
Palestinian Performing Arts

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This report results from two research trips made in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel/Palestine, during three weeks in December 1995/January 1996 and six weeks in July/August 1996.

The aim of the research was to get an idea about the state of the arts, especially the performing arts, in the West Bank and Gaza and to pinpoint the wishes and needs of people and institutions concerned with the Palestinian arts.

In the sponsoring of these research trips the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Dutch Performing Arts Fund, the Amsterdam Theatre School, the RO Theatre, and the publisher of this paper, Theater Instituut Nederland all took part.

Participants

Participants in the research trip were

- Han Bakker, manager of the Dogtroep, Amsterdam, a multicultural multidisciplinary theatre and visual arts company which has worked in several countries around the world, including most Western European countries, Canada and the United States, but also in Russia, Uzbekistan, South Africa, Rumania and the Czech Republic.
- Jeroen Croes, final-year student at the Amsterdam Theatre School.
- Koos Terpstra, director and artistic leader of the RO Theatre, Rotterdam.
- Harriët Stroet, actress at the RO Theatre.
- Mimoun Oaïssa, student at the Amsterdam Theatre School.
- Neil van der Linden, secretary to the theatre department of the Dutch Arts Council and free lance researcher, author of this report.

The background of toponymes

In the following text the geographical names that are common in the English language are used. So it is 'Jerusalem' and not 'Al-Qhuds', as the city is known in Arab language, 'Hebron' (Israeli name) instead of 'Al-Khalil' (Arab name), and 'Nablus' (Arab name) instead of 'Shechem' (Israeli name).

The word 'Palestine' is used for convenience, although (until now) there exists no Palestinian state in the proper sense of the word. It refers to Gaza and the West Bank and includes East Jerusalem, although until now there is no political reality supporting this use. According to

different views the word 'West Bank' may or may not include East Jerusalem. Partly for the sake of convenience in this text the word 'West Bank' often includes East Jerusalem. This complies with the point of view that the term 'occupied areas' as defined by United Nations resolutions *includes* East Jerusalem, which is otherwise a matter of debate. However, when I mention the fact that West Bankers cannot enter Jerusalem without a permission, I mean West-Bankers excluding the inhabitants of East Jerusalem.

I skip the question whether the Arab population living inside the pre-Six day war-borders should be referred to as Palestinians. I simply name them 'green-liners' as they are often called in the West Bank, after the name of the borderline between pre-1967 Israel and the West Bank. This population includes some quite large communities, living in Nazareth, Acre, Haifa, and Jaffa.

Until now there are just a few areas which could be referred to as Palestinian territories. These are the areas which up to now have been handed over to the Palestinian Authority of chairman Yasser Arafat: the major parts of the cities Jericho, Gaza, Jenin, Bethlehem and Ramallah and smaller areas surrounding them.

The Ministry of Culture of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah considers itself responsible for covering cultural life in the whole area comprising the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, its policy towards Jerusalem is very restricted, as for political reasons the Palestine Authority is denied any immediate jurisdiction over any part of Jerusalem, including the Eastern, until now predominantly Arab parts. For this reason, the Ministry in Ramallah is rather reluctant to deal with Palestinian artists and institutions in Jerusalem.

Palestinian West Bankers from outside East Jerusalem are not allowed to enter the city without a permit, and on occasion the borders between the city and the surrounding West Bank areas are sealed off by road blocks. This severely affects economical as well as social life, including cultural life, as will be discussed further on.

Current political background

The world in the West Bank and Gaza is now in a transitional phase. The Palestinian uprising of the late eighties, the *intifada*, has come to a halt for a number of years. The Oslo agreements, the creation of a few autonomous areas, Palestinian elections, a series of violent incidents on both sides, the closing down of the border on several occasions and the Israeli elections all took place in rapid succession.

Palestinian urban cultural life is concentrated in a few larger cities: East Jerusalem, which functions as the de facto cultural capital, the nearby cities Bethlehem and Ramallah (the

Palestinian Ministry of Culture is located in Ramallah) and, additionally, Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem in the north, Hebron in the south, Jericho in the east and Gaza and the densely populated Gaza Strip in the west.

Historical backgrounds

The geographical entity of Palestine was drawn on a map at the end of the First World War by the English and the French, when dividing among them the remnants of the Ottoman empire. It was assembled from lines partly drawn by a ruler, around an area between the Mediterranean sea and the river Jordan. It contained a mainly Arab population separated somewhat in a natural way by mountains from the geographical entity called Lebanon in the North and by desert from the Egyptian population in the Nile delta in the Southwest.

After the Second World War in between the borders of this geographical entity Palestine the state of Israel was established.

Before this partition in 1948 there existed a somewhat distinct Palestinian society, comprised a multifaceted collection of religions and races, all of whom had coexisted in relative peace for hundreds of years - at least until the late 1920s. Muslims, Christians from Nazareth and Galilee, Druze people from Lebanon, indigenous Jews, most of them living around Jerusalem, nomadic tribes who roamed the great deserts towards the East, farmers, villagers and townspeople, Egyptians, Turks, Circassians, Cypriots and Greeks.

Although the city ports of Jaffa and Haifa and the city of Nablus were already commercial centres, most Palestinian settlers were farmers (*felahin*). The author Beshara Doumani has written an interesting monograph, *Rediscovering Palestine, Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700 - 1900*, a sociogram detailing the social and cultural lives of a number of families over two centuries (1995, University of California Press).

History of the Palestinian performing arts

Music of the *felahin* was mainly functional - songs for harvesting, tending the flocks, fishing, grinding coffee or making olive oil. There were also epic songs about old heroes and legends recited by itinerant storytellers (*zajaleen*). Some small-scale shadow-play and puppet theatre may also have had its origins here. On top of this, there were the Koranic incantations of the muezzin, which according to Islamic principles officially is *not* considered as music.

The most important musical events used to be weddings, at which the partygoers would sing and dance. Some popular singers are still named wedding-singers. The dances were collectively known as *debke*, 'foot-tapping'. *Debke* is still a living art. It is a group dance, often performed by men and women together. The dancers put their arms on each other's

shoulders and move in rows, jumping up in parallel lines, performing precise steps and jumps. The music is provided by village musicians who sing rhythmic songs, accompanied by instruments such as the *shababi* and *ney* (short flute and long flute), the *mijwiz* (shawm), the *tabla*, *darbouka* and *daff* (percussion), the *rabab* (fiddle) and the *ud* (al-ud = lute). Some aspects of *debke* are reminiscent of Turkish or Armenian folklore dance styles. Part of the Palestinian population consists of Armenians and the Ottomans once ruled the area. The melody lines call to mind Bedouin music of more Eastern regions and there are complex, typical Arab rhythm patterns. Certain songs became so ingrained that they mutated into distinct song forms with fixed melodies and verse structures upon which new lyrics could be superimposed.

