

not holding myself apart and separate, I am part of the community that is spontaneously created at each event. Spect-actors, by bearing witness, turn my memories of the torture chamber into a space where I am safely held. In return and through the process, I am able to create an aesthetic space in which they feel less constraint about allowing their own free flow of emotion. We are able to recognize the community's complicity in torture as well as the community's power to confront the practice. As the workshop changes focus, I revert to the traditional Joker's neutral stance as we explore issues specific to the group. I do not tell spect-actors what action to take or what to do with their own situations and emotions. If I do help power the engines of change, it is by awakening the imagination. It is by offering spect-actors, through the spontaneous creation of their own images, access to what they already possess: desire in the soul, knowledge in the blood, energy in the body, fire in the mind.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Chen Alon\*

### Non-Violent Struggle as Reconciliation Combatants for Peace *Palestinian and Israeli Polarized Theatre of the Oppressed*

PAULO FREIRE SAID, "THE minute you freeze history or ideas, you also eclipse the possibility of creativity and undermine the possibility of the development of a political project" (1997, p. 311). The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians often seems frozen, but it has been going on long enough for both sides to know that reality is never static. Even though we seem to be in a no-win situation, we know that history is dynamic and flexible. This is true of theatre as well, and we know human imagination makes flexibility and transformation possible, and we know that hope results from it.

#### From Uni-national to Bi-national Struggle Against the Israeli Occupation

This chapter tells the story of the Tel Aviv/Tul-Karem Activist Theatre Group (TA/TK), a wing of Combatants for Peace (CFP). CFP is a non-violent movement of Palestinian and Israeli ex-combatants that uses Theatre of the Oppressed to struggle against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and to work for dialogue and reconciliation. In 2002 when I was called to reserve duty as an officer in the Israeli army (Israeli Defense Force, or IDF), I refused to serve in the occupied territory and was incarcerated for a month. I came to the conclusion that I could not serve in the occupied territory based on what I had seen and done as an Israeli army officer, as well as because of the army's actions in the West Bank and Gaza. It was not only a moral or political issue. I realized that I was a part of the problem. I was personally responsible for horrible acts. I had guarded almost every Israeli settlement, had been in every refugee camp, and at every roadblock. It was I who had invaded

\* With thanks to Ellie Friedland for helping me tell this story by offering wisdom, patience, and sensitivity during the editing process. Her contributions to the work went beyond revision, and I am grateful for the true dialogue and for the mutual learning.



Palestinian houses in the middle of the night, it was I who had humiliated adults and intimidated children. I had to report this to my conscience.

At the time I was in the army reserve I was also acting in the well-established Be'er Sheva Repertory Theatre. Often I would perform in a play, take off my costume, put on my reservist uniform and go to the front in Gaza, an hour away, and arrest people at checkpoints. My refusal to serve in the occupied territory led me to also refuse to participate in art that seemed to perpetuate the status quo. Acting in a repertory company felt like doing cultural reserve duty, and I wanted to find a way to use my love, and need, for theatre for a new path. I needed to stop living a split existence.

I was active in the Courage to Refuse movement for three years, working to bring the message to Israelis that the occupation is destructive to the state of Israel. In 2004, some of us in Courage to Refuse heard that there was a similar group of Palestinian ex-combatants, most of whom were from the Fatah group, who were refusing to participate in violence.<sup>1</sup> We realized that both sides must take responsibility for stopping the violence and that we must do it together. Some of us from Courage to Refuse joined some of the Palestinians from their group to co-found Combatants for Peace as a movement of Palestinians and Israelis who have taken an active part in violence: Israelis as soldiers and Palestinians as part of the armed struggle for Palestinian freedom. After brandishing weapons for so many years, we decided to put down our guns and struggle together non-violently to bring an end to the occupation and to achieve peace.

Combatants for Peace operates in five regional groups to end the Israeli occupation, halt Israeli settlement in the West Bank, and establish a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem, alongside the State of Israel. We work to:

- Raise the consciousness of the public in Israel and Palestine regarding the hope and suffering of the other side and to create partners in dialogue.
- Educate toward reconciliation and non-violent struggle in the Israeli and Palestinian societies.
- Create political pressure on both governments to stop the violence, end the occupation, and resume a constructive dialogue.

