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THE REVOLUTION'S PROMISE

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NOTES ON THE REVOLUTION'S PROMISE

Written by Zoe Lafferty

From the words of Ahmed Tobasi, Ali Abu Yaseen, Arna Mer Khamis, Dareen Tatour, Juliano Mer Khamis, Loai Tafesh, Mariam Abukhaled, Mohammad Al Azza, Mohammed Bakri, Mohammed Saba'aneh, Omar Barghouti, Rania Elias, Suhail Houry, Yousef Swaitat, Zakaria Zubeidi

Research by Ahmed Tobasi, Alia AlRosan, Mustafa Sheta, Zoe Lafferty

To be projected or read out...

The script is comprised of testimonies from Palestinian artists, as well as material available online.

The interviews have been edited and juxtaposed together.

People were interviewed separately, without knowing who else was being interviewed. Each interviewee's perspective, thoughts and ideas are solely their own.

Further notes for performers. They do not need to be shared with the audience...

Clarification including names, dates and places are in () and should be spoken as part of the dialogue.

Stage directions are in ***bold italics***.

TEXT IN BOLD CAPITALS (e.g. titles of scenes, people's names, locations, dates etc.) should be projected, as should the conclusion.

Money is in dollars for simplification.

Often 48 or Historical Palestine is used by Palestinians to describe Israel.

'The Story of The Freedom Theatre' is told in four parts. People are telling the same story but from their own perspectives.

'Prisons Within Prisons' comprises four separate stories, told simultaneously.

All other scenes and stories stand alone.

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VOICES

**JULIANO MER KHAMIS
CO-FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

**ARNA MER KHAMIS
ACTIVIST & TEACHER
MOTHER OF JULIANO MER KHAMIS**

**AHMED TOBASI
CURRENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

**YOUSEF SWAITAT
YOUNG ACTOR,
THE STONE THEATRE**

**MOHAMMED BAKRI
ACTOR & DIRECTOR
DIRECTOR OF JENIN JENIN**

**ZAKARIA ZUBEIDI
ARMED RESISTANCE FIGHTER
CO-FOUNDER OF THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

RANIA ELIAS

**DIRECTOR
YABOUS CULTURAL CENTRE**

**MOHAMMAD AL AZZA
ARTIST & PHOTOGRAPHER
LAJEE CULTURAL CENTRE**

**MARIAM ABU KHALED
ACTING STUDENT
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

**SUHAIL KHOURY
MUSICIAN & COMPOSER
GENERAL DIRECTOR OF
NATIONAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC**

**DAREEN TATOUR
POET, WRITER &
PHOTOGRAPHER**

**LOAI TAFESH
DANCER & CHOREOGRAPHER
FOUNDER NAQSH POPULAR ART TROUPE**

**MOHAMMED SABA'ANEH
CARTOONIST**

**ALI ABU YASEEN
ACTOR, WRITER & DIRECTOR,
CO-FOUNDER AL-MISHAL CULTURAL CENTRE**

**OMAR BARGHOUTI
CO-FOUNDER
BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS (B.D.S.)**

**THE STORY OF
THE FREEDOM THEATRE
JENIN REFUGEE CAMP
1929 - 1995**

Juliano joins the stage...

**JULIANO MER KHAMIS
CO-FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

JULIANO: It's Juliano Mer Khamis

I'm an actor, pretty successful. Successful, not good, good is up to you to judge. But successful at least by my salary.

My mother was Israeli, and my father was Palestinian. So I tried both sides... I joined the Israeli para shooters, and after three years, I tried to join the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. Then I had two years in the Philippines with magic mushrooms in the Jungle... ***Gestures that his head is exploding***... and I lost all my identities. I came back and said, okay, you have a gift. You are not *only* consciously un-nationalised, you are inside of yourself divided. Use it.

Now I live trying to implement what I think in my body, in my acts, in my daily life.

But to tell my story, I must begin with my mother.

Arna joins the stage...

**ARNA MER KHAMIS
ACTIVIST & TEACHER
MOTHER OF JULIANO MER KHAMIS**

ARNA: I was born (in 1929) in a small community in Palestine. These rocky but green hills between the Sea of Galilee and the Lebanese border, were at the time under the British Mandate.

JULIANO: In 1948, my mother joined the special forces, fighting for the establishment of the Israeli state, expelling the Palestinians from their homeland.

When she realised that what she had been told was a big lie, I am quoting her... that she was taking part in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, she decided to leave the Israeli army.

ARNA: The land, the source of livelihood and foundation of an entire (Palestinian) culture, has passed into the hands of others through sheer robbery or forced displacement. This has left a deep wound in my soul. While one half of me is intact, the other bears the terrible pain of that reality.

JULIANO: She joined the communist party. Here she meets my father, Saliba, a Palestinian Christian from Nazareth. He's handsome and she is beautiful and they fell in love. They get married and have three sons. And this is a big big scandal.

My mother obviously became an activist for the liberation of Palestine. She becomes anti-zionist. But let's be clear, because people get anxious when they hear this. Being anti-zionist does not mean being anti-jewish.

ARNA: In this land were sown the seeds of racism and suffering, wars and death and pain. An entire (Palestinian) nation stands before us bereft of human rights, where children grow up surrounded by the imagery of soldiers, stones and guns.

