

Khalid Amine

After the 'Years of Lead' in Morocco: Performing the Memory

During the so-called 'Years of Lead' in Morocco (1956–1999), state-sponsored violence was embedded not only in assaults on the bodies of victims, but also in their affective and psychological well-being. This occurred to such an extent that many attempts at the narrativization of violence via testimonials and prison memoirs fail to convey the trauma experienced in Moroccan secret prisons. In the present article Khalid Amine is concerned with the fragility of testimony as a performative act, in which the obligation of voicing pain and trauma is in tension with the impossibility of its telling. After the hearing sessions organized by the Moroccan Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) in 2004, another narrative turn has emerged in Moroccan theatre and in other artistic forms whereby re-enactments of prison memoirs, testimonials, and other registers of repressed personal archives are employed onstage as a means of breaching the walls between the personal and political. Khalid Amine is Professor of Performance Studies, Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Tetouan, Morocco. He is co-author with Marvin Carlson of *The Theatres of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia: Performance Traditions of the Maghreb* (2012).

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When Morocco first regained its independence from France in 1956, King Muhammad V focused on re-establishing the sovereignty of the monarchy and not allowing the national liberation parties, such as Istiqlal and USFP, to assume power in its place. In so doing, he and his son, Hassan II, were not afraid to use repression, including the arrest or even murder of hundreds of political opponents.¹

AFTER the independence of Morocco in 1956, the political situation was unstable, characterized by tension between, on the one hand, a monarchy intent on cementing its power and, on the other, a political opposition desiring to rule, with frequent *coups d'état* attempts by the military during the reign of King Hassan II. This led to severe suppression of political dissidents, as well as a firm yet coercive control over both the ideological and repressive state apparatus.

The 'Years of Lead' in Morocco

The result was the reinforcement of a legacy of terror and the establishment of a semi-democracy during this dark past, often called the 'Years of Lead' (*sanawat ar-rassas*),²

with reference to the lead bullets fired at civilians during protests. Freedom of expression was strictly limited by three constraints: no criticism of the sacred institution of the monarchy; the integrity of the nation; and Islam as the official religion of the kingdom. Since independence, Morocco has become a 'liberalized autocracy' whereby its political structure allows less political representation than it pretends; it is a representation that does not represent all the people.³

This state of affairs is secured by the *Makhzen* (the all-powerful state machine that embodies Morocco's ruling network of elites and high ranking officials, centred on the King) through 'patronage rituals, legal shackles, spiritual rarefaction, political constraints, symbolic invocations, and, of course, the tacit threat of force'.⁴ 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 of July 2011. This is best illustrated in the *bay'ah* ceremony (the allegiance ritual) as the most significant national ritual of commemoration in the nation as an 'imagined community'.⁵

The *Bay'ah*: a State Spectacle of Power

The *bay'ah* is a yearly ceremony in which selected 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 monarchic sacred body, while at the same time erasing and denying other bodies. As such, the *bay'ah* is a temporary reification of the *Makhzen's* power: a performative practice that attempts to foreclose agency and to assign specific places for participants by reducing them to submissive 'subjects' rather than 'citizens' in the structure of *blaad al-Makhzen* (the *Makhzen's* land). The repetitive performance of the *bay'ah* and 'royal hand-kissing' reinforce Moroccans as subjects through reiterated performance behaviour.

However, as a state spectacle of power, the *bay'ah* has generated heated public discussion since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011. The most recent acts of dissent against the *bay'ah* ceremony, which 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 in so far as they enable the agency that was denied by the official *bay'ah* ritual for years. While agency is foreclosed by the politics of *al-bay'ah* as a performance, it also enables 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'.⁶

During the Years of Lead, the *Makhzen's* policy was based on zero tolerance of

political opposition. For decades, Moroccan authorities have routinely practised a regime of *garde à vue* detention (inherited from the French colonial administration), whereby thousands of suspected political dissidents were imprisoned in secret detention centres utterly cut off from the outside world, without trial or any other legal due process. The secret facilities, where the practice of torture was endemic, constituted almost 70 per cent of the overall prison institutions of the country.

Such a system of indefinite uncommunicative detention 'disregards', according to an Amnesty International Report of 20 March 1991, 'the most basic safeguards of detainees against torture'. Political imprisonment during the Years of Lead has sedimented subtle and insidious forms of trauma with a cumulative and life-altering impact not only on victims, but their families and relatives.

State violence was deeply embedded in the 'intimacy of [victims'] bodies and selfhood and in their affective and social worlds' to the extent that many attempts at the narrativization of violence via testimonials and prison memoirs have failed to convey the trauma experienced in Moroccan secret prisons.⁷ The dehumanization of victims went so far that identifying with them in any meaningful sense was impossible. 'My body was a mass of pain, head to toe. . . . I had become a "dismembered body";' writes Nour-eddine Saoudi in his prison memoirs.⁸ Symbolic violence at *Derb Moulay Cherif*, the most infamous and atrocious detention centre in *Hay Mohammadi* in *Casablanca*, is manifested also through a peculiar regime of superseded values that undo the 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.⁹

Al-hajj is an honorific title given to Muslims who accomplish 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, who were regarded as public enemies and a threat to order. *Al-hajj* becomes a recurrent leitmotif that appears again and again in prison memoirs and Moroccan films related to the era of Lead.

Violence in the 'Years of Lead'

All sorts of injuries were permitted and practised upon the victims' bodies and psyches in the Derb. 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, to reinforce the *hujjaj's* superiority within a sexist society. The gendered dimension of state violence is still a taboo topic for many since 'it threatens the prisoners' image of virile masculinity, as predominantly conceived in Morocco'.¹⁰ As for women prisoners, the situation was even worse, for they were punished for daring to practise politics – an exclusively male domain – and thus challenged patriarchal co-option, besides their opposition to the *Makhzen*, the supreme big brother.

Another post-traumatic silence was 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 into the category of acting against culturally constructed social and moral norms. As a mode of political correctness, the word *h-shuma* is mainly 'applied to acts constituting a violation of certain norms',¹¹ mostly those 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 seven months at the Derb and five years as a political prisoner, agrees that sexual violence to erase the gendered subjectivity of women was the most unpleasant form of victimization for women prisoners: '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.'¹² Fatna El Bouih was re-gendered as 'Rachid 45'.

They gave me a number and a name: 'From now you are named Rachid. . . . Don't move, don't speak, only if you hear your name: Rachid.' This was the beginning of identity erasure: the kidnapping, imprisonment, then the negation of my femininity by treating me as a man. For them, I was only a man they called Rachid.¹³

As a punishment for transgressing the 'male sphere' of politics she lost her 'gendered identity'. It seems that the torturers were not ready to imagine the possibility of imprisoning a woman because of her ideas, as clearly illustrated by the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Zahra Zriouil in the preface to *Haditu al-'Atama*. The 'feminization' of male prisoners and the 'masculinization' of female prisoners revealed 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.¹⁴ El-Bouih's continuing resistance took the form of refusing to submit to any calls of the name 'Rachid'. She, along with six other women prisoners at the Derb, resisted physical and psychological torture more than some male inmates, and never reported on others.

