

A CULTURAL INTIFADA

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There are no words to describe the pain, the sore that we have as Palestinians.

You see all this mess? Everything is destroyed...And I don't know why...

It's not a military base. There are no guns.

There are books, pictures, cameras, computers, music and instruments... All of it has been destroyed... the whole theatre.

I was in my house, which is in front of The Freedom Theatre and I was waiting because the army were going from house to house, arresting everyone. Then they broke the door of my home.

I told them, "Please, there are children here. We are a whole family, and we can do whatever you want but there is no need for violence"

They stormed in breaking all the house, everything. The children were crying. The soldiers were screaming at my mom and dad - they are old people.

They put the guns on me. They took me, they pushed me down, and started to beat me. I don't know why.

They put army clothes on me and started to take pictures. Taking poses, soldier by soldier, to show their girlfriends they are heroes. While I was under arrest, under the guns, they were taking these pictures of me.

Then they handcuffed me and they put me in a truck to a checkpoint, and threw me in the mud. It was raining. They didn't even let me take my clothes to cover myself. It was December.

All the jeeps, the army vehicles, were going around me. I was blindfolded and I didn't know what was going on...

Are they going to drive over me?

Are they going to smash into me?

Are they going to kill me?

They take you from place to place, throwing you in and out the truck, making you walk, without shoes, in the mud.

Then they started to do an interrogation about my identity. All the time the soldiers go around with guns touching you, and you're just waiting for the moment they're going to shoot you.

It was torture somehow, a psychological torture.

I cannot describe it.

It took me directly to 2002, when I was 17 years old. The Israelis have the time machine, to bring you back 20 years with just one button.

On the same day, the army also took Mustafa Sheta, The Freedom Theatre's producer and it's clear they're going to hold him for a long time.

And even they attack our kids... Jamal, a student, was also arrested the same day, and in one year, we have three children from the theatre who have been killed.

For 17 years now, we have worked on building this place. For 17 years they are arresting and attacking and killing...

Last July, they bombed and destroyed outside the theatre. We rebuilt it again. We fix it again. Now they destroyed it again.

They destroy everything that shows there is culture, that we Palestinians are normal people.

The Freedom Theatre, is an artistic place. We have children, young people, girls, boys, women... They come here to practice, to find a place where they can express themselves and imagine a better life, a better place in this world.

And still, the Israelis come, and tell us, “No, you cannot dream. You cannot imagine there might be something different from the reality around you. You are under occupation, and that’s your destiny as Palestinians... To grow up and die under brutal, crazy, violent occupation”.

So, I am asking all the artists in this world — you have to unite, and we have to fight... not just for Palestinians... We have to fight for this planet, for the humanity, for the future, for the people who come next, for each community and each country still under colonisation and occupation.

Juliano Mer-Khamis and Zakaria Zubeidi, the main founders of The Freedom Theatre, believed the 3rd Intifada, should be a cultural, artistic intifada.

And even though Juliano is murdered and Zakaria is in prison, this is what we’re doing now, this is our mission... a cultural intifada.

**** The Israeli army detained Ahmed Tobasi for one day and Jamal Abu Joas for eight days. Mustafa Sheta has been given six months of administrative detention - imprisonment without charge or trial. This follows over thirteen years of targeted attacks and arrests by the Israeli Army on The Freedom Theatre and its team.***