JULIANO: My mother educates herself to become a therapist through arts but was banned to teach in Israeli schools because she was married to a communist, Arab, Christian, Palestinian. Things were difficult and she even worked in construction as an illegal worker.

Then in the 80's in the beginning of the 1st intifada, she took her crafts and came to Jenin Refugee Camp.

Ahmed joins the stage...

**AHMED TOBASI
CURRENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

TOBASI: I was born in Jenin Refugee Camp. My grandmother was expelled from her village in 1948 and was part of the first generation that fled here. It has always been Israeli soldiers, wanted people, attacks, martyrs, tanks, army, shooting. There is not so

much food or electricity and we live in very simple houses, but as a kid growing up, we had fun.

JULIANO: My mother just appeared on the streets (of the camp), she has some paper, some pencils. She is a barefoot blonde woman, with a big white dress that looks like pyjamas from a mental hospital.

TOBASI: I was very little, and I saw this old lady, wearing the Palestinian scarf, and around her, a line of children on the floor at least 50 meters long, doing arts, painting and drawing.

ARNA: Paper was unrolled, paints and brushes distributed, and hundreds of children together could be seen laughing and shouting, painting their thoughts and dreams, their anger and hope in all the colours of the rainbow.

JULIANO: Slowly, day by day, people start to trust her and invite her for coffee.

ARNA: We set up a network of community child homes. It provided a library, games, choir, and a human rights centre for young prisoners.

TOBASI: I started to go to the children's houses. Most of the kids in the camp were going.

JULIANO: You know, because (during the 1st Intifada) the official educational system collapsed...teachers were in prison... schools were shut down...

ARNA: These children joined hands in a battle for freedom with a rock and a burning tyre. They shouted their passion for liberty, for an end to oppression and humiliation and for the hope of a better life, the hope of the intifada. This is where our paths met.

Yousef joins the stage...

**YOUSEF SWAITAT
YOUNG ACTOR
THE STONE THEATRE**

YOUSEF: I met Arna on the street. I wanted to understand why she had come here.

We were already playing theatre games, but it wasn't serious. We had nobody to guide us.

Then Arna's son Juliano came.

JULIANO: (My mother) received the Right Livelihood Award. And with the prize money built a small theatre in the middle of the camp called '*The Stone Theatre*'. Being an actor, I took care of the theatre activities.

YOUSEF: Juliano taught me a lot. Things I could use in the future.

JULIANO: I succeeded in gathering a nice group of young people and we did a very good show.

TOBASI: '*The Little Lantern*' was the first play I ever saw. There were lights, costumes, decor...I did not believe what I was seeing...

YOUSEF: I played one of the ministers who tried to steal the sun from the Queen

TOBASI: The story is by the writer Ghassan Kanafani, who gave it to his niece as a gift. When the Israelis exploded the car that killed Ghassan, his niece, she actually died with him.

YOUSEF: I learnt I could oppose the Israeli occupation through theatre. I can tell people what I feel. What I want and don't want. Whether I love life or not.

ARNA: Our task was never easy. It was not paved with roses but mined with bullets and soldiers, anxious mothers and frightened children whose wounds have yet to heal.

YOUSEF: I'm not exaggerating, Juliano is like a brother to me, and I love Arna like my own mother...even more

ARNA: I came towards these children with the burden of my past, my broken half. I tried to tear away the veil of hypocrisy and crime, which leaves them wounded on the battlefield without first aid.

We shall not halt our struggle on behalf of these children and all others until peace and freedom can flow from their dreams and become reality.

ARNA leaves the stage...

JULIANO: In the mid 90's after the death of my mother from cancer, the theatre was closed down and I did not return to Jenin for five years.

Juliano, Tobasi & Yousef leave the stage...

DREAMS OF LIBERATION HISTORICAL PALESTINE

Bakri joins the stage...

**MOHAMMED BAKRI
ACTOR & DIRECTOR
DIRECTOR OF 'JENIN JENIN'**

BAKRI: I grew up on values of liberation, that we should all be revolutionaries. By the age of 15, I dreamed of going to Lebanon on foot to become a fighter, and that before I arrived, while I was in the wilderness, a tiger would attack me, and I would kill it and drag it behind me as I continued on my way. This tiger would be my ticket to join the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and I would be a hero. *'What do you want more than that? I have killed a tiger!'*

And it really happened that I went to go to Lebanon, intending to kill the tiger. But on my way to becoming a revolutionary, as night fell and darkness reigned, I felt fear, imagining where the monsters and hyenas lay, so I decided to go home.

These were dreams, dreams of a child who wanted to be a revolutionary but did not have the courage to kill a tiger, so things remained just a dream.

But I had an obsession. Perhaps this was why I went into cinema and theatre because there is the possibility of realising dreams of liberation, not through armed struggle, but through culture.

I was an actor performing on the stage in Nazareth when news began to spread about a massacre in Jenin Refugee Camp. We could hear the bombing from the stage, so we decided to stop the play.

I went with Valentina, my colleague, to the demonstration.

At the protest, an old Israeli in an army uniform, with wild eyes, took out an automatic weapon and started shooting at us. Valentina was hit by a bullet in her hand.

It was the first time in my life that I was at a scene like this, that I saw this amount of blood.

And I started to think, if these soldiers gave us all this hatred while standing in peace, what would the Israeli army do in Jenin, where there is fierce resistance?

