

The Dawn Multicultural Theater: Sharing heritage through documentary theater

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Introduction

Historically, theater productions contribute to the construction of a society's cultural heritage. They are perceived as a legacy that echoes the past, as well as, providing an important contribution to the future. Hence, theater was defined by UNESCO (1984) as a cultural asset that should be protected for the next generations. Even though theaters can fulfill different roles in the process of heritage construction, national theater tends to adopt the ideological narratives and points of view of the dominant hegemonic group of their given nation. Through these ideological lenses, such theaters aspire to contribute to the creation of a powerful communal solidarity based upon a dominant heritage, which defines and legitimizes the existence of the state via this dominant lens. By doing so, the national theater can be described as a social institution and a performance that is invested in the canonical cultural work to preserve the collective memory (Carlson 2003).

The Israeli national theaters also promote the national narrative and heritage advocated by its dominant hegemonic group. This narrative emphasizes the contributions of the Ashkenazi community (Jews that emigrated to Israel from European countries) to the building of the State of Israel, while ignoring other ethnic, and cultural narratives and affiliations (Ofrat 1980; Urian 2004; Shem Tov 2022). Only a few independent theaters shed light on marginalized communities and tell their stories through their voice. *The Dawn Multicultural Theater* (The Dawn Theater), which operates in Israel, aims to be one of them. The theater presents the history of the Iraqi Jewish community (Babylonian Jewry),¹ that lived in Iraq before emigrating to Israel,

1 Leading Iraqi-Jewish scholars describe their community by using the term "Arab-Jew". The term, which implies that Jewish and Arab cultures were interwoven, and thus rejects the binary division drawn by the Zionist political discourse between Jews and Arabs, has been the subject of heated controversy. See: Shohat (1989); Shenhav (2006); Somekh (2007); Levy (2008); Snir (2006); Yonah, Na'aman, and Machlev (2007).

and the community's immense support of the Zionist movement and the building of the State of Israel.

As a Jewish community that was part of the Arab-Muslim society and culture, Iraqi Jewry was caught in a paradox. The sharp division drawn by the hegemonic Ashkenazi Zionist group between Jews and Arabs underestimated the Iraqi Jewry's contribution to the nation, since its members were perceived as Arab-Jews (Cohen 2012). This hybrid cultural identity served to marginalize Iraqi Jewry, as well as the whole Mizrahi community (Jews that emigrated to Israel from Arab or Muslim countries) and exclude them from the national narrative and heritage. The Dawn Theater sought to reconstruct the Mizrahi community's image and their position in Israel's national heritage through a more inclusive lens, highlighting their experiences. Thus, while some independent theaters, especially documentary theaters, tend to prove that the heritage of the ethnic group that they represent is relevant, despite their rejection of the national culture and heritage, other ethnic groups use the theater's methods in order to be included in the national culture and heritage.

Given these understandings, the research examined the ways heritage is reshaped through the cultural experience of the of The Dawn Theater and its production of *Eliyahu's Daughters*. By analyzing the spectators' reactions to the play, I explored the ways in which the artistic event offered by The Dawn Theater is designed not only to mediate the narrative of the Iraqi Jewry by focusing on the past, but also to reshape it as a relevant event that influences the ways in which the group is included in the Israeli national cultural heritage.

Examining the various reactions of the audience that was exposed to the narratives of the Dawn Theatre reveals the power of the national heritage, and the ways in which local ethnic heritage perceive the national heritage as an important element in their identity and in establishing their sense of belonging to the collective.

Theater and the construction of national heritage: A case study in Israel

As a cultural practice, heritage has received a broader definition, recognizing non-physical attributes, such as intangible heritage, as a part of a group's legacy (Smith 2006). Intangible heritage has social impacts at different levels, being a symbol of history, social values, and the development of goals. Intangible heritage is seen as quite diverse, including: storytelling, craft, literature, performance arts (theater, music, dance), cultural design, and artistic productions.

Theater 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 that store and transmit customs, skills, traditions, and knowledge from generation to generation (Logan, Kockel and Craith 2015). And they both serve as transmitters of values, knowledge, and cultural heritage through the utilization

of words and performances. “Words and ideas that surround the emotions of listeners are the basis of stories”, claims Pereira (2019, p. 35). This act of storytelling happens in two different ways: they can portray “real life” events in a realistic way or tell a tale where creative license is given to reshape reality, creating a more appealing narrative.

