AFAC — Arab Fund
for Arts and Culture
الصنـــدوق العـــربي
للثقـــافة والفنـــون

ARAB WORLDS PERFORMING ARTS IN SEARCH OF A REAWAKENING

Research supervised by Driss Ksikes

ARAB WORLDS
PERFORMING ARTS IN SEARCH OF A REAWAKENING

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Performing Arts:

A QUANTITATIVE PAPER ON THE CREATIVE PRACTICES IN THE ARAB REGION

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Abstract

This paper aims to conduct quantitative research on the practices and knowledge of artists working in the field of performing arts in five fundamental areas of the Arab world: the Maghreb, Egypt and Sudan, Iraq and the Gulf, the Levant, and Arab artists of diaspora, through three dimensions.

The quantitative research team has adopted a multidimensional approach, through building on the diversity of research data and methodologies. Although the team based their work primarily on statistical and quantitative data, they also focused on qualitative data related to performing arts in the region through collecting data from sectors related to the research topic; attempting, especially, to create a database from different sources, including the funding of performing arts, artistic infrastructures, festivals, the sales of performing arts, the human resources used in the field, national and international financial support dedicated to creations in the field of performing arts...

Key words: performing arts, quantitative research, economies of culture, heritage, contemporaneity

General introduction

The quantitative research team has adopted a multidimensional approach through building on the diversity of research data and methodologies. Although the team built their work primarily on statistical and quantitative data, they also focused on qualitative data related to performing arts in the region through collecting information from sectors related to the research topic; attempting, especially, to create a database from different sources, including the funding of performing arts, artistic infrastructures, festivals, the sales of performing arts, the human resources used in the field, national and international financial support dedicated to creations in the field of performing arts...

We have also worked on quantitatively analyzing the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture - AFAC's data related to supporting the performing arts during the period of 2010 - 2021, with the aim of drawing a picture of the state-status of works of performing arts supported by AFAC, and attempting to recognize their type, cost, geographic location in the region or abroad (diaspora)...

We have also conducted a survey that stemmed from the conceptual and methodological conception, prepared by Driss Ksikes, the scientific coordinator of the AFAC research team, in order to produce data related to the performing arts in the studied region. In terms of methodology, we built the survey following five dimensions that were defined by the different groups constituting the research team (the thematic researchers, the regional team, and the quantitative research team): the connection of performative arts to heritage and modernity, the economies of producing culture, the right to culture, networking (knowledge transfer, joint training and production), and digitization.

Cognitively, the survey, forwarded to performing arts practitioners, took into consideration the Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) method, which combines both the qualitative and quantitative methods, in order to understand the socio-anthropological phenomena in different fields. In this paper, we brought this methodology to the performing arts in order to understand their status in the region through systematically adapting it to the five dimensions defined in the Policy Paper of the project.

01 General context

It is well known that the governments of the countries studied in this project do not care about the performing arts in a manner that is already organized and defined in clear and reasonable cultural policies. There are some cases where some countries use the performing arts in order to promote a mainstream narrative, whether related to heritage or modernity, but that serve a culturally hegemonic view in the context of its production.

Nevertheless, due to the lack of sufficient qualitative or quantitative data on the performing arts, nor on the arts and culture in general, it remains difficult to produce an assessment of the status of performing arts in the majority of the studied countries. In this context, there is the problem of access to information, especially the grant-budgets allocated to the field, the status of cultural infrastructures, the sales of performing arts, the statistics of the human resources in the field...), as well as not rendering such data publicly accessible.

The lack of studies and literature related to the performing arts and cultural policies in general from the point of view of studying the practices and status of these arts can be witnessed even in scientific production in general, aside from qualitative and creative production, especially in the field of cultural studies. Even when such literature is available, it rarely undergoes periodic updates.

This study comes in a context where all fields, including the performing arts, are affected by COVID-19, which made artists reconsider their economic models and, sometimes, even their ways of producing their creations, including resorting to digitization in search of alternative means of subvention, promotion, and performance.

In the end, we must point to the monopoly of theater over the other performing arts in the studied region, in practice, funding, and availability of performance spaces...

02 Data collection

QUANTITATIVE DATA

The collection of quantitative data is based on bibliographic references that the research team members have used in previous research on the topic of performing arts, in addition to a documentary search on the internet. These data are composed of scientific articles, PhD dissertations, digital media articles, studies, reports and assessments by (local, regional, and international) state and independent institutions in the different countries concerned with this project. The documents collected by the team, (50 in Arabic, English, and French) dated between 2009-22, are primarily related to the following axes:

SPECIALIZED INFRASTRUCTURES DEDICATED TO TRAINING, PRODUCTION, AND DISSEMINATION OF PERFORMING ARTS :

Compared to the needs of communities and their proximity to performing arts spaces, they remain generally rare in the Arab world. There are also very rare (accredited) professional training institutions specialized in stage-direction, acting, personification, scenography, writing, acrobatics... (less than 10 in every country on average). such training programs, when available, are provided at universities of arts and humanities, or at public institutions specialized in dramatic and choreographic arts. There are amateur training programs that are more abundant at public or private schools at the suggestion of civil society organizations in the form of workshops for beginners or semi-professionals, or in the framework of training/orientation programs provided by foreign institutions (Goethe, Institut Français...).

Performing arts creations are mostly produced in public or private spaces (theaters, cultural centers, youth houses...) of which every country has 100 on average. We can add to that movie theaters, which can be platforms for broadcasting plays or, sometimes, dance performances in cities where there are no theaters.

THE ECONOMIES OF PERFORMING ARTS CREATIONS

There are many sources of funding for the performing arts; ranging from grants, international support, ticket sales, to self-financing.. State budget dedicated to performing arts is meant mainly for production and distribution, but very little support goes to training. It is worth noting, in this context, that

theater gets the lion's share of public funding (given by the ministries of culture, national theaters, and operas), compared to dance or circus across the region. It was difficult to track down (on official websites and open access data) the share of performing arts in the total state budget for culture, which accounts for less than 1% of the total budget in the majority of countries covered in this study. It is almost impossible to find data about the total revenue of tours or ticket sales to measure the effect of performing arts in the total wealth of a country, nor even the statistics on the workers in the field of those arts, in order to evaluate the impact of this creative domain on the job market in general. Data related to the performing arts are rarely made available to the public, which is, indeed, connected to the issues of access to information and accountability in the studied countries.

THE IMPORTS / EXPORTS OF PERFORMING ARTS IN THE ARAB WORLD

According to the UNESCO's 2013-2019 data on cultural and creative industries, as well as the UNCTAD and UNESCO's data, the performing arts constitute a tiny fraction in the total imports/exports of creative products, compared to design and crafts, across the Arab World. In 2015, the performing arts exports did not exceed 1- 2% in the majority of Arab countries ($4 million on average), compared to design, which constitutes, along with crafts, over 70% of the exported creative goods ($200 m on average) in the Arab world. In the same year, the performing arts cost around $7 m in the total creative imports on average, rising to $9 m in 2019.

PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVALS IN THE ARAB WORLD AND INTERNATIONALLY

Performing arts festivals, both in the studied region and internationally, fill up a significant vacuum in terms of programming and promoting dramatic creations, choreography, and circus by Arab artists. There has been a great number of theater festivals in the region for over 50 years, with less dedicated to dance, both classical and contemporary, and very few dedicated to circus and street arts. Those events are organized and supported by the ministries of culture in some countries, and by other private or independent parties and colleges when it comes to university festivals. These festivals have become (bi-)annual dates for performing arts practitioners in the region to promote their new creations and compete over regional prizes. It is worth noting here that these festivals have a seasonal nature; as the majority of theater festivals take place in the Fall, while dance, circus, and street arts festivals take place more in the Spring or the Fall.

As professionals, artists, and audience, the Arab youth of diaspora participate in poly-disciplinary festivals that promote Arab performing arts in North America (i.e. the Arab World Festival in Montreal), or contemporary arts in Europe and Great Britain (such as Shubbak Festival: a Window on Contemporary Arab Culture in London), or in West Africa (such as the Abidjan Performing Arts Market).

THE AUDIENCE AND CONSUMPTION OF THE PERFORMING ARTS

According to our research, there is a limited number of statistics on the issues of the audience and its relationship with the performing arts. There are generally very few studies that tackle the subject of cultural and artistic practices in the Arab world. Likewise, public census institutions do not include the indicators of artistic consumption (all disciplines) in their population censuses. We have found two studies that tackle the subject audience in relation to the performing arts in Morocco and Tunisia. The first is a public opinion survey about the cultural practices of Moroccans, done by Roots (روذج) Association in 2016, which provides data on audience presence at festivals and spaces where performing and street arts are programmed, as well as the practices of performing arts by Moroccans. The second, conducted in 2021 as a part of the Tfanen program, is a study that measures the cultural practices of Tunisians; it highlights the presence of Tunisians in general, and youth in particular, at dance and performing arts-related artistic practices shows.

ANALYZING AFAC'S DATA

Assessing, measuring, and monitoring the development of arts in the Arab world presupposes having defined tools that enable collecting the required information to develop the necessary indicators and analyses for producing proofs and results, as well as evaluating the achieved progress in this context. For that purpose, the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) has a rich statistical system with updated and dynamic information that allows for providing information about the status and amount of funds allocated to the beneficiaries of AFAC's support. The data at our disposal include a diverse collection of data organized under around 40 statistical variables, covering a diverse group of topics, and dating to more than a decade. The data that AFAC put at our disposal cover the period of 2007-2021 and are divided following the type of beneficiaries (individuals or institutions). We must therefore thank AFAC for giving us access to this data and working on them.

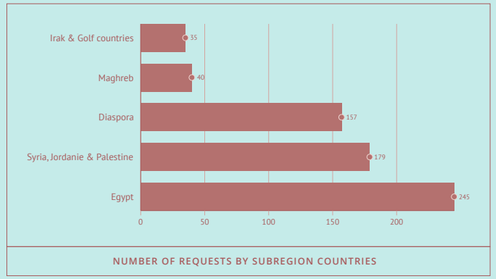
It is also important that we point out that, for the purposes of this study, we have focused on the period of 2010-2021. In addition to that, we have attempted, for the purpose of simplifying the process of longitudinal data analysis, to form a single linear timeline, with a folder that includes the seemingly significant data in our analysis, such as:

- Individual information on the beneficiaries, such as the first and last names, birth date, sex,
- information about the requested budget,
- information about the granted amount,
- the geographical area of the beneficiaries,
- the type of practiced art...etc.,

Furthermore, it was necessary to filter the databases and integrate them in one single folder, which is an important step before treating the folder and analyzing it in order to turn that data into executable knowledge and eliminate all potential biases that may result from low quality data.

That is why it was necessary to adopt different approaches for the sake of explaining the similarities and differences between the different groups. Hence, the longitudinal and multi-variable evaluations that were conducted in this context have shed light on the big gap between the beneficiary artists in terms of the requested funds, the delivered grant sum, or even the type of project.

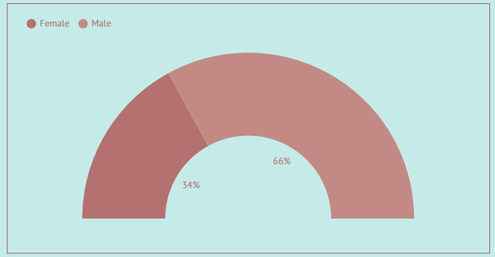
Therefore, the data that have been built include 656 observations. The geographic origin-analysis shows that the lion's share of grants goes to Egyptian beneficiaries by more than a third (37.34% (i.e. 245 beneficiaries)), followed by Syria, Jordan, and Palestine (27.28%), while grantees from Iraq and the Gulf countries barely represent 5.33% (i.e. 35 grantees).



Source: AFAC's 2010-2021 data analysis.

The gender-based analysis shows that male beneficiaries represent more than two thirds (i.e. 66%), compared to roughly 34% of females.

Source: AFAC's 2010-2021 data analysis.



THE SURVEY

Academic and research circles use surveys as tools for producing quantitative data, instead of limiting themselves to data made available by official and non-official institutions. In this context, the AFAC research group decided, during the preparatory meetings for this project, to come up with a survey and distribute it to artists working in the field of performing arts, either by depending on AFAC's database during the period of 2019-2021, or through targeting artists by the quantitative team and assisting the rest of researchers in the team.

The methodology of preparing the survey was built upon the methodological conception of the research project in order to bring about harmony between all components of the project (as mentioned in the Policy Paper). Therefore the questions related to the five axes were defined by the quantitative team, so the survey would later be presented to the rest of the members to evaluate and discuss them.

This research was based on data collection in the field, which was done through designing an electronic survey on Google Forms. That obliged the team supervising the project to monitor the quality of collected data and perform daily observation of the compilation of information in order to reduce the possibility of lack of harmony or mistakes during the data entry phase. Regarding samples, we have adopted the methodology of taking experimental samples, which is a non-probable method that entails choosing a specific number of statistical units (beneficiaries) in a logical and random way.

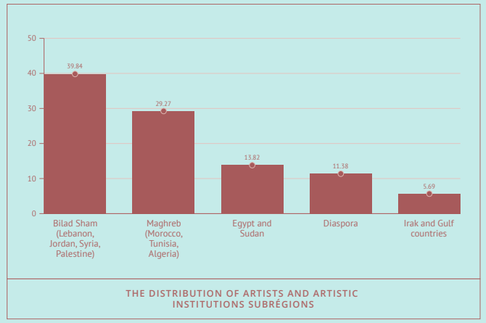
We must point out here that during the field research, we increased the size of the studied sample in order to decrease, as much as possible, the errors of measuring and observation on the one hand, and guarantee semi-representation of all the studied countries on the other. Compared to other peers, this methodology has several characteristics, such as fast execution and reducing the burden of response, as well as requiring less human resources.

The sample we have accumulated across different media (email, social media...) was 123 performing artists from the different studied countries. The sample collection was done in two phases: the first phase lasted from May 13, through August 17, 2022, and resulted in 116 responses, with a quasi absence of artists from the Gulf, Algeria, and Iraq. The second phase was launched on September 19 through November 15, 2022, in which a sample adjustment was necessary to add responses from Iraq, the Gulf countries, and Algeria. This phase saw a relative increase in responses from Iraq thanks to mobilization by our team member, Mohammed Sef, who is writing the papers on Iraq and the Gulf. However, there was a quasi lack of responses by performing artists from Algeria, with barely one more response added to the single one that had been recorded in the first phase.

The low participation rate in the survey and lack of interest by artists from Algeria and the Gulf countries can be explained by the fact that performing artists in these countries do not have any prior relationship with AFAC, which is confirmed by this latter's data on the projects it has supported since the launching of the performing arts program in 2007. Indeed, the practice of doing survey research, both in the field and virtually, is still generally difficult. It has become more evident that such lack of interest is, especially, present among artists interested in culture and arts.

In the same vein as the general methodology of the project's, the studied sample has been distributed according to the regional distribution defined for all the papers. Therefore, the sample has been distributed in the following method: 29.2% in the Maghreb region, 39.8% in the Levant, 13.8% in Egypt and Sudan, 5.7% in Iraq and the Gulf, and 11,3% in diaspora.

Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)



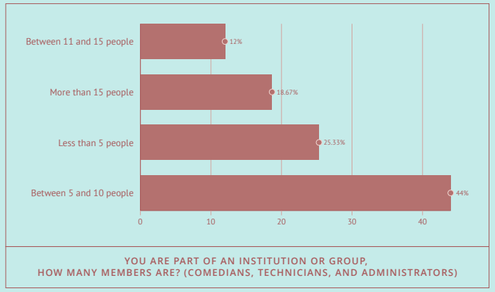
Among the fundamental and original variables that we have adopted in the survey in order to recognize the organizational status of the performing arts (i,e. the working style), there are questions of whether they function in the form of institutions (organization, association, company...), as individuals, or as (non-officially registered) groups. The goal of adopting this variable as fundamental one is not just to know the percentage of organizational forms of the interviewed samples, but also to measure and recognize the existence of differences between these organizational forms at the level of practices, knowledge, as well as attitudes and opinions towards the performing arts through the dimensions set forth in the research methodology.

As the table below explains, 46.3% of interviewed artists work as individuals, while 48% function as institutions or registered organizations, whereas only 16,3% of interviewees work in groups that are not officially or legally recognized.

		N	Percent	Percent of cases
Do you work in the performing arts individually or in an organized framework ?	Individual	75	41,9 %	46,3 %
	Organization	59	43,4 %	48,0 %
	Group/Collective (Uregistered legally/officially)	20	14,7 %	16,3 %
Total		136	100 %	

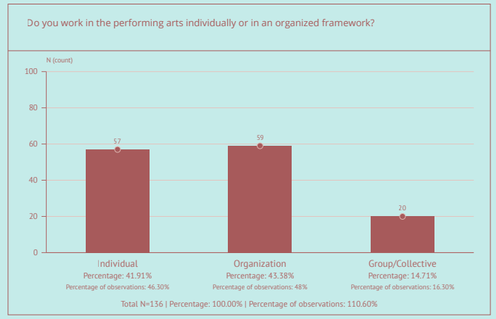
Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

In the majority of responses to this study, the number of members in groups and organizations in the field of performing arts is 5-10 members (44%), organizations with less than five members come second with 25,33%, whereas groups whose members exceed 15 come third with 18,67%, while only 12% of organizations are composed of 11-15 members.



Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

Another fundamental, but independent, variable that we have adopted in our data analysis in order to understand the relationship between the performing arts and the main problem of the research team, depending on the field, is the artistic field of working. The majority of artists work in theater (74,8%), followed by dance (42,3%), and street arts (22.8%), while 23.6% of interviewees chose "Other" as their field of practice in the performing arts.



Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

03 Analyzing the five dimensions of the research

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMING ARTS AND CONTEMPORANEITY

The survey did not go into the complicated details of the relationship between the concepts of "heritage" "tradition" or even "legacy".. compared to the different aspects of "contemporaneity" and "modernity"... We limited our question to the relationship of their work in the performing arts to "heritage" In order to make the question clearer and simultaneously inclusive of the different research regions (due to the differences in nominations across the region: heritage, tradition, legacy, or even folklore, sometimes), we have added the phrase "local culture" Some responses to the question of working on heritage texts or ones inspired by local culture, were:

> ***"working on local rituals, such as death and mourning in the Arab world, as well as on oral traditions in the Levant, in addition to using the types of movements inspired by traditional and folk dance and its aesthetics"***
> ***Ali Chabrour, dancer, Lebanon***

> ***"Several aspects of cultural heritage have inspired my work, but I would say that as well in "Folkah" with the treatment of the Guedra (dance of the South of Morocco) as "Contessa" influenced by the history of the sheikhats (dancers and folk singers in Morocco), or "Aaroussa" which is inspired by Moroccan wedding ceremonies. My work is strongly influenced by the history of my country.."***
>
> *AR2D/Espace Darja, Morocco.*

However, more than 68% of respondents who said that they had previously worked on topics inspired by heritage and/or from local culture, gave diverse responses about examples of their work, crisscrossing, at times, concepts or cultural and artistic expressions that fuse folk culture and heritage, rituals, folklore, and other expressions that show working on what can be called artistic and folk heritage in the performing arts.

Nevertheless, the "heritage/contemporaneity" binary has shown paradoxes at the level of the performing artists' responses, showing lack of clear-cut boundaries in the practices and, sometimes, conceptions of artists between heritage and contemporaneity. The majority of interviewed artists (95.1%), even and including those that have not worked on topics related to heritage (31%) said that resorting to written and oral heritage texts serves current causes in society, while no artist responded negatively to this question, as the rest (4.9%) did not respond, opting for "No answer"

The heritage/contemporaneity paradox in working in the performing arts appears as well in artists' declarations (92.2%) that current issues define their artistic topics; while only 9.8% of the interviewed artists consider that the current issues do not define their topics.

> ***"Unfortunately, there are no projects in the region that provide a contemporary reading of the heritage, in a shallow or, say, tourist attempt to revive it."***
> *Leish troup, Syria.*

When the interviewed artists were asked whether they had previously done performances inspired by heritage and local culture according to the artistic field of practice, the majority who responded "Yes" came from street arts, followed by the category of artists who chose "Other" (79.3%), then theater in the third position with (66.3%), and dance with (63.5%), and last came circus with 40%.

			Have you ever worked on a topic in your artistic field that was derived, inspired or borrowed from the local heritage or culture ?		
			No	Yes	Total
In which of the Performing Arts do you work ?	Street Art	Count	4	24	28
		% within $	14,3 %	85,7 %	
	Circus	Count	6	4	10
		% within $	60,0 %	40,0 %	
	Theatre	Count	31	61	92
		% within $	33,7 %	66,3 %	
	Dance	Count	19	33	52
		% within $	36,5 %	63,5 %	
	Other	Count	6	23	29
		% within $	20,7 %	79,3 %	
Total			39	84	123

Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

THE ECONOMICS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

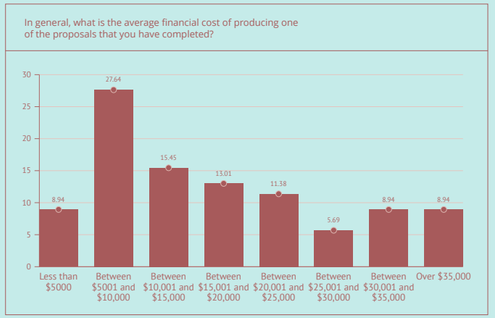
It is difficult to talk about a specific economic model for culture in general, and, especially, for performing arts in the majority of the studied countries. Except in rare cases, the majority of shows in our region are produced thanks to support from official, private, or public cultural institutions... The majority of interviewed artists (90.2%) in our empirical research stated that they depend on the financial support of institutions and organizations in producing their projects. The quantitative research shows that the most generous support to the performing arts comes from foreign cultural institutions (67%), followed by national NGOs (63.3%), international NGOs (56%), official national institutions (51.4%), and, equally, both regional NGOs and private national institutions (46.8%).

		N	Percent	Percent of cases
If yes, what institutions have you dealt with to support the production of your artworks ?	Official instituions in your counry	56	15,2 %	51,7 %
	Private institutions in your country	51	13,9 %	46,8 %
	Foreign cultural institutes in your country	73	29,8 %	67,0 %
	National NGOs	69	18,8 %	63,3 %
	Regional NGOs	51	13,9 %	46,8 %
	International NGOs	61	16,6 %	56,0 %
	Other	7	1,9 %	4,6 %
Total		368	100 %	

Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

More than ⅔ (77.2%) of artists interviewed in this research depend on alternative means of funding for their artistic projects. One of the most recurrent means is self-funding, as the vast majority of interviewees (99%) picked it as their first choice, followed by open crowdfunding (84.4%), raising funds from institutions and figures (40.6%). A quarter of the interviewed artists (26%) depend on cultural sponsorship as an alternative means for producing their cultural works, while 25% chose "Other" alternative means of funding.

		N	Percent	Percent of cases
If yes, what are these alternative means ?	Self-Financing	95	36,0 %	99,0 %
	Crowdfunding	81	30,7 %	84,4 %
	Cultural Mecenat	25	9,5 %	26,0 %
	Collecting donations from persoanlities or organizations	39	14,8 %	40,6 %
	Other	24	9,1 %	25,0 %
Total		264	100,00 %	



Regarding the size of funding for the performing arts, an important percentage (67.5%) of interviewed artists stated that the production of one show costs $5,000 - $25,000, while 8.9% said that production budget of shows they had already produced was less than $5,000, and an equal percentage of artists (8.9%) mentioned that the production of one show cost them over $35,000.

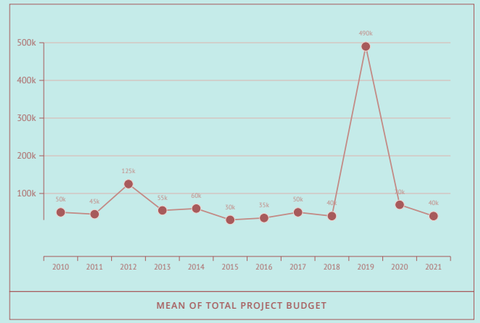
Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

It is impossible in this context to ignore the situation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly affected the artists and other related jobs (technicians and administrative staff) in the field of performing arts; as more than 94% of participants in the survey stated that their funding and production were affected by the pandemic, while only 5.6% said that their work was not affected.

> ***"Artistic performance has decreased due to several factors connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, social networking slowed down to a great extent, which was clear at later stages in people's interest in watching shows or contributing to them. Cultural institutions suffered as well, which caused the funding for activities by individuals and small institutions to shrink, as the resources were redirected towards health and awareness-raising campaigns related to hygiene, affecting the value of arts and their necessity for society"***
> ***Mondir Jawabra (Al Jabri), street artist, Palestine.***

> ***"The COVID-19 pandemic caught us working on a project entitled (Tawalib), supported by the Opera Theater. We continued working, finished the rehearsals, and produced the paintings and exhibited them at the 2021 Garbouz Festival in Beni Khaddach, despite epidemic, as the area was immune thanks to health protection, awareness, and courage, which kept the arts alive in our country and we kept singing for life in the lyrics of our poet, Abou Elkassim Ech-chabbi"***
>
> *El Hachimi El Houssine, actor, Tunisia*

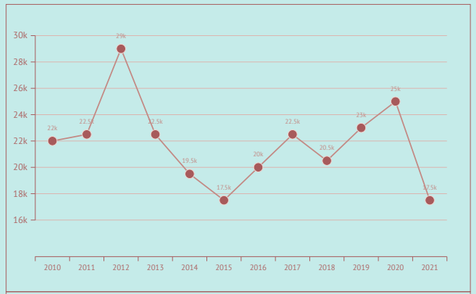
On a different note, AFAC's data show that the average budget total reached $37990.55 in 2021, compared to $39003 in 2010, while the highest change was recorded in 2019 at $491929.46.



Time	Mean of Total Project Budget
2010	$39,003
2011	$37,530
2012	$127,252
2013	$41,267
2014	$49,753
2015	$25,846
2016	$34,077
2017	$52,491
2018	$42,019
2019	$491,929
2020	$69,866
2021	$37,991

Source: AFAC's 2010-2021 data analysis.

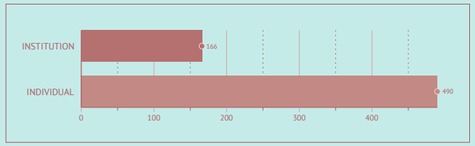
The requested amount of funding underwent a huge decrease (19.28%) during the period of 2010-2021; as the average requested amount was $21956.78 in 2010, while barely reaching $17722.71 in 2021.



MEAN OF REQUESTED AMOUNT

Time	Mean of Requested Budget
2010	$21,957
2011	$22,302
2012	$29,274
2013	$22,442
2014	$19,530
2015	$17,699
2016	$20,067
2017	$22,403
2018	$20,560
2019	$22,597
2020	$24,956
2021	$17,723

Regarding the (individual/institutional) nature of projects, the data show that AFAC's funding went mostly to individual than institutional projects (490 for individual artists VS. 166 for institutions and organizations).



Source: AFAC's 2010-2021 data analysis.

The contribution of creative goods and services, including the performing arts, in the local GDP in the Arab world and Africa is very low (1.1% of the the regional GDP), compared to Europe (3%) and North America (3.3%), especially as Arab countries import more creative goods and services than they export. During the period of 2013-2019, Algeria and Yemen were the top Arab importers of these items, while Sudan and the UAE bottomed the list. In terms of exports, Algeria and Yemen ranked last, while the UAE and Tunisia spearheaded the Arab exporters of creative arts.

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Algeria	11.62	52.91	43.28	37.58	37.11	—	—
Bahrain	3.77	3.82	4.12	3.79	3.72	3.55	—
Egypt	14.36	16.94	11.46	12.85	25.15	24.78	7.95
Iraq	—	0.64	—	—	—	—	—
Jordan	13.87	—	6.97	5.83	7.52	5.35	5.71
Kuwait	6.30	9.47	16.94	—	2.50	4.92	—
Lebanon	7.39	8.43	7.28	12.04	8.43	5.61	6.11
Morocco	—	3.53	3.22	3.16	2.41	4.04	4.61
Palestine	11.07	11.05	15.26	11.16	10.28	14.64	11.94
Qatar	3.48	3.46	10.02	3.72	8.34	7.64	7.24
Saudi Arabia	11.76	13.58	15.08	10.32	6.31	6.78	6.69
Sudan	—	5.31	1.66	2.49	1.39	2.31	—
Tunisia	8.14	10.29	—	8.41	9.47	10.39	12.14
United Arab Emirates	1.85	1.84	2.33	3.30	8.80	3.44	2.75
Yemen	35.16	31.4	44.02	—	—	21.5	37.24

Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Algeria	6,126	7,289	2,569	62,677	422	—	—
Bahrain	4,318,415	2,532,644	10,757,119	3,820,543	1,647,979	497,949	—
Egypt	1,297,163	537,403	940,456	542,991	307,818	182,529	199,225
Jordan	5,556,325	15,413,995	32,703,727	64,247,876	17,720,643	3,580,875	3,307,305
Kuwait	233,806	655,823	101,440	438,475	1,067,505	1,067,505	1,133,350
Lebanon	1,970,742	3,592,989	2,761,094	1,581,207	1,767,533	1,139,671	—
Morocco	4,103,447	3,423,122	582,375	412,961	723,244	549,740	702,747
Oman	4,703,517	517,735	2,403,550	—	1,811,058	3,389,433	—
Palestine	252,820	154,852	219,277	215,644	261,062	295,860	328,522
Qatar	181,439	1,487	641,912	2,077	2,077	44,778	—
Saudi Arabia	2,504,536	2,461,847	4,440,929	2,677,655	2,496,685	1,432,036	545,736
Sudan	—	—	—	—	47,667	386,696	—
Tunisia	8,164,009	463,798	1,016,736	1,217,838	1,438,844	5,891,625	5,383,109
United Arab Emirates	37,392,895	81,685,463	63,229,970	59,194,492	327,399,901	347,392,063	331,674,382
Yemen	8,281	8,918	502	—	—	—	—

Source: the quantitative research team (AFAC)

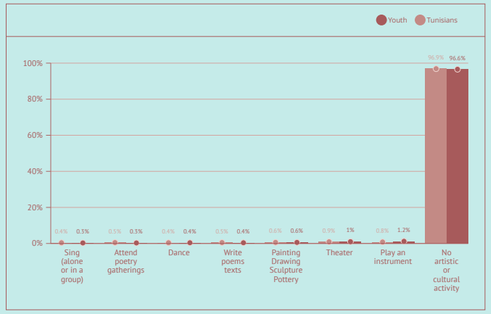
THE RIGHT TO CULTURE

The 2007 Fribourg Declaration defines cultural rights as fundamental rights that are, first and foremost, linked, not only to access and participation in cultural life, but also to education and training, and communication and information. Regarding cultural life, Article 5 of the Declaration specifies it in the following terms:

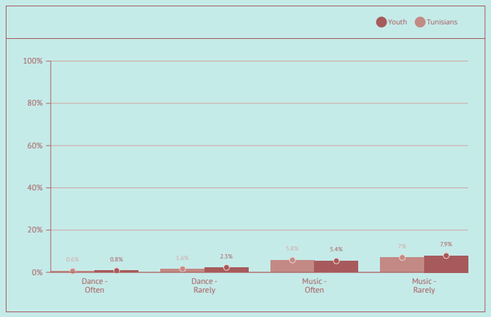
> ***"a. Everyone, alone or in community with others, has the right to access and participate freely in cultural life through the activities of one's choice, regardless of frontiers.***
> ***b. This right includes in particular:***
> ***• The freedom to express oneself, in public or in private in the language(s) of one's choice;***
> ***• The freedom to exercise, in conformity with the rights recognized in the present Declaration, one's own cultural practices and to follow a way of life associated with the promotion of one's cultural resources, notably in the area of the use of and in the production of goods and services;***
> ***• The freedom to develop and share knowledge and cultural expressions, to conduct research and to participate in different forms of creation as well as to benefit from these;***
> ***• The right to the protection of the moral and material interests linked to the works that result from one's cultural activity"***

The Fribourg Declaration (2007), Article 5.

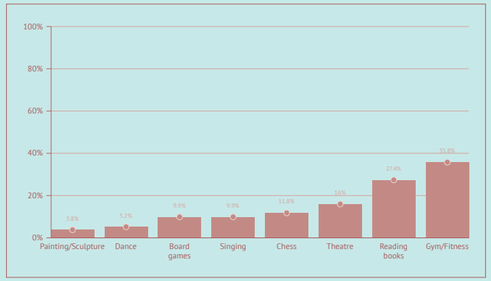
These cultural practices are less documented, analyzed, and surveyed in the Arab World, let alone performing arts practices as a foundation for learning or access to activities and spaces dedicated to performing arts. We have found two examples of auditoriums that provide a humble example of these practices in terms of audience participation, access to spaces, and learning these practices in Morocco and Tunisia.



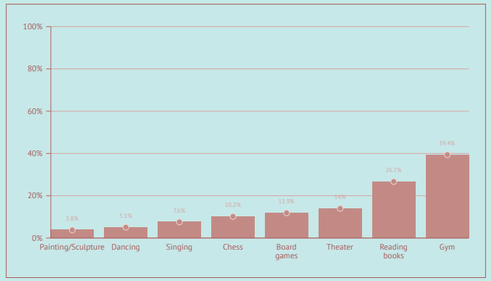
The artistic activities practiced by Tunisians.



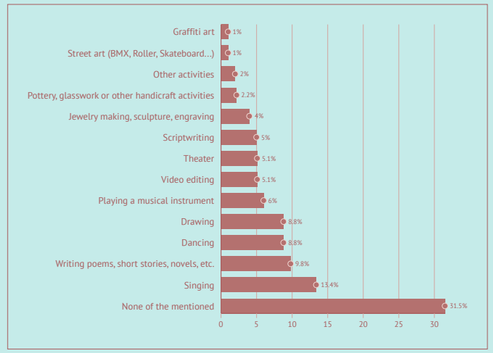
The numbers of Tunisians and youth who go to live performances.

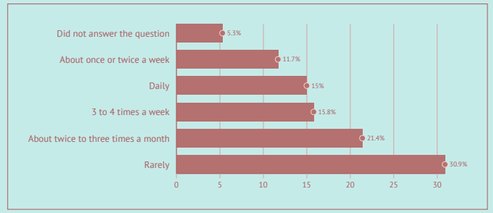


Artistic activities practiced by Tunisians at houses of culture.

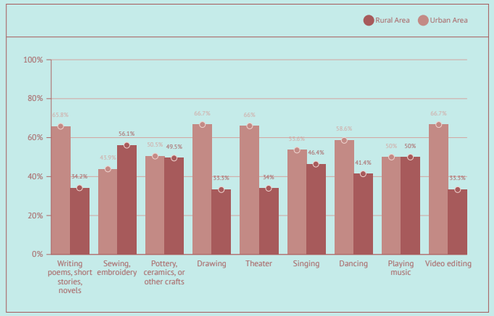


Artistic activities practiced by Tunisians at youth houses
Source: The barometer of the cultural practices of Tunisians (Tafannun Program 2021)

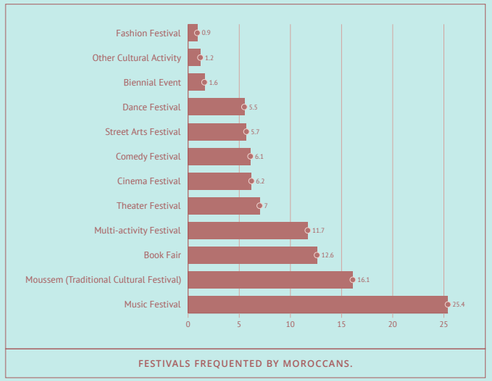




Artistic activities practiced by children.



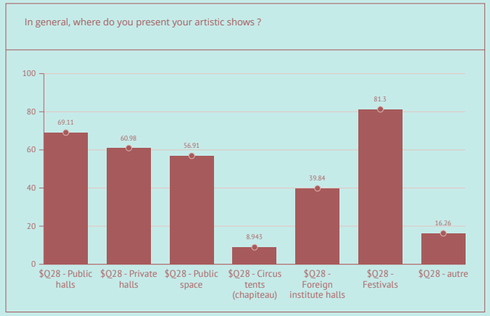
Artistic activities practiced by Moroccans.



Festivals frequented by Moroccans.

Source: Field research into the cultural practices of Moroccans (Roots Association 2016)

It is also difficult to separate the right to culture from the rest of civil and political rights. Therefore it was necessary to go beyond the logic of limiting the question to cultural consumption, and open the survey to questions related to the general civil and cultural atmosphere. The availability of public space and easy access to it for artists is one of the most fundamental mechanisms for the right to culture; therefore, the survey asked artists about the main performance spaces; and the responses showed that festivals are the main venue by 81.3%, followed by public halls (69.1%), private halls (60.9%), while public spaces ranked last with 56.9%.



Accessibility to public spaces in the studied region is subject to restrictions that vary from legal to administrative, and even authoritative, through arbitrary prohibition. 67.4% of interviewees said that there are restrictions and limitations that prevent artists from accessing public spaces in their countries. These restrictions include administrative (73.5%), authoritative (68.7%), legal (54.2%), and "Other" (18.1%).

		N	Percent	Percent of cases
If yes, what kind of restrictions is there ?	Legal	45	25,3 %	54,2 %
	Administrative	61	34,3 %	73,5 %
	Authoritarianism	57	32,0 %	68,7 %
	Other	15	8,4 %	18,1 %
Total		178	100 %	

NETWORKING (KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER, TRAINING, AND JOINT PRODUCTION)

81.3% of respondents in the survey explained that they cooperate with NGOs in their artistic work; the majority of them (40.2%) have partnerships with national NGOs, 31.7% have had partnerships with international NGOs, while 28,1% have had partnerships with regional NGOs.

		N	Percent	Percent of cases
Nature of relationship with NGOs	Co-Production	73	20.3%	71.6%
	Training	43	11.9%	42.2%
	Art Tours	50	13.9%	49.0%
	Management Help	26	7.2%	25.5%
	Capacity Building	22	6.1%	21.6%
	Technical Assistance	26	7.2%	25.5%
	Art Residencies	54	15.0%	52.9%
	Partnership	60	16.7%	58.8%
	Other	6	1.7%	5.9%
Total		360	100.0%	352.9%

According to the survey results, joint production comes at the top of relationships artists have with other parties by 71.6%, followed by partnership (58.8%), artistic residences (52.9%), artistic tours (49%), internships (42.2%), organizational and technical assistance (25.5%), and training programs (21.6%).

When asked about knowledge transfer through relationships with schools and universities, 65.8% of artists said that they have relationships with universities and institutes in their countries. These relationships have several aspects and components; organizing artistic workshops (75%), followed by programs and shows at the partner schools and universities (51.2%), and benefitting from -or giving- courses in performing arts (38.8%). Joint artistic-research productions ranks fourth with barely 28.7% of artists mentioning having participated in such projects, while only 22.5% have participated in research programs by schools and universities.

