 2002, physically separating West Bank Palestinians from East Jerusalem and Israel proper. As with the first intifada, theatre activities were at first halted due to the violence, but slowly began to respond once more to their changing environment. However, due to the unstable political environment and frequent episodes of military brutality, in addition to the emergency humanitarian regime implemented by international NGOs, the focus was directed onto alleviating the suffering of Palestinians, in particular children.

Theatre productions in Palestine during the second intifada primarily became that of testimony and portraying the Palestinian narrative of their experiences to an international audience. Performances were devised based on everyday occurrences of living within a violent conflict zone and undergoing trauma. Professional theatre productions created for a globalised audience, such as al-Kasaba's *Qusus Tahat al-Ihtilaal* (*Alive From Palestine: Stories Under Occupation*; Ramallah; 2001), al-Rowwad's *Ehna Awlad al-Mukhayyam* (*We Are the Children of the Camp*; Aida Camp, Bethlehem, 2000) and 'Inad's *Hata Emta?* (*Until When?*, Beit Jala, 2002) all focus on the Palestinian plight of living under siege, using personal narratives to express to foreign audiences their experiences and trauma, with the intention of raising awareness and encouraging support from the international community.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p203-4

⁷⁰ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories from under Occupation', p37; Interviews with George Ibrahim (16th June 2012); Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012); and Marina Barham (10th January 2012).

Within the West Bank itself, despite the stringent travel restrictions placed upon Palestinians, theatre practitioners endeavoured to reach their young audiences to provide them with a brief respite from the conflict, and the opportunity to process their emotions through dramatic means. Due to the policy of confinement, Palestinian theatre-makers tended to remain focused on their local areas due to issues of accessibility; however theatre for trauma relief for children and Boalian Theatre of the Oppressed became prominent theatre practices during the second intifada out of necessity.⁷¹ Despite the intention of creating a 'safe space' for children, the theatre buildings and performance spaces themselves were not excluded from Israeli 'urbicidal' policies, whether by accident or on purpose as part of the destruction of the city. 'Inad Theatre in Beit Jala, located in close proximity to the Gilo settlement, found itself forced to evacuate and find alternative rehearsal spaces due to the frequent air assaults on Beit Jala.⁷² Likewise, al-Rowwad in 'Aida Camp found itself forced to transform its space into an emergency medical centre and community care hub during the worst of the violence in 2002.⁷³

The Israeli 'urbicidal' policies in the West Bank in 2002 also involved the attempted destruction of cultural centres and spaces for performances, including al-Kasaba Theatre in Ramallah⁷⁴ and the Stone Theatre in Jenin, which was bulldozed by the Israeli military.⁷⁵ Despite these tremendous obstacles, Palestinian theatre practitioners have persevered in their endeavour to create high-quality, entertaining and socially relevant theatre to serve the needs of their people. As George Ibrahim of al-Kasaba theatre states, theatre in Palestine exists "to enrich our cultural life... and to create the cultural infrastructure [as] it is the only weapon we have to oppose the occupation."⁷⁶ Marina Barham has asserted that during – and because of – the second intifada, "there was a cultural revolution. Palestinians started believing that using art and culture is a way to inform the people in the

⁷¹ Interviews with Marina Barham (10th January 2012) and Iman Aoun (27th October 2012).

⁷² Interview with Marina Barham (10th January 2012).

⁷³ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

⁷⁴ Laïdi-Hanieh, A. (2006), 'Arts, Identity, and Survival: Building Cultural Practices In Palestine', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 35: 4, 28-43, p38

⁷⁵ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism: Thinking the Political Anew*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, p44

⁷⁶ Interview with George Ibrahim (16th June 2012).

world about what is happening in Palestine, so it was becoming a way of resisting the occupation, and resisting the different oppressive ways that the Israelis were using against the Palestinians during the second intifada by using theatre, arts, music, [and] dance.”⁷⁷

Indeed, it has been said that “performance changes the nature of occupation by placing ‘suffering in the land’ in a Palestinian theatrical framework. The storyteller, through comedy, children’s puppet theatre, and traditional epic singing, takes command of a state of affairs he is powerless to alter.”⁷⁸ The continued conventions of Arabic storytelling, performed to both local and international audiences within Palestine and on the global stage, contribute to the deepening and perpetuation of cultural resistance, one of the few weapons which Palestinians possess whilst living under prolonged and seemingly unending military occupation. Palestinian theatre practices respond to their spatial conditions, and it is through these cultural rejoinders that awareness of the ‘spacio-cidal’ policies are raised and attempts to counter them made.

Methodology

Prior to commencing my fieldwork, I undertook a year of intensive Arabic language study, both formal and colloquial. I developed my language skills as a graduate student at the University of Manchester, and additionally took Arabic language courses whilst living in the Middle East to improve my proficiency. These language skills enabled me to understand the Palestinian plays under consideration in much greater depth, and to converse with numerous Palestinians during the course of my fieldwork. Therefore, although the theatrical productions were performed in Arabic, I was able to comprehend them, and obtain a greater appreciation of them, in addition to gaining a more inclusive ethnographic experience. In order to test my

⁷⁷ Interview with Marina Barham (10th January 2012).

⁷⁸ Slyomovics, S. (1991), “To Put One’s Fingers in the Bleeding Wound”, p24

hypothesis regarding Palestinian theatre production as an attempt to forge a creative space within a militarised occupied territory, I spent around eleven months living in East Jerusalem and conducting in-depth studies with a number of professional and amateur theatre and performance companies in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Palestinian theatre initiatives exist within key urban sites within the West Bank and East Jerusalem, within spaces which have borne the brunt of Israeli military and 'post-urbicidal' activities since 1967, but especially since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000. Although I focus on the temporal and spatial present (2011-12), in order to fully understand how the space of the West Bank has been reconfigured, it is necessary to be aware of the changes which have occurred within it.

In particular, as a researcher engaging in fieldwork, I needed to be fully aware that this space and that within it was not fixed; it was subject to change, both physically, such as house demolitions, 'flying' checkpoints, further settlement construction, but also socially and symbolically, as Palestinians (and the Israeli military) actively engage with the socio-political conditions around them. Therefore, as this particular area is frequently volatile in terms of political unrest, where demonstrations and other forms of civil resistance, and the suppression of these by the Israeli military, are frequent, it would be incorrect to say that this space is solidified or consolidated; rather, like the process of 'urbicide' and the 'politics of verticality', cultural resistance within this space too is shifting, transforming and mobilising.

In order to study these phenomenon as they occurred 'in the field' during my research period, I conducted an ethnographic study of theatre practitioners and practices within the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Ethnography can be defined as "a formation of study aimed at understanding and explaining the cultural context of lived experience", whereby the ethnographer strives "to listen deeply to and/or to observe as closely as possible the beliefs, the values, the material conditions and structural forces that underwrite the socially patterned behaviors of all human

beings and the meanings people attach to these conditions and forces.”⁷⁹ For Paul Willis, ethnography comprises of the interlinking and making sense of three forces: “creative meaning-making in sensuous practices; the forms, i.e. what the symbolic resources used for meaning-making are and how they are used; the social, i.e. the formed and forming relation to the main structural relations, necessities and conflicts of society.”⁸⁰ Zureik takes this one step further and suggests that the focus of ethnography as a result of these forces is that the ethnographer seeks to understand and explain the “creative use (implicitly and explicitly) of a symbolic and material repertoire to comprehend and decode the world, cope with it, and understand it as a creative endeavor”.⁸¹ Therefore, not only is society created from a series of creative efforts and interactions, but it is the intertwined relationships between individuals, communities and their environments which produce meanings through symbols and codes which are then enforced through social practices.

My aim as an ethnographic researcher was to explore these relationships between people and the space they inhabit through the lens of creative performance, namely through theatre. Theatre as a medium for expressing culture and beliefs through the enactment of symbolic representations shared by a given audience embodies the space in which it is performed, reacting and engaging with both the actual performance space, and the wider geopolitical space which serves to contextualize the performance. Although I do not intend to anthropomorphize theatre into a ‘living, breathing thing’, I would suggest that the nature of theatre, the deep involvement of those who participate within the theatrical process, from the actors, directors, producers, to the audience, in combination with the strongly-felt convictions of nationalist sentiment often expressed within Palestinian theatre, could be said to result in an intermingling of the collective sense of ‘being’ Palestinian with the actual form of expressing it. Thus, through the utilization of theatre as a form of resistance, the emotional investment incorporated into the act

⁷⁹ Forsey, M. G. (2010), ‘Ethnography as Participant Listening’, *Ethnography*, 11:4, 558–572, p567

⁸⁰ Cited in: Zureik, E. (2003), ‘Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Palestinian Society’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23:1&2, 152-162, p153

⁸¹ Zureik, E. (2003), ‘Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Palestinian Society’, p153

itself means that the desires, dreams and principles articulated through the act of theatre cannot be divorced from those who are performing it. This is particularly true given the theatrical content, which is often focused on the Palestinian predicament of suffering under occupation.

I complemented my observation of performance and rehearsal processes with interviews conducted with a number of Palestinian and international theatre practitioners and funders, including those who engage in professional and amateur theatre activities. I interviewed thirteen Palestinian theatre practitioners from all the major Palestinian theatre companies in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, five internationals working with these theatres, and two representatives of international humanitarian agencies providing funding to the theatres. I found that the Palestinian theatre practitioners were incredibly hospitable and enthusiastic about my research project, and showed willingness to be interviewed about their activities. During the interviews, it was mentioned by nearly all the desire for internationals – including researchers such as myself – to promote the existence of cultural activities and resistance in Palestine, to make visible theatre practices to as wide an audience as possible. This could have been said out of self-interest, for by raising the profile of the theatres, so too could the workload increase; however, it appeared that it was more from a deep-held belief in the potential for theatre practices to empower Palestinians, and that disseminating knowledge of Palestinian suffering to a global audience would highlight and create awareness of the Palestinian situation under Israeli occupation.

On the other hand, I found it difficult to obtain interviews from international humanitarian organisations operating in the West Bank, especially if they were funders rather than having an ‘on-the-ground’ presence in Palestine itself. This is reflected in the relative scarcity of interviews conducted with representatives from these institutions, relative to the requests made to the numerous organisations. It could be surmised from this that the humanitarian organisations did not perceive any benefit from engaging in my research, either at a personal level from the representatives, or from the institution as a whole. Similarly, given numerous

recent academic articles criticizing the international humanitarian regime, as discussed in my chapter on international involvement in Palestinian theatre practices, it might have been seen as more advantageous to not engage with researchers, out of concern for any potential negative repercussions from critical analysis of the international humanitarian regime. Of course, time constraints and workloads could also account for a lack of take-up from potential interviewees from INGOs.

It was necessary for me to be aware not only of my own identity status in regards to the research process, but also the very effects of my presence upon the ethnographic fieldwork process as a Caucasian, Western, British female in her late 20's. As Erica Townsend-Bell notes, the physical and social attributes of the fieldworker is of immense importance to the conducting of fieldwork itself, as well as the results obtained through it. Basing her claims on intersectionality theory, whereby our physical identity, based on our race, ethnicity and sex, and social identity, based on our nationality, gender, politics *et cetera*, has a pivotal role to play within the fieldwork setting, and therefore "should be a central focus of both fieldwork preparation, and analysis and interpretation of the research."⁸² As a white female (and feminist) Western researcher from a liberal democratic, peaceful and relatively non-oppressed background, the cultural differences between both myself and the mainstream Israeli and Palestinian perspectives and experiences may have initially hindered my research process, and I needed to become suitably acclimatized to the realities 'on the ground'. It is also likely that my worldview influenced how I perceive the data collected and interpretations of it.⁸³

This may not in itself be problematic, for as Marshall Thompson says, "the research process will not suffer if investigators appreciated the relationships between not only value orientations and research questions, but also between value orientations

⁸² Townsend-Bell, E. (2009), 'Being True and Being You: Race, Gender, Class, and the Fieldwork Experience', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 42:2, 311-314, p311

⁸³ Townsend-Bell, E. (2009), 'Being True and Being You: Race, Gender, Class, and the Fieldwork Experience', p311-2

and the investigator's standpoint".⁸⁴ Israel and Palestine are such politically charged and divided atmospheres, where, in my experience, should you deviate from the expected norms of expressing absolute sympathy for whichever 'side' you are encountering, you are automatically 'against' them. This was not always the case, and there are a number of nuanced perspectives within, amongst and between Israelis and Palestinians, but there also exists a sense of there being a zero-sum game, whereby an utterance of sympathy or empathy for one side is decried as an attack on the other.

Oren Yiftachel states that "critical scholarship should not be content with a mere description: it should expose the sites of abuse and exploration, delineate the practices of marginalization, and sketch paths for liberation and justice. In a deep sense, then, critical theories must be political."⁸⁵ It cannot be disputed that the theories I am using of 'urbicide' and the 'politics of verticality' are inherently political, for they are extremely critical of Israeli military policy within the post-1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories. Within this dissertation I am not intending to delegitimise the existence of the state of Israel; instead, I aim to engage in critical, reflexive ethnography where I attempt to understand the social and cultural processes of Palestinian theatre as resistance without unwittingly participating in some kind of Orientalist representation of the 'Other', or alternatively, as developing a stance which evokes political activism. This thesis is not intended to be a call to action; instead, I am attempting to provide an in-depth examination of the key issues and themes which were displayed during the productions analysed. A further aspect to consider is that my fieldwork was conducted within a conflict zone, and that my research may have produced problems for my interviewees and other research subjects. Thankfully, at the time of writing, it appears that no negative impacts have been imparted upon any of the people with whom I interacted. Although hostilities were at the time manageable, and did not present unbearable levels of risk to my person, there was the possibility that another

⁸⁴ Thompson, M. (2009), 'Research, Identities, and Praxis: The Tensions of Integrating Identity into the Field Experience', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 42:2, 325-328, p325

⁸⁵ Yiftachel, O. (2003), 'Relocating "the Critical": Reflections from Israel/Palestine', *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space*, 21:2, 137-42, p139

intifada may have arisen, or that the recent Arab uprisings in neighbouring countries and further afield may incite and ignite existing tensions in the area. As Zureik states rather bluntly, but accurately, “To study the Palestinians is basically to study a society in conflict and transition”.⁸⁶

I engaged in that which Danny Hoffman terms as “frontline research”, which can be defined as “scholarship that takes as its subject what occurs within zones of violent conflict” and a place in which the researcher becomes embedded in “a crucial position to bear witness to the complex dynamics of that space.”⁸⁷ It can be said that the research process of “understanding resistance and counter-hegemony is not only a function of decoding and deconstructing the discourse of the powerful; it is also linked to revealing ‘unrecorded’ histories as experienced by the less powerful, those in whose name intellectuals and governments speak.”⁸⁸ The virtual lacuna of academic research on Palestinian theatre – both historical and contemporary - not only displays the insistence on chronicling the political events almost within a vacuum by which displays of culture are omitted, or if referenced is in relation to the culture of Islamism or from within political discourses. This is not to say that this theatre is not worthy of intellectual pursuit by academics interested in Palestine, but rather that there are ‘greater’ concerns to be had, involving national leaders and key players. This insistence upon ‘harder’ social science knowledge not only undermines the work undertaken by these theatre troupes, but ignores the key role theatre has played in the cultural expression of Palestinian nationalism and its use as an agent for nation-building, particularly following the 1967 War. This dismissal of a rich and vibrant cultural scene of the Palestinian theatre movement provides great scope for potential research into the multiple ways identity and national desires are formed and performed with an occupied space. Thus, not only does my research seek to give voice to an oppressed people, it also aims to present the actions of grassroots activists and community leaders

⁸⁶ Zureik, E. (2003), ‘Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Palestinian Society’, p152

⁸⁷ Hoffman, D. (2003), ‘Frontline anthropology: Research in a time of war’, *Anthropology Today*, 19:3, 9-12, p9-10

⁸⁸ Zureik, E. (2003), ‘Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Palestinian Society’, p154

who play an increasingly important role in shaping their local and national culture. This in itself makes it a worthy topic for current and future research.

Chapter Outlines

This thesis has been structured thematically, in order to explore the different ways in which theatre practices are intertwined with their spatial contexts. In the following chapter, I introduce the theoretical perspectives which act as the lens through which I analyse Palestinian theatrical performances. I explain the relevance of Sari Hanafi's 'spacio-cide', which encompasses the reciprocally interdependent concepts of Neve Gordon's Principles of Colonization and Separation, and Giorgio Agamben's 'state of exception', which provide the overarching theoretical framework for this dissertation. I additionally draw upon Eyal Weizman's concept of the 'Politics of Verticality' and 'Elastic Geographies', in order to depict the flexibility of borders and the encroachment on Palestinian space perpetrated by the Israelis. I state that the space of the West Bank has taken on a theatrical state of being as a result of the Israeli configuration of territory post-1967, as the settlements and surveillance apparatuses create the sense of a ready-made theatrical set under which Palestinian actions are scrutinised. I furthermore contend that Palestinian theatre productions are imbued with the 'Idea of Equality', as espoused by Maurya Wickstrom and based upon Alain Badiou's conceptualisation of the body, which seeks an active transformation of the space of the stage into one of justice and national liberation as a rehearsal for the future Palestinian state. I link these ideas to Palestinian theatre as a form of cultural resistance, arguing that theatre practices are moulded from and respond to the geopolitical and spatial conditions in which they exist. Moreover, they exist with multiple objectives, namely to resist the Israeli occupation; to empower their participants and audience; and to draw international attention to the Palestinian plight. However, I acknowledge in line with James Thompson's revisioning of Michel de Certeau's concepts of 'strategy' and 'tactics' that theatre practices do not have the ability to reshape the structural powers operating in Palestine and therefore must engage in resistance at the tactical level.

In Chapter Three, I examine how international intervention in Palestine affects theatre practices, particularly within the non-refugee urban area 'A's. I begin by analysing the neoliberal humanitarian doctrine which has arisen from the Oslo Accords, in addition to the reconfiguration of West Bank territory. I contend that as Israel has reneged upon its responsibility to the Palestinian population, so too has the PA 'outsourced' its obligations to promote and produce cultural activities to the INGOs. I then argue that Palestinian theatre companies comprise part of the professional NGOs who rely upon external funding to continue their activities and are thus constrained by donor demands and funding prerequisites. I analyse one Palestinian cultural response to the humanitarian doctrine through a performance of *Beit Yasmin*. I then investigate how the prominent issue of gender equality becomes problematized through Palestinian theatre practices, especially involving amateur youth groups in Hebron. I move onto discussing joint partnership initiatives in Palestine, examining three plays which depict the contentions arising from cultural misunderstandings and power disparities between international and indigenous theatre troupes. However, I also suggest that these obstacles can be overcome through my third example, *48 Minutes for Palestine*.

In Chapter Four, I examine theatre practices at Al-Rowwad theatre in 'Aida refugee Camp, Bethlehem. I begin with an in-depth analysis of Giorgio Agamben's theoretical understanding of the 'state of exception'. I further this through using Sari Hanafi and Adam Ramadan's conceptualisation of the refugee camps as containing multiple actors, each competing for power. I then argue that theatre in a 'state of exception' produces an exceptional space in which theatre practices can be performed. Following this, I scrutinise Al-Rowwad's ideology and activities, including two of their productions, in particular the concept of 'Beautiful Resistance' in relation to the 'Idea of Equality'. Furthermore, I consider the problematic use of children as tools for promoting the Palestinian cause. I argue that the director of Al-Rowwad, Abdelfattah Abu Srou, becomes a local sovereign within the space of the theatre, who directs children to perform a nationalist narrative reminiscent of the revolutionary post-1967 movement, in direct

opposition to the 'theatre for development' produced by theatres in the main urban sites.

In Chapter Five, I continue my examination of theatrical activities within the space of the refugee camp by focusing on the Freedom Theatre in Jenin camp. I highlight the spatial repercussions of living in an exceptional place such as Jenin, before turning my attention to theatre practices. I explore the Freedom Theatre's motif of creating a cultural intifada, through generating cultural resistance. I argue that the exceptional space of the theatre produces alternative local sovereigns of a more democratic and egalitarian nature than that of Al-Rowwad. I then examine the insecurity of the Freedom Theatre in relation to the desire to develop a 'safe' space for theatrical pursuits. Following this, I analyse the work of the Freedom Bus, an offshoot project of the Freedom Theatre, which performs Playback theatre within sites of extreme contention, primarily in Area 'C'. I examine the ideology and objectives of this initiative as an attempt to engage strategically with the structural force of the occupation, within a 'frontier zone' of extreme volatility and the constant potential for violence. I conclude with an examination of whether the sole focus on political circumstances actually serves to stifle Palestinian cultural production.

Chapter 2: Theories of Space and Theatrical Practices in Palestine

Introduction

As noted in the introductory chapter, the Israeli-Palestinian territorial conflict occurs in 3D. According to Eyal Weizman, the division of the West Bank space through “massive infrastructural systems, drawing provisional borders through sovereign three-dimensional spaces” has created a “hollow land”, which attempts to segregate Israelis and Palestinians through the manipulation of territory.⁸⁹ Theatre, itself a multi-dimensional space, can be considered to be an ideal medium through which to represent and negotiate these spatial configurations; to investigate how the three layers of the physical environment (underground, surface and air) interact with a particular location, and how those people within this site respond culturally, as shown through the dramatic performance. This study analyses how theatre responds to the changing landscape and spatial configuration of and within the West Bank, both in relation to the Israeli occupation and methods of control over this territory and the population contained within it. It specifically refers to analyses of performances conducted within key sites in the West Bank during 2011-12. In this chapter, I provide a detailed discussion of the key theoretical perspectives which provide the critical framework for the analytical chapters in this thesis. Primarily, I draw upon the spatial theories of ‘spacio-cide’, the intentional annihilation of Palestinian space in the West Bank, alongside with the complementary concepts of the ‘Matrix of Control’ regarding the regulation of space, the ‘Hollow Land’ created in the West Bank through Israeli mechanisms of configuring the territory, including ‘Elastic Geographies’ and the ‘Politics of Verticality’. Additionally, I apply this theoretical framework to theatrical practices within the West Bank, including the notions of ‘fixed’ and ‘elasticated’ set design. I conclude with an examination of theories of theatrical practices within a context of conflict, including an analysis of theatre as a ‘strategy’ of resistance in relation to

⁸⁹ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p15

the 'tactical', and how theatre is a potential medium for creating the 'Idea of Equality' upon the stage, which could be transposed into reality.

The space of the West Bank is not a monolithic one, for it has multiple and complex categorisations imposed upon it by the Israeli administration. This was actualised through the implementation of the Oslo Accords (1993 and 1995), which physically segregated the West Bank into numerous spatial categories, including Areas 'A', 'B', and 'C', as explained in the introduction. Although a number of academics have attempted to theorise the West Bank as a space, it has proven difficult to locate a single theory which encapsulates the entirety of the reality of the lived space, due to the differences in Palestinians experiences which I observed during my fieldwork in 2011-12, in addition to a preliminary period over the summer of 2008 which I spent living in Palestine (Bethlehem). The multitude of spaces cannot be defined within a single theory, for the daily realities of Palestinians are dependent upon the classification of the space in which they reside. As a result, the theory which I shall use is that of Sari Hanafi's 'spacio-cide', which brings together a number of relevant theories, including Neve Gordon's structural analysis of the modifications in the Israeli occupation based upon the work of Michel Foucault, in particular his concepts of 'bio-power' and 'sovereign power', applied to the Palestinian situation. Although 'spacio-cide' does not capture the entirety of the situation which I perceived during my period of fieldwork, it is one of the more useful theories based upon its utilization of pertinent theories.

Hanafi additionally draws upon Giorgio Agamben's notion of the 'state of exception', notably the infliction of 'bare life' upon the Palestinian population of the West Bank. Furthermore, Hanafi also utilizes Martin Coward's concept of 'urbicide', and mentions Eyal Weizman's 'Politics of Verticality'. Therefore, although I shall apply Hanafi's concept of 'spacio-cide' to examine the territorial configurations within the West Bank, I use it cautiously, and with reservations regarding its applicability as an all-encompassing theory to describe the entirety of this multi-faceted and complex space. This is not to attempt to delegitimise this theory, but rather to put forward the notion that each locale in Palestine is

distinctive, and therefore that the different components of 'spacio-cide' are more relevant to certain spaces, dependent on their Israeli-enforced administrative classification, in addition to the cultural significance of these spaces as conceived of by Palestinians. For example, as I shall explore in Chapters 4 and 5, the refugee camps within the urban spaces of Bethlehem or Jenin are conceptualised differently to those of downtown Ramallah. These codifications also impact upon Israeli military presence and confrontations between Palestinians and Jewish-Israeli settlers, for rural areas in close proximity to the Separation Wall and/or Jewish-Israeli settlements are considered to be 'sites of extreme contention' with frequent uprisings and visible resistance from local residents; on the contrary, Palestinian urban Area 'A's since the dissolving of the second intifada, are – with the exception of night raids by the Israeli military to arrest Palestinians suspected of being a security threat – void of a permanent Israeli military presence. In addition to the use of 'spacio-cide', I utilize Jeff Halper's concept of the 'Matrix of Control' to examine the military infrastructure of checkpoints and restrictions upon Palestinian movement, to further explain the spatial realities in the West Bank. Although Hanafi does mention these phenomena within his research, he does so in relation to Neve Gordon, rather than Halper himself, despite Gordon's alluding to Halper's work.⁹⁰ Direct reference to Halper's 'Matrix of Control' is a useful tool for analysing Palestinian space in the post-second intifada period.

At the commencement of my research, I was drawn to the theory of 'urbicide' as espoused by Martin Coward and Stephen Graham, it is my belief based upon my fieldwork that although this theory was especially applicable during the violent extremes of the second intifada (2000-05), it was no longer illustrative of the situation at the time of research in Area 'A's. Arguably, the West Bank is experiencing a 'post-urbicidal' situation, whereby the mechanisms of 'urbicide' have moved away from urban areas into these 'sites of extreme contention', those which are perceived by the Israelis as being especially pertinent to issues of national security, and which are located primarily in Area 'C'. Area 'A's – the

⁹⁰ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory', p197; Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p179

populated urban centres – are experiencing different spatial configurations, primarily the imposition of the international humanitarian regime, in order to enforce neoliberal economic and social ‘development’, in addition to a professionalization of Palestinian NGOs in collaboration with international NGOs, which serves to ‘normalise’ the occupation and divert attention from the overarching structural force of the Israeli occupation.

Based upon these theoretical underpinnings, this thesis focuses on the geopolitical situation in the West Bank and Palestinian non-violent cultural resistance to these particular circumstances, using the medium of theatre. It seeks to examine the ‘spacio-cidal’ practices, in the West Bank and analyse the Palestinian socio-cultural response to this phenomenon by focusing on the productions and activities of theatre companies and initiatives located and currently active within the West Bank. Within this blanket term ‘spacio-cide’, exists a number of other terms as mentioned above, all of which serve to exemplify and differentiate between the manifestations of ‘spacio-cide’ based upon the specificities of the location in which ‘spacio-cidal’ activities are occurring. Hanafi suggests that ‘spacio-cide’, is the intentional targeting and obliteration of place⁹¹ for “it targets land for the purpose of rendering inevitable the ‘voluntary’ transfer of the Palestinian population, primarily by targeting the space upon which the Palestinian people live”.⁹²

The Theory of ‘Spacio-cide’ in relation to Palestinian Space

In order to fully explain ‘spacio-cide’, I will primarily utilize Hanafi’s most recent published paper on the subject, for although older versions exist,⁹³ he has somewhat modified his concept over time, and this latest version most clearly

⁹¹ Hanafi, S. (2013), ‘Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory’, p191

⁹² Hanafi, S. (2009), ‘Spacio-cide: Colonial Politics, Invisibility and Rezoning in Palestinian Territory’, *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 2:1, 106-121, p107

⁹³ Including: Hanafi, S. (2006), ‘Spaciocide’, in *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, [Eds. Philipp Misselwitz & Tim Rieniets, 2006], Basel: Birkhäuser and Hanafi, S. (2009), ‘Spacio-cide: Colonial Politics, Invisibility and Rezoning in Palestinian Territory’, *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 2:1, 106-121.

articulates his overarching theory. For Hanafi, 'spacio-cide' is a multifaceted strategy used by Israel in order to contain and control Palestinians within strictly delineated spaces within the West Bank, whilst appropriating this territory's natural resources for its own purposes. It is "a deliberate ideology with a unified rationale, albeit with dynamic process because it is in constant interaction with the emerging context and the actions of the Palestinian resistance".⁹⁴ 'Spacio-cide' is not genocidal, in that it does not seek to physically destroy the Palestinian people as a whole, nor does it attempt to remove all Palestinians from the West Bank through force or other means (although the strategy does contain the potential for such a scenario). However, "military-judicial-civil apparatuses for spacio-cide", in particular the demarcation of the West Bank into 64 separate sections, and the creation of Areas 'A', 'B', 'B-', 'B+', 'C', 'H1', and 'H2', and the mass construction of Jewish-Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory, has resulted in the partial eradication of Palestinian space.⁹⁵

There are three main components of the Israeli 'spacio-cidal' project in the West Bank: the 'Principle of Colonization', the 'Principle of Separation', and the 'state of exception', which serves as an intermediary between these two Principles. Hanafi borrows these concepts of the Principles of Colonization and Separation from Neve Gordon, who asserts that the onset of the al-Aqsa Intifada in late 2000 was the culmination of a process started during the Oslo Accords of the 1990s, resulting in the implementation of a new form of occupation in the Palestinian Territories. The overriding Israeli desire to separate itself from its Palestinian neighbours was conceived as a response to the first intifada of 1987, when mass Palestinian protests, civil disobedience, rioting and striking broke out and was sustained until the Oslo Accord of 1993. Whereas pre-Oslo the occupation could be defined according to the 'Principle of Colonization', whereby the occupying force assumes responsibility for, and controls the lives of, the occupied population, in addition to controlling the territory's natural resources, the post-Oslo Israeli occupation embodies the 'Principle of Separation', whereby the colonizer retains control of the

⁹⁴ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory', p194

⁹⁵ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory', p191-4

resources, but refuses to accept responsibility for the population.⁹⁶ Indeed, for Gordon (and Hanafi), Oslo itself “signified the *reorganization* of power rather than its withdrawal and should be understood as the continuation of the occupation by other means.”⁹⁷

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s conceptualisations of state control, Gordon asserts that Israel has simultaneously employed three modes of power throughout the Palestinian Territories since 1967 – disciplinary, biopower, and sovereign power. Disciplinary power is both temporarily constant and spatially dispersed, functioning through everyday social relations which serve to uphold socially constructed behavioural norms throughout the population. This form of power is conducted at the ‘grassroots’ level, it “operates from below” and “attempts to impose homogeneity on then inhabitants both in thought and comportment, thus striving to render people docile” whilst concurrently individualising them, perceiving each person as a separate being within the population as a whole. In relation to Palestine, disciplinary power served as a form of control which demanded Palestinian acquiescence and submission to Israeli domination.⁹⁸

Biopower concerns itself with the population as a whole; like its disciplinary counterpart, it is spread out in space and is continuous through time, but it is power contained within and displayed through civil and political institutions, the aim of which is to collect data on the population in order to monitor them. Therefore, at the beginning of the occupation, efforts were made to improve the Palestinian existence, seeking to “normalize” the occupation and render the Palestinians passive.⁹⁹ Until the outbreak of the first intifada, both disciplinary power and biopower were the methods used to manage the Palestinians, each operating simultaneously, albeit in varying degrees dependent on and responding to local conditions and needs within the territories. The third form of Foucauldian power is sovereign power, the “more traditional” state-led dominance, which is

⁹⁶ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p199-200

⁹⁷ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p170

⁹⁸ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p11-12; 82

⁹⁹ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p12-13; 19; 107-8

based on the “imposition of a legal system and the employment of the state’s police and military to either enforce the rule of law or to suspend it.”¹⁰⁰ The enforcement of a range of oppressive laws operated to confine Palestinians, particularly in relation to attempts to independently develop the Occupied Palestinian Territories, increase living space, or express the Palestinian nationalist voice. Therefore, when Palestinians showed signs of resistance to the occupation, the Israeli military was used to quell and suppress. In addition, such practices as house demolitions, detentions, and collective punishments like curfews were relatively infrequently imposed before 1987. They were rather more like a ‘back-up plan’ for when disciplinary power and bio-power failed.¹⁰¹

For Hanafi, this ‘Principle of Colonization’ is underpinned by bio-power, as it “deals with the *population* (as opposed to the individual) as a political problem.”¹⁰² This Principle encompasses two strategies: firstly, “systematic dispossession”, such as land confiscation and the stymying of Palestinian territorial expansion; secondly, the “economic dependency” thrust upon Palestine by Israel’s intertwining of their two economies, which serves to keep Palestine in a state of limited development.¹⁰³ Although Gordon suggests that the ‘Principle of Colonization’ was dismissed by the Israeli authorities following the outbreak of the first intifada, to be replaced by the ‘Principle of Separation’, a move necessitated as a result of the “excesses and contradictions engendered by the controlling apparatuses” of the ‘Principle of Colonization’,¹⁰⁴ Hanafi alternatively proposes that both Principles occur simultaneously within the West Bank, for it is through the ‘Principle of Colonization’ that the population is kept under control, whereas the territory is the primary concern for the ‘Principle of Separation’.¹⁰⁵

The ‘Principle of Separation’ is shown through the geography of the West Bank. Eyal Weizman suggests that this principle is represented through the notion of the “logic

¹⁰⁰ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p13

¹⁰¹ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p13; 109-10

¹⁰² Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p12

¹⁰³ Hanafi, S. (2013), ‘Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p195

¹⁰⁴ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p15

¹⁰⁵ Hanafi, S. (2013), ‘Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p197

of partition”, which “has always swung between selective presence and absence, addressing two contradictory Israeli strategies: territorial (attempting to annex as much empty land as possible); and demographic (attempting to exclude the areas most heavily populated by Palestinians).”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the ‘Principle of Separation’ is predicated on physical separation of Palestinians and Israelis, a process of “distanciation”, which is based upon this desire for the actual division of the two ethno-national groups, but also the segregating of Palestinians from their fellow Palestinians.¹⁰⁷ This is done through the imposition of ‘facts on the ground’, such as checkpoints, road closures, and other methods of regulating and physically impeding Palestinian movement, based upon the assertion of sovereign power as it is regulated by the Israeli military. This, for Weizman, signifies the intensification of the “politics of closure” since the onset of Oslo, whereby the “occupation effectively shifted to the road network, working as a system of on/off valves at checkpoints and roadblocks.”¹⁰⁸

Gordon suggests that the ‘Principle of Separation’ is exemplified by the ‘Separation Barrier’, a device officially designed to prevent Palestinian insurgents from entering Israel proper, but has been criticised by many of the key writers as being, in the words of Gordon, a “political weapon to confiscate land and thus to contract Palestinian space” due to its routing east of the 1967 borders, deep into West Bank territory.¹⁰⁹ This has resulted in the creation of sixteen internal Palestinian-inhabited enclaves which are either wholly or nearly wholly surrounded by the wall, and includes instances where Palestinian villages are separated from the hinterland of the West Bank. For Gordon, therefore, the ‘Separation Barrier’ is “the paradigmatic example of the separation principle”, whose main objective is to undermine the nascent Palestinian state.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p94

¹⁰⁷ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p11

¹⁰⁸ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p142-3

¹⁰⁹ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p212

¹¹⁰ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p213

Hanafi's interpretation of the 'Principle of Separation' is predicated upon the dual-strategy of the "fragmentation of Palestinian space and the administration of Palestinian movement".¹¹¹ Through dissolving Palestinian territorial contiguity and creating 87 separate segments interspersed spatially with Jewish-Israeli settlements and utilizing the differing classifications of Palestinians in order to limit their movement between these segregated sections, the Israelis are able to monitor Palestinians more effectively, whilst simultaneously denying Palestinians the benefits of a fully-formed social and political infrastructure.¹¹² Indeed, whilst both Gordon and Hanafi posit that the 'Principle of Separation' is "a politics of segmentation using a complex technology of territory management",¹¹³ Gordon emphasises the Palestinian Authority (PA) as "a subcontractor that could normalize the occupation".¹¹⁴ This is an important consideration when examining the structural forces at play in the West Bank, and one which Hanafi appears to overlook in favour of emphasising the role of the Israeli occupation.

Even though the PA is intricately interlinked with the mechanisms of the occupation, and indeed is produced from within this structure of occupation, it has transformed "into a more indirect or neo-colonial form of domination" rather than the straight-forward 'Principle of Colonization'.¹¹⁵ Therefore, the PA has assumed responsibility for Palestinian welfare and civil matters, but this is not based upon autonomous state sovereignty, but rather an additional arm of the occupation, which served to conceal its continuation.¹¹⁶ As such, in Chapter Three, I extend this notion of 'subcontracting' responsibility for Palestinian existence by suggesting that although the PA has a role to play within this structure, its reliance for funding upon the international community, and the presence of an established and wide-reaching international humanitarian regime within the West Bank and East Jerusalem takes on the characteristics of the subcontracted agency more fully than the PA does. Indeed, the entrenching of the humanitarian regime is pivotal to the re-

¹¹¹ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p197

¹¹² Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p197

¹¹³ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p198

¹¹⁴ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p170

¹¹⁵ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p170-1

¹¹⁶ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p171

establishment of Palestinian civil society as a professionalized and outcome-focused enterprise as per the demands of the international agencies. This has had a profound impact upon theatre practices, as shall be discussed.

I concur with Hanafi's assertion that both Principles exist in mutual reinforcement at the same time, but modify this notion to propose that rather than operating in equal measure throughout the entirety of the West Bank, these Principles vary in their intensity in relation to the specific locale in which they are being practiced. Therefore, whilst in Area 'A's, it can be said that the 'Principle of Separation' is the most visible form of control, due to the lack of military presence within these areas, and the prevalence of the outsourced international humanitarian regime, other places in Area 'C', especially those situated next to the Separation Wall and settlements, or in places with a rich abundance of natural resources, such as the Jordan Valley and South Hebron Hills are more subjected to the 'Principle of Colonization'. Whilst Hanafi proposes that the Principles can be neatly divided into population and territory, I would suggest that these terms are useful for examining the geopolitical manifestations of the occupation and methods of control. However, they are not so obviously defined as a dichotomy of people and place, and therefore a deeper analysis of each space is necessary in order to determine the varying levels of both Principles of Separation and/or Colonization, as dependent upon the specificity of the site. As I show in subsequent chapters, Palestinian theatre as a cultural practice reveals the different Principles in action, as dependent upon the local site in which this theatre is situated.

In this study, I primarily refer to spaces which are under the 'Principle of Separation' – namely Area 'A's, as this is where the Palestinian theatre buildings are located. I will further analyse the Gordon's 'Principle of Separation' in relation to Palestinian space in more detail below. However, Palestinian theatre companies under consideration do not remain at all times within their urban base, and all those interviewed mentioned that they take their theatre to other places – including rural - in the West Bank, as part of their outreach educational programmes. Of most interest is the Freedom Bus, which unlike the others, who attempt to bring theatre

activities to communities in need without an overt objective for inciting political action, is primarily designed to directly respond to and counter the most intense manifestations of the occupation, such as military and settler violence, land appropriation, and house demolitions within sites of extreme contention. Within these sites, both the 'Principle of Colonization' and the 'state of exception' become most apparent, as does the exertion of Israeli sovereign (militarized) power.

One further aspect of 'spacio-cide' is the adoption of Giorgio Agamben's socio-legal concept of the 'state of exception', which Hanafi proposes occupies an intermediary position between the two Principles, and enables them to be made cohesive within the West Bank.¹¹⁷ Hanafi suggests that the sovereign power held by the Israeli state distinguishes between those imbued with 'political life', and therefore enjoying the full benefits of citizenship, and those who exist merely within the constraints of 'bare life'. For Hanafi, the 'state of exception' embodies a modified form of power, which can be defined as:

a process of categorizing people and bodies in order to manage, control, and keep them under surveillance and reducing them to a 'bare life', a life which refers to the body's mere 'vegetative' being, separated from the particular qualities, the social, political, and historical attributes that constitute individual subjectivity.¹¹⁸

As a result, not only is 'spacio-cide' implemented through these regulatory mechanisms, but so too does it effectively stymie the Palestinian ideal of national liberation and self-determination. As the Palestinian people are separated and their power diffused, so too does their focus become more localised, and they are set in opposition against each other in relation to their self-interest.¹¹⁹ In addition to the imposition of 'bare life', so too the 'state of exception' is 'normalised' through the activities of the international humanitarian regime. Indeed, the 'state of exception'

¹¹⁷ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p195

¹¹⁸ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p199

¹¹⁹ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p202

becomes a “facilitating framework that is moderated, legitimized, and reproduced by the logic of humanitarian concern”.¹²⁰ Thus, the presence and implementation of humanitarian practices by external aid agencies serves to further institutionalise the ‘state of exception’, despite their outward presence of attempting to offset the worst effects of the occupation upon the Palestinian inhabitants.

Urbicide

As noted in the introduction, at the outset of this research project, I intended to utilise the concept of ‘urbicide’, in order to explain the hypothesis that Palestinian theatre practices responded to the deliberate eradication of the Palestinian urban way of life by Israeli military forces. Martin Coward suggests that ‘urbicide’, a term formed from the collocation of ‘urban’ and ‘-cide’, “refers both to the destruction of the built environment that comprises the fabric of the urban as well as to the destruction of the way of life specific to such material conditions”.¹²¹ However, the changing circumstances, including mass construction projects within Area ‘A’s - especially Ramallah - which were perceived during my fieldwork, rendered this theory unusable when applied to the main Palestinian urban sites. However, the application of the mechanisms of ‘urbicide’ to the rural and more peripheral areas in the West Bank, suggests a ‘post-urbicidal’ state, whereby the ‘urbicidal’ practices were occurring, but within the sites of extreme contention – near to the Separation Barrier and settlements – rather than in the densely populated urban centres. As a result, it is useful to consider the ramifications of ‘urbicide’ as a strategy in order to understand the spatial dimensions of the contemporary West Bank, and highlights the context in which theatre practices seek to intervene in.

Urbanity is generally taken to describe the conditions of living in a city environment, as opposed to a rural setting, and carries the connotations of ‘civility’

¹²⁰ Hanafi, S. (2013), ‘Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory: Colonization, Separation, and State of Exception, *Current Sociology*, 61:2, 190-205, p202; referencing Ophir, A, Givoni, M, & Hanafi, S. (2009), ‘Introduction’ in Ophir et al (Eds). *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, New York: Zone Books, pp15-30

¹²¹ Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide*, p38

and of being 'progressive' in comparison with its rural counterpart. Urbanity also relates to the physical structures existing in an urban environment, the buildings and infrastructures which exist to make the setting recognisably urban. However, urbanity and the urban cannot be reduced merely to that of the corporeal, for "the built environment comprises more than just an ensemble of buildings", including cultural conceptions of identity and community, where the structures within the urban space is the 'cultural property' of those who reside within the site, and therefore an attack on that which is contained within the space is an attack on the identity of the inhabitants.¹²²

In relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Stephen Graham has utilised the term 'asymmetric urbicide' to explain the vast disparities in military power that exist in an "intensely urbanized context," whereby the primary objective is "to try to deny the rights of the 'enemy' to their respective, city-based, lives".¹²³ The dual-process of the destruction of the Palestinian means of existence (economic, social and cultural), in conjunction with the construction of Israeli-Jewish settlements and supporting infrastructure, in addition to increasing restrictions on Palestinian movement through the erection of the 'security' barrier and checkpoints, serves to fragment and therefore undermine Palestinian civil and political life in the West Bank, thereby constituting 'urbicidal' practices.¹²⁴ For Graham, the conflict over the contested territory of the West Bank "manifests itself most clearly in the adaptation, construction and obliteration of landscape and built environment".¹²⁵

When discussing 'urbicidal' practices in the West Bank, the Israeli offensive 'Operation Defensive Shield' (ODS) is frequently used as a case in point to describe and analyse Israeli military policy towards Palestinian urban centres during the second Intifada (2000-2005). In April 2002, following mass Palestinian-perpetrated

¹²² Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide*, pp24-8; 130-1. For a further discussion on this, see in particular: Graham, S. (2002), 'Bulldozers and Bombs: The Latest Palestinian-Israeli Conflict as Asymmetric Urbicide', *Antipode*, 34:4, 642-649; Hanafi, S. (2006), 'Spaciocide', in *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, [Eds. Philipp Misselwitz & Tim Rieniets, 2006], Basel: Birkhäuser.

