

"We're none of us at peace"

- creating resistance through theatre

Abstract

Freedom Theatre, Jenin, Palestine/Israel conflict, resistance, nonviolence, theatre, applied drama, identity, narrative, politics

This essay aims to begin to fill a potential gap in previous research when it comes to studying the political content of specific cultural practices, in this case the Freedom Theatre in Jenin. The theatre expressively refers to itself as a political theatre, calling themselves freedom fighters and places itself at the forefront of they call "cultural resistance". The creation of this cultural resistance is investigated here. This essay aims to explore, through examining the theatre's methods of practice, how cultural resistance could be transformed into political action and what problems that may hinder their political aspirations from becoming a true potential for political influence. The essay concludes that the theatre uses identity and narrative for political purposes in order to unite and strengthen the Palestinian collective identity, creating a civil resistance towards the Israeli occupation. This is however not an unproblematic process, and many of the same problems facing other nonviolent resistance movements are also present within the theatre.

Abstract	2
<i>Table of contents</i>	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Problem and essay questions	4
1.2 Limits to study and basic assumptions	5
1.3 Disposition	5
2. Theory	6
2.1 The concept of culture	6
2.2 Political theatre and/or drama	6
2.3 Theatre, culture and politics: previous research	7
2.4 Politics and theatre in Israel and Palestine	8
3. Method	9
3.1 Source and method criticism	10
4. Findings and analysis	11
4.1 The Freedom Theatre, an overview	11
4.2 Forming a cultural resistance movement	14
4.3 The battleground of identity	16
4.4 Telling a Palestinian story	19
4.5 The power of myth	20
4.6 Talk and action - the problems of practice	22
4.6.1 Divided leadership and internal conflict	23
4.6.2 Inability to maintain nonviolent discipline	24
4.6.3 Negative effects of international involvement	25
4.7 Re-imagining tradition	27
5. Conclusion	28
Bibliography	34
Appendix - the Patrice Pavis questionnaire	39

1. Introduction

This essay aims to begin to fill a potential gap in previous research when it comes to studying the political content of specific cultural practices, in this case the Freedom Theatre in Jenin. Even without any political aspirations, the regional and socio-political context of the theatre means that it cannot avoid being drawn into politics. But the Freedom Theatre expressively refers to itself as a political theatre, calling themselves freedom fighters and places itself at the forefront of what is called "cultural resistance" or the third, cultural Intifada.¹

1.1 Problem and essay questions

It has been claimed by many scholars that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is heavily structured on what you could refer to as a battle of cultures,² and Robert Bowker argues in *Palestinian refugees: mythology, identity and the search for peace* (2003) that if enough attention is not placed on this struggle, a successful end to the conflict cannot be achieved.³ The field of politics is however often concerning itself with a general study of culture as a social creation, and not specifically studying various practices of local culture. Studying of this kind of cultural resistance, or "theatre activism", presented here by the Freedom Theatre, is relegated to the theatre studies discipline. And whereas Israeli cultural practices have received some attention, Palestinian culture is more rarely subject to academic research.

Political activity takes place in many localities, outside of the traditional state and state-building domains. It is not only important for scholars of theatre to understand the possible politics of theatre, but also for scholars of politics to understand the many localities and sites of political action and popular resistance. Theatre unlocks the emotional contents of conflict, and the power that myth, romance and trauma have on the political. As Helen Nicholson writes in *Applied Theatre* (2005), theatre and drama have the potential to reveal the various instances where theory and practice interact, and that "theory has a performative dynamic".⁴ Theatre, and especially political theatre, links the study and theory of politics to its performed and embodied forms.

This essay aims to explore what the political actions of the Freedom Theatre consist of, and how the idea of cultural resistance is transformed into practice, namely;

How is the idea of cultural resistance transformed into practice, and by what methods?

What is the potential political impact that these methods are likely to generate?

Does the theatre experience any problems in transforming theory into practice, and how are these problems manifested?

1.2 Limits to study and basic assumptions

This essay rests on certain key general assumptions. Firstly, in order to assume that culture has any bearing on political issues, we must move away from the classic realist perspective that focuses on state-centric, military power as core of politics and security. Secondly, we must assume, as Emine Fisek states, that theatre has an active, rather than a passive or receptive role in society. The work of a theatre is not just "resonance", but it has the possibility of creating a voice of its own, that is then able to engage in dialogue with its surroundings.⁵

This study will be interdisciplinary, drawing on political, sociological and theatre studies' discourse. This essay will not attempt to delve into the larger macrolevel conditions surrounding the Freedom Theatre. Thus this study will not set out to answer the question of whether the Freedom Theatre is successful or not, but it will engage in a discussion on some of its problems, which will be relating to the actual practical successes and failures of the theatre.

1.3 Disposition

The essay will firstly discuss theory, define certain key concepts and go through previous research on the connection between culture, theatre and politics. It will move on to discuss methodology. The analysis begins with an overview of the theatre's history and present activity. The findings and analysis will then be presented simultaneously, beginning with discussing the civil resistance profile of the theatre, concluding that it uses narrative and identity deployment to create a civil resistance movement. The essay will then move on to a discussion on identity formation and deployment, followed by a similar discussion of narrative. Lastly the essay will also discuss some of the problems the theatre experiences, comparing it to Sharon Erickson Nepstad's research on the problems of nonviolent resistance movements.

2. Theory

2.1 The concept of culture

What is meant by culture in the context of cultural resistance? As Edward Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism*, the concept of culture can have two particular significances. The word holds all of the aesthetic practices, which aim to describe, communicate and represent, in an often pleasing manner.⁶ He continues that "culture" can also be associated with a specific society or nation, where certain elements of that society are elevated to become what could be likened to the "characteristics" of a "national character".⁷ We can use the word culture to mean specific artistic practices, or in a wider sense as an accumulation of certain practices within a society. This has given rise to terms such as multicultural, intercultural and clash of cultures. However, the arts are a part of social practices yet at the same time a method of questioning and transforming these practices, and so can be seen as standing both within and outside of the great moveable structure that we refer to as culture or cultural practices. This essay, when using the word culture, uses it in such a way that it focuses more on forms of artistic communication, without fully separating the arts from a greater idea of social and political culture.

2.2 Political theatre and/or drama

In order to discuss political theatre, we must first determine what the "political" in political theatre refers to. The definition in the Oxford English Dictionary reflects a dual meaning. The political is either "of or relating to the government or public affairs of a country", with regards to ideas or strategies, interest or motivation; or, "done or acting in the interest of status or power within an organization". When used in this essay, the concept of the political resides in the first category. However there is less focus on the governmental aspect, as the conflict is what is dominating the political landscape of Palestine. This essay ultimately defines a "political" action as any action which will have an impact on the outcome of the conflict.

Ken Nielsen and Lisbet Jørgensen when writing on the concept of "political theatre" describes how in the past, the normative definition was one that tried to separate "normal theatre" or "art", which was neutral, from another type of theatre, the political, which was not.⁸ This view of theatre is now seriously put under question, as E.J. Westlake argues in the introduction to *Political Performances* (2009);

Aren't all performances political, I wondered, even if only to uphold the dominant culture? Even when artists set out to make "political" performances,

aren't they always in danger of falling into the trap of creating art that ultimately reifies rather than transgresses, disintegrating into the self-congratulatory instead of inciting to action? And how can we, as scholars, even *being* to negotiate the complexity of myriad starting points and obstacles and the unpredictable ways in which they are read?⁹

Nielsen and Jørgensen show that the current definition of political theatre has changed into a more analytic examination of "the politics of theatre", meaning that different types of theatre must be studied in order to understand how their political significance.¹⁰ Although all theatre can be said to have political content in some form, theatre has no inherent capacity for being politically radical or influencing political change.¹¹

The argument is made in this essay that the Freedom Theatre is practising a form of applied theatre. As Helen Nicholson writes in her *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* (2005) "applied theatre" or "applied drama" (where theatre is more oriented towards production, while drama focuses on the process of creating) is a name given to the kind of theatre that aims to "improve the lives of individuals and create better societies".¹² This covers a large amount of different theatre phenomena, a diversity that makes applied theatre an interdisciplinary practice.¹³ She adds that applied theatre often carries out its work in specific contexts, with specific audiences, not only to create art but also to further educational, social and political goals.¹⁴

2.3 Theatre, culture and politics: previous research

The study of the interplay between culture, theatre and politics is a relatively new and emerging field both within theatre studies and the political discipline. A couple of studies have been carried out to examine the connections between culture and politics, for example how theatre has been used as a tool for social and political reform in countries that have experienced colonialism.¹⁵ In the same discipline Rustom Barucha has used theatre practices in India to question how multicultural or intercultural policies are implemented.¹⁶ This in turn ties in with various literature on the connection between cultural practice and national identity. One example here is how culture is used in nation-building to create a sense of national cohesion,¹⁷ for example how Nazi-Germany excluded Jewish involvement in German theatres, making the theatre one of the most influential symbols of the national socialistic ideal, an opportunity to both to rewrite history and to control the future.¹⁸ Another

example is the connection between culture and questions of citizenship, which is further explored by Nick Stevenson in his *Cultural Citizenship* (2003). Stevenson focuses on the informal, or cultural, processes of inclusion into society, rather than the formal citizenship procedures of the national state. Instead the question of cultural citizenship involves studying what and who in society is rendered visible and invisible.¹⁹ When it comes to culture being used specifically in different forms of political protest, the subject has been discussed in *Between Resistance and Revolution* (1997), edited by Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn, which discusses how many minorities or otherwise oppressed or marginalized groups in Australasia, South America, Europe and Asia have used culture and cultural forms of expression as means of carrying out social protest.