The storytelling tradition, passed from one generation to the next, could also take the form of professional one-man, stand-up comedian theatre acts. Like European cabaret artists, storytellers often included music in their acts. There is a long-standing tradition of artists using well-known phrases or songs and mutating them slightly with verbal turns, to a hilarious effect, often tending to political satire.

Apart from this, there has always been the more mythical or fairytale kind of folktale storytelling. Efforts are undertaken to save traditional stories from being lost as an effect of modernisation.

From the indigenous Palestinian cultural tradition in general, it seems that a lot of has been lost. This might largely be due to the regular effects of 'modernisation', but also for a considerable part due to the Palestinian 'diaspora', which divided the Palestinian population into many isolated entities scattered throughout many countries with hardly any means of communication. Borders prevent those who would be interested from re-establishing cultural ties. To give an example, one 75-year-old *ud* player of Palestinian origin, Rhawhi Chamash, is a renowned musician in Iraq, but little is known about him in the West Bank. Another example, from the country of this paper's author, is the gifted actor Ramsey Nasr, who just recently visited his father's homeland for the first time.

The Palestinians who remained in the areas which are now part of Israel in the pre-1967 sense, the *green-liners* (mainly concentrated in large populations in Nazareth, Acre, Haifa and Jaffa), have been able to preserve a more coherent knowledge of their musical history. Musicologists of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, like Amnon Shiloah, have preserved recorded findings in this field. It is further known that the German composer and music researcher Hans Helfritz did research into Palestinian musical life in the 1930s.

In Israel, through the immigrants, derivatives of musical cultures (both 'urban' and traditional) from Yemen, Morocco, Iraq, Kurdistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Europe can also be found, so traces of an indigenous Palestinian musical culture could probably be discovered among the descendants of the indigenous Jewish communities .

The political events since 1948 in relation to culture

Since 1948, the year of the establishing of the Israeli state and the first wave of Palestinian refugees, texts set to music have been strongly influenced by the idea of the 'liberation' and the 'return to the homeland' theme. Refugee-camp singers adapted traditional ballads with words expressing these issues. In 1967 the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem came under Israeli rule, adding a second big wave of refugees and reviving the 'occupation' theme. However Palestinian musicians from now on began to record in Tel Aviv studios as well. In the case of political songs this made it necessary to develop a symbolic language in order to bypass Israeli censors. In the refuge countries Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq much Palestinian music was censored or banned as well. There were uncensored Palestinian radio broadcasts, though, from secret locations in Lebanon refugee camps.

Israeli authorities eventually gave up trying to control the clandestine Arab cassette industry and recordings became readily available, even if they had to be sold under the counter. Some foreign names related to the Palestinian cause are to be mentioned in this field as well: Marcel Khalifa, who was Lebanese but who sang texts by the Palestinian poet Machmud Derwish, the famous Lebanese singer Fairouz, who was married to a Palestinian and dedicated some of her repertoire to the Palestinian cause, and the Egyptian singer Sheikh Imam, who for this reason faced to be sentenced to jail by the Anwar Sadat government; offers to give up the hard edge of his messages and to come and sing for the Egyptian broadcasting company were fruitless.

During the seventies and eighties the Palestinian singer/songwriter *Mustafa al-Kurd* became an internationally acclaimed icon of Palestinian resistance. His cassette 'Kullee Amal' (Full of Hope) enjoyed fervent popularity throughout the Palestinian world. He used a new combination of local folk forms, Egyptian and Lebanese pop and Western rock. At the end of the seventies he was exiled. He settled in Lebanon. Meanwhile he toured the world, including the United States and Western Europe. Over the years Mustafa al-Kurd has also taken up composing for the theatre, like writing music for performances by the *Al-Hakawati* theatre group (see below). After Mustafa al Kurd's success in the seventies, another group made a similar impact at home and abroad, *Al-Ashiqeen* ('The Lovers'), based in Syria, who achieved fame all over the Arab world. Their best-known cassette release, 'Sirit Izzed-Deen al-Kassam' ('The story of

Izzed-Deen al-Kassam') is about the life of Sheikh al-Kassam, a popular guerrilla fighter from the days when Palestine was an English colony. In fact this group was popular among Jewish circles as well, although it wrote political songs.

Playwrights were forced as well to use highly symbolic language to convey defiant messages. Moreover, theatrical performances were subject to much closer scrutiny than music, which could go on unheeded in the privacy of homes. However during the seventies the *Balaleen* ('balloons') theatre group and during the eighties the *Hakawati* ('storytelling') theatre group managed to make an enormous impact. The *Balaleen* group was led by Emile Ashrawi, now working as a photographer, and Adel Tartir, now a carpenter. The nucleus of the *Hakawati* group originally consisted of the actors François Abu Salem, the American Jackie Lubeck (then husband and wife) and Edouar Mouallim. This group found a way to express itself in a political manner and created an autonomous art form in the process: The style was grotesque, Grand Guignol-like, with bitter, absurd overtones. It relied partly on the individual comic skills of actors, so its demands resembled those of storytelling. The *Hakawati* players performed throughout the world. Many people in the European arts field, among them former artistic director of the London Almeida Theatre Festival, Pierre Audi, now artistic director of De Nederlandse Opera, have pleasant memories of performances by the group.

After a few years the group was able to move into its own building in East Jerusalem, a former cinema. At a certain point, however, the group suffered from internal differences in opinion and was split up. Edouar Mouallim and his wife, actress Eman Aoun, started the drama education school in Ramallah, the Ashtar Theatre (see below). François Abu Salem left for France. Jackie Lubeck and recent member Jan Willems (a Dutchman) have now started new projects under their own name (see below).

The theatre building now does not have a permanent ensemble. It was renamed the Palestinian National Theatre, although it is still often referred to as the *Hakawati* Theatre (see below).

The effects of the intifada

During the intifada a great change occurred in Palestinian cultural life. Aside from the obvious effects of curfews on the performing arts, the 'hardening' of attitudes resulted in a self-imposed ban on 'entertainment', which was considered 'frivolous', 'luxury', 'decadent'. So theatres, cinemas and music cafés were closed down and art life was suppressed for a considerable period of time. All efforts seemed focused on the struggle. One principal form of music flourished however, the intifada songs. Singers, musicians and groups like Bassam Bashara, Walid Abdel Salaam (whom we will meet later in this paper as theatre director), Ash-Shaabeh (in fact a *debke* group), and Riyad Awad have brought the hard-edged sentiments

of the intifada to a receptive audience. Bassam Bashara's hit cassette 'Atfal al-Hijara' ('Children of the Stones'), recorded in London, is an example of the brooding, mournful and yet powerfully defiant style of singing and songwriting that epitomises modern Palestinian pop. This song became famous international, however it was not a real success in Palestine. Walid Abdel Salaams composed a song 'Thna as-Shawra' ('We go to the streets and throw stones'), which according to a story in a humorous way was inspired by a visit to Amsterdam; through the text the author ponders on the idea that an intifada could never take place in a city like Amsterdam because in such cities there are no stones to be found in the streets. Intifada songs were also practised at school, where - and this probably partly was a pity - they took the place of traditional music education.