¹²³ Graham, S. (2004), 'Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer', p193

¹²⁴ Graham, S. (2002), 'Bulldozers and Bombs, p643

¹²⁵ Graham, S. (2004), 'Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer', p8

suicide bombings in Israeli civilian centres which resulted in the deaths of 81 Israeli non-combatants,¹²⁶ Israeli military forces began a sustained campaign to militarily occupy West Bank Palestinian urban sites, with the stated goal “to root out ‘the terrorist infrastructure’ and thus prevent further suicide bombings in Israel proper”.¹²⁷ However, it has been suggested that the methods and force used by the Israelis was beyond necessity, and that the wide-scale devastation inflicted upon Palestinian urban spaces was in fact a “deliberate attempt to destroy the urban, civil and infrastructural foundations of the proto-Palestinian state”.¹²⁸

According to Stephen Graham, the Israeli authorities “see rapid and spontaneous Palestinian urbanisation and demographic growth, within both Israel and the occupied territories, as the Palestinian’s major long-term strategic “weapon” in shifting the demographic, geopolitical and military balance against Israel.”¹²⁹ Therefore, the Palestinian urban space and the population who live within it are inherently threatening to Israeli existence, a danger which must be removed. The overcrowded, “fast-growing, labyrinthine Palestinian cities”¹³⁰ were subsequently subjected to “constructive destruction”, whereby the Palestinian urban space was deliberately mutilated in order to provide military access to the central core of the site. In order to achieve this, mass house demolitions occurred.¹³¹ Within Israeli military logic, house demolitions and the removal of physical obstacles their surveillance of Palestinian movement within an urban conflict situation was necessary in order to eradicate operational bases and weapons storage facilities from militant Palestinian groups within the urban site. These demolitions were also carried out on the homes of suspected terrorists or resistance leaders as a visible punishment to the supposed militants and discourage similar behaviour from other Palestinians.¹³² Although house demolitions and similar tactics have long been used

¹²⁶ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p203

¹²⁷ Carey, R. (2003), “Palestine Besieged: The Threat of Annihilation”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102:4, p677

¹²⁸ Graham, S. (2002), ‘Bulldozers and Bombs’, p642

¹²⁹ Graham, S. (2002), ‘Bulldozers and Bombs’, p645

¹³⁰ Graham, S. (2002), ‘Bulldozers and Bombs’ p646

¹³¹ Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel*, London: Pluto, p192

¹³² Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide*, p9-10

against the Palestinians in the West Bank,¹³³ the manner in which ODS was executed “marks a shift from occasional and sporadic demolitions to the systematic and planned destruction of carefully targeted settlements for political and military reasons”.¹³⁴

As Jeff Halper notes, “it was not the destruction of the ‘terrorist infrastructure’ but of the Palestinian civil infrastructure that stood out – houses, roads and physical infrastructure of course, but also the institutional infrastructure such as the data banks of the government ministries.”¹³⁵ Therefore, the intentional wrecking, ransacking and destruction of hospitals, water tanks, roads, electronic communication systems and other vital infrastructure, as well as nearly all Palestinian Authority ministry buildings and 65 NGO locations,¹³⁶ which was not essential to the completion of the military mission, can be perceived as being a “campaign of attrition directed against a civilian population and intended to erode the Palestinians’ ability to resist the Occupation altogether”.¹³⁷ In his summation of Israeli military practices, especially in relation to the demolition of Palestinian houses, Martin Coward concludes that “this punitive destruction is disproportionate to the military objectives sought and, as such, seems to fall under the logic of urbicide.”¹³⁸

Whilst undertaking my fieldwork, it became apparent that within Palestinian urban sites in 2011-12, ‘urbicidal’ practices were not occurring in Area ‘A’s. Indeed, Palestinian urban centres seemed to be thriving, economically developing, and cultural life as exemplified by a multitude of theatres, restaurants and nightclubs was rapidly resurging, especially in Ramallah, Bethlehem, and East Jerusalem. Therefore, it can be said that urban sites in Palestine were experiencing a ‘post-

¹³³ Neve Gordon discusses the use of the demolishing of Palestinian houses as a method of control in the West Bank from 1967, including the demolition of houses of those “suspected of being part of the resistance movement” in Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p10; 53-4.

¹³⁴ Graham, S. (2002a), ‘Bulldozers and Bombs’, p645

¹³⁵ Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine*, p191-2

¹³⁶ Hanafi, S. (2006), ‘Spaciocide’, in *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, p93; Graham, S. (2002), ‘Bulldozers and Bombs’, p642

¹³⁷ Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine*, p192

¹³⁸ Coward, M. (2009), *Urbicide*, p104

urbicidal' regeneration, whereas the active conflict had transposed itself onto the peripheries of Palestinian territory, onto the frontiers where Israeli security demands override Palestinian human and national rights. As a result, to borrow from Graham, there appears to be 'asymmetric development' occurring particularly in Ramallah, which appears to be the focus for economic and cultural development activities funded by international agencies, to the detriment of lesser urban and rural sites.

Palestinian Space: The 'Matrix of Control' in the West Bank

Writing before the outbreak of the second intifada, Jeff Halper argues that since 1967, the entire structure of the occupation has been based upon "an interlocking series of mechanisms, only a few of which require physical occupation of territory, that allow Israel to control every aspect of Palestinian life."¹³⁹ Halper likens these structural apparatuses to the Japanese game 'Go', whereby the objective is to immobilise your opponent through obtaining pivotal nodes within a matrix to ensure that the other becomes entrapped.¹⁴⁰ This 'Matrix of Control' consists of four interlinked and interdependent modes of regulation in the present-day West Bank. Firstly, the uses and abuses of bureaucracy: laws and planning policies which are deliberately intended to hinder Palestinian development, and which Halper terms as "the Kafkaesque skein of rules, restrictions, procedures and sanctions Israel has imposed over the Occupied Territories".¹⁴¹ The second notion involves "economic warfare" through the deliberate de-development of the Palestinian economy.¹⁴² Thirdly, the creation of 'facts on the ground', through which Israel reconfigured the entire space of the West Bank, eventually fashioning a number of Palestinian enclaves based around a single urban site, discontinuous and separated from each other through a number of military checkpoints, the road network, and

¹³⁹ Halper, J. (2000), 'The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control', *MERIP*, 216, 14-19, p15

¹⁴⁰ Halper, J. (2000), 'The 94 Percent Solution', p15; 18

¹⁴¹ Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine*, p154

¹⁴² Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine*, p157; 160

since 2002, the Separation Barrier.¹⁴³ Therefore, “with the adoption of the separation principle, Palestinian space was contracted, and the Green Line that had enabled some form of movement was closed and sealed, thus transforming the OT into a container of sorts.”¹⁴⁴ Halper’s final mode of control is the Foucaultian sovereign power, whereby the Israeli military has been engaging in low-intensity conflict as and when the Palestinian show overt signs of resistance.¹⁴⁵

As a result of this ‘Matrix of Control’ using settlement blocs, the interconnected grid of highways and bypass roads, and army bases in the West Bank, Palestinians have become “virtually paralyzed” within their immediate locales.¹⁴⁶ Updating his theory in 2009, Halper states that since 2000, “the occupation has grown immeasurably stronger and more entrenched.”¹⁴⁷ Indeed, the further appropriation and circumscribing of Palestinian territory in addition to the proliferation of more checkpoints, mass expansion of settlements, an increase in the settler-only road network, confiscation of natural resources, and the Separation Wall, have all served to further separate and segment the Palestinian spaces in the West Bank.¹⁴⁸ However, Halper offers little hope for the future, as he asserts that the “matrix has become far too intricate” and too entrenched within the West Bank for it to be successfully disassembled.¹⁴⁹

‘Elastic Geographies’

Eyal Weizman has termed Israel’s participation in the conflict ‘the Politics of Verticality’, whereby Israel engages in a three-dimensional orchestration of territorial configurations to maintain, and deepen, Israel’s geopolitical advantage”,

¹⁴³ Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine*, p161

¹⁴⁴ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p199-206

¹⁴⁵ Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine*, p172

¹⁴⁶ Halper, J. (2000), ‘The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control’, *MERIP*, 216, 14-19, p15; 18

¹⁴⁷ Halper, J. (2009), ‘Dismantling the Matrix of Control’, *MERIP* online, published online: September 11, 2009, accessed online: 10th October 2010 at: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero091109>

¹⁴⁸ Halper, J. (2009), ‘Dismantling the Matrix of Control’, *MERIP* online.

¹⁴⁹ Halper, J. (2009), ‘Dismantling the Matrix of Control’, *MERIP* online.

above, below, and on the surface.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, it is this three-dimensional nature of the conflict which has led to Weizman to state that “the frontiers of the Occupied Territories are not rigid and fixed at all; rather they are elastic, and in constant transformation. The linear border... has splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border-synonyms – ‘separation walls’, ‘barriers’, ‘blockades’, ‘closures’, ‘road blocks’, ‘checkpoints’, ‘sterile areas’, ‘special security zones’, ‘closed military areas’ and ‘killing zones’ – that shrink and expand the territory at will.”¹⁵¹ It is this elasticity of space, whereby Israel is consistently pushing the frontiers of its borders eastwards, penetrating ever-further into Palestinian territory, where the “various inhabitants of this frontier do not operate within the fixed envelopes of space – space is not the background for their actions, an abstract grid on which events take place – but rather the medium that each of their actions seeks to challenge, transform or appropriate.”¹⁵²

The occupation has reconfigured the territory of the West Bank based on using the distinct topography of the mountains and valleys in order to perpetuate its hold over this land. Whereas traditional notions of geography focus on the single dimension of the surface level, that which is seen on the map, Weizman envisages this “single territorial reality” in three dimensions, adding the airspace above and the subterranean level into the equation when contemplating configurations of West Bank space. Elastic geography is “a military and political pattern of elastic and shifting geography, a zone of contact that cannot be represented by lines.”¹⁵³ It exists in opposition to “the geography of stable, static places, and the balance across linear and fixed sovereign borders,” for its “frontiers are deep, shifting, fragmented and elastic territories. Temporary lines of engagement, marked by makeshift boundaries, are not limited to the edges of political space, but exist throughout its depth.”¹⁵⁴ What marks this territory, and the process, as elastic, is that the territory is configured and reconfigured as a response to various actors and

¹⁵⁰ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p12

¹⁵¹ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p6

¹⁵² Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p7

¹⁵³ Weizman, E. (2006), ‘Principles of Frontier Geography’, in *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, [Eds. Philipp Misselwitz & Tim Rieniets, 2006], Basel: Birkhäuser, p85

¹⁵⁴ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p4

agents, representing both the state and individual levels. Space is organised as though it is “political plastic” or as a “map of the relation between all the forces that shaped it.” It is in itself a site of conflict, as opposing voices seek to dominate the frontier-making process.¹⁵⁵ This cacophony of political forces all push the imaginary borders and barriers with their will; the elasticity of the physical barriers and obstacles to the Palestinian way of life is not a top-down, state-imposed phenomenon, its very essence as elastic is due to its response “to a multiple and diffused rather than a single source of power, [therefore] their architecture cannot be understood as the material embodiment of a unified political will or as the product of a single ideology.”¹⁵⁶

Elastic geographies can be seen in a number of different methods employed by the Israeli military in the West Bank. Some, like the checkpoints and road networks, have been present or in the process of being planned since the beginning of the occupation, and subsequently expanded; others, like the Separation Barrier, are recent additions. Of all the symbols of occupation, the Separation Barrier is the most prominent, in some places overbearing. Whilst many have claimed that the Barrier is supposed to represent the border between Israel and a future Palestinian state, the official Israeli definition of the Barrier is that it was a necessary response to increased terror attacks inside Israel proper; it was therefore dependent upon the situation, an “instrument of contingency in a temporary state of emergency”, and thus did not constitute a permanent political border. A barrier differs from a border, for “they do not separate the ‘inside’ of a sovereign, political or legal system from a foreign ‘outside’, but act as contingent structures to prevent movement across territory”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Included in this list of “actors operating within this frontier” are “young settlers, the Israeli military, the cellular network provider and other capitalist corporations, human rights and political activists, armed resistance, humanitarian and legal experts, government ministries, foreign governments, ‘supportive’ communities overseas, state planners, the media, the Israeli High Court of Justice”. Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p5

¹⁵⁶ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p5

¹⁵⁷ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p172

The Barrier is thus a physical impediment to Palestinian movement, for Israelis are not subjected to such restrictions. Indeed, this Barrier offers the “illusion that with a set of unilaterally fortified lines reinforced with concrete, barbed wire and surveillance technology, Israel and Palestine could both become ordinary, territorially defined nation states, disguises the violent reality of a shifting colonial frontier.”¹⁵⁸ As a direct result of the Barrier, sixteen enclaves within the West Bank have been created, whereby Palestinian urban sites are either completely or nearly surrounded by the Barrier; they are not contiguous, and to pass between these enclaves, Palestinians must pass through Israeli military-controlled checkpoints.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, “thousands of Palestinians have been enclosed in huge prisons, with every gate, every line of people, every police officer, soldier, or guard, becoming the emblem of Israel’s supremacy and sovereignty.”¹⁶⁰

In addition to the West Bank being cantonised through the imposition of physical obstacles to movement, forming a cartography of fragmentation along the surface level, the level of the map, Segal and Weizman assert that the West Bank is additionally divided along its vertical axis. The location of Israeli settlements are not accidental, albeit that they were not created from a state-level, top-down masterplan; indeed, like the Separation Barrier, the settlements evolved organically, based on strategic and opportunistic ‘grabbing’ of land and (originally) influenced by religious Zionism.¹⁶¹ The use of settlements as ‘watchtowers’ and settlers as agents for the state, providing surveillance over the Palestinians for the authorities, was based upon the logic of that which Weizman names “optical planning”. This logic is based on the topographical advantage the higher ground holds, as firstly, it self-produces “tactical strength”; secondly it is able to protect itself; thirdly, it can obtain a panoramic view of its surroundings.¹⁶² In addition to

¹⁵⁸ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p179

¹⁵⁹ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p213; 216

¹⁶⁰ Ben-Eliezer, U. & Feinstein, Y. (2007), “‘The Battle Over Our Homes’: Reconstructing/Deconstructing Sovereign Practices Around Israel’s Separation Barrier on the West Bank’, *Israel Studies*, 12:1, p179

¹⁶¹ Segal, R. & Weizman, E. (2003b), ‘The Mountain: Principles of Building in Heights’, in *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture* [Eds. Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman, 2003], London: Verso, p83-4

¹⁶² Segal, R. & Weizman, E. (2003b), ‘The Mountain: Principles of Building in Heights’, p86

this notion of 'optical planning' is the interdependent and mutually beneficial concept of the 'Politics of Verticality', whereby the one-dimensional topographical configurations of space are trebled to also include that which exists above and below. Here in these spaces too is Palestinian national aspiration denied, for Israel controls both the subterranean, including major water aquifers, and the sky above, thus using what should be Palestinian national airspace to monitor and control the inhabitants below. As Weizman says, "the horizon seems to have been called upon to serve as one of the many boundaries raised up by the conflict, making the ground below and the air above separate and distinct from, rather than continuous with and organic to, the surface of the earth."¹⁶³

In relation to theatre space, the elasticity of boundaries become prevalent not only when the theatrical action is responding to or mirroring the Palestinian experience under occupation and territorial constraints, but also through the blurring of performance and audience spaces. Palestinian theatre is highly interactive, not least because of the political topics presented on the stage, but also due to the frequent use of participatory theatre models, such as Ashtar theatre's Forum Theatre based upon the Boalian Theatre of the Oppressed, which produces Forum Theatre plays in addition to a biennial International Theatre of the Oppressed Festival which tours the West Bank.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Freedom Theatre's Freedom Bus utilises the participatory Playback Theatre as part of its activities, working within highly contested Palestinian spaces in order to highlight the geopolitical issues occurring within them.¹⁶⁵ Even within more conventional theatre productions we see the traditional (Western) delineation between performer and audience space being contested, as I observed numerous occasions when the audience would reveal positive or negative reactions to that depicted on the stage through clapping or hissing, shouting comments, or showing other responses to the performance. Although this did not affect the actors' performance in these conventional productions, the intensity of emotions displayed, and willingness to

¹⁶³ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p12-3

¹⁶⁴ See: http://www.ashtar-theatre.org/?page_id=36. During my fieldwork period, there were no Forum theatre performances for me to include in this dissertation.

¹⁶⁵ See: <http://www.freedombus.ps>

participate publicly in applauding or denouncing actions on the stage suggests an involvement with the theatrical practices being undertaken in the West Bank.

Occupied Theatre Space in Palestine

It is this three-dimensional aspect of the conflict within spatial configurations and power struggles which interest me the most, and consequently, how these notions of space and the conflicts they contain within them, are represented, negotiated and challenged through theatrical performance. Indeed, it is not my primary intention to examine the place in which the theatrical performance is situated, in that I shall not be looking at the buildings hosting the performances *per se*; I am analysing space within a wider geopolitical and cultural lens, whilst simultaneously focusing on the specific site in which the production takes place. Given the difficult situation in the West Bank today, it is remarkable that a cultural practice like theatre is not only existing, but thriving. The majority of urban Palestinian centres – including East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jenin and Hebron - boast not only dedicated theatre space, but also professional theatre practitioners devising, creating, and celebrating Palestine through performance. In addition, numerous amateur and children's theatre groups attempt to offer space, a refuge, for children and young people to escape the reality of life under occupation and provide an alternative to violent confrontations with the Israeli armed forces.

Theatrical performance – the object of this study – can be considered to be the total sum of all activity within this space being utilised specifically for this performance, including all those present, such as the performers and objects comprising the set, and the relationships between these performers and the physical entities within the entire space of the stage. In order to be a performance, there necessarily must be spectators, who are “a crucial and active agent in the

creative process”.¹⁶⁶ The performer must be aware of the existence of the individual spectator, or an audience of spectators; through the existence of both performer and spectator, there inherently exists a relationship between the two, one which creates meanings and raises issues based upon the actions of the performer and the interaction between the physical being of the performer and the physical objects within the space in which the performer is, and making meaning through. My focus shall be on theatrical performances in themselves, as a social product relating to the contemporary geopolitical situation in the West Bank, rather than performances of the ‘everyday’ or the performativity of those existing under military occupation. I am looking at theatrical practices as a response to ‘spacio-cide’, however, it is important to mention the theatricality of the space of the West Bank in order to aid analysis of the theatre productions as examples of cultural resistance, particularly in relation to sites of extreme contention.

As James Thompson *et al* declare, spaces in which conflict occurs “themselves are highly performative places” and that “the majority of performances in war zones cannot be untangled from war-making practices”.¹⁶⁷ The interwoven nature of performance and conflict, where occurrences of war and war-like behaviour take on theatrical attributes, whereby the area of conflict becomes like a physical stage for the performance of war, and state military apparatus and resistance forces, both violent and popular, are simultaneously both actor and audience to each other, can be seen in the West Bank. The space of the West Bank is a highly charged political arena, and through the mechanisms of control which Israel has implemented since its occupation of the territory in 1967, has become in itself like a theatrical stage, one where the three-dimensional configurations of territory and the natural topographical features of West Bank mountains and valleys, become theatrical through the physical changes constantly imposed upon them. The construction of settlements on the mountain apex, the slicing of territory into bridges above and tunnels below through the transport network, and the cantonisation of Palestinian

¹⁶⁶ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p235

¹⁶⁷ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, London: Seagull Books, p2; 8

urban centres are like an elaborately designed theatrical set upon which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict plays itself out. This sense of the theatrical also serves to reinforce the permanent insecurity of the 'real' spaces in which Palestinians live, which are constantly under threat of being reinvaded or eradicated, depending on where they are located in the West Bank.

In order to examine theatrical space, I draw upon the work of theatre theorist Gay McAuley. The space of the West Bank is not inert, it is not the backdrop to the action, for as McAuley asserts, the spatial context of the theatrical performance is "not an empty container but an active agent; it shapes what goes on within it, emits signals about it to the community at large, and is itself affected."¹⁶⁸ The deeply-held beliefs regarding the land from both the Palestinians and the Israelis, imbue the territory with profound meanings, and create deep attachment.¹⁶⁹ It is this relationship with the land, the sense of ownership and belonging, which forms the basis for both the historical and the present-day conflict. If we accept the metaphor of the West Bank as a theatrical space, like an open-air theatre, then the territory within the geographical limits - the cartographical area - can be conceptualised as performance space, the overall site upon which the conflict is performed. By utilising theatrical terminology, I am not attempting to belittle attachments to the land or to suggest that ethno-national emotions are in some way fictional or falsely felt. Rather, I am trying to show how the space of the West Bank has become theatricalised, and that theatre practices within this territory are constructed in relation to the Palestinian experience of the physical space and all that is contained within it. It is the reflexive relationship between the individual, the social groups, and the actual composition of the space, both natural and human-made, which supports this notion of theatricality within the location of the West Bank.

In order to elucidate my point more clearly, I will relate certain aspects of the geopolitical theoretical framework outlined above to this particular territory, using

¹⁶⁸ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p41

¹⁶⁹ Detailed analyses of these can be found in, for example, Kimmerling, B. & Migdal, J. S. (2003), *The Palestinian People: A History*, London: Harvard University Press and Segev, T. (2001), *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, [Trans. Haim Watzman], London: Abacus.

theatrical and performance terminology. McAuley speaks of “spatial facts” within the theatre; constituting the entire theatrical process and experience central to performance are five fundamental realms of spatial and social practices which come together to form the complete performance. At the level of “social reality” is that of physical space, the locations in which the theatrical offerings are dreamed up, devised, worked on and rehearsed before finally being performed. This includes the actual theatre building itself, should one exist, and other places of performance. McAuley declares that the audience space is important in and of itself, as for “the spectators theatre is a social event, their reception of the performance is part of a social experience”.¹⁷⁰ Beyond this ‘social reality’ informing performance practice is that which is conceived of as: firstly, the *performance space*, which is “fundamental to, even constitutive of, theatre”. Indeed, this space consists of the meeting of two separate spaces, the practitioner and the audience space: “the divided yet nevertheless unitary space in which the two constitutive groups (performers and spectators) meet and work together to create the performance experience.” Secondly, the “physical reality / fictional place duality”, which is “the constant dual presence of the physical reality of the performance space and the fictional world or worlds created”. This dual space is further separated into three divisions: the *stage space*, the actual space of the stage and its surrounding auditorium; the *presentational space*, which is “the physical use made of this stage space in any given performance”; and the *fictional space*, that which is presented and represented both onstage and off.¹⁷¹

Although these spatial delineations offer useful categorisations for conceptualising theatre productions, they are primarily based upon conventional, Western theatre practices and productions within a non-conflict setting, and are therefore not wholly applicable to ‘hybrid’ Palestinian theatre practices existing under conflict. Despite this, these spatial delineations provide a detailed framework for understanding and analysing theatrical performances in relation to their spatial contexts. Furthermore, McAuley’s insistence that theatre “is always local and must

¹⁷⁰ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p25

¹⁷¹ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p26-29

be local”, thus resulting in a “double quality of being both local and located”¹⁷² which resonates most deeply in regards to Palestinian theatre. The spatial and social facts comprising a performance emanate from its location, the very space in which it is performed, and are therefore explicitly intertwined. Furthermore, the close relationship between performer and audience, in both traditional and more experimental theatre practices, results from both the spatial confines of the performance space, and the political issues being raised in Palestinian theatrical productions. Likewise, the ‘physical reality / fictional place duality’ referred to by McAuley takes on particular importance in Palestine, for this duality becomes as blurred and elastic as the physical borders and boundaries when the supposedly fictional place depicted on stage replicates or reflects the reality of Palestinian experiences outside of the theatre. The distinction between the inside and the outside of the theatre becomes softened and obscured due to the theatricality of the West Bank itself. However, theatre does not become an extension of the everyday, for “theatre is an activity that is in some way separate from daily life”, whereby the place in which a theatrical performance occurs delineates this “separation of the theatrical from the everyday.”¹⁷³ Therefore, although Palestinian theatre may implicitly refer to, or explicitly state, political occurrences happening outside its spatial boundaries, this is not to suggest that the spaces have merged. Rather, the performance space retains its special qualities as a site in which a theatrical production is executed, but as one which is profoundly connected to its socio-political environs.

These theatrical relationships are inter-dependent and serve to elicit meaning for both performer and spectator, resulting in, as McAuley states, the “occupation of the space, their entrances, exits, other movements and gestures, and the proxemic relationships that these moves and gestures set up between actors, spectators, objects, and the space itself... become meaningful only when situated in the given space, and they are the major means whereby that space is activated and itself

¹⁷² McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p11

¹⁷³ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p39

made meaningful”¹⁷⁴ Both the Palestinians and the Israelis can be considered to be actors on the ‘theatrical stage’ of the West Bank, albeit ones who possess significantly differing levels of social power. Israeli settlers, as agents of the occupying force, are privileged as they hold a position of sovereign strength: they are armed, are economically better off, and, most importantly when we are considering negotiation of theatre space, have freedom of movement. They are part of the Israeli state-imposed design of the West Bank, by which I mean that the Israeli state, through the methods employed for territorial control, has constructed a theatrical set through the building of settlements and physical transport networks. This set is based upon ethno-national lines, for the Palestinians and Israelis are separated through the intentional segregation of space, as based upon the ‘Principle of Separation’. Therefore, interaction between the two groups is actively discouraged by the physical infrastructure of the occupation, and territorial space is configured so as to decisively divide them.

‘Fixed’ Set Design

The construction of the settlements since 1977 within this set design have been in themselves a “spectacle... an act of creating something from nothing”¹⁷⁵. The visibility of these settlements dominating the topographical high ground has been utilised to demonstrate to the Palestinians that the Israeli state and their settler agents possess and control the territory of the West Bank. Indeed, Weizman attributes the notion of “authorship” to the myriad Israeli groups involved in the settlement enterprise¹⁷⁶, evoking the idea of the textualisation and theatricalisation of the West Bank, whereby settlements are envisaged as the result of an indelible marker pen, permanently marking the territory with the Jewish-Israeli presence. Through this textualisation, the land becomes like a dramatic map, upon which

¹⁷⁴ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p8

¹⁷⁵ Rotbard, S. (2006), ‘Wall and Tower: The Mold of Israeli Architecture’, in *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, [Eds. Philipp Misselwitz & Tim Rieniets, 2006], Basel: Birkhäuser, p111

¹⁷⁶ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p87

ethno-national identities are constructed in relation to the territory, and whose space becomes not fictionalised as such, but becomes imbued with the sense of the theatrical, as though the map becomes a script through which movement of the performers is prescribed and directed through stage directions based on human-built territorial configurations. Thus, the Palestinian must remain with strictly geographically-confined enclaves and travel along designated routes, if at all, whilst the Israeli settler travels along different roads, freely and unrestricted.¹⁷⁷

The settlements within this set design also function regarding the 'Logic of Visibility', which according to Weizman is designed to present Israeli strength by the very fact of their existence, and through their strategic positioning upon mountain summits. The military functionality of the settlements can be perceived as providing an additional purpose, namely to cement the notion of being colonised within the collective minds of the Palestinians through being permanently "under the gaze" of the settlers, leading to an internalisation of Israeli dominance.¹⁷⁸ We can therefore conceptualise the settlers as being a captive, albeit hostile, audience to every Palestinian movement within the West Bank. The dual role, therefore, of the settlers and their military protectors as performers of dominance and spectators of the dominated is the direct result of the location of the settlers within the settlements, and the very structure of the built environment. By placing the settlers within this fixed position of the settlement, which unlike the other physical constructions in the West Bank such as the barrier and checkpoints, is a constant and unchanging part of the set, the watchful gaze of the settlers over the Palestinians is guaranteed.

The construction of the spectating space is determined in relation to the natural topography of the terrain, and the way in which the Israeli settlement enterprise has chosen to utilise this. The circular configurations of the settlements, "typified by a principle of concentric organisation", are placed atop the mountain summits

¹⁷⁷ Halper, J. (2008), *An Israeli in Palestine*, p162

¹⁷⁸ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p81

and commanding a panoramic view over the lower ground of the West Bank.¹⁷⁹ They are therefore in themselves organised within this metaphorical conception of the West Bank as a kind of auditorium, whereby the settlers enjoy the privileged position of optimum viewing opportunity over the performance space below. This is exemplified through the use of lighting. As McAuley suggests, lighting in the contemporary theatre is instrumental in providing a “hiding/revealing dialectic”.¹⁸⁰ B’tselem document the prolific use of security lights attached to the outer borders of many settlements, their light facing outwards from the settlement.¹⁸¹ The security rationale of creating visibility over Palestinian areas can also be viewed within the theatrical framework I am purporting.¹⁸² Through this use of lighting, the space upon which the light is directed becomes inherently theatrical. This means that any movement captured within the space covered by the lighting is subjected to scrutiny by the spectator and meaning regarding the actions of the individual/s is constructed. However, the use of lighting does suggest that surveillance over the Palestinians is constant, therefore Palestinian actions cannot be hidden by the cover of night; they are placed in the role of performer for twenty-four hours a day. Indeed, as Gordon asserts, the use of surveillance is part of the disciplinary mode over control over Palestinian inhabitants, which has the potential to turn into militarised state violence by the Israelis.¹⁸³ This notion becomes increasingly relevant in Chapter Five, when I assess the activities of the Freedom Bus in sites of contention.

Weizman refers to this as the “one-way hierarchy of vision”, and notes that Israeli military rules of engagement since 2003 have allowed soldiers to ‘shoot to kill’ Palestinians who may be behaving in a way perceived by the settlers as threatening,

¹⁷⁹ Segal, R. & Weizman, E. (2003b), ‘The Mountain: Principles of Building in Heights’, p83

¹⁸⁰ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p76

¹⁸¹ B’tselem, *Access Denied: Israeli Measures to Deny Palestinians Access to Land Around Settlements*, September 2008, p20

¹⁸² Interestingly, Weizman uses a theatrical simile to describe the Israeli settlers’ ‘paradox of double vision’, whereby settlers perceive the land around them through a ‘biblical’ or ‘pastoral’ lens, albeit one which seeks to exclude the Palestinians from the land itself. He states that: “Like a theatrical set, the panorama is seen [by Israeli settlers] as an edited landscape put together by invisible stagehands [the Palestinians] who must step off the set as the lights come on.” Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p135-7

¹⁸³ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel’s Occupation*, p138-9

including those “observing settlements with binoculars”. This, he suggests, means that “Palestinians should presumably avoid looking at settlements at all.”¹⁸⁴ This may be the case should the lighting comply with the conventional theatrical use of lighting as one-directional, focusing the spectators’ attention upon the performance space and the performer within it; however, an apparent contradiction exists, for the settlements themselves are also lit-up, seemingly encouraging the Palestinian gaze upon them, yet should this gaze be forthcoming, punishment may be meted out. However, by being illuminated, the settlements and the settlers within them find themselves within another performance space; they can be subjected to the critical gaze of the Palestinians, and find their actions and movement under scrutiny. The asymmetrical power capabilities between the two parties, however, mean that no repercussions upon them would be forthcoming from the Palestinians.

Weizman and Segal also contend that this role of ‘captive audience’ is not one actively wanted by the settlers; rather it is a gaze of necessity in order to provide security. Indeed, the contention is that the ideal gaze, and the one strived to be achieved by the settlers is in fact one where the Palestinians are absent from the landscape, albeit the “pastoral” and “biblical” panoramic view includes those items which have been physically created by the Palestinians. Therefore, the sights of stone-clad buildings in quaint villages and olive orchards in the valleys below the settlements are romanticised into being that of a passive panorama, existing within the past through an imaginary construction whereby the settlers transform “topography into scenography, forming an exegetical landscape with a mesh of scriptural signification that must be extracted from the panorama and ‘read’ rather than merely be ‘seen’”¹⁸⁵ This notion blends back into the concept of Israeli ‘authorship’ over the land; for not only have they created a new scenography through the imposition of settlements and transport infrastructures, they also perceive existing material structures from a perspective which fits in with their world-view, and seeks to deny the existence of the Palestinians. This denial is

¹⁸⁴ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p133

¹⁸⁵ Segal, R. & Weizman, E. (2003b), ‘The Mountain: Principles of Building in Heights’, p87

consistent with the settlers claim to ownership over the land, exemplified through the notion of 'authorship', but also embodies a "cruel paradox", for that which has been created by Palestinians within the landscape is precisely that which is celebrated by the gaze of the settler; however, the Palestinians themselves are refused the privilege of being present within this space that they have created, they "are there to produce the landscape and then disappear", which forms for the settlers an "edited landscape" from which the Palestinians are wilfully excluded from. This gaze is ultimately based upon the 'Principle of Separation', one which "does not register what it does not want to see, it is a visual exclusion that seeks a physical exclusion".¹⁸⁶

'Elasticated' Set Design

If the settlements within the West Bank constitute a fixed set design, then the Barrier and other physical mechanisms of control, such as the checkpoints, are their 'elastic' counterparts, moveable pieces of set which respond to localised action within the Palestinian performance space in the territory. The arbitrary nature of the existence of 'flying checkpoints' and physical obstacles, and the 'elastic' nature of the Barrier, in addition to the established checkpoints, which may or may not be available for movement through for Palestinians, as a whole comprise an Israeli-designed set which serves to constrict and direct Palestinian movement. The elaborate infrastructure which results in Palestinian enclaves directly produces a series of 'mini-stages' within the performance space of the fragmented West Bank. It is at the intersection where these enclaves, these 'mini-stages', meet the Israeli infrastructure of control which engenders interaction between the Israeli military and the Palestinian civilian; the Palestinian as performer meets the Israeli soldier as spectator in an area which McAuley describes as the "frontier zone, where presentational [performance] space and audience space meet" within the theatrical space of the West Bank.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Segal, R. & Weizman, E. (2003b), 'The Mountain: Principles of Building in Heights', p92

¹⁸⁷ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p55

This 'frontier zone', the point at which the Palestinian and Israeli meet at the checkpoint or security gate, is not a permanent cartographical point. Although within the present moment of performance, such as that time during which the Palestinian passes through the checkpoint, the physical obstacle to their movement and reason for their being in the 'frontier zone' is fixed within that specific point in time. However, due to the "continuous spatial reorganisation of the political borders", the re-routing of the Barrier, the 'flying checkpoint' which may or may not be present on a given day on a particular route, the further expansion of physical security measures into Palestinian territory, these pieces of the set can be perceived within Weizman's conception of 'elasticity'. The repercussions of these negotiations of territorial configurations actively engage and construct meanings of the interactions between the Palestinians and the Israelis. As Weizman states, "space is not the background for their actions, an abstract grid on which events take place, but rather the medium that each of their actions seeks to challenge, transform or appropriate."¹⁸⁸

Theatre in Palestine: Resistance in the Theatre of War

If we accept that the West Bank can be usefully described through drawing on the concept of the theatrical stage, how then do actual theatres, the microcosmic representations of the wider territory exist, respond to and engage with their surroundings? Given the 'facts on the ground', to which political demonstrations and protests of resistance are prominent reactions to the conditions within the space in which they occur, how can 'conventional' theatrical practices occur? By 'conventional' I refer here to normative practices of theatre located within a site which is specifically designated as a site for performance, be it a theatre building, or a place where the objective is theatrical performance and conceptualised as a performance to be presented to an audience within a given space and time. This

¹⁸⁸ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p7

dedicated space is designated as a site upon which theatre is to be performed, within which professional and/or amateur actors create, devise and rehearse performances intended for public consumption within that same theatrical site, or another site elsewhere within the West Bank, specifically designated as a site for a piece of theatre to be performed within.

Palestinian theatre occurs within numerous spaces of the West Bank. Although theatre practitioners are primarily located in urban areas, they often travel to other places in order to perform and conduct theatre activities. Of particular interest for this study are sites of extreme contention, located near to the Separation Wall and Jewish-Israeli settlements. Palestinians located within these contentious sites are not passive and docile in all circumstances and in all places; many non-violent protests have taken place within these 'frontier zones'. McAuley defines the 'frontier zone' within theatrical space as "where presentational space [the stage] and audience space meet".¹⁸⁹ This notion of the 'frontier zone' can therefore be simultaneously be applied in Palestine to both theatrical productions and real-life confrontation, especially regarding the sites of extreme contention in which the Freedom Bus/Ride in particular operates. By performing within these sites - Palestinian villages in close proximity to heavily guarded Jewish-Israeli settlements – not only is there a Palestinian and international audience within the site itself, but a hostile audience of Israeli military personnel observing the activity from afar, whose presence contains the possibility of intervention and potential violence. These sites comprise a dangerous element, inherent within the space itself, which poses a threat to both actors and sympathetic audience.

Theatre in Palestine is, like other theatres in places of conflict, a "theatre with specific social agendas" which occurs "of, by, and with silenced, marginalized, and oppressed peoples."¹⁹⁰ Whilst there may be convincing arguments for the use of

¹⁸⁹ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p55

¹⁹⁰ Thompson, J. & Schechner, R. (2004), 'Why "Social Theatre"?', *TDR*, 48:3, 11-16, p12; 16

theatre practices in communities living in a wartime society,¹⁹¹ this becomes more problematic when applied to an intractable conflict such as the Israeli-Palestinian one, where militarized violence is endemic and affects wide sections of the population, but it more concentrated within specific pockets located within these frontier zones, or sites of extreme contention. Although Palestinians at the time of writing are not being subjected to wide-scale aerial bombing campaigns or the re-invasion of their towns and cities as during the second intifada, nonetheless they are continuing to exist under prolonged military occupation, which does not appear to be finishing any time soon. Therefore, non-violent resistance to the occupation in Palestine is operating in relation to the current machinations and manifestations of it. As an established part of this non-violent resistance, theatre practices in Palestine exist with the stated overall objective of alleviating their community's suffering and working towards ending the occupation.

Strategy versus Tactics

As grassroots activism working within space dominated by the international NGO paradigm, theatre companies are therefore operating at a tactical level in terms of their power capabilities in relation to the overarching structural forces functioning in the West Bank. James Thompson applies Michel de Certeau's notion of the divergence between tactical and strategic performance practices in relation to theatre activities within a conflict zone. At the strategic level exists those at the higher end of socio-political organisation: the military and government, who possess the ability to institute far-reaching structural changes. At the tactical level are "'ways of operating'" by those who lack political power, and which are located within a sub-structural realm.¹⁹² Performances – including theatrical productions¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ See Chapter 2, 'In Place' in: Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*.

¹⁹² Thompson, J. (2009), *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p35

¹⁹³ Thompson is examining Applied Theatre in particular, but his premise can equally relate to 'traditional' theatrical performances and activities. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, a variety of theatrical practices occur, including Applied and non-'traditional' forms of theatre; however, I would

– within a context of war may therefore be a useful tool for understanding and cognitively processing the experiences undergone by participants and audience members, but they do not have the ability to undermine the structural forces at play. This may prove problematic, and indeed hazardous, for theatre practitioners should they adhere to the belief that through their activities they can effect structural change, particularly by those who come from the oppressed group.

Any suggestion that theatre as non-violent resistance can produce the desired outcome of removing the military occupation from the West Bank could certainly be seen to be “raising dangerous expectations”, inciting further action which could elicit a violent, perhaps deadly, response from the occupying forces.¹⁹⁴ Within the Palestinian context, this is of special importance when considering theatrical productions being performed within sites of extreme contention, due to the volatility of the space. By suggesting that theatrical productions exist only at the tactical level is not to diminish the work of those involved, nor the positive impact that they have upon their participants and audience, but rather to accept the limitations of theatre practices within this particular conflict zone, given the massive disparities in power and change-making capabilities between the different parties. Additionally, this acknowledgement should not be assumed to mean that even though the overarching objective of expunging the occupation cannot be reached through theatre initiatives alone, the tactical actions of theatre practitioners and their audiences may well be “powerful political terrain that enables survival and resistance”.¹⁹⁵

“On the Stage, Equality Is”?

One contrasting theoretical perspective regarding the efficacy of theatre projects as an instrument for resisting the occupation is that of Maurya Wickstrom’s ‘Idea of

argue that all Palestinian theatre regardless of form, exists at the tactical level in terms of its political power in relation to the Israeli occupation and internal Palestinian social and political structures.

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, J. (2009), *Performance Affects*, p36

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, J. (2009), *Performance Affects*, p37

Equality'. Here, Wickstrom applies Alain Badiou's notion of the reconfiguring of a current oppressive situation into a 'new present' through the creation of a 'new space'. Using the example of Spartacus' slave rebellion, Badiou suggests that those slaves who participate in revolting against their persecutors actualise a different reality, one which engenders liberation and personal freedom, and which inspires other enslaved persons to consider their enslavement and become emancipated. Those participants form a body, an army, and redefine themselves as subjects within the 'new present'. This body instigates the reconceptualization of the self and abides by the concept of an 'Idea', "an eternal, a truth, something that by definition must apply to all, outside of any identitarian categories."¹⁹⁶ Within the Palestinian context, those who engage in active resistance against the occupation therefore form a body - an army – which strives to achieve this 'new present' based upon the 'Idea of Equality', the notion of personal and national liberation and a right of return for the refugees located outside of Israel and Palestine.¹⁹⁷

It is through theatre productions in Palestine that the space itself is modified within the 'new present'. Indeed, these two concepts – spatial and temporal – and interlinked and mutually exclusive in order for the 'Idea of Equality' to be achieved. Wickstrom puts forward the notion that "On stage, equality *is*." Through imagining an alternative reality to the current situation, Palestinian theatre practitioners and their audiences are enabled to envisage the social and political justice for which they strive. This focus on changing space as an objective can be perceived as being a strategy, rather than a tactic. Through the demand that "*space must be changed*" in order for the 'Idea of Equality' in Palestine to be achieved,¹⁹⁸ Wickstrom is suggesting that the entire structural organisation of space within the West Bank is radically overhauled and, should the 'Idea' be actualised, within Israel proper with the return of the Palestinian refugees. Through promoting the notion that theatre could have the capabilities to achieve such an ambitious aim, through creating an army of resistance, Wickstrom is promoting an ideal, rather than referring to the

¹⁹⁶ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p33-4

¹⁹⁷ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p34

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

actual potential of grassroots activism to effect change at the structural level, despite this being a fervent desire for many Palestinian theatre practitioners. However, the existence of such an 'Idea' is a useful concept for understanding the motivations for many cultural practices in Palestine, and as such will be utilised in the analyses that follows, albeit cautiously.

Although the notion of an army is problematic in that it evokes violent rebellion, Wickstrom applies this to Palestinian theatre – a non-violent form of resistance - in the West Bank, within the context of an oppressive military occupation carried out by the Israelis and a nefarious neoliberal economic regime imposed by the international community. Wickstrom suggests that the globalizing of the Palestinian economy, through an enforced application of neoliberal ideals of free markets and a diminishing role for the state regarding social welfare, has been made more palatable to local inhabitants through “social partner initiatives”, which serve to obfuscate the more iniquitous aspects of neoliberalism through an apparent focus on ‘human rights’ and ‘social development’, fronted by foreign-born aid workers complicit with this regime.¹⁹⁹ As a result, she proposes that theatre in Palestine is a “theatre for resisting development”, whereby theatre practitioners are wholly in condemnation of this externally-imposed humanitarian regime.²⁰⁰ Although I am in agreement that many Palestinians, not just those involved in cultural practices, are deeply critical of international involvement in Palestine, this overarching statement does not fully explore the complexities of the reality in Palestine.

My research suggests that due to theatre companies and practitioners depending upon international funding for their survival, there is a simultaneous integration through financial necessity into the international humanitarian regime whilst holding strong feelings of mistrust against it, as I examine in my chapter on the internationalisation of Palestinian theatre practices. However, I do concur with Wickstrom's assertion that UNRWA and associated development-focused aid agencies seek to render Palestinian refugee camps as “frozen, immobile” spaces,

¹⁹⁹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p6

²⁰⁰ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p10

which Palestinian attempt to resist through theatrical productions.²⁰¹ Likewise, the ‘rights discourse’ which is so prevalent in the humanitarian regime greatly influences numerous productions in relation to their content, particularly regarding the promotion of women’s rights.²⁰² Through concentrating on internal social issues, and concomitantly demanding demonstrable and quantifiable outcomes, externally-funded Palestinian theatre is in danger of being “tied to a sense of the theatre’s efficacy, in terms of its impact on its audience and/or on the situation it is representing.”²⁰³ This echoes Thompson’s concern that theatres in conflict zones which are dependent upon outside funding avenues, focus on the *effects* of theatre. Therefore, whilst it may promote positive results such as increasing awareness of human rights and social justice, in addition to personal development for its participants, the consequent defining of its work in terms of ‘social impact’ may well obscure – or even undermine – the more complex *affects* of theatre which seeks to locate performance practices (including theatre) as a ‘cultural expression’ of those experiencing the crises of war and social disruption.²⁰⁴

Conclusion

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is three-dimensional; it is informed by and relies upon two ethno-national groups declaring ownership over the same piece of land. However, this territory cannot just be considered on the topographical horizontal level, for although this surface area is extremely important, the space within this land, that which exists both beneath and above, has become instrumental in attempting to reconnect territory fragmented on the surface level. Thus, enclaves within the Palestinian West Bank are strung together by checkpoints and the Security Barrier; Israeli settlements are joined via road networks which bridge across Palestinian-controlled areas or through the earth underneath. These three-

²⁰¹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p46

²⁰² Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p62

²⁰³ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p3

²⁰⁴ Thompson, J. (2009), *Performance Affects*, p116

dimensions are predicated on and made necessary by the 'Principle of Separation', the Israeli desire to exist apart from the Palestinians, and for Palestinians to be internally fragmented within their territory. As a result, a number of mechanisms have been implemented in order to achieve this separation, including the construction of physical barriers, tight restrictions on movement and the constant surveillance of the Palestinian inhabitants. Taken as a whole, these practices constitute 'urbicide', the denial of the right to urban existence and development.

Both professional and amateur theatre companies are present within the West Bank, performing a number of both scripted and devised productions for Palestinian audiences throughout the West Bank. Just as the space of the West Bank is contentious and filled with cultural meanings, so too is performance space; it too is imbued with the cultural conditions from which it arises, be this a theatre auditorium or an improvised stage in a non-conventional setting. We can view the territory of the West Bank as a stage within its own right, due to the imposition of a 'set' in the form of Israeli settlements, checkpoints, the Security Barrier, and the existence of Palestinians and Israeli settlers and military personnel as both performer and spectator, depending of the situation. These roles can become tenser when located within the 'frontier zone' of the performance space, that area where the Israelis and Palestinians meet, such as at a checkpoint or by the proximity of a settlement.

