



rather limited, except for the few who had lived abroad and had the chance of becoming informed about the development of theater in other countries...

On the other hand, the occupation undermined a whole series of artistic and cultural experiments, including the theater, during the eighties. Under occupation and the increasing process of capitalization in the occupied territories, more and more citizens were burdened with concerns about the difficulties of everyday life and making a living. This led to members of the theatrical troupes being preoccupied with their daily problems. Consequently, the surplus time and energy that could have been invested in cultural life contracted.

At the beginning, most of the participants in theater activities were students or new graduates who were severely affected by the economic and social conditions. As they got more involved in family life with all its requirements, many of them gave up the theater and some even left the country; the absence of professionalism also contributed to this. Waves of theater activists succeeded one another, as students and new graduates came and went. While the initial activists came at the time of the revolutionary tide, later ones came at a time when the phenomenon of bureaucratic deviation had set in, in the early eighties.

Then the theater faced the problem of the audience who began to avoid the theater and concentrate on their own lives. People were exhausted by the search for work and subsistence in the day, and were watching television in the evening. As a way out of this impasse, a number of theater artists decided to address youth and school children, attempting to form a mass base with the perspective that real Palestinian theater must be promoted by the rising generation. Theater groups concentrated their attention on children's theater and the schools. Over the last ten years, there have been 54 full theatrical performances shown to children.

These shows were essentially based on legends and often overloaded with social and political content. Now, with Palestinian children having acquired a greater life experience and deeper dimension of thought, we hesitate a lot when choosing the story for a children's play. The children have started demanding more; they are asking for something beyond the legend and the social themes; they insist on getting revolutionary plays which deal with the real situation of occupied Palestine, and correspond to the revolutionary tide that has penetrated their very beings.

Meanwhile, other plays continue to depict the repression practiced by the enemy against the cultural movement in the occupied territories. The theater has played a significant role in revolutionizing the Palestinian masses. The plays which took the lead are those which called for shaking off slumber and giving up waiting for the unknown savior who might never come. One such play, «Waiting for Faraj» (*faraj* means relief), was presented by the popular group *Sanabel*. It reviewed the situation of the Palestinian people at that time, calling on everyone to rise and take action.

The play, «Who is the Barren Woman?», identified surrender with death, since capitulation means sterility... Birth never comes unless there is revolution and liberation.

«Caligola», by the Artistic Theater Workshop, clearly speaks out against the fear of confrontation, since fear never protects against death; life is based on challenging injustice and overthrowing the oppressor.

«Two Aliens», by the troupe of Theatrical Arts, is a condemnation of emigration from the homeland.

«Kafar Shamma», presented by the Hakawati Theater, deals with the tragedy of the Palestinian people who are scattered all over the world because of the first disaster (1948).

«The Ignitors», presented by the Artistic Theater Workshop, was an open letter to the ruling Arab bourgeoisie, warning them of the inevitable fire which will certainly con-

sume them if the status quo persists.

Some may imagine that things were going smoothly in a comfortable atmosphere of cultural and intellectual liberty, where Palestinian artists enjoyed freedom to create and perform. The reality was, however, completely different. The occupation authorities went on persecuting Palestinian artists. In addition to the notorious British Emergency Regulations of 1945, the Zionist authorities have issued a whole series of arbitrary decrees depriving Palestinians of the freedom of cultural creation and expression. Many creative workers are under house arrest; others are in prison. Cultural centers and institutions have been closed. Many performances have been stopped, and the performers arrested. All performances were prohibited in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They can only be held in Jerusalem where there is relative cultural freedom due to the Israelis' imposition of civil rule there immediately after the occupation. Yet even the special status of Jerusalem did not prevent the occupation authorities from closing down the sole Palestinian cultural center in the city 34 times since it was established in 1983. There have been repeated raids during artistic performances. The center has even been attacked by soldiers using plastic bullets and tear gas, injuring several performers.

The shackles imposed by the enemy on Palestinian national cultural expression are too many to be listed here. Inversely, they constitute sufficient evidence of the depth of this cultural expression and its vigorous influence on the course of political life. Palestinian culture stresses the identity of the Palestinian people and their adherence to national unity and their leadership, the PLO. Our commitment has gone beyond the political framework to become an expression of our very identity, and an authentic synonym for Palestine...

We have no other weapons than stones. Also our theater possesses only the most basic artistic instruments, similar to stones. ●