2.4 Politics and theatre in Israel and Palestine

With regards to specific Palestinian culture and politics, most research touches on the implications and significance of the cultural relationship between Palestine and Israel, mainly on how Palestine is represented in the Israeli culture. Glenda Abramson has written on how theatre since the installation of the state of Israel has dealt with the issue of Zionist ideology.²⁰ In *Political Performances* (2009) Tal Itzhaki and Avraham Oz has pointed out how most of the visual reminders of war are absent for today's Israeli stages, including the presence of Arabs both as characters or as performers.²¹ Palestinian theatre or art, especially in connection to politics, is largely underrepresented in scholarly research.

The Freedom Theatre itself has been subject to a limited amount of study, mostly exploring various elements of Mer Khamis' documentary *Arna's Children*, which explores the Care and Learning project of his mother Arna Mer Khamis, who started the first children's theatre in the camp in 1994, and the subsequent fate of her pupils, most of who died in the Second Intifada. Shimon Levy has discussed its qualities as a theatrical work of art, and Emine Fisek has used the film in order to investigate how acting out violence within restorative drama and dramatherapy can become paradoxical.²² Since the death of Juliano Mer Khamis a number of biographical articles has been published,²³ most of which are more concerned with the story of the man rather than the specific political agenda of the theatre. This reveals a gap in the research that has been done, partly in the region but also on the Freedom Theatre specifically.

3. Method

As is now mostly generally acknowledged within theatre studies, the main impact of theatre lies not in written text or in rhetoric, but in the live performance.²⁴ This makes ethnographic method, which focuses on social interaction and allows for a mix of observation, participant observation and interviews, an ideal choice for this study. As the participant observation has included observing performances by the company, I have made use of a structured form of performance analysis. The participant observation has taken place at rehearsals, performances and in conversation, formal and informal, with students, teachers and administrators at the theatre. The process of observation has been recorded in a personal field journal. Whenever my personal observation or assessments are referred to in the essay, it references processes or events recorded in the journal. The study has taken place over a period of eight weeks, openly and with the approval and assistance of the theatre.

I have used the Pavis questionnaire as a basis for my performance analysis. The Pavis questionnaire was designed by semiotician Patrice Pavis and has become a traditional tool for performance analysis in the field of drama and theatre studies. The questionnaire is constructed to break down the full experience of the performance, so that it becomes possible to see how the parts of the performance work together to create meaning. It is done as soon as possible after viewing the performance, and stresses that "obvious" answers and immediate reactions to the play are included, as starting points for a critical analysis of objects or actions on the stage.²⁵ By making the structure of the play visible, it can then be re-assembled as a whole performance and analysed. The full questionnaire has been included in the appendix.

As the goal of the interviews has been to explore how my interviewees view certain issues and subjects, rather than verify a specific theory, the interviews have been semi-structured, to allow for openness in the interview. As the subjects I will be exploring might be considered sensitive, I have been using a model built on psychoanalytical methods, Elton Mayo's six-point model, which focuses on listening, non-interference and respecting the view of the interviewee.²⁶

Each interview was prepared with suggestions for questions based on certain subject areas that were in turn based on the essay questions. These subject areas were firstly the interviewee's own perception of the theatre and their role in it, specifically the potential politics of the theatre and themselves and secondly which methods and practices that are used by themselves as actors, teachers or practitioners in the theatrical education and in their productions.

Interviewees were chosen strategically, based on their role in the structure of the theatre. I have chosen to interview Jonatan Stanzcak, managing director, Saber Schreim, graduating acting school student, Di Trevis, the director of the theatre's latest production and Micaela Miranda, teacher and acting school manager. This selection achieves a balance in the interviewees' level of involvement in the theatre, time spent working at the theatre (from six to two years), gender and age. These formal interviews have been recorded and transcribed. They have lasted between 30 to 90 minutes and have taken place in a place that the interviewee has chosen. In addition to these formal interviews, informal talks have taken place during the course of the field study, which have been written down from memory afterwards. The ethical aspect of the interviews has been taken into consideration, and the interviewee's wishes with regards to anonymity, etc. have been accommodated.

The coding schema for analysis has been set up partly through theory and partly through empirical knowledge learned in the field, according to ethnographical method.²⁷ As Patrik Aspers writes in *Etnografiska metoder* (2011), the coding of the material starts already in the field.²⁸ All material has been coded according to methods and practices of the theatre and the political nature of the theatre, here with specific focus on narrative and identity aspects of the political.

3.1 Source and method criticism

As Aspers points out, two of the problems with using an ethnographic method is firstly that when entering openly into a community, the community must accept your presence and to a degree trust you, in order to uncover correct and valid information.²⁹ Secondly, when entering into a community different from your own, the researcher will experience trouble understanding social and cultural codes, and he or she might misinterpret some of the events that he or she may witness.³⁰ These two problems are very much related, in the context of this study. Theatre can be highly personal as well as political, and both the personal and the political are sensitive issues in this region. The language barrier between the Arabic-speaking interview subjects and myself has of course presented certain problems, and in my experience has certainly added to a sense of "otherness". Coming from the outside could however also have played to my advantage, since I was not as much a part of the power politics and structures at the theatre. The plays were acted in Arabic, but for the main performance that I watched, *Lost Land*, I had the opportunity to read the English translation

of the script in rehearsal, before the performance. Any quotes from the play are taken from that translation, and are an approximation of the actual Arabic line.

The problem of misinterpretation is of course a valid one, and one that cannot be fully averted. It is recommended to use the knowledge from other researchers who know the culture better,³¹ which I did. I also benefited from having previous experience of working in theatre and drama, which aided my understanding of the rehearsal process and play analysis. In the end however, my interpretation and my perspective is of course unique and to a large extent, the process to produce results in this study is difficult to replicate. Yet since theatre is a practice so much based on physical and verbal interaction, it is impossible to find a method better suited for the purpose of this study. As Aspens writes, the ethnographic researcher possesses the ability to uncover the discrepancies between word and action, and the "silent, embodied and implicit" knowledge that is hidden there.³² Participant observation has enabled me to connect various areas within the theatre and to observe processes that can only be communicated through non-verbal means. I have tried to investigate those discrepancies between what is observed by me and what I am being told, which have provided insight into some of the theatre's problems of practice.

4. Findings and analysis

4.1 The Freedom Theatre, an overview

The Freedom Theatre was started in 2006 by its three founders. The most well-known is Juliano Mer Khamis, son of Arna Mer Khamis who worked with theatre in the camp many years before the start of the Freedom Theatre. The other two are Jonatan Stanczak, a Swede with Jewish ancestry and Zakaria Zubeidi, born and raised in Jenin refugee camp. Stanczak is the only one still at the theatre today, since the murder of Mer Khamis by an unknown assailant in the street in 2011, and the withdrawal of Zubeidi's amnesty in same year, which has forced him into house arrest in Ramallah. The founders come from extremely diverse backgrounds. Mer Khamis worked professionally as an actor and Stanczak is originally trained as a nurse. Zubeidi was at the beginning of the theatre's existence the leader of the militant branch of the Fatah called the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (hence the amnesty). This divergence of interests already present at the start of the theatre very likely accounts for the mix of theatre, social work and resistance that exists in the Freedom Theatre.

The Freedom Theatre lies on the outskirts of the Jenin refugee camp. The theatre houses, apart from the stage, rehearsal rooms and workshop, also a café, a small

cinema, computer rooms and a small number of apartments for guests and staff. There are always children running around and playing, stage managers constructing scenery in the workshop or journalists and tourists coming in for the day. An olive tree grows in the centre, domineering the scene. This is the place where the main activities of the theatre are carried out, but the acting school also has a rehearsal room available in Jenin City.