As a cultural project, theater took part in what Benedict Anderson (1983) has termed an “imagined community”, by generating and legitimizing the ideological narratives of the nation. Zionism – the belief that Jews should return to their ancient homeland of Israel and continue to protect their right to live there – went through similar stages, within the process of recognizing and adopting national symbols and incorporating the myriad of ethnic Jewish narratives that represent the State of Israel.

Historically, since public displays of Judaism were generally forbidden in the diaspora, theater remained a small part of Jewish creative expression within the confines of the Jewish community. Thus, Jewish theater tradition was almost non-existent in Europe until the advent of Zionism. Only in the 1890s, during the Ottoman rule in Palestine/Eretz-Israel (mandatory Palestine), was the first play in Hebrew performed in Zionist schools. Since then, almost eighty original plays presenting the national narrative of the Ashkenazi pioneers, and their role in it, were published and staged before the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 (Aronson-Lehavi and Rokem 2010). The first established theaters that started operating in the *Yishuv* period (Hebrew for the Jewish settlement in Palestine/Eretz-Israel), aiming to become a forum that would influence the ideological-national perception of the *Yishuv* members in a real way, were the *Habima National Theater* and the *Ohel Theater*. Examining the political, ideological, and artistic roles of the Habima Theater (Hebrew for stage), founded in 1918 in Moscow and emigrated to Tel Aviv in 1931, exposes the national mission and role that the theater was fulfilling in its early days (Levy 1979). The Habima Theater took part in the Zionist cultural revolution by reflecting its commitment to the nation-building project and voicing the stories of the Zionist pioneers and their settled communities before the establishment of the State of Israel (Ofrat 1980; Abramson 1998). The glorification of the Ashkenazi pioneers and their contribution to the Zionist revolution, served to create the strong image and persona of the “New Jew” (as opposed to the antisemitic image of a weak, pale, and limited Jew). This “New Jew” theme was espoused in the repertoire of the Ohel Theater (Hebrew for tent), which was founded in 1925 as part of the socialist cultural activities (Feingold 2005).

The next generation in the Israeli theater presented nationalism as the ideal of self-sacrifice to the nation, as well as dealing with the Holocaust, mainly through the Ashkenazi point of view (Avigal 1996; Urian 2002). In the following years, the repertoire of the Israeli theater included more critical, satiric, and parodic perspectives that deconstructed the Zionist ethos. This move was still preoccupied with the Ashkenazi national culture and heritage. Even though the theater started to repre-

sent more groups that comprised Israeli society and questioned the relationships between Zionism and Judaism (Urian 2000), the Mizrahi Other remained in the margins (Urian 2001).

The image of the Mizrahim was highly influenced by the orientalist discourse (Said 1978), which served mainly the Ashkenazi Zionist viewpoint. Mizrahim were usually represented in the Israeli theater through stereotypes that resembled the representation of Arabs in Israeli culture.² Mizrahim were identified as aggressive, vulgar, and uneducated. Being perceived as trapped in their Arab culture, which the Ashkenazim looked down upon mainly because they didn't understand or appreciate the language and traditions, most Mizrahi characters in plays represented the fringes of society. The only way for these figures to escape their oriental "fate" was to experience interethnic integration by marrying an Ashkenazi character in the "happy end" of the plot (Gertz 1993). These representations marginalized the Mizrahim's contribution to the state of Israel, while espousing the superiority of the Ashkenazi culture and shared heritage. Thus, despite the Mizrahim's emergent representation in Israeli society (Samocha 1993), Mizrahim were still underrepresented in Israeli theater, culture, and heritage.³ Therefore, the preservation of the Mizrahim's ethnic culture faced difficulties. Even though theater can challenge the values of the dominant party's shared heritage, most theaters are still contributing to the construction of the national heritage as it is designed through the lens of the Ashkenazi pioneers (Shem-Tov 2022).

