



Dance for Everyone

On Multi-Culturalism in Israel and its Influence on the Development of Dance

in Israel operate, for the most part, in the center, namely in Tel Aviv and the three other large cities – Jerusalem, Haifa, and Beer Sheva. However, the demand to increase cultural supply and form cultural institutions in the periphery and for the benefit of disadvantaged populations gradually intensifies.

However, according to Prof. Elihu Katz and Hed Sela, writers of the Beracha Report on "Culture Policy in Israel", the "democratization of culture" policy merely brought about "the replacement of the center's paternalism, which previously characterized the policy of bringing culture from the center to the periphery, with decision-making on a local level, which increasingly leans toward populism."⁵

In her essay about cultural periphery and center entitled "All Rivers Flow to the Center,"⁶ Dr. Shosh Weitz notes that the data concerning cultural supply indicates that, despite an explicit government policy aimed at subsidizing the mobility of performances and prioritizing the periphery in establishing cultural institutions, there is a decrease in the number of performances in development towns, a manifest tendency of increased commercialization in the fields of culture and art, and a decrease in publicly-supported events in the periphery. As the

distance from the center or the main large cities increases, canonical artistic supply decreases, and the number of attendances of artistic events decreases from 2.6 attendances per person in Tel Aviv and Haifa, to 0.02 in smaller towns. Dr. Weitz maintains that the main factor influencing the level of activity in a certain city or area is the number of local creative institutions; which transform culture from a mere form of entertainment into a social and economic branch. The reason there is no significant progress in the periphery despite the policy of "culture mobilization" lies in the fact that artistic institutions going out to the periphery do so in order to expand their "market shares". The performances sold to theaters or "culture halls" are plays, concerts or dance performances that have the capacity – as far as the commissioners are concerned – to sell well to the local audience.

Multi-Culturalism and the Sectorial Threat

"Melting pot," "multi-culturalism," and "cultural pluralism" are not only academic terms. They influence the formation and crystallization of Israeli society. It is essential to understand them in order to confront the rifts and ruptures in Israeli society, the cultural war transpiring therein, and the attack waged by religious groups and post-Zionist historians on "Israeli culture." It should be noted that Israeli culture is a national culture, whose formation

להקת משפחת אקילוב - ריקוד אתני של יוצאי בוכרה
 The Akilov Family Folklore Ensemble - Dance of B. cahra

להקת מטייב בהנהלת הכוריאוגרף יוסף מטייב - ריקוד אתני של יוצאי קווקז
 The Matayiv Dance Group.
 Director and Choreographer:
 Joseph Matayiv. Ethnic dances of
 Caucas Jews

has been one of the goals of the Zionist movement. The founding fathers dreamt of an exemplary society in Israel, of normalization and modernization of Jewish existence, of a secular Jewish culture based on the Hebrew language, one that draws upon Jewish heritage, yet does not restrict it to Jewish Halacha (religious law) and the synagogue. The religious and post-Zionist attack exposed dilemmas in Israeli culture: tension between continuity and change, diversity and unity, vision and reality, seclusion and openness. On one hand, artistic and quantitative prosperity of original creation, and on the other, the difficulty experienced by the secular public in protecting its values and life style. The document "Cultural Declaration – Vision 2000" presented to the Minister of Science, Culture and Sports, read as follows: "In 21st century Israeli culture there is room for all groups seeking cultural expression of their emotional, ideological and historical world, in contrast to the 1950s 'melting pot' policy. However, recognition of the legitimacy of difference and multiplicity is not a legitimization of a separatist cultural reality, devoid of a

common denominator."⁷ The document's authors were well aware of the threat inherent in multi-culturalism; the threat of splitting Israeli society into sectors, being an essentially sectorial society consisting of an Arab minority, an Ashkenazi (European) ultra-Orthodox sector, a Sphardic (Oriental) ultra-Orthodox sector, a national-religious sector, a secular sector, various immigrant groups, etc. "Multi-culturalism can lead to social separatism and segmentation, to a society made up of groups primarily interested in internal dialogue."⁸ Thus, among the basic assumptions underlying the cultural policy determined by the committee in "Cultural Declaration – Vision 2000", it is maintained that: "The cultural policy of the State of Israel will strive to reinforce a common cultural nucleus and a recognition of a common center and a common set of values, which allows autonomy for the