Restoring Public Memory

Public memory about the past should be expansive, encompassing many narrative accounts – those of perpetrators, and those of the victims. While many victims have testified publicly in Morocco and many others have written memoirs and other artefacts about the years of lead, what has been solely missing is the voice of the other(s): the perpetrators.¹⁵

After the death of King Hassan II and in order to come to terms with past atrocities and redress the damages done to the victims of the Lead era, his son and successor King Mohammed VI, who pursues a more tolerant political line than his father, ordered the establishment of an independent Indemnity Commission (*Commission d'arbitrage*) in August 1999, its purpose being to compensate materially former victims of forcible disap-

pearance and arbitrary detention and/or their heirs. The violation of human rights was measured only in material terms. According to Susan Slyomovics, such a procedure means

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.¹⁶

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, whose executive committee consisted of Driss Ben Zekri, a prisoner of conscience between 1974 and 1991 from the banned Marxist-Leninist group Ila-Al-Amam, and thirteen other former political prisoners. A major action of this civic forum was the organization of a sit-in at the gate of Derb Moulay Sherif on 4 March 2000:

Over a thousand 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.¹⁷

The Storyteller's Circle

The metaphor of the storyteller's circle that Slyomovics uses in her description of the sit-in ironically voices the ubiquitous silence of the *hujaj* (plural of *al-hajj*), the perpetrators and masters of Derb Moulay Sherif. *Al-halqa* is a major performance paradigm in Morocco wherein the storyteller stands at the centre of the circle surrounded by his attentive audiences.¹⁸ At the centre of the *halqa* devised by human rights activists stands not a traditional storyteller ready to share his stories with his audiences, but the expropriated silent site of the Derb, which was used for torture from 1959 until 1991. The outer circle of victims and human rights activists demanded that the Derb be re-appropriated as

a *lieu de memoir* of past atrocities and traumas, a commemorative monument and a national site of conscience.¹⁹

The chief purposes of sites of memory are 'to stop time, to block the work of forgetting', and to inspire 'a will to remember' collectively.²⁰ This will was much more acceptable as an alternative commission for truth and reconciliation despite the absence of accountability. Yet, as the Derb and other similar sites remained silent, some torturers did not appear to justify their acts in any way. Worse, the victims of torture were not allowed to name perpetrators and torturers in their public testimonies, staged in the form of public hearings.

On 7 January 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 was the first of its kind in the Arabo-Islamic world, and functioned from 2004 to 2006. Although it was independent, it had non-judiciary powers to establish the truth about gross human rights violations committed in the past. As a modality for national response to endemic human rights violations, it acted only through investigation, evaluation, indemnification, research, and recommending amendments.²¹ More than 22,000 victims had filed requests for reparation by the set deadline of February 2004.

The Moroccan ERC exemplifies the ambiguous compromise inherent in transitional justice as the place where 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 human rights violations or creating an environment conducive to greater democratic reform.'²² The Commission's mandate covered forty-three years, from independence in 1956 until the death of King Hassan in 1999.

The premise of reconciliation in Morocco (as in other similar contexts such as South Africa) is, indeed, a politically motivated enterprise. Fadwa Loudiy observes: 'Forgiveness, however, escapes such a realm and when forced it becomes a commodity and

loses its gift-like quality.²³ In a related context, Jacques Derrida argues against this 'ecological imperative' of forgiveness as a means to social and political health. For him, forgiveness 'does not, it should never, amount to a therapy of reconciliation'.²⁴ Forgiveness, when deployed to normalize relations or reconcile conflicting parties after a past trauma, is not what it should be. According to Derrida:

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.²⁵

Forgiveness does not require the mediation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, since it must happen between victims and perpetrators with no intervention of a third party.

The Nature of Testimony

A major contribution of the Moroccan ERC, however, was 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. Victims were their main protagonists and primary witnesses of the traumas generated by the Years of Lead. On-site audiences, as well as those who became audiences of the media staging of the event, were secondary witnesses. The sessions were televised – one broadcast live on National TV – and were widely covered in the national and international media.

Although testimony and witnessing are related to the notion of 'performance', I am constantly reminded of Rustom Bharucha's critique of 'performance' as a 'restored behaviour'.²⁶ The frenzied type of violence restaged at the reinvented *Gacaca* traditional court system in post-genocide-Rwanda from 2005 to 2012, for instance, can by no means be 'so unproblematically subsumed within

the category of behaviour'. Bharucha, in line with Butler's theory of subjectivity, extends 'performativity' to the refusal to submit to norms in so far as it refers to attempts to undermine regulations through acts of dissidence. One can even read repeated injury and trauma, especially that of victims of *Gacaca* trials, as staged events with the potential to resist through acts of repetition. In the context of *Gacaca*, however, repeated injury and trauma especially that of victims, is countered through that 'very derivation' of re-enactment.²⁷

The *Gacaca* trials promoted reconciliation by allowing victims and/or their families to learn the truth about what happened during genocide, and by offering an opportunity for perpetrators to confess their crimes and request forgiveness. An immune system's recovery can be achieved through the 're-signifying' and 'restaging' of trauma and terror. It is then that *Gacaca* can be a performance having effects – a political transformation through subversive performative practice. The counter-*bay'ha* performance, as noted earlier, and the restaging of injurious masculine violence in *Dyali* by Maha Sano (as will be illustrated later) are other examples. In the context of *bay'ah*, repeated servitude and subjection, especially of dignitaries, are countered through the 'very derivation' of its re-enactment. The counter-*bay'ha* then becomes a subversive reiterated practice.

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'.²⁸ If performativity, for Butler, is about the 'culturally scripted character of identity' generated by power through reiterated citations of norms, that still have a potential for transgression, performance studies, too, have long studied the ambiguous liaison between performance and performativity, and have foregrounded the potential efficacy of performativity theory within the context of performance.²⁹ Performance as an embodied praxis thus 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’.³⁰

Testimony, Witnessing, and Performance

The testimony testifies to nothing less than the instant of an interruption of time and history.³¹

Truth-telling through testimonies of victims was one of the salient forms of seeking justice in the aftermath of political violence in Morocco, which included disappearances, torture, imprisonment in inhuman conditions, arbitrary harassment, beating, intimidation, and so on. Still, memory narratives of trauma, as manifested in testimonies and other representational forms, are never complete entities (as revealed in the edited documentary released by ERC) in so far as they are full of gaps and silences, edited in and out.³²

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 in which they relive victimization time and again? How is witnessing located in a performance? Is it 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 his ‘Street Scene’.

It is true that testimony is a painful exercise for most victims as it plunges them again into the scene of trauma suppressed by a ‘post-trauma silence’, and somehow forces 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 politic as performances with transformative praxis and effects upon all participants. Thus, primary witnessing is also a comprehensive process of reintegration that takes cognizance of the experience that characterizes trauma. More than simply coming to terms with trauma, it

is an attempt to position trauma within the symbolic realm.

