



With Eyes That Can See

Reviewed by Annie Higgins

*Al-`Uyun allati tushahidu /
Eyes That Can See*

Palestinian National Theatre, Jerusalem

Director: Morten Krogh

*Cast: Raeda Adon, Hisham Suleiman, Doreen
Mnaier, Ali Suleiman, Ayman Nahhas, Ramzi
Al-Juabeh, Raheeq Haj-yehia.*

Live Music: Hisham Abu Jabal

24, 25, 30, 31 January 2003

The Palestinian National Theatre, under the artistic direction of Jamal Ghosheh, is making something creative from the events of everyday life. *Al-`Uyun allati tushahidu/Eyes That Can See*, written by the performers and director, opens windows to familiar scenes, and views beyond them to a more universal application of the attitudes and actions therein. With Norwegian director Morten Krogh, these young Palestinian actors have turned their own experiences into a performance infused with insight, and laced with suggestions for rethinking some



customs. They illustrate high points of joy and low points of violence, conflicting expectations between genders and generations, and obstacles imposed by their own traditions as well as by outside oppression.

The open stage in the small hall seating one hundred draws the viewer in, and the creative use of very few props stimulates the imagination. A drum provides continuity across the shifting patterns and personas in scenes of children's play interspersed with learning, women's work, adolescent experiments, military occupation, death, and marriage. The ensemble works together symphonically to show daily experiences from fresh angles, figuratively and physically. A young woman flies with joy by stepping from hand-to-hand of the men below. In the pregnancy scene, each woman literally carries a man wrapped around her waist, from whence he somersaults into birth.

A laughter-inducing moment occurs when they play "Army". Three boys line up doing effeminate gyrations while chanting, "Ken, lo, ken, lo [yes, no]." They look as absurd as real life, and it is a relief to be able to laugh aloud at them. They proceed in fluent Hebrew, with the girls paraphrasing for the audience in Arabic. The soldiers line up toilet plungers as listening devices to investigate a ticking sound in a young man's chest, which they pronounce to be a bomb. All the children come together, touching their hearts and pronouncing with awe, "There's a bomb inside me!" This traditional comic scene takes on a dark hue for Palestinians whose very existence is construed as being a ticking bomb.

In another scene, the Army is not visible, but the atmosphere is imbued with its Occupation. The seven actors seem like a large crowd, criss-crossing the stage with various goals and professions until the music stops, and they freeze. Each hand holds up an

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identity card. The commonness of this scene is the tragedy of it. The dim green lighting accentuates the ubiquitous identity check that colors everyone's experience in Palestine.

Two sides of hope find expression in the cruelty and cooperation of children's play. As the children jump rope, a crippled boy, Ali, approaches. He represents his handicap by straddling a ladder and walking awkwardly on the rungs as if on stilts: "I want to jump," he says. The boy holding the rope is vehemently opposed. "I want to jump," he reiterates. The girl holding the other end of the rope kindly suggests he sing along with them instead. His frustration is palpable, welling up in this impossible hope until he cries fervently, "I want to jump!" They swing the rope for him once, to no avail. Twice. The third time, to his surprise and to the amazement of the entire audience, he succeeds. "I JUMPED! I JUMPED!" he exclaims, as the audience applauds. It is a deeply affecting reminder that a yearned-for goal can become possible, whether it is skipping rope or liberating a land.

These versatile performers succeed in touching our hearts by inviting our eyes to see familiar images in a new light. Most significant is that they did not look outside for a script or famous name. They have relied on their own experience as the greatest resource, and from the bitter and sweet of it, have created something hopeful for every viewer to take home.

The play is performed in Arabic, and is accessible to English speakers by means of a full synopsis handed out before the performance. The play was also shown in Ramallah (Al-Kasaba Theatre), Jaffa (As-Saraya), Nazareth and Haifa (Al-Midan).

Annie Higgins is a specialist in Arabic and Islamic issues, and volunteered this year in Palestine.