Documentary theater and the construction of heritage

Only a few independent theaters in the Israeli theater scene shed light on narratives that represent minority groups and marginalized groups through documen-

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- 2 It was assumed that the Ashkenazi perception of the Oriental Jew was influenced by the stereotype of the Arab, because the Mizrahi immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s represented, in part, the disguised anxieties of the Ashkenazi Israelis concerning the "Jewishness" of their society. Hence, the flow of Jewish immigrants from the Arab countries would, from that viewpoint, lead to the erosion of the Western nature of Israeli society.
 - 3 Since the 1980s, the Israeli theater has produced a few plays that dealt with the Mizrahi Jews' history. The *Khan Theater* presented *Refuge* by Sami Michael, *Haifa Theater* presented *Demons in the Basement* by Sami Michael, and *Habima National Theater* presented *Moroccan King* by Gabriel Ben Simhon (Shem-Tov 2022). Mizrahi theater for youth includes two productions that concern Iraqi Jews: *Palms and Dreams* (1983) and *Scapegoat* (1987), which contests the orientalism of the Israeli education system and at the same time remains adherent to the conventional Zionist narrative (ibid).

tary theater. The Dawn Theater is one of them.⁴ Recent attempts to define documentary theater have characterized it as having “a central or exclusive reliance on actual, rather than imaginary events [...] found in historical records” (Dawson 1999, p. 17). Hence, documentary theater is often focused on historical topics, which challenge the participants to engage with questions of cultural identity and heritage. As part of heritage work, documentary theater strives to provide the audience with a sense of history, community, and sensitivity to tangible and intangible cultural heritage that has been marginalized (Craith 2008). The practice of incorporating primary source materials into the spine of the play is one of the main features through which documentary theater composes a new understanding of the multifaceted and multicultural histories. Moreover, such theater groups aspire to create a “performative utopia” (Dolan 2005), that is an experience in which the audience feel a part of the event represented on stage, thus creating a connection and a sense of belonging between them and the historical event itself. Thus, documentary theater has been widely used to reconstruct the interpretations of historical events by derided communities through carefully chosen historical fragments, which were sometimes forgotten (Lev-Aladgem 2010).

There are few independent theaters currently operating in Israel, such as the *Al-Karma Theater*,⁵ *Inbal Dance Theater*,⁶ *Bimat Kedem Theater*,⁷ and *Gesher Theater*.⁸ Most of these theaters are voicing marginalized ethnic and ethno-national groups that comprise Israeli society today. Even though most of these theaters are using critical practices to present various cultural identities and heritage, they rarely engage in documentary theater.

The Dawn Theater was specifically founded as a documentary theater in order to create a theatrical experience that represents and promotes awareness of the history, culture, and heritage of Mizrahi Jews who immigrated to Israel in the 1950's and paid a high social and cultural price in the process of absorption, where their rich culture and heritage was denigrated by Ashkenazi cultural dominance (Meir-

4 Documentary theater is known by a variety of names, such as historical drama, contemporary historical play, theater-of-fact, nonfictional theater, repertory theater, theater of journalism, and theater-in-education (Dawson 1999).

5 Alkarma Theater is the oldest Arab theater in Israel. The theater had put on plays for all ages, particularly children and youth.

6 The company was founded in 1949 to safeguard the rich heritage of Yemenite Jews. See: Roginsky (2006).

7 This theater promoted original Israeli productions with an emphasis on non-European Jewish culture. The theater was closed in 2013 due to insufficient financial support from the Ministry of Culture. See: Shem-Tov (2021).

8 This theater was founded in Israel in 1991. The theatre consists mostly of new immigrants from Russia and acts as a bilingual theater, performing in Russian and in Hebrew alternately. See: Gershenson (2005).

Glitzenstein 2018). The Dawn Theater was born out of a desire to address the life stories of these Mizrahi Jews, and for Israelis of every background to become acquainted with their unique legacy. Its first production, *Eliyahu's Daughters* written by Gilit Itzhaki (2015), tells the story of an Iraqi Jewish family in the years leading up to their emigration to Israel. Their lives in Iraq, relationships with their Arab neighbors, their connection to the Zionist Movement, as well as the dilemmas of departing to an unknown country (Israel) and leaving their lives behind were the backdrop of the play. The family's story takes place during the 1940's, when the Jewish community in Bagdad suffered from the *Farhud* (Arabic for looting or robbery). The Farhud was a brutal pogrom that erupted on June 1, 1941. It was two days of mayhem, led by an inflamed mob that was influenced by the pro-Nazi Iraqi regime of Rashid Ali. During the pogrom two hundred Jews were massacred, over two thousand were injured, jailed and tortured, raped, and left orphaned as their homes and property were looted (Saar-Mann 2018). This event marked the end of Muslim-Jewish co-existence in Iraq, and sparked the Iraqi Jewish community to seek eventual emigration.⁹ The riots were described in detail in books (Kazzaz 2010; Shemesh 2011) and in a television series (*War and Memory*),¹⁰ but despite that its history is virtually unknown among Israelis, with little to no representation in Israeli theater (Cohen 2012).¹¹ It is important to note that Ashkenazi Jews produced a rich cultural and historical narrative and heritage concerning their horrific suffering and martyrdom, as opposed to the lack of recognition given to the similar suffering of Mizrahi Jews, which lacked public expression. The play begins during the Gulf War,¹² when Israel was attacked by Scud missiles sent from Iraq. The juxtaposition of the past Farhud and the present Gulf War prompted the elderly parents to reveal the secrets from the family's life in Iraq to their daughters. While the historical events regarding the Jewish-Iraqi blood-soaked relationship collide, the daughters realize that the unspoken family past haunts them even though they had been living in Israel for decades. Through this personal story, the play exposes the audience to the Iraqi Jewry's customs, songs, and culture, and gives a window into their way of life. Although the play tells the story of one family, it presents the heritage and collective memory of the entire Iraqi Jewish community, and has universal themes for all Mizrahi Jewry.

