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## قصاصة من مجلة المنبر، "ثورة مسرحية"، آب ١٩٨٨

الانجليزية مع فرانسوا أبو قصاصة من مجلة المنبر تتضمن مقابلة باللغة  
تحت عنوان "ثورة سالم في مجلة المنبر عن مسرح الحكواتي، المقابلة  
مسرحية".

## THEATRE

# A THEATRICAL UPRISING

*Although the Palestinian uprisings have been greatly covered by the world media, the Palestinian culture has been rather neglected by it. In order to keep this culture alive, the Palestinian theatre troupe El-Hakawati located in Jerusalem writes and creates their own plays in order to tell the story of their people. "The Tale of Koffor Shamma", recently on tour in Europe, is the story of a Palestinian who searches for his long-lost village. Made three-dimensional on stage, and with beautiful production values, this production has touched many about the plight of the Palestinians. The "Tribune" spoke to François Abou Salem, director of the company, about "El-Hakawati".*

### □ When did El-Hakawati begin ?

■ The company dates back to about 1977. In fact, we just celebrated our 10-year anniversary last year. For the last 4 years, we have had a theatre, but having this has made us terribly tired to the point that I'm wondering if it's not better to abandon the idea of having a permanent place. It was an important step in our 10-year existence, but the problem is that everybody need premises, at least over there, as there aren't others. So we have had to open our doors to everybody. We had to, we couldn't say that we were going to be selective, thus we got schools, youth clubs, etc.

### □ What is your theatre like ?

■ It was, in fact, the first cinema constructed in East Jerusalem. Before 1948, the beautiful areas of Jerusalem were in the west, so the cinemas were built there also. They were the areas of the Arab and Palestinian bourgeoisie. The beautiful houses are still there, but they are now lived in by Jews.

So the first cinema in the East was the "Noshah", it was more of a garage than anything else and even existed for years without a roof, with a sort of tarp over the whole thing. After 1967, it was destroyed during the war when shells fell on it. The owner was a self-made businessman who didn't care much about it, but instead wanted to earn the most money out of the deal. After the war, he made it into a sort of erotic cinema which became an important

attraction for Jerusalem between 1968 and around 1982. Then the Moslems completely burned the cinema, and the owner lost hope in the thing, got the insurance, and abandoned the building. It became a garbagé can and a place for drug traffic. Nevertheless, it was interesting to us. When we passed it, we kept thinking, "No, he'll never give it to us. We'll never have the money to have it". After five years of existence as a company and several tours in Europe, we knew that we couldn't continue to do theatre half-time. People in the troupe had jobs and families and all came from different regions and we knew that if we didn't do something the company would split apart. So we rented this space at a very high price and began with very little money. We worked on it ourselves. It was completely in ruins, we were renting a carcass, but it was in the centre of town and we decided to work on it, even though we were beginning our project with 10 % of its budget. People thought we were crazy. Nonetheless, as promised, seven months later we opened our doors. It's a very beautiful theatre. Now it's the administration and management which must hold it up, a very difficult task indeed.

### □ What kind of theatre is there in Jerusalem and what kind of relationship does El-Hakawati have with its public ?

■ There isn't any other theatre, we're

the only one. We began to work without giving alot of importance to Jerusalem ; it was the place where we rehearsed ; we had played there before perhaps 10 or 12 times. It was enough. Jerusalem is a small place. Most of our shows were in the country, in the villages, sometimes very large villages, but they're organised like villages, not cities. I know that in the state of Israel, there are around 20 of these huge villages without clinics or a hospitals, and they've only had electricity for something like the last 5 or 6 years.

But what I wanted to say was that the relationship with the public couldn't exist before having the theatre because one can't have a regular public as a touring company. Emotionally, playing in a village is very rewarding but you can't return more than once a year so it's not the same as being in a city where there is a certain bourgeoisie whom you see each month. It's more of an event in the village, and thus stronger, but you can't really try new theatrical experiments in the situation. To have a theatre, then, means to also receive suggestions, criticisms even, from a public which asks for more, which wants new things in theatre, and is not content simply because you came.

So little by little with the theatre we have begun to create contacts, but for the moment it hasn't gone terribly far. It's also due to the fact that we've had to welcome everything and everybody to