I rented a jeep, a camera, and a sound device.

I infiltrate through the mountains, a closed military zone. The Israeli army convoys passed, and we marched on until we reached Jenin.

When I saw the situation there and how much Jenin was destroyed, I was paralysed; I did not know what to do, my body trembled.

I managed to control my nerves and for five consecutive days filmed whatever my eyes fell on. A spontaneous act with my limited capabilities... Walking the streets and filming people that I encountered.

Since the first screening of my documentary, '*Jenin Jenin*,' there have been protests, revenge and intimidation. Attempts to silence me, make me a lesson for those who think about undertaking actions critical of Israel.

Trials and prosecutions have been going on for 20 years, from 2002 until now. I'm tired and tired, the same stories, the same accusations.

In 2021 I was fined \$55,000 for defamation damages to be paid to an Israeli army captain who participated in the invasion of Jenin Camp.

Then the judge ordered that the documentary be permanently banned from being screened.

Today, I continue to tell my story because I do not see any other solution, and I do not see any other way to address my case except to deliver it to the world.

My dream is to tell the great story of Palestine, about my life and our lives.

But for now, I'll go smoke.

BAKRI leaves the stage...

**THE STORY OF
THE FREEDOM THEATRE
JENIN REFUGEE CAMP
2001 - 2006**

Juliano & Yousef join the stage...

**YOUSEF SWAITAT
YOUNG ACTOR
THE STONE THEATRE**

YOUSEF: To my brothers, my family, my dear mother, my loved ones. I greet you and say goodbye. Don't be sad. It's a sacrifice.

**JULIANO MER KHAMIS
CO-FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

JULIANO: In October 2001, Yousef, my acting student, drove a stolen jeep to Israel with his friend Nidal. When they reached the city centre, they opened fire on the people around them. Four women were killed, and many others were seriously wounded. A few moments after the shooting started, a nearby police patrol arrived at the scene. They shot Nidal dead whilst he was driving. Yousef jumped out of the jeep and was shot a few meters away...

Sorry... He was the joker of the group. He was the most charming boy, my best student, talented, amazing, beautiful, never practised violence in his life, and he does this.

Yousef leaves the stage...

Months later the Israeli army invaded Jenin Refugee Camp. For 10 days, the camp struggled to resist.

A few days after the Israelis lifted the siege on the camp, I went. I wanted to see what had happened to the children my mother had taught... my acting students... why Yousef chose a suicide mission... why some had joined the armed struggle....

Tobasi joins the stage...

AHMED TOBASI
CURRENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE

TOBASI: You could not believe what we lived through when the Israelis invaded Jenin Refugee Camp.

I was just a 17-year-old boy with AK 47, trying to defend my home against one of the largest armies in the world.

It was like a cartoon movie: the sounds, the shooting, the Apaches, the tanks.

Seeing my friends die in front of my eyes.

Explosions in the sky like fireworks. You feel each rocket as it comes to you.

Each night felt like a year. You are counting each moment.

I was shot in the arm, but there was no hospital and no ambulances. So people just bandaged me up and we continued to move from house to house, as each home was bombed or bulldozed to the ground, Jenin Camp was destroyed, and there was nowhere to go.

The soldiers arrested me. There were many men from Jenin who were taken. Some in the resistance, some not.

I didn't have a proper trial; there was no evidence against me. And even if there was, what would it say?

I held a gun and defended my camp against an invading army?

A bomb dropped next to me, and I didn't get blown to pieces?

I was shot, and I didn't die?

I was sentenced to four years in prison in the Negev desert.

I was 17 years old.

Tobasi leaves the stage...

JULIANO: During the invasion of Jenin Camp, most of my acting students were killed except Zakaria Zubedi.

Zakaria joins the stage...

Zakaria's mother had been snipped to death and his brother killed. Zakaria had become a leader of the armed resistance and was now Israel's most wanted man.

(With many fighters killed or in prison) the armed resistance was on its knees, and they were offered an amnesty if they put down their weapons, which they took...

ZAKARIA ZUBEIDI
ARMED RESISTANCE FIGHTER
CO-FOUNDER OF THE FREEDOM THEATRE

ZAKARIA: These weapons, if they are not packed with values and politics and real honest leadership, liberation leadership, I don't want to fight anymore.

JULIANO: We (Palestinians) were raged, angry, frustrated, desperate. We must start a new kind of resistance.

ZAKARIA: We must build up this leadership from scratch and to do this, the best way is to start an artistic venue, *'The Freedom Theatre'*.

JULIANO: I left the Israeli society because I thought it was about time to get off the fence, and go and do something. And we started building the theatre.

ZAKARIA: The occupation destroyed my childhood. Now the theatre is back, allowing us to develop a different narrative.

JULIANO: It is a venue to join the Palestinian people in their struggle for liberation with poetry, music, theatre, cameras.

ZAKARIA: It's an umbrella for everyone.

JULIANO: It offers the very basic elements of life, to children, to grown-ups, to women to men. Freedom. To say, to curse, to concentrate, to play, to create, first of all. And then of course, with all the tools that are possible, photography, drama therapy, computers, video cameras, lighting, whatever the person needs, just to flip away from years of occupation.

ZAKARIA: Through the theatre, you can talk to the world and give a different message from how they see us as terrorists.