9 Following the Farhud, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the Arab defeat in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, led to the exodus of nearly the entire Jewish community of Iraq in 1950 and 1951.

10 See Other Sources: No. 1.

11 Not much attention has been paid to the memoirs of the Jewish community in Iraq. See: Landau (1981); Levy (2006); Bashkin (2010). The only other play that dealt with the Farhud is *Ghosts in the Cellar* by Sami Michael, that was shown in *Haifa Theatre* (1983).

12 During the Gulf War, Iraqi forces fired approximately 42 Scud missiles into Israel from January 17 to February 23, 1991.

Methods

The research is based on 6 semi-structured interviews as well as a news program (*Yoman*) that was produced about the Farhud in 2019 (see Other Sources: No. 2). The interviews were conducted with 4 audience members and two members of the production of *Eliyahu's Daughters*. Of the audience members, two were born in Iraq and two were born in Israel to Iraqi Jewish families that emigrated in the 1950s. The other interviewees were Lyrit Mash-Batish, one of the actors in the play, and Gilit Yitzhaki, the founder of the theater and the playwright. The interviews with the spectators were conducted privately while those involved in the theater play were absent. Interviews with the members of the theater took place at the theater. All were one-on-one interviews. The interviews were recorded in Hebrew and then transcribed and translated into English.

All interviewees were given explanations about the nature of the study and full details on how the data would be used. The interviewees' names were changed to protect their privacy, except for the names of the actor and the name of the founder of The Dawn Theater.

Analysis

The interviews focused on exploring how the audience and the people involved in the theater reacted to the narrative of the Iraqi Jewish experience and what impact it had on them. Two main concepts emerged from the data: (1) An affective experience that expressed an emotional response; (2) a consciousness-raising experience that fostered reflexivity and re-positioned cultural identity in Israeli society. These responses stemmed from the theater's effort to enliven, represent, and reposition the narrative of Iraqi Jewry in the Israeli national heritage.

Emotional resuscitation and revitalizing of personal memories

Eliyahu's Daughters tells a story that wishes to impact the audience's emotions by turning its gaze from the modern-day crisis of the Gulf War, in which the play is set, to flashbacks of life in Iraq. Boal (2008) suggests that turning to the past can create a path that enables communication which appeals to the audience's emotions, rather than just their reason. By reviving emotions that were hidden or ignored, the narrative can be used to encourage the audience to translate their individual emotions and stories into a collective narrative (Escalas and Stern 2003). In other words, using emotions can give a voice and build consciousness that will be used as a social intervention vehicle.

Fig. 1: Fragments from the play “Eliyahu’s Daughters” (Photo: Dalia Gal Sabardalin)



Fig. 2: Fragments from the play “Eliyahu’s Daughters” (Photo: Dalia Gal Sabardalin)



Most of the interviewees made sense of the past events shown by the play through the emotional route. Some of the interviewee's emotions were evoked while they were reliving memories of similar experiences to those shown in the play. Yitzhak, one of the people highlighted in the news interview, described his emotional state after watching the play. Replying to the news reporter of the *Yoman* news program, he said in heartbreaking tears, "I founded the underground organization myself."¹³ The reporter then asked, "are you excited to see this [referring to the story of the Jewish Zionist underground] on stage for the first time?" Yitzhak replied in a voice choked with tears, "yes". Daisy, an audience member interviewee, who was a little girl in Iraq during the Farhud, also used her emotions to describe the effect the narrative had on her. She expressed: "It reminded me of the fears and the things [that happened]. It was hard, [the] memories that came up." Her emotional response ("it was hard") opened the door for her to detail more of her experience. Like Yitzhak, she shared her personal narrative, saying that she lost her two brothers in the massacre.

