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Editorial

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Palestine: Performing arts as resistance, resilience and *sumud*

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Editorial note

For over two years, and indeed for many decades, the international community has witnessed an escalating humanitarian crisis characterised by profound cultural suppression and unprecedented violence against civilians and cultural institutions, including theatres, schools, universities and community spaces. The ongoing occupation and genocide of the Palestinian people is also evident in the disruption, threat or forced displacement of artistic and educational activities. In turbulent times like these, it is a moral imperative and urgent ethical responsibility to act, rather than merely bear witness to these practices. In November 2024, the *Education & Theatre* Editorial Board decided to dedicate its next issue to the Palestinian theatre, drama and education community.

We therefore established communication channels with our peers working in education, theatre, drama and the performing arts in Palestine. It quickly became evident that culture and the arts play a crucial role in their unarmed resistance to the occupier. They embody the finest qualities of Palestinian resilience and tenacity, as well as *sumud* (often translated as steadfastness), in the face of the looting of their narrative, land and folklore. This resistance provides Palestinians with valuable opportunities to learn about and express their experiences through various art forms in formal and informal educational settings.

After extensive communication, dialogue and the exchange of ideas and views, Issue 26 proudly presents a diverse selection of contributions from practitioners, educators, artists, researchers and activists who have persevered under conditions of displacement, fragmentation and loss. Together, these contributions highlight theatre, drama and the performing arts as vital social practices, offering communities a means of sustaining memory, fostering collective care and exploring the possibility of a hopeful future.

In this context, theatre, drama and the performing arts transcend their conventional function as sources of personal or collective entertainment. Instead, they constitute a language through which lived experience and collective trauma can be expressed, confronted and processed. Rather than manifesting as a spectacle, resistance emerges through the everyday act of creating spaces for expression. Resilience is reframed as a shared capacity built on human relationships, community interconnection and intergenerational knowledge transmission, rather than as individual endurance. Here, the concept of *sumud* (steadfastness) is revealed not as passive endurance, but as a dynamic commitment to staying put, remembering and imagining alternative possibilities. The following articles outline how art forms such as theatre, storytelling, poetry and drama are used as creative strategies to reflect experiences of freedom of thought and expression. They recount aspects of Palestinian narratives and portray elements of Palestinian life.



The insert begins with three research articles, each offering a different research paradigm. In their discussion of the Palestinian experience, **Khitam Edelbi** and **Shams Almanal Timraz** emphasise the significance of storytelling in transmitting historical memory, and consequently, in safeguarding collective identity and envisioning the future. In their autoethnography, they analyse embodied art forms such as the dabkeh dance, theatre, literature and graffiti on the Separation Wall. These cultural expressions and political testimonies counteract the fragmentation of the people and provide a sense of continuity through storytelling. Recognising the perspective of author Ghassan Kanafani, who viewed storytelling as a means of cultural survival and a revolutionary act, they present two stories by their sisters, Muhibah Edelbi and Sabha Timraz. These stories recall intergenerational memories of Palestinians being displaced from their homeland during the Nakba of 1948 and act as a form of resistance against erasure. Finally, Edelbi and Timraz explore the role of graffiti during the First and Second Intifadas, and the increased visibility of Palestinian storytelling through theatre and digital media. These amplify marginalised voices by promoting them on global platforms.

Hala Al-Yamani, Abdelfattah Abusrour and **Fadel Alsawayfa** introduced found poetry as a legitimate analysis tool into the research dialogue. Combining this approach with interpretative analysis enabled them to explore various aspects of the lives of Palestinian youth. In their qualitative research with postgraduate students at Bethlehem University, they used Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* as a pre-text in drama workshops. Throughout these workshops, participants were able to engage creatively with the novella's characters, exploring and challenging their choices through improvisation and role-play. The qualitative research was based on testimonies from five students, who provided data through individual interviews and written reflections. Combined with the researchers' observations and analysis, the resulting found poems highlighted dominant concepts such as homeland, emigration and a strong sense of belonging among all the young participants.

Rand Barakat reviews the Master's programme in Creative, Pedagogical and Community Practices at Bethlehem University. This Palestinian arts-based programme focuses on personal, pedagogical and community development within the context of Palestinian higher education. Through qualitative case studies and semi-structured interviews with three female students, the review explores their motivations, experiences and engagement with creative practices. Thematic analysis reveals how the programme fosters critical reflection, personal growth and innovative teaching methods among participants while providing a supportive environment in which to confront complex social and institutional challenges. In the face of dispossession, fragmentation, control and standardisation, Barakat concludes that this Master's programme emerges as a vibrant alternative, placing creativity, dialogue and socio-culturally connected learning at its core.

In a different vein, the Innovative Programmes category features contributions from artists, educators and activists who share their work and experience in the field. **Abdelfattah Abusrour** presents "Beautiful Resistance", his philosophy on how the arts contribute to peaceful and creative self-expression. Wanting to utilise his previous interdisciplinary



knowledge, he focuses on telling his story and speaking about Palestine. Through sharing important autobiographical details, he helps us understand how he developed his approach to working with Palestinian children and young people in communities and refugee camps, such as Aida. This approach enables them to express themselves through the arts, to resist the uprooting and inhumane conditions in which they live and to ultimately discover themselves in the same way that he did. He redefines resistance as creative expression rather than violence. Through the Alrowwad Cultural and Arts Society, which he founded, he creates and adapts performances for students using theatre in education and storytelling, among other methods. These performances promote creativity, self-expression and a deeper understanding of Palestinian culture and identity.