The Jenin camp and the city of Jenin are as two towns situated next to each other, the city run by the municipality of Jenin and the camp by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency, for Palestine refugees in the Near East). The camp was established in 1953, and most of its population arrived from Haifa or the Carmel mountains. According to the UNRWA it currently houses more than 16,000 refugees, around a quarter of which are unemployed, on an area of 0,42 square kilometres.³³ It was a stronghold for resistant fighting during the second Intifada, making people refer to Jenin as the "capital of suicide attackers".³⁴ The camp is small and crowded, and social control and conventional values dominate people's lives. In the camp your solidarity is with your family and individualism is not appreciated. As Nabil al-Rae, the theatre's current artistic director, phrased it, in the camp "being different is a threat".³⁵ One of the most important struggles is to work against conservative forces offended by what they see as the theatre trying to take over and corrupting their youth with Western ideas.

The Freedom Theatre creates three to four performances a year, each a piece of what Stanzcak calls "conventional theatre" which is in some way relating to the community, either through using stories from the community or by adapting international plays by inserting "the socio-political reality of this place into the performance".³⁶ The theatre is also certified to perform and teach Playback Theatre, a form of theatre based on the techniques of psychodrama, which invites therapeutic reflexion as personal stories from the audience as improvised, often through abstract movement and music, by actors on stage.³⁷ These performances often take place on the yearly Freedom Bus rides, when the theatre goes out into the smaller villages and towns in Palestine and they also perform as part of other protests or demonstrations.

The theatre also plays hosts ten to twenty touring productions from the rest of Palestine or international companies who come to visit. The average yearly audience is reckoned by Stanzcak to be somewhere around 15-18 000 visitors, made up mainly of kids and youth from the camp, but schools around Jenin are also offered the opportunity to be chartered to the theatre by bus.³⁸ The theatre usually takes the productions on tour abroad

and in the year 2013, they have toured the United States, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Brazil.

The work of the Freedom Theatre qualifies as a form of applied theatre. While the theatre doesn't disregard aesthetics and artistic quality, it is purely instrumental in order to further their political goals. As one of the other students phrased it, being professional, being an artist that is *liked on stage* is the first step towards changing other people, because it makes them interested in what you do.³⁹ Even though teachers or directors coming from the outside would make different choices in a production in order to ensure its artistic qualities,⁴⁰ the Freedom Theatre's artistic direction are very much directed towards their main goal, to "give voice" to the Palestinian people.⁴¹

The theatre also runs a three-year acting school program. The last class graduated four students, the next class will consist of fifteen. Students are most often selected from other Freedom Theatre activities, and go through an eight-week admissions process which judges their willingness to work, their physical and mental capabilities and gives the students a chance to test if acting is for them.⁴² The school connects physical theatre, (related in many ways to modern dance), with processes of devising theatre (which creates collaboratively, often through improvisation) to reflecting on and "mirroring" society.⁴³

The Freedom Theatre also holds workshops and courses mostly held by international volunteers for children and youth in for example filmmaking, drama in education and creative writing. The division of gender varies; the courses and workshops are estimated to have more women than men, while the theatre school is almost exclusively male. Stanzcak explains the absence of women actors on the stage in the following manner:

it is very sensitive, first of all for a girl to be in a theatre, in a theatre school, which is controversial in itself, something foreign, something unknown... What is the reference to theatre in society? It's TV. What is there on the TV? It is Egyptian-Turkish action movies and sort of, semi-pornographic material from Hollywood. Who wants to send their daughter to do that? Moreover, theatre, or how theatre is seen, it is something that children do, it's not something for adults.⁴⁴

Mer Khamis meant that providing freedom for all also meant freeing women.⁴⁵ Freedom, said Mer Khamis in an interview, is "to be able to criticize. To be free is to be able to express yourself freely."⁴⁶ The concept of freedom, in all its forms, dominates the theatre's

practice. From the beginning the theatre has tried to position itself as a new alternative, not belonging to any existing political or religious organisations.⁴⁷ The theatre is funded through three main channels; crowdfunding initiatives, fundraising events hosted by the Friends of the Freedom Theatre in Europe and the U.S., and the largest part consisting of grants given from cultural or development foundations, NGOs, governmental organisations and aid.⁴⁸

4.2 Forming a cultural resistance movement

The motivation behind the Freedom Theatre's cultural resistance was explained in the following manner by Mer Khamis;

I mean – we lost the Intifada, we lost the public opinion, we fucked up. Because we were not clever enough. We were raged, angry, frustrated, desperate – you can't create a resistance with desperation. With desperation you create suicide bombers, and this is what we did. Because we were so angry, so hurt, so destroyed that the only thing we could do was to blow ourselves up in Tel Aviv. Now, once we learned that this is going to create the opposite we might start a new kind of resistance. And we are trying in this gap, between the occupation, and the new authority, the Palestinian, to create a third dimension⁴⁹

During the first Intifada, the Palestinian leadership failed to unite the different fractions of the resistance movement.⁵⁰ Shafiq al-Hout, one of the founders of the PLO referred to the Palestinian political identity as a "phony national unity".⁵¹ What Mer Khamis argues is that culture, or theatre, is able to offer up a valid alternative when traditional political measures fail. This is not the first instance when this has occurred. One example is Augusto Boal's "legislative theatre" of 1970's South America, explained in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). Boal instituted a whole theatre movement, including "legislative theatre" and "forum theatre" to combat the increasing loss of political vision he saw in society.⁵²

While I was at the theatre, it was often pointed out to me how difficult it was for the theatre to operate in the area. Jenin camp might be seen as an antagonistic space for a theatre. The Freedom Theatre has been over the period they've been established in the area been attacked, having stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at the building.⁵³ These physical dangers are the main difficulty that the acting school manager Micaela Miranda sees with her work:

sometimes you just need to hold everyone together, you just have to hold on sometimes, or else everything will just go down in one second (...) It's not so easy to live here, it is dangerous times. Some days or a week ago, we had a friend calling us and he said, don't go to the theatre from the front door, there is shooting going on (...) It is disturbing, you need concentration. Art, it is a basic need, but we don't see it as a basic need - and if you know your life is in danger, you cannot do art⁵⁴

Yet, as a possible resistance movement, the Freedom Theatre is a much more likely to benefit from being located in this area of Palestine. Polly Pallister-Wilkins has argued that Israel traditionally controls Palestinian space, not just the borders, but also inside those borders.⁵⁵ Linda Tabar, in her study of the Jenin camp, has put it forth as an "oppositional space", a site of strong local resistance.⁵⁶ As such, the camp attracts freedom fighters, including artistic ones.

Unlike much of the previous resistance coming out of the Jenin camp, the Freedom Theatre practices nonviolent resistance. However they do not *teach* nonviolence, an aspect of their work that will be discussed in detail further on in this essay. The idea of the Freedom Theatre as a new site of resistance and social power is however founded on the foundations of nonviolent resistance, as formulated by Gene Sharp:

*The degree of liberty or tyranny in any political society is, it follows, largely a reflection of the relative determination of the subjects to be free, of their willingness and ability to organize themselves to live in freedom and, very importantly, their ability to resist any efforts to dominate or enslave them. In other words, the population can use the society itself as the means to establish and defend its freedom. Social power, not technological means of destruction, is the guarantor of human freedom.*⁵⁷

The activity of the theatre is non-confrontational against the Israeli state, except in a few instances on the Freedom Bus tours. Instead it focuses more on influencing its local and global audiences, in Jenin, Palestine and the international audience it encounters on its tours. While other civil resistance movements employs such measures as "boycotts (social, economic, and political), strikes, protests, sit-ins, stay-aways, and other acts of civil disobedience and noncooperation"⁵⁸ the theatre concerns itself with representing and creating a political narrative, through repeated instances of personal identity formation and

identity deployment.

