THE SOUL IN MOTION

Philosophical Anthropology, Islam And Theatre

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Md. Mahedi Tanjir | Sydur Rahman Lipon
Andalib Rubayat | Zulkarnain Hatta
Jahid Siraz Chowdhury

TRC

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Dedication

To those artists dedicated to Social Work

Preface to Soul and Self

ONE

Soul – an immeasurable mystery as well as a reality is to be realized in the spiritual journey of man. This journey leads us towards the *Ultimate Truth* – the Supreme Power which starts from individual's *soul*. Different religious philosophies have their own interpretations of *soul* which Islam too does have. Soul, being an *abstract reality* can be pointed out as 'real' as it is synthesized through realization. In spirituality, realization is a level, a point where man gets an unambiguous answer of his question, doubt or conflict.

'Theatre' on the other hand is the *re-configuration* of life, human behavior and attitude creating deep sense among the viewers in a '*built space*'. The space could be *Proscenium* or *Non-Proscenium*.

In case of academic pursuit, the contemporary *research methodology* proposes multiple *methods* or diverse *conceptual tools* for unveiling the mystery of the 'unknown'. In spite of limitations, most of the methods give us some clear logic of exploring the phenomena of material world. But so far as, the *soul* and *realization* are concerned, they lie in between the *material world* and the *spiritual world*, which are partly capable of being structured and mostly remain non-structured.

'Self' when points out to a singular man (micro-singular), it means *individual*. But 'self', when realized in terms of '*universal singularity*' – He stands as the *Universal Self* – the *Ultimate Truth*. In spirituality, a devotee's *micro-singularity* is surrendered to the *Universal Singularity* – the ILAHA. This is Sufi logic. This

is the journey of soul. This spiritual journey is made through the evolution of our consciousness.

This very book 'THE SOUL IN MOTION' (2025) tried to grasp the immeasurable *motion of soul* from the point of Philosophical Anthropology, giving emphasis on Islam, incorporating *Theatre* – the performing art discipline. The *conceptual design* of the book including a unique *methodological approach* to deal with the discourse stands undoubtedly innovative, explorative and challenging as well.

Islam is known to all, Theater too, is known to all. But the effort of making a bridge between Islam and Theatre is hardly heard of. Technically the *space of Islam* incorporates both spirituality and practice (it is pragmatic). *The space of Theater* on the other hand is rooted in the *thought process* (cognitive level) which is reflected through performance. The potential of *practice* in Islam, and the potential of *performance* in Theatre come under single category because both need to be *configured* in reality, in human behavior or in action. This is the exact point where spiritual practice and the theatric performance are overlapped. In Islam *Ruh* (soul) comes from Almighty (Quran 38:72). *Nafs* (Quran 12:53; 75:2) is inherent in human being while the idea of *Tazkiya* (purification of self) goes with one's sense of personal entity.

Anthropology perceives the '*anthropo*' - the human being from a *holistic* point of view considering both the *tangible* and *intangible* potentials of human culture *i.e.*, what man believes in, what he subscribes to, how he behaves as well as what he creates or configures. Among many of man's creations, *Theatre* is a *composite art tradition* produced by men. Theatre in its wide periphery includes human thought, faith, consciousness, social

reality, body movement, body language, music, infrastructure (stage, dress for presentation) and others.

Let us pay attention on two words - *drama* (noun) and *dramatic* (adjective). There is no disagreement that the concept of *drama* is hardly found in the Holy Quran. But some of the narratives of this mighty scripture appear to be highly *dramatic*. In this regard, I would like to mention *Sura Fil* (Sura-105). If we appreciate the symbolic narrative (the 5 ayats) or try to configure narrative in our imagination, we shall visualize mentally that big elephant marches forward towards the *Kaba* and the little birds defeated them by throwing small stones and finally achieved victory by subjugating the so called 'big' elephants. This is undoubtedly dramatic.
Methodologically, Al-Quran gives us a symbolic narration in *Sura Fil* which one can visualize as in case of drama we do. In Sura Fil, lies a *dichotomy* of *Fil* (elephant) and *Ababil* (bird), and the *dialectics* between the two is dramatic as the small birds finally triumph. It declares the grace of the Almighty. This gives a message that almighty can do any miracle which appears to be dramatic.

When literary narrative (readable text) is transformed into performance, it gives birth to theatre. Islam has 'philosophical narratives' (readable texts) and 'practice' (to be done person). This book 'THE SOUL IN MOTION' endeavors to incorporate 'performance' (Theatre) into its fold. This is a new theoretical attempt. The conceptual and methodological alignment found here appears to be the *logical foundation* of this work. This has different levels and may be codified as follows:

Level-1	Islam	Text, narrative, spirituality, core values and ethics
Level-2	*Practice* of Islam	the Pragmatic Space
Level-3	Philosophical Anthropology	the Angle of Perception and theoretical point of interpretation
Level-4	Soul and Self	Focus on dynamics
Level-5	Theatricization of Islamic values	Using – Theatre, the performance as medium
Level-6	Solidarity and Social Change	Goal
Level-7	Making use of Islamic Ethics	Facilitating the process of social justice and human rights with the help of Islamic Values
Level-8	This book THE SOUL IN MOTION	Systemizing the vision, the theoretical frame, the document of research record

TWO

The **Chapter-1** deals with the FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE of Islamic teachings on *soul* and *self*. The entire spiritual journey of Islam towards *Ilaha* (Quran 37:35) starts with our *soul*. Theatre is the re-configuration of our life by human being. Theater is presented in a *built space* (in proscenium) or in *chosen space* (non-Proscenium, non-built). Theatre presents the problems of our daily life and also makes us aware about the social conflicts. *Philosophical Anthropology* as an approach is essential for understanding the fluidity or the flexibility of the *motion* of the journey of our soul. Philosophical Anthropology deals with the human nature, emphasizing human emotions. The formation of unity between *body, soul* and *self* helps human to

understand the ‘unity’ in wider sense, say ‘*Unity of Almighty*’ (Tawhid; Quran 39:4) and ‘*Unity of Men*’(Quran 3:103).

Islamic value proposes that ‘unity’ comes through our *union with almighty*. The concept of unity rests on our *internal spiritual harmony*. Major issues like the Relevance of Philosophical Anthropology, Spirituality in Human Understanding, the idea of Soul and Self in Islam etc. are discussed in this chapter, highlighting Theatre as a Platform for Social Advocacy. Theatre is such a powerful platform (mode of communication) that can connect with others through the performance. The book tries to locate the position and role of theatre in social advocacy and in facilitating the process of *social change*. When theatre is *designed* in such a way, the audiences are not just spectators but also they actively participate by involving themselves with the entire *theatre process* that desires to stimulate changes in social space, creating *socio-spiritual awareness*. Sociologically, it is *awareness*, spiritually it is *awakening*.

The **Chapter-2** PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ISLAMIC TEACHINGS ON SOUL AND SELF throws light on the key concepts of Philosophical Anthropology and Islam. Philosophical Anthropology aims to explore the essence of human nature. In conformity to the Theoretical Perspective (vide Chapter-1), Chapter-2 elaborates the theoretical foundation of the Philosophical Anthropology referring to its history, key concepts, individualism and collectivism in its first phase.

The second phase of the Chapter-2 illustrates the Islamic View of Soul and Self, *Nafs* and *Ruh* as well as Self Awareness in the light of Prophetic Tradition, *Tazkiya* etc. The discussion on the

intersections between Philosophy and Islam gives us the conceptual clarity followed by the Ethical Pillars of Islam.

Soul and self, the core points of this book are intensely observed in Philosophical Anthropology. The dialectics between *individualism* and *collectivism* play a significant role in society. According to Holy Quran, Almighty created human being with a *soul* which is related to 'awakening' and a *self* that is related to 'social responsibility'. Key Islamic concepts like (1) *nafs al-ammarah*, (2) *nafs al-lawwamah* and (3) *nafs al-mutma'innah* are examined to address the spiritual growth. The Islamic idea of *Tazkiyah* is a spiritual process as well as fasting, charity, prayer are the processes of self-purification. This chapter points out to human being, the social-body as pertaining to both *ethical* and *spiritual forces* with regard to Philosophical Anthropology and Islam.

Chapter-3, THEATRE AS MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND CHANGE focuses on the role of Theatre within the fold of Philosophical Anthropology and Islam. Theatre, as a powerful medium possesses the capacity to bring about *social change*. Theatre is not only an art form but every time it tries to make us see the social reality through the process - *Theatricity*.

The Chapter-3, to the best of our understanding explores the core areas of this book – THEATRE. As a medium, Theatre is able to bring about two major things – *Social Solidarity* and *Social Change* (beyond entertainment). *Solidarity* is the key secret behind bringing social change. From the point of *Theatristics* (Theatre Science) it can be said that *Social Solidarity* and *Social Change* are obviously the *sociological impact* of Theatre. When it comes to the point of Theatre and Activism, it expects certain *effective result* in the society – in the *collective consciousness* of

the mass. The collective consciousness may be understood in terms of both *social awareness* and *spiritual awakening*. When theatre is designed in this direction it theoretically becomes APPLIED THEATRE. Theatre not only raises social awareness but also can influence the audience through the dialogues and actions. Theatre encourages spectators to delve into the lives of others by witnessing social realities. Theatrical performance connects with social dimensions like race, gender, class etc. and as a result viewers experience a character's life directly rather than observing them from a distance. The emersion of the '*The Gram Theatre Movement*' in Bangladesh played a vital role to decentralize theatre and empowered local performers to show their talent to the larger population.

It is also striking that this work tries to formulate the methodology of evaluating the outcome (technically, *the Evaluative Method of Assessment*).

Chapter-4 INTEGRATION OF PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, ISLAMIC TEACHINGS AND THEATRE refers to the key theoretical connections that bridge between Theater, Philosophical Anthropology and Islamic teachings.

Theatre serves as an influential medium for connecting tradition and modernity through storytelling, ritual and critical analysis. Soul, self and solidarity are the core ideas that create a bridge between these three. This chapter also highlights methods such as *community-based performances*, theatrical initiatives in the shape of *workshops* that can accelerate empathy and spiritual growth. Audience engagement and feedback are also necessary things to build a strong relationship here. *Theatre workshops* can be a tool for community advocacy and empathy. I must mention that once

Badal Sarkar adopted the *Theatre Workshop* method with regard to *Third Theatre* (the goal was to create social awareness and to bring change in society). This chapter presented some *case studies* to show the power of the theatrical art in promoting social awareness.

Chapter-4 explores the possible connectivity between Islam and Theatre (performance) as well as examines spirituality as guiding force of *ethical theatre*. Questions like how through *Participatory Theatre*, community engagement is possible for social healing (remedy) has also been addressed. The idea of *community development* is found illustrated through case studies, such as -

Case study-1 deals with the methods of *Amakhosi Theatre* which addresses social change by empowering individuals.

Case study-2 points out to the unique technique of *Forum Theatre* that encourages viewers to actively participate in the performance by suggesting solutions for the issues presented.

Case study-3 tells about the *Shong Yatra* which is a traditional and entertaining performance of Bangladesh. It explores the interrelationship between philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings and theatre.

When issues like *theatrical interventions* for human rights, Islam-inspired Performance for social changes are strongly raised, it is evident that the work is not mere a theoretical one but also committed to the social responsibility (bringing social change, ensuring human the rights).

Final **Chapter-5** THE INTERPLAY OF SOUL, SELF AND HUMAN RIGHTS talks about the future directions for research

and practice. This research opines that the integration of theatre, Philosophical Anthropology and Islamic teachings altogether is needed to promote social awareness. The interplay of soul, self and emotion is noteworthy. The soul is the essential part where lies ethics, dignity and sense of rights. On the other hand, the self plays an important role in validating those rights. Philosophical Anthropology focuses mainly on the essence of human nature and because of this, the significance of Philosophical Anthropology lies in justifying issues related to human rights.

The previous chapters (1 to 4) demonstrate theatre as an influential tool that has the capability of healing the societal issues. So, theatre as a performing art is a weapon in the quest for social justice.

THREE

Before I conclude, I think some more theoretical points need to be pronounced with regard to the discourse of this book THE SOUL IN MOTION.

Point-1: Aristotle made us aware about the "... *imitation of an action that is serous* …" But this book draws our attention to a point where we can visualize "... *performance of an action that is spiritual*…" The vision of this book speaks of a shifting from *social reality* to *spiritual reality*. We find a *phase* of Devotional Drama (*Bhaktimulak Natak*) in the history of Bengal which paid emphasis on devotion and spirituality. THE SOUL IN MOTION too has addressed the issue of soul and self with a new connotation, new vision, in a new theoretical frame.

Point-2: Concepts like social solidarity, social change, justice and rights have always been the key issues in Theatre. The perspective

is usually socio-economic-political where the social process is seen in the perspective of (a) capitalist-proletariat frame, (b) base structure and superstructure hierarchy, (c) Hegel-Feuerbach-Marx's ideology, (d) class struggle, (e) social change and (f) exploit-free society ensuring justice. But, THE SOUL IN MOTION deals something *soul* and *self* (with regard to their dynamics). The aim of bringing about social cohesion, social change is same, yet the underlying *guiding ethics* that this book proposes is Islamic Values – the Self, the *Tazkiya* (purification of self). Here *spirituality* is the guiding force. *Motion of Soul* is supposed to be in function. This is a *practicable model* of course. For cross reference I wish to refer to the fruitful *Bhakti Movement* of Medieval period which depended more on spirituality and universal ethics.

This book offers a model of Theatre Philosophy, which will make use of the teachings of Islam, the universal values and ethics in order to change the society.

Point-3: The book perceives *Theatre* as a *powerful art-space* where both awareness and awakening is possible. When theatre is designed to solve any social problem, it turns as *Applied Theatre*. Creating *applied utility* of Theatre is a remarkable. Transplanting Islamic Values in theatric process (in content or in approach) is a new vision. Theatre process is flexible enough to include Islamic values. Islam, by this time has incorporated songs and other forms to convey the core of its teachings and expected to give a legitimate position to theatre in cultural arena. A healthy *mutual acceptance* will help this *theatre vision* to grow in the coming days and to persist for long time. This is what we are awaiting.

Point-4: This book emphasizes on the complex relationship between soul and self. These two concepts are the primary pillars of this discussion. The interrelationship between Philosophical Anthropology, Islamic Teachings and Theatre altogether, forms a unique structure for analyzing soul and self in the context of human rights.

Theatre as a powerful medium is not only a source of entertainment here but also an artistic weapon that has the capability to create and promote social awareness.

Point-5: The book THE SOUL IN MOTION also talks about the future directions for research and practice that eventually encourages scholars and performers.

The work wants to form a transmuting framework that unifies philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings and theatre. The unification of Philosophical Anthropology, Islamic discourse and Theatre create a new path for building solidarity, justice and social awareness.

This book makes a profound and timely contribution to the field of social work education by advancing a decolonial and Indigenous-centered epistemology that challenges the dominant Eurocentric paradigms historically embedded in social work theory and practice. Grounded in both critical social theory and Indigenous wisdom traditions, the book serves not only as a curricular resource but also as an epistemological intervention—reshaping how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and applied in the social work classroom and beyond.

First, the book addresses the urgent pedagogical imperative to decolonize the curriculum. Social work, as a discipline and profession, has long struggled with the legacy of colonialism and the reproduction of Western-centric values under the guise of neutrality and professionalism. This book disrupts such legacies by foregrounding Indigenous philosophies, community knowledges, and non-Western ways of being. In doing so, it aligns with global shifts in social work education that call for "epistemic justice" and pluriversality—recognizing multiple coexisting worldviews as valid bases for ethical practice and social transformation.

Second, this book deepens the ethical orientation of social work education by reframing the role of the practitioner not as an expert or intervenor but as a co-learner and co-struggler. By drawing on concepts such as *phronesis* (practical wisdom), relational accountability, and epistemic humility, the text invites students to develop a moral and political consciousness that transcends instrumental logic. This is essential for preparing social work graduates who can engage with the complex intersections of race, gender, class, caste, and coloniality in their field practice.

Third, the book offers a concrete pedagogical model for critical reflexivity. Through its structure—combining theoretical exposition, case studies, and reflections—the book cultivates in

students a self-reflexive posture that is essential for ethical relationality and solidarity with marginalized communities. Such a model resonates with transformative learning theories that emphasize dialogue, discomfort, and embodied knowing as central to social justice education.

Moreover, the book's emphasis on Indigenous research methodologies introduces students to alternative knowledge systems that challenge extractive and objectifying research traditions. In doing so, it equips future practitioners with tools to engage in knowledge co-production with communities rather than imposing frameworks upon them.

Ultimately, the significance of this book lies in its capacity to reorient social work education toward liberation. It is not merely an academic resource but a call to action—an invitation to reimagine the discipline as a space of resistance, healing, and social transformation. For institutions seeking to meaningfully incorporate diversity, equity, and decolonization into their curricula, this book offers both philosophical depth and practical guidance. Its adoption in classrooms would not only enrich intellectual discourse but also cultivate a new generation of practitioners grounded in justice, humility, and relational ethics.

There is no doubt that going through this book gives us impression of a journey through the overlapped areas of Theatre Process and Islamic Values. The inter-disciplinary approach and cross-disciplinary method of understanding deserve to be appreciated for taking the challenge for thinking something new.

30th April, 2025, Kolkata

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Relevant Books

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Book

Philosophical anthropology has long sought to unravel the essence of human existence, probing into the nature of the self, consciousness, and soul. The discipline is deeply intertwined with philosophical traditions and cultural narratives, yet it often omits the spiritual dimensions central to many non-Western paradigms. Islamic teachings, with their rich epistemology of the *nafs* (self) and *ruh* (soul), provide a profound framework for re-examining philosophical anthropology. Integrating these teachings with theatre, a medium known for its reflective and transformative capacity, offers a unique avenue to explore social solidarity and human rights. Philosophical anthropology emerges from a historical and intellectual lineage, grappling with fundamental questions about human nature and existence (Koo, 2007). Western traditions often emphasize individualism, which sometimes marginalizes relational and spiritual perspectives. Morgan (1970) critiques this approach, advocating for relational epistemology, where selfhood is understood as inherently connected to others. Such frameworks resonate with Islamic perspectives, integrating individual and collective responsibilities underpinned by spiritual growth (Neuve-Eglise, 2019). Modern interpretations of philosophical anthropology, as highlighted by Hennig (2007), stress the importance of integrating immaterial dimensions, such as the soul, to achieve a holistic understanding of humanity. This complements Islamic teachings on the *nafs* and *ruh*, which emphasize the refinement of the self through ethical and spiritual practices (Muhammad Hasbi, 2016). Al-Ghazali, one

of the most influential Islamic philosophers, argued that self-awareness and purification (tazkiyah) are crucial for human fulfillment, aligning with broader anthropological inquiries into human potential (Mohd Fakharuddin & Suhid, 2016). The intersection of philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre provides a unique framework for exploring human essence, self-awareness, and social solidarity.

Islamic Teachings on Soul, Self, and Solidarity

Islamic teachings offer profound insights into the interplay between the self and community, grounded in Qur'anic and Prophetic principles. The *nafs*, as described in the Qur'an, represents the seat of human desires and moral accountability, with various levels of development, from the inciting self (*nafs al-ammarah*) to the peaceful self (*Nafs al-mutmainnah*) (Ghofar et al., 2018). The *ruh*, by contrast, signifies the divine spark within humans, urging them toward unity (*tawhid*) and compassion (*rahma*). These spiritual concepts underscore the interconnectedness of individuals, advocating for social solidarity and justice (Mangini, 2016). Islamic theology further bridges these spiritual dimensions with pragmatic solutions for social challenges. Alfi Jihad (2016) highlights how Islamic teachings can address social inequalities through ethical and spiritual development. Similarly, *Murabatah al-nafs* (self-discipline) is emphasized as a transformative practice for cultivating balance and holistic well-being (Fakharuddin & Suhid, 2016). Such practices not only benefit the individual but also strengthen the moral fabric of society, laying a foundation for human rights and collective prosperity.

Theatre as a Medium for Reflection and Advocacy

Theatre, historically rooted in storytelling and moral instruction, has proven to be a powerful tool for social change. Hinda (2018) notes that theatre in Islamic contexts has been a space for both defending cultural identity and critiquing societal injustices. Its capacity to evoke empathy and self-reflection makes it an ideal platform for addressing complex issues like communal solidarity and human rights (Vicente Pestana et al., 2020). Sforza (2019) emphasizes that politically sensitive theatre-making, especially for young audiences, can challenge existing power dynamics and promote ethical deliberation. Likewise, Reclam (2018) identifies theatre as a therapeutic and healing practice, capable of addressing collective traumas and fostering community cohesion. The Islamic ethics of justice (*adl*) and unity (*tawhid*) can thus find an expressive outlet through performance, allowing for both individual and communal transformation (Degli Esposti, 2017). Incorporating Islamic teachings into theatre aligns with broader efforts to make the performing arts a medium for education and advocacy. Spero (2012) demonstrates how human rights education through theatre can empower marginalized communities, creating a shared space for dialogue and action. These approaches resonate with Islamic principles, which emphasize dignity, compassion, and the moral imperative to protect the vulnerable (Houshmand, 2010).

Integrating Philosophical Anthropology, Islam, and Theatre

The synthesis of philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre creates a unique framework for

exploring the soul and self in the context of social harmony and human rights. This interdisciplinary approach is not merely theoretical; it has practical applications in addressing contemporary challenges. As noted by Mangini (2016), integrating Western and Islamic ethics can lead to transcultural virtues, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic global discourse. Theatrical performance, with its ability to embody and dramatize ethical principles, provides a dynamic space for this integration. Vicente Pestana et al. (2020) highlight how theatre can be a leisure experience that simultaneously develops the self and deepens social awareness. This aligns with Islamic teachings on moral refinement, where individual growth is seen as a means to contribute to collective well-being (Abdul Ghofar et al., 2018). Ethical dramaturgical approaches, as explored by Sforza (2019), can be adapted to incorporate Islamic concepts of justice, compassion, and unity. These performances can serve as a platform for challenging societal inequities, promoting human rights, and fostering spiritual and ethical growth.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the integration of philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre offers immense potential, it also faces challenges. Hinda (2019) observes that tensions between modernity and tradition can create ambivalence in the Islamic world, particularly regarding the arts. Addressing these tensions requires a nuanced approach that respects cultural and religious sensitivities while embracing the transformative infusion of power of theatre. Opportunities lie in collaborative and participatory practices that engage diverse audiences. Degli Esposti (2017) underscores the importance of

community-driven performances in creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and healing. Similarly, Houshmand (2010) highlights the role of shared ethical frameworks in bridging cultural divides and fostering global solidarity.

Toward a Transformative Framework

Theatre has long been a site of philosophical and spiritual reflection, where performance transcends entertainment to become a powerful tool for social critique and ethical transformation. As Richard Schechner (2003) argues, theatre is not just a mirror but a rehearsal for change, shaping how individuals and societies understand themselves. Islamic traditions, particularly in Sufi thought, have similarly emphasized self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) as a means of ethical development (Al-Ghazali, 1980). When these ideas intersect, theatre becomes a dynamic space where Islamic teachings on the soul (*ruh*) and self (*nafs*) find expression, reinforcing the moral obligations of human existence (Ahmed, 1990). Peter Brook (1996) describes theatre as "deadly, holy, rough, and immediate," underscoring its ability to provoke spiritual and existential inquiry. Islamic philosophy similarly views art as an extension of divine wisdom, aligning theatrical performance with sacred expression (Creswell, 1981; Isa, 1981). By integrating these perspectives, this book explores how theatre, as both an aesthetic and ethical practice, can foster social cohesion, advocate for human rights, and serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity (Tanjir, 2024). In doing so, it redefines performance as an essential space for reimagining justice, identity, and the shared human experience.

Figure 1: captures a poignant moment from the performance The Rules of Love, featuring Rumi and Kera Khatun. This image evokes a deep sense of spiritual and emotional connection, with Rumi portrayed as a mystic, possibly delivering a revelation or reflecting on divine love. The upward gaze of both characters suggests transcendence, yearning, and cosmic inquiry, hallmarks of Sufi poetics and performance. The visual composition emphasizes intimacy, devotion, and mentorship, underscored by the physical closeness between the two figures.

Figure 1.1: The Rules of Love: Rumi and Kera Khatun

Source: Limon Ahmed (Photograph), Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, JKKNIU, Bangladesh.

Rumi, clad in traditional Sufi attire with a green turban and holding a manuscript, symbolizes the seeker-scholar, while Kera Khatun appears as a supportive presence, invoking themes of feminine wisdom, grace, and silent strength.
The background text in Bengali reads "নিঃসন্দেহে মানুষ ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত," which translates to "Surely, humankind is in loss" (Qur'an 103:2). This scriptural reference deepens the spiritual frame of the scene, echoing themes of human fallibility and divine guidance. The stark blue background creates a meditative ambiance, heightening the metaphysical undertone of the play. Overall, this figure bridges theatre, Sufi mysticism, and ethical reflection, demonstrating how performance can act as a visual philosophy and medium of love, loss, and transformation in human and divine relations.

The Soul in Motion seeks to establish a transformative framework that integrates philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre to explore the soul and self as foundational to social cohesion and human rights.

Comparison of Philosophical Anthropology, Islamic Teachings, and Theatre

Characteristic	Philosophical Anthropology	Islamic Teachings	Theatre
Focus	Human existence and nature	Self, soul, and community	Reflection and advocacy
Key Concepts	Self, consciousness, soul	Nafs, ruh, tazkiyah	Empathy, self-reflection, transformation
Application	Understanding human nature	Addressing social inequalities	Promoting social solidarity
Potential	Holistic understanding of humanity	Transcultural virtues	Education and advocacy
Challenges	Tensions between modernity and tradition	Cultural and religious sensitivities	Creating inclusive spaces

By drawing on the insights of scholars like Hennig (2007) and Al-Ghazali, it aims to provide a holistic understanding of human existence that bridges individual and collective dimensions. The incorporation of theatre as a performative and reflective tool further amplifies these ideas, offering practical applications for advocacy, education, and community-building.

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CHAPTER ONE

FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The conceptual foundation for integrating philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings on soul and self, and theatre as a medium for social advocacy and human rights. It argues that the Islamic understanding of nafs (self) and ruh (soul) offers a profound framework to reimagine humanity's ethical responsibilities in the 21st century. Drawing from both classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and contemporary thinkers, the chapter explores how the refinement of the self (tazkiyah) and awareness of divine unity (tawhid) contribute to social harmony. Theatre, in this context, becomes a performative space for embodying moral ideas, challenging injustice, and fostering collective reflection. Indigenous forms of Islamic theatre, like Jāri Gān, Kavi Gān, and similar, such a vast number of performance forms in Bangladesh are highlighted as culturally embedded expressions of resistance and communal dialogue.

Keyword: Spiritual Anthropology, Colonial Epistemology, Secular Humanism, Inner Voice (Ashis Nandy), Postcolonial Reflexivity.

The chapter further examines how theatrical performance can reawaken ethical sensitivity and promote solidarity across diverse audiences. By bridging Islamic cosmology, philosophical ethics, and dramaturgy, this chapter proposes a transformative educational and performative model. It invites readers to view the stage not merely as entertainment but as a site of ethical renewal, where the soul and self are enacted toward collective liberation and social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Theatre as a place where social problems and human rights are analyzed; what is seen in theatre and/or attended in performance generates thoughts, questioning, criticism, and eventually actions. With this concern, this text intends to show how the philosophical anthropology found in soul and self-teaching as essentializing fundamentals could play roles in determining good and bad, right and wrong in human action, and transformation into a performance script undertaken by the playwright, director, and performer. This text tries to expose the essentializing philosophical anthropology based on the teaching of soul and self from human creation in the Islamic perspective and its shifting theatrical interpretation accommodating the socio-cultural context from the concern of the Islamic theatre defended towards social and human rights theatrical activism (Hinda, 2018). This aligns with the conventional theatre function as a reflection, criticism, and transformation of society's conditions.

Philosophical anthropology, as a philosophical study trying to understand what man/being human could be interpreted as an anthropological concern in philosophy's perspective, by exposing the fundamental view on humans applicable as an a priori foundation for deciding good and bad, right and wrong in human action. Philosophical anthropology is found in soul and self-teaching as essentializing fundamentals, which is going to show how this philosophical anthropology plays roles in human action transformation into a performance script undertaken by the playwright, director, and performer. This text is part of the research on essentializing philosophical anthropology through Islamic teachings in Theatre, focusing

on the socio-cultural context adjustment and shifting interpretative track from the initial conception and exposition as research questions.

