

## **A Play: Cries from Gaza, Mirrors of Resilience and the Geography of Struggle**

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### **Abstract:**

This study examines how the Palestinian issue is manifested in Iraqi theatre following the events of 7 October 2023, using a dramatic reading of *Cries from Gaza* by Mohamed Sakhi al-Itabi as a case study. The study is based on the idea that theatre is a form of art that can express human concerns and their various social, political and cultural aspects. Historically, Palestinian theatre has been linked to defending national identity and representing the suffering and struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their historic and geographic rights. Developments in the Palestinian cause, particularly the war on Gaza, have contributed to reshaping Arab theatrical discourse. Playwrights have turned to documenting the crimes committed by the Zionist occupation, exposing the falsity of its media narrative and highlighting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in the face of policies of annihilation and displacement. In this context, Iraqi theatre has emerged as a creative space that aligns with Palestinian resistance. It draws upon symbols, historical events and religious discourse to entrench the centrality of Jerusalem and Gaza in Arab consciousness. *Cries from Gaza* reveals the presence of a revolutionary and resistant dimension within contemporary Iraqi theatrical discourse. This is achieved by portraying the suffering of Palestinians and documenting their heroism and resilience, reflecting theatre's engagement with current events and its transformation into a tool of cultural resistance against attempts at erasure and forced displacement. Accordingly, the dramatic text functions as an artistic and historical document that contributes to preserving Palestinian memory and strengthening awareness of the cause at Arab and human levels.

**Keywords:** Place; theatre; dramatic architecture; representations.

### **Introduction**

The Arab theatrical movement has served as a means of translating and documenting the issues and conditions of Palestinian society across different historical periods. Since “every art expresses a particular aspect of human life”, theatre, more specifically, expresses human life from multiple angles, as it constitutes the outcome of all the arts (Afouna, 2016). Therefore, discussing the Palestinian cause in an implicit and enacted manner situates Palestinian theatre at the forefront, asserting its presence through a technical strategy shaped by the stages that both the theatre and the Palestinian political reality have undergone.

In this context, the Palestinian people have tended to use theatre as a means of expressing their issues, joys, sorrows, ideas, feelings, hopes and aspirations for a better future (Mahamid, 1989, p. 23). This has enabled the production of performances saturated with national and political concerns, expressed in an imaginative language that strengthens Palestinian identity and reinforces Palestinian geography, conveying messages that intensify revolutionary resolve. These messages aim to reclaim their geographic and historical rights, particularly in light of the revolutionary, resistance theatre that gained widespread international attention following the events of 7 October 2023.

Playwrights have therefore sought to portray the brutality of the Zionist occupation against civilians, expose the falsity of its media narrative and statements issued by its authorities, and record Gazans' steadfastness amid betrayal by the Palestinian Authority and the world's continued negative silence, particularly in the Arab world. In this regard, Iraqi revolutionary theatre has strongly influenced the Palestinian scene, shifting the focus from Gazan Palestinian identity to the Palestinian revolution itself. It has anchored the concept of struggle and resilience through ideological, historical and cultural impetus as an expression of rootedness in the face of Zionist occupation, internal and Arab betrayal and attempts to impose a culture of erasure and displacement.

The Iraqi theatre addressed the events of 7 October 2023 and the evolution of Palestinian resistance and jihad. It took shape through its characteristic features, blending with religious and historical-geographical propositions for a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, under the slogan 'For it is jihad of victory or martyrdom' (Shaqir, 2023). In this way, the playwright expressed his stance on the reality imposed by political and social events relating to the Arab human being within a conscious, overarching perspective on the essence of events and their objective circumstances 'within the movement of history' (Ali 'Isa al-Mashaqba and Salim, 2014).

This produces modifications in geographic premises, contrary to any Zionist illusion. However, the predominance of geography, particularly Gaza, has taken centre stage in the regional arena and within the creative theatrical axis. This granted the author a revolution in both the text and the performance, opening space for new ideas. As theatre moved away from conventional patterns, its texts became bolder in their treatment of the Palestinian cause in order to end its isolation in the struggle against Zionist forces.

Among these works are the plays of Mohamed Sakhi al-Otaybi, whose play *Cries from Gaza* conveys messages about a genocidal war.

### **1. Cries from Gaza: Mirrors of Steadfastness and the Geography of Struggle**

The play *Cries from Gaza* returns us to the stable, foundational reality of our contemporary history — indeed, to the most deeply rooted image in our memory in terms of steadfastness and resistance through martyrdom. The play presents Gazan fighters as being defined by both religion and geography. However, this image is depicted in an 'open' version, marked by inhumanity and blood-soaked brutality. This leads the author to open the first scene with a sunset over Gaza's devastated landscape. The scene contrasts the beauty of the sunset with the destruction of Gaza's neighbourhoods:

"Sunset colours the sky with beauty, but in Gaza's neighbourhoods, darkness prevails and destruction is visible in the form of people carrying heavy belongings as they search for shelter"

(Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 1).