JULIANO: Breaking the wall down, not physically but metaphorically, creating the grounds for hope.

ZAKARIA: I burst open the lock to the theatre with the butt of my machine gun. You can't separate armed resistance from cultural resistance.

JULIANO: Arts cannot free you from your chains. But it can generate and mobilise the discourse of freedom, create debate, expose.

ZAKARIA: I didn't want to become an armed resistance fighter, but this is what life gave me. I wanted to be an actor. I wanted to be Romeo. Now at The Freedom Theatre others can have that chance.

Tobasi joins the stage as Zakaria leaves...

TOBASI: After four years I finished in the prison and I arrived back in Jenin Refugee Camp. I was 21 years old. No job. No future. Everything in you has changed. People come out of prison losing their minds, and I was close to death, mentally.

JULIANO: I am not going to pretend here to colour the situation. It's dark. No hope in Palestine. The maximum dream is about death.

TOBASI: I had grown up with all of this madness, invasions, tanks, rockets, bullets, murder. Israel, the West, Europe, the USA, had made all these things ready for me, a young Palestinian to go one way...

But when I joined the theatre, a small hole opened in my mind. Like a child playing in the garden who finds a small door that takes you to another world... It was magical.

Juliano, Tobasi & Zakaria leave the stage...

**BUILDING A NATIONAL IDENTITY
YABOUS CULTURAL CENTRE
JERUSALEM**

**RANIA ELIAS
DIRECTOR
YABOUS CULTURAL CENTRE**

Rania joins the stage...

RANIA: Who I am is not an easy answer, but put simply, I am a mother of four children and a dog.

I am 49, and I am not afraid to announce this because getting old is great... Every experience is a learning opportunity.

I love life, and everything I do is with love.

I decided from the beginning to leave a trace wherever I work. To commit with full passion.

The Oslo agreement indicated Jerusalem's fate and that the Israelis had plans to occupy the city entirely.

So we formed Yabous cultural centre in 1995 to strengthen artistic life in Jerusalem. It was the start of a challenge, an impossible task, to keep Jerusalem, our Palestinian capital, on the map. We were broke, building something from nothing but our effort and ideas.

Over 25 years, we created a strong cultural foundation with thousands of activities, and Yabous became one of the most beautiful experiences of my life.

However, the challenges have become bigger and bigger.

There are difficulties with the Israeli authorities who oversee our premises and must grant a work permit.

Many donors do not like our vision, so we must reject funding to remain true to our values and national identity.

We are prohibited from working with many Palestinians who have specialist skills, as after the wall was built, they could not travel to Jerusalem.

I am from Bethlehem, living in Jerusalem on a family unification permit, so my personal situation is unstable. There have been many threats by Israeli authorities to take it away if I do not stop working at Yabous.

The centre has been closed down several times. The Israelis were so determined to cancel one festival that they arrested the organisers and then started chasing a balloon with the festival logo down the street.

Recently there was the relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem, and with it plans to abolish any institution working to uphold Palestinian national culture. This was when attacks on us intensified, starting with the arrest of my husband and me.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when the Israeli army arrived at our house.

I woke my children and told them not to be afraid.

They search our house, taking research papers, education certificates, our photos, and passports.

They stormed Yabous centre, confiscating everything and loading it into cars.

My interrogation lasted 12 hours. And when I was released on bail, I was banned from speaking to anyone from Yabous for a month, including my husband.

Since then, the Israeli authorities have not stopped calling and questioning me. We are still trying to recover the confiscated computers, documents and files. And I have had further interrogations and bans from contacting anyone at Yabous centre.

There is no official crime to charge us with, so they work in a roundabout way through intimidation, obstructing our path, and an attempt to break our morale.

So yes, the challenges in Jerusalem are huge.

And for sure, they cannot stand a strong Palestinian woman who leads an institution that strives, who can speak to the media and has relations with thousands of people around the world...

A Palestinian woman who defies the stereotype they wish to paint. And who works to plant the seeds of belonging, love for Jerusalem and for Palestine.

Rania leaves the stage...

**TO BE OR NOT TO BE
AIDA REFUGEE CAMP
BETHLEHEM**

Al Azzah joins the stage...

**MOHAMMAD AL AZZA
ARTIST & PHOTOGRAPHER
LAJEE CULTURAL CENTRE**

AL AZZAH: I started photography as an artist. Taking photos in the camp, just daily life, the people, the children, the houses. But the moment you live in Palestine, it becomes difficult to photograph anything unrelated to the Israeli Military Occupation. The situation forces you to cover it again and again.

I was in my office when the shooting started, so as I usually do, I took my camera and stood by the window to take photos.

Around 10 Israeli soldiers marched through the camp, firing bullets, tear gas, and sound bombs indiscriminately.

I continued taking photos, and the soldiers continued to approach.

They got to the office where I was leaning out of the window, and they started shouting 'Go to your house now'.

They were exceptionally violent at the time, so I started to close the window. At that moment, one of the soldiers directed his rifle towards my face and shot me.

The bullet hit me in my face. They shot with the intent to kill; if I had not been on the second floor, I would be dead.

I was screaming while I heard them laughing loudly. I started to bleed very hard. I thought that I was going to die. But I was more worried about the camera than myself because it contained photos of the soldier who shot.

