



The Importance of Children Theatre and its Impact on Algerian children:

The Cultural Association Workshop of Sidi Bel Abbes

أهمية مسرح الطفل وأثره على الأطفال الجزائريين: ورشة الجمعية الثقافية بسيدي بلعباس

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Abstract ;

The Children's Theatre is an art of children's literature and is one of the most important actors in building the child's personality and developing his mental abilities and preparing him to be a productive creative energy. The present paper attempts to shed light on the importance of children theatre and its impact on Algerian children. The researcher chose to consider the theatrical national days that was organised in 2015 by the Cultural Association Workshop in SidiBel Abbes as a case of study. The study shows that children's theatre has a positive impact on the child development. Being merged in the artwork, the children acquire some of the qualities that help them to face the challenges in his surroundings.

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1. Introduction

Theatre is one of the means of communication that works to clarify meanings communicated ideas and achieve communication between individuals and groups. This communication leads to the realization of many of its objectives and a very important assertion that goes beyond the limits of pleasure and entertainment to achieve social awareness and intellectual and artistic upbringing

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in a wider and more welcoming field, as a media and cultural means that expands the circle of culture and knowledge, and paves the way for creation and artistic creativity.

Through the goals it achieves, children's theatre, as one of its types, has expanded and become of great importance and prestige, and this is confirmed by the interest and the diversity of research and studies, and its spread during the festivals that embrace it. If theatre is generally an important art, the children's theatre is more important because of its educational, recreational and artistic aspects associated with the education of the child and his upbringing. Raising the child to deal with this technique can train him on how to deal with the other. He can establish a love of this fine art and transforms courses into knowledge games that children circulate among themselves in a dynamic way and do not depend on preservation, and the consolidation of authentic values in society is put on a stage without artificial and deliberate indoctrination.

The importance of theatre is not only the intellectual aspect, because playing is one of the most important human activities in the child. Children's theatre can become a beloved game, and it has been made up of the child's play to be a collection of games (games, demonstration games, social drama games, etc.). Based on this value and the importance of this theatre, the present paper attempts to answer the following questions: what is the children's theatre? How did it appear in Algeria and be developed? Why is it important? And finally, what is its impact on child development?

2. The definition of children's theatre

Children's Theatre is plays specifically created and performed for children. Ibrahim Hamada defines children's theatre as: «That designated and prepared place specifically for children's viewers, and on making representative presentations. Thus, the main factor in allocation is the audience of children who have produced for them the play. The children's theatre is a serious theatre full of artistic elements. It starts from the author to be associated with the director, decorator and actors, to end up in the audience, and in doing so, he generates the same experience he seeks to achieve adult theatre (Hamada, 1971).

Children's theatre is also referred to "human theatre based on professionalism for children. Its job was identified as a contribution to the education of the child through artistic work, so it has clear social, educational, and psychological objectives going hand in hand with artistic pleasure, recreation and entertainment." (Farag, 1992, p. 63). Moreover, by focusing on its importance, Mohamed Islam Abbas, a former teacher at "L'Institut National Supérieur des Arts et Métiers du spectacle (ISMAS)", defines child's theatre as that space which delights the child and enriches his or her knowledge, it is a dramatic theatrical art intended for children which conveys educational, moral and psychological values with means full of life through expressive characters on the theatre stage. This makes it an educational means for the child and the construction of its personality (Abbas, 2021).

3. The birth of children's theatre

Before talking about the children's theatre and the date of its appearance in Algeria, it was necessary to talk about the beginning of the emergence of theatrical art generally in Algeria. This beginning is dated back to 1921. This date, in fact, is extended to other Arab countries as well and many scholars argue that an Egyptian company under George Abiad, touring Algeria in 1921, triggered off the creation of Algerian Theatre. This is partly true because the visit was met with great enthusiasm by Algerians who took pride in the idea of 'Arab' theatre given the prior exclusive control of French theatre over drama in Algeria.