Jerusalem Chronology

(February - May 2003)

February 5

A tightening closure policy has had dire implications for the Jerusalem transportation sector. Israeli forces impounded 26 Palestinian shared taxis and parked them on the Qalandia airport runway, adjacent to the Qalandia military checkpoint, charging that the drivers with working in "Israeli areas." Eyewitnesses reported Israeli border guards rounding up the bright yellow taxis in the West Bank neighborhoods of al-Ram, Dahiet al-Barid, and near the Qalandia checkpoint (al-Quds).

February 12

In preparation for an impending United States war against Iraq, Israel began distribution of gas mask kits to Israeli citizens. Jerusalem residents were deemed eligible to receive the gas masks (but not the accompanying shot of atropine), while Palestinians under Palestinian Authority control (as per the interim Israeli-Palestinian agreements) were not. Physicians for Human Rights Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent Society petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice to force Israel to distribute free gas masks and kits to all residents of the occupied territories as well as migrant workers in Israel, Bedouins living in "unrecognized" villages, and all prisoners and detainees (PHRI).

February 17

Israeli troops closed the doors of the Center for Social Research, a Palestinian organization based in East Jerusalem. The center had been considered an office of the Orient House, the Palestine Liberation Organization's East Jerusalem headquarters, which was ordered closed by the Israeli government in August

2001. Israeli authorities claimed that the research center was illegally operating as an arm of the Palestinian Authority (al-Hayat al-Jadida).

February 19

The Jerusalem Electricity Company announced the completion of a power upgrade in the areas it services north of Jerusalem. Using a Palestinian Authority loan of \$20 million, the company has raised the flow of wattage to the Dahiet al-Barid station between Jerusalem and Ramallah, which serves the Jerusalem neighborhoods of Dahiet al-Barid and al-Ram. The al-Tur station has been upgraded to serve as a backup for the Wadi al-Joz neighborhood. The voltage of the Abu Dis station has been raised from 3.5 to 7.5 megawatts, and will serve several outlying areas of Jerusalem (al-Quds).

February 25

In a rare snowstorm, Jerusalem residents enjoyed more than a foot of snow that closed all but major roads and cause power outages in some areas. Many places of work and schools were closed for two days in the city's heaviest snowfall since 1950 (al-Bawaba).

February 26

The Jerusalem Cinemateque on the western side of the city was named this week in a lawsuit filed against Palestinian filmmaker Muhammad Bakri by five Israeli army reservists who served in the April invasion of the Jenin Refugee Camp. The libel suit for NIS 2.5 million, or half a million dollars claims that the film incorrectly portrays the soldiers as war criminals. The documentary had already been banned from public screening by Israel's censorship board; the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem Cinemateques screened the film in private showings (Ha'aretz).

Israeli internal security minister Uzi Landau renewed the closure of the Orient House, the center of Palestinian administrative and political affairs in East Jerusalem, for an



additional six months. This is the fourth closure renewal since August 9, 2001, and it applies to all official Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem (al-Quds).

Palestinians continue to complain of discriminatory treatment when trying to gain entry to Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus. Technion Master's student Mohammed Kimri was repeatedly denied entry to the school, despite that he is an East Jerusalem resident and was given research access to all affiliated university libraries. The refusal contradicts assurances faculty received after a campus bombing in July 2002 that new security procedures would not be used to discriminate against Arabs (Ha'aretz).

February 27

Jerusalem police chief Major General Mickey Levy said that Jewish worshippers would be allowed to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, after the war on Iraq. Awqaf officials have closed the compound to non-Muslims since Ariel Sharon visited the area in September 2000 prior to his election as prime minister, sparking the al-Aqsa Intifada (al-Quds).

March 4

Tens of thousands of new settlement housing units were approved for construction along the mountain ridges west of Jerusalem by the Israeli National Planning and Building Commission (Ha'aretz).

March 5

Palestinian Authority Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Samir Ghosheh reports that the Israeli government is pursuing a plan for "Greater Jerusalem" that will encompass an area of 440 square kilometers and introduce housing for one million Jews by the year 2010 (al-Hayat al-Jadida).