In 2007 Nour Al-Din Shehadda and I founded the Tel Aviv/Tul-Karem Activist Theatre group (TA/TK) as the Theatre of the Oppressed sub-group of CFP. Nour is a Palestinian ex-combatant who was jailed twice for participating in armed struggle. He is the same age as I am, and soon after we met we realized that we had confronted each other in violent combat. By then, he, like me, had already experienced a transformation to non-violent activism. Nour emphasizes that though he is against violent resistance, this does not mean

that he thinks the Palestinians have no right to resist the Israeli occupation. Just as Nour and other Palestinians are clear that they are resisting the occupation, I, and the other Israelis in CFP and in our TO group, are clear that we are not joining or supporting the Palestinian struggle. This is my struggle as an Israeli. I cannot and must not give up my identity as an Israeli and a Jew, with all the history that comes with it, as I act against the occupation.

### Theatre of the Oppressed as Non-violent Struggle

I knew when we began TA/TK that I wanted to use Theatre of the Oppressed as our method for strategizing and for taking action, and I felt the need to extend Boal's TO to fit our context. The fifteen Israeli and fifteen Palestinian members of TA/TK spent the first year together exploring how to use and adapt TO methods to fulfill our needs. As Boal often said in workshops, Theatre of the Oppressed is born as a consequence of a need. We used TO techniques to define our needs, and agreed that the purpose of TA/TK is:

- To work for reconciliation and active dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Much so-called "dialogue" between Palestinians and Israelis serves to normalize the occupation. As one of the Palestinian members of the group said in our first meeting, "We can't have a dialogue while your boot is on our necks." (This kind of dialogue is called *tatbia* in Arabic.) We are interested in active dialogue that is part of activism against the occupation. For example, we hold "house meetings," following the model of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committees in which we visit Palestinians or Israelis in their homes, and together we tell our personal stories of transformation from violence to non-violence. This creates trust and healing, and at the same time allows people to take mutual responsibility for the violence.
- To use Theatre of the Oppressed as the way to understand each other and work together, and to strategize our non-violent actions. All of our internal work in TA/TK employs TO techniques, and some of our public action is TO-based. Our actions sometimes require civil disobedience, and include rallies, marches, demonstrations, and Forum Theatre performances for mixed groups of Palestinians and Israelis (our use of theatre actually makes it possible for us to meet in places in which we would otherwise be forbidden by Israeli laws and regulations in the West Bank to gather Israelis and Palestinians together).
- To use theatre to bridge language barriers, since most Israelis and Palestinians do not share a language. We always work with translators, mostly



for processing and reflecting, as most of the work is communicated by action and movement.

### Playing Polarities

We knew when we began TA/TK that, as Israelis and Palestinians working together, we would each bring our memories of violence and oppression. For example, from my duties as an Israeli soldier I am familiar with checkpoints, arrests, curfews, entry permits, home invasions, searches, eavesdropping, expropriations of land, tree clearing, fences, and more. I have images of innocent victims from both sides. I think of Smadar, the sister of my Israeli friend Alik—a co-founder of CFP—who was murdered in Jerusalem in a suicide attack on September 4, 1999. I think of Abir, the daughter of my Palestinian friend Basam, a co-founder of CFP, who was shot by an Israeli soldier in her schoolyard in Anata in the east of Jerusalem on January 16, 2007. Abir was ten years old when she died, the same age my daughter Tamar is now. Everyone in our group has memories and images like this, and we have been taught to blame each other.

In TA/TK our experiences, many of them traumatic, are the fuel that allows us to dream the utopian dream of an end to the occupation and peace, independence, and justice for both sides. In Boal's words, "The role of utopias is not to be reached; it is to stimulate us to try harder and go further. To be able to dream is already a dream come true" (1992, p. 10). Every time we meet we must begin with the reality of our polarization. Our process is modeled on the structure of the Truth and Reconciliation Committees in South Africa, and we are inspired by Desmond Tutu's statement: "To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them" (1999, p. 3).

