

Dear LUTSF

Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Fund - Report

Please accept my humble apologies for not forwarding this report earlier – and thank you for granting me the chance to forward it now.

The opportunity to go to Jordan and the Occupied Territories of Palestine was a life-changing experience and, although to date a new aerial dance work has not been created from the findings, it has had a dramatic affect on my life and the way in which I approach my work. Most significantly it led me to pursuing a Masters in Practice as Research at the University of Kent at Canterbury, where I am currently spending a year really looking at how and why I make work, with the hope that the work I generate in the future will be all the more valuable – to me and the viewers.

Many thanks for your organisation's support of me in this fundamental personal journey.

Yours sincerely,

Katrina Carter

I was awarded a grant of £450 to travel to the Middle East in May 2005. My main reasons for travel were:

- To discover the lost world of my Palestinian Grandmother, seeking stories, music, dance and imagery that could aid the furtherance of understanding for my passion for the Middle East and its influence on my work;
- To meet with three diverse contemporary organisations: *Jerusalem Circus*, *Al Kasaba Theatre & Cinematique* and *Dar al Sonun* to gain an understanding into current Israeli and Palestinian contemporary practice;
- To see if there were any correlations between my work with disaffected young people in Britain and those working similarly with young people but in troubled times in another culture.

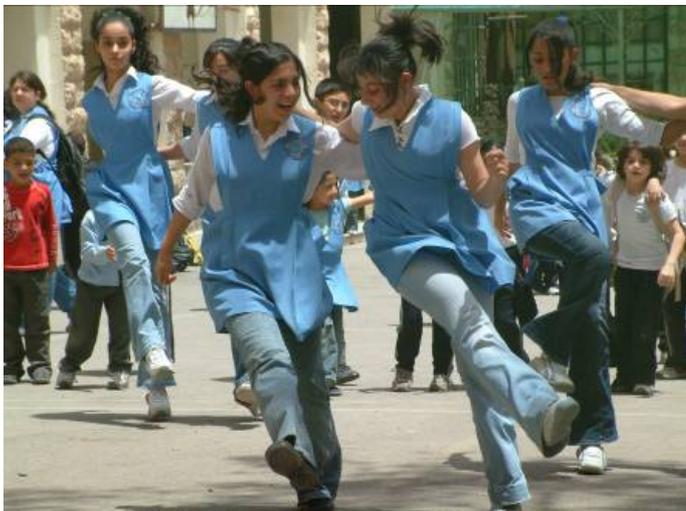
I spent two emotionally charged weeks travelling around Jordan and the Occupied Territories of Palestine. Though I had specific reasons to visit the 'Holy Land' relating to my life and my work, I hadn't anticipated just how emotionally charged the experience would be.

I entered a room full of strangers, the youngest was 5 with the oldest into his 70s; their voices sang musically in a language I didn't understand but their faces smiled at me, followed by arms wanting to touch me, to welcome me, hug me and kiss me: "Just like Trishy, just like Trishy"... at which point the tears just gushed out and I realised that here I was in the bosom of a family that I hadn't really believed existed.

This is not the place to detail the familial tales that were unfurled, nor is it the place to examine the complexities of the continuing conflict that haunts so many lives on all sides of the political spectrum, other than how it impacted on my time and research that was generously co-funded by the Travelling Scholarship Fund.

In a way my journey and research failed from the start; but that is not to say that the time was wasted or that lessons haven't been learned. I failed in fulfilling some of the criteria I set myself in my application simply because I hadn't understood the power of family and culture when time and space have been so constrained. I set out on a personal quest to discover more about who I was, where I came from and what this life-long passion for Palestine was about and how and why it impacted on my life and work.

I had fears that my unmet family would be too busy in their own lives and concerns to be interested in me and mine, so paid little heed to what impact I may have had upon them. This selfish drive for self-determination smacked me straight in the face on first meeting – such generosity of spirit and open heartedness struck me to the core; how could I possibly contemplate turning these experiences into 'art' when life was a perpetual struggle for so many of these people? They didn't have access to galleries and theatres, and dance only occasioned from old movies and what was offered on the TV or at familial functions – there was no access to dance education, though the dance I did see was energised, enthusiastic and full of hope as it told of a young girl's (my cousin) interpretation of 'staying alive'...



I had hoped to capture sounds, images and smells that could lead to the inspirational development of a new aerial-dance work; and

perhaps in time this will happen. My cousins dream of travelling the world and shared these fragile fantasies openly with me and I felt ashamed to think that I had come here to steal from them, to *recapture* elements of lives that had lived with captivity or exile for decades. But I didn't halt my documentation; I didn't flagellate myself over the selfish pursuit of knowledge and experience; I kept a journal written and recorded onto mini-disc, collected sounds of my surroundings at night and kept a visual record through photographs.

Coming from a devising and improvisational performance background, it felt natural to remove the constraints of my 'aims and objectives' and I allowed myself to open up to the journey itself, to allow a more spontaneous attitude to steer the time I had – not that I really had much choice: having met my exuberant cousins, aunts and uncles just once it was clear that they had plans for my time – “we haven't seen you for 36 years, so you can allow us to have at least two weeks of your life” – a hard one to argue!



My journey to Ramallah was one out of a mafia movie. I was protected on all sides with family and close friends ensuring that I had the right paperwork, knew what buses to go on, and had escorts from one side to the other. I was anxious but determined to visit my Grandmother's youngest sister trapped inside the West Bank, and with my heart beating I ventured into the land I had only read and dreamt about for so long. Once inside and away from the ubiquitous wall a wave of joy ricocheted through my body. I felt like I had come home. A strange time particularly pertinent as the day before I had spent six hours in the company of a young Israeli woman – in my world we'd have been friends; in this world fear stood behind every smile. The thought that I could simply stroll in and out of Israeli then Palestinian arts organisations in the vain hope of trying to glean a sense of the contemporary was ludicrous – particularly with such little time.

I had made contact with all the organisations mentioned in my application, but once in the Middle East discovered that the *Dar al Sonun* had shut for a few weeks (that had been unpublished at time of applying) and I decided not to stay in Jerusalem due to political sensitivities at that time. However, I did find a new and exciting space in the centre of Ramallah, the *Palestine Cultural Palace*, which is a state of the art building that draws top professional artists from across the globe to perform there. I had a private tour of the venue, and exchanged details with the artistic director with the view to returning to Ramallah with a contemporary aerial dance work... the family were very excited at the prospect of me returning, but also at the opportunity to see my work live!

On my return to England I felt that I had undergone an important quite life-changing experience. Though the details of the actual journey differed from the journey planned the results were probably far greater than I had at first envisaged.

I did hold a 'sharing' at Whitstable's *Horsebridge Arts and Community Centre* a few weeks after returning; I hadn't known what this would really entail, though it became a photographic exhibition accompanied by a soundtrack of recorded sounds and my whispered journals. The photographs have since been exhibited in two other galleries. On my return I was also asked to give a workshop for young people relating to my journey and most significantly for me, the impact of the journey helped me to take the plunge and I applied to the University of Kent at Canterbury to undertake a full time *Practice as Research MA* to further investigate where I really wanted to go as an artist, and if and how my passions for Palestine could relate to my work as a contemporary aerialist.

For the future: I hope to return to the land of the holies as family member, volunteer olive picker and artist. On completion of my MA I hope to pursue links with the *Palestine Culture Palace* and *Al Kasaba*, as well as looking to taking workshops and a performance to Jordan. In a land of such pain there is yet such colour, vibrancy, love and compassion.

The journey continues.