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.³³

For Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, 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. . . . An 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.³⁴

Peggy Phelan argues that trauma is ‘untouchable’. ‘It cannot be represented. The symbolic cannot carry it: trauma makes a tear in the symbolic network itself.’³⁵ In Phelan’s Lacanian reading any attempt at representing trauma would amount to a kind of misrepresentation, leading to a misrecognition on 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 are the limits of the symbolic order and language for expressing extreme human emotions, for ‘trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency’.³⁶ 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’s testimonies presented in the ERC documentary, the narrative voice of the testimonies oscillates between the first and the third person because of the drifting

trajectories of their thoughts as they strive to lift pain into the symbolic arena.

Testimonies in which some forms of victimization relate to the victims' gendered subjectivity remain beyond words; yet they are voiced through silences, gaps, metaphors, elliptical constructions, and other traumatic layers of the prisoners' gestural embodied memory. Silence, too, has a voice. Most women witnesses paused between words while describing gendered violence, especially sexual violence. The most educated among these women (Widad El-Bouab, Touria Tinani) used standard Arabic as a medium of expression. Others (Khadija El-Malaki, Fatma Ait Tajer, Fatima Ameziane) used *darija* as vernacular dialects.

The public staging of testimonies also affects how they are articulated. More than that, there is 'no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lies, and perjury'.³⁷ Since traumatic memories often evoke a plethora of disturbing feelings such as fear, horror, sadness, shame, hate, and guilt, they are necessarily disrupted and emotional rather than cognitive. Despite all comprehensive attempts at reintegrating trauma within the symbolic, it remains beyond victims' cognizance. 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.'³⁸

Meanwhile, a testimony 'is always to render [something] public'; so such rendering involves a potential audience, which is, according to Derrida, the 'essence of testimony'.³⁹ Without this 'there would be no testimony'.⁴⁰ 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'.⁴¹

In the testimonies of the Years of Lead, the injury exercised on the bodies and psyches of the prisoners cannot be represented or pinned down as a fixed set of movements and reactions; they are a non-reproducible knowledge and a repertoire that enacts an 'embodied memory'.⁴² 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 the participation, transmission, production, and reproduction of knowledge. They required the presence of both the 'I' located in the space of trauma and the 'we', at the scene of narrative performance.

Theatre Testimonies of the 'Years of Lead'

Theatricality and performativity both underpin and reframe how trauma thinks and recognizes itself.⁴³

Before ERC, there were very few theatre pieces related to the Lead era. The public hearings, along with many published prison memoirs and testimonies since the 1990s, known in Morocco as *la littérature carcérale*, were signs of a new beginning in Morocco.⁴⁴ They have opened up a Pandora's Box of the registers of trauma and violence, especially violence against women in both private and public spaces. It seems that film, autobiography, painting, performance art, and theatre have become instrumental in overcoming the complexities involved in representing trauma, for 'fiction opens up possibilities for overcoming the representational difficulties posed by trauma'.⁴⁵

Another narrative possibly has emerged in Moroccan theatre, as in other artistic interventions where re-enactments of prison memoirs and personal archives are employed onstage for various reasons: as symbolic witnesses to past trauma – Nabyl Lahlou's *Ophelia is not Dead* and Mohammed Kaouti's *No Man's Land* being two examples; as counter-agents to official historiography, renegotiating its versions and exclusions, as in Zobeir Ben Bouchta's *Lalla Jmila* and Jaouad Essounani's *Hadda*; and as empowering instruments for Moroccan women, Maha Sano's *Dyali* being still unique in its subversive re-inscription of private archives in public and as an intervention in the face of silence and amnesia.

A major feature of these theatrical testimonies, however, which differentiates them



Above: Jaouad Essounani's *Hadda*. Photo courtesy of Daba Theatre Company. Below: Hajar Gregae in the role of Itto in Zobeir Ben Bouchta's *Lalla J'mila*. Photo: Aziz Khalili.

from some Rimini Protokoll projects or the work of the Lebanese performance artist Rabih Mroué, is that the traumatic event resides in the space of an 'unexperienced experience' rather than in an in-between space. This is one of the major differences between primary witnessing and secondary witnessing.

In this context, *Riding on a Cloud* by Rabih Mroué presents Yasser Mroué first as a primary witness and then as a performer onstage: it was he who had received a bullet in his head in Beirut during the civil war; and it was he who then witnessed the event onstage at the HAU Theatre in Berlin on 17 January 2015.

This kind of witnessing oscillates between the scene of trauma and the scene of the telling (the scene of the account). Rabih Mroué further complicates the situation by uncovering parts of Yasser's personal archive and making them public on the stage. The videos projected by Yasser along with his commentaries during the performance further complicate the relation between personal memories and trauma within the context of the Lebanese Civil War.





Scenes from *Ophelia is Not Dead*. Left: Nadia Niazi.

Below: Sopha Hadi and Nadia Niazi.



Ophelia is Not Dead

Nabyl Lahlou's *Ophelia is Not Dead*, a play in two acts with two characters, is a visionary text, and a strong statement about the lack of artistic freedom in the newly independent states of the Arab world, with a particular focus on Morocco.⁴⁶ The play was written at the peak of the Years of Lead. Challenging and abusive, it subverts the audience's instinct for moral judgement and pushes the spec-

tators to attend to the humour and subtle humanity of the two actors till the end.

Lahlou (b. 1945) brings together two plays by Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, in which the two tragic characters become voluntarily paralyzed actors. They role-play a series of micro-dramas mostly related to the meta-play in *Hamlet*, 'The Mousetrap', which reveal their intense self-reflexive awareness of previous theatrical behaviour. From the title page, there is a clear reference

to one of the most celebrated characters of the Shakespearean gallery – Ophelia. Lahlou is a prominent Moroccan playwright, actor, director, and filmmaker. He wrote the play in 1968, a significant date that marked artistic and intellectual life in Paris, where he was living as a student.

Written originally in French, the play was produced in 1969 by Lahlou's own theatre company with Lahlou and Rachid Fekkak as Hamlet and Macbeth respectively. In the 1970s, the play was performed by Lahlou alone or sometimes accompanied by Josiane Benhaïm, Abbas Brahim, and others. Later, it was produced at the University of Lancaster in 1991 (as a student production) by the Moroccan artist Hicham Regragui. Upon returning to Morocco, Regragui also staged his English version of the play along with his colleagues at the University of Kenitra, and performed it in Rabat and at the International Festival of University Theatre in Casablanca in 1993.⁴⁷

In 1998, the play was revived by Lahlou's company under the auspices of the Moroccan Ministry of Culture. This time, Lahlou opted for female actors to play the roles of Hamlet and Macbeth. Actress (and Naby's wife) Sophia Hadi played Macbeth, and Amal Ayouch played Hamlet. They first performed the play in a small theatre at the Goethe Institute of Rabat between 4 and 13 January 1999. With Hadi and Ayouch on stage, the play became a critique of deeply rooted patriarchal power structures. The production questioned how theatre could be utilized as a site for the marginalized and subaltern so that both could participate in political life and partake of existing regimes of theatrical representation. The history of the play's production indicates its continuous appeal to different Moroccan audiences over a period of three decades. The play continues to challenge comfortable Moroccan notions of what constitutes acceptable theatre.