Every time Palestinians and Israelis gather together our mutual struggle is for humanization itself. When we meet we share at least one story from each side about past violent experiences, allowing us to take mutual responsibility for our own stories. This part of our work is personally and collectively therapeutic, and it is our way of building an activist alliance. Like Augusto Boal (1995), we agree with Che Guevara's statement that solidarity means running the same risks (p. 3), but when we began, we had to find out how to do that without abandoning our different and directly oppositional identities.

One early experience exemplifies this complexity, and led to what I call the Polarized Model of Theatre of the Oppressed. This transformative moment for me, and for others, took place in one of the theatre workshops I led

for the members of the TA/TK group. Before the workshop I had asked each person to bring five different photos from her/his personal album. I explained that "personal album" was purposely vague so each person could define it for him- or herself, and so that it would generate questions and discussion when we met. Everyone brought photos and shared them. Sima, a Palestinian co-founder of TA/TK, had been imprisoned in Israel and her husband, brother, and cousin had been killed by the Israeli army. She brought photographs of her beloved relatives, who in the pictures wore khaki coats and Kuffyas, and held M-16s. I looked at the photos and the first sensation in my body was fear. Next came anger, and then the mix of strong emotions that comes when any Israeli looks at photographs of "terrorists." Plus, I knew from talking with Sima that some of her relatives in the photos had killed innocent people.

My friend Oren, another co-founder of TA/TK and formerly an officer in the paratroopers' elite unit of the Israeli army, also showed his photos. One was of his friends from the elite unit, in which some of the men were standing, some were kneeling. They wore khaki coats and held M-16s. I looked at these photos and opposite reactions rose up in me: I thought, "What a great group—the salt of the earth." I felt security, togetherness, belonging, familiarity. Later in the workshop I realized that I had forgotten that Oren had told me that they too had killed innocent people. And then I stopped. I looked at Sima, Shiffa, Nour, Iyyad, and all our Palestinians partners, and was pulled away from my point of view. "Is it possible that when they see the images in Oren's photos they feel the same way we feel when we look at Sima's photos?" Impossible. These are wonderful young men in Oren's photos. These are our friends who volunteered to protect our country. Yes, and in her photos are Sima's friends and relatives from the refugee camp Tul-Karem, who put themselves at risk in the armed struggle against the oppression and the Israeli occupation.

We all walked around looking at our photos in silence, yet we felt the intensity of the moment. We looked at each other, and that courage to look directly at each other—with the acknowledgment that who we are now is also who we were in the past—is at the heart of our TO group. Next we used Image Theatre to show our responses to the photos. First we made silent, static images, and then images with sound and words. We stayed in our polarized groups as we showed each other our images, a line of Israelis facing a line of Palestinians. Image Theatre allowed us to bridge the impossible polarization between us, and after this non-verbal dialogue, we added words, then sentences to the images. Then we were ready to discuss and reflect. As joker, I asked everyone to reflect on what touched us, what resonated, and how we could identify with the "other."



TA/TK's theatrical work and activism are grounded in the collective intimacy we develop through experiences like this, which I call "polarized intimacy" because it is based on traumatic experiences and memories, seemingly from opposite sides of the trauma, but, in fact, it is based on shared experiences and memories of a common pain. It is different from typical notions of intimacy, which is usually perceived to be based on tenderness. In TA/TK we attempt to touch our sense of loss, together with those who caused the losses, and examine the violence that we initiated against each other, in order to build joint memory that makes it possible to create a new alliance for a shared future. This is possible only if we acknowledge our polarization and our pain, as well as the needs and ambitions of each side. The Polarized Model of Theatre of the Oppressed is based on the acknowledgment that we will not turn away from the society we come from, yet we invite those who oppose us to join us in a search away from "us and them" to our shared pain, and toward shared justice.



**Figure 1:** The scene—Palestinian grandfather and his two grandchildren stopped by the soldier at the checkpoint. Photo by Einat Gutman (CFP).