Arab culture as well as for different traditions and cultures, alongside interaction among them." The writers of the Beracha Report believe that, multi-culturalism existed in Israel in the past as well – manifested, for instance, in the various currents in education, the separate Arab culture, the various communication channels, the isolated Orthodox culture, the newcomers who sought to preserve their native culture and language, etc. – but none of these has been a success story.⁹

One must bear in mind that the problem inherent in multi-culturalism is not only the problem of the different sectors in Israeli society, but a part of the globalization issues. Multi-culturalism is also linked to the openness of Israeli culture to various global cultural influences alongside the attempt to develop a unique culture of its own. This problem is not unique to Israel. Many cultures throughout the world exhibit a basic tension between the nourishment of original creation drawing on local materials and the exposure to external influences.¹⁰

Recognition of the center does not deny the existence of sub-cultures, which evolve and are defined in relation to it.

The privatization of culture, as demanded by some of the adherents of multi-culturalism, like the privatization of education and welfare, implies the disintegration of both the center and the hegemonic culture. This would also weaken the cultural sub-groups, whose success is dependent upon collaboration with the center. The demand for multi-culturalism and the dissolution of the cultural center is a political slogan more than a cultural platform, and it only contributes to the socio-cultural rift, serving the interests of the more powerful groups in society. Efforts to promote culture in the periphery and make sub-cultures part of the central culture will contribute to the development of culture and the promotion of disadvantaged groups. An immigrant can realize his/her private world only when belonging to a community, to a "home". S/he is a multi-cultural human being, who left one culture and adopted another, who is not only entitled, but is essentially obligated to bind them together in his/her very person. According to Michael Waltzer, this is, for the immigrant, a fact rather than an ideology; it is an internal rift, rather than an abstract model.¹²

One of the explanations accounting for the sectoriality and rifts in Israeli society is the need felt by the country's citizens, who have not regarded secular Israeli culture as their home, to find a "home" for themselves and nurture a sense of belonging. Religious fundamentalism and nationalism are part of a rejection of the modern world and an attempt to formulate a set of norms based on universal moral values. Religious fundamentalism relies on the aspiration to refurbish society with its unity as opposed to disintegrative, separatist liberal values, such as radical individualism, freedom of choice, the relativity of values and norms.

In Cultural Declaration – Vision 2000, Ziva Sternhal asserts that in recent years beliefs have gradually taken root in Israeli art, according to which artistic language is more important than concrete reality, and that truth in art is designed to deconstruct the set of prevalent norms.¹³ The apprehension felt by many people with regard to life devoid of a guiding set of norms not only drives them into becoming religious, into mysticism, or toward the culture of their native country, but it is also one of the signs indicating a cultural crisis which generates conservative and reactionary ideas.

Dance as a Multi-Cultural Activity

The processes of democratization in culture and the notion of "multi-culturalism" have had an immense impact on the development of dance. Innovative approaches, new languages, experimentation and fusion of various art forms have been welcomed in Israel and across the world. The efforts invested in training new audiences to realize the individual's "right to culture" have drawn greater audiences to the field of dance – which comprises mainly contemporary creation – greater than those



Sharing and Multiplicity of Cultures

According to the writers of the Beracha Report, the only form of multi-culturalism compatible with the dream of "collaboration", "solidarity" and "a common goal" is one which strives toward pluralist self-expression in order to enrich the common culture. "No sector has a separate story," claims Nissim Kalderon, "but there is a partially distinct story, that ought to be heard and respected."¹¹ A separate story implies the disintegration of society and the destruction of solidarity. Distinct stories deserve to be heard and make their contribution, without interfering with collaboration. The real alternative to both the melting pot and multi-culturalism is collaboration and multiplicity of cultures. The peripheral sub-cultures do not deny the existence of a cultural center; they struggle to penetrate into the consciousness of the center – to assimilate therein, influence it and re-define it.

drawn to innovative contemporary works in the fields of music and theater. The emphasis on equality of opportunity in culture prompted the establishment of young dance companies in the center as well as in the periphery, and the financial support, albeit meager, of these companies.

The recognition of "other" cultures, the multiplicity of cultures, and the State's recognition of its duty not only to allow preservation of heritages but also to promote and develop various heritages, led to enrichment of creative sources. The world's most prominent choreographers as well as many Israeli choreographers, such as Rina Nikova, Sarah Levi-Tanai and others, turned to the rich sources of cultural and ethnic diversity in the world in general, and in Israel in particular, forming new artistic languages.