4.3 The battleground of identity

Mer Khamis states in one of the promotion videos for the theatre that "[t]he Israelis have succeeded to destroy our identity, our social structure, political and economical. Our duty as artists is to rebuild or reconstruct this destruction; who we are, where we are going, who we want to be."⁵⁹ Participants in the Freedom Theatre's activities are encourage to explore their identities freely, as Saber Schreim, one of the graduating acting students told me:

inside the acting school, or the theatre, it's different. That is to say for me, it's the only place I can express whatever I want, and I can speak as freely as I want, which is my freedom. You learn a lot of things, you can try a lot of things - without any borders! You can do, like, mad things, good... I don't know, I just - it's your freedom, you are a free man.⁶⁰

Identity, when seen in this way, is what Judith Butler refers to as "a performative accomplishment", that identity is represented through the repetition of certain acts over time, a "becoming" rather than "being".⁶¹ This makes identity into something which can be altered. Only to a certain point, however - as Michael Walzer argues in *Politics and Passion* (2004), identity is not an autonomous creation by a free individual, but social factors weigh heavily in on the shaping of a person's identity.⁶² The personal becomes political, which as Butler suggests means that personal identity forms and shapes our collective socio-political life, but also means that culture has a vast impact on our personal identity formation.⁶³

The mere display of Palestinian identity is a political action, for an individual to stand up and declare himself Palestinian. The Israeli laws during the first Intifada translated Palestinian terrorist activities as "everything from painting slogans and graffiti to singing national songs to making the victory sign, displaying the Palestinian flag, throwing stones, burning tires, demonstrating, and forming political gatherings."⁶⁴ The conflict, and accompanying Israeli occupation, has made the expressing of Palestinian collective and personal identity a political act.

As E.J. Westlake states when writing on the political in performance, it is dependent on the fact that it makes us locate ourselves "on a map of political context and political action".⁶⁵ She argues that both for the spectator and the practitioner (the actor, the director, the stage manager) political change is brought about through personal recognition

of the different relationships of "the character to the actor, the character to the person being represented, the history to the story, the place to the space of performance."⁶⁶ Schreim talked about how the Freedom Theatre had taught him in this way to map his own identity;

You learn how to act, but also you learn about yourself, who you are, what you love, what you want. To have an open mind, to learn, to search, to study, to question, to experience, all of this you learn, you learn what is important, which is for us to know who you are, to know yourself, to listen to yourself (...) You also learn about your culture, about your history, and other histories, other cultures - which is important, because we are a politic theatre, here, which means that you have to know about many things⁶⁷

This approach was enforced by Stanzcak, as he suggests that acting has an immense impact on personal development in relation to politics: "putting yourself in someone else's shoes [means] you also have to deal with the greater issues of that character - you can't just play a person without placing that character in a greater context."⁶⁸ From observing the general atmosphere at the theatre and the highly supportive attitude from other theatre staff towards the young actors and students, I would argue that the theatre's work focuses largely on influencing their pupils. The personal and political development of these young, (mostly) men are at the heart of the Freedom Theatre. The process, before and after joining the theatre, is described in the following manner by Schreim:

I didn't know who I was. I've been a bad person, like I mean a really "bad boy". (...) I don't want to be in school, I don't want to learn, I don't want to do anything. I just want to live, without anything. One of the reasons, why all of this happened to me, was that my father was killed by the Israeli army when I was ten years old. That was the first time for me that... I saw blood, soldiers, dogs, dark night, and all that just had a big effect on my mind (....) And then from that time on I started to be, you know, just someone who doesn't care about anything. (...) for sure, for everyone there is a reason that caused him to do that - you know? Nobody wants to be a bad person. (...) That's the reason why I started to do that. And then after I joined the Freedom Theatre, I learned a lot of things...! Like everything, it changed, upside down. To my life, it just like *(makes flipping motion with his hands)* go upside down. Because I wanted that.⁶⁹

Schreim's story is an example of how the theatre sets out to work with personal identity formation on a political level. He describes himself as someone who was lost and unable to find point to his life. He suffered from trauma and as a consequence he did "bad" things. Through joining the Freedom Theatre, he manages to make sense of his own identity, and to separate the "bad person" from who he wants to be as a performer. More crucially, he can also place himself and his story in relation to other people – he understands that everyone who does bad things has a reason why he or she does them, and that it might not be a voluntary choice. The theatre seems to have taught him to place himself in a political context, to become a political actor, both on the boards of the stage and in "real life".

By in this way attributing his own personal transformation to the Freedom Theatre, Schreim legitimizes the Freedom Theatre's potential to change lives. In the most basic of explanations of the theatre's political work, it is fighting on the battleground of the identity of its participants. They are using what Mary Bernstein in her writing on identity movements calls "identity deployment", that is, to express identity "such that the terrain of conflict becomes the individual person so that the values, categories, and practices of individuals become subject to debate."⁷⁰ She argues further that this makes the expression of identity a political strategy, when displayed at a collective level.⁷¹

Identity however is not only a matter of mental attitude, but is also carried in the body. As theatre demonstrates to us, the body carries another level of social and political significance. As Helen Nicholson writes:

There is an intimacy about bodies, and how people feel about touching each other or using their bodies expressively is fraught with complications, particularly as the body is representative of wider cultural and social values. (...) Just as spoken and written language carries social meanings, so does the body⁷²

When concentrating on how the body is shown in the theatre, I found it revealed an aesthetic that to a Westerner would seem to revolve around the portrayal of violence and pain. It is not uncommon to connect Palestinian identity, and bodies, to violence. Julie Peteet has researched the significance of the body in Palestinian culture, specifically the bodies of young men. To the Palestinian people, she argues, "the battered body, with its bruises and broken limbs, is the symbolic embodiment of a twentieth-century history of subordination and powerlessness - of "what we have to endure" - but also of their determination to resist"⁷³ Through

transforming the bodily harm that particularly Palestinian male youth suffers at the hand of the occupants, into a rite of passage, she argues that Palestinian youth makes meaning out of the occupant's violence.⁷⁴

Although few of the young actors in the Freedom Theatre have personally been subjected to imprisonment or torture, their bodies can instead serve as an form of embodied archive, in Nicholson's words again, through representing and reinterpreting other's stories, which "is not about 'preserving' history, but about making it a part of a dynamic of lived experience."⁷⁵ Physical theatre forms one of the main pillars within the teaching structure of the Freedom Theatre.⁷⁶ It is what comes easiest to performers and audiences alike, in Stanzcak's opinion because of the concrete and relatable nature of physical expression versus verbal or intellectual processes.⁷⁷

The physical expressions that I witnessed in the theatre's productions and workshops, revealed a readiness to embody and express images of violence. I observed that in rehearsal actors would find it difficult to express soft, billowing movements, most often resorting to hard, muscular stances and loud voices, even when doing simple warm-up exercises. On the stage, actors' bodies writhe in imagined pain or discomfort, often in a sharp contrasting lighting to heavy, beating music. In performances such as *Sho Kmen* (2011) and *Fragments of Palestine* (2009) screaming or shaking actors are being showed down, held or pushed as puppets dragged round by a militant puppeteer. In this manner, by framing the violence of the body in the context of a sociopolitical narrative, the young actors by embodying represented violence, are able to access means of forming and sustaining the idea of a collective Palestinian identity.

4.4 Telling a Palestinian story

Mer Khamis stated that a large part of the cultural resistance consists of spreading the Palestinian narrative around the world.⁷⁸ Stanzcak adds that the theatre is also involved in the task of making Palestinians *take back* their narrative, to present a "counter-story" from your own perspective against the people who are telling your story for you.⁷⁹

In the theatrical telling of a story within a certain political narrative, the political lies in representing sentiments that have arisen collectively from a concrete political event and make them present in the minds of the audience. The most recent of the Freedom Theatre's productions is a play sponsored by the French Consulate, and is based on a French novel called *Le Grand Meulnes* by Alain Fournier. The production made by the theatre is a

transposition, and is now called *Lost Land*. It depicts the time before and after "the Nakbah" in 1948, following Mon, an adventurous young man, his best friend Francis, the woman he loves, Neveen and her brother Jamjoon, a freedom fighter. *Lost Land* is simultaneously expressive of a kind of postmemory, the "recollection of an event not personally experienced by socially felt".⁸⁰ The actors play out their roles, acting as *carriers* of personal experience, rather than having lived through these events themselves. Postmemory and the role it plays in Palestinian mythology, functions to legitimize this kind of political representation and remembrance.

Inside the Palestinian postmemory resides two separate approaches to deal with the occupation. Mon is forced to make the choice between remaining with the people he loves, Francis and Neveen, or to join Jamjoon in the fighting. Neveen's approach to the political situation is expressed in her line "just stay by me for now and we'll wait for morning together".⁸¹ Neveen and Francis represent one response to the occupation, that of *sumud*, or steadfastness, a passive resistance, a "refusal to budge".⁸² Jamjoon, on the other hand, represents an active, but violent resistance. Mon decides that it is his fate to join in the fighting, but through his choices, the end of the play offers no other option for the future than death and destruction.