The relationship between conflict and space and space and performance within the West Bank is at present underexplored. It is my intention to analyse performances within the space of the West Bank and in light of the political situation 'on the ground' to explore this relationship, to investigate how spatial configurations within a given territory and performance space are mutually dependent and reflexive of each other, and how these are represented through performance.

Chapter 3: International Involvement in Palestinian Theatre Practices

Introduction

This chapter focus on the role of international agencies operating as part of the international humanitarian regime within Palestine, and the effects their presence has upon theatre practices within the West Bank and East Jerusalem, especially within Area 'A's. The analysis of theatre productions which reference the relationships between international donors and grassroots theatre practitioners suggests that 'spacio-cide' is conducted through the international neoliberal humanitarian regime in these non-refugee urban sites. This is done via the implementation of the 'Principle of Separation' and the neoliberal development discourse championed by the humanitarian regime within Area 'A's, and particularly in Ramallah, the *de facto* capital city of the West Bank. Since the cessation of active conflict and the removal of Israeli military forces from inside Palestinian cities, the focus for international NGOs (INGOs) has been to finance projects promoting Palestinian 'development' through cultural initiatives. However, in order to access these funds, Palestinian theatre companies must adhere to international donor agencies' protocols and objectives, which may diverge from Palestinian intentions, in order to be successful. Therefore, Palestinian theatre within these areas has been 'encouraged' to produce plays focusing on internal social issues, rather than addressing the occupation. In this context, the possibilities for theatrical resistance are limited. Recently, as shall be discussed below, Palestinian theatres have been resisting this international humanitarian paradigm whilst remaining within the parameters of acceptability.

I begin with an overview of the neoliberal state-building paradigm as an instrument of both the 'state of exception' and the 'Principle of Separation' which exists in Palestine, before moving on to examine the repercussions of this development model upon Palestinian theatre practitioners and activities. I shall particularly focus on one production, *Beit Yasmin* (*Yasmin's House*; Dir: Iman Aoun, Ashtar Theatre,

Ramallah; 2011) which highlighted the problematic relationship between Palestinians and the international donors. I then analyse the external funders' championing of women's rights in Palestine through theatre practices. Furthermore, some of the productions which were performed in Palestine during my fieldwork in 2011 and 2012 will be examined, in order to examine some of the problems arising from joint initiatives between Palestinian and international theatre practitioners. The concluding section analyses how joint partnership working can be achieved through long-term relationships between Palestinian and international theatre-makers, away from the more traditional funding avenues for short-term or one-off projects.

Contemporary Palestinian theatre does not exist as a purely indigenous form, as it has configured itself through borrowing from other cultures and reinvigorating existing cultural traditions, thus creating a new "hybrid" style which reflects the political circumstances in which it exists.²⁰⁵ Palestinian theatre practitioners from theatres in the main urban, non-refugee sites form part of the globalised elite and have frequent and in-depth interactions with international theatre-makers, be it within Palestinian space, or outside, through collaborative theatre productions. Palestinian theatre companies today function as NGOs, which, although registered with the PA, do not receive funding from the underfunded Ministry of Culture.²⁰⁶ As a result, these theatre companies are completely reliant on international funding from established and omnipresent donor agencies such as the European Union and United Nations, in addition to smaller grants from Western sources. The disparity of power between the funder and funded serves to impact upon the work produced by Palestinians operating throughout the cultural sphere, including the theatre and performance arts, and establishes a paradigm which cultural providers must adhere to working within.

²⁰⁵ Khamis Nassar, H. (2001), *Palestinian Theatre Between Origins and Visions*, Thesis (PhD), Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

²⁰⁶ It has been suggested that the total expenditure of the Ministry of Culture is 0.2% of the total PA budget. Interview with Abdulfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

Sari Hanafi suggests that the 'Principle of Colonization' imposed upon the West Bank includes that of enforced Palestinian economic dependency on Israel, whereby through the Paris Protocol (2004), Israel retains commercial advantage and does not enable the full economic development of Palestine.²⁰⁷ At the same time, the territorially-based 'Principle of Separation', applicable primarily to the urban Area 'A's, has led to an 'outsourcing' of the occupation to the Palestinian Authority as a renewed and revisioned new structuring of Palestinian space. Thus, the Oslo Accords "signified the *reorganization* of power rather than its withdrawal and should be understood as the continuation of the occupation by other means."²⁰⁸ Indeed, the PA exists as a tool to disguise the occupation, and assumes alleged legal, political and economic responsibility for the Palestinian population, despite being subjected to continuing control by Israel.²⁰⁹ However, as has been made apparent through my interviews, Palestinian theatre receives no funding from the PA's Ministry of Culture, and therefore as a result of this inability to cater for Palestinian theatrical pursuits, it could be said that the PA further outsources the performance arts to the INGOs, thereby reducing any semblance of autonomy or agency. The onus for financing performance projects is thus placed onto INGOs, who are constrained by their organisational policies and protocols. However, this 'outsourcing' does not stop at the INGO level – indeed, a number of donor agencies manage their programmes' content and policy, but 'outsource' the actual administration, and the carrying out of the project is delegated to "local partners".²¹⁰ Theatre companies are therefore placed in the role of service provider for implementing INGO policies, of which they have little say in determining or influencing.

The omnipresent existence of INGOs following the Oslo Accords within Palestinian space is especially pronounced within the West Bank's main urban centres of Ramallah and Bethlehem, in addition to East Jerusalem. The plethora of INGOs

²⁰⁷ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory', pp195-6

²⁰⁸ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p170

²⁰⁹ Gordon, N. (2008), *Israel's Occupation*, p171

²¹⁰ Challand, B. (2008), 'The Evolution of Western Aid for Palestinian Civil Society: Bypassing Local Knowledge and Resources', p406

operating from and within these urban sites has led to an abundance of Western aid workers, primarily from powerful European countries and the United States. As has been suggested in the theoretical chapter, development in Palestine has been asymmetrical, with external funding agencies focusing particularly on Ramallah to the detriment of other areas. The function of international NGOs appears to be that of conduits for the dissemination of foreign aid as part of the neoliberalisation of Palestine, which encourages the privatisation of public services and infrastructure, the opening of domestic, regional and international markets, and to engender a social ethos centring on the individualisation and self-reliance of the neoliberal subject.²¹¹ As a result, NGOs working within Palestine, both those headed by internationals as well as local parties, have found it necessary to transform themselves into bodies perceived as acceptable to internationally-determined objectives to receive funding.

The pervasive presence of INGOs can be said to significantly alter Palestinian lived space, and contributes to the 'spacio-cidal' project through the mass intrusion, both literally and metaphorically, of foreign bodies. Indeed, a number of Palestinians during my period of fieldwork referred to this presence as the 'other' or 'third' occupation.²¹² The ramifications arising from internationals working within this space is especially prominent in regards to issues of funding projects and schemes for local Palestinians. The international community is, essentially, "footing the bill" for the continued existence of the Israeli occupation within the West Bank and East Jerusalem.²¹³ It also responds, albeit relatively impotently and without addressing the underlying causes, to the strategy of "space annihilation"²¹⁴ implemented by the Israeli military. This can be seen most pertinently in the UNRWA emergency

²¹¹ See for a further discussion of these issues: Khalidi, R. & Samour, S. (2011), 'Neoliberalism as Liberation: The Statehood Program and the Remaking of the Palestinian National Movement', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40:2, 6–25, p20; Merz, S. (2012), "'Missionaries of the New Era': Neoliberalism and NGOs in Palestine', *Race and Class*, 54:1, 50 –66, p52; Turner, M. (2012), 'Completing the Circle: Peacebuilding as Colonial Practice in the Occupied Palestinian Territory', *International Peacekeeping*, 19:4, 492-507, p497-8; Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p40

²¹² The first occupation is perceived of being that of the Israeli military and settler presence; the second that of the poorly thought of and corrupt Palestinian Authority.

²¹³ Le More, A. (2005), 'Killing with Kindness: Funding the Demise of a Palestinian State', p993

²¹⁴ Hanafi, S. (2013), 'Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory, p191

humanitarian project and subsequent reconstruction of Jenin Refugee Camp following Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, which saw the almost-complete obliteration of the camp by the Israelis. Whilst UNRWA successfully completed this reconstruction, they did so through a “minimalist humanitarian framework”, which perceived the camp as a de-politicised space and ignored the political claims of the refugee inhabitants against the occupation.²¹⁵

However, the destruction of Jenin camp is an extreme example which arose from a period of active conflict whereas the marriage of neoliberal economic policies with liberal social policies emanating from, and imposed by, the international donor community, is based upon the false presumption that the occupation was over, and that a new era of economic and political prosperity could flourish in the post-second Intifada period (post-2005). Indeed, the apparent collusion with, and lack of challenge to the status quo can be said to have derived from the conceptualisation of Palestine, namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as a post-conflict sovereign state. This is, according to Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar, especially problematic for two primary reasons: firstly, at the conceptual level, whereby the ‘post-conflict’ development model is conceived of as following a linear trajectory, whereas the actual conflict is in reality temporally cyclical; secondly at the procedural level, whereby the international aid contributor places itself as an unbiased, ‘neutral’ force, thus both undermining and omitting the causes of the conflict, which, for Hanafi and Tabar, are that of Israel’s continuing colonial presence in Palestine.²¹⁶ International NGOs operating in Palestine can therefore be said to be normalising the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, by attempting to alleviate the worst effects of the occupation upon the Palestinian population by providing emergency, humanitarian aid whilst simultaneously engaging in a ‘neo-orientalist’ conception of Palestine as a place in which ‘superior’ Western values and modes of government need to be implemented and enforced.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Tabar, L. (2012), The “Urban Redesign” of Jenin Refugee Camp: Humanitarian Intervention and Rational Violence, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 41:2, 44-61, p53

²¹⁶ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), ‘The New Palestinian Globalized Elite’, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 24, p17

²¹⁷ Challand, B. (2008), ‘The Evolution of Western Aid for Palestinian Civil Society’, p411-12

Beit Yasmin (2011): A Palestinian Theatrical Critique of the Neoliberal Humanitarian Regime

It is from these pertinent issues that the joint Ashtar and al-Harah production of *Beit Yasmin* emanates. Ashtar is a theatre based in central Ramallah, founded by key Palestinian theatre practitioners Edward Muallem and Iman Aoun, who were both previously involved in the El-Hakawati theatre in East Jerusalem. Ashtar theatre focus on producing Forum theatre, through which it has tackled contentious and even taboo issues within Palestinian society, such as early marriage, using the character of 'Abu Shaker'. Additionally, Ashtar theatre provides drama training programmes for young people, including in Theatre of the Oppressed.²¹⁸ Al-Harah, based in Beit Jala, Bethlehem, also offers drama training for Palestinian youth, concentrates on devising original plays for performances for both adults and children.²¹⁹ Both theatre companies work extensively within Palestine and internationally, collaborating with numerous theatre companies from abroad, and are registered as NGOs. These two companies, in addition to the el-Hakawati/PNT in East Jerusalem, al-Kasaba in Ramallah, and Yes Theatre in Hebron, are reliant upon mainstream international funding for their theatre activities, and as such are located in a deferential position within the neoliberal humanitarian regime. There exists an uneasy and problematic relationship between these theatre practitioners and the donor community, for although their mutual interests regarding the content and intentions of plays can coincide, leading to works which fulfil the objectives of both funder and cultural provider, should these aims drastically diverge, funding is not allocated to the project.

It was this situation which provided the impetus for *Beit Yasmin*. This production presents a provocative and self-reflexive critique of the role of international agencies who, through funding civil society programmes, such as theatre activities

²¹⁸ Interview with Iman Aoun (27th October 2012).

²¹⁹ Interview with Marina Barham (10th January 2012).

in the West Bank, are perceived as prolonging the Israeli occupation and denying the Palestinian right to self-determination. I was told by the director, Iman Aoun, that the premise for this production arose out of a situation regarding funding for a number of performances of the play *Munulujaat Ghaza (The Gaza Monologues; 2011)*. This production was comprised of a series of verbatim monologues written by children in Gaza, describing their everyday existence in this extremely volatile area during Israel's 'Operation Cast Lead' in 2008-09. A number of theatre practitioners wished for there to be simultaneous performances of this play throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and sought funding for this project from UNRWA. However, because the production included certain prohibited words, such as 'occupation', 'blood', and 'martyr', UNRWA denied funding unless these specific words were removed. The practitioners refused to do so, as this would be denying the Gazan children their voice, and from their perspective would serve to mask the reality of the situation in Gaza, and therefore they did not receive the funding and could not complete this project. *Beit Yasmin* was created therefore as a cultural response to this experience, as resistance to the funding conditions imposed upon Palestinian theatre practitioners.²²⁰

The absurdity of such a situation, whereby Palestinians are simultaneously encouraged to express themselves culturally, albeit within a highly structured and prohibitive framework of donor concerns depicting fears of Israeli and American disapproval, is stated by Beit Yasmin's director, Iman Aoun:

The [Gaza Monologues] was a great idea for us, but for many of the funders wouldn't touch it because of its political connotations and because of what it represents... And it's stupid that they didn't want the people to speak up and say what's going on and what went on to the world, but they're ready to spend millions on food and aid, straightforward aid, but not, nothing that would make, would change international perception about the Palestinians, and this is why, this is

²²⁰ Interviews with Iman Aoun (27th October 2012); and Riham Isaac (5th January 2012).

one thing, that was the trigger on why we wanted to talk about this issue.²²¹

Although the play was performed throughout the West Bank during 2011, I saw it at Ashtar theatre close to the centre of Ramallah – the de facto economic and cultural ‘capital’ city of the West Bank in which numerous international NGOs base their headquarters. Ramallah is also known as the “economic-peace bubble” of the West Bank, due to its recent resurgence via internationally-funded construction and urban regeneration, particularly since 2007.²²² This production is concerned with the protagonist, Yasmin, a Palestinian human rights activist who presents a discussion show on pertinent current events, transmitted from the living room of her house. Following an assassination attempt by an unknown perpetrator, Yasmin, shot in the head and critically injured, remains comatose for the remainder of the performance, as her family and colleagues attempt to source funding and medical equipment from international aid agencies in order to save her life. The intrusion into their lives by the INGOs is represented through the character of Kate, the



Figure 1: The main performance space in *Beit Yasmin*, performed at Ashtar Theatre, Ramallah, 28th August 2011.

²²¹ Interview with Iman Aoun (27th October 2012).

²²² Khalidi, R. & Samour, S. (2011), ‘Neoliberalism as Liberation: The Statehood Program and the Remaking of the Palestinian National Movement’, p8

Western medical aid worker. It transpires throughout the production that those acting originally with good intent, become self-serving and seek to prolong Yasmin's condition for their own benefits.

The performance space itself is divided into three segments, representing the fragmentation of Palestinian space and the delineation of the different structural political strata produced under the 'spacio-cidal' regime. This can be seen on the vertical level: firstly, the main stage, depicting Yasmin's house; the other two performance sites, showing an NGO office and a café, are based within the audience space, one on the far right, the other at the furthest back left. Within the main site a metal bridge-like structure is prominently positioned, visually suggesting the intertwining humanitarian and governmental regimes upon Palestinian space. On either side of this a widescreen television has been placed, which concurrently broadcasts the action of the play as it is performed, by an actor who plays the role of cameraman to Yasmin's programme.

The audience and performer space are not separated; rather, they are infused through the placing of audience seating within the main performance area, much like a living room, and furthermore through the frequent interaction of some of the characters with the audience members, creating the sense of both participation and interaction, reflecting Gay McAuley's assertion that "the spectator has to be seen as a crucial and active agent in the creative process".²²³ Here, not only are any possible power differentiations between performer and audience minimised, but there is a sense of the establishment of a more equal space whereby those observing the performance are invited to contribute to and participate in the theatre which is being created. As Maurya Wickstrom suggests that in this "theatre for resisting development", it can be said that: "On stage, equality *is*".²²⁴ This desire for

²²³ McAuley, G. (2000), *Space in Performance*, p235

²²⁴ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p11; 34. Wickstrom is referring to all Palestinian theatre companies here, although she bases her analysis on Al-Rowwad, Ashtar and Inad (in Beit Jala) theatres only. Wickstrom does not differentiate between the theatre companies, placing all their activities under the blanket phrase of 'theatre for resisting

achieving equality is formulated through the configurations of the theatrical space, through making visual the separations which exist throughout Palestine by replicating them within the space of the theatre building as part of the performance. This not only raises awareness of the methods of segregation existing in Palestine, but also explains the socio-political structures which serve to define and reinforce them, particularly that of the international humanitarian regime, working in cooperation (however unwillingly) with the PA and Israeli regimes.

Spatially, it could be said that the structuring of these performance spaces into three distinct locations, represent the fragmentation of Palestinian society as a result of the intervention of international agencies. The distinct partition of the three spaces - that of the home or private space, the café or public space, and the NGO office or international space - suggests that Palestinian space in the West Bank has been significantly reconstructed in line with the increased presence of INGOs, and their concurrent remaking of Palestinian civil society within their model of neoliberal economics and liberal democratic principles.²²⁵ However, the dual-use of Yasmin's house as family home and site of televised political discussion suggests that practices of national resistance has been relegated to the private domain, transmitted to other private domains through the television. As is revealed through the course of the play, the spaces of the NGO office and café, although public arenas, are not imbued with spirit of resistance; indeed, they are constrained within the imposed paradigmatic reference frames created and reinforced by the donor agendas to which Yasmin and her family are constricted within.

The imposing metal structure, taking centre place within the main performance space, can be said to represent the three intertwining and mutually complimentary occupations, each of which contribute to the 'spacio-cidal' state of Palestine. These three layers are not definite or fixed, for there is movement in and between them, albeit on an unequal and disproportionate basis. Firstly, the overarching macro-

development', which does not explain the contradictory relationship mainstream theatre companies have with the international regime from which it obtains its funds.

²²⁵ Merz, S. (2012), "Missionaries of the New Era", pp52-3

structure of the Israeli military occupation exists as the predominant structure which defines and delineates the boundaries of spatial existence for the Palestinians. Secondly, the Palestinian Authority is located at a subservient and subsumed level, that of the quasi-state/governmental level, which imposes restrictions upon Palestinians, albeit always in accordance with Israeli military demands. Finally, simultaneously existing both above and below the governmental level, due to its operating at both the more local level as well as a structural regime – albeit one that exists on a spatial and conceptual plain above the grassroots – is that of the INGO, which attempts to permeate the micro-level of the everyday, and indeed has significant effect, but again is held ransom to the demands of the overarching structural power.

As has been mentioned by a number of critics of the ‘NGO-isation’,²²⁶ of Palestinian space and society, the international community is following a development model based upon the illusion that in the post-Oslo period, Palestine is a post-conflict quasi-state which can therefore be subjected to the tried-and-tested methods of post-colonial development. However, this is not the case, as the Israeli military occupation still exists, controlling the critical junctures of Palestinian movement, in addition to continuing to build Israeli settlements on Palestinian West Bank land, and as such Palestine cannot be considered post-conflict. Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar put forward the notion that international aid “invariably follows the modality of colonial control; thus within Palestine, as a new site of ‘peace-building’, the international order is superimposed over the colonial order”.²²⁷ However, the representational spaces depicted in this performance suggest that the international exists both on a level between that of the governmental/state level and the grassroots micro-social, and between the governmental and overarching occupation level. The international humanitarian regime traverses within and between the different layers in order to facilitate continued working practices through cooperation with both Israeli and Palestinian authorities. As such, the

²²⁶ Jad, I. (2007), ‘NGOs: between buzzwords and social movements’, *Development in Practice*, 17:4-5, 622-629

²²⁷ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), ‘The New Palestinian Globalized Elite’, p17

interaction with Palestinians occurs at the local level, and as such, becomes intertwined with the everyday practice of Palestinian life.

This situation is depicted through the character of Yasmin. She is a multi-faceted representation: she is the embodied territory of historical Palestine, physically destroyed and made passive through violence; any Palestinian characteristics she held as an active agent of Palestinian culture and resistance has been made void through her incapacitation and enforced comatose state. As a result, she simultaneously symbolises the presence and the absence of the Palestinian collective, for her body and spirit is both there and not there, like the former land of Palestine has experienced the loss of its Palestinian inhabitants. Yasmin becomes a shell, as hollow as the land; she is 'bare life', a 'present absentee'. At the same time, Yasmin represents national resistance and the 'true' Palestinian voice; she is made mute through violence, and she is transformed into an object which must be saved by the 'international community'. She becomes an idea, a symbol, a cause to be championed. Her comatose body is laid centre-stage, at once the object of the



Figure 2: The multiple forces at play in Palestine, as represented through Beit Yasmin.

audience's gaze but at the same time an object that can be ignored. Symbolically, she represents the inaction and debilitation of the resistance movement, she has been physically prevented from continuing her acts of resistance, and as such, has been muted and made void, despite her continuous physical presence on stage.

Beit Yasmin also offers a damning critique of Palestinian leaders and their collusion with the international community, as being against the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. The so-called 'globalized Palestinian elite' are formed from the upper echelons of Palestinian society. Highly educated and proficient in English, the lingua franca of the international aid industry world, this elite (of which the majority of theatre practitioners themselves comprise) are Western-orientated and acutely aware of the rules which they must abide by in order to become part of, and remain within, the professionalised and bureaucratised, internationally-dominated localised order. It is said that this elite "move within the space occupied by donors and INGOs, attending global conferences and forming their own relations with international organizations."²²⁸ We can see this clearly depicted in one of the scenes from *Beit Yasmin*. Yasmin's brother, in his Western suit and ability to charm the foreign aid worker in English, is the typified representation of these globalised elites. His characterisation as one of the "upper-class, English-speaking professionals who have the charisma necessary for communicating with the West",²²⁹ in addition to his acquiescence to the demands imposed upon him in order to receive medical care for Yasmin and willingness to place his individual position and social status above that of the national desires of the Palestinians, effectively results in his being an unsympathetic character to a Palestinian audience.

The collusion between the Palestinian elites and international humanitarian regime in stifling the national demands is revealed spatially at a key point during which the brother and Kate are situated on the 'bridge' structure, together hanging a banner proclaiming 'Yasmin's Hospital'. The physical dominance which exudes from their

²²⁸ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), 'The New Palestinian Globalized Elite', p27

²²⁹ Abdo, N. (2010), 'Imperialism, the State, and NGOs', p244

elevated position suggests that these characters have the political power and ability to reconceptualise and represent Palestine from above, resulting in the modification of the meaning of the space below according to their agendas. This re-defining of Yasmin's space from that of a home and place of politics and resistance into that of a medical facility suggests a sterilisation and subsequent imposition of the label of 'diseased', 'sick', in need of intervention. The hospital is, of course, funded by the aid agencies operating in Palestine, and thus removes possession from Yasmin, and by extension from the Palestinians. The transformation of the area from Yasmin's house, her private possession and own space, to that of Yasmin's Hospital, a public space in which the ill and dying come to either recover or pass on, removes the notion of the space as belonging to Yasmin; instead, it belongs to the funders of the hospital. The name itself suggests commemoration, rather than active belonging and possessing, and as such becomes in effect an artefact, something reduced to a slogan, a cause. Thus, we can see that the principle of ownership, a supposedly key ethical concern for funding bodies, has been undermined, and that due to the dependence of the Palestinians upon these agencies for survival, an inherently asymmetrical relationship ensures that Palestinians remain the weaker party, removing their ability to negotiate better



Figure 3: The representation of structural forces in Beit Yasmin.

terms for themselves.²³⁰

The re-positioning of the private space of the individual home into that of a hospital additionally reflects the specialisation and privatisation of this place; rather than a multi-faceted and multi-purpose, instead, this newly designed and 'rebranded' hospital has a designated role as a provider of primary health care for the comatose Yasmin, out of which it cannot deviate from its specialised function. Indeed, the character of the international NGO nurse, Kate, must herself administer Yasmin's 'medicine', thus removing agency from the Palestinians and placing herself in the role of 'saviour' of the failing body, both literally the individual body of Yasmin, and figuratively the embryonic Palestinian state. She embodies the "soft power" favoured by international funding bodies such as the EU and the UN, of encouraging Palestinian acquiescence through the provision of services.²³¹ She becomes the 'outsourced' implementer of international NGO policy, a specialist medical worker who although supposedly working in 'partnership' with the Palestinians, is in fact serving to impede local autonomy and denying the realisation of an egalitarian space in which important decisions regarding the plight of Palestinians can be discussed and potentially remedied.²³² Indeed, Kate herself traverses the spaces presented in this performance in a neo-colonial manner; she displays the correct level of "outsider outrage" regarding the occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but despite her best efforts, she exemplifies that which Maurya Wickstrom has labelled as the 'neoliberal subject', those Western humanitarian workers who believe themselves to be acting within the paradigm of human rights advocacy, a member of the international community espousing Palestinian self-determination and equality, whilst in actuality perhaps unwittingly working against these objectives through their very presence and actions within the neoliberal development model.²³³

²³⁰ Ibrahim, N. & Beaudet, P. (2012), 'Effective Aid in the Occupied Palestinian Territories', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 12:5, 481-500, p493

²³¹ Abdo, N. (2010), 'Imperialism, the State, and NGOs', p244

²³² Challand discusses the issues arising from 'partnership-working' and the effects upon local autonomy and decision-making spaces, which I have applied in relation to this performance. Challand, B. (2008), 'The Evolution of Western Aid', p405

²³³ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p6; 33

The multiple intrusions upon Yasmin's space are reinforced through the use of material. As Yasmin-as-cause becomes more popular, so too does the desire to participate in her 'recovery'. Thus, we see a number of different coloured sheets being placed over Yasmin's prone body, in addition to numerous medicines attached to her, each representing the different aid agencies at work in Palestine. This material is also reminiscent of the superfluity of the donations given to Palestinians, for it has been alleged that rather than focusing on the actual needs of the people, agencies instead follow their own agendas, based on their own directives and priorities, thus providing excessive amounts of expendable paraphernalia, of little use to the intended population.²³⁴ Additionally, the vast majority of international NGO initiatives are short-term, either one-off projects or lasting for a duration of around three to five years. This is obviously problematic in regards to long-term development in Palestine.²³⁵ The new ethos of competition for increasingly scarce funds, especially following the economic crises of the past few years, has undermined – indeed neutralised²³⁶ – the well-formed Palestinian civil society of the years of the first intifada in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and created both a hierarchy and a heteronomy of local NGOs which is based upon criteria determined by the donors.²³⁷

This reality of competing for scant resources for Palestinian theatre companies is put most succinctly by George Ibrahim, founder of al-Kasaba theatre in Ramallah, who states that:

Unfortunately, we are depending on our life on donors and funds. All aspects of life, and because of this, it has created hundreds of NGOs in this country. And all NGOs are longing for funds, and hunger for funds, and they are trying everything, and of course they are fighting to

²³⁴ Merz, S. (2012), "Missionaries of the New Era", p58

²³⁵ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), 'The New Palestinian Globalized Elite', p24.

²³⁶ Merz, S. (2012), "Missionaries of the New Era", p55

²³⁷ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), 'The New Palestinian Globalized Elite', p21; Challand, B. (2008), 'The Evolution of Western Aid for Palestinian Civil Society', p397

survive, like we do. And the donors, they don't look in their eyes to such places different from others, because they look for proposals, they don't look for such a centre that needs more money to go on surviving and go on serving the community. They look at the proposal and that's it... So this is what happens, everyone is submitting proposals, everyone is trying to sell projects and proposals, and even sometimes people who have nothing to do with theatre apply for theatre projects because there is theatre funding, if they hear that this country is donating for cultural this and this. So it is a chaos of project life... The Palestinian society, the Palestinian country is a project as well...²³⁸

One of the main criticisms directed against international NGOs is that their actions, albeit formed through 'good intentions', actually serves to normalise the occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem through providing humanitarian aid and managing crisis situations when they arise, without addressing the core reasons for these crises – namely the continuing occupation.²³⁹ The aid given to the Palestinians by the international community is thus perceived as, in the words of Anne Le More, a "strategy of overcompensating with money for political inertia".²⁴⁰ Indeed, the 'NGO-isation' of Palestinian society and its socio-cultural manifestations through externally funded projects, results in the at least partial depoliticization of Palestinians, both collectively and individually.²⁴¹ This is achieved in part through the focus on internal Palestinian issues, such as women's and children's rights, education, health care and so on. Although these are of course important matters to be dealt with, the overwhelming concern with rectifying these through "participation" and "empowerment" projects,²⁴² such as those run by theatre companies in the West Bank, can be said to be detracting from critiquing the structural forces at work enforcing these problems.²⁴³

²³⁸ Interview with George Ibrahim (16th June 2012)

²³⁹ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), 'The New Palestinian Globalized Elite', , p19

²⁴⁰ Le More, A. (2005), 'Killing with Kindness', p992; 995-7

²⁴¹ Khalidi, R. & Samour, S. (2011), 'Neoliberalism as Liberation', p20

²⁴² Merz, S. (2012), "'Missionaries of the New Era'", p58-9

²⁴³ Abdo, N. (2010), 'Imperialism, the State, and NGOs', p244-5

Indeed, many Palestinians, including those working within the performance arts, are becoming increasingly disillusioned by the social and political repercussions of international NGOs working in Palestine, seeing them as a “tool of ‘cultural co-optation’”²⁴⁴ and even “cultural imperialism”²⁴⁵. Of particular concern to theatre practitioners is the recently implemented ‘Code of Good Conduct’, which recipients of American donations through USAID must sign in order to obtain the funding. This ‘Code’ demands that all Palestinian ‘clients’ must “denounce, condemn and boycott ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorists’”.²⁴⁶ Although this appears judicious, many individuals and groups who opposed the Oslo Accords for various reasons are included under the ‘terrorist’ umbrella, even if they had or have not committed any actions related to terrorism or incitement to violence.²⁴⁷ However, the reliance upon international funding means that theatre practitioners, like other Palestinian NGOs, are caught in the impossible situation of having to sacrifice their principles in order to complete their projects.²⁴⁸ Indeed, many theatre companies refused to sign this ‘Code’, making their endeavours to produce theatre all the more difficult.²⁴⁹ Indeed, many Palestinians NGOs find themselves in the unenviable position of having to choose between their principles and opportunities for funding; although many Palestinians actively oppose USAID in particular, they simultaneously accept direct financial assistance from them.²⁵⁰ This problem is explored during Beit Yasmin, when Yasmin’s sister-in-law vocally opposes signing the document, even if this would result in Yasmin’s death. Her eloquent repudiation of the central premise of the ‘Code’ – that Palestinians are somehow inherently involved with terrorist activities, serves as a self-reflective lamentation for the theatre community in Palestine, and the moral dilemma that they face as they are torn between the desire to produce high-quality theatre performances for their local audiences, and the ramifications of accepting these conditions from international funding bodies.

²⁴⁴ Abdo, N. (2010), ‘Imperialism, the State, and NGOs’, p238

²⁴⁵ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p64

²⁴⁶ Abdo, N. (2010), ‘Imperialism, the State, and NGOs’, p244

²⁴⁷ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p59

²⁴⁸ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), ‘The New Palestinian Globalized Elite’, p27

²⁴⁹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p59; Merz, S. (2012), ‘Missionaries of the New Era’, p53

²⁵⁰ Hanafi, S. & Tabar, L. (2005), ‘The New Palestinian Globalized Elite’, p27

It is through the character of Yasmin's son, representative of the new generation not only of Palestinian youth but also of theatre practitioners, that some hope for the future is made apparent. The son is offered the prospect of decent employment or scholarships for overseas study in return for his obedience to the status quo, which he explicitly rejects. Instead, he physically moves away from the three main performance spaces and immerses himself within the audience space, and begins a demonstration. The repeated chant of 'end the green medicine', whereby the 'green medicine' is representative of the medical aid given to Yasmin, and by extension the aid industry keeping Palestine 'alive', is taken up by the audience, who during the performance that I saw, enthusiastically engaged with this moment of encouraged audience participation. This suggests not only a renewed call to resistance against the Israeli occupation, but also against the more invidious consequences of the international NGOs working in Palestine, as Palestinians recognise the negative repercussions of these donor-driven projects and initiatives upon their community. It is this new generation of exceptionally politically aware and active Palestinians who are challenging those elements detrimental to the local and national health – both literally and figuratively – which suggests a renewed momentum for resistance against the three levels of occupation currently rendering Palestinians and their aspirations for self-determination comatose.

(En)Gendering Practices: The Female Focus

The international humanitarian regime privileges theatre productions and projects which work with 'vulnerable' groups such as women and youth, which has led to a multitude of cultural initiatives involving these 'marginalised' demographics. However, in order to secure funding, these must comply with policies promoting 'gender equality' and egalitarian principles. These policies originate from outside Palestine, and were created without direct consultation with Palestinians, meaning that issues of cultural sensitivities may be overlooked, with some West Bank inhabitants therefore perceiving these projects to be a form of neo-colonial cultural

impositions from Westerners trying to change their way of life. Gender issues in particular are contentious, as Westerners may easily fall into the trap of Orientalism, locating Palestinians within a dichotomy of “a ‘modern us’ and a ‘traditional them’”.²⁵¹ However, Palestinian society is patriarchal, and the position of women is subservient to men in hegemonic Palestinian culture. This is made more problematic in terms of human and gender rights due to issues of family honour relating to the female body, which demands modesty, with the punishments for transgressions severe.²⁵² It is therefore interesting that a woman is chosen to represent the state of Palestine and the silencing of resistance in *Beit Yasmin*. Although within traditional Palestinian literary narratives of *al-Nakba* and resistance, the land of Palestine is depicted as a woman, the passive, ‘raped’ victim, which Palestinian men must reclaim ownership over.²⁵³ However, within the post-Oslo development paradigm and ‘NGO-isation’ of Palestinian theatre companies, it could also be a comment on the new ‘femocrat’,²⁵⁴ female directors of Palestinian NGOs, and the partial re-emergence of women into public space following the end of the second intifada.

One recurrent theme in the theatre practices observed during my fieldwork is that of the gendering of Palestinian space, primarily as a result of the policies and preferences for funding initiatives from international agencies, but also emanating from a desire by female theatre practitioners to improve the situation for their fellow women. Although the international humanitarian regime exerts pressure to ‘develop’ Palestinian society through programmes for gender equality, this is not to say that all cultural initiatives promoting female participation are perceived negatively or challenged by many Palestinians, particularly when they involve

²⁵¹ Baxter, D. (2007), ‘Honor Thy Sister: Selfhood, Gender, and Agency in Palestinian Culture’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 80:3, 737-775, p739

²⁵² Baxter, D. (2007), ‘Honor Thy Sister: Selfhood, Gender, and Agency in Palestinian Culture’, p753

²⁵³ For a discussion of the gendering of the Palestinian nationalist narrative, see: Amireh, A. (2003), ‘Between Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102:4, 747-772; Kanafani, S. (2008), ‘Leaving Mother-Land: The Anti-Feminine in Fida’i Narratives’, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 15:3, 297-316; Massad, J. (1995), ‘Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism’, *Middle East Journal*, 49:3, 467-483.

²⁵⁴ Jad, I. (2011), ‘The Post-Oslo Palestine and Gendering Palestinian Citizenship’, *Ethnicities*, 11:3, 360-372, p361

children. It can be suggested therefore, that when theatre projects operate within the established social boundaries of gender norms in Palestine, carried out by fellow Palestinians, there is greater acceptance than when implemented by internationals, regardless of the funding origins. Female performers, and plays representing women and issues of women's rights, are therefore positioned in a site of contention between local cultural resistance and neo-colonial cultural imperialism. This depicts the complexity of the practice of cultural resistance within this context, and undermines the appealing simplicity of 'on stage, Equality is'.

The West Bank and East Jerusalem exists under two intertwined systems of patriarchy – that of the Israeli military occupation and Palestinian dominant culture - which serve to disproportionately impact negatively upon the lives of women. Many Palestinian women exist “under a double occupation: Israeli occupation, and the occupation of a conservative and patriarchal society”.²⁵⁵ Palestinian society has consistently been a “classic patriarchy”, whereby women are perceived as being of “inferior status” to a certain degree. This is enforced through the legal systems, drawn from existing laws from the Ottoman era, British Mandate and Jordanian or Egyptian rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively. These laws, in line with the numerous historical cultural belief systems which brought them into being, fail to protect women, “are often discriminatory and even condone the second-class status of women in society”.²⁵⁶

Based on my fieldwork interviews with leading female professional theatre practitioners, both established and emerging, there is general consensus that they as individuals have not been subjected to overwhelming restrictions or opposition from their families or society as a whole. For example, Farah Saleh, a freelance dancer and actress from Ramallah, stated that:

²⁵⁵ The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), Gender-Based Violence in Palestine, January 2006. Accessed 11th October 2012 online at: http://www.miftah.org/Publications/Books/Gender_Based_Violence_in_Palestine.pdf, p8.

²⁵⁶ Rought-Brooks, H. et al, (2010), 'Palestinian Women: Caught in the Cross-Fire Between Occupation and Patriarchy', *Feminist Formations*, 22:3, 124-145, p128

Well maybe I'm not the best woman to talk to about this, because I come from a very open-minded background, family, friends and everything, so it's been really really easy for me. And I started ever since I was 6 to be on stage, because of ballet then contemporary dance, then a bit of theatre and music, so it's been a piece of cake, from the social point of view, the family point of view, friends, no problems whatsoever.²⁵⁷

This sentiment is expressed by a number of Palestinian female theatre practitioners, from both the established and new generations. Iman Aoun of Ashtar theatre in Ramallah began her theatrical career in the 1980s with al-Hakawati theatre in Jerusalem. She states that when she first began to pursue a career in theatre, she faced some initial difficulties from her family, in particular her father, despite coming from a liberal background.

I started early at school, and my parents were really encouraging me to use theatre and to do it as a form of a hobby or a way of asserting myself, especially my father. But then I decided that this is going to be my career and my life, he was angry and frustrated. He tried to stop me, but he did not succeed... [His fears concerned] the future, of who would marry me, and the fact that theatre is not a profession that would really feed a person, so we had to work for other things in order to pay for the theatre... That was for me, but for other girls, absolutely, the problem was the preconception of theatre and what it would, the life, what it would really lead, and the life that the female is not entitled to. And so they are afraid of the social issues, and of the people who talk.²⁵⁸

Therefore, we can see that whilst there may have been some misgivings about females choosing theatre as a profession, due to the social conditions concerning

²⁵⁷ Interview with Farah Saleh (22nd October 2012).

²⁵⁸ Interview with Iman Aoun (27th October 2012).

the role of women in Palestinian culture, this did not translate into serious issues of prohibitions or regulations on female choice and action.

However, it cannot be said that these women are representative of Palestinian society, for they come primarily from the middle-class urban (primarily East Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem/Beit Jala) cultural elites. These women tend to be highly educated, to at least university level, with many holding postgraduate degrees and diplomas.²⁵⁹ They also have extensive interaction with the international community, with many having studied abroad, mostly in America and Europe. As part of the 'Globalised Palestinian Elite', with progressive views and frequent interaction with internationals, both inside and outside of Palestine, they are allowed more freedom than their rural and less educated and financially secure counterparts. However, this concept can only really be applied to the more liberal theatre communities within East Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem/Beit Jala. Within more strictly conservative areas such as Jenin and Hebron, this relative freedom is more curtailed, and theatrical activities engaged with issues of women's rights as well as the presence of female adult performers on the stage is more problematic. One of the more pertinent criticism raised by the more traditional community in Jenin regarding the activities of the Freedom Theatre related to the inter-gender mingling of teenage boys and girls. It was felt by some imams in Jenin's mosques that such behaviour was inappropriate and a threat to Palestinian Islamic values. Shortly prior to Juliano Mer-Khamis' murder outside of the Freedom Theatre in April 2011, a notice detailing that the activities of the theatre were "corrupting the morals of the Muslim youth and pushing them to rebel against the customs of our society" was circulated throughout Jenin refugee camp. It was alleged that mixed-gender groups were at the heart of Mer-Khamis' "'corrupting' project", and may have been the impetus for his assassination.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Marina Barham holds a postgraduate degree from Warwick University in the UK. Barham, Marina. Personal Interview. January 2012. Similarly, a number of female Palestinian practitioners have studied formally or informally in Europe and/or the USA.

²⁶⁰ Amireh, A. (2012), 'Activists, Lobbyists, and Suicide Bombers: Lessons from the Palestinian Women's Movement', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32:2, 437-446, pp437-8 – see footnote 6 in particular

In direct comparison, the activities of Yes Theatre in Hebron adhere to dominant gender norms and values in order to enable the participation of females within their programmes. Hebron is consistently described as very traditional and conservative, with strong Islamic values influencing the place of women within its society. Yes Theatre plays an important role in promoting the visibility of female Hebronians on the stage and within its productions and activities, backed by its European funders, the primary one being the German children's charity, WFD. As Ghada Arori from the War Child Institution says: "Working in theatre is not easy, especially in Hebron, where people are bound to specific social and cultural codes. So their mere presence in Hebron is a great accomplishment and a proof of the high level of their proficiency and efficiency."²⁶¹

Yes Theatre, however, is a known quantity in Hebron, its founders are local personalities with standing in the community; theatre activities have been ongoing and promoted for over a decade, "working to enhance the role of the Palestinian theatre in the Palestinian society".²⁶² A great deal of community work has been done by the theatre in order to foster an environment of trust and transparency. Whilst initially gender issues were indeed prominent, over time they have reduced as the work produced is perceived of being in line with the deeply-held social beliefs. As Raed Shyouki, co-founder and artistic director of Yes Theatre states:

Since 1997 till 2004-5 maybe, it was not easy to work with boys and girls... it was impossible to work with boys and girls together. It was not easy to work with girls, and they wonder what is she going to learn? Acting? And many people believe that acting is taboo, haram. Singing? Singing is haram!... We faced many problems, and sometimes they talked about us in mosques, in Friday *khutba* [sermon] – the Sheikh, the Imam, 'ah these foreign organisations who come from America, from Europe, who came to spoil and damage our children. They want girls to

²⁶¹ Ghada Arori, War Child, 'Yes Theatre Introduction', video accessed online at: www.yestheatre.org/pages/main?lan=en.

²⁶² Raed Shyouki, 'Yes Theatre Introduction', video accessed online at: www.yestheatre.org/pages/main?lan=en.

dance and act and sing. They want our children, boys and girls together, to touch the hands of each other, you can imagine! This is a big disaster, boy and girl touching hand[s], this is a big disaster. Kick them out of your country! Kick them out of your houses, don't let your children go to them or work with them or participate tut tut tut tut'. Many sheikhs many times came and talked with us and we always say: Sheikh, don't judge before you see what we do. Have you ever heard that we hit girl or boy? No. Have you ever heard that a boy touched a girl? No. Have you ever heard that a boy hit a girl or did something bad to her? No. Have you ever came and see what we do? No. We are welcome, can you please come and see. It's the same with the parents – many times the father comes and, shouting where's my daughter? What you do, you teach her dancing, working with boys? And I say, would you please come and watch what we do, simply, if you like it, you keep her. If you don't like it, you take your daughter and go in peace. They come and sit and they like it.²⁶³

It could be said from this extract, therefore, that engagement with religious leaders and parents of the child participants relieved the fears and anxieties of the community regarding this 'foreign' import. These actions produced an atmosphere conducive to the production of community-based theatre which, although amateur in regards to the 'Kids 4 Kids' projects, still fulfils a required need for female self-expression and the development of self-confidence and awareness.

²⁶³ Interview with Raed Shyouki (16th August 2012).



Figure 4: Female participants perform 'Hakawiyat' play at Yes Theatre, Hebron, 13th October 2011.

Can it be said, therefore that, as Maurya Wickstrom alleges, within Palestinian theatre: “On stage, equality *is*”?²⁶⁴ If social and political equality is the desired outcome of theatre programmes, does this also apply to gender equality within Palestinian society in addition to equality between Palestinian and Israeli nationals? This can be explored through one production from the 2011 ‘Kids 4 Kids’ programme, ‘Stories’, was a devised piece of theatre based upon the everyday experiences of female teenagers from Dura Town, adjacent to Hebron City. As the programme for the play states, the actresses:

tell their stories and reflect on each event they have lived. They try to describe their realities through stories they have collected from their schools, classrooms, homes, and even the places where they go shopping. They laugh, scream, and get angry. They are very proud to share their stories and express their feelings, dreams and thoughts. They represent each one of us.²⁶⁵

The presence of younger teenage girls on the stage gives voice to the specific concerns and aspirations of young Palestinian women and children, albeit one

²⁶⁴ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p34

²⁶⁵ Yes Theatre, ‘Hakawiat’ (‘Stories’) Programme, Kids 4 Kids production 2011, Dir: Ihab Zahda; English and Arabic

which is confined within the parameters of gender constraints for this society. The set very much adheres to these gender roles, as the domestic appliances located on the back wall correlate with the traditional role of the female as homemaker; the theme of social expectations placed on females revealing the gender inequalities rife within patriarchal Palestinian society. However, the very fact of females appearing on the stage, directly addressing the audience to highlight their issues and concerns within modern-day Palestinian Hebronian existence away from the occupation, transforms the stage into a platform for community awareness of the plight of women and girls in Palestine. Although the play does not deal with sensitive issues *per se*, such as gender-specific violence or female emancipation, it does offer an insight into the gender trappings Palestinian girls are subjected to, the constraints upon their being, as shown through various scenes. These problems are, to a certain extent universal, as the girls bemoan the social pressures to be fashionable, to achieve high grades at school, domineering mothers wanting to control their every move, and the teenage desire to be more independent. However, Palestinian Hebronian females have the added dimension of living in a society which remains strongly patriarchal and male-dominated.²⁶⁶ Likewise, the additional assertion that these girls “represent each one of us” sounds inclusive and acknowledges that females can be representative of Palestinian suffering and hardship under occupation.