One of the characteristics of cultural democratization is creative wealth, manifested in the "Survey of Dance Companies in Israel", 1998.¹⁴ Despite difficulties and inadequate financial support for dance, the creative impetus in Israel is immense. In 1998, the various dance companies staged 117 pieces in 155 programs and performed on 721 occasions. The majority of pieces (95) were defined as modern, while the rest were classical, ethnic, jazz, flamenco, or dance theater. 69 pieces were staged by the 8 seasoned companies, and 48 works by the 29 younger, non-institutionalized companies. Altogether, the number of attendances of Israeli companies' dance performances totaled nearly 350,000 in Israel and 87,000 abroad. This and other data is indicative of the great interest evoked by Israeli dance throughout the world and of the intensive nature of dance activity in Israel.

Another important fact is that the professional dancers in Israeli dance companies come from all social strata and all immigrant groups. One of the reasons for this is that there is no language barrier in dance. Furthermore, the majority of dance activity in Israel is focused on modern and ethnic dance, which do not require intensive training starting from a young age (as in the case of classical ballet). Thus, individuals from lower socio-economic strata can also take part in dance activity, whether through folk dancing or other channels.

The fact that dance draws upon all cultural sources allows each of the dancers and each of the spectators to feel a sense of "belonging." Most of the dance pieces are original and current, and the lack of a desirable, obliging "model" allows for path-searching and diverse original creation. All these reinforce dance as a multi-cultural activity.

The majority of dance companies, eight out of eleven, are Tel Aviv-based, including six of the seven most established companies. While often performing outside their "home" theaters, 52% of the dance activity in 1996 still took place in Tel Aviv. The second prominent district in terms of dance activity is the northern district, due to the fact that the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company is based there, thus often performing in the area.

In her survey, Shosh Weitz¹⁵ indicates the imbalance between center and periphery in terms of artistic offerings. Omanut La'Am

('Art for the People') brings to the periphery, to the smaller towns, a dance supply which is different from that available in the big cities. One of the causes for this is the "democratization" practiced by Omanut La'Am as well. That democratization manifests itself in the fact that the choice of performances intended for the periphery is made by local figures and bodies, while Omanut La'Am merely acts as a mediator.

Weitz proposes to give top priority to support for institutions in the periphery and to condition the establishment of new institutions on their location in areas of national priority; to support dance groups according to the principle of mobility, which would rely not only on the economic and marketing-related preferences of each institution, but also on the needs and requirements of the various districts in the country. Furthermore, she proposes to select several quality performances each year, which would be subsidized for the purpose of reducing ticket fees in the periphery. Fear of the harmful influences of "democratization" also exists with regard to the established public dance groups. These groups struggle for survival; if they are not granted increased finances, they may become more inclined toward cultural populism and compromise in order to meet the audience's taste.

Dance has suffered in the past (as in the case of the Batsheva Dance Company and the Jubilee Bells event) and may suffer again in the future from the tensions and rifts in Israeli society; from the cultural tendencies combined with economic hardships and religious fundamentalism. Dance will profit if we succeed in defining multi-culturalism in Israel as a legitimacy for manifesting cultural differences among various sectors in Israeli society and encouraging diverse heritages, on one hand, and as the need for common denominators, collaboration, and solidarity, on the other. "Pluralism within collaboration," as Nissim Kalderon puts it. "We must express the plurality, yet avoid nurturing separatism and animosity."¹⁶ Only if each and every citizen is allowed to define his/her identity as part of the Israeli collective which strives to rid itself of ethnic characteristics, and at the same time define his/her collective identity within the framework of sub-communities, only then will we be able to maintain a society based on a common denominator. "The separatism of the Arab and ultra-Orthodox public can be particularly high, whereas that of other communities - low," claims Yossi Yona.¹⁷ As for the religious groups, that do not accept the values of liberalism, there are two options: One is that the secular and ultra-Orthodox sectors define and formulate common goals and values which do not touch upon liberalism; the other - to develop a system of co-existence based on the principle of tolerance. As for the Arabs, since it is not very likely that Arab heritage will be ascribed a place in the Israeli common cultural ethos, we must allow the Arab public to develop their unique heritage alongside the Jewish national one.

Dance can serve as a model for the above-mentioned kind of