



PERFORMING THE MEMORY OF THE 'YEARS OF LEAD' IN MOROCCO

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KEYWORDS: Performance Studies, Theatre, Years of Lead, Morocco

ABSTRACT

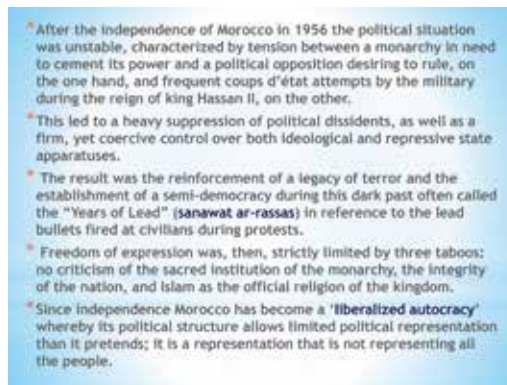
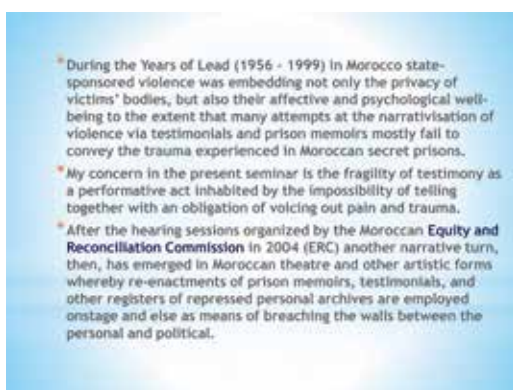
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re-enactments of prison memoirs, testimonials, and other registers of repressed personal archives are employed onstage and else as means of breaching the walls between the personal and political.

YEARS OF LEAD IN MOROCCO

After the independence of Morocco in 1956 the political situation was unstable, characterized by tension between a monarchy in need to cement its power and a political opposition desiring to rule, on the one hand, and frequent coups d'état attempts by the military during the reign of king Hassan II, on the other. This led to a heavy suppression of political dissidents, as well as a firm, yet coercive control over the ideological state apparatuses. The result was the reinforcement of a legacy of state-sponsored terror and the establishment of a semi-democracy during this dark past often called the «Years of Lead» (*sanawat ar-rassas*) in reference to the lead bullets fired at civilians during protests. Freedom of expression was, then, strictly limited by three taboos: no criticism of the sacred institution of the monarchy, the integrity of the nation, and Islam as the official religion of the kingdom. Morocco becomes a kind of 'liberalized autocracy' whereby its political structure allows limited political representation than it pretends; it is a representation that is not representing all the people.¹



This state of affair is secured by the *Makhzen* (the all-powerful machine of the state that embodies Morocco's ruling network of elites and high-ranking Officials, centered on the King) through «patronage rituals, legal shackles, spiritual rarefaction, political constraints, symbolic invocations, and, of course, the tacit threat of force.» (Loudiy 2014: 68) Power is sustained and centralized in the hands of the *Makhzen* through a mixture of «guided pluralism, controlled elections and selective repression.» The kingdom has become organized hierarchically around its sovereign, who is both its spiritual and worldly leader. Islam is not only the official religion of the state, but also the source of the King's legitimacy, the spiritual foundation of his power and the ultimate reference of a legitimate structure that allows the Sovereign to proclaim his pre-eminence even in the new constitution voted during the so-called Arab Spring protests July 2011. This is best illustrated in the *bay'ah* ceremony² (the allegiance ritual) as the most significant national ritual of commemoration related to the nation as 'imagined community'.

The *bay'ah* is a yearly ceremony where dignitaries from all over the kingdom pledge allegiance to the King, bowing before him in a very strict ritual of authority. The ritual exhibits and celebrates the monar-

1 The ensuing violence of both the repressive state apparatuses and political opposition during the 1960s and 1970s through the 1980s seems to leave simplistic bipolar manicheasms open to different interpretations today. The monarchy has managed «to stay in power for the past sixty years», as Fadwa Loudiy argues in her well-researched book entitled *Transitional Justice and Human Rights in Morocco: Negotiating the Years of Lead*, «through a clever double-ended game of violence/fear and co-optation/corruption internally, along with a well-orchestrated public relations campaign internationally.» (Loudiy 2014: 61).

2 The *bay'ah* tradition is rooted in Islam; it is an act of allegiance whereby the companions of the Prophet owed him faithfulness.

"Makhzen" المخزن

is the Arabic word for warehouse. It was originally used to name the treasure chest where Sultans stored the taxes collected from the people.

- The meaning evolved through history. It first broadened up to mean, symbolically, the content of the chest—i.e., the Sultan's assets.
- Later, it embraced the personnel paid with these assets, then the whole government, administration and army.



- Since the Alaouite dynasty was installed in the 17th century, "Makhzen" is used in reference to anyone who contributes in relaying the king's power to the population. In its political usage, however, the word refers to the circle surrounding the king, often operating as a club of shadow decision makers.

- The Makhzen is also associated with fear and loathing, as citizens, or rather subjects, who are not within the good graces of the king and his entourage, live in fear of its wrath and ubiquitous violence.



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB1XwqJol3M>



The Bayh'a to the King

chic body while at the same time erasing and denying other bodies. It is a performative practice that attempts at foreclosing agency and assigning specific places for participants by over-reducing them into submissive 'subjects' rather than 'citizens' in the structure of *blaad al-Makhzen* (the Makhzen's land). Therefore, the *bay'ah* ritual and 'royal hand-kissing' interpellate Moroccans as subjects through a reiterated performance behavior. As a state spectacle of power, it has generated a heated public discussion the last few years. The most recent acts of dissent against the *bay'ah* ceremony that took place in Rabat and Paris in

2012 underline the fundamental changes in national discussion.³ In Judith Butler's terms, there is an embodied performance aspect, or rather a performativity, in these reiterated yet subversive dissident acts against *bay'ah* in so far as they enable the agency that was foreclosed by the official *bay'ah* ritual for years.