Pri'el, who immigrated to Israel at the age of four, recalled the emotions that arose after hearing the language and the stories from her old homeland, "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". Pri'el shared her excitement that there was finally a public, artistic outlet that shared her family's experience and that of countless other Iraqi Jews, which had been void in the Israeli public sphere. She also felt that this could be a turning point for highlighting the Iraqi Jewish experience. When asked if she thought that the play could change the narrative of Iraqi Jews in Israel, she responded, "without a doubt. The show powerfully transports the audience into the emotional experience of their history, leaving an impression that will last well beyond the final curtain". She added that, "the story was so touching that it would likely inspire viewers to want to learn more on their own about the historical events that took place." In trying to understand why theater appears to elicit such an emotional response from the audience, I turned to Gilit Yitzhaki, the theater's founder, for greater insight. She expressed her belief that:

Theater is a powerful tool. [...] Unlike an intellectual experience of admiring a piece of art, for example, theater makes one feel. It evokes emotion. Eventually people attend the show in order to go through an emotional experience.

Yitzhaki also believes in the power of theater not just to rescue the hidden narrative of the community, but also to evoke empathy and excitement that can change the viewers' perception of the community and its positioning in the national heritage.

13 Referring to the Zionist underground movement that was established in Iraq (Sheena, Elazar, Nahtomi and Motzafi-Haller 2004; see Other Sources: No.3).

To my question: “Do you think the play will affect the Israeli narrative regarding Iraqi Jewry?” She answered: “A good play conveys the audience’s deep emotional experience, which remains long after the play is over.” In other words, Galit and Pri’el claim that the performance does not just validate the experience of the community whose story has been told by the play by evoking their emotions. Touching the audience’s emotions, the performance also reconstructs the historical event and embeds these events in the views of the spectators who are not part of the Iraqi Jewish community.

Hence, “performing history” (Rokem 2000) can enact emotions (and other physical experiences) that are brought up through the stories that were excluded from the hegemonic narrative and shared heritage. Thus, the combination of history, theater, and emotions can create a significant political awareness and effect of both the marginalized community and the general society.

Consciousness-raising: Repositioning memories of community heritage

Eliyahu’s Daughters brings up historical events, which had been repressed, and attempts to weave them into a personal story that the audience could relate to and feel as part of a common heritage. This was the direct intention of the playwright. Yitzhaki painstakingly researched and documented testimonials and stories over a five-year period. She interviewed Iraqi Jewish immigrants and included the stories from her own relatives. When asked about the audience reaction, Yitzhaki replied:

This is a generation that comes to the play, leaves it and says, ‘Wow, this play is finally about us.’ The representation of the historical story was important to the audience, not only in raising their own consciousness, but also because they viewed the project of consciousness-raising as a political act in, and of, itself.

Yitzhaki further expanded on the sense of responsibility in preserving the history of the Iraqi Jewry and on the political aspect of this act with regards to the heritage of the Israeli society:

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

The validation sought to focus on understanding the ways ethnicity shaped both the Iraqi Jewry experience and the Israeli national heritage. Yitzhaki said: “[...] an entire history is gone. I want to talk about this history. For an audience that does not know the stories explicitly, or even remotely, I offered something new.”

The practice of consciousness-raising and the notion of the personal as political fostered solidarity with the non-Iraqi Jewish community. The actress who played Mazal, the youngest daughter in the production, Lyrit Mash-Batish phrased it this way: “Before the show, I was not aware of the story of Iraqi Jews. I thought it was an Aliyah [Hebrew word for immigration to Israel] for Zionist motives. I had never heard of Farhud, it was a history I knew nothing of.” She added, “the play opened a window for me to stories that I couldn’t believe had never been shared, even in our school history lessons. The historical stories, especially about the Farhud, made me ask questions and want to learn more about the events in Iraq.” The process of identifying one’s own story as having political roots is closely related to processes of reconstructing what it means to be an Israeli. In an interview with Pri’el, regarding the Iraqi Jewry heritage and the events that led to mass Aliyah to Israel, she said: “It is [the Farhud] definitely very important, it is part of our history facing antisemitism, or more correctly it was hatred of Jews because it was committed by Semites themselves, part of things [part of the history of the Jewish people].” By recognizing the tribulations of the Mizrahi community, such as that of the Iraqi Jewry (i.e., the Farhud) and at the same time merging it with the common Israeli narrative of modern history [the Holocaust], a new heritage is being constructed. The new heritage that Pri’el suggests is searching for a stronger ethnic collective identity by seeking out national contexts that will validate and affirm Iraqi Jewry’s sense of belonging. Shedding light on the rich history of Iraqi Jewry brings visibility to its collective experience and shares its heritage within the larger national heritage – finally giving the group the sense of belonging and a window of understanding what binds them further within the national heritage.