Education in general suffered during this period. A considerable 'education gap' can be observed in young people of around 25 years of age and under. In addition to inadequate schooling, many belonging to these generations have never seen a theatre from inside, held a musical instrument in their hands or sung a regular song; many have never even seen a movie, except for on television. Regarding art life, since the intifada East Jerusalem has turned into a dead city, because of the Israeli checkpoint policy, because of a shift in attitude among the inhabitants due to the political circumstances and since a part of the international social life has moved from East- to West-Jerusalem.

The current situation of the performing arts

Music performance has undergone a gradual evolution, as described above, from merely functional entertainment music for weddings and other festivities to modern concert music like that of the Sabreen ensemble.

The form of dramatic art being seen in theatres since the Balaleen and the Hakawati groups developed their style is a relatively new phenomenon and does not have a historical and traditional place in Palestinian culture. However, throughout the country it appears not difficult to attract audiences for this relatively new art, probably due to the scarcity of such events and thus their heightened value and novelty.

In both fields as well as in dance (see below) it is hard to make a living of the arts alone. The issue of professionalism will be discussed further on.

First it would be good to look at the actual facilities throughout the West Bank and the Gaza strip.

East Jerusalem

Palestinian National Theatre

When a former cinema was reconstructed as the *Palestinian National Theatre*, it was originally designed to host the Hakawati Theatre group, until that group split up. Now it remains as an entity on its own. It is still often referred to as the Hakawati Theatre. It offers the facility of both a main stage and a studio theatre.

It is still the central Palestinian theatre venue, although since 1993, when the entrance roads around East Jerusalem were closed, the building locked off from most of the West Bank communities. It is run by Jamal Ghosheh, its general manager, one of the very few full-time professional arts administrators in the Palestinian community.

The building is located in an area where also the legendary American Colony Hotel, the British Council, the YMCA, the French Cultural Institute and the Orient House can be found.

The venue can host as much as about 400 spectators. By European standards, the building is in a pitiful state. A part of the auditorium is becoming so dangerous that costly reconstruction works are necessary; the alternative is to reduce the size of the auditorium.

Since the building does not host a permanent company any longer, it is fully dependent on incidental events. These consist of productions of the house and guest programmings.

The theatre runs educational programs. In fact for its survival the house partly depends on theatre performances for children, because through schools there is enough audience for these in Jerusalem. Besides special activities for the youth and for families the theatre focuses on women emancipation. Moreover it organised conferences on the position of female artists, such as writers.

1995 saw the fifth edition of an annual puppet festival. Productions from France, Belgium, Burkina Faso, South Africa, England, Germany, Spain and Switzerland participated. Additional performances were organised in Ramallah, Gaza, Jericho, Nablus, Hebron, Tulkarem, Nazareth, Jaffa, the Askar Camp and a few villages.

The theatre also hosted a storytelling-theatre week, including Palestinian and other Arab stories as well as stories by Gogol and Kafka.

Among the productions which were produced or co-produced by the theatre in recent years, there was *Ansar* by the Ar-Ruwha group, a play based on the experiences of one of the actors in a Negev desert detainment prison. Then there was the puppet theatre production *The Bridge*, directed by Ole Braun from Denmark. *Joha the Arab* was a children's theatre production. The theatre co-operated on the production of *The Last One*, written by Dutch playwright Pauline Mol, by a group of former members and heirs of the Hakawati group: Edour Muallem, Jackie Lubeck, Eman Aoun, Amer Khalil and Raida Ghazali, with Jan Willems as director.

Further there are activities for Ramadan holiday, art exhibitions, workshops on acting and directing, lighting, dance and arts administration. The summer of 1996 saw a workshop on acting in front of the camera, organised by Jan Willems and Jackie Lubeck, the Dutch Media Academy and the theatre.

The theatre possesses a 16 mm film projection system, enabling incidental film screenings. The theatre's foyer features a nice restaurant and a beautiful terrace and has developed into a meeting place for what is left of East Jerusalem cultural life. However its central position is severely hampered by the current lack of possibilities to reach West Bank audiences from outside Jerusalem.

The Palestinian National Theatre is appointed as the venue for a performance of the European Community Youth Orchestra as well; this will show whether the venue is fit for this and whether events like this fill a need.

Jamal Ghosheh is representative for the ITI, the Unesco-affiliated International Theatre Institute.

The Qhasabeh Theatre

Near to the National Theatre, just around the corner, there is another theatre, the *Qhasabah Theatre*. It hosts a small company in the strict sense of the word, founded in 1970 under the name 'Dramatic Arts Company'. It resides in this venue since 1992. The present venue features some 100 seats. *George Ibrahim*, who studied theatre at the West-Jerusalem Hebrew University, is the artistic leader, director, and an actor with the company. One celebrity makes incidental appearances with *Qhasabah*, *Mohammed Bakri*, as actor and director. Bakri, a 'green-liner', also enjoys relative popularity in Israel on stage and on television. Other regular or incidental actors are Husam Abu Aisha, Amer Khalil and Ahmed Abu Saloum.

The *Qhasabah Theatre* collaborated with the West-Jerusalem-based *Khan Theatre* on *Romeo and Juliet*, an Arab/Jewish co-production from two years back. *Romeo* and his family were played by Arab actors, *Juliet* and her family by Jews. The Arabs were West Bankers as well as green-liners. This project also met with severe criticism. The production was not performed throughout the West Bank, partly for want of suitable venues, but lack of acceptance on both sides was another likely factor, and fear or mere reluctance from the Israeli side might have played a role.

The company tours throughout the cities of the West Bank. It has had guest appearances in Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Italy and France.

To give an idea, the repertoire of the former 'Dramatic Arts Company' and the current *Qhasabah Theatre* mentions for instance Egyptian plays like one by Tawfiq al-Hakim, a series

of plays by George Ibrahim, like *Ramzi Abul Majd* (the name of the protagonist), which has been performed in Amman, Tunis and Paris as well, Beaumarchais, Marivaux, *An Angel Came Down to Babylon* by Dürrenmatt, *The Broken Jar* by Kleist, *Biedermann and the Fire Raisers* by Max Frisch, *The Dead Without Graves* after Sartre and *Caligula* by Camus.