In her article, **Marina Johnson** revisits ASHTAR Theatre's *The Gaza Monologues*, a project that transformed the testimonies of Gazan youth into a lasting global act of remembrance and resistance. Johnson explores how this work has found new resonance 15 years later through *Letters to Gaza*, an initiative inviting people worldwide to share words of solidarity. Together, these two initiatives reveal theatre's power to bridge distances, convey grief and sustain hope in the face of destruction. Johnson emphasises the performative nature of writing these monologues, which continue to serve as a striking example of "performative resistance". This is the first part of Johnson's work on this issue and should be read in conjunction with Part II, in which she discusses the project with Iman Aoun, the co-founder and director of ASHTAR Theatre (see further below).

Marina Barham and **George Matar** take us on an empowering journey with Palestinian children, showcasing the work of Al-Harah Theatre. In the face of genocide, theatre becomes a refuge and the arts transform into a powerful form of resistance, resilience, healing and hope. We witness the pioneering work of an organisation that has integrated theatre and drama into the heart of Palestinian schools, not just as an extracurricular artistic activity, but as a vital toolkit for psychological, educational and cultural empowerment. Barham and Matar emphasise that these creative practices are a catalyst for emotional healing, self-expression and hope. They describe how their work helps communities – including children, women and people with disabilities – to process and cope with the ongoing trauma and despair caused by the Israeli occupation.

Khalid Massou, co-founder of Inad Theatre, focuses on inclusive theatre and drama processes that bring together people with and without disabilities. He presents a case study of an inclusive theatre programme developed by Inad Theatre and the Effetà School for students with hearing impairments in Bethlehem. Drawing on the philosophies of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, Massou argues that this project redefines theatre as a participatory pedagogy, restoring agency and confidence to young people affected by violence. Through such collaborations, he suggests that theatre can become an act of social justice that expands accessibility, nurtures empathy and affirms the right to education for all.

From a different standpoint, **Jenny Karaviti** provides an overview of the actions organised by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-GR) in solidarity with Palestine over the years. She also introduces "4 Colours", a relatively new working group comprising TENet-Gr members and volunteers that was set up to coordinate these activities more effectively. Named after the four colours of the Palestinian flag, the group's main focus is to strengthen dialogue, advocacy and solidarity actions under the TENet-Gr umbrella. Karaviti reviews some



of the main activities undertaken by the group, such as translating Palestinian poetry, joining or endorsing solidarity campaigns, and holding or participating in events. The paper provides examples of where TENet-Gr and Palestinian voices converge, including the ASHTAR Theatre, *The Gaza Monologues*, The Freedom Theatre in the Jenin refugee camp and the artist group "We", which is showcased elsewhere in this issue.

In the Interviews category, **Marina Johnson** talks to Iman Aoun, the co-founder and executive director of ASHTAR Theatre. In the second part of Johnson's work featured in this issue (see also Part I above), they discuss the revival of *The Gaza Monologues*, the creation of *The New Gaza Monologues* and the *Letters to Gaza* solidarity initiative. Here, Aoun interweaves artistic vision and creation with political responsibility, revealing how theatre can serve as a means of bearing witness and fostering connection in times of siege.

Lastly, **Jenny Karaviti** discusses the newly formed group of Palestinian artists, "We", who are displaced in southern Gaza. During a day conference celebrating World Theatre/Drama & Education Day in Thessaloniki in November 2024, painter and digital graphic designer Alaa Al Jabari, theatre director and puppet maker Mahdi Karira, and writer Fidaa Ziad communicated via live internet connection with TENet-Gr members and friends. They talked about how the group came together, their experiences as artists during the war and the writing, visual arts and puppetry workshops they run in Gaza. Fidaa Ziad presented extracts from her diary in which she reflects on her experiences of displacement and shared some recorded stories of women who had lost loved ones, as well as discussing the psychological impact of this loss. Mahdi Karira described how he creates puppets out of food cans, the only material available to him, and presented the mobile theatre he has built to perform for children in southern Gaza. Alaa Al Jabari talked about the workshops she runs for children. By listening to their experiences and questions, and discussing their creations, she provides them with initial psychological support during the war.

The cases presented in this issue do not cover all aspects of theatre, drama and the performing arts in relation to the educational work currently taking place in Palestine. Nevertheless, they encourage the international scholarly and cultural community to engage in dialogue about the performing arts as a means of achieving cultural continuity, educational progress and a political presence. When the line between life and death is blurred, Palestinian artists, educators and pedagogues are naturally drawn into activism. They remind us that theatre and drama can serve as both refuge and public declaration, as a healing practice and as an act of resistance. Above all, they call upon us to listen with care, respect and solidarity. It is therefore fitting that their voices are disseminated widely and published in the official languages of this journal – Greek and English – as well as in Arabic, their original language. We anticipate that the ensuing discourse will encourage profound understanding, emotional engagement, and reflective action.

The Editorial Board