Yes Theatre frequently cites within its brochures and promotional material about its wish to promote positive social change within Palestinian society. The staff state that by working with children and young people, social transformations can occur, to the benefit of all members of Palestinian society. It can be suggested, therefore, that Yes Theatre is engaging with the community in order to transmit the value that girls are important members of Palestinian society, that their voices should be heard. Yes Theatre’s activities to attempt to increase the standing of females in

²⁶⁶ For a discussion of the socio-cultural status of Palestinian women, see: Baxter, D. (2007), ‘Honor Thy Sister: Selfhood, Gender, and Agency in Palestinian Culture’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 80:3, 737-775; Jad, I. (2011), ‘The Post-Oslo Palestine and Gendering Palestinian Citizenship’, *Ethnicities*, 11:3, 360-372; European Union Commission, *National Situation Analysis Report: Women’s Human Rights and Gender Equality – Occupied Palestinian Territory 2009-10*. Last update on July 2010. Accessed online 12th October 2012 at: www.euromedgenderequality.org/image.php?id=292

Palestinian society can further be seen through their promotional material. In the programme for 'Stories', the female participants, aged between thirteen and fifteen, state how performing and involvement in this project has served to empower them with confidence and the ability to speak up for themselves. Statements such as: "I am not shy anymore"; "I have become more confident and more focused in my life"; "Theatre has encouraged me to step out of my shell" and "I have learned how to voice my ideas in the society" all demonstrate a desire for more gender inclusivity.²⁶⁷

This is one potential reading of the situation. A less optimistic one would be that the females involved in this theatre are still officially very much children, both under international law and in the eyes of the community. Unlike the West, and Europe in particular, where young adulthood can be equated to the loss of childhood, girls in their early and mid-teens are still very much regarded as children in Palestine. Therefore, rather than exhibiting the promotion of female self-empowerment as a tool of women's liberation from the patriarchal confines in which they find themselves, these productions may in fact reproduce the creation of a separate space for children of both genders. This means that rather than challenging gender norms through the promotion of female visibility on the stage, Yes Theatre's activities, especially their 'Kids 4 Kids' programmes, are more concerned with children's rights than with gender equality. This apparent acquiescence to local conservative cultural demands can therefore be read as Yes Theatre trying to please their funders through including female performers on the stage, whilst placating traditional social customs by ensuring these females are children, not adult women.

In terms of the creation of professional theatre practitioners, as per Yes Theatre's mandate, gender does appear to play a role, one which impacts negatively upon women. According to Uli Schiessel from WFD, the German sponsors of Yes Theatre cultural programmes, young women are active participants whilst they are in the

²⁶⁷ Yes Theatre, 'Hakawiat' ('Stories') *Programme*, Kids 4 Kids production 2011. These sentiments are often expressed throughout Yes Theatre's production programmes and promotional material.

audience, when they are responding to a performance which has been created and performed for them, or when they are involved in interactive theatre, such as Forum theatre, which requires an audience response and participation. However, this participation does not extend to the actual performing upon the stage per se. For example, two young women from Hebron who completed the training programme and wished to continue performing, were dissuaded from doing so due to pressures from their families. Instead of performing on the stage, they were relegated away from the public gaze and instead were offered jobs as librarians within the theatre.²⁶⁸ Therefore, we can see that there is an imagined spatial boundary between the performance space and the audience space. Whilst it is acceptable socially for young women to form part of the audience and become involved in the issues raised by other performers, they themselves are not encouraged to be the performers. This could be due to the problems emanating from gazing upon the female body, where the female becomes the centre of attention and visually present, as an individual as opposed to being one person in a mass of audience members. It appears that whilst Palestinian women are allowed to have their voices heard about issues raised in performances, as responders to these issues within a public forum, there is less tolerance when the female wishes to be the one performing.

It would appear, therefore, that this concept of 'equality' on the stage remains both elusive and problematic when applied to Palestinian space – both within and outside the theatre. When contrasted with professional performances from the more liberal, secular urban theatre companies in Ramallah and Bethlehem/Beit Jala, where adult females frequently perform on stage, the absence of local women performing in Hebron suggests that contrary to the aims of the funders, the international backing of initiatives involving Palestinian females may actually serve to limit the opportunities for women's emancipation due to the opposition to the international humanitarian regime, whereby all that is associated is automatically seen negatively as cultural imperialism. By denying adult women the opportunity to

²⁶⁸ Interview with Uli Schiessl (29th June 2012).

perform whilst enabling young females to do so, Yes Theatre is resisting this cultural imposition and therefore retaining acceptability within the eyes of the local community, whilst simultaneously fulfilling the criteria laid down by the funding body for female inclusion.

It can be argued that despite some protestations to the contrary, Palestinian theatre companies are themselves de facto incorporating themselves into the neoliberal model through their professionalised and specialised role as internal civic educators for their local community, and awareness-raising advocates about their situation for the international community. Therefore, although theatre practitioners are working within the arts sector, their actions are not independent of the international aid industry; indeed, they form part of the Globalized Palestinian Elite, and as a result, willingly or not, have adapted into the post-Oslo neoliberal development paradigm and adjusted their working practices to fit into its parameters in order to secure funding. The focus on human rights, democracy promotion, and issues surrounding women and children 'tick all the boxes' for funding bodies, which duly reward them with financial support for their operations and projects.

The Problems with Joint Partnership Initiatives: Passages of Martin Luther King, Jnr. And Al-Karitha

One key practice for theatre in Palestine is that of joint initiatives involving a production created in partnership by a Palestinian and an international (usually European and North American) theatre company. Usually, the international company, funded by their home country or conglomerate funding agency such as the EU, would come to Palestine to work, due to travel restrictions placed upon Palestinians. Following the completion of the project, which would tend to average a month to six weeks of rehearsals, the production would be performed in the main

urban sites in the West Bank (and East Jerusalem if working with the PNT or with Jerusalem residents) before travelling to the country of origin to be performed. The overarching objectives for these initiatives tended to be raising awareness of the Palestinian predicament outside of the Middle East, and encouraging political mobilisation from Westerners in favour of the Palestinian cause. Whilst productions may produce a positive experience for those involved, and create a hybrid theatre based upon indigenous Palestinian and European/North American cultural and theatrical customs, this hybridity in itself may prove problematic due to a divergence of opinions and perspectives from those participating in it. However, as shall be shown in the subsequent section, the establishment of long-term partnerships between international and Palestinian theatre practitioners may counteract these negative experiences, and provide a more useful framework for theatrical collaboration.

One of the inter-cultural exchanges which raised a myriad of problems concerning partnership working was that of the joint American-Palestinian production of *Passages of Martin Luther King, Jr* (Dir: Kamel el-Basher, PNT, East Jerusalem; March 2011). Although I had not seen this production, as it had been performed prior to my arrival in Palestine, the issues awoken by the close working of African-Americans, a disenfranchised minority group with a long history of civil rights action, and Palestinians, demanded attention. The play itself was conceptualised and written by Clayborne Carson, an African-American Professor of History and Director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University, with performances throughout North America, and in partnership with the National Theatre of China at Beijing Oriental Pioneer Theatre in 2007. Following the acquisition of funding from the American Consulate in Jerusalem, Carson and his cast of African-American performers commenced an intensive joint partnership with the PNT to create an Arabic-language, Palestinian version of *Passages*. This production involved eight Palestinian actors from the PNT, who would be playing the characters of King and his family, in addition to globally recognised persons, such as John F. Kennedy and Malcolm X. Six African-American theatre practitioners

and choir singers would be accompanying Carson, and performed gospel songs throughout, as per the original production.

Carson writes in depth and with candour about the difficulties inherent in adapting a play regarding the historical struggles of African-Americans in the US to that of the current-day Palestinian predicament. These were primarily questions of ownership over the text, the translatability of the figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. from one context to another and the superimposing of one established paradigm of non-violent resistance onto another. In the original scripting of the play, which was first performed in 1993 in the U.S., focused on the life and times of Martin Luther King, Jr., including the most famous events, such as his 'I have a dream' speech and assassination. In his account of the Palestinian adaptation of *Passages*, Carson laments the changes made by Palestinian director, Kamel el-Basha. Although this is from the first-hand perspective of Carson, and therefore no refutation from el-Basha exists²⁶⁹, the problems which arise are indicative, albeit in extremis, of the issues working with a Palestinian theatre company can entail for a Western theatre practitioner, particularly when the play used depicts such a well-known and lauded individual as Martin Luther King, Jr. Of primary concern, for Carson, is that his play is transformed into something unrecognisable to himself and his African-American gospel choir performers in the play. From his writings, the most jarring controversy results from el-Basher's re-writing of the piece for a Palestinian audience, albeit one which detracts and even undermines, in Carson's view, the intent of the original play.²⁷⁰

Carson states that:

²⁶⁹ During my interview with el-Basha, although he mentioned the production, he spoke only briefly about it, and did not mention any problems arising from this collaboration. Interview with Kamel el-Basha (8th July 2011).

²⁷⁰ Carson, C. (2011; 2012), 'Chapter 21: A Palestinian King Drama', Draft Chapter, in *Martin's Dream: My Journey and the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 2013. Also available in a modified version as: 'A Palestinian King Drama, March 2011', accessed online at: <http://claybornec.wordpress.com/2011/06/30/a-palestinian-king-drama-march-2011/>

I later skimmed through my copy of the English version of the Arabic script, and found that Kamel has created his own play as a frame for *Passages*. Using improvised dialogue drawn from discussions with the Palestinian actors, he had written a farce about disgruntled cast members rehearsing to perform a King play supported by an American cultural exchange program and directed by a blind American who could speak to the actors only through her Palestinian assistant. His concept enabled the Palestinian actors to inject their own sentiments about their characters in my play and, more generally, in Kamel's words, 'the reality of the Palestinian actors and their relationship with the American director.' My play had become a play within a Palestinian play.²⁷¹

From this, we can see that what is being contested here is an issue of ownership over the text itself. Indeed, the freedom allowed to explore potential further avenues for creativity with a text appears to be mired somewhat by the author's continued presence within the creative space.

The annoyance felt by el-Basha's rather radical divergence from the original is deepened by what appears to be the result of the Palestinian improvisations, namely criticism of America, and of the 'blind American' who Carson may believe to be representative of himself. Carson further questions whether the harshly vocalised criticism of the American government in their support for Israeli policy was a "thumbing [of] their noses at the American government that was helping to sponsor the play?"²⁷² The perceived ungratefulness of Palestinians without acknowledging the reasons behind these actions reveals a lack of awareness regarding American involvement in the region, and the negative repercussions upon Palestinians. The very subject of the play, Martin Luther King Jnr., is sidelined in favour of pertinent Palestinian present-day issues, rather than a loyal adherence to the original protagonists. Additionally, characters within the play were changed

²⁷¹ Carson, C. (2011; 2012), 'Chapter 21: A Palestinian King Drama', p6

²⁷² Carson, C. (2011; 2012), 'Chapter 21: A Palestinian King Drama', p12

to reflect the local political situation, such as a policeman speaking Hebrew, and King's wife, Coretta, becoming a Palestinian active in the resistance.²⁷³

The inherent contestation between producing a performance which stays true to the original, especially when the director and American cast members remain the same, and adapting it to a Palestinian environment and audience is enhanced by the assertion of el-Basha that "'I know my audience'"²⁷⁴. This heavy implication that the Americans are mere outsiders who cannot attempt to know or understand the Palestinian situation may be an attempt to reverse the balance of power in favour of the Palestinians – as an American proclaiming that they 'know' Palestine and the Palestinians would be subject to accusations of Orientalism and/or cultural imperialism. On the other hand, the Americans are foreigners, with little to no experience of the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. They have arrived into Palestinian space, *Passages* has been handed over to the PNT for a Palestinian interpretation, and therefore within this particular time and space, it necessarily becomes a Palestinian play for a Palestinian audience. It is of fundamental importance that the play speaks to Palestinians, as they are the primary cultural consumers of this production, and therefore although King is a well-known and admired figure in Palestine²⁷⁵, his plight and achievements are located within 1960s North America, not Palestine in the 2010s. The emergence of a 'play within a play' from the Palestinians can be perceived as an attempt at resistance against the neoliberal humanitarian regime, of adapting a text in order to make it relevant to their Palestinian audience and therefore claiming ownership over it, rather than submissively accepting it as a given project for reproduction in Palestinian space. As with *Beit Yasmin*, the PNT are acting within the boundaries of the regime, as they are engaging in a 'cultural exchange' project funded by international donors. The attempt to use this opportunity to produce a Palestinian-centric performance, an arguably subversive act of resistance against the regime, is met with outraged opposition from Carson. Therefore, this Palestinian tactic for

²⁷³ Carson, C. (2011; 2012), 'Chapter 21: A Palestinian King Drama', p7

²⁷⁴ Carson, C. (2011; 2012), 'Chapter 21: A Palestinian King Drama', p12

²⁷⁵ El-Basha is quoted as referring to King as "a ray of light for all believers in peaceful resistance around the world", *ibid* p5

resistance can be stymied by the intervention of the more powerful Western partner.

Rather than solidarity being forged between two marginalised and disenfranchised minority groups, what resulted was a harsh disconnect between the two. The African-Americans involved in this production, although from a minority group, form part of the middle-classes, mostly Ivy League educated professionals,²⁷⁶ engaging with the Palestinian Globalized Elite. Despite coming from a persecuted group, these African-Americans emphasised their American nationality, and it was this presence, along with the power held implicitly with the holding of an American passport, which could be said to undermine a true sense of solidarity between the two groups. By attempting to forge links with Palestinian theatre practitioners, it can be said that differences rather than similarities were emphasised, and that Palestinians are so involved in their own current-day struggles against the Israeli occupation, that they feel it necessary to reinterpret existing plays within their own strictly delineated reality. As a result, Carson became an active subject in the humanitarian regime, reproducing its mechanisms of control and contributing to its 'spacio-cidal' policies through his demands to recreate the original text without due consideration of the objectives of Palestinian theatre as an instrument of cultural resistance.

Additionally, problems can arise between internationals working within Palestine regarding differing expectations of theatre styles and approaches. Steven Lambert of Badac Company, based in London, worked with al-Harah theatre, from Beit Jala, in Bethlehem governorate, for around a month in June-July 2011 to produce a piece of devised theatre based on the experiences of Gazans during the 2008-09 Israeli military incursion into the Gaza Strip. This was shown in Bethlehem for one performance, and then three performances in the UK. Badac prides itself on producing experimental and hard-hitting performances, primarily for a British audience. However, the experiential nature of Badac's productions, and their

²⁷⁶ Carson, C. (2011; 2012), 'Chapter 21: A Palestinian King Drama', p4

dedication to the extreme in terms of their performance subjects, caused a number of controversies when this doctrine was transported into Palestinian space. Steven Lambert is the first to admit that he was somewhat not fully prepared for the cultural and artistic differences between the British and Palestinian theatre communities:

Before we went to Palestine, to the West Bank, we were warned a little bit about, that in a sense that Palestinian theatre is quite young in its development, and if you go there and try to do something which is too far, in a sense experimental, for example, then it might just put up barriers because that's not where they are in their development as theatre companies... and it's not where their audience is at as well.²⁷⁷

This reveals a sense of Eurocentric infantilisation of Palestinian theatre from Lambert's perspective. Although professional theatre in the Western sense in Palestine is a relatively new phenomena, as I outline in the introduction, theatrical practices such as the *hakawati* have existed for centuries in the Middle East. By defining Palestinian theatre as young, Lambert is inadvertently adopting a problematic paternalistic persona, as someone who comes to Palestine to 'teach' the locals about more experimental theatre practices.

The joint Badac-al-Harah production, for which I saw as a non-participant observer a large number of rehearsals in Beit Jala, in addition to the first - and only - performance in the Peace Centre in Nativity Square, Bethlehem, encountered a number of difficulties in regards to artistic intention and direction. One of the first points of contention between Lambert and al-Harah was the name of the production itself. The original name of the production, as written on Lambert's proposal to the funding body, UK-based Arts Council East, was 'The Catastrophe', as representative of the disastrous events that occurred on the wider level of Gazan society, as they faced repeated aerial bombardment from Israeli fighter jets

²⁷⁷ Interview with Steven Lambert (25th October 2012).

between December 2008 – January 2009. At the micro-level, this title reflected the personal disaster of the death of a child as ‘collateral damage’ within a family setting; however, when translated into Arabic, ‘the catastrophe’ is *al-nakba*, which for Palestinians is the name of the mass expulsion and fleeing of around 750,000 Palestinians from Mandatory Palestine during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Therefore, to entitle a play ‘*Al-Nakba*’ would signify a completely different event for a Palestinian audience well-versed in their national narrative than for a British one, who may not be aware of the significance of the name. As a result, the Arabic title was changed to ‘*Al-Karitha*’, ‘The Disaster’, whereas the original title remained for the performances in the UK. Additionally, the decision by the director to portray the family as Muslim, with the female actors wearing hijab, even though they were within the private sphere, and therefore would not wear the Islamic headdress in the presence of family members, was problematic. It seemed as though the director was intentionally depicting the Palestinians as devout Muslims, perhaps for a Western audience, even though the actual depiction of the family within their home was not strictly accurate. This reveals a certain level of misunderstanding from the international director in regards to one of the most pivotal events, and sorest of points, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as Arab cultural codes and behaviours.

Al-Karitha consists of an hour-long, experiential theatre performance, whereby the both the audience and actors are surrounded within long metal sheets. With a minimalist set representing the inside of a Palestinian house in Gaza during the 2008-09 Israeli military offensive, with only one chair and some metal tins and stones comprising the props, the performance consists of an hour in the lives of Palestinians under siege and frequent bombardment. At repeated intervals, the metal sheets are viciously beaten, as an attempt to replicate the sounds and effects of extended bombing within a built-up area. The audience is seated almost in-the-round, inside these metal sheets; they too are subjected to the noise and vibrations of an all-encompassing bombardment. The story itself was devised from the rehearsals, and consisted of a number of different actions whereby the mother and older brother attempted to distract and pacify two younger, female children



Figure 5: Set design for Al-Karitha, performed at the Bethlehem Peace Centre, 8th July 2011.

distressed by the experience. Within rehearsals, it was decided initially that very few words would be spoken; instead, the emphasis would be on actions, for example the games played by the children as a distraction device; the obsessive, repeated counting and scratching on the metal pane with stone by one of the traumatised children; the frenzied rush of the family into the centre every time when the bombings commenced.

The differences between the British director and Palestinian actors regarding the artistic direction and intentions came to the fore during the final week of rehearsals, at which point the al-Harah managerial team intervened and requested for Lambert to change the production in order to make it more suitable for a Palestinian audience. This included the ‘fleshing-out’ of the characters, and more verbal interaction between them. For Lambert, this reversion to a more “kitchen-sink drama” which “became very safe”, was not the production which he had originally intended to do. On his part, the reasons for this reduction in experimental theatre were to do with the negativity of one of the main actors, who refused to

accommodate any of the new techniques which Lambert attempted to introduce. For, as Lambert says:

that was one of the major problems, in the tradition regarding actors thinking things should be done in a very specific [naturalistic] way, and if you come in and try to change that, then it just became very negative. And I think that they were scared of what their audience reaction was, they're quite entitled to do that, as they work there all the time, it is their audience. But it was a little disappointing, because it wasn't as though I hadn't explained to them about what the ideas were... Palestinian theatre is still in that phase – maybe not all Palestinian theatre, but certainly the ones I've come across – is that it's in that phase of still being liked. They want to be liked through their work. They want the audience to like their work... It changed because of the pressures put on us, that's what they wanted to show, and they would have made it even more theatrical. To me, it wasn't about that, it was about this as an experience, it wasn't about, in a sense, language. It's about the audience having a visceral experience and feeling.²⁷⁸

Indeed, it must be acknowledged that theatre companies, as Palestinian NGOs, need to be accepted by the local community and funding bodies in order to receive funding for projects; therefore, it could be said that it is not so much that Palestinian theatre practitioners want to be liked, per se, rather that it is part of the structure of the cultural sphere as dependent upon international funding that theatre productions must necessarily be liked, or found useful according to the funding agency's directives, in order for it to achieve the desired social 'impact' criteria and therefore receive approval for further projects.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Steven Lambert (25th October 2012).



Figure 6: Al Karitha production; one of the 'bombing' moments.

Despite this, when *Al-Karitha* was performed at the Peace Centre in Bethlehem, there were mixed reactions to the content and style, for as actress Riham Isaac relates: “the Palestinian people here, they were really shocked, and it was really intensive for them, and some of the audience even got out [left], because it was very hard. I mean, there is bombing all the time, the sound is shaking around them, so it gave them a flashback and a memory that they couldn’t get [rid of], and some people were really crying afterwards.”²⁷⁹ Bethlehem and its surrounding towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour were bombarded with shells during the second intifada, and a number of people were killed by misplaced bombings. This raises the ethical question of whether such a performance should have been put on in a place which had relatively recently undergone active conflict, around ten years previously. As a result, the desired “visceral experience and feeling” which Lambert wished to present to the audience, whilst well-received in the relative safety and security of the UK, brought back traumatic memories for a number of the Palestinian audience members of the second intifada. However, the blame for this cannot be wholly placed at Lambert’s feet – al-Harah knew about the project’s content when it was proposed to them, and accepted its basic premise and ideations. Therefore, this

²⁷⁹ Interview with Riham Isaac (5th January 2012).

case study suggests that disconnect can occur between vision and reality of Western ideas regarding Palestine, and the place of theatre within it.

As theatre practitioners in Palestine are more vulnerable to whether they are liked and approved of by the funding bodies, as this enables them to receive the financial aid which they work relies upon, Palestinian theatre companies are understandably more reticent about criticising their international partners. Whereas Lambert, like the majority of international theatre practitioners, has the advantage of being a Westerner based in the UK, creating a one-off project with Palestinians, then returning to their place of origin to work on a new project, Palestinians are located within Palestine, and thus are subject to the parameters of the funding agencies, their whims and agendas. For Marina Barham of al-Harah admits that *Al-Karitha* was “OK” but “not the best experience”, choosing instead to highlight the more positive collaborations with international theatre troupes and companies.²⁸⁰

As Lambert himself acknowledges: “We weren’t doing it from middle-class London, we were doing it from there [Bethlehem; the West Bank; Palestine] as well, and then to get there and find that negativity and to find that all they wanted to do was draw it [the performance] back and put it in their little box was, for me, again, it was a big lesson for me. Eventually, you’re struggling to get to the end of it, which is not what it should have been about.”²⁸¹ The relative failure of this project in facilitating lasting links, and exposing fundamental differences in the comprehension of the social role of theatre between Badac and al-Harah, does not mean that every international practitioner who comes to Palestine creates the same negative experience, but it does give one example that theatre culture is locational and culturally relative, dependent on its context, and whereas Lambert’s concept for experiential theatre was well received and applauded in Britain, in Bethlehem, the production was found to be more unsettling than educational, a

²⁸⁰ Interview with Marina Barham (10th January 2012)

²⁸¹ Interview with Steven Lambert (25th October 2012).

reproduction of the military conflict within a place which had experienced the devastating repercussions of this conflict all too well.

My analysis of *Passages* and *Al-Karitha* suggests that sometimes when an international company comes together with a Palestinian one to work inside Palestine, what eventuates on stage, in contrast to Wickstrom's proposition, reflects a form of 'equality is not'. The vast divergence in power capabilities between the external company and the Palestinians even if not explicitly declared, exist implicitly, and is expressed through the types of production being worked on, including the performance style, content, and intention. The desire for internationals to work with Palestinians may well be based on the universal ideals of equality, justice and the freedom for creative expression, but the reality can be very different and, for both parties, somewhat disappointing. Questions of ownership over the production itself arise, for as actress Riham Isaac, who has worked on numerous joint projects stated, "I don't know if we as Palestinian chose to do these stories, or if we do it because they [the international theatre practitioners] come with their visions."²⁸² This is not to say that all joint initiatives suffer from this disconnect, but rather to show that when theatrical projects are dependent upon external funding and international involvement, the resulting hybridity of theatrical productions can unearth multiple problems due to the pre-existing power inequalities and disparate cultural conceptions of theatre as an endeavour.

Palestinian Theatre for International Awareness Raising and Support Mobilisation

Palestinian theatre exists as a tactical device through which to resist the structural forces which exert negative pressures upon Palestinian lived space. Part of these

²⁸² Interview with Riham Isaac (5th January 2012).

tactics includes engaging with the 'international community'. Many Palestinian theatre practitioners interviewed as part of this research project stressed the necessity of internationalising Palestinian theatre in order to raise awareness of the Palestinian predicament and garner support for their opposition to the occupation. There exists the perception that by performing internationally and engaging with foreign theatre practices and activities outside of Palestine, the negative opinions of the international community regarding Palestinians can be countered. As can be seen clearly through the words of Faisal Abu el-Heja of the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, it is the desire to change international perception of Palestinians which is one of the main motivations for performing internationally. He says that:

This is part of our fight, also to tell them [the international community] that we are not terrorists, we have also dreams, we have artists, we want to live. They thought about us that we want to drop bombs in Israel, to go to paradise, to marry seventy womans [sic]. This is a famous idea in Europe. No, when we go to do play, we convince them that there are artists here, that people fight for the right, like the South Africans, like everywhere in the world. We have rights and we want them, and you must to stand up, to at least to know the truth, the push them, to watch Palestine and to see the truth about Palestinians, that they are normal people...²⁸³

By relocating theatrical performances outside of Palestine and into the West, Palestinian practitioners are depicting an alternative narrative against the stereotypes held by many Westerners, and revealing through creative endeavours the experience of living under occupation to those who have not felt it first-hand.

One production which deliberately sought to visually depict the Palestinian narrative of events since 1948 specifically for an international audience is *48 Minutes for Palestine*, directed by British theatre playwright and activist, Mojisola

²⁸³ Interview with Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012).

Adebayo, and devised through improvisation workshops with two Palestinian actors, Edward Muallam and Riham Isaac. At the time of writing, it has toured extensively, and has been performed in the UK, South Africa, Jordan, Brazil, Spain and Sweden. It could be suggested that the success of *48 Minutes* arose from the lack of constraints potentially imposed from above by international funding bodies, for the production received limited financial assistance from the British Council (covering Adebayo's airfare and subsistence costs), so was mostly funded by the director herself.²⁸⁴ Indeed, Adebayo has long been involved in promoting Palestinian national and human rights, and has a long history of professional interaction with Palestinian theatre practitioners. As a result, this production was the culmination of numerous years of connections between Adebayo and Palestinians, and as such this play emerged from a partnership between artists with similar goals. Although Adebayo held more power due to her coming from a wealthy European country, her commitment to working in ways which are culturally sensitive and egalitarian resulted in a high-quality production based upon knowledge and understanding of the situation in contemporary Palestine, and a desire to raise awareness of this internationally.

This piece in particular demonstrates visually the 'spacio-cidal' project which has been occurring in Palestine, since the creation of Israel in 1948. The play itself is performed within a space delineated through the placing of oranges and small rocks alternately to create a circle, thus suggesting not only the human-made nature of national borders which are then accepted by some as 'natural', but also the cyclical occurrence of violence and displacement in Israel and Palestine. Both the orange and the stone are emblematic symbols of the area – the Jaffa orange and the stone-throwing youth being prominent within local narratives. In particular, the Jaffa orange symbolises the concept of loss of land and nation through *al-Nakba* and the formation of Israel in 1948.²⁸⁵ Conversely, the stone represents the national Palestinian pride regarding those who threw stones against the Israeli military

²⁸⁴ Interview with Mojisola Adebayo (1st May 2013).

²⁸⁵ Abufarha, N. (2008), 'Land of Symbols: Cactus, Poppies, Orange and Olive Trees in Palestine', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 15:3, 343-368, p349. See for an in-depth analysis of the symbolic values of oranges within Palestinian culture.

during the first intifada,²⁸⁶ and since 2003, the building of the Separation Wall in the West Bank. Through deliberately placing a visual border around the theatrical action, this play is drawing attention to the importance of borders in contemporary Palestinian life, and how these borders serve to frame not only the movement of people, but also the framing of the different narratives regarding the conflict.

The content of the play focuses on the historical events in Israel and Palestine since 1948. Inside the circle of stones and oranges is a set resembling a home, with personal possessions and items suggesting domesticity, such a chair and blanket. On the downstage right hand side is a large sunflower inside a jug of water, surrounded by rocks, evoking the sense of a small garden. We first see a lone female wearing a large key around her neck²⁸⁷ inside this space, happily tending to her home and garden, until she is interrupted by the arrival of a stranger, an elderly



Figure 7: 48 Minutes for Palestine, performed at Ashtar Theatre, Ramallah, 14th September 2011.

²⁸⁶ Peteet, J. (1996), 'The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11:2, 139-159, p143. See for an in-depth analysis of the importance of stones during the first intifada.

²⁸⁷ The house key is another important symbol in the Palestinian narrative, relating to the homes left behind during *al-nakba*. See, for example: Bishara, A. (2003), 'House and Homeland: Examining Sentiments about and Claims to Jerusalem and Its Houses', *Social Text*, 21:2, 141-162, p144

man holding a suitcase who comes into her home. Over the next forty-eight minutes, we see frequent stand-offs between the two, as they struggle – literally and figuratively – for control and ownership of the home. Through a series of confrontations, we see the female attempt to resist the male taking over her space, using a mixture of wile and cunning, physical restraint, and playful resistance. However, the male continually resorts to using his superior physical strength over her, and indeed once threatens her with a knife to her throat. We can see the space contracting to the male's will – he gains possession of the home, and makes it his own, to the detriment of the female character.

The audience is made repeatedly and explicitly aware of the mutability and fragility of the territory when the male character - representing the Israeli – modifies the space according to his will. He confiscates possessions from her, wastefully uses the precious water resources, and constructs his own home within this pre-existing one. The female – representative of the Palestinians – is constrained within increasingly smaller spaces within the circle until she is barricaded inside a sliver of space on the right-hand side, sitting on the pile of rocks and prevented from leaving by a 'wall' formed from the male's suitcase and other pieces from the set. It is at this moment that the victorious male, smiles smugly and extends his hand over the



Figure 8: The reconfiguration of space in 48 Minutes for Palestine.

‘wall’ towards her, satirically indicative of the famous handshake between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin preluding the Oslo Accords. Her refusal to accept his ‘peace’ results in her being evicted from the remaining space – representative of the West Bank – and the play finishes with her walking away, suitcase in hand, another refugee created. The cycle which began with one refugee – the male – arriving to claim a home, has finished with another refugee forced out of hers.

Conclusion

Maurya Wickstrom alleges that:

When the international community sends NGOs to advocate for civil society, gender issues, democracy, or to deliver aid (charity), they are relying on Palestine, the space of Palestine, to be a representation of a moment of fixed time, where history has brought about certain conditions. They are relying on it to be placated, tamed, a receptive surface, a place reduced to total dependency. They look to the space of Palestine in the future to represent yet another moment in the unfolding of a narrative of development: when Palestine will be a success story for neoliberalism, with the new state in full collaboration with the World Bank, full of entrepreneurs, good citizens paying mortgages, women liberated from their veils into a corporate workforce, and so on.²⁸⁸

International NGOs fill the role of “metaphorical Band-Aids or fire extinguishers”, alleviating abject suffering by providing necessary emergency humanitarian aid as and when it is needed, but also through implementing a number of short-term projects based upon donor-decided plans for social, cultural and economic development. It is due to the increasing dependency upon these international funding bodies, which dispense aid according to their working directives and ideals,

²⁸⁸ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p46

rather than the actual needs of the local population, in addition to the continuing Israeli occupation over all the key infrastructures relating to Palestinian development, which helps prevent Palestinians from achieving national self-determination. Indeed, the inherent problem regarding international funding stems from its inclination to “promote the interest of the funding agencies and their respective countries rather than the people they are supposedly trying to help”.²⁸⁹ Although this may not be the case in regards to some humanitarian workers, and individuals coming to Palestine in order to run joint projects with theatre companies, the structural imbalances of power and financial reliance of Palestinian cultural institutions on foreign aid has left deep, perhaps indelible marks upon Palestinian theatre practices.

Palestinian theatre productions funded by the international humanitarian regime exist within strict parameters of acceptability as defined by the regime. As a result, it is not possible to obtain financial assistance for theatrical activities which could directly incite violence and/or threaten Israel’s security. Therefore, for resistance to occur, it must take place implicitly, at the tactical level. Criticisms of the regime are emerging from Palestinian theatre practitioners, as can be seen through the production of *Beit Yasmin*. However, more subtle forms of resistance can be seen through the practices of Yes Theatre, which placates the concerns of the local community in regards to gender roles, whilst at the same time conforming to the pre-requisites of their international funders. Joint initiatives between internationals and Palestinians can be problematic when the power disparities between the two parties replicate those of the international humanitarian regime’s paternalistic relationship with Palestinians. However, this can be overcome, as shown through *48 Minutes*, through long-term partnership working rather than a one-off project.

Despite the proliferation of programmes aimed at training a new generation of artistic practitioners, including those in theatre, these are primarily of insufficient length, involving international practitioners who help produce a one-off project and

²⁸⁹ Abdo, N. (2010), ‘Imperialism, the State, and NGOs’, p245

then return to their home country, result in no lasting impact, and do not provide reliable employment for local talent. Although the emerging generation of artists express gratitude for these projects, the lack of longevity and further opportunity render them less inclined to perceive such activities positively. Additionally, established practitioners find themselves at a disadvantage as international trainers will provide their services for free, thus skewing the market and reducing opportunities for native-born professionals.²⁹⁰ However, theatre, as an established practice of cultural resistance against the Israeli occupation, the nefarious Palestinian Authority, and the seemingly well-meaning but ultimately pernicious international NGOs, provides a critical eye against these three interwoven systems, and as such, provides a potential for future change emanating from the grassroots level.

²⁹⁰ Merz, S. (2012), "Missionaries of the New Era", p62-3

Chapter 4: Theatre Practices as Response to the Spacio-cidal State of Exception in the Palestinian Refugee Camp

Introduction

The refugee camp in Palestine exists as a particular space conceptually and spatially within the Palestinian everyday experience and imagination. Although most Palestinians spoken to as part of this thesis refer to themselves in relation to their ancestors' pre-1948 place of origin, and that they therefore are refugees dislocated from their rightful home, the following two chapters will focus on the actual sites set up by UNRWA in the 1950s within the West Bank, in particular Aida and Jenin refugee camps. Both this chapter and the subsequent one are concerned with theatrical activities occurring within Palestinian refugee camps, and are therefore interwoven both theoretically and spatially. Here, I focus on Al-Rowwad Theatre and Cultural Training Centre in Aida Camp (Bethlehem) and in the following chapter, focus on the Freedom Theatre (Jenin). Both Aida and Jenin camps are being through the lens of the 'state of exception' and the Palestinian attempt to re-create an exceptional space through the formation and implementation of alternative local (sub-)sovereigns as a response to this, albeit with differing success.

In order to articulate the 'state of exception' in relation to Palestinian theatre practices as a response to 'spacio-cide', it is necessary to detail the work of Giorgio Agamben pertaining to the refugee camp. Agamben suggests that the refugee camp is not an anomaly in the modern world, but instead that it belongs "in some way as the hidden matrix and *nomos* [law] of the political space in which we are living."²⁹¹ Based upon his considerations of the means and contexts in which recent historical concentration camps, from the British internment of Boers in the early 1900s to the Holocaust, Agamben depicts how the space of the camp has been forged during the

²⁹¹ Agamben, G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, [Trans: Daniel Heller-Roazen], Stanford: Stanford University Press, p166

history of warfare, in which the exceptional becomes normal; although it exists legally as a separate and 'outside' space, it simultaneously remains *in situ* within the state. The camp emerges when normal legal practices of a nation-state within peacetime are suspended, becoming a physical actuality that enables this state to be achieved and perpetuated.²⁹² The refugee camp is the space in which the stateless reside, become "an extreme case under the state of exception".²⁹³ It is not normal within the modern state-system to be uprooted from your homeland and displaced, to be removed and relocated within another space outside, and to be denied the rights that citizenship of a nation-state entails. However, the camp does not become a site of absolute transgression, existing wholly outside the 'normal' order of the state; instead, it is a "'zone of indistinction' between fact and law, norm and exception, integral to the constitution of the political order of modernity".²⁹⁴ Therefore, although refugee camps become differentiated in terms of their existing outside of the legal order, they are conceived of in relation to the space of the non-camp, and thus are included within the system by virtue of their exclusion.²⁹⁵

The figure of the refugee is one of the "uprooted body" existing outside of a space of its own; it becomes a "subject without relationship to territory; it is a body in orbit, a satellite."²⁹⁶ For Agamben, the refugee is a "limit concept", a being who challenges the very essence of the nation-state, due to the refugee's lack of citizenship and therefore political legitimacy with the state itself.²⁹⁷ Indeed, the refugee, the non-citizen *homo sacer*, is completely assigned into the realm of 'bare life', that which is "stripped of every political status", and rendered immobile and subject to extermination at any time, at the whim of the state's sovereign.²⁹⁸ The

²⁹² Agamben, G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p168-9; italics in original.

²⁹³ Hanafi, S. (2008), 'Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception', Research Paper: CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes; 2008/44, p9

²⁹⁴ Ramadan, A. (2013), 'Spatialising the Refugee Camp', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38:1, p67

²⁹⁵ Sanyal, R. (2013), 'Urbanizing Refuge: Interrogating Spaces of Displacement', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, p2

²⁹⁶ Hanafi, S. (2009), 'Spacio-cide: Colonial Politics, Invisibility and Rezoning in Palestinian Territory', p118

²⁹⁷ Agamben, G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p134

²⁹⁸ Agamben, G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p171

refugee, within the space of the camp in which s/he is both confined within and defined by, is subjected to the disciplinary power of biopolitics, whereby they are monitored and excluded from normal everyday existence within the nation-state. However, the refugee camp, unlike the Agambenian example of the concentration camp, aims “to sustain life, not extinguish it”.²⁹⁹ As such, the refugee is contained within a space of exception, both excluded from the nation-state whilst being subordinated by the state’s sovereign power, living in a precarious predicament of being without rights and with the constant possibility of annihilation. The fragility of the space itself is shown through the concept of “*space sacer*”, in which the *homo sacer* refugees and the space in which they reside are both simultaneously subject to decimation at the whim of the sovereign; this was shown during the 2002 destruction of the Jenin refugee camp by the Israeli military forces under the auspices of preventing terrorism.³⁰⁰

Agamben’s writings have a pervasive presence in the literature concerning refugees and the camps in which they dwell, including Palestinians.³⁰¹ However, this literature problematises somewhat essentialist conception of the space of the refugee camp as a site in which the refugee figure becomes static in her/his subjugation, thus an inactive subject rather than active political participant. Sari Hanafi’s reading of Agamben in relation to Palestine, for example, suggests that it is sovereign power which serves as “a process for categorizing people and bodies in order to manage, control, and keep them under surveillance and reducing them to a ‘bare life’, a life which refers to the body’s mere ‘vegetative’ being, separated from the particular qualities, the social, political and historical attributes that constitute individual subjectivity”.³⁰² However, the uniqueness of the Palestinian situation in the West Bank, whereby Palestinians born and bred within a refugee camp, the descendants of refugees from the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars although not for the whole part themselves those who have suffered from actual

²⁹⁹ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p68

³⁰⁰ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper: CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes; 2008/44, p9

³⁰¹ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p67

³⁰² Hanafi, S. (2013), ‘Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory’, p199

forced migration from their places of origin³⁰³, demands a more nuanced reading of Agamben. Indeed, as Sophie Richter-Devroe acknowledges, the “specificity of refugees in the West Bank derives from their paradoxical situation of living as Palestinian refugees within the Palestinian quasi-State under Israeli occupation”.³⁰⁴

Both Sari Hanafi and Adam Ramadan use the Agambenian notion of the camp as a ‘state of exception’, controlled through managing the populations’ lives (biopower). However, these theorists both suggest that the space of the refugee camp in Palestine is a more complex and nuanced set of interactions between a multitude of actors, including the ‘real’ sovereigns of the Israeli state and Palestinian Authority quasi-state apparatus, as well as the ‘phantom’ sovereign of UNRWA and local sovereigns within the camp itself.³⁰⁵ For Hanafi, these multiple sovereigns have arisen out of the perceived “territorial illegitimacy” of the refugee camps themselves, from the perspective of all parties, and concretised spatially through the Oslo Accords.³⁰⁶ Indeed, in terms of political power, the fermentation of the notion of Palestinians as existing away from, and separate to, the Israeli state and nation, resulted from the implementation of the ‘peace process’ of the 1990s, and demarcated in its most simple terms in relation to the 1967 ‘borders’ between Israel proper, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. As Linda Tabar states, “the Oslo process enabled the fiction that the Palestinians were now ‘outside’, separate and exterior to Israeli sovereignty and control.”³⁰⁷ However, the Israeli presence continued within the West Bank, albeit within the Matrix of Control espoused by Jeff Halper, and consisting of particular nodes of control regulating Palestinian movement, rather than a complete military presence throughout the entirety of Palestinian space.

³⁰³ Richter-Devroe, S. (2013), “‘Like Something Sacred’: Palestinian Refugees’ Narratives on the Right of Return”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 32:2, 92-115, p106

³⁰⁴ Richter-Devroe, S. (2013), “‘Like Something Sacred’”, p100

³⁰⁵ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p7-8; Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p69-70

³⁰⁶ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, p4

³⁰⁷ Tabar, L. (2007), ‘Memory, Agency, Counter-Narrative: Testimonies from Jenin Refugee Camp’, *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 21:1, 6-31, p12

in addition to the remaining Israeli military domination and overall control, there are a number of 'sub-sovereigns', existing within the space of the West Bank, and particularly relating to the refugee camps, although these 'sub-sovereigns' are subjugated to the overarching will of the Israeli state, in addition to the international humanitarian regime and PA at varying levels. Adam Ramadan refers to these sub-sovereigns as "multiple partially sovereign actors", as none can muster the power to be the absolute sovereign over the entirety of the space of the refugee camp, but these actors "all exercise power within the camps in important and often conflicting ways."³⁰⁸ As with the previous chapter on internationalised space, I suggest that there are three interlinked and mutually dependent power structures: that of the Israeli state, the Palestinian Authority, and the international neoliberal humanitarian regime. The latter two are most prevalent within the majority of the space of the West Bank, albeit at differing levels of interaction and always subservient to the Israeli state. Unlike the non-refugee areas, the Palestinian Authority has less control within the actual spaces of the refugee camps, which are under the jurisdiction and administrative capacity of the international aid agencies, in particular UNRWA, although other international aid and charities are present and active within refugee spaces. Whereas theatre companies within non-refugee areas are grouped with international and local NGOs, refugee spaces are special within the West Bank, and as such a further classification of local power structures are necessary in order to understand the social dynamics at play within the camps. The extant theatre companies in the refugee camps, in particular Al-Rowwad in Aida camp, and the Freedom Theatre in Jenin camp, are part of these local actors, in competition with other indigenous groups for power and prestige. However, as shall be explained, although there are many similarities between the two initiatives, the means through which power is formed and actuated differs greatly.

The refugee camp as separate Palestinian space has been institutionalised through the PA's policy which bequeaths citizenship within the quasi-state of Palestine in the West Bank to those living in refugee camps, but does not allow them to vote in

³⁰⁸ Ramadan, A. (2013), 'Spatialising the Refugee Camp', p69

municipal elections. Through a classification of this space into that which Hanafi calls “extra-territoriality”, refugee camp dwellers are only given a political voice when voting in national elections.³⁰⁹ Additionally, despite PA grandiloquent verbosity regarding the rights of refugees, including the right of return, in reality PA methods in the refugee camps of the West Bank “cement the exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination of refugees *vis-à-vis* the *muwatineen* [Palestinian citizens outside refugee camps].”³¹⁰ We can therefore see a disconnect not only between the different understandings of Palestinian space in terms of perceived legitimate and illegitimate spaces, but also in terms of ‘political life’. Spatially, the refugee camp is distinguished not only from the Palestinian non-refugee camp spaces, but also from the Israeli settlers’ militarily “‘protected’ enclaves” through the use of Israeli-imposed, and Palestinian Authority-approved (albeit by-proxy through the Oslo Accords) borders, made physical through the use of barriers and visible security apparatus.³¹¹ Therefore, within the West Bank itself, there are numerous spaces, perceived as legitimate and illegitimate based upon the ideological persuasions of the inhabitants, and enforced through sovereign-defined boundaries.