The acting itself is cramped by the use of crutches and wheelchairs, which illustrate the actors' paralysis, frustration, and contingency. The action takes place in closed environments: a room, a hospital, a prison

cell, a theatre stage. As the play progresses, the audience becomes aware of the link between these various locations. Confinement, imprisonment, and impasse become defining features of the location specified by Lahlou for his drama. Lahlou's Hamlet is an example of what Margaret Litvin calls the inarticulate post-heroic Arab Hamlet, unable to fix the 'out-of-joint' world around him.⁴⁸ He aspires to be 'a Che Guevara in doublet-and-hose', whose 'fierce pursuit of justice [leaves] no room for introspection or doubt'; however, he is paralyzed with guilt and sadness.

Thus, the play is about *de facto* political structures across the Arab world, ranging from total autocracies to liberalized autocracies. For Lahlou, Hamlet and Macbeth become emblematic of Moroccan artists who devote themselves to theatre and reap only repression or frustration. Their reward is either torture or a prison cell. 'Each militant actor had his own cell,' says Hamlet, commenting on his imprisonment after ten years of impasse. Yet the two actors persist in performing, despite their paralysis, and although they can no longer act on the stage, generate new roles or new plays, because they are frustrated artists who have been silenced.

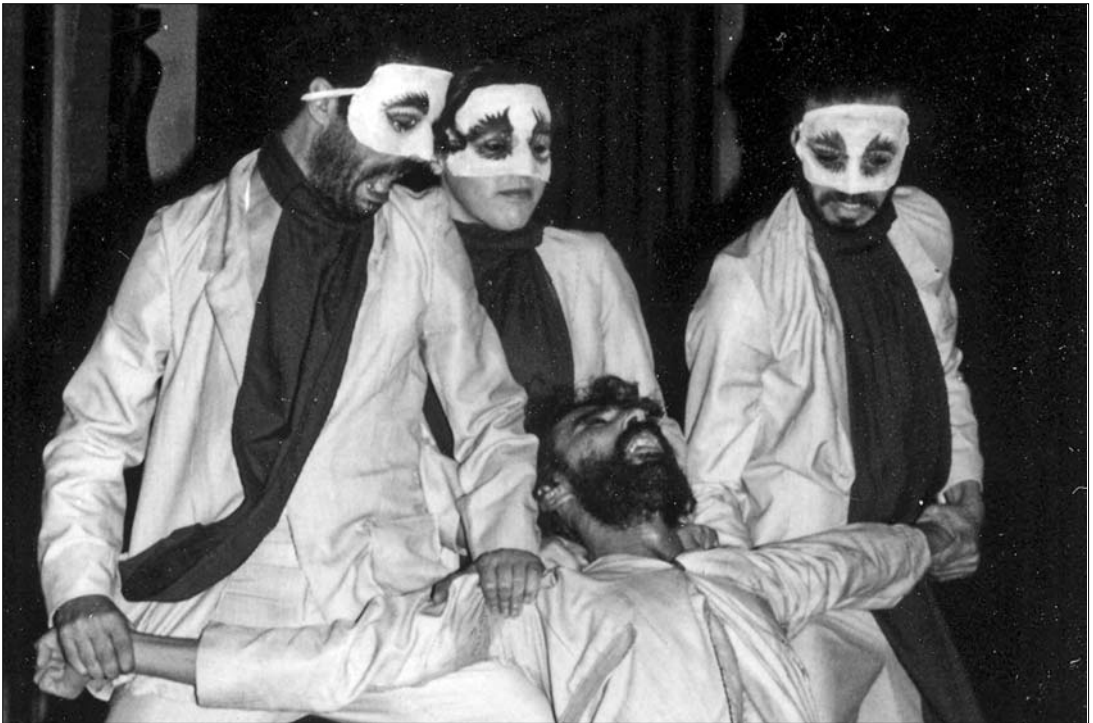
No Man's Land

Mohammed Kaouti's *No Man's Land* was written over a period of three years (1982 to 1984) and was presented to the Moroccan public for four years (1984–1987). In 1986 the production received two awards, for best performance and best actor, at the National Theatre Festival. Written and performed during Morocco's hard times, and long before the era of reconciliation and political overture, *No Man's Land* is one of the most significant Moroccan theatrical testimonies of the past, voicing what the repressive regime had muted. It is a play about political imprisonment and the resulting damage at various levels, mainly the endless psychological traumas endured by victims.

The play is considered to be a historical document that portrays the socio-political conditions in Morocco during the years that



Scenes from Mohammed Kaouti's *No Man's Land*.



followed independence and the traumatic conditions of prisoners of conscience in Morocco from the 1960s 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 centres, including the infamous *Derb*. It was written at the height of the Years of Lead, and was performed by Assalam Al-Barnoussi's company throughout Morocco. This explains Mohammed 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 jail. Using the 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 politic, and censorship and performative openness in post-colonial 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 predicament of political detention in Morocco during the 1970s and 1980s, Kaouti was caught between the desire to give voice and systematic self-censorship. This ambiguous task is achieved via poetic condensation and the Sufi symbolic lexicon. It would have never been possible for Kaouti to address the disastrous experience of political imprisonment without this symbolic dimension. Kaouti's choice was also aesthetic in so far as he embraced research into the Sufi dimension of Moroccan Islam.

No Man's Land exemplifies the fully-fledged counterculture that was highly sensitive to Pan-Arabism as a painful process of renewal, growing out of attribution and contention and a post-colonial struggle affected by, at times, violently conflicting aspirations for a better future. The play was performed and debated among scholars in Morocco during the late 1980s, and sheds light on important chapters of Moroccan political history, leading to what is now called the 'Arab Spring'.

Following the logic of the metaphor of 'deep Morocco', depth is manifested in *No Man's Land* in the intense overlap between moments of crisis, tragic sublime, and the dream of utopia. Such overlap is best illustrated in terms of essentialist claims over certain historical past, territories, or cultural memory. Kaouti stages the ambivalent state of repression which characterized Morocco in the recent past, fuelled by taxonomic violence and conflicting aspirations long before the 'Arab Spring'.

The play is intricately elaborated around the idea of confinement and imprisonment

as major dehumanizing factors. Kaouti makes use of one main character, Mr X, who is an exemplary instance of the thousands of prisoners of conscience arbitrarily arrested in secret detention centres such as the Derb, and three other characters who shift roles between a chorus of faces symbolizing community and a chorus of masks representing the agents of repression. The interplay between the faces and the masks highlights the theme of illusion and reality that is embedded within the play's narrative.

These other characters, unlike Mr X, whose real face dominates his mask, as manifested in his double (Mr XX), appear mostly as a group of masked faces. Sometimes they are the chorus representing the repressive state apparatuses. At other times, they are the inner voice of the torturers, through which can be seen the impacts of torture and ill-treatment upon the psychological well-being of prisoners. The three characters' shifting from one role to another creates an ideal theatrical platform for an unmediated presentation of conflict on the stage. The chorus is meant to represent the oppressed yet submissive Moroccan subjects who have accepted the actual situation without demanding change. At times the chorus represents the *Makhzen* (state authorities).