### Israeli and Palestinian "Cops-in-the-Head"

We have learned that to be able to work together, we need to meet separately to keep contact with our identities and our different needs, so between every bi-national session of TA/TK we spend some time meeting uni-nationally. In these uni-national meetings we focus on issues and obstacles we face in our own societies because of our activism, and we reflect on the difficulties in our recent sessions with the "other" group. We try to identify our own blind spots and how they were created. We then rejoin both groups, and build our next activities, decisions, and actions on what we have done separately.

Recently in our joint sessions we used Image Theatre and Forum Theatre to figure out how to deal with opposition from those in our own societies to our activism against roadblocks and "apartheid roads" (roads for Jews only) in the West Bank. One Palestinian member was told by his boss that if he

traveled with our theatre group he would be fired from his job. He shared this with the whole group and this led to stories from both sides about the increased pressures we are facing in our societies for "serving" the "other" side of the conflict. We divided into groups of four—two Palestinians and two Israelis in each group—to make images and scenes of the different pressures we face. Each person shared a story with the small group, then the groups created images for each story. Each group chose one story and used the images to create a scene.

We reconvened as a whole group, showed the scenes, and decided to Forum two scenes. One Israeli woman's scene was about her father's voice in her head as she planned a demonstration with her Palestinian TA/TK colleagues. Her father's "cop-in-the-head" voice was played by an Israeli, standing on a chair behind her talking to her non-stop: "How can you believe them? They are your enemies! They are all the same; they want to throw us into the sea. The problem isn't the occupation; the problem is that they don't want us here, period. You're naïve! They are exploiting your naivety for their cause!"

Right after the performance, I, as joker, asked if that could happen in a Palestinian family too. When the Palestinians said, "Yes," we forumed the scene in two phases: first we improvised the "mirror scene," with the cop-in-the-head of a Palestinian member of the group. In this scene the Palestinian mother's comments were similar to those of the Israeli father: "How can you work with them while they are occupying us? They are not truthful; they don't really want peace because they don't want to return the land they took from us. They are all soldiers; they took our land in '48, but it was not enough for them so they took more in '67." We then created a new scene that included the cops-in-the-head of both protagonists. Israelis and Palestinians replaced the protagonist first from their own side, and then from the other side. When we use theatre in this way, to reflect both sides of the polarization, we are able to understand the obstacles both sides face. Only then can we strategize the specific actions that we need to take together.

### Polarized Forum Theatre and the Role of the Joker

Polarized Forum Theatre is specifically designed for mixed groups who have extreme conflicts. It allows spect-actors to replace the antagonist as well as the protagonist. It invites everyone to play the "other" and to confront each other's questions and dilemmas. This creates meaningful dialogue in which each side is respected and fully heard. In discussions I had with Boal, I was surprised that he accepted Polarized Forum, including inviting spect-actors to replace the antagonist as well as the protagonist. In an interview with Peter



Duffy in *Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed* (2010), Boal said in response to a question about work with the "oppressors":

... like here, in Brazil, there is a group for men who have beaten their wives or partners, and they make an association to try and understand why they did that. So, they are the oppressors, but they make forum theatre to try and look at their situation and to ask, What would you have done? And they are, all of them, oppressors. The only one who is not an oppressor was one of my assistants who works with me here, and the oppressors, they play the situation out and the other men who are also oppressors or have been oppressors of their wives or partners, they replace the oppressed and try to analyze what happened to them that makes this monstrosity that is to beat a woman whom you supposedly love. So this I believe is perfect to work with oppressors of that kind who are willing to change. But, the example from Israel, the example from this group of men, and other examples like in prisons—sometimes you work with prisoners, sometimes you work with guards—the guards are the oppressors, but by playing prisoners they understand the situation, they humanize the relationship, and that I think is okay. (p. 261)