I was hospitalised for 17 days. My eyes were pulled out of their place, and they put platinum pieces to fix the bone. They performed three surgeries.

I couldn't eat because I couldn't move my mouth, and I drank processed food with a straw.

After I got released from the hospital, I stayed with my sister. That night about 40 soldiers broke down the door, storming my parent's home, destroying everything in their way. They gave them a summons notice, demanding I go to interrogation.

I needed to see a doctor for medical follow-ups on my surgery and regularly take my medicine. If I surrendered myself, this wouldn't be possible.

For two months, I secretly moved between several houses in Bethlehem as the army continued to assault my family.

When the condition of my face improved, I went home.

That night they came and broke in.

I ran and escaped, so they attacked my family, even my grandfather and grandmother.

It was a long night. Eventually, they found me and began a violent attack. I begged them not to hit my face, but the moment I asked, they directed their blows there.

They put me in the military base, under investigation for 12 days. They found no evidence for their allegations. I was transferred between 5 courts, none of them able to substantiate the charges against me.

Finally, the judge decided to release me, fining me \$500 and telling me I had to come to the court every month for an interview. This continued for three years.

I went back to the field to work in photography. I decided not to be stationed at the office window anymore. I decided to approach the soldiers, to photograph between them.

After they shot me in the face, what's the worst they can do?

They wanted to kill me to stop me from taking pictures and filming, but it is a challenge that keeps me going.

They pushed me toward the idea: of "to be or not to be."

Al Azzah leaves the stage...

**THE STORY OF
THE FREEDOM THEATRE
JENIN REFUGEE CAMP
2006 - 2011**

Juliano & Mariam join the stage....

**MARIAM ABU KHALED
ACTING STUDENT
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

MARIAM: I was 18 years old and studying in the school for girls.

I wasn't very good, and I wasn't really interested. A friend's sister told me about the theatre, so I decided to see what was going on.

The first person I saw was Juliano.

**JULIANO MER KHAMIS
CO-FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

Juliano speaks to Mariam...

JULIANO: Are you here because you want to be an actress?

MARIAM: And thought...wait a minute, I don't know what I want to be.

Juliano invited me to see the stage, and I was really surprised...

JULIANO: If you want, we have a role for you.

MARIAM: And I thought, what is 'role'?

JULIANO: You just have to come and do rehearsals.

MARIAM: I thought, wow fuck, okay.

I joined the first-ever class of professional acting students. I was really happy to go every day and rehearse with Juliano.

Then suddenly there was a costume, and I was like, why did he give me a black dress and everyone is in white?

And he starts to explain to me the idea of the play...

JULIANO: Maybe it's the political groups against each other... maybe it's the angel and the devil... maybe it's the women's power against the man's power.

MARIAM: And I'm thinking... what the fuck?!

It was tough, crazy, because I didn't understand shit. What it is to stand on stage and be proud and open. I believed that women had to take care of how we talk and walk, how we sit. Once Juliano sent me back home because all I was doing was pulling my t-shirt down, afraid that someone was watching my ass. There were things in my head that were hard to get rid of.

JULIANO: Israel is pushing the Palestinian people into the stone age, destroying the cultural identity. Our responsibility as artists is to rebuild or reconstruct this destruction. Who we are? Why we are? Where we are going? Who we want to be?

MARIAM: You have to forget all these oppressive ideas and be you, discover your voice, your body and your freedom

JULIANO: We are saying that freedom of expression comes first, before freedom from the occupation.

MARIAM: With Juliano, the revolutionary values were clear from the beginning. That we can't be on stage without understanding why.

Ahmed Tobasi joins the stage...

AHMED TOBASI
CURRENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE

TOBASI: My group was called the Bad Boys. Yes, because for sure, we were bad boys. Spending our time on the street, smoking, not in school, maybe even stealing things to sell so that we can eat. And Juliano liked that. It excited him; he could see our fucked up potential.

The Bad Boys created the first-ever show at The Freedom Theatre. 'The Journey' was about the kids in the camp, who wanted to go to the sea, a dream of every Palestinian child.

MARIAM: My first acting production was called 'Fragments'. We had the "premiere", which I did not understand at all... and suddenly there was an audience and lights.

TOBASI: The play talked about young people's lives. So when they saw the play, the theatre became a part of them.

MARIAM: And there was screaming and clapping... what the fuck?!

TOBASI: It was very nice to be seen, to be heard, to share an understanding. We became a bit famous in the camp.

MARIAM: And I still hadn't told my family that I am doing theatre...

One week later, it was the results for the final exams in school, and I failed.

I told Juliano, and he was really happy and laughing...

JULIANO: Bravo, good.

MARIAM: I didn't know what was my mission in life... but then I understood that The Freedom Theatre was the place to be.

TOBASI: The theatre showed me that there is a whole world out there I never knew existed.

And for the first time in my life, I was given a decision.

And the choice I wanted to make had become so clear

I wanted to choose to be alive.

And now, I had a mission to tell my story.

Juliano, Tobasi & Mariam leave the stage...

PRISONS WITHIN PRISONS VARIOUS MILITARY JAILS, ISRAEL

Four separate stories, told simultaneously. Suhail joins the stage...