March 19

The Aqsa Institute for the Renovation of Islamic Sites warned of an Israeli attempt to transform rooms inside the al-Aqsa mosque into a Jewish temple. The Israeli police have closed the offices of the Islamic Heritage inside the mosque. The Institute says it fears that the Israeli plan is to establish a site inside the al-Aqsa Mosque in order to impose a new status quo similar to the divided worshipping area of Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque (al-Hayat al-Jadida).

Palestinian Interior Minister Hani al-Hasan met during the previous week in Jerusalem with Israeli President Moshe Katsav to discuss the prospects of an Israeli-Palestinian exchange: a Palestinian ceasefire in trade for Israeli withdrawal from all West Bank towns and Palestinian assumption of security control within them (Israel Radio).

March 20

Palestinian and Israeli demonstrators gathered in Ras al-Amud to protest the construction of a new Jewish settlement. Tens of settler families are expected to move to the neighborhood. Building a new settlement in the heart of Ras al-Amud is "provocative," warned Palestinian official Sari Nusseibeh. "In turn, we should be able to build in the middle of Jewish neighborhoods, whether in West Jerusalem or Tel Aviv," he said (al-Quds).

April 7

Four homes, consisting of 11 housing units, were demolished in the Issawiyeh neighborhood. The bulldozers arrived one week after the owners say they received a 40-day stay from the Israeli courts (Palestine Report).

April 7

An educational play, "The Treasure," was performed before 120 students of al-Quds University and members of Jerusalem youth organizations. The play, sponsored by the youth development department in Jerusalem,

addresses various aspects of everyday Palestinian life, including national identity and Palestinian cultural heritage (Palestine Report).

April 9

The new Israeli mayor of Jerusalem, Rabbi Uri Lupolianski, announced an Israeli proposal to build a new government compound in East Jerusalem's Wadi al-Joz that would solve overcrowding at the East Jerusalem interior ministry. "We have allocated 150 million NIS to improve the infrastructure of East Jerusalem to bridge the gap between the two sectors of the city," he said (al-Quds).

April 27

Dozens of settlers attacked the United Nations Relief Works Agency housing project in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. Eyewitnesses say settlers smashed the windows and doors of several homes and attacked residents, and also destroyed a number of cars. In response, the Israeli courts ruled that the homes should be closed until further notice (al-Quds).

May 4

The Palestinian National Theatre hosted The Pippo Delbono Company, established in Italy in 1986, in a showing of the production "Guerra/War". The play was also to be performed in Bethlehem, Nazareth and Haifa (This Week in Palestine).

May 5

The International Solidarity Movement held a Jerusalem press conference to refute Israeli charges that they were somehow linked to two British citizens that had perpetrated a bombing attack in Tel Aviv on April 30. The two British citizens "Omar Khan Sharif and Asif Hanif never made contact with the ISM, never registered to join us and never attended our mandatory training and orientation," said ISM founder Huwaida Arraf in a statement. The bombers briefly drank tea in the group's Rafah

house, said an ISM volunteer (ISM).

May 7

For the first time in several years, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak sent Israel congratulations on its Independence Day. The Jewish state celebrated 55 years since its establishment (al-Bawaba). Palestinians inside the 1948 areas called the day "their independence, our disaster."

May 13

Opening ceremonies were held for a showing of antiques from the collection of Nasser Nusseibeh at the Issaf Nashashibi Center in Sheikh Jarrah. The exhibit will be open until mid-January (This Week in Palestine).

May 15

Israeli interior security minister Tzachi Hanegbi told the Knesset that Jews will soon be allowed to pray at the Haram al-Sharif. The Muslim shrine has been closed to non-Jews since the start of the Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. "The site will be reopened as part of an agreement [with Palestinian authorities], but if there is no agreement, it will be done without one," Hanegbi said. "The time is close, much closer than one thinks, when Jews will be able to pray on this holy site," he said (Ha'aretz).

May 16

Palestinian Muslim officials rejected the Israeli interior security minister's attempts to "usurp" control of Jerusalem Muslim holy sites. With the expectation of large numbers of worshippers coming to the day's Friday prayers, Israeli forces said that the mosque would be closed to all men below the age of 40 and those not carrying an Israeli identity card. Women would be allowed entry (al-Bawaba, Ha'aretz).