

# When theatre turns to a cause

**Walid Nabhan** is a

*Palestinian biochemist and poet who has lived in Malta for the past sixteen years. Here he gives his impressions after watching a theatrical collage based on Palestinian contemporary poetry at the Malta Drama Centre.*



As part of its "issue theatre" programme for the current year, the Malta Drama Centre presented *Il-Ferita*, an impressive montage of ritual, chants and physical symbolism based on a number of Palestinian poems and other prose-verse, including the works of celebrated writer Mahmoud Darwish. A devised theatre piece, running for about sixty minutes, was undertaken by four adult actors who are following an extended programme at the Centre.



The struggling experience of the Palestinian people to retain their land shows that those people will never walk out neither from history nor from geography. There was a lot of electrifying acting at the Centre, and it was made evidently clear to the public who packed the Black Studio that

acting is all about empathy and understanding what it feels to be another person. *Il-Ferita* (The Wound), was a courageous message with a powerful healing assignment. We assisted to a peculiar and a very unexpected piece of theatre coming from the mud of life, so to speak, in the occupied territories.

The actors of the Malta Drama Centre have cleverly and expertly recruited the beauty and sensibility of some prominent contemporary Palestinian poetry to create a unique style of theatre which presented a platform from which they could make their vital moral



pronouncement: "we also insist upon taking responsibility." It is

truly heartening to know that the Centre does not shrink away from perceiving theatre as a medium for conscience-empowerment and universal human concern.

Although poetry is animate and illuminating in itself, it still needs a lot of careful and premeditated creating in order to make it breathe freshly, especially when brought from a different context and a different language. This type of ability is very personal and indeed, extremely individual. The talent shown by the Centre's actors to fill this delicate and tricky "gap" was beyond belief.



The clarity, and the structural logic of *Il-Ferita*, and the way the actors moved inside many different times and many different places without interrupting the emotional or the narrative fluidity of the play, revealed that acting is much more than just empathy. It can be also a "cause".

My comments as a Palestinian should be pronounced without inhibition or hesitation. When I witnessed the Maltese artists wearing my pain, I immediately felt shy and my language became confused. No one should die instead of me, I kept thinking.



*Il-Ferita* assured me that the most important thing for us is not to drop "home" from our hands or from our imagination. Huge walls can be built not only between "us" and "them", but also between us and ourselves. But no walls can be built between reality and myth, reality and falsehood, reality and fear. *Il-Ferita* made me

understand, more intensely than ever, that behind massive walls there could exist arsenals of the most virulent destruction. It is very sad that apartheid walls are brought down in one part, and constructed in another part of the world. In such grave circumstances, we Palestinians are left with only two choices: either life or... life. We will always choose life. Freedom is very ferocious but aggressively beautiful, and one must remain handcuffed to this captivity, forever.

Such thoughts had a throbbing life of their own as I watched three female and one male actor at the Drama Centre embody the woes, the deep wounds and the hopes of my suffering people.

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