

The "Dawn Multicultural Theatre"
Documentary Theatre and Shared Heritage

Sigal Peres

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Introduction

Heritage is defined as the legacy we receive from the past, we learn in the present and we transmit to the next generations (UNESCO, 1984).¹ Shared Heritage has been constructed and can be re-constructed. Theatre and arts can challenge the values of authorized and hegemonic heritage. In Israel, some cultural organizations have started using different forms of theatre and performances to represent their multiple histories and negotiate their hybrid cultural identities through projects and play cases. Such as - The "Al-Karma" Theatre,² Inbal Dance Theatre,³ Gesher Theatre.⁴ Among these praxes, drama has been widely used for audiences to reconstruct their own interpretations of historical events through carefully chosen historical fragments often neglected and even forgotten. These dramas are a way to recompose a new understanding of multifarious and multicultural histories.

In a country with diverse cultural identities and a history of political complexity, the "Dawn Multicultural Theatre" was founded in order to create a theatrical experience, that deals with the culture and heritage of Arab and Middle Eastern Jews,⁵ and to promote cultural awareness and identity within the Israel society. Through theatre plays, it presents the culture, the language, the stories, the music, the singing of the Jews of Asian and African origins, and Arab Jews. It tells the stories which had not been told before.

The research examined the relationship between shared heritage and documentary theatre, by focusing on the "Dawn Multicultural Theatre" and more specific on the first play; "Daddy's Girls". To understand the phenomena of recovering marginalized communities, their stories, their history, and their cultural heritage, my main research question was: If and

¹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/faq/19>

² <https://beit-hagefen.com/BeitHagefenCategoryId.aspx?BeitHagefenCategoryId=2&lang=2>

³ <https://www.inbal.org.il/> "The way to breathe life into heritage, to adapt it and turn it into an artistic raw material."

⁴ <http://www.gesher-theatre.co.il/he/>

⁵ <https://shachartheater.com/>

how documentary theatre as a cultural, artistic, and educational site can be a tool to understand, widen and re-construct collective memory and shared heritage?

I made six Interviews (Photo-based interviews and Telephone interviews) with the theatre's founder and playwright, Mrs. Gilit Yitzhaki, the actress participating in the play as the youngest daughter, Mrs. Lyric Mash Batish, two native born Iraqis who attended the play, and two viewers, native Israelis from families who immigrated from Iraq. In addition, I wrote my own personal reflections (Appendix A-F).⁶

Heritage and Documentary Theatre

Heritage has gained a broader definition, recognizing non-physical attributes such as the intangible heritage- as a world of historical legacies. The importance of the intangible heritage has social impacts at different levels, being a symbol of history, social values, and the development of destinations. The intangible heritage is quite diverse, and it includes storytelling, craft, literature, performance arts (theatre, music, dance), cultural design and artistic productions. Different parameters are considered, such as its impact on the local community, the country, and the world, its influence on behavioral and cultural patterns, as well as its own aesthetics, identity, and symbolism (Pereira, 2019).

Theatre and storytelling are cultural practices that can be found in almost every society and are officially recognized forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Both are practices which store and transmit customs, skills, traditions and thus knowledge from generation to generation (Logan, Kockel and Craith, 2015). Both are transmission of values and knowledge and sharing of cultural heritage by the utilization of words and performances.

"Words and ideas that surround the emotions of listeners are the basis of

⁶ All interviewees were explained as to the nature of the study and given the project full details on how the data would be used. They were given the possibility to maintain anonymity and to have full research confidentiality. The interviewees gave their consent to have their full names appear and were given the option to withdraw from the project at any time.

stories"(Pereira, 2019, 35), and the act of storytelling happens in two different ways. They can tell real events in a coherent way, or tell a tale where reality is shaped to create a narrative appealing to the public. Documentary theatre has often focused on historical topics which challenge the participants to engage with questions of cultural identity and shared heritage. As part of heritage work, theatre and documentary theatre can provide people with a sense of history, community, and with a sensitivity to spoken language or music and their importance to intangible cultural heritage (Craith, 2008).