Plays for children have also been produced. These plays were performed in schools in Jerusalem and the West Bank, but also crossed the green line into Haifa, Acre, Nazareth and the Galilee. Other projects include theatre programmes for children in summer camps and instructional programmes for schools.

On the program for the coming period are Ariel Dorfmanns *The Death and the Maiden*, *Antigone*, *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist* by Dario Fo.

The auditorium was used for a Palestinian Film Festival in 1992 and 1993. The small foyer also serves as an exhibition space for photography and art. Like the Palestinian National Theatre and other East Jerusalem cultural institutes, the role of the theatre is hampered by the current lack of possibilities to reach West Bank audiences outside Jerusalem.

Smaller theatre companies in Jerusalem

The afore-mentioned play *Ansar* was performed by the *Ar-Ruwha* theatre, led by Ismail Dabbaagh, who studied acting at the Hebrew university. The *New York Times* described it as 'a searing depiction of an Israeli prison in the Negev'. The group alternates plays for adults and family plays. Through the latter it can survive financially. A nice example of a play directed at children was *Hodydoon and Goblin*, an object theatre play, with fine puppetry and scenery design by Ismail Dabbaagh. The group has a small venue of its own. It aims at establishing a venue in the Old City, in a former tile factory. Until now their ambitions have been hampered by some tax problem concerning the former tile company, but it is said that the actual obstacle was the Israeli policy discouraging Palestinian social activities in the Old Town.

The *Al-Jawal* theatre group works in a similar field.

Yakoub Abu Arafah is a gifted puppetry player and musician. He tours schools with a by now famous character, Nakhleh Ash-Shiber, in order to support the school's reading campaigns.

Music

Mustafa al-Kurd currently lives in Jerusalem. He resides in a glass house on the grounds of the National Theatre, where he has installed a studio and a music school. On occasion he tours through the United States, Germany and France.

In more recent years, groups have been experimenting by infusing traditional indigenous forms with elements of jazz, Western classical and Indian music. The music group *Sabreen* has been performing in this vein now for about ten years. The group, widely recognised as the national Palestinian music group, is based in Jerusalem. Most of the instruments are acoustic, combining the traditional Arab *ud*, *ney*, *qanoun* (like the Hungarian cimbalom), *darbuka* (vasedrum) and *daff* (Arab percussion instruments) with Western instruments (piano, guitar, drums, electric bass).

Sabreen now consists of five permanent members. Its main vocalist, Kamilya Jubran, also plays several instruments skilfully. Her sound reminds one of the fluent, sweet voice of the famous Lebanese singer Fairouz. The other mainstay of the group is composer Said Murad, who also possesses a great instrumental talent. Most or all of the musicians have followed a professional education, partly at the conservatory of the West-Jerusalem Hebrew University.

The group has a studio very close to the old part of the city, which it uses as a training facility for technicians and recording engineers and where the latest album was cut.

The word *Sabreen* means 'We are patient'. Although most of the lyrics on their latest album, 'Zjai al-Hemaam' ('Here Come the Doves'), convey a romantic mood, this album features a song about Ramallah during the intifada and a song about Israeli immigrants from the Arab world who drop their original Arab sounding names in favour of Jewish names.

A number of former group members have branched out in their endeavours, like Suheil Khoury, who for a while led the now defunct music group *Washem* ('Tattoo'). Their CD 'Ashiqah', 'The (female) lover', also combined romantic lyrics with political and social elements, in a blend of Arab and Western acoustic instruments and electric bass. Again, it would be apt to classify this group's music as 'jazzy folk-rock'. The group also consisted of lead singer Reem Telhami, who is known in the West Bank for her skilled voice and who is a talented actress as well (she performed in *Hodydoon and Goblin* by Ar-Ruwaha) and their percussionist was the puppeteer Yakoub Abu Arafah. Suheil Khoury in the meanwhile is also chief advisor to the music department of the Ministry of Culture in Ramallah and artistic director of the (Palestinian) *Jerusalem Festival*.

Another interesting group (actually based in Bethlehem) exposing a similar style is *Al-Bara'em* ('The bud'). It was established in 1985. Recently they released a highly interesting album, 'Arus al-Mooj' ('The bride of the wave'), featuring the fabulous voice of Rana Soudah.

Another former *Sabreen* member, Raed Saadeh, is in charge of the Jerusalem Festival as well. Besides he runs the charming Jerusalem Hotel near the East Jerusalem bus station. There he

organises live music performances. This is another remaining bastion of "live" cultural life in East Jerusalem.

Open Air

The Hinom Valley, a huge canyon bordering the old town on the Southeast side, has been used for pop concerts. However currently it is being used by the Israelis and Palestinians practically have no possibility to use it. One other location in East Jerusalem would be very suitable for small events, the King's Tombs, outside the National Theatre and facing the British Council. Whether this possibility could become reality is not known. This location is French property.

It should be noted that the majority of the artists employed live and/or congregate around Jerusalem. Here, notwithstanding the Israeli checkpoint policy which practically locks Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank and Gaza, the opportunities for employment, stimulation through contact with like-minded people and the inspiration of seeing other work are provided. The closure of Jerusalem in March 1993 however has resulted in a severe drop in attendance in Jerusalem by many of the regular spectators and visitors from the surrounding areas. So probably partly because of this recently the artistic "scene" is expanding its area and partially moving to Ramallah and Bethlehem.

Ramallah and Bethlehem

The cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem are situated just a short distance to the north and south of Jerusalem. Because of the road block corridors to Jerusalem they are in practice worlds apart now, given the fact that it takes two hours of a rough hairpin-loop drive through the mountains surrounding Jerusalem to reach the one town from the other. Yet in both towns the same tendency can be seen, namely to develop an autonomous cultural life, independent from Jerusalem. Each town counts a lot of North-American repatriates among its inhabitants and a lot of university students. Ramallah is even famous for some brand new 'grand cafe'-style venues and fashionable restaurants, like 'Angelo', 'KM5' en 'The Flamingo'.

The As-Siraj theatre

Ramallah has a theatre facility located in a converted cinema again, the As-Siraj theatre. The general manager is Ibrahim Najjar, outside Jamal Ghosheh of the Palestinian National Theatre, one of few other full-time arts administrators. To give an idea of the state the building is in: during the first night of the very successful Palestinian election campaign play *Democracy by*

force by Machmud Shukeir, with a full house, the electrical power failed several times. Luckily there were TV cameras that night and thanks to their lighting the actors were able to continue the performance. This production, by the way, was directed by the head of the theatre department of the Ministry of Culture in Ramallah, Walid Abdel Salam. It saw the return to Palestine of the very popular Jordan-Palestinian Zuheir Nubani, famous from television, in the main role. The success of this play, which is still running and until now has been performed for more than 10 months enabled several actors from other groups, like Reem Elow, Ismail Dabbaagh, Samira Natur and several others, to survive in their profession for a while.