		N	Percent	Percent of cases
Nature of Relationship with Universities or Schools	Benefit from and provide training	31	15.8%	38.8%
	Research partnership	18	9.2%	22.5%
	Programming artistic shows	41	20.9%	51.2%
	Organizing artistic residencies	17	8.7%	21.3%
	Organizing artistic workshops	60	30.6%	75.0%
	Co-production of research – artistic works	23	11.7%	28.7%
	Autre	6	3.1%	7.5%
Total		196	100.0%	245.0%

According to the artists who participated in the survey, the total halt of activity in their countries, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, had a great effect on performing artists. Those effects encouraged them to conclude partnerships with other "local" partners, which is confirmed by 41.5% of them. The following statements are examples of such cases:

> ***"The pause encouraged us to communicate, exchange information and some resources, and reach understandings with other theater troupes, which may result in future partnerships"***
> ***(A Dialogue for Independent Theater and Performing Arts, Egypt)***

> ***"A Partnership with the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication to promote a play as an exceptional support (four days of shows)"***
> ***Hamza Boulaiz, Spectacle Pour Tous Association, Morocco***

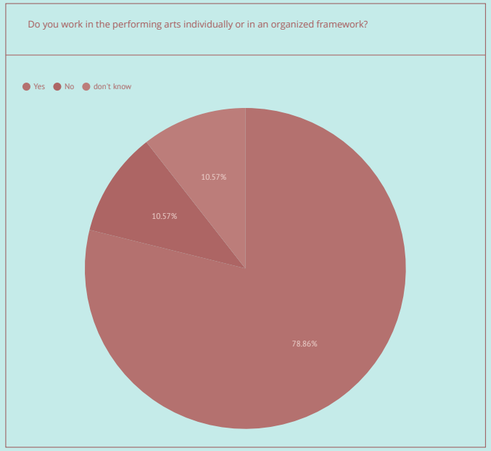
> ***"We have collaborated with the Circus school Shamsy in Salé, suggesting artistic workshops for their students, as well as developing a theoretical workshop on the production and distribution of cultural projects.***
> ***On the other hand,we have had the time to cultivate new relations with collectives and cultural spaces in the southern regions of Morocco; with the purpose of participating in enriching the cultural offer in that area (such as programming spectacles and workshops)"***
>
> *Colokolo Urban Circus, Morocco*

> ***"Since the pandemic and the economical collapse in Lebanon, I've decided to only work with local artists and stop my artistic collaborations with peers living abroad because I feel I carry an economical responsibility towards my artistic community, and this decision led me to meet and work with emerging artists and peers I've never had the chance to meet in a work frame"***
>
> *(Chrystèle Khodr, theatre artist, Lebanon)*

DIGITIZATION

The importance of digitization in the field of performing arts saw a noticeable increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed universal restrictions on access to public spaces, including those of cultural offer/consumption. Therefore, some artists and troupes resorted to digitization in order to ensure the continuity of their artistic activity under the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. However, the idea of the performing arts entering the digital space as a show and performance platform still has not found its complete model yet, in addition to the fact that there are still people who refuse the idea of substituting the live show space by a virtual one.

In the survey, 78.8% of artists said that digitization must be taken into consideration in the field, while 10.5% responded negatively, and another 10.5% chose "I don't know".



27.6% of interviewed artists declared that they have not shown their work on online platforms, while 72.3% said that they have shown one of their creations on a broadcasting platform. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic seems obvious on artists' resort to showing their work on digital platforms; as 74.1% of them took to the virtual world after the pandemic, while only 25.8% said that they had used digital media before the pandemic.

In terms of using digitization in a performance, the majority of artists (83.7%) mentioned that they have used technological media (videography, maps, digital shows...) in their performances before, compared to only 16.2% who never used such techniques in their artistic work.

The majority of artists (72.3%) believe that digitization can serve the performing arts, both creatively and virtually, while 27.3% think that it cannot.

> ***"Digitization contributes to reaching wider audiences locally, regionally, and internationally, especially in our case in Palestine. It is difficult for the Palestinian audience to watch shows in-person because of the checkpoints and roadblocks, as much as it is difficult for Arab audiences to come to Palestine to watch artistic shows and participate in workshops and conferences. During the experience of the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival, we managed to invite 27 Arab artists in the Arab Youth Dance Forum and stream the opening ceremony online, which allowed Arab and international audiences to watch the shows, and gave the chance to dancers from Arab countries to participate in the workshops"***
>
> *(Khalid Alyan, Dancer, Palestine).*

On a different note, digitization intervenes in the performing arts in different ways. That intervention manifests in using new information and communication techniques in documenting theater, circus, or dance performance and promoting them on the YouTube channels of Arab artistic institutions, or even in producing promotional videos for online advertisement before shows or festivals. The use of digitization in the performing arts includes using online ticket selling platforms (such as www.ticketsmarche.com, www.guichet.ma, and www.teskerti.tn) for performing arts related activities. It is obvious that the health crisis of COVID-19 has increased the use of digitization through the creation of a new digital platform (www.basita.live.org) for live-streaming or re-broadcasting free or ticketed shows online.

04 General conclusions

THE LIMITATIONS AND VISION OF THIS RESEARCH

- Under-representation of certain categories of the population
- Qualitative questions remain subjectives and do not allow for taking decisions.
- The concluded results should be handled very carefully, especially when it comes to drawing generalizations
- AFAC's database is not exhaustive, as it lacks a lot of information, especially one related to some fundamental variables in the research

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The Arab Region

المنطقة العربية

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS): a program that enables performing all statistical analyses of data usually used in human, economic, and cultural sciences.

برنامج يسمح :(SPSS) البرنامج الإحصائي للعلوم الاجتماعية بإجراء جميع التحليلات الإحصائية للبيانات المستخدمة عادة في العلوم الإنسانية والإقتصادية والثقافية

Survey: a document containing a series of systematic questions that aim to define a status, attitude, or request among a big number of choices.

الاستبيان عبارة عن وثيقة تحتوي على سلسلة من الأسئلة التي يتم طرحها بشكل منهجي من أجل تحديد حالة أو موقف أو طلب من بين عدد كبير من الاحتمالات.

Sample: statistically speaking, a sample means a group of representative members of the studied category. The objective of picking samples is to achieve a better understanding of one or more of the population or sub-sectional group (groups) via studying a number of statistically representative samples.

العينة: يقصد إحصائيا بالعينة مجموعة من الأفراد الذين يمثلون الساكنة المراد دراستها. يهدف أخذ العينات إلى الحصول على معرفة أفضل لواحد أو أكثر من السكان أو مجموعة (مجموعات) فرعية من خلال دراسة عدد من العينات التي تعتبر ممثلة إحصائيًا

AFAC: the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture
الصندوق العربي للثقافة والفنون

A GLOBAL PICTURE

Driss Ksikes

Policy Papers

Introduction

This research project, conducted from January 2022 onwards across “Arab” and diasporic territories, stems from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture’s (AFAC’s) desire to mark its fifteenth anniversary. This study intends to document the practices and understand the changes, transformations, or merely subtle modifications, that take place in these different contexts; this project should provide a response to take them into account, anticipate, and know how to deal with them.

Making the results of this research freely accessible will allow decision-makers, producers, actors, and other stakeholders, both Arab and non-Arab, to appreciate, through the reflections, descriptions, figures, analyses and findings presented here, the extent of current and future projects in the field of performing arts.

The purpose of this Policy Paper, which precedes and encompasses the various regional analysis of quantitative data and thematic papers, is to summarize the main findings and to propose, based on the findings, recommendations. But before addressing the main findings of the study, it is important to understand the context, the objectives and the mixed methods adopted (conceptual, empirical, quantitative, and qualitative).

Let’s start by questioning the important points of this work. Firstly, the geographical/cultural area. Is the Arab region singular or plural? By focusing, before taking any step, on the literature related to this subject, we identify that there is either a use of the description as an identitario-linguistic determinant, «Arab theater», or a reference to the Arab region as a place by referring to «theater in/from the Arab region» and the more recent use of pluralization, through the expression «theater in the Arab regions.»

When it comes to this subject, it is important to emphasize the places where this research and studies take place. There are several different orientations. The first one is orientalist or orientalizing; however, as part of a postcolonial rationale, it is essentially the product of American and German universities, and focuses on the spatial dimension, based on a tradition of area studies, where forms of expression are hybridized and where it is a matter of spectacular forms in Arab countries or in Arabic. The second, a purely identity-based approach, supported by the frequent publications of the Arab Theater Institute, supported by the United Arab Emirates, tends to essentialize the adjective «Arab theater» recognizing, sometimes, the diversity of forms and expressions that run through it. Addressing the performing arts in the Arab region—while perhaps a less conventional approach—allows us to move beyond the illusion of unity that our fields often maintain.

Indeed, in several respects - as we shall detail below– whether in terms of economic models (subsidized or not), traditions of creation, training, and transmission (schools, structures), but also audience cultures (box-office or invitation traditions), or the presence of contemporary, body forms of expression, hybridized in terms of means and languages, the Arab region is crisscrossed by a linguistic, ethnic, aesthetic, but also social and political plurality, which deserves to be taken seriously.

Taking these different configurations and representations as a starting point, this research tries to appreciate the plurality inherent in the practices of performing arts, as they are manifested and expressed empirically.

Context and Temporality of the Research

In addition to responding to AFAC's desire to anticipate the future, this research project is taking place in a context whose various dimensions need to be identified. Firstly, politically, it is being carried out more than ten years after the wind of change that blew across the region in 2011, and which has been transformed here and there, with varying degrees, into frustration (ihbat). This change is taking the form of a return to authoritarianism, such as Egypt and Tunisia to mention just two countries that initiated the uprisings. This reversal is reflected in arbitrary practices that affect the performing arts in the form of censorship, restricted access to public spaces, and forms of indifference that minimize interest in the arts. With respect to public space, the maneuvers introduced by artists in this field, such as taking over flats, building terraces, and virtual spaces, invite us to reconsider the concept, far from its euro-centric, bourgeois, normative definition, and to apprehend it based on the multiple uses and side-steps undertaken in daily realities by practitioners.

This research also comes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with all that this implies in terms of the precariousness of a sector that depends on the physical presence of audiences, and the introduction of a new dose of uncertainty, but also of new reasons for biopolitical control over unusual expressions. Of course, this is a major boost to the desire to get back on stage, meet audiences, recreate new links, and use technology to invent alternative solutions, but this period of the health crisis accentuates the feeling of human, ecological, and social fragility.

The performing arts, while aware of their marginality, are, more than ever, obliged to justify their human and social necessity. In its latest report on the effects of Covid-19 on cultural sectors, UNESCO lists five forms of response that are needed everywhere: focusing more on the social value of culture; increasing awareness of the need to ensure the livelihood of professionals; developing collaboration and solidarity within the cultural sector; accelerating the adoption and use of digital practices and techniques; adapting economic models throughout the value chain.

The sense of urgency expressed here, is the same one that has, over the last ten years or so, increased the need for government and private decision-makers to highlight the economic usefulness of cultural and creative economies. Never has the discourse on what the UNESCO and UNCTAD have conceived as one of the major levers of economic development generated so many studies and data production in the region, with increasingly significant funding from partners in the North. But this is happening at a time when geo-economic balances and the rise of a form of sovereign anti-globalization, exacerbating European and American protectionism, are reducing support for artistic and cultural policies in the Arab region. Most of the foundations in the North, which have historically been involved in this area, are reconsidering their priorities and making a strategic withdrawal back to their home territories.

While cooperation from the North is on the wane, it has to be said that the role of foreign cultural centers, such as the French Institutes, the British Council, the Goethe Institute and, for the last ten years or so, the Swiss foundation DROSOS, is still on the agenda, albeit at a relatively low level in the case of Palestine, due to restrictive European legislation. Year in, year out, foreign institutions of European countries continue to play a threefold role towards the so-called «independent» creative structures, through: supporting contemporary creations, especially those that are poorly supported locally, such as dance and the circus; organizing, through calls for projects, local residencies and international mobilities, either for local artists to go abroad, or for artists from the diaspora to their countries of origin; and connecting local structures with their peers in the North, providing artistic, technical, or educational assistance.

This, more or less, revised continuation of support from European bodies comes at a time when the Gulf States are creating a double window, particularly open to classical forms for the general public, through the United Arab Emirates, which is taking over as an Arab-Muslim cultural hub, and Saudi Arabia which, since 2020, and after Covid-19, through the «Riyadh Season 2022» is positioning itself as a massive market for the dissemination of Arab theaters, both public and private.

In this context, which is strongly driven by external demand, we are witnessing a dual phenomenon that is reshaping the field. On one hand, there is the growing hegemony of the Gulf States, whether it be the sudden liberalization of the Saudi Arabian market for classical actors in all disciplines, or the Arab Theater Institute in Sharjah for experimental theater actors. In addition to fostering a sense of identity, the Institute is becoming a financial lever that attracts more and more professionals and is establishing, through its policy of touring festivals and support for publications, a growing number of supporters. On the other hand, it confirms the importance of a number of European platforms and events for professionals in need of tour operators and distributors. Ultimately, this indicates the extent to which internationalization is a structuring factor, hence the importance of connecting players who act as links between «here» and «there.»

Of course, this permanent need for other places also points to the lack of means and structures of representation in each country, which would enable productions to live long enough with local audiences. This contextual element can be generalized, with a few nuances, to show the extent to which the lack of permanence and regularity prevents the ritualization of practices within societies, and makes the question of audiences, their sensitivities and expectations, a major unthought.

In addition, and on the margins of these major trends, two phenomena emerge as a counterpoint, outlining avenues to be explored through theoretical and empirical study. The first is the notion of territories (cities, regions), which, in this context of relocation, accentuated by Covid-19, sometimes substitutes, or even complements, that of the state. This fact interests us because it presupposes the existence of local ecosystems and, also, for performing arts professionals, new ways of building viable networks and alliances in their localities. The second phenomenon is the relationship to digitalization, mostly perceived as a marketing and commercial lever, as an aesthetic and dramaturgical springboard for creation. Yet, the reality of the Arab region is that it is crisscrossed by lines that deeply divide it, between hyper-connected countries and regions (e.g. the Gulf States) and destroyed, poorly-connected countries (e.g. Syria and Iraq).

Last but not least, there is the question of inter-Arab mobility. Without mentioning the cases of closed or impassable borders, or even disaster zones, it suffices to note the low rate of visas granted for visits from Bilad Sham to North Africa. This not only highlights the difficulty of organizing horizontal collaborations between companies and creators in the region, but also reinforces the role of the rare regional festivals and international meetings organized elsewhere, mainly in Europe.

The Object of Research

This contrasting contextualization raises a crucial question: how can we develop the performing arts in societies crisscrossed by multiple modernities? It is important here to emphasize the different forms of rationality and imagination that intersect in the performing arts, since they are, at once, inherited, imported, transplanted and recreated forms of expression. They are also places and practices where the rise of individuality, the permanence of certain communities of practice, and the need to recognize singularities revealed by the creative act and collectives in need of structuring are expressed.

The aim of this work is neither to capture a static snapshot in time nor to compile a mere inventory of recent developments. For it would be misleading to believe that it is possible to address the state of the performing arts in the Arab region(s), while ignoring the founding moments of theatrical and dramaturgical modernity, and above all the names of those who contributed to refounding theater in lands that seemed supposedly resistant to it. Whether in reference to the Manifesto of the Eleven in Tunisia, Masrah Ennass in Morocco, Saad Allah Wannous's role in the evolution of theater in Syria, or Kateb Yacine and Abdekader Alloula in Algeria, today there are still experiments that draw inspiration from these pioneers, revisit their approaches, or break with or extend their aesthetic and dramaturgical projects. The fact that the transplanted European forms of theater in Arab countries have a history linked to colonialism and post-colonialism, and a forgotten relationship with local forms of orality, ritual and performance (halqa, hakawati…), reveals the extent to which the relationship of (dis)continuity with the pioneers is still relevant today, albeit poorly documented.

This does not prevent practices from diversifying, inventing new paths and, above all, exploring imaginary and creative territories that have not been explored locally. Whether in relation to the body, the public space, post dramatics, intermediality and technological modernity, or economically, with the growing demand for socially useful theater by NGOs, or the fashionable canons that enable the international circulation of works, and more singularly the original research of distinguished creators, it is important to take a closer look at what is emerging and digging new furrows. Basically, the aim is not to privilege the old, the new, the reinvented, or the unprecedented, but to probe, as acutely as possible, the various trends, circularities, resurgences, as well as risk-taking and appreciating the weight that different experiences take on and the means that enable them to intensify, take root, and spread.

In the same vein, it is important to examine the supposed centrality of theater. Is it still relevant everywhere? What about forms of formal and scenic hybridity that give greater prominence to music and the effects of sound on text? What does the integration of urban forms (slam, rap, hip hop, etc.) represent in new dramaturgies? To what extent are dancers and choreographers fighting for the recognition of their art in societies and vis-à-vis elites that tend to ignore them? By questioning the relationship between heritages, classics, and contemporaneity, this research is partly concerned with aesthetics per se, and also with the status given to each trend, not only by the creators and producers themselves, but additionally by audiences, partners, patrons, and other interlocutors, both local and international.

With these questions in mind, a paradox emerges. While theater is the predominant form in Arab countries, and dance is struggling to establish itself as a recognized form of expression, why is it that, in Europe in particular, it is precisely contemporary and urban dance that is the most demanded and valued as a reflection of the creative dynamism of Arab artists? Are we to believe that, out of a new-age orientalism, European programmers believe that Arabs cannot speak, except through the body?

While drawing on existing academic production to put it into perspective and approach it from a comparative point of view, this research project aims to understand the conditions of production and dissemination, the stakes involved in the socio-economic development of practices, and, hence, the relationship to networks and alliances and the relationship to audiences and digitization. This approach responds to a critical gap: the absence of studies that situate Arab performing arts within their socio-political and economic frameworks—not in isolation, but as part of a global dialogue.

At this point, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the reasons for this failure. First of all, there is the absence of a political economy of cultural and creative industries, and the recent and timid introduction of social science approaches to the artistic spheres from university curricula in the South. On the other hand, it is evident that since the pivotal year of 2011, anthropological and sociological scholarship has demonstrated a marked fascination with protest art, significantly expanding the scope of research. Yet crucial dimensions—including cultural policies, economic value chains, and the political contingencies shaping artistic production (with their implications for emerging forms of censorship)—remain conspicuously understudied, relegated to the margins of academic research.

This is all the more obvious given that the performing arts remain the prerogative of humanities departments, and that the relationship to text remains dominant, notwithstanding the new ways of apprehending representations introduced by Cultural Studies. It is noteworthy that university theater activities continue to operate as parallel artistic practices, remaining peripheral to both formal curricula and established modes of knowledge production.

Moreover, trans-disciplinary approaches likely to link the various dimensions mentioned above remain underdeveloped. Within the social sciences and anthropology in particular, research continues to prioritize studies of ancestral expressive forms, while largely neglecting manifestations rooted in contemporary practice. Similarly, the paucity of available, aggregated, and comparable figures makes it difficult to quantify phenomena. What is needed—not as an end in itself, but as a crucial complement to observational and documentary work—is a framework for systematically organizing and cross-referencing disparate sources.

With this in mind, we have defined the various forms of performing arts (theater, dance, circus, street theater) as our object of research, with the aim of achieving a documented understanding of the field, the societies in which it takes shape, the economic models that underpin it, the challenges faced by professionals, the social and political obstacles it faces, the gray areas in relation to audiences, and the emerging dynamics that sketch out qualitative leaps.

Methodology

In order to embrace all the elements arising from our preliminary findings, we had to define a synthetic research question: What understandings should be developed about the performing arts in the Arab regions in order to prioritize policies that would enable them to be developed locally and internationally? Subsidiarily, this led us to address four levels of interrogation: 1- the relationships of creators and audiences to heritage, contemporaneity and language; 2- value chains, indicating the economies of production, mediation, dissemination, and appropriation; 3- questions of access to culture, of communities of practice, of networks and alliances, with civil society and the academic world; and 4- the effects of digitization, whether in the act of artistic production or in the modalities of communication.

These different lines of inquiry formed a common matrix, highlighted through three levels: a- regional papers (the Maghreb, Egypt, Middle East, Gulf countries, Diasporas); b- quantitative data production based on the AFAC database, a targeted questionnaire, and data extraction from gray sources and other national and regional reports; c- thematic insights through scientific articles by researchers and papers by actor-curators, on cross-cutting issues requiring theoretical understanding and empirical feedback (audiences, the body, street theater, post-drama).

In order to understand what is being practiced and what mechanisms are being put in place to achieve this, it was necessary to survey practitioners using databases of applicants to AFAC (between 2010 and 2021) and a large population of 116 professionals interviewed online; these surveys and interviews draw up an inventory by sub-region based on existing literature, and they were supplemented with qualitative interviews, which help to clarify trends based on empirical cases.

In addition to outlining and articulating the key ideas emerging from the various fields and analyses (included in this volume), this policy paper aims to synthesize the lessons learned and formulate the main recommendations derived from the research. The first part is devoted to a description of current practices and dynamics in the various regions, supported by the quantitative data collected for this purpose. The second part, on the other hand, is based on qualitative descriptions and analyses carried out by field and by theme, with the aim of identifying new practices and emerging trends that merit particular attention. This funnel structure allows for the formulation of recommendations, useful not only for AFAC, but also for other donors and stakeholders involved in the development of the performing arts in the Arab region(s).



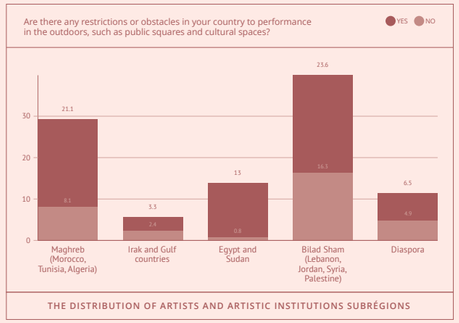
01 Current Practices And Dynamics

The following synthesis pre-
sents key findings that allow
practices to be systematically
documented, quantified,
and contextualized. We begin
by examining the political
and social constraints iden-
tified by practitioners, analyze
the economic models and
value chains shaping their work,
and conclude with conte-
mporary shifts driven by local
stakeholders, internationalization,
and digital transformation.

Against Political and Administrative Constraints

In this regard, we list three contextual elements that deserve particular attention: countries with a long theatrical tradition, having to make efforts to rebuild and adapt after phases of destructive violence, war, permanent colonization or sudden imperialism (Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon…); countries faced with a return of authoritarianism, which has created an atmosphere of fear, self-limitation, and the need to circumvent the rules imposed by the structures operating in theater, dance, and especially, street theater (Tunisia, Egypt…); supposedly politically liberal countries held back by heavy social and institutional conservatism (Gulf, Morocco…).

In the study we carried out among professionals, it is striking to note that the reasons given for limiting access to public spaces are almost equally legal (25%), administrative (31.1%), or linked to the return of authoritarianism (32.4%). In the study, which focuses mainly on street theater in Tunisia, we note how the subjects tackled by troupes have changed completely over the last ten years, from the political to the social, from the expression of anger to the duty of entertainment, reflecting at the same time not only a transformation of expectations, but also a limitation of possibilities.



THE DISTRIBUTION OF ARTISTS AND ARTISTIC INSTITUTIONS SUBRÉGIONS

If we look at the chart above, which compares responses concerning the restrictions and obstacles faced by artistic structures in public places and cultural spaces, we can see the extent to which the assertion of these limits is prominent. This takes the form of access bans, refusal of administrative authorization and, sometimes, other forms of barriers. And it is striking to see that even within the diaspora, the sentiment expressed is slightly similar.

In terms of variations, it is important to note the diversity of control models and the adaptability of players. While some countries (e.g. Lebanon) continue to practice prior censorship, with a national security commission viewing the work and reading the text before granting a visa, it is important to note that some artists manage to circumvent this limit by the subterfuge of a work in progress. And while in other countries (e.g. Morocco), there is no direct censorship; according to the professionals we interviewed, national grant-awarding commissions may resort to moral or political considerations to reject applications thereby creating a climate of self-censorship.

The different representations of creative freedom from one country to another allow us to apprehend the notion of national or official theater differently. While in some recent traditions, this is the rule or a widely shared desire (Gulf States), in countries more circumspect about the role of the state and with fewer resources, it remains a suspect practice. There are two recent cases in point. The first is that of the Palestinian play Parallel Time (2014), directed by Bashar Murkus and produced by Théâtre Al Midan, which was excluded from the contemporary repertoire in Jerusalem for «apology of Palestinian terrorism against the State of Israel.» The second notorious case of a posteriori censorship involved the Iraqi play Ya Rab, written by Ali Abdenbi Zaïdi and directed by Mustapha Ragubi, during the Arab Theatre Festival held in Algeria in 2016. The Institution in charge of the event, run from the United Arab Emirates, not only deprogrammed the play after its highly acclaimed performance, but also removed its video from its official website. Far from being an isolated case, this practice is indicative of the widely shared sensitivity of the free treatment of religious issues intertwined with politics on stage. Similarly, the fate reserved for artist-activists such as the playwright Mohamed Al Attar, exiled in Berlin and persona non grata in his homeland, Syria, provides an insight into the aftermath of the post-2011 period, and how this period has reduced to shreds the creative possibilities that feed on reality with little hope of transforming it.

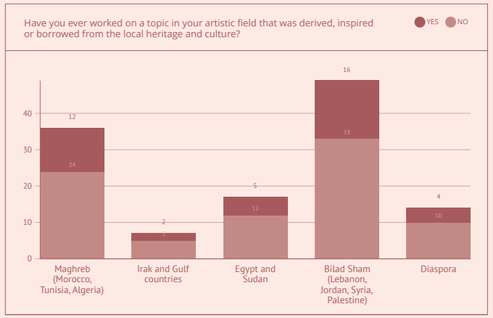
Beyond religious taboos, the performing arts contend with three persistently overlooked constraints—the body, individual freedoms, and political arbitrariness—which remain obscured by routine social conformity, bureaucratic obstacles, the cautious conservatism of funding bodies, elite disengagement, and limited public mobilization. As far as the first is concerned, a real battle is being waged on the margins, starting in Beirut, Cairo, and Marrakech, and above all in the diaspora; this battle is being waged through the multiplication of choreographic hotbeds and integrative creative processes within cities. It is manifesting through the beginnings of a connection between creators, training schools, and experimental spaces. As far as individual freedoms are concerned, there are occasional plays that take up individual choices, but this remains more confined to the realm of didactic theater, with limited social impact. Finally, politically speaking, given the fluctuation and unpredictability of those in power, the possibilities of addressing politics through documentary theater, or more subtly through comedy, have diminished drastically over the past decade.

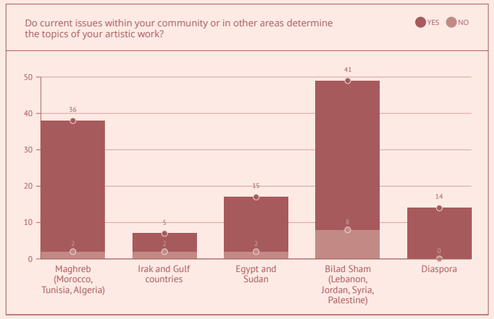
Far from suffering episodic setbacks, artists–especially those engaged in contemporary forms of expression–are acting, as explained below, through three channels. The first is the mode of financing, where the search for alternative means of ensuring autonomy is predominant. All those who resort to alternative financing do so not out of a concern for freedom of expression, but first and foremost to ensure the economic survival of their projects. This can sometimes make them subject to the utilitarian agendas of NGOs in search of socially useful shows. The second channel is that of internationalization, with a local base and the possibility of amplification beyond national borders, allowing for a certain amount of political and aesthetic leeway.

Lastly, the third channel is the more difficult one of reinventing the notion of public space, based on everyday bricolage, by taking over unusual spaces (apartments, terraces…).

The Relationship to Heritages and Contemporaneity

When we try to draw a general map of the preferred subjects treated in each sub-region, looking closely at the relationship between the classics, heritage and contemporary issues, we find what may at first appear to be ambivalence. Indeed, when we first look at the two graphs below, we notice an equal interest in the old and the new.





On closer examination, especially through the analytical work of each region, we come to a much more nuanced understanding of this data. First of all, it's important to note that we're not talking here about folkloric treatment of heritage, and that we're talking exclusively about companies and troupes that are interested in heritage from the point of view of contemporary creation. But even at this level, it's important to note the differences in representing these issues between the Mashreq, the Maghreb and the diaspora. For artists in Egypt, for example, there are two ways of approaching heritage: on the one hand, there is an official instrumentalization, tinged with nostalgia, of the «Zaman al gamil» (the beautiful past) as a relic; and there is, on the other hand, an attempt by independent artists to draw on it as a springboard for contemporary, decolonial creation, revealing the wounds of the past (racism, slavery, female circumcision). In Algeria, for example, we can see that the revival of Alloula's work today implies greater involvement in the public space, with a reinvention of the role of troubadours as audience drivers, but also an inspiration from the theater of the oppressed as practiced by Augusto Boal under the dictatorship in Brazil. Similarly, in Cabaret Cheikhattes in Morocco, it's clear that popular heritage culture and the effects of contemporary creation are intertwined.

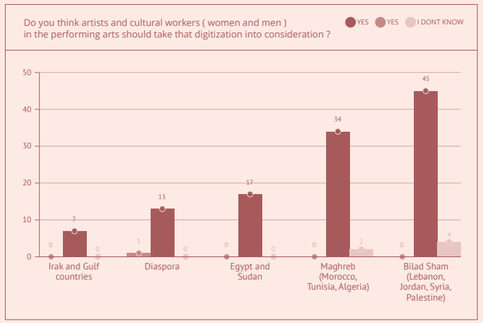
In expressing their views on possible weavings, respondents are overwhelmingly convinced (94%) that in theatrical expressions, the back-and-forth between past forms and present realities is justified. In fact, these practices are recurrent, and the divisions between the recyclers of halqa in Morocco, and hakawati in Lebanon, and others who reinvent heritage, are more or less integrated into the repertoire. But procedures have varied from the pioneers to the new generation.

On the other hand, novelty comes more specifically from the field of dance, where drawing on ritual, popular, mystical, and ancestral forms (with Taoufiq Izeddiou and Bouchra Ouizguen in Morocco, Redouane Meddeb in Tunisia and Ali Chahrour in Lebanon) suddenly takes on a whole new dimension, both mimetic and idiosyncratic, through gesture, physicality, and orality. This is echoed internationally, either by these same artists, who are developing their network there, or by choreographers from the diaspora, such as Fouad Boussouf, who comes from a background rooted in urban culture and slam (hip-hop), and who, through Nass El Ghiwane, draws on popular culture, especially music, as the springboard for new contemporary creations. It is also worth noting that this hybridity is strongly encouraged in countries that subsidize the practice, with 59.4% of respondents believing that their governments prefer to support projects that combine heritage and the present.

When we interviewed the artists, this question of the relationship to heritage did not meet with unanimous approval, and even provoked a few sensitivities, in view of the identity-related dimension that would underlie it («there's no need to flaunt my Egyptianity through my clothes», or «the public was frustrated not to see a belly dancer in a contemporary Arab dance performance»). Tossed back and forth between the appeal of exoticism and the expectation of international stereotyping, designers do not turn their backs on the past, and use a variety of creative techniques to draw on it for inspiration. In some cases, this is propelled by a search for anchorage, giving rise to micro-localized projects, such as the one led by Hassan El Geretli, at the foundation of the Mallawi Center in Minya, Middle Egypt, where the art of Taḥṭīb is taught, or the ongoing project of stage director Jaouad Essounani, founder of Dabateatr, to create a structure for experimentation and training in his hometown of Sefrou.

However, it is important to note a continuation linked to heritage, in a more intra-theatrical sense, linked to the adaptation of classical works. This is recurrent everywhere. As the graph below shows, not only is the practice of adaptation, historically the foundation of theatrical practice in the Arab world, still alive and well, but it is also widely acclaimed and justified. This can be explained in a number of ways, and offers us several ways for understanding the current field. On the one hand, given the massive recourse to European texts, the nature of curricula within drama schools is strongly influenced by this heritage. On the other hand, there is the lack of contemporary texts and

the poor recognition of the author's rights. Finally, there is the weight of commissions, which both guide and limit the choices of creators.



This is not to say that the creative process is dominated by local or imported heritages. Indeed, it is important to note that in countries such as Iraq and Syria, the relationship with the present, with the burning issues of the day, or with wounds that are still gaping (wars, conflicts, tragedies) remains predominant in theatrical creations. Similarly, Palestinian theatrical creations from the occupied territories, like those of Lebanese artists, remain largely marked by recourse to dialogues on the current state of political power relations, making the stage one of the places where public opinions are constructed. We find the same tendency in Syrian theater in exile, where directors and playwrights often come and go, eager to rework memory and current events.

In the face of political impasses, we also observe a transplantation of methods. The use of the word «transplantation» in place of the more usual «adaptation» refers, in the philosophy of translation, not only to a linguistic, but also to a cultural, transfer of forms. And it has to be said that the arrival on the theatrical scene, in less than two decades, of a new generation, trained in their own country but also elsewhere in Europe, through specific experiences, has given rise to creations that attempt to transfer the essence of theater to speak differently of local realities. Whether through the theater of the oppressed, revived in Egypt by Nora Amin and in Morocco by Hosni Mokhlis, or Rimini Protokol, inspiring egyptian playwright and director Laila Hassan Soliman's documentary theater, these are the ingredients of a search for new bases for a political theater, concerned with the local and borrowing its aesthetic codes from elsewhere.

Basically, the non-binarity of the relationship between the past and the present in contemporary creation implies different modalities of formal hybridity. Without claiming to be exhaustive, there are three particularly striking trends that emerge from the various fields studied, which run through the various performative arts practices in the Arab world. The first, linked to the increasingly massive use of narration, concerns the need to bear witness to and bring to the stage intimate, painful stories of collective resonance. The second is the need to break out of the black box and take to the streets or unconventional spaces, not without difficulty and hindrance, in order to reach out to audiences elsewhere. This constitutes both a return to practices rooted in popular culture and a borrowing from engaging experiences such as forum theater or, in a more entertaining sense, acrobatic performances. The third is the increasingly marked development of visual processes, or of plays with more gestural than textual content, as symptomatic of so-called «post-dramatic» theaters.

Over and above the dichotomies that contemporaneity reveals between heritage and relationship with the present, a review of the most recent productions (over the last 10 years), as well as the questioning of professionals on their preferred subjects, combined with an appreciation of the themes supported as a priority locally or prized for international tours, brings us face to face with a great heterogeneity. But in this jumble of disparate subjects, we can identify three major trends.

The first trend concerns human and social realities, with their accompanying injustices, inequalities, racism, oppression, and corruption as prominent themes. These phenomena are portrayed in various forms, including boulevardesque, tragic, and comedic, or in commercially-driven one-man shows. The interactions and crises experienced in urban settings have become increasingly prevalent in productions.

The second topic is that of migration and exile, which is, once again, drawing a great deal of attention, due to the mass influx of Syrians into Europe, as well as the ongoing Mediterranean crises. The demand for stories that represent, witness, or sublimate the experiences of abandonment, departure, and the

Do current issues within your community or in other areas determine the topics of your artistic work ?

The distribution of artists and artistic institutions subrégions

	NO	YES	TOTAL
Maghreb (Morocco Tunisia, Algeria)	0	36	36
Irak and Gulf countrie	2	5	7
Egypt and Sudan	2	15	17
Bilad Sham (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine)	8	41	49
Diaspora	0	14	14
Total	0	111	123

improbable desire to survive is once again very strong, with a significant number of resources created specifically for this purpose, particularly throughout Europe.

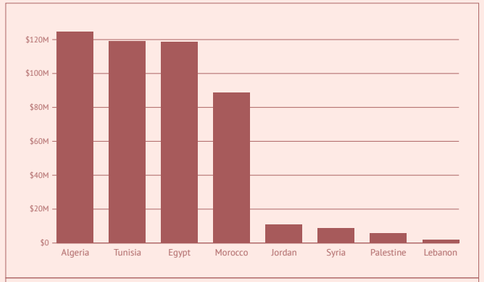
The third theme that imposes itself is the recurrence of identity, whether it be national, ethnic, familial, or gender-related. Simultaneously, this signals a yearning to express one's sense of belonging in a unique manner, not always in a chauvinistic manner, but occasionally in a distinctive one. It also involves acknowledging differences and, when theater takes on a more distinctly social dimension, proclaiming gender equality through devices such as inversion or situational comedy.

Everywhere, people note the lack, if not the scarcity, of children's theater, while mime, pantomime, clowning, and puppetry, except for some outdated experiences, are not witnessing any significant attempts of renewal.

This demonstrates that in reality, performing arts are intended for adults and are subject to reality. This does not always result in realistic aesthetics, but rather highlights that theaters in the Arab world are not a place for dreaming. Instead, they raise awareness about the gravity of dramas or, at the very least, provide a space for laughing about them.

Decisive Economic Data

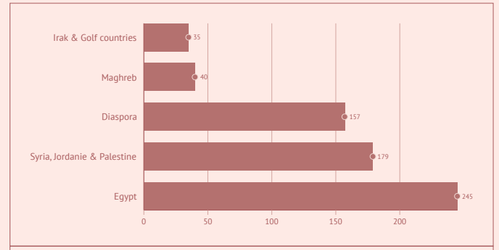
To better understand the economic realities across different countries and regions, our approach comprised several stages. We began by analyzing the fluctuations in cultural subsidies, specifically those allocated to theater. Consequently, we characterized the 656 applicants that sought funding from AFAC between 2010 and 2021 before taking a closer look at the individuals and structures that ultimately received those funds. Our research team's qualitative assessment of the field informed our analyses. Not with standing the challenge of attaining consistent, unified data, our cross-referencing indicates that a distinct mapping is materializing in relation to economies that are subsidized or unsubsidized, cultures of external fundraising, and the density of the creative fabric by region.



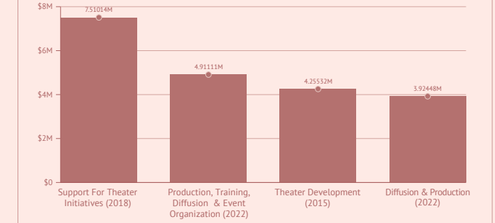
STATE BUDGET ALLOCATED TO THE CULTURAL SECTOR IN THE ARAB WORLD (IN US DOLLARS)

While recent data for Palestine and Jordan is lacking and public data for the Gulf States is weakly aggregated and shared, this comparative table clearly illustrates the disparity between governments in the Maghreb and Egypt that allocate subsidies for culture, even with modest sums that did not exceed 1% of GDP, and those in the Mashreq that primarily rely on the private sector and associations to take the initiative.

There are limited data on theater and performing arts, but the following table provides an overview of the extent of aid solely dedicated to theater in a few countries where this practice exists. This highlights the persistent importance of the theater, compared to dance and circus, which are not directly subsidized by governments across the Arab region. However, festivals partially supported by central or local government departments offer modest indirect subsidies.



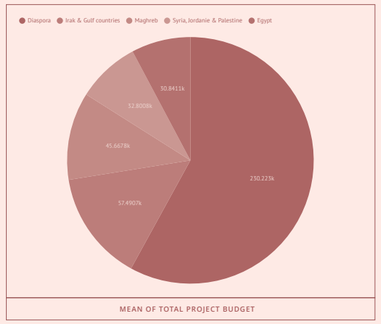
NUMBER OF REQUESTS BY SUBREGION COUNTRIES



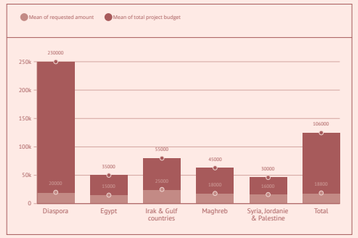
STATE ALLOCATION DEDICATED FOR THEATER IN THE ARAB WORLD IN US DOLLARS

Interestingly, the majority of funding requests submitted to AFAC over the last ten years came from countries where the practice is not subsidized by the state (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan). This trend extends to countries where there are subsidy policies in place to varying degrees (Egypt and Diaspora). Above all, this indicates that expertise in fund-raising is more deeply established in comparison to the Maghreb and Gulf countries where, although the practice is more subsidized, the practice of find-raising has recently started.

The data on requests made exclusively to AFAC are certainly revealing, but a comparison of the economic volume of projects by region reveals striking disparities between the diaspora and the rest.

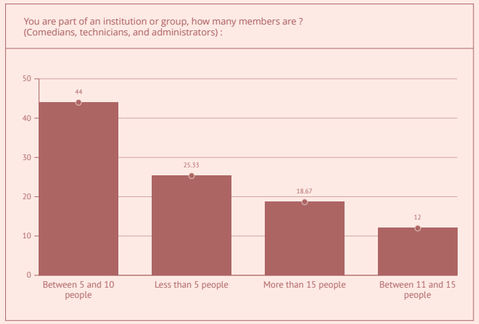


The discrepancy is even more perceptible once the amounts allocated are compared to the average budget of projects by region. This shows, on the one hand, the discrepancies in terms of the institutions involved in the means of artistic production, and, at the same time, the importance of the search for alternative funds (fundraising, daret or contributory, collaborative financing or by rotating company members...), in all regions, even more so in those where the availability of resources is limited.