Through this, the author invokes a familiar pattern of ideological conflict rooted in Islam versus 'hostile religions' and examines its reflection in Palestinian reality. Through a historical-religious

ideological vision, he examines the distribution of the play's scenes, offering a religious-geographical classification that draws us back to Islamic history. This makes it possible to understand the 'secret' of departure and struggle within the play's first ideological sequence, following the continuous logic behind paired oppositions.

Islam/Zionism and Palestine/'Auschwitz' (existence/non-existence). These oppositions determine the 'movement' of the mirrors within the civilisational frame, drawing support from theatrical techniques insofar as they constitute the literary reference for the characters' relationship with the place's geographic specificity and identity, which is understood as rootedness within geographical memory. Thus, the greatest jihad for Palestinians is their steadfastness. As the mother says in a mournful voice: "Love that you remain strong for them. We must confront this injustice with everything we have." (Ali Isa al-Mashaqba and Salim, 2014, p. 1).

In the face of the Zionists, this is a challenge to their attempts to destroy the region's history and geography, and to reshape its identity by bombing cities and refugee camps, falsifying their names and erasing their heritage. This is evident in the following scene:

'People feel panic and terror as the shelling intensifies and the area descends into chaos as everyone searches for shelter and looks for their missing loved ones with lamps.'

(Ali isa al-Mashaqba and Salim, 2014, p. 1).

Despite the brutality of the scene, it functions as a theatrical motif (geography-rootedness). Most of the play's events revolve around the inhabitants of Gaza and its geography, with the former acting as the performance's protagonists and the latter representing the reality/history of the genocide witnessed by the entire world during the siege. The characters therefore choose steadfastness, struggling through jihad and martyrdom within Gaza itself. Importantly, the author does not sideline reality; rather, he introduces a human disruption capable of shattering Arab and global inertia at the level of both people and organisations. This is achieved through the play's artistic themes, which activate the collective unconscious as a soft instrument for mass mobilisation — one that cannot be avoided when confronting what opposes reality and rejects the occupier.

Theatrical scenes convey this force, shifting the question of identity decisively towards the truth of jihad and rootedness and thereby affirming the legitimacy of jihad and resistance. The second scene begins with the continuation of shelling. Nonetheless, amidst the rubble, a young fighter perseveres. One of the resistance youths appears carrying a weapon to defend Gaza:

'One youth holds a weapon in his hand, defending Gaza' (Sabhi al-itabi, 2023, p. 3).

(Sabhi al-itabi, 2023, p. 3).

This conveys the idea that jihad is a form of sacrifice for Gaza's geography, with Gaza as the focal point of jihad. Consequently, a Gazan youth rises up and declares:

"We must defend ourselves and our loved ones! We will not allow injustice to triumph."

"Fighting erupts between the Palestinian resistance and the army of the Zionist occupiers, and children can be seen hiding and screaming in fear" (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 3).

Thus, Gaza is the body of every Palestinian in which steadfastness and struggle are staged, even when childhood is brief and suffering relentless. If we apply the play's subject to the Palestinian reality from which it arises, we see an exact correspondence: a war of genocide and the world's silence. In this context, as the text indicates, 'activists and supporters rush to help and provide protection; the conflict

intensifies and events grow more violent. Shelling stops momentarily, and one of the activists appears, speaking loudly to the crowds present.

Activist: ‘Where is the international community? Where are the United Nations and the human rights they claim to defend? We have become victims of international politics, and the world watches as if it does not care.’ (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 3).

The play seeks to provide the world with a glimpse of itself from within Gaza. The Gaza war mirrors project a vision of the ‘civilisational usurping’ scheme directed at the Islamic civilisation. This scheme is the result of the expansion of the Jewish state, not only at the expense of Palestine, but also of many other Muslim Arab territories. With its strategic, economic, military and cultural aspirations, the Palestinian conflict appears to be the most dangerous future clash of civilisations. Moreover, this struggle transcends merely drawing the borders of a core Palestinian state, instead becoming a confrontation between the historical right of Islam, established in Jerusalem since the first conquest, and a foreign, distorting project in which the efforts of the Crusaders and the Zionists converge. (Al-Adidi, 2025, p. 53).

Due to the absence of a sense of solidarity and an effective, forward-looking vision, the author presents the play’s characters within a realist structure and a defined artistic form. This enables the characters to construct a genuine reality: they choose jihad and martyrdom to anchor their position in the geography of their homeland, Palestine, thereby asserting their right to expose the ongoing genocide dominating the region and the world’s betrayal. Through the author’s framing of the text, the Gazan Palestinian resister is transformed from the position of the oppressed to that of the oppressor, embodying jihad and steadfastness in scenes characterised by violence.