In the Polarized Model we do not "give equal time" to the voice of the oppressor. We always acknowledge the oppressive power structure of the occupation, but we also acknowledge the layers of oppression experienced by both sides. For example, we presented a Forum play in which an elderly Palestinian man, just released from the hospital, and his grandchildren are forbidden by Israeli soldiers to pass a check point to get to their home. The old man is the primary protagonist, but a Palestinian spect-actor replaced the grandson. He immediately became violent, pushing and striking out at the soldiers (played by Israeli and Palestinian actors). I, as joker, stopped the intervention at that point to talk with the audience of Palestinians and Israelis about how such violence immediately creates polarization, and that the intervention made this real, in this moment. We all agreed that part of the creativity of using theatre as a non-violent weapon is to learn how to represent violence as a "rehearsal for transformation," rather than allowing it to become real violence.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately after this, an Israeli woman, who was visibly upset by the first spect-actor's intervention, came on stage. She also replaced the grandson, but she dropped to her knees and begged the soldiers, almost crying, "Please, please let us pass." The Palestinians in the audience laughed at this intervention. Next, another Israeli woman from the audience replaced the Israeli soldier. She threw away her weapon and tried to convince her commander to do the same. The Israeli officer in the scene, played by a Palestinian, vehemently refused to allow the old man to pass through the checkpoint, "in order to safeguard the country's security." I stopped the scene and asked: "Did these interventions solve the old man's problem?"

"No," said the Palestinian who had played the violent grandson. "I didn't solve a thing, but I restored my pride."

The Israeli answered the same question, saying, "No, but it was important for me to demonstrate that violence is not an option no matter what."

The Polarized Forum Model is based on these principles: (1) the Forum is performed for audiences of Israelis and Palestinians together, by Israeli and Palestinian actors. Our plays show the oppression of Palestinians by Israelis under the occupation; we never deny that. But spect-actors may replace characters other than the protagonist. This allows us to ask what those on both sides of the conflict can do to create transformation. (2) Our Polarized Forum Theatre is based on true personal stories, including Israelis' stories. For instance, the Forum scene described above is the true story of an Israeli soldier. Though he was oppressing the Palestinian grandfather, he was oppressed by his officer. The soldier may be replaced by spect-actors, but his very presence, and the presence of all the Israelis in this situation, is a demonstration of the oppression of the Palestinians and acknowledgment that the oppressed protagonist in the scene is the old man who is not allowed to pass through the checkpoint. (3) Palestinians and Israelis know the complexities of our conflict. Creating opportunities for both sides to be in the shoes of "the other" strengthens our new activist alliance.

I have questioned my role as joker in Polarized Forum: is it possible for Palestinians and Israelis to have a true dialogue, to ask the necessary questions, when I, an Israeli, am in the role of joker? James Thompson (2003), who did TO workshops in Sri Lanka during violent conflict, emphasizes that the joker in such situations is not neutral or objective:

It is stating the obvious to say that any workshop facilitator in a conflict situation is not some neutral arbiter between the participants and the issues at stake. I do not simply pose problems or questions. The facilitator has the power to direct the focus of the inquiry for the audience. (p. 185)

Thompson says that he was not neutral—he wanted the conflict to end, but without either side being defeated. He wanted to help both sides see the truth of each other's stories.

This is how I see my role as joker as well. The questions I asked the audience during the roadblock scene were not neutral, and I did not accept facile magic solutions. I made it clear that I want the conflict to end, and that I wanted the Forum to demonstrate that the conflict originates, at least partially, in each side's insistence that there is one true story. Boal often said in his workshops that a joker has to be a difficultator, not a facilitator. In TO all narratives have to be challenged; this is especially true for polarized TO work.