Theatre and performing arts widely happen in the socio-cultural development of society, even for marginalized groups. As widely accepted, theatre could play roles within society to reflect the social life conditions, to question, criticize, and transform them. The emergence of theatergoers and performing arts in society marks the awareness and sensitivity toward the socio-cultural environment. Theatergoing and performing arts play roles as a forum to share societal sensitivity and awareness; what is seen in theatre and/or attended in performance generates thoughts, questioning, criticism, and eventually actions. This is in line with theatre activists and performers' concerns on collective and human rights issues, as has been realized and attempted in several performance endeavors. Through theatre and performance, what are considered communal and human rights violations, the awareness and sensitivity to these concerns, theatre activists and performers attempt to share, question, criticize, and transform these conditions with the hope of liberating and setting free the subdued and silenced from social bondage.

WHY THIS UNEVEN CONCERN

The recent decades have witnessed a renewed interest in the broader societal roles of theatre and performance in the West and elsewhere, emphasizing their civic functions and capabilities. This has led to the emergence of various concepts, such as community theatre, social theatre, theatre for development, political theatre, cultural activism, and theatre-

making as social practice, which seeks to interrogate and rethink the nature and functions of theatricality beyond the dominant modes of representational realism (Hinda, 2019). In the Islamic World, the modernist project of representing life on stage sparked a debate between theatre makers who embraced modernity and those who staunchly rejected it on the grounds of Islamic validity and relevance. Such theatre was paralleled by the zeal to either embrace or reject modernity. Despite such a charged historical situation, there has tended to be a pan-Islamic silence regarding Islamic theatre practice emulating modernity.

Article I. As Islamic theatre practicing cultures are currently feeling the tremors of socio-political upheavals, this silence is particularly puzzling (Hinda, 2018). In the age of the Arab Spring and its aftershocks, it is essential to examine how and why Arab-Muslim states, societies, and cultures were, and are being, solidified, fissured, and reconstituted, and to explore the possibility of and grounds for a pan-Islamic and/or Arab solidarity between them. It is also essential to consider the roles and responsibilities of theatre and theatre activists in such solidarity and fissuring. To that end, an Islamic reading of the philosophical anthropology of soul and self in Ibn Sina, a.k.a. Avicenna, will be the focus of attention and concern. The intention here is that this reading be a stepping stone to rehearsing and debating how theatre practitioners can and ought to transcend the (de)solidifying fissures afflicting contemporary Islamic states and societies, in and through their artistic endeavors on stage. In the face of contemporary global challenges such as climate change, terrorism, globalization, social inequality, and collective anxiety, societies are compelled to seek wisdom that fosters

and strengthens social harmony. Theatre, as a global cultural medium, holds significant potential to serve as a reflective and transformative space. However, in its pursuit of modernity and social progress, theatre can sometimes misinterpret or overshadow local cultural dispositions. Therefore, rediscovering and amplifying cultural wisdoms that nurture togetherness becomes essential. Theatre, as an embodiment of philosophy in action, offers a medium to reconnect with essential thoughts and cultural practices (Alagha, 2022). Philosophical anthropology, which delves into the essence of humanity, finds profound expression in Islamic teachings. These teachings, with their anthropological cosmology and axiomatic exploration of the soul (*ruh*) and self (*nafs*), provide a framework to articulate human interconnectedness and solidarity. This framework was performed in a theatre performance staged during an international seminar on Islamic Inwardness and Human Rights, emphasizing social solidarity and the promotion of human rights.

Humanity, in Islamic cosmology, is understood as comprising three interconnected realms: the divine realm of God (al-ghaib), which transcends the material; the world of forms and ideas (*al-mithal*), which shapes human inspiration and thought; and the tangible, sensory world (*al-syahid*), experienced through human senses (Chittick, 2001). These realms collectively position humanity as the noblest of all creations, endowed with the extraordinary gifts of the soul, self, and rationality. Humanity is directed to transcend material desires and align itself with the divine, fostering unity with God. The natural law of togetherness (*syara*), intrinsic to the soul, serves as a moral compass that guides humans toward noble and collective living. These natural laws, deeply rooted in Islamic philosophy, provide the

foundation for community cohesion and human rights (Faruque, 2021). The notion of shared humanity is indispensable for addressing the stifling socio-political conditions of the 21st century. Peace, traditionally defined as the absence of war, violence, or conflict, must now be reimagined to encompass broader dimensions such as equity, justice, sociality, and solidarity. Peace is no longer just a political ideal but a fundamental human right, intertwined with the right to life and dignified existence (Houshmand, 2010). These expanded notions of peace require philosophical reconstruction and socio-historical contextualization to address the pressing challenges of our time. Social and cultural movements that embody this reimagined peace, particularly those rooted in Islamic philosophy, hold significant potential to foster wider solidarity and justice. Islamic cultural and theatrical movements provide a compelling case for performing Islamic philosophical anthropological insights to resolve social dilemmas. These movements emphasize the Tauhid-based understanding of the soul and self, situating them as essential elements of humanity and society. Through performance, they elucidate the meanings of the soul as both a philosophical and religious concept, while contextualizing the self as a socio-cultural entity (Faruque, 2021). Such performances, however, are often challenged by cultural contingencies, linguistic diversities, and socio-political barriers, which can lead to clashes or misunderstandings between civilizations. Despite these challenges, shared aspirations for peace, justice, and human rights remain universal, as reflected in both Islamic teachings and global philosophical traditions.

Theatre, as a performative medium, transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, creating spaces for dialogue and reflection. Scholars highlight how theatrical performances can navigate contested identities and conflicting cultural narratives, fostering understanding and empathy (Alagha, 2022). When infused with Islamic ethical principles, such as compassion (*rahma*) and justice (*adl*), theatre becomes a powerful tool for advocating human rights and promoting social solidarity (Faruque, 2021). The essence of philosophical anthropology, particularly as interpreted through Islamic teachings, lies in its emphasis on the shared dignity and interconnectedness of all humans. The performance of these principles not only reaffirms the universality of human rights but also provides a pathway for addressing the socio-historical roots of inequality and injustice. By exploring the soul and self through the lens of Islamic thinking and theatre, this work aims to bridge the gaps between cultural, religious, and social divides, fostering a shared understanding of humanity's essential unity.

The Relevance of Philosophical Anthropology

Philosophical anthropology is a foundational field that critically explores the question, "What is man?" not merely from a biological or sociological standpoint, but from a deeply metaphysical, ontological, and ethical perspective. This area of inquiry is particularly relevant today, as modern education and development paradigms increasingly emphasize measurable outcomes, often at the cost of the inner, spiritual, and moral dimensions of the human being. Philosophical anthropology, by contrast, re-centers human inquiry on the composite nature of man: as a being made of both body and soul, matter and spirit, and whose dignity stems from this dual nature (Grene, 1966; Spaemann, 2006). The central premise of

philosophical anthropology aligns with the Islamic view of the human being (*insān*) as a composite of self (*nafs*), intellect (*aql*), and spirit (*ruh*). Islam teaches that the human being is created with inherent dignity (Qur'an 17:70) and is appointed as a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on Earth (Qur'an 2:30), charged with the responsibility of moral agency and the pursuit of justice. This understanding reflects the anthropological view that man is ontologically ordered toward a “golden mean” balancing rationality and materiality, transcendence and embodiment (Nasr, 1989). In the words of Max Scheler, a key figure in philosophical anthropology, man is a "spiritual person" who transcends mere biological determinism (Scheler, 2009). Similarly, thinkers such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina integrated metaphysical anthropology within Islamic philosophical frameworks to present man as a rational, social, and spiritual being whose highest function is the realization of the intellect and proximity to the divine (Black, 2008).

Moreover, philosophical anthropology allows for the integration of ontology into the educational process, particularly within Islamic pedagogy. By incorporating anthropological foundations such as the purpose of human life, the ethical structure of being, and the soul's journey, teachers and curriculum designers can deepen the learning experience beyond instrumental knowledge. For instance, Al-Ghazali’s emphasis on purification of the self (*tazkiyah*) and spiritual knowledge (*ma‘rifah*) underscores the need to cultivate inner wisdom alongside cognitive abilities (Nasr, 2006). These perspectives are not just theoretical; they can enrich pedagogy by embedding values of self-realization, justice, and spiritual awakening into various subjects, especially in philosophy, ethics, and religious education

(Halstead, 2004). In this sense, philosophical anthropology is not a peripheral academic pursuit but a vital component of holistic human development. It provides a conceptual bridge between Islamic spiritual anthropology and contemporary educational needs. As such, introducing dedicated courses or modules on philosophical anthropology or integrating its themes across subjects can profoundly transform how students understand themselves, their purpose, and their moral responsibilities.

The Spiritual Dimension in Human Understanding

Understanding the human being as a composite of body, soul, and self is not only a religious or mystical idea but also a deep philosophical assertion grounded in many ancient and contemporary traditions (Nasr, 1989; Scheler, 2009). In both Islamic and philosophical anthropology, the human is described as an *nāṭiq* being a rational, spiritual, and moral agent whose essence transcends physicality (Al-Attas, 1990). Teachings across spiritual and wisdom traditions emphasize the importance of harmonizing the body (*jism*), the soul (*nafs*), and the spirit (*ruh*) to realize both self-knowledge and the ability to relate ethically to others (Gutas, 2001; Ghazali, 2002).

Those who embark on this inner journey often demonstrate heightened moral perception, spiritual discipline, and an ethical life rooted in service to others. This can be seen in how Sufi teachings, for instance, stress the idea of *ihsān* acting beautifully and consciously in the presence of God, which fosters not only personal purification but also social ethics of compassion and justice (Chittick, 2000). The person whose soul is awakened becomes habituated to mutual respect,

dignity, and balance in social relations from the rights of animals and ecosystems to the responsibilities within human communities. The Qur'anic worldview also charges individuals with guarding against unethical tendencies like *ghaflah* (heedlessness) and *ẓulm* (injustice), which corrupt the heart and damage the soul–body unity (Qur'an 91:7–10; Nasr, 2006).

Education, therefore, has a transcendent mission: to help individuals awaken their spiritual dimension and become attuned to ethical behavior through embodied learning. This includes cultivating good manners (*adab*), relational harmony, and environmental consciousness not as separate subjects, but as integral parts of human flourishing (Halstead, 2004; Al-Attas, 1990). In this context, artistic expressions such as theatre become more than mere entertainment; they serve as moral pedagogy and spiritual performance. Theatre has historically functioned as a mirror to society and a vehicle for collective healing, offering participants and audiences alike a transformative space where conscience and community interact (Schechner, 2002).

The human body, though made from elements of the earth, becomes animated by a soul imbued with divine qualities such as mercy, justice, and truth (Qur'an 32:9). This understanding leads to a view of the human being as a microcosm reflecting the broader universe, and the task of education is to align the inner cosmos with the outer world through spiritual and ethical cultivation (Nasr, 1989; Black, 2008). Thus, the heart (*qalb*) is not merely an emotional center but a metaphysical organ of perception, central to the realization of truth and moral discernment (Ghazali, 2002; Chittick, 2000). Ultimately,

a spiritually oriented understanding of the human being insists on an outward-bound ethical praxis where self-realization is tied to the wellbeing of others, and where moral conscience expands into collective responsibility. Only by activating this spiritual and ethical potential can humanity protect the sanctity of life and nurture a sacred ecology of being within and beyond the self.

For some of the members of the leadership team, the connection between the ecological emergency and the arts and culture was a relatively new debate, so the first moments of the workshop were marked by unanimity. However, when the attention was directed more specifically to the role of the arts in inspiring societal change and civic action, the foundations of the unanimity began to break. Their strong belief in the symbolic power of the arts was still there, but it was met with ambivalence. At this point, they began to gauge the alleged social power of the arts (and consequently, of their theatre) towards the risks this entails in terms of instrumentalizing its power

(a) Islamic Teachings on Soul and Self

One of the greatest scholars who ever aspired to essentialize man's existence as the subject of a unified philosophical study was Mulla Sadra, a seminal figure in Islamic philosophy. Known as the founder of the Transcendent Theosophy (*al-hikmah al-muta'āliyah*), Sadra provided a revolutionary explanation of the self through the dynamic and substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*) of the soul, uniting the internal self with external realities (Rizvi, 2009). He asserted that the soul is not a static entity but a being-in-motion that evolves toward perfection, reinforcing the interconnectedness

between knowledge, existence, and moral agency (Mulla Sadra, trans. Rahman, 2001).

This ontological view diverges from dualistic or purely idealistic approaches found in some religious traditions, as Sadra emphasized that true perception is possible because the soul shares a metaphysical continuity with the objects of knowledge. In other words, knowledge is not a passive reception of external truths but an ontological unification between the knower and the known (Nasr, 2006). Sadra argued that the manifestation of knowledge must reflect the very structure of external existence, and through this mirroring, clarity and expanded understanding can be achieved (Rizvi, 2009). For those entrenched in dualist metaphysics, adopting this unified soul-centered approach would dissolve inner obsessions and offer a clearer path to self-awareness.

Furthermore, the soul maintains a deep relationship with spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and intrinsic human value, where knowledge is not divorced from being but is part of its actualization (Black, 2011). The self, when purified, becomes a vessel of meaning and moral purpose, manifesting values through conscious action. This contrasts sharply with reductionist materialist views that see humans merely as physical composites acting on instinct. For Sadra, disorganization of the soul leads to disintegration of moral clarity, whereas its proper cultivation serves the divine order of creation (Mulla Sadra, trans. Rahman, 2001; Nasr, 2006). In this framework, morality, spirituality, and knowledge are inseparable dimensions of a fully realized human existence.

(b) Theatre as a Platform for Social Advocacy

Theatre is a powerful form of social engagement grounded in aesthetics and emotion. It has been convincing audiences for the beginning of theatre history. Throughout the ages and long before the establishment of universities/schools/academia, theatre was a part of educational systems. Not only does theatre address public and corporate views on local and universal themes, but it has also supported the outsider, the doubters, and the suppressed. As a live, simultaneous event, it gives public and private solace; and by presenting contested life situations, it stimulates exchange between performers and their audiences. At the very least, theatre rectifies individual deficiencies, but it can be a political instrument for 'giving the people a voice.' As a public realm, the theatre form has as one of its starting points the presence of an audience. That type of presentation, play, or lecture has tantalized, educated, amused, and created aesthetics from its beginning, as well as functioning as soft, moderate or violent expressions of collective criticism, upholding harmony and enhancing or counteracting totalitarian power or social oppression.

Figure 1.1: Kavi Gān Performance
Source: Ahmed (2000, p.318, 3, abc)

This image captures a live Kavi Gān session, a traditional Bengali lyrical debate form featuring both vocal contestation and musical accompaniment. The gathering includes vocal performers, instrumentalists with harmonium and violin, and an attentive audience, emphasizing the participatory and dialogical essence of

this folk genre. Kavi Gān blends humor, philosophy, and satire, and often serves as a medium for social critique and communal entertainment.

Figure 1.2: Gāzir Yātrā (Didār Bādśā): The ogre and its companion.
Source: Ahmed (2001, p.174)

Islamic Indigenous theatre forms in Bangladesh, such as *Jāri Gān, Imāma Yātrā, Gājīra Gān, Gājīra Yātrā, Gājīra Pāta, Mādāra Pīrēra Gān, Satya Pīrēra Gān, Mānika Pīrēra Jāri, Mānika Yātrā, Khāja Khijirēra Jāri,* and *Bā'ula Gān*, have long served as potent platforms for social advocacy. These indigenous performances extremely embedded in the cultural fabric of rural Bangladesh, blend storytelling, music, and dance to convey moral lessons, societal critiques, and

communal values. *Jāri Gān*, for instance, narrates tales of religious and historical significance, often highlighting themes of justice and righteousness. Similarly, *Bā'ula Gān*, with its mystical lyrics and melodies, challenges social norms and promotes messages of spiritual equality and humanism. These art forms not only entertain but also provoke thought and inspire change within communities. In his comprehensive study, "Acinpakhi Infinity: Indigenous Theatre of Bangladesh," Syed Jamil Ahmed explores over **eighty genres** of indigenous theatre, emphasizing their role in reflecting and shaping societal values (Ahmed, 2000). Ahmed notes that these performances often address concerns such as social injustice, religious intolerance, and the plight of the marginalized, thereby fostering awareness and encouraging dialogue among audiences. The participatory nature of these performances enhances their impact as tools for social advocacy. Audiences are not mere spectators but active participants, engaging with the narratives and internalizing the messages conveyed. This interactive dynamic facilitates a communal reflection on societal issues and collective contemplation of solutions. Moreover, the adaptability of these indigenous forms allows them to address contemporary issues while preserving traditional aesthetics. For example, theatre groups have utilized improvisation based on indigenous cultural forms to work within local communities, raising social awareness and advocating for change (Social Theatre in Bangladesh, 2004). By integrating modern themes into traditional frameworks, these performances remain relevant and continue to resonate with audiences today. Bangladeshi indigenous theatre forms serve as vital instruments for social advocacy, leveraging their cultural resonance and participatory nature to address

pressing societal issues. Through their dynamic storytelling and performative traditions, they continue to inspire reflection, dialogue, and transformation within communities.

In the 21st century, when the world is faced with the crisis of social solidarity and the tragedy of human rights abuse, it is essential to revisit human rights as the foundation of the community contract for social cohesion and human rights. Philosophical anthropology, as a discourse of essentializing the understanding of humans, is relevant for this purpose. This approach can be enriched in the light of Islamic teachings on 'soul' and 'self', which comprise the spiritual dimension in the understanding of human. The teachings on 'soul' and 'self' can be the foundation for social solidarity and human rights as the universal values in the multicultural society of the 21st century. The discourse of philosophical anthropology, along with Islamic teachings on 'soul' and 'self' as the social contract for social solidarity and human rights, should be essentialized so it can be used to address the issues faced by the world in the 21st century (Hinda, 2019). The essentialization of philosophical anthropology and the teachings on 'soul' and 'self' is to be elaborated and presented in the form of a theatre performance. Theatre is chosen as a medium of performance because it is seen as a medium that can awaken the sensitivity of the audience (Hinda, 2018). It is also in line with the original function of Islamic theatre as a unity (*wahdah*) discourse. Philosophical anthropology and Islamic discourse on 'soul' and 'self' will be performed in the theatre, as an effort to social advocacy, through which the audience is expected to reawaken their sensitivity to the social issues. Theatre is also seen as an appropriate medium since it allows for creative expression in the presentation of the discourse on the 'soul' and 'self' of human, in the form of monologues or collective

performance. Finally, the creative act becomes visible as human's 'soul' and 'self' social solidarity contract.

THE PURPOSE OF ESSENTIALIZING THE SOUL AND SELF

As a response to some of the contemporary socio-political issues in Indonesia, this research is proposed as an academic inquiry on Poesy Theatre's creative works *Empat Belas* and *Tubuhku, Hak-ku*, wherein Islamic teachings on soul and self, as the essentialization of philosophical anthropology, are dramatized to build awareness of social solidarity and human rights. This inquiry will elaborate on the formulation of the dramatization's essence, philosophically and aesthetically, as a contribution to the discourse of theatrology and theatre praxis. In addition, it aims to discover how the socio-political contexts influence Poesy Theatre's choice of discourse in the dramatization and how this discourse affects audience reception to encourage social actions (Sforza, 2019). These objectives are framed on the concern that contemporary theatres in Indonesia tend to ignore discourses that uphold the public space's criticality against dominant powers. From the purpose of essentializing soul and self, discourse changes are identified in the socio-historical contexts. Discourse on the soul and self-awareness of social solidarity is chosen in the New Order regime, while discourse on the soul and self-awareness of human rights is chosen after the Reformation, despite both having the same Islamic context (Hinda, 2018). In terms of audience reception, the theatre's differences in theatricality styles affect the audience's social action responses. In *Empat Belas*, the audience takes the initiative to directly involve in communal actions; whereas in *Tubuhku, Hak-ku, Mulyani's* performance on the courtroom stage limits

the audience's involvement to a mere observational position. This research contributes to theatrology by providing a framework of contemporary Indonesian theatre analysis in three levels: socio-historical context, performance's essence in a philosophic-theological perspective, and audience reception's effect on collective action. It also contributes to the discourse of Islamic teachings on philosophy and humanity by elaborating the soul and self as the essence of philosophical anthropology from a perspective that upholds the Islamic context and theology discourse as a medium of this elaboration. Lastly, theatre praxis is critically investigated within socio-political contexts, thus creating a historical narrative of contemporary Indonesian theatres.

The increasing number of conflict-based humanitarian crises and their unrelated impacts on societies in academic contexts urge the need to build harmony and empathy. Theatre has been proven to be a medium to grasp abstract moral issues and engage audiences emotionally. However, it can enhance ethically distorted perceptions if theatre-making is neglectful of ethical consciousness. The essentialist epistemologies on the concepts of soul and self/*nafs* in the Islamic tradition can provide a dramaturgical approach to theatre that cultivates human beings' inherent dispositions towards social solidarity, empathy, and care (Hinda, 2018). This study investigates how Islamic philosophical anthropology disciplines the notions of dramaturgy-as-theatre-making, performance, and audience reception to ethically address the issues of social cohesion and human rights in the theatre of the Islamic tradition. It will be explored through a theatre-textual analysis of Nurcholish Madjid's plays that were written in post-1998-Reformasi Indonesia, in which the social contexts are plagued by

religious-based violence and the ramifications of global humanitarian crises.

Using an analytical framework constructed from the Islamic philosophical anthropic notions of soul and self/*nafs*, this study aims to explore how theatre texts dramaturgically articulate philosophical anthropologies that discipline the audience's mind and heart engagements in ethically understanding and addressing social solidarity and human rights issues. The specific objectives are: first, to reveal the soul and self/*nafs* philosophical anthropologies that essentialize the audience's theatre-as/epistemic, -performance, -dramaturgy, and -text/heart engagements in understanding the issues; second, to uncover the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the theatre-texts that relate to the audience's heart-engagement; and third, to elaborate the Islamic-national theatrical aesthetic principles contained in the theatre-texts' dramaturgy that discipline the soul and self/nafs philosophical anthropologies (Sforza, 2019).

There are three key questions:

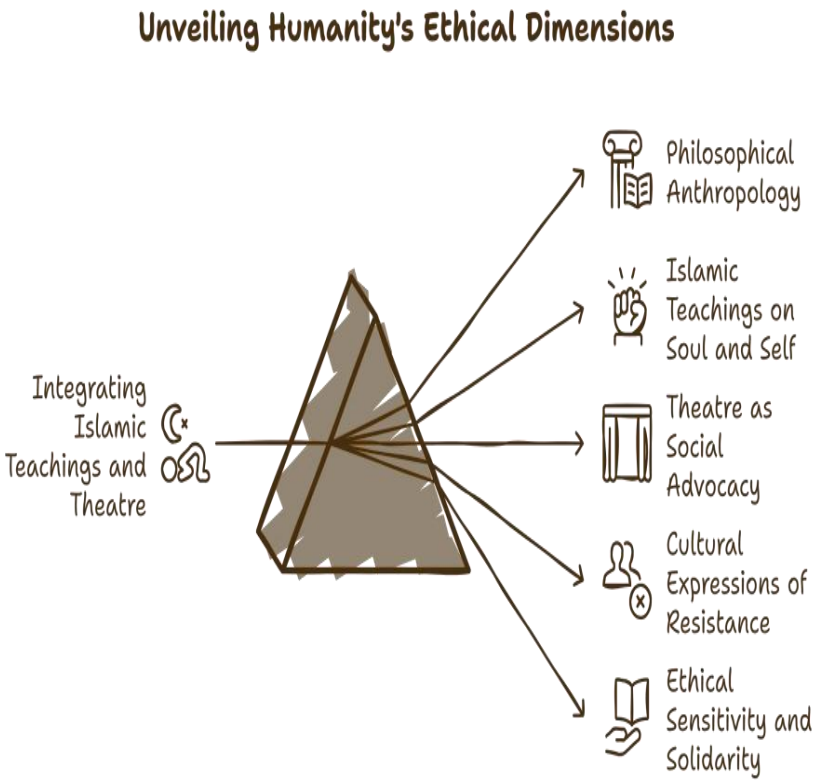
1) How do the soul and self/*nafs* philosophical anthropologies essentialise the audience's theatre-as/epistemic, performance, dramaturgy and text/heart engagements in understanding social solidarity and human rights issues, in the Islamic context?

2) What are the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the theatre-texts that relate to the audience's heart-engagement to the social solidarity and human rights issues?

3) How do the Islamic-national theatrical aesthetic principles, as articulated in the theatre-texts' dramaturgies, discipline the soul and self/*nafs* philosophical anthropologies?

CONCLUSION

The fundamental question of what it means to be human through the lenses of philosophical anthropology, spiritual pedagogy, and Islamic metaphysics. We have seen that human beings are not merely biological entities but are endowed with soul, self, and spirit—dimensions that demand ethical cultivation and inner awareness. Philosophical anthropology offers a critical ontological framework that aligns with Islamic views of humans as vicegerents on Earth, seeking balance between material and spiritual realities. The spiritual dimension calls for a unification of knowledge, behavior, and being, where the heart, mind, and body work together for both personal and collective harmony. Mulla Sadra's metaphysics further deepens this understanding by showing how the evolving soul is intrinsically tied to knowledge and moral action. Together, these perspectives remind us that any vision of education or society must begin with a holistic, sacred view of the human being, oriented toward truth, justice, and transcendence.


Unveiling Humanity's Ethical Dimensions
Integrating Islamic Teachings and Theatre
Philosophical Anthropology
Islamic Teachings on Soul and Self
Theatre as Social Advocacy
Cultural Expressions of Resistance
Ethical Sensitivity and Solidarity

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CHAPTER TWO

PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ISLAMIC TEACHINGS ON SOUL AND SELF

Explores the theoretical foundations of philosophical anthropology and its intersections with Islamic teachings on the soul (*ruh*) and self (*nafs*). It begins by tracing the historical evolution of philosophical anthropology and key concepts such as selfhood, consciousness, and moral agency. The chapter critiques Western models of individualism, arguing that they often overlook the relational and spiritual aspects of human existence. In contrast, Islamic perspectives offer a more holistic view of the human being, emphasizing the balance between body, soul, and ethical action. Core Islamic concepts *nafs al-ammarah*, *nafs al-lawwamah*, and *nafs al-mutma'innah* are explored to demonstrate the inner struggle for moral refinement and spiritual growth.

Keywords: Indigenous Epistemologies, Ubuntu, Buen Vivir, Two-Eyed Seeing, Spiritual Cosmology.

The chapter also discusses *tazkiyah* (purification of the self) as a pathway to societal well-being and justice. Prophetic traditions are examined for their ethical emphasis on self-awareness, community responsibility, and social harmony. By bridging philosophical and Islamic thought, the chapter proposes a unified framework that sees the human as both a moral agent and a spiritual being. This integration deepens the discourse on identity, ethics, and collective responsibility, offering a foundation for reimagining education, advocacy, and human rights in diverse cultural contexts.

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Philosophical anthropology, at its most basic level, deals with the human condition. This simple statement precedes an area

of exploration that is immensely complicated, diverse, and far-reaching. Such an exploration, however, is significant and necessary. What one understands to be human critically shapes the way one lives his or her life, as it becomes the vantage point from which all else is viewed. In a more specific, academic sense, philosophical anthropology deals with the intersection of philosophy and anthropology. As a union of two variously defined fields, philosophical anthropology is perhaps most succinctly described as the philosophical quest for self-knowledge (Koo, 2007). Since philosophical inquiry attempts to examine that which is most familiar yet most taken for granted, it is reasonable that human beings what it is to be human would be at the center of philosophical reflection. In 1956, we found a ground breaker,

> *I presume that no philosopher who has attacked the philosophical idea of givenness or, to use the Hegelian term, immediacy, has intended to deny that there is a difference between inferring that something is the case and, for example, seeing it to be the case. If the term "given" referred merely to what is observed as being observed, or, perhaps, to a proper subset of the things we are said to determine by observation, the existence of "data" would be as noncontroversial as the existence of philosophical perplexities. But, of course, this just is not so. The phrase "the given" as a piece of professional-epistemological shoptalk carries a substantial theoretical commitment, and one can deny that there are "data" or that anything is, in this sense, "given." without flying in the face of reason.*
>
> *(Sellars, 1997 [1956]). Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind. Cambridge/Mass.*

Despite varying cultures, societies, religions, and languages, the self has been a central concern for humanity. How one perceives the self is essential in examining the particular moral and ethical frameworks by which he or she lives. When addressing a philosophical theme, it is important to note its relevance within contemporary society. As Western civilization has materialistically progressed, there has been a simultaneous spiritual regression and disillusionment. Thus, the philosophical and theoretical exploration of the soul and self is imperative, especially regarding Islamic teachings that pertain to these subjects. Regarding this theme, there is a need to unite philosophy and Islamic teachings by discussing the soul and self (Taufik & Abidin, 2023; Norman and Ruhullah2024; Jahangir et al., 2022; Faris, 2023; Wiranto et al.2023). The primary aim is not simply to arrive at a definitive conclusion but rather to provide ample space and opportunity for a much deeper and more thorough analysis. To begin with, the philosophical foundations of concepts such as the soul and self will be thoroughly discussed and examined. Following that, the Islamic perspective on the ideas of the soul and self will be carefully articulated and explored. Finally, the significance and implications of these discussions will be briefly elaborated upon to emphasize their importance. In today's contemporary milieu, which is increasingly globalized and interconnected, this social and theoretical exploration is essential for better understanding the diverse and multifaceted ways of being human in various cultures and societies.

PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Philosophical anthropology refers to a specialized field of inquiry that seeks to answer the fundamental question: What is man? It moves beyond the empirical concerns of the natural sciences and instead probes the ontological, ethical, and metaphysical dimensions of human existence. As a distinct academic discipline, philosophical anthropology emerged in the 20th century but has roots in ancient and medieval philosophy ranging from Aristotle's definition of man as a "rational animal" to Kant's critical question, "What is man?" as the culmination of philosophical inquiry (Cassirer, 1944; Kant, 2006 [1784]). At its core, philosophical anthropology grapples with the concepts of selfhood, subjectivity, and consciousness, recognizing that definitions of the human being shape our moral, social, and political frameworks. Thinkers such as Max Scheler and Helmuth Plessner argued that humans are "eccentric" beings, capable of self-reflection and positioned uniquely between nature and spirit (Scheler, 2009; Plessner, 2019). According to Scheler, the human is not merely a biological or rational entity, but a spiritual being whose values and behaviors stem from inner moral awareness and self-transcendence.

Despite divergences in cultural and philosophical contexts, the question of selfhood remains central. For instance, in many Western traditions, the self is perceived as autonomous, individualized, and internally coherent. In contrast, Asian and African philosophical systems often emphasize the relational self, grounded in community, harmony, and shared being (Ames & Hall, 2001; Wiredu, 1996). In Confucian philosophy, the self is seen as dynamically formed through familial and

societal roles, not in isolation but as a nexus of relationships (Tu, 1985). Similarly, in African thought, especially among Akan philosophers, personhood is something that must be achieved through moral participation in community life (Gyekye, 1992). These traditions demonstrate that philosophical anthropology is far from static or monolithic. Rather, it is a diverse and evolving field where "the self" is theorized through various cultural, metaphysical, and ethical lenses. Some Islamic thinkers, such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, emphasized the rational and spiritual aspects of human nature, arguing that man is distinguished by his capacity for intellect (*ʿaql*) and proximity to the divine (Nasr, 2006; Black, 2008). In Sufi metaphysics, the self (*nafs*) undergoes stages of purification, suggesting that human identity is not fixed but becomes realized through spiritual refinement and ethical struggle (Chittick, 2000).

Such contrasting interpretations of selfhood and consciousness, whether individualistic, relational, or spiritual, are not just abstract concepts. They carry significant implications for how we understand moral agency, educational goals, interpersonal ethics, and social organization. As Koo (2007) notes, how we conceptualize the human person determines how we design social institutions and evaluate human behavior. Similarly, ل. م. دا سن (2018) argues that anthropological models of the self-influence broader understandings of subjectivity, freedom, and responsibility. In sum, the theoretical foundations of philosophical anthropology reveal a rich tapestry of thought traditions, each addressing core human concern's identity, morality, knowledge, and destiny. By mapping these conceptual landscapes, we are better equipped to appreciate

the cultural and historical variability in how humanity understands itself. These insights set the stage for a deeper engagement with Islamic perspectives on the soul, self, and human purpose.

Historical Roots and Evolution of Philosophical Anthropology

This subsection explores philosophical anthropology's historical trajectory, emphasizing critical periods of development. It begins by tracing the foundations of anthropological thought in ancient civilizations, moving through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and ending with modern philosophy. Key figures in the development of anthropological thought across these critical periods are highlighted. The self and concept of the self are examined as philosophical problems (Koo, 2007). An analysis of influential thinkers illustrates how understanding of the self has changed from early philosophy to contemporary debates. The interplay between philosophy and cultural narratives is examined in two debated philosophical texts: Confessions and Discourse on Method. Philosophical anthropology investigates what it means to be human, exploring human nature and the relationship between body and soul. Soul and self are deeply examined and compared concepts in philosophical anthropology. Understanding of the soul and self has changed over time, so the philosophy of soul and self in philosophical anthropology is situated in its historical context. In doing so, a distinct culture. The influences that shaped the ideas of soul and self are revealed. Philosophical anthropology is contextualized within broader philosophical movements, showing how its evolution compounds important shifts in understanding. As a subfield of philosophy, anthropological

thought is examined from the emergence of the concept 'philosophical anthropology' in early nineteenth-century German philosophy to the present day. Important historical backdrops are sketched out so that substantive issues in philosophical anthropology are examined and debated. In examining philosophical debates, the historical contexts of the debates are also considered. In this way, the philosophy of soul and self in philosophical anthropology is enriched and broadened beyond the scope of contemporary debates.

Key Concepts: Self, Consciousness, and Moral Agency

Philosophical anthropology, as an inquiry into the nature of being human, engages with the most essential and intricate concepts of philosophy. Within Western philosophical traditions, the principal concepts of philosophical anthropology include self, consciousness, and moral agency. Hence, these concepts are introduced as the key parts of this chapter. The nature of 'self has been one of the most crucial yet complicated subjects in philosophy from the very beginning. In the context of Western philosophy, numerous philosophical discourses have elaborated on the characteristics of the self-found in their diverse definitions, such as 'a simple indivisible immaterial substance,' personal identity through 'memory,' 'transcendental apperception,' or confused self-notion as a 'bundle of perceptions.' Despite these variations, it can be argued that some fundamental features are mostly shared by these philosophical definitions in examining what is human: individuality, interiority, and permanence through change. On the one hand, the social, collective, and outward characteristics of 'self' are often discussed in the milieu of political philosophy. Here,

‘individual’ means an isolated, singular entity that is distinguishable from others as ‘one.’ Existence, identity, and reality are associated with this independence from anything or anyone else. On the other hand, the self as an individual is an inner dimension of being, reflected in terms like consciousness, mind, soul, and psychic rather than corporal characteristics. The third feature of self implies that it is not merely a momentary/accidental existence but a substantial permanence which constitutes its identity through changes in time and space (Coseru, 2019). As it is widely accepted that there is no human experience without consciousness, consciousness is carefully examined as a pivotal and problematic element in understanding human experience and identity formation. What it means to be human or to have a human ‘self’ is primarily questioned in terms of consciousness. However, it should be noted that here, consciousness is understood in a broad sense that includes both the conscious and unconscious levels of the human psyche. In philosophical thought, the critical relationship between selfhood and moral agency is discussed, recognizing that the notion of self carries ethical implications. These key concepts of philosophical anthropology are also examined in broader interpretations found in Islamic teachings. Attention is drawn to the common grounds as well as the points of divergence between philosophical and religious viewpoints on them. Hence, a comprehensive understanding of self, consciousness, and moral agency as the key concepts of philosophical anthropology should be pursued in the first place so as to clarify how they interact with each other in philosophical thought.

The Debate Between Individualism and Collectivism

The territory of philosophical anthropology since its birth has been occupied by the debate between individualism and collectivism. With diverse nuances, both perspectives have embroiled social theorists and philosophers until today. A plethora of terms have been employed to denote the self or person to society, such as "individual," "self," "subject," "ego," "collective self," "communal self," and "social self," which either typify the contextual aspect of society or highlight the isolated quality of selfhood (Morgan, 1970; Taylor, 1989). Nonetheless, individualism and collectivism are the two broadest possible alternatives, both of which have received their share of support and criticisms, along with notable implications, particularly for the concept of self (Lukes, 1973; Triandis, 1995). In its simplest form, individualism conceives of the individual as existing before and independent of society, while collectivism stresses the interconnectedness and embeddedness of individuals within social contexts (Geertz, 1973; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). This grand debate has been staked in the literature of social philosophy or social theory, not only contesting the ownership of the social, but more fundamentally, shaping the moral considerations of social norms (Rawls, 1971; Sandel, 1982). From moral individualism to ethical collectivism, and vice versa, philosophical critics have long struggled to circumscribe either perspective for determining personal responsibility or evaluating good and bad in social ethics (MacIntyre, 1984; Etzioni, 1995). Proponents of individualism have often been challenged by the "free-rider" problem, which also exposes a vulnerability within collectivist frameworks—namely, the difficulty of assigning personal blame in deviant

collectives, such as organized criminal rings (Feinberg, 1970; Pettit, 2007). Inversely, if social arrangements are presumed to be perfect, individuals may be morally absolved of wrongdoing, prompting concerns about how to engage with tyrants or offenders in society (Kymlicka, 2002). These philosophical puzzlements cannot be wholly resolved within the frameworks of individualism or collectivism alone, as both approaches generate paradoxes when applied to questions of justice, agency, and responsibility (Miller, 2001). Nevertheless, scholars have proposed intermediary approaches, such as factionalist representations of collective agency or models that adjust conceptions of moral agency beyond strict dichotomies (Gilbert, 1990; List & Pettit, 2011). The continuing relevance of these paradigms for contemporary social philosophy is undeniable, especially in light of current issues concerning community, social exclusion, and the moral foundation of personal responsibility, most of which are still debated within the individualism–collectivism schema (Oyserman et al., 2002; Sandel, 2009). Social practices, in this light, are increasingly theorized in terms of local arrangements, negotiated conventions, and collective norms, indicating the gradual reinstatement of a shared, pluralistic understanding of the social.

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON SOUL AND SELF

Shifting focus from Western philosophical anthropology, it is important to offer Islamic teachings regarding the soul (Ruh) and the self (Nafs). Soul and self-teachings are significant from a philosophical perspective because they speak of human identity.

Figure 2.1: The Times of India, June 25, 2025

This image visually embodies the concept of inner spiritual energy, often associated with the heart center or anāhata chakra in yogic traditions. The radiant blue light symbolizes the awakening of the subtle body, a core theme in spiritual anthropology and embodied epistemologies (Kakar, 1991). In Sufi metaphysics, this glowing center corresponds to the qalb (heart), the seat of divine presence (Schimmel, 1975). The purple and blue aura evokes an expanded consciousness, signifying that the self is not isolated but interconnected with a larger, transcendent field (Kleinman, 2006). Such visuals affirm the view that the body is a sacred site of spiritual knowledge, healing, and memory, challenging Western dualisms that separate mind, body, and soul (Csordas, 1994). In indigenous and mystical cosmologies, energy is not metaphorical but a lived

experience, reinforcing the legitimacy of embodied spiritual knowledge as central to healing and being.

These teachings enlighten philosophy with Islamic perspectives on the soul and the self. According to cultural contexts, the Qur'anic scripture's exegesis or interpretation gives different nuances, such as in the interpretations of. The Sufi interpretation of Ibn Arabi also brings a different accent. With all related differences in interpreting the Qur'an, the core ideas must resonate with identical themes. The soul and the self are central themes in the Qur'an. These two themes are relevant to one's behavior, especially ethical conduct in society (Muhammad Hasbi, 2016). As the word of God, the soul, and the self-teachings must have universal notions, though cultural contexts shape them. In Philosophy, the soul and the self are discussed in the broader theme of philosophical anthropology. According to the Qur'an, God created a human being complete with a soul (Ruh), human awareness of God's creation, and a self (Nafs) as the center of moral agency and responsibility. The Nafs concept is discussed in three broad sub-discussions: The Qur'anic notion of Nafs, the analogy of Nafs in, and the classification of Nafs. Philosophically, the Qur'anic concept of Nafs enlightens the notion of the self as a metaphysical understanding of the spiritual dimension(s) in human existence. The self is beyond biological existence; the self is a sign of God (Ayatullah) imbued with divine qualities that distinguish humans from other creations. Although they accentuate different contextual backgrounds, the core ideas resonate with the same vision. emphasizes the political dimension of Nafs, while focusing on the cultural aspect of Nafs. Moreover, the prophetic traditions

nurture human self-awareness. Nafs understanding as the self is vital for ethical conduct in society. This discourse socially emphasizes communal ties on the importance of being aware of one's Nafs and other Nafs. The Nafs concept as the self-enriches philosophical discourse on the self and its implications on behavior and ethics. This is prudently important in the globalized world of post-modernism amidst religious fundamentalism and extreme violence. Religion must bring peace to humanity instead of being the cause of conflict. However, interpretation can creatively nurture religious values or dangerously distort them. Cultural contexts shape religious interpretation; therefore, it is essential to acknowledge diverse interpretations within the same religious tradition.

Qur'anic Teachings on the Nafs (Self) and Ruh (Soul)

Nafs (the self) and Ruh (the soul) constitute the cornerstone of philosophical anthropology in Islamic thought. The way one understands Nafs and Ruh will determine one's identity and purpose in life. This exploration attempts to look into the Qur'anic teachings concerning Nafs and Ruh in detail. In the Qur'an, Nafs is presented as something complex, which has degrees of consciousness and moral disposition. According to the Qur'an, there are three levels of Nafs. The first is Nafs al-ammārah (the commanding self), the lowest level of Nafs, which inclines towards evil. As God says in the Qur'an, "Surely the Nafs of a person incites (him) to evil." The second is Nafs al-lawwāmāh (the self-reproaching self), which feels regret over its wrongdoings or moral lapses. This Nafs has a higher moral disposition as it criticizes itself and strives to actualize its goodness. The third is Nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah or Nafs al-

rāḍiyah (the tranquil self), the inherently good self, which is pacified by God's remembrance. When one has attained this Nafs, God will be pleased with him and he will enter Paradise. In addition to degrees of Nafs, this self is also ambiguous. According to the Qur'anic narrative, human beings are created in the best stature. Yet, this noble creation can sink to the lowest of the low because of its wrongdoings. In this context, Nafs also refers to the personal self that encloses one's character, uniqueness, and dignity. Therefore, Nafs is intricately woven with one's moral disposition, either elevating or degrading human dignity (Muhammad Hasbi, 2016; Hasbi, 2018). Conversely, Ruh is what God blew into Adam and made him a living being. It is the divine essence within human beings that distinguishes human from non-human creatures, placing them in a higher degree of creation. The intervention of Ruh is the momentous factor of human creation. Adam was created from clay, and then, God ordered the angels to prostrate him after He blew into him His Ruh. The Qur'an stresses the superiority of Adam (humans) over the angels by virtue of this divine gift. Angels, as God's obedient creatures, do not possess this Ruh, therefore being in a lower rank compared to humans. Consequently, this Ruh also makes human beings unique among God's creation. In addition, the Qur'an emphasizes the greatness of God by the given gift of reason to human beings and the command to name the objects. This Ruh grants humanity a greater understanding of the spiritual reality than the angels and the jinn who were created from smokeless fire. As a consequence, this gift of Ruh contains both bounteous and perilous implications for human beings. By bringing a part of Himself (the divine) into humans, God then establishes the covenant of His Lordship over them.

Prophetic Traditions on Self-awareness and Social Justice

The second set of propositions comprises the traditions which advocate self-awareness (nafs bil marafah) and social justice (adl-i ijtima'i). In the message of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad undoubtedly played the central role in revealing the teachings of the religion profoundly. Nonetheless, his influence could be seen in the prophetic traditions (Hadith) as well, or the recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. The compilation and preservation of Hadith could be seen as an effort to safeguard the message of Islam beyond the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. Conscious of the religious and textual rootedness of Hadith, the traditions concerning the soul might be explored within the religious framework. Moreover, with the resurgence of interest in ethics, the prophetic traditions might offer rich resources for the discussion on ethical conduct, moral agency, and character formation. Nevertheless, the Hadith literature is not merely religious. Some of the traditions might be considered as philosophical propositions concerning the nature of the human self and its ethical responsibility (ZA & Masbur, 2016). The first sub-proposition discusses nafs bil marafah (self-awareness) regarding individual moral responsibilities (hukm-i fard). Unlike God-consciousness (taqwa-i fard), which is viewed as a means to achieve spiritual and ethical maturity, the awareness of soul (nafs bil marafah) emphasizes the individual aspect of human self in becoming an accountable creature of God. Both propositions link the religious with the philosophical, in which the soul is viewed as the centre of knowledge and moral agency. The second sub-proposition discusses adl-i ijtima'i (social justice) concerning collective

moral responsibilities (hukm-i wajib). Unlike the philosophical discussions on social justice that focus on the collective aspect of individual actions, the traditions of justice emphasize the wider impacts of individual actions. Moreover, the discussion on justice highlights the importance of community (ummah) to fulfil the sense of empathy (rahamat) exposed in the prophetic messages. While the Hadith might be understood as the religious discourse addressing social issues and collective actions, these traditions might also be interpreted as the philosophical disposition on community welfare.

Spiritual Growth: Tazkiyah (Purification) and Its Social Implications

The word Tazkiyah (Arabic: تزكية) derives from the root words Zakat (Arabic: زكاة) and Zakiy (Arabic: زكي), which conceptually mean "purification", "growth", and "development". In the Qur'an, Tazkiyah is generally defined as purification. However, Tazkiyah also has a wider meaning, namely growth or development, as found in the Qur'an where the word Zakiy is used to refer to the growth of a plant or tree. In the social context, Zakat means property that has been purified and is expected to grow and develop. This dual meaning of purification and growth is also reflected in the understanding of Tazkiyah (Indra, 2018). Therefore, Tazkiyah can be interpreted as purifying and growing the soul from destructive characteristics (vices) to praiseworthy characteristics (virtues). Destructive characters such as being greedy, angry, and envious must be eradicated and cultivated with virtuous characters through intellectual, emotional, and spiritual education so that one attains personal well-being (sa'adah) as well as communal well-being (falah). In Islamic

thought, Tazkiyah is regarded as the main foundation in the inner development of the self to achieve happiness (sa'adah) and inner peace (tranquility). This tranquility is a reflection of the health of the soul or self. Therefore, in the Qur'anic perspective, the health of the self is highly determined by the degree of Tazkiyah. The self that can purify itself (Tazkiyah) will attain happiness, while the self that is neglectful of Tazkiyah will be doomed. In the process of Tazkiyah, Tadzakkur (self-reflection) is imperative to recognize the self as a moral being and to acknowledge the presence of God, the Creator, whom one must devote oneself to to comply with God's guidance. This self-recognition enables one to realize the importance of ethical behavior towards God (habl min Allah) as well as towards fellow human beings and the environment (habl min al-nâs), based on the principles of compassion (rahmah) and justice (‘adl) ((Abdul) Ghofar et al., 2018).

INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND ISLAM

Recently, philosophical anthropology, often referred to as the philosophy of the self, has received considerable, perhaps even exceptional, attention from philosophers across both the analytic and continental traditions. This paper will adeptly focus on several key topics within this growing and dynamic area of philosophical research that may be of particular interest in enriching and advancing the discussion of selfhood in Islam. In a broad sense, philosophical anthropology is primarily concerned with the understanding of human nature, exploring the complexities and intricacies of what it means to be human. Although the question regarding human nature seems relatively straightforward at first glance, it inevitably

gives rise to a multitude of challenging issues that warrant serious reflection. Following some thoughtful attempts to clarify the purpose and scope of philosophical anthropology, attention will next shift to contemporary discussions of the self and the nuanced concept of personal identity that have emerged. The aim is to elucidate how particular philosophical concerns centered around the self might resonate deeply with, and be effectively expanded by, rich Islamic teachings concerning the soul (nafs) and the self (ahli). This exploration will thoughtfully consider the ethical parallels that emerge, as both philosophical systems and religious doctrines voice similar and profound concerns about morality, existence, and the pursuit of the good life. While acknowledging the inherent differences in approach and methodology, there is a concentrated focus on how the various questions arising from philosophical inquiry might significantly deepen an understanding of the core Islamic principles that touch on the profound topics of the soul and the self.

Table 2.1: Islamic Teachings and Philosophical Anthropology

Section	Key Themes	Subtopics	References
Qur'anic Teachings on the Nafs (Self) and Ruh (Soul)	Understanding the concept of *Nafs* (self) and *Ruh* (soul) from the Qur'anic perspective.	- The different levels of *Nafs*: *Nafs al-Ammarah* (Commanding Self), *Nafs al-Lawwama* (Self-reproaching Self), and *Nafs al-Mutma'innah* (Tranquil Self). - *Ruh* as a divine gift and the essence of human consciousness. - The role of *Nafs* and *Ruh* in determining	**Siregar et al., 2024; Norman and Ruhullah, 2024; Yilmaz, 2024**

		moral behavior and ethical decision-making. - How the Qur'an emphasizes self-awareness and accountability.	
Prophetic Traditions on Self-awareness and Social Justice	Examining how Hadith and Prophetic actions shape the understanding of self-awareness and social ethics.	- The Prophet's teachings on introspection and self-discipline (*Muhasabah*). - *Taqwa* (God-consciousness) as a guiding principle for moral self-improvement. - *Adl* (justice) and *Ihsan* (excellence) in individual and communal responsibilities. - The role of *Shura* (consultation) in collective decision-making and social justice. - How the Prophet emphasized balance between personal spirituality and societal engagement.	**Norman and Ruhullah, 2024; Alfian et al., 2024**
Spiritual Growth: Tazkiyah (Purification) and Its Social Implications	The process of self-purification (*Tazkiyah al-Nafs*) and its transformative impact on personal and collective ethics.	- *Tazkiyah* as a lifelong spiritual process. - The integration of self-purification with social responsibilities. - The role of fasting (*Sawm*), charity (*Zakat*), and prayer (*Salat*) in *Tazkiyah*. - *Murāqabah* (self-vigilance) and	**Surbakti et al., 2024; Raimi, 2024**

		Mujāhadah (spiritual struggle) in refining character. - The societal benefits of self-discipline in creating an ethical community.	
Intersections Between Philosophy and Islam	How Islamic philosophy enriches classical and contemporary philosophical anthropology.	- Ethical parallels between Islamic thought and Western philosophy. - *Fitrah* (innate disposition) as a fundamental concept in understanding human nature. - The balance between *Aql* (intellect) and *Qalb* (heart) in decision-making. - Contributions of scholars like Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Ghazali to philosophical anthropology. - The role of Islamic epistemology in contemporary ethical dilemmas.	**Khan-Wise, 2024**

Table 1.1: The intersections of Islamic teachings and philosophical anthropology, focusing on the concepts of Nafs (self) and Ruh (soul) in the Qur'an, emphasizing moral accountability and self-awareness (Siregar et al., 2024). Prophetic traditions highlight self-discipline, justice, and ethical conduct in both personal and social spheres (Norman and Ruhullah, 2024). Tazkiyah (purification) is presented as a spiritual process that fosters individual growth and societal harmony (Surbakti et al., 2024). Finally, the integration of

Islamic and Western philosophies is examined, showing ethical parallels and the contributions of classical Islamic scholars (Khan-Wise, 2024).

A concern with selfhood joins together the discussed topics and makes possible a dialogue between secular philosophical inquiries and religious doctrines. This dialogue may be fruitful, particularly given contemporary philosophical concerns about personal identity, the nature of the self, and the implications these have in a post-modern world. Recent philosophy has shown how questions of personal identity and the problem of ever-changing selves might have implications for the consideration of modern ethical dilemmas surrounding, for example, abortion or euthanasia. Questions of selfhood also have implications in the context of modern debates about immigration and the understanding of cultural and personal identity. It is hoped that the presentation will clarify how, in light of philosophical discussion, insights from Islam may enrich the discourse on selfhood (Muslich Rizal Maulana, 2017). At the same time, it is acknowledged that the melding together of different disciplines will raise possible challenges and criticisms. For instance, objections might be raised against the bringing together of philosophy and religion or, more pointedly, against the very necessity of such a convergence. Finally, issues might be raised about the differences in approach and methodology between the two fields and how such differences might preclude any meaningful collaboration (ZA & Masbur, 2016).

Ethical Parallels Between Philosophical and Islamic Worldviews

Moral philosophy, whether philosophically or religiously motivated, seeks to analyze how one ought to act and live. Hence, a philosophical worldview and an Islamic worldview must both engage in discussions that approach similar and significant ethical questions. The various pressing questions surrounding morality, justice, and what truly constitutes the good life, alongside humanity's place within this complex framework, serve as fundamental starting points for both traditions. As a result, they must grapple with the profound and fundamental issues of delineating good and bad, identifying justice and injustice, as well as addressing caring and neglecting, and understanding compassion and cruelty, not to mention the critical concept of dignity. It is precisely at this intersection that a shared ethical horizon becomes visible and more pronounced. From a philosophical perspective, the vast Western philosophical canon is thoroughly examined; specifically, the diverse ethical theories encompassing Socratic philosophy, the notable ideas of Kant, the principles of utilitarianism, and the various approaches emerging from the 20th century are analyzed in depth. These theories have been shown to possess elements that harmonize remarkably well with Islamic teachings, leading to a richer understanding of ethics that transcends cultural boundaries. Ethical alignment refers broadly to how different conceptualizations of the good life, anthropological understandings, and moral philosophical considerations converge on the same basic ethical values (Al-Aidaros et al., 2013). Contemporarily contested moral questions such as acts of terror, human dignity, animal rights, the beginning and end of life, and limits to freedom are

examined, revealing how philosophical and Islamic perspectives speak to one another.

The Profound Impact of Islamic Teachings on Enriching and Deepening the Understanding of Philosophical Anthropology

Discussion and exploration of the nature of humanity, understood as the self, have been central pursuits in philosophy. While it is often considered a subtopic within the broader discipline of philosophy, examination of the self, in the philosophical sense, yields fundamental questions that shape and influence discourse in diverse philosophical realms. This deep and expansive inquiry into the very nature of the self takes on a particularly significant and impactful role in the rich tradition of Islamic intellectual thought. Although the term "philosophical anthropology" may be relatively novel and contemporary, the endeavors and explorations that are associated with this concept are deeply and historically entrenched within the vast continuum of Islamic thought and scholarship. The relationship between the self and the broader context of existence raises essential issues that resonate through centuries of intellectual traditions across various cultures. As a living tradition, philosophical anthropology, or its Islamic equivalent, is of great relevance today as well. Additionally, it can be argued that philosophical anthropology possesses dimensions that, while not absent in other disciplines, are more prominently foregrounded within this particular discourse. Contemplating the significant place of philosophical anthropology, or the equivalent discourse that exists within Islamic thought, may truly engender profound reflections on issues that are of paramount significance and

importance in the contemporary world and society. Why are the concepts of the self, the soul, and the broader notion of humanity explored and discussed so extensively and thoroughly across various traditions? What ultimately emerges through such thoughtful explorations and investigations into these deep topics? How might Islamic teachings and perspectives contribute to or enrich the already complex field of philosophical anthropology? What is it about the Islamic conception of the self that invites and demands sustained philosophical consideration, deep reflection, and scholarly inquiry? What unique insights does the Islamic philosophical understanding of the self-bring to the wider disciplines of both philosophy and philosophical anthropology? What can the rich and nuanced Islamic discourse surrounding the self and philosophical selfhood contribute to effectively addressing the pressing moral crises that permeate contemporary philosophy today? Like the often-neglected dimension of the moral philosophical self in Western philosophical traditions, is there a moral philosophical self within the Islamic tradition that might correspondingly shed significant light on the intricate themes of self, soul, and the multifaceted nature of humanity? Such questions concern the wider world of philosophical anthropology, beyond the limitations of individual or specific worldviews (Qorbani, 2014). The hope is to probe some of these questions preliminarily throughout this essay. It is argued and posited that the nature of the self as found in Islamic thought contains unique insights and, in some respects, unparalleled. Moreover, and importantly, much of what is found in Islamic thought vis-à-vis the nature of the self revolves around considerations concerning the self's place in, or relationship to, the universe. (Faruque, 2021; Koca, 2024)

There are also contemplations, reflections, and considerations regarding the moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the self that are either neglected or overlooked entirely in contemporary secular philosophical approaches and frameworks. Additionally, it will be suggested that certain aspects of the Islamic discourse on philosophical anthropology enhance and enrich the discussion and considerations within philosophical anthropology, broadly defined (ZA & Masbur, 2016).