Adam Ramadan is in agreement with Sari Hanafi in relation to both the usefulness of Agamben’s theory of the space of exception, and the biopolitics at play within this space, in addition to the consideration of multiple sovereigns simultaneously interacting with each other and the Palestinian population at large in the West Bank. However, whereas Hanafi focuses on the ‘spacio-cide’ occurring within the West Bank, the local geopolitics of the refugee camp is central to Ramadan’s theorising. For Ramadan, it is imperative to further Agamben’s claims to understanding the space of the camp, by additionally focusing on “everyday geopolitics”: the internal workings of the camp, and the social relationships and

³⁰⁹ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p5; Richter-Devroe, S. (2013), “‘Like Something Sacred’”, p100-1

³¹⁰ Richter-Devroe, S. (2013), “‘Like Something Sacred’”, p101

³¹¹ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p8

power struggles at play by multiple actors within it.³¹² Agamben's conception falls short by essentialising the camps as "sites of intensified sovereign power in which the normal legal order is suspended by the sovereign."³¹³ However, it is necessary to concede, according to Ramadan, that if "sovereignty, following Agamben, is about the ability to declare the exception, then we must understand what actors, relations and practices contribute to the suspension of the legal order."³¹⁴

In conjunction with the Israeli state and Palestinian quasi/pseudo-state power, the role of the international community is especially prevalent within the refugee camps. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1950, ostensibly to provide temporary assistance to Palestinian refugees from the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. According to its website, UNRWA's "services encompass education, health care, relief, camp infrastructure and improvement, community support, microfinance and emergency response, including in times of armed conflict."³¹⁵ As of 2013, UNRWA claimed responsibility for around 727,000 UNRWA-registered refugees, located within nineteen refugee camps in the West Bank.³¹⁶ Just like the refugee camps are conceived of within the Palestinian imagination as temporary spaces,³¹⁷ so too is UNRWA considered a temporary entity, its mandate indefinitely and consistently renewed every three years through the voluntary financial contributions and approval of its funders.³¹⁸ For Hanafi, UNRWA constitutes the '*phantom*' sovereign, due to its administrative biopolitical power in lieu of the Palestinian Authority, who relinquished responsibility for the camps' inhabitants to the international community, and additionally due to the local Palestinians' consideration of the UN agency as "responsible for disorder in the camps".³¹⁹

³¹² Ramadan, A. (2013), 'Spatialising the Refugee Camp', p74

³¹³ Ramadan, A. (2013), 'Spatialising the Refugee Camp', p68

³¹⁴ Ramadan, A. (2013), 'Spatialising the Refugee Camp', p68-9

³¹⁵ UNRWA website, accessed 25th August 2013 at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=85>

³¹⁶ Richter-Devroe, S. (2013), "'Like Something Sacred'", p100

³¹⁷ Ramadan, A. (2013), 'Spatialising the Refugee Camp', p65

³¹⁸ Bocco, R. (2009), 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History Within History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, 229-252, p233

³¹⁹ Hanafi, S. (2008), 'Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception', Research Paper, p8

UNRWA, along with other international NGOs and agencies, through its presence and workings within the camps, has created a super-imposed humanitarian space onto the camps. Concomitantly with the simultaneous humanitarian discourse as defined by the international community, UNRWA makes decisions regarding the camps which are taken by non-Palestinians a great distance away from the refugee camps themselves. Agamben himself conceptualises humanitarian space as the product of “the extreme phase of the separation of the rights of man from the rights of the citizen” in which humanitarian agencies “can only grasp human life in the figure of bare or sacred life, and therefore, despite themselves, maintain a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight.”³²⁰ Indeed, the outside organisations’ complicity with the ruling yet absent sovereigns – the Israeli military and civilian PA – and their desires to act within the humanitarian, and therefore allegedly apolitical remit, results in the reproduction of bare life and the depoliticised subject within the eyes of the humanitarian organisations.³²¹

The presence within the refugee camp of international humanitarian agencies reiterates the notion of refugee camps as “spaces that fall within the remit of humanitarian protection and aid, and outside the national order of things, [therefore] they are simultaneously within and outside the law”.³²² UNRWA, as ‘phantom’ sovereign, adopts and implements many biopolitical (quasi-)State functions within Palestinian refugee camps within the West Bank, to the extent that it is referred to as the “Blue State”, based upon the colour of its flag.³²³ Indeed, although around 99% of its 24,000 staff are Palestinians from the local vicinity,³²⁴ those occupying the upper echelons of the administrative structure, with decision-making power, are overwhelmingly and consistently foreign, primarily European and North American.³²⁵

³²⁰ Agamben, G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p133

³²¹ Agamben, G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p134

³²² Sanyal, R. (2013), ‘Urbanizing Refuge: Interrogating Spaces of Displacement’, p2

³²³ Bocco, R. (2009), ‘UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees’, p234

³²⁴ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p71

³²⁵ Bocco, R. (2009), ‘UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees’, p236

Indeed, the very essence of the refugee camp is that of a time-limited construction during the immediate conflict and post-conflict periods, until the time that it is safe for the displaced to return to their homes; it is not intended to become a new site for dwelling. For Palestinians who fled the 1948 and 1967 wars, and their descendants, however, the camps have become “permanent-temporary landscapes of exile, spaces of Palestine in liminality.”³²⁶ This linking of time and space is particularly interesting in relation to the imposition of the international humanitarian regime, which serves to perpetuate the camp as a ‘humanitarian space’ by UNRWA. As such, refugee camps are therefore “spaces enforced so as to be frozen, immobile.”³²⁷ As a humanitarian space, therefore, the Palestinian refugee camps are necessarily depoliticised by the humanitarian organisations, whose focus primarily lies with ensuring that ‘bare life’ and basic human needs are met first and foremost. Although in 2004 UNRWA moved more towards human rights-based initiatives, these did not concern one of the most important rights as perceived by the Palestinians, namely the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees from the wars of 1948 and 1967 to the territory which is now Israel. As such, whilst there is an impetus towards securing women and children’s rights, education and health, these are not overly contentious or problematic for the Israelis, but from the Palestinian perspective serve to distract and undermine the primary refugee objective of returning ‘home’.³²⁸ The refugee camp as humanitarian space therefore occupies an exceptional space within the actual physical space of the West Bank, as well as within the Palestinian imagination, both refugee and non-refugee.

Ramadan identifies additional sovereigns, which interact, collaborate, and simultaneously exist within the space of the refugee camp, which collude to maintain and reinforce the “complicated and exceptional sovereignties of camps”.³²⁹ Apart from the existing - and mostly absent until a security crisis -

³²⁶ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p66

³²⁷ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p46

³²⁸ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p5

³²⁹ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p69

sovereigns of the Israeli military and PA, and the omnipresent quasi-state of UNRWA, multiple local actors coexist in simultaneous cooperation and low-level conflict. These are derived from the immediate locales of the camp, and are site-specific, including political groups of varying persuasions, religious figures, popular committees, and local and international NGOs. Together, these groups interact and compete with and between each other and the other power structures within the space of the camp to produce that which Ramadan calls the “camp-society”, “a diverse, dynamic and at times divided assemblage in constant motion”.³³⁰ Resistance from local Palestinians against these multiple (sub)-sovereigns is key, for Ramadan, and leads him to develop a more nuanced application of the ‘state of exception’ to Palestinian refugee camps. For, as he states:

A generalised model of the space of exception falls short of an effective analysis of the refugee camp. Studies of real-world refugee camps cannot be reduced to a formulaic reading of spaces of exception filled with silenced and disempowered *homines sacri*. Such readings risk losing sight of the complex sovereignties of refugee camps, and the possibilities of agency on the part of the refugees themselves.³³¹

Indeed, it is the space of the refugee camp itself which results in this resistance by locally-situated Palestinian political agents, which comes into being through the very site itself, especially in relation to the right of return, for the “camps are political claims of return rendered through bricks and mortar.”³³² As both a marginalised and delegitimized space within the Palestinian imagination and the actual civil administration policies of the PA, refugee camp inhabitants have created a unique social identity relational to the place in which they reside.³³³ As a space protected by the international humanitarian regime remit, albeit one which is not physically or militarily protected by UNRWA, the exceptional status of the refugee

³³⁰ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p69-70

³³¹ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p68

³³² Sanyal, R. (2013), ‘Urbanizing Refuge: Interrogating Spaces of Displacement’, p11

³³³ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p5

camp has created multiple actors resisting the perceived injustices meted out against them, disputing the notion that the inhabitants are placid and apolitical subjected beings.³³⁴ Indeed, some inhabitants have become a renewed “refugee-warrior community”, demanding their right of return to their homeland, through both militarised and non-violent means.³³⁵

The increasingly urban character of the refugee camp is one which grows both organically and illegitimately, reinforcing the separation between camp and non-camp space, which is defined through the sovereign acts of urban planning, and the clear delineation of borders.³³⁶ However, this is contained within the site itself, the space of exception, whereby the boundaries of the space of exception are determined through and by the demarcation of borders. It is these borders which are created at the hands of the occupying Israeli power, and came into being through the military controls imposed upon Palestinian space by the Israeli military.³³⁷

As Adam Ramadan states:

Where Palestinian people, organisations and leaders *become* in some way sovereign, by contributing to the suspension of law in the camps or controlling its conditions, then they also come to define or shape the conditions in which political life can exist... The refugee camps are not spaces of intensified sovereign power that produces bare life, but spaces of sovereign *abandonment* filled with an alternative order (sometimes *dis-order*) that can have the capacity to produce its own political life. This alternative

³³⁴ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p71; Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p5

³³⁵ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p69

³³⁶ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p7

³³⁷ Hanafi, S. (2008), ‘Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception’, Research Paper, p8

order is something more than the depoliticised humanitarianism of international agencies, and something less than a state.³³⁸

This notion of sovereign abandonment echoes Neve Gordon's notion of the 'Principle of Separation', whereby Israel has removed its concern over the everyday lives of Palestinian residents of the West Bank to the control of the Palestinian Authority and international organisations. A void of 'official' military sovereignty has emerged in which a multitude of actors have established themselves as competitors within these 'spaces of exception'.

Following the widescale destruction of the second intifada, a sense of the importance of non-violent resistance has become prevalent throughout the West Bank, including refugee camps. This is due not only to the increased international funding available to Palestinian NGOs, but also perhaps due to the perceived failure of non-state militarised actions with limited weapons and means against a regional superpower with a military arsenal. It has been stated that the third intifada, when it comes, will be a 'cultural intifada'.³³⁹ As such, theatre companies are at the forefront of this cultural revolution, using the tools of their craft to educate and empower, and exist as alternative sovereigns, offering another sovereign space for young Palestinians. Theatres located within refugee camps are imbued with a somewhat different mentality to those elsewhere in Palestine. Whereas theatre companies in Ramallah, Beit Jala and East Jerusalem are more outwardly compliant with the international demands upon them in order to secure funding, despite productions such as *Beit Yasmin*, the two theatres based in Aida and Jenin camps are overtly resolutely opposed to adhering to the strictly delineated confines of the international funding paradigm. Although they do work with internationals, it is determinedly on the basis of 'partnership' working, on an equal footing, rather than

³³⁸ Ramadan, A. (2013), 'Spatialising the Refugee Camp', p72; italics in original.

³³⁹ Juliano Mer Khamis and the Freedom Theatre, cited in: Mee, E. B. (2011), 'Juliano Mer Khamis: Murder, Theatre, Freedom, Going Forward', *TDR*, 55:3, 9-17, p10

as grateful recipients of foreign aid, with all the pre-requisite conditions that this entails.³⁴⁰

If we accept that the refugee camps in the West Bank are 'spaces of exception', then theatre companies acting within these spaces are becoming exceptional spaces through their activities. The theatre building and other sites of theatre activity become exceptional spaces, which local inhabitants attempt to re-create through localised and politicised resistance. The space within the theatre building, through theatrical activities, is revitalised, brought to life and given meaning as a special place – an exceptional space – in which cultural resistance against both the Israeli occupation and the international humanitarian regime can be formed and developed. This is not to say that this space is a *tabula rasa*, free from pre-existing cultural values and the experiences of living under occupation; rather, it is a space which has been reclaimed by Palestinians, despite the overarching presence of occupation and the restrictions of the conservative elements of Palestinian society. Despite the constraints, both spatially and socially of living within a refugee camp, the very fact that a cultural space in which the Palestinian national narrative and traditions can be made physical can be said to serve as a resistance strategy against the negative effects of living under occupation. However, this alternative space is not free from competition regarding establishing the sovereign over this space. The theatrical space can both produce a single or multiple local alternative sovereigns within the one space, which can result in democratic egalitarianism, autocratic despotism, or a combination of these with individual theatre practitioners holding unequal power capabilities.

Al-Rowwad Theatre: Creating 'Equality' (Liberation and Return) on Stage?

Maurya Wickstrom has suggested that Palestinian theatre activity can bring about a sense of 'Equality' within and among Palestinians, both those involved in the production of, and those engaging with theatre within the space of the West Bank.

³⁴⁰ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012)

The abstract concept of 'Equality' is brought into being as it is "enacted as the new present... a present that will also be linked to a new space."³⁴¹ Wickstrom evokes a spatial-temporal agreement in which the existence of theatre activities and creative practices results in the production of a new understanding of Palestinian being, one which is 'Equal'. Here, Wickstrom draws on the work of French philosopher Alain Badiou, for whom 'Equality' is "a statement that is axiomatic, that is not to be bargained for, opined about or arrived at by consensus".³⁴² Indeed, it is based upon the 'Idea', a universal conceptualization which transcends space and time, and which is pertinent at both the global and the local levels. It is simultaneously ubiquitous and specific to its environs.³⁴³ However, just as there are a number of competing sovereigns at all structural levels from the grassroots to the occupying state, so too are there contesting notions of the 'Idea', particularly in relation to the overarching humanitarian regime administrating the refugee camps, which is supposedly based upon universal human rights, but from the perspective of local Palestinians, serves to deepen the occupation and aids the lack of fulfilment of Palestinian national demands and the right of return. Despite this, the concept of the Palestinian 'Idea' is a useful one through which to analyse the local workings of theatres in refugee camps as cultural resistance to numerous sovereigns and the desire to create a 'new space' based upon 'Equality', whereby this equality is based upon the actualisation of Palestinian "liberation and return".³⁴⁴

The work of Al-Rowwad Cultural and Theatre Society can be examined as an example of this notion in relation to theatre promoting the concept of 'Equality'. Aida refugee camp is located on the "volatile border"³⁴⁵ of Bethlehem, a relatively small space of around 0.71 kilometres squared, within which around 4,000 people comprising approximately 650 families are resident. Of these inhabitants, around

³⁴¹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p33

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p34

³⁴⁴ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p44

³⁴⁵ Beadle, D. (2006), 'Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict', *Youth Theatre Journal*, 20:1, 94-109, p95

40% are under-18s.³⁴⁶ As a site, Aida camp exists on the periphery of Bethlehem, and due to its proximity to Rachel's Tomb, a site holy to Judaism, and the Israeli settlement of Gilo on the adjacent hilltop, it is cut off from its surrounds by the Israeli-constructed Separation Wall, completed in 2005. Indeed, the Separation Wall is one of the most noticeable features in the spatial landscape, a large concrete Wall complete with observation towers, and topped with barbed wire, 'snaking' around the peripheries of Aida camp, ostensibly to protect Israelis residing on the 'other side' from terrorist attacks. However, the Wall has also in itself become a place for resistance, whereby "various murals, pictures and slogans scrawled in graffiti across the cement, turning the imposing barrier into a large canvas inscribed with messages of hope, support and defiance".³⁴⁷ As a result, the Wall has become visually transformed from a blank, monotonal surface, constructed without the consent of Palestinians and the subject of numerous legal appeals, into something which could be said to have been reclaimed somewhat by the inhabitants of Aida camp.

Although the Israelis own and control the Separation Wall and its surrounding security apparatus, maintaining a constant military presence at strategic sites along the Wall itself, the side of the Wall facing the Palestinians has been transformed into a place in which Palestinians can attempt to reclaim the concrete structure which has been imposed upon their space. The Wall impedes Palestinian movement, blocks their view of the surrounding landscape, and creates a feeling of claustrophobia within the camp. By changing the Wall face from blank, military greyness into a site on which numerous Palestinian figures, motifs and expressions of resistance are loudly and colourfully proclaimed, the Wall is reconfigured whilst simultaneously denying its legitimacy.

Al-Rowwad is a Palestinian NGO which works primarily with children and young people, as well as women, from Aida Camp, on multiple arts and cultural projects,

³⁴⁶ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories From Under Occupation', p33, UNRWA website, Aida Refugee Camp, accessed 16th August 2013 at: www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=104

³⁴⁷ Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine: Travel Notes on Attending Alrowwad Theatre's Production of Handala (2011)', p133

with a focus on theatre. Al-Rowwad's mission statement is as follows: "An empowered Palestinian Society on [an] educational and artistic level, free of violence, respectful of human rights and values, (with special focus on children and women) based on the spirit of social entrepreneurship and innovation in self-expression and respect of human values."³⁴⁸ As Wickstrom notes, and confirmed by my interview with Al-Rowwad director, Abdelfattah Abu Srou, his disenchantment with the negative effects of the international funding regime is overt and his "speech is thorny with a bitter awareness of the consequence of development and international humanitarianism on his theatre making and on Palestinian life in general".³⁴⁹ Although it is apparent from Al-Rowwad's website, with its early projects "worded in the mandatory development-inflected vocabulary" of the INGO discourse,³⁵⁰ Abu Srou now refrains from accepting money from international agencies which he perceives as complicit inaction of the international community in relation to the existing power structures.

Arguably, the international and multilingual wordings displayed on the Wall, in addition to representing cultural resistance (as above), are also indicative of the humanitarian regime which has been imposed upon both the space and inhabitants of the refugee camps in Palestine. Although permanent in their indelible paint, these stereotypical slogans depict the transient presence of international supporters of the Palestinians, who tend to volunteer for brief periods of time before returning to their home countries. The post-Second Intifada period has witnessed a growth of a phenomenon of "political tourism", whereby the majority of international volunteers coming to Palestine for a month or two "require more time than they are worth" and do not bring about the political changes desired by Palestinians.³⁵¹ Indeed, Abu Srou is bitterly aware of "how humanitarian regimes often work to depoliticize and dehistoricize refugee experience".³⁵² The Wall, with its internationalised slogans actualises the power structures encompassing

³⁴⁸ Al-Rowwad website, accessed at: <http://www.alrowwad.org/index.php/who-we-are/our-vision>

³⁴⁹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p50

³⁵⁰ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p49

³⁵¹ Abdelfattah Abu Srou, cited in: Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p50

³⁵² Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p139

Palestine: the most visible construction of the continuing Israeli occupation over the West Bank is made less ugly and more palatable by the introduction of supposed international solidarity and presence. However, rather like the actual existence of the international community and aid agencies, as has been argued in the previous chapter, the bold colours and proclamations of support for the acquisition of freedom on the Wall have not been translated into reality for the Palestinians who remain under occupation. Despite this, the Wall also has a decidedly local flavour, with the depictions of ‘martyrs’ from the camp and nationwide in addition to Arabic language mottos and revolutionary phrases.

The ‘Idea’ of Beautiful Resistance

Although it is a highly contentious phrase, and a phrase which is not ubiquitous amongst Palestinian theatre practitioners, Abu Srouf’s concept of “beautiful resistance against the ugly Israeli occupation, and its devastating effects on the Palestinian population, especially its children” underscores every activity undertaken by Al-Rowwad Theatre.³⁵³ As Rand T. Hazou states:

For Abusrouf, the importance of beautiful resistance as a strategy of creative expression is ultimately bound up in the need to respond to the ongoing *invisibility* brought about by the Nakba. Ultimately, what emerges from the need to respond to negative stereotyping of Palestinians in the media, is an appreciation of creative self-expression as a form of ‘visibility’ practice, linked to the Palestinian struggle for human rights in the wake of the cataclysm of the Nakba.³⁵⁴

The desire for visibility, for the international community to not only acknowledge but actively counter the destruction on Palestinian existence in the West Bank, is one of the key policies of Al-Rowwad, made manifest through the concept of beautiful resistance. This links in specifically with Hanafi’s concept of ‘spacio-cide’,

³⁵³ Abu Srouf, A. (2006), ‘Beautiful Resistance, Revolting Memory’, *Al Majdal*, 29, p20

³⁵⁴ Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’, p145

one element of which is the “institutionalized invisibility of the Palestinian people” through Israel’s policies within the West Bank, as has been outlined previously.³⁵⁵ Therefore, it can be said that beautiful resistance is a two-pronged approach to the entrenched ‘spacio-cide’ occurring in the West Bank, and Aida camp in particular.

The practice of ‘beautiful resistance’ attempts to achieve this in two ways. Firstly, as a mechanism to raise international awareness of the situation in the West Bank in general and Aida camp in particular, “to show this other image of Palestine... we are not born with genes of hatred or violence as they want to portray us... And we are not born to be just numbers on a list of martyrs or handicapped for the rest of our lives or perish in Israeli prisons, or capable of throwing stones or burning tyres and nothing else.”³⁵⁶ This reflects the desire to educate international audiences, and to raise awareness and support for the Palestinian national cause. Secondly, the internal function of creative expression for the children of Aida camp, the descendants of refugees from the 1948 and 1967 wars, who identify - individually and communally - as refugees from pre-1948 Palestine themselves. Al-Rowwad provides a space in which children from Aida camp can communicate everyday problems and issues arising from living under military occupation artistically, using the “‘safe’ medium of expression” of the theatre.³⁵⁷ As such, the focus on theatrical endeavours seeks to articulate “what we share as human beings, and what unites us as human beings, not what segregates us and what differentiates us”.³⁵⁸

The ‘re-humanising’ process is an attempt to counter the effects of the dehumanising everyday existence of Palestinians, to reaffirm their place within the world, despite their being forcibly located within a site of exception, relegated to the realm of depoliticised ‘bare life’ through the dual processes of military occupation and humanitarian regime. Through focusing on the internal self-perceptions of Palestinians, by giving them purpose and hope for the future, and by

³⁵⁵ Hanafi, S. (2013), ‘Explaining Spacio-cide in the Palestinian Territory’, p190

³⁵⁶ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012); Hazou also states this point at: Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’, p140

³⁵⁷ Abu Srouf, A. (2006), ‘Beautiful Resistance, Revolting Memory’, p20

³⁵⁸ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

encouraging self-improvement through cultural activities, Abu Srouer can be said to “facilitate the process of survival rather than the process of victimization” imposed upon the inhabitants of Aida camp.³⁵⁹ Through this ‘rehumanisation’ process, not only does Al Rowwad resist the normalisation of the ongoing occupation through its activities, but also provides an alternative to becoming just another statistic of a dead/injured Palestinian in this protracted conflict whilst enabling the participants to actively work towards their objectives of becoming “peaceful citizens” in a liberated Palestine.³⁶⁰

Abu Srouer’s insistence upon beautiful resistance as a concept for creating equality for everyone within the space of Israel and Palestine is materialised on the stage. For Abu Srouer, the stage is an ideal setting within which Palestinians have control over their situation and surroundings, and command equal status, based upon the Palestinian perception of human rights and egalitarianism. Indeed, in order for these values to become actualised outside of the theatre, it is necessary for the space itself to be transformed, for as Wickstrom states, “equality in Palestine means that *space must be changed*, and it must be changed for all.”³⁶¹ Therefore, it can be said that Abu Srouer, through the activities undertaken by Al-Rowwad represent a concerted attempt to transform the space of Aida refugee camp from that of the ‘state of exception’ to a new space, which offers the possibility of regeneration,³⁶² moulded in the ideal image envisaged by present-day Palestinians of refugee descent, and who identity still as refugees themselves.³⁶³

The space surrounding Al-Rowwad is politically charged and this determines the nature of the resistance it produces. The relationship between Al-Rowwad’s activities and the space in which it has been formed from cannot be separated, for

³⁵⁹ Beadle, D. (2006), ‘Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, p96

³⁶⁰ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p37

³⁶¹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p34; Italics in original

³⁶² Beadle, D. (2006), ‘Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, p95

³⁶³ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouer (16th January 2012); Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p43

the theatre itself is “embedded in a specific locality” of the Aida refugee camp.³⁶⁴ Nearby is the Lajee (Refugee) Centre, a grassroots non-governmental organisation focusing on the needs of local children through providing social, cultural and artistic activities. Adjacent to this is an arch constructed across the width of the main road, upon which the ubiquitous symbol of the refugee house key is prominently positioned. Directly perpendicular to this arch is the overbearing presence of the Separation Wall, complete with its graffiti of resistance. Therefore, it can be said that the space in which Al-Rowwad’s activities occur reinforces this notion of beautiful resistance, through making evident the very necessity of such a philosophy through the presence of these physical manifestations of the Palestinian condition. Maurya Wickstrom states that, for Palestinian theatre makers: “on stage, equality *is*”, whereby equality denotes a different space and is defined by the return of Palestinian refugees and the application of human rights equally to both Israelis and Palestinian within one united space of the pre-1948 Palestine.³⁶⁵ Abu Srouf is depicted in her work as “a militant, if a gentle and sad one, a militant who advocates non-violent resistance without, I think, disavowing the resurrections of the Idea in forms of armed struggle.”³⁶⁶ As a result, Wickstrom argues that theatre activities conducted in the West Bank attempt to reinvigorate the space of the refugee camp, transforming it from “frozen, immobile”³⁶⁷ space as designated by both the humanitarian regime and the occupation, into a ‘new space’, based upon the concept of the Palestinian ‘Idea’.

This ‘Idea’ simultaneously encapsulates “both armed struggle and beautiful moments of non-violent resistance,”³⁶⁸ and is concerned with the history of Palestinian resistance from the late nineteenth century to the present day, with the large-scale national protests and intifadas, to the everyday *sumud* practiced by Palestinians. It is concerned with “Palestinians’ deep sense of the beauty and

³⁶⁴ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p59

³⁶⁵ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p34; 44; italics in original

³⁶⁶ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p49

³⁶⁷ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p46

³⁶⁸ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p54

fullness of life and the land”.³⁶⁹ It is overall based upon the Palestinian conception of their belonging to the land, their rootedness to the soil, that of their ancestors, and to which they believe will be returned to their descendants at some point in the future. Al-Rowwad’s theatre activities purport to strive to achieve this through the creation of an “army” within the space of the theatre, where the ‘Idea’ can be played out and practiced in preparation for the envisaged return. However, this is active militancy, not the “passive non-violence the world community hopes for.”³⁷⁰ Here, an army of future Palestinian resistance fighters are being created, ones who are avowedly tied to their aspirations for national statehood and their rights as human beings. Theatre spaces in the refugee camp are as a result “new spaces” which are “implicated in the war over space as an assertion of the Idea of equality (liberation and return)”.³⁷¹ As such, my argument proceeds along a slightly different track to that of Wickstrom: instead of reifying the practice of resistance embodied in Al-Rowwad’s work, the examination of the plays that follow is made problematic through the militaristic associations which are discernable in the ‘beautiful resistance’ in practice, albeit associations which simultaneously coexist with Abu Srour’s peaceful rhetoric. Furthermore, the use of children to form this ‘army’ is considered as questionable, particularly in relation to the notion of theatrical space being one for equality and where alternative local sovereignty can exist. Instead, I argue that Abu Srour replicates the existing power modes by establishing himself as a traditional local sovereign, who displays complete control over the theatre space and the content of the performances, rather than allowing it to become an egalitarian and equal space for all theatre participants.

This ‘Idea’ is displayed throughout Al-Rowwad’s work, and is primarily Palestinian-centric. The concept of Israeli participation, where the Israeli as identifying marker becomes synonymous with the occupation and dispossession of Palestinians, is denied and dismissed. As Abu Srour asks rhetorically, who would engage positively

³⁶⁹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p54

³⁷⁰ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p61

³⁷¹ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p44

with their rapist, during the act of rape?³⁷² As a consequence, Al-Rowwad delivers an “uncompromising stance on refusing to ‘normalize’ relations with Israel”³⁷³. This lack of concessions is underscored by fixed values which are not open to discussion. It is the universal conceit of human rights expressed in a very local context. As Abu Srouer states:

When we talk about these values that we share as human beings, we talk about human rights, which were born in 1948. We talk about justice, freedom, peace, equality, love, and these are the values that we share truthfully as human beings, whether we are Muslim or Christian, or Jewish or Buddhist, Hindu or Atheist, or whatever we are. But these values are not elastic, they don’t change according to the reality on the ground, or the direction of this leader or that leader. This is the essence of our humanity, and this is hopefully the heritage you, me, whoever wants to leave to his children and future generations to come. So there is no compromise in these plans.³⁷⁴

Through the assertion that the values held are ‘not elastic’, Abu Srouer is defiantly resisting the geopolitical and spatial configurations being executed through Israeli colonisation. Whilst the space itself might be elastic and hollow, the values held by Abu Srouer regarding Palestinian national and human rights most certainly are not. The ‘Idea’ therefore is a direct counter to the elasticity of the territory as defined and imposed by Israeli policy in the West Bank. Although Palestinians cannot control how the space of the West Bank is reconfigured and manipulated in accordance with Israeli actions, they do have the ability to create the ‘Idea’ within the space of the theatre.

The Palestinian Child as Al-Hakawati

³⁷² Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouer (16th January 2012).

³⁷³ Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’, p137

³⁷⁴ Interview with AbdelFattah Abu Srouer (16th January 2012).

The Palestinian 'Idea' is expressed very clearly within the theatrical works of Al-Rowwad, primarily through the figure of the *hakawati* (storyteller). As Hala Khamis Nassar has stated, Palestinian theatre has taken on a hybrid form due to international interactions, "using patchwork as a strategy for survival" throughout its history; however, the traditional figure of the *hakawati* is culturally Arab, and has a long and distinguished history throughout the Arab world. Khamis Nassar charts the evolution and practise of the *hakawati* in Arabic theatrical arts, from a secular, traditional teller of well-known stories, such as One Thousand and One Nights, who travelled the region performing to multiple audiences, to "a particular contemporary spokesman for cultural survival and political mobilization" within the specific context of Palestinian resistance and nation-building.³⁷⁵

The role of the *hakawati* existed both at the regional level, with the 'professional' *hakawati*, and also at the local, whereby both men and women would entertain their fellow inhabitants in their villages and towns, primarily during the evening.³⁷⁶ For Khamis Nassar, by regaling their audience with stories, the *hakawati* could utilise the symbolism and metaphors of historical tales to relate to the present-day circumstance and "stimulate the collective memory of the audience as a means of political resistance and empowerment". Therefore, the pivotal role played by the *hakawati* is that of bolstering collective identity of the audience, providing social cohesion through shared cultural memory, especially in the face of suffering, such as in the Palestinian situation. The *hakawati* is perceived by the spectators as an authentic portrayer of Arab and Palestinian culture, and is therefore a legitimate mechanism through which to express nationalist sentiments, transmitted through consistent interaction between the *hakawati*, the stories, and the audience. This dynamic serves to reinforce the sense of a shared cultural history and present, deepens social ties, and works at countering the alleged attempted "cultural annihilation" experienced by the Palestinians at the hands of the Israelis through the continued occupation over the pre-1948 Palestine.³⁷⁷ Therefore, as a form of

³⁷⁵ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories From Under Occupation', p16; 20

³⁷⁶ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories From Under Occupation', p21

³⁷⁷ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories From Under Occupation', p16; 22

resistance, the reiteration of Arabic stories, particularly those derived from a local context, forms part of the concept of *sumud*, of steadfastness, whereby the unwillingness to forget past achievements and important historical events reaffirms the Palestinian identity for the audience, especially for children and future generations. The *hakawati*, as a result, fulfils Abu Srouf's concern with leaving a suitable cultural heritage for his, and every Palestinians' descendants, for through the transmission of stories, the wrongs suffered by Palestinians, and the need to rectify these, are carried through time into the future.³⁷⁸

Al-Rowwad uses a number of local children in its productions. Through performing in these plays, and undertaking the role of *hakawati*, refugee children from Aida camp are not only becoming part of a wider Arab cultural tradition of Arabic storytelling, but are also empowered through their participation. Although this thesis is not concerned with dramatherapy or how theatre can be used therapeutically in conflict situations, it is important to note the positive benefits of participating in cultural programmes, especially for children living under occupation. As Dixie Beadle notes, by adopting the *hakawati* persona, they are enabled with "the power to appropriate and re-inscribe national events, and to write a possible future ending to the national narrative. The performers take ownership of the Palestinian narrative, and thus, they open up the possibility for current and future generations to find alternative solutions to the cyclical violence."³⁷⁹ Through obtaining this power, however marginal it may be, the participant children may be emboldened to continue striving for the actualisation of the 'Idea' through non-violent actions.

However, there is an uneasy tension between the use of children in performances for international consumption as somehow exploitative, both against the children themselves and in the attempted manipulation of the audiences' emotions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This ties in with James Thompson *et al*'s

³⁷⁸ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

³⁷⁹ Beadle, D. (2006), 'Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict', p100

concern regarding the young person as multiple signifier when participating in theatrical productions within sites of conflict, especially as these activities “can become inflected with emotionally and politically invested discourses relating to victimhood, survival and hope for the future of the community”, particularly when the international humanitarian regime is involved in perpetuating these discourses and modes of representation at the local and international levels.³⁸⁰ Certainly, there appears to be a kind of paradox occurring within Abu Srou’s thinking regarding the theatre and child actors, as within the human rights discourse, much of Al-Rowwad’s activities focuses on children and youth, and their rights as a separate phenomenon. Whereas Al-Rowwad runs a Playbus as part of the Mobile Beautiful Resistance programme, which travels around the West Bank when this is possible, in order to enable that “children have the time to enjoy childhood... and make them remember that they are children and not adults”, Abu Srou simultaneously claims that:

here [in Palestine] you don’t have children, you have adults, born immediately. Israelis imprison ten years old, twelve years old, fifteen years old. We have children who are in prison at the age of twelve and fourteen – they are still in prison – and Israelis consider Palestinians as adults from the age of sixteen, while for Israelis at the age of eighteen, so again, their system is considering children as adults also. But I guess for Palestinian children, they have this political awareness, not only because we tell them as parents or adults [but] because of the reality of the occupation that is still going on.³⁸¹

Although it may be true that children are denied a childhood within the oPts, the deliberate rendering of children into political subjects to be viewed and assessed by multiple audiences, both local and global, is somewhat troubling.

³⁸⁰ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p35-6

³⁸¹ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srou (16th January 2012).

The notion that children are, willingly or not, “transformed into politically aware adults, much like their own parents”³⁸² may appear to collaborate with this denial of childhood itself. However, in relation to one AlRowwad production, *We Are the Children of the Camp*, as Dixie Beadle states regarding the use of children and their politicisation when talking about their daily lives and struggles:

For those who object to the use of children to perform political theatre, this scene [depicting the children’s hopes and dreams for the future in the face of the present conflict] bears witness to the emotional wrangling that preoccupies youth living with the atrocities of war on a daily basis. Their need for an outlet of resistance is just as poignant as those of the adults in the community; youthfulness does not invalidate emotions.³⁸³

Indeed, Abu Srour also adheres to this notion that Palestinian children, particularly those originating in the refugee camps, are enveloped by and through the political space in which they have been born into, and are thus “eager to talk about their case and their cause and demonstrate a rejection of all forms of occupation”, especially through artistic media.³⁸⁴ Therefore, it could be said that rather than allowing children to remain passive, or denying them a voice on a situation which intricately involves them, Al-Rowwad is giving children from Aida camp a platform through which to express themselves and their refusal to acquiesce to the Israeli military occupation.

Despite this more positive interpretation, because the children are speaking the words which Abu Srour and his generation are putting in their mouths, the stated intentions of Al-Rowwad and its practices seems contradictory and problematic. These activities produce a theatrical space which goes against the ethos of egalitarianism it sets out to achieve. Although Al-Rowwad’s theatre activities are

³⁸² Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), ‘Stories From Under Occupation’, p34

³⁸³ Beadle, D. (2006), ‘Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, p98

³⁸⁴ Abu Srour, A. (2006), ‘Beautiful Resistance, Revolting Memory’, p20

resistance against the occupation, it is done through reproducing a model of sovereignty within the theatre space which, although alternative to the current situation, is also autocratic, with the power over decision-making in the theatre being held primarily by Abu Srour. The children are obeying his commands, performing that which he wishes to produce on the stage in relation to the resistance. The theatrical space therefore becomes less a space for children's self-expression; instead, it replicates the existing local power structures of Palestinian society and traditional resistance narratives within the refugee camp, which the children compliantly recite to their audiences, both local and international. It is these contradictions which will form part of the examination of the plays below.

We Are the Children of the Camp, and Handala

In order to analyse Abu Srour's conception of the 'Idea' and its manifestation within the productions of Al-Rowwad, I shall examine two plays, both of which were performed inside the camp as well as toured locally and internationally, with a particular focus on the performance that I witnessed in live performance: *Handala* (Dir: Abdelfattah Abu Srour, Al-Rowwad, Aida Camp; 2011). Both productions have strong themes of the Palestinian 'Idea' of equality through liberation and return. These plays, written and directed by Abu Srour (albeit based on improvisations and participation from the actors), attempt to create an exceptional space within the 'site of exception' that is the Palestinian refugee camp. Here, the theatre becomes a place in which the Palestinian 'Idea' can be rehearsed and performed in preparation for the potential future fruition of the 'Idea', with the advent of the space of pre-1948 Palestine based upon equality and human rights for all its citizens. Although this is very much an ideal, and that which is depicted in the performances is not reflected in the reality of life for Palestinians living in the West Bank under occupation, through making the theatre an exceptional space, the space itself becomes transformed into one of hope and possibilities.

We Are the Children of the Camp

The first play under consideration, *We Are the Children of the Camp*, was first conceived of and performed in August 2000, weeks before the outbreak of the Second Intifada in the September of that year. Based on improvisation work with the participating children, this play chronicles the Israeli-Palestinian conflict chronologically, from the beginning of the twentieth century until the present-day. As with Palestinian theatre in general, Al-Rowwad's plays seek to provide the Palestinian perspective – indeed, “an explicitly Palestinian narrative”³⁸⁵ – on the political events of the past century; however, Al-Rowwad in particular, due to its political objectives and adherence to the ‘Idea’, appears to produce plays which are partisan political propaganda intended to persuade the audience that they are being presented with the ‘absolute truth’, and could therefore be termed as ‘Palestinian agit-prop’. Although this term is not used by Abu Srouf, his ‘militancy’ and refusal to compromise his ideals, in addition to his perception of his people as the ultimate victims, not only of Israeli aggression, but also European colonialism and the Holocaust,³⁸⁶ reinforces this impression of highly politicised agit-prop theatre being produced by Al-Rowwad.

This utilisation of agit-prop can be seen in *We Are the Children of the Camp*, and is intimately linked to its location within Aida camp and the context of the occupation.³⁸⁷ The play's depiction of key historical events, such as the 1917 Balfour Declaration in support of a Jewish national home in Mandatory Palestine, through to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and subsequent exile of 750,000 Palestinians to neighbouring Arab countries, to more recent history such as the First Intifada and the Oslo Accords, is heavily biased in favour of the Palestinians, with little room for nuance. It is an absolute representation of highly contested and controversial events, presented as fact, as unconditionally true. *We Are the Children of the Camp*

³⁸⁵ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p60

³⁸⁶ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf, (16th January 2012).

³⁸⁷ Thompson, J., Hughes, J. & Balfour, M. (2009), *Performance in Place of War*, p62

displays this one-sided version of history through twelve scenes, which serve to reveal “the frustration, humiliation, deprivation, hopes, and aspirations of camp residents, the lack of proper infrastructure due to the tragic events of 1948 and 1967, and the political deadlock and the frequent attacks on the camp by the Israeli Defence Forces”.³⁸⁸

This play shows the chronological history of the conflict, from its inception until the present day, making it clear that in this production, the current situation as experienced by the child performers is the direct and continuous result of previous events. The first scene creates an idealised image of Palestinian society prior to the presence of Jewish-Zionists, with the children playing happily on stage, portraying a romanticised nostalgia from the collective Palestinian imagination. The stage itself does not contain any set and few props; however, a large screen is located upstage-centre, upon which video footage of actual historical occurrences are displayed to contextualise the actors’ performances, temporally and spatially.³⁸⁹ The first image shown is that of the Balfour Declaration, the 1917 document whereby the British government promised support for the creation of a Jewish national home in Mandatory Palestine. At that specific moment, the children’s play ceases abruptly, and images of mourning and loss are shown, which increases as they represent the war of 1948 and exile, whilst recounting their lost villages and Palestinians killed during the conflict.³⁹⁰

Albeit that the show is presented primarily as a “living archive” of the suffering of the Palestinians throughout the twentieth century, whereby the children relate their present-day endurances through the lens of their ancestors’ displacement and negative experiences. The past is conflated with the present through “documentary-style testimony”, and the vibrancy and aliveness of enduring

³⁸⁸ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), ‘Stories From Under Occupation’, p32-3

³⁸⁹ Beadle, D. (2006), ‘Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, p97

³⁹⁰ Beadle, D. (2006), ‘Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, p97-8; Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), ‘Stories From Under Occupation’, p33

Palestinian culture is displayed through songs and *dabka* dancing,³⁹¹ in addition to the reinvigoration of conventional *hakawati* Arabic storytelling.³⁹² *Dabka* dancing is used in Palestinian theatre and cultural productions “as a form of, and forum for cultural resistance and cultural memory... all of them embody Palestinian culture, and performing them enculturates the dancer.”³⁹³

The children embody the traditional role of the *hakawati* within the ‘space of exception’, using this inherently political theatrical device in order to imbue meaning into their environs, to give body and cultural shape and form to the space. Through their presence on the stage as multiple *hakawati*, telling their stories to the audience, they become politicised, away from the mere continuation of existence meted out to them under the humanitarian regime of UNRWA and allowed by the Israeli occupation, and use their everyday experiences to articulate their hardships, and show artistically that they, as representatives of Palestinian refugees, will not allow this situation to continue to occur. Likewise, the repeated performances of the traditional *dabka* dances, further locates Palestinian culture temporarily as having a continuing history, serving to reinforce the sense of cultural resistance against the imposed bare life upon camp inhabitants.

This refusal to enable the consolidation and reiteration of ‘bare life’ for Palestinians within the space of Aida camp is delivered through non-violent means, through theatre. However, as Wickstrom notes, there is a real tension existing between the meanings of the words sung in the revolutionary songs of freedom and independence, and the international community’s understanding of non-violent resistance. It is this seeming contradiction which is encapsulated within the Palestinian ‘Idea’ of creating a space for equality and justice to prevail, the space in which the mantra of “On stage, equality *is*” reigns supreme.³⁹⁴ As Wickstrom states in relation to the final song, entitled ‘Pigeons Fly’: “This song carries the ambiguity

³⁹¹ Beadle, D. (2006), ‘Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, p98

³⁹² Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), ‘Stories From Under Occupation’, p16

³⁹³ Mee, E. B. (2012), ‘The Cultural Intifada: Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank’, *TDR*, 56:3, 167-177, p171

³⁹⁴ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p34; 51- 54

of being children born and bred in and by violence, both against Palestinians and by them, and *also* being children who are occupying the new space of the Center in Aida camp, a space dedicated to non-violent ‘beautiful resistance’”.³⁹⁵ What is interesting in relation to the inconsistencies inherent within the Palestinian ‘Idea’ as displayed through Al-Rowwad’s productions is the repetition of the concept of Palestinians being the victims, and the use of theatre as an attempt to counteract this victimization through the very process and presence of these activities. Within the Palestinian version of historical events, they represent themselves as innocent scapegoats for a colonial European project of implanting Zionists within Palestine at the expense of the native population. Indeed, in my interviews, this was a very popular sentiment expressed.³⁹⁶ However, through the transition to the ‘new space’, to the Palestinian version of ‘Equality’ encapsulated within the Palestinian ‘Idea’, there is a marked shift between scenes away from the martyred bodies of the intifadas “traumatization of victimhood to the celebration of survival”.³⁹⁷ There is a transformation from the self-description of the everyday Palestinian experience as being comparable to that of “cockroaches”, trapped in “cages like birds”, to those of political demands in order for peace to be negotiated with the Israelis.³⁹⁸

The juxtaposing representations of victim and survivor in parallel scenes reflect the dual-identity felt by Palestinians regarding their situation, and depicted upon the stage to the audience. As the space of the stage is the place where ‘equality *is*’, a supposed ‘safe’ space in which to promote the Palestinian ‘Idea’, then these mutually self-defining identities are played out in equal measure. For the image of the Palestinian refugee forced into exile, there is a counter-image of the armed resistance during the rebellion of 1937 and the war of 1948.³⁹⁹ Additionally, the externally imposed global media representations of Palestinians, which many Palestinian theatre practitioners attribute to their perceptions of the ‘Zionist bias’

³⁹⁵ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p52

³⁹⁶ Interviews conducted with theatre practitioners during fieldwork period.

³⁹⁷ Beadle, D. (2006), ‘Al-Rowwad Theatre Community: Children Surviving in the Rubble of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, p99

³⁹⁸ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), ‘Stories From Under Occupation’, p33

³⁹⁹ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), ‘Stories From Under Occupation’, p35

within and 'control' over the media,⁴⁰⁰ are counteracted through the attempted deconstruction of such images. In one scene, the children stand on stage with multiple-language newspapers, reading out their headlines in Arabic.⁴⁰¹ This awareness of the international dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, and active participation in refuting the negative stereotypes perpetuated by the global media shows an interaction with the overarching power structure of international forces beyond the local sovereigns at play in the camp.

This suggests that the purported safety of the theatrical space is being infused with violence through the direction of Abu Srouf as sovereign over Al-Rowwad's theatre space. He is placing these Palestinian children into the position of simultaneously being passive victim and active resistant; however, the resistance being portrayed in this performance is one of violence. Although theatre activities are non-violent, the messages being disseminated could be seen as inciting a resurgence of armed conflict, with these child actors being the future 'warriors', much like many of the children involved in the Stone Theatre in Jenin went on to become actively involved in armed resistance in the Second Intifada, resulting in their deaths.⁴⁰² This precarious balance between non-violence and armed resistance is evidenced through the lyrics for 'Pigeons Fly', the fourth song in *We are the Children of the Camp*. Part of the evocative and provocative lyrics read:

We don't have any patience in our hearts.