Divine Intervention and Human Response

The chorus of faces represents the typical individual who prefers to cope with conditions as they are. Throughout the play, the chorus of faces tries to comfort Mr X's pain by attempting to convince him to accept his present circumstances. The chorus of masks, on the other hand, represents the *Makhzen* and throughout the play repeatedly torture 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 *Mukhatabat*, where the voice of God is employed. Kaouti acknowledges that he read Niffari and also the revolutionary mystic Mansur Al-Hallaj while preparing the script of *No Man's Land*. He seizes these moments of intensity and explores them, notably in what appear to be 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 on the psychological obstacles that confront the seeker, Kaouti seems to perform the paradigmatic dialectic between self-scrutiny, as a journey deep within the innermost recesses of his being, and ascetic forms of spirituality as a strict adherence to the Islamic *Shari'ah*.⁴⁹ The interplay of divine instruction and human response constitutes the basis of the performance. However, it becomes more explicitly pedagogical and overtly symbolic in structure and tone than the more palpably experiential, directly expressive work of Niffari. Kaouti's use of Gnawa spiritual music and Sufi body movement leading to trance are also made integral elements of the performance and the journey to unlocking the mysteries hidden within those forms.

Kaouti uses live music and dance to access the higher levels of consciousness 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. His

journey advances by slow stages, called *maqamat* in the Sufi lexicon, with Niffari's *Mawaqif* and *Mukhatabat* acting as spiritual guides to the goal of union with reality, where attention blissfully turns inward and spiritual ecstasy is performed as a state of intoxication. That was the path chosen by Kaouti to unveil some of the realities of trauma as experienced by Moroccan political prisoners.

Women and Patriarchal Power

Zoubair Ben Bouchta's play *Lalla J'mila* is also a serious critique of oppressive violence and the potentially subversive moments of flying over and beyond patriarchal hegemony.⁵⁰ The journey that the play chronicles reveals the stories of two sisters, Itto and Lalla J'mila, which they trace and dramatize through the various experiences they painfully recall as they take stock of their suffocating situation as oppressed women. Their narratives become a means of empowerment when other forms of power are denied or are beyond reach, for stories, as Edward Said states, are 'the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history'.⁵¹ The play also shows how struggles of national liberation and private battles of self-assertion are linked in a variety of ways.

Struggles of national liberation during the colonial era as well as the Years of Lead and private battles of self-assertion are intricately linked in a variety of ways. *Lalla J'mila* recalls:

As a little girl, accompanying my mother in her visits to the *F'qiha Lalla Yennou*, I used to hear them talking about the year of hunger and Franco's military campaign in which he occupied Tangier in the year 1940. It is said that as soon as the Spanish had entered the city, food supplies were cut off; the military took everything and left people starving . . . and provisions were distributed by vouchers.⁵²

Under such conditions, women led by the *Fqiha Lalla Yennou* also took part in the national struggle for independence.⁵³ In their everyday practice, they strove to fight illiter-

acy and patriarchal power structures, as well as those of colonial repression. They turned places like the public Turkish bath, ironically named 'Franco', into arenas for giving voice to their discontent as subaltern and colonized subjects:

Lalla Yennou composed a song that women started to sing. One day, as they were accompanying a bride to Franco's Hamam, they started to sing. (*She sings.*)

Oh! Poor ploughman,
Overloaded with debts,
His only food is Gou'rne,
Cooked with Rou'jla,
In every village,
Mek'hzen would swindle,
And would order a queue up,
They would be burnt by the sun.⁵⁴

The song that is supposed to be non-political and entertaining turns out to be a sharp social satire and a carnivalesque mirror, a world turned upside down. It is an instance of 'hybridity' that Homi Bhabha identifies as

a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition.⁵⁵

Women's song disrupts the authority of the colonizers as well as their Moroccan representatives such as Ba'haddou, whose wife is part of the chorus. And male presence is painfully incorporated in the two sisters' narratives. The character of Ould Lgllassa is an exemplary instance; he is the trauma embodied in the continuous movements of Itto's inward journey through her past, for he is her brother, son of her father, who runs away with her bird, and cuts off her wings:

ITTO: They brought me silver bracelets to handcuff me with at the bed's front, and they gave well extra anklets.

LALLA J'MILA: They are as well silver made?

ITTO: Everything they have is silver made; our silver, home-made. Well! They put anklets on my feet, and bracelets on my hands. I will be lying to you if I tell you I still remember something. When he assaulted me, I can only remember myself screaming a single scream. And they started to sing: 'He took her! He took her. Ould Lgllassa is her master.'

LALLA J'MILA: What? Ould Lgllassa! (*An instance.*)

ITTO: I have never seen his face, because my eyes were enfolded with a strip of cloth.

LALLA J'MILA: Do you know, after all, who Ould Lgllassa is?

ITTO (*performing the act of lying down on bed, and subjection to rape*): No, I did not know him, but I felt he was heavy as lead.⁵⁶

The rape scene exemplifies the symbolic excess of violence practised against the female body during Itto's imprisonment. It is an act conducted against her by the repressive state because of her affiliation with the student movement. It is the ultimate evil that can be inflicted on the female body, particularly in a strict Muslim society such as Morocco, where the loss of virginity or, even worse, being a spurned wife, is considered a disgrace. In brief, *Lalla J'mila* performs the politics of gender in present-day Morocco with the advent of the new family code called *mudawanat al-ussra*.

Ben Bouchta's play was written for and co-produced by an active feminist network right after the implementation of the new law in 2003. It is among the few feminist-conscious writings that appeared in Morocco in response to the new family code. In problematizing the old-fashioned division between public and private space, the play also searches for a better correlation between space and women's corporeal existence. In doing so, it calls for a complete shake-up of the paternalistic view of the family.

Dialy in the Arab Spring

Naima Zitan's *Dialy* is another challenging narrative performance that voices a diverse body of different experiences, bound together by their confluence and the interrelations between womanhood and female sexuality within a deeply rooted patriarchal society. The performance critically intervened at a vulnerable moment for artistic freedom in the wake of social intolerance and regressive religious attitudes towards everything different from what had become known as 'clean art' in conservative public morality debates. With the rise of the Islamic tide in Morocco in the late 1970s and 1980s, there



Scenes from Naima Zitan's *Dialy*.



was a constant Islamization of the public sphere. Although political Islam had been less violent than in other neighbouring Arab countries such as Algeria, at least before 2003 it was used by King Hassan II as a balance against socialist opposition.

The tension between Islamists and the National Union of Popular Forces Party (NUPF) peaked in 1980 with the killing of the socialist leader Omar Benjelloun. Members of the Islamic Youth Movement (founded in 1972 and banned in 1975) were accused of the murder. However, after the Casablanca bombings of 16 May 2003, Moroccans were shocked into awareness of intolerant Islamic radicalism within the country's borders:

Phenomena like 'the clean cinema', 'Islamic tourism', 'Islamic standup comedy', and 'Islamic heavy metal' attest to the growing influence of Islamic sensitivities in the public sphere.⁵⁷

Islamists now compete with secularists, and call artists to support the 'Islamic revival and create an Islamic alternative and ambience'.⁵⁸

Women and the Arab Spring

For playwright and artistic director of Aquarium Theatre Company Naima Zitan, the Arab Spring is seen as an opportunity to redefine the role of women in a society in transition.⁵⁹ Women participating in the 20 February Movement campaigns have, indeed, experienced the revolution in their own way as they marched in the streets with men, claiming equality and dignity as part of the Arab Spring package.⁶⁰ In responding to the controversy over artistic freedom and the fierce debates over women's position in the political scene, the Aquarium Theatre Company staged *Dialy* as a critique of deeply rooted patriarchal power structures. The production is a subversive act of dissent against conservative politics, using the public sphere to underline feminine difference in a country striving to come to terms with the Lead era.

