

THE REVOLUTION'S PROMISE

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INTRODUCTION TO THE REVOLUTION'S PROMISE

The Revolution's Promise is a verbatim, testimonial script, created from interviews with artists across Palestine as well as material available online.

People were interviewed separately, without knowing who else was being interviewed. Each interviewee's perspective, thoughts and ideas are solely their own.

For Momentum Reading Groups we have taken extracts of the full script and edited them into monologues.

Today's format will include reading these monologues/testimonies and having structured discussions.

The entire script is available to read and perform, alongside learning and resource materials, at: www.therevolutionspromise.com

We will start by reading three testimonies.

DREAMS OF LIBERATION HISTORICAL PALESTINE

MOHAMMED BAKRI
ACTOR & DIRECTOR
DIRECTOR OF 'JENIN JENIN'

I grew up on values of liberation, that we should all be revolutionaries.

By the age of 15, I dreamed of going to Lebanon on foot to become a fighter, and that before I arrived, while I was in the wilderness, a tiger would attack me, and I would kill it and drag it behind me as I continued on my way. This tiger would be my ticket to join the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and I would be a hero. 'What do you want more than that? I have killed a tiger!'

And it really happened that I went to go to Lebanon, intending to kill the tiger. But on my way to becoming a revolutionary, as night fell and darkness reigned, I felt fear, imagining where the monsters and hyenas lay, so I decided to go home.

These were dreams, dreams of a child who wanted to be a revolutionary but did not have the courage to kill a tiger, so things remained just a dream. But I had an obsession.

Perhaps this was why I went into cinema and theatre because there is the possibility of realising dreams of liberation, not through armed struggle, but through culture.

I was an actor performing on the stage in Nazareth when news began to spread about a massacre in Jenin Refugee Camp. We could hear the bombing from the stage, so we decided to stop the play.

I went with Valentina, my colleague, to the demonstration.

At the protest, an old Israeli in an army uniform, with wild eyes, took out an automatic weapon and started shooting at us. Valentina was standing next to me and was hit by a bullet in her hand.

It was the first time in my life that I was at a scene like this, that I saw this amount of blood.

And I started to think, if these soldiers gave us all this hatred while standing in peace, what would the Israeli army do in Jenin, where there is fierce resistance?

I rented a jeep, a camera, and a sound device.

I infiltrate through the mountains, a closed military zone. The Israeli army convoys passed, and we marched on until we reached Jenin.

When I saw the situation there and how much Jenin was destroyed, I was paralysed; I did not know what to do, my body trembled.

I managed to control my nerves and for five consecutive days filmed whatever my eyes fell on. A spontaneous act with my limited capabilities... Walking the streets and filming people that I encountered.

Since the first screening of my documentary, 'Jenin Jenin,' there have been protests, revenge and intimidation. Attempts to silence me, make me a lesson for those who think about undertaking actions critical of Israel.

Trials and prosecutions have been going on for 20 years, from 2002 until now. I'm tired and tired, the same stories, the same accusations.

In 2021 I was fined \$55,000 for defamation damages to be paid to an Israeli army captain who participated in the invasion of Jenin Camp.

Then the judge ordered that the documentary be permanently banned from being screened.

They try to tame the horse, try to tame every human who does not follow their line. That is why they are afraid of imagination.

Today, I continue to tell my story because I do not see any other solution, and I do not see any other way to address my case except to deliver it to the world.

My dream is to tell the great story of Palestine, about my life and our lives.

But for now, I'll go smoke.

RESIST, MY PEOPLE, RESIST THEM REINEH NEAR NAZARETH

**DAREEN TATOUR POET,
WRITER & PHOTOGRAPHER**

I was always aware of what I wanted to be, and that was a writer.

I remember my extreme obsession with knowing the meanings of words until one of the teachers told me outraged, "Go and buy a dictionary". I asked my grandmother to buy me a dictionary and presented it to the teacher as if it was a novel.

As I got older, I started turning everything I learned from my grandmother about our history into political poetry.

In 2015 I witnessed the killing of dozens of Palestinian youths who were murdered in cold blood.

I watched how they killed a woman at the checkpoint because she refused to take off her hijab.

The kidnapping and murder of a 16-year old boy by Israeli settlers.

The firebombing of a home, that severely burnt a baby and killed his parents.

I was feeling suffocated, unable to express the ugliness of these crimes. I felt guilty as a human being and it was breaking my soul.

How are these children killed in front of our eyes while we are just watching? It is a stain on our forehead.

So I wrote a poem calling for my people to resist this crazy violence. It was the cry of pain I was feeling.

I posted the poem on Facebook.

It was three in the morning and I was asleep. Suddenly, I hear the scream of my family saying: 'Dareen, the Israelis are coming to arrest you'.

There were more than 40 soldiers in my home and five armoured vehicles closing the entrances.

They transferred me between several prisons for interrogation. My family did not know where I was. I was washing and wearing the same wet clothes I was arrested in.

Then they searched my Facebook account.

And after approximately 21 days, they presented my poem 'Resist, My People Resist Them'. Through the poem, they accused me of planning to carry out a suicide operation and that I support terrorist entities.