There is, in the very logic behind the allocation of funds by AFAC, an adaptation that takes into account the intrinsic structure of the sector. Of the total number of applicants (656), 490 (75%) are individuals, and just 25% are groups or institutions. We also note, when detailing the population of individual applicants, that this reflects gender imbalances, since 66% of them are men and only 34% are women.

When we take a closer look at the nature of the recipient structures, based on our questionnaire completed by 116 respondents, we discover that we are dealing with a large predominance of VSEs, where structures with a combined workforce of between 1 and 10 employees represent 70% of the fabric, with just 17.1% having more than 15 employees.

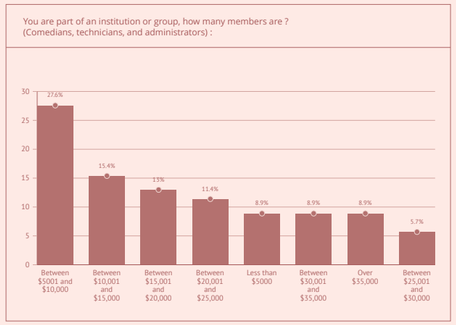


When analyzing the data by region, even when the number of respondents is weak, we clearly observe pronounced structural disparities, some of which are present even in under-subsidized areas (e.g., Bilad Sham), with dense fabric and clear variation in organizational size.

These structural insights enable both macro and micro-economic understandings of the sector; however, a more detailed analysis of the players' business models is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the sector's dynamics.

Business Models and Stakeholder Relations

A review of studies conducted across each sub-region indicates that, while there is flourishing commercial theater (mainly in Egypt) and institutional support for national theater in some cases, the majority of contemporary performing arts, including theater, dance, and circus structures in the Arab world, operate on a precarious project by project basis and rely on third-party structures or self-funding. To gain a better understanding of the business models behind these structures, we have identified major commonalities and exceptions that follow varied paths. Beginning with the average cost of a show.

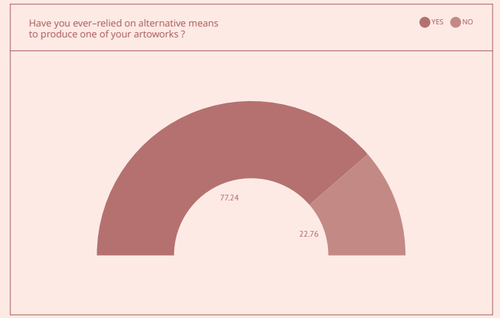


To secure production support and funding, companies typically seek out foreign institutions (73/109), national NGOs (69/109), international NGOs (61/109), before resorting to the private sector. In addition to confirming the aforementioned data that indicates a divide in public funding, it is crucial to concentrate on the constant and structured involvement of international NGOs and foreign institutes. This is gradually hindered by various constraints, including national legislation that restricts them, pressure groups that vilify them, and policies from their providers that redefine their contributions.

The distribution of artists and artistic institutions subrégions

	Official institutions in your country	Private institutions in your country	Foreign cultural insitutes in your country	National NGOs	Regional NGOs	International NGOs	Other	Total
Maghreb (Morocco Tunisia, Algeria)	22	16	21	20	8	20	2	31
Irak and Gulf countrie	5	1	4	3	1	1	0	6
Egypt and Sudan	3	7	14	12	11	11	2	16
Bilad Sham (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine)	17	19	26	29	29	25	1	44
Diaspora	9	8	8	5	2	4	2	12
Total	56	51	73	69	51	61	7	109

As mentioned above, the first factor to be noted in order to ensure production is the use of non-conventional financing methods. To the question «Have you ever used alternative financing?», 72.7% responded positively. And when it comes to detailing the methods used, self-financing (35.5%) and crowdfunding (31.9%) come out on top.



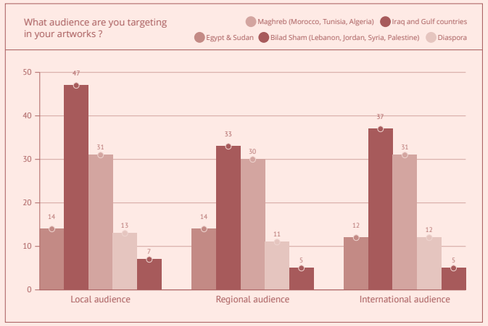
Focusing on NGOs, we see that 81.03% confirm that they use them, with a more or less equal dispatch between national (40.1%), regional (28.3%) and international (31.6%) structures. However, of all the activities cited as articulating these partnerships, co-production comes out on top (20.3%).

If yes, what are these alternative means?

	N	Percent	Percent of cases
Self-financing	95	36,0 %	99,0 %
Crowdfunding	81	30,7 %	84,4 %
Cultural mecenat	25	9,5 %	26,0 %
Collect donations from personalities or organizations	39	14,8 %	40,6 %
Other	24	9,1 %	25,0 %
Total	264	100,00 %	

The main point that arises from these observations is the concept of constrained productivism. Indeed, with limited resources, a small staff, project-based operations, the need for regular production to receive subsidies or apply for grants, and no possibility of strong and regular promotion to attract audiences, most companies are in the delicate position of relying on a sole individual who handles everything from writing to fundraising and who loses momentum without a permanent structure.

Among the collected elements related to the practice across all regions, which reflect or clarify the aforementioned relative instability, there is a growing prevalence of monodramas, as well as more commercially trendy forms of one-man shows and stand-up. The former, a more traditional form linked to theatrical practice, demonstrates valid aesthetic choices, in addition to the need to lower expenses and thereby increase the prospects of touring and dissemination. Regarding the remaining two options, imported from Europe and the USA, and heavily promoted by social media, they primarily indicate the infiltration of globalized styles of representation and humor. Furthermore, the study of the diaspora reveals that these forms dominate the stage under the label of the Maghreb, among others, and are more popular than theater.



The professionals surveyed emphasized a crucial factor: the importance of focusing on the target audience. Based on the responses, it is clear that players across all regions aim to reach the local, regional, or international level with similar goals. These orientations relate to a linguistic survey in which professionals were asked to rank languages for conception, creation, and promotion. The results showed that the order of preference was not clear-cut, with 33.9% selecting the vernacular language Darija as their top choice, followed by 23.8% going for standard Arabic, 22% for English, and 15.4% for French. As well as revealing discrepancies among regions with English- and French-speaking traditions, this supports the rational decisions made by producers, as outlined in the chart below about target audiences.

Behind the almost identical targets from one region to another, it is necessary to explain certain important facts in terms of circulation and audience relationships that are sometimes related to social norms, cultural conflicts, established policies, or proven expertise.

The primary defining element is the existence of a counter-culture. Apart from the European diaspora that lives in countries (France, Germany, Great Britain...) where these traditions are firmly rooted, the situation within the Arab region is quite dissimilar. On the one hand, there are countries with a well-established history of theatrical practice, (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt) which have varying degrees of commercial and independent circuits, and a bourgeoisie that supports artistic activity. In such places, box-office sales have become the norm. In Egypt's public theater, 43 successful plays will be revived in 2021 after reopening following the health crisis. There will be 900 total performances in Cairo and Alexandria, welcoming over 75,000 spectators, as well as 105 performances in the provinces. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we come across countries where the practice is relatively new, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and the Gulf states. In such countries, the scenario is mixed with a well-established commercial practice on one hand, and a subsidized one on the other, still associated with a culture of free admission and invitations that cultivate loyalty among a group of associates, yet fail to expand the audience. That being said, when inquired about the significance of public interaction, 94.8% of professionals express sensitivity towards it. However, in reality, the majority of the communication is concentrated on social media rather than face-to-face interaction.

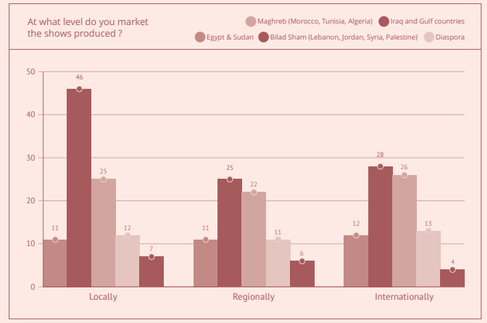
When considering audiences, it is not just about the numbers and statistics. The crucial question is about relationships. What kind of connections exist between the creators, producers, and distributors of theatrical and choreographic works and their audiences? Are they taking their audiences' experiences into account? Do they genuinely understand the experiences they are providing? In this work, we connect the concept to communal, public spaces and other ecological dimensions that empower artists and performers to transcend their self-focus and confront the reception, perception, and representation generated by their work - extending beyond the customary confines of the stage they construct - to reevaluate their association with the city.

The other crucial factor in comprehending the economic model of companies, troupes, and productions is the dual capability of structures to anchor and disseminate. This leads to the query regarding venues for creation, rehearsal, and hosting. Such facilities are rare among companies and are predominantly sustained by international NGOs, donors, cooperation agencies, and occasionally, local governments. It's worth noting pilot projects like D-Caf, which is run in Cairo by the Egyptian playwright and director Mohamed El Attar. The project offers the perfect blend of hosting, networking, and international opportunities, which in turn influences a myriad of experiments, including the Zoukak company run by playwrights Junaïd Sarieddeen and Lamia Abi Azar based, among others, in Beirut, whose space was rebuilt after the harbour explosion.

These performance spaces, catering to both local and global viewers, are part of a collection of establishments developed by theater companies, including El Teatro in Tunis and Aquarium in Rabat, which operate on a model incorporating training, creation, and dissemination. Regarding training, the questionnaire responses indicate that connections with NGOs, schools, and universities assist in promoting their work and mostly allow them to receive or offer training (15.9%) or more commonly, brief workshops (30.1%).

Structurally, artistic training faces a paradoxical situation. In certain countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, and Morocco, drama schools are firmly established in institutions and society. Conversely, dance training is virtually non-existent and is provided by artists who received training elsewhere or are self-taught on the job, and thus dependent on connections with the diaspora and schools in Europe. Circus training, on the other hand, is typically reserved for socially oriented organizations that utilize this art form as a tool for integrating disadvantaged individuals into society, such as the Ecole Shemsy in Salé. These organizations thrive through collaboration with international structures and experiences.

When it comes to the question of distribution, target audiences have nearly identical values across all markets. This is because the markets that make it possible for productions to come to life are a combination of local, regional, and international. These markets experience fluctuations that are dependent on various factors, including box-office culture. The international market holds an even larger share due to its vast potential, which is relatively limited at the national level.



In this regard, it is essential to highlight two crucial facts. The first is the quasi-lack of expertise of tour operators and presenters who facilitate the dissemination of Arab artworks on a global scale. Notably, the networks that enable dance performances, often disregarded domestically, to tour internationally are of critical importance. Apart from a few exceptional cases, like the theater productions of Fadhel Jaïbi and Jalila Beccar in Tunisia, Mohamed El Attar and Laila Hassan Soliman in Egypt, Lina Saneh and Rabie Mroué, and Hanane Hadj Ali in Lebanon, which will be featured in the 'In' program at the 2022 Avignon Festival for Jogging and were previously staged in 'Off' at the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the Arab theater's tendency to export itself through established professional networks is rather limited. For instance, in Morocco, the Tangier-based acrobats ensemble, under the direction of Sanaa El Kamouni, holds the record for the highest number of international appearances, exceeding 200 shows annually.

Leaving aside the exceptions that suggest both a lack of management skills and political biases tied to domestic and global priorities and creative economies, it is crucial to highlight for a moment the most substantial distribution channel in the region: festivals.

Zoom on Festivals

Looking at the table below, we can see that public (20.7%) and private (18.3%) theaters rank equally as the second choice for theater and dance companies. In some countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, this indicates a natural balance, but in others, like Syria and Jordan, it highlights the need to find venues that are less controlled by the state. Additionally, utilizing open public squares to host street theater is a method of attracting audiences without charge in countries with limited viewership, such as Jordan. In general, festivals remain the most popular choice, accounting for 24% of occurrences and ranking higher than public, private, experimental, or commercial venues, which are intended to institutionalize and integrate the practice into urban culture. This surpasses the multitude of settings (public, private, experimental, commercial) that aim to formalize the activity and embed it in city culture - rural regions are still mostly absent.

In view of the vital nature of these one-off events and the networks they support, we have chosen to assess their scale and recurrence. We invite you to take a closer look at the table listing all the international or national festivals with an international dimension (considering their high number, we have chosen not to count strictly national and regional festivals) that have survived the Covid-19 episode, we will reveal a few important highlights below.

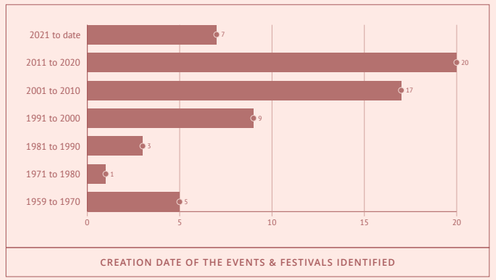
		N	Percent	Percent of cases
In general, where do you present your artistic works ?	Public halls	85	20,7 %	69,1 %
	Private halls	75	18,3 %	61,0 %
	Public space	70	17,1 %	56,9 %
	Circus tents (Chapiteau)	11	2,7 %	8,9 %
	Foreign institute halls	49	12,0 %	39,8 %
	Festivals	100	24,4 %	81,3 %
	Other	200	4,9 %	16,3 %
Total		410	100 %	

Geographically, it is worth noting that the practice of organizing festivals is not evenly distributed. Quantitatively, it is worth mentioning that in disaster-stricken areas like Iraq and Syria, the practice is slowly developing, with just two festivals in Baghdad and Babylon, and a single university festival in Homs, without taking into account the scope, scale, or specialty of the events. Morocco leads with 15 festivals, followed by Tunisia with 7, then Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan with 5 each, while Algeria and Egypt have 4 each. Although the Gulf countries only have 2 festivals, it is worth noting that the one organized by the Arab Theatre Institute in Dubai has a touring element and is called the «Arab Theatre Festival.» As far as the diaspora is concerned, Great Britain has the highest number of festivals open to or dedicated to the region (4), while most other countries - Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Canada - only have one festival. It is worth noting two festivals that feature a North-South relationship: Dancing On the Edge (Amsterdam and Cairo) and BIPOD (Lyon and Beirut). Additionally, both Hanover and Naples incorporate programming dedicated to artists from the Arab world and immigrants from the region.

Of course, not all of these festivals are worth the effort, as they vary in reputation, quality, discipline, and attendance. Of the 66 events listed, half are solely focused on theater. This information is crucial, as it demonstrates that despite the persistent centrality of theater, in terms of subsidies, for example, and the fact that it was prominently featured in national and international events, this is no longer the case. In comparison, we now have 13 multidisciplinary festivals, with 9 exclusively focused on dance and 6 on street art and circus arts.

This demonstrates that festivals serve not only as venues for promoting, recognizing, and contracting tours, but also as a platform for showcasing emerging trends and diverse fields and practices. Festivals have been widely promoted, for some time now, making them the ideal medium to reflect the plurality and evolution of the industry. In examining this topic, it is crucial to consider the establishment dates of festivals to determine the degree to which this trend has become more democratic and rapid over the past twenty years.

In addition to its age, which demonstrates the resurgence of a widely-shared fashion, it is equally important to see the extent to which this practice, traditionally monopolized by governments, has been liberalized, creating both a profusion of private, independent initiatives and a competition of chapels.

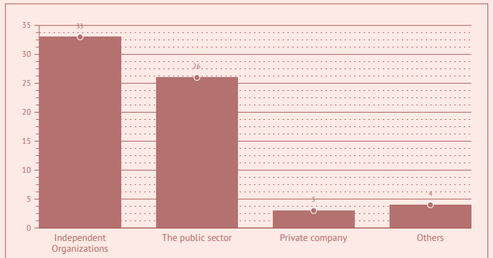


CREATION DATE OF THE EVENTS & FESTIVALS IDENTIFIED

It is evident, from these indicators, that performing arts in the region or related areas operate on a sporadic, ad hoc basis due to the lack of venues with the necessary resources to accommodate permanent, regular shows. Theaters like Al Madina in Beirut and Al Kasabah in Ramallah may host plays for multiple days in a row. However, due to steep rental costs, the energy crisis, and the lack of specific subsidies for venues, this has become less common. As a result, companies are turning their attention towards festival seasons, as described below.

Festival dates show that the peak season lasts around five months, between June and November each year, with a few special cases in the spring. But if activity in the city remains episodic and seasonal, what about the virtual?

THE PARADOXES OF DIGITALIZATION



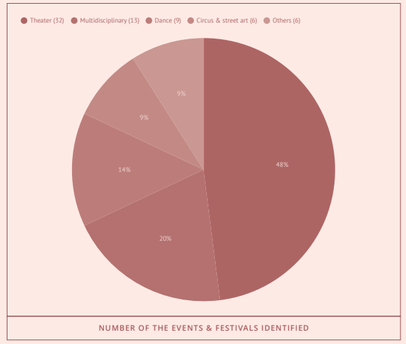
THE DISTRIBUTION OF ARTISTS AND ARTISTIC INSTITUTIONS SUBREGIONS

As mentioned above, even though the Covid-19 phenomenon has led to an unprecedented level of digitalization, it does not necessarily apply to all Arab countries to the same degree. As experts in the region's digital transformation have highlighted, there is significant variability across countries. On one end of the spectrum are nations predominantly from the Gulf and Jordan, where connectivity rates approach and surpass 100%. At the opposite end are Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, with a connectivity rate of around 20%. North African countries fall in between, with rates fluctuating between 50 and 60%. The persistence of white zones and infrastructural shortcomings in remote areas create a digital divide, making it difficult to approach the subject uniformly across different regions.

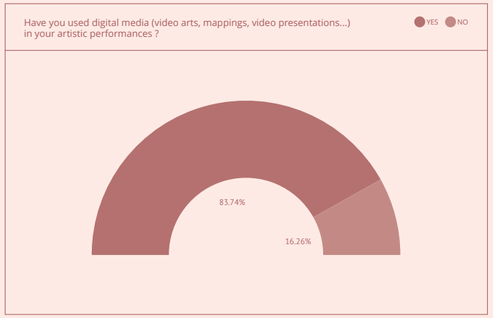
Notwithstanding, three notable phenomena emerge concerning communication and marketing, conception and creation, valorization, documentation, and distribution, which deserve a specific attention. The widespread use of social networks for communication (36.1%) and show promotion (35.7%) has become a top priority for professionals who were surveyed. Distribution (25.5%) follows as the next priority. It should be noted that using digital platforms to market shows, which is more commonly done by companies with a commercial focus, is not mentioned as a desired use.

With regard to archiving, documentation, and online distribution, mentioned by respondents as a third desired use of digitization, we have observed the extent to which this remains strongly correlated with festivals which, thanks to the resources allocated to them, are the first to develop this practice, sometimes putting filmed pieces online in extenso on dedicated sites (e.g. Arab Theater Festival).

When it comes to the place of digital in the creative phase, we observe a phenomenon of increased trivialization, which may or may not be aesthetically justified. So, when asked about practices at this level, the response shows a massive recourse to digital technologies, to its visual effects or other sophistications, as a widely installed norm.



NUMBER OF THE EVENTS & FESTIVALS IDENTIFIED



This absolutely definitive trend can be interpreted in various ways: as support for classical creations, or as an aesthetic orientation towards what is commonly known as "post-dramatic" by incorporating visual languages and other virtual performative tools in scenic writing, or as an indicator of intermediality concern by incorporating media into complex reality, object of theatricality, in textual writing. On these various aspects, which have undergone several reflections, we have made a conscious effort to question the significance of «post-dramatic» to gain a better understanding of its diverse meanings.

If the answer is yes, should digitization be used in :			
Communicate with the audiences	92	36,1 %	94,8 %
Promote artistic performances	91	35,7 %	93,8 %
Broadcast artistic shows	65	25,5 %	67,0 %
Other	7	2,7 %	7,2 %
Total	255	100 %	

02 New Trends And Emerging Practices

In this second part, we assume that certain practices and trends develop naturally through the interplay of players, the market, networks, or affinities, or as a result of cultural policies where they exist. We begin by observing that the performing arts are not given their due place socially and politically in the region. Furthermore, there is limited recognition of their significance in shaping the city's (off-screen) life, especially in underdeveloped ecosystems. As a result, there are currently no policies in place to support this vital sector. We must identify these «emergences,» referring to new, self-generated practices, and other trends with underestimated or unappreciated potential. These require special attention and a concerted effort to foster their sustainability.

«New» Writings and Language Diversity

While it should be remembered that what is sometimes labeled «new dramaturgies» is not necessarily a break with what already exists, but a continuity of pre-existing practices in different forms, we note these transformations at three distinct levels.

In terms of the relationship with the text, even if there are still experiments in classical collaboration (playwright-director), with scrupulous respect for the written text, in association with playwrights such as Arzé Khodr from Lebanon, or Mustapha Benfodil from Algeria, this is far from being the norm. It is more a case of blurring the author's identity, with multi-hand writing, superimposed textual and scenic writing, and the increasingly popular search for testimonies and narratives, with a dramaturgical exercise in composition, which reduces the dialogic part of stage texts. In what is generally acknowledged as a post-dramatic trend, dramaturgies are increasingly integrating poetic or fictional writings into the script, in support of body and visual language. And at the other end of the spectrum, there are more and more plays without text or the physical presence of actors, as attempted by Lina Saneh and Rabie Mroué. But here and there, this impetus requires even more time for work and experimentation, if it is not to be reduced to mere fashion or formal exercises in style.

In terms of the relationship between the stage and the extra-scenic world, whether it be memorial, distant or inaccessible, we note an increasingly important use of visual language as an archive medium, of the body, as an emotional vehicle, of painful experiences (wars, violence, shipwrecks...) with a concern for bringing the experience to life rather than reporting or recounting it. In the same vein, albeit with different intentions, the use of video editing, mapping or film editing techniques is developing, to simulate, in a different way, the represented reality. These hybrid forms combine dancers and actors on stage, sometimes with circus performers, slammers or other urban hip hop actors. While this diversity of languages and grammars shows a profusion within the Arab scene, it still poses a major problem; given that these are recent artistic expressions, and that training is more ad hoc and improvised, stage directors are, sometimes, faced with the difficulty of getting young people to work, as they are good technicians but not sufficiently artistic.

In terms of languages and idioms, it is important to note an emerging diversity that underscores a paradigm shift away from the historical centrality of standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect. It is worth noting that in some contexts (Syria and Jordan), the idea still persists, even if to a lesser extent, that theater in standard Arabic is more «serious» (Jad) than that in spoken languages. However, there has been a relative upsurge in the circulation of productions in vernacular languages, because they are closer to orality and therefore to a form of organic theatrical language. Two other manifestations of diversity are also worth noting. The first is the alternating use of foreign languages (French and English) and local Arabic, in text, dialogue and even titles. This serves, in addition to reflecting a form of postmodern linguistic flexibility, to better market productions in several localities, with a penchant for the international, as is the case, for example, with Amnesia (Jaïbi and Beccar, Tunisia), No time for art (Soliman, Egypt), or more recently Jogging (Hadj Ali, Lebanon). In a completely different direction, we note the relative rise and recognition of Arab plays that include so-called minority languages, such as Tamazight - this is not yet the case for Kurdish in Iraq, for example - reflecting the acceptance, through theater, of differences within the national space, as in Chatara (Nasseur, Morocco). Beyond the issues of representation and marketing raised by the question of languages, it should be noted that theaters in the region are witnessing a real heterogeneity of languages and inspirations, which constitutes a wealth that is still little recognized and valued.

The Position of the Body and Dance

In many countries of the region, the display and concealment of the body remains a political issue, where the dominance of patriarchy, moral bias, and social media's influence as a referee for public taste, revealing, on the other hand, diversities that are often less recognized in society. There are numerous plays that have been hotly debated and criticized, particularly for their explicit or implicit, physical or verbal, depiction of the female body. From Morocco, a country known for its progressive values, we can cite Latefa Aherrar's Capharnaüm and Naïma Zitane's Dialy, a reconstruction of the Vagina Monologues based on first-hand accounts.

On a positive note, in 2022, Moroccan troupes, Aquarium and Anfass, inaugurated an international festival for female directors titled Jassad (Body). Artists from the region, such as Lina Abyad from Lebanon, and Meriem Bousselmi from Tunisia, participated in the festival where they openly discussed the portrayal of the human body. Through the body and, above all, its staging by modern choreographers and dancers, we are exposed to the tensions present in several Arab nations today, to varying degrees. These tensions surround subjectivity, heritage, public space, the legitimacy of dance practices, moral codes, and the struggle for institutional recognition.

The question often raised by practitioners concerns the relationship with society. Society tends to view the dancing body primarily as sexual and eroticized, but the true issue is one of self-affirmation and acceptance through an artistic act. This act is intended as a political expression of the right to express oneself, which is often marginalized and even banned.

Choreographers often struggle with reconciling their ancestral, culturally draped dance traditions with contemporary dance, which is a globally imported language that is still gaining acceptance as a grammar and language. Some artists, as the Lebanese dancer Ali Chahrour and the Moroccan dancer Taoufiq Izeddiou, draw upon popular traditions based on local or religious mythologies, like Ta'zieh (a Shiite funeral rite) or Hmadcha (a Sufi brotherhood trance), to transform their movements and gestures into artistic work.

If these artistic creations circulate within their own nations and beyond, they also remain mindful of their duty to transmit cultural values within their societies. Here, the individual expression of creators diverts attention from established rituals and customs, sending them elsewhere. Yet, this recognition among institutions remains sluggish, resulting in a dearth of funding for dance and a necessity to practice within marginalized spaces, such as terraces, streets, and squares.

The endeavor, spearheaded by artists and supported by curators, is still distant from the scene and has not yet discovered a critical language. It still lacks the language to translate itself within societies that perceive it as alien. Choreographers, on the other hand, occasionally embrace multidisciplinarity, incorporating text and breaking down the barriers between artistic languages. This approach creates openings, providing potential avenues to a language that is far from being fully assimilated.

From all these considerations, it is clear that dance faces a dual reality: a politically marginal position at home and a profusion of economic opportunities abroad. Each choreographer deals with this paradox in his or her own way, but the challenge for those who try not to avoid it is to be attentive to the possibility of local emancipation in dialogue with international opportunities. With this in mind, the Shemsy circus school in Salé welcomed Moroccan choreographer Mourad Merzouki from the diaspora, to create a highly acclaimed show, Elevation (2022), involving dancers, actors and circus artists.

Alliances and the Search for Complementarities

As demonstrated in this example, it is evident that the most creative and encouraging solutions, which open up new opportunities for the performing arts, stem primarily from inter-regional collaboration and alliances between Arab nations. Although less common, such cooperation also occurs with Europe and, even more rarely, with Africa. Of course, we acknowledge the tremendous challenges that companies face while operating in occupied territories (e.g., Ramallah), crisis-ridden countries (e.g., Syria), or in territories where legislation hinders access to funding from international NGOs (e.g., Egypt). We also recognize the paradigm shift brought by the emergence of new countries in this field (U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia), which perceive themselves primarily as «Muslim nations,» but also as Asian, liberal, and affluent, and being in a new power relation with Europe. In terms of virtuous experiments, we can cite some examples that barely scratch the surface of their incredible potential for developing further alliances.

The first, revolving around promoting and connecting Arab artists, is spearheaded by Egyptian playwright and director Ahmed El Attar. Since 2013, he has orchestrated an «Arab Focus» to invite and showcase Arab artists. Each year, the Focus is held between Cairo, where D-CAF Festival takes place, and a cultural institution in another city that hosts the event (the Sunflower theater in Beirut in 2016, Edinburgh in 2017, and the Théâtre Jean Vilar in Vitry-sur-Scène in 2021).

The TAMAM association - Théâtre des arts du monde arabe et du pourtour de la Méditerranée - founded in 2010 by Aline Gemayel, a Lebanese journalist who has lived in Avignon for the past 10 years, is also worth mentioning, even though the experiment probably did not survive the COVID ordeal. In collaboration with the Avignon Festival, it offered a program of Arab shows and theatrical immersion master classes for students from both sides of the Mediterranean, as well as practical workshops, during the days of this global event. In the same vein, it is worth noting the multidisciplinary nature of a number of events that attempt to bring together scattered players or fields, such as Dream City in Tunis, where several arts intersect, D-Caf in Cairo, where the range has gradually widened, or Tanja Al Machhadia, organized by the International Center on Performance Studies, created by Professor Khalid Amine at Abdelmalek Essaadi University in Tétouan, through which he has created a bridge between researchers and artists. The same impetus for cross-fertilization between academics and creators is behind the initiative launched by Omar Fertat at the University of Bordeaux for theatrical encounters between East and West.

In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lebanese artist, Kassem Istanbouli, co-founded the Arab Culture and Arts Network (ACAN) in 2020 alongside other cultural actors in the region. The purpose of ACAN is to facilitate networking and collaboration among cultural communities, foster creativity and exchange, provide grants for creation, and enhance policies supporting arts and culture in the region. Still in Lebanon, specifically related to performing arts, three organizations - Yazan, Yaraqa, and Clown Me In, specializing in theater, dance, and clowning, respectively, established the Network for Cultural Outreach (NCO) with European funding for the purpose of decentralizing their practices. In different situations, social initiatives support artistic projects and influence their funding. One example is Samu Social International, which enlists artists to lead theater workshops with street children and isolated women.

Additionally, considering the significance of set design, stage management and other creative support roles, we observe the effort by Ettijahat-Independent Culture, financed by the Swiss foundation DROSOS, to consolidate resources and provide training in stage management. Still linked to understanding local needs and adapting to the precarious status of artists, we can note the efforts of major regional institutions and foundations. For instance, the dynamic theater scene in western Algeria centered around La Grande Maison in Tlemcen, the Abdelkader Alloula Foundation in Oran, and the Uzine Espace of the TAZI Foundation in Casablanca that brings together numerous dancers, choreographers, and artists. Additionally, the Gorara Theater of the Oppressed troupe is also worth mentioning. Not forgetting the waning, but still significant, role that French Institutes play in supporting «minor» arts by prioritizing their support for dance and circus companies (au Maroc, Col'Jam, Espace Darja, Irtijal, and 2Kfar).

However, the relationship with foreign institutes is not equally relaxed in all contexts. Although this pattern appears in the Maghreb and Lebanon, it is less evident in Egypt, due to administrative restrictions, and in Palestine and Jordan, due to political skepticism among the actors themselves. The partnership has facilitated the spread of locally developed work produced in exile, as in Syria, and has also at times promoted virtuous circulation between diaspora artists and local structures, like the Benfodil-Lardjem duo in Algeria.

Spaces and Audiences

Establishing durable creative practices in public spaces requires the ritualization of these practices, the creation of habits, the establishment of communities of practice, and regular meetings. While there are some regions and countries where

this tradition is well-established and the necessary infrastructure is abundant and operational, it is not yet widespread. The most common scenarios involve available infrastructures that are challenging to access or are diverted from their intended use for political or other motives. This raises a critical question about the connection that decision-makers and stakeholders have with two key components. 1- Venues, and, necessarily, alternative venues, serve as spaces for rehearsal, creation, encounters, and performances, and 2- Audiences, not just as quantitative data used for balancing finances or providing statistics to partners and donors, but also as sensitivities and clusters of representations to be understood.

On these two fronts, which play a critical role in determining the resilience and embedding of practices in societies, our diverse range of analyses and fields have uncovered several rising trends that demand special consideration. The concept of spaces poses a common issue with the limited availability of private and alternative options, resulting in the growing necessity to utilize them for three key reasons: circumventing text censorship, exploring hybrid and freer methods of expression, and engaging less conventional audiences.

Of course, the main priority is to ensure that shows are successful in fixed, regular locations or through pre-established tours. This responsibility falls on a small minority of highly respected companies. However, even when this is feasible, presenters face two hindrances: limited production, and show procurement budgets, which can be hindered by a deficient box-office culture; and the deficiency or near-deficiency of technical support or even sufficient equipment, resolved by private service providers, foreign institutes, and infrequently, groups established for this purpose.

The other special feature of alternative spaces is that they provide the opportunity for discovery through the staging of texts and interdisciplinary projects. These projects can have a kitschy allure but also generate a fruitful dialogue between the visual and performing arts. This is demonstrated when the spaces host professionals and young apprentices from various artistic industries, as observed in spaces like Zoukak in Beirut, l'Uzine in Casablanca, and Les Ateliers Sauvages in Algiers.

Despite these efforts, there is still the challenge of expanding the audience interested in, attracted to, and loyal to performing arts. This requires three approaches to overcome the structural deficit. The first is school outreach, where mediators are starting to enter the sector and reassess ways to engage and mobilize young audiences. Foreign funding from organizations such as DROSOS, the EU, Institut français and Goethe Institute support a growing trend that emphasizes the impact on stakeholders and distills that impact on audiences through a limited number of support programs. This approach often uses politically standardized language.

The theater truck, Aji Tferrej (Come watch), brought about by young director Hamza Boulaïz is a leading example of this trend. It is mainly presented in middle and high schools in Tangier. The drawback of this approach, while acknowledging the value of the Tangier experience, is its tendency to merely check off boxes and treat the audience as a variable for adjustment, disregarding their individualities and subjectivities.

The second pathway is the street, an attractive and eye-opening place that is often associated with theaters, cultural centers, and other grand architectural structures that appear imposing and out-of-place within society's conception of common spaces. As highlighted by the article on street theater, the practice is becoming increasingly autonomous, establishing itself independently rather than being viewed as an excuse or supplement to traditional theater. Nonetheless, this does not hinder performance troupes from using it in both directions, capitalizing on its unique blend of accessibility and cultural significance.

The third path is media coverage and the increasingly massive use of social networks, accentuated by COVID-19, to lift the performing arts out of the elitism of which they are sometimes suspected. As it happens, in some countries (e.g. Morocco), the purchase of shows broadcast online has done more to make up for companies' deficits than to broaden the audience reached. At the same time, popular forms of sketch, stand-up and ready-to-consume humor are tending to take over the web, creating other forms of audience expectation.

Few studies have been conducted to date on audience practices; one significant study is the 2015 one by Racines Association in Morocco. This study revealed two major findings: the low attendance at theaters and the prevalent belief that art is entertainment to be consumed at home through TV screens and social media platforms. Although nuanced, it is important to note that with the effects of lockdown, the passive willingness of consumers to endure, instead of act, has worsened. Differences in audience practices and ticketing traditions, previously mentioned, highlight the need for a tailored approach. This has been confirmed in various fields, where the question of winning back audiences has become even more pressing. Especially in light of concerns expressed by professionals in Syria, Egypt, and other countries, it is, unfortunately, common for professionals to gather at events and festivals to view their colleagues' work with complacency.

The question then becomes, how can we break free from this isolationist mentality? How to expand both the supply and demand for art in Arab countries? How can we encourage interactions between creators and audiences beyond mere circumstantial post-show discussions? These are unanswered questions that require tentative answers. In the final section, we will propose recommendations on the specific aspects we have deemed important for the next decade.

03 Recommendations

The aim of this research project, as conceived at the beginning, is to arrive, through selection, elimination, deduction and consultation between the team of researchers, at what makes the most sense and deserves to be promoted and supported as a priority over the next ten years. This raised the crucial question of selection criteria. Is it novelty, relevance, fragility, a gap to be filled or momentum to be maintained? In the end, there was no need to choose between these five elements, but rather to combine, confront and compose what emerged as useful, necessary and yet rare or under-favored by governments, markets, circuits and, due to a lack of data feedback, donors. In what follows, we will proceed in one, two or three stages: what needs to be done by transnational donors, AFAC in the first place, what needs to be done by the players, if necessary, and, when appropriate, what requires advocacy with national decision-makers?

On Time and Space for Projects to Mature

The first observation that justifies this orientation is that the short timeframe of projects, determined by the means or modicity of public subsidies, and sometimes by the precariousness of the players, which limits their availability, does not encourage the co-construction of meaning. However, we know that even though project promoters are largely individuals (75% of AFAC applicants), projects are collective constructions that require time and a dedicated space. These are the rare commodities that enable projects to mature, and help project leaders through the writing, development and assembly phases.

This creates the need to allocate funds to the preparatory stages, which helps projects mature before the implementation phase.

This requires project leaders to specify and justify whether there is a need for a preliminary phase of writing, co-construction of meaning, or experimentation.

If subsidy policies exist in certain countries; these policies need to be reoriented to create not only production requirements but also conditions (spaces, residencies) for developing, writing, and designing projects.

Revitalizing And Appropriating Public Spaces

If, in the current context, restricted access to public spaces is even more evident, it is crucial to assist performers in redefining and reclaiming those spaces in a manner that promotes equal access to the performing arts. Whether in working-class neighborhoods, public squares, terraces, traditional marketplaces, modern markets, or major thoroughfares, our goal is not merely to entertain passersby, but rather to establish a recurring and enduring means of artistic expression to be uncovered, explored, admired, and embraced as a fundamental aspect of urban life.

In order to revitalize public spaces, lessors should offer an option that considers this approach from the outset of projects and in representations.

This approach would help performers from street theater, circus, or dance, as well as groups formed for this purpose, to create projects that focus on the ethical and aesthetic re-appropriation of public spaces.

Anchoring, Circulation And Formatting

If we were to summarize the three challenges that hinder the performing arts industry, they are, first, the absence of territorial and local roots. This results in productions being unstable entities that do not take time to acclimatize to their birthplace through frequent and regular performances. The lack of circulation opportunities and the almost non-existent presence of touring companies are the main issues. Additionally, the conversion to physical and digital platforms to promote projects and productions is taking place at a sluggish pace.

The first point is a result of the cultural policies of each country and the orientations taken by institutions, with a view to helping creations establish themselves in the long term. It is probably necessary to make a precise plea in this direction, to help categorize productions and give visibility to what the market or the common taste of the moment does not naturally favor.

With the circulation and mobility of works already provided for by dedicated funds, the missing link is the connection between tour operators and creators in the region. Over and above the showcasing that takes place at a few festivals, this requires substantial support for the creation of platforms that give both parties access to projects, creator profiles and the structures that support them.

This means encouraging players to make data, archives and narratives more widely available, so that they can be put to good use.

Recognition Of Alternative Economic Models

It is evident from the collected data that most productions occurs through «informal» economic models (such as self-production, crowdfunding...) that lack recognition and value. It is time to acknowledge the legitimacy and efficacy of these alternative economic models, which accurately reflect the ecosystems in which structures and creators operate. But in addition to formally recognizing them, we must also promote these models as viable examples of the creative process in the region. This approach diverges from duplicating the industrial models of the North and requiring an excessive expansion of structures, leading to a two-fold impact:

Enable players to highlight, in their funding applications, models hitherto considered unjustifiable and therefore invisible. This would create greater flexibility in terms of understanding the economic realities of the sector, and at the same time demand transparency in what has hitherto gone unnoticed.

To be on the side of donors and decision-makers, as close as possible to real economic realities, and to adapt accordingly in order to help structures grow organically rather than artificially, and thus identify the most resilient ones to help professionalize them.

Redefining The Relationship With Audiences

As stated in our research, the question of the audience is still unanswered. In addition to being under-analyzed, it is reduced to an instrumental role, to a mass of consumers, seen as anonymous receptacles. However, if we are to move beyond this rudimentary and archaic posture, we need to take a few significant steps.

On the actors' side, ritualize the relationship with audiences, upstream and downstream of productions, in an inclusive phase of mobilization and mediation, and also a phase of feedback and conversation and, when relevant, create ad hoc spaces for associations to discuss the tastes, desires and sensations of the public, without any link to a production per se.

For governments, this means recognizing, in the cultural rights, the place of audiences as stakeholders in cultural and creative economies, as producers of meaning and bearers of intrinsic heritages and sensibilities. It also requires a rethinking of subsidy policies, so that they serve not only to multiply productions, but also to broaden audiences.

Without succumbing to the "neoliberal" approach of measuring audience impact, funders should promote all forms of mediation, inclusion, and audience consideration to facilitate the ethical and aesthetic objectives of creators, regardless of their location.