There are key teachings found in Islamic thought that deepen and enrich philosophical anthropology as it has been, and is, conceived in the broader and wider context. These insights found within Islamic thought may even be considered as necessities that must be highlighted and brought into the fore if philosophical anthropology is to be adequately and holistically construed. For instance, the Islamic notions of tazkiyah and the welfare of the community underscore that which is ethical and morally good, (Siregar et al.2024; Norman and Ruhullah2024; Yilmaz, 2024; Alfian et al.2024; Surbakti et al.2024; Raimi, 2024; Khan-Wise, 2024) which is not necessarily the case in philosophical anthropology, whether in the past or in the present. Here, and within the broad context of contemporary philosophical anthropology, a communal and critical capacity pertains to the wider community of all humanity as a whole, rather than being limited to individual or personal communities. While individual communities are indeed critical and valuable in their own right, they are not intended to serve as a critique or judgment of other communities that may be based on differing worldviews, beliefs, or perspectives. Instead, what we have here is an acknowledgment that the communal discourse, particularly at

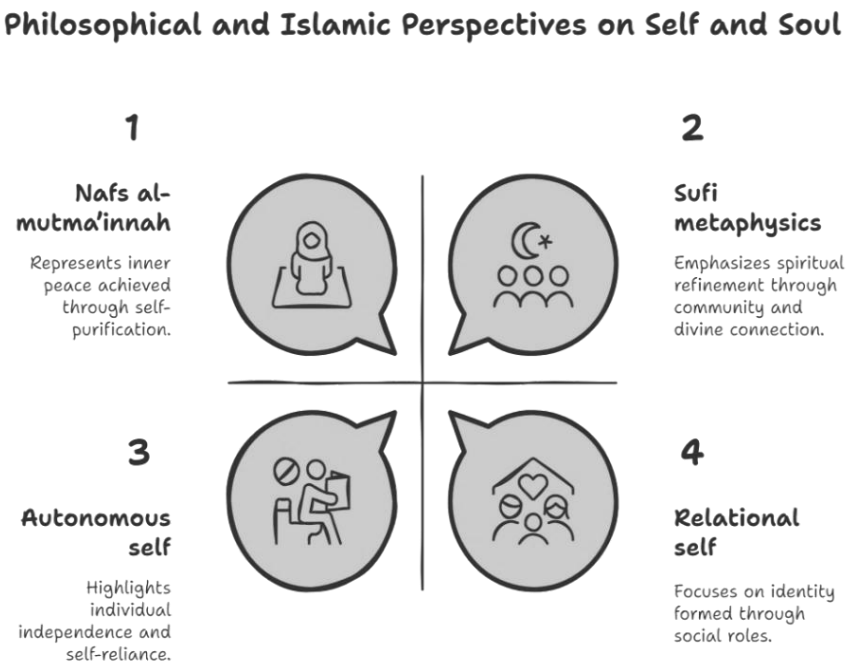
a level that is most general or broad, is not only necessary but also crucial for the purposes of development and understanding within society. Such discourse significantly fosters connections among people and promotes a richer engagement with the multiple narratives, diverse experiences, and varied cultural backgrounds that ultimately shape our collective human identity and experience. Through these interactions, we can appreciate the vast tapestry of human existence and cultivate a deeper sense of empathy and respect for one another.

Philosophical inquiries into selfhood and its purpose may very well be expanded and enlarged by considering the discourse of selfhood in a particular religious framework. The discussion may be better understood as a "contribution" that helps ensure philosophical anthropology does not become too narrowly construed, but rather, allows for broader facets of the human condition and the questions it engenders to be considered. Alternatively, philosophical anthropology may be regarded as a discipline that attempts to apprehend and comprehend the self through philosophical discourse. If philosophical anthropology is regarded in this manner, then the self, soul, or humanity cannot but be the focus of religious considerations, as they speak to that which is most fundamental and primary in disputation and consideration. (Reichenbach, 2021). Further, suppose philosophical inquiries into selfhood and its purpose can be better understood as having been shaped by paradigmatic examples. In that case, the philosophical considerations, reflections, and discourses on selfhood in the Islamic tradition may be regarded as a robust and comprehensive framework that ensures many dimensions of the self are accounted for.

Lastly, it is worth noting that although the focus in this particular instance is upon an Islamic articulation of philosophical anthropology with respect to humanity, thought, and reason, the broader hope is to illuminate and highlight that which is most fundamental and primary to human existence, and in so doing, ensure that diverse viewpoints contribute to illuminating the condition of existence. Through outlining and rendering that which is central, essential, and rudimentary to things, it is hoped that consideration will be given to particular philosophical inquiries into human existence, with attention to the questions, doubts, and uncertainties that arise in the most personal of regards, and that that which most comprehensively addresses such inquiries be considered. Ultimately, it is hoped that engagement with the potential discourse in a particular worldview fosters deeper comprehension of the discourse on the self, humanity, and existence more generally and invites further contemplation and reflection upon the particular discourse itself.

CONCLUSION

The intricate dialogue between philosophical anthropology and Islamic teachings on the soul (ruh) and self (nafs), offering a cross-cultural and cross-philosophical perspective on the question of human nature. Philosophical anthropology, with its foundational inquiry into what it means to be human, provides rich frameworks for understanding selfhood, consciousness, and moral agency across traditions.



Western discourses have often emphasized individuality, autonomy, and rationality, while Islamic thought, especially through scholars like Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Mulla Sadra,

presents the human being as a spiritual and moral agent on a journey of purification and divine proximity. The soul is not merely a metaphysical concept in Islam, but the center of ethical struggle, knowledge, and inner transformation. The debate between individualism and collectivism further enriched this chapter by showing how the human self is conceptualized in relation to society and community. Islamic anthropology, with its emphasis on balance between body, soul, and intellect, invites a rethinking of education, ethics, and development rooted in divine purpose and moral responsibility. This chapter ultimately underscores that a spiritually grounded philosophical anthropology is essential to reclaiming the fullness of the human experience in today's fragmented world.

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CHAPTER THREE
THEATRE AS A MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND CHANGE

The role of theatre as a reflective and transformative medium for promoting social solidarity, ethical consciousness, and human rights within the framework of Islamic teachings and philosophical anthropology. It begins by highlighting the historical significance of theatre in moral instruction and its power to provoke empathy, self-reflection, and social change. Theatre is presented not only as an art form but as a space for engaging audiences in critical dialogue about justice, oppression, and collective healing. The chapter emphasizes how Islamic ethical principles such as adl (justice), rahma (compassion), and tawhid (unity) can enrich theatrical narratives and performances, guiding both creators and audiences toward spiritual and ethical awarenesss.

Keywords: Reptilian Brain, Kundalini, Embodied Spirituality, Shadow Work (Jungian Psychology), Nafs Tazkiyah (Sufi Self-Purification).

It draws attention to inclusive theatre practices, especially those involving marginalized communities, and discusses how storytelling can humanize social issues and foster cross-cultural understanding. Case studies of Islamic and indigenous theatrical traditions, particularly in South and Southeast Asia, illustrate how performance can defend cultural identity while addressing contemporary injustices. Ultimately, the chapter argues that theatre, when grounded in spiritual and ethical values, becomes a powerful tool for advocacy, education, and transformation, allowing the stage to serve as a platform for healing, solidarity, and the reimagining of a just and compassionate society.

INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE AS A MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Theatre has long been a powerful instrument for social transformation. For centuries, community and professional theatres alike have raised awareness about pertinent social issues in their local areas, galvanizing communities to take action. From control to progression, mental health to sexuality, migration to racism, countless social issues have been addressed through the theatrical lens. It is this unique capacity of theatre to both entertain and engage audiences psycho-physically that allows for reflection and dialogue on societal encounters. The medium's ability to catalyze curiosity and a desire for social change currently feels more important than ever (Hageman, 2017). Theatre has long been a powerful medium for fostering social solidarity and instigating alteration. By bringing communities together to share in collective experiences, theatre not only reflects societal issues but also challenges audiences to engage

critically with them. This chapter delves into the multifaceted role of theatre as a catalyst for social cohesion and transformation, exploring its historical context, methodologies, and contemporary applications. Throughout history, theatre has mirrored societal structures, beliefs, and conflicts. In ancient Greece, for instance, plays often addressed moral dilemmas and civic responsibilities, serving as a forum for public discourse. Similarly, during periods of political upheaval, theatrical performances have been employed to question authority and inspire collective action. This tradition underscores theatre's inherent capacity to both reflect and influence social dynamics. A seminal framework in understanding theatre's role in social modification is Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed." Developed in the 1970s, this methodology empowers marginalized communities to express their experiences and explore solutions to oppression through performance. Boal's techniques, such as Forum Theatre, encourage audience participation, blurring the line between spectators and actors. This participatory approach transforms passive viewers into "spect-actors," who actively engage in dialogues about social issues and potential reforms. Theatre serves as a mirror to society, reflecting its virtues and vices. Dramatizing real-life scenarios, it allows audiences to confront uncomfortable truths and consider alternative perspectives. For example, plays addressing issues like racism, gender inequality, economic disparity and various problems like these prompt viewers to reflect on these difficulties within their own communities. This reflective quality fosters understanding and empathy, laying the groundwork for collective solidarity. One of theatre's most potent functions is its ability to amplify voices that are often silenced. Community-based theatre projects provide platforms for underrepresented groups to share their narratives, thereby humanizing abstract communal issues. By bringing these stories to the forefront, theatre encounters dominant

discourses and promotes inclusivity. For instance, the National Black Theatre's initiatives in Harlem create spaces for Black artists to express their own stories, fostering cultural pride and community cohesion. Interactive theatre practices, such as Forum Theatre, engage audiences directly in the performance, encouraging them to propose and enact solutions to the concerns presented. This participatory model not only democratizes the theatrical experience but also empowers individuals to envision and work towards societal change. By involving communities in the storytelling process, theatre becomes a rehearsal for real-life action, promoting agency and collective problem-solving.

Case Studies: Theatre in Action

Recent productions exemplify theatre's role in addressing contemporary social questions. "Mariupol Drama," for instance, recounts the harrowing experiences of individuals from Mariupol during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. By sharing these personal narratives, the play fosters global awareness and harmony with those affected by conflict. Similarly, Emmet Kirwan's "Dublin Oldschool" highlights concerns like homelessness and drug addiction in Ireland, challenging audiences to defy and address these pressing societal complications.

1. Theatre of the Oppressed – Brazil

Developed by Augusto Boal, this participatory theatre method empowers marginalized communities to rehearse real-life struggles and explore solutions. In Rio de Janeiro's favelas, it has been used to address police violence, racism, and housing issues (Boal, 1979). Participants become "spect-actors," shifting from passive observers to active change-makers.

2. Shong Jatra – Bangladesh

A traditional street theatre performed during Chaitra Sankranti, Shong Jatra uses satire and masks to address political corruption, inequality, and local concerns. It serves as a communal critique and reflection tool, engaging rural audiences through humor and folk aesthetics (Ahmed, 2001).

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3. Freedom Theatre – Palestine

Located in Jenin Refugee Camp, this theatre uses drama therapy and storytelling to help youth deal with trauma and resistance. It stages performances on occupation, gender, and human rights. The theatre also trains local actors, making it a grassroots model of resilience through art (Mikdadi, 2019).

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4. ActNow Theatre – Australia

This socially engaged theatre group focuses on anti-racism, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate justice. It uses interactive performances and community-based workshops to co-create narratives with marginalized groups. Projects like "Virtual Intimacy" address mental health and digital ethics among young people (ActNow Theatre, 2023).

'The Grām Theatre Movement' in Bangladesh emerged as a powerful cultural initiative to decentralize theater and bring it to rural areas, making it accessible to the larger population. Rooted in the ethos of communal awareness and empowerment, this movement began in the 1970s as a response to the dominance of urban-centric theater. By leveraging the simplicity of indigenous

and the richness of Bangladeshi countryside life, the ‘Grām Theatre Movement’ sought to create a participatory art form that vibrated with rural communities (Rahman, 2008). This movement emphasized the use of theater as a medium for addressing local issues such as poverty, gender inequality, education, and so on. By incorporating indigenous performance styles like Yātrā and Baul music, it maintained cultural authenticity while fostering critical thinking among audiences. Additionally, it empowered local performers by providing them with platforms to showcase their talent and tell their stories (Ahmed, 2015). The Grām Theatre Movement not only democratized theater but also contributed to preserving Bangladesh's rich cultural heritage. Its enduring influence is evident in the continued engagement of grassroots theater groups that prioritize community participation and collective transformation (Khan, 2019). This movement remains a testament to the transformative power of art in fostering discussion and building inclusive societies.

Theatre not only raises awareness but also can influence policy and public perception. By bringing social issues to the stage, theatre can sway public opinion and, in some cases, prompt legislative action. For example, plays that highlight systemic injustices can lead to increased public discourse and have an effect on policymakers to enact reforms. This underscores the potential of theatre as a tool for advocacy and societal transformation. While theatre holds significant impacts for promoting social change, nevertheless, challenges remain, such as ensuring authentic representation, avoiding the exploitation of marginalized narratives, and reaching diverse audiences are critical considerations. Moreover, the results of a theatrical production on social change can be difficult to measure, as it requires continuous engagement and evaluation. And to address aforementioned challenges, a commitment to ethical practices and

a focus on community collaboration is a prerequisite. The unique blend of storytelling, performance, and communal experience positions of a theatre make it an influential medium for fostering social solidarity and effecting transformation. Through reflecting societal matters, amplifying marginalized voices, and engaging audiences in dialogue and action, theatre contributes to the ongoing pursuit of a more just and consistent society. As contemporary examples demonstrate, the stage remains a dynamic space for challenging norms, inspiring empathy, and mobilizing communities towards collective betterment. Theatrical performances can take a myriad of forms, all of which have the potential to catalyze social change. Traditional theatrical performances, whether they are community-led or enacted by larger companies, often aim to explore common issues that currently affect humanity. However, contemporary and experimental pieces can also serve a collective purpose, with absurd storylines or avant-garde aesthetics serving to grapple with and critique social realities. Regardless of style or content, all theatrical expressions that deal with communal matters are boldly interrogated. How does theatre come into contact with social concerns, impact community interconnection and the desire for community activism? As a point of departure, there is recognition that theatre holds the potential to enact social reformation, either through directly addressing collective matters or by creating space for discussion (Leahy, 2008). The purpose of the exploration is twofold. First, it seeks to outline the theoretical frameworks that underpin the dynamic change potential of theatre, addressing the group responsibilities of both the artist and the audience. Secondly, it interrogates, through a number of practical case studies, how social concerns are addressed within theatre. A consideration of what social adjustment means in a practical context is also included. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the

broader debate on the theatre's engagement with social issues. Ultimately, this discussion hopes to inspire further creativity in the exploration of common problems through the theatrical medium.

Historical Perspectives on Theatre and Social Solidarity

Theatre has long been a medium for social solidarity, serving as both a mirror and catalyst for collective consciousness. Historically, theatre has not only reflected society but also actively contributed to shaping and unifying it. From ancient ritualistic performances in Africa and Asia to classical Greek tragedies, the theatre has provided a shared space where people come together to witness, grieve, celebrate, and act in unison (Schechner, 2002; Carlson, 2004). Performance has operated as a community ritual that binds members through collective experience and emotional resonance, often connected with political, spiritual, or ethical action (Turner, 1982). Ancient Greek theatre, particularly in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles, fostered civic dialogue and public morality through mythic storytelling, while medieval European mystery plays reinforced religious values and social order (Brockett & Hildy, 2014). In many Indigenous cultures, such as the Yoruba of Nigeria or the First Nations of Canada, performance is inseparable from communal identity and memory, forming part of oral traditions that sustain intergenerational cultural continuity (Okpewho, 1992; Taylor, 2003). In the modern era, theatre has often become a tool of resistance and solidarity. During the suffrage movement, feminist theatre was used to mobilize public opinion and challenge patriarchal norms (Dolan, 2005). Similarly, during the U.S. civil rights era, playwrights like Lorraine Hansberry and activists like the Free Southern Theater employed drama as a means of racial uplift, education, and protest (Elam, 2004). These

performances went beyond entertainment, they became acts of cultural and political engagement that shaped public discourse and collective memory.

Theatre's potential for solidarity is not limited to historical movements; even today, performances are used to challenge oppression and build community. Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed is an example of participatory performance where the audience is encouraged to become "spect-actors," actively engaging in problem-solving and envisioning alternatives to injustice (Boal, 1979). Boal's work illustrates how theatre can help individuals move from passive observation to active participation, emphasizing collective empowerment. Integral to theatre's social function is cultural memory shared, transmittable recollections of the past that help bind communities together. Cultural memory, as argued by theorists like Assmann (2011), is not only stored in texts or rituals but is dynamically recreated through performance. These narratives create a collective identity, constructing the "we" that distinguishes a community from others. Myth, symbol, and embodied storytelling serve as vehicles for this remembrance, enabling continuity between generations and reaffirming the moral order of the community (Taylor, 2003). Contemporary theatre has seen a shift in its role due to technological and cultural changes. Once a dominant form of public discourse, theatre now operates alongside mass media and digital platforms. Yet, the decline in hegemony does not signal irrelevance. Rather, in experimental, community-based, and activist spaces, theatre continues to foster participatory, affective, and dialogic forms of sociality. Such practices revive ancient functions of theatre, bringing people together, sparking conversations, and empowering action (Kershaw, 1999; Thompson, 2009). Ultimately, historical and cultural perspectives

on theatre reveal it as more than an art form; it is a civic ritual, a site of resistance, and a repository of memory. Understanding these functions equips us to see how past theatrical practices can inspire new solidarities in contemporary movements for justice and transformation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING THEATRE'S IMPACT ON SOCIETY

The theoretical frameworks have been used to examine the relationship between theatre and social impact. Various approaches (sociological, anthropological, performance studies) are outlined, with differences highlighted as necessary. The discussion of key theoretical models generally follows the same order as their introduction (theatre as catalyst, provocation, education, and community building). The relevance of the selected theories is explored, illustrating how they help unpack the complexities of theatre’s effect on societal dynamics. Coercion, invisibility, and distance are noted as theatre’s potential difficulties that could undermine its effectiveness. The desire for common transformation leads to consideration of the theatrical practice’s complications and catastrophes. Since the theories employed are not exclusive to one discipline, the interdisciplinary aspect is acknowledged. Theoretical lenses are seen as a set of tools for evaluating the successes and worries of theatre as a medium for advocacy. While the foundations of these theories are explained, a precise description of how theatre is understood and interpreted is also provided, offering a basic understanding of the influence of theatrical practice. This is essential for considering the context and application of the case studies in the second half of the proposition. The rationale for selecting specific theoretical frameworks that approach theatre differently is also outlined. The impact of theatrical representation on audiences has long been a

subject of inquiry. Historically, debates surrounding the communal effects of theatre can be divided along two poles: a belief in theatre's power to incite action and a perception of its inherently soothing qualities (Leahy, 2008). These views echo Aristotle's notions of catharsis and mimesis in Poetics. Ideally, theatre's representation (mimesis) of action and emotions leads the audience to catharsis, or purgation, and understanding. In contrast, the church fathers vehemently condemned theatre as a harmful distraction (Hageman, 2017). It was seen as a medium that seduced the audience into accepting false illustrations of reality, with the danger of learned immorality intensified for the illiterate masses. The threat posed by theatrical representation led to attempts to control its effects. Restrictions on who could write, act, and attend performances were meant to contain the power of theatre. Even so, theatre still managed to proliferate and escape regulation. From the perspective of authority, theatre's efficacy as a medium to reflect and change collective conditions necessitates a consideration of how to control and contain its effects.

Case Studies of Theatre Initiatives for Social Change

Theatre has often been pushed aside as unimportant, frivolous, or irrelevant to social considerations, but it can bring about social change and foster communal solidarity far better than more 'serious' art forms. Still, it is often dismissed as something that wouldn't matter if it disappeared forever as a 'responsible' attitude to take towards art and culture. However, in challenging those who felt theatre a waste of time, space, and energy, they noted why certain thoughts, actions, and interactions still seemed to matter, particularly their performative nature. In letting those actions coalesce into a typology of theatre initiatives for a better tomorrow, it focused on the social purposes of theatre, rather than

the many civic plays or festivals in ancient times, or community enactments. Instead, it lets what various contemporary theatre groups do when addressing pressing common matters, from inequality to discrimination, and the fragmentation of communities, coalesce into a narrative of seven different sorts of theatrical performance.

Each is being done by theatrical folks convinced that showing out the absurdities and injustices of the world in a creative, captivating, and witty fashion can lead to its improvement. The focus is not on effectively realized theatrical dreams, nor on lofty esoteric exercises in theoretical considerations of theatre and sociality, but on the real, tangible actions of those theatres and their necessity in this day and age. This dance with social cohesion and modification through theatre adds to the ongoing debates over what comprises community and sociality. Some of these initiatives famously came a cropper or were utilized for less noble purposes. But on the whole, these theatrical presentations, undertaken in a large variety of local circumstances, show how it is still possible to bring marginalized thoughts often rooted in common indigenous practices to the fore of wider considerations, bending the dominant tales ever so slightly (William Somers, 2013). The aim is to let the tales of these theatre-based missions, done in the crevices of the everyday, coalesce into an imagined form of hope for the upcoming.

The Role of Theatre in Promoting Understanding and Empathy

As a unique medium combining diverse art forms, theatre has the capacity to foster understanding and empathy among audience from various backgrounds. Theatrical performances can bridge cultural and social divides, inviting spectators on a shared journey that promotes connection and solidarity. Through stories,

spectators are encouraged to step into the lives of others, gaining a glimpse into different realities (Percuoco, 2017). While plays inherently fulfill this role to some degree, particular tensions in the narrative and production can heighten the effect, especially when audiences witness social realities far removed from their own. Theatre is capable of reflecting and shaping societal understanding at multiple levels including community representation or engagement, influencing social identity, ethical understanding of doing and wrongdoing, even as a process of healing of social trauma or establishing a problem-solving mechanism. It brings people in a shared physical and emotional space, creating a sense of belonging as live performances represents moments of collective reflection and joy. Through a performance audience can find the story rooted in specific communities and similarities with their struggles, triumphs, and traditions which often involve them in a common process, voice and experience. Individuals have an affinity to see themselves reflected on stage and to explore identities that may differ from their own, which is why a story that connects societal dimensions like race, gender, sexuality, class etc. encourage empathy and self-belongingness. In addition, by subverting or directly addressing stereotypes, theatre can connect with societal perceptions and challenge biases. Often, complex characters and/or plots can reveal the interplay of multiple phenomena of identity, fostering an understanding of how social factors intersect. This situation continues even in moments when characters in ethically challenging situations, certain performances encourage audiences to reflect on their values and choices. As a result, they have the scope to deal with sensitive issues or social taboos through social or individual level dialogues on ethical grounds in a non-confrontational way and raise critical thinking about socio-

political systems along with understanding of ethical responsibilities within a social set-up.

A theatre irrespective of being the story is comedy or tragedy is also a platform for processing social or individual trauma by sharing their stories and witnessing others similar ones. This creates a connection with one another and removes the feeling of isolation through collective understating of emotional dynamics like mourning, celebration, or reconciliation and such a process facilitates healing ranging from stage to the community. The impact of storytelling is enhanced when spectators form an emotional investment in the characters' lives. The use of character development techniques such as backstory, dialog, and physicality assist in building this investment, granting audience members access to a character's interiority. Even spectators who approach a character's story with resistance may be moved to understanding through this investment (Dewey, 2014). Immersive and participatory theatrical techniques further draw audiences in, allowing characters to invite spectators into their world, and vice versa, creating a "communal space" where reality and performance blend. Here, spectators experience a character's life directly, rather than observing from a distance, motivating them to seek understanding of viewpoints initially foreign to them. Direct engagement with characters' lived realities fosters a desire for community, and the shared experience of spectatorship allows empathetic connections to flourish. Empathy is a key precondition for the formation of societal solidarity and community. Though often seen as a positive, even innate, public force, empathy also has its limitations. As mass audience responses to tragic events reveal, empathizing with one group can lead to the exclusion and dehumanization of others. Therefore, while theatre encourages spectators to understand another's viewpoint, it is essential to consider the quality of this understanding. Research further

demonstrates that while empathetic engagement with a story facilitates community building, connection to a group also necessitates shared characteristics, such as the experience of similar trauma. Although empathy is necessary for a spectator's engagement with a social matter, the specific collective context also influences audience response. Empathy may thus serve as a vehicle for social cohesion and community-building, but the relationship between empathy and audience engagement with group issues is more complex. Certain preconditions enable audiences to empathize with the characters or social realities portrayed, yet these conditions seldom occur. Still, theatre does provide a space for the negotiation and exploration of understanding. As theatrical narratives humanize complex social concerns, performances depicting similar realities for both characters and audiences have the potential to create a shared space for dialogue about prevailing social challenges.

The Intersection of Theatre and Activism

Theatre and activism share an inherent synergy, each domain capable of informing and enhancing the other (Leahy, 2008). Theatre can act as a direct art form for political protest, social movement initiatives, and community campaigns, with various examples from around the world. In Bogotá, Colombia, "Theatre in the Park" involved actors performing straight to people queuing for public services to raise awareness about corruption in the system. In 2011 in Paris, actors of "Art and Action" allied with the "Indignant" movement, taking to the streets to perform plays against capitalism in front of banks. Worldwide opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the subsequent "à la guerre comme à la guerre" movement in France, witnessed cafes and public spaces transformed into theatres, where activists read plays against the

war, inviting people to join their actions. Recent years have seen theatre artists joining efforts with social movements, from performers in the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ to the ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. Both theatre and activism share common goals in confronting injustice, raising awareness and fostering a sense of community, working both in parallel and together. Street theatre, embedded in Bangladesh’s culture, played a significant role in raising consciousness and inspiring act. Unlike traditional plays in theatres, these performances were set up in open spaces like markets, roadside, footpaths, and university campuses, and attainment everyday people. Groups like the Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation and Dhaka Theatre used satire and symbolism to highlight concerns like corruption and oppression. Plays like "Shikar" (The Hunt) depicted General Ershad’s rule as predatory. Performers endured custody and violence, but their courage moved many. Street theatre helped unite people, making them feel part of the fight for equality. In 1990, General Ershad’s regime fell, and these cultural movements left a lasting mark on Bangladesh’s political history. Even today, street theatre leaves a sign of resistance and a recap of how art can drive transformation. In the 2011 London riots, arts organizations collaborated with police and local authorities to, in the words of the initiative’s title, “Paint the Town Calm.” Such instances of theatre in parallel with activism are more common, including on a global scale, action by ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ forums, co-founded by Augusto Boal in the 1970s, aimed at empowering communities to voice their concerns through theatre. Sometimes referred to as “Social Theatre”, these initiatives can be found even in remote villages in India, Africa, or Latin America. A more recent example is the global network of Jerzy Grotowski’s “Art as a Vehicle” seminar participants forming a “Performance for Advocacy” partnership, inviting local artists to collaborate in bringing attention to pressing issues in various communities via

the performance art genre. In 2020, a similar endeavor emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a call to “Reinvent Public Space” and inviting artists to come together with city officials to “intervene” in public spaces. All in all, such collaborations yield powerful results in addressing local grievances, and performance can become an effective tool in advocacy efforts, however, this raises the question of theatre’s responsibility in the tilt towards activism.

Ethical Considerations in Using Theatre for Social Change

The growing popularity of using theatre as a tool for collective change is often accompanied by a multitude of questions surrounding its ethical implications. Who has the right to tell certain stories? What are the responsibilities of the artist towards the community they engage with? Where is the sensitive line between representation and appropriation? These inquiries are crucial in examining the potential impact of theatre on communities and the artists who work within them. Theatre is an influential medium that can elevate voices, yet it can simultaneously silence and misrepresent them. The ethical dilemmas regarding the ownership of stories and the representation of sensitive topics are also addressed. Past experiences have revealed that sensitivity is not always considered in the creation of art, despite artists being affected by the same events as their subjects. Sometimes, the harm outweighs the good. Therefore, care should be taken not only in what they are told but also in how they are told (Dodders, 2011). The complexity of creating art responsibly is acknowledged, as there is often a clash between pragmatism and ideals. However, art changes perception, and with that change comes the obligation to affect the world

positively. Blinded by the desire to create, artists often overlook the potential harm. Nevertheless, there is a strong resolve to strive for impactful storytelling that brings attention to issues of social equity while maintaining integrity.

To examine potential repercussions, the medium in question is theatre, which can misrepresent that which it aims to support. Misrepresentation can result in the theatre working against the community it seeks to assist. Three ethical frameworks addressing ownership and representation in the creation of theatre are gone through. These frameworks are not solutions but rather guidelines that help in thinking through some of the ethical dilemmas. It is essential to keep in mind the desire for social modification when creating art and to not lose sight of the theme being told and their impact. In past experiences, there has been a strong focus on the storytelling itself but not enough on the medium through which the story is told. Theatre is a collective art form, and when the collective incorporates a community, it is necessary to consider the potential harm it could cause that very community (Sforza, 2019). Addressing the moral considerations in theatre is not to deter artists from creating socially sensible work but to bring attention to what needs deliberate care in the process. Theatre is a space for questioning the world, and questioning how responsibly that world is shaped is crucial in achieving responsible and sustainable change.