The Ashtar theatre company

The former Hakawati Theatre members Edouar Muallim and Eman Aoun, together with dramaturg Sameh Hijazi, founded the Ashtar Theatre. Ashtar's main concentration is the training of young people and teachers: They have a team of teachers for drama teaching, directing, as well as some principles of lighting, set and costume design. They run two main projects:

- a drama course for 14-17 year olds after school hours, formerly in Jerusalem as well, now mainly in their new centre in Ramallah; they have from 20 up to 30 students;
- a theatre teacher training workshop for adults who are interested in teaching drama in schools; this is a three year programme and it used to involve participants in Gaza, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, although for this they are now concentrating in Ramallah as well.

Last summer with the students they did a major production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this summer they did a performance of *The Little Prince*. Either Edouar Muallim or Eman Aoun or both often perform with the students. In the spring they do smaller productions, featuring one or both of the artistic leaders. This year's play, *Martyrs are Coming Back*, was based on a novel by the Algerian writer At-Taher Wattar and poems by the German writer Heiner Müller. Ashtar has at its disposal a well-equipped training venue in a new building, which doubles as a very small theatre.

Bethlehem University theatre

Bethlehem has one aptly sized and neatly equipped permanent stage facility, the university theatre, which opens on one side to a regular, charming theatre hall and on the other side, through a huge steel screen, which can be lifted, to an open air audience seating, turning the whole site into an amphitheatre with a covered stage. The venue is being used in the conventional way for touring productions. In the other way it has not been used for theatre until now.

Two young promising actors, who work everywhere else as well, Khaled al-Masu and Raeda Ghazaleh, together form the Inad Theatre Group.

Gaza

The Rashad Shawwa Cultural Centre

This is the only purpose-built cultural centre in the Palestine areas. It's named after the sponsors, the influential Rashad Shawwa family, which owned the trade routes through Gaza. The centre features up-to-date technical equipment, a large auditorium hall (which seats upwards of 1200 spectators) and a small auditorium (seating about 350). However the large hall might be too big for theatre, especially as the floor is flat and the stage shallow and quite high above the floor. There are no towers or flyovers. It works better for music. The smaller auditorium also has the flat-floor problem, but better sightlines.

Jan Willems en Jackie Lubeck

Jan Willems en Jackie Lubeck are former members of Al-Hakawati. After the group split they have concentrated on educational theatre. For instance they recently produced *Bridge to Eternity*, based on a text by the legendary Palestinian poet Ghassan Kanafani, featuring the young actors Raeda Ghazaleh and Khaled al-Masu, playing before adult audiences, but also designed to tour along schools. This play deals with the issue of emigration and people leaving their original country behind.

In the Gaza strip they worked with an ensemble on an incidental base, which now has continued performing on a more permanent base under the name of 'Gaza Theatre'. A few years ago they produced a very successful production of Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* as well as Pinter's *One for the Road* and recently *Hafiza and Mtawa*, an educational programme about the garbage piling up in the Palestine areas, a serious issue in the area. This production has toured for months along schools. Members of this group also entered drama-education activities in schools and mentor young theatre recruits. For their educational productions Jackie Lubeck and Jan Willems now are incidentally working for the 'Theatre Day at School' organisation.

There is another group working on a semi-professional basis in Gaza, led by Khalil Tafisj, representative of the Ministry of Culture of Ramallah in the Gaza Strip. Tafisj leads a group of enthusiastic actors with professional ambitions, for which again there are few real possibilities. We saw them working on a drama about family alienation in relation to recent political and social circumstances.

The YMCA in Gaza is a supporter of local performing arts initiatives. Groups are able to rehearse and perform there.

Nablus

Nablus is the largest town in the West Bank, but there exist just a few cultural centres. The Al-Asi cinema, used for performing arts, has recently closed its doors, due to disputes among the members of the family which owns it. That leaves the small Ain Sukar centre and the Eybal centre, which is actually a sports club. The Nablus University building has a charming small amphitheatre, which sometimes is used as a performance venue.

The Al-Yasmin theatre group used to be popular. However in its original form it has split up. A mainly new ensemble is working under the same name, consisting of academics and university students, led by Usama Malhas. They now make productions in comedy style about political issues.

In the nearby village of Salfiet there is a promising amateur group.

Jenin

In Jenin the Al-Arrabi cinema has been converted into a theatre facility, but the building is in a poor condition and better suited for local festivities and weddings. In the nearby village of Qabatia there is an enthusiastic amateur theatre group, the Abna er-Rif group, led by two dedicated people, Nasri Kami and Mahmud al-Abed. A play by them about corruption in politics drew broad audiences.

Tulkarem

The Al-Andalus cinema, which was converted into a stage, has already been closed down. Touring productions perform in schools. The nearby village of Einabta, which has an intellectual and politically active academic tradition, has an amateur theatre group, which rose to local acclaim.

Hebron

Hebron is known for its stricter religious tradition. This might seem to all but exclude a flourishing public performing arts life. However, reality shows a slightly different picture in this second largest city in the West Bank. Successful experiences by NGOs such as the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association with programmes about family planning and even sexually transmitted diseases, using actors as a medium, indicate that in Hebron too theatre can play a role.

There is a cultural centre, the Al-Khalil Cultural Forum, a focus of intellectual and literary activities. With some simple adaptations it could accommodate small theatre performances. The University Graduates Union of the Hebron Technical Engineering College runs a far better equipped club building of its own, featuring a small stage fit for modest-scale performances. The University buildings themselves house some very modest facilities. When the British Council presented the production *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Roehampton Theatre College, England, the performance took place in the auditorium. The university would like to enhance theatre life. Such efforts would dovetail nicely into the programmes of the language department of the university.

Jericho

There is some amateur art life in Jericho and at least there is a large cultural centre. The former Rivoli Cinema went up in fire, but the owner rebuilt it as the Jericho Cultural Centre, which is a relatively apt facility, enabling about up to 400 spectators to be seated. It is used for local festivities, but also for touring music and theatre productions.

Outside the aforementioned centres performances can take place in schools and church halls which, however, offer hardly any or no stage and technical facilities.