Documentary theatre is known by a variety of names such as a kind of historical drama, a contemporary historical play, a theatre-of-fact, a nonfictional theatre, a repertory theatre, theatre of journalism, theatre-in-education (Dawson, 1999). Recent attempts to define documentary theatre as a form that is characterized "by a central or exclusive reliance on actual rather than imaginary events...found in historical records" (Dawson, 1999, p. 17). The practice of incorporating primary source materials into the spine of the play is a dominant feature of documentary theatre. Yet, additional characteristic aspects are micro historical: documented realism, seeks to empower, private to public, public outcry, and lacking heroes (Dawson, 1999).

The "Dawn Multicultural Theatre"

The Dawn Multicultural Theatre was born out of a desire to address, in theatrical way, the life stories of Jews from Arab countries and to become acquainted with their unique legacy. Its first play "Daddy's girls" deals with a story of an Iraqi Jewish family in the years leading to their migration to Israel. Their lives in Iraq, their relationships with the Arab neighbors, the Zionist Movement, the dilemmas of leaving to an unknown country and leaving their lives behind. All These stories and their great complexity have so far not been properly expressed in the field of theatre. There is a strong desire and thirst to hear the story of parents who migrated to a new land whose voice is almost silent. The theatre aims to promote awareness of cultural heritage and appreciation of the arts. Due to the current situation of coronavirus pandemic

the "Dawn Multicultural Theatre" had to shut down without knowing when and how it will reopen. There is hardly any compensation from the government for their loss and the theatre is looking for new ways to stay active. Digital interviews and different workshops are held to keep the existing audience and as a means to garner a new crowd of supporters.

"Daddy's Girls" - The Play

"Daddy's Girls" is the first play of the "Dawn Theatre". It deals with the story of an Iraqi Jewish family in the years prior to its immigration to Israel. In those years, beginning of 1941 with the rise of Nazism in Europe, there were Iraqi Jews, victims of a brutal pogrom that lasted three days and was called "Farhud" (looting or robbery in Arabic). These riots are described in detail in the books of Nissim Kazzaz (2010) and Gideon Shemesh (2011), as well as in the television series "War and Memory".⁷ These occurrences eventually led to an internalization of the understanding that the glorious life of the Jewish community in Iraq and life among the Arab population had come to an end. Indeed, following the "Farhud", the family immigrated to Israel. The play takes place 50 years later, in Israel, during the Gulf War. While Israel is attacked by Skud Missiles from Iraq, the parents and their daughters reveal secrets from the past that make them realize that the unspoken family past, haunts them until today. Through their personal story, the play exposes the audience to Iraqi customs, songs, culture, in other words the heritage and way of life in Iraq before they migrated to Israel. Although the play tells the story of one family, it largely represents the heritage and collective story of the entire Iraqi Jewish community.

Feel/ Think / Relate

The findings that emerged from the analysis of all interviews indicate three types of responses and two main ways that documentary theatre such as the "Dawn Theatre " allows in relation to heritage. I found three types of

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5iv-DJeXg>

reactions of the spectators in the play: A. Feel- Affective experiences to obtain an emotional response (Empathy / Sympathy); B. Think- Cognitive experiences, fostering thinking and reflexivity; and C. Re-late- Social experiences, associated with cultural identity and the social context in which they insert, integrating aspects of the other dimensions. All at once, I found two ways in which the play related to heritage. The first one is Re-enliven - Emotional resuscitation and re-enliven of personal memories and historical events of community heritage. The second is Re-presenting and Re-positioning historical events and cultural heritage.

Emotional resuscitation and re-enliven of personal memories and historical events of community heritage.

The play tells a moving, emotional story. It turns its gaze to the past, evokes empathy, memories and revives the story of the spectator that had a similar experience. In heartbreaking tears, Yitzhak Elias, who had just watched the play, replies to the news reporter of the YOMAN news program: "I founded the underground organization myself" [referring to the Jewish underground organization]. The reporter asks: "Are you excited to see this [referring to the story of the Jewish Zionist underground] on stage for the first time? Yitzhak Elias replies in a voice choked with tears: " Yes "(minute 8:56)





In an image video of the "Dawn Theatre", there is a footage of a reaction of a woman who had just watched the play: "It reminds me of Dad's house and such things should not be forgotten, want to be preserved and this is an opportunity" (1:41 minute)



"It reminded me of the fears and the things [that happened]. It was hard, memories that came up," said Ms. Dalia Gabay, who was a little girl in Iraq during the Farhud period. During our interview, she also mentioned that she lost her two brothers in the massacre.