**SUHAIL KHOURY
MUSICIAN & COMPOSER
GENERAL DIRECTOR OF
NATIONAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC**

SUHAIL: I am a musician, a composer, a teacher and a dancer. The murder of my mother's cousin, Kamal Nasser, (a leader, writer, and poet) greatly impacted me. I was ten years old, and I began to comprehend what was going on in a deeper way.

At the beginning of the 1st Intifada, the Israelis did not pay any attention to revolutionary music... But then, just as they decided to smash the hands of the children who threw stones, they banned these songs in all their forms.

One day, I was on my way back from the copy studio and secretly had in my possession about 6,000 tapes.

The soldiers had been watching me for a long time, and the army set up a special ambush on the road. An ambush like this was normally only intended to capture a revolutionary leader.

They arrested me as if I was a terrorist and what I had was a weapon.

Dareen joins the stage...

**DAREEN TATOOR
POET, WRITER &
PHOTOGRAPHER**

DAREEN: In 2015 I witnessed the killing of dozens of Palestinian youths who were murdered in cold blood.

I watched how they killed a woman at the checkpoint because she refused to take off her hijab.

There was the kidnapping and murder of a 16-year old boy by Israeli settlers.

And the firebombing of a home, that severely burnt a baby and killed his parents.

I was feeling suffocated, unable to express the ugliness of these crimes. I felt guilty as a human being and it was breaking my soul.

How are these children killed in front of our eyes while we are just watching?

It is a stain on our forehead.

So I wrote a poem calling for my people to resist this crazy violence. It was the cry of pain I was feeling.

I posted the poem on Facebook.

It was three in the morning and I was asleep. Suddenly, I hear the scream of my family saying: 'Dareen, the Israelis are coming to arrest you'.

Loai joins the stage...

LOAI TAFESH

**DANCER & CHOREOGRAPHER
FOUNDER NAQSH POPULAR ART TROUPE**

LOAI: I am from a poor neighbourhood, and my family life has always been overshadowed by occupation. My first arrest was as an eighteen-year-old student studying accounting at the university. I was sentenced to 3 years because of my union work. Nine years later, my life contained nothing more than a plan to marry my fiancé and working with my dance group. Then I was arrested again.

DAREEN: There was military, police, special forces.

LOAI: They started by blowing off my front door and storming my house

DAREEN: More than 40 soldiers in my home and five armoured vehicles closing the entrances.

LOAI: Only the soldier's eyes were visible. It is a special squad called the Masked Division, and they are shouting; they want to intimidate.

DAREEN: As they put on the handcuffs, I asked to see an arrest warrant but they did not give me anything.

LOAI: I was arrested and I am trying to understand what is happening, is this a nightmare or a reality?

DAREEN: They transferred me between several prisons for interrogation. My family did not know where I was. I was washing and wearing the same wet clothes I was arrested in.

LOAI: When I tried to find out the reason for my arrest, they answered that they cannot give me this information because we have to keep the source confidential.

DAREEN: They said that they have secret materials about me.

LOAI: I was put in administrative detention. It is a preventive arrest based on the idea that you might do something that we do not want you to do - an arrest without any charges.

DAREEN: The judge repeatedly postponed my trial.

Then they searched my Facebook account.

And after approximately 21 days, they presented my poem 'Resist, My People Resist Them'. Through the poem, they accused me of planning to carry out a suicide operation and that I support terrorist entities.

LOAI: After nearly three weeks of interrogation the intelligence officer asks *'What does your dance group teach children?'*

I answer... *'Folk dance'*

Then in a provocative attempt to prove his theory, the officer turns the computer screen in my direction and shows me two videos of the group. *'I mean, what else besides folk dance are you planting in their minds?'*

I insist... *'It's a group of children aged six to sixteen learning folk dance...'*

The officer began formulating his idea, that everything I do in culture, reflects my affiliation with a certain Palestinian political party that is hostile to Israel.

I told him... *'This is not true. We are not aligned with a political party. Rather, we reject the presence of Israeli occupation, and we express this through our dances.'*

The Israelis have always targeted the Palestinian cultural and intellectual front. Before them the British Mandate had the same tendency, imprisoning revolutionary poet Nuh Ibrahim, and confiscating his books until, in the end, they assassinated him. So if my dance group is able to provoke the occupation with these two dances, then this is evidence that we are moving in the right direction.

Sabaaneh joins the stage...

**MOHAMMED SABA'ANEH
CARTOONIST**

SABAANEH: I am a Palestinian born in Kuwait.

Naji Al Ali used to work in Kuwaiti newspapers and was famous for his drawings about Palestine. When Naji Al Ali was killed for his work, my mother began to talk to us about our homeland, through his cartoons.

I became a cartoonist because I like cartoons. They are something easy to understand and creative in shaping your messages.

I was placed in prison for two months alone inside small cells with rough walls, without windows.

Just thinking about what is going to happen to me. How long will I stay?

Starving for my family, and friends thinking about my work.

LOAI: Inside this deafeningly silent place, moments of weakness come. There is a struggle between wanting salvation at any cost and respecting yourself and your cause. You are left to question which of these two warring beasts you decide to feed?

SABAANEH: It is a method of torture.

SUHAIL: During the investigation, I was subjected to very severe psychological and physical torture. They were asking:

*'Who wrote the songs?
Who composed them?
Who distributes them?
And who produces them?'*

They used a technique called '*The Blender*'. The interrogator was big and strong, holding me firmly by the shoulders and shaking me with force for a very long time. I began to feel every organ inside my body vibrating and mixing like I was dying.