This strategic positioning helps us to understand the nature of jihad and steadfastness in Gaza. The text states: ‘Fighting flares up between the Palestinian resistance and the occupying Zionist army; the struggle continues despite the betrayal of the international community and human rights.’ The author reinforces this through the voices of protesters and activists: the world, and especially Arabs and Muslims, falter because of confusion and fear. In truth, this is the emergence of Muhammad Sukhay al-‘Atābī’s own voice within the text, bearing its advocacy payload and narrative orbit. This is the most distinctive element of the third scene, which is structured around supplications and invocations directed towards the sky. This transforms the sky into a space of salvation through ideological intensification and subordination to the authority of the sacred reference that governs steadfastness and martyrdom. As a result, all voices converge and surge forth, shaped by geography itself (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023). Gaza is depicted in all its spatial visibility, where the voice of prayer rises above the shelling: ‘As events accelerate and shelling increases in brutality, ordinary families gather beneath the bombardment. An elderly man appears, raising his hands towards the sky...’

The elderly man: (in an affecting whisper) ‘O God, have mercy on us and on our children. We seek refuge in your mercy from this brutal shelling. O God, protect us and have mercy on our families.’ (Women and children join in and begin loudly chanting Islamic slogans.) (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 4) Thus, in Gaza, religion does not merely exist at the margins; rather, it functions as a means of resistance and as a source of identity. Amid the continuing shelling, Islamic chants resound forcefully, while the voices of families rise up in unison. A small child appears, holding the Qur’an and reciting the supplication. (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 4).

In this way, the dramatic text establishes a pattern of resistance and rootedness — an outcome tied to the ideological and civilisational specificities of Palestinian society in Gaza — and calls for support. As T. Tililani notes, ‘Theatre is the most provocative of arts... At its core, theatre is a political discourse that adopts incitement and revolution, directing women towards the intended goal of change’ (Tililani, 2006, p. 75).

Accordingly, the play *Cries from Gaza* articulates the author’s vision and convictions regarding the justice of resistance and the Palestinian people’s right to freedom. It also issues a call to support the Palestinian cause in the form of a forward-looking message that appears on the Gaza horizon, offering hope of victory. A picture of the sun rising over the horizon is shown, and people begin preparing for a hopeful and faithful day: the day of peace will soon come, and ultimately, love and cooperation will prevail in this land. (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 5).

In an attempt to reconcile Palestinian divisions by offering a dual perspective on geography and Palestine, the author brings together the scattered elements of the outside and inside in the final scene, guided by new aspirations. This is reflected in the following excerpt from the final scene:

‘Movement comes to a stop, while the people remain, eagerly waiting — prepared for whatever the future may bring. In their hearts, they hold great hope in God’s mercy and promise’

A moment of silence is broken by the appearance of a distant light on the horizon.

It gradually grows until it becomes a brilliant star, quickening people’s hearts and filling their eyes with hope.

The elderly man says in a hopeful voice, ‘Look! Perhaps it is a sign that we may find salvation through a new approach, where efforts are joined and sincere prayers are offered.’ (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 5).

This caused the language of discourse to shift from a militant register to an interpretive mode, envisioning Palestinian unity — both ideological and geographical — embodied in the joining of the two banks, and of the Islamic and Christian faiths, in a struggle for a unified Palestine.

People continue to walk towards the light, growing closer to hope and faith with every step. They remain steadfast in their supplication and their belief that peace will return to their shattered land at the end of these calamities.

‘One of the priests joins the group and begins to pray.’ (Sabhi al-Itabi, 2023, p. 5).

This transformation in theatrical discourse is an active force driving events. It confronts the audience with the reality of the conflict by tearing at the land/geography of Palestine — yet this is presented as a false reality that is soon revealed in the light of day: the truth of geographical unity. If we follow the elderly man’s dialogue, which represents the historical presence of the Palestinian individual and his geographical roots, we find that the author insists on being a witness to resistance and steadfastness through an interactive, sequential vision marked by transformations and surprising developments within a prophetic, visionary geographical framework. This vision is all the more compelling given his resistance to treacherous authority. In this sense, it is a discourse that is freer in how it distributes itself between the interior and exterior.

### **General Summary**

The essence of this revolutionary theatrical text lies in the cries emanating from Gaza, which are presented as a form of presence and mobilisation. This is not an idea invented and embellished through literary dramatic techniques; it is a real phenomenon with its own geography and circumstances. The author traces the steps of resistance, both as a people and as a movement, in order to depict a scene of

struggle and rootedness, and its enduring echo within the Palestinian interior and the complicit external world. By extending the reach of these cries to the furthest limits of humanity, the author conveys a discourse through his play, namely that the stance of contemporary Muslims is false, as reflected in the ‘mirrors’ of Gaza’s struggle. These mirrors expose the repeated failure of the ideological system among Muslims and Arabs to adopt an effective stance in response to the reality of Gaza amid the devastation caused by the collapse of Arab and Islamic regimes.