The occupier shall be defeated.

After the injustice comes the victory....

Fire and bombs exploded. We are freedom revolutionists.....⁴⁰³

Although other lyrics in the songs contain blunt reminders of the injustices faced by Palestinians, and the bitterness felt at the failed attempts at a just peace, it is these

⁴⁰⁰ Interviews with theatre practitioners.

⁴⁰¹ Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories From Under Occupation', p35

⁴⁰² Fisek, E. (2012), 'I Want to be the Palestinian Romeo! *Arna's Children* and the Romance with Theatre', *Theatre Research International*, 37:2, p105

⁴⁰³ From Al-Rowwad's website, accessed on 26th September 2013, at:
<http://alrowwad.virtualactivism.net/stories/songsfromplay/pigeon.htm>

words which stand out as exemplary of the dislocate between the desire for peaceful, beautiful resistance, and the threat of potential violence simmering just below the surface.⁴⁰⁴

The overwhelming content of the play, however, is based upon the rights and demands of Palestinians levelled against Israel, the primary occupier, and the complicit international community. During the depiction of the first intifada, when the children representing stone-throwing Palestinians are each shot and killed, the dead bodies rise and appeal to the audience for their internationally legal rights with the words:

We are the children of the camp
We are born strangers in our own land
We are called refugees
This land is our land, the land of fathers and grandfathers...
From here they [the Israelis] want to uproot our memories
But our roots are deep here as beech trees....⁴⁰⁵

Indeed, the explicit demand for national and individual rights permeate deeply throughout this production, reflecting Abu Srouf's stance of 'no compromise' in regards to these issues. In the tenth scene, the children state clearly and concisely:

No peace without the freedom of circulation for all Palestinians
No peace without the return and the compensation for the refugees
No peace without stopping the colonization
No peace without justice
[all] No peace without the complete liberation of Palestinian prisoners from
Israeli prisons
No peace without real peace.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p51

⁴⁰⁵ Excerpt from 'The Encounter' scene, described in: Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories From Under Occupation', p35

The insistence of these pre-requisites for a just and final peace emanate from the Palestinian people themselves, from refugees located within the West Bank, speaking for their kin situated outside of the territorial boundaries of Mandatory Palestine. The unconditional nature of these statements are vocalised from a place in which the complete opposite of these ideals exist in reality – the Palestinians trapped within the refugee camp, subjected to numerous restrictions upon their everyday existence through the presence of the occupation and the complicity of the dual regimes of the international-humanitarian community and the PA, both perceived as acting against the best interest of the Palestinian refugees.

It can be said from this example, therefore, that the structural powers existing above the grassroots level – primarily those of the invisible yet overarching structure of the omnipresent occupation, and the visible yet paradoxically detrimental presence of the international-humanitarian regime, rendered possible through the lack of positive PA intervention, serve to designate the space of the refugee camp as a 'state of exception'. The theatre activities of Al-Rowwad are in themselves a force of non-violent resistance, mobilised by an alternative form of local sovereign, headed by Abu Srour, to define and promulgate refugee rights through the creation of an exceptional space – namely, that of the theatre stage in which an ideal state can be produced as a direct counter at the grassroots level to the higher structural power forces bearing down upon it. It is my contention, demonstrated through these examples, that whilst Al-Rowwad provides a much-needed cultural venue in Aida camp, within a space dominated by the Separation Wall and continual reminders of dispossession and refugee status of its inhabitants, it is also a problematic space. This is most apparent in regards to the omnipotence of Abu Srour within the space. As founder and managing director of the theatre itself, as well as creative director of all the theatre productions and cultural outputs, it could be argued that Abu Srour has adopted the mode of local sovereign in the theatre space, in competition with other NGOs and political groups operating

⁴⁰⁶ Excerpt from 'The Cadres (Frameworks)' scene, described in: Khamis Nassar, H. (2006), 'Stories From Under Occupation', p36

within the camp. This is not to say that he is a negative influence, or that he has become something of a dictator, or even to question his personal integrity and unending efforts; rather, Abu Srouer is a social product of his environment, and operates within the boundaries set both by the external forces at play within the camp (the Israeli occupation and the humanitarian regime) as well as localised socio-cultural power structures resulting from internal and location-specific societal formations emanating from existence within Aida camp.

Abu Srouer as local sovereign dominates the space of Al Rowwad by his continuous presence and involvement with all of its projects. As has been stated, and needs repeating, Abu Srouer is a conscientious and dedicated person, who has devoted his energies to improving the cultural lives of his local community. In order to do this, however, he necessarily abides by the “warrior-refugee community” mentality of refugee camp inhabitants, and has both internalised and projected the stance of ‘no compromise’, highlighting the refugees’ right of return as a central ethos. However, Al-Rowwad’s productions and ethos serve to perpetuate, and therefore are complicit within, the local sovereign parameters, which may result in a stifling of discursive practices regarding the local power structures within the camp. Al-Rowwad does not provide an alternative to these existing structures, and does not act as a platform for provoking debate regarding issues of resistance tactics; instead, a highly-prescribed and repetitive notion of resistance through this contradictory state of militarised, violence-encouraging voices with a mantra of beautiful, non-violent resistance espoused by Abu Srouer during interviews. The dominant narrative of resistance, based upon the pre-Oslo Palestinian liberation rhetoric includes the potential for violence, and appears to contradict this concept of ‘beautiful resistance’. Additionally, although the children had some input into the devising of the performance, the actual content and conflicting messages of the play was formulated and implemented by Abu Srouer, thus denying the children agency for other stories - unrelated to the conflict - to be told, and instead transforming them into internationally acceptable mouthpieces for Palestinian political rhetoric. This discord between the aims of the theatre to advance

children's rights and promote non-violence, and the actual practices as depicted through the play's contents, is problematic.

Handala

The issue of refugee rights is paramount to Al-Rowwad's work, not only through the present-day empowerment of the local community, but also through the evocation of Palestinian refugee collective memories, through theatrical productions. *Handala* (Dir: Abdelfattah Abu Srouf; Al-Rowwad, Aida Camp; 2011) is based upon the eponymous character created by the Palestinian caricaturist, Naji al-Ali (1938-1987), who was part of the Palestinian exodus to Lebanon during the 1948 war, and who was allegedly assassinated in the 1980s by the Israeli Mossad for his political cartoons. Out of the plethora of his widely published and disseminated characters, a number of recurring motifs revealed his "uncompromising political commentary" and vitriolic visual attacks on regional and international figures of power.⁴⁰⁷ As a member of the Palestinian resistance literature canon, including such notorious authors as Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish, al-Ali sought through his cartoons to redress the negative attention afforded to Palestinians, and encourage local resistance to the occupation through documenting "an unspeakable past, something which dominant History has been bent on silencing."⁴⁰⁸

This desire to bear witness, to turn the pages of a newspaper into a replicate Palestine, whereby the ink of the cartoonist's pen draws indelible marks into the paper as symbolic of the invisible, yet culturally present in the Palestinian imagination, roots tying Palestinians to their former land, can be said to be repeated through the staging of *Handala*. As al-Ali attempted to recreate the attachment through his art, by making visible the Palestinian refugee and the duplicitous Arab politician, the suffering of the peasant woman and the Palestinian

⁴⁰⁷ Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p134

⁴⁰⁸ Hamdi, T. (2011), 'Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance Literature', *Race and Class*, 52:3, 21-42, p23

child, through the deliberate artistic portrayal of symbols of Palestine and the Palestinian people, so too has Abu Srour replicated this relaying of the rootedness of Palestinians to their land through evoking these familiar images within the 'safe' space of the Al-Rowwad stage – the place in which the Palestinian 'Idea' can be fully formed and perfected. For Hazou, *Handala* depicts a “deeper significance of beautiful resistance”, one which is “intimately linked to the history of the Palestinian non-violent struggle, and informed by the collective experience of the Nakba, Palestinian refugee identity, and the right of return which penetrates deep within the fabric of life in [Aida] refugee camp”.⁴⁰⁹

The relocation of the image of the Palestinian refugee from camps outside of Palestine, to the internally displaced Palestinian within the boundaries of Mandatory Palestine, who is denied access by the Israelis to the village of their birth, instead remaining languishing in refugee camps within the West Bank, not only reconfirms the notion of the Palestinian refugee within the present-day Palestinian Territories, but also serves to amplify the 'state of exception' and exile. Whereas the Palestinian refugee in Lebanon or Jordan is outside of the state borders of Israel and the Palestinian Territories, refugees within the West Bank are doubly reminded of their exile due to the imposition of the Separation Wall clearly visible from their windows in Aida camp, and additionally presented on stage in AlRowwad. As such, the physical environment in which the theatre exists cannot but reinforce this sense of exile and abandonment by both the Israeli state mechanisms and Palestinian Authority. As a result, the local sovereigns dominate the political landscape, including cultural institutions and leaders, such as Al-Rowwad and Abu Srour.

The character of Handala, a ten year old boy who is drawn with his back to the viewer, is ubiquitous throughout the different walls in varying public spaces in the West Bank. Its omnipresence and adoption as a “powerful image” and an “international symbol of the Palestinian resistance and defiance”, particularly when

⁴⁰⁹ Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p151

existing as graffiti on the Separation Wall, has reinforced the Palestinian refugee awareness of and identification with the cartoon child.⁴¹⁰ Indeed, Handala represents not only a connection with the past tragedies which have befallen upon the Palestinian people, but his presence also serves as a meme for “rootedness and resistance”, whereby the child, as symbol of the Palestinian people, is needed to be physically present within the land of Palestine in order for Palestine to be liberated. It is this deep connection of Palestinians living in exile with their lost homeland, a “sacred attachment to the land”, which is formed precisely due to their current lack of presence within it, and the overbearing desire to return.⁴¹¹

The strong relationship between the Palestinians and the lost land can be surmised as Sari Hanafi states:

In the same vein that Israeli ‘spacio-cide’ is informed by the Zionist myth of ‘a land without a people for a people without land’, Palestinian refugees nurture a dream of a land without refugees for refugees without a land. The Palestinian refugees of the West Bank and Gaza, but also of the diaspora, have greater attachment to the *land* of Palestine than to the people of Palestine.⁴¹²

Indeed, the land, and with it the primary signifiers of Palestinian identity, such as the Jaffa orange and the olive tree⁴¹³ is therefore entwined with the Palestinian people, although the land itself holds more appeal and evokes more emotion than its inhabitants. The desired return to the land of Palestine as envisaged by the refugees is made tangible not only through the multiple graffiti of the Handala cartoons on various sites throughout the West Bank, including Aida camp, but is

⁴¹⁰ Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine,’ p135

⁴¹¹ Hamdi, T. (2011), ‘Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance Literature’, p26

⁴¹² Hanafi, S. (2009), ‘Spacio-cide: Colonial Politics, Invisibility and Rezoning in Palestinian Territory’, p119; italics in original.

⁴¹³ See Abufarha, N. (2008), ‘Land of Symbols: Cactus, Poppies, Orange and Olive Trees in Palestine’, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 15:3, 343-368.

also made physical through the production and presentation of *Handala* the play on the stage of Al Rowwad theatre in the centre of Aida camp.

For Abu Srou, Handala as a symbol occupies a paradoxical stance: on the one hand, the internationalisation of Handala achieves his objectives of creating awareness of the Palestinian cause and especially the plight of the refugees amongst the international community; however, the question of ownership over the symbol itself and its uses by non-Palestinians has become a pernicious and contentious issue. Abu Srou states, Handala is “the property for everybody, the reference for everybody. It’s the sign of no compromises and no sales on the rights and values”⁴¹⁴ of the Palestinian ‘Idea’, for there can be no concessions made regarding the right of return for Palestinian refugees from 1948 and 1967. This is an absolute, a necessity, and therefore the staging of *Handala* is part of this uncompromising demand. At the same time, although the image of Handala might be for everybody, simultaneously it is not for the international community to appropriate for their own purposes, political or otherwise. As such, the producing of the play, using this widely recognised symbol of Palestinian cultural resistance, performed in the refugee camp, in the theatre space of Al-Rowwad, suggests another uncompromising stance: that the ownership of Handala-as-image, as representative of the Palestinian refugee population and their rights and needs, is itself not for sale, ownership remains firmly with the Palestinians, and in particular with the refugees living in Aida camp.

Handala is presented as a “child witness”; therefore by watching the performance of Handala, the audience too become witnesses to Palestinian suffering.⁴¹⁵ The play took place at the Al-Rowwad theatre in Aida camp in September 2011. In the compact, fully-seated auditorium with an audience of primarily local Palestinians, both children and adults of varying ages, the play brought to life a vocalisation and visualisation of the creation of Handala through the experiences of Naji al-Ali, and the physicalisation of his most familiar cartoon characters. The set was basic, as is

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srou (16th January 2012).

⁴¹⁵ Hamdi, T. (2011), ‘Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance Literature’, p26

characteristic of all AlRowwad productions, ostensibly due to the logistics of travelling within the West Bank and internationally, in addition to budget constraints.⁴¹⁶ Along the entire length and breadth of the back wall was a collage of Arabic newspapers, on top of which were examples of al-Ali's numerous political cartoons, enlarged and placed at seeming random points on the wall. By contrast, the newspaper sheets are aligned without gaps, one after another, forming a complete wall of media information about Palestine and the Palestinians.

Hazou suggests that the set was deliberately designed by Abu Srour as a direct riposte to what he believes to be a wholly negative and detrimental media campaign against Palestinians.⁴¹⁷ As the set appears to be comprised entirely of Arabic language newspapers, this could possibly mean that this unfavourable portrayal of the Palestinian people is not confined to Western media sources, and is endemic throughout the Middle East as well. Alternatively, it could just be that local newspapers were used, in order to save time and money. However, what does become apparent is the use of a static wall as counterpoint to the Separation Wall which encircles Aida camp. Whereas Palestinians, including those in the immediate vicinity of the Wall in the camp, have no control over the building or maintenance of the Wall – this is entirely within the security remit of the Israelis – it becomes a physical embodiment of the occupation, a daily reminder of the unjust living conditions and attempted imposition of bare life upon camp dwellers. It is there, present, in the everyday existence of Palestinians, but they have no ownership over it, despite their attempts at creating a sense of creative resistance through graffiti and artistic images and slogans. By contrast, the back wall of the theatre, in the 'safe' and creative space of Al-Rowwad theatre, is a site upon which the Al-Rowwad theatre troupe, led by Abu Srour, can instil their own vision of the Palestinian 'Idea'. This is not to say that the theatre space and its set within this space is a form of *tabula rasa*, a blank slate upon which to envision new concepts and ideas, for the space is given meaning through the interactions between the collective Palestinian society of Aida camp and that which is portrayed upon the Al-Rowwad stage.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srour (16th January 2012).

⁴¹⁷ Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p140

However, Al-Rowwad has ownership over this space, and therefore has the means and abilities in order to represent themselves, to the theatre audience.

Al-Rowwad appears to offer Abu Srou's definition of resistance and his agenda; due to his institutionalisation as a local sovereign, this may well discourage dissent from his overarching objectives regarding Al-Rowwad's activities. This is made apparent through his presence on the stage in addition to behind the scenes. In *Handala*, Abu Srou's portrayal of Naji al-Ali is suggestive that he perceives himself to be moulded from the same material as al-Ali; that his self-reflexive characterisation of al-Ali is a mirror-image of how he envisages himself to be: a visionary artist, a revolutionary refugee, a warrior whose art becomes his weapon of choice.⁴¹⁸ This is presented in particular in the second scene, during which Abu Srou as al-Ali is subjected to a barrage of questions from a character in military uniform. Abu Srou as al-Ali responds with increasingly descriptive articulations reflecting not only on the role of cultural practitioners within the Palestinian resistance, but also highlighting the problems Palestinians face when attempting to cross both national borders, and within the West Bank itself.⁴¹⁹

One passage which depicts the eloquence of al-Ali's language in contrast to the stark, barked-out utterances of the military guard can be shown as follows:

Guard:	Who are you?
Naji:	A swallow looking for its nest, a space liberated and not mortgaged to any organization or regime...
Guard:	Special identifying features?
Naji:	Marks from Arab daggers in the back and Israeli bullets in the chest.
Guard:	Your Occupation?

⁴¹⁸ Hamdi suggests that al-Ali, "who used his pen as a sword, saw himself as a warrior, an Achilles", in: Hamdi, T. (2011), 'Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance Literature', p29

⁴¹⁹ Hazou documents this clearly in his article, along with a transcription of this particular scene. See: Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p141-143 in particular.

Naji: An engraver of the tragedies of our people from the Atlantic to the Gulf...

Guard: And in what galleries do you display your works?

Naji: On the walls of our tent in the camp and on prison walls and the floor of my prison cell. I engraved them in the hearts of the poor and the minds of the fugitives and in the blood of the exiled and embroidered in the eyes of the grave dwellers.

Guard: What nonsense! Are you mad?

Naji: Maybe. I am one of the people.⁴²⁰

Indeed, as Hazou relates, and which was made apparent during my interview with Abu Srour, this passage has resonance with Abu Srour's experiences whilst as a student in France in the 1980s. Whilst applying for his residency card, there was no suitable option for his nationality, with 'Palestinian' not existing on the French database, and with Abu Srour's refusal to accept the identity of 'Jordanian refugee under Israeli mandate'. In the end, his identity card stated him as being of 'Nationality undetermined', despite his protestations that he was a Palestinian refugee living in Palestine, under Israeli occupation.⁴²¹

Spatially, in this scene, Naji al-Ali and the guard are located centre-stage left, with al-Ali being placed on the edge of the stage. The domineering attitude and body language of the guard suggests that he is almost literally being restrained within a corner, that the guard is in control over who has access to the remaining stage space, and who is excluded. Al-Ali's positioning and inability to traverse this space due to the imposition of the guard's body reinforces this sense of marginalisation and adds to the evocation of the imposed bare life and marginal existence on the refugee on the outskirts of the social order, refused entry to the centre due to his status as refugee.

⁴²⁰ Cited in: Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p142

⁴²¹ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srour (16th January 2012). Also relayed in Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p141

It is interesting that this exchange is between two Arabs, using the Arabic language, suggesting that this is not a representation of interactions between Palestinians and Israelis, but is between Palestinian refugees and other Arabs. The contempt and deprecation displayed towards al-Ali is indicative, therefore, of the appalling treatment of Palestinian refugees by their Arab brothers in neighbouring countries.⁴²² Indeed, Naji al-Ali in his political cartoons is equally disparaging about Arab leaders and political elites, which is shown through this particular scene. The guard, Dahdul, is, as Hazou acknowledges, “a composite of various Al-Ali caricatures that Abdelfattah [Abu Srour] introduced into the play to symbolize various figures of authority, from the complacent Palestinian leadership, to corrupt Arab regimes and their henchmen.”⁴²³ The negativity of this scene, the abuse of Palestinian refugees at the hands of the powerful, resonates with the experiences of Palestinians residing in Aida camp. However, the coterminous scene depicts the potential of creative resistance to undermine this external imposition of degrading opinion and treatment. Al-Ali is depicted drawing Handala, who then comes to life, appearing on the stage beside him. As a result, Al-Ali “reclaims the agency of creative self-expression to re-represent Palestinian identity as a radical and positive intervention”.⁴²⁴ These juxtaposing scenes firstly present the conditions Palestinians both within and outside Palestine are facing due to their identities as refugees, and how through the concept of beautiful, artistic resistance, Palestinians become empowered to portray their own sense of self against this barrage of discrimination and unfavourable misrepresentation. As a result, by depicting the determined self-representation of Palestinian refugees as cultured, imaginative and talented in the arts, the stage is transformed into a positive affirmation of the Palestinian character, as imagined by Abu Srour.

The prominence of al-Ali is ascertained from the beginning of the performance, which opens with a spotlight flickering on and off as al-Ali and the actor playing the

⁴²² Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, for example, are still denied Lebanese citizenship and are marginalised in refugee camps, especially in the South, without being integrated into Lebanese society or political structures.

⁴²³ Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’, p141

⁴²⁴ Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’, p143

child Handala are interspersed with each lighting change. Once the spotlight is fixed on al-Ali, he commences a prologue about his life experiences as a child refugee from Palestine during the 1948 Israeli-Arab war, and his family's settlement in Lebanon. The scene finishes with the assassination of al-Ali by gunshot from offstage. The stage is then filled with al-Ali's cartoon creations, holding lit candles and mourning his death. The remainder of the play is concerned with an envisaged bringing-to-life of al-Ali's creations, translating two-dimensional characters from the page into three-dimensional individuals upon the stage. This can be seen to be a reversal of what occurred to the territory of the West Bank; for as Israel has carved out the space of Palestine into three dimensions to inculcate the occupation, the Palestinian response has been to add flesh to two-dimensional characters in order to resist this hollowing out of their land.

Although each of these figures are representational, in that they are symbolic of a key characterisation of the Palestinian condition, they are simultaneously representative and individualised through their coming into being on the stage. Each character evokes an archetype of the Palestinian as envisaged by al-Ali, and familiar to the Palestinian audience. Firstly, Fatima is the typical Palestinian *fellahah* (land-owning and working 'peasant') who is explicitly linked to agriculture and the land, in addition to the traditionally feminine sphere of the home. This is depicted through her embroidered Palestinian dress, and her being presented at all times within the domestic arena. She wears a large key around her neck, as symbolic of the homes abandoned by Palestinians during the Nakba of 1948.⁴²⁵ Fatima is "everywoman", a stereotype of the historical "universal woman that represents peasant goodness".⁴²⁶ As a refugee, living outside her homeland, Fatima as representation of both the Palestinian home and the land, results in the intertwining of the two. The key is of particular importance when linked with the body-as-representation of the homeland, for the key becomes:

⁴²⁵ Hazou, R. T. (2013), 'Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine', p146-7

⁴²⁶ Najjar, O. A. (2007), 'Cartoons as a Site for the Construction of Palestinian Refugee Identity: An Exploratory Study of Cartoonist Naji Al-Ali', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 31:3, 255-285, p269

the ultimate Palestinian symbol of longing for a homeland. It is a material object whose possession is loaded with memory and hope; it is a symbol instantly recognized by the Palestinian interpretive community... [It] also has symbolic significance because it articulates a major refugee claim: that 'The Right of Return' has not been abandoned. Figuratively, it is also the key to ending the conflict.⁴²⁷

The oversized and prominently placed key, representing therefore the popular Palestinian claim to the right of return as paramount to any peace deal is presented as a highly symbolic device within *Handala*.

Fatima in this production is both politically active and politicised. She is presented as wholly and unambiguously morally sound and correct, a pillar of society whose strength and determination is unequivocal in her demands to return to her homeland. She is, in Abu Srouf's words, the "symbol of resilience, resistance, connection with the right of return."⁴²⁸ In direct contrast are the Westernised male politicians, who are depicted as being self-interested and detrimental to the Palestinian cause. Within al-Ali's cartoons, these nefarious, greedy Arab politicians are shown in a British colonial attire of Bowler hat⁴²⁹; within *Handala* however, they are depicted wearing Western-style suits and ties, albeit dishevelled and unkempt. We are first introduced to Hamdoul, "the more political guy" and Dahdoul, "the more military direct guy"⁴³⁰ when the former enters the stage on top of the latter's back, riding him like a donkey, suggesting not only that we should look upon these characters with disdain and suspicion from the beginning, but that we the audience should mock them, in particular Dahdoul, for in Arab culture to be referred to as a donkey is a grave insult. There is also religious significance here, with Jesus alleged to have entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. The suggestion here, therefore, is that these self-styled, self-serving politicians perceive themselves as saviours, as demi-gods amongst their fellow Palestinians.

⁴²⁷ Najjar, O. A. (2007), 'Cartoons as a Site for the Construction of Palestinian Refugee Identity', p269

⁴²⁸ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

⁴²⁹ Najjar, O. A. (2007), 'Cartoons as a Site for the Construction of Palestinian Refugee Identity', p275

⁴³⁰ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

The two politicians “were composed characters, and sometimes they are Arab leaders, sometimes they are [the] Palestinian leadership, sometimes they are international politicians”⁴³¹. It becomes highly apparent that these characters are representative of the external sovereigns existing outside of the refugee camp, who act within their own interests and not for the good of the Palestinian people. Their status as illegitimate sovereigns, especially in the eyes of the refugees, is exemplified by one moment which provides a light moment of comic relief in an otherwise depressing play. As Handoul sleeps in a chair centre-stage, the child Handala walks onto stage in front of him, and appears to urinate upon him, ostensibly the squeezing of a water bottle. Abu Srouer related to me a story concerning Naji al-Ali which inspired this scene. When al-Ali visited a Palestinian leader to his home in exile, proudly displaying orange and lemon trees purportedly from Jaffa, this pretence at re-enacting Palestine in exile, of “breathing and eating from Palestine, because he has some oranges from Jaffa while he is in exile, so al-Ali urinates on the oranges, urinates on his speech [that] in fact what emptiness you are talking about.”⁴³²

This falsity, this thin veneer of apparent respectability and commitment to the Palestinian cause which Abu Srouer finds so despicable among self-appointed Palestinian leaders, is condemned through this moment. It is especially important that Handala performs this act, as representative not only of the displaced refugees, but as symbol of the Palestinian resistance movement. For Handala to be, in the words of Abu Srouer “pissed off of these people who are talking empty talks and always pretending that they are talking in our name... that’s why it’s an act in his thoughts, to piss on these people.”⁴³³ By establishing himself as an alternative force to these national leaders, Abu Srouer is therefore maintaining his position as local sovereign within the refugee camp, adhering to popular opinion within the

⁴³¹ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouer (16th January 2012).

⁴³² Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouer (16th January 2012).

⁴³³ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouer (16th January 2012).

camp, and therefore providing much-needed temporary relief to the problems faced everyday by local camp residents.

Conclusion

Al-Rowwad's productions are unashamedly agit-prop through their inherently political nature, and as such adhere to and reinforce the collective Palestinian narrative of exile and displacement brought about due to the Nakba of 1948 and Naksa of 1967. The refugees created as a result of war remain today within refugee camps, whose lives exist on the margins of society and who are intentionally excluded from power by the Israeli occupation and humanitarian regime. Al-Rowwad attempts to redress the balance and restore a sense of active participation in the political struggle for independence, but through its actions, it ultimately reinforces the existing local power struggles within the refugee camp, producing populist plays which reiterate notions of resistance strategies which have as yet proved futile. Despite his claims to beautiful, non-violent resistance, the songs and images used, in addition to the unconditional demands for Israel to cease to be, and the creation of a state of Palestine throughout the entirety of the land, is problematic. Additionally, it could be said that Abu Srouf as local sovereign may well reproduce the 'state of exception' within the theatrical space through the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of the children who perform in his plays without having equal creative agency.

One notable occurrence arising out of this research is the notion of performativity emanating from Abu Srouf's multiple interviews. His English-language interviews are replications of highly similar phrases and sentences, consistently repeated to international researchers. Indeed, this has led to Hazou considering his interview with Abu Srouf to be a "well-rehearsed explanation of Alrowwad's approach to

beautiful resistance.”⁴³⁴ Although it could be said, therefore, that Al-Rowwad “is not teaching revenge, but transformation”⁴³⁵, the ‘Idea’ of Justice and Liberation of Palestine based upon the Right of Return that Al-Rowwad, and indeed many Palestinians demand, is transformative only in that it wishes to return to the pre-Israel period; this, for many Palestinians, troublingly for Israelis, is justice.

In addition to refusing to collaborate (in every sense of the term) with Israelis, Abu Srouf will not participate in joint projects with international theatre practitioners when he does not believe that they are equal partners. Although the repercussions of this stance ensures that Al-Rowwad does not receive all the international funding it possibly could,⁴³⁶ it does mean that all partnerships are forged on Abu Srouf’s principles, rather than the disproportionate and unequal relationship, whereby the funding providers are acting in the spirit of charity so “that they can sleep calmly and know that they have helped these poor miserable Palestinians”.⁴³⁷ Instead, Abu Srouf talks about a partnership with Norwegian schools, whereby children from both nations visit each other in their home countries and engage with joint theatre productions. This, for Abu Srouf, defines the concept of solidarity with the Palestinian people, and is in essence a positive model to be potentially replicated with other partners.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012); Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’, p138; Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, in particular Chapter 2.

⁴³⁵ Mee, E. B. (2012), ‘The Cultural Intifada: Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank’, p172

⁴³⁶ Hazou, R. T. (2013), ‘Encounters in the Aida Refugee Camp in Palestine’, p139

⁴³⁷ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

⁴³⁸ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012).

Chapter 5: Theatre Practices as Response to ‘Spacio-cidal’ Practices in Sites of Extreme Contention

Introduction

This chapter examines theatre practices within sites of extreme contention, located on the peripheries of the West Bank and near to Israeli settlements and the Separation Wall, focusing specifically on Jenin refugee camp and the activities of the Freedom Theatre. Palestinian theatre counteracts the Israeli government’s policy of “institutionalized invisibility of the Palestinian people”⁴³⁹ through making Palestinians and their concerns visible upon the stage. Although often confined to Palestinian spaces, this visibility is an important facet of Palestinian non-violent resistance, especially due to the high international profile of the Freedom Theatre and the vast number of international cultural practitioners who come to work or volunteer here. The Freedom Theatre in Jenin takes a two-pronged approach to counteracting conservative forces in the local and national society in addition to contesting the overarching occupation. The themes presented on stage by the Freedom Theatre are those prevalent to everyday Palestinian existence, focusing both explicitly and implicitly upon the military occupation and the difficulties faced on a daily basis as a result of this, so much so that the distinction between what is presented on the stage, and what is happening in real life, are for the most part indistinguishable. This notion shall be explored by looking in particular at the Freedom Theatre’s activities, both within Jenin refugee camp, where the theatre is located, and through the mobile Freedom Bus, which at the time of writing has completed a number of tours of the West Bank. The Freedom Bus utilises Playback Theatre techniques as an artistic practice, and deliberately performs in sites of extreme contention between Palestinians and Israelis. Whilst the chapter on Al-Rowwad focused on the contestation of space by a local sovereign, here I explore an organisation that, in addition to engaging in the competition for local

⁴³⁹ Hanafi, S. (2009), ‘Spacio-cide: Colonial Politics, Invisibility and Rezoning in Palestinian Territory’, p107

sovereignty, also deliberately perform within the extreme sites of contention. As a result, the Freedom Bus attempts to go beyond the tactical and remonstrate against the occupation itself, to engage at the strategic level with the Israelis, albeit within a particular local site.

Inspired by the African-American 'Freedom Riders' of the Civil Rights era in the USA, the idea of the Freedom Ride emerged from the non-violent protest during November 2011, when a group of Palestinian activists took over a Jewish-Israeli settler bus going to Jerusalem. This act of civil disobedience was filmed and streamed over the internet, successfully gaining a large amount of local and international awareness of this occurrence and raising awareness of the unofficial but socially enforced segregation of Israeli state-owned transport routes in the West Bank.⁴⁴⁰ The inaugural Freedom Ride in September 2012, a composite of the Solidarity Stays and Freedom Rides of the American Civil Rights era, was comprised of nine days of travelling around the West Bank. Its main objectives included bringing together Palestinians from different areas of the West Bank and Israel proper. This was a direct response to the geopolitical fragmentation of the West Bank under the Oslo Accords and segmentation through military rule remaining from the second Intifada, and enables Palestinians to congregate in different sites throughout the West Bank, experiencing the specific problems encountered by these local communities. Once located within the site, Playback theatre performances were put on, in addition to educational and civil resistance projects relating to the space itself, and the challenges its community faces as a result of the occupation.⁴⁴¹ Through these acts of cultural resistance, therefore, Palestinians and internationals were brought together in order to ferment a "cross-pollination between different communities" and engender a network of local and international artists and activists which each community can draw upon to highlight their own issues in a mutually productive manner. These artists include not only theatre and performance practitioners, but also musicians, dancers and poets, amongst

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

others.⁴⁴² In this respect, the Freedom Bus project is acting as a hub for facilitating the assembly of activists using culture for resistance activities and initiatives. In terms of the international presence, the vocal endorsement of globally renowned and admired activists such as the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Alice Walker, Noam Chomsky , and Peter Brook,⁴⁴³ add a vital credibility to the project, and may well provide further impetus for funding opportunities through their prestigious and much-welcomed support.

Although during the second intifada all Palestinian urban spaces were subjected to military incursions, in addition to strict curfews, blockades and restrictions upon movement, much academic and media attention focused upon Jenin refugee camp due to the severity and destruction of the camp during ‘Operation Defensive Shield’ in April 2002. The ‘urbicidal’ strategies employed by Israel in Jenin were achieved primarily through the D-9 armoured caterpillar bulldozer, which became the most potent symbol and tool of destruction in the West Bank. Bulldozing was used as a weapon of war, based upon the Israeli conception of their national security and their desire for the “annihilation of landscape”, primarily that of Palestinian residences and means of existence which could potentially threaten the Israeli settlements and their way of life. Therefore, as Stephen Graham suggests, in concurrence with Eyal Weizman, the bulldozer was used during the second intifada as “a weapon of collective and individual punishment and intimidation, and as a means of shaping the geopolitical configuration of territory.”⁴⁴⁴ Graham utilizes Weizman’s notion of the “politics of verticality”, which is described as the “three-dimensional orchestration of territorial configurations to maintain and deepen Israel’s geopolitical advantage”, by suggesting that the use of the bulldozer as a weapon of mass destruction is not arbitrary, and instead should be perceived as an inherent part of Israeli strategy for territorial control over the area.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

⁴⁴³ Amongst others too numerous to personally name. See <http://www.freedombus.ps/> for more details.

⁴⁴⁴ Graham, S. (2004), ‘Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer in the Occupied Territories’, p197

⁴⁴⁵ Graham, S. (2004), ‘Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer in the Occupied Territories’, p197; Weizman, E. (2004), ‘Strategic Points, Flexible Lines, Tense Surfaces, and Political Volumes: Ariel

Indeed, concomitant to the visible symbol of the bulldozer, it has been suggested that 'urbicide' was synonymous with the "forced demodernization" of Palestinian urban spaces by the Israeli occupying power, which Graham defines as the simultaneous organised and deliberate stymying of Palestinian urban development, including the infrastructures on which urban life is dependent, with concurrent creation and expanding of Jewish-Israeli settlements and their infrastructures, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.⁴⁴⁶ This composite notion of 'urbicide', which applied to all urban sites in the West Bank during 'Operation Defensive Shield' and, indeed, the second intifada, can be analysed somewhat differently in relation to Palestinian refugee camps, particularly Jenin, the perceived epicentre of Palestinian armed resistance by both Israelis and Palestinians.⁴⁴⁷ As the camp was sectioned off as a "closed military zone", so too did the extremity of the 'state of exception' rise exponentially,⁴⁴⁸ culminating in the devastation of the Battle of Jenin in April 2002. The special status of Jenin simultaneously as "both the locus of and the urban condition for the 'breeding' of resistance", resulted in the defining of the space as "evil and dangerous places... 'black holes'",⁴⁴⁹ the "main 'terrorist nest' from which suicide bombers emerged"⁴⁵⁰, and "a site of epic heroism and struggle"⁴⁵¹ led to an intensification of the 'urbicidal' strategies employed in other urban locations in the West Bank. It can be said that this was due to the distinctive position of the Palestinian refugee camp, and especially Jenin refugee camp, as the "illegitimate" and "marginal" site of "extra-territoriality" in which the 'state of exception' was transformed into a space of conflict through the militarized disciplinary power

Sharon and the Geometry of Occupation', in *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics*, [Ed. Stephen Graham], London: Blackwell, p190

⁴⁴⁶ Graham, S. (2004), 'Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer in the Occupied Territories', p199

⁴⁴⁷ Tabar, L. (2007), 'Memory, Agency, Counter-Narrative: Testimonies from Jenin Refugee Camp', p19

⁴⁴⁸ Hanafi, S. (2008), 'Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception, Research Paper', p9

⁴⁴⁹ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p192

⁴⁵⁰ Graham, S. (2004), 'Constructing Urbicide by Bulldozer in the Occupied Territories', p208

⁴⁵¹ Tabar, L. (2007), 'Memory, Agency, Counter-Narrative: Testimonies from Jenin Refugee Camp', p19

displayed and exerted by the Israeli armed forces during 'Operation Defensive Shield'.⁴⁵²

In Jenin camp, over four hundred homes and buildings were bulldozed, which served not only to destroy the houses, but also led to the "creation of a radically new layout for the camp", whereby the previously narrow streets and overcrowded buildings were flattened in order to allow access for military tanks. Primarily, these actions undermined the exalted status of the Palestinian camp as an "impenetrable enclave", and instead re-envisioned the space as open to Israeli penetration.⁴⁵³ The mass annihilation of Palestinian homes in Jenin not only "generate[d] deep insecurity, fear and anger" amongst Palestinians,⁴⁵⁴ but also reinforced the pre-existing Palestinian resistance. Indeed, the Palestinian armed resistance in response to the Israeli invasion reiterated the refugee camp as a "site of local agency and exemplary form of collective action."⁴⁵⁵

Following the military conflict, UNRWA created a new masterplan for the reconstruction of the camp, leading to heated debates with representatives of the Jenin camp residents. UNRWA itself reports that there were "serious obstacles to reconstruction" as a result of Israeli military incursions and Palestinian militants threatening the project.⁴⁵⁶ One of the main issues regarding the redesign of the camp, was the UNRWA desire to "adhere to a technical 'neutral' approach", based upon "linear modernising progress" underpinned by the belief regarding the universal desires for modern urbanity amongst the population.⁴⁵⁷ Therefore, the masterplan put forward sought to rebuild the camp with a completely new layout and modern houses.⁴⁵⁸ Additionally, the local preference to reproduce the exact

⁴⁵² Hanafi, S. (2008), 'Palestinian Camps: Disciplinary Space and Territory of Exception', Research Paper, p4-5

⁴⁵³ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p203

⁴⁵⁴ Meade, T. (2011), 'Violence and Domestic Space: Demolition and Destruction of Homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories', *The Journal of Architecture*, 16:1, 71-87, p73

⁴⁵⁵ Tabar, L. (2007), 'Memory, Agency, Counter-Narrative: Testimonies from Jenin Refugee Camp', p7

⁴⁵⁶ UNRWA, Jenin Refugee Camp, 24th November 2009, accessed online on 5th September 2013 at: <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/features/jenin-refugee-camp>

⁴⁵⁷ Tabar, L. (2012), 'The "Urban Redesign" of Jenin Refugee Camp', p49; p53

⁴⁵⁸ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p204

“dense, interconnected kasbah nature” of the infrastructure of the camp, particularly its winding, tight streets and road network of the camp, led to the UNRWA assertion that extending and expanding the site would be necessary to counteract the severe overcrowding and over-density of the site.⁴⁵⁹ Despite these attempts at ‘improvement’, Palestinian residents of Jenin refugee camp were highly critical of this masterplan, primarily out of fears that this imposition on the composition of their space might not only enable the Israeli military to enter the camp at will, but would also undermine the exalted status of the refugee camp as a temporary space, reducing the claims of refugees to return to their pre-1948 homes.⁴⁶⁰

Indeed, contentions between Jenin camp residents and UNRWA operatives reached such an unworkable impasse that in August 2011, UNRWA ceased operating in the camp altogether due to “recent and ongoing threats to the personal safety, security and well-being of UNRWA employees in that area” and an “atmosphere of violence and intimidation”.⁴⁶¹ Therefore, it can be suggested that Palestinian residents of Jenin camp actively resist humanitarian intervention within their space, and remove elements they are opposed to, through both violent and non-violent means. The removal of UNRWA from the camp – which at the time of writing is still ongoing - has resulted in the elimination of the visible presence of the “phantom sovereign” which the UNRWA represented, within the space of the camp itself. This occurrence reiterates the remarkable nature of Jenin, not only as an exceptional space, but also as one which is fiercely resistant. At the time of writing, Jenin refugee camp is comprised of 0.42 kilometres squared, within which there are over 16,000 registered refugees. Of these inhabitants, around 60% are aged under 24 years and under. In addition to a large percentage of the working-age population being unemployed and schools being overcrowded, and despite the redesign of the camp, there is still pronounced infrastructural destruction resulting from the second

⁴⁵⁹ Tabar, L. (2012), ‘The “Urban Redesign” of Jenin Refugee Camp’, p51-2

⁴⁶⁰ Weizman, E. (2007), *Hollow Land*, p204; Tabar, L. (2012), ‘The “Urban Redesign” of Jenin Refugee Camp’, p51

⁴⁶¹ Official UNRWA Statement, ‘UNRWA Forced to Suspend Operations in Jenin’, 12th August 2011, accessed online at: www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-forced-suspend-operations-jenin

intifada.⁴⁶² Despite Jenin refugee camp not being surrounded by the Separation Wall unlike Aida camp, there is a strong sense of the “mental occupation” felt by the residents due to the continuing Israeli military incursions into the West Bank in general, and Jenin and its surrounds in particular.⁴⁶³ The perceived lack of personal security is all-pervasive; this is particularly pronounced in Jenin due to its recent devastation, the emotional scars of which still vividly remain.

The Freedom Theatre: Cultural Resistance in a Space of Exception

Juliano Mer-Khamis: The Dangerous Alternative Local Sovereign

It is from this spatial context that the Freedom Theatre, established in 2006 by the Palestinian-Israeli Juliano Mer Khamis, Swedish-Israeli Jonatan Stancyk, and the Jeninite former commander of the al-Aqsa Brigade’s Zacharia Zubeidi, emerged in order to provide “an island” for Jenin’s young people away from the daily horrors of occupation and the struggle of existence in such an impoverished and incommensurable place.⁴⁶⁴ The Freedom Theatre replaced the former venue, the Al-Hajar (Stone) Theatre, which was founded by Mer Khamis’ mother, Arna Mer, in the late 1980s located within the Zubeidi family home. Named to commemorate the stone-throwing youths of the First Intifada, the Al-Hajar theatre was destroyed by Israeli military bulldozer during ‘Operation Defensive Shield’.⁴⁶⁵ Mer Khamis returned to Jenin in 2003, during which time he produced the documentary *Arna’s Children*, based on his mother’s work with Jenin’s youth, before setting up the Freedom Theatre in 2006 with his colleagues. In April 2011, Mer-Khamis was murdered by an unknown perpetrator who shot him seven times in the head outside the Freedom Theatre. At the time of writing, his assassin has still not been identified, nor brought to justice.

⁴⁶² UNRWA, Jenin Refugee Camp, 24th November 2009: <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/features/jenin-refugee-camp>

⁴⁶³ Interview with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012).

⁴⁶⁴ Interview with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012).

⁴⁶⁵ Killian Fox, ‘Young Palestinians act out their struggle on another stage’, The Observer, Sunday 25 March 2012

The aims and objectives of the Freedom Theatre are closely intertwined with the personality and ideals of Mer-Khamis himself. Mer-Khamis was a Jewish-Israeli citizen, born in Israel to a Jewish-Israeli mother and a Palestinian-Israeli citizen from Nazareth. As such, he referred to his identity as being “100 per cent Palestinian and 100 per cent Jewish”.⁴⁶⁶ Much like Adbelfattah Abu Srouf in Aida Camp, Mer-Khamis became a local and alternative sovereign in Jenin camp, advocating a “new vision in dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by focusing firstly on individual freedom and liberation in one’s social and cultural life.”⁴⁶⁷ However, Mer-Khamis did not abide by the social and cultural parameters prescribed by the local society in which he operated, he was a highly controversial figure, who was “seen as a threat by both Palestinians and Israelis” due to his politics.⁴⁶⁸ His opposition to the continuing occupation and oppression of Palestinians by the Israelis as well as his stance against the conservatism of Palestinian society, particularly in relation to women’s rights, could well be the primary reason behind his assassination. The theatre academic and practitioners Hala al-Yamani and Abdelfattah Abu Srouf, describe Mer-Khamis as follows:

Juliano was not a diplomat; he did not search to please others by what he said or did. He dared to challenge, to provoke and irritate others without compromise. He would go to a donor and say: you will build me this theatre. He challenged the local authorities and occupation forces. He defied traditions and the stereotypes.⁴⁶⁹

The Freedom Theatre: Creating a Cultural Intifada

⁴⁶⁶ Shatz, A. (2013), ‘The Life and Death of Juliano Mer-Khamis’, *London Review of Books*, 35:22, 3-11. Accessed online.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Yamani, H. & Abu Srouf, A. (2012), ‘Juliano Khamis: Martyr of Freedom and Culture’, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 17:1, 73-81, p74

⁴⁶⁸ Mee, E. B. (2011), ‘Juliano Mer Khamis: Murder, Theatre, Freedom, Going Forward’, *TDR*, 55:3, 9-17, p14

⁴⁶⁹ Al-Yamani, H. & Abu Srouf, A. (2012), ‘Juliano Khamis: Martyr of Freedom and Culture’, p78

The Freedom Theatre offers a variety of theatre and multimedia training programmes for Palestinian young adults (over 18 years), and produces numerous productions for their local, national and international audiences. It explicitly equates itself with the notion that freedom for the Palestinian arises through revolutionary, non-violent means, and the idea that liberation from the occupation was unobtainable without first achieving personal freedom.⁴⁷⁰ They state that:

...we do not take a neutral position on the issue of Israeli apartheid, colonization, occupation and military rule. Nor do we turn a blind eye to the violation of human rights in general or the rights of women and children in particular.⁴⁷¹

Therefore, although it can be said that their desire for social change and the end of the military occupation is the same as other theatre companies in Palestine, their message is couched much more in revolutionary language than that of the others. The Freedom Theatre, like other theatre enterprises in Palestine, has a dual-function and two-pronged approach to cultural activities. As with the other theatres, the Freedom Theatre stresses the existence of a 'safe' space for young people, in which self-expression and creativity can flourish. Secondly, the concept of creating the means for a third intifada as a non-violent, 'cultural intifada' is explicitly referred to in the theatre's promotional material. Although these sentiments are shared in relation to the other theatres in Palestine, the Freedom Theatre is the most transparent about this aspect of their objectives.