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON THEATRE FOR SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

This investigation examines the ways theatre has adapted to and been transformed by technology as a medium for social harmony. The opening question is: What is the impact of technology on theatre as a medium for social solidarity? Theatre, as an art form, has been molded by changes in available materials, styles, and

technologies throughout history (Auslander, 2008). It has also served to promote social solidarity and transformation, in a variety of ways, for different communities and peoples (Dolan, 2005).

Theatre of the Oppressed – Brazil

The winds of democracy have recently swept through Latin America's Southern Cone. Democratization began in Brazil in the late 1970s and was formalized with the establishment of a civilian government in 1984. Artists active in the underground struggle found a unique situation: Brazilian workers felt relatively empowered to challenge employers and laws that kept them passive for years. Once the instruments of state coercion are neutralized, a strike or a mass meeting has its inherently theatrical dimension keenly perceived. There is no question that the name of Augusto Boal deserves conspicuous standing in the ranks of contributors to the Brazilian stage, most notably for his invigoration of the long-standing tradition of children's theatre in his home country. Boal's work with the theatre of the oppressed may at first glance seem to come out of the early commitment to reform theatre through the belief in the power of Thalia – or perhaps Terpsichore. Boal's name, however, would subsequently be associated with a handful of technically radical, though politically well-intended, efforts. International collectors of plays and theatre games are unquestionably familiar with Boal's work.

That familiarity, though, is hardly universal. The radical reconstruction zeal for putting power in the margins of the text of a dramatic piece is largely a phenomenon of overly enthusiastic North American collegians. In Brazil, this work has engendered a network of social activists who practice Teatro do Oprimido. Furthermore, the literature from which these techniques come is made a function of the theatre of the oppressed in a way that Boal

himself finds tending to blackmail for dialogue. Brazilian censors have long questioned these claims, finding them politically dubious as well. Given the attention, though, forgive the taking of such notable events as the norm. These techniques came to be used to draw the techniques of and who are the direction for analysis too, such a sources. Boal's ways to find the truthfulness of such systems use their data.

Budhan Theatre – India

Budhan Theatre – India / Budhan Theatre is a mobile street theatre performing group from Central India, from the state of Madhya Pradesh. They are Dalits, also known as the so-called Untouchables, the lowest caste of Hindu society. Their performances deal with the causes why the majority of the convicted are from their caste. It is estimated that 10% of the prison population in India is Dalit. The group performs in village marketplaces directly in front of the police stations. The performances do not have a specific script but involve a lot of spontaneity. The members have themselves survived on average 26 years in Indian prisons.

The Freedom Theatre – Palestine

The Freedom Theatre was founded in 2006 during the second intifada and as a response to the oppression of the occupation. Its founders implemented theatre as a tool to resist the Israeli occupation. The theatre is located in the refugee camp of Jenin, which is encircled by the Israeli wall on three sides. It became a place where young people from the camp could regularly meet, socialize, and engage in drama and theatre workshops. The theatre offers a range of workshops, including sessions for young children as well as diploma courses for older participants. Theatre facilitates the freedom of speech that is being limited in

contemporary Palestine. Beyond that, theatre as a rehearsal space for real-life situations opens individuals and society to different perspectives. Playback theatre is among the different kinds of theatre that are put on stage or practiced by people to speak out their stories. It works in a way that people from the audience tell their stories, feelings, or things they care about, and a small group of actors, known as the group, perform them in a theatrical form on stage. Quotes are found to enrich and develop a collective narrative that touches upon both personal and communal experiences and viewpoints (Rohrbach, 2018). Used in a socially, culturally, and politically critical and engaged way, playback theatre can lead to new social forms and resist against dominant neoliberal and capitalist ones. On the other hand Spark, a Palestine theatre, is a very vital and volatile mix. The company uses contemporary and traditional storytelling styles and integrates text with choreography of movement and sound. The company has also been cultivating, devising, and employing collaborative composition techniques to generate fresh responses to the material from all company members. The symbol of Spark is the rice seed, the basic food item in Palestine and many other of Asia's "developing countries". It is also common among other nations to have a tradition of "manifesting money to the poor" by throwing products of basic needs. This allusion is treated with a notion of charity, in a country with increasing poverty, also pointing to the fact that most of the societies bombarded during war have to fight poverty.

ACT Now Theatre – Australia

Act Now Theatre in Adelaide, Australia, uses a three-year youth arts project as an offline hub in which to creatively reflect on the tension between arts-based research imperatives and situated,

creative processes enacted by participants. Exploring the challenging praxis of negotiating ethical strictures of research, while working in a partnership with youth theatre actors, the article examines the creation of a new theatre-play. Employing Theatre-in-Education, the production was developed in situ with participants working as actors with a professional playwright/director through a progressive series of workshops designed to explore their knowledge and expertise and creatively respond to the project's focus on young people's perceptions of law. Recording the conflicting perspectives from which the work was viewed by project partners, the reflexive analysis identifies and explains the shortcomings of this research process and suggests a dynamic alternative engaged in iterative knowledge transfer. Obese young people aged 13–15 years will be working with theatre professionals to create a performance about their experiences of weight, obesity, and food in their lives, histories, and neighborhoods Act Now Theatre, 2023).. This project takes up heated public health and wellbeing debates, and the ethical implications of giving young people agency to speak in the public domain about their lived experiences of obesity and their sense of place. The inherently complicated notions of food, bodies, and place, it is apparent that both the young people involved in the project and the resulting performance defy singular representations.

Community Theatre in Italy

Community theatre became an essential tool for civic engagement and cultural rebuilding in Italy after World War II. Mario Apollonio and his student Sisto Dalla Palma were at the vanguard of this movement, redefining the function of the spectator and emphasising the role of the community via their theoretical and practical contributions that transformed Italian theatre. Mario, a co-founder of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano in 1947, put out a

theatrical paradigm that viewed the audience as a moral and social collective, similar to the ancient chorus, rather than as passive spectators. His idea of theatre as a "community in action" placed a strong emphasis on cultural reflection and civic engagement. The groundwork for this revolutionary perspective was established by Apollonio's works, such as Drammaturgia (1954) and Storia, dottrina e prassi del coro (1956).
Sisto Dalla Palma developed Apollonio's theories during the 1970s sociopolitical upheaval. Dalla Palma promoted "open" theatrical styles influenced by festive customs through his writings such as Verso una nuova drammaturgia (1971) and his leadership at Milan's Centro di Ricerca Teatrale. His collaborations with neighborhood organizations on initiatives such as Venice's Carnival demonstrated how theatre may develop into a platform for critical consciousness and group expression.

Apollonio and Dalla Palma co-founded a dramaturgy that is based on cultural democracy and social participation. Their legacy continues to influence community-based and participatory theatre practices today in Italy and abroad, providing practitioners with an inspiring example of theatre as a potent force for social change and togetherness. (Bino & Locatelli, 2021)

Miunikh–Damaskus Theatre

Through a creative, cooperative creative process, the post migrant theatre piece Miunikh–Damaskus examines themes of displacement, individuality, and cohesion. The project, which was created in Munich with a group of Syrian actors and German theatre creators, combines devised theatre and documentary with techniques including translation, auto-fiction, and improvisation.

It engages a diverse Munich audience in a common theatrical environment while reflecting the actual experiences of Damascus migrants.

The production emphasizes the agency and perspectives of displaced people, challenging conventional narratives of migration as trauma or burden. Language is important; Arabic and German coexist without always being translated, highlighting communication's gaps as well as its bridges. The intricacy of diasporic identification and cultural translation are metaphorically represented by this language layering.

Because of the non-linear and fragmented nature of Miunikh–Damaskus, actors are able to switch between characters, share personal narratives, and provide real-time commentary on their performance. This establishes a "third space" where community narrative, theatrical fabrication, and autobiographical memory converge. The performance emphasises shared authorship and multiple subjectivities while rejecting oversimplified depictions.

Fundamentally, the project embraces solidarity as a practice as well as a theme. By presenting refugees as co-creators rather than subjects, it steers clear of a paternalistic perspective. The rehearsal process itself evolved into a forum for dialogue and listening between participants, highlighting solidarity as a dynamic, continuous activity rather than a static identity.

Additionally, Miunikh-Damaskus serves as a political gesture in the context of German theatre. It helps to rethink cultural belonging by elevating postmigrant voices and challenging the prevailing aesthetic standards of institutional theatre. It shows a

move towards theatre as a place of social interaction and change, encouraging intercultural communication.

In the end, Miunikh–Damaskus provides a potent example of artistically demanding and politically active theatre that upholds the importance of complexity, co-presence, and group production in a world growing more divided by the day. (Totah & Khoury, 2018)

FESPACO- African Theatre

FESPACO (Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou), a significant cultural organization in Burkina Faso, is the subject of one noteworthy case study in African theater. The study looks at how the festival developed into an important venue for political participation and cinematic and theatrical expression. FESPACO was founded in 1969 with the intention of celebrating African cinematic artistry, but it quickly evolved into a forum for critical sociopolitical discussion.

It is well known that theater companies that took part in FESPACO, including Atelier-Théâtre Burkinabè, used performance to address colonial heritage, corruption, and governance challenges. These organizations prompted viewers to consider issues of justice, civic duty, and national identity through interactive performances and dramatizations. Performances were able to establish a strong connection with local audiences through the use of indigenous languages and culturally relevant themes, which made the theatrical experience both thought-provoking and inspiring.

This case study demonstrates how FESPACO functioned as a transformational civic forum in addition to an artistic venue. The festival's theater served as a forum for discussion, instruction, and self-determination in addition to providing entertainment. The distinction between participant and spectator was frequently dissolved in performances, which served to further the notion that social transformation was a shared duty. (African Theatre, 2002)

For instance, in 2025, actor Michael Sheen launched the Welsh National Theatre to revive English-language theatre in Wales following budget cuts that led to the closure of National Theatre Wales. The initiative, backed by £200,000 from the Arts Council of Wales, aims to reach rural audiences through touring performances. While it has been welcomed, some theatre professionals express concerns about competition for limited resources and the neglect of grassroots efforts (Brown, 2025).

In the U.S., the Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation introduced "Change Capital Grants" in 2024 to support theatres adopting innovative business models. Grantees include the Latino Theater Company (succession planning), Portland Center Stage (alternative ticketing models), and Seattle Children's Theatre (collaborative operations) (Biller Family Foundation, 2024).

The UK's National Theatre released the Scene Change report in early 2025, highlighting the fragility of current funding structures. The report calls for sector-wide reforms such as a Technology Roadmap, decarbonization funding, and shared

economic playbooks for sustainable theatre management (National Theatre, 2025).

In Portugal, Teatro Nacional D. Maria II has incorporated "Doughnut Economics" into its operations, aligning ecological concerns with social responsibilities. This is part of a broader STAGES project (2021–2025) aimed at developing a sustainable model for theatre (Rodrigues, 2024).

In Australia, Act Now Theatre continues to work with First Nations communities, LGBTQ+ groups, and culturally diverse populations through participatory theatre methods. Their funding model combines government support, social impact grants, and community-based co-creation, showcasing a holistic approach to sustainability and inclusion (Act Now Theatre, 2023).

As digital technology evolves, theatre as a medium for social cohesion has adapted to new technological advancements, including the internet, digital recording and broadcasting, computers, audio and video tools, social media, and mobile phones (Bay-Cheng, 2010; L. et al., 2020). Technological developments have expanded access to theatre and performance, enabling outreach to diverse audiences (White, 2013). Digital platforms have broadened the landscape for storytelling, audience interaction, and performance staging (Causey, 2009). Theatre practitioners and groups exploring the possibilities of technology have produced new forms of performance and engagement (McConachie, 2010).

However, this technology-driven exploration also poses challenges for theatre as a medium for solidarity and outreach (Reason, 2006). Although theatre can expand communities and inclusiveness through technology, it can also create a digital divide, leaving some groups in isolation and exclusion (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). With an unflinched recognition of technology's double potential as both a facilitator for connection and a barrier for some communities, a critical narrative inquiry examines how theatre has been and can be used for fostering social solidarity in the age of technology (Boal, 2001; Klich & Scheer, 2012).

The case studies focus on the engagement with technology as a theatre medium for social solidarity before, during, and after the global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic (James & Boulos, 2021). The opening discussion explores how technology was integrated into theatre practice for social solidarity before the pandemic, particularly via social media for outreach and audience mobilization (Hope, 2020). The following examination looks at virtual presentations and live-streaming for engagement during lockdowns, which opened new possibilities for outreach (Dinesh & Haq, 2021). The concluding section reflects on the ongoing engagement with technology in theatre practices for cohesion and connection in the post-pandemic world (Pavis, 2021).

The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in Socially Engaged Theatre

Socially engaged theatre practices will be most effective when they embrace diversity and inclusion. Proponents of socially engaged theatre practice should actively pursue a diversity of voices in this work. The inclusion of diverse perspectives in storytelling enriches narratives and fosters a broader understanding of social problems. Efforts must be undertaken to dismantle the barriers that marginalized voices face in the theatre

landscape. If theatre companies aspire to illuminate communal issues, they must ensure their representation is equitable (Matchett, 2005). As an art form, theatre has traditionally been associated with a certain privilege; it is necessary that within this medium, a multiplicity of narratives is both told and championed. There are theatre companies that have earnestly pursued diversity and inclusion; these companies will be highlighted here as examples of positive practice. In highlighting these inclusive practices, the intention is to provide examples for artists to consider how they might act as advocates for social justice through their work. The inclusion of diverse representation in a narrative is beneficial to its audience. The sharing of varied perspectives creates a space for understanding, empathy, and connection (Wasmuth et al., 2020). However, it is vital to acknowledge that even as momentum for inclusivity has grown, there are still barriers to access that persist within the industry. As theatre companies aspire to be socially engaged, consideration must be given to how equality and inclusivity are embraced in their practice. These efforts may be perceived as tokenistic if theatre companies share social narratives without also diversifying their personnel and decision-making processes. It is paramount to recognize that inclusivity should not be treated as an obligation or a marketing strategy; rather, it should be viewed as a pathway toward promoting deeper social cohesion through theatre.

Funding and Sustainability in Theatre Initiatives for Social Change

Theatre initiatives focused on social change must confront the persistent challenge of funding. Financing activism, particularly through the arts, is notoriously unstable, often subject to shifting political priorities, economic constraints, and institutional

limitations (Jackson, 2011; Kershaw, 1999). While public grants ideally provide monetary support for socially beneficial projects, their availability frequently depends on the prevailing political climate and cultural policies (Harvie, 2013). Furthermore, the nature of public funding can lead to compromises, where theatre makers may feel pressured to align their work with state agendas or grant criteria, potentially diluting their critical or transformative intentions (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). Other sources of funding, such as corporate sponsorships, NGOs, charitable foundations, or religious organizations, often come with their own implicit or explicit ideological frameworks that may conflict with the grassroots or radical ethos of theatre for social change (Burns, 2022; Cummings, 2020). Community fundraising, while rooted in democratic participation, also shifts the burden of financial support onto audiences and volunteers—what Jackson (2011) calls the "labor of care." This may unintentionally exhaust already marginalized communities and divert energy from creative or political action.

To achieve impact, theatre interventions for collective transformation must incorporate sustainability as a foundational principle, alongside artistic intent and social relevance (Thompson, 2009). Sustainability entails not only long-term funding strategies but also deep community engagement, built over time and rooted in shared ownership of the process, including co-creating budgets, defining outcomes, and maintaining involvement beyond a single performance (Boal, 2001; Hope, 2020). If these participatory financial planning practices are overlooked, social gains achieved through performance risk become fleeting events with no structural continuity. The case studies explored here emphasize that sustainable theatre projects require reciprocal investment from funders, facilitators, and community members alike. Without this triadic engagement, such

ventures often collapse post-performance, particularly in disenfranchised communities where theatre is already perceived as elite or inaccessible (Harvie, 2013). Funding should not merely be transactional; it should be transformative, ethical, and inclusive in its process. In the absence of sustainable planning, theatre intended for social reformation can paradoxically deepen the alienation it seeks to heal.

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEATRE IN PROMOTING SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

While the social and political role of theatre is well-documented throughout history, there remains a need for frameworks to assess the extent to which theatre initiatives effectively foster social solidarity, empowerment, story-sharing, and creative development (Thompson, 2009; Jackson, 2011). With increasing reliance on funding from public agencies, local government bodies, and charities, there is mounting pressure to track and report social outcomes and impact (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). This finance often comes with strings attached, requiring project leaders to use specific, pre-decided evaluation methodologies that may not align with their practice (Harvie, 2013). This is particularly challenging for theatre practitioners, artists, and companies whose work prioritizes the intangible and imprecise qualities of social engagement (White, 2013). The torn feeling between wanting to ‘measure successes’, but being cognizant of the limitations in doing so, resonates with many individuals working at the intersection of art, social change, and community engagement (Hope, 2020). Theatre that prioritizes deep community engagement often finds itself conflicted by the formalities of institutional evaluation. While accountability is essential, rigid frameworks can undermine the organic power of creative

processes. Assessing impact becomes a balancing act between integrity and compliance.

Methodologies for Evaluating Effectiveness

This narrative not only addresses the need to evaluate effectiveness but also offers examples of how it can be done. Various methodologies for evaluating effectiveness are examined, drawing from both academic literature and theatre practitioners with first-hand experience involving participants in the assessment of outcomes (Reason, 2006). The effectiveness of theatre in creating social outcomes can be evaluated almost purely on qualitative grounds, using participants' own narratives, modifications, comments, and feedback as assessment devices (Thompson, 2009). However, purely qualitative approaches may inadvertently perpetuate pre-existing power dynamics. For example, participants may not challenge the outcome because they have been granted a voice in a medium the evaluators control (Boal, 2001). Qualitative approaches, while necessary, benefit greatly (for credibility's sake) from some quantitative assessment as well (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). Therefore, quantitative methodologies are also examined, but it must be noted that quantifying qualitative outcomes is notoriously precarious (White, 2013).

Measuring Progress and Outcomes

Theatre initiatives often create, enact, or respond to stories in a way that influences intangible outcomes (Hope, 2020). Progress is often visible, but the change itself is intangible and less visible. As such, many outcomes are intangible: how does one measure community cohesion, confidence, emotional engagement, or ownership? These are just as measurable as the national GDP; they can be crudely approximated through multiple devices, but

can never be tangibly measured (Reason, 2006). Great care has been taken to create methodologies that attempt to measure these intangible outcomes (Jackson, 2011). Most of these methodologies rely on fixed questionnaires responding to a linear scale, which is far from ideal (Harvie, 2013). Theatre, by its very nature, approaches the intangible through the tangible, attempting to tell the untellable (Boal, 2001). Theatre companies hoping to create meaningful change in intangible outcomes face the challenge of measuring those same outcomes (Thompson, 2009).

CASE STUDIES

Theatre companies that have successfully negotiated the complex challenge of measurement are presented, offering valuable insight into best practices. These are not blueprints; rather, they illustrate that it can be done, providing examples for the many companies trying to navigate these hurdles. By presenting case studies of theatre companies from within England, Quebec, Canada and Australia reflecting five different approaches, this chapter aims to guide those theatre practitioners, companies, or academics contemplating how to approach measuring social impact. These examples highlight the importance of participant and audience feedback in evaluating social impact: what impact does the theatre have, and how has it affected the audience? While there are numerous examples of theatre initiatives attempting to measure impacts and outcomes, in many cases, theatre is acting as a catalyst for social change without understanding how it is doing so or what exactly is changing. In an attempt to address this, a theatre initiative is evaluated to understand the effectiveness of different initiatives. Expanding on this evaluation, and in support of similar theatrical initiatives, the methodology is suggested to

understand the success of theatre in catalyzing social change (William Somers, 2013).

Collaborations and Partnerships in Theatre for Social Change

Theatre initiatives that address social issues can become more effective by working in collaboration and partnership with others. This section explores the possibilities that can arise from working together, particularly with community organizations, activists, and representatives of other art forms. Collaborations and partnerships can amplify the reach and impact of social actions by using readily accessible art forms to spread messages and compel audiences to think and act (Matchett, 2005). There are many examples of theatre projects or performances inspired by outside activists or community groups. Some of the most memorable projects have emerged from the synergy of diverse stakeholders coming together to create theatre. Successful partnerships between theatre practitioners and community groups or activists have an empowering effect on those involved in the performances and the performances themselves. However, relationships developed through collaborative processes can be challenging and complex due to differing goals, expectations, and communication approaches between parties. While recognizing that each partnership is unique and develops organically from a particular context, some important issues should be considered, including time, trust, and maintaining space and opportunity for open discussion between partners. It can be analyzed by outlining two tasks that exemplify partnerships in socially engaged theatre, as a way of illustrating successful models for these kinds of theatre experiments. There are many different ways in which partners can create theatre together, from collective imaginings to pre-designed frameworks instituted by social workers, artists, or educators

across the globe. Projects can take place over weeks or years, on a small or large scale, at a specific site, or be replicated across different sites. The emphasis is not on box-ticking regarding specific modes of collaboration but, rather, on advocating for the development of creative alliances that can deepen the impact of performances addressing social issues. When groups work together to create theatre around social concerns, it becomes possible to consider how collective effort can significantly strengthen the cause of social solidarity. The following case studies focus on collaborations with professional theatre companies and community partners, as well as the complexities that arise when tackling social concerns within collaborative frameworks.

Challenges and Limitations of Using Theatre for Social Change

Theatre can be an influential tool for social change, but there are challenges and limitations to consider. It is important to create space for reflection and self-criticism in the field of socially engaged theatre. While practitioners talk about their experiences, it is necessary to acknowledge the failures and miscalculations that come with taking action. There are internal limits to ensure that action does not oversimplify or misrepresent an issue, and attempts to create transformation do not further entrench a stereotype. It is often the case that theatre practitioners' understanding of a problem does not align with the community's view, making attempts to address it irrelevant (Lewis Pratt, 1970). Even with the best intentions, changes that seem beneficial or necessary may not match what is needed, and efforts to help might do more mischief than good. Theatre-as-practice for social alteration arises from the desire to address injustices and

inequalities, and yet is those injustices and inequalities that affect its viability (William Somers, 2013). Funders and practitioners acknowledge that they struggle to be relevant within social justice efforts, and there is an ongoing search for a foothold in the crowded landscape of good intentions. Theatre practitioners often find themselves in a position of questioning the impact of their work, how to measure change, and whether modification even occurs. The hope is that by naming these limitations, theatre practitioners might be encouraged to scrutinize and adapt how they work in a communal change capacity. The note of caution is that there will always be a temptation to take theatre action, and it will take many shapes that might not always achieve the intended outcomes.

Future Directions and Innovations in Theatre for Social Solidarity

In contemplating the future directions and innovations in theatre as a medium for social cohesion, it is essential to consider emerging trends that could enhance the ability of solidarity-based performances to engage wider audiences. Such trends include new technologies, hybrid forms producing both live and digital performances, and storytelling techniques that utilize public space or cross-genre approaches. These possibilities are not predictions for the future but rather developments that are already taking place within some theatre companies and experimental groups across the world. As the COVID-19 pandemic forced many live performance spaces to close temporarily, theatre groups considered how to adapt their live performances, primarily meant for physical spaces, into streaming formats that employed digital media as a supplementary tool. In many instances, live theatre performances streamed online effectively preserved the theatrical experience and reached vast audiences. Some theatre companies were entirely basing their performances on digital media beforehand, but this was new territory for most other groups. It

could be interesting to see how these two different modes of performance, live and virtual, could complement each other in the future theatre landscape without fully replacing one another. While live performance remains irreplaceable, especially in its ability to create a unique shared experience between the performer and spectator, virtual media can potentially expand the audience reach and allow for new modes of engagement. Although theater requires three-dimensional space and direct interaction between the audience and the performers, 'virtual-based theater' can overcome this if the virtual connection of live performers can be presented to the audience through this communication 3D project and contemporary technology. Performers from different parts of the world can overcome the crisis of spatial distance by joining the theater production process at the same time. The performer who is directly active in front of the audience can establish a living and virtual relationship at the same time through involvement with the virtually connected performer. Currently, we live in two realities, one living and the other virtual. Theater can be able to unite these two media.

Moreover, one of the possible shifts this post-pandemic landscape of theatre could bring is changed narrative styles and thematic focuses in solidarity-based enactments. Looking at contemporary solidarity-based performances, most focus on present-day issues such as the refugee crisis, rising nationalism, environmental concerns, and so on. However, some zeitgeisty issues may not be addressed in the performance realm for quite some time, as witnessed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it might be worth asking broader questions about what and how theatre should create solidarity after an unprecedented global situation that affected the everyday lives of almost everyone, albeit in different ways. How could solidarity performances and

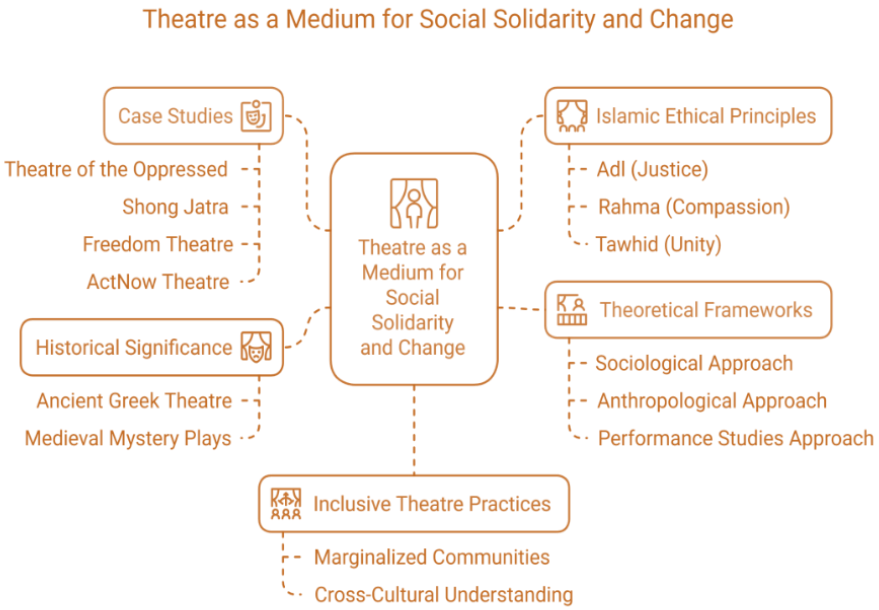
the resulting communities counterbalance exclusion and fragmentation have brought on by disinformation and conspiratorial thinking? What must a performative act of solidarity do towards the pluralistic but fragmented public sphere? There is a hope to instigate a discussion on these topics as necessary within the theatre community. Nevertheless, it is naively optimistic to think that solidarity-based performances would be able to overcome such a complex and multifaceted socio-political problem as the aforementioned fragmentation within the public sphere. Instead, the emphasis must be placed on the performative approach that could at least attempt to negotiate such concerns. At the policy-making level, it is crucial to create the conditions for an ongoing dialogue within the community working on performative acts of solidarity. As art should never stop questioning what and why it does, the hope is that future imagination will find ways to harness creativity to explore some options for social advocacy. The social theatre movement may have been created out of necessity then, but it is of utmost importance to nurture young and diverse voices and minds so that future initiatives can take on new and unknown shapes. Finally, the ambition to change the world should still lie at the very heart of a socio-critical theatre as adaptation and innovation must be viewed as two equally essential components in the quest for social change (William Somers, 2013).

CONCLUSION: REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THEATRE IN SOCIETY

As the role of theatre in creating social solidarity and modification has been explored through various lenses, there are some final reflections on its transformative power and the ongoing journey of tackling social concerns through theatre. Within society, theatre possesses a unique capacity to act as both a mirror and a catalyst,

reflecting realities while simultaneously imagining alternative possibilities, thus encouraging individuals and communities to act. Through discourse, awareness, and engagement, theatre reflects and shapes the ever-changing world. The narratives, questions, and challenges put forth throughout the presentations of different initiatives are ongoing, filled with a multitude of possibilities, but also vulnerabilities and dilemmas that require constant attention and consideration. The attempts and thoughts shared here are by no means comprehensive or prescriptive. Instead, they serve as one way of narrating past experiences and ongoing questions. As with any art form, there is an ethical obligation to approach the medium of theatre carefully and conscientiously, particularly when addressing social issues. Awareness, insight, and sensitivity prevent the misuse of theatre's transformative potential and avoid it from becoming an empty gesture. Efforts to examine historical and contemporary theatre initiatives that tackle communal issues

are rooted in the belief that theatre has a significant impact on communal engagement and awareness. Throughout the narratives, it is evident that theatre possesses diverse potential to create empathy, understanding, and collaboration in a search for alternatives and solutions to various social issues (A. Leahy, 2008). Whether small or large in scale, these shared initiatives are steps toward creating social solidarity or change.