Visibility Of Processes And Outputs

If creation is a process, very few decision-makers, external observers, and key players in the economic decision-making chain do fully understand the value of the steps that have been taken due to lack of visibility. Even the outputs, which necessitate a visit to theaters and other performance spaces, do not receive the exposure they deserve. All of this falls under the purview of cultural managers responsible for promotion and mediation. These professionals are often inadequately integrated into projects due to financial constraints faced by the players involved.

This crucial requirement cannot be fulfilled by individual players alone. It must be approached as a cross-functional project that is highly encouraged. Showcasing the processes and outputs through filming, editing, interviews, and podcasts has become a necessary skill set that requires dedicated support. This should be aligned with projects that warrant such visibility.

Learning And Transmission Laboratories

Existing structures, particularly the most prominent ones, have developed their own technical, aesthetic, and dramaturgical learning methods. They encourage both internal and external dissemination due to reasons related to their economic models, but fail to perceive themselves as learning and transmission laboratories. By placing ethical experiments in proximity, we should establish spaces in the long run where this symbolic capital can be advantageous. How can this be accomplished?

This necessitates, above all, self-organization from the individuals involved, beginning with acknowledging the cognitive facet of art. Or, let us say, artists as providers of practical knowledge on gesture, the body, space, energy, heritage, etc. This facilitates the creation of multidisciplinary projects between researchers and artists, as well as interdisciplinary experiments. This allows for the creation of collaborative projects between researchers and artists, promoting interdisciplinary experimentation. This leads to valuable creations and conceptual elaborations that strengthen learning.

Acknowledging the efforts of artist-research groups that develop laboratory projects aimed at formalizing and sharing their knowledge is of concern to both public authorities, who would provide them with recognition, and funding agencies, who would offer them opportunities.

Background Papers

This section comprises papers based on quantitative and qualitative research about five sub-regions in the Arab world (Levant, Irak and Gulf, Egypt, Maghreb and Diaspora in Europe).

Each paper gives a comprehensive and documented understanding of dynamics, from five perspectives (historical and contextual background ; relationship with heritage and contemporariness ; economics of culture ; alliances, networks and rights to culture ; digitalization).

These papers written by researchers and practitioners are meant to be mainly descriptive and informative while giving some analytical insights. While gathering scattered data and giving a synthetic view on countries and regions, they differently zoom on various aspects of performing arts, depending on their level of maturity. The time span adopted for all regions ranges, with slight variations depending on data, from 2007 to 2022.

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PERFORMING ARTS IN SYRIA AND JORDAN

by Anna Akkach

Main productions and
trends in Syria & Jordan



Syrian Inventory In Critical Times

Introduction

The official theater production in Syria has not stopped since the outbreak of the war in 2011. The Ministry of Culture's Directorate of Theaters and Music has maintained its scheduled annual plan. However, due to the difficulty and risk of commuting for both theater workers and the audience, the number of performances per season varied during the first years of security instability in the capital (Damascus).

The new circumstances also imposed a change on the recognized theatrical traditions before 2011, particularly the timing of theater shows. Taking into account checkpoints, transportation hurdles, and lack of security, shows were scheduled relatively earlier in the day. In addition, the almost constant power outage and the shortage of fuel oil for generators have compelled theater workers to resort to alternative plans, in case of a power cut during shows that relied on music and lighting.

However, the Directorate of Theaters and Music's productions of children's and puppet theater did not come to a halt. Seasonal festivals were organized during the spring and summer vacations. Audience attendance varied, depending on the security situation, transportation, fuel crisis, and weather conditions.

Working in the field of theater, especially during the early years of the war, became a perilous endeavor for technicians and actors who faced the constant threat of death at any moment while commuting to or from work. Actress Suzan Salman, sound technician Shadi Raya, and director of programs at the Damascus Opera House, Lama Fallouh, were among those who lost their lives. Moreover, several students at the Higher Institute of Drama Arts were injured following shells that targeted the building repeatedly. Despite the risks, the theater itself remained a safe haven, temporarily isolated from the external turmoil.

The Culture and Arts House (Damascus Opera House) continued its cultural and artistic productions, music concerts, as well as dance shows in its three halls. However, it closed its doors to theater shows due to administrative and coordination reasons with the Directorate of Theaters and Music, despite the fact that both institutions function under the umbrella of the Syrian Ministry of Culture.

The Higher Institute of Drama Arts continued to present its term graduation projects to the audience on an annual basis, with significant attendance. The directors of these performances are the likes of Hasan Oweiti, Urwa al-Arabi, Bassam Koussa, Fouad Hassan, Fayez Kazak, Ghassan Massoud, Samer Omran, Jihad Saad, Abdel Menhem Amairi, to mention but a few.

Commercial theater also presented several shows, taking risks by investing in the production of a special genre that relied on box office sales.[2]

Several independent Syrian theater groups and bands continued their work, opting for a clear line and plan, unlike the Directorate of Theaters and Music. For example, Dr. Osama Ghanim's ***Damascus Theater Laboratory*** staged works such as *Return Home 2013 (l'ouda ila Lbayt)*, *Glass 2015 (Zuzaj), Drama 2017, Sun and Glory 2021 (Chams wa Majd)*. Through these works, I tried to unveil the reality of Syrian families during the war and imposed new traditions[3] on the spectator. Moreover, Nora Murad's band "Leish Band"[4] performed *I Wish I Were a Stone (Laytani Hajar)*, *Survival (Baqaa)* and *Embraces (Mo'naqat)*. In addition, the "School of Art" by Dr. Samir Osman, presented *The Suicide (al-Muntahir)*, *Harsh Lesson (Dars Qasi)*, *Decay (Inhilal) 2021*, and other shows in the form of graduation projects performed by students. Other bands include the "al-Hakwati Troupe"[5] of Kifah Lkhous, and Anna Akash's "Mraya Theater Project" In order to perform their works, they relied on the Directorate of Theaters and Music galleries, or the Higher Institute of Drama Arts. However, due to the lack of the required approvals by the official theaters, these bands had to resort to alternative spaces for staging, thereby witnessing a remarkable presence.

There are also other individual art shows that were sponsored by Arab cultural institutions such as *The window (al-Nafidha)* and *Open Sea ('Ard al-Bahr)* by Majd Fedda, *Today and Yesterday (al-Yawm wa Ams)* by Mariam Ali, Arab Eye Cosmetic (Kohl 'Arabi) by Susan Ali, *Heart Attack (Sakta Qalbiya)* by Mansour Nasr, *Eyelids (Jufun)* by Rana Karam, *The House Always Wins (al-Bayt Yafuz Daiman)* by Mohamed Istanbuli, and many others.

In order to carry out this research, I opine that it is necessary to categorize the types of performing arts in Syria as a reference point for data investigation. For instance, there is a noticeable absence of circus arts, pantomime, street theater, and classical ballet[6] performances as predominant expressive forms in the Syrian spectacle system. However, a few attempts have been made, such as the Koon Theater *(Masrah Kawn)* in street theater[7] and the *The Flash Project*[8] *(Mashrou' Wamda)* of Nagham Naeissa. Furthermore, we observe the absence of shadow puppetry since the enforced disappearance of Zaki Cordelo. Recently, there has been an attempt to revive this art as part of Syria's intangible heritage, sponsored by the Syrian Development Authority. A team of young puppeteers was trained, and the Dilal troupe was established in an effort to bring back the art of shadow puppetry.

However, the absence of some types of performing arts, unlike other genres, has not erased the distinctive footprint that characterized the Syrian theater in the years preceding the war.

1. Between Heritage and Modernity

What distinguishes this decade is the absence of a cultural plan that responds to the status quo or a clear artistic repertoire for national theater[9] represented by the Directorate of Theaters and Music. The artistic caliber of performances exhibited a range, with certain productions fading in significance, while others taking center stage. Some names had a fleeting moment and then vanished, while others became regular fixtures on the theatrical scene with each passing season.

I am going to categorize the Scripts, types of shows, and themes separately, and then deduce the results. This holds particular weight as the defining feature of this period lies in a deliberate effort to mirror all performance texts, irrespective of their origins and presentation forms, against the backdrop of Syrian reality, considering both social and political perspectives. All of them, directly or indirectly, converge towards the theme of war, which either takes the forefront or lingers in the background as an inevitable backdrop.

1.1 SCRIPTS

1.1.1 Adaptations from translated international scripts

The majority of the staged productions hinged on adapted versions of translated international scripts, with a significant number directly addressing the Syrian war, particularly in its early years. Examples include *Hamlet*, and *About Love and Other Things* based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, presented by Aroua al-Arabi. *The Chalk Circle* adapted from *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht, *Factory (Fabrica)* based on the play *The People's Deputy* by Branislav Nušić, *Abduction (Ikhtitaf)* based on the play *Trumpets and Raspberries* by Dario Fo and *Supermarket* presented by Ayman Zidan. Ma'moun al-Khatib presented *They Are All My Children (Koulouhoum Abna'i)* an adaptation of Arthur Miller's play, *Pulse (Nabad)* adapted from Terrence McNally's play *Mothers and Sons*, and *Olives (Zeitoun)* based on Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. *Brasovia is Free* based on *A Place for Pigs* by Athol Fugard, presented by Fuad Hassan; *The Trees Die Standing* is based on a text by Alejandro Casona, and it was exhibited by Hisham Kafernah, and many others. All these works were produced by the Directorate of Theaters and Music.

1.1.2 Adaptations from Arabic scripts

Ibrahim and Safiya adapted from *Maqam (Temple) of Ibrahim and Safiya* by Walid Ikhlassi, was staged by Zinati Qudsia in 2021.

1.1.3 Scripts written specifically for the stage

There were far more adapted texts that were from translated international texts in contrast to the relatively small number of stage-specific works. Examples include *Out of Control* (2014) by Wael Qaddour, *Color Correction* and *Performance Experiment* by Samer Mohammad Ismail in 2021, *Truce* by Adnan Al-Azrouni, *Them (Hunna)* by Anna Akkash, *The Will* by Faisal al-Rashed, *Eyeliner and the Pot (al-Mirouad and al-Mukhala*) and *Raisin (Zabib)* by Adnan al-Ouda, *The Tale of a Land Where There Is No Death*, *In a Bar in al-Hamra Street*, *The Tale of Aladdin*, *The Prolonged Life of Don Quixote*, *The Road to the Sun* all by Kifah al-Khous, and *Nadima*, and *Ibn Arabi* by Ali Sattouf, amongst others.

1.1.4 Improvised Scripts

Most of these texts are the results of workshops with students from the Acting Department within the Higher Institute of Drama Arts in Damascus. They are not based on a specific text, but rather on a premise that the actor develops with the director on stage. Examples of these texts include *(Iwaa Waa Waa)* by Fayez Qazaq, *Hysteria* by Jihad Saad, *Ashes of Violet* by Samer Imran, *Libido* by Abdul Moneim Amayri, *Syrians Titled* by Tamer al-Arabaid, and others. In addition, the play *A Syrian Tale*, directed by Mamoun al-Khatib, was a result of a workshop with amateurs organized by the Directorate of Theaters and Music.

1.1.5 Classical and colloquial Arabic

A portion of the texts adapted from foreign sources retained Classical Arabic on stage, especially Zinati Qudsia and Hisham Kafarneh's shows. This is also evident for a significant portion of children's theater, especially puppet shows. On the other hand, most of the texts that were specifically written for the stage and improvisational performances were performed in Syrian colloquial Arabic.

1.2 TYPES OF SHOWS

Here, I tried to categorize other forms of performing arts in addition to traditional theatrical shows:

1.2.1 Monodramas

Considered as a low-cost production, many directors opted for the monodrama due to production constraints. Notably, directors are not required to work with multiple actors, as theater budgets often fail to cover even transportation costs. As a result, many actors veered away from working in theater, preferring roles in television series for the exposure, fame, and earnings. Monodrama shows are inexpensive in terms of travel and commuting, making them suitable for participation in theater festivals. Notable monodramas include *My Inner Night (Layali Dakhili)* by director Samer Ismail, *Gandhi and Abu Shanar* by Zinati Qudsia, *A Lonely Woman* by Nissrine Fandi, *Recycling (I'ada Wa Tadwir)* by Sami Nofal, *Heart Attack* by Mansour Nasr, *Sour Coffee* by Hazem Haddad, *Farewell Night* by Suhair Barhom, and *Faces I Long to See* by Ismail Khalf.

1.2.2 Motion Theater and dance groups

Among the notable performances are Leish Troupe by Nora Murad; their works include *I wish I were a Stone*, inspired by a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, and *Embraces* based on the two books *Voices of Time: A Life in Stories* and *Embraces* by the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galean° This type of performance is a fusion of literature and body language. The show *Survival* is a continuation of *Identities (Huwiyyat)*, a project that Murad started in 2004. Choreographer Mu'taz Malaiteh staged the works *Bones and Faces ('izam wa Wujūh)* and *Moments (Lahazāt)* with his students in the Dance Department at the Higher Institute of Drama Arts. Additionally, fifteen dance laboratories also performed shows, most of which featured works from different dance schools. These labs are based on specific themes designed by students, transitioning them from solo dancers to choreographers. Other dance performances include *Minutes (Dakaiq)* by Alaa Karimied, *Self-Visit (Ziyara Dhatiya)* by Hussein Khaddour, based on *The Pigeon* by the German author, Patrick Süskind, and *Potential Distortions (Tashwīhāt Muhtamala)* by Nagham Ma'ala. Therefore, these performances are either composed of choreographic dance that relies on a specific idea in each one, or they are built on a complete and cohesive drama structure.

Raqqa Troupe for Folk Arts[10] continued its shows despite its members being forced to flee the city in 2013 after ISIS took control and accused them of heresy. Other groups such as Al Muhra, Aram, Jelnar, Ajyal, and Syria Dance Theater also persisted. As for the Inana Troupe[11] , managed by Jihad Mufleh, its performances came to a halt at the beginning of the war, and its activities shifted to Qatar.

1.2.3 Children shows and puppetry

The annual repertoire of the Directorate of Theaters and Music did not exclude children's shows and puppet theater. Even in the early years of the war, the seasonal children's theater festivals[12] continued, despite the volatile situation.

1.2.4 Visual Theater

During the time span covered by this research, a new type of theater emerged in Syria that entirely relies on visual, graphic, and video art, categorizing it as visual theater. Adham Safar directed his show *Transformation* in 2017, followed in the same year by Bassam Hamidi's *Moonlight* show. The latter continued his efforts in this field with the shows *The Handkerchief* in 2020 and *Fulla and the Seven Dwarfs* in 2021.

This achievement is noteworthy for Syrian theater, especially under siege and forced isolation, which have prevented it from adopting the technological advancements in global theater. In a country lacking modern devices and technologies due to their high costs, in addition to the near-complete interruption of power, Syrian theater has managed to adapt and showcase innovative productions.

1.2.5 Stage readings

In 2015, Nissrine Fandi initiated her project "Harf for Stage Reading" at Khan As'ad Pasha in Damascus as an alternative venue to the traditional theater stage. The project resulted in approximately eight productions, all produced by the Directorate of Theaters and Music.

In addition to the "Harf Project" there were sporadic efforts presenting theater readings such as *On the Road* (2014) by Lusin al-Sharqi, *Faces and Tales* (2015) directed by Maysoon Ali with students from the Department of Theatrical Studies, *Traverse ('Obur)* (2021) by "Mraya Theater Project" directed by Hassan Doba, and *Writing In Progress* (2022), directed by Majd Fadi, which is one of the outcomes of the "Scriptwriting Workshop for the Stage 2" organized by the "Citizens Artists Foundation"

1.2.6 Musical theater

I will only mention three examples: *The Road to the Sun* (2015), directed by Mamdouh al-Atrash and produced by the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Information, Dar Al-Assad for Culture and Arts, and the Metha Establishment for Artistic Production; *One Night After a Thousand Nights* (2021) by the Gardinia Choir, whose script I wrote, and it was a project supported by the Cultural Resource and independent cultural initiatives; *Folla and the Seven Dwarfs* (2021) is a visual performance for children, written by Hisham Kafarneh and directed by Bassam Hamidi, commissioned by the Directorate of Theaters and Music, in collaboration with the Mayar International Foundation for Artistic Production and Distribution.[13]

1.3 THEMES

Following a comprehensive overview of the productions of over a decade, we observe three main themes:

1.3.1 Popular heritage

Here we can address the storyteller shows and some theater productions by Kifah al-Khous, where he drew on the oral heritage of his hometown Zabadani, in addition to some children's and puppet theater shows based on local or global folk tales. Additionally, the Gardinia Choir performed One Night After a Thousand, a musical experiment that adapted stories from The Arabian Nights (1001 Nights), reinterpreting them through the lens of contemporary social and political realities. Another notable experiment is the Mraya Theater Project with a storytelling performance titled *Folk Tale from Text to Stage*, which was the result of a workshop with participants from various Syrian provinces. Each participant brought stories from their city's oral heritage and presented them. Zinati Qudsiah's performance titled *Ibrahim and Safiya*, based on Waleed Ikhlassi's text, has its roots in the oral tradition narrated in the city of Aleppo.

Indeed, we can consider that all scripts based on translations and adaptations belong to the classical theater heritage. As for those written specifically for the stage, they belong to the contemporary era, or, at the very least, attempt to create the beginnings of a new trend in contemporary Syrian drama writing.

1.3.2 Reflecting on the contemporary social status quo

The majority of texts, whether they were translations, stage productions, or products of improvisation, along with dance performances, conveyed insights into the societal, political, and living conditions shaped by the presence of war and its consequential economic and social impacts in Syria. The prevalence of war as a theme persisted in the substance of these texts, occasionally seizing the spotlight and at other instances, taking a backseat to social developments.

1.3.3 The theme of war

After 2018, the theme of war gradually diminished in the texts and no longer appeared, turning towards topics entirely unrelated to this context, leaning towards entertainment to satisfy an audience weary of daily life issues. Examples include *Marital Confessions* by Mamoun al-Khatib, *A Lonely Woman* by Nissrine Fandi, and *Adrenaline* by Zuhair Qanoua, among others.

CONCLUSION

The war in Syria has completely cut off the Syrian theater scene from external developments. Participation in international and Arab theater festivals came to a standstill due to restrictions on Syrian passports; the Syrian Ministry of Culture's financial limitations added to the constraints of sending delegations. Despite these challenges, certain productions managed to overcome the barriers. Majd Feddah's *The Window* successfully reached the Carthage Theater Festival through individual

efforts. Jamal Shakir's *Statico* garnered three awards, while Samer Mohammad Ismail's *Color Correction* received two awards. Other works, including Aroua al-Arabi's *A City in Three Seasons*, Ayman Zidan's *Abduction*,[14] Anna Akash's *Them*, and Ajaj Sleem's *Alchemy*, took part in various editions of the Arab Theater Festival, an annual event organized by the Arab Theater Authority in different countries. Furthermore, Mamoun al-Khatib's *Marital Confessions* was showcased at the Cairo Experimental Theater.

The Damascus Theater Festival, which served as a gateway for spectating Arab and foreign theatrical productions, stopped its activities. Furthermore, the Higher Institute of Drama Arts in Damascus stopped hosting theater workshops conducted by international theater experts. Prior to 2011, the Institute was a hub for research opportunities and theatrical labs receiving experts from abroad. They conducted workshops in various aspects of theater, including writing, improvisation, acting, and dramaturgy. These exchanges allowed supervisors and students to share experiences and keep abreast with global theater developments. For instance, workshops were organized by Swiss director Alain Knapp, a teacher and curriculum officer at Strasbourg School, and French director Jacques Lassalle, director of the Strasbourg National Theater.[15] The war disrupted the continuity of these programs, and external delegations were hindered due to restrictions on Syrian passport movements. Consequently, students and graduates from the Institute faced challenges in participating in theater workshops abroad and gaining exposure to developments in theaters around the world. This isolation marked a significant shift in the Syrian theater landscape.

On the level of form, Syrian theater has shifted towards realist schools in performance and the utilization of a singular setting, as seen in productions like *Extra* by Lezan Dahook, Hide-and-Seek (*Tamima*) by Aroua al-Arabi, *The House Always Wins* by Mohammed Istanbuli, and all the shows of the Damascus Theater Lab.

It also moved away from experimentation and the innovation of new artistic forms and visual treatments (except when working with students at the Higher Institute of Drama Arts). The element of surprise and novelty was absent, and the experiences remained repetitive, repeating themselves exactly as they were thirty years ago at the beginning of the professional careers of directors like Hisham Kafarneh, Zenati Qudsiah, and Hassan Akla.

However, some works gained prominence by relying on the director's name and television stars, turning into popular shows regardless of their content and artistic form. We can include *The Chalk Circle* (2014), *Abduction* (2017), and *Factory* (2018), both by Ayman Zidan. Additionally, there are *As If it is Theater* and *Westophile* by Ghassan Masoud. These productions attracted audiences beyond the circles of theater professionals and enthusiasts.

Until now, the Higher Institute of Drama Arts remains the only free space for theatrical experimentation in all its departments, whether in working with actors or innovating, and experimenting with, theatrical techniques. For example, the experience of theatrical work in alternative outdoor spaces is no longer available except within the Institute's premises[16] and not outside its walls, as it was before 2011.

2. Economics of Culture

"The issuance of Legislative Decree n° 32 in 1973 contributed to granting Syrian artists rights and benefits that helped provide them with more security and dedication to their artistic work. Syrian culture witnessed a new type of theater gatherings established by graduates of the Higher Institute for Drama Arts in Damascus. These groups, numbering over thirty before 2011, became prominent landmarks in the cultural and artistic movement. Their constant aim was to present their contemporary vision of a new theater in Syria. However, these groups, gatherings, and professionals quickly disappeared during the early months of the war. Most of the artists emigrated, while others faced insurmountable challenges"[17]

During these past ten years or more, many have distanced themselves from working with the "State" theater affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, either due to travel constraints or because the wages no longer cover the cost of transportation to the theater. For example, the salaries in 2011 were approximately 150,000 Syrian pounds ($3,000). However, this figure remained in Syrian pounds until 2021 despite the collapse of the exchange rate. However, even though some figures stepped back from theater, new names have emerged on the Syrian theater scene to compensate for the shortage in theater personnel, seizing opportunities that might not have been available to them earlier.

In this context, we must recognize two distinct production models: state-subsidized theatrical works and independently produced cultural creations. Each of them carries a different political, cultural, cognitive, and aesthetic orientation.

2.1 CULTURAL PRODUCTION

The Ministry of Culture is the primary funder for all artistic productions in Syria.[18] Before 2011, it received funding from the European Union dedicated to cultural development,[19] in addition to support from other European and Asian cultural institutions. However, the situation changed after 2011 and the eruption of the war due to economic sanctions, the absence of partnerships, and the halt of European funding. As a result, the ministry's spending capabilities experienced a substantial reduction.

2.2 PRODUCTION PARTNERSHIPS

2.2.1 The Ministry of Culture and the private sector

For high-cost productions that cultural institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Culture cannot cover within their budgets,[20] there are indications of partnerships with the private sector. For example, in the case of the show *Moonlight*, one of three visual shows directed by Bassam Hamidi, performed for the Directorate of Theaters and Music, he collaborated with the Golden Line for Artistic Production;[21] and in his show *The Handkerchief* for the Syrian Opera House, he collaborated with the Arab Advertising Foundation. In his latest show, *Folla and the Seven Dwarfs*, also for the Directorate of Theaters and Music, he partnered with Mayar International Establishment for Artistic Production and Distribution, which was, incidentally, an advertising company producing a theatrical and visual musical work for the first time. The entry of the Arab Advertising Foundation as an advertising partner for the show was a significant incentive for its promotion.[22]

In general, the production sponsorship phenomenon is unfamiliar in Syrian artistic productions due to the absence of a law that stipulates tax reductions for companies or sponsoring institutions when supporting cultural or artistic works. Consequently, the incentive for sponsorship is lacking, and it is considered a waste of money on an artistic project that does not generate profit. As a result, most experiences have not been repeated. Additionally, the inability of ticket sales to cover production expenses is noteworthy. It is important to mention that ticket revenue in Syria usually goes to the Ministry of Finance and is not used to cover wages, expenses, or production costs. In cases where there is a sponsor, they typically serve as an advertising sponsor, such as Arabesque Radio or mobile phone companies like MTN and Syriatel.

2.2.2 The Ministry of Culture and funding institutions

Joint productions between the Ministry of Culture and recipients of production grants occur due to the beneficiaries' need for an equipped venue with determined specifications; unlike Lebanon and Jordan, Syria lacks dedicated, properly equipped theaters.[23] Consequently, the beneficiary is compelled to establish a production partnership with state-owned theaters to benefit from the available venue and equipment. However, the process is not as straightforward. The Directorate of Theaters and Music, as well as the Opera House, impose their conditions, including the prohibition of displaying the logo of the funding institution that contributed to the financing. As a result, the state-owned theaters appear as the primary funder of the production. The reason behind this lies in the existence of an unofficial blacklist of some Arab and foreign institutions, despite obtaining the necessary work permits in Syria before 2011. State-owned theaters fear potential security scrutiny if they display logos associated with foreign funding sources.

2.2.3 Independent troupes and funding institutions

Syrian independent artistic troupes or institutions, as well as individuals working in the arts sector, rely on grants provided by donor institutions such as al-Mawred al-Thaqafy, Itijahat, Citizens Artist, Goethe, the British Council, or the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC). Additionally, they might seek support from the United Nations Development Programme for projects related to interactive theater and community development, either for the production of their shows or for conducting training workshops. However, the process of obtaining these grants has gradually become more challenging with the onset of the war, economic sanctions, and restrictions on banking. For instance, it is no longer feasible to transfer the grant directly to the beneficiaries' bank accounts in Syria, due to concerns about foreign funding and potential security issues. Workers in the independent cultural sector in Syria have resorted to indirect methods, such as transferring the grant amount to the bank accounts of their friends abroad and then finding a way to bring this amount into Syria in cash, rather than through a bank transfer, because of the significant difference in the exchange rate between the official and black markets. A significant portion of these transfers used to go through Lebanese banks, but after the collapse of the banking system there, the transfer process became nightmarish. Sometimes, transfers involve multiple bank accounts distributed across the five continents before the beneficiary finally receives the production grant, or what remains of it after deducting transfer fees.

Independent theater troupes and individuals who receive grants often turn to alternative venues that provide a more lenient regulatory environment for the content and presentation of their work–in addition to the possibility of direct advertising for the producing entity. For example, Mustafa Ali Gallery in al-Amin neighborhood has hosted several theatrical performances, and Zawayya Gallery in al-Qasaa has hosted both theatrical shows and readings. Furthermore, the Burj al-Firdous Hotel has hosted performances by the "Damascus Theater Lab" in one of its halls dedicated to celebrations. There is also the House of al-Abad in Sarouja, in addition to some cafes that have hosted al-Hakawati shows.

CONCLUSION

The Syrian Ministry of Culture serves as the primary funder for all artistic productions. However, independent theater troupes and entities do not receive any financial support from the Ministry of Culture and its affiliated institutions, as is the case in other countries where official institutions support the independent cultural and artistic sectors. The support from the Ministry sometimes comes in the form of providing performance spaces equipped with all the necessary technical equipment. However, the conditions set by the Ministry can be unfair to artists[24] and donor institutions. Moreover, the Ministry of Culture is not considered open to production partnerships thereby negatively impacting the budgets of sponsored shows due to low wages and production costs. As a result, many artists have refrained from working in the theater.

3. The Right to Culture

3.1 AUDIENCE

Theatrical performances in Syria do not enjoy widespread popularity in terms of audience presence. It is commonly agreed upon that those who attend Syrian theater productions are usually from the elite social class, in addition to individuals working in the artistic, theatrical, cultural, and media fields—those interested in keeping up with the Syrian theater scene. There are exceptions, particularly related to the names of actors or directors involved in a production. For example, shows by Aiman Zeidan and Ghassan Massoud have a significant popularity among the general public due to their use of television stars in most of their works. The theater halls are completely filled,[25] along with the corridors, during the fifteen days of the show. Television celebrity actors play a crucial role in attracting an audience that is not accustomed to attending the theater.

As for the audience of children's and puppet theater, which includes parents and their children, the elitist criteria does not apply to them. This audience sees theater as an opportunity for entertainment and enjoying their time, namely during special theatrical festivals for children held during holidays and school breaks. During the theater season, the number of attendees varies depending on the timing of the show and may decrease during school exam periods or due to weather conditions (hot or cold).

The graduation ceremonies at the Higher Institute of Drama Arts also attract a distinct audience of young people who are interested and may not be encountered in the national theater performances held at venues like the Hamra and Qabbani theaters.

3.2 ART SPACES

Despite the relatively large number of theaters in Damascus, including cultural center theaters, the main events are still limited to al-Hamra Theater, al-Qabbani Theater, and the Opera House with its three halls. The Italian and Circle theaters at the Higher Institute of Drama Arts[26] also play a significant role. As for the Workers' Theater, which has an equipped hall in a strategic location in Damascus, and the March 8th Theater or the Military Theater, they have been out of service for a long time. In addition, there is an open-air theater in the ancient Damascus International Fair. There is also a theater in the Damar Complex, but the events held there are usually seasonal, since it is an open space.

As for open artistic spaces, they are virtually nonexistent, except within the premises of the Higher Institute of Drama Arts. There, some graduation performances have been presented outside its walls, utilizing the garden, open-air theater, and the surrounding area of the Institute as alternative venues.

Without doubt, all performances are subject to censorship regarding the script and then the actual show. Necessary approvals are to be obtained from the Directorate of Theaters and Music. The script undergoes evaluation by a reading committee, and then the staged show is assessed by a viewing committee before it is allowed to be presented. As for security approvals, they are limited to open spaces or alternative venues such as art presentation halls (galleries), which often manage to bypass this procedure by obtaining approval from the Directorate of Fine Arts.[27]

3.3 PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING OR PUBLIC ATTRACTION

Most advertising activities for shows primarily rely on social media platforms rather than traditional roadside advertisements, since the latter tend to be more costly. Occasionally, you may come across show posters on local radio stations, local television stations, or in newspapers. However, as mentioned earlier, Facebook is considered the leading platform for advertising any cultural, artistic, or theatrical events.

CONCLUSION

The Syrian theater movement over the past decade appears to be stumbling compared to its pre-2011 state. The impact is measurable in declining audience participation, which is directly correlated to deteriorating security conditions. Additionally, life's daily challenges, such as the availability or lack thereof of transportation due to a severe shortage of gasoline and diesel, contribute to the difficulties. Many artistic spaces in both the capital and provinces have stopped activities. Even the advertising landscape has deteriorated significantly, with traditional promotional channels like roadside billboards and cultural event posters no longer accessible.

4. Alliances

4.1 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

"Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Syria face difficulties that make strategic work difficult and lack the authority to make independent decisions. Direct foreign or international funding is extremely challenging because the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor handles all financial matters. One of the key actors is the non-profit organization Syria Trust for Development, officially registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Its aim is to undertake development projects in three areas: education, rural development, and culture. It operates independently and collaborates with the government, organizations, and international partners, such as the Qatar Foundation 23, ECUM Association (France, 1983), the European Union, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Population Council in Egypt. It also has partnerships with the private sector, receiving financial assistance from Syrian business groups such as Syriatel and MTN, mobile phone service providers"[28]

4.2 ACADEMIA

Academic institutions include the Higher Institute of Drama Arts, al-Manara Private University, and the Arab International University (AIU).[29] In addition, there are a handful of private institutes or accredited schools such as Stage Art managed by Ngham Naissa,[30] Drama Road managed by Rania al-Jeban, and the School of Theatrical Art managed by Samir Othman.[31]

During these past ten years, there was the emergence of specialized acting institutes that primarily focus on conducting acting workshops for children and preparatory courses for admission to the Higher Institute of Drama Arts in the acting or dance departments. However, these institutes have not guaranteed their continuity; they appeared for a limited period and then disappeared. This is often due to their reliance on course fees for sustainability, lacking the ability to secure support or sponsorship from any funded entity.

4.3 FOREIGN CULTURAL CENTERS

Their support for various cultural activities gradually ceased with the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011, eventually leading to the complete closure of their centers.

4.4 LOCAL NETWORKS

In fact, it is impossible to speak of private networks within Syria. Each independent cultural institution or association operates essentially on its own, struggling to secure the support that ensures continuity and ongoing work. Some rely on securing funding for each independent artistic project, covering their annual plan related to production. However, the challenge lies in institutional sustainability, administrative management, and covering the operational expenses of administrators.

Since 2021, I have been attempting to establish myself as the Artistic Director of the "Mraya Theater Project"[32] I launched an initiative called the Artistic Alliances Network as a response to the difficulties faced by those working in the independent Syrian artistic sector. The network includes five Syrian art associations, licensed by the Artists' Union or operating as companies offering artistic training. These entities are the Mraya Theater Project, Leish Group, Gardenia Choir, Stage Art, and Drama Road.

The network aims at creating alliances and technical artistic collaboration among these independent cultural entities as a guarantee and a mechanism for the sustainability of independent cultural work within Syria. The goal is to maintain the independence of each entity[33] in terms of artistic direction, administrative affairs, and financial matters. However, after a whole year of discussions, this initiative has not resulted in any concrete alliance or declared joint collaboration.

4.5 INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

The establishment of international networks during the past decade, which have completely isolated Syrian theater from what is happening abroad, can be considered individual initiatives by some operators of independent cultural institutions. An example is the partnership with the Münchner Kammerspiele (2021) in Germany, which includes Mraya Theater Project, Leish Group, and Damascus Theater Lab. This initiative was led by the Syrian dramaturge Rania Mleihi; she is attmepting to reconnect independent theatrical and artistic groups operating within Syria with the international scene. There are also individual partnerships between Leish Group and Damascus Theater Lab on the one hand, and cultural entities in Tunisia and other places on the other. Additionally, there are partnerships between Mraya Theater Project and theater institutions in Bulgaria, Egypt, and Turkey.

4.6 UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Programme supports some cultural and community initiatives, particularly in the field of theater, by sponsoring interactive theater workshops through various institutions or associations.

4.7 INTERACTIVE AND SCHOOL THEATER

The project began in 2009 through co
llaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Rawafed Project, and the Syria Trust for Development, funded by the Swiss Drosos Foundation. This collaboration resulted in numerous interactive theatrical performances across various regions in Syria. Interactive theater relies on collaborative work between trained children and youth interested in the art of theater and specialized trainers. It is framed within specific, temporally and spatially mobile workshops. Expert theater professionals, often graduates of the Higher Institute of Drama Arts from the theatrical studies department, train participants in theater, familiarizing them with it and cultivating their appreciation. The workshops usually culminate in the creation of a theatrical production in which everyone participates in its composition and performance under the supervision of these specialists.

Currently, civil society organizations specializing in community development are using interactive theater techniques and mechanisms,[34] particularly in the field of advanced psychological support. One example is the "Y-Peer Network," where the national network in Syria coordinates with the Syria office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). It operates under their supervision within a joint agenda, aligning its activities with local youth objectives while maintaining financial and administrative independence.[35] The network covers parts of Syrian provinces. Other organizations involved in this approach include the Sada Association for Community Development, the Anis Saadeh Association, the Albatoul for Social Services, and the Syrian Family Planning Association-Youth Center[36] in Tartous.

4.8 IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON ESTABLISHING ALLIANCES AND EXPLOITATION OF TECHNICAL SPACES

Syria is considered one of the countries that did not take the pandemic seriously in terms of preventive measures and has been delayed in obtaining the vaccine through the Ministry of Health. This is compounded by the general public mood, taking the pandemic as a peripheral issue compared to the challenging security and living conditions in Syria. It cannot be denied that the state has taken precautionary measures regarding social distancing in theaters and art spaces, as well as setting capacity limits. However, these measures have been widely criticized by those in the art field as excessive and unnecessary, leading to a lack of any form of alliance in this context.

5. The Impact of Digitization

"Most internet users in Syria suffer from low debit and frequent service interruptions due to high demand, stemming from the continuous increase in the number of users. A technical study that covered 185 countries to determine internet download and upload speeds revealed that Syria's situation in this regard is problematic. It ranked 151st among the countries included in the study. In terms of cost, internet service in Syria is high compared to other countries in the region. A comparative study by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority confirms that the cost of internet in Syria is the highest globally. The study attributes this to the severe network slowness and constant interruptions, making task completion on the internet in Syria require multiples of the time needed in other countries"[37]

The internet situation in Syria has persisted since the writing of the previous article in 2015 and up to the current year, 2022. Additionally, there remains a large number of blocked websites and communication apps for Syrian users. For example, Zoom is blocked in Syria, and it can only be accessed through a VPN, negatively impacting the quality of communication. It is worth noting that many business meetings and interactions now take place through this application, which can be considered a gateway for Syrians to connect with the outside world.

It was challenging to discuss dramaturgies, presentation methods, and production during the Covid-19 pandemic in Syria. There were very few Syrian productions specifically tailored for online broadcasting during the pandemic. Only two initiatives stand out, conducted by the Directorate of Theaters and Music and the Syrian Opera House, which broadcast recorded shows on

their Facebook pages and YouTube channels. Even the websites of cultural institutions, if they ever exist, are not actively utilized. Instead, the primary focus is on Facebook for promotion and advertising to reach a large audience and those interested.

It has been challenging to follow the initiatives launched by a group of cultural institutions during the pandemic to showcase their grant-winning productions from previous years, which were previously limited to festivals or in-person performances. Most of these initiatives uploaded their content to Vimeo, a platform that is difficult to access smoothly due to the slow and intermittent Syrian internet signal.

Other platforms launched paid ticket initiatives to watch international theatrical performances for a limited period. However, it was also challenging for Syrians, specifically, to access these initiatives because they faced difficulties in paying for tickets online due to the lack of access to international credit cards resulting from banking restrictions and sanctions.

6. The Syrian Theater Beyond Borders

This section has been added to emphasize the importance of shedding light, even briefly, on the Syrian theatrical experience outside the geographical boundaries of the country. It consists of a series of three interviews conducted with cultural actors in Lebanon, France, and Germany to discuss some aspects of this research.

6.1 LEBANON

Osama Halal moved his theatrical experience with the Kon Troupe[38] to Beirut in 2013. He stated: “It became necessary to have a legal form for the troupe and a place, so it was licensed as a civil company representing an independent space in a city where everything is paid for. The production mechanisms there differ fundamentally from those in Syria, in addition to the presence of institutions that support independent art”

In Beirut, I started asking myself: Why do I work in theater, and what do I want? Considering the social and political role of theater, our work with the team focused on posing political questions and exploring social transformations on a human level. We begin the writing process with a blank page rather than a pre-existing script. We start with a question and present ideas collectively. By the end of rehearsals, the written and visual text is discovered through a collaborative process. One of our productions, *Above Zero* (2014-2018), resulted from workshops based on the poems of Brecht. Another work, *The Other Side of the Garden*, revolves around the central theme of loss. Currently, we are working on a new piece entitled *Sometimes Trees Dance*, addressing themes of memory, the city, and the demographic shifts and visual identity changes experienced by cities. The themes we tackle include migration, violence, fear, loss, and the preoccupations of every Syrian citizen.

In Beirut, Koon Lab was also established, consisting of a series of free workshops aimed at exchanging experiences for both amateurs and professionals. Later, a new program was designed to create financial sustainability for the troupe, representing a first step for artists to make a living from theater. However, for this to be realized, it is crucial that independent art spaces receive support from the government or municipalities and not be reliant solely on individual efforts.[39]

6.2 FRANCE

Jumana al-Yasiri considers that “The separation between what is happening in theatrical production inside Syria and outside of Syria is an artificial one. The mechanisms of scriptwriting, directing, and acting remain the same despite attempts to approximate the form of scriptwriting to the European style. The older generation of playwrights who established themselves in Syria carried their experiences with them abroad and founded Syrian entities in the usual manner they were accustomed to. However, they continued to face the problem of the new language and the difficulty of learning, which is not related to cultural assimilation, but rather to professional integration. This is especially true as production mechanisms in Europe are completely different from those in Syria, and thus the method of project execution varies. For example, in Germany, many Syrian artists introduced German personnel to their teams to be able to enter German production mechanisms and increase their chances of obtaining grants”

There is also Omar Abu Saada and Mohammed al-Attar, whose work is a continuation of an experience that began earlier in Syria with the Royal Court. In addition, Mohammed Al Rashi and Hala Imran were previously in contact in France due to their studies; Hala lived in France before 2011.