When first watching the play, I would have described it as a sentimental, nostalgic romance, played out against the backdrop of Palestinian history. The beginning half of the play is certainly nostalgic - the stage is illuminated by a rosy light, the costumes and scenery, especially during the party scenes, are sumptuous, full of colour and flashes of gold. But as the play progressed, and I perceived that the stage and the general mood of the play darkened, nostalgia is being taken over by a feeling of melancholia. Melancholia, in contrast to nostalgia or mourning, refuses peaceful closure of the past. In the play Jamjoon expresses this most clearly, when he states that "We're none of us at peace".⁸³ As David Eng and David Kazanjian argues in *Loss: the politics of mourning* (2003), expressing melancholia is a process of keeping the past alive, by actively relating to it in order to gain new insight.⁸⁴

In a melancholic mode, the past does not simply influence the present; the past is being kept alive. As Linda Tabar writes it works in the Jenin community to create solidarity, to tie the community closer together.⁸⁵ Because of it, symbols like a kuffiyeh (a chequered scarf in white and red/black, usually worn by freedom fighters) or a traditional wedding call induced spontaneous applause from the audience during the performance. The

melancholia in *Lost Land* is present in the images the actors present to the spectators, a fleeing group of people, shaking with fear on an old truck or refugees walking slowly in the rain, clutching a few possessions under broken umbrellas, singing mournfully.

However, as all the characters dies by the end of *Lost Land*, the play also demonstrates the risk of a melancholic narrative, when a permanent sense of loss is allowed to influence or replace the present, or even the idea of a future. As Judith Butler phrases it in her afterword to *Loss: the politics of mourning*: "Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community."⁸⁶

4.5 The power of myth

By referring to narrative as history, we are simultaneously implying that narrative is factual truth. Myth, however, tells us of the ever-changing and ever-contested nature of narrative. As Ivan Strenski writes on the subject, myth is full of paradoxes; "Myth is everything and nothing at the same time. It is *the* true story or a false one, revelation or deception, sacred or vulgar, real or fictional, symbol or tool, archetype or stereotype. (...) 'Myth' names a reality that we 'cut out', not one that 'stands out'."⁸⁷ And as he continues that if myth appears as an authentic, coherent story it is because artists and intellectuals has "manufactured" it.⁸⁸

To understand the power of narrative we can look closer at the narrative surrounding a specific issue, for instance the question of Palestinian terrorism. Ilan Pappé argues that the Zionist claims to Palestine are justified by making the Palestinians into "Arabs who terrorised the people who returned to redeem a lost and empty homeland".⁸⁹ Palestinian terrorism thus covers any type of Palestinian politics that challenges Israel's claim to the land, a narrative of Palestinian terror that continues to this day.⁹⁰ The opposing narrative views the Israelis as nationalist, or even colonialist nation, and frames the Palestinian resistance as an anti-colonialist policy.⁹¹ Each of these narratives is being cherished on either side of the conflict, both legitimizing the presence of one, at the expense of the other.⁹² This is a battle of narratives that has a strong cultural presence in it. According to Pappé, Israeli media helped to "invent the mythology of Israeli heroism".⁹³ On a cultural battlefield, the Freedom Theatre is fighting brandishing the opposing narrative, broadcasting to the world that "not all Palestinians are terrorist".⁹⁴

One important part of building a narrative is the use of symbols or symbolic language – for instance, should it be called a "security fence" or a "wall"? Classic symbolism in the Palestinian narrative could include the ocean (or anything to do with it, including boats), which represents the sea the Palestinians cannot freely swim in. It also incorporates stones, from the stones thrown at the occupants, as during the first Intifada, where fighters were called "Children of the Stones"⁹⁵ or any kind of traditionally Palestinian folk customs or clothing, especially the kuffiyeh. The aging olive trees, such as the one that has been planted in the courtyard of the theatre, also carry a special significance as olives are a traditional Palestinian crop that connects Palestinians to their land.⁹⁶

These symbols are carried through in the work of the Freedom Theatre. I witnessed a storytelling performance for children, *Mukthar Abo Deneen Kbar* (Muhktar who has big ears), during my first few days at the theatre. Fidaa Ataya performed hakawati, which is a traditional form of Palestinian storytelling, accompanied by Samer Abu Hantash on oud, a traditional Palestinian instrument. His music completed the scenography, consisting of a small tree, which reminded me of the olive and a cluster of stones. Fidaa was dressed in a traditional gown and embodied different characters with the help of a fez and a kuffiyeh. But Fidaa also tried to make her audience enter into the performance. She asked them questions, made them sing and clap along with the music, and finally everyone got invited down onto the stage for a concluding dance. I find that *Mukthar...* is an example of how the Freedom Theatre uses traditional narrative elements, but through this tries to engage its audience and include them in the making of the performance.

The creation of myth and narrative is instrumental to creating a sense of community. As Smith writes, it is possible to link "sentiment" to myth and symbols, which in turn can unite groups and form the basis for ethnicity.⁹⁷ By ethnic groups, Smith means groups that often are collected in one region, and unlike social groups, fosters a belief in the unique nature of the group, and what links the group together with their past and their future.⁹⁸ Smith argues that ethnicity, in this manner, has been used long before even pre-industrial warfare, to mobilise populations and unite groups or nations.⁹⁹ Although some may suggest that these ethnic divides are often the basis for conflict, Smith suggests that in fact war can be a trigger for increased ethnic grouping, and that it makes "a rather shadowy sense of difference, evidenced in local beliefs, customs and dialects" develop into strict dividing lines between groups.¹⁰⁰ Yet Smith meant that the construction of ethnicity has mainly been used by one crucial institution, the state.¹⁰¹ But what if, as in the Palestinian

case, the state is oppressive and holds no trust with the population? On which basis is then ethnicity going to be created and sustained? Here is where the Freedom Theatre finds its *raison d'être*, as a possible locale to create and support the collective ethnic narrative of the Palestinian people.

4.6 Talk and action - the problems of practice

However, there exists discrepancies between what the Freedom Theatre wishes to accomplish and the practical reality of their work in the community. As has been mentioned earlier, the theatre has had problems with physical attacks. Also as Nabil al-Rae pointed out, there is a danger of setting yourself apart from the tightly knit community of the camp. These issues are part of the theatre's rhetoric. However, while at the theatre I came to question certain of their practices that I regarded as problematic in connection to the theatre's profile, problems which were not as readily mentioned to me by Schreim, Miranda and Stanzcak. To examine the potential hazards of these problems of practice, I will compare them to the research that Sharon Erickson Nepstad has done on nonviolent resistance movements. She argues in *Nonviolent revolution* (2011) that aside from structural conditions and strategic choices (issues which are too large to be expounded on here) there are three major factors that influence the success rate and impact of a civil resistance movement.¹⁰² These factors are: divided leadership and internal conflict within the movement, inability to maintain a nonviolent discipline and negative consequences of international involvement.¹⁰³

4.6.1 Divided leadership and internal conflict

As Dawne Moon points out in her writing on stigmatized groups and their collective narratives of selfhood, movements based on the identity of their participants (identity movements) are balancing all kinds of tensions within the group when trying to represent the experiences and goals of all the members within the movement. If the movement is long-lived, this is one of the key reasons why the group most likely will eventually divide itself.¹⁰⁴ Mary Bernstein also points out that if a group is facing strong opposition and suffers negative interactions with the community this will result in dissension and factionalization.¹⁰⁵

The theatre is facing strong prejudices against it in the local community. Schreim commented in his interview both on his own reluctance to join the theatre based on

what he had been told about it, and the negative judgment that he in turn receives from "people in normal life".¹⁰⁶ This strong opposition to the theatre showed itself also, as was mentioned previously in this text, that the theatre has during its time been attacked with stones and Molotov cocktails.¹⁰⁷

In my observations of the theatre it seemed that the theatre's managers had quite diverging opinions of what the main focus of the theatre should be. While Stanzcak was the only one who spoke to me about the theatres health benefits, most of the students and teachers at the acting school mainly spoke of artistic quality and resistance. These two seemingly quite contrasting objectives, have occurred and reoccurred in the theatre's narrative, stated in its annual reports (released until 2011). Here the goals change over time from "Reinstate the confidence in the potential of social and collective work."¹⁰⁸ to "Demonstrate a model of artistic excellence in theatre and the arts."¹⁰⁹ and "Raise the quality of performing arts and cinema in the area."¹¹⁰

The identity of the theatre is all at once one of social work, artistic work and resistance. However, if we recollect the importance of narrative and mythology to the theatre's practice, it offers up some interesting defence for the theatre's split vision. As John Hutchinson argues in his writing on warfare and the power of memory, the past has no own power over the present, rather recollection serves as a "plasticine" that can be moulded into whatever may serve the present at the moment.¹¹¹ Indeed memory and myth, we learn from Robert Bowker, are always contested "within the societies from which they originate."¹¹² So the different narratives might be just versions of the same narrative, serving the same purpose, but differing on the exact "how" this should be accomplished. Organisations such as these, which are based in a large degree on identity politics and identity development, are prone to conflict as the projects people are working on are not just work, but essentially defining themselves as people.