The play creates a realistic and artistic atmosphere, revealing the components of resilience and struggle among the people of Gaza. It draws on the sacred text, specifically the Noble Qur’an, as a foundation for endurance and continuity. The ‘mirrors’ of geography — Gaza as a sacred place — appear as a magnetic site that attracts resisters and centres the concentration of martyrs.

What becomes clear is a longing for, and sanctification of, geography—Gaza—laden with spiritual charges. This longing is artistically shaped in such a way that the play’s characters seek to immerse themselves in it rather than abandon it. The author’s impulse to constitute the sacred and the fixed—Gaza and its people—functions as a symbolic spiritual reference that links understanding the relationships between the Islamic world and the place: Palestine.

The play is based on a mobilising discourse that recognises the racial conflict directed against Muslims and the threat to their identities. The doctrinal structure of the ‘war of annihilation’, and the attempt to represent Gaza through theatre, expresses long historical phases and extended periods of time in order to reveal the silent Arab currents of resistance, or the ‘Himaoawiyya’, as well as the hostile entities and identities, within an interpretive vision of the internal Islamic struggle. In doing so, the author invokes the voices of his characters encapsulated in the phrase, ‘Arab silence kills hope’.

Through the interrelation between the play’s subject matter and the reality of Gaza, we infer a forward-looking discourse that stems from Gaza’s resilience: these cries are nothing other than charges that fuel Arab fear by breaking through the veils of silence and giving rise to embryos filled with Islamic chivalry. The ending of the play indicates an approaching Islamic advance.

Despite the Zionist and American entities’ efforts to erase Palestinian resistance from Palestinian and global geography, theatrical art has confronted these efforts. This is evident in the play’s textual realism, which reveals the truth of resistance and the comprehensiveness of the struggle to seize freedom. Thus, the play ‘Sarkhat min Ghazza’ (‘Cries from Gaza’) can be read as a historical document rendered through artistic ‘mirrors’ that carry their own evidentiary and documentary value, along with the tense question it poses about this concealed, impure silence.

Has the text made you a listener who hears in silence?

## **2. Creative representations in the theatrical text**

The play’s aesthetics rest on several pillars, represented by the following elements: Characters, time, place, language, dialogue, ideas, plot, dramatic structure and conflict. The dramatic structure formed by the theatrical text interacts with the issue raised by the playwright to ensure aesthetic success and communicative effectiveness.

### **2.1 Characters**

The dramatic figures in sarkhat min Ghazza (Cries from Gaza) are based on real people, and their presence elevates the dramatic work from the realm of the written text to the world of lived reality on

stage. This is achieved through a combination of factors that transform the characters' <sup>1</sup> general appearance into a revolutionary, intellectual dimension, which develops and alters the course of the theatrical event in harmony with various external influences, while also satisfying the requirement to shape their energies in a way that engages the audience and draws them into the events through intensification and adaptation. This is because theatrical action is an intensified act that occurs over a shorter period than the same action in real life.

Typically, the character is an extension of realistic details and situations drawn from life beyond the stage, as interpreted by the reader in the context of their era. This is also the case in *Screams from Ghazza*. The play offers multiple, divergent interpretations across different cultural, social and historical political levels, providing special clarity because its aim is to highlight the intense reality experienced by the oppressed people of Gaza under Zionist domination and Arab betrayal. The play embodies the ideological position of Mohamed sakhi al-ittabi, reflecting his understanding of the Palestinian cause through his portrayal of destruction, shelling, displacement and Gazan conditions.

The struggle of Gazans has been said to derive its legitimacy from history, laws, and human rights through the reordering of events, as well as from the idea of religion as a legitimate right and inevitability revealed by all religions before they are distorted, and legislated and affirmed by Islam.

Thus, entering the worlds of the characters is a multi-directional journey organised through symbolic systems that reveal intellectual crises within Arab society and the degree of Gazan awareness and steadfastness. It is a short play about the Palestinian cause and the assault on Gaza. The characters have no names, but are marked by symbolic indicators and interpretive energies that help the audience to understand and take a stance on the events of reality.

Mohamed sakhi al-ittabi presents the play's characters on three levels, as follows:

**- First level: The elderly man and the priest**

The elderly man and the priest represent a generation shaped by the Nakba and Palestinian memory, which has a distinct historical and religious character. They embody patience and steadfastness, carrying concentrated symbolism that, on the one hand, extends aggression and, on the other, signifies resistance and rootedness. They also anchor the long historical and geographical dimension of Palestinian existence in Palestine, countering the perceived 'intrusion' of the foreign/alien, which has continued to fail in the face of optimistic resistance.

