

EXPLORING NONVIOLENCE THROUGH DRAMA



How can young people surrounded by violence—living under a military occupation with killing, house demolition, land seizure, and imprisonment, and witnessing violent responses by their own society to that occupation—be brought to consider the transformative potential of nonviolence for their lives and their society?

One answer that we at the Friends International Center in Ramallah are exploring is through the power of drama to touch the conscience and prompt reflection on the past and

present use of nonviolence in Palestinian society and the possibility of building a nonviolent reality for the future.



The FICR Nonviolence Drama Workshops

For the last two months, twelve Palestinian youth from the Ramallah area have been participating in what we hope will be the first phase of an ongoing series of workshops on “Using Drama to Promote Alternative

Nonviolent Responses to the Violence in Our Lives.” With the cooperation of the American Friends Service Committee, whose Ramallah-based youth program helped us identify participants for the initial workshops from many local youth groups, and with the inspiring leadership of a Palestinian woman actor and trainer from Nazareth, Faten Khoury, we have begun to see what drama can do to contribute to the interest in nonviolence in one’s personal life and nonviolent resistance to oppression at the political and social levels that is stirring among Palestinians.

As the photos on these pages illustrate, the workshops involve young Palestinian women and men in group exercises and role playing. Each workshop session begins with a warm up activity and ends with a relaxation exercise before participants reflect on what they have done and learned in the session. The exercises are designed to promote empathy and cooperation among participants and deepen and expand their awareness of both their immediate and wider social environments. The opening exercise of the first session





had participants interview a partner to learn as much as possible about them and then play the role of their partner in answering questions posed by the rest of the group. Another exercise had participants assume postures that they interpreted as showing strength and weakness, and another required one participant to mirror the movements of another.

Central to the workshop was an exercise at the end of the second session that required participants to reflect quietly on and then write about an incident in their lives in which they were either subjected to violence or did violence to someone else. These stories became the subjects of later sessions when participants acted out the incidents as they occurred and then acted out variant versions exploring how nonviolent responses might have led to different endings to the stories.

Sources for the FICR Nonviolence Workshops

Workshop leader Faten Khoury develops the content for the workshops from her own extensive training and experience as an actor and from an impressive set of resources that includes manuals on teaching nonviolence from the Swedish Council of Churches, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and UNESCO.



A preliminary assessment of the FICR nonviolence drama workshops comes from a participant. Reflecting on the experience of playing out the violent incidents in the lives of group members and the imagined variant versions, one young woman concluded, “It is worth it to change but it is not easy.” We at the Friends International Center in Ramallah hope to be able to lead more Palestinian youth to this conclusion. “Through the workshops,” Faten Khoury says, “we seek to develop the nonviolent aspects in ourselves and in our society, building on our often ignored Palestinian history of nonviolence.”