4.6.2 Inability to maintain nonviolent discipline

Traditionally, nonviolent action has been used both by pacifists and non-pacifists who use nonviolence for strategic reasons.¹¹³ Within the Freedom Theatre, there is a recurring notion that using the nonviolence of play will both allow participants to learn new practices and insights which might be applied to their everyday realities and to diffuse their anger and so heal possible traumas.¹¹⁴ However, firstly one might question the possibility that a person behaving in one way in one particular space, will be able to transfer those habits into another

space, especially if that space is significantly different than the first. Secondly the idea that dramatic enactment of violence can stop people behaving violently "in real life" can very much be put into question, as Emine Fisek has points out in her reading of the film *Arna's Children*.

In the film, a scene is shown where the children are asked to punch Arna in the belly, to express their anger over their houses being bombed by the Israeli army. As Fisek writes; "the theoretical expectation that underlies theatrical self-expression is that in having punched Arna in the belly, the children will have experienced release and thus refrained from punching the far-less-forgiving body of the Israeli army."¹¹⁵ However as she makes clear, the expressing of violence might be just as much a recognition and support for violence, as it might diffuse it, which makes the link between art and violence much less clear-cut.¹¹⁶ Thus theatre, instead of being a substitute to violence, becomes a way to recycle the experience of violence in other, more abstract forms.¹¹⁷ The theatre, while not practicing violence has no actual nonviolence profile. Not encouraging the use of violence amongst their students, it will not discourage it either. Instead, the theatre wants its participants to "make their minds up for themselves".¹¹⁸ My observation of the violent aesthetic of the theatre and the embodiment of violence by the actors, as discussed earlier in this essay, additionally makes the case that the Freedom Theatre, far from shying away from or diffusing the concept of violence and trauma, embodies and carries it through as a part of the Palestinian narrative.

I would even suggest the possibility that, as Stanzcak mentions that the work in the theatre is about fostering a culture of cooperation and communication, and strengthening the minds of its young participants, when combined with the theatre's attempt to take a "neutral" stand on violence, the work of the theatre could be argued to eventually produce individuals who have capacity to collaborate well, who possess mental strength, and the readiness to take up arms - in short, individuals with a good soldier mentality. Of course I am here pushing my perception of the discourse of the theatre to its very extremes. Yet the co-existence of a "restorative" theatre practice and a policy that condones violence is problematic and possibly mutually exclusive. As James Thompson stresses when writing on the possibly implications for theatre and drama practitioners working in conflict and war situations;

It is very hard to be creating a theatre for peace, when the language of this form of community theatre is strewn with words that imply violent resistance - struggle, fight, oppressed, liberate, resist. However much we might claim in the comfort of a non-war situation that these words could be referring to non-violence, when uttered in a war, they immediately refer to the taking up of arms.¹¹⁹

When the Freedom Theatre is referred to as a political theatre, a theatre of resistance, and when using the type of discourse mentioned by Thompson above, it enters into the conflict. This means that it also "can easily slip into a theatre that sustains armed struggle and promotes violent resistance" - something that could of course be intentional.¹²⁰ As the Freedom Theatre exists in a society where violence, both from outside and inside the community, is common, it is unlikely that violence would not feature in their work somehow. But as Thompson so correctly points out, practitioners within a resisting theatre with the possible intention of supporting armed violence (and may I add, the people that write about them) must also accept the possible fallout of that discourse.¹²¹

4.6.3 Negative effects of international involvement

Sharon Erickson Nepstad points out that although international presence might not be wholly detrimental to a resistance movement, internationals should not gain "inappropriate levels of power and influence", and even though their assistance might be beneficiary in small doses, local resisters must possess the greatest determining power.¹²² International involvement at the Freedom Theatre takes place on many levels. Many of the staff have international backgrounds, including the managing director (Jonatan Stanzcak, Sweden), the communications officer (Johanna Wallin, Sweden), the acting school director (Micaela Miranda, Portugal) and almost all of the production directors to the present date (excluding artistic directors Nabil al-Rae and Juliano Mer Khamis).

The theatre is dependent on foreign endowments in order to survive as a working theatre. Also, as British director Di Trevis points out; "the whole model of the theatre, the whole auditorium, the set-up, the technical team, everything, it's a totally foreign import".¹²³ I would agree with this statement, based on my observations of the rehearsal process and the students' training, both of which are very much constructed on a Western basis, using exercises and warm-ups that are standard on any American or European stage. One could argue, as many others have, that the very concept of individual freedom as

presented by the theatre is a purely Western concept, which is incompatible with the local society. Jonatan Stanczak values the different background of staff in the theatre, as it breaks the isolation of Palestine from the rest of the world.¹²⁴ However as he himself has international background, he wouldn't be likely to deny his own right to remain at the theatre.

When it comes to the problem of accepting foreign aid, Stanczak meant that it in many ways crippled the theatre, as international involvement meant that the theatre did not appear as a part of an indigenous civil society, but in many ways is judged like just another NGO.¹²⁵ Still, the structure of the theatre is based on routines laid out by Stanczak and the international teachers and expertise who come to teach the acting students, teachers and stage managers - routines which have not yet become self-generating and that Stanczak feels he has to remain at the theatre to uphold.¹²⁶

The theatre exists in a paradox - it would not survive without international funds, professional know-how and volunteers offering their services. At the same time it struggles to balance international involvement with its desire to be seen as a part of the local community. Nevertheless, both protest movements and applied theatre projects are likely to have international involvement, both in funding and manpower.¹²⁷ In addition, the theatre through welcoming international visitors, teachers and journalists has become a way for internationals to gain access to Jenin, and brings tourists to an area which have little else to offer a visitor. The theatre bridges the gulf between Palestine and the outside world, and lets its actors and students communicate with the outside, which gives them opportunity to grow and develop. Yet international involvement at the Freedom Theatre remains something they will have to continue to balance carefully, in order for it not to engulf the practice that it carries out in the local community.

4.7 Re-imagining tradition

By examining the presence of Nepstad's three detrimental factors, we can see that all are in some ways present in the work of the Freedom Theatre. The internal narrative is confused and often questioned, the nonviolent discipline can be seriously questioned and heavy international involvement remains a risk. As if these problems were not enough, Nepstad also references Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephen's study on the success of nonviolent campaigns, where they argue that they are only successful in achieving their goals if they attract a high number of participants.¹²⁸ This suggests that popular support for the theatre, both in their local and global audiences, is extremely important for their survival.

The Freedom Theatre is attempting to create a new kind of nonviolent resistance movement, what they refer to as cultural resistance. By working with methods of narrative and identity, the Freedom Theatre's potential political impact is mainly one of unifying and strengthening the Palestinian narrative and the identity of the Palestinian people, through breaking oppressive structures and freeing minds. However they are also facing problems that in many ways hinder their political aspirations to evolve into a true capacity for political influence, much the same kind of problems that research on nonviolent resistance movements has uncovered. The high level of international involvement, together with a questionable stand on nonviolence and division within the movement itself, makes the work of the Freedom Theatre a strenuous activity. The theatre struggles to provide hope and strength to the Palestinian people, to unite them as a community.

I found it essential when analysing their political work, to categorize their work as a *struggle*. Their political activity is not constant, but exists in an almost organic shape of flux and fluidity, which to me often appeared haphazard or ad-hoc. This was, as I later discovered because of a diversion of interests, and between the rhetoric of the practitioners and what they were accomplishing. The theatre is not only struggling with the occupation on a structural level – the struggle is mirrored down from great political concepts to the struggle within the individual. But in the struggle it is also possible to see their most vital strength. The Freedom Theatre is not a static institution where traditions or culture is presented and maintained within a rigid structure. Static cultures have stopped evolving, and so they are also dead. A culture which is able to support successful resistance is a culture that is changing and transforming, allowing the individuals in it to grow, mature, learn and adapt. The Freedom Theatre has a strong political role in that it serves as both as a vessel for tradition, and a place where it can be re-imagined. Whether its struggle to exist will prove too much in the end, only time will tell.