These two characters embody Mohamed al-Ittabi's vision: he urges Palestinians towards steadfastness and resistance, presenting this through supplication and prayer, so that it aligns with the course of history and the development of resistance handed down across generations. The elderly man bequeaths religion together with resistance. He confronts shelling and aggression and seeks martyrdom through religion, fighting the enemy by means of religion. Therefore, he chooses to confront his fears about the present and future with religious 'prayer'. In this sense, waging war against his enemy through religion is his strongest tool for continuity.

The priest accepts this reasoning and joins the Muslims, beginning to pray with faith and believing that prayer carries the hope of victory. Consequently, neither the elderly man nor the priest are portrayed as heroic, leading figures who confront their enemies with weapons. Rather, they confront

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<sup>1</sup>- Abdelwahab Shokri, *The Theatrical Text: Its Structure and Aesthetic Dimensions*, Egyptian General Book Organisation, Cairo, 1998, p. 66.

the possibility of defeat by postponing it through prayer. The two characters convey that strength is not measured by victory, but by steadfastness. The elderly man does not appear as a heroic figure, but rather as one of the greatest examples of humanity.

He realises that Arab societies may ‘steal’ the courage of children and future generations, so he chooses to transform the concept of defeat into one of strength through religion and supplication. So, when the shelling intensifies and the space shrinks, he does not tell them that they will be annihilated. Instead, he opens a radiant gap driven by imagination and filled with supplication. In the scene, this appears as follows:

The elderly man: “Look! Perhaps it is a sign. We may find salvation through joining our efforts and offering sincere prayers.” The people begin to walk slowly towards the bright light. Meanwhile, the whispering and prayer continue.’

The light serves as a memory awakener, not an illusion, but something more important than any miracle. For this reason, the child is permitted to dream of preserving the moment of running towards the homeland rather than fleeing from it. The radiance of the light is greater than the world itself. Here is the paradox: victory begins when darkness spreads.

The Gazans gather — all of them: the fearful, the elderly and the children — at a silent moment. The stage opens onto ourselves: each scene in the play preserves our memory. After farewells and losses, the audience receives a message of unity. It is as if the author is reminding us of our homelands and sending a long spiritual message to our communities, in a moment of clarity where all the things we have been denied become equal. One of the most beautiful aspects of the play is its ending, when all categories come together in a unified prayer<sup>1</sup>.

In this prayer, every human being has their own ‘virtuous city’ in which they can find salvation. Ultimately, the play raises awareness of the need to reunite Arabs. It is as though the author is telling us, ‘This is what we have been deprived of: a united Arab community, so preserve it, even if only in the realm of imagination.’

## **2. Second level: The child, the mother and ‘the people’.**

The child, the mother and ‘the people/others’ represent the voice of the individual who is shattered by devastation amidst cries and sorrowful sounds. This level also generalises, presenting the story as belonging to all Palestinians — the tale of generations transmitted across time, the story of every oppressed person. Here, Person (1)<sup>2</sup> poses the existential question:

‘What a catastrophe — can there be hope after this destruction?’

Person 2 then answers with the unexpected and dramatic reply:

“The world is watching.”<sup>3</sup>

This functions as the voice of the collective. It is a message from the creator — the issue is not merely individual, but shared at an ideological level. Artistically, the play is politically lyrical and affective: it elevates Gaza’s tragedy to a global tragedy, aiming to break the barrier between performer and audience, and between stage and geography.

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<sup>1</sup>- Mohamed, Play, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, Cries, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, Cries, p. 1.

At this level, the characters are not portrayed as psychologically complex individuals. Rather, they are bearers of an idea. Therefore, the playwright selects them in a way that corresponds to the flow of events — events that are larger than any individual (the child, the mother and ‘the people’).

To ensure the transfer and distribution of the collective voice, and not merely the narration of the story of the Palestinian individual — whose purpose would simply be to humanise the character — the author turns these figures into symbols that represent genocide: the annihilation of both the represented and the observer. In this context, silence becomes the harshest form of genocide against our humanity. This aligns with Brecht’s approach in his plays, where he emphasises the message while moving beyond the individual character — an aesthetic choice on which Muhammad Sukhay al-Attabi bases his dramatic storytelling. The foundation is not emotional sentiment alone, but rather the necessity of feeling responsible, breaking the barrier of silence to produce political awareness through an artistic effect rooted in simple questions — questions that may seem small yet are ‘deadly’ at the level of conscience.

A small child appears, crying and holding a torn doll.

Child: (crying) “Where did my toy go? Where are my mother and father?”<sup>1</sup>

The dark, expansive setting encloses the scene, while the human gesture addresses the humanity in us, the audience. In another image, the mother responds; she symbolises every mother.