Brief, during the Years of Lead the Makhzen's policy was based on 'zero tolerance' against political opposition. For decades, Moroccan authorities have routinely practiced a regime of *garde à vue* detention (inherited from the French colonial administration), whereby thousands of suspected political dissidents were imprisoned in secret detention centers utterly cut off from the outside world without trial or any other legal due process. The secret facilities wherein the practice of torture was endemic constituted 70% of the overall prison institutions of the country. Such system of indefinite uncommunicated detention, according to Amnesty International Report of 20 March 1991, 'disregards the most basic safeguards of detainees against torture'. Political imprisonment in Morocco during the *Years of Lead* has sedimented more subtle and insidious forms of trauma with a cumulative and life-altering impact not only upon victims, but also their families and relatives.

State violence was deeply embedded in the 'intimacy of victims' bodies and "selfhood and their affective and social worlds"⁴ to the extent that many attempts at the narrativization of violence via testimonials and prison memoirs mostly fail to convey the trauma experienced in Moroccan secret prisons. The dehumanization of victims went too far that identifying with them in any meaningful sense would be impossible. "My body was a mass of pain, head to toe (...) I had become a 'dismembered body', writes Nour-eddi-

ne Saoudi in his prison memoirs (2007: 23). Symbolic violence at *Derb Moulay Cherif*, the most infamous and atrocious detention center in Hay Mohammadi of Casablanca, is manifested also through a peculiar regime of trans-valuation of values and undoing of everyday world. Laura Menin rightly observes in her reading of Saoudi's memoirs «besides ensuring the jailers' anonymity, forcing the prisoners to address their persecutors with this honorific title (Hajj) represented a form of symbolic violence. The reversal of moral values in the 'derb' reinforced the undoing of the everyday world.» (Menin, 50) *Al-hajj* is an honorific title given to Muslims who accomplished pilgrimage to Mecca. However, at *Derb Moulay Sherif*, *al-hajj* was deployed as a derogatory term by the prison personnel (torturers) to ensure their anonymity as well as their superiority over prisoners.

At the *Derb* all sorts of injuries were permitted and practiced upon the victims' bodies. All victims were under permanent threat of rape. Raping male prisoners with a bottle was a common practice to shake their sexual identity, and of course reinforce the *hujjaj's* superiority within a culturally sexist society. The gendered dimension of state violence is still a taboo topic for many; «it threatens the prisoners' image of virile masculinity, as predominantly conceived in Morocco.»⁵ As for women prisoners, the situation was even worse, for they were punished for daring to practice politics -an exclusively male domain-, challenging patriarchal co-option, besides their opposition to the *Makhzen*. Another post-traumatic silence was also imposed by the taboos of 'h-shuma' rooted in Moroccan culture. 'H-shuma' is an umbrella term in Morocco used to designate everything that falls in the category of acting against constructed social and

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvlHKQSBkI8>

4 Menin 2014: 46

5 Menin 2014: 50. In interviews much more than his published memoir, Saoudi reveals more details of the atrocities of state violence: «In their system of violence the macho dimension was part of their way to destabilize and break the male prisoners' morale by addressing them with the most abject terms –“faggot”, “I will fuck you”, “son of a bitch”- and by the agony of the bottle, when prisoners were forced to sit on a bottle.» (Interview with Menin, 2 May, 2013).

moral norms. As a mode of political correctness, the word 'h-shuma' is mainly «applied to acts constituting a violation of certain norms.»⁶ Most of these norms are related to oppressive attitudes of shame and vulnerability as inscribed by patriarchal discursive practices and legitimized by male interpretations of Islamic religion and the veiling of women in the private space of the 'harim'.

Fatna El-Bouih, who spent 7 months at the Derb, admits that political violence against women was the most unpleasant; women prisoners were victims of sexualized violence as a strategy to erase their gendered subjectivity: «they didn't want to recognize that we were women. They gave us a number and a man's name. The woman is haram, is silence.» (Interview with Menin, 2012) El Bouih was re-gendered as «Rachid 45»: «They gave me a number: 'Now you are named Rachid... don't move, don't speak, only if you hear your name. Rachid.' This was the beginning of the depersonalization: the abduction, the arbitrary sequestration, and the negation of my femininity. For them, I was only a man they called Rachid.»⁷ As a punishment for her transgression into the 'male sphere' of politics was the loss of her 'gendered identity'. «The 'feminisation' of male prisoners and the 'masculinisation' of female prisoners reveal the gendered dynamics of power and domination whereby the regime tried to shatter their political agency and symbolically reaffirm the social order they had dared to challenge.» (Menin, p. 58) Still, El-Bouih's resistance against the masculine injurious voice operating underneath took the form of refusing to submit to any calls by the name 'Rachid'. Along with six other women prisoners at the Derb, they had resisted physical and psychological torture more than some male inmates and never reported on others.

