



Education through Expression: Supporting Youth Performance as a Tool for Coexistence Building in East Jerusalem

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Abstract

The Israel/Palestine conflict has a way of repeating itself; a way of crisscrossing in and out of the headlines of mainstream international media, often remaining as a spotlight to ongoing problems in the Middle East more broadly. Peace talks have started and ended and begun again, but little progress is made when both sides claim stake to the land. There is a growing roar from civil society on both sides that changes must be made, while the changes may be different they stem from the hope for safety and freedom. These people are split both mentally and physically by a wall but there is hope yet. Violence between Israelis and Palestinians which seem to dominate the discussion is not the only story to be told, there is a story of hope, a story of the arts being used as a tool for education and for self-expression. This hope is being provided by arts programming that allows for Israeli and Palestinian youths to create works together, which allows them to have an outlet for their emotions and provides them with a non-violent path to resistance. By highlighting these stories and by creating a new performance based- alternative to this conflict with an original peace and implantation plan, perhaps a new door can be opened on a path towards coexistence and ultimately peace.

Main Arguments

“They are the awakening of the Arab nation and the latent effort of the Jews to reconstitute on a very large scale the ancient Kingdom of Israel. Both of these movements are destined to fight each other continually until one of them wins. The fate of the entire world will depend on the final result of the struggle between these two peoples representing two contrary principles.”
-Naguib Azoury, 1905

What is the Problem?

Walls, fences, checkpoints, guards and what seems to be the use of military or violent protest on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the Israel/Palestine conflict, is the world which more than one generation of children and young adults have grown up surrounded by. A political struggle over the right to land and at its core the right for recognition as a state. One can consider a possible shift from a conflict that started as a political conflict to one that is ideological, one where religion is at its core. While the conflict is shifting, the tactics of warfare and the guise of security have not changed much. Israel due to its recognition in the world political arena has strength and by having a conscripted army where many young Israelis spend two to three years of their life, they have a constant stream of able-bodied youth fighting a battle that has existed longer then they have been alive. One wonders what these youths think and feel about this ongoing conflict they have become a part of. In relation to Palestine, while there has been a steady increase of global recognition to the plight of its people and what many call an Israeli occupation, life is uncertain and violence surrounds the children, again here there is a steady stream of able-bodied young adults who are yearning for freedom, who too are fighting a battle that has lasted many years longer than they have been alive. Oddly there are periods of time where life seems normal, if you are to visit Israel you will barely notice the physical impact of this conflict but its impact has been imprinted in the hearts and minds of the people and its physical effects are seen on the other side of the wall. A push towards an understanding of one another and of coexistence on the level of civil society needs to take place in order to help the youth of both sides who may be yearning for freedom and hope but are instead being faced with the prospect of death.

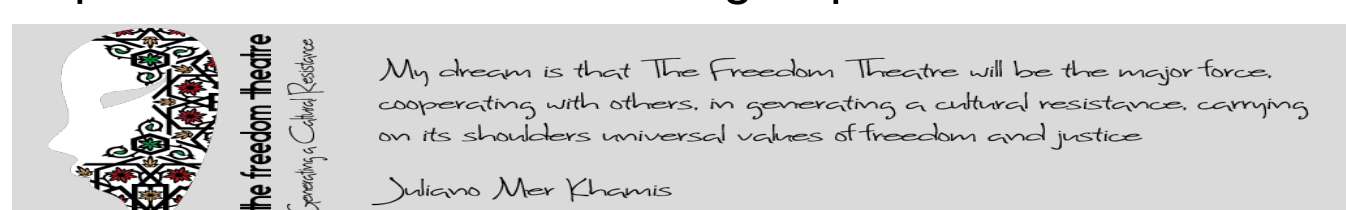
Conflict Transformation Through Theatre Circus Galilee



The circus works with children from the northern region of Israel, the Galilee, between the ages of 6-20. The circus allows participants to develop mutual trust. They create circus performances together and they have appeared in Israel and abroad. (Galilee Foundation) Since this region of Israel is filled with ancient history; this type of team work is used as an important model for understanding how to live, play and work together, where shared history has occurred. This organization’s catch net of children appear to be mostly in the northern region which could limit overall participation. As well this art form relies heavily on non-verbal performance; whereas sometimes oral communication could be helpful in conflict transformation

Freedom Theatre Of Jenin

The Freedom Theatre has many different facets to their programs, such as acting, stage management, multimedia art, and community outreach. Through these multiple avenues they are able to reach many different populations within what they consider to be oppressed Palestinian. In 2014 when the most recent report was published they shared the theatre pieces that were performed that year, as well as their various other projects. (Freedom Theatre, 2015) While this theatre company seeks to bring peace to the region they focus on empowering Palestinian youth through words not violence; not on multi-culture immersion or shared experiences between the two groups.