5. Conclusion

I think I'd like to do work that cheers the Palestinians up in their struggle.
(*chuckles*) Makes them feel that the struggle might be worth it. That's what I want.
And I can't actually go and fight, but, it seems to me that this theatre held out, or holds out the hope that you can fight on a level where I can contribute.¹²⁹

In the battle of cultures that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Freedom Theatre uses methods of displaying, exploring and so creating Palestinian identity, which on a personal and on a collective level, aims to form resistant and political individuals. This validates the transformational potential of the theatre's work, and reinforces the idea of a collective Palestinian identity. The theatre also transforms the idea of cultural resistance into theatrical productions through using theatre's possibility to access, represent and form myth and political narrative. Their potential political capacity lies in their role of strengthening and uniting the Palestinian people, through using identity and narrative formation. Like Trevis phrases it in the quote above, the work is about making the Palestinians feel that "the struggle might be worth it", and so keep on resisting. However the theatre also suffers problems, much alike those experienced by other nonviolent resistance movements. These problems manifest themselves in internal divides, a pronounced acceptance for violence and a risk for having too high a level of international involvement. The theatre is however constantly in motion, changing and adapting to its surroundings, which is also one of its most vital strengths, and provides some hope for the future of the theatre. By studying the methods and practices of the Freedom Theatre, this study hopes to contribute to a further understanding of conflict, and all spaces and places where it is enacted.

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- ⁷ *Ibid.* pp. xiii-xiv
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- ⁹ Westlake, E.J. "Mapping Political Performances: A Note on the Structure of the Anthology" in (2009) *Political Performances: Theory and Practice*, edited by Susan C. Haedicke, Deirdre Heddon, Avraham Oz, E.J. Westlake, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi), p. 7
- ¹⁰ Nielsen and Jørgensen (2004) p. 8
- ¹¹ Nicholson, H. (2005) *Applied drama: The Gift of Theatre* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 24
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8
- ¹⁵ See especially (1998) *Theatre Matters: Performance and Culture on the World Stage*, edited by Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
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- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 66
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 68
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 79
- ³² Ibid., p. 113
- ³³ UNRWA, *Where we work. Camp Profiles: Jenin*.
- ³⁴ Rees, M., Ghosh, A., Hamad, J. and Klein, A. (2002) "Untangling Jenin's tale", in *Time*, 159(19). p. 40
- ³⁵ al-Rae, N. artistic director. Informal talk, Freedom Theatre, Jenin. Recorded in field journal 12 December 2013
- ³⁶ Stanzcak, J. managing director. Personal interview, Freedom Theatre, Jenin. 3 November 2013. Quote in original: "konventionell teater där vi helt enkelt ehm, bygger in sociopolitiska ehm, verkligheten här i föreställningen **(mm)** antingen via unika berättelser som vi samlar eh, från, samhället, eller det vi framförallt gör är det att vi anpassar, utvecklar internationellt erkända föreställningar till den rådande socioekonomiska verkligheten här" (transcript, p. 6)
- ³⁷ Rowe, N. (2007) *Playing the Other: dramatizing personal narratives in playback theatre* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers), p. 12
- ³⁸ Stanzcak, J. interview.
- ³⁹ Informant 1, actor and acting school student. Informal talk with the author, Jenin. Recorded in field journal 2 December 2013 [my cursivation]
- ⁴⁰ Trevis, D. British director, *Lost Land*. Personal interview, Freedom Theatre, Jenin. 27 November 2013
- ⁴¹ Miranda, M. movement teacher, director and acting school director. Skype interview by the author, 5 January 2014
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Stanzcak, interview. Quote in original: "det är ju väldigt känsligt, för det första för en tjej att, att gå in i en teaterverksamhet, en teaterutbildning som är kontroversiell i sig, **(mm)** någonting främmande, okänt... någonting, vad är referensen till teater i samhället? Det är TV. **(mm)** Vad finns det på TV, vad är referensen till TV; det är egyptisk-turkisk actionfilm, och det är Hollywood semi-pornografiskt, liksom, material. **(mm)** Vem vill skicka ens dotter för att göra det? Utöver det teater, perspektivet av teater i sig självt är någonting för barn **(mm mm)** så det är ingenting som vuxna sysslar med det" (transcript, p. 15)
- ⁴⁵ *The Freedom Theatre, Jenin, West Bank, Palestine*, Ben Aylsworth, *Youtube* (online), 10 October 2008.
- ⁴⁶ Mee, E.B. (2011), p. 10
- ⁴⁷ Zakaria Zubeidi cited in Horwitz, S. (2012) "Working Against the Clampdown" in *American Theatre*, 29(10), p. 40
- ⁴⁸ Stanzcak, J. interview.
- ⁴⁹ *Palestine for Dummies - Juliano Mer-Khamis (ENG)*, palestinefordummies, *Youtube* (online), 7 April 2011.
- ⁵⁰ Chenoweth, E. and Stephan, M.J. (2011) *Why civil resistance works: the strategic logic of nonviolent conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 141
- ⁵¹ al-Hout, S. (2011) *My life in the PLO: the inside story of the Palestinian struggle* (London: Pluto), p. 180
- ⁵² referenced in Nicholson, 2005, p. 27
- ⁵³ *The Freedom Theatre attacked.mov*, Jonatan Stanzcak, *Youtube* (online), 29 July 2011.
- ⁵⁴ Miranda, interview. Quote in original: "sometimes you just need to, to hold everyone together, you just have to... to hold on sometimes, or else it will just - everything will just go down in one second. **(yeah, yeah)** (...) It's, it's not so easy to live here. **(no. laughs)** it's dangerous times... you know, sometimes, we have, some days ago, a week ago or something, we had a friend calling us, Zakaria I don't know if you know him **(yeah, yeah)** he.. yeah - he he called us and he said don't go to the theatre from the front door there's shooting going on, you have to go from the other side, **(oh!)** you know it's like this **(yeah, yeah)** It's eh, eh... disturbing, you need concentration, you need to, you know **(mm mm)** Art, it's a basic need, but we don't see it as a basic need **(mm)** and if, you know, your life is in danger, you cannot do art" (transcript, p. 4-5)
- ⁵⁵ Pallister-Wilkins, P. (2011) "The Separation Wall: a symbol of power or a site of resistance?", in *Antipode*, 43(5) p. 1858
- ⁵⁶ Tabar, L. (2007) "Memory, agency, counter-narrative: testimonies from Jenin refugee camp" in *Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural and Media Studies*, 21(1), p. 7
- ⁵⁷ Sharp, G. (1990) *Civilian-based defence: a post-military weapons system* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 33
- ⁵⁸ Sharp, G. (1973) cited in Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) p. 12

⁵⁹ *The Jenin Freedom Theatre Today!*, Jen Marlowe/Friends of the Freedom Theatre in NYC, *Youtube* (online), 11 November 2010.

⁶⁰ Schreim, S. acting school student. Personal interview, Freedom Theatre, Jenin. 2 December 2013. Quote in original: "inside, the acting school, or the theatre, it's difference, which is for me, it's the only place I can express about whatever I want, and I can speak as freely as I can – you know which, it's my freedom. You know which is like, you learn a lot of thing, which is you can try a lot of thing – like, without any borders! **(mm)** You know? You canna do, like madness thing, good – I don't know, **(mm)** I just, it's your freedom, you are free man." (transcript, p. 3)

⁶¹ Butler, J. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", in (1990) *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), p. 271

⁶² Walzer, M. (2004) *Politics and passion: toward a more egalitarian liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University), p. x

⁶³ Butler, J. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", in (1990) *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), p. 273

⁶⁴ Chenoweth and Stephan, p. 121

⁶⁵ Westlake, p. 8

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Schreim, S, interview. Quote in original: "you learn how to act, also you learn about... yourself, **(mm)** who you are, what you love, what you want... to have a open mind, to learn, you know, **(yeah)** to search, to study, to question, to... to... experience, you know, all this kind of thing you learn, you know which is the important thing, like for us, like to know who you are, to know yourself, to listen to yourself, (...) Which is you, you, you learn also about your culture, about your history, like, other histories, other cultures, **(mm mm)** you know, which is the important, which is like, because we are a politic theatre, here, which is you have to know many thing, you know?" (transcript, p. 4)

⁶⁸ Stanzcak, interview. Quote in original: "genom att sätta sig i någons roll **(mm)** så måste man... också hantera den rollens större frågor, det det går inte bara att spela någon och tro att man kan spela en person utan att försöka sätta sig i den karaktärens större kontext" (transcript, p. 4)