The themes of Palestinian art and the theatre style

Apart from existing Arab and traditional European repertoire, newly written comedy plays are produced dealing with current issues. Much of this kind of theatre, although 'conventional' according to the rules of comedy, showed an open-ended dramaturgy, i.e. it tended to reject the 'well-made-play' formula. For instance, the aforementioned election family comedy 'Democracy by Force' by Machmud Shukeir gradually turns into a wry satire on an autocratic pater familias who thought he could fiddle with morals within the confines of the family home, ending as an unsolved problem, demonstrated by way of the *mise-en-scène*. The acting style of this play should be categorised somewhere between the well-defined, tight style of Egypt and the more improvised style of the Jordanian theatre. It is easy to understand how both styles reached Palestinian theatre. The emphasis on the monologues delivered by the principal character, however, is related to the indigenous 'solo storytelling performer' style.

Throughout the Arab world art is mostly seen in a political and social context and in Palestine this is almost always the case. Performers put political and social connotations in their productions, audiences seek them. Apart from the plays which explicitly are focused on the intifada, occupation, refugee camps and victims of war, many recent plays deal with political

and social issues in a symbolic way. For instance *Bridge to Eternity* by Theatre Day Productions, based on a text by Ghassan Kanafani, to Western eyes might seem to deal with a spoiled mother and son relationship. But in fact, and Kanafani - who was deeply involved in politics; he was a refugee activist in Beirut and was assaulted for that by the Israeli - explicitly intended his text to do so, it treats with the moral attitude of a refugee. The same text can be read as a comment on emigrants. In fact, some of the theatre makers say they are getting tired with the obsession with the past as, to their idea, it is being exploited by some of the writers and the theatre makers. They prefer to face current social and political issues, or to interpret the past through the present, like in this *Bridge to Eternity* production. Western repertoire is interpreted in a similar ways.

Aside from the recent past, the Israeli occupation, the refugee theme and the intifada, new themes are coming up. *Democracy* is one of them, *children education* and *children's rights* are often mentioned, as well as *women's rights*.

Puppet theatre

Market place and street puppet theatre performers demonstrate a distinctive virtuoso style, improvising on any given situation with any given props. These performers are involved in school performances as well.

Apart from these folklore styles, the more established theatre ensembles practice puppet theatre as well.

For instance, the aforementioned Ar-Ruwha theatre group has some popular puppet theatre shows on its repertoire, like *Hodydoon & Goblin*, designed for conventional theatre. In fact, as stated, these groups can survive through their youth theatre activities.

The Palestinian National Theatre hosts an annual Puppet Theatre Festival, featuring foreign acts as well.

Dance

Dance as a performing art lives an inconspicuous life in the West Bank, except for *debke*. One practical reason for the relative indifference to Westernised dance is the fact that hardly any stage in the Palestine areas is suited to it. Furthermore, ballet is a very costly affair. A third explanation is that much of Western dance is so preoccupied with Western concepts that, however beautiful aesthetically, it is often meaningless outside that context. The impact of Western-style world-calibre Israeli companies like the Bathsheva Ballet has had no spin-off throughout the Palestinian cultural community.

Theatre and music festivals

Festivals are a way to expand the cultural and social scope of the arts, which fits in with structure of relatively tight communities like those throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Events like these play an important role attracting large numbers of people who have been deprived of opportunities to gather socially.

As a result, promoted through the Ministry of Culture, various local festivals flourish throughout the area.

The Bir Zeit Festival, the Palestine Festival and the Ramallah Festival are among the most ambitious of them. They might develop from just local into regional, national and even international festivals. The Gaza Summer Days and the Hebron Grape Festival are a few others. According to some, there is now even a festival-overflow. It is said that at least festivals should co-operate in order to present optimum quality and to prevent double efforts. Collaboration in the technical field would also be beneficial, as sound and lighting quality now often are extremely bad, this years Ramallah Festival with its very professional lighting and sound technician team being a blessed exception to the rule.

Aside from these festivals with a regional scope there are smaller specialised festivals like the puppet theatre festival organised by the Palestinian National Theatre and two larger international festivals. For autumn 1996 a Palestinian *Jerusalem Festival* was scheduled. Due to the political turmoil of end-September 1996, the festival was cancelled and replaced by a series of smaller performing arts events throughout the year. Two former Sabreen members are responsible, Suheil Khoury, now musical adviser to the Ministry, and Raed Saadeh, now manager of the Jerusalem hotel. Their organisation is called *Jebus*. The festival originally was intended to bear that same name, *Jebus Festival*, after the city's name before the biblical King David conquered it.

The Roman amphitheatre nearby Nablus used to be the location for the Sebastia festival. However, to turn the festival more into a local event, the festival has partly moved to the city. Last year saw guest appearances from Italy, England and France.

Funding of performing arts institutions

East Jerusalem institutions can not take direct financial support from the Palestinian Ministry of Culture in Ramallah. None of these theatres seems to want to accept subsidies from the Israeli government either. The Palestinian National Theatre has some institutionalised subvention ties with Norway (NORAD), France and The Netherlands. The Al-Qhasabeh theatre

and the Palestinian National Theatre are run on a commercial basis and hired as a venue for television productions as well. Efforts like these enable the venues to pay rent and taxes, both of which are high in Jerusalem, with no special facilities in return, allegedly due to Israeli policy.

Throughout the rest of the West Bank and the Gaza strip, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture can more easily support institutions. But foreign countries, the churches, the British Councils and the YMCA have to add to this as well.

As mentioned, the West Bank audiences from outside Jerusalem can not reach East Jerusalem, and the effects can be seen at the box offices as well.

Training for the performing arts

Facilities are limited. In music the situation is slightly better than in the theatre and the visual arts. At Nablus University there is a Faculty of traditional music, led by professor Rhawhi Rhawhi from Nazareth. The professional ud teacher at Nablus is Khaled Sadouk. As some insiders confirm, one ud student in particular is worth mentioning as a promise for the near future: Hassan Sharif.

Nablus University fosters ambitious plans for an arts faculty, which might be impeded by lack of funds needed to finish the new building. The university also has a faculty for the visual arts.

Ramallah is home to the National Conservatory of Music, managed by Suheil Khoury, still an institution of modest scale, now housed in three upper levels of a villa. It has ambition to move back to roomier quarters nearby, the same building where the music school was located in the sixties and seventies. The National Conservatory is now aiming to offer primary, intermediate and advanced levels. After completing the three levels, students qualify to take diploma's in performance or theory. The conservatory aims to prepare students for a professional career, either as performing musician or music teacher. So far, options for realising these ambitions have been rather limited, but at least a start has been made now.