Conclusion

Theater can enrich heritage by bringing visibility to narratives and sharing the collective identities of marginalized groups within the public sphere, while creating a sense of commonality among the audience. The Dawn Theater used these “visibility politics” (Adams 2005) to negotiate the excluded, neglected, and forgotten history of Iraqi Jewry, to elevate the heritage of the entire Mizrahi ethnic group, and to integrate their legacy within the national Israeli narrative. Marginalized groups tend to politicize their heritage through struggles that strive to empower their ethnic, racial, and cultural uniqueness as opposed to the hegemonic culture and heritage (Taylor and Whittier 1992). In this case, The Dawn Theater made a theatrical attempt

to frame the ethnic heritage of Iraqi Jewish, not just as a unique heritage, but also as a path to belonging to the national heritage. Even though The Dawn Theater presents the uniqueness of the Jewish-Arab culture and heritage of Iraqi Jewry (Shem-Tov 2019), at the same time it strives to integrate it with that of the Zionist history and heritage. In other words, The Dawn Theater employed artistic practices to evoke audience emotions and raise political consciousness to shape the national conversation. This endeavor hoped to influence both the awakening of the young Iraqi Jewish community and educate non-Iraqi Israelis in order to promote awareness and the inclusion of Iraqi Jewish history within the wider Israeli identity. Thus, by empowering their ethnic heritage, The Dawn Theater wanted to break the ethnic barriers that separated Israelis of Iraqi descent from the national heritage, which was framed by the Ashkenazi contribution to the nation. Therefore, The Dawn Theater emphasized ethnic distinctness in order to highlight this marginalized group into the national mainstream.

In 2019, when I first saw the play, I distinctly remember feeling their intention without recognizing that was their point at the time. The play reintroduced me to my own Iraqi Jewish culture and took me back to the stories my grandmother used to share. For many years, I thought she had told me fairy tales. I didn't believe her stories. The play changed that, making them come alive and gave her tales credibility. Though, admittedly, some parts of the play were emotionally draining – i.e. the horrors of the Farhud, and the immense challenges and heartbreak they felt leaving their homes and financial security to move somewhere they had never even visited (Israel), even if they were already emotionally connected. I recall sitting in my chair at the end of the play, unable to move because of the intensity of my emotional awakening – it was like I had to process what I'd seen before I was able to get up again, so deeply was I moved. Theater is a dynamic tool for creating culture. The interplay of the story and its physical representation can play an important element in building heritage. The dialogue itself may be about creating and maintaining historical and social consensus, but simultaneously, it can also be a process of dissent. The example of *Eliyahu's Daughters* illustrates the personal transformations that looking back at life stories and sharing them may bring about. It can invigorate cultural heritage, as well as the struggles of the past, for new audiences. Looking back thus becomes an important element in drawing the contours of a future collective identity and heritage. The creative and theatrical techniques used in *Eliyahu's Daughters* can inspire the audience to become emotionally involved, to empathize, to want to learn more and research, and thus, hopefully, create new narratives for the collective. Theater opens the past to the present, as a creative resource for contemporary formulation of a future understanding, offering points to identify with, which reach beyond contested heritages (Pfeifferand and Weiglhofer 2019). Theater can problematize the dominant discourse by personalizing and humanizing the absent narrative (Park-Fuller 2000). The Dawn Theater demonstrates that

we make heritage by not only using the means of governmental policies, among other creative outlets, but also through the artistic power of theater spectacle, sensation, memory, and storytelling. The case study of *Eliyahu's Daughters* signified that heritage is not static, but vital and alive. It is not composed of frozen moments in time, but of a multi-layered, ongoing story that deserves recognition and to be incorporated into a shared historical narrative.

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