The Egyptians, however, came with a borrowed form of drama -a form which already existed in French Algeria. However, because they were an Arab company performing in Arabic, they acquired added appeal because of the sense of Arab nationalism then prevailing in Algeria. Thus, the feeling of opposition gave birth to the modern theatre in Algeria. As Roselyne Baffet comments:

Algerian theatre owes its existence to a tradition of struggle and opposition acquired during the recent history of the country. From the banning of karakuz in 1842 to the exile and clandestine nature of the theatre of combat just before independence. The history of the Algerian theatre is closely linked with political struggle. Indeed political commitment has always been the major characteristic of this theatrical form.(Baffet, 1985, p.180).

The history of the Algerian theatre, thus, started well before 1921, even though the French invasion had caused its demise. The Egyptian touring company in 1921 then simply injected new enthusiasm for the idea of a modern Arab theatre as opposed to a French one. The 'Theatre of Shadows' or karaguz arrived in Algeria from Turkey via Sicily and was one of the main forms of leisure in large towns throughout North Africa - such as Fez, Tangiers, Oran, Algiers, Constantine and Tunis. It consisted of the projection onto a screen of the shadow of puppets manipulated by one man, who also spoke the dialogue. Therefore, theatre in Algeria tented to come largely from outside the country.

A new theatre took shape in the 1920's under the initiative of Mahieddine Bachetarzi and Ali Sellal (known as Allalou) who both had a certain knowledge of the arts because of their acquaintance with the French cultural activities of the time (music, opera, theatre). Allalou was well read in Arabic literature and had a talent for playwriting and costume design, while Bachetarzi was already a well-known tenor singer in Algerian classical music known as Andalusian Music. The year 1926 was a landmark in the history of the Algerian theatre for it was to determine the nature of drama in Algeria, Bachetarzi asserted:

1926 a great year yes of course it was of major importance for the Algerian theatre: it provided it with ITS play and ITS actor in the sense that the Algerian audience found what they had been waiting for and have spontaneously approved and adopted it (Bachtarzi, 1968, P.63)

As for the children's theatre, its appearance was during the colonial period and was accompanied and highlighted by the emergence of the Association of Muslim Scholars, where the theatre practiced a cultural activity through school parties and religious events. It was initially associated with the school framework, and its subjects were directed for schoolchildren and students. One of the first plays that resonated with the students of those schools at the time, is bilal bin Rabah presented by Mohammed Eid Al Khalifa in 1938 (Munwar, 1986). During the 1940s, during the occupation, the "Puppet Theatre" and the "Shadow Fantasy" theatre, which drew its themes from the reality of Algeria, also criticized the colonizer and mocked those who dealt with it. The French authorities responded by stopping this theatre.

It was not until the 1970s that the children's theatre was known for its development and movement. In fact, children's theatre is relatively recent in Algeria. "Its actual beginnings date back to 1975 at the Regional Theatre of Oran with the production of the show 'Ennahla' (Amghar, 2008). In this period, child-oriented theatrical writing was widespread. "Algeria's adoption of socialist thought had the greatest impact not only on the emergence of children's theatre, but also in its use as an effective means of creating a citizen (socialist), and to achieve this, the National Union of Algerian Youth, the National Festival of Houari Boumediene in 1977, and the regional theatre began to allocate a section to the children's theatre, and since this year it has been performing for the city of Oran for children (Ismail, 2004).

In the 1980s, the National Children's Theatre Festival appeared in Constantine in 1982, and the Ministry of Education created an annual school theatre festival in Mustaghanem, dedicated to material potential and human power, and promotional awards in 1986, which was then interrupted in 1992 to return in 1995. (Bouhajar, 2006).

Recent years have seen a strong push for the Children's Theatre in Algeria. In 1996, the days of the children's plays were held in Oran, and these days returned in its second edition of the city theatre during 2011. Moreover, the city of Khanshala witnessed a national cultural festival of children's theatre in three editions respectively in 2008, 2009, and 2010. These festivals were popular with various teams. As for the Batna Al-Jahwi Theatre, it also devoted theatrical days to the child in December 2010, and March 2011.