The conservatory of the Israeli West-Jerusalem Hebrew University currently has one (male) student from East Jerusalem for jazz piano and one (female) Palestinian student from Nazareth for classical piano. The conservatory lacks the possibility for studying classical Arab music, which is also a disfavour to Jewish immigrants from Arab countries. The musicology department of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, through the efforts of professor Amnon Shiloah, from Syrian Jewish ancestry, hosts probably one of the leading academies for studying history and theory of Arab and other Middle-East music.

Mustafa al-Kurd leads the Jerusalem Centre for Arabic Music in his studio in East Jerusalem, providing some training facilities for music students.

Besides there is a East Jerusalem based Arab Music Centre.

In its studio the music group Sabreen also exploits a training facility, the Sabreen Musical Centre, where courses in voice, instruments, sound technology and construction of traditional instruments are being organised.

For theatre, there are even less professional training facilities, except immediately in practice, through the aforementioned ensembles, and except for some incidental training, sometimes initiated by foreign efforts. There is no completely clear line between professional and amateur theatre.

Arts Education at schools

Ashtar is the most professional school for drama teachers. In the wake of the productions of Theatre Day at School some former collaborators took up teaching drama in schools as well. Actors like Raeda Ghazaleh and Khaled al-Masu incidentally or regularly teach at schools as well.

The musicologist Oday Ruzjman, who was trained in England and like so many others has played in Sabreen as well, is now working on a project in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, to 'retrain' schoolteachers, to enhance their music training capabilities. He is also working on a project, which could be described 'Orff instruments the Arab way', to provide schools with simple musical instruments, partly based on oriental musicological principles, such as microtone flutes. Oday Ruzjman is working on this project together with the Ministry of Culture in Ramallah, but he acts as a NGO.

The Al-Mawrid organisation aims to let children get acquainted with the monumental sites in their own country, by arranging excursions and short historic plays accompanied by music, performed on the spot with the children themselves. This enhances children's awareness of the meaning and the role of their own homelands through history, and it might show them how many different cultures have had an influence on this homeland: Canaanite, Jebusite, Syrian, Jewish, Aramaic, Greek, Roman, Armenian, Byzantine, Arabic, Roman-Catholic, Ottoman, Egyptian, English, French and American. Children are thus confronted with the pluriform, multicultural tradition they stem from. Al-Mawrid also collects stories from the oral storytelling tradition in order to preserve them. It plans to make these available for use in literature and history lessons.

Professionalism in the arts

One must bear in mind that until now hardly any artist can live on a permanent base from his/her work. Just one or two West Bank and Gaza painters and cinematographers might be able to earn themselves a living because they have a name outside. The majority of artists has a second job in a different field. The line between professionalism and amateur art is not very clear and not very useful. To this adds the fact that there are no fully developed professional arts education institutions in the West Bank and Gaza, but some artists have been trained in Israel or elsewhere.

Although miraculous efforts have shown what *could* be done, the entire arts scene is suffering from a lack of options for producing and organising in a professional way.

The issuing of contracts to theatre personnel differs from venue to venue. The Palestinian National Theatre and the Al-Qhasabeh theatre offer contracts. In many other places the majority of employees do not receive written contracts or employment.

Many actors work as drama teachers and some hold jobs entirely unrelated to their profession. Although several theatres and companies appear to operate independently, actors may switch from one to the other. In the present situation, even some most promising artists might be tempted to change careers.

The efforts of the Ministry of Culture in Ramallah

The Palestine Ministry of Culture in Ramallah is responsible for governmental culture policy throughout the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, although it exercises caution in its policy towards Jerusalem; Palestine authorities are forbidden to interfere in the Jerusalem issues. Quite a few staff members are involved in artistic pursuits themselves. Suheil Khoury, former *Sabreen* and *Washem* member, now in charge of the new music school in Ramallah and the Jerusalem Festival, is chief advisor in music policy to the Ministry. Walid Abdel Salam, an actor and former intifada song singer, recently the director of the successful elections comedy *Democracy by Force*, is in charge of the theatre department of the Ministry. The head of the film department is the renowned journalist and novelist Liana Badr. The vice-minister Yahia Yachlef is a poet. The head of the public relations department, Jack Persakian, runs a modern art gallery in East Jerusalem, the Anadiel gallery.

The Minister is Yasser Abed Rabboh.

Relations with universities

Bir Zeit University in Ramallah has a department of cultural studies which deals more with the sociological, political and anthropological side of culture than with practising the arts.

However, in the Palestinian cultural ideology, this department plays an influential role, also because of the many international contacts maintained by the Christian minority in Ramallah. Comparatively a lot of the leading Palestinian ideologists and opinion leaders come from Bir Zeit. The university has an amateur theatre group.

Bethlehem University is the smallest university in the country, which however plays a relatively important role due to its central location and the relatively influential role of the Christian community with its many international contacts. Financially it is relatively well off because of international support, for instance by the Vatican. This university offers no cultural studies, but there are amateur theatre groups.

Nablus University is the largest university in the West Bank. It offers an arts training department.

Hebron University, like its host town, is relatively large but also relatively poor. Staff and students from the English department are keen on setting up a theatre department; in future, if that would be beneficent, such a department could be open to the Hebron Palestinian community, whereas the performing arts climate in Hebron otherwise seems to be a bit subdued.

Gaza University, Jerusalem University and other learning institutions (there are seven universities and three polytechnics throughout the West Bank and Gaza) might have similar facilities. However, except for the programme that has been launched in Nablus, academic professional training facilities for the performing arts do not yet exist.

Relations with film and television

Recently Theatre Day at School, the Palestinian National Theatre and the Jerusalem Film Institute set up a workshop together for acting in front of a camera. In this the artistic director of the Jerusalem Film Institute, George Khleife, participated. Projects like hopefully will lead to the involvement of native actors in future drama-productions for the Palestinian Broadcasting Cooperation.

A climate in which native Palestinian film can flourish begins to develop. (Green liner) Rachid Mashrabi's films *Curfew* and *Haifa* have gained international acclaim. There are more important cinema directors and producers, like George Khleife, his brother Michel Khleife, Elias Salman, Nizar Hassan and Daoud Kuttab, some of them working from abroad. In this field there are also some Israeli-Palestinian coproductions. The experiences of the region could in the future

lead to interesting films. The visual liveliness of Palestinian literature suggests possibilities to visualise the imagination on screen.

A 'peace process' project is a collaboration of the Jerusalem Film Institute with the Israel Education Television for a new series of Sesame Street under the theme of 'Tolerance and Mutual Respect'. This includes workshops for writers, set designers and people who work in animation. However, the project was hampered and perhaps has to be stopped because of the fact that the Israeli's wanted to play a dominant role in the project, according to a Palestinian source.

Welcome side-effect of projects like these will be better working opportunities for people in the performing arts.