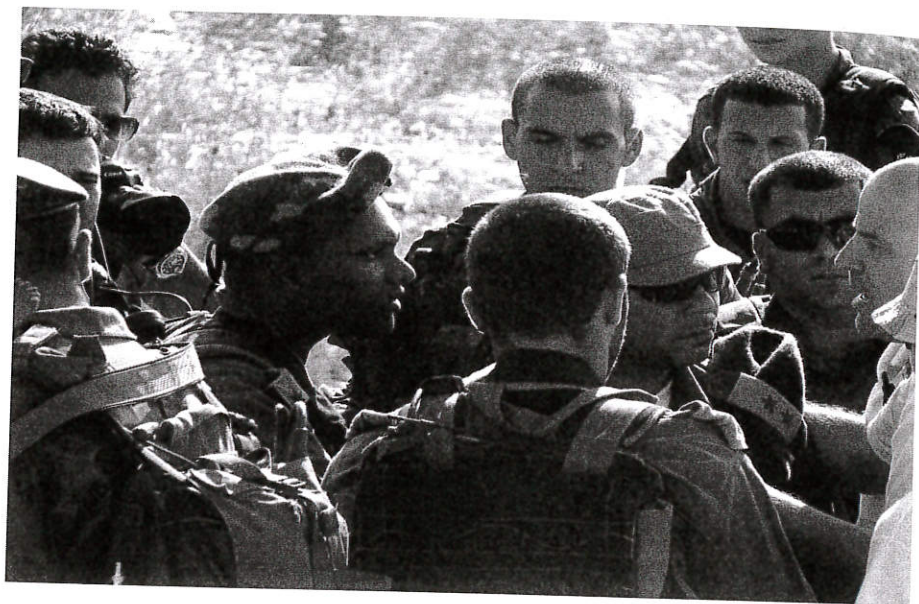


Figure 2: Real Israeli officer (wearing beret) interrupts the scene to arrest Munir, the actor playing an Israeli officer soldier (in cap and sunglasses). Chen (far right), the joker, intervenes to prevent the arrest. Photo by Einat Gutman (CFP).

### Polarized Theatre of the Oppressed: Strategies and Tactics

There are few places now (in 2010) where Israelis and Palestinians are allowed to gather together, so trespassing is a strategy we often use in our public actions. This choice is ethical, activist, and aesthetic. Boal often said that TO asks us to trespass, to break the barriers between the stage and the audience, between the dominant and the dominated, in order to remove the borders of oppression defined by the oppressors. We decided to present our Forum Theatre piece about the grandfather at the road block at an actual road block outside the village of Shuffa, close to the Israeli settlement Avnei-Heffetz, in the occupied territories. In this performance the soldier, a medic, was played by the Israeli, a member of TA/TK, who had told the original story. He is in conflict with his commanding officer, a medical doctor, who was played by a Palestinian actor. The old man was played by an Israeli actor, and the two grandchildren were played by a Palestinian and an Israeli.

As is typical, we translated everything, and we had cross-language actors. For example, when the Israeli soldier asks his commander a question (in Hebrew), the officer, who is played by a Palestinian actor, repeats the question

in Arabic and answers in Arabic. The soldier repeats the answer in Hebrew, and so on. Similarly, for the spect-actor's interventions, the actor repeats the spect-actor's words in his/her language and answers in the other language.

We performed the play with an audience of fifty Palestinians and forty Israelis, at a real checkpoint, with Israeli soldiers all around. At the point when the Palestinians are arriving at the checkpoint, the soldier appeals to his commanding officer, "We must follow our medical ethics here. We can tell this man is telling the truth, we can see that he has just had an operation and is very weak." But the officer continues to say the man cannot pass. The soldier tries to argue, but the play ends with the commanding officer insisting that the soldier has to tell the Palestinian grandfather that he cannot pass and cannot go home.

In this performance, when we reached the moment when the Palestinians arrived at the checkpoint, a real Israeli officer and some of his soldiers rushed into the stage area and started to arrest the Palestinian actor who was playing the Israeli officer. He said he was arresting him for "contempt of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) uniform." As joker, I responded as if this was a sincere spect-actor intervention. I stepped in and said, "Stop, stop! What's the problem officer? This is only theatre; this is not a real situation or a real soldier. Why are you arresting our actor, Munir? He is just playing his role, like the other actor who is also playing a soldier. Is it just because Munir is Palestinian and Eyal is Israeli? They are both playing the same type of role in the play!"