Dalia Shalev, who immigrated to Israel at the age of four, told me in an interview about how exciting it was to hear the language and the stories: "The play brought back memories of my parents' house. It was exciting to hear the language, the songs and the stories that were so familiar to me." [Interview, 14/01/2021]

I personally watched the play about two years ago, I still remember it clearly. It introduced the Jewish culture in Iraq, the manners and the language, things that took me back to stories my grandmother use to tell me. For many years, I thought she told me fairy tales, I didn't believe her stories. The play Made her stories come alive and gave them credibility. Some of the stories were emotionally draining. I remember sitting in the hall at the end of the play in the chair, unable to move because of the intensity and the excitement.

In response to my question: " what is the power of theatre in comparison to other artistic expressions that bring the heritage?" Ms. Gilit Yitzhaki, the theatre's founder, playwright and director of the play "Daddy's Girls":

Theatre is a powerful tool. [...], an emotional experience is always enacted because it touches you. Theatre, like cinema, works on the emotional aspect, it is the same format. [...] Eventually people attend the show in order to go through an emotional experience [...] so there is no doubt that the because the play touches emotion and brings a story that is engraved in memory. [Interview, 20/01/2021]

Dalia Shalev also believes in the power of theatre to evoke empathy and excitement that can change the viewers' consciousness. To my question: "Do you think the play will affect the Israeli narrative towards Iraqi Jewry? Dalia answers:" Without a doubt. A good play conveys the spectator deep emotional experience which remains long after the play is over." [Interview, 14/01/2021]

Re-presenting and Re-positioning historical events and cultural heritage

The play brings up events from the past and historical stories, which have not been told or had been repressed. This is how the viewer encounters historical facts as they are woven into a personal story. Indeed, the play is the product

of a research paper that, according to the author's testimony, lasted five years, in which she collected stories and researched historical events woven into the play that were never presented. There is a great importance in taking responsibility of the second and third generation for making that voice heard and the presence of historical stories. Their publication is an expression of respect for the previous generation and has great value for future generations.

In Channel 1 TV report (4:04 min), the reporter mentions that Gilit collects documents of relatives who have already died, and as a will she unites the story of their lives into the play "Daddy's Daughters". In the same TV report, Yitzhaki is asked about the spectator's reactions, and she replies: "This is a generation that comes and goes from the play and says wow, this play is finally upon us." (4:50 min)



[Interview, 20/01/2021]

In the interview I conducted with Ms. Gilit Yitzhaki, an actress, creator, art director and founder of the Dawn Theatre, she expanded on the sense of responsibility and the need to play and present the historical story and past heritage of Iraqi Jewry:

Completely on our shoulders. This is the feeling that motivated me to explore and collect the stories. I realized that there is a collective story here that represents us all. Like the story of the Farhud that came up again and again. Look, there are so many details that the people I interviewed tell me and ask me to put them in the show. It is important for them that things are heard. [...] We actually took historical stories and revived them. The stories are so true on stage that they cannot be ignored. Suddenly the stories get a seal of approval. After the show people can talk about the topic, get interested. It is not a subject that is studied in school and when you see the play it is tangible.

She added: "[...] an entire history is gone. I want to talk about this history." And further to my question does she feel that the play "Daddy's Daughters" helps rebuild a collective memory? Ms. Yitzhaki answered:

For an audience that does not know the stories explicitly, I renewed. The audience's reactions are "oh we did not know". This is already changing the reference. There are communities about which they knew nothing. Putting aside the difficulties our parents experienced in absorption in the country, the important thing is

the cultural sacrifice. [...] This process of recognizing this music has only happened in the last decade and it is thanks to our generation, who took documentation and culture as a task [...] The immigrant generation is disappearing and deserves to have its contribution documented and be part of the collective memory. [Interview, 20/01 / 2021]

In an interview with Ms. Dalia Gabay, regarding the importance of the play, she replied: "It is definitely very important, it is part of the Holocaust, part of things ... [part of the history of the Jewish people]." (Appendix D Minute 9:12). Later in the interview she claimed that they did not give the full picture and omitted details (17:26 min). When asked if the show still was important, she replied "yes, yes it does matter ... there were things that really reminded me of things, the fears" (minute 19:44).