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE YEARS OF LEAD

After the death of King Hassan II and in order to come to terms with past atrocities, his son and successor King Mohammed VI ordered in August 1999 the establishment of an independent Indemnity Commission (Commission D'Arbitrage) to indemnify former victims of forcible disappearance and arbitrary detention. The violation of human rights was measured in material terms only, «meaning that the only way for victims to be acknowledged is for them to file claims requesting indemnification. There are no public hearings, no attempts to provide the nation with an account of the past and blanket amnesties were declared as part of the creation of the Indemnity Commission.»⁸ The response of the Moroccan human rights community, the most vibrant and active in the Arab world and composed mostly of former political prisoners and other victims of the *Years of Lead*, was prompt and sharp. In November 1999 they formed the Moroccan Forum for Truth and Equity with Driss Ben Zekri, a prisoner of conscience between 1974 and 1991 from the banned Marxist-Leninist group *Ila-Al-Amam*, and 13 other former political prisoners as members of the executive committee. A major action of this civic forum was the organization of a sit-in at the gate of *Derb Moulay Sherif* on March 4, 2000. «Over 1000 people formed a human chain ... Those most wounded by torture encircled the place that most dramatically represents their bodily pain... The sit-in took the form of another circle, the *halqa* of the storyteller.»⁹

The metaphor of the storyteller's circle used by Susan Slymovics in her description of the sit-in is ironically voicing the ubiquitous silence of the *hujjaj* (plural of *al-hajj*), the perpetrators and masters of the Derb in the Morocco that was. *Al-halqa* is a major performance paradigm in Morocco wherein the storyteller stands

6 Noever 2005: 189.

7 El Bouih 2002: 16.

8 Slymovics 2001: 19.

9 Slymovics, 2001: 21

at the center of the circle surrounded by his attentive audiences.¹⁰ At the center of the present *halqa* devised by human rights activists stands not a traditional storyteller ready to share his stories with his audiences, but rather the expropriated silent site of the *Derb*, which was used from 1959 till 1991 for torture. With all the violence invoked by its provisional temporality as a burial ground for past atrocities and traumas, the demands of the outer circle of victims and human rights activists claimed the re-appropriation of the *Derb* as a *lieu de memoir*¹¹ demanding to turn it into a national site of conscience. A major purpose of sites of memory is «to stop time, to block the work of forgetting», and they all share “a will to remember» (Nora 1989: 19). This will was much more considered by another commission for truth and reconciliation despite the absence of accountability. Yet, the *Derb* and other similar sites still remained silent as torturers did not appear to justify their acts in any way. Worst, the victims of torture were not allowed to name perpetrators and torturers

in their public testimonies staged in the form of public hearings.

On January 7, 2004, the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter abbreviated as ERC) was created by a royal decree as a national commission on truth, equity, and reconciliation. The ERC is the first of its kind in the Arabo-Islamic world and functioned from 2004 to 2006. Though it was independent it had non-judiciary powers to establish the truth on gross human rights violations committed in the past. As a modality for national response to endemic human rights violations, it acted only by means of investigation, evaluation, indemnification, research, and recommending amendments.¹² More than 22.000 victims had filed requests for reparation by the set deadline February 2004. The Moroccan ERC exemplifies the ambiguous compromise inherent in transitional justice as the place wherein ethics and politics meet. «The sanction-free approach adopted in the specific case of Morocco limited the commission’s effectiveness by not establishing the truth about past hu-

10 *Al-halqa* (The circle of Storytelling) is the most important traditional performance paradigm in Morocco. It is a public performance in the form of a circle in a space of popular culture that is open to people from all different paths of life. *Al-halqa* hovers between high culture and low mass culture, sacred and profane literacy and orality. Its repertoire is as open and fluid as the tradition of *Thousand and One Nights* and *Sirat Bani Hilal*. The performance has a magical capacity to implicate its audiences as it negotiates the differing relationships among participants, and in the process it reformulates social legitimation and cultural values. The role of the spectators in the fulfillment of *al-halqa* performance is mandatory, as they are active participants and co-subjects rather than passive recipients of a finished spectacle. The agency embedded in audience’s participation is best illustrated in ‘autopoietische feedback-schleife’ (the autopoietic feedback loop) wherein the “aesthetic experience of a performance does not depend on the “work of art” but on the interaction of the participants”. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 36).

11 Though the counter bay’ was violently banned in Rabat, it was re-enacted in Paris on September 1, 2012 right in front of the Moroccan Embassy. For details about the Paris event see the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ov1HKQSBkI8>

«A *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any» (Nora 1996: XVII). In other words, sites of memory are «where [cultural] memory crystallizes and secretes itself» (Nora 1989: 7). These include: «places such as archives, museums, cathedrals, palaces, cemeteries, and memorials; concepts and practices such as commemorations, generations, mottos, and all rituals; objects such as inherited property, commemorative monuments, manuals, emblems, basic texts, and symbols».

12 According to the founding royal decree, the Commission has the following tasks:

1.

- Determining the facts of human rights violations committed in the past by conducting investigations, receiving declarations and testimonies, studying official archives, and collecting all the available information and data that can be used to unveil the truth.
- Conducting investigations in cases of forced disappearances of victims whose fate remains unknown.
- Elucidating the fate of the disappeared and finding adequate solutions to cases of people whose death has been confirmed.
- Determining the responsibility of governmental entities, or others, for the violations, and the facts under investigation.
- Including the findings of research, investigations, and analyses of cases of human rights violations and the contexts in which they took place, in the final report.

2. Redressing damages to the victims and/or their inheritors through material compensation, rehabilitation, social integration, and all other adequate means of reparations.

man rights violations or creating an environment conducive to greater democratic reform.»¹³ The commission's mandate covered forty-three years spanning from independence in 1956 till the death of King Hassan in 1999.

The premise of reconciliation in Morocco and other similar contexts such as South Africa is, indeed, a politically motivated enterprise. «Forgiveness, however, escapes such a realm and when forced it becomes a commodity and loses its gift-like quality.» (Loudiy, 47) In a related context, Derrida argues against this 'ecological imperative' related to forgiveness as a means of social and political health. For him, forgiveness «does not, it should never, amount to a therapy of reconciliation.»¹⁴ When forgiveness is deployed as a currency to normalize relations or reconcile conflicting parties after a past trauma: «Each time forgiveness is at the service of a finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by work of mourning, by some therapy or ecology of memory, then "forgiveness" is not pure –nor is its concept.»¹⁵ Forgiveness does not require the mediation of a truth and Reconciliation Commission, as it must happen between victims and perpetrators with no intervention of a third party.