‘We must stay strong for them,’ she says in a sad voice. We must confront this injustice with everything we have.’<sup>2</sup>

The play is therefore not only ‘about Gaza’. It is about communities that history has tried to erase and annihilate time and time again. It becomes a testimony to the memory of peoples whose annihilation, and erasure from geography, repeats itself through the world’s silence at the moment<sup>3</sup>. Gaza’s story is constructed from decades that follow one another across eras. The voice of the mother is the voice of the earth itself — its dust — and with it, it embodies steadfastness through postponed possibilities: resolute and unyielding.

### **Third level: Activists, protesters and the youth of resistance**

Activists, protesters and the youth of resistance are characters whose function is marked by a deliberate symbolic divergence from the dominant current. They ‘write a new chapter’ by transforming a state of weakness into a state of strength. This accomplished act is conveyed through the image of the resisters. The ‘resistance’ characters appear as young people defending their homeland, stripped of any slogan, name or sect. Their depiction reflects the field of confrontation, which is rooted in their conviction that the military option is a legitimate means of reclaiming land in Gaza, expanding into a geography that is rooted in the Palestinian, Arab and global consciousness. This is enabled by an additional pillar: the figure of supporting, globally aligned activists—the transcontinental voice—who speak in Gazan cries referring to a geography with historical and civilisational backgrounds whose people are being subjected to sudden aggression and annihilation.

As the play shows in the protest scene:

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<sup>1</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *The Play*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>- Mohamed Sahi Al-Ghiabi, *Focused Cries*, p. 9.

Protesters: “The world must listen! Justice must be achieved!”<sup>1</sup>

The activists and protesters therefore unite with the youth of resistance in a legitimised defence of the oppressed. The story of Gaza/Palestine unfolds within these roles on three essential levels that move in parallel through deep symbolism open to reality:

1. Victims who pay the price for belonging to a particular geography — Gaza — yet remain steadfast through the strength of their presence and hope.
2. Memory, which preserves events through history and religion.
3. A world that moves and resists, acting as both a voice and a weapon. Ultimately, they all become resistance, refusal and rootedness.

Thus, the conclusion is that the contemporary Palestinian stance has evolved beyond the concept of displacement to encompass rootedness and resistance.

Dialogue:

Dialogue refers to speech exchanged between two or more parties. It is derived from the Greek language, with the word ‘dialogue’ formed from ‘dia’, meaning ‘through’, in the sense of speech passing between interlocutors. Dialogue gives theatrical texts an interactive and communicative dimension among characters, and is also tied to the idea of how events develop and reveal stances and perspectives.

In this play, dialogue is the main form, operating with intense focus over a brief period of time in a specific setting — Gaza, which is charged with many rapidly unfolding events. Its structure therefore relies on the flash (the sudden, compressed moment). The play’s charged references and signals aim to make the reader experience the moments of shelling and displacement as lived reality. This is evident in the text:

Person 3: “The shelling is increasing, and we must find a secret shelter quickly.”

A woman appears, holding a crying child.

Woman: (trying to calm the child) ‘We’ll find a safe place — don’t be afraid, my dear. We will be all right.’

The shelling intensifies, causing more casualties. A little girl appears, running in search of her parents.

> Girl: (screaming) “Father! Mother! Where are you?”

One of the activists appears, carrying the girl and trying to calm her down.

Activist: (in a sad voice) ‘We will do everything we can to find your parents. Don’t worry’<sup>2</sup>

This demonstrates the dramatic force of dialogue: it lengthens and shortens according to the demands of the situation and the characters in different scenes. This gives the text flexibility and vitality as it moves from the author’s voice to the characters’. As a result, the reader is drawn into a mental and emotional polarisation towards the events — either acceptance or rejection. The movement of dialogue aligns with the setting to the point of near-identical correspondence: the word rises from the arena of destruction caused by shelling in Gaza, while speech is born from a space of fear and an insistence on survival. In the play, dialogue and space are intertwined.

This is articulated in the words of one of the young men of resistance addressing the Gazans:

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<sup>1</sup>- Farhan Bublul, *Word and Action*, a study from the publications of the Union of Arab Writers, Damascus, Syria, 2003, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *Theatrical Work: Cries from Gaza\**, pp. 7–8.

Young man: ‘We must defend ourselves and our loved ones! We will not allow injustice to triumph.’<sup>1</sup> Dialogue is determined by the space/geography: fighting erupts between the Palestinian resistance and the Zionist occupying army, and children appear, hiding and screaming in fear.

Here, dialogue functions as a connective element, allowing the play text — produced through suggestive ‘allusive’ combinations — to establish a narrative correspondence between the story and the theatrical spaces of its scenes. It illuminates the text, revealing the hidden corridors of the narrative.

### **Dramatic Space**

The author restages places as realistic spaces, connecting them to the various ideas and ideologies that arise from the characters’ dialogue and their respective roles in the drama. Through this, the author seeks to engage the audience with these interactions.