⁶⁹ Schreim, interview. Quote in original: "I don't know who am I, actually **(yeah)**. I've been a bad person, like I mean I've been really – bad boy. (...) I don't want to be in the school, I don't want to learn, I don't want to do anything. You know I just I want to live, without anything – you know? **(mm)** And eh... yeah, which is, it was a reason, why all this kind of thing it happened to me, you know **(mm mm)** when, my father he's killed by the Israeli army when I've been like ten years old. Which is the first time for me it was... I saw blood, soldiers, dogs, dark night, all this kind of thing just it, it... it's give big effect, to my mind **(yeah, yeah)** you know? (...) And then from that time I start to be... **(mm)** you know, just – one who don't care about anything, you know? (...) You know, because I, for sure there is reason for everyone it led him to do that – you know. There is no-one he want to be a bad person. (...) And eh... Yeah! Yeah. That's why I like, I start to, do that. And then after that when I joined the Freedom Theatre I learn a lot of thing...! **(mm)** Like everything it change upside down. **(yeah)** To my life it just like (*makes flipping motion with his hands*) go upside down. Yeah. **(yeah. definitely)** Because I want that. Yeah." (transcript, p. 4-5)

⁷⁰ Bernstein, M. (1997) "Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement" in *American journal of sociology*, 103(3), pp. 537-8

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 535

⁷² Nicholson (2005) p. 59

⁷³ Peteet, J. "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in Palestinian Intifada: A Cultural Politics of Violence" in (2011) *Arab Youth: social mobilisation in times of risk*, edited by Samir Khalaf and Roseanne Saad Khalaf, (London: Saqi) p. 207

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 213

⁷⁵ Nicholson (2005) p. 105

⁷⁶ Miranda, interview

⁷⁷ Stanzcak, interview.

⁷⁸ al-Yamani, H. and Abusrour, A. (2012) "Juliano Khamis: martyr of freedom and culture" in *Research in Drama Education*, 17(1), p. 74

⁷⁹ Stanzcak, interview.

⁸⁰ Larkin, C. "Between Silences and Screams: The Lebanese Postmemory Experience" in (2011) *Arab Youth: social mobilisation in times of risk*, edited by Samir Khalaf and Roseanne Saad Khalaf, (London: Saqi) pp. 128-9

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- ⁸¹ *Lost Land*. Adapted by Nigel Gearing and Nabil al-Rae. Dir. Di Trevis. Freedom Theatre, Jenin. 21 November 2013. Performance.
- ⁸² Harms, G. with Ferry, T.M. (2008) *The Palestine-Israel conflict: a basic introduction*, 2nd edition. (London: Pluto Press), p. 143
- ⁸³ *Lost Land*. Adapted by Nigel Gearing and Nabil al-Rae. Dir. Di Trevis. Freedom Theatre, Jenin. 21 November 2013. Performance.
- ⁸⁴ Eng, D.L. and Kazanjian, D. "Mourning Remains", in (2003) *Loss: the politics of mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 4
- ⁸⁵ Tabar, L. (2007), p. 12
- ⁸⁶ Butler, J. "After Loss, What Then?" in (2003) *Loss: the politics of mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 468
- ⁸⁷ Strenski, Ivan (1987) *Four theories of myth in twentieth-century history: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss and Malinowski* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press), p. 1
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1-2
- ⁸⁹ Pappe, I. (2009) "De-terrorising the Palestinian national struggle: the roadmap to peace" in *Critical studies on terrorism*, 2(2), pp.130-1
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 130
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 139
- ⁹⁴ *The Freedom Theatre, Jenin, West Bank, Palestine*, Ben Aylsworth, *Youtube* (online), 10 October 2008.
- ⁹⁵ Harms, G. with Ferry, T.M. (2008), p. 144
- ⁹⁶ Jawad, R. (2011) "Staging Resistance in Bil'in: Performance of Violence in a Palestinian Village", in *TDR: The Drama Review*, 55(4), p. 133
- ⁹⁷ Smith, A.D. (1981) *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 73
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74-6
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77
- ¹⁰² Nepstad, S.E. (2011) *Nonviolent revolutions: civil resistance in the late 20th century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 6-7
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 131-5
- ¹⁰⁴ Moon, D. (2012) "Who Am I and Who Are We? Conflicting Narratives of Collective Selfhood in Stigmatized Groups" in *American journal of sociology*, 117(5), p. 1337
- ¹⁰⁵ Bernstein (1997) p. 541
- ¹⁰⁶ Schreim, interview
- ¹⁰⁷ Khalidi, I., Mee, E.B. and Wallace, N. (2012) "Creation under occupation" in *American Theatre*, 29(2), p. 28
- ¹⁰⁸ Freedom Theatre, 'Annual report' (2007), p. 6
- ¹⁰⁹ Freedom Theatre, 'Annual report' (2008), p. 7
- ¹¹⁰ Freedom Theatre, 'Annual report' (2010), p. 7
- ¹¹¹ Hutchinson, J. "Warfare, Remembrance and National Identity" in (2007) *Nationalism and ethnosymbolism: history, culture and ethnicity in the formation of nations*, edited by Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 48
- ¹¹² Bowker (2003) p. 13
- ¹¹³ Nepstad, S.E. and Kurtz, L.R. "Introduction" in (2012) *Nonviolent conflict and civil resistance*, edited by Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Lester R. Kurtz (Bingley: Emerald), p. xii
- ¹¹⁴ Stanczak, interview
- ¹¹⁵ Fisek, p. 110
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114
- ¹¹⁸ Stanczak, interview. Quote in original: "vi säger inte till någon att det är rätt eller fel, vi gör inte, vi vill inte ta de ställningstagandena, vare sig på den nivån eller på någon annan nivå, om, om vad man ska tycka eller tänka, utan det handlar om att folk själva ska komma fram till..." (transcript, p. 13)
- ¹¹⁹ Thompson, J. (2002) "Ugly, Unglamorous and Dirty: theatre of relief/reconciliation/liberation in places of war" in *Research in Drama Education* 7(1), p. 112
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Nepstad (2011) p. 135

¹²³ Trevis, D, interview. Quote in original: "and the whole model of the theatre, the whole auditorium, the set-up, the technical team, everything, is on a totally... it's a totally foreign import" (transcript, p. 6)

¹²⁴ Stanzcak, interview

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Fox, R.G. and Starn, O. "Introduction" in (1997) *Between Resistance and Revolution. Cultural Politics and Social Protest*, edited by Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn. (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press), p. 11; Nicholson (2005) p. 28

¹²⁸ Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) p. 11

¹²⁹ Trevis, D. Interview. Quote in original: "basically, I think I'd like to do work that cheers the Palestinians up in their struggle. *(both chuckle)* Makes them feel that the struggle might be worth it. **(mm)** That's what I want. And I can't actually go and fight, you know, **(mm)** but, it seems to me that this theatre held out, or holds out the hope that you can fight on a level where I can contribute." (transcript, p. 10)

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Appendix - the Patrice Pavis questionnaire

from "The Patrice Pavis Questionnaire" in (2001) *Performance Analysis*, edited by Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 230-32

1. *General discussion of performance*

- (a) what holds elements of performance together?
- (b) relationship between systems of staging
- (c) coherence or incoherence?
- (d) aesthetic principles of the production
- (e) what do you find disturbing about the production; strong moments or weak, boring moments?

2. *Scenography*

- (a) spatial forms: urban, architectural, scenic, gestural, etc.
- (b) relationship between audience space and acting space
- (c) system of colours and their connotations
- (d) principles of organization of space
 - (i) relationship between off-stage and on-stage
 - (ii) links between space utilized and fiction of the staged dramatic text

3. *Lighting system*

4. *Stage properties type, function, relationship to space and actors' bodies*

5. *Costumes how they work; relationship to actors' bodies*

6. *Actors' performances*

- (a) individual or conventional style of acting?
- (b) relation between actor and group
- (c) relationship between text and body, between actor and role
- (d) quality of gestures and mime
- (e) quality of voices
- (f) how dialogues develop

7. *Function of music and sound effects*

8. *Pace of performance*

- (a) overall pace
- (b) pace of certain signifying systems
- (c) steady or broken pace?

9. *Interpretation of story-line in performance*

- (a) what story is being told?

- (b) what kind of dramaturgical choices have been made?
- (c) what are ambiguities in performance and what are points of explanation?
- (d) how is plot structured?
- (e) how is story constructed by actors and staging?
- (f) what is genre of dramatic text?

10. Text in performance

- (a) main features of translation
- (b) what role is given to dramatic text in production?
- (c) relationship between text and image

11. Audience

- (a) where does performance take place?
- (b) what expectations did you have of performance?
- (c) how did audience react?
- (d) role of spectator in production of meaning

12. How to notate (photograph and film) this production

- (a) how to notate performance technically
- (b) which images have you retained?

13. What cannot be put into signs

- (a) what did not make sense in your interpretation of the production?
- (b) what was not reducible to signs and meaning (and why)?

14.

- (a) are there any special problems that need examining?
- (b) any comments, suggestions for further categories for the questionnaire and the production