How much has this story affected you? Has it changed your Israeli narrative about Arab Jews? I asked the actress Lyrit Mash Batish in a conversation, and she replied: "Before the show, I did not know the story of Iraqi Jews. I thought it was an Aliyah [Hebrew for immigration to Israel] for Zionist motives. I did not know about the Farhud, it was a history I did not know." [Interview, 17/01/2021] The play opened a window for me to stories I had not known or heard about and did not really delve into. The historical stories presented in the play, especially about the Farhud, made me ask questions and find out more about the events in Iraq." [Interview, 28/08/2021]

The following remarks by Navit Kuba, who watched the play, combine the three main points of this study, in relation to the question of the relationship between documentary theatre and heritage: emotional revival of memories and events, presence and re-representation of the historical story and the power of theatre in redesigning the common heritage. Navit said in a conversation:

The show reminded me a lot of things from my parents' house. The language, the stories. But the most important thing, is that the play

brought the story of my history, something I had not seen on the theatre stages before, and I subscribe to many. A theatrical performance has the power to make the story tangible, it works on emotion. [Interview, 28/08/2021]

Conclusion

Looking at the "Dawn Multicultural Theatre" demonstrates that we make shared heritage by using not only the means of governmental policies, but also the power of theatre spectacle, sensation, and memory storytelling. Exploring the case study of "Daddy's Girls" signified that heritage is vital and alive. It is not frozen moments in the material form, but it is moments of action. The dialog between actions and material representations is an important element of heritage. The dialog may be about creating and maintaining historical and social consensus, but simultaneously, it can also be a process of dissent and contestation (Smith 2006, 83) .

Theatre is a dynamic tool, for intervention in both self and culture. The example of "Daddy's Girls" illustrates the personal transformations that looking back to past life stories and sharing them, may bring about. It re-enlivens the shared cultural heritage, as well as the struggles of the past for new audiences. Looking back thus becomes an important element in interrogating and drawing the contours of a collective identity. The creative and theatrical techniques used in "Daddy's girls", enable audiences to get emotionally moved, empathize, negotiate, cross-reference, and borrow, and thus re-construct future narratives from the narratives of others. Theatre thus opens the past in the present, as a resource for contemporary formulation of future vision, offering points for identification, which reach beyond contested heritages (Pfeifferand & Weiglhofer, 2019).

My research illustrated, that the Dawn Theatre, with a historical topic focus, brings the past into the present with the expressed intention of shaping a different future. It is a 'backwards and forwards looking act' (Park-Fuller,

2000, p. 28), as a lens through, which we can see past events that demand reflection, if we want that the present is to be changed into a better future.



The question the study dealt with, is the relationship between documentary theatre and cultural heritage. And in a more focused way: what are the ways or tools through which documentary theatre can observe and understand the memory of the past and cultural heritage and re-understand narrative and collective memory? The question was examined through a case study of the play "Daddy's Girls" at the "Dawn Theatre. The research presented, reinforces the fact that documentary theatre is a significant and valuable tool in the presence and accessibility of cultural heritage and unknown or unfamiliar historical stories. The intensity of the emotional reactions, revealed as a result of watching the play, demonstrates the potential inherent in it. Entire communities which came to Israel, left behind heritage and culture that did not receive the proper recognition, and were pushed to the margins (Meir-Glitzstein, 2018, 2021). The community of Babylonians, the Jews who immigrated from Iraq, is an example of a community, whose stories of heroism involving immigration, did not enjoy the proper representation in the textbooks of the Israeli education system.

In the public discourse, a visual image is present, which best illustrates the distortion, resulting from the lack of story of the Jews of the East in the curricula. Explains its creator, the artist Meir Gal:

The book I hold in the history of the Jewish people in recent generations, written by Dr. Kirschenbaum and approved by the Ministry of Education, served high school students (including me) in history studies in public schools in Israel in the 1970s. The nine pages I hold in the photo, are the only pages in the book discussing the history of non-Europeans, hence the title "9 out of 400".