In responding to the controversy over artistic freedom and the fierce debates over women's position in the political scene – and by extension in the theatre scene – the Aquarium Theatre Company staged *Dialy* in

the middle of the 'Arab Spring' in 2012.⁶¹ *Dialy* is also an ideal medium to educate people about the types of violence women, particularly young women, face. Furthermore, the play insists that it is not against men at all. It has allowed many women to share their stories without being afraid or insecure because of the stigma surrounding women who openly speak about their sexual preferences and experiences.

In the play, private confessions are transformed into public announcements. Although inspired by *The Vagina Monologues*, the production genuinely reflects the specific conditions of Morocco under transition⁶² and revitalizes the spirit of struggle through a community-based model for anti-violence within a purely post-*Moudawana* Moroccan context.⁶³

Dialy is a two-act play with no *dramatis personae*, only nameless female characters identified by numbers: Woman 1, 2, and 3. The three actresses remain on the stage, and never disappear fully in order to foreground a given character. They enact a drama of confession with a fervent belief in the power of storytelling. Act One exhibits a painful process of overcoming the shame of voicing what was otherwise the silent world of the 'vagina'. Although the 'vagina' might be the pathway to the womb, which houses a woman's power of creation, such a totalizing feminine rhetoric, according to Julia Kristeva, tends to eclipse women's differences. Kristeva persistently warns against essentializing the myth of the 'archaic mother'.

The image of woman as 'possessor of some mythical unity – a supreme power, on which is based the terror of power and terrorism as the desire for power' needs to be challenged.⁶⁴ Although Kristeva acknowledges the power of the womb as a force of subversion, she also admits that such discourse fails 'to bring out the singularity of each woman and, beyond this, her multiplicities, her plural languages'.⁶⁵

It is not by coincidence that the play centres on the muffled, subdued, and silenced voices of the 'womb'; by doing so, it also maps out new territories of Moroccan women's autonomy within a religiously re-

gressive social structure. Using the artistic manoeuvres typical of *al-halqa* such as addressing audiences directly, bringing up questions asked previously in interviews, and framing the stories through interruption, *Dialy* opens with one of the actresses addressing the public, establishing, from the outset, a subtle contact with the audience: 'What do you call your sexual organ? What is its form? Have you ever contemplated it? How does it smell? What is its suffering?'

Fragmented confessions with no linear development become the stage of a sensual, yet painful delirium, culminating in the pronouncement of the word 'vagina' in a multitude of registers of Moroccan dialects. Some of these registers are conceived by conservatives as 'vulgar' and politically incorrect – taboos that are hardly tolerated, especially when pronounced by women in public. However, such vulgarity was meant to show these actresses in their most vulnerable states, and to restore their humanity and dignity after being deified in the name of tradition. It is a subversive attempt to restore their innermost languages and speak out.

The Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi (1940–2015) argues in her classic study *Beyond the Veil: Male–Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* that gender politics are rooted in our culture 'rather than Islam', and are deeply revealing of the political issues facing North African society today:

The conservative wave against women in the Muslim world, far from being a regressive trend, is on the contrary a defence mechanism against profound changes in both sex roles and the touchy subject of sexual identity. The most accurate interpretation of this relapse into 'archaic behaviours', such as conservatism on the part of men and resort to magic and superstitious rituals on the part of women, is as anxiety-reducing mechanisms in a world of shifting, volatile sexual identity.⁶⁶

The Relapse into Conservatism

The relapse into conservatism in present-day Morocco during a massive transition is partly a defence mechanism, since access to education for both sexes alike has 'dissolved traditional arrangements of space segre-

ation'.⁶⁷ Women are no longer veiled inside as they have become more visible in the streets, schools, universities, workplaces, and parliament. However, fundamentalism has also regressive effects in the social sphere; it has gained territory with the Islamic tide since the late 1970s, as is illustrated in the theatre scandal over *Dialy*, while re-veiling women and limiting their outdoor activities and visibility.

The new conservatism is striving to reverse the feminist gains after decades of struggle. Mernissi's deconstruction of the concept *fitna* (chaos, threat to order) reveals the danger of women's sexuality and the need for patriarchal discursive structures to maintain social equilibrium only by controlling or rather veiling women's sexuality in the public domain. She concludes that 'the entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on and a defence against the disruptive power of female sexuality'.⁶⁸ Her writings undermine the discursive structures that oppress Muslim women. Her book *Doing Daily Battle* (1989) thus comprises a series of interviews with Moroccan women who voice their daily struggle against poverty, illiteracy, and patriarchal oppression.

Following Judith Butler's thread in her provocative book *Excitable Speech: a Politics of the Performative*, 'pornographic debasement' also 'interpolates' Moroccan women as subjects, particularly in the public sphere, revealing the 'performativity of political discourse'.⁶⁹ Symbolic violence and sexual assaults against women in public spaces imply that the female body is construed, by deeply rooted conservative discourse, as a sexualized object 'and a syndrome of appropriation, one of the most significant of the spirit of *harem*'.⁷⁰

The very language that 'counters the injuries of speech, however, must repeat those injuries without precisely re-enacting them'.⁷¹ Only then is critical agency released from the repeated injury, 'and injury countered through that very derivation'.⁷² In line with this, *Dialy's* recurrent obscenity challenges patriarchal injury by 'resignifying' and 'restaging' it. It becomes a performance with effects, a political transformation by

means of a subversive, underground cultural practice that persists in returning the gaze. If male violence, especially in public spaces, is a religiously veiled and repetitive patriarchal oppression, performative restaging of such violence by women in public is subversive in its very displacement of gender norms and of the oppressive conventions framing them.

The Authentic Presence of Narrativization

Today, many theatrical performances from Morocco are concerned with staging past memories of the Lead era. These are also contaminated by narrativization, visual dramaturgy, and digital workflows, which can hardly be subordinated to the spoken text. The narrativization of personal stories is thus seen by many Moroccans as authentic presence, using 'people's actual words' in a way similar to Verbatim Theatre or even Rimini Protokoll (although Moroccan companies use professional actors rather than people-in-the-street). However, recent displays of personal narratives in the theatre demonstrate quite different urges to play with the notions of 'authentic' experience and to place the audience as the main agent in the centre of the game.