Although the Freedom Theatre exists as an NGO, and is therefore dependent upon international funding, as are all the theatre companies in Palestine, it does not adhere to the humanitarian aid paradigm, refusing to use the internationally acceptable language of 'development'. Instead of working within this funding model, it deliberately sets itself apart as a centre for non-compliance and revolutionary action. As Adam Shatz notes:

⁴⁷⁰ Shatz, A. (2013), 'The Life and Death of Juliano Mer-Khamis', online.

⁴⁷¹ The Freedom Theatre Annual Report 2011, publication, p7

The theatre's stance was unusually radical for an NGO in Palestine. It refused to criticise the armed struggle, or to parrot the PA's rhetoric about the peace process, positions that lost it some potential funding. It attacked the PA's collaboration with Israel, and described itself as part of a struggle against occupation rather than another 'capacity-building' organisation.⁴⁷²

Whereas the other theatres tend to focus the gaze of the international funders and donor community upon the development benefits of theatre as a cultural practice in Palestine, the Freedom Theatre directly relates their activities to a preparation for a forthcoming uprising against the Israeli occupation. Whereas most of the Palestinian theatre practitioners I interviewed and had contact with during my period of fieldwork in the West Bank agree with the principles of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions policy against Israel, for example, and are forthcoming with this argument, it is explicitly written as an objective for the Freedom Theatre to be aligned with this movement, whereas for other theatre professionals, although they might personally support this, it is absent from their promotional material and applications for funding. This means that the Freedom Theatre is targeting sources of financial support from a highly specialised and political segment of the international community, rather than the generic funding programmes the other theatres (excepting Al-Rowwad) seek financial assistance from.

The 'cultural intifada' which the Freedom Theatre is working towards is based upon the premise of encouraging expressions of individual freedom as a necessity for national freedom. This is strove for through the arts - primarily professional theatre productions and the training of the next generation of theatre practitioners through their three-year acting programme. The theatre also offers multimedia and photography courses, as well as a place which Jenin's youth can frequent as and

⁴⁷² Shatz, A. (2013), 'The Life and Death of Juliano Mer-Khamis', online.

when they wish.⁴⁷³ The reason for these activities is due to the belief that the arts and freedom are synonymous, and that in order to achieve justice and equality, the arts must be a prized and promoted part of Palestinian cultural life. As such, the Freedom Theatre, in its own words, “plays an important role in strengthening resilience and contravening feelings of hopelessness by contributing to the enrichment of cultural life”.⁴⁷⁴

This cognitive shift from the ideology of the second intifada of armed resistance to the resurgence of non-violent means is based upon the failure of weapons to achieve anything other than mass destruction and loss of life during ‘Operation Defensive Shield’ in Jenin. This is not to say that the Palestinian desire for liberation has diminished; rather, it signifies an acceptance of the futility of armed struggle against the occupation, and the recognition of the necessity for other methods. The Freedom Theatre is avowedly “not a neutral place”, it is conceived of absolutely by its staff and supporters as an “alternative” space which enables the possibility of freedom from the various constraints upon Jenin camp residents.⁴⁷⁵ The alternative proposed is that of revolution without the need for participating in violence. As actor Faisal Abu el-Heja asserts, the Israeli army could kill him within minutes should he be involved in violence, as they did members of his extended family during Operation Defensive Shield. It is his belief that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is cultural in addition to territorial, and therefore “if you keep your culture alive... you’ll keep your society strong. And this is the fight.”⁴⁷⁶ Likewise, Miranda Micaela states that Jenin’s youth equate theatre with a “powerful gun”, thereby enabling a strategy of active resistance within the local area and its surrounds.⁴⁷⁷ These assertions that cultural practices are intertwined with the larger resistance movement in Palestine and that although Palestinians are ensured absolute failure militarily, they can resist through artistic means, strengthening their society and

⁴⁷³ The Freedom Theatre website: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/what-we-do/multimedia/>. Also noted in: Mee, E. B. (2011), ‘Juliano Mer Khamis: Murder, Theatre, Freedom, Going Forward’, p10

⁴⁷⁴ The Freedom Theatre Annual Report 2011, publication, p7

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with Michaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raee (8th January 2012).

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012).

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Michaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raee (8th January 2012).

thereby countering the “cultural ethnic cleansing and the de-culturation” of Jenin camp residents.⁴⁷⁸

As can be evidenced through actors such as Abu el-Heja, and in contrast to Al-Rowwad, the Freedom Theatre in Jenin is comprised of highly politically aware and active participants aged in their late teens and early twenties. As such, they are no longer children, engaging in projects envisaged and executed through the vision of a sole director, as is the case with Al-Rowwad, but instead theatrical productions are a joint effort based upon the matured and first-hand experiences of the theatre participants. Therefore, it is these young adults, the Palestinian refugee youth, who “express their political viewpoints clearly, demonstrating a high level of political agency and awareness”.⁴⁷⁹ The notion of individual freedom of choice is one wholeheartedly espoused by the Freedom Theatre, and which the emerging generation of theatre practitioners in Jenin adhere to. These young people congregate within the offered alternative space of the Freedom Theatre in order to create new possibilities for their future, whereby these imagined prospects for existence are created and made physical through theatrical representations. The theatre, as such, becomes a platform for potential, for the expressions of hope and ambitions that they are at present denied through the conservatism of their society and the overbearing, all-pervasive Israeli occupation.

As Adam Ramadan states, refugee camps exist as a “permanent-temporary landscapes of exile”⁴⁸⁰; it can be said, therefore that the destruction of the Stone Theatre during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 reflects this spatial and temporal uncertainty. As Palestinians do not know if their homes will be bulldozed for ‘security’ reasons or due to a lack of official permits, so too within these liminal spaces of the refugee camps this uncertainty is compounded by its status as illegitimate and marginal. Even though the Stone Theatre was rebuilt in 2006, albeit in a different location in Jenin camp to its predecessor, the Freedom Theatre is itself

⁴⁷⁸ Mee, E. B. (2012), ‘The Cultural Intifada: Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank’, *TDR*, 56:3, 170

⁴⁷⁹ Richter-Devroe, S. (2013), “‘Like Something Sacred’: Palestinian Refugees’ Narratives on the Right of Return”, p107

⁴⁸⁰ Ramadan, A. (2013), ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, p66

not secure in its existence; it too has the potential to be demolished at any time. Just as its actors and other staff members can be arrested and transported out of Jenin camp to a detention centre elsewhere in the West Bank, so too can the building be removed by Israeli military forces. There is nothing concrete about the Freedom Theatre's presence in Jenin camp. As Mer Khamis can be assassinated metres from its front door, and Artistic Director Nabil Al-Raei detained by the Israelis over a month⁴⁸¹, the fragility of Palestinian life is transposed onto the theatre building itself.

Just as Agamben asserts that the refugee camp as a space exists as a "zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit"⁴⁸², so too can this notion be applied to the Freedom Theatre. This sense of uncertainty regarding its continued existence is multiplied due to the Freedom Theatre's self-defined status as the epitome of cultural resistance. Whilst its performances are for the most part accepted as part of the Palestinian cultural resistance movement, with its aims and objectives being that of liberating Palestine from 'Zionist occupation', thus existing within the realm of 'inside', 'licit' and the 'rule' of socially



Figure 9: The Freedom Theatre's Playback Bus rehearsal, 26th July 2012.

⁴⁸¹ The Freedom Theatre, News, Accessed online at: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/nabil-al-raei-released-on-bail/>

⁴⁸² Agamben, G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p170

acceptable resistance strategies against external occupation, its message concerning internal social attitudes and conventions, particularly those concerning gender, pushes it into the area of 'outside', 'illicit' and the 'exception'. Therefore, whilst the Freedom Theatre is perceived as a positive force for garnering international support and promoting the national-political interests of Palestinians both inside Palestine and globally, it is also a problematic enterprise for social conservatives who decry the liberal values espoused by the theatre and its productions. It can be said, as a result, that the Freedom Theatre in particular, is located within a cultural 'zone of indistinction', both by the perception of it by others, and as self-defined by Freedom Theatre participants.

During my interview in January 2012 with Nabil al-Raee and Micaela Miranda, Artistic Directors at the Freedom Theatre, the continuous whine of Israeli fighter jets could be heard overhead, an audible presence which could be both heard and felt by those in Jenin camp. According to al-Raee, this is a constant in the lives of Jenin residents, with his bitterly humorous remark that: "It's the Israelis – yeah, they don't need to bother the people in Tel Aviv, so they come to bother the people in Jenin. Seriously, I'm not kidding. It sounds like a joke, but I'm not kidding."⁴⁸³ it becomes apparent that as Eyal Weizman notes, airspace becomes another space of occupation in the three-dimensional Israeli control of the West Bank.⁴⁸⁴ The invasive noise from above is an unrelenting reminder of the Israeli occupation which extends into the space of the Freedom Theatre in which our interview is occurring, interrupting thoughts and conversation flows. Although it is largely ignored by the actors, and rehearsal processes which I witnessed in July and August 2012 continue regardless of this aural intrusion, the sounds of actors conducting their work blocking out the drone of the engines, the knowledge that Israeli fighter jets were operating above us, performing their own rehearsals in case of another outbreak of airborne violence, was a little disconcerting. It had, however, become

⁴⁸³ Interview with Nabil al-Raee and Micaela Miranda (8th January 2012)

⁴⁸⁴ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p238-240

normalised for the actors in the Freedom Theatre, who merely shrugged and continued their work, creating an interesting dialectic between actors rehearsing resistance strategies of theatre practices at precisely the same moment that the Israeli airforce was performing their rehearsals for the potential annihilation of Palestinian life through high-tech military equipment above. As a result, the notion of the Freedom Theatre as a dangerous space, a space made temporary through potential destruction, became concretized through the existence of a potential threat which could become actualised at some unknown point. The precariousness of the physical survival of the Freedom Theatre thus face numerous threats, from both the Israeli military, as well as oppositional Palestinian militants.

The Blurring of Theatricality and Reality

The blurring of boundaries between the ephemeral nature of the performance and the vulnerability of real-life existence creates a pervasive sense of theatricality. My interviewees state that Jenin camp residents suffer from a pronounced lack of personal and collective security, due to frequent Israeli military incursions, with arrests, detentions being commonplace, imprisonment and allegations of torture less so, but still claimed.⁴⁸⁵ One particular example is that of the arrest of Freedom Theatre actor, Faisal Abu Al-Heja, following his involvement in a Freedom Theatre production on the streets of Jenin in December 2011. Due to an upsurge in the number of Jenin residents arrested in the previous month – over thirty – and the military invasion and detention of eight Palestinians, including three staff members of the Freedom Theatre for undisclosed reasons, on 21st December 2011, the theatre decided to put on a Playback theatre production in order to “bring

⁴⁸⁵ Interviews with Ben Rivers (17th June 2012); Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012); Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raee (8th January 2012).

attention to Israel's systematized practice of military rule and arbitrary arrests".⁴⁸⁶ Although arrests of the Freedom Theatre personnel did occur prior to Mer-Khamis' murder, the frequency and intensity of the detentions increased exponentially in the months following his death, despite claims that the Israeli administration was not overly concerned with securing justice for Mer-Khamis.⁴⁸⁷

As a response to these events, the Freedom Theatre put on an afternoon performance in the streets of Jenin refugee camp, in an open space around 500 metres from the theatre building itself. The audience was comprised of local residents, including those who had been arrested and released by the Israeli authorities, and who were invited to share their stories to be 'played back' to them using the Playback Theatre format.⁴⁸⁸ As stated by the Freedom Theatre, Playback Theatre can be defined as:

...an interactive theatre approach used in over 50 countries as a tool for community building and community dialogue. In a Playback Theatre performance, audience members volunteer life experiences and watch as a team of actors and musicians transform these accounts into improvised theater pieces. Playback Theatre helps to foster community strength through the sharing of experiences that remind us of our common humanity and our capacity for courage, creativity and resilience.⁴⁸⁹

Indeed, the primary aims of this performance were to highlight the escalation in administrative detention perpetrated by the Israelis, and offer a space in which

⁴⁸⁶ The Freedom Theatre website, 'Military Invasion in Jenin Met by Theatre Performance', 21st December 2011, accessed 12th November 2013, at: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/military-invasion-in-jenin-met-by-theatre-performance/>

⁴⁸⁷ Interviews with Ben Rivers (17th June 2012); Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012); Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012).

⁴⁸⁸ Interviews with Ben Rivers (17th June 2012) and Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012)

⁴⁸⁹ The Freedom Theatre website, 'Military Invasion in Jenin Met by Theatre Performance', 21st December 2011, accessed 12th November 2013, at: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/military-invasion-in-jenin-met-by-theatre-performance/>

those who had been personally affected by these measures could share their experiences in a supportive communal environment.

What is interesting in particular about this performance is the Israeli military reaction to it. Although the vast majority of theatre practitioners and productions in Area A of the West Bank are not subjected to intervention from the authorities, either Israeli or Palestinian, the Freedom Theatre is an exception. Indeed, almost exactly twelve hours following the performance, Faisal Abu el-Heja, the lead conductor in the Playback production, was allegedly awoken in his bed by eight heavily armed Israeli soldiers brandishing weapons. He was marched to the exact place that the Playback Theatre performance had occurred earlier that day, before being blindfolded and sent to the Jalameh detention centre near the Separation Wall between Israel proper and the West Bank. Following hours of interrogation about Mer-Khamis' assassination and other security issues, Abu el-Heja, who had never before been in trouble with the Palestinian or Israeli authorities, was released.⁴⁹⁰

It is thought-provoking that the Israeli authorities would single out – and make exceptional – the conductor of the first Playback performance and subject him to the same treatment which those who had shared their stories had endured. Abu El-Heja stated that in a way, he was prepared for what was to come from the detention and interrogation procedures, due to the knowledge gained from hearing these stories; however, the brutality of some of the treatment also elicited fear within him that he too could be mistreated.⁴⁹¹ That he was taken to the exact space of the performance by the soldiers, around 500 metres from his home, could be due to logistics – it could have been the nearest open space suitable for the Israeli military vehicles – or there could also have been an underlying psychological element to the method of his arrest. However, what does become apparent is the strong defiance felt by the theatre practitioners in Jenin in the face of harassment from the Israeli authorities. In a statement released following Abu el-Heja's

⁴⁹⁰ Interviews with Ben Rivers (17th June 2012) and Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012)

⁴⁹¹ Interview with Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012)

detention, and a second performance on December 28th 2011 as an act of resistance against these nightly military incursions, the Freedom Theatre remonstrated that:

The people of Jenin are using theatre in a highly innovative way to communicate their story and resist the intimidation of the Israeli military apparatus. Today's action [the second Playback performance] communicates to the Israeli army that their egregious behaviour will be closely observed, monitored and publicized.⁴⁹²

We can see here that the Freedom Theatre is directly responding to the military aggression through non-violent and creative means. If we accept the premise that the Israeli army re-entered Jenin camp and arrested Abu el-Heja at least in part for his participation in the Freedom Theatre in general, and the first Playback performance in particular, then staging a second Playback session can be seen as a direct reaction to these events. Indeed, the statement calls the performance an "action", thus directly supporting this notion of the Jenin residents as active participants within – and fighting against - the 'state of exception', rather than merely passively enduring the conditions of 'bare life' imposed on them.

Despite this courageous act of defiance in the face of an overwhelming military power capable of destroying their homes and means of existence as evidenced during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, and reiterated through the frequent night-time raids, the continuing presence of the Israeli military occupation, and the potential they have to obliterate both the residents and the camp itself, severely threatens to undermine the notion that the Freedom Theatre can exist as a 'safe' space in Jenin camp. This lack of security is acknowledged by the theatre itself, for it declares that the "systemized attacks by the Israeli army on the Freedom Theatre and its employees seriously damage the theatre's ability to operate as a safe place

⁴⁹² The Freedom Theatre website, 'Invasions and Harassment Continue', 23rd December 2011, accessed online at: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/invasions-and-harassment-continue/>

for children and youth”.⁴⁹³ This too was noted during my interview with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei, for when Miranda stated that the theatre exists as, and is referred to by the team as “an island”, using the present tense, al-Raei sadly countered that “it *was* an island”.⁴⁹⁴ Although this differentiation was not extrapolated upon, it could refer to the assassination of Mer-Khamis close to the ‘sanctified’ space of the theatre, or in relation to the increased assaults by the Israeli military within the territory of Jenin camp.

The militant language espoused by the armed resistance, has been transferred onto the theatrical activities. As has been said, theatre has become the renewed medium of resistance in Jenin, a metaphorical gun against the occupation,⁴⁹⁵ whereby “we are fighters here, at the theatre, we are not only artists”.⁴⁹⁶ This deliberate intertwining of theatre and violence, of proposing the theatre as an alternative to violence, albeit through the use of violent images and intentions, reinforces the notion that theatre, despite its “association with life... is in fact a vulnerable space”.⁴⁹⁷ This vulnerability stems not only from Israeli military action, but also from the local community which the Freedom Theatre attempts to serve and liberate, both from the occupation and their conservative social values. Indeed, the Freedom Theatre is unequivocal on their intention to rotate “the pyramid of authority upside down” by means of “challenging oppressive elements in society through presenting alternative realities and by defying hierarchical orders of power and decision-making”.⁴⁹⁸ This provocative language promoting significant social change within the space of the refugee camp against the established sovereignty of both the locals and the occupying powers (Israeli and international humanitarian organisations) is simultaneously empowering and dangerous for its adherents. For the adherents to the Freedom Theatre philosophy, it can be said that there is a striving for the creation of individualised sovereignty, away from the strict hierarchy

⁴⁹³ The Freedom Theatre website, ‘Invasions and Harassment Continue’, 23rd December 2011, accessed online at: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/invasions-and-harassment-continue/>

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012).

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012).

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012)

⁴⁹⁷ Fisek, E. (2012), ‘I Want to be the Palestinian Romeo! *Arna’s Children* and the Romance with Theatre’, p112

⁴⁹⁸ Freedom Theatre Annual Report 2011, p8

of conservative Palestinian society, with all the constraints it entails, through the focus on personal freedom as a precursor for national freedom. This has resulted in deep animosity towards the Freedom Theatre from local residents, the likes of which is not perceived in relation to other theatres in Palestine. This may be that the social conditions in Jenin are vastly different from the more liberal cultural city centres of Ramallah and East Jerusalem; however, the existence of theatre activities in other urban sites which hold deeply traditional values, such as Hebron, or Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem, belie this notion to some extent. Therefore, it could be said that Jenin's uniqueness permeates throughout the space of the refugee camp, and shapes the local perceptions towards the Freedom Theatre's projects.

There have been a number of problems reported to me relating to the local community's reactions to the Freedom Theatre. Although some have been overwhelmingly in favour of the existence of the theatre and their activities in Jenin camp, there have also been deep animosity and violent acts perpetuated against the theatre building itself. Prior to the existence of the Freedom Theatre, and its precursor, the Al-Hajar theatre, theatrical activities and performing arts were not prevalent in Jenin unlike the primary historical cultural centres of East Jerusalem and Ramallah. The Al-Hajar and Freedom Theatres have had to work incredibly hard in order to gain support from the local community, with relative success rates. Juliano Mer-Khamis stated himself that: "To create an audience is harder than to create actors", and this is especially applicable to Jenin refugee camp.⁴⁹⁹ Faisal Abu El-Heja recounted to me that his family argued against his involvement in the Freedom Theatre Actor Training programme, citing such reasons as that Mer-Khamis was Jewish-Israeli – and therefore most likely a Zionist – and that it was controlled by internationals. This, he states, is a residual psychological effect from the Second Intifada and the trauma of 'Operation Defensive Shield', which created a specific "strange" mentality amongst Jenin residents where they were "afraid" of that which was unfamiliar, especially external forces.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Mee, E. B. (2012), 'The Cultural Intifada: Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank', p170

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with Faisal Abu El-Heja (26th July 2012).

Indeed, this negativity towards ‘outsiders’ is not restricted to Israelis; similarly, Palestinian Artistic Director and long-term resident of Jenin, Nabil al-Raei, is also considered to be from ‘outside’, as he grew up in the southern West Bank. Likewise, al-Raei’s Portuguese wife, Micaela Miranda, is still perceived as foreign, despite being present in Palestine for a number of years, and married to a Palestinian.⁵⁰¹ Therefore, it can be said that the opposition to Mer-Khamis cannot be laid solely at the feet of alleged anti-Semitic or anti-Israeli feelings against him by the Jenin residents, for not only was his mother, Arna Mer, Jewish-Israeli, and much loved by Jenin camp residents, there are also a number of Jewish-Israeli citizens – and Palestinian-Israeli citizens – who continue to work in Jenin, including co-founder Jonatan Stancyk and Playback Theatre Director, Ben Rivers (who has a Jewish-Israeli father), alongside with internationals of all religious backgrounds, including Jewish. Indeed, the Freedom Theatre is not only the most famous theatre globally, but is also the most internationalised of all the Palestinian theatres in terms of the composition of its staff and volunteers. It thus appears that opposition to Mer-Khamis was against his ideals, his actions through the Freedom Theatre, and his personality, rather than his ethnic origin, *per se*.

Given the negative repercussions resulting from the impositions on Jenin and its residents originating from the multiple sovereign paradigm, including the Israeli occupation and humanitarian regimes leading to the ‘bare life’ existence of Jeninites, it is perhaps understandable that fear of the unknown has increased exponentially. However, the rage directed against the Freedom Theatre as a “shameful place where boys and girls mixed”, and where theatre was being used by ‘foreigners’ to undermine social cohesion and the local resistance has been aggressively fierce, and resulted in the distribution of leaflets denouncing the theatre’s activities, and violence against both the person of Mer-Khamis, and the Freedom Theatre building itself.⁵⁰² In 2009, two arson attacks were perpetrated on the Freedom Theatre within the space of a month. Although the fires caused minimal damage, hard-felt opposition to the theatre and the threat of potential

⁵⁰¹ Interview with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012)

⁵⁰² Shatz, A. (2013), ‘The Life and Death of Juliano Mer-Khamis’, London Review of Books, online.

future violence was very real.⁵⁰³ Indeed, it is acknowledged by the creative staff that many in Jenin camp are strongly against the theatre's activities – some even “hate” the theatre; however, this is attributed to generational differences, with the older residents perceiving the theatre as “morally provocative”, whereas young people enjoy attending productions and engaging in cultural activities in the theatre.⁵⁰⁴ At the time of writing, there has thankfully been no further aggression against the theatre itself, or its staff, local and international alike.

As a response to the continuing problems with the local community, the Freedom Theatre has made a concerted effort to reach out to Jenin camp residents, inviting them to attend performances and meet the Freedom Theatre team. It can be said that this approach has achieved a measure of success, for in 2012 over 9150 people watched the numerous theatre productions.⁵⁰⁵ Faisal Abu El-Heja also states that his family became accepting of his participation in the theatre once they had seen him perform in the theatre, and recognised the opportunities that the Freedom Theatre offered a young Palestinian.⁵⁰⁶ Of course, the community as a whole cannot be held responsible for the murder of Mer-Khamis: the blame lies solely with the individual who perpetrated that act. I am not trying to suggest that residents of Jenin camp are uncultured or ‘backwards’ in their approach towards the Freedom Theatre, but rather that a combination of structural social forces, including the Israeli occupation, which has led to great impoverishment and overcrowding in the area, in addition to the residual effects of the trauma of the military invasion of the camp in 2002,⁵⁰⁷ and the existence of the humanitarian regime and imposition of ‘bare life’ has led to a particular situation in Jenin refugee camp which makes it hostile to that which it perceives as international intervention.

However, within this strict traditional society, it is the Freedom Theatre which has become a local site of extreme contention between some local Palestinians and the

⁵⁰³ The Freedom Theatre, Press release, ‘The Freedom Theatre Under Attack’, 16th April 2009, accessed online at: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/the-freedom-theatre-under-attack/>

⁵⁰⁴ Interview with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012).

⁵⁰⁵ Freedom Theatre Annual Report 2012, accessed online.

⁵⁰⁶ Interview with Faisal Abu el—Heja (26th July 2012).

⁵⁰⁷ Mee, E. B. (2012), ‘The Cultural Intifada: Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank’, p168

Freedom Theatre practitioners. The presence of international theatre-makers has contributed to this discontent, due to the behaviour occurring within the theatre (mixed-gender acting groups, for example), which is perceived by many in the local community as immoral and a foreign imposition. Therefore, just as armed resistance to the Israeli military invasion during the second intifada, as UNRWA were forced out from the camp in 2011 through intimidation and threatening behaviour,⁵⁰⁸ as attacks on the Freedom Theatre building itself, and culminating in the assassination of Juliano Mer-Khamis suggest, some members of the Jenin community still perceive violent means as the primary method through which to achieve that which they desire.

The Freedom Bus: Playback Theatre in Sites of Extreme Contention

In a continuation of the history of cultural exchange and hybridity, one of the most recent theatrical models to come into play in Palestine is the Playback Theatre philosophy and method. Playback Theatre originated in the 1970s in the USA with Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas, who formed the Hudson River Playback Theatre Company in order to promulgate the Playback Theatre ethos. Although it has its origins in psychodrama, and has some similarities in terms of the sharing of stories and the re-enactment of these experiences by a trained group of professional actors, Playback prides itself on being primarily an art form, albeit one with therapeutic properties. Although Playback compares to the Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre, with its purportedly political intentions, and the implicit aim of inspiring dialogue and critical thinking, Playback is “more a reflective process, it’s more like a mirror” for both the teller and the audience.⁵⁰⁹ Each Playback performance event typically lasts for around ninety minutes, with two or three stories being told. Additionally, one or two related representations which arise as a result of the full-length enactments intersperse them.

⁵⁰⁸ Official UNRWA Statement, ‘UNRWA Forced to Suspend Operations in Jenin’, 12th August 2011, accessed online at: www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-forced-suspend-operations-jenin

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012)

Playback Theatre is a kind of interactive theatre through which audience members are encouraged to share a real-life personal story within a communal setting. The performance facilitator, known as the conductor, invites someone from the audience to become the 'teller', and asks them questions in order to elicit information from them regarding the event. It is imperative that the teller is voluntary and has not been chosen beforehand. The troupe of professionally trained actors - usually numbering four - sits in the stage area, and listens to the teller's story. Once the story has been told, the teller is asked to choose which actors s/he would like to portray his/her story. Once selected, the actors immediately perform the experience, using physical and highly stylised improvisations based upon the central themes of the story conveyed, through "an emphatic, embodied and active form of emphatic mirroring".⁵¹⁰ Additionally, a group of professional musicians accompany the actors' movements, and although they are a separate component of the performance, and improvise accordingly, the intense rehearsal process includes both actors and musicians, thus resulting in a merging of performances based upon prior workings together. Both actors and musicians are equally important, for in the words of Palestinian actress Riham Isaac:

The music is almost like an actor with us... We need music to be with us, to hold our emotions, to hold what we're playing, and it gets more into the conscious[ness] of the audience. It affects them, and it goes with the mood... It is usually a reflection of what we give, and sometimes we reflect on what the music also gives us.⁵¹¹

Therefore, the music responds to the action depicted by the performers, and vice versa. For example, should a story involve something terrible happening, the music become ominous and the actors switch to representing this section of the experience described. Once the performance has been completed, the teller is

⁵¹⁰ Rivers, B. (2013a), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', *Applied Theatre Research*, 1:2, 157-176, p162

⁵¹¹ Interview with Riham Isaac (25th July 2012)

asked for his/her feedback on the accuracy of the actions shown. If agreed with, the conductor will invite another teller to share.⁵¹²

Central to the notion of Playback Theatre is that of the 'red thread', whereby through an 'unconscious' communication between the different stories, linking them thematically and emotionally, "rooted in the language of image, rhythm, sound and emotion."⁵¹³ This enables the creation of "a collective, yet multifaceted exploration of certain issues".⁵¹⁴ The relationship between the shared stories emerges organically out of the experience and is related to the specific context out of which it arises. As a theatrical activity rooted in communality and inclusivity, being context-specific and relevant to local conditions is necessary for the success of the Playback endeavour.⁵¹⁵ In Palestine, Playback Theatre focuses specifically on the consequences of the geopolitical realities created as a result of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, in particular the fragmentation of the territory and its Palestinian population. The Israeli policy of separation and segregation of the different sections of the West Bank through checkpoints and restrictions on movement, as described in the theoretical framework of this thesis, has served to restrict the Palestinian imagination in relation to the suffering of their fellow West Bankers. As Riham Isaac told me, Palestinians become "desensitised" to others' problems and issues outside of their own localised area due to being confined within their own spaces, and are therefore unable to acknowledge the adversity undergone by Palestinians outside of these limited geographical areas.⁵¹⁶

The Freedom Theatre uses Playback Theatre in its Freedom Bus and offshoot project, the Freedom Ride, as a response to these conditions and has at its core the concept of civil resistance against the Israeli occupation. Although Playback Theatre

⁵¹² Rivers, B. (2013a), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', p161-2

⁵¹³ Rivers, B. (2013a), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', p163

⁵¹⁴ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', Unpublished paper, p4

⁵¹⁵ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p16

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Riham Isaac (25th July 2012)

is a new initiative, Palestinians have an acute awareness of the potential and actual efficacy of the arts in promoting civil resistance due to the increase in programmes since the 1990's, and therefore this new theatrical form has easily slotted into the existing model of non-violent actions for Palestinian national and civil rights. The Freedom Bus is a highly and explicitly political project, aligned with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions international movement against Israel. From its various social media sites, it is clear that the political stance taken is one of proactive cultural resistance, promoting non-violent militancy of the kind Maurya Wickstrom attributed to Abdelfattah Abu Srou. ⁵¹⁷ However, unlike Abu Srou, the militancy espoused by the Freedom Bus is not 'gentle', it is fierce and relentless in its demands for equality and justice for Palestinians, enacted through "cultural actions that address Israel's practice of settler colonialism, military occupation and structural apartheid." ⁵¹⁸ The use of such partisan terms to describe the situation in the West Bank, as well as referring to the entire territory – including the internationally recognised area of Israel proper within the 'Green Line' – as 'Occupied Palestine', defines the Freedom Bus as sectarian in its endeavours. Like the Freedom Theatre, and in line with the BDS movement, the Freedom Bus does not work with Israeli institutions, or with its government, although it welcomes sympathetically-minded individual Israelis to participate in its activities. ⁵¹⁹

There are two components to the Freedom Bus: firstly, the Freedom Ride, which shall be examined in detail below; secondly the long-term projects whereby the Freedom Theatre Playback troupe establishes strong and prolonged contact with communities existing outside of the main urban centres, within the peripheries within Area 'C' which are sites of extreme contention and where the most physical manifestations of the Israeli 'urbicidal' policies are made most apparent. During the period of fieldwork in 2011-12, it could be said that the areas of active conflict are occurring away from the Area 'A's of the densely-populated Palestinian cities and towns, and have become more pronounced and prevalent within the villages and

⁵¹⁷ Wickstrom, M. (2012), *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, p49

⁵¹⁸ Freedom Bus website, <http://www.freedombus.ps/>

⁵¹⁹ Interviews with Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei (8th January 2012); Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

locations near Jewish-Israeli settlements and by the Separation Wall in the West Bank. As a response to the home demolitions, land confiscations and settler violence perpetrated upon the Palestinians and their land in these locales, the Freedom Bus specifically and deliberately performs within these contentious spaces as part of an organised, long-term programme of civil resistance.⁵²⁰ As Ben Rivers, Co-ordinator of the Freedom Bus and Playback practitioner told me, in relation to civil resistance:

Our role is not to engage in institution-building, but to support the development of creative capabilities and critical thinking... Even at the moment, while our focus is more on resisting the occupation, I think in some ways, we are doing more than pursuing resistance as an end in itself, because we are engaging in community-building, trauma healing, encouraging creative capacity et cetera... I think that there is a danger in pursuing resistance as an end in itself, and we do need to support the development of a robust civil society that can take over once the occupation ends.⁵²¹

The primary objective of Playback Theatre is a “dual action” of “personal affirmation and social cohesion”⁵²² in order to enhance and strengthen Palestinian civil resistance through cultural activities due to its “inbuilt potential for consciousness-raising, meaning-making and community mobilization.”⁵²³ This exists at the local level, for Palestinians residing within the site itself, as well as Palestinians from other areas in the West Bank, Israel proper, and the diaspora, in addition to foreign activists sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, and NGO workers and other members of the international diplomatic community.⁵²⁴ Therefore, the

⁵²⁰ Freedom Bus website, <http://www.freedombus.ps/>;

⁵²¹ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012)

⁵²² Rivers, B. (2013a), ‘Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine’, p163

⁵²³ Rivers, B. (2013c), ‘Playback Theatre, Cultural Resistance and the Limits of Trauma Discourse’, p2

⁵²⁴ Rivers, B. (2013a), ‘Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine’, *Applied Theatre Research*, 1:2, p172; Rivers, B. (2013b), ‘The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine’, p9; Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

Playback Theatre projects have the potential to perform the role of advocating for Palestinian rights and raising awareness⁵²⁵ of the situation at all structural social levels operating within the space of the West Bank and globally through the use of the internet and social media sites. As Freedom Bus Conductor and actor Faisal Abu el-Heja suggests, it is through these activities that solidarity is engendered between Palestinians from different parts of the West Bank and Israel proper once they are brought together; as such, the Freedom Bus “breaks the checkpoints” imposed upon Palestinian space by the Israelis.⁵²⁶

The desire to tell the world what is happening to them as a result of the occupation is a common one amongst Palestinians. It could be said that the overriding motivation for participating in the Freedom Bus’s activities is the opportunity for their stories to be transmitted to as many people as possible, in particular internationals within Palestinian space. According to Ben Rivers, “the Palestinian audience is already highly politicized, and understands well the utility of art and media for conscientization.”⁵²⁷ Through the narrating of stories in front of the local, national and international communities, the tellers – who are always voluntary and therefore active agents in the relating of their experiences - are able to achieve a number of objectives. Firstly, the tellers themselves have “the need to generate, maintain and transmit coherent narrative structures” to others regarding their experiences.⁵²⁸ The stories told can be modified in relation to the context of who is present in the audience. Rivers notes from his fieldwork that when the audience is comprised of a majority of Palestinians, the tales told were more likely to be concerned with resistance activities, with the teller presenting him/herself as an active participant in resisting the occupation, more of a fighter than a victim. However, should the audience have a large number of international observers,

⁵²⁵ Freedom Bus website, <http://www.freedombus.ps/>

⁵²⁶ Interview with Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012)

⁵²⁷ Rivers, B. (2013a), ‘Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine’, p167

⁵²⁸ Rivers, B. (2013b), ‘The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine’, p13

especially journalists and official persons, the stories revolved around the injustices and human rights abuses suffered by the teller and his/her community.⁵²⁹

This can be seen in relation to a Playback performance put on in Jenin refugee camp in December 2011, following a period when a large number of local Palestinians had been detained and interrogated by the Israeli authorities. Following their release, the ex-prisoners were enjoined to relay their experiences to their fellow Jenin residents in a Playback production held in the streets of the refugee camp, in close proximity to the Freedom Theatre. In accordance with Playback aims, the stated objectives were simultaneously the raising of awareness and enabling of the prisoners' to cognitively process the traumatic events they had suffered.⁵³⁰ Instead of narratives of victimhood and humiliation, the tellers instead revealed their heroic actions in self-glorifying terms thus suggesting that this performance was "perceived as an opportunity to demonstrate one's active engagement in civil resistance".⁵³¹ It was revealed that the primary objectives for sharing their stories were in order to inform younger Palestinians about the detention process, and to heighten determination to continue popular resistance in the community.⁵³² On the other hand, at the Playback performance which I attended, along with a number of other internationals, in Nabi Saleh near Ramallah on 19th June 2012, the narratives related were more attuned to the international audience, and thus focused more on the atrocities committed against them by the Israeli army, rather than their tales of resistance to these. This reiterates the canniness of Palestinians in the utilization of different platforms for increasing awareness amongst foreigners to their situation.

⁵²⁹ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p5

⁵³⁰ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p3

⁵³¹ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p7

⁵³² Rivers, B. (2013c), 'Playback Theatre, Cultural Resistance and the Limits of Trauma Discourse', accessed online on 29th November 2012 at: <http://www.playbacknet.org/drupal/sites/default/files/interplay12%202013.pdf>

Secondly, through watching the re-enactment of their tale within the public sphere, the teller can observe their narrative from a more objective perspective and from the viewpoint of the wider contextual national struggle, rather than a personal occurrence per se.⁵³³ Indeed, the Palestinian tellers cite that their reasons for engaging in this theatrical form of civil resistance in order to promote *sumud* (steadfastness), share their experiences relating to that particular site, and encourage further non-violent actions amongst the local and national Palestinian communities.⁵³⁴ Additionally, the teller re-established a sense of authorship over the story, thus reducing the feeling of powerlessness and passivity in regards to the geopolitical situation.⁵³⁵ It can therefore be suggested that the tellers are utilizing the space – both physical and literal – provided by the Freedom Bus, in order to re-establish their own site-specific form of local sovereignty based upon resistance. Ben Rivers touches upon this by stating that “tellers are seeking to establish authority over the representation of their very selves”.⁵³⁶ However, I would go beyond this to propose that the tellers are seeking to achieve social recognition from other Palestinians and prominent internationals that they are active agents of resistance within their local area. They are positioning themselves as contesting local sovereigns, thus creating a persona which defines them as socially significant and politically operative. This can be seen in one performance in Aida camp, where according to the Freedom Bus blog, the tellers were comprised of “clearly well-known figures” and “heroes” from the first intifada.⁵³⁷ I do not mean to suggest that the tellers are motivated by gaining social status, and are cynically manipulating the existence of the Freedom Bus in order to further their own goals, but rather in a culture which idealises ‘martyrs’ of the resistance and which remain

⁵³³ Rivers, B. (2013c), *Playback Theatre, Cultural Resistance and the Limits of Trauma Discourse*, online.

⁵³⁴ Rivers, B. (2013b), ‘The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine’, p12

⁵³⁵ Rivers, B. (2013b), ‘The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine’, p13

⁵³⁶ Rivers, B. (2013b), ‘The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine’, p13

⁵³⁷ The Freedom Bus. Day Four: Stand with Aida! Retrieved 20th November 2013, from <http://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/2012/09/27/day-four-stand-with-aida/>

under occupation, inspiring collective resistance through the actions of individuals is a privileged method of resistance.

As part of the Freedom Bus initiative, it is imperative for the Playback troupe to establish meaningful relationships with the communities where they perform. Therefore, they conduct in-depth research on the specific place and community with whom they will be interacting, frequent visits, and comprehensive discussions and planning with the community.⁵³⁸ One of the fundamental activities of the Freedom Bus is the practice of 'Solidarity Stays' as a key component in the complete multiple-day programme of "home-stays, protective presence activity, building construction, interactive seminars, political actions, traditional storytelling, *Zajal* poetry, live music and drama-in-education workshops for children", with at least one Playback performance.⁵³⁹ This 'immersion' of participants in prolonged activity within the site of contention itself, whilst engaging in resistance activities, not only gives a fuller understanding of the particular problems being suffered by the host community, but also encourages 'cohesion' between the geographically fragmented Palestinians, thus further promoting national solidarity and the continuation of *sumud*.⁵⁴⁰

It is essential that the troupe modifies itself to the needs of the partnering community – represented by "community members, village coops, popular struggle committees and grassroots organizations"⁵⁴¹ – as this ensures that cultural sensitivities are adhered to, particularly in relation to the more conservative Palestinian culture.⁵⁴² Indeed, the ethical principles undertaken by the Freedom Bus are pronounced and adhered to, especially in relation to the psychological

⁵³⁸ Rivers, B. (2013a), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', p169

⁵³⁹ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p8

⁵⁴⁰ Rivers, B. (2013c), 'Playback Theatre, Cultural Resistance and the Limits of Trauma Discourse', p6-7

⁵⁴¹ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p8

⁵⁴² Rivers, B. (2013c), 'Playback Theatre, Cultural Resistance and the Limits of Trauma Discourse', online.

issues which could arise from participation in the project.⁵⁴³ As such, the Freedom Bus treads a fine line between international acceptability in order to gain funding, effectiveness in accomplishing their stated aims, and further garnering support from the Palestinian communities with which they work. Of particular concern is the acceptance of Playback practices by more conservative communities. As the Freedom Bus reaches sites which exist on the periphery of the West Bank, both spatially and socially, working outside the more liberal and cosmopolitan urban centres in which artistic activities (including theatre) are prominent and popular, special attention must be paid to ensuring that the partnering communities do not perceive the Freedom Bus as imposing “exotic entertainment or education product” which might directly contravene the dominant social values of the community. This is especially because Playback is not an organic development from Arabic theatre – although the teller closely resembles the *hakawati* storyteller - but originates from the USA.⁵⁴⁴ Although now a global practice, due to a lack of local Palestinian Playback instructors, it is by default necessary that those who train the future practitioners within Palestine come from abroad. In order to avoid reinforcing the humanitarian paradigm, it is imperative that these international Playback trainers are aware of their own foreignness and consequently must self-reflexively “assess whether imported theories and attitudes towards trauma, adversity and political resistance are in alignment with the indigenous perspectives.”⁵⁴⁵

The involvement of the community is the primary method in counteracting the danger of accidental collaboration with the existing structural inequalities by the Freedom Bus. As the majority of the Playback troupe from the Freedom Theatre are Palestinians (albeit trained by international Playback practitioners), there is a common cultural thread and shared experiences of living under occupation,⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ This is especially prominent in relation to gender segregation in the public sphere. See: Rivers, B. (2013b), ‘The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine’, p4

⁵⁴⁴ Rivers, B. (2013a), ‘Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine’, p160

⁵⁴⁵ Rivers, B. (2013b), ‘The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine’, p8

⁵⁴⁶ Rivers, B. (2013a), ‘Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine’, p160

which can aid in making the teller feel more comfortable in disclosing their stories, and increases the likelihood that the teller will receive empathy and understanding (as opposed to sympathy from non-Palestinians).⁵⁴⁷ The use of culture-specific motifs and popular culture, such as Palestinian music opening the performance, and folk songs used during the intifadas to contextualise and spatially locate the performance, thereby facilitates the relevance of the content for the participants, and enabling the linking of individualised stories to a more universalised context.⁵⁴⁸

The centrality of the audience, coming from the organising committees, in the performance as potential tellers, and active spectators, helps ensure that the Freedom Bus can receive “on-the-ground feedback” based on the desire to improve and modify future performances from interested parties.⁵⁴⁹ Above all, it is the voluntary nature of narrative dissemination by the teller which can help ensure a positive and productive experience without detrimental side effects. For: “Ultimately, they *choose* to enter the stage. They *volunteer* to tell. They cast the



Figure 10: A scene from the Freedom Bus' Playback performance in Nabi Saleh, 19th June 2012.

⁵⁴⁷ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p7

⁵⁴⁸ Rivers, B. (2013a), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', p160

⁵⁴⁹ Rivers, B. (2013b), 'The Freedom Bus and Playback Theatre: Beyond Neo-Colonial Approaches to Trauma Response in Occupied Palestine', p8; 14

actors. The teller's participation in this reconstruction of events allows them to effectively separate past from present, and thus engage with the traumatic material from a more empowered stance."⁵⁵⁰

The Freedom Ride 2012: Playback Theatre in Nabi Saleh - Cultural Resistance in a Site of Extreme Contention

Although I was not in Palestine at the time of the Freedom Ride in September 2012, I was part of the audience for a performance in Nabi Saleh near Ramallah. Therefore, I have experienced the Playback method and perceived the audience response to it. Nabi Saleh, of which 75% of its land exists in Area 'C', is located twenty kilometres northwest of Ramallah, and is surrounded by Jewish-Israeli settlements, resulting in its description not only in its description as a "village under siege",⁵⁵¹ but is also "well-known throughout occupied Palestine as a centre of non-violent resistance" due to its weekly demonstrations since December 2009 against the occupation.⁵⁵² The five hundred residents of Nabi Saleh are allegedly continually subjected to frequent and numerous military incursions and night-time raids from the Israeli security forces and attacks by Jewish-Israeli settlers from the nearby settlements, particularly when the Palestinians protest the confiscation of the Ein al-Qaws spring and surrounding land which has been held by the prominent Tamimi family for generations.⁵⁵³ Indeed, the village has become a site of acute contention between Israeli settlers, especially from the adjacent Halamish settlement, who are backed by the military, and the local Palestinians. During these demonstrations, Israeli military and border police are posted in this space in order

⁵⁵⁰ Rivers, B. (2013a), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', p162

⁵⁵¹ Rivers, B. (2013a), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', p164

⁵⁵² The Freedom Bus. Day Two: Stand with Nabi Saleh!. accessed 20th November 2013, from <https://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/2012/09/25/day-2-stand-with-nabi-saleh/>

⁵⁵³ B'tselem, *Background on the Demonstrations at a-Nabi Saleh*, published online 2nd January 2013, accessed online on 12th January 2014 at: http://www.btselem.org/demonstrations/a_nabi_saleh

to prevent local residents from reaching the spring, and the settler-only road next to it, ostensibly to deter attacks on settlers by Palestinians.⁵⁵⁴

Nabi Saleh has become a microcosm of the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict over West Bank territory, where sites of contention have moved away from the urban areas of the second intifada and into the hinterland and peripheries of Palestinian space. Active conflict has become concentrated in specific locations of key geopolitical value to both Israelis and Palestinians. Therefore, the 969 dunams of Nabi Saleh villagers' land - including 15 dunams around the Ein al-Qaws spring, the primary water source for local residents, now designated as an "archaeological site" – which has been confiscated by the Israeli state, along with 400 olive trees, has resulted in Nabi Saleh becoming "the site of some of the most violently oppressed protests in the occupied Palestinian territory."⁵⁵⁵ Non-violent resistance, primarily through weekly protests, have spiralled into vicious encounters between heavily armed troops and stone-throwing youths, resulting in the deaths of two young Palestinian men over the past two years.⁵⁵⁶ The frequent deployment of Israeli troops into Palestinian space, alongside with numerous night raids, arrests and other military activity, has transformed Nabi Saleh into a highly and frequently militarized site, albeit the militarisation is grossly asymmetrical in terms of military capability.