In the play *A Cry from Gaza*, the dominant setting is an open spatial field that shapes the events and performances, as “place is one of the essential factors on which the event is founded”<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the place appears in the text as the Gaza spatial field. It ‘presents a group of people carrying their belongings as they search for shelter’<sup>3</sup>, and the built fabric of Gaza’s streets becomes the comprehensive structure that constitutes the play’s dramatic space. Throughout its development, all social categories converge through this shared spatial medium. This medium was employed throughout the scenes, revealing the author’s political idea that resistance can only occur within a broad arena that unifies opinions and clarifies the cause.

The open street is one of the most striking settings in theatrical performances. Symbols are concentrated within it and events on the stage accelerate, intensifying the psychological impact on the audience. Against the backdrop of a lively, kinetic setting, dramatic encounters intersect with life itself. At the beginning of the first scene, the author presents the space and describes the humiliation of the destroyed place: ‘Sunset paints the sky with beautiful colours, but in the Azza neighbourhoods, darkness and destruction prevail.’<sup>4</sup>

The Gaza street produces resisters and supporters, breaking the obscurity and creating revolutionaries before the eyes of the world. Therefore, at sunset, the street space becomes a visual discourse containing symbolism for the evaluation conducted by the Zionist army through shelling and falsification intended to mislead public opinion. Yet the darkness is torn apart by light, around which all spectators gather in intense focus — not merely on the performers, but on the audience’s imagination. This raises the question: Where are you positioned among the neighbourhoods of Gaza? In other words, what is your stance on the Palestinian cause?

Are you on the side of the child’s cry, or the enemy’s bombardment? In this way, the space widens from the stage to the performance hall until it spills out into the world. The dramatic space in the play is therefore a geographical space extended into ethical humanity. In this way, the theatrical space bears witness to Gaza’s resilience and the aggression of silence.

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<sup>1</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *A Cry from Gaza*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>- Hassan Bahrawi, *The Structure of the Narrative Form*, Arab Cultural Centre, Casablanca, Morocco, 1st edition, 1999, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>- *The Play*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *Cries from Gaza*, p. 1.

## Time

The author uses time as a sign rather than merely as a technical device in the play's dramatic construction. By doing so, he transcends the confines of realistic narration, venturing into a realm of political discourse imbued with symbolic depth. He breaks the conventional, patterned line of time by compressing it into a single moment: sunset, which coincides with the shelling and destruction. This moment is severed from the past and blocked from the future; its scope is confined to Gaza's neighbourhoods in the present moment of tragedy. This creates shock and tension in the audience, who wait for this immediate time to end and for the transition into sunrise — the time of deliverance.

Alongside this, and as a gesture towards hope, the author attempts to soften the severity of the present psychological time weighing upon the audience: the sun rises on the horizon, simultaneously nourishing the aesthetic and political aims. Believing that resistance is the solution to reclaiming Arab/Gaza time gives us strength to face the bombardment and destruction. Thus, psychological time exerts its influence on the artistic time of the play. This is because the author intends to mobilise the audience's inner feelings to awaken human awareness and break the chain of real time — the time of silence.

## Dramatic Conflict

Dramatic conflict is the decisive element that brings to the surface the divergence arising from the opposing viewpoints of the characters—viewpoints that translate the ideas and visions proposed by the author regarding a particular issue or ideology. Such an issue/ideology either dominates a given society or culture, is intended to be promoted, or is intended to be confronted. The very idea of collision is what “generates tension or clashes.<sup>1</sup>” It constitutes one of the necessary faces within the dramatic structure of any theatrical creative work, because it activates dramatic events and forms the plot: “it is the conflictive stance that provides justification for the beginning of dramatic events; it leads to the formation of a crisis, drives action toward the climax, and then toward resolution.<sup>2</sup>”

In *Cries from Gaza*, the gradual movement towards the climax is achieved by focusing on two conflicts. The first is an external conflict, represented by aggression. This conflict strengthens the confrontation between the aggressors, who assault through bombardment and annihilation, and the people of Gaza, who stand firm and cling to their right to their land. They are steadfast. The more the conflict escalates and the more savage the aggression becomes, the more deeply rooted the people of Gaza become. This is expressed in the mother's words: ‘We must remain strong for them; we must face this injustice with everything we have.’<sup>3</sup> This is also evident when ‘Islamic chants begin in a thunderous voice as a small child appears, carrying the Qur'an and reciting a supplication’<sup>4</sup>.