Relations with the artists

From the West, but also from Israeli side some efforts have been undertaken to establish Israeli-Palestinian 'co-operation'. One of them was the *Romeo and Juliet* by the Qhasabeh theatre and the East Jerusalem based, but Israeli Khan theatre. This production met a lot of criticism, not only for the fact that nobody in the Palestinian territories was able to see it, but for the fact that the basic idea might have been wrong. The production was largely funded by foreign money. But the assumption that through this way peace with the Palestinians could be bought was pretentious, according to many critical votes, even among the Israeli audiences. The fact is that a lot of Israeli, including the liberals, are ignorant about the Palestinian situation and even deny their history. This might indeed be true especially for the liberals, as they mostly are very Westernised. Not only do they deny that their new neighbours are not Westerners, but they in fact even deny that a majority of their Jewish fellow-inhabitants are not of Western origin and cannot automatically be assumed to agree on Western values.

It is my opinion that most of the Palestinians now accept the fact of the state of Israel, even it has been put down to them through their throats and in daily practice they do not have any other choice. Most important is, I feel, that many Palestinians want to be treated with respect by the international community and from the Jewish side. They first must be enabled to establish and develop their own cultural values, if this is not a too patronising approach already. All efforts which are not based on respect and consideration are doomed to fail, as I think the recent history has proved. Western aid organisations should especially be aware of imposing any concepts which do not comply with Palestinian notions. In the culture Western institutions should not be too eager in wanting to push any concept about a 'peace process' too fast. The only positive experience I had from this point of view is that as soon people are outside of Israel, they sometimes can get on with each other quite well or even very well.

There seems little objection to organising in foreign countries opportunities for exchanging of ideas between Israeli, Palestinians and other surrounding Arab nations.

But in the area itself, Israeli and Palestinians mainly have to find out for themselves how to cope with each other.

Besides *Romeo and Juliet* there have been some incidental co-operation-projects between individual Palestinian and Israeli artists and Palestinian and Israeli institutions, like *Cycles*, a theatre production featuring two Jewish and two Palestinian actresses, the renowned Naomi Ackerman, Corinne Markov and Raeda Ghazaleh and Eman Aoun. There are some 'green line' actors who gained acclaim throughout Israel, like the renowned Mohammed Bakri. None of the West Bank actors is performing in Israel, at least not on a regular base.

Outside the performing arts there are some artistic exchanges in cinematography and the visual arts.

Some logistic considerations

From a memorandum on the theatre situation, possibly written by the British Council, provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture in Ramallah, some useful observations could be summarized.

- In the smaller ensembles the members must share their time between administration including box office organisation on the one hand and artistic creativity and development on the other. This might result in the somewhat neglecting of both sides.
- The average price of tickets is 10 shekel, but in refugee camps and small villages this can go down to 4 or 3 shekel. There have been no marketing research to find out exactly what people would be prepared to pay.
- The lack of permanent opportunities is far reaching for the professionalism and the production standard.
- Of the people who have received some organised training most had the opportunity to study outside the country, including Israel. Jordan provides some scholarships and some are in the lucky circumstance of receiving support from relatives overseas.
- Now through the Ministry of Culture, the Palestinian National Theatre, the ITI and foreign institutions, some people can be sent abroad for short training courses.
The desire to bring in expertise from other Arab countries and elsewhere is raised repeatedly. Outside contact is seen as a way of expanding opportunities and sharing ideas, opening up new influences and creating new channels for funding as well.
- The public sees this in this way too, stressing anyhow that Palestinian culture also needs to be given encouragement and promotion.

- A most successful approach applied in a number of countries lacking suitable venues, has been the provision of a specially designed, constructed and equipped tent. This could also be a good interim solution for this region.

Recommendations

The basic needs in Palestinian society are huge. Culture is just a small part of the vast amount of needs. However, as culture can help to define a society and a nation, relatively modest investments in culture can already be very effective, if well-chosen and carefully approached. Now that a recognised homeland might become reality, Palestinians are showing a tendency to define their own culture and media and to produce art forms which embrace people's revived aspirations.

There can hardly be any civil development and self-respect in a society lacking cultural awareness and autonomy. In the end, the promotion of social and economic development could prove futile in the absence of cultural self-confidence. This is not necessarily synonymous with promoting arts and culture after Western models.

To reach this, the following steps could be implemented:

- Stimulate debate within the Palestinian arts community and with the government on the issue of new directions for the cultural policy in general and the performing arts in particular.
- Offer advice, consultations and materials about production and distribution.
- Set out a long-term project policy through short-term projects.
- Foster some centres of excellence. As they existed in the past, these centres exist today, only in a subdued form, calling for a careful approach.
- Stimulate links between European institutions and Palestinian counterparts.
- Stimulate interest and encourage debate throughout the European arts communities with respect to new developments in the West Bank and Gaza.
- As the Palestinian population is comparatively young and younger generations have suffered an 'education gap', special attention is needed in the area of theatre for broad audiences and children. Theatre involving community action might be a better-appreciated and a more rewarding way to help people reshape their lives than dramatic theatre alone.
- As Palestinian institutions stress themselves, besides a special approach towards children, a special attention to the position of women is also necessary.
- Stimulate practical exchange programmes for arts professionals in order to develop their skills.

Invite Palestinian colleagues to festivals, symposia and courses. Secure travel grants from ministries of culture and foreign affairs in partner countries, the EU, development co-operation NGO's, UNICEF, UNESCO.

Collect recyclable sound and lighting equipment in Western Europe for venues in the West Bank. Facilities for mobile theatre and cinema are welcome as well.

Additional sources:

- part of the information on musical history was based on the *Penguin Rough Guide to World Music*
- for a few facts on the theatre situation the author used a few reports provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture

Further information can be obtained from the author via Theater Instituut Nederland or directly: Keizersgracht 772, 1017 EB Amsterdam.

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Colophon

Blue report 3

Palestinian Performing Arts
by Neil van der Linden

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Blue Reports is a series of occasional papers bringing out reports, articles, opinions and analyses about the performing arts and cultural policies in The Netherlands and in the international context. The reports are published in Dutch and/or English, depending on the subject matter and vary in size and scope.

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The Theater Instituut Nederland provides information, conducts research, initiates debate, encourages reflection and supports professional development in relation to the needs of those working in the performing arts, both national and international. It also promotes knowledge of and insight into the theatre - in all its manifestations - among today's and tomorrow's public. To accomplish these goals, the Theater Instituut Nederland oversees a large museum collection; collects current information; organizes events such as discussions, conferences, workshops, exhibitions and international presentations; publishes books, cd's and other materials; and participates in a large number of international networks.