When Wael Qadour writes, even if he writes in Arabic for a French audience, his writing style minimally resembles French or modern German text in terms of writing style. He writes a French text in the Syrian dialect, employing a method aimed at reaching foreign spectators. Similarly, the use of subtitles or translation in Syrian productions targeting foreign audiences becomes a necessity over time, to the extent that subtitles become a character within the text. In other words, there is a structure of two overlapping texts.

Wael Ali, who has been working in France since 2007, always begins by asking: “As a Syrian, what does it mean for me to create theater in France today?” He connects the Syrian to the French, linking history together starting from the colonial period. Consequently, he veers away from directness when addressing the theme of the French researcher working on the manuscript of al-Daher Bibars.

The Syrian theatrical experience in France is different. For example, there are some European institutions that support artistically weak projects under the pretext of supporting refugees, thus promoting mediocrity. Some artists remain trapped in asylum and exile issues–a theme that has become less sought after and fashionable in European theater since 2020–due to their inability to integrate or create something new. Additionally, their lack of communication with other theatrical generations and their language barrier hinder them from integrating into European production mechanisms.

As for the audience, depending on the theater where the performance is programmed, the Syrian attendance is often limited compared to the French or multicultural audience. This point plays a role in attracting the audience, and the audience of a particular theater usually has a significant impact. This is an important and complex point. If we look at the colonial history in the region, how would a performance in Arabic, for example, appear in a prominent theater in Paris? This is a point that deserves consideration.

Concerning the pure Syrian audience, they often follow Syrian topics outside the artistic context within spaces of solidarity that support humanitarian issues. These spaces do not typically offer much in terms of artistic content. The Syrian community tends to be closed off and do not engage with the experiences of others.

This is based on the experience of playwrights from generations over the age of thirty-five, while the situation is entirely different with the younger generation. They have a different approach to learning mechanisms, language, and integration.[40]

6.3 GERMANY

Rania Mleihi divides the relationship of Syrian playwrights who migrated to Germany into two stages: "The first stage, before 2015, was limited to artists who spoke German and had previously established a network of professional relationships with Germany through study or work, including herself and Mey Seifan”

The second stage is after 2015 when European policies, especially in Germany, shifted towards Syrian refugees arriving in the country. A portion of the budget of the Ministry of Culture was allocated to emergency matters, supporting new incoming artists and enabling them to familiarize themselves with the production mechanisms in German theaters. Many Syrian artists seized the opportunities, regardless of their cultural background, and secured funding for their projects. In return, any German artist or theater group needed the presence of a Syrian artist to qualify for funding.

As for the application procedures for grants, it was somewhat of a shock for Syrians who were not accustomed to this process. While it was possible to secure funding, finding a rehearsal and performance space was not guaranteed.

Between 2015 and 2017, many German artists connected with Syrian peers. In Berlin, for instance, the "exile ensemble" was established as part of the “Maxim Gorki Theater” which presents a diverse repertoire based on immigrant artists and diversity within the team. Consequently, language proficiency became a challenge, as did leveraging one's Syrian identity in such a prominent and historic theater. Nevertheless, this presence was seen as an opportunity that should be seized.

In Berlin, there is the headquarters of Nors Foundation, which is an initiative aimed at integrating Syrian artists into the German system and familiarizing them with the legal frameworks for artistic and cultural work. It also emphasizes the necessity of acquiring health insurance.

The Barzakh Foundation administers multiple performing arts projects, notably including the Qaf Project for Theatrical Readings. Tanween Group, by Mey Seifan and Ziad Adwan, receive funding from the German Ministry of Culture.

In Munich, dramaturge Rania Mleihi works in the Münchner Kammerspiele Theater. She is, in fact, the first foreign dramaturge to work at the City Theater Staatstheater, and her work in Germany is a continuation of her work in Syria due to her pre-existing network of relationships and language proficiency.

In Mülheim, the first integrated theater group was established following the invitation of An Der Ruhr Theater. This group is called Maklouba Collective, founded by Mudar Alhaggi and Amal Omran.

This pertains to the groups. As for individuals, Syrian artists often focus on themes such as refuge, revolution, and the concept of the victim. It seems as if they are living within their own bubble, with their audience primarily composed of Syrians, marking a total absence of targeting the German audience. To address this issue, the crucial questions to ask are: What do we offer? And for whom are we presenting Syrian theater in Germany?

In an attempt to answer these questions, it is evident that what is being presented is not necessarily art or theater, especially given the conventional presentation style. On the one hand, Syrian artists often do not spectate German theatrical productions, and they do not learn the language. The German audience, on the other hand, is not accustomed to long dialogues without visual scenes. Consequently, the form of the presentation creates a gap between Syrian artists and the German audience.

There is, indeed, a noticeable phenomenon related to integration. Individuals in their early twenties and below the age of 35 are more flexible and adaptable to the language, the German system, new production mechanisms, and dramaturgies than older ones. This, in turn, affects the response to the previously posed questions: What do we offer? How? And for whom are we presenting Syrian theater in Germany?[41]

CONCLUSION

If the mechanisms of theatrical production in Lebanon differ from those in Syria, how do they compare to Europe?[42]

As evidenced by the preceding discussion, Jumana al-Yasiri and Rania Mleihi demonstrate significant alignment in their perspectives regarding artists' experiences in Germany and France. This includes the generation’s ability to integrate into the European production system, the mechanisms of new dramaturgical writing, and the varying degrees of success among individuals. In addition, there is an emphasis on the necessity of distinguishing between good and mediocre art based on the scale of European funding. Additionally, this applies to the audience following both in Germany and France. Mleihi also reinforces the idea of Syrian theater presentations in a renowned German theater, especially in the global city and, at the same time, the capital of Syrian diaspora, Berlin. This corresponds to the concept mentioned by Jumana al-Yasiri, particularly the unequal relationship between the West and the East.

Alaa al-Dine al-Alam argues that “the most significant development that has occurred in Syrian theater in Europe after seeking refuge is the image of the artist itself. Previously, they dealt with the artist as a theater artist coming from Syria, expressing his own conception and vision. However today, the artist is molded with the identity of the refugee artist, or the artist refugee. According to the European spectator’s perspective,

Performing Arts In Jordan Between 2007–2022

Introduction

Jordan differs from Syria in that there is no annual theatrical repertoire produced by the Ministry of Culture, as is the case in Syria, where most theatrical productions are created for participation in festivals only. The reason for this may be attributed to the end of the cultural prosperity that Jordan experienced during the 1990s. This period witnessed a widespread and flourishing Jordanian theater scene after the Gulf War, due to the low demand for Jordanian TV productions in the Arab region. This led artists to focus on theater, and theater troupes emerged, producing many plays, often supported by the Ministry of Culture, which organized cultural festivals in general and theatrical festivals in particular.[44] However, this prosperity did not last long; it declined at the beginning of the second millennium, along with the economic, political, and, consequently, social decline.

Abdul Salam Qubailat opines that "there is no foundational theater movement in Jordan due to the absence of a mass audience, and theatrical activities are primarily concentrated in the capital and limited to festivals"[45]

1. Between Heritage and Modernity

Here, I will attempt to adhere to the same categorization used for Syria:

1.1 SCRIPTS

- 1.1.1 Foreign classics translated with adaptations that involve abridgment of the original text, usually in Standard Arabic, which adheres to the literary nature of the theatrical text, affecting performance mechanisms, as seen in most of the works directed by Hussein Nafe', which were based on Spanish theatrical literature.
- 1.1.2 Adaptations of foreign classics with contemporary overlays, most of them with political and social themes addressing the concerns and issues of the Arab world and Jordan, such as *A Night in Taybe* based on *Oedipus Rex*, *Hamlet Reconstructed* based on *Hamlet*, *Symphony of Blood…Macbeth* adapted from *Macbeth* by Hakeem Hareb, *The Three Penny Opera* by Zaid Khalil Mustafa, *Payback* based on *Dario Fo* by Abdul Salam Qubailat, and others.
- 1.1.3 Texts written for children's theater, derived from international and Arab folktales.
- 1.1.4 Local writing that critiques the Arab political and social reality, indirectly reflecting on the Jordanian situation, such as *Divine* and *A Citizen Named H* by Mohammad Aldamour, *And You Will Wash, Jordan River* by Hakeem Hareb, *The Necklace of Blood by Majd Al Qasas*, *A Void in the Fifth Season* and *Jacob's Ladder* by Hakim Masoud, *Now I Understand You* by Moussa Hajazin, *Sea and Sand* by Abdul Salam Qubailat.
- 1.1.5 Arab texts such as *Rituals of Signs and Transformations* directed by Zaid Khalil Mustafa in 2008 and *Mischievous Dreams* directed by Nabeel Al-Khatib in 2009, and others.

1.2 TYPES OF SHOWS

1.2.1 Musical Theater

If Petra Speaks (2009) tells the story of the Arab Nabateans in Petra, highlighting their lifestyle, values, and unique culture. It reflects their scientific progress in extracting water and introducing it into the rocks and their great concern for peace and justice.[46]

Night of Joy (2015) revolves around the old customs and traditions of Jordanian weddings and celebrations, featuring recorded videos of Jordanian and Bedouin weddings, the wedding events, a variety of folk dances, songs, and popular dances.

Love Story of Jordan (2018) deals with human belonging, emotions, and homeland, presenting traditional Jordanian songs in a musical-theatrical performance.

These aim to engage the audience, introduce them to Jordanian heritage, and shed light on the present through folk songs and tunes from the countryside, the desert, and the contemporary scene.

1.2.2 Ballet Productions

These are primarily performed by the National Center for Culture and Arts and most are designed and directed by Rania Qamhawi, the head of the Dance and Ballet Department at the center, including productions like *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Princess* (2010), *Scheherazade*, and *Coppelia* (2014), featuring students from the center and the Musk Troupe.[47]

1.2.3 Monodramas

Monodramas are rare; some recent works are Juliet Awwad's experiment with *Cake Mold*, Asmaa Mustafa in *Adrenaline*, and Sawsan Drouza's experiment with Sandra Madi in *Afflicted with Clarity*. Notably, these are women acting and directing experiments.

1.2.4 School Theater

Focusing on teaching students in private and public schools acting skills and public speaking, among other artistic activities, most private schools are equipped with theaters. Schools such as the Amman National School, the American School, Montessori School, Teresanta School, Amman Ahliyya School, and Baccalaureate School have dedicated budgets for school theater productions, unlike public schools.

1.2.5 Interactive Theater

The National Interactive Theater Team[48] presents its interactive performances throughout the year in Amman and many other governorates; in addition, it has its external engagements[49] under the Performing Arts Center umbrella.

1.2.6 Contemporary dance productions

Contemporary dance productions are supported by Rania Qamhawi through the National Center for Culture and Arts; numerous workshops are conducted every year by international choreographers. In addition, there is the Amman Contemporary Dance Festival,[50] which has produced four Jordanian dance productions since its inception. And there is the "Maharjaan - Jordan Contemporary Dance Festival" a Jordanian non-profit dance festival dedicated to contemporary dance; its main aim is supporting the local Jordanian dance scene. It was established in 2014 by a group of young Jordanian dancers. It is the only dance festival in Jordan that focuses on the practice of contemporary dance in the Arab region, including practices of performance, choreography, dramaturgy, stage design, lighting, and sound.[51]

1.2.7 Children's Theater

This also depends on the shows during festivals held in various Jordanian cities.

1.2.8 Storytelling

Several cultural institutions, such as Al-Balad Theater[52] and the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, are involved in this category. There are also initiatives funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

1.2.9 Traditional Folk Dance

The Hanoun Dance Troupe and the al-Nashama Dance Troupe, among others, fall under this category.

1.3 THEMES

1.3.1 Heritage and Celebrating Victories

Drawing from Jordanian popular traditions, heritage, and celebrations, theatrical texts transform these elements into a captivating visual spectacle. They also draw inspiration from Sufi poetry and the Jordanian Kingdom's ancient history, such as the play *Shadows of the Villages* by the Taqous group, directed by Abdul Karim al-Jurah, which glorifies and talks about the history of Ma'shi al-Dhubi'ani, an ancient king of eastern Jordan who recorded his victories with the Hebrews. This includes his plays *Ma'shi Stays Alive* and *And You Shall Wash, O Jordan River* by Hakim Harb. From the history of the establishment of the Jordanian state, as part of the kingdom's centenary celebrations, there is *Birds of Babel* by director Firas al-Rimawi, written by Iyad Al-Rimawi, which highlights the achievements of the martyrs of the Jordanian Air Force, Mufeq al-Salti, Firas al-Ajlouni, and Ma'ad al-Kassasbeh.

1.3.4 The Palestinian cause

This category includes works like *Events in Paradise* by Zaid Khalil Mustafa, *Return to Haifa* by Yahya al-Bashtawi, *Caricature* by Majd al-Qasas, and other productions. Their production in Jordan relates to the demographic situation and the Palestinian roots of a significant portion of the population. Majd al-Qasas believes that "playwrights should take responsibility for reminding future generations of reality and the Palestinian issue so they do not forget, and the struggle continues"[53]

1.3.5 Women's issues

Shows on women issues address social, political, religious, and the ethical domination of women. Some shows discuss the status of women throughout history and their role in the Palestinian cause.

CONCLUSION

Most of the productions involve a mix of various elements, combining theatrical performance, dance, music, singing, and presentation, while also incorporating heritage. Consequently, their artistic identity becomes blurred, making them difficult to classify under a specific genre.

As for language, there are two trends: the first is the use of Modern Standard Arabic, considered the official language of theater. It is referred to as "serious theater" by Jordanian playwrights. The second is the use of colloquial language or the language of daily life, known as "popular theater" According to Dr. Najwa Qandil, this language is more accessible and encourages audience engagement,[54] making it more attractive for Jordanian spectators who might otherwise be deterred by formal Arabic, which creates a linguistic barrier.

2. Economics of Culture

2.1 CULTURAL PRODUCTION[55]

The Ministry of Culture is the primary official government supporter of various cultural and artistic projects in Jordan. It provides financial and logistical support to hundreds of cultural associations, artistic groups, and creative organizations.[56] There are over 700 cultural associations in Jordan operating in various cultural and creative domains. Additionally, some private-sector entities, such as banks, telecommunications companies, media organizations, and hotels, also contribute to cultural initiatives. Major companies like the Cairo Amman Bank, the Zara Investment Foundation, Orange and Zain telecommunications, Unique Business Group, and the daily newspaper *al-Ghad*[57] have supported cultural activities in Jordan.

Recently, cultural partnerships and international agreements have been established with the Arab Theater Authority and foreign cultural centers and embassies.

"The financial support provided by the Ministry for professional production amounts to approximately 9,000 Jordanian Dinars (equivalent to 12,700 US dollars), while support for children's shows ranges from 6,000 to 8,000 Jordanian Dinars, and support for youth productions is around 5,000 Jordanian Dinars"[58]

Jordan differs from Syria in terms of its openness to various sources of funding from the Arab region, the European Union, and the presence of numerous cultural partnerships and international agreements specific to cultural exchange.

When asked about their reliance on production grants, Jordanian playwrights Majd al-Qasas and Abdel Salam Qubailat expressed concerns about the sources of funding for these grants and the fear that they might come from American cultural institutions or institutions that have normalized relations with the Zionist entity. In their view, this is a sufficient reason for artists to avoid such funding and rely on local sources. They also pointed out the difficulties in filling out grant applications, which often require the use of the English language, a skill that many artists do not possess fluently.[59]

Regarding marketing, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for purchasing productions from playwrights for showcasing outside the festival framework.

3. The Right to Culture

3.1 THE AUDIENCE

All Jordanian directors I interviewed during this research project share a common perspective regarding the theatrical audience during festivals. They believe that it consists of "artists who watch each other's works for the sake of mutual praise and perpetuating the same game" This situation is convenient for organizers who deceive themselves and their institutions by inviting Arab artists to participate and exchange invitations. They maintain total control, hindering any potential for theater development"[60]

Abdel Salam Qubailat further states that "the theatrical movement is absent in Jordan, and its presence is contingent on two societal factors: first, the availability of plays with regular performances throughout the year, and second, an audience willing to buy tickets to watch the show. Here, it is not about

commercial motives, but rather the presence of a prior decision and desire to attend the theater"[61]

Majd al-Qasas adds that "the Jordanian audience is not accustomed to buying tickets. As long as there is no ticket, there is no theater in Jordan. Therefore, private theater spaces are threatened by their inability to sustain continuity"[62] The absence of ticket culture is attributed to the high-income tax on tickets.[63] Theater is an artistic product, and this product should have a value that changes some of the behaviors related to attendance etiquette; behaviors should impose certain viewing rules and respect for the artistic work. Artistic work is not valued when it is presented for free.

Other factors that lead the audience to stay away from theatrical events include the "conservative nature of the Jordanian people, who continue to assess all forms of art from a conservative religious and social perspective. They shy away from performances that contain 'visual audacity' in terms of the actors' clothing or actions on stage. The head of the family, for example, sets off to the theater as a moral guardian, and if he does not find anything that offends his sensibilities, he returns the next day to attend the show with his family"[64] Khalid al-Tarifi agrees with this view, stating that "90% of the Jordanian audience is bound by religious concepts and sees theater as sinful and indecent"[65] Additionally, the language issue, as mentioned previously, causes the audience to shy away from Modern Standard Arabic and the "distant theater" bringing them closer to colloquial language that mirrors their daily lives.

Raed Asefowr believes that "building an audience base requires time and effort depending on the project's vision and choices. Some events cater to the youth, such as music concerts, while others target families and children, like the 'Hikayat' festival, which has built its audience over time. However, theater requires more effort to reach its audience and often involves ticket sales. Nevertheless, some local theaters occasionally reach out to the audience for free, especially in open spaces and public squares"[66] They actively engage with communities in villages and other cities through collaborations with associations and institutions.

3.2 THEATER SPACES

There are several equipped theater spaces in Jordan, most of them concentrated in the capital, Amman, including:

- ***The Royal Cultural Center,*** which houses the main theater and the round theater.
- **Osama Al-Masheeni Theater**, affiliated with the Department of Culture and Arts.[67]
- **Shams Theater.**
- **The Performing Arts Center at the Noor Al-Hussein Foundation**, managed by Lena Tal.
- **The Hussein Cultural Theater**, under the Greater Amman Municipality.[68]

3.3 FESTIVALS

Notable theater festivals in Jordan include:

- The Jordanian Theater Festival, organized annually by the Ministry of Culture. It features local and Arab dramatic works and has taken on an Arab identity since its ninth edition in 2001. Arab productions now compete for its awards, and it hosts parallel theatrical shows and main intellectual discussions, as well as critical discussions for all participating theatrical productions. The festival aims to create a sense of collaboration between Jordanian and Arab theater practitioners to enhance the Jordanian and Arab theatrical movement.[69]
- **The Amman Youth Theater Festival.**
- **The Children's Theater Festival.**
- **Amman Theater Days**, organized by the Fawanees Theater Group, has evolved from a local festival in the mid-80s to an international event in 1994. However, it ceased to operate after the late director Nader Omran resigned from its administration. He cited reaching a point of despair as the reason. Another notable festival is the International Free Theater Nights Festival, organized by the Free Theater Group since 2006, featuring experimental theater productions for both adults and children.
- **"The Taqus Rituals" Theater Festival.**
- **Jerash Festival.**[70]
- **Another festival is the Amman Contemporary Dance Festival.** It is a global Jordanian event; it was first held in Amman in April 2009. It is organized by the National Center for Culture and Performing Arts in cooperation with the Greater Amman Municipality, the Dutch Embassy, and the Korean Embassy in Amman. It aims to introduce the Jordanian audience to the techniques and aesthetics of contemporary dance; and it provide opportunities for Jordanian artists to attend workshops in contemporary dance and benefit from the experiences of the participating troupes.[71]

Regarding theater festivals specifically, there is a recurring issue addressed by Abdul Salam Qubailat, highlighting the repetitive presence of the same theater groups and shows across various Arab theater festivals. This trend restricts opportunities for new productions deserving participation and exposure. He also points out that "the Arab Theater Authority introduced negative traditions into the theater, emphasizing public relations and involvement in the selection of shows"[72]

3.4 PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING OR AUDIENCE ATTRACTION

Most promotional and advertising efforts for theatrical productions primarily rely on social media; in addition, they rely on festival brochures, local radio, and local TV channels such as Ro'ya TV and newspapers. In Syria, as in many other countries, Facebook is a key platform for cultural, artistic, and theatrical promotion.

4. Alliances

"The Ministry of Culture in Jordan actively engages in strengthening cultural relations with many countries, regional and international organizations, and participating in various regional and international conferences and workshops. Jordan is a member of numerous regional and international cultural committees"[72]

4.1 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Civil society organizations have a presence in the cultural and artistic field, with Noor al-Hussein Foundation being a significant contributor to artistic production in general and theater in particular.

However, the impact of civil society on cultural work is scattered and has not yet moved towards advocating for a comprehensive cultural policy that promotes cultural rights and enhances cultural work. The focus is on providing more independence to this type of work.[74]

4.2 ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND CULTURAL CENTERS

Academic institutions and cultural centers play a crucial role in nurturing the theater scene in Jordan. Some of the notable institutions include:

- **The Department of Performing Arts** at the University of Jordan.
- **The Faculty of Fine Arts** at the Yarmouk University.
- **The Department of Performing and Theater Design** at the Amman Private University.
- **The National Center for Culture** and Performing Arts, also known as the **Performing Arts Center,**[75] offers academic training for youth and children in the fields of performing arts, folk arts, performing arts, dance, and ballet. It organizes international events such as the International Arab Youth Conference and the Amman International Contemporary Dance Festival. The Center also conducts local and regional training workshops, including interactive theater, drama in education, public speaking, and audience communication skills.
- **Haya Cultural Center,**[76] which specializes in working with children.
- **The Department of Culture and Arts**[77] under the Ministry of Culture serves as an umbrella for cultural activities in Jordan and focuses on cultural and artistic affairs. It consists of three main departments: Culture and Arts, Libraries and National Documents, and the Youth Care Foundation.
- **The Performing Arts Center**, part of the Queen Noor Foundation for Arts Expression, is dedicated to the performing arts, including theatrical productions and contemporary dance.[78]
- **Al-Balad Theater**, which holds a local, regional, and international artistic vision and serves as a major station for artists and groups from all directions. It acts as a meeting point between artists from the East, West, North, South, and everywhere in between, connecting them with the Jordanian and Arab audience to achieve cultural, intellectual, and artistic growth. The theater benefits from Jordan's geographic proximity to neighboring Arab countries.[79]

4.3 THEATRICAL GROUPS

Most of them are licensed as non-profit civil society organizations by the Ministry of Culture. Consequently, they receive financial support from the Ministry of Culture, in addition to support from the Greater Amman Municipality, private companies, telecommunications companies, and banks such as Arab Bank and Union Bank, which are mentioned as supporters of various theatrical productions. Some of the most important and effective ones at the moment include: the Free Theater Group, Rituals Theater Group led by Firas al-Raymoni and Abdul Kareem Jurah, On Wood Theater Group led by Zaid Mustafa Khalil, Shams Theater led by Abdul Salam Qubailat, Modern Theater Group led by Majd al-Qasas, and Nomads' Lab Theater Group led by Hakim Harb.

Most of these theater groups usually present their performances at annual festivals organized by the Directorate of Arts and Theater; alternatively, they organize their own events, depending on the financial support they receive from official institutions like the Ministry of Culture, the Greater Amman Municipality, in addition to local banks and companies. Some of the most well-known festivals where these groups often showcase their work include the Jordanian Theater Festival, Amman Theater Festival, Children's Theater Festival, Amman Theater Days by the Fawanees Theater Group, Free Theater Nights Festival, and Taqus Rituals Theater Festival.

4.4 FOREIGN CULTURAL CENTERS

The private non-governmental organizations and international representatives of foreign cultural centers in Jordan strategies are typically driven by their directors' or founders' interests. These organizations usually express an interest in supporting a wide range of activities that range from general culture and heritage to contemporary art events. Major funding organizations, like the national cultural institutes in the European Union and the European Union itself, play a significant role in defining the strategies and annual vision for these centers.[80]

For instance,[81] "the American Cultural Center recently organized the "Nabad" festival in collaboration with Zaal and Khedra Art Production Company.[82] The festival relied on classical American texts prepared by students and enthusiasts, addressing social and awareness-raising themes such as love, disability, spinsterhood, addiction, cancer, and the challenges of patients in a mental health hospital. The productions were showcased at the Royal Cultural Center"[83]

Moreover, there is the Spanish cultural center, Cervantes, which has supported a significant number of productions. These include productions by the director Hussein Nafaa based on classical Spanish texts, including *Yerma* (1997), *The Amazing Shako* (2006), *House of Bernarda Alba* (2007), *Blood Wedding* (2009), *So Passed Five Years* (2011), and *Mariana* (2013).

The British Council, as part of its interactive educational theater initiative, collaborates with the Performing Arts Center under the Noor al-Hussein Foundation to deliver works tailored for schools and social institutions.

Foreign cultural centers abroad typically support texts by writers of their own countries, and as a result, there is apprehension among Jordanian directors when seeking support from these centers. This hesitation stems from concerns that such centers may interfere with the artistic process or may not prioritize support for local projects that are not directly related to their own cultures. Additionally, internal policies and affiliations tend to influence cultural alliances. For example, the American Cultural Center, as an organization, might avoid collaborating with cultural institutions that are open to Russia.[84]

4.5 LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

"There is collaboration between non-governmental organizations, representatives, international cultural centers, as well as local government bodies, in addition to the Ministry of Culture and the Greater Amman Municipality. Some private companies and banks have also demonstrated participation in the artistic and cultural sectors. Their activities include funding exhibitions in the commercial sector, as well as organizing workshops, festivals, and performances.[85]"

For instance, there is the Al-Balad Theater, built on various partnerships with local, Arab, and international platforms since its inception. Another example, the "Hikayat" festival is based on sharing vision, resources, design, and developing resource search mechanisms among local and Arab institutions. This has contributed to the continuity of the project for 15 years. Thanks to horizontal partnership mechanisms rather than vertical ones, Al-Balad Theater has entered into various alliances. It is a member of the "Tamashee" coalition, the only Arab coalition that includes ten institutions from the Arab region with a shared vision, shared funding, and a free vision. Through ideas, consultations, resources, and management, the founders were able to find solutions to this massive coalition that started in 2000, officially announced in 2007.[86]

Additionally, Al-Balad Theater has a partnership with the Arab Center for Theater Training, where it is one of the founding members. It is also involved in the *Return to the House* project.

5. The Impact of Digitization

Regarding the digitization of theatrical performances, we observe two cases: the 27th Jordan Festival in 2020 and the Youth Free Theater Festival during the same period.[87] The "participating shows in the season were broadcast online on the Ministry of Culture's website, the Arab Theater Authority's website, and the International Theater Authority's website"[88] Most of these were productions created before the pandemic,[89] but they were not presented to the audience due to the closure of theaters at the beginning of the pandemic. Therefore, they cannot be classified as shows specifically produced for online presentation during the closure. Instead, they were performances that participated in the festival and were staged on the theater platform without an audience. They were then broadcast through electronic websites and social media platforms.

The same applies to traditional dramaturgies that have not undergone any changes to adapt to digital broadcasting during the lockdown. Works that were classified under contemporary themes or reflections on the current reality are exceptions. For example, *Contact Line* by Ali Alyan from the Free Theater, directed by Firas al-Masri, addresses the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the world through various signals. This cannot be classified within traditional dramaturgies, as Majd al-Qasas did in my personal interviews with her and in her research entitled "The Impact of Pandemics on Theater Between Past and Present; "In reality, it did not affect the form of theatrical writing, but it was rather a theme addressed in the background of the main event"

In her research, Majd raises some important questions regarding the production format and the virtual relationship between the sender and the receiver during the pandemic.

> *"Did the workers in the Jordanian theater, especially at the time of the spread of Covid-19, have to resort to new means of communication with the audience? Will these alternatives created by writers and directors persist after the end of the pandemic, or will they disappear with the disappearance of the cause? Have workers in the Jordanian theater suffered psychologically and economically due to the pandemic? Has the theater lost the conditions of its existence represented in its triad: script - actor - audience? What happened to the script at the time of Covid-19? How did the online broadcasting of theatrical works affect the performance of the actor? Can it compensate for the stage? And can they achieve the same results as in live performances? When the shows moved to the virtual space through online broadcasting, how did the relationship with the audience change through the two-dimensional screen? And through television or cinematic transmission techniques and specific shots for the space?"*[90]

It concludes with results indicating that theater without a live audience loses its reason for existence and transforms into a completely different form of art, two-dimensional, affecting the viewer's interaction with the performance and also impacting the performer in terms of the absence of stimulation from not seeing the actor's reactions to the audience in the hall and hearing their applause at the end of the show.

The Free Theater Festival broadcasted its performances without an audience to the virtual world using electronic platforms in France, the United States, and Egypt, as well as the Cultural Circle platform for the Greater Amman Municipality and the Free Theater platforms on social media.

> *"We can observe that the festival was not only presented to the Jordanian audience but extended to the Arab and international world. This is a noteworthy achievement for the troupe, which managed to broaden its audience from local to Arab and international levels"*

According to the team's report, they were able to achieve over 16,000 views on these platforms within six days during this short period. (...) This audience number is not achievable by any theater in the world even during a live performance in the same duration. But the question now arises: Does virtual viewing achieve the same results as in-person theater attendance? And can television filming achieve the same perspectives for the audience inside the theater?[91]

The result could be a good film with advanced digital techniques, but it bears no resemblance to the theater at all.

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3 The Show Duration set at 3 Hours with a Break.

4 Motion Theater.

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6 Affiliated with the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus. Despite the presence of a ballet school.

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8 http://wehda.alwehda.gov.sy/?p=5787

9 Established in 1960.

10 Established in 1968

11 Established in 1995

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15 Ali, Alisar. "The Theater Inside Syria After the Revolution" September 5, 2019, Untold Story, a website.

16 Graduation performances of the institute's students under the supervision of Fayez Qazq and Samer Imran as a model.

17 محد إسماعيل، سامر. المسرح السوري في الحرب، جبهة مفتوحة ودائمة مع ثقافة الموت، مركز دمشق للأبحاث والدراسات، دمشق، 2019 ، صفحة 12.

18 The overall budget of the Syrian Ministry of Culture reached 2135 million Syrian pounds in 2009. From: Syria by Reem Al Khatib and Rana Yazaji published in 'Cultural Policies in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. An introduction', Cultural Resource/European Cultural Foundation, Bookmanstudies, 2010, 179-180.

19 Cultural Policies in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia An Introduction Culture Resource (Al Mawred Al Thaqafy), European Cultural Foundation, Boekmanstudies.

20 The Directorate of Theaters and Music, Opera House, as an example.

21 Television Series Production Company.

22 حميدي، بسام. مسرح الطفل ليس عملاً تجارياً لإضحاك الصغار، 17/5/2021، موقع نيولي الالكتروني.

23 There are art galleries that adopt theatrical activities as alternative venues, but they are not equipped with the necessary technical equipment, which consequently must be rented from private companies.

24 Regulatory interventions include prohibiting the placement of the donor institution's logo on the brochure and poster of the presentation.

25 For example, the capacity of Al-Hamra Theater in Damascus is 550 seats.

26 Reserved for training sessions and graduation performances, rarely do they present on their stages theatrical works other than, or rather, works that are not produced by the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts.

27 The Directorate of Fine Arts, affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, specializes in art and visual exhibitions. Galleries inform it of their artistic activities on a specific date, and often there is no scrutiny of the nature of this activity, so it is not subject to text and presentation control.

28 Cultural Policies in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia An Introduction Culture Resource (Al Mawred Al Thaqafy), European Cultural Foundation, Boekmanstudies, p. 190

29 Both are private universities that include a college of arts.

30 She recently moved her work to the United Arab Emirates.

31 Each of these institutes is facing financial difficulties that threaten their continuity.

32 An artistic union was established in 2017, working on documenting audiovisual memory, presenting theatrical readings, and conducting specialized training workshops in theater and interactive therapeutic theater.

33 From the introductory statement of the network and its objectives.

34 A popular narrative performed by actors on stage, with the audience influencing its events. https://alarab.news

35 https://www.ypeer-syria.org/about

36 It has branches in several provinces in Syria.

37 The Syrian Internet in Times of War," Maher Salam, December 21, 2015, UltraSawt, Website.

38 Which started in Damascus in 2002.

39 Exclusive interview with Osama Halal, August 2022.

40 Exclusive interview with Jumana Al-Yasiri, August 2022.

41 Exclusive interview with Rania Mleehi, August 2022.

42 Example of the Syrian Arts and Culture Festival (SACF) in London or Celebrating Syria in Manchester.

43 Alaaddin Eddine al-Alam, "The Syrian Theater Opens its Behind-the-Scenes in Europe,' December 28, 2021, Qalamon, website.

44 Essayid. Hatem - History of the Arts in Jordan, website of the Jordanian Ministry of Culture.

45 Exclusive interview with Dr. Abdul Salam Qubailat - May 2022.

46 عياد، جمال- تواصل الاستعدادات لتقديم المسرحية الغنائية "بترا إن حكت"- 6/10/2009- الرأي- موقع الكتروني

47 The National Center for Culture and Arts established it in 1996, comprising twenty highly skilled dancers in the arts of ballet.

48 Established in 1989.

49 خضر، محمد جميل- التل: المسرح التفاعلي جزءا جماليا من مشاريع التنمية المستدامة- 25/7/2011- الغد- موقع الكتروني

50 Established in 2009.

51 مهرجان ملتقى الرقص المعاصر الدولي- حكمت الثقافة - موقع الكتروني

52 Tales Festival

53 A personal interview with Dr. Majd Al-Qasas - May 2022.

54 A personal interview with Najwa Qandqaji - May 2022.

55 Public budget for culture (2016) : $10 773 590, Of which: $391 664 allocated to cultural institutions and $1 972 411 dedicated to the support and empowerment of cultural and creative projects & activities. Ref. Jordan country report 2018 (Medculture), p.9.

56 مئوية الدولة الأردنية- قطاع الثقافة- موقع الكتروني

57 المسح الاستكشافي للسياسات الثقافية في الأردن، سماح حجاوي، نوال علي، آلاء يونس، رائد إبراهيم، 2009- 2015، المورد الثقافي، اتجاهات ثقافة مستقلة، صفحة 22

58 Exclusive interview with director Mohammed Al-Asha - May 2022.

59 This hypothesis is supported by the quantitative data provided by the team participating in this research, as the percentage of beneficiaries of the Afac grants in Jordan (2010-2022) is very modest compared to those from Syria.

60 منير، محمود- مسرح المهرجانات في الأردن، إقصاء الجمهور- 19 سبتمبر 2019، العربي الجديد، موقع الكتروني

61 See the previous source.

62 Exclusive interview with Majd Al-Qisas - May 2022

63 See the previous source.

64 Exclusive interview with Abdul Salam Qubailat - May 2022.

65 Exclusive interview with Khaled Al-Tarifi - May 2022.

66 Exclusive interview with Raed Asfour - August 2022.

67 Established in 1996.

68 I could not obtain accurate information about the programming of these theaters and the frequency of shows in them. However, it is evident that they are the main spaces used for various cultural events in the capital, Amman, especially various types of festivals, which are numerous.

69 The website of the Jordanian Ministry of Culture.

70 Established in 1981.

71 المسح الاستكشافي للسياسات الثقافية في الأردن، سماح حجاوي، نوال علي، آلاء يونس، رائد إبراهيم، 2009- 2015، المورد الثقافي، اتجاهات ثقافة مستقلة، صفحة 58

72 Exclusive interview with Abdul Salam Qubilat, May 2022.

73 مئوية الدولة الأردنية- قطاع الثقافة- موقع الكتروني

74 السكري، سهاد، دراسة حول الإطار القانوني الناظم للعمل الثقافي في الأردن، المورد الثقافي، 2013، صفحة 12

75 Established in 1987 under the direction of Queen Noor Al Hussein, and in 2009, it became the branch of the International Theater Institute affiliated with UNESCO.

76 Established in 1976.

77 Established in 1966.

78 المسح الاستكشافي للسياسات الثقافية في الأردن، سماح حجاوي، نوال علي، آلاء يونس، رائد إبراهيم، 2009- 2015، المورد الثقافي، اتجاهات ثقافة مستقلة، صفحة 58

79 مسرح البلد- موقع الكتروني

80 علي، عواد- بعد مئة عام.. هل استطاع المسرح الأردني تأسيس تقاليد راسخة؟ مسرح بدأ في الكنائس جمع المسلمين بالمسيحيين- 11/4/2021، العرب، موقع الكتروني

81 المسح الاستكشافي للسياسات الثقافية في الأردن، سماح حجاوي، نوال علي، آلاء يونس، رائد إبراهيم، 2009- 2015، المورد الثقافي، اتجاهات ثقافة مستقلة، صفحة 57

82 A comedic duo consisting of Hassan Sbayla and Rania Ismail presents purposeful interactive plays, social comedy series, informative scenes, and theatrical arts training.

83 Exclusive interview with Najwa Qandakji, May 2022.

84 Exclusive interview with Abdul Salam Qubailat, May 2022.

85 المسح الاستكشافي للسياسات الثقافية في الأردن، سماح حجاوي، نوال علي، آلاء يونس، رائد إبراهيم، 2009- 2015، المورد الثقافي، اتجاهات ثقافة مستقلة، صفحة 58

86 Exclusive interview with Raed Asfour, August 2022.

87 https://alrai.com/article/10553668/ثقافة-وفنون/انطلاق-ليالي-المسرح-الحر-تحت-شعار-الوضع-كوفيد 19-

88 المسرح الأردني يشهد طفرة إنتاجية ويستنجد بالفضاء الافتراضي- 2/12/2020- موقع نيولي الالكتروني

89 As mentioned earlier, most theatrical productions in Jordan are created for participation in festivals rather than as a theatrical repertoire

90 القصص، مجد- أثر الأوبئة على المسرح بين الماضي والحاضر- بحث غير منشور- 2022- صفحة 6

91 المصدر السابق، صفحة 21

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2

PERFORMING ARTS IN GULF AND IRAQ

by Mohammed Sef

Iraqi Theater at an Intersection of Paths

We will explore the world of performing arts, beginning with its state prior to 2003. This encompasses theater groups, concepts, and production mechanisms, enabling us to understand the essence of Iraqi theater after this pivotal year. This period was marked by uncertainty, confusion, and chaos, making it challenging to provide a singular description, especially when it comes to Iraqi theater. According to Dr. Beshar Oleiwe, everyone involved in Iraqi cultural affairs "has not yet agreed upon a specific description for the post-2003 era. (...) Terms like 'change,' 'post-dictatorship,' 'after the Iraq occupation,' 'liberation,' 'post-2003,' 'April 9, 2003,' and others, signify a new phase in Iraqi culture, and that includes theater" In this paper, we aim to dissect Iraqi theater's intellectual discourse during this phase and its characteristics in various theatrical performances staged in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities.[1] But, what exactly has changed, and how? And on what basis? We understand that discussing this period necessitates a return to its origins, which are the preceding experiences of Iraqi theater. That is because we cannot ignore the foundational aspects of the Iraqi theatrical experience under the umbrella of change. Secondly, this period cannot erase or overshadow the collective memory of the early pioneers' experiences that shaped Iraqi theater and its teachings. Additionally, this era and its experiences were firmly rooted in the soil of Iraqi theater; they did not deviate from its teachings, struggles, and the genuine pain of its true mentors. Finally, no matter how much we try to obscure the events preceding this era, whether intentionally or not, we must acknowledge that erasing the rich history of Iraqi theater and its pioneering experiments is impossible.