A major contribution of the Moroccan ERC, however, is the organization of seven sessions of public hearings of testimonies by victims of the *Years of Lead* in different Moroccan cities. These were staged by the commission, according to specific rules and procedures, as public performances with victims as main protagonists and primary witnesses of the *Years of Lead* traumas and on-site audiences as well as distanced ones as would be secondary witnesses after the staged testimonies or

rather re-staged ones. The sessions were also televised –one broadcasted live in the national TV- and widely covered in the national and international media. Though testimony and witnessing are catalyst concerns of the present undertaking through their relationships to performance, I am constantly reminded of Rustom Bharucha's critique of 'performance' as a 'restored behavior', for as an expansive category it needs substantial limits. The frenzied type of violence restaged at the re-invented *gacaca* in post-genocide Rwanda, for instance, can by no means be "so unproblematically subsumed within the category of behavior".¹⁶ In line with Butler's theory of subjectivity, Bharucha extends 'performativity' to the queer refusal to submit to norms, for it refers to attempts to trouble regulations through acts of dissidence. In the context of *gacaca*, however, repeated injury and trauma, especially that of victims, is countered through that 'very derivation'.¹⁷ An immune system's recovery can be achieved through the 'resignifying' and 'restaging' of trauma and terror. Then *gacaca* will be a performance with effects, a political transformation by means of a subversive performative practice. The Counter-Bayh'a performance and the restaging of injurious masculine violence in *Dyali* stand also as examples.

After all, «performative acts», according to Fischer-Lichte, «offer the possibility for individuals to embody themselves, even if this means deviating from dominant norms and provoking social sanctions.»¹⁸ If performativity, for Butler,¹⁹ is about the 'culturally-scripted character of identity' generated by power through reiterated citations of norms, yet with a rooted potential for transgression, performance studies, too, has long studied the ambiguous liaison between performance and performativity, foregrounding the potential efficacy of performativity theory wi-

¹³ Hazan 2008: 399.

¹⁴ Derrida 2001: p. 41.

¹⁵ Derrida 2001: 32.

¹⁶ Bharucha 2014: 113.

¹⁷ Butler 1997: 41.

¹⁸ Fischer-Lichte 2008: 28.

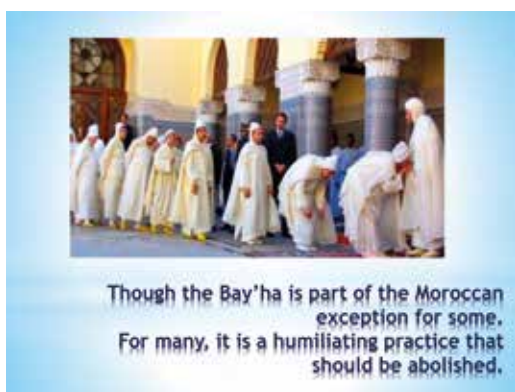
¹⁹ For a critique of Judith Butler see Boucher 2006.

thin the context of performance. As such, performance as an embodied praxis becomes «the site in which performativity materializes in concentrated form, where ‘the concealed or dissimulated conventions’ of which acts are mere repetitions might be investigated and re-imagined.»²⁰

(Show Video of testimonials)

TESTIMONY, WITNESSING, AND PERFORMANCE²¹

«The testimony testifies to nothing less than the instant of an interruption of time and history.» (Derrida, *Demeure*, 73)



Truth-telling, through testimonies of victims, was one of the salient forms to seek justice in the aftermath of political violence in Morocco that has generated traumas and atrocities such as disappearances, torture, imprisonment in inhuman conditions, arbitrary harassment, beating, intimidation, etc. Still, memory narratives of trauma, as manifested in testimonies and other forms, are never complete entities (as we have seen in the edited documentary) in so far as they are full of gaps and silences, edited in and out. The liaisons between testimony, witnessing and performance are controversial in both trauma studies and performance studies. Is it possible to «apply» trauma studies to performance? Can performance liberate victims of «trauma» or is it a medium whereby they relive the victimization time and again? How is witnessing located in a performance: at the scene of

the accident or at the scene of the account? In what sense is witnessing an after-effect of spectatorship? These questions and others resonate with the foundational line of questioning already traced by Brecht in the street scene. True that testimony is a painful exercise for most victims as it re-plunges them again into the scene of trauma suppressed by a ‘post-trauma silence’, and somehow force them to relive pain. But it is also liberating as they lift the burden of an eclipsed memory and share it with others. Private grief becomes collective and the hearing sessions are absorbed in the body politics as performances with transformative praxis and effects upon all participants. Thus, primary witnessing is also the experience of ‘comprehensive integration or cognizance’ of the experience that characterizes trauma. More than simply coming to terms with trauma, it is an attempt at positioning trauma within the symbolic.

Caroline Wake underlines two prevailing schools of thought about performing testimony within the field of performance studies: «On the one hand, there is a conviction that theatre and performance have a particular ability to convey, indeed to become, testimony, and therefore to transform their spectators into witnesses (...) On the other hand, there is criticism that performing testimony in some way threatens, or at least lessens it.»²² For some, a testimony is «the performance of a story which is constituted by the fact that, like the oath, it cannot be carried out by anybody else... (A)n irreplaceable historical performance, a narrative performance which no other statement (no report and no description) can replace and whose unique enactment by the living witness is itself part of a process of realization of historic truth.»²³ For others like Peggy Phelan, trauma is «untouchable»; «it cannot be represented. The symbolic cannot carry it: trauma makes a tear in

²⁰ Diamond 1997: 47.