Freedomtheatre.org

Conclusion

When studying the Israeli/Palestinian conflict it is important to look at events that took place prior to the formal creation and implementation of the State of Israel in May of 1948. Prior to World War II, the situation for the Jews of Europe and Russia was oppression whether due to the threat of physical violence or economic stability, this drove them towards the creation of Zionism in the late 1800s and a drive to find a new home that could be developed to meet the needs of this population. Ultimately a few locations were suggested but the biblical land of Jerusalem was the popular choice. Some groups that emerged in the early to mid-1900s suggested taking the region by force while others suggested a more diplomatic approach that could lead to a sense of neighborliness and teamwork with the Arabs in the region. Leading up to the creation of the state of Israel there was violence on the part of the Jewish settlers perpetrated against the Arab population in the region and today this sense of violence both at the government and individual level still exist. Since the creation of the state there has been a shift; the Jews of Europe who were once oppressed peoples have turned into the oppressor and there has been a cycle of violence that has continually occurred with flare-ups most recently a series of stabbings that have been perpetrated by the Palestinians against the Israelis. In this way the cycle has continued but by addressing this conflict by using Augusto Boal’s “Theatre of the Oppressed”, perhaps a new light will shine from this dark place.

Pathway through Theatre

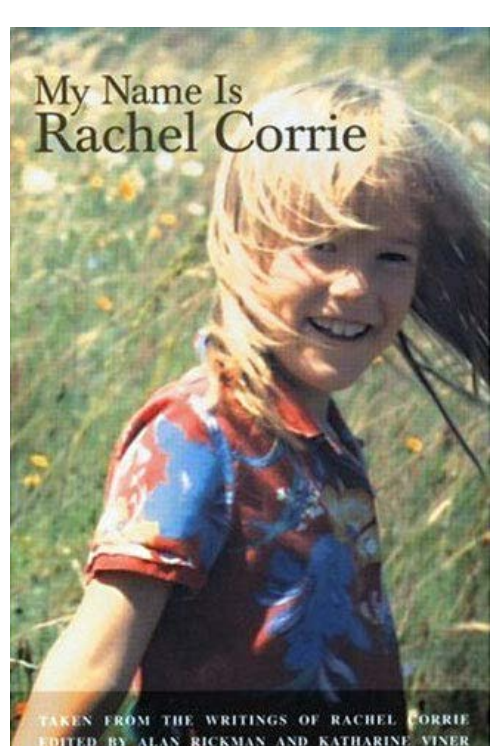
Theatre is a tool often used in conflict zones, in order to give the oppressed, the underdogs, a voice in the case of this conflict it is extremely important that both parties come together to hear each others voices. Since often during conflict negotiation the Holy City specifically the site of al-Aqsa Mosque and the Western Wall are purposely left on the sidelines with this plan they become the center of attention. The author of this thesis will write a short performance piece that could be performed into order to open a dialogue based on the shared story of Abraham; which is found in all three of the major faiths involved in the conflict. After the main performance a group will be created to help young adults and teenagers create their own pieces about the conflict in a safe space environment. This plan will allow for participants between the ages of 10-21 from across Israel/Palestine and will use both verbal and non-verbal communication techniques. It hopes to contain multiple outreach points throughout the state to create a national program that can gain further publicity. In this way by having a cross-cultural experience the youth participants can become the generation that lays down their weapons and crosses the conflict line to join hands and fight for peace.

Key Questions

- 1) What are the roots of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict?
- 2) What is conflict transformation and coexistence building?
- 3) What role does theatre play in conflict zones?
- 4) What is the western perspective of the conflict through performance
- 5) What role can or youth performance play in creating an environment of coexistence in East Jerusalem?



What Dreams are Made of! SUNY Purchase 2012 (Photo by Jillian Herman taken from Facebook)



Cover for the play My Name is Rachel Corrie

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