Nevertheless, given that Iraqi theater has been somewhat explored, analyzed, and given its due recognition, this piece aims to shed light on theater in Iraq after 2003. We are not just looking at Iraqi theater as a whole, but we are delving into the changes and transformations that occurred during this period across society—socially, politically, religiously, and artistically. This approach seeks to provide a more comprehensive insight into all its variables and challenges.

After 2003, performance arts found themselves at a critical juncture, where various paths converged and overlapped, shaping the contemporary Iraqi theater scene within the same social and political contexts of the country. The nation, more fragmented than ever due to successive wars, the former dictatorial regime, and the American invasion, descended into chaos after its infrastructure was obliterated by devastating bombing campaigns. The invasion also led to the creation of makeshift political and religious structures, paving the way for various religious factions with their multiple militias to spread across the country. As a result, ambiguity and confusion pervade the public sphere, where there are no longer singular Iraqis but multiple, and not just one Muslim identity but several ones: Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Turkmen, and so on.

Interpretation now poses a greater threat to politics than it does to religion. This division has torn Iraqis apart. Instead of bridging the gap between political and religious aspects, the cycle of killing, bloodshed, and brutality continued among Iraqis, to the point where it became the most reactive and influential and active compound.

Every faction in the ongoing conflict seeks power. Accordingly, are we, then, compelled to discuss the wreckage of both politics and religion, which inadvertently exposes everything hidden beneath the surface? Nothing truly fades away... Here, the tribe rises as a rebel in a new attire against the backdrop of the emerging political and religious society." Each side fights in the name of resentment...and thirst for power.

The myth of unity and conformity, which is the tendency to adhere to established norms, has died. It was killed and has driven Iraqis towards division, fragmentation, and war. Jean Duvignaud's concept of the "mad cluster" has indeed found resonance in Iraqi society during this period. This is because all social elements have become power-thirsty, dreaming of religion to the extent that social drama has turned into a culture of contradictions, marked by religious and political upheaval.

While the Iraqi state attempted to eradicate tribalism through the construction of a unified nation, the fall of the tyrant resurrected the tribe, bringing its warrior descendants back to the forefront. What was once buried has reemerged, both politically and religiously.

IMPLICIT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

There are several pressing questions that come to mind in the midst of this incomprehensible chaos. What kind of narratives can emerge within Iraqi dramaturgy to make sense of this catastrophic nightmare? How can these narratives be presented today, especially when compared to the theatrical traditions of earlier eras in Iraq? Can the audience be drawn back to the theater after a period of neglect caused by all these tumultuous events? And more fundamentally, what is the true purpose of theater and why does it matter? Is it possible to break free from the stereotypes that plagued Iraqi theater during the nineties and the subsequent rise of commercial theater that persists to this day? And is it really necessary to get rid of it entirely? Or should we rethink our approaches, making them more attuned to the rhythms of the streets, rather than continuing to drain themselves in the pursuit of mere entertainment and farce? This is especially pertinent considering one of the key factors contributing to the ascent and persistence of commercial theater: the lack of government support, its disinterest in cultural activities, and its limited funding.

As the Iraqi artist Aziz Khayoun pointed out, "Imagine if a fund were set up to support culture, allocating just one dollar from every barrel of oil exported. This could fuel the artistic endeavors presented by our artists, scholars, and emerging talents, facilitating the staging of numerous theatrical performances.[2] This indicates that Iraqi theater, from the nineties to the present day, has endured neglect, not only by the government and the artistic community, but also on a humanitarian level.

This neglect, both public and private, can also be attributed to the disregard for the infrastructure of theaters, rehearsal studios, and performance venues. A poignant example of this is the Al-Rashid Theater, a cornerstone of Baghdad's cultural heritage and a vibrant symbol of Iraqi theater. Constructed in 1979 by French and Swiss firms and officially opened in 1981 with a seating capacity for 600 spectators, this theater fell victim to looting and arson following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Its doors have remained sealed for the last eighteen years.

However, against all odds, it was renovated and reopened on November 20, 2021. Remarkably, this revival was not facilitated, nor funded by the state. Instead, it was the result of the dedicated efforts by Iraqi artists themselves who turned into

construction workers, electricians, maintenance workers, cleaners and more.

Undoubtedly, the parameters shifted dramatically after 2003, particularly with the rise of the tribal Islamic regime during this era. This regime indirectly hindered artistic expression by cutting off both financial and moral support for arts and artists, citing the economic downturn and its societal impacts as reasons. For some artists, poverty and fear of death or physical retribution pushed them to leave the country (figures like Bahjat al-Jubouri, Taha Alwan, Muhsin Alali, Muhannad Hadi, Sabry Al Ramahy...). Others took up alternative work to put food on their families' tables. Yet, a brave few continued their artistic pursuits, facing the risks, which cost some of them their lives. Simply stepping out of their homes has become a real danger for them and their families. They leave home not knowing if they will return, and even if they do, there is uncertainty about finding their homes intact due to daily bombing, the civil war among religious factions, and ongoing vendettas–both old and new. Revenge, animosity, escape, and fragmentation have sadly become hallmarks of this period.

Despite the brutality of the previous regime in restricting and suppressing artistic freedom, there was a semblance of safety and basic livelihood that allowed many artists to create, innovate, and think freely, shielded from direct danger and the ominous threat of religious or tribal-driven purges. However, we cannot overlook the arrests, executions, and emigration of several intellectual and artistic figures due to their political differences with the regime. They lived in fear of persecution and elimination on grounds of betrayal or disloyalty.

This situation was especially prevalent before and after the formation of the Progressive National Front in 1947, where an alliance was established between the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Iraqi Communist Party, the Kurdish Revolutionary Party, a faction of supporters from the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, and various independent individuals before it dissolved in 1979.[3]

Following its dissolution, the Communist Party shifted to the opposition, advocating for "ending the dictatorship"[4] Similar incidents occurred during the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from September 1980 to August 1988, as well as during the First and Second Gulf Wars. The latter was triggered by the Iraqi army's invasion of Kuwait on August 11, 1990, preceded by a comprehensive international blockade on Iraq. These events forced a significant number of Iraqis, especially intellectuals and artists, to seek refuge in distant lands or neighboring Arab countries.

Nevertheless, theatrical productions persisted, within the national troupes, whose shows leaned towards political propaganda, like the play "The Tale of Thirst and Man" by playwright and director Qasim Muhammad. This production premiered at the National Troupe's Theater on December 23, 1981, during the early days of the Iran-Iraq war. The same resilience was visible in local troupes, treading the fine line between artistry and peril, skillfully reflecting the painful reality, condemning war, dictatorship, and the senseless loss of life. Notable among these was the play "The Rocking Chair Hymn" by the Popular Theater Troupe, penned by Farouk Mohamed and directed by Auni Karumi. Featuring lyrics sung by poet Erian Al Sayed Khalaf, the play was performed on September 1, 1987.

In essence, artists, thinkers, scholars, and everyday people in this country, marred by a history bereft of peace and tranquility, have been consistently under threat, facing hunger, death, and perpetual migration due to the single-party policy, dictatorial governance, internal and external conflicts, and endless wars.

Despite the challenges of the tumultuous post-2003 period, the context reveals silver linings and opportunities. Most notably, it offered Iraqi artists a glimpse of freedom and democracy, profoundly influencing the themes of theatrical texts and their performances. This influence was reflected in the breaking of societal taboos, transforming theatrical performances, stage design, and directorial perspectives. Directors endeavored to infuse their experimental visions into theater, giving rise to various forms like the "Theater of Debris" the drama theater or choreographic body, and protest theater.

Furthermore, innovative techniques were incorporated, emphasizing body language, scenography, lighting, and digital multimedia technology. These advancements played a pivotal and substantial role in expanding creative possibilities through the utilization of shadow play, sound recording, computer technology, video imagery, as well as aspects from television and cinema into theatrical productions...

For instance, in the play "Adaptation 2012" written by Ali Abdel Nabi Al Zaidi and directed by Mustafa Al Rikabi, the stage was divided into multiple sections, each offering a distinct perspective on the narrative.

The storyline revolves around a terrorist bombing in an Iraqi café, resulting in casualties, including a newlywed young man who lost his genitals. This incident sparked significant social and religious tensions, especially after a doctor implanted a prosthetic genital organ found at the blast site, unaware that it belonged to the terrorist who blew himself up in the attack. In this production, the director, following a conversation with digital expert and researcher Dr. Mohammed Hussein Habib, utilized shadow play as a primitive cinematic technique and relied more on sound recording than digital technologies. Thus, post-2003 theater embraced these innovative methods,[5] potentially "influenced by the diverse range of Iraqi playwrights. Figures like Ali Abdel Nabi Al Zaidi and Mithal Ghazi played a pivotal role in reshaping contemporary theater's presentation methods.[6]

This indicates that Iraqi theater cannot be separated from the ongoing events and societal challenges that have caused divisions at every level. Consequently, it has led to the creation of daytime shows that run for no more than two days, attended exclusively by a select group of journalists, poets, writers, and artists. This represents a departure from the past when theater halls were not just packed with locals and university students from Baghdad, but also with audiences from other provinces. They came in groups, or rather, in large crowds, renting private buses to attend the shows that hadn't reached their areas. They would spend a night in the city's hotels and then return the following day, brimming with joy and excitement.

The enthusiasm for theater came to a somber halt during a certain period marked by a cessation of life, overshadowed by widespread violence and senseless public executions. Iraqis found themselves living in what Bertolt Brecht aptly described as "dark times" albeit with a slight adjustment. This situation sheds light on the significant role of reception, or the audience's right to

experience it, and how much resonance theatrical works can truly leave within oneself.

This leads us to the profound question of what Iraqi theater has offered throughout its rich history, both ancient and modern, extending to its recent years, especially after the changes in 2003, as Kazem Lazem aptly puts it. During this period, theatrical productions varied significantly, with diverging opinions among experts and theater enthusiasts. While a handful of shows, very few, indeed, managed to captivate a diverse audience, a considerable number of productions fell short of the required aesthetic and theatrical standards. Consequently, Iraqi theater finds itself navigating a realm of new forms, strongly influenced by Arab transformations and the peculiar contradictions of Iraqi politics.[7]

In his article, Kazim Lazim explores different viewpoints that have shaped the development of a new Iraqi theater landscape, one that "speaks to everyone and meets the needs of diverse segments of society that are hungry for this cultural discourse and its various forms."[8] Theater critic Abbas Latif, responding to Kazim Lazim's inquiries, in the article mentioned below, stated: "The entire landscape was shaken by the political changes after 2003 and the subsequent cultural renaissance that brought about permanent transformations. However, this should not deter us from critically evaluating the authentic theater productions that emerged. Some managed to captivate a diverse audience, while others soared to the heights of theatrical art, becoming distant and challenging for many to grasp. Simultaneously, certain productions catered exclusively to those deeply embedded in the artistic realm"

This situation can, undoubtedly, be attributed to several factors. One of the most prominent was the state of theater production and its grim repercussions. Performances became confined to a single venue, the National Theater, while others were crafted specifically for participation in Arab and international festivals. Moreover, some directors and playwrights hesitated to address themes such as administrative and religious corruption, embezzlement, and bribery prevalent within government departments, spanning from tea vendors to top officials. There was a fear that their work might be interpreted as opposition to the government, bringing us back to the scrutiny that prevailed in the past. Director Bakr Naif commented that "Iraqi theater underwent significant fluctuations after 2003, both artistically and intellectually." He noted that some artists courted favor with the government and specific influential parties in exchange for their approval and financial backing, while others persisted through sheer determination. "As a result, the Iraqi theatrical scene remains in a constant flux between acceptance and rejection, especially given that some plays and their dialogues criticize the government and the state, but from an external perspective.

As for the artist Abdul Jabbar Al-Sharqawi, he stated that "there is no dispute over serious theater, including the academic one, whose narratives are inspired by global experiences, various theatrical doctrines and schools of thought, all within aesthetic and structural frameworks. Additionally, the ideas presented in this genre of theater, which has offered numerous performances, were not staged within Iraq, but were showcased exclusively in festivals and competitions abroad. These shows involved a group of artists who worked on high-level coding and experimentation (...). Meanwhile, the broader audience, which was exposed to popular or folk productions attracting large crowds, missed out on these festivals and plays. These productions, sometimes delivered in a comic tone, tackled their concerns and issues(..)"

However, according to the scenographer Suheil Al-Bayati, the Iraqi theater audience has waned in its interest in Iraqi theater productions for various reasons, one of them being the absence of compelling theater works that could engage the viewers. Many audience members have been absent from these shows for years due to the security situations that prevented them and their families from attending. As for the productions after 2003, they lacked amazement, creativity, and the ability to evoke emotions in the audience.

Al-Bayati elaborated that "...what is being presented now and in recent years mostly consists of repetitive works, with some artists creating them merely to showcase abroad" After 2003, Iraqi theater lost its fundamental base, which was the students of the Institute and College of Fine Arts. These students, throughout the 70s, 80s, and even the 90s, infused the theatrical movement with fresh perspectives and modern ideas. However, the new generation of students is quite different; they do not resemble their predecessors in any way. None of them has read anything.

In conclusion, revisiting the words of the article's author, Kazem Lazem, the new Iraqi theater continues to search for an identity that unifies its discourse within this vast realm of freedom and rapid change, without succumbing to any agenda that might steer it away from its noble goals, reminiscent of the ideals we experienced in the 1970s. According to Kazem Lazem's own article, theater director Ibrahim Hanoun observed that "Post-2003 Iraqi theater can be characterized by two phases: one after the transition and another that experienced the transition" The latter relied mostly on interpretation and the reproduction of new shows filled with aesthetics, visual elements, and experimentation. Some recent productions have manipulated international scripts to fit the Iraqi reality and its complexities.

Therefore, as we consider some of the opinions shared in this article/interview, it becomes evident that many theater professionals are discussing elite theater, a trend imposed on the average viewer by the compelling circumstances due to the limited duration of performances, often lasting just a day or two. This "brief period isn't enough to cater to the needs of all viewers." Moreover, recent productions have attempted to engage this elite audience by "interpreting the presentation system; they offer popular shows in the evening that attract a diverse audience, regardless of their varying cultural backgrounds." This is a credit to the theater, regardless of whether these presentations are elitist or not.

In his article, Kazem Lazem raises the question: Is this group an exclusive social class or simply a numerical elite? According to the author, it is a numerical elite, consisting of individuals with a deep understanding of theater. Despite the attempts of professionals in the theater industry to reject the term "elite theater" it remains implicit in their responses. For instance, director Ibrahim Hanoun disavows the term "elite theater" asserting that "what we presented was a result of the resources available. Many projects were delayed or came to a halt due to insufficient support. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic about the future and what the younger generation, who have started making their presence felt in recent years, will bring to the table"

On the other hand, artist Aziz Khayoun comments that "Elitism in Iraqi theater is not a continuous phenomenon, as seen in many global capitals, as a societal and artistic necessity. Post-2003 theater became elitist not in terms of production, but due to specific circumstances like security concerns, the disbandment of theater groups, and the state's neglect of this vital cultural discourse. This made it seem more like a luxury than a necessity. There is also a noteworthy observation: those attending the theater, including poets, journalists, writers, and their families, alongside students from the Institute and the College of Fine Arts, turn the theater into an exclusive domain, despite the recurring faces in every performance."

Renowned artist Fatima Al-Rubai'y points out that "the absence of widespread theaters and the concentration of performances solely on the National Theater stage made many productions appear elitist. There used to be a theatrical ambiance that people were accustomed to in the 1960s, 1970s, and even the 1990s, when theater shows became a social phenomenon involving everyone. However, after 2003, shows began to be staged at 1 PM or 3 PM, deviating from the theatrical traditions expected by the audience"

Based on that, it is clear that the events Iraq underwent after 2003 have significantly contributed to distancing the audience from theatrical performances. These events were labeled as elitist because they were primarily attended by the artists themselves, especially since they weren't presented for an extended period. Furthermore, most artists' productions were showcased more abroad than within Iraq, "escaping the intensity of the security situation and its consequences." However, the situation has gradually stabilized, with the recent occurrence of the National Iraqi Theater Festival (2019), followed by the Baghdad International Theater Festival (2021). The country is now gearing up for the upcoming Baghdad International Theater Festival scheduled for October 20, 2022. This indicates that the theatrical community has, once again, started to experience a sense of renewal.

THE RELATION BETWEEN PERFORMING ARTS, HERITAGE, AND MODERNITY.

The Historical or Classical Legacy of Performing Arts in Iraq After 2003

In order to truly grasp the mechanisms and dynamics of Iraq's theatrical landscape, it is crucial to delve into the methods and approaches that have navigated the historical or classical heritage of performing arts in Iraq since 2003, and how these have reverberated in contemporary society. Surprisingly, this period remains relatively unexplored, approached with a certain hesitancy or, perhaps more accurately, limited engagement when compared to its predecessors. This reluctance stems from Iraqi theater practitioners distancing themselves from the rich tapestry of global theater, unlike the earlier generations who found in it their "intellectual and artistic sanctuary during the 1960s and 1970s.[9]

It is crucial to acknowledge that Iraqi theater before 2003 was deeply connected to its heritage, incorporating myths, ancient folk tales, and a wide array of literature, both Iraqi and global.[10] Directors like "Qasim Muhammad" explored diverse theatrical styles in writing, preparation, theatrical composition, and inspiration. He drew inspiration from ancient Arab history,[11] contemporary events, and political occurrences. His play "Eternal Baghdad between Seriousness and Comedy" staged in 1974, marked a significant experimental leap in the history of Iraqi theater.[12]

Similarly, director Sami Abdul Hamid balanced his theatrical pursuits between delving into Iraqi mythology, exemplified by his work "Epic of Gilgamesh" in 1977, and engaging with international productions.[13] Through the examples shared in this research, whether in the main content or footnotes, it becomes evident that pre-2003 Iraqi theater encompassed a rich repertoire. Each theatrical season featured works rooted in folklore, heritage, ancient myths, world masterpieces, as well as local and Arab themes. This dynamic approach has undergone notable changes, with directors nowadays rarely aiming to explore international or even Arab works.

Since 2003, Iraqi theater has seen a plethora of theater productions that have marked a new era–the post-war period. These productions have effectively revived theater, restoring its distinctive presence amidst the ruins and chaos that engulfed our society due to wars, the absence of order, and the dominance of anarchy.

"These plays add to the impact of bomb blasts, car bombings, and explosive belt, most of them were daytime performances, reminiscent of ancient Greek theater, with sparse audiences. Some were lit by candles and lanterns due to power outages, creating an ambiance akin to medieval churches.

These performances were powerful, both in script and direction, capturing the remnants and evidence of the incident, both in form and content. For example, a production like "A Scream in Mutanabbi Street" served as a powerful protest and a loud voice against the bombing of Baghdad's renowned cultural and literary hub, Mutanabbi Street, on 6/03/2006"[14]

We observe that the approach to theatrical elements in Iraqi theater has changed significantly compared to the period before 2003. Back then, there was no doubt about the artistic production method or style. The main and ultimate focus was the text and its content. Artists at that time conveyed their messages through symbols, or by depicting the events of that era through historical simulation and its artistic aspects like heritage, folk tales, rituals, and mythology. These elements served as a common ground, or rather as a channel, to convey what they wanted to express to their audience.

On the other hand, most Iraqi theater productions in the post-2003 period do not heavily rely on international texts or their globally renowned characters anymore. Instead, they revolve around Iraqi characters experiencing the harsh realities of everyday life. Heroism in these plays is no longer mythical; it has become a tangible reality filled with horror and challenges that do not resemble the falls of Greek tragic heroes, not in the slightest. Events in these plays are no longer singular or linear, but rather haphazard, and no longer adhere to the three unities outlined by Aristotle in his work Poetics: (time, place, and unity of subject). Space has transformed into multiple spaces within the event's time and place, or rather, events that seem scattered here and there, or in various places. This fragmentation of space has resulted in disjointed pieces or scattered fragments. Characters find themselves confined within specific and defined spatial constraints, where the notions of beginning and end fade away. Time is now fragmented and has become somewhat hybrid: the past blends with the present, not to intertwine with it, but to juxtapose it, almost as if they are parallel. The future is nearly non-existent. As a result, the present can stretch indefinitely, as long as there is no vision for tomorrow.

Everything is shrouded in darkness and exists within a chaotic whirlpool: "What is my fault if war bestows white mustaches upon children?[15] We are all blinded by the heart's panic, trying to find our way to one another" In these plays and texts, words act as a painter, creating strokes of yellow, red, or blue. We find ourselves immersed in the red inferno, not just at its gates. The words in these texts carry warm and cool tones, rich with curves, diacritics, and breaks. Thus, they form letters, and letters weave straight, circular, winding lines, hooked, and adorned with dots akin to freckles on faces and the dust on the soul. No one in this land can be judged innocent; lies have intertwined with truth, making them appear like characters in a play narrated by the theater itself. Despite this, there is no glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel into which the country and its people have slipped, especially since the war has become a paradigm for contemporary drama.

SOME ASPECTS OF POST-2003 TEXTS, WITH 'ALI ABDUL NABI AL-ZAIDI' AND GHAZI AS EXAMPLES

In Ali Abdul-Nabi's theater works, there is a confusion and an ambiguity that arises from the collision between its realistic dialogues and its fantastical, implausible situations. This interplay creates a theatrical event, a drama irony in itself, making the very conflict a subject of inquiry and a question mark that stirs anticipation and suspense. Essentially, the coexistence of these elements (realistic dialogue and unrealistic, fantastical situations) forms a textual theme, inherently playing on a dual contradiction, not devoid of harmonious discrepancies, making it challenging to conceive. Yet, we ultimately accept it as an extraordinary imaginative reality, closely mirroring what we endure and experience daily but remaining intangible.

We might wonder, is it our misfortune that these dramatic contradictions contain images of the longstanding suffering experienced by Iraqis? Is it also our misfortune that these texts serve as a horrifying mirror reflecting the happenings in the streets and alleys of our cities, devoid of joy? This implies that his texts are profoundly connected to life as an art form, intimately tied to life as a simulation. Consequently, one's life becomes a theatrical piece, opening up to the current reality in which they live here and now, without necessarily resorting to historical references. In other words, it depicts the present state of a society spiraling into an abyss, more linked to the local religious heritage and its oppressive customs than to global literary heritage. It avoids borrowing from global textual themes or ancient myths, but, instead, wholly adheres to the language of theater, not the literary language Aristotle intended to summarize theater in. Hence, Ali Al-Zaidi's texts employ distorted and magnified images, symbolizing reality through various situations and characters inspired by the collective memory of Iraqi society. Through these depictions, we confront our mistakes, and perhaps even our hidden desires. For him, writing serves primarily as a form of theater.

This is evident, for instance, in the plot of the text "How to Become Honorable in Five Days" where God engages in a dialogue and argument with the character "Saleh" about faith and the believer. Saleh desires to become a "broker, in other words, a pimp" even for a brief period, as he is weary of virtue. These situations arise from the lengthy monologues, whether with God or the devil sent by God Himself, all designed to make Saleh change his mind and return to his faith and righteousness. This logic itself represents a dramatic and metaphorical paradox, even making the devil, traditionally known in our religious and social traditions as a source of obsession, temptation, sin, and transgression, more virtuous, honorable, and obedient to God than humans themselves. These texts push the reader or viewer to envision what lies beyond visible boundaries—whether sacred or taboo—asserting their power over the human subconscious. Through this intricate and complex equation, Ali Abdul-Nabi attempts to establish a tense, turbulent, and unsettling theatrical life, simultaneously bridging the irrational reality one lives through and his imaginative, theatrical representation. This equation isn't easy to penetrate, depict, and embody without a prior understanding and knowledge of how to grasp it performatively, both intellectually and aesthetically.

MITHAL GHAZI

Mithal Ghazi is one of the playwrights who delved into the Iraqi reality through various plays, shedding light on Iraqi pain, both before and after 2003. His works include[16] "The Key" "Azrael" "Manno" "Family Honor" "Rainy Night" "Oh Weakness...Your Name Is Woman" and "Waiting for Vladimir" the latter which is a reinterpretation and a new adaptation from an Iraqi standpoint on Samuel Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" as well as the play "Joseph's Blood" and so on.

As noted by Rana Mohammed Nizar, in his play "Open the Doors" there is a poignant eloquence that subtly hints at the history of political oppression, which silenced many behind bars and underground. The eloquence suggests: '(Perhaps there isn't a memory under which we dwell to become aware of what we mean).' The play is based on a real incident in Alexandria Hilla, where three missing prisoners were discovered in an underground cellar after more than two decades. One of them remembers his name and his father's name, the other only knows his first name, and the third does not recall anything about his identity. The play revolves around the last person, who has completely lost his memory and is searching for his identity in vain"[17] In their portrayal of this incident, there is a clear reference to the history of political oppression, not only in Iraq, but also in other Arab countries that have endured and continue to endure the tyranny of oppressive dictatorships.

Through these two examples (Ali Abdul-Nabi Al-Zaidi and Mithal Ghazi), it becomes evident that contemporary playwriting significantly differs from the past. It has become easier to address what was previously silenced or deliberately overlooked. Their texts portray realistic dramatic contradictions that go beyond mere tragedies, allowing a deep understanding of the confusion and ambiguity in sensitive situations. This is achieved by amplifying the characters' verbal expressions, often stumbling upon contemporary and nuanced dramatic contradictions. These contradictions, both modern and sharp, are not without their peculiarities and playful elements, offering implicit insights into events or situations that continuously probe into unspoken realms, opening doors and windows into the wounded memories of this nation's political and social heritage, or rather, its homeland. These insights delve deeply into the unspoken, challenging the conventional political reality filled with wounds and decay, ultimately aiming to reshape and question stagnant realms of thought and reflection. All of this is skillfully conveyed through speeches unafraid to closely examine social, political, and cultural truths or run parallel to them.

The beauty in the texts of these playwrights lies in their realistic language and the strange, ambiguous situations they place their characters in, without resorting to riddles or exaggerated metaphors. Perhaps they do not intend to amplify the mystery or complicate the confusion further. Instead, they candidly depict what is happening in their countries and the thoughts resonating in their minds as an undeniable reality. Because the wound runs deep and festers in the Iraqi soul and its diverse, multifaceted layers, it cannot be hushed. Hence, these playwrights prefer to expose the truth, lay it bare, and unveil the ugly truth behind the masks. Otherwise, what would be the fate of theater if it were not very raw and authentic? How can such theater, as a vessel of imagination, remain relevant in the face of the stark realities of the present and the living truth?

THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

In Iraq before the changes or the occupation, there were several official theater groups overseen by the state. One of these was the National Acting Troupe based in Baghdad, which had seven branches: the Basra Acting Troupe, The Nineveh Acting Troupe, The Erbil Acting Troupe, The Diyala Acting Troupe, The Najaf Acting Troupe, The Hilla Acting Troupe, and The Karbala Acting Troupe. These troupes were part of the Theater Department of the Cinema and Theater Directorate and its productions received systematic support from the Ministry of Culture and Information.

Additionally, there were 28 private troupes recognized by the Ministry of Culture and Information at that time,[18] operating under various names, defined as groups of artists. Those troupes included the Modern Art Theater Troupe, Popular Theater Troupe, Today's Theater Troupe, Iraqi Theater Troupe, Rafidain Troupe, Baghdad Theater Troupe, Free Theater Troupe, Contemporary Theater Troupe, Artists' Union Troupe, Al-Risalah Theater Troupe, July 14th Theater Troupe, Contemporary Youth Theater Troupe, Vanguard Theater Troupe, Iraqi Theater Troupe, Ushtar Theater Troupe, Success Theater Troupe, Ninety Chair Theater Troupe, Mass Organizations' Troupes, Workers' House Theater Troupe, Workers' Cultural House Theater Troupe, all under the General Federation of Workers' Unions.[19] Additionally, there were the Peasants' Theater Troupe under the Ministry of Agriculture, Military Theater Troupe under the Ministry of Defense, Police Theater Troupe under the Ministry of Interior, and Khansaa Theater Troupe under the Iraqi Women's Union. There were also the Radio and Television Theater and the Children's Theater Troupe under the Public Culture Troupe.

Moreover, there were non-professional troupes operating under the names of labor organizations, women's groups, students, and similar entities. Some of these troupes functioned under the umbrella of institutions and unions such as the College of Arts, the Institute of Arts, universities, and the Artists' Union.

It is important to note that almost all private theater groups used to rely on self-financing for their productions, including covering the rent for their theaters. They often depended on donations from friends and the earnings of their members, most of whom worked in various fields, whether in the arts or other professions. Sometimes, they had to resort to temporary loans, either from banks or from individuals (such as merchants or affluent friends of the group). These loans were paid back after the performance using the income generated from ticket sales. As Adel Korkis, the head of Today's Theater group, aptly puts it, they also depended on the meager support provided by the government, which felt more like a token gesture.[20]

This financial challenge posed a significant obstacle for these groups. It led to a decrease in their annual productions, often limited to just two or three plays per year, in contrast to state-supported groups. The state-backed groups, in various forms, used this financial hurdle as a means to suppress the private groups, sometimes even acquiring them. This strategy was aimed at subduing them under the directives of the authorities, preventing their works from gaining recognition and reaching a wider audience. They achieved this by marginalizing them in various ways. Consequently, some private theater groups could only manage to perform one or two plays in a season, facing difficult presentation conditions. This was due to the lack of permission to secure suitable venues, a form of harassment and opposition. This situation occurred if the script managed to evade the scrutiny of the watchful eyes that were meticulously observing every detail"[21]

After 2003, most theater groups, including the "Modern Art Theater" a significant symbol in Iraqi theater, halted their activities. This was due to financial challenges, lack of security, fear of physical reprisals, and attacks from militia groups associated with Islamic movements on artistic and cultural gathering places.

The theaters, totaling 14 halls according to the researcher, archivist, and lighting designer, Bashar Tameh,[22] included venues like the National Theater Hall,[23] the Mansour Theater Hall, Baghdad Theater Hall, and al-Rashid Theater Hall, which was destroyed due to the occupation, chaos, and looting that engulfed all state institutions, including the Iraqi Museum with its ancient artifacts dating back to the early days of Iraqi civilization. These venues also comprised halls like the People's Hall, the 60-seat Theater, the Tent Theater, the Success Theater, the Theater Forum, the Ushtar Theater, the Bond Theater Hall, the Pioneers Theater, and the Ibn al-Nadim Theater.

WHAT IS LEFT OF ALL THIS?

Today, only nine theater groups remain: the National Theater Group, formerly known as the National Acting Group, the al-Rashid Theater Group, which has recently been rehabilitated and rebuilt due to the damage it endured, the Basra Theater Group, the Pioneers Theater Group in the Nineveh Governorate, the Kurdish Vanguard Theater Group in the Sulaymaniyah County, the Salar Theater Group in Sulaymaniyah County, the Modern Kurdish Artistic Theater Group in the Erbil Governorate, the Shour Shigan Theater Group in Duhok County, and the Nasiriya Theater Group.

To understand the theatrical production mechanisms during this period, we need to delve into the numerous changes that occurred in the Iraqi theater landscape after 2003–following the American invasion of Iraq. This event significantly shook the foundational pillars of Iraqi society, affecting its social, economic, educational, and political foundations. The Americans did not just topple the existing Iraqi government at that time; they, along with their Iraqi collaborators, deliberately sought to dismantle the Iraqi state, undermining all its humanitarian, legal, and national principles. This undoubtedly had a negative and gloomy impact on Iraqi society, especially on intellectuals and artists, who, as one of the politicians leading the Iraqi Ministry of Culture under the occupation stated, according to Awatif Naim, "were the orphans of the former regime. Hence, they needed to be punished through exclusion, marginalization, and instilling doubts about their creations, obstructing their projects.[24] From this statement, it is evident that there was a sinister plan to rid this condemned class without justification. However, the awareness and resilience of Iraqis, their commitment to their culture, and their artists, who represented their sophistication and enlightened minds, thwarted the execution of this evil plan. Nevertheless, this misguided political scheme negatively impacted artistic, cultural, and theatrical productions. Political Islam, which regarded arts as forms of atheism and immodesty, dominated and controlled the financial policy. Consequently, there was a clear deficit in the institutions responsible for culture, arts, and literature in executing projects and providing the necessary financial liquidity for advancing the Iraqi artistic reality. This was particularly apparent in the Cinema and Theater Department, which was the primary support for theatrical, cinematic, and folk art projects within the Iraqi Ministry of Culture!

According to the artist and researcher Awatef Naeem, "Artists had to find means of support to implement their projects and activate the theater movement.[25] For this reason, there were two options: either they would produce artistic projects with a specific religious orientation, glorifying the newcomers, or they would draw from Iraqi heritage, the history of the Arab state, Iraqi mythology, and folk tales, as well as from the global human heritage to present their projects, which embodied their intellectual and national stance regarding the events that occurred on Iraqi soil. This was not an easy task; hence, many determined artists in charge of Iraqi theater projects resorted to seeking support from humanitarian organizations and European cultural centers such as the German 'Goethe Institute' and the French Institute in Iraq. They persistently and insistently managed to activate the theater movement" Here, the director and author Awatef Naeem speaks of her artistic experiences with the French Institute in Iraq, which supported significant projects she presented on stages in Baghdad, as well as at the French Institute and the German Embassy. According to Naeem, The French Institute supported her in "six important artistic projects, some of which were performed in the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia. Subsequently, with the political changes and the change of some faces that came to power in Iraq, there was a breakthrough, allowing several institutions to show interest in theater projects. The involvement of these institutions stemmed not from artistic appreciation or cultural solidarity, but rather from calculated efforts to cultivate favorable perceptions and project a facade of cultural progressiveness. Consequently, the movement to organize festivals, events, and participations began, albeit with limitations and constraints for Iraqi artists" An example of this is the case of the prominent Iraqi artist Aziz Khayoun. According to a conversation we had on the sidelines of the 29th edition of the Cairo Experimental Theater Festival, his significant theatrical production "Imkadi's Dilemma" an Iraqi interpretation of Brecht's "Three Penny Opera" involving 40 artists, had been approved by the viewing committee since March 2022. However, the budget allocated by the Ministry of Culture for the production of the play has yet to be disbursed! Nevertheless, despite the obstacles and disappointments, the Iraqi artist, with determination, continues to create and produce, knocking on doors and insisting on creativity. How could he not, being the descendant of Gilgamesh, the seeker of immortality...[26]

THE OPEN SPACES AND ABANDONED PLACES

Due to the decrease in the number of theaters and the widespread destruction of auditoriums, theaters, and cultural institutions, some directors turned to unconventional and innovative spaces. They performed in open areas, abandoned sites outside the traditional theater spaces, residential areas, mosques, churches, explosion sites, and archaeological locations. Despite the challenges, experimental initiatives emerged, shaping their artistic essence amid the ruins of destroyed structures and buildings. Iraqi critic and researcher Saad Aziz Abdul Sahib coined these initiatives as "Rubble Theater experiments."

One notable example[27] is the experience of the "Survivors" troupe. They staged their inaugural performance on the ruins of al-Rashid Theater in Baghdad on 5/3/2003, offering an immediate response to the artistic challenges reflecting the social and political realities (...). Another remarkable effort was "Jabar Muhaibis's" monodrama "The Scream of Mutanabbi Street" performed on 6/3/2006 amidst the ruins of a corner in Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad after a terrorist bombing targeted the market of books and booksellers (...). Similarly, "Jabar Khumait's" production, "A Day from this Homeland" was presented on the ruins of Al-Anbari Building in Al-Karrada Al-Sharqiya in Baghdad on 9/15/2007.

In addition, there is the performative poetic experiment by the group (Culture Militia),[28] which showcased their readings in unconventional or "socially and culturally obscure spaces within society" aiming to create a unique and contrasting performance that reflects the location, the people, and even the dead, all in a different poetic language, unconventional and unexpected, "drawing inspiration from reality while being its opposite"[29] One notable event was their presentation in the largest cemetery in Najaf, Iraq, in early 2015. They recited their poetic works in the presence of the dead—victims of incessant wars, explosions, car bombs, physical confrontations, and the harshness of life. They confronted the harsh reality, as they put it, to "face our deceased audience" Otherwise, what else could a poet/playwright do here in such a moment?[30] For them, modernity meant "living in the present."

For instance, some of their performances: Back Off One Hundred Meters, Concrete Barriers, Barbed-Wires, Tools for Roadblocks, and "Hummer" Vehicles (that they saw for the first time when the American military entered their homeland). Explaining the name of their group, the "Cultural Militia" Ahmed Diaa said: "Living in a land plagued by death, killing, destruction, and weapons, where even the youth possess arms as much as the elders, compels us to take a stance vis-a-vis these stark realities. We need to be aware amidst the collapse of fundamental systems that begin and end with death. It prompts us to react in ways that defy societal norms and the status quo. This theme forms the core of our work; our thoughts and creations are deeply influenced by these harsh realities. The areas we navigate on a daily basis have been scarred by countless explosions, to the extent that we've incorporated the essence of these blasts into our texts. We strive to translate our experiences into the poetic language of these events, embracing this method as an integral part of our formal performance readings"[31]

In order to create a truly experimental and unconventional theater, one that questions the quotidian and immerses us in the ancient history of this country that has been worn out by relentless wars to the point where it turned its back on its own heritage and symbolism, we interviewed director Abbas Rihak,

one of those who have continued to work in this unique style. Rihak directed a series of impactful productions, such as the play "What the World Needs" (2009). There is also "Urban Basket" performed at the historic site of Borsippa[32] in 2011. And in 2012, the Babylon train station served as the setting for the staging of "Cosmic Adventure." Then in 2013, the play "Red Masks" was brought to life in the midst of Shatt al-Hillah. Additionally, Rihak directed "Prophecy" by the German playwright Peter Handke, a mesmerizing performance that unfolded in the backyard of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Babylon in 2015. The production "Oedipus Rex" presented at three distinct locations in 2016, (a brick factory, an incomplete governorate building, and the abandoned Palace of Babylon). In 2018, "Red Line" captivated audiences, staged within the ancient Temple of Ninhursag in Babylon.

It is important to note that all these productions came at a significant cost because they required constant relocation, along with specific accessories tailored to each unique space. The creative vision and scenography had to adapt to the location, whether it was an archaeological site or an open space devoid of any modern amenities. These expenses were all charged to the director and his team, even though the productions were presented under the banner of the University of Babylon; "however, the university's involvement was limited to endorsing the work with its name."

THE VIEWER, THE TEXT, AND ITS CONNECTION TO THE SPACE IN THIS TYPE OF PERFORMANCE

Is the audience's engagement and enjoyment a valid measure of success for any performance? Our response to this question can be both yes and no simultaneously. A successful performance often hinges on the viewer's personal taste, observations, and artistic background. Does the audience's celebration of one performance necessarily mean they are being negative? In this context, we recall the words of the French playwright Jean Anouilh: "The purpose of a play is to provide work for the actors and pleasure for the audience." Because theater is a live experience, it allows us to feel genuine emotions. Therefore, from our perspective, the viewer becomes a vital factor in shaping this kind of performance, especially since the event primarily unfolds within the historical venue itself. The viewer's vitality in navigating through its corridors, rooms, and passages, touching the performance space, and living within its walls becomes pivotal.