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGeVGn1qvII>

²² Wake 2013: 329.

²³ Felman and Lamb 1992: 206-255.

the symbolic network itself.»²⁴ In Phelan's Lacanian reading any attempts at representing trauma would amount to a kind of misrepresentation, leading in its turn into a mis-recognition from the part of a potential audience. While Felman conceives of testimony as a unique and exceptional performance, Phelan focuses on performance's restaging of an absent referent together with the inexpressibility of pain or rather the untranslatability of pain.

Combined with the limits of representing one's own trauma is also the limits of the symbolic order and language to express extreme human emotions, for «trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency.»²⁵ Testimony is inhabited by the impossibility of telling, as it is mostly composed of bits and pieces of an overwhelmed and disrupted memory and acts that can by no means be articulated as knowledge per-se. In the selected women testimonies (we have just seen) the narrative voice of most testimonies is oscillating from first person to third person, because of the drifting trajectories of their thoughts as they are striving to lift pain into the symbolic. Testimonies wherein some forms of victimization relate to the victims' gendered subjectivity remain beyond words, yet voiced out through silences, gapping, metaphors, and elliptical constructions and other traumatic layers of the prisoner's gestural embodied memory. Silence, too, has a voice. Most women witnesses were pausing between words while describing specifics of gendered violence, especially sexual violence. The most educated among these women (Widad El-Bouab, Touria Tinani) were using standard Arabic as a medium, yet others (Fatma Ait Tajer, Fatima Ameziane)

were using *darija* as vernacular dialects. More than that, there is «no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury.»²⁶ Since traumatic memories often evoke a plethora of disturbing affects such as fear, horror, sadness, shame, hate, guilt... they are necessarily disrupted and emotional rather than cognitive. Testimony cannot escape fictionality due to the affective impact of the event. «Whenever one testifies about a traumatic event, the problem of articulating an unexperienced experience will be there.»²⁷

Meanwhile, a testimony «is always to render public»;²⁸ such rendering involves a potential audience, which is according to Derrida, the «essence of testimony». Without the «we there would be no testimony.»²⁹ Besides, «a testimony», in Derrida's terms, «is always autobiographical: it tells, in the first person, the shareable and unshareable secret of what happened to me, to me, to me alone.» (Demeure, 43) In the *Years of Lead* testimonies, the injury exercised on the body and psyche of the prisoners cannot be represented or pinned down as a fixed set of movements and reactions, rather as a non-reproducible knowledge and repertoire that enacts 'embodied memory'.³⁰ It is newly defined with every attempt to restage injury in public, drawing on the embodied knowledge of incarceration and torture. Among the pedagogical and liberating premises of Moroccan testimonies as exemplified in public hearings were participation, transmission, production and reproduction of knowledge. They required presence of both the «I» located at the space of trauma and the «we» at the scene of narrative performance.

24 Phelan 1997: 5.

25 Gilmore 2001: 6.

26 Derrida 2000: 29.

27 Murray 2008: 4.

28 Derrida 2000: 30.

29 Derrida 2000: 34-35.

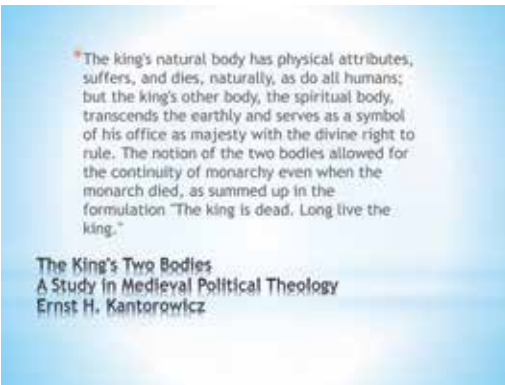
30 In this context, Diana Taylor (2003: 19-20) makes a very important distinction between archive and repertoire. «Archival memory exists as documents, literary texts, letters, archeological remains, bones –items supposedly resistant to change... The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing- in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge.»

THEATRICAL TESTIMONIES OF THE YEARS OF LEAD

These public hearings, along with many published prison memoirs and testimonies since the 1990s, were signs of a new beginning in Morocco. They have opened up Pandora's box of all other registers of trauma and violence, especially violence against women in both private and public spaces. Another narrative turn, then, has emerged in Moroccan theatre and other artistic interventions whereby re-enactments of prison memoirs and personal archives are employed onstage for various reasons: as symbolic witnesses to past trauma (*No Man's Land* and *Al-Karnaval* are examples); as counter-agents to official historiography renegotiating its versions and exclusions (*lalla Jmila* and *Hadda exemplify this tendency*); as empowering instruments for Moroccan women (*Dyali* is still unique in its subversive re-inscription of private archives in public); and as an intervention in the face of silence and amnesia (*In the Face of Silence* installation by Monir Fatmi exemplifies this).

A major feature of these three theatrical testimonies, which differentiates them from some Rimini Protokoll projects or the work of Rabie Mrue, is that the traumatic event resides in the space of an «unexperienced experience» rather than an in-between space. This, in its turn, is one of the major differences between primary witnessing and secondary witnessing. In this context, *Riding On a Cloud* by Rabie Mrue presents Yasser Mrue as a primary witness then a performer onstage: It was he, who had received that bullet in the head once in Beirut during the civil war, and it is he now witnessing the event onstage at the HAW Berlin. This kind of witnessing oscillates between the scene of trauma and the scene of the telling (the scene of the account)....