LOAI: They are trying to permanently stop us from functioning, from being able to practice normal behaviour.

SUHAIL: They used a method known as '*The Stretch*'. I was put on a chair without a back, my legs extended. One interrogator had his foot on my genitals, and another a foot pressing my chest. I experienced severe pain.

LOAI: The end justifies the means, and they were ready to lie and fabricate any story. They told me that my house had been demolished while my family was in it. They said my mother had been killed, showing me distorted pictures of our home and bodies covered in blood, saying, '*You have nothing left to lose; why resist confession.*'

SABAANEH: I decided that I am not a prisoner. I said to myself: I am a journalist who came here to do an artwork about the Palestinian prisoner, to know about their experience. I got some pens, pencils and paper and started creating artwork. I have a swift hand, like a monkey; this is how I was drawing in prison.

SUHAIL: During the torture, certain musical melodies occurred to me, and I would write them in my mind.

By the 12th day, the torture reached such an extreme degree of violence, that I turned numb. The investigation became useless, so they stopped it.

At that moment, I felt two contradictory feelings. Firstly, I was on the verge of death because of the violence.

And secondly, the opposite, as I learned that I had finally triumphed over the interrogators.

Thus, the musical melody I created was a victory piece with a contradiction.

SABAANEH: I did not just draw prisoners but also their families outside who are in the big prison of Palestine.

LOAI: We had a library, and I read history, politics, philosophy, and literature. I tried to transform my prison experience from a tool of oppression, into an opportunity to arm myself with awareness.

SABAANEH: I decided I would make an exhibition, planning who exactly I am inviting, where I am going to hold it, and its main topics.

I smuggled all the artwork out with one of the prisoners who was released. And when I got out, I held my exhibition.

DAREEN: After five months in prison, they sent me to house arrest. Notice the contradiction; they claimed that I intended to kill Israelis and carry out terrorist operations, and at the same time, they put me in a house in an Israeli settlement.

All they wanted from the beginning was for me to break and apologise, and this is what I did not give them. Apologise for what?

SABAANEH: I was there for just over five months. They claimed that I was connecting with an enemy of Israel. It's all stupid, unreasonable.

SUHAIL: They did not find a law to convict me, so they used a law from the days of the British Mandate. They issued a verdict of 15 months under the title of incitement to violence and revolution.

LOAI: After a year, I got out, but the prison remained inside me, creating psychological damage in many places.

SUHAIL: It was not until 10 years later that I could write the music that had come to me whilst being tortured in prison.

LOAI: A person needs a lot of strength to be able to heal.

DAREEN: Prison stays within me, and now I feel that I am in a bigger prison.

LOAI: I have a suspended sentence. So if I do anything that they find unacceptable, I will be arrested again. They have denied me travel for three years.

SABAANEH: If you have a fear of being arrested or whatever they may do to you, this means you won't do anything; they achieve stopping your life.

DAREEN: After two years, six months and eighteen days I was released from house arrest.

The settlers tried to kill me three times. I received many threatening and racist messages. I felt constantly in danger. I couldn't work, study, or publish my books. If I published or performed my poem, I would return to prison. I tried to open new doors, but I couldn't.

Finally, I left for Sweden on a grant for artists under threat. Here I continue my fight.

Suhail, Dareen, Loai & Sabaaneh leave the stage...

**A MOMENT & NINE MISSILES
AL-MISHAL CULTURAL CENTRE
GAZA**

Ali joins the stage...

ALI ABU YASEEN
ACTOR, WRITER & DIRECTOR,
CO-FOUNDER AL-MISHAL CULTURAL CENTRE

ALI: That day we were supposed to show a play at the Al-Mishal Cultural Centre in Gaza.

The performance included 14 girls; it was about their rights.

Suddenly, the United Nations Development Program called and ordered us to cancel without giving any reasons.

We stopped the rehearsals and sent everyone home. It was the first time I had ever postponed a performance.

I went home, and the Israelis began to bomb Gaza, and the rockets started shaking the city.

The bombs were landing near the theatre. I was afraid the cultural centre would be damaged, that the glass would shatter, that the play's set would fall.

I got dressed and went out.

I walked a street the length of 200 meters; it was completely black from smoke and dust, as if it was night, you could not even see your finger.

As I approached, my vision started to become clear.

The theatre was destroyed...complete destruction. Nothing. The features of the place disappeared... the cultural centre had vanished from existence and become a hole... a 6-storey building now turned into a two-story underground crater.

How could this be?

The set from the plays, the costumes that I designed, my hopes and dreams, the effort and the exhaustion collapsing in a second.

I am standing there, and thoughts are clashing in my head like waves, sadness eating my heart, as if when the decor disappeared, so had all the joy.

The faces of the youth I trained passed in front of me, the children's laughter that had now vanished.

Until this moment, I cannot believe that the theatre disappeared along with fourteen years of our work in a moment and nine missiles.

Our theatre had become a theatrical flame, so they shut it down.

Since the bombing, we have held several performances on the rubble.

The theatre is part of us, and we as artists continue whether it is in a building... or not... We will do theatre on the tree, at sea, underwater...

We have created artists, and we will stay to be artists.