The tendency to privilege the turbulent reflection of liminal experience, where we are invited to become co-artists and witnesses rather than passive consumers, becomes apparent in the theatres and performances of Asmaa Hourri, Jaouad Esonnani, Abdelmajid Hawass, Mohamed El Hor, and Youssef Rayhani. By increasingly blurring the performative and the everyday, dramaturgy can inform and strengthen the composition of contemporary Arab identity, providing access to context. After all, alternative dramaturgies are shaped by political motivations. The political in these exemplary alternative dramaturgies from Morocco lies not only in the projects' hot issues pertaining to the Lead era and the Arab Spring, but also and most importantly in disputing conventional theatrical forms, dramaturgical operation modes, and relations with the audience. Recourse to personal stories within the context of the revolutionary Spring is also political.

Hadda, a theatre-concert of the activist company Dabateatr, is a free adaptation of Saphia Azzeddine's first novel, *Confidences à Allah* (2008). Azzeddine's narrative is presented in the form of a long monologue in which Jbara, a prostitute and later a housewife, addresses Allah directly. The crudity of the monologues explicitly re-enacts women's empowerment within a deeply rooted patriarchal structure. Perhaps this is what attracted Jaouad Essounani to rewrite and stage the novel as *Hadda* within the context of the rising Spring of Democracy in 2012.

The production plays with pre-existing templates – myths, narrative frames of traditional historiography, images and elements from pop culture – in order to produce a double effect of emotional identification and critical distance, assisted by the effects of the multimedia landscape and live music. It seems that *Hadda* is telling her story in almost a single breath. Telling the story in retrospect has the quality of mediating the events of the past through *Hadda*'s present frame of mind, allowing her unlimited leverage to edit her past, modify it, alter it, reinvent it, comment on it, and interpret it to her own advantage.

Essounani seems to insist that every piece of storytelling, even one based on facts, maintains a very personal point of view. By revealing predominant patterns of perception, the performance points beyond the momentary, and the actual events become a reflection on how we deal with truth – more specifically, how we deal with the dominant structures of truth within everyday reality and actual political systems. By staging a personal archive live on stage, Essounani calls into question the memory in Morocco of the Years of Lead – for remembering is also a means of critical reflection on social tensions and political conflicts.

More often than not, the return to the monologue in post-Arab Spring theatres is occasioned by a crushing crisis in the life of the monologist, a bitter sense of embattlement, or of resounding defeat in the face of the rotten state. In these ways, *Hadda*'s monologue is a carefully chosen fragment of retrieved personal (as well as collective)

history, narrated in retrospect with a will to vengeance and recovery. Her many defeats in the past are transformed into cathartic verbal victories through the narrative within the performance. More than simply a conventional form of confessional discourse, the monologue in *Hadda* is a critique of contemporary conventional assumptions about subjectivity and truth.

Hadda also 'uses the personal memories and recollections of Hadda, a woman who comes from an extremely poor economic background, to open up a larger canvas of political, social, and religious questions'.⁷³ Hadda appears 'saintly', both at the beginning of the performance and at the end, 'covered from head to toe in white cloth; but she sheds this outer layer as she takes the audience back through her life to reveal stories of violence, rape and prostitution'.⁷⁴ However, the ritual preparation of Hadda at the end of the performance, along with her explosive bomb belt, is seen as a justification of terrorism, or else as a positive expression of the 20 February Movement.

Conclusion

In the wake of the political reconciliation between monarchy and opposition, initiated primarily by King Hassan II during the last decade of his reign and sustained by King Mohamed VI, testimonies from the Years of Lead have become important means for regaining agency and giving voice to the voiceless. Still, if Moroccans are experiencing radical changes after the Years of Lead era, and if they are on the verge of redefining themselves as a nation that celebrates its proper cultural diversity, will theatre have a place in this process? Or will it continue to serve only the need to escape from the more painful imperatives that pepper the urban sprawl of modern Moroccan society? These are pressing questions, the answers to which are yet to be revealed by time. Given the increasing number of theatre performances in contemporary Morocco that bear witness to the atrocities experienced in the Years of Lead, a memorialist turn has emerged with a persistence to give voice to the voiceless.

Notes and References

1. Michel McFaul and Tamara Cafman, 'Morocco's Elections, the Limited Reforms', *Journal of Democracy*, XIX, No. 1 (2008), p. 27.
2. The 'Years of Lead' describes a period of political turmoil in Morocco from 1956 to 1999. It was marked by state violence against opposition, manifested in the form of political murders, forced disappearances, torture, and other cruelties typical of the arbitrariness of the system.
3. The ensuing violence of both the repressive state apparatus and political opposition during the 1960s and 1970s and through the 1980s seems to leave simplistic bipolar manicheisms open to different interpretations today. The monarchy has managed 'to stay in power for the past sixty years', as Fadwa Loudiy argues, 'through a clever double-ended game of violence/fear and co-optation/corruption internally, along with a well-orchestrated public relations campaign internationally'. See Fadwa Loudiy, *Transitional Justice and Human Rights in Morocco: Negotiating the Years of Lead* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 61.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
5. The *bay'ah* tradition is rooted in Islam; it is an act of allegiance whereby the companions of the Prophet owed him faithfulness. The phrase 'imagined community' is borrowed from Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
6. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Matter of 'Sex'* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 21.
7. Laura Menin, 'Rewriting the World: Gendered Violence, the Political Imagination, and Memoirs from the "Years of Lead" in Morocco', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, VIII, No. 1 (2014), p. 46.
8. Nour-Eddine Saoudi, *Voyage: au-delà des nuits de plomb* (Casablanca: Zino-Mar, 2007), p. 23.
9. Menin, 'Rewriting the World', p. 50.
10. *Ibid.* In interviews more than in his published memoirs, 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.)
11. Ixy Noever, 'Women's Choices: Norms, Legal Pluralism, and Social Control among the Ayt Hdidou of Central Morocco', in Walter Dostal and Wolfgang Kraus, ed., *Shattering Tradition: Custom, Law, and the Individual in the Muslim Mediterranean* (New York: Tauris, 2005), p. 189.
12. Interview with Menin, 2012.
13. Fatna El Buih, *Haditu al-'Atama (Talk of Darkness)* (Casablanca: Le Fennec, 2001), p. 15.
14. Menin, 'Rewriting the World', p. 58.
15. Loudiy, *Transnational Justice*, p. 122–3.
16. Susan Slyomovics, 'A Truth Commission for Morocco', *Middle East Report*, No. 218 (Spring 2001), p. 19.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
18. *Al-halqa* (the circle of storytelling) is the most important traditional performance model in Morocco. It is a public performance in the form of a circle 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 *A Thousand and One Nights* and *Sirat Bani Hilal*. The performance has a magical capacity to encompass its audiences as it negotiates the differing relationships among participants; in the process, it reformulates social legitimation and cultural values. The role of the spectators in the fulfilment of *al-halqa* performance is mandatory, as they are active participants and co-subjects rather than passive recipients of a finished spectacle. Their agency is best illustrated in terms of the 'autopoietische feedback-schleife' (the auto-poetic feedback loop), by which the 'aesthetic experience of a performance does not depend on the "work of art" but on the interaction of the participants'. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: a New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 36.