Mohammed Kaouti's *No Man's Land*, written and performed during Morocco's hard times in 1984, is one of the most significant theatrical testimonies of Morocco that was, as it voices out what the repressive regime had muted. It is a play about political imprisonment and the resulting damages at various levels, mainly



the ever-lasting psychological traumas. The play is considered a historical document that portrays the socio-political conditions in Morocco during the years that followed independence. It is about the traumatic conditions of prisoners of conscience in Morocco during the 1960s, 1970s, through the 1980s... *No Man's Land* is partly informed by the prison experience of the political activist Kamal Al-Habib, a prisoner of conscience who spent five years in Morocco's most cruel detention centers including the infamous *Derb*. The play was written during the peak of the *Years of Lead*, between the years 1980 and 1984. This fact explains Mohamed Kaouti's resort to Sufi symbolic dimensions and the rhetoric of ambiguity, for it was not an easy task to write about imprisonment during these days without running the risk of being jailed. Using artistic conceit of anti-utopia as a spine, Kaouti attempts to highlight the seemingly irreconcilable struggle between political necessity and creative imagination, performance and the body politics, censorship and the performative turn in postcolonial Morocco.

No Man's Land was not just a play for Kaouti, it was a lived yet unexperienced

experience. Writing a densely loaded text about the experience of political detention in Morocco during the 1970s and 1980s, Kaouti was caught between the desire to give voice and a systematic self-censorship on the other hand. This ambiguous task is achieved via poetic condensation and the Sufi symbolic lexicon. Without envisioning this symbolic dimension, it would have never been possible for the writer to address the disastrous experience of political imprisonment. Kaouti's choice was also aesthetic insofar as he embraced on a research in the Sufi dimension of Moroccan Islam.

No Man's Land exemplifies the full-fledged counterculture that was highly sensitive to Pan-Arabism as a painful process of renewal that grew out of attribution and contention, a postcolonial struggle affected by sometimes violently conflicting aspirations for a better future. The play has been largely performed and debated among scholars in Morocco. It sheds light on important chapters of Moroccan political history leading to what can be called now «The Arab Spring». Following the logic of the metaphor of 'deep Morocco', deepness is manifested in *No Man's Land* in the intense overlapping between moments of crisis and tragic sublimity, and the dream of utopia. Such overlapping is best illustrated in terms of essentialist claims over certain historical past, territories, or cultural memory. Moroccan playwright Mohamed Kaouti stages the ambivalent state of repression, which characterized Morocco in the near past that was fueled by taxonomic violence and conflicting aspirations long before the «Arab Spring».

The play is intricately elaborated around the idea of confinement and imprisonment as two major dehumanizing factors. Kaouti makes use of one main character called Mr X, who is an exemplary instance of thousands of prisoners of conscience arbitrarily arrested in secret detention centers such as the *Derb*, and three other characters that shift roles to highlight the predicament of X. Unlike Mr X whose real face predominates over his mask as manifested in his double (Mr XX), the three other characters appear mo-

stly as a group of masked faces with no clear individual imprints. Sometimes, they are the chorus representing the repressive state apparatuses, and other times, they are the inner voice which unfolds the impacts of torture and ill-treatment upon the psychological well-being of prisoners. The three character's shifts from one role to the other create an ideal theatrical platform for an unmediated presentation of conflict onstage. The chorus is meant to represent both the oppressed subjects who have accepted the actual situation as it is without claiming any change, and at times they represent the *Makhzen*. The chorus of faces represents the typical lower-class individual who prefers to cope with the actual conditions. Throughout the play the chorus of faces has tried to comfort Mr X's pain by attempting to convince him to accept his present conditions. The chorus of masks, on the other hand, represents the *Makhzen* (State authorities). Throughout the play they are repeatedly torturing Mr X. At the beginning of the second act, Kaouti even quotes a fragment from the most famous address of *Alhajjaj Ibnu Yusuf Al-Thaqafi*, the Umayyad administrator and governor of Iraq (the butcher of Baghdad):

The chorus of faces is now advancing in a harmoniously mechanic military pace as they beat imaginary victims... The chorus of masks: "we won't conform until we render you worthless, making the resident a stranger; the submissive a rioter; the obedient a rebel; and the believer in himself lost till you find your brethren and say..."

No Man's Land is also informed by the *Book of Standings* (Kitab al-Mawaqif) and *Addresses* (Mukhatabat) by the tenth century Sufi mystic Muhammad an-Niffari, a fascinating collection of visionary poems divided into seventy-seven "standings," each in the form of a brief divine revelation addressed to the sincere seeker on the path of a spiritual quest. These two mystical texts are in fact very theatrical in nature, given the dialogic nature of the *Addresses* 'Mukhatabat,' where the voice of God is utilized. Kaouti, who admits his reading of Niffari and also the revolutionary mystic *Mansur Al-Hallaj* while devising

the script of *No Man's Land*. He seizes these moments of intensity and explores them onstage, mostly in what appears as the hallucinatory speeches of Mr X along with his double or the two other choruses. Kaouti uses Sufi reflections on veiled reality as tools for telling and showing within the frame of narrative theatre.

By being attentive to Niffari's poetic formulations pertaining to the psychological obstacles that confront the seeker, Kaouti seems to perform the paradigmatic dialectic between self-scrutiny as an introverted journey deep within the innermost recesses of his being and ascetic forms of spirituality as a strict adherence to the Islamic *shari'a*. The interplay of divine instruction and human response constitutes the basis of the solo performance. However, it is made far more explicitly pedagogical and overtly symbolic in structure and tone than in the more palpably experiential, directly expressive work of Niffari. Kaouti's use of Gnawa spiritual music and Sufi body movement leading to trance are made integral elements of the performance and the journey to unlocking the mysteries hidden within those forms. Inspired by the spiritual tradition, particularly the trance music of Gnaoua that recreates the first sacrifice and the genesis of the universe by the evocation of the seven main manifestations of the divine demiurgic activity, Kaouti uses live music and dance to access the higher levels of consciousness. His journey advances by slow stages called in the Sufi lexicon *maqamat*, with Niffari's *Mawaqif* and *Mukhatabat* acting as spiritual guide, to the goal of union with reality where attention blissfully turns inward and spiritual ecstasy is performed as a state of intoxication.