I spent five months in prison, then they sent me to house arrest. Notice the contradiction; they claimed that I intended to kill Israelis and carry out terrorist operations, and at the same time, they put me in a house in an Israeli settlement.

All they wanted from the beginning was for me to break and apologise, and this is what I did not give them. Apologise for what?

After two years, six months and eighteen days I was released from house arrest.

Since then the settlers tried to kill me three times. I received many threatening and racist messages. I felt constantly in danger. I couldn't work, study, or publish my books. If I published or performed my poem, I would return to prison. I tried to open new doors, but I couldn't.

Finally, I left for Sweden on a grant for two years for artists under threat. Here I can continue my fight through cultural resistance.

A MOMENT & NINE MISSILES AL-MISHAL CULTURAL CENTRE GAZA

**ALI ABU YASEEN
ACTOR, WRITER & DIRECTOR,
CO-FOUNDER AL-MISHAL CULTURAL CENTRE**

That day we were supposed to show a play at the Al-Mishal Cultural Centre in Gaza.

The performance included 14 girls; it was about their rights.

Suddenly, the United Nations Development Program called and ordered us to cancel without giving any reasons.

We stopped the rehearsals and sent everyone home. It was the first time I had ever postponed a performance.

I went home, and the Israelis began to bomb Gaza, and the rockets started shaking the city.

The bombs were landing near the theatre. I was afraid the cultural centre would be damaged, that the glass would shatter, that the play's set would fall.

I got dressed and went out.

I walked a street the length of 200 meters; it was completely black from smoke and dust, as if it was night, you could not even see your finger.

As I approached, my vision started to become clear.

The theatre was destroyed...complete destruction. Nothing. The features of the place disappeared... the cultural centre had vanished from existence and become a hole... a 6-storey building now turned into a two-story underground crater.

How could this be?

The set from the plays, the costumes that I designed, my hopes and dreams, the effort and the exhaustion collapsing in a second.

I am standing there, and thoughts are clashing in my head like waves, sadness eating my heart, as if when the decor disappeared, so had all the joy.

The faces of the youth I trained passed in front of me, the children's laughter that had now vanished.

Until this moment, I cannot believe that the theatre disappeared along with fourteen years of our work in a moment and nine missiles.

Our theatre had become a theatrical flame, so they shut it down. Since the bombing, we have held several performances on the rubble.

The theatre is part of us, and we as artists continue whether it is in a building... or not...We will do theatre on the tree, at sea, underwater...

We have created artists, and we will stay to be artists.

CULTURE IS MY RESISTANCE JENIN REFUGEE CAMP

AHMED TOBASI

ACTOR

CURRENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE FREEDOM THEATRE

I was born in Jenin Refugee Camp. My grandmother was expelled from her village in 1948 and was part of the first generation that fled here.

It has always been Israeli soldiers, wanted people, attacks, martyrs, tanks, army, shooting. There is not so much food or electricity and we live in very simple houses, but as a kid growing up, we had fun.

In 2002 during the second intifada in the Israelis invaded Jenin Refugee Camp. You could not believe what we lived through.

I was just a 17-year-old boy with AK 47, trying to defend my home against one of the largest armies in the world.

It was like a cartoon movie: the sounds, the shooting, the Apaches, the tanks. Seeing my friends die in front of my eyes.

Explosions in the sky like fireworks. You feel each rocket as it comes to you. Who would believe that I am sitting in the same house where a mortar exploded in the room next to me? You shake yourself, and you are alive.

Each night felt like a year. You are counting each moment.

We could feel the bullets firing from us in all directions. I was shot in the arm, but there was no hospital and no ambulances. So people just bandaged me up and we continued to move from house to house, as each home was bombed or bulldozed to the ground, Jenin Camp was destroyed, and there was nowhere to go.

The soldiers arrested me. There were many men from Jenin who were taken. Some in the resistance, some not.

I didn't have a proper trial; there was no evidence against me. And even if there was, what would it say?

I held a gun and defended my camp against an invading army? A bomb dropped next to me, and I didn't get blown to pieces?

I was shot, and I didn't die?

I was sentenced to four years in prison in the Negev desert.

I was 17 years old.

After four years I finished in the prison and I arrived back in Jenin Refugee Camp. I was 21 years old. No job. No future. Everything in you has changed. People come out of prison losing their minds, and I was close to death, mentally.

Exactly in this black moment, I discovered The Freedom Theatre, which offered something different from all the dark things around me.

I had grown up with all of this madness, invasions, tanks, rockets, bullets, murder. Isreal, the West, Europe, the USA, had made all these things ready for me, a young Palestinian to go one way... But when I joined the theatre, a small hole opened in my mind. Like a child playing in the garden who finds a small door that takes you to another world... It was magical.

The theatre showed me that there is a whole world out there I never knew existed. And for the first time in my life, I was given a decision.

And the choice I wanted to make had become so clear

I wanted to choose to be alive.

And now, I had a mission to tell my story.