Theatre can be an excellent medium for storytelling and exploring diverse realities. It can engage local communities through their narratives and questions, creating space for reflection, consideration, and exploration of alternatives. Furthermore, the intent behind these initiatives is not to provide ready-made answers or solutions. Instead, they aim to plant seeds that provoke thought, awareness, and debate regarding the presented topics. Even if only momentary pauses are created in the rush of daily life, alternative

possibilities still have the potential to grow.

On a broader scale, theatre can also play a communal role in addressing shared realities or concerns. It can link various actors and create networks where ideas and practices circulate, allowing critical reflection and consideration of the examined topics. Nonetheless, this communal role is utterly dependent on the various actors' willingness to listen, question, and engage in an ever-evolving discourse. It is vital to acknowledge that there are no straightforward solutions or panaceas to the challenges imposed by contemporary society, whether from a theatrical, artistic, or political perspective. Every attempt to create social harmony or change can produce the opposite effect, and this risk is particularly valid within the art field, where the nature of the medium might promote, surrender, or idealize social engagement. However, this should not hinder exploration or experimentation, as art's significance and impact are often found in the unforeseen outcomes of its practice. Moreover, art and theatre are not meant to provide ready-made solutions to the world's complexities. Instead, they can create space and time to rethink, question, and re-imagine shared realities. They can be places of play where the possible and impossible coexist, generating new insights and propositions regarding the social fabric. As a closing remark, and despite the taken-for-grantedness of the statement, theatre is still one of the best media for social solidarity, change, or just reflection. So, let the exploration continue because the journey is ongoing. It cannot be left solely in the hands of a few practitioners, researchers, or champions; it has to be actively sought and participated in by all. It is everyone's role to ensure that the art of theatre in communal harmony is continuously pursued, as it is not a given choice but rather an obligation.

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a Technology Roadmap, decarbonization funding, and shared economic playbooks for sustainable theatre management (National Theatre, 2025).

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CHAPTER FOUR

INTEGRATION OF PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, ISLAMIC TEACHINGS, AND THEATRE

The integration of philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre as a unified framework for ethical reflection, education, and community empowerment. The chapter introduces key theoretical linkages that bridge the philosophical concepts of soul and self with Islamic values such as tazkiyah (self-purification), adl (justice), and rahma (compassion). It explores how these values can be embodied and performed through theatre, offering a practical method to promote ethical awareness, social dialogue, and collective healing. Through performance, abstract moral principles are translated into lived experience, enabling deeper audience engagement and emotional resonance.

Keywords: Philosophical Anthropology, Islamic Spiritual Ethics, Performative Pedagogy, Theatre for Social Transformation, Embodied Epistemology.

The chapter also highlights participatory theatre methods such as community-based performances and workshops that facilitate empathy, shared learning, and spiritual growth. Case studies show how Islamic-inspired theatrical projects have contributed to human rights advocacy and social transformation in various cultural settings. The chapter emphasizes that theatre, grounded in both philosophical insight and spiritual ethics, becomes a tool for representation, reformation, and reconciliation. This synthesis presents a new path forward for using theatre as a performative practice of conscience where the soul and self are activated for building solidarity, justice, and moral clarity in increasingly fragmented societies.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses how philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre are intertwined purposefully. Every human being is asombrasa (wonder), curious and wanting to know berbagai hal (various things). Sensing a need to discover the world, one's mind, and the inner self, questions start emerging. Who am I? What is this world? Where have I come from and where am I going? And many other questions related to what it means to be human. Just by being a human, there is a requirement to know and understand the human, which is synonymous with philosophy. Anthropology deals with insight into human beings and thus becomes philosophical anthropology. It is important to grasp that to be human means to be philosophical, or in other words, every human being is a philosopher (Hinda, 2018). Philosophical anthropology tries to understand human beings through rational thinking and philosophical discourse. However, to understand human beings in their wholeness cannot be left merely to philosophical reasoning. According to Islamic

teachings, human beings have a spiritual dimension. The philosophy of the West takes reason as the universal sense of being human. Islam considers that the heart (qalb) is the essence of being human. And theatre, as one of the arts, expresses what it means to be human in narrative and dramatic forms. Artistic creation would be the third path meeting at the summit. So, philosophical anthropology, religious teachings, and theatre are interconnected with each other in a meaningful way (A. Edelman, 2018). This chapter aims to explore the integration of philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre. It argues that to understand what it means to be human needs a synthesis of philosophical reasoning, spiritual teachings, and narrative art forms. This integration is intended to examine how spiritual teachings create ethics in performing theatrical art. Fundamental beliefs in Islam will be explored, and it is expected that these beliefs will shape how humans is represented on stage. Theatre (play, staging, and performance) will be defined as a space to discourse on good and evil, right and wrong, moral and immoral, and in general as a space to talk about God sententiae humana. Solidarity, togetherness, and community engagement in theatrical performances will also be emphasized throughout the discussions. Finally, some possible pathways for the integration of these three disciplines will be suggested and developed to enhance mutual understanding.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The introduction of philosophy to Islamic thought has broadened the understanding of the cosmos, man, and God, and underscored the validity of other disciplines, such as theatre, in deepening the exploration of humanity. Philosophy plays a crucial role in facilitating a deeper consideration of the multifaceted implications

of theatre and performance on various human understandings and experiences. At the same time, Islamic thought enriches this exploration by bringing a sense of spirituality and moral composure to the nuanced practice of theatre and performance. Furthermore, performance discourse underscores the profound significance of theatrical and performative practices in shaping human life, thought, and culture. By bridging these three distinct and rich realms of philosophy, Islamic thought, and performance discourse, we can create a cohesive and wholesome framework for contemplating the far-reaching implications of theatrical performance in the realm of humanity, particularly regarding our moral and ethical obligations to one another and the broader world around us. This interconnected approach opens new avenues for exploration and understanding. (Kiani, 2024; Abd, 2024; Langis & Lupton, 2024). Focusing on theatrical performances as deliberation on humanity necessitates contemplation on the concepts of soul, self, and solidarity, which have been central to philosophical anthropology since its establishment. There are extensive expositions on these concepts from Western philosophers that set the agendas for philosophical anthropological discourse. Meanwhile, these notions also occupy pivotal positions in Islamic thought, either explicitly or implicitly, in the deeper attempts to expound the quintessence of humanity or the perfections bestowed upon humanity. Although these notions were the focus of deliberation in both domains, differences in context, objectives, and outcomes create spaces for each to complement the other. While theatrical performances endeavor to articulate these philosophical and Islamic contemplations, the spirits and ethical concerns addressed in Islamic clarifications would infuse theatrical performances with a moral touch (Reclam, 2018).

Bridging Philosophy, Islam, and Performance

Philosophy and performance, Islam and theatre, have generally been perceived as disparate fields unable to meaningfully connect. Yet there are significant points of intersection between them. This concept note will examine how philosophy and Islamic perspectives can synergistically inform theatrical narratives and vice versa, bringing to light their mutual importance. Islamic teachings and philosophical principles often identify similar values, such as justice, compassion, and truth, so as to avoid a clash between the two. Despite some variance, these fields can collaborate seamlessly. Performance art, including theatre, has proven to be an effective medium for tangibly conveying philosophical and spiritual ideologies (A. Edelman, 2018). Although many schools of philosophy and religious teachings exist, understanding human existence through the more specific lens of philosophical anthropology enriches insight into the breadth of Islamic teachings. Perceptible performances are transformative spaces in which abstract philosophies and beliefs find tangible manifestation. In presenting this note, some key examples are provided where this bridge has already been constructed. By illustrating some overlooked niches, this exploration seeks to stimulate a broader discourse on how these disciplines can coexist and enhance one another. The intersection of philosophy, Islam, and performance creates a rich and layered field for exploring ethical, cultural, and artistic questions. Historically, Islamic philosophy has profoundly shaped various artistic expressions, including architecture, calligraphy, and poetry. These art forms have reflected theological principles and cultural values, offering a medium through which spirituality and philosophy intertwine. However, the inclusion of performance arts, particularly theatre, in Islamic cultures has often been met with theological concerns. Some Islamic scholars, wary of

representation and its association with idolatry, have hesitated to fully embrace forms like drama and dance. Despite these reservations, performance arts have persisted in Islamic cultures as tools for storytelling, moral instruction, and communal bonding (Necipoğlu, 2012). In many Islamic traditions, performance is deeply integrated with spirituality. For example, the Sufi practice of Sema, which includes music, chanting, and whirling dances, serves as a ritualistic act aimed at achieving spiritual transcendence. These practices underscore the potential of performance as a means of connecting with the divine, focusing on inner experiences rather than external representation. Such rituals exemplify how performance and Islam can harmonize, fostering a space where artistic expression becomes a vessel for philosophical inquiry and spiritual growth (Karmali, 2015).

Theatre, in particular, has been a significant medium for bridging philosophical and Islamic thought. Historical narratives and religious parables are frequently dramatized to present complex ideas in a relatable format. Plays based on Islamic history, such as those depicting the lives of the Prophet Muhammad's companions or pivotal moments in Islamic civilization, allow audiences to engage with ethical questions and philosophical concepts. For example, performances inspired by the Battle of Karbala or the teachings of Al-Ghazali offer both moral lessons and opportunities for intellectual reflection (Moreh, 1981). By transforming these stories into dramatic experiences, theatre invites communities to reflect on justice, sacrifice, and the human condition within an Islamic framework. Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed provides an illuminating theoretical framework for understanding how theatre can foster social solidarity in Islamic contexts. Although developed outside Islamic traditions, Boal's participatory methodologies, such as Forum Theatre, resonate with the communal and dialogical ethos of Islamic societies. In these interactive performances, audiences are

transformed into “spect-actors,” actively engaging in the narrative to propose solutions to social issues. When adapted to an Islamic cultural context, this model of theatre has the potential to amplify marginalized voices while remaining rooted in ethical and spiritual principles (Boal, 1995). Contemporary theatre artists within the Islamic world navigate a complex landscape, balancing tradition with modernity. They often grapple with how to honor religious values while expanding the boundaries of artistic expression. For instance, the resurgence of Islamic-themed theatre in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia reflects a conscious effort to create art that resonates with both spiritual and cultural identities. Productions like the Malaysian play "Puteri Gunung Ledang" integrate Islamic ethics with folklore, showcasing how performance can serve as a bridge between heritage and innovation. These works highlight the adaptability of Islamic philosophy in addressing modern societal challenges, from globalization to social inequality (Necipoğlu, 2012). In Bangladesh, "Bishad Sindhu" (directed by Syed Jamil Ahmed, 1991) connects the meaning of life through the tragic history of Karbala.

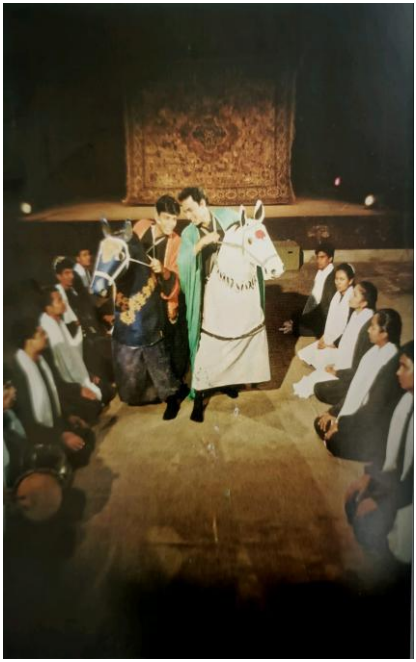


Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.**1**

Biṣāda sindhu (Episode 2): Hasan (right) conveying his desire to marry Jaynab to the messenger (left)

Source: Ahmed, 2001, p.206

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document..**2**

Biṣāda sindhu (Episode 6): Hosain's leave-taking before his final encounter with Ejid's army at Karbala

Source: Ahmed, 2001, p.207

On the other hand, "The Rules of Love" directed by Md Mahedi Tanjir in 2024, is a theatrical adaptation that intertwines narratives from Elif Shafak's "The Forty Rules of Love" and Nigel Watts's "The Way of Love." The play explores two parallel stories: one

set in 2024-25, focusing on a Jewish woman's transformative journey through a novel review written by a Sufi saint, and another in the 13th century, depicting the spiritual evolution of a Sharia-supporting Maulana through his union with Shams-i Tabriz. This dual-timeline structure delves into themes of self-realization and the unifying power of love across different eras. The director's note emphasizes the play's intent to bridge the crises of contemporary life with those of the 13th century, highlighting the universal quest for truth and self-liberation. By integrating Shafak's and Watts's works, the production aims to present a nuanced portrayal of Rumi's life and the transformative journey of its characters. The director notes that the play "compares the life crisis of contemporary people with the life crisis of the thirteenth century and the attainment of God," suggesting a deep exploration of the human condition across time. Critics have lauded the play for its compelling narrative and innovative staging. An article from The Business Standard describes it as "a theatrical masterpiece in bending The Rules of Love," noting the challenges and being able to present two different stories and timelines to a live audience. The play's achievement is attributed to its ability to resonate with audiences through its universal themes and emotional depth. By juxtaposing the personal transformations of characters in both the 13th and 21st centuries, it underscores the timeless nature of love and self-discovery. The director's vision to use the play as a tool in the search for the path to truth is evident in its thoughtful narrative and character development. "The Rules of Love" offers a profound exploration of love's transformative power across time, blending historical and contemporary narratives to illuminate the universal journey of self-realization. Its critical acclaim and audience reception attest to its success in conveying these timeless themes.

In addition, in the socio-economic context of Bangladesh, the political landscape has changed as a result of the movement with the widespread participation of students and the public in 2024, and the loss of values in society due to violence has been observed, resulting in an existential crisis among people. During this time, attacks were observed on followers of various religions in some cases, and the shrines of Sufi saints were vandalized. In all these cases of violence, it is clear that people have chosen extremism instead of love. The performance plays a role in presenting the importance of practicing love in the light of Islamic values, the philosophy of people towards people, and the values of the lives of Rumi and Shams. Although this violence in Bangladesh has subsided over time, it can be assumed that its impact on the souls of people has not been freed. Humanity is witnessing such violence in the world of politics. Just as the war between Ukraine and Russia and the war between Israel and Palestine have put the people of the world in a humanitarian crisis, today humanity is under threat due to oppression and cruelty. In such a situation, "The Rules of Love" seeks to show the way to the need for interconnection and unity by presenting the importance of love instead of violence. In the contemporary context, instead of the instability of the human mind, "The Rules of Love" finds the path to humanity and stability.

Figure 4.3
The Rules of Love: Shams (lefe) and Rumi (in front)
Source: Source: Limon Ahmed (Photograph), Department of

Theatre and Performance Studies, JKKNIU, Bangladesh.
Figure 4.4
The Rules of Love: Ella's family life crisis.Source: Source: Kamal Uddin Kabir (Photograph), Associate Professor, Department of Theatre, Jagannath University, Bangladesh.

Figure 4.5
The Rules of Love: When Rumi explains the importance of love and the way to practice it.
Source: Source: Limon Ahmed (Photograph), Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, JKKNIU, Bangladesh.

Figure 4.3 The Rules of Love
Ella Rubinstein in a video call with Aziz Zahara.Source: Source: Kamal Uddin Kabir (Photograph), Associate Professor, Department of Theatre, Jagannath University, Bangladesh.

Figure 4.7

The Rules of Love: Preparation time for the Shama dance. Source: Source: Kamal Uddin Kabir (Photograph), Associate

Professor, Department of Theatre, Jagannath University, Bangladesh.

Figure 4.8

The Rules of Love: Presenting people's thoughts on the spiritual journey of Rumi and Shams and describing the Sufi philosophy about love. Source: Source: Kamal Uddin Kabir (Photograph),

Associate Professor, Department of Theatre, Jagannath University, Bangladesh.

Figure 4.9
The Rules of Love: When Ella embraces the Sufi mind.

Source: Source: Kamal Uddin Kabir (Photograph), Associate

Professor, Department of Theatre, Jagannath University, Bangladesh.

Figure 4.10
The Rules of Love: When expressing surrender to Allah and the desire to be united with Him.
Source: Source: Kamal Uddin Kabir (Photograph), Associate Professor, Department of Theatre, Jagannath University, Bangladesh.

Performing arts also provide an invaluable platform for addressing contemporary matters such as gender inequality, extremism, and cultural alienation and like that kind of issues. Community-based theatre projects in Muslim-majority regions often focus on giving voice to underrepresented groups, such as women and minorities. These initiatives not only humanize abstract social issues but also challenge prevailing stereotypes

and dominant narratives. For example, theatre productions addressing the experiences of Syrian refugees in Europe have successfully highlighted their struggles while fostering empathy and solidarity among audiences (Karmali, 2015). This aligns with Islamic teachings that emphasize compassion (*rahma*) and justice (*adl*) as cornerstones of communal interaction. The reflective nature of theatre enables audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about society, encouraging dialogue and critical thinking. For instance, plays focusing on corruption, inequality, or religious hypocrisy compel viewers to question societal norms and consider alternative futures. Islamic philosophy, with its focus on ethical living and the pursuit of justice, complements this reflective process. Al-Ghazali's teachings on the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and the cultivation of moral character are often invoked in Islamic-themed performances to inspire ethical introspection and collective action (Karmali, 2015; Moreh, 1981). Theatre's capacity to blend philosophy, religion, and art into a cohesive experience is perhaps most evident in its ability to unite communities. Performance is inherently communal; it requires the active participation of both performers and audiences, creating a shared space for emotional and intellectual engagement. This communal aspect mirrors the Islamic concept of *ummah* (community), which emphasizes mutual responsibility and interconnectedness. By bringing people together to explore shared narratives and values, theatre strengthens the bonds of social cohesion and fosters a sense of collective purpose (Necipoğlu, 2012). Despite its potential, the integration of philosophy, Islam, and performance is not without challenges. Cultural and theological concerns must be navigated carefully to ensure

that artistic expressions remain respectful of religious values. Moreover, accessibility remains a significant issue; theatre often struggles to reach rural or economically disadvantaged communities in Muslim-majority countries. Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches, such as mobile theatre troupes and numerical platforms, to ensure that performance art can reach and benefit diverse audiences (Boal, 1995).

The integration of philosophy, Islam, and performance art offers a profound opportunity to explore ethical and spiritual questions in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences. By blending storytelling, ritual, and critical inquiry, theatre serves as a powerful medium for bridging tradition and modernity. Its ability to amplify marginalized voices, foster social solidarity, and inspire reflection makes it an invaluable tool for both cultural preservation and social transformation. As Islamic-themed performances continue to evolve, they not only honor their philosophical and religious roots but also contribute to a richer, more inclusive artistic heritage. There have been dedicated efforts to exhibit the bearing of philosophical thoughts on theatrical narratives, but such theatrical discourses remain marginal in Islamic context, especially those addressing Islamic teachings through the lens of philosophical anthropology. These performances often draw inspiration from canonical texts of Western philosophy, thereby limiting understanding to a specific cultural context. Instead, theatrical narratives based on Islamic teachings expressed through philosophical perspectives could foreground the universality of such teachings. The performance of philosophical debates is a well-established genre in Western theatre (Cull, 2012). These theatrical narratives typically dramatize the public performance of a

philosophical dialogue or discussion on a specific theme by renowned philosophers. Since the mid-nineteenth century, such theatrical representations have also been adopted in Indian theatre framed by Islamic worldview. The intention here is to present some paradigmatic instances where theatrical narratives on Islamic teachings proposed through philosophical discourses were pivotal in bridging these fields together and highlight some missed opportunities where this bridge could be further explored.

(c) Central Themes: Soul, Self, and Solidarity

Soul, self, and solidarity as the core ideas that shape a discourse involving philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and artistic practices, particularly in theatre. These three themes are presented here as a set of integrated concepts. Each theme is elaborated on, framing the concepts for integration. The interrelationship among the three ideas is demonstrated through examples from theatrical practices. Philosophical questions regarding the soul are usually answered either philosophically or spiritually. Taking a philosophical perspective implies a discussion based on reason. This discourse usually involves a debate on key notions such as the meaning or essence of the soul and provides an explanation of the soul's characteristics, such as its significance in understanding human dignity, life, and purpose. Spiritual perspectives often include religious interpretations of the soul and are articulated through sacred texts. In this case, the soul is revealed through guidance that defines the nature of humanity, the world, and the divine. However, this guidance also has a philosophical dimension that invites reasoning and contemplation (Morgan, 1970).

Therefore, apart from expounding the teachings, theological discourse often involves philosophical engagement. The notion of the self can involve many perspectives, such as metaphysics, identity, ethics, epistemology, aesthetics, and politics. Discussions on the self may focus on one or more aspects, depending on the approach taken. Self-contemplation often concerns human identity, autonomy, freedom, and rationality. In ethical terms, it often addresses interdependence, responsibility, power, and justice. Solidarity essentially emerges as a condition that binds individuals in a common framework of life. Inescapable historical and socio-political contexts often raise doubts about the relevance of solidarity as a principle. Nevertheless, solidarity is addressed in various ways, and the idea is enlarged to include and encourage engagement. In theatrical practices, these principles are conveyed in diverse modes, such as narratives, characters, settings, and processes. Therefore, the analysis does not examine specific works. Instead, it focuses more on the genres or modes of theatrical practices that deliberately convey the discussed themes. The purpose of this analysis is to express the ideas and illustrate the means of their embodiment. By delineating the central ideas and their interplay, the analysis presents a backdrop that could inspire more profound engagements with these ideas. It is not proposed as a definitive model but rather as an invitation to explore the potential of performance in expressing these themes. Theatre artists could emulate this framework by drawing on these ideas and modes of performance.

(d) The Role of Spirituality in Guiding Ethical Theatre

This subsection considers the role of spirituality in the development and enactment of ethical theatre, seeking to

articulate how beliefs and practices of a spiritual nature might furnish the foundational values that inform the telling of dramatic stories. At the heart of this investigation is the assertion that spiritual reflection should be cultivated among people working in theatre as a means of encouraging moral integrity and empathetic compassion in what they conceive and create. Some performances are examined, all of which emerge from religious traditions and seek to embody spiritual principles. Attention is paid to how their forms and intentions resonate most profoundly in the minds and hearts of those who witness them. It is suggested that, by honoring the spirituality at play in their art forms, theatrical practitioners might more effectively grapple with ethical quandaries and explore social injustices. Performances infused with predominantly spiritual concerns and insights can shine new light on audience members' experiences and understandings of issues such as morality, tolerance, and human rights, inspiring them to reflect and engage in dialogue. Moreover, when theatre is perceived as a spiritual pursuit, narrative depth might be ascribed to the performance text that otherwise appear to be lacking, enriching audience engagement and involvement. Hence, spirituality is proposed as a key pillar in the ethical framework of theatre (A. Edelman, 2018).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This section shifts the focus to practical applications that naturally emerge from previous theoretical frameworks. Having explored how philosophical anthropology can integrate with Islamic teachings, attention now turns to how this integration can be realized in theatrical performances that

are not only art but also reflect ethical and spiritual values. The first step is the design of theatrical performances that play a role in cultural and social discourse, not merely as entertainment but as a means of raising awareness of ethical and spiritual values. This includes innovative strategies for designing performances that engage audiences with issues such as justice, identity, and empathy. One strategy is to examine how relevant issues could be better communicated through theatrical performances rather than other media and art forms. This probably includes a consideration of the themes that should be raised, as well as the dramaturgical style and theatrical language used. As a starting point for discussion, it can be framed around the five essential elements in a performance: (1) the purpose and theme of the performance; (2) the audience in mind; (3) the community of performers involved; (4) how the performance is staged; and (5) the space where the performance takes place. The second step is to explore how theatre can develop community engagement through participatory theatre performances. By participatory theatre is meant theatrical performances designed and staged in collaboration with audience members. This participatory approach is motivated by the awareness that performance practices should be inclusive, giving audience members a chance to reflect on and articulate their voices through performances. At least two strategies can be employed to achieve this inclusivity goal in performance practices, namely: (1) theatrical initiatives in the form of workshops aimed at advocacy, healing, and empathy; and (2) community-based performances that seek to create dialogue spaces between "mainstream" and "marginal" communities. Community-based performances often involve a series of workshops, gathering the community together to openly

discuss the issues to be raised in the performance, which is then staged in their shared space. Some performance projects in this category have been successfully conducted to address social inequities based on ethnicity and disability. Conducted with Indonesian migrant worker communities in Hong Kong, the workshop series aims to develop performances that empower community voices in articulating their rights and aspirations, sometimes through traditional theatre forms. The third step is to show how workshops can be designed to raise social awareness within a certain community about issues that affect them. These workshops will focus on the importance of empathy in understanding the community's experiences as the basis for designing and staging performances that invite the audience to reflect on these experiences. A performance project involving student communities highlights the need to ensure community voices are not only heard but also seen as valid narratives. This project raises issues of bullying and discrimination in the academic environment through short video performances collaboratively created with student groups. By focusing on these experimental learning strategies, it is expected that a broader discussion can be opened up on how to utilize theatre as a medium for social change, particularly in developing communities (Reclam, 2018).

Designing Performances to Reflect Ethical and Spiritual Values

The Design phase considers how theatrical performances might best reflect a particular set of ethical and spiritual values, be they derived from philosophical anthropology or Islamic teachings. There is a complexity involved in this task as, generally speaking; the very nature of designing for

theatrical performance involves creativity, invention, and play. These dimensions are precisely what allow a designer to reflect upon how and what narratives might best be shaped in order to play with an audience's moral viewpoint or perspective (A. Edelman, 2018). For this reason, creativity cannot simply be set aside in the hope that, by adhering to a set of ethical and/or spiritual principles, the resultant performance might avoid misinterpretation. Rather, it is necessary to consider how and in what way the content of a performance might best reflect a particular set of philosophical and/or Islamic principles so theatre, as a form of designed performance, is able to more efficiently channel and impart ethical lessons. Throughout his Philosophical Anthropology, and specifically in the Ethics portion, there are a number of mechanisms that dramatists might employ to ensure spiritual themes find resonance within an audience. These include the use of symbolic gestures, character development, and the way in which the narrative is structured to convey deep ethical reflections. Dramatists are also encouraged to consider how best to engage with their own spiritual journey since personal insight of this sort might serve to enrich a dramatic work. A performance's audience also plays a crucial role in the impending understanding of what is ethical or spiritual in the design of the performance. Therefore, the impact of audience engagement and feedback is also considered, suggesting performance and audience understanding should have a reciprocal relationship. Ultimately, the aim here is to consider how theatrical performances might best be designed to address ethical and spiritual issues beyond entertainment and spectatorship, connecting audiences to themes of virtue and transcendence

in ways that might encourage a desire to undertake corresponding personal actions.

Community Engagement Through Participatory Theatre

Community engagement through participatory theatre is viewed as a viable means for social transformation. Theatre is not only meant to be observed, instead, it should advocate an active engagement of community members in the creation and presentation of performances. The belief is that if the community embraces this participatory approach, theatre will provide everyone the possibility to express themselves, to share personal stories, to talk about local issues, and to find a way how to present it through theatrical performance. As pointed out in the discussions, participatory theatre has the power to bridge the gap between different cultures, and to create a deeper understanding and solidarity among the so-called "others", the unknown, and the different (Inyang, 2016). The emphasis given is on the ability of community-driven performances to empower those who are marginalized, silenced, and ignored, to encourage them to tell their stories and to reflect, to accept, and to heal. Several successful cases from practical experiences are shared, where communities took the initiative to create theatre, and the results were impressive. Participatory theatre is about prioritizing inclusivity and collaboration, and it is believed that by doing so, theatre can assist in cultivating empathy and solidarity in society. This approach, seen as a theatre artist, as an educator, and as an individual, fits ethical values, spiritual values, as well as the understanding of what art should be, hence how it should serve communities. Theatre is contemplated as art

with a purpose, as a medium with a powerful tool that can cause a change, a transformation, in an individual and at a societal level. Taking everything into consideration, theatre should not be a passive observation spectacle, but rather a community engagement, a community experiment (Reclam, 2018).