* As a state spectacle of power, the bay'ah, however, has generated a heated public discussion since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011.

* The most recent acts of dissent against the bay'ah ceremony that took place in Rabat and Paris in 2012 underline the fundamental changes in national discussion.

* In line with Judith Butler's theory of subjectivity, there is an embodied performance aspect, or rather a performativity, in these reiterated yet subversive dissident acts against bay'ah in so far as they enable the agency that was foreclosed by the official bay'ah ritual for years.

* If agency is foreclosed by the political citationality inherited within al-bay'ah as a performance, it is also enabled in the counter-bay'ah as a contentious practice of 'queerness', which is, according to Butler, "an exemplary instance of the 'political' enactment of performativity as citationality."

Zoubeir Ben Bouchta's play *Lalla J'mila* is also a serious critique of oppressive violence and the potential subversive moments of flying over and beyond patriarchal hegemony. The journey that the play chronicles reveals the stories of two sisters, Itto and Lalla J'mila, which they constantly trace/dramatise in the various pieces of experience they painfully recall as they take stock of their suffocating situations in the presentness of their statuses as oppressed women. Their narratives become a means of empowerment when other forms of power are denied or beyond reach, for stories, as Edward Said rightly states, are «*the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history.*» The play also shows how struggles of national liberation and private battles of self-assertion are linked in a variety of ways.

Male presence is painfully incorporated in the two sisters' narratives. The character of Ould L'glassa is an exemplary first instance; he epitomizes a pathetic trauma in Itto's continuous movement in her mental journey across the terrain of her past, for he is «*her brother, son of her father, who run away with her bird and cut her wings off*». The rape scene reflects metonymic representations equating ironically a wedding night with the utmost sexual violence. Itto painfully narrates her sexual abuse by the police while in custody. The scene of rape is by no means redemptive, for Itto learns that Ould L'glassa (the policeman who was chosen by his colleagues to invade her virginity and innocent body) is in fact her brother. Bahadou, in his turn, is omnipresent in Lalla J'mila's narrative. He represents the authoritarian step-father who forced her to annihilate her femininity and adapt a phallic identity as a runaway woman, so as to survive within the arena of men. This narrativization of patriarchal violence is not without its subversive moments... (more...)

Naima Zitan's *Dialy* is another challenging and abusive narrative performance that voices a diverse body of different experiences, bound together not with one single narrative, but by their confluence and interrelations between womanhood and



Against bay'ha / Rabat July 2012



Counter bay'ha Protests in France
against the Baya in 2012

Rabla Lfrouh
<https://vimeo.com/137741160>

Excerpts from public hearings 2004-5

female sexuality within a deeply rooted patriarchal society. Some of the narratives appropriate the prevalent misogynist images of women as sex objects commodified and over-reduced into no more than procreators under the yoke of male domination: «Sometimes my mother used to tell me: “Jemii hammek”; and she was right. “Hammee, mouchkil dialy”, mine, my own problem! And not only mine, but all women’s... At home, we used to talk about it among women’s gatherings. In the public

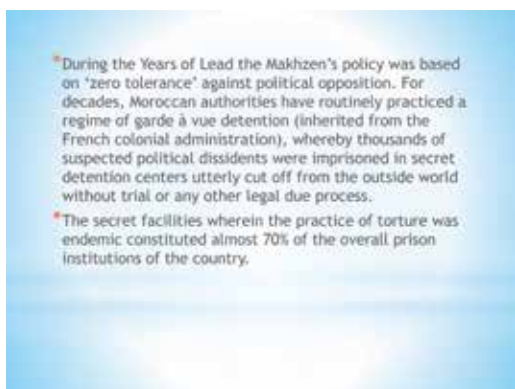
bath, all women are naked!» (*Dialy*, 3) Others manifest a furious response to the ritualistic subjugation of women in the name of tradition. The production opens up another register of oppression; it is partially inspired from *The Vagina Monologues* by the American playwright and feminist activist Eve Ensler.³¹ Driven by the same archival impulse as Ensler’s, Zitan’s team interviewed around 150 Moroccan women from different walks of life right in the middle of the spring and for the period of seven months. The interviews unmasked different forms of women’s oppression. What constitutes the bulk of the play *Dialy* is a series of revelations and private testimonies that represent «informal archives» in the form of stories narrated, or rather, re-enacted onstage.

The magic word «dialy» implies different meanings most of which reveal patriarchal oppression and violence: «(*rani kharejlek sdaak, raak dialy*) I have given you a dowry; so you’re mine», said Sanaa’s husband. Sanaa pronounces the sentence with deep sadness as she was re-enacting the moment she was being raped by her proper husband the first night of their marriage: «It was him who raped me the day of the wedding. The father of my children... I hate him.» (*Dialy*, 10) Such stories become the outlet, or rather the offshoot, of silent and repressed histories related to everyday practices insofar as they encode exactly what they do. They provide a testament to the strength of women despite living under repressive conditions.