Art can protest, alert, excite, mobilize, and even correct. There is no doubt that the image of Meir Gal is outrageous and screaming. But the playwright, Gilit Yitzhaki, chose a different path, one of correction through theatre. Her answer to absence is presence. Its response to repression and oblivion is the creation of a new collective memory. Its mode of operation is the establishment of the Association for Multicultural Documentary Theatre, and the writing of plays that would correct the distortion. She embarked on a long journey, of five years of research, in which she collected stories, that had not been told before. In doing so, she allowed an audience that had never seen itself on stage, to get excited and empathize with personal stories. Thus, the Farhud riots turned from a historical name into an event perceived as distant, a name that marks a traumatic, difficult, and painful experience for members of the Iraqi community - some self-harmed immigrants and some descendants, born in the country, who knew very little about their past.

"There is no doubt that the play touches on emotion and brings a story that is engraved in memory," says one of the interviewees. The play works on several levels. It brings the viewer to an emotional experience, that stems from his identification with the content uploaded in the show, and at the same time, evokes among viewers an elevation of memories and a desire to share the personal story, which is part of an entire community committee, in fact, a new collective story. In a personal column, the author Yossi Alfi writes about his feelings in the face of his father's stories. He recalled, that when his father recounted that he was a hero in the Zionist underground, the son had no acquaintance with the background of his father's stories, as these were not

mentioned or taught in the education system. "I would think he invented it from his feverish Oriental mind. About forty years after his death, they decided to award him the Medal of the State Warriors, without the world ever knowing he had received it. "It is clear that if there was recognition of the history of the Iraqi communities in the school system, we would not get into such situations."

As Ms. Yitzhaki pointed out in an interview with me "For an audience that does not know the stories explicitly, I renewed. The audience reactions are "oh we did not know". This already changes the reference. There are communities, which they knew nothing about". [Interview, 20/01/2021] Although the theatre has played a key role in restoring the history and cultural heritage of the Eastern Jews of Babylon, in recent years it has enjoyed only partial budgets from the state and has had to look for other venues for fundraising, to survive. Although the play has won many accolades and has been performed over 100 times in full halls, it is still considered by some of the major theatres as fringe; "Comments that the show is sectoral. There is 'elusive' discrimination, covert discrimination, that is not talked about." Take for example cultural coordinators in schools. [...] Few coordinators are willing to break the glass ceiling and take our show and bring the story". [Interview, 20/01/2021]

Even when the history of the community was told in greater detail, it took many years, before the Farhud has been recognized a result of the rise of Nazism (Saar-Mann, 2018). Only in recent years, the immigrants have been recognized as Holocaust survivors and received a minor reward, following a stubborn struggle. According to Gilit Yitzhaki, the majority of the viewers in the play, are still members of the community, and it has not yet been broken through, for example, as an activity around Holocaust Remembrance Day.

From the testimony of one of the actresses - Lyrit Mash-Batish, one can learn that she knew nothing about the dramas that took place behind the scenes of the Aliyah from Iraq. However, many members of the community, who were born in Israel, did not know that almost 200 people were murdered in

cold blood in Farhud. For the history of this Aliyah and its cultural heritage to be engraved in the collective memory, not only of its children, but also of the general public, two moves must take place. The first - acquaintance with the facts, and the second - experiences that allow identification with these facts. The first move is primarily intellectual, while the second is emotional. The Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center has been operating in Or Yehuda for many years. Important works have been published in Hebrew literature that have brought readers closer to Iraqi Jewry, such as Eli Amir's books, as well as a film based on his book "Flying the Pigeons", Sami Michael's books, as well as a film, based on the book "Trumpet in the Wadi". There is nothing like good theatre and a touching play to complete this move and strengthen it. Thanks to the research work, I was able to show the emotional side of the play, in the documentary theatre. I learned how documentary theatre can be a tool for understanding and rebuilding collective memory and cultural heritage.

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<https://www.facebook.com/HaShacharMulticulturalTheater/videos/%D7%A%D7%99%D7%90%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%97%D7%A8-%D7%A8%D7%91-%D7%AA%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%99-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%99-%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A5-1/1302316576477805/>

Retrieved from Israeli television - Channel 1.

Taping of the telephone interview, Appendix D
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXZdkl2a9lw&list=UUABw7Vyo74aqTy52VDygyiA&index=42>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ep4VETAwR0M\(4:00 דקה\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ep4VETAwR0M(4:00 דקה))
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