Workshops for Advocacy, Empathy, and Healing

Theatre workshops can be a vehicle for community advocacy, empathy, and healing. Before each creative workshop, the facilitator will meet individually with each participant to discuss their thoughts and feelings about a personal or societal challenge. These pre-workshop discussions provide an opportunity to ensure participants feel safe and to craft the trajectory of the subsequent group workshop. In the group workshop, participants will gather in a safe space to read selections from their discussions aloud. Sharing their voices, worries, and stories, participants can create a community dialogue around personal or shared thoughts, allowing them to feel less alone. After the group discussion, participants will be provided tools for self-exploration, articulating their challenges creatively in writing or performance, to be individually developed outside the group setting. Theatre can function "both as a medium for storytelling and a way to enact change," and thus sharing narratives through theatre workshops can develop empathy (Reclam, 2018). Listening to someone's story creates a bond between the storyteller and audience, evoking compassion for the character's plights, which can extend to their real-life counterparts. Empathy-building performance is particularly poignant between groups with existing power imbalances. For example, in the imagined performance of a play about children's experiences of war, the

initial audience consists only of adult politicians and military figures, and are visibly uncomfortable. As one child recounts his experiences, the play moves from a passive to an active witnessing, compelling the audience to process their grief and culpability, ultimately inspiring them to take action. Listening to others' stories can also promote empathy toward those who seem vastly different from oneself. The stories, initially fraught with misunderstanding, become a place of connection as both sides share narratives of playing with the same cat. The shared bond of storytelling fosters mutual understanding both "within and across ethnic groups." Sharing narratives from within a religious tradition can also build empathy for its misunderstood aspects, as when Muslim youth create a play addressing misconceptions about their faith for non-Muslim audiences. Narrative-sharing workshops must include ethical principles. Participants' past experiences may cover sensitive subjects, so precautions must create a relational ethic of care to govern the group's interactions. Each participant's identity must be respected and never exploited. This is particularly pertinent in spirituality-laced workshops, as care must be taken to avoid moral imperialism or misusing sacred elements. Nonetheless, spiritual reflection is crucial to the process, as "When being creative, people explore deeper questions, place themselves in larger contexts, give meaning to their lives and actions. Involvement in the arts relates to people's spiritual lives." Conducting workshops without ethical and spiritual reflection can be a hollow means to an end. These principles are vital to fostering good moral character in both the participants and the audience. The effectiveness of these outcomes workshops can enact change and healing is evidenced by many successful prior projects. A

college theatre troupe worked with local youth to develop their voice through performance. One devising play's final scene, originally scripted as a cast member's fictional recounting of abuse in a foster home, played out verbatim the youth's true experiences, forcing the state social service agency to take action. Similar successful outreach projects illustrate how theatre can promote personal healing and public advocacy. These workshops can be designed to respectfully, inclusively, and culturally sensitively approach community needs while honoring the participants' identities. Nevertheless, it is pivotal that the workshop facilitator hold a Qawwali Muslim identity, preventing the misappropriation of this spiritual form, and that the devised performance remains culturally specific to one community's perspective. Ultimately, these workshops will demonstrate that theatre can catalyze change in the community, providing a tool not only for audience engagement but meaningful advocacy inside the home.

CASE STUDIES

Theatre has long been a powerful medium for promoting social change and fostering solidarity. By engaging audiences in critical reflection and dialogue, theatrical performances can challenge societal norms and inspire collective action. Below are three case studies illustrating how theatre has been utilized to address social issues and encourage community development.

Case Study 1: Amakhosi Theatre's Community Productions in Zimbabwe

Amakhosi Theatre, founded in 1981 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, stands as a pioneering example of how theatre can be mobilized as a tool for social transformation and civic engagement. Known for integrating performance with political consciousness and grassroots empowerment, Amakhosi Theatre emerged during a critical moment in Zimbabwean history, shortly after independence, when cultural production became deeply entangled with nation-building and social healing (Kerr, 1995; Chinyowa, 2004). Community theatre has been central to Amakhosi's mission. Their productions, including notable examples like Don't Ungaquali (which means "Don't Be Afraid") and Stop, were designed not just as artistic expressions but as interventions aimed at transforming public attitudes and behaviors. These plays directly engage issues such as HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, political disillusionment, and youth unemployment urgent concerns in Zimbabwean society (Chinyowa, 2005). Importantly, these performances are conducted in local languages and infused with indigenous forms of storytelling, music, and dance, ensuring cultural resonance and accessibility.

What distinguishes Amakhosi Theatre is its participatory model, which integrates community members not just as audience members but as co-creators of the theatrical experience. Through workshops, open dialogues, and collaborative rehearsals, participants become active agents in both shaping the narrative and addressing local challenges (Mda, 1993). This process not only democratizes cultural

production but also fosters a strong sense of ownership and collective responsibility. For example, in Stop, community members were involved in identifying themes and co-authoring scenes related to gender-based violence and peer pressure among youth. The outcome was not just a performance, but a series of discussions and mobilizations that extended into schools, churches, and civic groups (Chinyowa, 2007). The approach is aligned with Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, where theatre is used not as a mirror but as a hammer to shape reality (Boal, 1979).

Amakhosi Theatre's work demonstrates the broader potential of theatre as a medium for capacity-building, healing, and transformation in postcolonial contexts. It validates how cultural production rooted in local experiences can contribute to social cohesion, policy awareness, and behavioral change, particularly in regions where formal institutions of civic education and support may be lacking (Kerr, 1995; Chinyowa, 2008). Their work stands as a testament to how the arts, when integrated with community dialogue and social relevance, become powerful instruments of solidarity and justice.

Case Study 2: Forum Theatre in Social Responsibility Campaigns

Forum Theatre, originally developed by Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal as part of his Theatre of the Oppressed methodology, has become a globally recognized tool for social responsibility campaigns and grassroots activism (Boal, 1979). Central to this approach is the transformation of the audience from passive observers into active participants, "spect-actors" who are invited to step into the performance, intervene in the dramatic action, and

propose or enact alternative solutions to social problems being portrayed on stage. Forum Theatre is typically used in communities grappling with issues of discrimination, inequality, marginalization, and violence. By dramatizing real-life scenarios of oppression or injustice, the form creates a shared space for dialogue and experimentation. For instance, in campaigns addressing gender-based violence, participants may interrupt a scene depicting abuse and offer new ways for the victim to resist or escape, effectively rehearsing change within a safe, collective environment (Prentki & Preston, 2009; Thompson, 2009). The active engagement helps build empathy, stimulate critical consciousness (conscientização), and promote collaborative problem-solving.

One widely cited example comes from India, where organizations like Jana Sanskriti have implemented Forum Theatre as part of their efforts to combat caste-based discrimination and patriarchy in rural villages. By enabling villagers, many of whom may be illiterate or politically excluded, to participate directly in storytelling, Forum Theatre becomes a tool of civic education and empowerment (Rohd, 1998; Rai, 2012). Similar initiatives have been seen in Kenya, South Africa, Brazil, and the UK, where this method has been adapted to local socio-political contexts to address racism, migration, police violence, and youth disenfranchisement (Prentki & Selman, 2000). The power of Forum Theatre lies not in presenting fixed answers, but in posing provocative questions that invite collective exploration and solution-seeking. It aligns with Freirean pedagogy in treating participants as co-creators of knowledge, rather than passive recipients (Freire, 1970). In social responsibility campaigns, whether organized by NGOs, schools, activist groups, or

healthcare providers, Forum Theatre has proven particularly effective in building bridges between diverse audiences and addressing difficult topics in an accessible and emotionally resonant way (Boal, 1998). Moreover, Forum Theatre often fosters long-term engagement. When facilitated ethically, it creates opportunities for reflective dialogue, community mobilization, and policy influence. The method's open-ended structure ensures that it can evolve with each performance, allowing campaigns to remain dynamic and responsive to emerging social issues.

Case Study 3: Theatre for social critics

Shong Yatra, a vibrant indigenous form of folk performance from Bangladesh, exemplifies theatre's potential as a medium for social critique and communal reflection. Celebrated on Chaitra Sankranti, the last day of the Bengali calendar, Shong Yatra blends satire, symbolism, and humor to offer sharp commentary on the socio-political realities of rural communities (Ahmed, 2017). Traditionally performed in open spaces such as village grounds or riverbanks, Shong Yatra is a communal ritual where entertainment and social criticism are deeply intertwined. The term "Shong" literally means "mask" or "disguise," symbolizing the performer's assumed identity to represent and critique societal archetypes. Characters include political leaders, corrupt officials, law enforcers, local elites, and even abstract personifications of injustice or natural forces (Haque, 2019). Artists, adorned in colorful costumes, masks, and exaggerated makeup, use dramatic gestures, folk music, dance, and comedic dialogues to satirize issues such as corruption, gender inequality, environmental exploitation, and rural marginalization. These performances not only invoke

laughter but also stimulate public consciousness and moral reflection.

Shong Yatra functions as people's theatre, embodying a bottom-up model of performance where the audience is not passive but actively engaged, often participating through spontaneous reactions, critiques, or songs. This interaction transforms the performance into a living dialogue, making it a localized form of forum theatre where community voices are amplified through cultural expression (Sattar, 2020). The critique is rarely hostile; rather, it is presented with humor and empathy, allowing people to digest difficult truths in a familiar and celebratory atmosphere. The satirical nature of Shong Yatra aligns with the Brechtian model of distancing (Verfremdungseffekt), allowing viewers to reflect critically rather than emotionally immerse themselves in the performance (Boal, 1979; Haque, 2019). It also parallels Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in its communal intent—both aim to empower marginalized voices and encourage self-critique and collective agency (Boal, 1998).

Beyond its performative dimension, Shong Yatra reinforces cultural memory and communal solidarity. Each year, performers reflect on past events and community hardships, using theatre as a temporal bridge between the old and new year's. In this way, Shong Yatra becomes a form of ritualistic renewal, reminding communities of their resilience, shortcomings, and aspirations for transformation (Ahmed, 2017). As an indigenous form of critical folk theatre, Shong Yatra illustrates how traditional performance can intersect with political and ethical discourse. It is a cultural resource for building social awareness, promoting grassroots democracy,

and articulating local concerns in aesthetically compelling ways. In the context of applied theatre, Shong Yatra presents a powerful model of decolonial and participatory performance rooted in everyday life.

Case Study 4: Theatre for Social Change in the Modern World

Theatre has been utilized globally as a means to promote social change by educating communities and providing a platform for marginalized voices. Organizations like Cardboard Citizens in the UK work with homeless individuals, using theatre-making skills to empower participants and raise awareness about homelessness. By involving community members in the creation and performance of theatrical pieces, such initiatives embody the idea of theatre as a rehearsal for social change, fostering empathy and understanding among audiences and participants alike.

Even though the social issues addressed are diverse, the methodologies used by the artists to create performances are similar. The third case study discusses performances inspired by Islamic teachings, while the first two focus on human rights and social class dissatisfaction. These performances are relevant, highlighting the necessity to bring attention to something wrong in society. Furthermore, the second case study describes a performance designed to engage directly with the audience. One of the concerns raised by the audience in theatre discourse is that plays can become mere storytelling if the audience is passive and does not react. This concern is valid, but in some instances, even (post)dramatic readings or a performance without a dramatic text can evoke debates after the performance. The gathered discussions can also shed light

on the effectiveness of the performance. In the third case study, most performances successfully initiated discussions between the different audience groups. While the first case study highlights a performance that did not succeed in initiating discussions, the post-performance interviews reveal that this unfavorable outcome stemmed from audience expectations rather than the performance itself. In addition, the first and third case studies emphasize the importance of the scenic form in raising social awareness, while the second case study illustrates how an awareness-raising performance failed in its initial staging but succeeded after revising its methodology and presentation. The need for theatre groups to be aware of their audience is emphasised. However, despite different outcomes, all four case studies confirm that theatre can reflect societal values and question them. Finally, the importance of performances inspired by Islamic teachings is highlighted. Such performances pave the way for dialogue between different cultures and religions, discussing how cultural and ethical concerns can be addressed and how religions can develop a common language. Performing arts have the potential to prevent social imbalances or, if necessary, rebalance them. As such, they keep society's focus on what is significant. This section aims to ground discussions in concrete examples of theatrical intervention within the integration of philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre. These three case studies affirm the potential of theatre to be used as a tool for advocacy and to affect society. Further investigation is encouraged into how best to explore the intersection of these three disciplines, particularly practices that have proven effective at highlighting and

developing social awareness through theatrical interventions. (Reclam, 2018)

Effective Theatrical Interventions in Promoting Human Rights

Theoretical Background and Design of the Research Theater productions and interventions have played a major role in advancing human rights by raising awareness of invisibilized rights violations. Throughout history, theater has tackled a wide range of issues, from inequality, discrimination, and social injustice to the need for democracy. In recent years, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd by the police, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the refugee crisis in Europe, the need for theatrical storytelling that concerns human rights has been reiterated. Based on an understanding of human rights as a complex discursive field and in sum still a work-in-progress, theatrical interventions are suggested to play a significant role in the ongoing human rights work, particularly in the context of marginalized communities, significant role in the ongoing human rights work.

While human rights are often understood as a guarantee of individual rights and freedoms, it is suggested here to conceive of them as an overarching narrative that constantly seeks to be told and retold, disputed and renegotiated. In this sense, rights might be imagined as an open narrative excess that cannot be exhausted or fully recovered but must constantly be rearticulated. Understood as such, rights can only be performed by a community that rights interventions are necessary in order to bring attention to their violations. While human rights might be understood, at least ideally, as

global rights, the focus here is on local theatrical interventions that concern particularly marginalized communities. The case studies consist of several theater performances, participatory projects, and community gatherings that have been realized in collaboration with activists at various localities in Europe over the past five years, such as performances addressing and challenging anti-Black racism, discrimination against Roma communities, police violence and profiling, the decolonization of European cities, and the role of art institutions in the fight for social justice.

Examples of Islamic-Inspired Performances for Social Change

The emerging interest in Islamic-inspired performances as a catalyst for social change is examined, focusing on their methods and significance in addressing contemporary issues such as gender equality, environmental degradation, and the politics of intolerance. Selected theatrical works employing Islamic themes to advocate for justice, compassion, and the welfare of society are discussed. These performances engage Islamic values and teachings in a way that resonates with audiences of all backgrounds. Bridging the gap between universal human values and specific cultural contexts, this inquiry highlights the importance of Islamic-inspired storytelling in fostering understanding and dialogue across cultural divides. Several case studies of performances addressing contemporary issues through Islamic narratives are analyzed, including a spoken word theatre piece inspired by Sufi poetry from the 13th century, a parable about a bird defending its home, and a theatrical adaptation of a fable on social disparities. Although inspired by Islamic texts and

teachings, the essence of these works is their universal values, envisioning a world based on justice and peace. In an increasingly divided world, Islamic narratives can play a significant role in addressing pressing societal challenges through theatrical storytelling. Thus, performances inspired by Islam have the potential to contribute meaningfully to efforts for social transformation (Hinda, 2019).

The importance of storytelling in conveying Islamic values and teachings is discussed, particularly in theatrical settings. This art form's impact is most profound when narratives are adeptly told, allowing audiences to perceive the world through a different lens. Drama has the potential to shape public perception significantly. During the recent upsurge of Islamophobia, stories showcasing the beauty of Islam and the kindness of Muslims are believed to be necessary for today's society. If told effectively, these stories can reach and impact diverse audience groups, evoking thought, kindness, and shared humanity. Theatre is a powerful medium that illuminates the complex relationship between faith and creativity (Reclam, 2018). As a public art form, theatre reaches the broadest audience, making it an ideal medium to engage with social justice issues. In the modern globalized world, where the marginalized are still silenced, it is essential to vocalize their stories. Audiences are invited to witness an alternative perspective, challenging them to reconsider their views and assumptions. Thus, artists can counter stereotypes and dominant paradigms by engaging with themes of social justice, bringing hidden narratives into public discourse. In this context, narratives inspired by Islamic traditions and texts are reinterpreted and recontextualized for contemporary settings, addressing current socio-political predicaments. Performance is envisioned as a collective action in the public

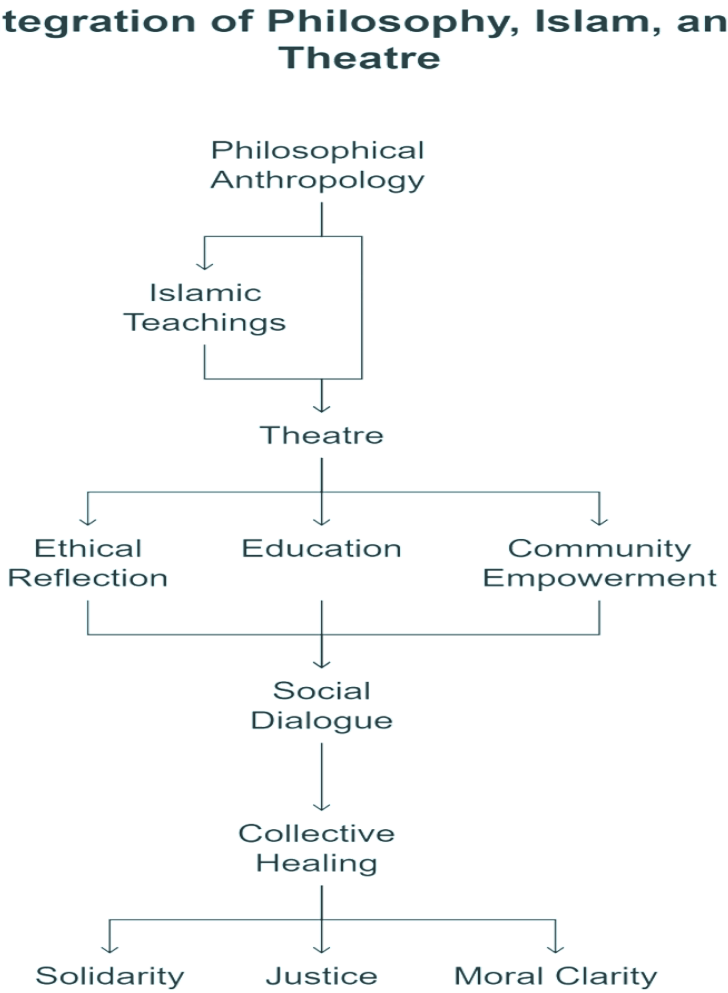
space, emphasizing its role in inciting change rather than merely reflecting it. Rumi's philosophy, rooted in love, unity, and the transcendence of individualism, holds significant potential for fostering social solidarity in the world. Rumi's teachings, often expressed through poetry and performance, emphasize the interconnectedness of humanity, transcending cultural and religious boundaries (Akbari, 2016). Islamic world, with the history of Sufi traditions and a vibrant theatrical culture, offers a fertile ground for exploring Rumi's ideas in a contemporary context. Theatre, as a medium of collective expression, resonates deeply with Sufi ideals, as it integrates emotional, spiritual, and communal dimensions (Schimmel, 1975; Ahmed, 2014). Performances exploring narratives from the Islamic tradition address crucial societal challenges, such as environmental collapse and the politics of intolerance. In such works, artists elaborate on the reciprocal relationship between faith and creativity, advocating for art's role as a social catalyst for change. Artists and activists from various cultural backgrounds are increasingly using performance as a catalyst for social transformation, public awareness, and community healing. Sociopolitical predicaments invoke a collective response from concerned artists, who use performance to voice these challenges and strive for positive change.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This chapter has explored the combination of philosophical anthropology, Islamic teachings, and theatre. Beginning with an outline of philosophy's collaborative role with spirituality and the arts, the influence of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology on contemporary understandings of humanity

was examined. The script of scholar Pramoedya Ananta Toer's The Dancer was used to illustrate humanity's potential for freedom, dignity, and ethical existence through the retrieval of shared memories and the need for personal and communal responsibility. The contemplative and communal aspects of Islamic teachings were then discussed, with a focus on the

mportance of remembrance to the soul's development and attaining virtues. Lastly, the potential of theatre as a medium for ethical discourse and a search for virtues through the performative act of remembrance was illustrated using the theatrical works of *The Performance of Remembrance*, The Wedding, and The Dancer (A. Leahy, 2008).



Philosophy, spirituality, and the arts are most fruitful when they collaborate in an integrated manner, bringing deeper insights into humanity's nature, condition, and concerns. There is a continuing need to explore collaborative practices that merge philosophy/spirituality and performance, creating theatrical works that expand and deepen these disciplines and address emerging challenges. Theatre can draw on the wisdom of communities in creating relevant artworks that explore humanity's search for freedom, dignity, and ethical existence. Artists should engage communities in collaborative works, ensuring theatre is not merely representational but that its actions resonate with and impact people's lives. A commitment to working with communities should be made, creating spaces for discourse and reflection on humanity's concerns. Furthermore, education should be seen as an ethical responsibility, allowing young people to explore their thoughts, feelings, and empathy through performance and spectatorship. Emerging questions in humanity's search for freedom and ethical existence should be engaged, exploring the transformative power of tragedy, spirituality, and the integrated approach of theatre.

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Theatre for Social Change in the Modern World: Metaphysical Review

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTERPLAY OF SOUL, SELF, AND HUMAN RIGHTS: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Concludes the book by synthesizing the core insights on the integration of ***philosophical anthropology****,* ***Islamic teachings****, and* ***theatre*** *to promote* ***social solidarity****,* ***ethical awareness****, and* ***human rights****. It emphasizes how the concepts of soul (ruh) and self (nafs) central to Islamic philosophy can serve as foundational pillars for reimagining collective life rooted in justice, compassion, and dignity. The chapter argues that understanding and performing the soul and self through theatre enables a deeper public engagement with moral responsibility, especially in multicultural societies facing crises of identity, inequality, and fragmentation. Drawing on earlier chapters, it presents theatre as a spiritual-ethical platform for ethical witnessing, storytelling, and communal healing.*

Keywords: Soul (Ruh), Self (Nafs), Human Rights, Ethical Performance, Spiritual Pedagogy.

The chapter also explores how performance can respond to historical injustices and offer hope for future transformations. Specific attention is given to the potential of theatre to become a *living pedagogy*, educating the heart, soul, and mind simultaneously. Finally, the chapter outlines future directions for research and practice, encouraging scholars, educators, and artists to develop contextually grounded, spiritually informed approaches to performance. In doing so, it reaffirms theatre's role as a medium of conscience, capable of restoring humanity's shared values and activating collective efforts toward peace, justice, and ethical co-existence.

KEY INSIGHTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This segment encapsulates the fundamental insights acquired from investigating the interplay of soul, self, and human rights. Through a philosophical-anthropological lens, this inquiry reveals that human rights discourse acquires a transformative potential when human existence is understood as a multi-layered reality comprising soul, self, and body. The soul, regarded as the profound inner dimension of human existence, is widely considered the essential locus where ethics, freedom, dignity, and rights converge and manifest. The self, deeply rooted in socio-cultural contexts and historical narratives, plays a critical role in either validating or negating the entitlements associated with human rights. It is through this intricate interplay that the nature of our humanity is shaped and understood in diverse ways. (Illies2023; Bergen2024; Thakkar, 2024; Samanani, 2022; Moyo2024) The emancipatory power of theatre is sought to create an awareness of the soul and self-dimension, thus advancing the human rights discourse. In this respect, Islamic teachings, understanding Islam as an ethical discourse, are introduced. The soul's fundamental stature is highlighted through theatre as an

ethical-artistic event, establishing theatre as parrhesia, truthful, free-speaking, which, through the awareness of soul and self, cultivates human rights solidarity (McEvoy Spero, 2012).

Fundamental insights advance these contributions as points of departure for further deliberation. First, it is underscored that the discourse conceptualized in philosophical-anthropological terms is not confined to the academic domain but moves to the socio-cultural arena, underscoring the applicability of philosophical inquiry beyond its academic stronghold. Philosophical deliberation transforms into a critical tool for grasping and responding to the contemporary world, its challenges, opportunities, and horizons. Second, insights gained from deliberations on human rights, soul, and self, and the relevance of Islamic teachings serve as an academic/ethical framework to be appropriated/implicitly actualized in theatrical performances. Outside academic considerations, these inputs might act as catalysts for theatre artists/directors to engage more deeply with human rights issues through artistic expression. Lastly, contributions form the basis for a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the ethics of performance, addressing a growing interest in exploring the ethicality of/the ethics in performance.

The Transformative Potential of Philosophical Anthropology

As a type of philosophical inquiry, philosophical anthropology focuses on the realm of human existence and seeks to formulate an understanding of humanity as such. All questions regarding human rights would presuppose some notion of humanity, either in a more philosophically naive or sophisticated understanding. This is the significance of philosophical anthropology in justifying and tackling various issues surrounding human rights. Philosophy

always has the power to change perceptions of human dignity, and hence, rights. This power derives from the capacity to revisit the most fundamental concepts of identity and existence. Through such a reevaluation, there arises a more profound compassion and ethical consideration of others. This anthropological approach is neither utopian nor idealistic. It argues that all private and public, individual and social, local and global struggles could be greatly nurtured by a persistent pursuit of the questions posed by philosophical anthropology. Philosophical inquiries concerning the soul, self, or subject would still hold primary importance in society, including education and research institutions, religious communities, and public spheres, as well as in individual lives. Concerning the contemporary world, complex and rampant struggles, challenges, and crises, be they personal, social, political, cultural, or ecological, would generally require a greater emphasis to be placed upon philosophical and, as a consequence, anthropological engagements. This would include a proactively critical consideration of what it means to exist as a self, being human among others, and in the world. Individuals, groups, communities, and societies who take such questions seriously would be able to cultivate greater resilience against threats to existence and humanity, either temporary or permanent. Regarding this resilience, it is of utmost importance how these philosophical inquiries could be disseminated effectively and adequately. On the one hand, a systematic engagement with philosophical anthropology, including its historical traditions and contemporary articulations, would need to be deepened. This pertains to how philosophically anthropological inquiries could take place in a more public venue, either as a collective or cooperative endeavor, and how such inquiries must be expressed through the medium of art and literature. On the other hand, there is a need to consider how the philosophical, and hence anthropological, foundations of humanity could be applied to

activist or advocacy movements. Concerning this application, the extremes of either a purely philosophical engagement focused only on how to think or a pragmatist perspective fixated solely on what to do must be avoided. Using the philosophical refuges of humanity as a horizon or benchmark, the struggles for justice, humanity, and rights could be enriched and expanded theoretically, yet always in a more imperfect manner. Therefore, it is hoped that conversations concerning the philosophical foundations of justice and humanity could bridge the gap between theory and practice (Koo, 2007).

Islamic Teachings as a Moral Compass for Theatre

This section explores the intersections between Islamic teachings and theatrical art in its capacity as a vehicle for ethical and moral reflection. Art is often seen as a space of freedom, where the artist can speak his or her mind and do what is right. However, an ethical anchor is needed to prevent art from transmuting into a vehicle of senseless vandalism. How can the dot of theatre and art be connected to the Islamic teachings composed based on the ethics of the soul, self, and human rights? It is argued that Islamic principles can guide the theatrical expressions in a way that promotes the social values and justice narratives conveyed in such performances in the Islamic context. In the Qur'ānic verses and the narratives of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Ahl al-Bayt, the social values to be upheld in the theatrical art are compassion, righteousness, and the acts of upholding the intrinsic value of every human soul. With these values in mind, theatre can play the role of challenging the established social norms and fostering critical discussions on such narratives. As an illustration, it is argued that the artists can make use of the Islamic narratives of the rights of the souls in demanding human rights through

theatrical performances (Hinda, 2019). The theatre performances on the Islamic rights narratives can awaken the audience's dormant ethical values towards the societal injustices based on the Islamic soul rights teachings. However, the socio-political context is consequential in determining the impact and reach of such performances. Some other examples are presented to demonstrate how theatrical art is used in reflecting the cultural and religious identities and hence the worldviews of the communities, which can enhance the understanding of the heterogeneous communities. In such a case, the theatre becomes a common ground for the meeting of the minds and hearts, which is needed in today's world that is so vulnerable to enmity and hatred between cultures and religions (Mangini, 2016). In such instances, the intersections of the Islamic teachings and theatrical art become the spaces of solidarity and empathy, which are considered as the fundamental elements of any just society. Conclusively, it is revealed that the theatrical art has the potential to be a transformative space in which the Islamic ethics are applied.