As the 'urbicidal' activities during the second intifada in Palestinian urban spaces were between a first-rate, industrialised and well-trained state army against non-state, fragmented and highly localised militant groups such as the al-Aqsa martyrs brigade in Jenin, the levels of resistance at the village level is armed only with natural resources, such as stones. In this new 'post-urbicidal' space, the conflict is between small groups of protesting residents, demonstrating in a specific site

⁵⁵⁴ B'tselem, *Background on the Demonstrations at a-Nabi Saleh*, published online 2nd January 2013, accessed online on 12th January 2014 at: http://www.btselem.org/demonstrations/a_nabi_saleh

⁵⁵⁵ MAAN Development Centre, *Israeli Water and Land Confiscations in the Village of Nabi Saleh*, Spotlight 16, 2012. Accessed online on 12th January 2014 at: <http://www.maan-ctr.org/pdfs/FSReport/spotlight/Spotlight16.pdf>

⁵⁵⁶ B'tselem, *Background on the Demonstrations at a-Nabi Saleh*, published online 2nd January 2013, accessed online on 12th January 2014 at: http://www.btselem.org/demonstrations/a_nabi_saleh



Figure 11: Scene depicting Israeli violence in Nabi Saleh.

against a highly localised issue, such as the confiscation of the Ein al-Qaws spring and surrounding land. The crowd control methods used by the Israeli military includes “extensive” and excessive use of tear gas amongst others, and is instigated pre-emptively without preliminary Palestinian violence, according to a B’tselem report.⁵⁵⁷

Although Nabi Saleh is a small community, comprising mainly of the extended Tamimi family, Playback has been embraced by the local residents as a mode of popular resistance and awareness-raising. The Freedom Bus has been active in this part of the West Bank since early 2012, and has performed numerous times there, in addition to joining in with other solidarity resistance activities. Stories which are already communal knowledge within the village are shared through Playback, which serves to illuminate the specific details of arrests, detentions, and the effects of the confiscated spring and land upon the community. This strengthens communal bonds as well as facilitates the sharing of experiences.⁵⁵⁸ Of particular poignancy was the tragedy suffered by the community when Mustafa Tamimi was killed as a

⁵⁵⁷ B’tselem, *Background on the Demonstrations at a-Nabi Saleh*, published online 2nd January 2013, accessed online on 12th January 2014 at: http://www.btselem.org/demonstrations/a_nabi_saleh

⁵⁵⁸ Rivers, B. (2013), ‘Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine’, p163

result of injuries sustained following being struck directly in the face by an Israeli tear gas canister during a demonstration in December 2011.

On 19th June 2012, I attended a Playback performance in Nabi Saleh, during which one story narrated by Bahaa Tamimi focused on the death of his cousin. We were seated outside the village hall, in the centre of the location, under the shade of a large tree which shielded us from the fierce summer mid-afternoon sunshine. With me in the audience were a number of local residents, and a significant amount of internationals, whom I surmised to be mostly low-level NGO workers and Western tourists. The piece of theatre began in typical Playback style, with the musicians leading the actors into the makeshift performance space, with loudly audible strumming of the oud, smashing of tambourines, and the actors singing in unison. As each performance is tailored to the specific location in which it occurs, the opening song came from a repertoire of songs from which the actors choose shortly before the theatre commences. For this particular performance, a revolutionary Palestinian song named 'Iz-Zanash ash-Shwariya' from the first intifada was chosen,



Figure 12: The Playback performers amidst some of the audience in Nabi Saleh.

to reflect the resistance-imbued space of Nabi Saleh.⁵⁵⁹ As the story of Mustafa Tamimi's life and death was recounted by his cousin, the atmosphere in this intimate space was palpably mournful. Even though the majority of the audience were reliant on the simultaneous Arabic-English translation provided by a volunteer, the mood during this story was that of solidarity and shared emotion.

As Ben Rivers, also present at this event, suggests, the political designation through the national narrative of the death as that of "an act of martyrdom" within the dual canon of resistance fighter and victim is made more real through the personalisation of this individual's death, revealing a different and more substantial from a local viewpoint, for the local community. Instead of just another 'martyr' who died at the hands of the occupying power, Tamimi was remembered as a close family member, as an absent loved one.⁵⁶⁰ One particular image which was especially striking in the Playback performance was the moment when the actors, playing back Bahaa's story, chose to represent Mustafa's life through the natural resources available to them. The teller had referred to Mustafa's life as being as delicate as a leaf; to represent this, the actors picked up leaves from the floor of the performance space, studied them for a few seconds, and then simultaneously threw them back to the ground. The leaf became both the fragility of life, particularly the life of a Palestinian in the West Bank living a 'bare life', and the deep connection Palestinians have with their land and that contained within it.

The presence of Israelis soldiers during Playback activities, although not within the performance or designated audience space themselves, but located within their stationed posts, thus become de facto audience members. Although this did not appear during the performance at Nabi Saleh which I witnessed, it has been noticed that when the Freedom Ride was occurring during September 2012, the Israeli army

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with Riham Isaac (25th July 2012)

⁵⁶⁰ Rivers, B. (2013), 'Playback Theatre as a Response to the Impact of Political Violence in Occupied Palestine', p166

was indeed observing the actions “from a distance”, thus becoming “uninvited guests” to the performance.⁵⁶¹ This phenomenon of Israeli soldiers becoming a second audience, wholly distinct and separate from the official audience of Palestinians and sympathetic internationals reiterate the notion extrapolated upon in the theoretical chapter regarding the West Bank topography enabling the creation of a ‘natural’ stage, through which the Israeli settlements (and their military protectors) are situated upon the hilltops, and thus form an audience by proxy through to their location above the Palestinian towns and villages in the valleys below. This is aided by military-technological inventions, such as binoculars and cameras, which serve to magnify the theatrical action. This can be seen from the Freedom Ride 2012’s performance in Faquaa, a village outside Jenin, located next to the Separation Wall and Israeli settlements. The event was performed in the open air, with clear views over the next-door Israeli settlement. As the performers and audience were engaging in their cultural resistance, they were being watched and filmed by Israeli soldiers located behind barbed wire on the border between Faquaa and the settlement.⁵⁶² As can be seen from a YouTube video documenting this bizarre event, Israeli soldiers are recording the theatrical activities whilst the actors are chanting ‘*hurriya*’ (‘freedom’) as part of the performance.⁵⁶³

Although in this instance, the Israeli soldiers were observing the performance from afar, without direct intervention impacting upon the theatrical activities themselves, it has been recorded that an unequivocal military interference did occur in al-Walaja, a small Palestinian village in between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and also next to the Israeli settlements of Gilo and Har Gilo. Al-Walaja’s location is highly contentious due to it being situated in such close proximity to the settlements and the Separation Wall. Indeed, Israeli plans for the Wall would not only confiscate 30% of the village’s lands, but would completely surround the village, cutting off residents from their agricultural income and access to other

⁵⁶¹ The Freedom Bus. ‘Day Four: Stand with Aida!’ Retrieved 20th November 2013, from <http://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/2012/09/27/day-four-stand-with-aida/>

⁵⁶² The Freedom Bus. ‘Day One: Stand with Faquaa!’ Retrieved 20th November 2013 at: <http://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/2012/09/24/day-1-stand-with-faquaa/>

⁵⁶³ The video can be accessed at: <http://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/2012/09/24/a-footnote-from-faquaa/>

Palestinian areas except for a single tunnel to Bethlehem. This would, in the words of UNRWA, isolate al-Walaja, “effectively rendering it a Palestinian enclave inside the [Israeli] Gush Etzion area”.⁵⁶⁴

On 13th April 2012, the Freedom Bus performed in al-Walaja, on a hilltop which was in the process of being confiscated by the Israeli authorities in order to construct another segment of the Wall. Located on this site was a house which had been intended for demolition in order to enable to building of the Wall, but which had been protested through legal channels and at the time performance was still within Palestinian possession. At the time of the performance, it was a common occurrence for there to be an everyday presence of Israeli bulldozers working on constructing further sections of the Wall, increasingly surrounding the village with a concrete barrier.⁵⁶⁵ As part of the continuing protests against the route of the Wall, the Freedom Bus performed Playback theatre in al-Walaja as a show of solidarity and to incorporate cultural resistance into the framework of existing non-violent actions. As a result, it was decided that the performance should be located on this site of extreme contention.⁵⁶⁶

It has been estimated that around two hundred people attended this event, including some high-level European Union officials, in addition to local and West Bank Palestinians, and international supporters.⁵⁶⁷ It was reported that the Israeli military, already located by the ‘frontier zone’ of the Wall in order to ‘protect’ it during its construction and who appeared to be monitoring the activity, decided to deploy its troops to cordon off the village around half an hour after the event began, and thus prevent further audience members from entering the site,

⁵⁶⁴ UNRWA, Al-Walaja Mini Profile, August 2011, accessed online on 20th December 2013 at: <http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2010070915338.pdf>

⁵⁶⁵ Rivers, B. (2012), ‘Al-Walajah Village Explores Theater as a Form of Resistance’, *Electronic Intifada online*, 25th April 2012, accessed online at: <http://electronicintifada.net/content/al-walajah-village-explores-theater-form-resistance/11209>

⁵⁶⁶ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

⁵⁶⁷ Rivers, B. (2012), ‘Al-Walajah Village Explores Theater as a Form of Resistance’, *Electronic Intifada online*, 25th April 2012, accessed online at: <http://electronicintifada.net/content/al-walajah-village-explores-theater-form-resistance/11209>

“apparently threatened by the musicians, actors and their audience.”⁵⁶⁸ As Ben Rivers stated the heavily-armed soldiers appeared to form a physical barrier between the congregation and “the precious Wall”.⁵⁶⁹ As the military presence was near to the performance space itself – around 100 metres⁵⁷⁰ - a connection can be inferred between the performativity of this military display in relation to the experience in Jenin camp, when Israeli aircraft were flying overhead, posing a threat to existence from afar. The danger resulting from the presence of a trained military squadron in opposition to unarmed civilians, within such close proximity, not only reiterates the notion of the West Bank being a ‘hollow land’ over which Israel exerts complete control, but also the ‘bare life’ of the Palestinian inhabitant. When the security of a concrete Wall, an inanimate object, takes precedence over human life, when it is deemed that the physical structure itself is in need of defence from potential attack, rather than the lives of those who may be behind the Wall, the structure itself becomes grotesquely anthropomorphised, with the simultaneous dehumanisation of the Palestinians in relation to it.

The absurdity of this situation was not lost on those who attended the performance. Indeed, although some members of the Freedom Bus troupe later expressed concern and fear over the military presence, and some of the al-Walaja residents asked for the internationals to remain in situ until the soldiers left,⁵⁷¹ others such as Riham Isaac found dark humour and empowerment through the ludicrousness of the situation. As she stated: “it felt like it’s so ridiculous what they are doing, actually I felt more powerful than what [I should] in my position.”⁵⁷² Likewise, one of the tellers, a young boy, articulated that through cultural resistance under the negative gaze of the Israeli soldiers, he felt “free from occupation”, which for Rivers affirmed the effectiveness of the Freedom Bus

⁵⁶⁸ Rivers, B. (2012), ‘Al-Walajah Village Explores Theater as a Form of Resistance’, *Electronic Intifada online*, 25th April 2012, accessed online at: <http://electronicintifada.net/content/al-walajah-village-explores-theater-form-resistance/11209>

⁵⁶⁹ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

⁵⁷⁰ Interview with Riham Isaac (25th July 2012)

⁵⁷¹ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

⁵⁷² Interview with Riham Isaac (25th July 2012)

project, particularly given that particular context.⁵⁷³ Although there were no violent incidents as a result of the performance, nor did the demonstrations descend into clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli military, the very presence of the army as a second audience, one with the potential for malevolence should the desire have taken them, highlights this notion that the conflict has transformed into a 'post-urbicidal' one located on the margins of Palestinian territory. By creating a highly vocal presence throughout the West Bank, traversing the area and focusing on performing in sites of fierce contention, it can be suggested that the Freedom Bus is attempting to directly undermine the Israeli dual-policy of creating Jewish-Israeli settlements whilst destroying Palestinian spaces in the West Bank. By performing specifically in these sites, the Freedom Bus is drawing attention to the presence of Palestinians within the location, and that it is not an empty space which Israel is choosing to develop for Jewish-Israelis, but an existing place belonging to the Palestinians. This visibility is a vital part of cultural resistance, for it accentuates the existence of Palestinians within a particular site, whilst simultaneously demonstrating that this is a people with indigenous culture and strong ties to the land through the performing arts.

Despite these endeavours, is the space forged out of the local site for theatrical performance one which is conducive to promoting resistance, or having any effect upon the local conditions? As the Israeli occupation is the overriding power, which impacts upon every aspect of Palestinians' lives in the West Bank, every action becomes a response to its overbearing presence, visible or not. Likewise, the substructure of the international humanitarian regime has an immense impact upon the space of the West Bank, not only through the ubiquitous presence of international aid workers (and theatre practitioners and trainers), but also through the dependency upon external funding for Palestinian NGOs, including cultural initiatives. Finally, within each separate segment of space exists area-specific local sovereigns, who work both within the confines of the higher structural forces, and in resistance to these within the national movement for Palestinian independence.

⁵⁷³ Interview with Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

The Freedom Bus is therefore operating within numerous sites with competing powers, each of varying prominence and ability, simultaneously providing a space of opportunity for resistance or acquiescence to both the overriding structures and the site-specific localised sovereignties. Within each site, Playback performances are used as a platform for promoting individual interests and social status in addition to endorsing collective action.

Based upon interviews with actors from the Freedom Bus (and Ride), it can be said that this project has achieved its aim of inspiring further collaboration between Freedom Bus actors and the various communities they work with. Although a small sample, it looks promising that as this embryonic project becomes more established, and networks both widened and strengthened, deeper ties between the artistic communities in West Bank towns and cities will collaborate at a more advanced level. As Faisal Abu el-Heja, aged in his mid-twenties, told me, as a native of Jenin growing up through the second intifada and the overbearing restrictions on movement between different West Bank sites which had only recently been reduced, he had not visited the southern West Bank prior to the Freedom Ride initiative. Since its inception however, he has been to Bethlehem and Hebron numerous times as a performer and Playback conductor, and has thus “broken through the checkpoints” physically and metaphorically. Being present within other places in the West Bank, and seeing the suffering of his fellow Palestinians, has only served to increase his motivation to resist the occupation on a national level, rather than just in Jenin.⁵⁷⁴ Likewise, Riham Isaac relayed to me that although Palestinians like herself are aware of the suffering of her people, through social media fora and via official reports, it is her physical presence in the place and the shared experience of another community’s problems under occupation which “makes it more real” to her.⁵⁷⁵ This has led to her conviction that Playback is “really one of the best methods to do community work, community theatre”, because: “You don’t impose on them a thought or a play or a way of thinking, or what is right for you. You just go there, very modest, in the reach of trying to solve the problems. We’re

⁵⁷⁴ Interview with Faisal Abu el-Heja (26th July 2012).

⁵⁷⁵ Interview with Riham Isaac (25th July 2012)

not solving it, but at least we're listening and doing some reflection of their stories. It feels really strong and powerful."⁵⁷⁶ Although there is some idealism regarding the 'power' of PBT, and the actual impact it can have in terms of strengthening community resolve for resistance, and whilst it must be stated that it is in the actors' self-interest to promote the Freedom Bus as this is their livelihood, the positivity regarding the project and its outcomes is encouraging, particularly given its vulnerability as an emergent art form and initiative in Palestine.

However, it can be said that one major problem arises due to language. Of course, Palestinians speak their mother-tongue when relating their stories to their community of fellow Arabic-speakers. Therefore, whilst this may well be useful in establishing inter-communal solidarity and for maintaining *sumud* within the community itself, this may prove problematic in terms of promoting international attention and sympathy. Although filmed events can add English or other language subtitles following the event, thus reaching an international audience, the impact upon the non-Arabic speaking spectators may well be diluted due to the language barrier. As a majority of the international aid workers operating within Palestine do not appear to be proficient in Arabic, and despite the use of translators to attempt to bridge this gap, the effect of the tellers' words may well be undermined by the divergence of the non-Arabic speaking audience's attention turning to the translator, who may or may not be able to adequately express the tellers' meanings to a significant degree. Additionally, although the lingua franca in the Palestinian aid industry is English, this is a second (or more) language for many European humanitarian workers, who would then have to translate from English into their native tongue, with further meanings being lost with each translation. As Playback theatre is a deeply language-intense performance, any utterances lost in translation would not only serve to confuse the audience, but would potentially detract from the original political intentions of the tellers and practitioners. Although it could be said that the performances by the actors could serve to rectify this language barrier, the highly stylised and physical performance of Playback serves as a

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with Riham Isaac (25th July 2012).

representation, and not a re-enactment of the story told. Therefore, Playback may have less effect upon the international audiences than desired.

Conclusion

Within the spaces of the refugee camp, the presence of the cultural centres of Al-Rowwad and the Freedom Theatre intentionally create an alternative sovereign, albeit differently figured across these contexts. For Al-Rowwad, Abdelfattah Abu Srouf offers directorship and positions himself as the sovereign over cultural activities in Aida camp. By contrast, the Freedom Theatre in Jenin appears to be a more genuinely democratic enterprise; whereas there is a clearly defined hierarchical structure pertaining to the management of the theatre, these boundaries are more fluid and less rigorously enforced, and do not determine the theatre practice. This may well be due to the ages of those involved, for whereas those engaged in activities in Al-Rowwad are children and young teenagers, therefore uninvolved in the actual day-to-day running of the theatre and as such being participants in projects rather than actual stakeholders invested in the continuation of the theatre, in the Freedom Theatre, the participants are older teenagers and young people. With the established theatre training programmes, and activist message, those involved in the Freedom Theatre have a pressing need to be actively engaged with the theatre activities, rather than accept a more submissive role as recipient of theatre activities.

Palestine is an over-saturated marketplace of the humanitarian aid industry, where funding is scarce and highly competitive as a result of the global economic crisis negatively impacting upon the availability of financial assistance. As a result, cultural initiatives need to adapt themselves and create a 'unique selling point' in order to engender external funding and gain the necessary media attention to successfully compete within this context. The Freedom Theatre, and its offshoot project of the Freedom Bus, has effectively navigated the capriciousness and

limiting nature of the international community's funding apparatus, albeit through hard work and perseverance in applying for grants, and despite serious financial deficits for their projects. In spite of the problems they have encountered, the Freedom Bus has managed to reach out to marginalised communities throughout the West Bank, offering support and a vital presence to the Palestinians most affected by Israel's ongoing policy of forcible evictions and land confiscations.

Conclusion

The research for this thesis was supported by a period of intensive Arabic language training, followed by an in-depth ethnographic fieldwork over the course of around a year of living in East Jerusalem and frequently commuting to different theatrical spaces within the West Bank. The research undertaken included numerous interviews with Palestinian theatre practitioners and associated persons, observing a multitude of Palestinian theatre productions, and experiencing the conditions of existing under an occupation which greatly restricts movement and individual freedoms. The study analyses contemporary Palestinian theatre within the spatial context within which it has been devised, rehearsed and performed, in order to elucidate how these cultural practices are formed from, and interact with, the various power structures existing within the space. My overall aim was to identify and examine how theatre was being utilised by artists and communities engaged in theatrical practices in the West Bank produce non-violent resistance. Although the overarching consideration has been how Palestinian theatre responds to the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, I have also examined the relationships between theatre activities and the international humanitarian regime, national and local sovereigns, and how these intersecting structures impact upon theatrical productions as resistance, both creatively and logistically. Before I outline my primary findings, I shall briefly reflect on my theoretical framework and methodology, before explaining why I did not examine theatre practices in East Jerusalem as a separate area of extreme contention.

Theoretical Considerations

The research method for this study was ethnographic, which has resulted in an in-depth analysis of Palestinian theatrical practices within their geopolitical spatial contexts. Due to the multiplicities of space in the West Bank, it has been difficult to find one overarching theory to adequately explain the situation, which has led to a synthesis of complementary theories, with the acknowledgement that these

theories apply at different levels in each single space. This reflects the fragmentation and localisation of Palestinian space and is an effect of the 'spacio-cidal' policies being implemented upon this territory. Palestinian theatre practices are a response to the site in which it is firstly created, and secondly performed. As a result, it has been difficult to merge Western notions of theatre space as put forward by Gay McAuley, as this mode of thinking has come about from analysing Western productions within non-conflict zones. It does not account for theatre buildings which are demolished during active warfare, or arson attempts by the local community. Likewise, it does not articulate the vulnerability of the space and theatre practitioners within it, such as Israeli military aircraft circling over the Freedom Theatre, the murder of Juliano Mer-Khamis, or the presence of belligerent armed soldiers watching theatre performances from afar in sites of extreme contention. Nonetheless, it is a useful starting point for the conceptualisation of theatre space, and that which occurs within it as arising from social interactions between performers and the audience.

My analysis of Palestinian theatre practices as cultural resistance within occupied space has enabled a critical examination of how theatre exists within the wider Palestinian non-violent resistance movement, and at the tactical level to encourage further Palestinian theatrical activities and the perpetuation of *sumud* in the face of adversity. By focusing on specific sites as single entities, I draw attention to the multiplicities of both space and theatrical practices within them, whilst scrutinizing existing literature on theatre in Palestine. In particular, I evaluate Maurya Wickstrom's concept that 'on stage, Equality *is*', demonstrating that this is a highly problematic term, especially since she applies this 'Idea' to the entirety of Palestinian theatre practices in the West Bank without in-depth analysis of the specificities of each theatre company and site in which it operates. Through merging spatial theories with theatre practices, I offer a new perspective through which to analyse Palestinian cultural resistance as a phenomenon.

Comments on East Jerusalem

Although East Jerusalem is considered to be the capital of Palestine by Palestinians, the 'spacio-cidal' policies of the Israelis have served to sever East Jerusalem from the West Bank, particularly through the denial of free movement for West Bank Palestinians into Jerusalem, and the construction of the Separation Barrier. There were numerous cultural activities occurring in East Jerusalem at the time of research, however the Palestinian National Theatre/el-Hakawati, the site of much of this activity, was experiencing a number of problems which greatly impacted upon its activities. Firstly, internal issues between management staff led to a suspension of programmes; secondly, the ending of funding for the Theatre and Multimedia training programme following disagreements with their Italian benefactors disrupted activity.⁵⁷⁷ Thirdly, the death of director Francois Abu Salim resulted in a period of mourning and uncertainty regarding one of the projects then underway. During the period of fieldwork, the PNT was in a state of turmoil, and therefore whilst I have mentioned case studies relating to East Jerusalem, I decided to not focus specifically on East Jerusalem as a space, despite it being a site of extreme contention. The location of the PNT in Sheikh Jarrah, which is undergoing immense changes due to an increasing religious-nationalist Israeli settler presence, is incredibly interesting, and research on contemporary theatre practices within this space would be much needed given the current lacuna. However, due to the circumstances, it was necessary to primarily concentrate on activities in the West Bank.

Primary Findings

Palestinian Space in the West Bank

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Marianna Bianchetti (16th July 2012).

There is no single overarching concept of space in Palestine, resulting from the fragmentation of territory and cantonisation of Palestinian areas in the West Bank. Due to these spatial divisions, occurring from the Israeli military occupation, Palestine has become a shattered space, with deeply delineated segments located apart from each other and separated by military checkpoints and Jewish-Israeli settlements. Palestinian space is not permanently fixed; instead it is elastic and temporary, with boundaries and borders vulnerable to change in accordance with Israeli policies. Palestinian movement between these different zones is highly regulated through the 'matrix of control' and as a result the Palestinian experience of space becomes highly localised and constricted. The Israeli occupation exists in a variety of forms, depending on the space in which it is located, as examined through the theory as 'spacio-cide' as espoused by Sari Hanafi. At the time of research and writing, Palestinian space is undergoing an Israeli-imposed policy of 'spacio-cide'. In contrast to the second intifada, which was characterised by the reinvasion of Palestinian asymmetric military capabilities) and resulted in the 'urbicidal' destruction of Palestinian urban sites, the active conflict in the West Bank at the time of research was primarily located within the Palestinian rural hinterland, near to key strategic locations vital to Israeli military and settler security.

Within each space in the West Bank exists multiple, competing sovereigns, each of which holds asymmetric and vastly disparate levels of social and political power. The omnipotent Israeli occupation, although not physically present throughout the territory, is the overarching power structure, enforced through military capabilities. The occupation applies three interlinking and mutually reinforcing states of being onto the space of the West Bank: firstly, the 'Principle of Colonization', which primarily involves the appropriation of Palestinian land for settlement building and other purposes; secondly, the 'Principle of Separation', which seeks to both segment Palestinian space and regulate Palestinian movement between these discontinuous sections through checkpoints and barriers, whilst ensuring a lack of contact between Palestinians and Israelis; thirdly, the 'state of exception', which has become normalised through the international humanitarian regime, in particular through the imposition of the development doctrine within 'post-

urbicidal' urban sites undergoing regeneration programmes funded and implemented by the international community. These three states exist simultaneously within the West Bank, albeit at varying degrees depending on the specific location of the site. Sovereignities existing at the sub-levels are firstly the PA and then the international humanitarian regime, followed at the grassroots standing by local sovereigns, of which there are established and alternative sovereignities in operation. These differing sovereignities operate in relation to each other, either in collusion with, or in resistance to, depending on their intentions.

An Overview of Palestinian Theatrical Practices in Palestine

Contemporary Palestinian theatre exists in multiple spaces throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including the main urban sites, refugee camps, and the rural hinterland. Both professional and amateur theatre productions are regularly performed and watched throughout Palestine by adults and children alike. Palestinian theatre practices are not monolithic, for they are situated in their immediate locale and respond to the geopolitical environment in which they are located. As a result, theatre forms part of the wider non-violent resistance movement in Palestine, which has existed since the onset of Zionism, and continues to the present day through a myriad of activities, including cultural activities. As a mode of resistance, Palestinian theatre has numerous objectives, primarily including actively struggling against the continuing expansion of Israeli military and settlement enterprises through empowering both performers and audience members by creating awareness of their situation and envisaging possible solutions, and presenting their version of their everyday experiences to an international audience to garner support. There is an overwhelming aspiration for theatre practitioners to create inspirational, high-quality productions for local and global audiences, which reflect the aspirations and desires of Palestinians in relation to ending the occupation as well as individual goals. Theatrical performance is perceived by those involved as a declaration of both life and culture as an antithesis and antidote to the daily sufferings experienced under the conditions of 'bare life'.

Palestinian theatre at the time of research in the early 2010's can be categorised into three main patterns, which correspond with the spatial context in which they find themselves. Firstly, the main urban areas of the West Bank undergoing economic regeneration projects and internal infrastructural construction funded by the international community - namely Ramallah, the New City of Hebron (H1) and Bethlehem/Beit Jala. Here, the international humanitarian regime typified by the discourse and practice of the post-conflict neoliberal development paradigm is firmly implemented and delivered through multiple INGOs, and their Palestinian counterparts. Since the Oslo Accords, both the Israelis and the PA have outsourced the responsibility for and practice of cultural activities to external organisations who allocate funding to Palestinian theatre companies to deliver a specific project or programme. This funding is highly competitive and outcome-driven (audience numbers, for example), and based upon overarching policies decided in the headquarters of the funding body outside of Palestine. As a result, Palestinian amateur theatre is placed within the 'theatre for development' model, which emphasises working with externally-defined vulnerable groups, such as women and young people.

Professional theatre is also held hostage to the process of grant applications and funding dogma, which serves to simultaneously normalise the occupation and de-politicise cultural production through the professionalization and 'NGO-isation' of Palestinian theatre companies. Rather than being actively and explicitly political regarding the occupation, mainstream theatre practices in Palestine have become entangled in this development doctrine, and as such align their goals of internal social change as per the funding guidelines. This is not to say that Palestinian theatre practitioners are rendered politically passive or even impotent by this doctrine; however, they must necessarily operate within the boundaries of the discourse in order to be successful and produce their theatre. Criticism of the paradigm itself can be seen explicitly through such plays as *Beit Yasmin*, however this is an anomaly amidst the more palatable theatre within the mainstream theatre companies in Palestine. This is not to say that Palestinian theatre

companies working within this paradigm are complicit with or accepting of it, but rather that this model is perceived as crucial to ensuring the viability of theatre in Palestine, and is therefore a necessary 'evil'. Likewise, many important internal social issues, particularly regarding gender issues, such as forced child marriage, sexual violence, and honour killings, are addressed, creating a platform for the discussion of controversial and taboo subjects. Despite this, the constraints placed upon Palestinian theatre practitioners are immense, not only in relation to the Palestinian experience of living under military occupation, but also in regards to the external pressures exerted upon them by strictly-delineated boundaries of the international funding regime.

The second mode of resistance identified in the research is applicable to Al-Rowwad in Aida refugee camp and in relation to the Freedom Bus/Ride initiatives in sites of extreme contention. The focus here is on a normative nationalist narrative, which combines international human rights laws, including the right to self-determination and statehood with socially conservative values. Based upon the uncompromising stance of creating an alternative sovereign space in which Palestinian rights come into being and are theatricalised, these theatre activities demonstrate how the theatre practitioner becomes a local sovereign within a defined theatrical space. Abdelfattah Abu Srou, the director of Al-Rowwad, becomes the absolute local sovereign through working with children, for whilst the productions may be based upon the stories and images devised by the children, it is Abu Srou who has the final say upon the material included in the play, including the themes and content. This results in a theatre of resistance which alleges to be 'beautiful', but may well be considered as the pre-Oslo nationalist narrative – with both violent and non-violent imagery utilised – which is then performed by Aida camp's youth. As such, although Palestinians may be expressing their political desires and rights, this is done through children, which may be inspiring children to continue the struggle for their political freedom, but may also be highly exploitative, in that these children are used as instruments to garner sympathy from an international community.

The Freedom Bus/Ride likewise adheres to the popular dominant nationalist ideology and espouses the formation of an alternative sovereign space; however this is comprised of multiple adult participants. The Freedom Bus troupe – comprised of primarily Palestinians - enters the site of contention to perform the stories of local residents, who actively and consensually engage with the performance. The testimonies shared by the local community reflect the desired objectives of the performance itself: awareness-raising and the desire to exert influence over external persons such as international NGO workers, or the continuation of resistance by the community itself. Through participating in an event, the teller becomes a local sovereign, a figure of authority on localised Palestinian suffering and defiance, thus raising his/her status in the eyes of the community as an active member of the resistance. Likewise, through relating his/her story to internationals, s/he becomes a known quantity, a contact for the NGO for future reference. At the time of research, the Freedom Bus/Ride concentrated solely on the effects of the occupation and political action, which resulted in the alternative space of the performance being imbued with the dominant nationalist discourse. As such, this focus side-lined potential internal issues of importance (such as gender), demoting them in favour of the normative and socially respectable model of resistance.

The third form of cultural resistance through theatre performances is that of the radically liberal Freedom Theatre, whose affirmation that personal freedom is a necessary precondition to national liberation has been, and remains, highly contentious within the local site of Jenin. The promotion of the Freedom Theatre as an alternative, exceptional space for self-expression and the promulgation of a 'cultural intifada', seeking to fundamentally alter the traditional nature of Palestinian society as a harbinger for overthrowing the Israeli military regime in Palestine, faced extreme antipathy from some conservative residents, resulting in violence against the theatre itself, as well as its founder, Juliano Mer-Khamis. As a local alternative sovereign, Mer-Khamis was deemed by his antagonists – the traditional local sovereigns - as too dangerous, a threat which needed to be eliminated due to his ideology of personal emancipation, particularly in relation to

females. The deliberate continuation of Mer-Khamis' ethos of creating the 'cultural intifada' by the Freedom Theatre shows resistance to the Israeli occupation in an area which suffered greatly during the second intifada, and also against local prejudices.

For both Al-Rowwad and the Freedom Theatre, there is an overwhelming rejection of the international humanitarian regime in relation to funding and practices, although projects are made financially viable through the theatres accepting monies from international aid agencies that share the same objectives and political positions as themselves. Therefore, Al-Rowwad espouses the 'Norwegian model', through which partnership working is based upon alleged equality as full partners in theatrical activities, whilst the Freedom Bus/Ride obtains its funding from politically active charities and independent organisations, or through mass individual small-scale donations through fundraising sites such as IndieGoGo.⁵⁷⁸ Although the intent to place themselves outside of the international humanitarian regime and achieve both autonomy and egalitarianism through more innovative funding channels, a question is raised about the extent of the equality reached when these theatre initiatives remain reliant upon the goodwill and active participation of external bodies. Likewise, the immense power disparities existing between a theatre company from the 'safe' West and a Palestine under occupation may render this assertion for equality futile. Whilst it may appear that finding alternative funding sources may be an innovative means of producing more Palestinian-centric theatre, for and by Palestinians, both Al-Rowwad and the Freedom Theatre (including the Bus/Ride) face chronic underfunding and financial shortfalls, making their activities vulnerable to closure.

Consequently, cultural resistance as a political endeavour engages at the tactical level of resistance practices, meaning that theatrical activities are limited in their scope, and do not individually serve to affect the structural powers existing within Palestine, despite the attempts of the Freedom Theatre and Bus/Ride to facilitate

⁵⁷⁸ Interviews with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf (16th January 2012); and Ben Rivers (17 June 2012).

strategic change. Nonetheless, theatre is but one part of a wider non-violent Palestinian resistance movement, and reaches across borders to the global community through international tours, with the specific intention of awareness-raising of both the effects of the Israeli occupation upon Palestinians, and their creative responses to it through theatre. Therefore, taking Palestinian theatre practices as a whole, whilst there may not be a discernable impact upon the structural forces, there can be finite influence upon the internal social character of resistance, primarily through encouraging its continuation of non-violent means, and strengthening collective *sumud* in addition to inspiring individual participants' self-development and ways of coping under occupation. At the tactical level, therefore, theatre has an important role to play in addressing both internal and external issues, with some capacity for promoting social change.

The Internationalism of Palestinian Theatrical Practices

Following the second intifada, Palestine has seen an influx of international aid primarily designed for a post-conflict situation which aims to rebuild and regenerate in particular urban areas in the West Bank. This development regime is based upon a neoliberal state-building programme which assumes that active hostilities have ceased, but which serve to further institutionalise the 'Principle of Separation' within the main cities and entrench the occupation through outsourcing the occupation not only to the PA but also to the international community. This is especially relevant in relation to the cultural sphere, which is entirely funded by external bodies, to the detriment of Palestinian theatre as it has to comply with numerous regulations and demands regarding the content of its plays and eligible participants. Palestinian theatre exists as a hybrid, both historically and contemporaneously. This is due to the necessity of international funding which places conditions upon financing a performance, such as the theatre being required to adapt an existing work from the dramatic canon of, or working in partnership with a theatre troupe from the financing country. On the other hand, the theatre company would be obligated to adhere to the policies of the funding agency,

therefore having to accommodate the objectives of the organisation in regards to the participation of designated 'vulnerable' groups, such as females and youth in order to acquire the necessary monies. This is not to say that these groups are unworthy, or unimportant participants, but rather to state the influence the financier has upon theatre practices, especially in relation to community projects, which must 'tick all the boxes' in order to secure funding.

Palestinian professional theatre practitioners primarily form part of the 'Globalised Palestinian Elite', who are generally upper middle-class, highly educated individuals who are familiar with Western theatre practices and regularly travel globally, performing and engaging with international theatre practitioners. As a result, they are highly skilled professionals with wide-ranging skills which are then employed in Palestinian theatre activities, further cultivating the hybridity of Palestinian theatre through a variety of theatrical forms. Additionally, numerous internationals come to Palestine to produce theatrical works in joint partnership initiatives, principally funded by cultural organisations in their countries of origin, with the intention of creating a performance for both Palestinian and home audiences. These initiatives can be a form of 'cultural exchange', as can be seen with the joint initiative between al-Harah theatre and the Swedish theatre company, Unga Klara Theatre, based in Stockholm, who co-produced an adaptation of the Swedish children's story "The Changeling" in 2010. This play was funded by The Swedish Institute, and to date has been performed in both Palestine and Sweden.⁵⁷⁹ Although many Palestinian theatre practitioners perceive these partnerships as an exciting opportunity, which enables them to travel and perform throughout the world, the disparity in power between the theatre practitioners is problematic, not least because the international practitioner is from a safe country which is not subjected to conflict and without the experience of living under military occupation. This is not to suggest that practitioners coming to Palestine do so out of a sense of pity or moral obligation, or indeed to perpetrate 'cultural imperialism', but it is somewhat

⁵⁷⁹ "The Changeling", Al-Harah website, accessed 13th January 2014 at: http://www.alharah.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9:the-changeling&catid=11&Itemid=179&lang=en

disconcerting that the Swedish company –just one example out of many – would choose to voluntarily engage in theatre with Palestinians, using a Swedish text as stimulus for a production to be performed in Palestine. Although it can be argued that universal themes are applicable in any situation, and can be adapted for a local audience, it is interesting that rather than customising a Palestinian folk tale for a Swedish audience, this production consciously imported a Swedish story for a Palestinian audience.

As discussed in Chapter 3, problems arose when international directors arrived in Palestine in order to produce a piece of theatre, due to cultural misunderstandings regarding both content and stylistic considerations, in addition to the asymmetric power relations existing between the two parties. In relation to *Passages*, the question of ownership of the text was brought under scrutiny, in addition to the practice of adapting existing texts to a local Palestinian audience. A lack of understanding of the experience of living under occupation and the complicity of the USA in its financial and vocal support for Israeli policies was interpreted by the American director as ungrateful and insulting, a personal slight, rather than a critique of the power structures active in Palestine. The Palestinian attempt to modify the text and characters into something more applicable and pleasing to local theatregoers was perceived as an affront to the existing play, an unforgiveable bastardisation, especially given the emotional attachment of the playwright to the play's characters.

It is not only 'cultural exchanges' which are problematic, as jointly devised productions can also be precarious endeavours, as discussed in relation to *al-Karitha*. This example raises ethical questions regarding the replication of traumatic events upon the stage which for an international audience would facilitate some semblance of being under siege, of experiencing that which Palestinians have suffered. However, this play was also for a Palestinian audience, a number of whom were left distraught by the performance, which although based upon the incursions into Gaza in 2008-09 were also applicable to the violence of the second intifada in the West Bank, less than ten years previously, and therefore

fresh in the memories of the Palestinian audience. Additionally, there was a discord in relation to expected stylistics of the performance, for whereas the London-based company were wholly committed to experimental theatrical forms designed to push boundaries and provide a different experience for its audience, Palestinian cultural preferences veer towards more realistic, character-driven theatre. Furthermore, Palestinian theatre companies need to provide popular entertainment in order to attract a higher number of audience members, thus 'proving' their success to funding bodies in relation to their positive outcomes and improving their chances of receiving further funding at a later stage.

The arguable failure of these initiatives serves to exemplify a lack of awareness of Palestinian theatre practices, and the conditions which they are constrained by. However, one positive example arises from *48 Minutes for Palestine*, as the British director continues to be a long-term supporter of the Palestinian cause, and has frequently visited Palestine over a number of years, establishing deep and lasting relationships with Palestinian theatre practitioners.⁵⁸⁰ Additionally, funding for this project was miniscule, mostly coming from the director herself, which removed the political constraints faced by others. Although this is just one example, it does suggest that partnership working between international and Palestinian theatre practitioners can be productive and generate high-quality, innovative plays without the dissonance created by cultural clashes and misunderstandings. Indeed, these findings suggest that in order for cross-cultural productions to thrive, there needs to be durable and deep-rooted collaborations between international and Palestinian theatre practitioners, independently funded and therefore not bound by the constraints of the international humanitarian regime. It is through such projects as *48 Minutes* that the 'spacio-cidal' project in the West Bank can be analysed and performed in a manner which depicts the lived experience of Palestinians without having to censor themselves in line with funding bodies' guidelines. However, the scarcity of such productions suggests that the institutionalisation of the humanitarian regime has been internalised through the 'NGO-isation' of the

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Mojisola Adebayo (1st May 2013).

majority of Palestinian theatre companies, as they compete with each other to secure single-project, short-term funding for their activities. It appears that this model will continue to constrain Palestinian theatre for the foreseeable future.

Political Theatre in Sites of Contention

The 'spacio-cidal' project becomes most apparent in Palestinian sites of contention. Theatre performances occurring within these spaces can be considered a dangerous pursuit, as the examples describing the presence of Israeli military personnel suggest. It is here at these 'frontier' sites, where both the 'Principle of Colonization' and the 'post-urbicidal' 'state of exception' are at their most explicit, that theatrical performances are most definitively political and precarious. The use of theatre as part of a wider, sustained programme of non-violent, direct resistance against highly local instances of 'spacio-cide' attempts to engage at the strategic level to directly counteract specific Israeli actions threatening the local inhabitants.

What does become clear within these sites of contention is the complication of the ideal of the theatre space as one which is 'safe', separate from the external conflict in operation beyond its doors, an exceptional space within a 'state of exception', serving as a challenge to the very structure of the space in which it operates. Indeed, in the West Bank, the space of the theatre building has become almost secularly sacrosanct in its definition as a 'safe space' in which young people, especially females, can express themselves. Again, this allocation of the status of safety to the space of the theatre is a common denominator throughout the theatre companies' promotional literature and funding applications. This appears to adhere to the humanitarian and international community's parameters of acceptability regarding the 'worthiness' and success of a project in terms of cultural and social development. Whereas it could be argued that space in general in Palestine is not safe for Palestinians, due to the Oslo Accords' statement that the Israelis can enter Palestinian areas at any time out of 'security concerns', thus leaving the Palestinian civilian open to harm from the occupying power, in the

course of my interviews, the vast majority of Palestinian theatre practitioners did not suffer from Israeli military violence. The overwhelming response I received was that Palestinian theatre makers were subjected to the same restrictions on movement and lengthy administrative procedures involved in leaving the West Bank to perform abroad, but that they themselves had not been detained specifically for their theatrical activities.

The Freedom Bus marks itself as different precisely because it refutes this notion of the theatrical space as a 'safe' one; indeed, the sites in which it operates are inherently unsafe. By deliberately placing itself into the site of contention, with full awareness of the inherent risks of performing in such a space, the Freedom Bus asserts itself as a credible form of cultural resistance. There could be, however, a concern that the Freedom Bus's overriding focus on single-issue events of a political nature may ultimately impact negatively upon its potential as a creative medium. By concentrating primarily upon political topics, important as they are, this denies the residents of contentious sites to express themselves on a wider variety of subjects relevant to their lives, which could be detrimental. It may also lead to frustration at a later stage should no discernable benefits arise from engaging with these cultural practices, which could sully relationships between the Freedom Bus troupe and communities, especially since there are raised expectations of the efficacy of this form of cultural resistance as a strategy for change, rather than a tactic. Should these intentions not come to fruition, the blame could be placed upon the theatre, and the alliance severed.

This apprehension with the focus of Palestinian theatre on political events and circumstances can be applied to the entirety of theatrical practices occurring in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Although it is somewhat inevitable that practitioners will respond to their environment, there is the possibility that creativity in Palestinian theatre is being stifled by the majority of plays produced examining matters relating to the occupation, rather than a multitude of more divergent themes. This situation has arisen from both the Palestinian desire to raise awareness of the conditions under which they exist both locally and internationally

and the demands of the external funding bodies upon whom they are financially dependent. This situation looks likely to continue whilst Palestine remains under the humanitarian 'development' doctrine and without independently funded cultural initiatives.

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Faisal Abu el-Heja, Actor at the Freedom Theatre and in the Freedom Bus/Ride,
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Farah Saleh, Freelance Actress and Dancer from Ramallah, 22nd October 2012

George Ibrahim, Director of al-Kasaba theatre in Ramallah, 16th June 2012

Iman Aoun, Director at Ashtar Theatre, Ramallah, 27th October 2012.

Kamel el-Basha, Director at el-Hakawati/Palestinian National Theatre, East
Jerusalem, 8th July 2011

Marianna Bianchetti, Italian Consulate employee working with the PNT, East
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Marina Barham, Director of al-Harah theatre, Beit Jala, 10th January 2012

Micaela Miranda and Nabil al-Raei, Creative Directors at the Freedom Theatre,
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Mojisola Adebayo, Director of 48 Minutes for Palestine, 1st May 2013

Raed Shyouki, Director at Yes Theatre, Hebron, 16th August 2012

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