In this scenario, and according to the director Abbas Rahak, "the audience becomes the second embodiment of the performance and a driving force in creating a drama form that relies on the present moment, improvisation, immersion, and contemplation. This gives rise to another form of viewer, following the flow of events within specific rooms or corridors. The events unfold, creating a viewer within themselves, one that cannot be predicted, shaped by the individual viewer and their cognitive references. The events oscillate between the embodied event and the embodied viewer, between what is embodied in the event and the viewer observing it"[33]

Ultimately, the spectator takes center stage. Everything is orchestrated for them; they are the individuals whom theater practitioners aim to captivate, and, in the end, they hold the final judgment. In the words of Oscar Wilde, "Art reflects the spectator, not life." When it comes to writing this type of text and its relationship with the venue, it can often be performed in the very place it is set. This feature is central to our observation of the play "Red Line" directed by Abbas Rahak, at the National Academic Theater Festival for the University of Babylon/Iraq in 2019, where I served as a member of the jury. One significant aspect was the creation of a unique script specifically tailored for the performance and the setting where the event took place, utilizing the venue's natural scenography. This included rooms steeped in historical significance, a central courtyard well—around which the drama's pivotal moments swirled—and corridors filled with rituals that merged effortlessly with the spiritual. Even the protests, rejecting Salafist extremism, wove into this tapestry of place and meaning. The historical venue itself shaped the play's form and content, and the director's vision relied on light and shadow, creating a portrayal of reality and illusion, between which humans oscillate, aligning with them periodically. The director utilized real fire, candles, torches, and drums. Consequently, the performance venue, with its natural elements and the evening timing of the show, crafted a unique scenography, pulling the viewer out of their everyday reality and leading them toward an ancient Babylonian space, transcending the confines of spoken text. This performance served as a catalyst for a new life experience for the viewer, prompting their interaction, immersion, contemplation, and, most importantly, compelling them to take a stance towards events unfolding outside the venue's walls—events of social, religious, and political violence. For us, the audience, it felt like an invitation to introspective reflection, spiritual exploration, and an adventure breaking through the fear barriers that had arisen within the viewer due to misguided policies in various forms. As the director of the show, Abbas Rahak, stated, it was "a cry of the soul seeking to return to the original source, reverting to the true essence of humanity by engaging with the viewer's conscious and subconscious." Thus, the venue becomes a question rather than an answer, an inquiry rather than a recollection or reminder. It transforms into a contemplation free from preaching, a confrontation with the self in a specific context. This context was a face-to-face encounter in front of the performance mirror (the performance venue). Undoubtedly, the venue in the performance possesses a local specificity, endowing it with a distinctiveness that distinguishes it from other shows presented locally, regionally, and globally. Therefore, transferring it to another place proved challenging, and creating a similar scenography in a traditional theater would inevitably strip it of its profound poetic essence. Herein lies its power and uniqueness in establishing a connection with the viewer, especially concerning the theme of collective memory shaped by books, knowledge, and tourism. Thus, the viewer enters the performance laden with their perceptions of the place, its historical and intellectual burdens. Here, the shock occurs, leading to the desired debate and the agitation resulting from this performance that questions all certainties.[34]

AESTHETIC AND INTELLECTUAL METHODS IN THE APPROACH AND PRESENTATION STYLE

In addition to performances in open spaces and historical sites that challenged the traditional theater format, attempting to establish a unique connection with the audience, there were productions that approached Iraq's daily struggles with both beauty and intellect, despite being staged in conventional theaters. Among these notable works are: "Curfew" (2007), "Heart of the Event" (2009), and "Camp" (2010), directed and written by Muhannad Hadi. There were also "Death and the Maiden" (2019), "Wars" (2016) by Ibrahim Hanoun, "Below Zero" (2008) by Emad Mohammed, and "Farewell Codo" (2013), "Romulus "(2006), "Echo" (2008) by Hatem Awda. Additionally, there are

"Rehearsal in Hell" (2009), "Hamlet under the Freedom Monument" (2010) by the late Hadi Al-Mahdi, and more recently, "Summer Rain" directed by Kazem Al-Nassar in 2005,[25] which was performed at the National Theater. Furthermore, director Anas Abdul Samad showcased his work "Yes, Godot" at the Iraqi National Theater Festival in 2021, an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot."

A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE PLAY 'CAMP' BY DIRECTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT MOHANNAD AL-HADI AS AN EXAMPLE.

The theater production of "Camp" written and directed by the artist Muhanad Hadi, is far from a typical show. Instead of relying on conventional dialogue and lengthy conversations, it daringly ventures into the realm of poetic imagery, offering a subjective and unconventional approach. In this production, images persist and interweave, often through intimate light projections, reflecting the intricacies of our daydreams and fantasies. This visual storytelling is complemented by both external and internal scenes, meticulously crafted by the director, creating a scenography that may seem confined but is, in fact, both stark and expansive.

Gradually, this stage comes to life with a rich tapestry of events, characters, doors, and windows, sometimes filled with bags, other times with chairs, echoing with howls and screams that wars in all their forms tend to evoke. It is as if we are being drawn into a cinematic narrative or a poetic verse, taking us on a fluid, sequential journey through puzzles and enigmas. Unexpectedly, it delves into the unconscious, aiming to provoke and stir the audience, reminding them of the depth of the tragedies, experiences, and nightmares that have permeated Iraqi society.

Within this performance, each character navigates the labyrinth of ever-changing Iraqi pain, unearthing layers of social, political, and historical complexities. These characters are on a quest for their threatened existence, attempting to escape from the endless mazes and long tunnels that seemingly lead nowhere. Little do they realize that departing ultimately serves as an entry into another realm. Indeed, the essence of the performance immediately exposes us to the schizoid nature of the Iraqi psyche, marked by extremes in love and hatred. This duality encapsulates the essence of its perpetual self-imprisonment. The production delves deep into the rawness of love, the bitterness of hatred, the intricacies of politics and traditions, the harshness of war, migration struggles, the parental authority, the defiance of sons, the brutality of law enforcement, the secrecy of interrogation rooms, and the complex realities of past and present regimes. It also lays bare the challenges faced by a homeland struggling to protect its own residents, all while highlighting the contradictions of the West, which claims to champion freedom, democracy, and civilization.

In this performance, dreams, nightmares, and a myriad of emotions are illuminated, and skillfully orchestrated to carry the audience through an increasingly intense and poignant journey from one scenario to the next.

THE INFERNO OF THE HOMELAND

The characters in this play suddenly find themselves thrust into an adventure that seems to transcend ordinary time, teetering on the edge of the unknown. These characters are fleeing themselves and the world around them, submerged in constant transformations. Doors open and close, and movements in and out follow aimlessly. The woman has no desire to ever return to her homeland, whereas the man, who spent half his life there, has no choice but to return, even though the country is plagued with death. But why does all of this happen to us? A futile question! In this performance, there are failed love affairs, ensnared and violated, extinguished by war and reduced to mere drops of dew. It is akin to an Iraqi dalliance, and modesty from which sparks of suppressed desire and unleashed boldness emanate, ultimately morphing into sexual harassment. Repression and deprivation are experienced by both citizens and the nation as a whole, where everything is forbidden and instills fear.

The father wields absolute power, especially when he discovers that his daughter's fiancé is just a soldier; he rejects him outright because, to him, this young man represents nothing more than a deferred death sentence. The traditional wedding chants are no longer sung for newlyweds, but for the dead. We are living in an era dominated by death, not joy. Mysteriously, the man finds himself abandoned by his wife, prompting him to attempt an escape from the scrutinizing eyes and judgmental words of others. According to Sartre, these people are the real tormentors. Suddenly, the stage fills with suitcases, enveloped by the strains of music and the evocative imagery of an ancient wedding, invoking painful memories. Inside the marital home, everything is prohibited; doors and windows are flung open, and the television blares. The marital hell converges with the horrors of war. The man had once hoped for a son instead of a daughter, overwhelmed by a sense of shame and introversion, a desire to flee from it all. Yet, there is no escape; tradition, war, occupation, and soldiers hungry for dishonoring ravage, operating as a heartless, emotionless machine from hell. Consequently, everything becomes a facade and a lie. The soldier who arrived on a tank, seemingly to rescue the country, is nothing more than a thief and a violator of the nation, its women, and its men. A mother bemoans her rebellious son's tyranny and his enlistment in the infernal contraption introduced by the new colonizer under the guise of purifying the land. He concocts reports about his neighbors, driven by a belief that they are responsible for his father's past suffering. Consequently, he insists that Sharia law be enforced upon them. What can be done?! How can she escape the shame brought upon her by her son's actions? Nightmares, dreams, and a wretched and painful past haunt every character without exception. Hence, the only recourse is to flee and seek refuge, but where? As the Iraqi poet Sargon Boulus poignantly questions.

THE COLLUSION OF TIME

In this performance, there is a raw and painful confession that pierces the soul, laying bare its agony and the scars of time, all in a serene and quiet backdrop. A woman finds herself burdened with an explosive belt, a weight she never wanted to carry. She didn't wish harm upon anyone, so she surrendered herself to the authorities. Yet, during the interrogation, she is accused of terrorism. The English language points an accusing finger at her, compelling her to confess, or else face the torment of torture. It is here that lines blur, where wrong becomes right and vice-versa, and the wicked appear virtuous, while monsters take on human traits, and traitors become righteous citizens. The woman is compelled to speak her truth. "My life was stolen from me" she admits. "Why? How? I do not know!" I had hoped for a son, but I had a daughter instead. She goes on to confess that one plus one equals two. The first "one" robbed her of her life, leaving behind a trail of illnesses. The second "one" was the love she wished to spend her entire life with, but he vanished, never

to return. As for the explosive belt, she carried it, much like countless other women. Some detonated it, their lives shattering along with it, while others, like me, never triggered it, much like my ill-fated destiny.

As for the man, he reveals his dream of owning a home in his name, one he'd build with his own hands, free from the burden of monthly rent. When asked during interrogation, "How much were they paying you?" he retorts sarcastically, stating that all the treasures of the earth could not be compared to the fragment of what they shattered and violated. He insists that the truth remains unaltered. He tells them that only myths and legends will remove them from our lives. They mock him, fading into the obscurity of the stage.

What does the play "Camp" aim to convey? Nothing can truly capture its essence—it is an exploration of vision and emotion above all else. Imagination transcends the constraints of reality. It is a vivid depiction of life teetering on the edge, leaving its core untouched, all while seamlessly blending into the theatrical narrative. The worlds within "Camp" are not narrated; they are lived in the moment. The journey unfolds through a landscape of pain that the entire country has endured, thrusting its characters into the darkness of war and the mundane struggles of daily existence. These characters appear and disappear, constantly reshaping their identities, all while being swept up in the elements beyond their control. There is no realism in these fluid images, movements, and conflicting emotions.

In this work, Mohannad Hadi has crafted a poetic language of nightmares, if I may put it that way, that seems to find its home only on the theater stage. In this unique manner, he has transformed the stage into an unparalleled space. The aesthetics presented in this performance pull us simultaneously into dreams and wakefulness, utilizing remarkably simple techniques like playing with lighting effects and a set design that manages to feel both light and heavy at the same time. These two elements allowed us to witness the magical interplay of appearances and disappearances, as well as surprising moments. They guided us through the twists and turns of the show, drawing us in until we became part of it, much like his actors. Everything in this performance flowed seamlessly. There was a constant, soothing rhythm despite the intense physicality and dynamism. Particularly impressive were the incredibly subtle transitions, the seamless shifts from one space to another, from one mood to the next, often without us fully understanding why or how. Yet, none of that truly mattered, as long as the essence of the story unfolded before us, pulsating with life. Just as we were about to grasp the unfolding narrative, the story revealed itself, making us forget that changes in scenes were even occurring.

Cast and Crew

Play: "Camp"
Written and Directed by: Mohannad Hadi
Starring: Murtadha Habeib - Lubna Salah
Assistant Performers: Ali Adel, Hind Nizar, Haider Wahib
Assistant Director: Hussein Hamoud
Scenography: Bayan Nabil
Stage Management: Majid Lafteh
Lighting Design: Abbas Qasim
Music Production: Majd Hamid
Costume Design: Mohammed Saddam
Set Design Execution: Technical Department,
Set Workshop, Cinema and Theater
Venue and Production: Iraqi National Theater

MAJID DARANDASH AND PROTEST THEATER

In this context, Majed Darandash also stands out with his directorial and writing prowess, shaping what he terms as "protest theater." He began his journey with the play "Letter N" directed by Kadhim Al-Nassar and produced by the Ministry of Oil, which made its debut at the Babel Festival of Global Cultures and Arts in 2015. The cast included Asia Kamal, Maimoon Al-Khaldi, Mazen Mohammed, Bassel Al-Khatib, Alawi Hussein, Asaad Mashaay, and Majid Darandash.

Following the "Letter N" there was the production "Can You Hear Me? Answer Me" directed by Khaled Alwan in 2015. It was produced in collaboration with the Maysan Theater Troupe and the Ministry of Culture. Majed Darandash explains over a phone call: "Both productions embodied the future vision, yet they did not fully align with my foundational concept of protest theater. They adhered closely to Aristotelian principles, following the written text's structure. They did not diverge from the Aristotelian norms and its ancient dualities. However, my protest theater revolves around a single conflict, relying on the displacement of one element. Therefore, I took on the role of director for my scripts to realize the style I envisioned"

Subsequently, he presented "Eight Witnesses from My Homeland" a play he both wrote and directed for the National Acting Troupe, produced by the Ministry of Culture. This play marks the pioneering model of protest theater in Iraq. Another creation, "Myths from My Homeland" written and directed by him for the National Acting Troupe in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and the War Media Foundation, stands as a continuation of the series. Additionally, "Black Box" another of his works, encompassed his roles as writer, director, and producer for the National Acting Troupe under the Ministry of Culture. This play constitutes the third installment in his theatrical project. The spirit of protest extended to various other theatrical productions, involving writers and directors from diverse Iraqi provinces. According to Majid Darandash[36] himself, the protest narrative branches into three distinct forms, each embodying its unique technique, setting them apart from one another.

First: The displaced text

The theater text deviated from Aristotelian norms. Following the occupation of Iraqi cities by the terrorist organization ISIS on 6/10/2014, families were forced to flee and became dehumanized beings living in camps referred to as displaced camps. The text could not remain unchanged after all these profound changes. Consequently, it strayed from traditional norms to embody the experiences of displaced individuals and their suffering. This displaced text presents an unidimensional narrative that maintains its beauty while eliminating the element of evil from the narrative, preserving its purity and protest within the theatrical space, so as not to taint the atmosphere.

Second: The Meccano text [37]

The term "Meccano" refers to a script that incorporates several scenes, allowing the creation of multiple theatrical productions. This script gives the director the flexibility to scatter scenes on the reading table like pieces of a Meccano game. The director can then cherry-pick scenes that align with their vision, leaving the remainder for another director to interpret and craft a distinct theatrical piece. It also enables the director to select scenes intuitively without a predetermined order, facilitating the

construction of a theatrical production based on artistic and aesthetic standards.

This approach allows the director to resequence scenes in a new order, deviating from the original arrangement. For instance, a scene originally fourth in the sequence could become the first scene for one director, with subsequent scenes rearranged accordingly. Similarly, a single director can present two or three consecutive productions, each with varying scene sequences and arrangements. Each rendition can feature different beginnings, middles, and three distinct endings, utilizing scenes selected from the Meccano text while adhering to consistent aesthetic and performance criteria.

The Meccano script can be brought to life by multiple directors. The first director selects scenes for their interpretation, and the second director does the same. Subsequently, the two visions are harmonized to present a cohesive production derived from a single script, creatively directed by two individuals.

Third: Panodrama text[38]

The term "panodrama" refers to a script that interweaves multiple independent stories. These stories converge, in the final scene, a moment of destiny, truth revelation, or existential questioning and protest. For instance, the script "5 Women from My Country" showcases monodramas where women stood against distortion, refusing to have their femininity stripped away from them in any manner. They confronted the disfigured face, symbolizing ISIS, and fought against it until death.

One of the conditions for presenting this script is that each day, one character performs a protest piece. Over five days, five monodramatic performances unfold. In the final presentation, all five monodramas merge into one concluding performance. As expressed by Majid Darendash, these texts question the meaning of dignity that demands our anger and protest. This leads us to the discussion of protest theater. Where does a person find themselves amid the marginalization of consciousness, culture, and beauty? Where can one find representation for their daily pain and shattered dreams? Where do we find solutions for defeats that surpass the boundaries of imagination? Where does a person find their dignity? Where is the path that leads us to cleanse ourselves from panic, fear, and terror? Can a beloved woman protest through Ophelia or Juliet? Can our fallen hero protest through Attil? Can Macbeth's condemnation heal the anguish of the mothers of the victims of the Spiker massacre? Is Hamlet's tragedy greater than the tragedy of youth-driven by delusion every day towards a free death under the streets of the caliphate war? Hence, it is essential to create an Iraqi theatrical script that serves as a bold witness, speaking the truth. A script that confronts humanity with all its deformities, scars, and weaknesses.[39]

MEDIA IN THEATER AND THE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

Experimentation has certainly opened the door to comprehensive exploration, particularly in the ever-diverse and rapidly changing circumstances and contexts. It has swiftly taken on a multifaceted character, embracing various forms, directions, specializations, and dimensions. As a result, technology now plays a significant role in reshaping our lives, from computers and advanced data structures to media outlets that fill our evenings everyday. Electronic games, through media intermediation, have become increasingly significant in our leisure time. Given this continuous influx of innovations, it is only natural to question the impact of technological advancements on experimental techniques in contemporary theater, be it in Iraq, the Arab region, or globally.

Theater is undoubtedly an ancient art form, yet it has not remained untouched by technology, contrary to what some may believe. It has been incorporating technology since its inception, building a legacy over thousands of years. However, in recent years, technological progress has been rapid, giving rise to the internet, social networks, computer advancements, and digital virtual worlds leading to a profound change in our daily lives and, likewise, in theatrical practices. Nevertheless, as is the case with many traditions, it seems that theater has taken some time to fully grasp these advancements. Nonetheless, it is an art form that has always known how to leverage technology to enhance its poetic essence.

Numerous productions have integrated digital technology into their form and content, using it to create a sense of reality by blending the real with the imaginary through modern technology. Onstage, actors often interact with their digital counterparts, engaging with their environment, reflecting on their past, envisioning their future, or condemning and denouncing the dire situation in their country. We will shed light here on two Iraqi experiments, not an exhaustive list, that have embraced digitization as a new technique. Through these experiments, they attempted to connect with their audience in unconventional ways, employing methods that allowed them to explore other art forms such as visual arts and choreography...

THE IRAQI DIRECTOR EMAD MOHAMED

This director has brought forth numerous theatrical works, including "Below Zero" (2008), staged at the National Theater in Baghdad, "Pawns" (2006) at the National Theater, "Muzaffar Al-Nawab" (2010) produced by the Free Iraqi Creativity Foundation, "Arabana" (2013), "Return of Aeschylus" (2004), "Your Place, Sir" (2016), and "Scent of War" (2019). Additionally, there was the play "Facebook" (2011), which was showcased at the National Theater. All these productions were part of the repertoire of the National Acting Troupe. This director was renowned for incorporating technology into his shows. While relying on the script, actors, realistic sets, and costumes—employing traditional presentation techniques—his productions featured screens, whether connected to computers or cinema screens.

In the play "Arabana" by playwright Hameed Al-Maliki, the director delves into the reality of contemporary media, ceaselessly conveying news and images in unique ways. This is depicted through the story of an ordinary citizen named "Hanoun" who possesses nothing but a "cart" as his means of living. Hanoun becomes consumed with following news about his homeland, which has fallen into chaos due to imported democracy and globalization. The stage screen displays scenes of Hanoun dragging his cart through the streets of his working-class neighborhood day and night, mirroring his journey through illusions. This odyssey begins with his dream of living freely and honorably, continues with his university graduation, involuntary involvement in the war, and culminates in his relationship with his wife. Besides the main screen, additional computer screens were placed on both sides of the audience. These screens periodically broadcast glimpses of Hanoun's life.

In the play "Facebook" performed at the National Theater in Baghdad on the evening of March 30, 2011, directed and prepared by Emad Mohammed and starring Mohammed Hashim, as per critic and researcher Dr. Mohammed Hussein Habib, it was "a monodrama that aimed to utilize new digital technologies in shaping its scenography. The director endeavored to create a digital scenography par excellence, where the digital computer screen dominated the theater space and the hall, serving as the central element of the performance. Before us was the personal Facebook page of the protagonist, displaying his authentic image. To our left, in the audience hall, a large wall screen showed a (keyboard) and a (white hand), resembling a live video camera. The fingers moved, imprinting moments of drama as demanded by the situation, such as significant moments like love and freedom. Additionally, there were sound effects generated by digital programs, along with moving images for certain film scenes."[40] The play's narrative revolves around "a night in the life of a protester or dissenter (a young man) attempting to express his protest (his inner struggle) first, and then his resistance against (authority) through a lengthy monologue interspersed with documentary images depicting the subjugation and oppression of individuals on Facebook. These images included film scenes from the Iraqi 'Abu Gharib prison,' the very images that were widely circulated in the media, revealing the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American forces, later referred to as the 'Abu Gharib scandal.' Additionally, impactful words like insomnia, love, freedom, and democracy were used. Ultimately, we come to understand that this protester simply seeks a discussion and dialogue with authority with the aim of enhancing the socio-economic and moral conditions of humanity."[41]

THE DIRECTOR AHMED MOHAMMED ABDUL AMIR, AND THE SHOW "SINDIBAD"

Sindibad is a silent shadow puppetry performance that falls under the realm of shadow artistry (mime shadow), produced by the Department of Cinema and Theater and the National Acting Troupe in Iraq in 2018; it was staged on the National Theater. The presentation is brought to life by the Puppetry and Shadow Imagination Workshop in Babylon, employing digital technology and advanced editing software to craft a virtual shadow realm. The script and direction were masterfully handled by Ahmed Mohammed Abdul Amir. The tale is narrated by a shadow living in exile, delving deep into the essence of a soul seeking a place to call home. This shadow, unlike the legendary Sindibad from The Arabian Nights, symbolizes all of us, laying bare the magnitude of our tragedies and perplexities. He is a shadow that unveils our unfulfilled dreams.

In the context of the research paper entitled "Digital Shadows in Shadow Imagination Theater" Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Abdul Amir, the creator and director of "Al-Sindibad"explained: "The performance comprises eight distinct shadow scenes, with a total duration of 33 minutes. The creation of the shadow imagery and its technical backdrops involved the use of digital technology and contemporary visual software such as 3D Max, pixelation, After Effects, and more. Nine programs seamlessly collaborated to shape the shadowy figures, their movements, gestures, actions, as well as the backgrounds, virtual settings, and imaginative environments that complement the digital shadows. These elements were instrumental in crafting the digital drama narrative, where spoken language gave way to the shadow's gestures and actions. This interaction, combined with the animated digital imagery, brought the scene to life.

The director of the performance embraced a comprehensive approach to shadow design, utilizing film and photographic editing software to create a fully digital shadow scene. This integration allowed for immediate interaction between the performer's gestures and the previously produced digital shadows, blending seamlessly within the digital technical space. In this context, the shadow performance, or "Shadow Imagination" is entirely shaped by technology, encompassing narration, description, character portrayal, performance, interaction, and creative expression (both visually and auditory). This approach, while stripping away the authentic interactive essence of the performance, minimizes the shadow's presence, rendering it a mere silhouette. This transformation brings the presentation closer to contemporary cinematic experiences and digital artistry. It can now be aptly labeled as "Digital Shadow Imagination Postmodern"[42]

AN INEVITABLE CONCLUSION

Indeed, technology has ushered in new visual devices, enriching our perspectives with its surprises and significantly disrupting the traditional stability of theater. It has challenged our long-held perceptions, where we often viewed theater solely through the lens of text, director, actor, and audience. Behind these fundamental elements, however, lie both human and technological intricacies. These intricacies, shaped by continuous advancements, have become pivotal in the theatrical process, contributing immensely to the diverse growth of its arts.

There are certainly aspects we no longer recognize. Theater today faces challenges reminiscent of those encountered in the past century. Consequently, it becomes imperative for us to continually reinvent and innovate, especially considering the complexity of understanding specific technologies as they emerge experimentally. This challenge arises partly because every technology carries its unique memory space. Theater was never a mere stage for live performances; it also represented a realm of freedom, allowing memory to break free from the constraints of time.

"In the years before 2003, theater practitioners managed to navigate around the control imposed by authority and its ideological and security structures. They achieved this through clever use of coding and encryption, allowing their artistic discourse to counter the discourse of power. However, these techniques have lost their effectiveness within a society that has lost its national unity, now fragmented into tribes, ethnic groups, nationalities, and sects, all in conflict with each other. This fragmentation has widened the chasm of doubt and suspicion between these groups"[43]

Post-2003 Iraq's artistic landscape demonstrates persistent limitations on freedom and democratic ideals. Despite the challenges posed by the religious resurgence and the inconsistent cultural policies—which, on the one hand, reject artistic and cultural activities due to ideological conflicts and, on the other hand, reluctantly accept them as a present reality and an inherited legacy from the past that Iraqis cannot abandon—Iraqi artists have managed to find a middle ground. They have bravely challenged societal norms through innovative textual approaches by embracing experimental forms of theater such as body or choreographic performances, rubble theater, theater in open spaces (particularly in historically significant areas affected by explosions and destruction), and protest theater. Additionally, they have embraced new technologies, focusing on scenography, lighting, and digital multimedia techniques, all of which play a fundamental and essential role in expanding horizons for innovation. These technologies involve shadow imagery, audio recordings, computers, video footage, and television and cinema presentations within the realm of theatrical performances.

Theatre in the Gulf Countries

Introduction

BEGINNINGS AND THE RELATION BETWEEN PERFORMING ARTS, HERITAGE, AND MODERNITY

Performing arts have been a means of expression for human societies since ancient times. These theatrical performances, complete with the necessary props, bring forth themes that resonate with shared experiences. They have evolved to explore topics that hold the potential to impact the present, echoing the brilliance of bygone eras. From epic poems, characters, and their roles in society and politics to humorous traits and playful elements, these performances offer valuable insights. They shed light on issues like greed, social injustice, oppression, betrayal, and corruption, providing a critical lens to understand the complexities of the present, both on a personal and societal level. Additionally, they explore ancient music and diverse instruments, costumes, historical periods, and dedicated performance spaces, among other aspects.

Communities participate in these experiences with the aim of prolonging these moments of engagement, replaying them, and deriving benefits from them. This is achieved by preserving their impact and sharing them through textual, performance, and visual materials. Consequently, confronted with the uncertain exchange of these poems, atmospheres, movements, games, and even places, collective reasoning, memory, knowledge, economy, and power can come to the surface.

However, before delving into the intricate relationship between performing arts, heritage, and modernity, it is essential to trace the origins of theater in the Gulf. This rich heritage is steeped in rituals, celebrations, folk music, and folklore. It encompasses sea shanties, the work songs of sailors before and after their sea journeys, and the unique bond between sailors and their ship's captain, known as "Al-Nawkhatha" The repertoire also includes plowing songs, songs associated with social events like weddings and circumcisions, which vary from one region to another, as well as playful folk games and diverse religious rituals. These performances also reflect the societal transformations that occurred in the region following the discovery of oil.

THE EARLY YEARS IN THE GULF COUNTRIES

Examining the roots of the theatrical movement in the Gulf countries reveals that theater arrived comparatively late, especially when compared to other Arab nations like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. The theatrical activity in the Gulf region, as highlighted in various references and articles, had its origins within the structure of modern formal education. This influence can be traced back to teachers from Egypt and the Levant. Muhammad Ould Muhammad Salem pointed out, "Teachers from Egypt and the Levant introduced students to this captivating art form in schools, which was entirely new to them. Talented students were trained in theatrical performances, and after leaving school, these individuals brought their newfound skills to clubs, gatherings, and local communities. It was from these grassroots settings that the theatrical movement took its initial steps"[44]

Similarly, Dr. Abbas Hassan Al-Gassab, in his book "Utilizing Folk Heritage in Bahraini Theater" emphasized, "Understanding the history of the theater movement in the Gulf region requires a closer look at the history of formal education—in other words, the education and theater activity. These two aspects were intricately linked, a relationship that can be traced back to the early decades of the last century"[45]

In terms of historical precedence, Kuwait and Bahrain stood out as trailblazers in embracing this form of art. Historical records show that the inaugural theatrical performance in Kuwait took place in 1922 during the closing ceremony of the first academic year at the "Al-Ahmadiyya" school.[46] The true genesis of theater in Kuwait occurred with the play "Islam Omar" (Omar ibn al-Khattab) during both the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras. This play, penned by Abdulaziz Al-Rashid, was printed in Baghdad in 1924.[47]

In Bahrain, Al-Hedaya Al-Khalifa school in Manama presented its first theatrical production titled "Al-Qadi Bi Amr Allah" in 1925. Subsequently, in 1928, the school showcased two plays, namely "Tha'labah" and "The Arab Delegations to Khosrow" on the stage of Al-Hedaya Al-Khalifa School. Another play, called "Dhi Qar"[48] was performed in 1939. Notably, early theatrical initiatives in Bahrain predominantly leaned towards historical themes. Some attribute this trend to the "discovery by Arab teachers–both male and female–whom Bahrain brought from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, that theater is the most effective and accessible means to impart the essence of Islamic history to their students."[49]

This indicates that theater, right from its inception, drew inspiration from Arab heritage as a rich source of material. This was particularly evident given the early recognition of "storytellers" as theatrical artists among the Arabs, as well as the prevalence of various theater elements in Arab heritage, such as shadow plays during the Abbasid era, "maqamat" and more.

This has prompted numerous individuals engaged in this field to explore the foundations of the theater phenomenon under the banner of authenticating Arab theater. Figures like Tawfiq al-Hakim, Yusuf Idris, Ahmed Abu Khalil Qabani, and Marun al-Naqqash were among the pioneers, followed by Abdelkrim Berrechid, who shared insights about celebratory aspects. Saadallah Wannous, Qasim Muhammad, and many others have also contributed to this discourse.

When it comes to the traditional folkloric forms embraced by Gulf theater in its works, it is essential to mention that, in addition to historical and Islamic themes, they delved into popular folk tales, literary myths, folklore songs, and heritage connected to proverbs, exploring their social, environmental, economic, cultural, and religious implications. Incorporating proverbs into theatrical texts served the playwrights, drawing inspiration from their heritage passed down from ancestors, preserved in heritage books, or transmitted through oral traditions across generations.[50]

Furthermore, epics, folk legends, animal fables, and stories from "One Thousand and One Nights" were embraced. "One Thousand and One Nights" held particular significance, becoming a rich source of inspiration for Gulf playwrights due to its widespread popularity and the elements of enjoyment, humor, and imagination it offered. Playwrights embarked on incorporating elements from "One Thousand and One Nights" into their contemporary texts, aiming to recreate the traditional narrative in a modern context. This reimagining not only revitalized ancient narratives, but also contributed to the evolution of theatrical storytelling, providing playwrights with a wealth of imaginative material for their creative endeavors.[51]

In the book's final chapter, author Said Mohammed Al-Siyabi delves into examples of Omani plays. After providing a comprehensive overview and analyzing each one, he focuses on the play "Al-Baraqi" (written by Dr. Abd Al Karim Jawad in 1995, directed in 1997, and performed by the Majan Theater Group). In this play, Dr. Abd Al Karim explores the issue of male dominance over women, who are concealed behind veils of isolation, constantly feeling the pressure and control exerted by men, whether as fathers, husbands, uncles, or brothers. In the end, this power cannot be undermined, regardless of the position of women in any family. The play's central themes revolve around injustice and oppression, conveyed through eleven scenes presented in a poetic and dance-like manner. The production relies on the actors' expressive movements and physical techniques, complemented by a fusion of traditional music and rhythms blended with modern Omani symphonies. Movement and expressive music serve as a unique language for dialogues and monologues, moving away from conventional verbal communication. The play garnered significant acclaim at the Fifth Gulf Theater Festival, earning it an award from the festival's jury committee.[52]

To further illustrate our discussion about Gulf theater and its unique theater productions, let's delve into another theater model. We had the chance to experience this at the inaugural National Bahraini Theater Festival in 2019, where the play "Na'al Al-Nokhatha" (The Nokhatha's Shoes) was brought to life by Bahrain's Awal Theater. This performance unfolded at the Bahrain Cultural Hall in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The play, written by Yaqoub Yousif and directed by Jamal Al-Ghaylan, featured a cast including Adel Shams, Hasan Asfur, Ameen Al-Sayegh, Hamad Atiq, Mohammed Saqr, Abeer Muftah, Rashid Al-Azmi, Mohammed Shahin, Khaled Janaahi, Ali Hassan Al-Fardan, and Khulood Al-Balushi.

At first glance, and even from its title, it is evident that this work heavily draws from folk tales and the rich traditional heritage deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of our Arab societies, be it in the past or the present. Thus, we are presented with a piece that encompasses a plethora of social, political, ethical, and cultural traditions. These elements, in one way or another, are imbued with the layers of collective memory that pervade Gulf societies at large and the Bahraini community specifically.

What adds to the local essence of this production is the fact that both the playwright and the director, Yaqoub Yousif and Jamal Al-Ghaylan respectively, are Bahrainis. Furthermore, all the actors and technicians involved are Bahraini as well. This emphasizes the inherently local nature of the play. By describing it as exceptionally local, we did not mean to imply that it could not resonate elsewhere, especially the text. Instead, we aim to underline the distinctly local nuances embedded within its language and presentation.

The text by the author Yaqoub Yousif discusses the theft of "Na'al Al-Nokhatha" a term in Gulf dialect referring to the leader or captain of a fishing boat, the one responsible for all decisions related to maritime trade and fishing. This character is expected to possess qualities like moderation, profound knowledge of the sea, good conduct, and physical prowess to navigate the ship. He bears the responsibility of rescuing the ship in case of sudden malfunctions or obstacles, while the sailors accompanying him are obliged to obey his commands with compliance and obedience. The text sheds light on these aspects, albeit in a contrasting manner. It portrays these traits and the captain's significant responsibility from a different perspective, depicting him exploiting sailors who have no choice but to rely on the sea's resources for their livelihoods, all for his personal gain and interests.

In addressing this theme, the author turns to folk tales. Although they may seem traditional on the surface, their content and adaptation in the theatrical narrative explore several essential themes, including tyranny and the misuse of power bestowed upon leaders by the people. Unlike mythical tales, this folk narrative has no fantastical creatures or animals, and it does not explore unrealistic situations beyond human understanding. Instead, it is grounded in real characters, situations, and events inspired by the Gulf region's climate. Both in its form and content, these elements gradually lead to something extraordinary and unfamiliar, naturally prompting rebellion against the established norms.

The story begins in the home of the "Nokhatha" (Bu Yusuf) in the southern region. Through a conversation between him and his wife (Um Yusuf), it becomes clear that they plan to marry their son (Yusuf) to his cousin. However, the cousin's father demands a hefty dowry, which they do not have. The father tries to borrow money from close friends, but he struggles to ask for help. He returns home hoping to discuss the matter later or at a more suitable time. However, Yusuf's Mother is worried that her son might lose the opportunity to marry his cousin, especially since her brother will not wait and might marry her off to a wealthy man quickly.

Meanwhile, their son Yusuf is away from home, taking care of the camels and set to return the day after tomorrow. The dilemma must be resolved before his return. After much thought, the wife suggests that her husband should approach the "Nokhatha" (Bu Salem), especially since he is currently looking for sailors. Initially, the husband hesitates. He mentions his age and feeling he is no longer fit for sea voyages. Moreover, Busalem hails from the north, and tensions between the northern and southern residents are apparent.

Despite this, the wife insists that her husband goes, not to work with him, but to borrow the necessary funds for their son's wedding. She hopes to repay the amount once their circumstances improve. She reminds him that he used to be one of Busalem's respected and valued sailors. After a brief moment of indecision, Buyusuf agrees to meet with Busalem. However, the wife notices her husband's old shoes, realizing they are inappropriate for the occasion.

Since there is no time to waste and waiting to buy new shoes next month is not an option, she quietly suggests, mindful that walls have ears, that he should go to the mosque and borrow a pair left by worshippers at the entrance before they enter. After using them, he can return them. Here, a comical twist occurs, leading to a series of complications. Unfortunately for Buyusuf, he mistakenly takes Busalem's shoes. Busalem had come to the mosque to inquire about Mulla Rashid's illness, seeking help and support from the southerners to sail with him. This is after the northerners abandoned him and deserted the sea to work with the companies exploring for oil.

However, before Busalem could address the issue he had come for with the southerners, prayer time arrived. Everyone entered the mosque, leaving their shoes at the door, where two beggars were sitting. After the prayer, which we did not witness since it took place inside the mosque, the author intended to shift us to an outdoor scene between the beggars and Hamid. This set the stage for a later comical accusation scene involving Hamid and Majdam.

All we hear is Busalem's voice, shouting, threatening, and reproaching the southerners who stole his shoes and insulted him in their own council.

Here things get complicated, and the situation becomes unclear because the theft has not been disclosed yet, and it happened inside the mosque while we were watching the scene with the beggars, Hamid, and Majdum. The author only hinted at it, indicating (a person running out of the mosque and colliding with Hamid).

The southerners were surprised by what happened and tried to pacify Busalem's anger. They questioned the beggars if they saw the culprit also accusing them, (Hamid and Majdum). With Busalem's anger subsiding a little, he demanded that the thieves join him in the council of northerners. He wanted to deal with them personally.

The playwright employs a deliberate theatrical irony. In the mosque scene where the theft occurs, the author briefly hints at a person exiting without specifying their identity, appearance, or name. We did not see "Buyusuf" among the worshippers as everyone entered the mosque for prayer. Even though the director followed the author's cue and did not show "Buyusuf" among the worshippers, he is revealed when he exits the mosque, holding a red sandal in his hand. He accidentally collides with "Hamid" the drunkard, and "Majdum" follows suit, all in front of the beggars. During the questioning, the beggars accused of the theft claim they each took one shoe from Busalem, without revealing the full extent of the situation. Perhaps the author intended not to reveal the game's details too soon, or maybe he wanted to create a sense of disguise.

It appears the director had a different approach in handling the scene. Logically, the theft could not have occurred without "Buyusuf" being present, even though we had not seen him earlier, as he swaps his old shoes for new ones. We only find out about this in the following scene when Busalem punishes both "Hamid" and "Majdum" explaining to "Buyusuf" what happened in the mosque and the southern council. In the meantime, "Buyusuf" escapes like a thief from the council, leaving Busalem to talk alone without asking him the reason of his visit.

When he arrives home and explains the irony of what happened to his wife, the couple try every possible way to dispose of "Busalem's shoes" However, their attempts fail because every time they throw the shoes outside, they somehow end up back with them. Bystanders assume it was a mistake and return the shoes to their home. This situation reminds us somewhat of the tale of "Abu Al-Qasim Al-Tanbouri's Shoe" despite the different context. However, it highlights that the author, in his storytelling, stays true to tradition and draws inspiration from it. He skillfully merges folk narratives with cultural heritage, adapting them for the present while looking toward the future.

What does this conflict between the north and south, which takes up a significant portion of the play's conflict, truly represent?! Is it merely a reflection of geographical and local social divisions, or does it symbolize an underlying cultural clash between (north and south) or (east and west) on a global scale? It hints at the latter's attempts to erode the uniqueness of other nations and control them under the banner of the new world order and globalization. Whether intentional or not, the author subtly suggests through his narrative a potential interpretation for the audience, especially given that in every country, there exists some form of conflict between its northern and southern regions, be it in Arab or Western nations.

Moreover, the play cleverly adapts and reinterprets the folk tale, making it parallel to real-life situations. Perhaps this is meant to rouse the people from their apathy, encouraging them to resist oppression and tyranny in all their forms, defending their humanity. This becomes evident through the act of resistance at the play's climax, where everyone unites against Busalem's arrogance. He dismisses all proposed solutions and suggestions from the southern residents, whether it is replacing his shoes with a new pair or acknowledging "Buyusuf's" temporary borrowing. Faced with Busalem's rejection and conceit, everyone joins forces, claiming they are the ones who stole the shoes. This signifies a significant victory for the people's awareness and their struggle for justice and freedom.

REGARDING THE SHOW

The director, Jamal Al-Ghaylan, and the scenographer, Ali Hussein, made a deliberate effort to immerse the production in its local setting. They achieved this by incorporating regional elements and seamlessly transforming various locations in the script, which remained consistent despite their diverse settings. The motif of "palm fronds" pervaded nearly every aspect of the scenography, creating a sense of uniformity among them. In fact, distinguishing between these locations became possible only through verbal cues and character transitions. Even in these shifts, a clear path emerged, particularly in the scene where Busalem and his companion, Marzouk, move from the northern council to the southern council. Here, we witness a wall made of "palm fronds" accompanying their every step, adding depth to the scene. This intricate detail captivated the audience's attention, dividing their focus between the wall's movement, its continuous formation, and the dialogue between these two characters. These elements served as the initial gateway to unraveling the play's complexity.