Women’s language in Moroccan culture (and also as we have seen in the testimonies) often reveals a frequent politeness, unlike men who are allowed to be vulgar. *Dialy*, not only condemns this appetite for political correctness, but subverts the deeply rooted masculine injurious voice operating underneath. The first Act of the play investigates women’s language that is full of taboos. It reveals the inequality between

31 Indeed, *Dialy* is not the first Arab play to be inspired by *Vagina Monologues*, the Lebanese playwright Lina Khoury did the same in 2006 in her *Hakeh Niswan* (Women’s Talk). After watching a production of Ensler’s play in Chicago in 2001, Khoury started thinking about a different form of writing and performing Arab women specificities. However, *Hakeh Niswan* does not use the word «vagina», as it was replaced by *Jamil* (the beautiful) to evade censorship.

the sexes by means of highlighting what is in the name. The voicing of the word ‘vagina’ in the utmost vulgar ways typical to street jargon by the actresses is performed as a collective therapy; it is a strong instance of dissent against conservative power structures and particularly male injury and violence, physical, verbal, or psychological. In «Violence against women in public spaces: the case of Morocco», Safia Monqid’s stunning field study reveals that:



This male violence, physical, verbal or psychological, which develops both in the family space and in the public space, engenders in women a negative attitude which soils their image of the body and their own self respect. A depreciation, a sterilization in its representation of themselves and their body are developed in the woman. Attitudes such as disgust, deletion, or even depersonalization may occur in girls and also women. Do we not often hear young girls say: "Why didn't God make me a boy?!" There is a denial of their femininity and sensuality which they try to hide. The attack by obscene language is a way for attackers to violate the privacy of women. It is a violation of their private space, mentally and physically in order to make them understand that they are not in their correct place. It is also a way for men to prove publicly their virility and dominance over women and space; because the fact of destabilizing and of weakening a woman means dominating her.³²

Injuries of speech have devastating effects on Moroccan Women. Following the thread of thought of Judith Butler, «pornographic debasement» also «interpellates» Moroccan women as subjects, particularly in the public sphere revealing the «performativity of political discourse». ³³ «The language that counters the injuries of

speech, however, must repeat those injuries without precisely reenacting them.»³⁴ Only then, critical agency is released from the repeated injury, «and injury countered through that very derivation.»³⁵ In line with this, *Dialy*'s repeated obscenity challenges patriarchal injury by «resignifying» and «restaging» it. It becomes a performance with effects, a political transformation by means of a subversive culture practice that persists in returning the gaze.

Dialy, however, reveals three stories (as narrative fragments released by all three actresses without associating characters and events): the first story shows a factory girl who was gang-raped at a cemetery all night long; the second one discloses the story of a married woman who hates her husband, who raped her the wedding night; and the third is the story of a girl who was abandoned by her partner after losing her virginity, left alone to face the violence of «public morality». Such stories expose the hypocrisy of Moroccan society in the face of the mounting rate of single mothers and victims of rape.

Dialy is the first play in Morocco voicing out loudly some thirty-two words referring to ‘vagina’ in different Moroccan dialects. «My organ is the source of life; it is not a dirty black hole. I carry it with me all the time to the big room, the small room, the shop, the souk, the school, and even to the mosque». (*Dialy*, 8) Through exposing the various names of the «vagina» in Moroccan dialect and their underlying meanings, *Dialy* generates a bewildering sense of immediacy which is concerned with the impossible narratives of women's most intimate world. Each monologue is a piece of text, or a story, or a fragment from a living archive inscribed by a woman who ultimately assumes full responsibility for it, though she might show up only in pseudonym. Each story becomes an integral part of a process of habilitation, or rather, the retrieving of a lost archive, that of Scheherazade and spellbound effects of

³² Monqid 2011.

³³ Butler 1997: 40.

³⁴ Butler 1997: 41.

³⁵ Butler 1997: 41.

storytelling. Now Scheherazade's heireses have transcended the boundaries and confines of the inside; they no longer tell their stories in a world closed upon itself, but voice out and share their most intimate thoughts and suffering with others. And by doing so, they have succeeded a great deal to destroy the wall of «hshuma» (shame) as the most delicate form of censorship in Moroccan traditional culture. Furthermore, to talk about sex, Moroccans are often tempted to make a switch through a foreign language. Naima Zitan underscores the relationship between sexuality and language:

*I cannot accept the social hypocrisy of Moroccans, since they accept to use such words in foreign languages rather than our Moroccan dialect... The vagina's names differ from one geographical entity to another; they should study it from a sociolinguistic perspective, not only as a name*³⁶

Dialy enshrouds the female body and compels audiences to take a position of voyeurism, inviting them to attend to women's narratives. The play is permeated by «colloquial speech» and «dirty jargon», which are made part of the play's strategy to emancipate women's language and free it from everyday life's confines imposed by tradition. The playwright Maha Sano makes use of words conventionally deemed as disrespectful, offensive, obscene, rude, and above all, «politically incorrect» for their pathetic and shocking effects in a conservative Muslim environment.

The crudity and offensiveness of the testimonies enunciate an inner uncomfortable situation. And since what cannot be expressed openly onstage cannot exist performatively, and any attempt to abolish the word 'vagina' from the play would be an act of violence against the female body itself – a veiled attempt in the name of «hshuma», or «political correctness», or tradition– to remove the female body from the Moroccan performance space, and by extension, the public space. Zitan's theatrical practice persists in re-inscribing

the female body within both spaces, and reinventing a variety of new profiles for Moroccan women. Such re-inscription is manifestly punctuated by the tendency of spelling out the body's most intimate parts and morphology, and voicing out its pain and suffering as well as its desire and delight. It is a recovery of a lost language, as well as a lost tradition, that of storytelling as an empowering apparatus for silenced women.

In a similar context, Luce Irigaray also reminds us in her critique of the underlying male bias in Western philosophical systems that «[if] we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. [We shall] leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back upon the words of men.»³⁷ In voicing out different names of the vagina in various Moroccan dialects, the aquarium theatre company succeeded in recovering a lost language. And by restaging injury the performance denounces the sexual hypocrisy beneath Moroccan obsession with a subtle yet permeating form of sponsorship called «hshuma» in the public sphere.

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³⁶ Zitan, www.hespress.com April 16th 2013 (last accessed June 20, 2013).

³⁷ Irigaray 1985: 214.

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