He repeated, "I won't let you show contempt for the IDF uniform!" Ridiculously enough, the officer interrupting the scene was the same rank as Munir's fictitious officer in the play. A real colonel was arresting a make-believe colonel on the same "stage." Our Palestinian translator Iyyad simultaneously translated all that was happening into Arabic, and the hundred people watching, Palestinians and Israelis, were laughing out loud. Munir's six-year-old child was in the audience, and he broke into tears. I offered a solution to placate the officer: I asked both the Israeli and Palestinian actors to take off their uniforms. I held up the two jackets and showed them to the audience, saying, "This is the power of theatre. The soldiers' power is of course much greater, and we will do what they tell us to do. But we have the power of imagination. We can continue our play with Eyal and Munir playing Israeli soldiers without their uniforms. As you watch the play, please remember two things: first, I will hold up the shirts for you, so the uniforms are still represented, but not actually on Munir's Palestinian body and Eyal's Israeli body. They both represent the same thing, but if you forget, look at the shirts. If that doesn't help, look at the soldiers, the road open only for Jews, and the Jewish settlement behind us."

Then I realized that a soldier was filming us, as surveillance. I said to the audience, "But the power of our imagination goes beyond these two ac-



tors/soldiers and their shirts. We can imagine the end of the occupation; we can imagine Israelis and Palestinians living in peace. These soldiers can't, they still can't. But I believe that one day they will be able to imagine this, one day they will join us. We all have to believe in that." When it was over I realized we were all on the edge, in new territory. This was not Forum Theatre, not joking as I know it. It was something else entirely. I understand now that there is no way to do "conventional" Forum Theatre when the actors and spect-actors are in real danger, when there is no safe space for mutual learning, for true interaction between the play and the spect-actors.

I do not know how to name or categorize this event and the role I played in the presentation yet. But it represents a reality that we can participate in, reflect on and ask questions about. Most importantly, we must consider how to take action to change it. This is a strange moment for all Israelis and Palestinians, for all of humanity, a moment of hope and hopelessness. As Boal wrote:

Let us hope that one day—please, not too far in the future—we'll be able to convince or force our governments, our leaders, to do the same; to ask their audiences—us—what they should do, so as to make this world a place to live and be happy in—yes, it is possible—rather than just a vast market in which we sell our goods and our souls. Let's hope. Let's work for it! (1992, p. 246)

#### Notes

1. "Ex-combatants" for Palestinians means that they have fought in armed resistance and served time in Israeli jails. In Israel they are called "terrorists" and in Palestine they are called "freedom fighters" or "political prisoners."
2. This is a paraphrase of Boal's original statement "Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubt, it is a rehearsal of revolution!" (1985, p. 155).

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*Toby Emert & Ellie Friedland*

### Considering the Future of Theatre of the Oppressed

*An Interview with Julian Boal*

**TOBY:** I WANT TO ask you about your story. How were you drawn to this work that your father began?

**Julian:** There was not a clear starting point for me because I saw many performances throughout my life, and that sparked the interest. When I was in my mid-twenties, I took a master's degree in history in France. I became interested in what was happening in Brazilian theatre in the 1960s. Most mainstream theatre was European in concept—in the plays, the actors even spoke with Portuguese or Italian accents. The director might be Polish. On the political theatre side, Brazilian theatre saw itself as serving the role of enlightening the audience. They were seeing the audience as inferior, as in need of being enlightened. Theatre of the Oppressed considers that people already have a sense of liberation, so I thought that Theatre of the Oppressed was more interesting. Also, I met Jana Sanskriti, the movement in India. It was those two things that made me really willing. Jana Sanskriti is a group that involves more than 20,000 persons in Theatre of the Oppressed throughout India. The performances are amazing, and the political lines they defend are really interesting.

**Toby:** Does TO feel like your life's work? Obviously it's part of the work your father did for his whole life, but do you feel like that's the case for you as well?

**Julian:** I think yes ... very likely. I really enjoy the work, I enjoy being a teacher, I enjoy being a joker, I enjoy being part of groups, I enjoy meeting people. I have made connections that give me friends around the world. I'm seeing opportunities, I'm seeing possibilities that I am willing to grab, and I would like to evolve the work. So, yes ... you can never say never. You can never say always ... but, yes.



their oppressive power or not. Power is, in fact, maintained, specifically by denying equity to others, thus oppressing them.

**Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO):** A not-for-profit organization with the following mission: "To challenge oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice." PTO organizes an annual conference focused on the work of liberatory educators, activists, artists, and community organizers.