Theatre as a Platform for Solidarity and Justice

Solidarity is the choice of an individual or a group to share the fate of others through a good or a bad situation. In social movements, solidarity is expressed as an alliance of individuals or groups to fight against the established powers for a specific cause. (Reclam, 2018). From a philosophical perspective, solidarity is a natural condition of human existence since human beings live in a culture built collectively and depend on others for the construction of their identity and agency. As Reclam Sia, this category of applied theater warrants specific attention. (Boal,1979) used theater work with oppressed communities to solve collective problems. In one example production, he gathered a group of urban individuals from an Aboriginal community and put on a

performer-created production about domestic violence. This kind of theater does not provide explicit answers but is based on the exploration of the social issue or question (Diamond, 1994). Studies have shown the effects applied theater can have on various groups of people. Somers (2009) directed a production created by a group of psychiatric patients to experience psychosis. Results showed that as the audience engaged in a discussion with the characters, deeper connections to the community story were developed for the performers, and further stories were being told. Somers concluded that the students who watched and participated in this performance gained from the experience, however, no follow-up was done to actually get their feedback. While the experience may have been extremely powerful for the participants, the inclusion of their specific reflections would have strengthened the conclusion of this study (Reclam, 2018, p.9). The Global South Movements argue for a universal form of solidarity based on shared experiences due to colonialism, neo-colonialism, and economic destabilization by the already established powers in the Global North. These experiences build a connectedness that transcends geographical borders. The theatre of the Global South Movements embodies these qualities of solidarity.

Theatre as a Tool for Solidarity and Social Justice

Let me begin with a brief discussion of my initial rationale for using the arts as a vehicle for an expression of communal justice. Theatre is both art and action; there is no permanent separation of the message from the medium. Recreation can indeed be re-creation. Why is it important for my human rights students to be part of a theatrical enterprise? First, as an active audience, their primary critical but interactive role usually prepares them for classroom rigor more effectively than passive lectures,

discussions, or even debates. Enactism does encourage them to communicate views, emotions, and opinions more successfully with others. Second, the artistic product can make a potentially durable impact favorable to social justice, the purpose of many but perhaps not all human rights courses. The venue for purpose-driven creativity here, in concert with personal development and community solidarity, formed a perfect storm.

Third, there are specific assets common across virtually all performing and visual arts. For example: Ensemble piece: No role is fairly written; ensemble members are usually guaranteed an active presence on stage, not a mere walk-on. Most group work, however, lacks this promise of drama. Partnership: Any artistic endeavor, regardless of legibility, is driven by strong, deeply caring partnerships among the creators, supporters, and the servants among us. Universality: Throughout millennia, dramatic and plastic works have examined pain and suffering and depicted cheering and enjoyment. Justice, compassion, morality, and ethical choices are as constant as time. Dress rehearsal for life: Excitement, disappointment, satisfaction, hope, and fear are tempered here. Beauty, truth, wisdom, and technical achievement heighten the experience. Individuality: No two performances of any artistic work are identical; spectator reactions vary; nerves, psychological energy, and challenge help to create those variances. Personal and social change: Action without passion is doubtful; art is a cauldron. Despite the nature of the entertainment we are viewing, we immediately become or remain engaged spectators searching for deeper meaning, soul, and understanding that we can bring to bear on our communal ways.

In 2005, the Brazilian performance artist and activist presented her performance at the Vienna-based theatre. The performance deals with the symbolic murder of the artist's father who was

killed by a group of corrupt policemen in Brazil. Through the retelling of this traumatic experience in a performance, the artist tries to transform the trauma from a burden into a tool for social change. She invites the audience to create a healing space through their attention and engagement with the performance. The performance triggered a chain of events that led to the formation of a collective of artists and social scientists who use theatre as a tool for solidarity and social justice. The emergence of the performance is an example of the complexities of the creation, reception, and interpretation of a performance. Performance art has the power to transform personal traumas into weapons for collective action. Performance art can be used as a tool for social justice and solidarity through various case studies. The performance highlights injustices in the social, political, and economic conditions of a group of people and invites the audience to engage with these issues critically. Through dramatization, a complex social injustice is represented in a fictional setting accessible for a wider audience to engage with it triggering a vital conversation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

The previous sections have delved into the interplay between the soul and self, drawing upon philosophical contributions from various thinkers. Using ethical advocacy for marginalized human beings as a lens, the relationships between soul and self-have been explored, especially in the context of rights discourse as either religious or secular. The soul and self are argued to be the necessary experiential and conceptual foundations for addressing human rights challenges, whether in individual or social matters. While the potential to amplify compassion, respect, and love

within each person exists, misinterpretations of either the soul or self could lead to a collapse of such capacities, thereby justifying the questioning of rights. The focus has shifted to matters of social solidarity and strategies to fortify rights, whether as social or human rights. It is asserted that narratives of the soul and self can assist in advocating for understanding and solidarity amidst societal disparities and injustices. Social and cultural expressions are highlighted as significant mediums for transmitting rights notions. Though, the articulation of such narratives may not be straightforward due to cultural divergences in conceptualizing the soul and self. Courts and institutions might deal with rights violations in one culture that are not comprehensible to another. Disparities also exist in how rights are inscribed within law or addressed by other forms of sociality. Additionally, an examination of how such narratives could connect differing rights articulations, ensuring collective consciousness and solidarity, is needed. The importance of dialogue in the public realm between various rights advocates or differing conceptions of rights, humanity, and sociality as a means of fostering understanding through appreciation and compassion for disparate narratives is underscored. Ultimately, broadening the philosophical discussion of rights as a shared humanity to the discourse and action of rights as a means of uniting the human soul is proposed.

Soul and Self as Foundations for Ethical Advocacy

This paper has sought to explore how concepts of the soul and the self-underpin a particular notion of ethical advocacy in human rights, or at least begin to do so. The basic argument is that an understanding of human beings as souls and selves, inseparably interwoven, enhances the efficacy of advocacy efforts by ensuring a nuanced understanding of identity as both simple and complex, universal and plural. Accepting that there is dignity in every

individual enables considerations of method in advocacy that are more likely to be empathetic to cultural context. Further, it is suggested that a particular interplay of soul and self helps clarify identity and dignity, ultimately informing human rights approaches to human dignity and therefore the efficacy of the advocacy efforts that this implies (Stevenson, 2014). As a general tendency, post-metaphysical thinkers urge us to reject any commitment to essentialism, i.e., to static ways of understanding things that assume that the features or characteristics of our objects of understanding are fixed atemporal essences. Furthermore, they also reject the demand that our understanding of things can ever be value-free or apolitical (KOO, 2007, Pp.107) Advocating for human rights may be approached in many ways, regardless of the characterization of identity. The contention here, however, is that a particular interplay of concepts relates directly to human dignity and therefore the efficacy of advocacy endeavours. As a starting point, it is argued that identity is both simple and complex, or unitary but plural, as Koo (2007) said. Elements of the simple or unitary identity underpin approaches to rights and dignity that consider individuality before social context. As such, dignity is an individual attribute that, if present, ensures acknowledgement of rights. This conceptualisation affords understanding of dignity as a human quality common to all and thus approaches that directly question or deny dignity, such as in the case of those suffering from mental illness or asylum seekers, necessitate a critique of the socioeconomic, socio-political, or cultural context of a denial to effect change. But the complex or plural dimension of identity must also be recognized. (Hollenbach, 2021; Hicks, 2021; Zamanzadeh et al.2023) Contemporary global challenges such as climate change, terrorism, globalization, social inequality, and collective anxiety have necessitated a deeper contemplation of wisdom to foster and

strengthen social solidarity. In this context, theatre, as a global cultural medium, holds immense potential to serve as a reflective and transformative space. However, in its pursuit of modernity and social progress, theatre can sometimes misinterpret or overshadow local cultural dispositions. Rediscovering and amplifying cultural wisdoms that nurture togetherness becomes essential in bridging this gap. Theatre, as an embodiment of philosophy in action, offers a medium to reconnect with essential thoughts and cultural practices (Hinda, 2019; Pestana, Valenzuela, & Codina, 2020). Philosophical anthropology, which delves into the essence of humanity, finds a profound expression in Islamic teachings. These teachings, with their anthropological cosmology and axiomatic exploration of the soul (ruh) and self (nafs), provide a framework to articulate human interconnectedness and solidarity. This framework was dramatized in a theatre performance staged during an international seminar on Islamic Inwardness and Human Rights, emphasizing social solidarity and the promotion of human rights.

Humanity, in Islamic cosmology, is understood as comprising three interconnected realms: the divine realm of God (al-ghaib), which transcends the material; the world of forms and ideas (al-mithal), which shapes human inspiration and thought; and the tangible, sensory world (al-syahid), experienced through human senses (Hinda, 2018; Kaukua, 2015). These realms collectively position humanity as the noblest of all creations, endowed with the extraordinary gifts of the soul, self, and rationality. Humanity is directed to transcend material desires and align itself with the divine, fostering unity with God. The natural law of togetherness (syara), intrinsic to the soul, serves as a moral compass that guides humans toward noble and collective living. These natural laws, deeply rooted in Islamic philosophy, provide the foundation for

social solidarity and human rights (Ghofar, Abubakar, & Azhar, 2018).

The notion of shared humanity is indispensable for addressing the stifling socio-political conditions of the 21st century. Peace, traditionally defined as the absence of war, violence, or conflict, must now be reimagined to encompass broader dimensions such as equity, justice, sociality, and solidarity. Peace is no longer just a political ideal but a fundamental human right, intertwined with the right to life and dignified existence (Houshmand, 2010). These expanded notions of peace require philosophical reconstruction and socio-historical contextualization to address the pressing challenges of our time. Social and cultural movements that embody this reimagined peace, particularly those rooted in Islamic philosophy, hold significant potential to foster wider solidarity and justice. Islamic cultural and theatrical movements, such as those seen in Indonesia's timuhun, provide a compelling case for dramatizing Islamic philosophical anthropological insights to resolve social dilemmas. These movements emphasize the tauhid-based understanding of the soul and self, situating them as essential elements of humanity and society. Through dramatization, they elucidate the meanings of the soul as both a philosophical and religious concept, while contextualizing the self as a socio-cultural entity (Koo, 2007; Fakharuddin & Suhid, 2016). Such dramatizations, however, are often challenged by cultural contingencies, linguistic diversities, and socio-political barriers, which can lead to clashes or misunderstandings between civilizations. Despite these challenges, shared aspirations for peace, justice, and human rights remain universal, as reflected in both Islamic teachings and global philosophical traditions. Theatre, as a performative medium, transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, creating spaces for dialogue and reflection.

Scholars like Degli Esposti (2017) highlight how theatrical performances can navigate contested identities and conflicting cultural narratives, fostering understanding and empathy. Similarly, Sforza (2019) emphasizes the ethical potential of theatre in politically sensitive contexts, particularly when addressing issues of injustice and marginalization. When infused with Islamic ethical principles, such as compassion (rahma) and justice (adl), theatre becomes a powerful tool for advocating human rights and promoting social solidarity (Mangini, 2016). The essence of philosophical anthropology, particularly as interpreted through Islamic teachings, lies in its emphasis on the shared dignity and interconnectedness of all humans. The dramatization of these principles not only reaffirms the universality of human rights but also provides a pathway for addressing the socio-historical roots of inequality and injustice. By exploring the soul and self through the lens of Islamic philosophy and theatre, this work aims to bridge the gaps between cultural, religious, and social divides, fostering a shared understanding of humanity's essential unity.

Here, identity is understood in the language of social selfhood, characterizing the individual as inextricably bound to a plurality of social relations. Unlike simple identity, complex identity concerns the manner in which social relations shape dignity, which can be abstracted in many ways. With dignity framed as a social attribute, approaches to rights based on unconditional dignity are highly vulnerable to critique and dismissal. Framing dignity in purely social terms means that it can be questioned through a consideration of social difference.

Addressing Marginalization Through Performing Arts

Throughout history, many forms of human and collective incompatibility or social contextualization have been addressed by the performing arts. Nevertheless, there appears to be a relative neglect of this discourse, albeit widespread, framing contemporary academic considerations around performative actions strongly and intentionally devoted to confronting and remedying social marginalization. Just as theatre has been used by the powerholders as a means of control and oppression, so it has been wielded by the marginalized as a way of protest and resistance. Theatre, one of the most viable forms of performing art, has been employed since its inception as a means of giving voice to the voiceless. Regardless of geographical or cultural specificities, theatres have opened the floodgates of narrativity to dispossessed communities. The performing art, particularly theatre, is an avenue to contest and challenge the prevailing hegemonic discourses with counter-discourses asserting the marginalized communities' rights to life and expressivity. A single narrative can be hegemonically appropriated, whereas multiplicity prevails in the contestation over its meaning. This multiplicity is articulated through performance by the very communities whose lives and identities are inscribed in the narrative. The performing arts, by showcasing narrative multiplicity, foster understanding and empathy among broader audiences. The understanding and empathy often facilitate the recognition of humanity in the Others, just like the issues of inadequacy and misery, poverty and hunger, race and discrimination, gender and oppression become visible. These issues, albeit in extreme circumstances, could be inflicted even upon the affluent as they are precisely the spaces of human rights violations. The consideration's takeoff points are isolated communities with mainstream or dominant societal contexts left

outside theatrical deliberation, bringing to the fore race, gender, and economic disparity issues.

As seen in Chapter 3, theatre initiatives worldwide are increasingly aligning with principles of philosophical anthropology, emphasizing human agency, cultural identity, and ethical responsibility. These initiatives not only reflect the human condition but also actively engage communities in dialogues about societal values and transformations.

1. Welsh National Theatre: Reviving Cultural Identity

In 2025, actor Michael Sheen launched the Welsh National Theatre (WNT) to rejuvenate English-language theatre in Wales after the closure of National Theatre Wales due to funding cuts. The WNT aims to tour extensively, connecting with rural communities and showcasing Welsh talent. This initiative underscores the anthropological emphasis on cultural preservation and the role of art in expressing and sustaining communal identities.

2. Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation: Empowering Community Voices

The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation's Social Impact Theatre Grant Program supports theatres that address pressing social issues through compelling productions. In 2024, the foundation introduced Change Capital Grants to help theatres implement new business models for sustainability. This approach aligns with philosophical anthropology's focus on human agency and the capacity of communities to shape their destinies through collective action.

3. National Theatre's "Scene Change" Report: Innovating for Sustainability

The UK's National Theatre released the "Scene Change" report in early 2025, highlighting the fragility of current funding structures in the performing arts sector. The report recommends developing a sector-wide Technology Roadmap, creating playbooks for cost-saving and revenue generation, and establishing a match fund to drive sustainability and decarbonization. These recommendations reflect an understanding of the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental factors in human societies, a core concern of philosophical anthropology.

4. Teatro Nacional D. Maria II: Integrating Ecological Consciousness

Portugal's Teatro Nacional D. Maria II has incorporated "Doughnut Economics" into its operations, balancing social and ecological considerations in theatre operations, American Journal of Arts Management. This initiative demonstrates a commitment to ethical responsibility and the recognition of humanity's embeddedness within the broader ecological system, central themes in philosophical anthropology.

5. ActNow Theatre: Participatory Democracy in Action

Based in Adelaide, ActNow Theatre focuses on social justice through interactive and issue-based performances. The company engages with diverse communities, including LGBTIQ+, First Nations Australians, and culturally diverse groups, using participatory theatre techniques to empower audiences ActNow Theatre. This model exemplifies the anthropological emphasis on

participatory democracy and the co-creation of meaning within communities.

- These theatre initiatives embody the principles of philosophical anthropology by:
- Reviving and sustaining cultural identities through community engagement and storytelling.
- Empowering communities to address social issues and shape their futures.
- Innovating for sustainability, recognizing the interconnectedness of human societies and the environment.
- Fostering participatory democracy, encouraging active involvement in cultural and societal dialogues.

By integrating these principles, theatre becomes a powerful medium for exploring and addressing the complexities of human existence in contemporary societies.

The performing arts' therapeutic potential is revealed through community performance, which makes public and visible the narratives long marginalized, prevented from narration, or narrativized by the Others. By reclaiming the life narratives, the communities confront the contextualized afresh margin, at times even imbued with a new sense and meaning, thus becoming an efficacy apparatus or armory in the contending with newly emerged dominations. Theatre at this point is considered an advocacy tool, an artistic weapon in the quest for social justice, evocative spectacles, performing community and participatory theatres, collective plays, and workshops designed for social, educational, and cultural equity and inclusivity. Augusto Boal, creator of Theater of the Oppressed, states that the role of participant-observer has unique characteristics that make it

particularly conducive to the reflection required for transformation, specifically calling it an “internal dialogue” (Jacques, 2011, p. 90). This duality gives the individual and the group a well-rounded understanding of the scenario and its implicit anxieties because the individual explores the situation both subjectively, as a participant, and objectively, as an observer. (Recalm 2018, p.13) The arrival of the performing arts to the dispossessed is often a long, torturous journey, as the power of the performing arts is not due to its mere presence or the actions' materiality, but the intentionality vested in it. The intent might decontextualize the performative actions, rendering them harmful or even dangerous, like in the case of colonization, where the powerholders aggressively anathematized the local performative traditions, branding them barbarous, obscene, and meaningless, as enacted by the enactment authorities' cleaving to the texts' holy and sacral. Under the performative actions' aegis, imperatives are inscribed upon the community members' lives, whose violation might lead to macroscopic disarray or local annihilation. As the performative actions might be life-constitutive, the performative arts' arrival might often be evocative death summonses. With performative actions, the meaning and value inscribed in the heritage dramatically shift, creating a new set of values and meanings or even obliterating the old ones. The newly inscribed imperatives radicalize community existence, inducing, oftentimes, incommensurable disparities between pre- and post-arrival existences. Nevertheless, after a rough and tortuous journey, the right to perform a certain art is appropriated, thus, a power to speak being the ground zero of all powers. The performative arts enact narratives formerly or still marginalization-conditioned inaudibly resonating in the communities' crevices, bringing the unheard, unseeable into life thus summoning new regimes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, the discourse around the interplay of the notions of soul, self, and human rights is worthy of further attention. It is hoped that the considerations presented here inspire research endeavors that expand the scope of inquiry to include a variety of cultural and religious traditions. As the understandings of the soul and self-do not exist in uniformity but vary widely, it is asserted that perspectives rooted in those variations can deepen the understanding of the notion of human rights, which some traditions may contest or embrace differently. Furthermore, it is suggested that studies involving an artistic dimension be encouraged, especially in consideration of the relevant philosophical discourse that derives from the works of noted philosophers. While theatre has been discussed, other forms of artistic expression may likewise reveal interesting grounds for philosophical inquiries. As pertinent issues have emerged in the interplay of the notions of soul, self, and human rights, it is recommended that art be embraced as a necessary supplement to philosophical discourse, especially on themes that concern ethics. It is also worth noting that the forms of art that involve performance might bear even more significance as they relate to the performative aspect of life itself (Spero, 2012). Ramos came to the project dedicated to protecting immigration rights and ending racial discrimination. In particular he was active in the campaign to repeal SB 1070, an Arizona law that discriminated against Latinos. Roy was a very kind and thoughtful sophomore in Anita's class who went above the assignment requirements to create not just one, but three posters. He was very proud of the artistic elements of his work, and most importantly, he wanted to inform others about injustices happening against Latinos in the United States. As part of his involvement in Homies Empowerment, he was chosen as a student leader to travel to Los

Angeles for a conference of La Raza organizers (Spero, 2013. p.64). The contemporary focus on digital and virtual theatre as a means of performing for global audiences who gather in front of computer screens might bear consideration in light of these recommendations. Though concerns have been raised regarding the loss of the original theatrical experience, it cannot be denied that the new modes of performance effectively reach more numerous audiences than ever before. The considerations presented here have focused primarily on the medium of theatre, but it is insisted that other forms of performance art, such as dance, may evoke philosophical inquiries similar to those explored here. The concerns of contemporary theatre and performing art have been viewed solely from the perspective of the artworks, but these concerns are profoundly relevant for the discourse of ethics and the societal implications of the artworks. It is necessary to keep questioning the long-lasting impact on society that performances deemed ethical are likely to possess. In this sense, it is hoped that the dialogue opened by the considerations presented here may inspire new directions for research and the application of research findings.

Expanding Research Across Cultural and Religious Traditions

A key concern brought forth by the empirical studies is the need to widen the cultural and religious breadth of research approaches on the soul-self-human rights nexus. Mainstream discussions typically revolve around a handful of traditions, such as those stemming from Western Enlightenment philosophy, Kantian liberalism, Marxism, and post-colonial critiques. It is argued here that many other approaches exist, and a richer tapestry of perspectives is essential in ensuring that advocacy efforts

surrounding the application of the human rights framework are as effective as possible. A simple yet fundamental recommendation is that scholarly attention should be given to traditions that have been marginalized in mainstream discussions, especially those that approach the nexus between culture, morality, and human rights in ways unintelligible to the dominant paradigm (Stevenson, 2014). For example, Philippine folk epics can be seen as engaging with a discourse on rights in a sense that word has been usually understood in the West, but such engagement could easily be overlooked because of differences in cultural context and performative form. Scholarship and activism need to take up the challenge put forth by research initiatives like the one that resulted in this volume. Responses may differ from region to region, but it is essential to view human rights discourse as open to engagement from diverse cultural perspectives. Such engagement can expose new insights regarding what dignity and rights are (or should be) in particular cultural settings and how far a given moral understanding might transcend cultural boundaries. It is important not to arrive at settled definitions of dignity and rights, but rather to see these terms as inviting debate that opens up various possibilities for their interpretation in different cultural contexts. Dignity and rights might well be understood in terms that are utterly incommensurable across cultures and therefore not worth pursuing as a global conversation. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that some understandings might resonate across cultures, at least in ways that render possible dialogue and mutual accommodation, albeit probably with no guarantee of agreement (V Spickard, 2010). At a minimum, it would seem desirable to co-generate a more comprehensive understanding of what dignity and rights are in as many cultural contexts as possible. A necessary prerequisite for this is fostering debates in and between cultures on what constitutes dignity and rights.

Exploring Digital and Virtual Theatre Experiences and Innovations for Global Reach

Virtual performances are playing an increasingly important role in advancing human rights discourse. The evolution of digital and virtual theatre offers new opportunities for expanding access, fostering inclusion, and challenging traditional geographic and cultural boundaries. Through the use of webcams, live-streaming platforms, and 3D immersive spaces, performers can collaborate across distances, allowing intercultural dialogues to occur in real-time (McEvoy Spero, 2012). Virtual theatre thus holds the potential to democratize participation in the performing arts, providing platforms for marginalized voices historically silenced in mainstream venues. Digital spaces can engage local communities while simultaneously broadcasting their messages to global audiences, transforming theatre into a form of activism that transcends physical limitations. Although challenges like digital access, technological literacy, and censorship persist, these should be viewed as areas for innovation rather than obstacles to progress (Nayar, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the resilience of digital creativity, as communities turned to virtual platforms to keep performance, hope, and activism alive during lockdowns (Perry, 2020). This shift toward virtuality does not replace the value of face-to-face engagement but adds a new layer where performance becomes a form of witnessing, resistance, and collective healing. Digital theatre can serve as a critical and transformative space offering both escape and intervention, raising awareness, and pushing boundaries of identity, locality, and global justice (Boal, 2006; Kuppers, 2011). As such, digital performance continues to ask urgent questions about justice, coherence, and responsibility in increasingly connected yet contested global landscapes. Whether emerging from local

communities or global centers, these performances represent experiments in reciprocity, care, and reimagined solidarity.

Evaluating the Long-term Impact of Ethical Performances

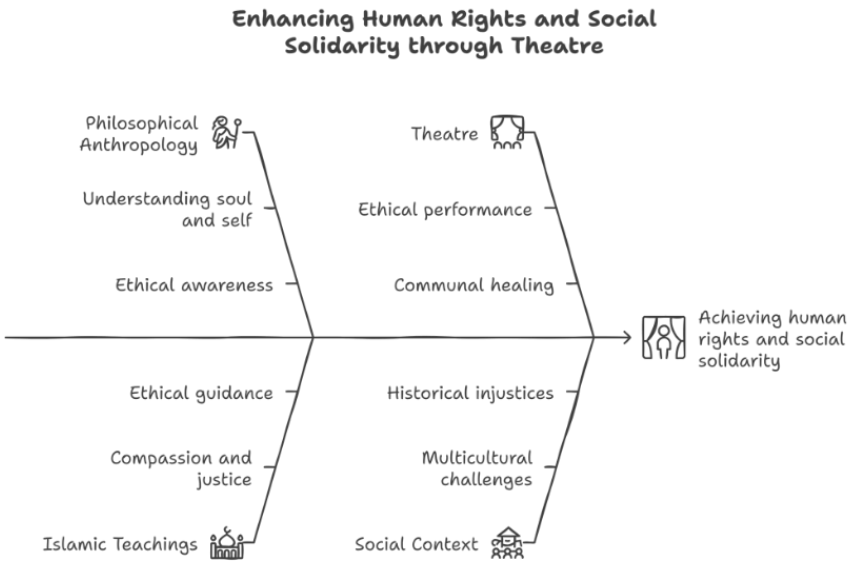
Evaluating the long-term impact of ethical performances requires a fundamental change in the way of living (Moldavanova, 2013). Understandably, those with accountability for advocacy want to know how strongly and for how long a change in attitude or behaviour has been initiated by a performance. The arts help people emotionally understand the ups and downs of this transition. Consideration of how strongly and sustainability impacts are felt or will be felt is a key question in a community of scholars and practitioners involved in performance art addressing human rights. The remarkable ability of art to evoke thoughts and reflections on what the future may hold is, therefore, crucially important for a meaningful consideration of intergenerational justice and the responsibilities we have towards upcoming generations. What is currently considered a "societal good" by some audiences, politicians, practitioners, and scholars may or may not be submitted to the same evaluation by future generations as they experience the unfolding of their realities. However, values that promote "societal good" may also be disregarded or overlooked in the complex transition path towards an envisioned future that holds promise for all. The theme of intergenerational dialogue is richly reflected in various forms of the arts and in creative thinking processes. Audiences and practitioners engage deeply, reacting not only to the present-day impacts of live performances and artworks but also to the potential impacts perceived to last into the future. Art that is created in the present moment can strongly promote timeless values and lasting messages that thoughtfully exceed the boundaries of our current

generations, bridging the gap between past, present, and future to create continuous dialogues across time. (Danker et al., 2023; Lee, 2024; Szabó2021)

Of interest to some scholars and practitioners, what is considered an impact of performance at all, and how such impacts are categorized. The process and practice of making art is itself valuable because the discussants/artists can inform themselves through it. One example is realizing artists working on climate change to create understanding, art discussed in public forums, so that scientists and the public can share knowledge, is a good model. In that case, think of art as a medium in the long term. A key theme is concerned with how audiences and practitioners perceive the impacts of performances and what categories they would put impacts in want to know how performances initially change some societal attitudes or behaviors. A key question in the community is how to art so that a change occurs. Art dealt with performance and dance, so how did they bring about change? Thinking in the long term requires a reconsideration of traditional moral values and the development of a new culture of thinking. Discussants were reminded about impact categories: long-term, intermediary, and immediate. Impacts currently being assessed are paralleled with what impacts are desired.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is seen in this volume that the interplay between soul and self is complex, multilayered, and multidirectional. The two concepts are distinct markers of the often unconscious and conscious limits and determining factors of how one perceives oneself, how one sees the self about others, and how one defines and perceives the existence and relation of others. Using different methods and theoretical backgrounds, the authors of this collective volume have shown in a variety of ways that the soul and the self are



constructed, negotiated, lived, and experienced differently not only across historical periods, cultures, social contexts, disciplines, and theoretical orientations, but also within what often seem to be stable, coherent, homogeneous bodies, individuals, and societies. This is not just an abstract academic issue.

The soul and the self deeply affect how societies perceive and treat the other. They can create community or division, support post-material human rights, or justify multiple forms of

discrimination and violation of human existence. The presentations in this volume document these issues by showing what is at stake in such differences in how the soul and the self are understood, experienced, challenged, and lived, and they offer specific insight into how these conceptual concerns of the other are reflected within the sociopolitical level of human rights as an excluding or inclusive framework of politics, law, and ethics, and as a mental and symbolic construction.

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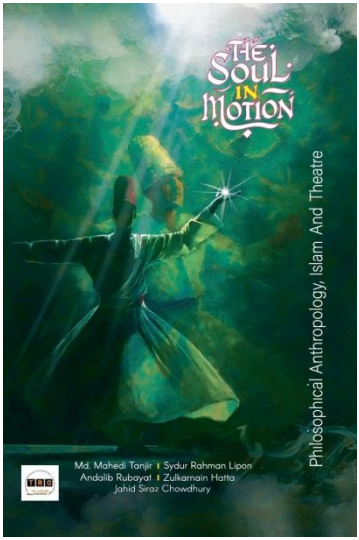

This Book explores how theatre can enrich social work education by enhancing empathy, communication, and critical reflection. Through practical examples and interdisciplinary insights, it offers a dynamic approach to teaching that bridges performance and pedagogy, empowering future social workers to engage more deeply with communities and complex social realities.

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