SidiBel Abbes took also a part of these national cultural events. In fact, during many years from 2000 to 2015, Cultural Association Workshop organised National Days of the Children's Theatre. The study of the project of this cultural association is the practical side of the present research. Through this cultural manifestation, the researcher aims at highlighting the significance of children's theatre, its objectives and its impact on the development of a child. However, prior to this it is important to define and discuss the aim of the cultural association in organizing the national theatrical days to children.

4. The Cultural Association Workshop

The Cultural Workshop Association is working hard to establish the traditions of a meaningful play that will serve the country and the artistic arena, and the proof of that is organizing these national days in the honour of children. The first session, which was held in 2000 from 20 to 23 June 2004, where eight national teams participated. The echo was great and

the friction was general. This made it easier for the task and made the executive office of the organization to organize other editions and crystallize some ideas, including organizing a special stare in the depth of the national days. The tenth edition for these days that was held in 2015 was the event that the researcher aims through it to put insight into the importance, the objectives as well as the impact of the children theatrical days on the children.

4.1. The significance of the theatrical national days of 2015:

Due to the marginalization of the children, this vulnerable group, which is considered the main axis of society, and also because of the belief of the members of the association that the health of the society begins and is based on the health of the child, the unity of efforts to look after all the children by organizing this educational cultural event, and because the city's cultural institutions and important achievements serve the sector, and because of the theatrical expertise of the organizers and the will of the concerned organization which is promoting this project, the members are working to consolidate this demonstration for a higher level of education.

4.2. The objectives:

- 1- Encouraging and guiding art of all creations and raising the level of theatre in general and child theatre in particular.
- 2- By going out in the field of art, especially schools and the role of young people, to acquire artistic activity aimed at taking care of its content and to study the offers presented on national days.
- 3- Exchange of ideas and opinions on the spot, artwork between teams and signature and promotion of the level.
- 4- Getting closer to the actors and artists and paying attention to their concerns and focusing on possibilities and selecting and directing high-end artwork.
- 5- The above-mentioned objectives create a competitive and constructive atmosphere that serves the artistic arena, national days and the maintenance of the standard.
- 6- Collection, codification and preservation of creative works of art to remain and become artistic references that can be used for cultural purposes.
- 7- To form representatives and assist in the completion of technical projects through degrees of anticipation and the incorporation of specialists in order to reach the dimensions of this phenomenon.
- 8- The necessary use of all standards and the important bases for the performance of any artwork directed at children.

The only trend of the executive office of the organizing association is to raise the level of children's theatre, pay attention to this sensitive group, get closer to the genesis of this type of culture, and form the actors who chose this specialization (children's theatre).

The National days are organized at the end of each school year or at the beginning of the social sphere. Due to the lack of works of art for children and their neglect, this cultural event was organized in their honour to focus on all standards and foundations, so that the organizing committee would not be restricted except in the variety of editions and courses, but to develop the

level, upgrade it, follow up and coordinate the wait for representatives to contribute artistically to the service of children's theatre. The Executive Office of the National Days organizes this cultural wedding under the auspices of the Ministry of Trusteeship and under the supervision of the Directorate of Culture of Sidi Bel Abbes Province, the Municipal People's Council, the Provincial People's Council and the Directorate of Youth and Sports.

The tenth national days of the Children's Theatre were held from 01 to 05 June 2015. The number of participating states: 10 states (2 divisions of Sidi Bel Abbes). Table 1 shows in details the participating states:

Table 1. The participating teams

Wilaya	Number of groups	Technicians	Total
Skikda	11	3	14
Djelfa	10	2	12
Oum El Bouagui	7	2	9
Saida	9	3	12
Médéa	10	2	12
Naama	9	2	11
Boumerdés	10	2	12
Tiaret	12	2	14
Tissimssilit	10	2	12
Sidi Bel Abbes	8	2	10
Number of participants		118	

Source: Taken from the project's documents of the Cultural Workshop Association

The dimensions of this cultural manifestation include:

- 1- Creativity and theatre upgrading
- 2- Taking care of activities and children's theatre
- 3- Inter-group friction and exchange of art
- 4- Attention to the concerns of artists
- 5- Working to create a positive competitive atmosphere
- 6- Keeping up with creative works
- 7- Technical Composition and Guidance
- 8- Focus on the standards and foundations of child theatre.