**Praxis:** Freire's concept of informed action. Freire speaks of praxis as the pairing of critical reflection and intentional action; transformation of oppressive circumstances requires thoughtful analysis of the circumstances coupled with action that responds to the analysis.

**Rainbow of Desire:** Boal's body of theatrical "psychotherapeutic" exercises that examine individual, internalized oppressions that influence the ways in which we view and interact with each other and the culture at large.

**Simultaneous Dramaturgy:** Boal's early approach to Forum Theatre in which, during the play, the actors stop the action and ask the audience for suggested solutions to the situation depicted. The audience voices ideas that the actors then play out on stage.

**Spect-actor:** Boal's term for TO audience members who choose to participate in the action of the Forum scene.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**CHEN ALON** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Theatre Department at Tel-Aviv University, where he is a facilitator/lecturer in "Activist-Therapeutic Theatre." As a Major (reserve) he co-founded "Courage to Refuse," a movement of officers and combatant soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied Palestinian territories, an action for which he was imprisoned for a month. Alon is co-founder of "Combatants for Peace," a movement of Palestinian and Israeli ex-combatants who abandoned the way of violence. Currently Alon, with Combatants for Peace, is developing a new model of Polarized Theatre of the Oppressed, working with Israeli and Palestinian youth, other mixed audiences of Palestinians and Israelis, as well as in state prisons and drug addiction/homeless rehabilitation centers. Chen Alon has facilitated TO workshops in Los Angeles, Minnesota, Omaha (USA), Paris, Marseilles, Nice (France), Pula (Croatia), Basque Country, Barcelona (Spain), Belfast, Enniskillen, and Donegal (Northern Ireland).

**HECTOR ARISTIZÁBAL** was born and raised in Medellín, Colombia, where his commitment to human rights work led to his arrest and torture and eventual exile in the US. He holds an M.A. degree in Psychology from Antioquia University in Medellín and a second master's as a Marriage & Family Therapist from Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, California. As the founder and creative director of the nonprofit organization ImaginAction, Hector works as an independent consultant for organizations throughout the U.S., Canada, and the world. He offers his unique blend of techniques combining Theatre of the Oppressed and Council Circle to communities dealing with difficult challenges, including in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, and Northern Ireland. He has worked extensively with at-risk and incarcerated youth, immigrant families, people affected by HIV/AIDS, and in hospice programs. As an actor, he has performed on stage and screen, and has toured the world with his autobiographical play, *Nightwind. The Blessing Next to the Wound: A Story of Art, Activism, and Transformation* (Lantern Books, 2010), coauthored with Diane Lefer, covers his tumultuous life and his multifaceted work. Hector helped found the Center for Theatre of the Oppressed/Applied Theatre Arts, Los Angeles which, beginning in 2001, brought Augusto Boal to Los Angeles for several years running to teach and to inspire. He has served on the national board of PTO (Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed).

**BRENT BLAIR** is the Founding Director of the Applied Theatre Arts program and of the new Master of Arts in Applied Theatre Arts at the University of Southern California. He holds an M.A. in Counseling Psychology and is currently completing his Ph.D. in Depth Psychology with an emphasis on Liberation Arts and Community Engagement. A Fulbright fellow with a focus on indigenous community-based Theatre in Eastern Nigeria, he trained as a voice teacher with Kristin Linklater in the late 1980s and has taught directing, acting, voice and/or applied theatre arts courses at numerous colleges and universities across the United States and around the world. He worked and trained with Boal since 1996, and is the co-founder of the former Center for Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Theatre Arts, Los Angeles (2001–2005) which hosted Boal four times. He is currently working on a book about Liberation Arts and Community Engagement (LACE).

**JULIAN BOAL** lives in Paris and Rio de Janeiro and has worked as an independent workshop facilitator of Theatre of the Oppressed for many years. In addition to his own work as a TO trainer, he collaborated extensively with his father, Augusto Boal, and has presented numerous workshops throughout the world, including France, Brazil, Switzerland, Bosnia, Italy, Spain, and the United States. He also works in India with the famed theatre company Jana Sanskriti,





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