Ali leaves the stage...

A DIVERSITY OF TACTICS BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS WORLDWIDE

Omar joins the stage...

**OMAR BARGHOUTI
CO-FOUNDER
BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS (B.D.S.)**

OMAR: I am an engineer by profession, an artist by passion and a student of Philosophy.

I was born in exile, a son of refugees. I came back to Palestine in 1993 with my partner, who is a Palestinian citizen in the State of Israel.

I think every part of my experience has helped me in my work as a human rights defender.

I was part of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. That was my first formative experience in that type of global struggle, and I learned a lot.

The '*Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions of Israel*' (B.D.S.) was launched by the largest coalition in Palestinian society, in Palestine and in exile. We felt that international law had stopped at the door of Palestine, so we took matters into our own hands and we walked the South African path if you will. We were inspired by their anti-apartheid movement, the anti-colonial movement in India, the US Civil Rights movement and of course our own struggle. But our key inspiration comes from the decades-old, rich Palestinian heritage of popular nonviolent resistance to settler-colonialism.

B.D.S. is a collective Palestinian voice, an absolute majority, asking democratic citizens worldwide to join us, in pressuring city councils, churches, trade unions, companies, and ultimately governments to stop its links of complicity with Israel.

The cultural boycott is a very important part because cultural institutions play a key role in whitewashing or what we call art-washing of Israeli Apartheid and occupation.

It calls for something much more profound than help, *Do No Harm*. If an international artist comes to Tel Aviv, they are lending their name to a system of apartheid and oppression. That is not art for the sake of art, music for the sake of music, that is complicity.

The cultural boycott targets *complicity*, not identity. Urging the cancellation of events, activities, agreements, or projects involving the Israeli State, its lobby groups or its cultural institutions. To reject funding and sponsorship from the Israeli government.

No one is calling for suppressing the rights of Israeli artists. If the UK invites an Israeli filmmaker to show her film, with no institutional connection to the state of Israel, the embassy, or lobby groups, there is absolutely nothing in the boycott to prevent this.

Actually, BDS explicitly calls on Israelis to join us. Israelis who abandoned colonial ideology, policies and dehumanization, who recognise our three basic rights under international law; ending the occupation, ending Apartheid, and the right of return for refugees.

Since there is nothing Jewish about occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, the siege of Gaza, and all the crimes committed, then there is nothing inherently anti-Jewish in proposing that this is against humanity and campaigning to end it.

Of course, there is anti-semitism that really bugs our minds, and it is growing every day in the West. B.D.S. was very clear from the beginning that we oppose all forms of racism, including antisemitism.

In fact, we don't see Palestine ever being liberated without an international movement for justice and equality winning the war for racial, indigenous, gender, economic and environmental justice, making this world better for everyone. In Ferguson, USA, after the first uprising when Michael Brown was killed, the Palestinians were one of the first to apply solidarity, because we understand oppression.

Since 2014 Israel started to consider B.D.S. a strategic threat. It is a fact that they have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to fight it. So they clearly do see the impact. It is extremely impressive how much the movement has grown in numbers.

They have started to target me personally, taking steps towards revoking my residency, repressing me with travel bans. The worst was when my late mother was undergoing surgery for cancer in Jordan, I wasn't allowed to leave to be with her.

Yes, I am worried for my life, and they use tools that don't show exactly who the culprit is. At a public conference in front of 200 people and the world's cameras, the Israeli Minister of Intelligence threatened me with "civil assassination." I had never heard this term before; possibly it means an assassination at the hands of civilians.

So it hurts on a personal level tremendously, but that is part of the price that all Palestinians pay, part of our resistance.

They are telling us you can't boycott Israel. So what do you want us to do?

You don't want us to do armed resistance, and you don't like our non-violent resistance.

...What do you want us to do? We shall never give up.

Omar leaves the stage...

**THE STORY OF
THE FREEDOM THEATRE
JENIN REFUGEE CAMP**

2011

Juliano & Tobasi join the stage...

**JULIANO MER KHAMIS
CO-FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

JULIANO: Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to our production of *'Alice in Wonderland*.

I dream that The Freedom Theatre will be a major force in generating cultural resistance, creating a political and artistic movement that raises its voice against discrimination.

Hope lives on in Jenin. Perhaps it was precisely my mother Arna's death that brought it to life. Sometimes the dead are more powerful than the living. There is a feeling that the spirit here is already seeded, and it's going to only grow, and I don't believe that anyone can stop it.

The 3rd Intifada must be a cultural one.

**AHMED TOBASI
CURRENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
THE FREEDOM THEATRE**

TOBASI: On the 4th of April, 2011 Juliano Mer Khamis was murdered. Shot five times by an unknown masked man just steps away from The Freedom Theatre.

He left behind his infant son, two daughters, and wife, who was pregnant with twins.

Juliano had recently directed his students in a production of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Juliano leaves the stage...

I didn't realise that our lives would still be in danger, even as artists.

An open mind is a dangerous mind, and culture has made us dangerous.

Juliano taught us how to use art to fight for change... How the stage could be as powerful as an AK 47.... How culture was a form of resistance.

We learned how using art we could question the world. How we could face our life, ourselves, our community, challenge our oppressors, and confront all the difficulties of humanity...

Juliano died teaching us this...

Now we must pass it on to the next generation.