The executive office of the National Children's Theatre Days is working hard, under the leadership of its president, to achieve very important results from these days. Its activity is not limited to the circulation of the cultural rituals, but it is the establishment of special artistic traditions that serve the cultural scene nationally and locally. The proof of that is programming and organization, especially at the heart of national days so that the friction is stronger, and the meaning is noble. The office itself promises the audience honourable results through this artistic event on the honour of children, this sensitive and marginalized group.

4.3. The impact:

The children's theatre national days have a powerful impact on children development. Being engaged in an imaginative activity as a theatre can help without doubt, fostering children's intelligence, seeing the world through new prospective helps young minds imagine new world, new possibilities and new ideas.

Indeed, the fact of playing and participating in something collective can help them develop their self-confidence, stimulate their interests to discover their talents and find their place. Similarly, Peter Slade confirmed that the children's theatre inspires self-confidence, a spirit of sharing, and the discovery of new areas of expression that help the young to discovering peace, self-confidence and the love of sharing in work with others. It also enables them to be open, sincere, and capable of practicing well their art works. (Slade, 1958).

In addition, child's theatre gives the child some entertainment and gets him out of the routine of life. His representation on the stage helps him to be liberated from some repressors that can be linked to his inability to fulfil some desires, and to get rid of some negative manifestations such as shyness and introversion, and so get started with his courage and self-confidence and his interaction with the team. - The child's artwork can also save him from some minor psychological problems such as guilt, oppression or fear with the consolidation of belonging and self-esteem.

The impact of the children's plays is also educational as children obtain good values and noble morals, that by adding entertainment and pleasure, and the children's theatre deals with different topics, which are chosen and presented mostly within the template of the story that depends on simplicity in events, pleasure and suspense, in connection and cohesion within one and a series idea in which good and evil are clarified. According to Al-Sharoni, one of the most important effect child's theatre on children is to develop in him a spirit of courage and self-confidence, and to stimulate their interest so as to help them discover their creative talents and develop their own potential, thus acquiring them experience to meet the different situations and problems that might face it in life, as they are prepared for what is asked of them toward Environment and Surroundings. (Al-Sharoni, .1992)

5. Conclusion:

Today, children's theatre is considered to be the fundamental basis for adult theatre and the psychological training of adults (today's child is tomorrow's adult). As a result, children's theatre is gaining ground in Algeria now, as long as it can contribute to the making of a play that can activate the upbringing of a gourmet generation. Despite the late appearance of the children's theatre in Algeria in comparison with its Arab counterparts, did not prevent the emergence of some efforts to fill the space in the theatrical arena for the child in our country. Hence, the theatrical discourse for children need to be modernized, while keeping its authenticity and promoting it towards an exemplary model.

To this end, it is necessary to emphasise the need to present theatrical plays for children performed according to their vision and to encourage young talent to write, perform and produce works in order to ensure the full integration of children into the play. This will also help to keep

them away from imitation and drive them to be creative. The focus should be on making plays for children by their counterparts, and encouraging young creators to compose, act and direct, with the aim of ensuring that children are fully integrated into the plays, moving away from tradition and simulation, and therefore the aim is the creation of children's theatre by children.

The achievement of the objectives of the children's theatre means that the impact of the latter on the children is positive. Developing self-confidence, increasing imagination and awareness, fostering creativity, developing children's skills and training in problem-solving, being independent from psychological problems as guilt, oppression and fear are all what children's theatre can bring to children. Hence, it is noteworthy that the Algerian child, being equipped with all these qualities, is able to face various problems, and be prepared for what he/she is asked to do in his environment.

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