19. Although the counter-*bay'ah* was violently banned in Rabat, it was re-enacted in Paris on 1 September 2012 in front of the Moroccan Embassy. For details see <www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvIHKQSBkI8>. '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.' See Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Gallimard), abridged translation as *Realms of Memory* (Columbia University Press, 1996), p. xvii. In other words, sites of memory are 'where [cultural] memory crystallizes and secretes itself'. See Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*', *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), p. 7–24.

20. See Nora, 'Between Memory', p. 19.

21. According to the founding royal decree, the Commission had the following tasks:

1. Unveiling the truth

- 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.

22. Pierre Hazan, 'The Nature of Sanctions: the Case of Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission', *International Review of the Red Cross*, XC, No. 870 (June 2008), p. 399.

23. Loudiy, *Transnational Justice*, p. 47.

24. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 41.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

26. Rustom Bharucha, *Terror and Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 113.

27. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: a Politics of the Performative* (New York; London: Routledge, 1997), p. 41.

28. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, p. 28.

29. For a critique of Butler, see Geoff Boucher, 'The Politics of Performativity: a Critique of Judith Butler', *Parrhesia*, No. 1 (2006) p. 112–41.

30. Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 47.

31. Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 73.

32. <www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGeVGn1qvII>. This documentary was released by ERC as part of the commission's international *Compiegne*. It is an edited version with selected testimonials from women.

33. Caroline Wake, 'Between Repetition and Oblivion', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, XXXIII, No. 4 (October 2013), p. 329.

34. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 206–55.

35. Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 5.

36. Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 6.

37. Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, p. 29.

38. Jessica Murray, 'Trembling in the Distinction between Fiction and Testimony', *Postcolonial Text*, IV, No. 2 (2008), p. 4.

39. Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, p. 30.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 34–5.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

42. In this context, Diana Taylor makes an 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.' See Taylor, *The Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 19–20.

43. Bryoni Trezise and Caroline Wake, ed., *Visions and Revisions: Performance, Memory, Trauma* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 15.

44. The following are a few examples of this literature: Abdelkader Chaoui, *Kana Wa Akhawtouha*; Abdelatif Lâabi, *Chronique de la citadelle d'exil*; Jawd Mdeh, *La Chambre noire*; Mohamed Raiss, *De Skhirat à Tazmamart retour au bout de l'enfer*; Ahmed Marzouki, *Tazmamart Cellule 10*; Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Cette aveuglante absence de lumière*; Malika Oufkir, *La Prisonnière*.

45. Jessica Murray, 'Trembling in the Distinction between Fictions and Testimony', *Postcolonial Text*, IV, No. 2 (2008), p. 1.

46. Nabyl Lahlou, *Ophélie n'est pas morte* (Casa-blanca: Le Fennec Editions, 1987).

47. To my knowledge, Regragui's translation has never been published, as it was mainly destined for the stage. My understanding was inspired by Regragui's

two performances in the early 1990s; I was particularly struck by his multiple rhyme patterns using northern English dialects. The present translation is slightly different in that it is in accordance with the published version of the French original. Wordplay is mostly adapted to American English.

48. Margaret Litvin, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 11.

49. Islam *Shari'ah* refers to the legal system and body of Islamic jurisprudence derived from the Quran and the Hadiths (opinions and life examples of the prophet Mohamed).

50. Zobeir Ben Bouchta, *Lalla J'mila*, trans. Mustapha Hilal Soussi (Tangier: ICPS Publications, 2005). All references to the play are from this published version. The play was first performed by Ibn Khaldoun Theatre Company in 2004. The acuity of the play was well explored by the experimental director Jamal Eddine El-Abrak along with his devoted team, particularly the amazing actresses Hasna Tantaoui and Kenza Fridou.

51. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. xii.

52. Bouchta, *Lalla J'mila*, p. 25.

53. *Faqih* in Arabic means a knowledgeable man who leans the Quran by heart and knows the Sunna of the prophet Mohamed, and all that concerns everyday life practice of the Muslims (*Chari'a*). In brief, it is a phallic position or rather a title that is achieved mostly by men, for they have an easy access to outdoor education. Very few women in Arabo-Islamic history have achieved the title of '*faqih*', which literally means an educated woman who is able to erect her proper interpretation of reality in a male-dominated world. Lalla Yennou's self-education and desire to educate other women are subversive attempts to dismantle paternalistic systems of governance.

54. Bouchta, *Lalla J'mila*, p. 25.

55. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 114.

56. Bouchta, *Lalla J'mila*, p. 28.

57. Karin van Nieuwkerk, 'Creating an Islamic Cultural Sphere: Contested Notions of Art, Leisure, and Entertainment – an Introduction', *Contemporary Islam*, II, No. 3 (December 2008), p. 169–76, at p. 174.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

59. The Aquarium Theatre Company was founded in 1994 by Naima Zitan, Naima Oulmakki, and Abdullatif Oulmakki. Against the backdrop of political transition in Morocco, the company draws its strength from being political in nature, deeply committed to social theatre and to the cause of gender equality and respect for women's rights. *Qabla Al-Futur (Before Breakfast)*, 1997) is another production by Aquarium that critiques the behaviour of the majority of Moroccan male intellectuals, who practice their version of modernity only outside their own homes.

60. The 20 February Movement is the Moroccan version of the 'Arab Spring'. The movement was represented on the internet with no founding ideology, only demands: more freedom, dignity, the end of corruption, and more limits on royal power (a consitutional monarch who reigns but does not govern). The movement's website *Mamfakinch* won the Global Voices Citizen Media Summit Award of 2012.

61. Inspired by Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*, and by women's testimonies in a workshop under the name *Avec elles (With Them)*, *Dialy* was written by Maha Sano, directed by Naima Zitan, with actresses: Nouria Benbrahim, Farida Bouazzaoui, and Amal Ben Haddou. The play premiered on 15 June 2012 at the Institut Français in Rabat and at the Théâtre Aquarium on 16 June.

62. *Dialy* is not the first Arab play to be inspired by *The Vagina Monologues*; another was written by the Lebanese playwright Lina Khoury in her *Hakeh Niswan (Women's Talk)*, 2006). 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. However, Hakeh Niswan does not use the word 'vagina', replacing it with *Jamil* (the beautiful) to avoid censorship.

63. The *Moudawana* (family code) was created in Morocco in 1958. Since its creation it has been edited numerous times, the last revision being in February 2004. The code has very specific goals in mind, as stated in its preamble: 'The promotion of human rights, a priority which lies at the very heart of the modernist democratic social project of which His Majesty is a leader. Doing justice to women, protecting children's rights and preserving men's dignity are a fundamental part of this project, which adheres to Islam's tolerant ends and objectives, notably justice, equality, solidarity, *ijtihad* (juridical reasoning), and receptiveness to the spirit of our modern era and the requirements of progress and development.' The new *Moudawana* was approved in 2004 after a longstanding mobilization by diverse feminist groups belonging to the conservative tide and the secularists.

64. Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 213.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 205–8.

66. Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. xxvii–xxviii.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

69. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 40.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

71. *Ibid.* p. 41.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Elaine Aston <<http://dramaqueensreview.com/2014/06/12/from-morocco-hadda-schizophrenia-and-larmes-au-khol>>, last accessed 30 July 2015)

74. *Ibid.*