A DIVERSITY OF TACTICS WORLDWIDE

**OMAR BARGHOUTI
CO-FOUNDER
BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS (B.D.S.)**

I am an engineer by profession, an artist by passion and a student of Philosophy.

I was born in exile, a son of refugees. I came back to Palestine in 1993 with my partner, who is a Palestinian citizen in the State of Israel.

I think every part of my experience has helped me in my work as a human rights defender.

I was part of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. That was my first formative experience in that type of global struggle, and I learned a lot.

The 'Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions of Israel' (B.D.S.) was launched by the largest coalition in Palestinian society, in Palestine and in exile. We felt that international law had stopped at the door of Palestine, so we took matters into our own hands and we walked the South African path if you will. We were inspired by their anti-apartheid movement, the anti-colonial movement in India, the US Civil Rights movement and of course our own struggle. But our key inspiration comes from the decades-old, rich Palestinian heritage of popular nonviolent resistance to settler-colonialism.

B.D.S. is a collective Palestinian voice, an absolute majority, asking democratic citizens worldwide to join us, in pressuring city councils, churches, trade unions, companies, and ultimately governments to stop its links of complicity with Israel.

The cultural boycott is a very important part because cultural institutions play a key role in whitewashing or what we call art-washing of Israeli Apartheid and occupation.

It calls for something much more profound than help, Do No Harm. If an international artist comes to Tel Aviv, they are lending their name to a system of apartheid and oppression. That is not art for the sake of art, music for the sake of music, that is complicity.

The cultural boycott targets complicity, not identity. Urging the cancellation of events, activities, agreements, or projects involving the Israeli State, its lobby groups or its cultural institutions. To reject funding and sponsorship from the Israeli government.

No one is calling for suppressing the rights of Israeli artists. If the UK invites an Israeli filmmaker to show her film, with no institutional connection to the state of Israel, the embassy, or lobby groups, there is absolutely nothing in the boycott to prevent this.

Actually, BDS explicitly calls on Israelis to join us. Israelis who abandoned colonial ideology, policies and dehumanization, who recognise our three basic rights under international law; ending the occupation, ending Apartheid, and the right of return for refugees.

Since there is nothing Jewish about occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, the siege of Gaza, and all the crimes committed, then there is nothing inherently anti-Jewish in proposing that this is against humanity and campaigning to end it.

Of course, there is anti-semitism that really bugs our minds, and it is growing every day in the West. B.D.S. was very clear from the beginning that we oppose all forms of racism, including antisemitism.

In fact, we don't see Palestine ever being liberated without an international movement for justice and equality winning the war for racial, indigenous, gender, economic and environmental justice, making this world better for everyone. In Ferguson, USA, after the first uprising when Michael Brown was killed, the Palestinians were one of the first to apply solidarity, because we understand oppression.

Since 2014 Israel started to consider B.D.S. a strategic threat. It is a fact that they have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to fight it. So they clearly do see the impact. It is extremely impressive how much the movement has grown in numbers.

They have started to target me personally, taking steps towards revoking my residency, repressing me with travel bans. The worst was when my late mother was undergoing surgery for cancer in Jordan, I wasn't allowed to leave to be with her.

Yes, I am worried for my life, and they use tools that don't show exactly who the culprit is. At a public conference in front of 200 people and the world's cameras, the Israeli Minister of Intelligence threatened me with "civil assassination." I had never heard this term before; possibly it means an assassination at the hands of civilians.

So it hurts on a personal level tremendously, but that is part of the price that all Palestinians pay, part of our resistance.

They are telling us you can't boycott Israel. So what do you want us to do?

You don't want us to do armed resistance, and you don't like our non-violent resistance. ...What do you want us to do? We shall never give up.

CONCLUSION / CURRENT SITUATION

The testimonies read today are only a few of many...

Artists continue to be targeted, facing arrest, imprisonment, torture and threats on their lives.

On the 4th of April, 2011, Juliano Mer Khamis, the co-founder and artistic director of The Freedom Theatre, was murdered. Shot five times by an unknown masked man just steps away from the theatre.

The Freedom Theatre and cultural organisations across Palestine continue to be raided and attacked by the Israeli army. Internationally, work is targeted by Israeli lobby groups and its embassies' who often succeed in getting it cancelled.

Palestinian artists are often restricted or banned from travelling out of the West Bank and have difficulty obtaining visas from other countries. International artists wanting to collaborate in Palestine are repeatedly refused entrance by Israel.

The borders of Gaza have remained closed since 2007, with a complete restriction on entering or exiting.

In 2021, Palestinian cultural organisations lost the majority of their core funding after refusing the demands of international donors to depoliticise their work.

Ahmed Tobasi, the current Artistic Director of The Freedom Theatre, said on launching The Revolution's Promise:

'As our borders become harder to cross, our funding removed, and censorship of our voices continues, it is crucial that we find new ways to mobilise as Palestinian artists. The Revolution's Promise makes sure our voice is still heard internationally, whilst putting pressure on Israel to stop the attacks on artists.'

The entire script is available to read and perform, alongside learning & resource materials and more information on joining the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions movement:
www.therevolutionspromise.com