



24/4/2014

National Theatret

Hanne Tømta, Thomas Gunnerud

Re: Terrorism Project

Dear Hanne and Thomas,

Habima is a very liberal theatre that has never been afraid of producing controversial political shows, which deal with the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, among other issues. As you might know, Habima, like other Int'l institutions such as the Batsheva Dance Company, is subsidized by the Israeli government, and like all subsidized institutions we are required to perform all across the country (out of over 1500 performances that Habima holds nationally each year, only a handful were held in Ariel). Moreover, actors who requested not to perform in Ariel were not obligated to do so by the theatre, and were temporarily replaced. Therefore, in response to your request, Habima cannot confirm that there wouldn't be a handful of performances in the settlements in the future.

I regret to hear that you are considering withdrawing your participation from the "Terrorism Project", which is an int'l initiative meant to promote open dialogue on a very important issue. Personally, I don't believe that boycotting the project due to political considerations is an effective means of protest when artists are concerned. In light of other current political events in the world, I doubt that you will stop bringing Russian Theatre to Oslo, for example, despite the current conflict with the Ukraine.

Over the years, many celebrated European cultural institutions and festivals have not cooperated with the boycott mentality when it came to inviting Habima to perform abroad, since they recognize the importance of open dialogue. Our company has pioneered productions that aim to cross the region's abysmally deep divides, as well as creating meaningful dialogue with Palestinian artists. As you can see from the following examples, stories of migration, exile and displacement fill *Habima's* repertoire: "The Third Generation", co-produced with Berlin's Schaubühne and presented at the Malmö Theatre in Sweden, brings together Palestinian, Jewish and German perspectives to interrogate the legacy of the Holocaust; "A Railway to Damascus" explores the roots of today's tensions in the upheavals of the 1940s; in 2013 *Habima* produced an adaptation of the book by the Palestinian Doctor from Gaza, Dr. Izzaldin Abuelaish, titled "I Shall Not Hate". This production brings to the stage the message of reconciliation and dialogue in order to achieve peace and understanding within this region. Moreover, *Habima's* current production as part of the Int'l "Terrorism Project" deals with an attempt to analyze a terrorist attack from a Palestinian perspective.

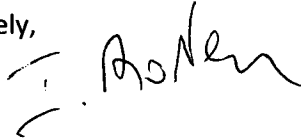
In 2012, leading figures of the British stage have strongly denounced calls for Israel's national theatre company, Habima, to be removed from the line-up of the Globe to Globe Shakespeare Festival for political reasons. Actor Simon Callow said: "I am strongly opposed to any attempt to ban the work of any artist, especially artists with the distinguished record for challenging and fearlessly exploratory work of the Habima company, whose work we have not seen for far too long. If there is to be confrontation, it must be done through the agreed channels of discussion and debate. Let us see what Habima has to tell us about human life, before we try to silence them."

Therefore, I think that choosing the boycotting-route is a mistake. It's acceptable, even recommended, to protest, and to express your feelings, but it's not acceptable to prevent meaningful dialogue through restricting a theatre's freedom of speech. I think there is a crucial need for the type of cross-cultural collaboration that a boycott renders impossible. From where I sit, the UTE's *Terrorism Project* and similar artistic enterprises do much more to challenge the Occupation paradigm than any boycott ever could.

We are all colleagues and I believe that artists shouldn't boycott other artists. Instead, as artists, we should engage in dialogue with everyone, and have the freedom to discuss and to disagree.

I hope you will reconsider your participation in this important Int'l Project.

Sincerely,



Ilan Ronen

President, *UTE*

Artistic Director, *Habima*

התיאטרון הלאומי, "הבימה", שד' תרס"ט 2, תל-אביב

טלפון: 03-5266660, דוא"ל: artsec@habima.org.il