This conflict with the Other is not merely articulated through characters, but also crystallised through the force of mechanical destruction, sirens and the technological apparatus of war. The war's illegitimacy and the extent of its barbarity towards an unarmed population explain this. Consequently, a profound sense of existential siege and technological domination by the war machine emerges,

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<sup>1</sup>- Sami Mounir Amer, *Among the Secrets of Critical Creativity in Poetry and Theatre* (Maanshaat al-Maarif), Egypt, 1987, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>- Marie Ilyes and Hanan Qasab, *The Theatre Lexicon: Concepts and Terms of Theatre and Performing Arts\**, Librairie du Liban Publishers, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st edition, 1997, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *Cries from Gaza*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *Cries from Gaza*, p. 4.

juxtaposed with a weak self in terms of equipment yet a powerful self in terms of steadfastness and religious devotion. This transfers the intensity of the conflict to the audience, transforming it into an internal conflict and turning passive spectators of the play into witnesses of the events, driven by human awareness.

### **Dramatic Language**

The meaning and use of language change according to how it is employed within a text or creative discourse. Mohamed Al-Sakhi seeks to imbue his language with political culture to construct an implicit discourse that influences the ideas he presents. He relies on both linguistic and non-linguistic systems of communication. As the saying goes: ‘You must give the audience the sense that the character is speaking under pressure from the situation they are in. Proper dramatic dialogue draws on everything said before it in a way that may produce conflict.’<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the author reshapes his language using a kind of genealogy that reveals the betrayal of the governing logic of global black hatred. He reveals that Gaza has been betrayed and wounded, and that the world is watching. Through polyphonic voices, he exposes the true nature of human rights organisations and advocates of child protection, while simultaneously revealing the hypocrisy of international courts. This is evident in the play’s text: ‘Activist (in an angry voice): Where is the international community? Where are the United Nations and the human rights they claim to defend? We have become victims of international politics. The world is watching, seemingly indifferent.’<sup>2</sup>

The play’s language is consistent with both the dialogue and the characters. This is also evident in the given excerpt, where the activist’s language is incitement-based. It addresses the performers and invites the audience to participate. The child’s language, on the other hand, shatters the walls of silence. It highlights the injustice of aggression against the innocent and places the audience in a moral dilemma when the child screams amidst the bombardment. ‘The child (crying): Where did my toy go!? Where is my mother? My father?’<sup>3</sup> Language draws a trajectory ‘through tears and blood’ — from weakness to strength — through the emergence of the youth of resistance and their forceful affirmation of their defensive stance.

‘Bombardment continues and people try to stay alive.’ A young man from the resistance appears, carrying a weapon to defend Gaza. The young man: ‘We must defend ourselves and our loved ones! We will not allow injustice to win. Fighting erupts between the Palestinian resistance and the occupying army.’<sup>4</sup>

Language becomes a weapon in this open address to the world. The interplay between the language of crying and the language of conflict creates a dramatic construction that contributes to our understanding of the ‘language of silence’. Silence itself becomes the space where language turns into a weapon — the language of struggle. The cries of resistance rise above the sound of explosions. In the play *Cries from Gaza*, the author seeks to pierce the deafening silence of the Arab and global communities. Ultimately, he persuades the audience through a sermon delivered in an optimistic tone, in which the cry of tragedy is transformed into the cry of impending freedom.

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<sup>1</sup>- Mohamed Sabri Salih, *Dramatic Authorship and Concepts of Adaptation/Quotation*, The Academic House for Printing, Authorship, Translation and Publishing, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Tripoli, Libya, 2007, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *Cries from Gaza*, p. 3. *Cries\**, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *Play: Cries*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>- Mohamed Sakhi Al-Itabi, *Play: Cries*, p. 3.

It is not destruction itself that evokes fear, but the shame of silence. This is what the linguistic cues at the beginning and end of the play establish and mirror. The discourse begins with the language of beauty and ends with the language of hope. Although the tragic event occupies the space between beauty and hope, the acoustic indicators intensify to form a complete yet cumbersome system driven by dramatic cunning. The author intended this in every scene, communicating with us in an accessible language amid chaos and devastation. An Arab system reproduces itself, producing grand slogans that are devoid of meaning and incapable of being understood by those they are intended for, and turning outcry into 'the voice of truth'. Only the people of Gaza understand the reality behind the slogans and the elegance of betrayal through awareness. In this way, the play's language becomes a sanctuary for condemning the world.

### **Conclusion:**

For Mohamed Al-Sakhi Al-ittabi, theatre has no value unless it addresses human issues and attempts to eradicate them by presenting multiple characters. Rather than providing direct answers to the audience, these characters treat the issues from several perspectives, thereby complicating and dismantling the very core of the presented cause and its extensions. This aims to shape collective awareness through the politicisation and incitement effected by art.

The political stance and conscious cultural discourse grant boldness in penetrating the audience's space across different groups by revitalising the political position as a form of artistic theatrical writing.

- In Mohamed Al-Sakhi Al-ittabi's work, creativity is based on the idea of educating people and rebuilding Arab thought, moving away from slogans and ready-made sermons by scrutinising them against geographical reality and social responsibility.

- Mohamed Al-Sakhi Al-ittabi seeks to restructure the Arab cultural and intellectual system with contemporary historical boldness.

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