Additionally, the door that served as the entrance to the mosque did not just represent the gateway to Busalem's house; its physical location remained unchanged. It is worth noting that the scene where it was first introduced was set in the south, while Busalem's residence is in the north. The director could have, at the very least, relocated the door and changed its direction. This adjustment would have allowed us to seamlessly transition with the events from one area to another, capturing the geographical and ideological distinctions intended by the author. It would have illustrated the contrast between two social groups coexisting within the same community.

Moreover, the folk environment's richness extends beyond just palm fronds; there are also palm trunks, for example, that the director and set designer could have incorporated. These palm trunks could have served as seating in the southern council and within Buyusuf's house. They might have been used

as a bench near Busalem's door, where Buyusuf, Hamid, and Majdum sit while awaiting Busalem. Given the play's commitment to realism—mirroring photography's unvarnished portrayal of daily life—incorporating these elements instead of wooden decor would have heightened the setting's authenticity. The play explores the lives of sailors, their diving experiences, and their concerns amidst societal changes due to the discovery of petroleum. Despite this, not a single element hints at an abandoned boat or machinery for drilling and blasting the earth's depths, not even within the realm of imaginative shadows, for instance.

The missed opportunity to use a fishing net as both physical trap and metaphor– containing the shoe-thieves Hamid and Majdum during their confrontation with Busalem– would have elevated the scene's dramatic potential. This would have brought more life to the production, incorporating elements beyond just palm fronds, injecting a playful and creative touch. It would have deviated slightly from the script and its limitations, to which the director remained strictly tied. Directing, after all, involves interpreting and offering alternative perspectives, not merely sticking to a literal representation.

Apart from that, there was music, although it didn't really play a significant role in building up the events or their intensity. It stuck to a single rhythmic musical phrase that repeated itself from one scene to another, almost resembling a TV series soundtrack. The only exception was the opening scene, where the music blended seamlessly with heartfelt sighs and beautiful poetic recitations. However, it abruptly stopped, without a gradual transition, shifting to a repetitive melody that persisted throughout the performance.

Regarding the ensemble, they had a vital role in the play, both in the southern council scene and in the final scene where everyone united against Busalem's arrogance. Interestingly, the director's handling of the ensemble in the southern council scene seemed confused and unorganized. Characters often obscured each other, affecting the overall aesthetic and cohesiveness of human formations. We missed witnessing their conflicts, doubts, and amazement at the unfolding events. This was in sharp contrast to the final scene, which was wonderfully choreographed. The director positioned some characters on raised platforms and others on the ground, giving the scene a dynamic and expressive quality, reminiscent of the captivating atmosphere of the initial opening scene.

As for the costumes, they were well-suited to the play's atmosphere and the treatment of the events. However, the lighting remained somewhat limited in its expressions and a bit reserved. This might be attributed to the theater's equipment limitations.

The play certainly had a profound impact on the audience, unlike anything we had witnessed in previous festival performances. Perhaps it resonated so deeply because it met their expectations and anticipations. The play's theme was significant as it tackled local and heritage issues, incorporating both dark humor and social comedy that occasionally veered into satire in certain situations and scenarios. Notably, the scenes featuring the drunken "Hamid" and "Majdum" with the beggars, as well as their confrontations with the arrogant "Busalem" character were memorable. Additionally, in the southern council scene, "Majdum's" constant commentary on any topic brought an element of amusement. These details were reminiscent of scenes viewers were accustomed to seeing on television.

But can the audience's response and their enjoyment be considered indicators of this play's success?

ONE OF THE INITIAL SIGNS OF THE BEGINNING OF THEATRE IN THE GULF COUNTRIES

If we want to trace the early roots of theater in the Gulf countries, particularly in the UAE, we need to turn the clock back to the year 1950. According to Dr. Abdul Allah, this leads us to the Qasimia School in Sharjah, recognized as one of the earliest formal institutions. At this school, notable educators like Zahdi Al-Khatib, Mohammed Diab Al-Mousa, and Ali Burehima played key roles. It was Ali Burehima who authored and staged the inaugural play at Qasimia School, titled "The Woodcutter and the Sultan's Daughter." As Sheikh Sultan stated, little did Ali Burehima know at the time that this play would mark the initial stride of the theater movement in the UAE; it would evolve into a significant force in the years to come.[53] This integration of heritage into Gulf and Emirati theater has endured as Ismail Abdullah, a contemporary writer and head of the Arab Theater Institute, underscores that the Emirati text and its discourse "did not emerge coincidentally, but rather were shaped by social, political, geographical, and religious factors (...)."

One of the key motivators for theater writers in the Emirates is their exploration of both written and oral folk traditions. They utilize these traditions as the core content of their works, continually striving to reintegrate heritage into literary and cultural spotlight. This approach authentically represents the identity of the Emirati people, focusing on themes that are distinctly Emirati. By modernizing these themes, they aim to apply them to everyday life (...). Ismail Abdullah skillfully incorporates this approach, drawing inspiration from oral Emirati heritage and infusing it with various elements to create a fresh and distinctive theatrical composition.

In the play "Al-Suloqi" written in 2010, an amalgamation of meanings expressed through the discourse crafted by the author becomes evident. The play takes inspiration from Mikhail Bulgakov's novel "Heart of a Dog" written in early 1925. However, Ismail Abdullah, in his new work, delves into folk traditions, specifically the diving rituals practiced during that era. He employs the character of the "new content" dog to convey the intended discourse, advocating for human issues, concerns, problems, and aspirations, while defending the right to live a dignified life as the ultimate objective.[54]

Theatrical activities in Dubai commenced in 1958 at Al-Ahmadiyya School and expanded to Al-Qasimiya School in Ras Al Khaimah in 1960. In Qatar, School Theater gained prominence in the late 1950s. Doha School presented the play "Bilal ibn Rabah" in 1959 and performed Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" reimagined as "Merchant of Basra" in 1963. The religious institute staged the play "A Scholar and a Tyrant" in 1969. Theater troupes began to flourish from 1968 onwards.[55]

Regarding the origins of theater in Saudi Arabia, Abdul Karim Al-Hajrawi's accounts differ. "Some researchers attribute its beginnings to 1960, the year when the first Saudi theater project was set to premiere: "The Conquest of Mecca" a play written by Muhammad Malibari, staged at the Quraish Theater.

However, this initiative faced opposition from its detractors. Others point to the year 1974 as the starting point, marked by the staging of Ibrahim Al-Hamdani's play "A Doctor in Mashaab" adapted from Molière's "The Doctor in Spite of Himself." The play was performed in Riyadh, generating considerable interest, and was even supported by Saudi television at the time.[56]

Our intention here is not to document the theater history of each Gulf country separately. We have relied on select documentary samples that almost align or, more accurately, coincide across various aspects of Gulf theater. Firstly, this convergence stems from the close social, political, and cultural ties between these nations. Secondly, the initial forays into theater in these countries share similar timeframes, albeit with slight variations, some predating others. Thirdly, these shared narratives highlight that schools across the Gulf served as the cradle and foundation of this theatrical movement simultaneously.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the themes explored in Gulf theater, stemming from heritage, Arab history, and literature, were fairly consistent across these nations

Furthermore, when we discuss the school environment as the primary incubator for Gulf theater, we naturally refer to the essential elements that played pivotal roles in shaping and sustaining this movement—actors, directors, writers, and even the audience, consisting of students and their parents, who became spectators due to their children's involvement. As this theater movement extended beyond the confines of schools, it seamlessly transitioned to clubs and private theater groups, which operated with a semi-official status, led by passionate theater enthusiasts steering the ship with their expertise.

THEATER THEMES AND APPROACHES

In recent years, Gulf theater has shown a keen interest in the quality and content of its productions. This focus has significantly impacted the form and substance of these performances, aligning them with the broader developments in Arab and global theater. However, Gulf theater has managed to maintain its authenticity, rooted in Gulf identity, traditions, and customs.

This is evident in the play "Residents of the Ground Floor" presented by the Bahraini Coastal Theater at the recent Bahrain National Theater Festival. Despite exploring texts such as Eugène Ionesco's "The Lesson" and Edward Albee's "The Sandbox" which delve into the theme of death, a concept somewhat detached from Gulf contexts and particularly given their absurdist nature, director, creator, and scenographer Hashem Al-Alawi incorporated numerous local traditional elements and songs into the production..

A similar approach is evident in "War of the Mites" written by Emirati playwright Hamid Fares and directed by Omani director Murshid Aziz. This play was presented by the Sultanate of Oman and produced by the Omani Cultural and Art Troupe as part of the 2017 Sharjah Gulf Theater Festival, albeit in a reversed manner. It narrates the struggle between good and evil within an agricultural village infested by mites. The plot unfolds between the villagers and their leader "Matar" as they attempt to uncover the cause behind the mite infestation. They soon discover that this calamity is a result of an old feud between the village leader, "Matar" and one of its former residents, "Kifan." Kifan had been expelled from the village due to his betrayal and sought revenge by sowing mites in the village's farms to incite conflict among its people. However, his plan failed, and his true intentions were revealed.

Although this story addresses a topic that is rooted in local context and holds a broader Arab perspective, particularly concerning the theme of war prevalent in the Arab region, the play's presentation is enriched with impressive stage design, diverse effects, and the use of technology. Despite these modern elements, the narrative remains deeply tied to Omani heritage, incorporating traditional clothing, dialect, and scenery depicting a palm tree oasis and social tensions. While exploring a universal theme, the play maintains its distinct Omani identity, even with the integration of contemporary techniques.

From what has been presented, we understand that Gulf theater, despite being influenced by modern scenic changes, has consistently balanced between its identity and the unique Gulf atmospheres, as well as modern theatrical trends. In this context, Qatari playwright and theater critic Dr. Hassan Rashid mentioned in an interview with the Qatari News Agency, "Gulf theater strives to keep up with Arab theater. This endeavor has not diluted its identity; instead, it has enriched it. Our theater has been influenced by external factors while preserving its distinct features, shaping our identity" he added. He emphasized that Gulf theater has its distinct identity both in language and representation.[57]

On the other hand, Saudi playwright Fahd Al-Harthi stated in a similar context, "When we explore Gulf theater, examining its identity and its ability to evolve while keeping up with formal and technical aspects, we encounter complex challenges. We face issues related to our problems, identity, heritage, technology, and modernity within a specific region, the Arabian Gulf, in a confined space, which is the theater"[58] Al-Harthi further elaborated, "When we discuss the topics of identity and heritage in Gulf Arab theater from this perspective, it is crucial to recognize one key point: theater is not inherently part of our heritage, nor is it directly linked to our identity. However, we find ourselves engaging with it as a global art form, immersing ourselves in its intricacies, and attempting to interpret it according to our thoughts and identity. While Arab theater attempted to challenge established global theater conventions through storytelling, festive performances, folk traditions, and other forms of entertainment, which, in their generality, remained largely theoretical without deep exploration due to various reasons, Gulf theater remained onlookers. We didn't actively participate in the experimental rebellion, nor did we deeply engage with it. We didn't endeavor to explore the depths of what could form the basis of a theatrical project or theory. At the same time, heritage theater and its narratives remained significant in preserving human identity. Gulf playwrights often drew inspiration from the sea, its tales, nomadic life, Bedouin traditions, and delved into the desert's essence and formation, as well as the lives in villages and farms. This was an attempt to establish a connection with our roots, steering clear of delving too deeply into experimental theater issues or engaging in discussions about grounding Arab theatrical forms or the application of theatrical techniques."[59] For this reason, the Desert Theater Festival was possibly established in 2012 under the coordination of Salih Al-Taniji,[60] the festival's general coordinator, as part of the cultural activities organized by the Department of Culture in the Emirate of Sharjah. This initiative translates the vision of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, a member of the Supreme Council and the Ruler of Sharjah, aiming to enhance the significance of

theater arts and integrate them seamlessly into the lives of people and society, transcending both time and place.

The festival seeks to explore and shed light on the natural and potential connections between various forms of performance and storytelling that bring the desert and the art of theater to life. Its goal is to amplify efforts and make the theater experience in Arab countries impactful, influential, and continually fresh. This is accomplished by addressing the concerns, questions, and aspirations of our lives, either through proposing innovative creative solutions that resonate with the present and anticipate the future, or by embracing all aspects of our lives.

The festival spans four nights, during which theater enthusiasts from diverse Arab countries come together for dialogue, communication, and collaboration. Through these interactions, they discuss everything that can contribute to the growth and stimulation of their creative and theoretical experiences. Embracing diversity and differences, the festival enriches these experiences with contrasts and distinctions, guiding them towards both tradition and modernity.

The essence of this event, blending artistic, social, and folk elements, is deeply rooted in the celebration of the richness and diversity of desert culture. This vibrant culture has long been a source of inspiration for travelers, storytellers, and artists, with its vast landscapes, endless horizons, sands, dunes, valleys, architecture, people, and their customs and traditions, whether in settled communities or nomadic lifestyles. The festival's performances center around storytelling, poetry, and various artistic expressions that are part of the desert's aesthetic heritage. These presentations aim to capture the multifaceted nature of desert culture, spanning across the Arab region from east to west.[61]

Without a doubt, the concerns of Gulf theater artists have always resonated with the issues and struggles of the Arab people, particularly regarding the Palestinian cause and the nationalist movements that shaped the entire region during the early days of theater in the Arab region. Consequently, themes such as citizenship, nationalism, and anti-colonialism were at the core of Gulf theatrical productions, influencing both the scripts and the direction. Nevertheless, Gulf theater has managed to preserve its unique identity.

It has delved deep into its rich heritage, embracing historical narratives and popular stories, including the tales of fishermen and their deep connection to the sea, the nuances of fishing seasons, as well as the melodies and folktales. These elements continue to be pivotal in shaping Gulf theater, influencing not only the dialogue, but also the set designs, costumes, and overall atmosphere.

While Gulf theater has recently embraced experimentation and modern techniques in lighting, sound, and scenography, its foray into digitization or multimedia remains relatively limited. The focus has primarily been on scenography and the evolution of lighting, evident in the works of acclaimed Emirati director Mohammed Al-Amri.

Take, for instance, the play "Sahil Al-Tin" by Emirati playwright Ismail Abdullah, delving into the intricacies of life and death. The dramatic language in this piece moved beyond conventional methods, adopting a visually artistic approach that emphasizes poetic theater. This fusion of traditional drama with anthropological theatrical rituals and symbolism echoes the spirit of Antonin Artaud's theater of cruelty.

Similar innovative approaches are evident in productions like "Yesterday They Were Here" "Al-Lawal" and "The Sandal War" by Ismail Abdullah, as well as "Ghasa'a wa 'Abur" by Taghreed Al-Dawood, showcased at the Tenth Arab Theater Festival in Tunisia in 2009.

The performance started with a visually captivating setup, featuring a backdrop screen reflecting the characters' faces on the stage and in the hall. It depicted scenes of the sky, storms, and a turbulent sea, along with a movable bridge at the center of the stage, separating two shores. Stranded travelers stood on the bridge–some escaping their homelands, while others yearned to return. Each of them had a story. They attempted to cross to the other side, only to find everything blocked off, particularly due to a guard stationed on the bridge, claiming it was on the brink of collapse and could crumble at any moment.

Based on what we have seen from this director, his vision often shifts between visual theater, celebratory elements, and a touch of raw intensity, not to mention the underlying symbolism in his shows. Or rather, the symbolism itself serves as a semiotic tool, hinting at deeper meanings that may not be immediately obvious, but are grasped through their connection to various elements. Mohammed Al-Amri can be considered part of the new wave of Emirati directors, reminiscent of, but not limited to, Bahraini director Mohammed Shahin in his staging of the play "Haider" penned by Bahraini playwright Ameen Saleh. The play unfolds in poetic language, rich in metaphors, allusions, mystery, and complexity, delving into intertwined, distinct, schizoid, and intricate emotions and relationships within the protagonist's psyche. Crafted as a living fantasy, it spans different times and eras, portraying the life experiences of an individual not advanced in years, but in terms of life lessons. Its echoes resonate in a fragmented psychological drama experienced by many, gradually stripping away their humanity.

In addition to Bahraini director Hashem Al-Alawi, in the play "Ground Floor Residents" Kuwaiti director Faisal Al-Umairi, in the play "Echo of Silence" by Iraqi playwright Qasim Maturud, captivated the audience right from the start at the eighth edition of the Arab Theater Festival in Kuwait. They immediately made the audience their partners. This approach was driven by the demands of contemporary theatrical writing and its treatment of events. The performance primarily relied on the character of the dramaturge, who was neither a playwright nor a director, but rather a figure who balanced between them, the actors, and the audience, akin to an orchestra conductor. This dramaturge distributed roles, produced events, commented on them, and created musical effects for every line and scene. Specific sets and lighting were imposed on the actors, with the dramaturge controlling the flow of events like a cinematic reel. The dramaturge intervened in the performance, sometimes as an actor and sometimes as a representative of the playwright. All of this unfolded before the audience, becoming an integral part of the theatrical experience. The audience actively participated, especially when directed by the dramaturge. For instance, he would instruct them to applaud warmly, not just politely, and the audience responded enthusiastically, the applause growing louder. The dramaturge even dared to tell them, "The playwright wants genuine laughter, not boisterous laughter." These theatrical maneuvers made the audience's involvement complementary to the performance, turning them into the creative fourth element alongside the playwright, director, and actors, just as Mayerhold had envisioned. This process itself revealed the essence of the theatrical game employed by Qasim Maturud as the playwright and Faisal Al-Umairi as the director when they introduced the character of the dramaturge, engaging with the audience during the very moment of the performance. This approach ensured the performance's dynamic cohesion, primarily relying on the audience's interactivity and response, rather than solely the actors and their roles, thereby defying conventional norms. It is important to note that the text was not a comedy, but a poignant tragedy that tugged at the heartstrings.

The themes addressed in Gulf theater from its early days have been remarkably consistent, with slight variations from one country to another, often involving nuanced details. This theater predominantly delved into the intricacies of everyday life, exploring topics such as family dynamics, familial bonds, the evolving nature of youth, social traditions, and their clash with the values of contemporary life that gradually permeated Gulf society. This influence became prevalent, possibly due to the surge brought about by the discovery of oil and the utilization of its wealth in various fields. Additionally, the influx of modern technology and Western lifestyles, for which the region was not initially prepared, further exacerbated the division between the previously prevalent simple way of life and the sudden, noticeable change intersecting with traditional society and rapidly spreading modernity.

In the first half of the last century, Gulf society, which was relatively stable, often explored themes for its limited theatrical productions from ancient history or folk heritage. However, in the latter half of the century, within a society torn between its past and present, progress and tradition, generations, and the residents and migrants, playwrights found a wealth of material ready for exploration. This divided society became a focal point for playwrights, offering rich material for Gulf theater.[62]

Experimental theater, by its nature, encompasses productions that diverge from the usual norms found in this field. This category includes performances that defy easy classification and avant-garde theater, which explores new experiments or employs innovative methods. However, the concept of experimental theater remains somewhat unclear. It is often perceived as unconventional, leading some Arab playwrights to conflate it with other theatrical genres like absurd or irrational theater. Additionally, any novel approach is sometimes mistaken for experimental theater.

To address the increasing confusion in classifying theatrical arts, there is a growing inclination to discuss the concept of live performances, particularly in Gulf theater. Firstly, this is a topic of research, and secondly, despite Gulf theater's embrace of modern techniques, be it in lighting, scenography, or multimedia, including screen displays and video imagery, and its exploration of various global, Arabic, or local textual styles, it remains faithful to its identity and the aesthetics of its social and environmental context. Gulf theater does not seek to exclude these elements from its productions or mask them, even when tempted by arbitrary and uncertain stylistic deviations. Perhaps this steadfastness is rooted in its soil and its life, providing the foundation for its vocabulary and textual and directorial perspectives, allowing it to authentically engage with its distinct reality.

Through this approach, it embraces the local context as an integral part of its identity, approaching it with a contemporary vision marked by artistic, aesthetic, and experimental aspirations. This perspective endows its work with a sense of relevance and contemporaneity, making it distinct from theater productions in the Arab region. Its primary audience is the local community, followed by the Arab audience, and then the global one.

The theatrical productions have thus moved towards a future Gulf theater, employing artistic tools and embracing cultural heritage. This expansion broadens the artistic horizons, allowing the theatrical narratives to extend beyond the constraints of experimental boundaries, as suggested by Dr. Abdul Rahman Bin Zaidan

We previously discussed some of the Gulf theatrical experiments that, despite their modern aspirations and attempts to explore experimental approaches influenced by Western productions, manage to strike a delicate balance. They draw inspiration from global texts, especially in the realm of absurd and nonsensical theater, adapting them with local perspectives and expressions. Rashid Najm Al-Najm, a theater practitioner and critic, and the founder of amateur theater in Bahrain, reflects, "(...) With the rapid developments in Gulf countries, diverse theatrical experiments have emerged. Each Gulf nation embarked on its unique journey at different times. Gulf theater continues to progress and evolve amidst a rich tapestry of distinguished creative practices. It carves its own path, embracing various Arab and global experiences without losing its unique characteristics. However, strong bonds persist, rooted in a shared rich heritage and deep social and human connections."[63]

CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND SUPPORT

Most of the theater groups in Gulf theater were almost entirely supported by the state, except for private groups that relied on well-known artists who had honed their skills in state-sponsored civilian groups. For instance, in Kuwait, these theatrical gatherings initially revolved around school productions. When interest expanded beyond the school setting, the first theatrical trailblazer, Hamad Al-Rajab, relied on students and teachers for his early performances. After returning from studying theater in Cairo in 1945, he continued his shows at the Teachers' Club and in schools.[64] The second pioneer, Mohammed Al-Nashmi, who was a student and collaborator of Al-Rajab in his initial shows, moved towards performances with a popular and improvisational character. The theatrical group 'Al-kashaf Al-Watani' was established in 1945, which later evolved into the popular theater group.[65]

Some of the most notable theater groups in Kuwait, backed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and currently operating under the supervision of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, include according to Mohammed Hamamsi's book:

- Popular Theater Group: Regarded as the first Kuwaiti theater group formed collectively, it continues to stage performances to this day. Its activities were particularly vibrant between 1955 and 1958 when Zaki Talimat arrived in Kuwait and laid the scientific foundations for the theatrical renaissance following official and educational guidelines for the art of theater.[66]
- Official Arab Theater Group: Established in 1962 under the direct sponsorship of the Ministry of Social Affairs, led by Zaki Talimat.

- Gulf Theater Group: Also monitored and financially supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs, with minimal interference in its plans or activities.
- Private Kuwaiti Theater Group: Founded in 1964, well-known within the framework of public welfare associations. Its establishment was credited to Mohammed Al-Nashmi, who pioneered the formation of the first "Popular Theater Group."[67]
- Children's Theater Group: Despite the initial focus of Kuwaiti theater on schools, significant attention was given to children's theater in the 1970s.

In the mid-1970s, private theater groups gained ground as the door opened for private initiatives. The theater and artistic production sector established private offices that operated on a commercial basis, sustaining themselves through ticket sales. Many leading artists seized this opportunity to break away from civil theater groups under the Ministry of Social Affairs. Notable examples include the National Theater Group (1975), spearheaded by the comedic actor Abdulhussain Abdulredha, who later founded the Arts Theater in 1997. Similarly, the Comedy Theater Group was founded by Saad Al Faraj and Abdul Amir Al Turki, along with the Hope Foundation, and the Peace Theater Group by Abdulaziz Al Muslim.

It's worth noting that these entities aren't conventional theater groups with fixed members, headquarters, and set programs. They are essentially production offices owned by individuals or groups, creating theatrical works and collaborating with artists based on specific project needs. Theater teams work on contractual terms with agreed-upon fees, and their association concludes upon the completion of the agreed work.

This theatrical movement, starting from its early days, coincided with other cultural developments, such as the release of the Theater Series, which enriched Arab theater with vital translations of international plays. However, the rise of satellite TV channels, technological advancements in communication, and the globalization trend as an economic and cultural phenomenon introduced new challenges to Kuwait's theater landscape, especially in the 1990s. A significant portion of theater professionals shifted to working in television dramas. Moreover, social and economic shifts affected the audience's relationship with theater, reflecting a broader trend in the Arab world rather than being unique to Kuwait.[69]

In Bahrain, theater support primarily came from the Kingdom's Cultural Administration, except for the Gilgamish Theater Group, founded in 1993. It operated for five years through the dedicated efforts and personal support of its founding members until the Bahrain Ministry of Information officially registered it as a theater group in 1996.[70]

The beginnings of Bahraini theater, much like other Gulf countries, were rooted in school activities, as mentioned earlier. School theater, supervised by school budgets, had a significant influence on theatrical activities practiced in civic clubs. It seems that students and their teachers, who were also club members, wanted a broader platform than schools to express their theatrical ideas. These clubs served as hubs for cultural, social, and even political activities.[71]

Several of these clubs organized theater festivals, thanks to the Public Authority for Youth and Sports, as highlighted in the book "Theater in Bahrain." These clubs included Al-Ahli Club, Al-Thaqafi Sports Club, Al-Aruba Club, Al-Islah Club, Al-Nahda Club, Al-Hala Club, Annaim Club, Al-Maamir Club, and many others. However, these clubs "halted theatrical activities" for various reasons. Some clubs experienced changes in leadership, with new management being conservative, considering theater activities as taboo. In other cases, the clubs' budgets barely covered sports activities. Moreover, individuals leading theater activities within these clubs found opportunities in private theater groups and made the transition.

It's important to note that many individuals working in private theater groups initially honed their skills in clubs and school theater activities.[72]

It's worth mentioning that there are eleven amateur theater groups in Bahrain. There's the Mobile Acting Troupe and the Bahrain Troupe, which was established after the Mobile Acting Troupe disbanded. Some of its members split to form a new group under the name 'Bahrain Troupe,' although this group focused solely on radio performances. There's also the Family of Amateur Art, Awal Theater, which is considered one of the most important theater groups and continues its theatrical activities to this day. The Popular Union Theater Group continued its activities until it officially ceased in 1975. There's also the Al-Jazeera Theater Group and the Graduates Theater Group.

Notably, the Theater Division under the Ministry of Culture and Arts has adopted the group and contributed to its financial support. It had the potential to become the nucleus of a national or patriotic theater group, but this didn't materialize. The group disbanded, and its members joined other theater groups.[73] The Sawari Theater Group was established in 1991 and, from the beginning, aimed to be unconventional and rebellious in its theater productions. It embraced experimental approaches and organized theatrical workshop labs. Additionally, it has been organizing theater festivals up to the present day. The Gilgamesh Theater Group was founded in 1993, the Reef Theater Group in 1994, and the Bayader Theater Group in 2005."

From our experience as members of the judging committee at the First Bahrain National Festival, it became clear that everyone involved in Bahraini theater, despite their artistic talent and creativity, is considered an amateur. They don't dedicate themselves exclusively to theater work, but instead, most of them have other jobs to make ends meet. This is largely due to the limited official theater production and financial support provided by the Ministry of Culture and Arts. As Khalifa Al-Areedi pointed out, it's crucial for the private sector to step up and support the cultural sector. Unfortunately, this sector is still quite stingy when it comes to culture, being overly generous with sports and other areas. Despite Bahrain's rich cultural history, it still lacks a modern theater venue with essential features like proper lighting, sound facilities, and a workshop for set design.[74]

In Saudi Arabia, theater receives support from government bodies such as the Ministry of Culture and Information, as well as educational institutions like the Theater Department at King Saud University in Riyadh. Efforts to promote Islamic theater have been made by Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University, and a similar trend is observed in other universities such as King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals. Sometimes, support also comes from sports clubs. The budgets for cultural activities in various organizations often rely on entities like municipal authorities and branches of the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts, which are official bodies overseeing cultural activities.[75]

In Qatar, the Theater Education Department under the Ministry of Education plays a significant role as a talent pool for adult theater. After Qatar gained independence in 1971 and established government ministries, including the Ministry of Information, theater was officially recognized and received funding from the ministry.[76]

In Oman, support also comes from the Ministry of Information and other sources.

The above suggests that funding for theater groups in the Gulf region, which are quite diverse in number and type across different countries, primarily relies on the governments themselves, university involvement, and school activities. Moreover, it depends on groups that engage in theatrical endeavors independently, especially those depending on ticket sales and featuring popular actors from the theater and television world. These artists have all moved away from the domain of officially supported theater groups, both governmental and private, as well as theatrical clubs. In contrast to private theater groups in other countries like Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, whose theatrical groups continue to face financial challenges. Some have even been forced to cease their activities due to financial constraints. The ones still operating are struggling with limited resources, constrained production capabilities, and a lack of promotion for their works. This situation is reminiscent of the official groups supported by their respective countries, leading them, on occasions, to seek external production sources and explore other avenues.

"In addition to leading the way in theatrical activities, Kuwait holds the distinction of being the first country in the Gulf Cooperation Council to establish an institute for theater studies in 1964. This institute later evolved into the Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts in 1973. Functioning as a Kuwaiti educational institution, it was established by ministerial decree in line with princely directives and was subsequently integrated into the Ministry of Higher Education.[77]

Kuwait's influence extended beyond its own borders; it served as a beacon of knowledge and education for all Gulf countries. Many professionals in the field of theater across the region received their education and expertise in Kuwait. The country also sought expertise from Egypt, attracting teachers and artists who played a crucial role in the establishment and teaching of this art form, with their pre-existing knowledge and understanding of its various fields. As an example, one of the initiatives involved bringing in the renowned artist Zaki Talimat to establish a theater. His recommendations, outlined in a 1958 report, paved the way for the establishment of an institute for theater education, a theater group, and even an opera house. These recommendations were put into practice in the early sixties."

Furthermore, artists such as Saad Ardash and Karam Mattawa, among others, were also brought to Kuwait to teach theater. Egyptian actresses were recruited to play female roles until Kuwaiti actresses Mariam Al-Saleh and Mariam Al-Ghadban emerged.[78]

To highlight the significance of this institute, researcher Sayid Ali Ismail stated, "It is important to note that the Kuwaiti institute had a major influence on the theater scene in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, both in terms of theater and art. Most of the theater practitioners in these countries were graduates of the Kuwait Institute and became leaders in acting in their own nations."[79] This distinction became clear as theater artists who graduated from the Kuwait Institute for Theater Studies, as well as from Arab and foreign institutes, joined these groups.

In addition to the numerous festivals in the region, which have played a crucial role in promoting and advancing the theatrical arts, theater groups have actively participated in local events such as the Gulf Theater Festival, Sharjah Theater Days, and the Omani Theater Festival. Additionally, they have been involved in a wide array of Arab and international festivals. These engagements have significantly influenced the evolution of theatrical perspectives and have been instrumental in discovering new creative horizons. Implicitly and effectively, it has contributed to crystallizing the Gulf theatrical experience, which, as mentioned above, arrived relatively late to the theater scene.

If we take Oman as an example of the diversity of festivals, we find that it hosts a total of eight theatrical festivals: the Omani Theater Festival, the Festival of Omani Theater Groups, the Arab Theatrical Den Festival, the Mazoon Festival for Children's Theater, the Salalah Mime Troupe Festival, the Rustaq Comedy Theater Festival, the Beit Al Zubair Circular Theater Festival, and the Salalah Tourist Festival for Public Theater. Despite the limited availability of theaters equipped with modern technologies, as Imad Al-Shanfari pointed out,[80] "the theater stage has become a challenge for the team during their daily rehearsals and performances." This challenge has led some directors to frustration. However, it has also encouraged many directors to break away from the conventional style of theatrical presentations and the traditional Italian box, leading them to showcase their works in various open venues. This shift has not only paved the way for the presentation of unique theatrical pieces but has also been considered a groundbreaking experience for these directors.

The Arab Institute and its Role in Reviving Theatrical Activities

Following the decline of theater in some countries that were once pioneers in the Arab theatrical scene, such as Iraq, Syria, Cairo, and even Tunisia, as well as Kuwait, which was a significant cultural hub in the Gulf region, the active contributions of these nations dwindled due to ongoing wars in Iraq and Syria, economic challenges, and the revolutions of the Arab Spring. As a result, many important theater festivals and publications in these countries, which were once consistent sources of intellectual and artistic inspiration, came to a standstill. This shift led the United Arab Emirates to emerge as a pivotal center, not only for Arab theater but also for Gulf theater as a whole.

INTRODUCTION TO THE INSTITUTE[81]

The Arab Theatre Institute is a non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to Arab theatrical affairs. It was established on October 28, 2007, through the initiative of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, a member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates and the Ruler of Sharjah. The organization is headquartered in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, and maintains close ties with the Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science. Its highest leader is His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, a member of the Supreme Council of the Union and the Ruler of Sharjah.

Its Objectives Include:

- Contributing to the advancement of Arab theater and
- nurturing theatrical culture in Arab communities.
- Showcasing exceptional achievements in Arab theater and
- fostering independent creative expression in the field.
- Introducing and supporting innovative experiences in
- youth theater.
- Promoting education in various theater-related professions.
- Facilitating collaboration among Arab theater artists
- and creators.
- Advocating for the literary and financial rights of playwrights
- and performers within the theater domain.
- Enhancing school theater programs and advocating for
- the integration of theater education into curricula across
- Arab nations, recognizing theater as a contemporary,
- all-encompassing artistic form and actively working
- towards that realization.
- Establishing collaborative partnerships between Arab
- theater professionals and their counterparts in non-Arab
- countries, highlighting diverse forms of Arab theatrical
- creativity on the global stage.
- Expanding cooperative efforts with regional and interna–
- tional theater organizations.
- Disseminating and preserving theatrical culture in the
- Arab world.

Since its establishment on October 17, 2007, the Arab Theatre Institute has shouldered the responsibility of addressing numerous challenges within the Arab theater community. Annually, it hosts a vibrant Arab festival, showcasing the most significant productions. This festival takes place in various Arab countries, with all performances broadcast live on the Institute's dedicated channel, ensuring that the festival reaches a wider audience beyond the event venue. The most outstanding productions are carefully chosen and honored with the Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi Award. Sheikh Dr. Sultan, a member of the Supreme Council of the Federation and the ruler of Sharjah, serves as the highest authority within the Arab Theatre Institute. He personally selects an influential figure from the Arab theater world to craft and deliver the Arab Theatre Day speech, which coincides with January 10, marking the commencement of the Arab Theatre Festival. The festival also pays tribute to notable theater personalities from the host country.

In addition to organizing the festival, the Institute conducts theater workshops and intellectual conferences, offering support even for events taking place in other Arab festivals. It also extends its support to national festivals in economically disadvantaged Arab countries, regions affected by conflicts and Arab uprisings, as well as countries lacking the resources to host their own theater events. This initiative reflects the vision of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi. To realize this vision, the Institute has successfully organized seven national theater festivals in collaboration with relevant authorities in these countries. Furthermore, the Institute publishes books related to theater and periodic theater magazines, including 'Arab Theatre,' published by the Arab Theatre Institute, 'Al Masrah,' published by the Sharjah Department of Culture, and 'Kawalis,' the quarterly theater magazine of the Emirates Theatre Association."

The Arab Theatre Institute has resumed its activities after a two-year hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They recently launched competitions for both adult and young playwrights, as well as a research competition in theatre studies. Moreover, the 13th edition of the Arab Theatre Festival was recently held in Casablanca, Morocco....

However, it is quite striking that no specific dates have been announced for the eight theatre festivals supported by the Institute in eight Arab countries. There has been no official statement or clarification regarding these festivals. Interestingly, the national amateur theatre festival in Morocco announced its third edition, set to take place in the city of Safi in early October 2022, without any mention of the Arab Theatre Institute, which supported its first and second editions.

The fate of this support for these festivals remains uncertain. Why the silence? Why hasn't any information been provided to playwrights and possibly even to the responsible authorities organizing these events in the eight countries involved?

Certainly, the Arab Theatre Institute has played a vital role in revitalizing not just Gulf theatre but also the broader Arab theatrical landscape, as outlined above. It's essential to underscore a few key points, starting with the democratic aspect and artistic freedom. Without these elements, we firmly believe that genuine theatre cannot truly flourish. This emphasis on fundamental aspects might stem from a regrettable incident during one of its festivals, hosted by Algeria not just as a producer but as a nurturing host country, not directly overseeing the event but supporting it.

The festival held in Algeria in 2016 saw the participation of numerous theater groups, with their performances spread across the cities of Oran and Mostaganem. Additionally, theater groups from various Arab countries like Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were actively involved. The inaugural performance, "Al-Majnoon" based on Gibran Khalil Gibran's text and directed by the acclaimed Tunisian artist Tawfiq Al-Jabali, was presented out of competition. The festival showcased a diverse range of performances, each with its unique style. Some of

these productions vied for the prestigious awards presented by Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, the ruler of Sharjah and the president of the Arab Theatre Institute. Additionally, there were other shows that were presented outside the competition.

Iraq participated in the competition with the play "Ya Rab" written by Ali Abdulnabi Al-Zaidi and directed by the talented young director Mustafa Al-Rikabi. Notably, this performance garnered immense acclaim both artistically and from the audience. Its success was evident in its direction, performances, visual treatment, and the audacious approach to its subject matter, where the playwright fearlessly delved into what is considered sacred. The narrative didn't limit itself to mere complaints and prayers to God; it boldly demanded a direct resolution to the harrowing ordeal, portrayed brutally, this time on the grim backdrop of Iraq. This was exemplified through the refusal of the revered intermediary, represented by the character of the prophet (Moses), showcasing his helplessness in the face of the burdens shouldered by the character of the mother. She stood as a representation of the pains experienced by the women in the country, a powerful and compelling portrayal.

Mother: Who sent you?
Moses: God Almighty!
Mother: God? And yet, you bargain with me? But I didn't ask for a prophet. I just want God—just Him—to hear a mother's pleas, and I have the authority from them. That's all.

In noticing this text and others, the author engages in an ongoing dialogue not only as a writer but also as a Muslim. Yes, as a person whose doors have all been closed, who no longer knows where to turn, he chose the most challenging and immediate path:

- The most challenging, because he isn't sure if his pleas will be heard, especially since he addresses them to a divine power that can't be directly contacted. Thus, his words become akin to unintentional mockery, but he is compelled to do so because the pain is immense, and poverty is a lethal and degrading force.
- And the most immediate, because it lacks an intermediary, that bargains and negotiates with Him for his dignity.

Despite the artistic and popular success of the play "Ya Rab" instead of being celebrated by the Arab Theatre Institute, they chose to exclude it from the competition, even though it was their first and only nominee for the award. Not only did the Arab Theatre Institute disqualify it, but they also completely erased the recorded video from their channel. They accused him of unintentional mockery, an unforgivable mistake, to the extent that they issued a statement against him and adopted a new cultural policy. This policy eliminated the role of the committee responsible for reviewing the shows, which traditionally consisted of a group of artists and critics from various Arab countries.

Yes, indeed, the committee has been dissolved, and theater practitioners are left wondering who is now responsible for selection, especially after the play "Ya Rab." The Arab Theatre Institute no longer discloses the members of the committee overseeing the performances in its Arab festival, unlike in the past. In this manner, it began exerting a discreet yet stringent control over the selection of performances featured in its Arab festivals—a cultural policy that resonates with its narrow and conventional perception of theater and its role in enlightenment. This approach, however, stands in stark contrast to artistic freedom and the democratic essence of theater itself. Consequently, it has positioned itself as a key arbiter of theatrical productions, especially since it has emerged as the predominant force in the Arab theater landscape, following the disappearance of numerous festivals and artistic events.

As a further demonstration of its dominance, they have designated a day to celebrate Arab theater. However, instead of recognizing the historic significance of the first Arab theatrical performance staged by Marun al-Naqqash in 1874—a date unanimously acknowledged by historians and writers as the true inception of theater in the Arab world—they opted for the founding date of the Arab Theatre Institute (January 10, 2007) as the official celebration of Arab theater. This decision seems to overlook the rich theatrical heritage established by the pioneers that came before them.

In addition, the Arab Theatre Institute has initiated several projects that were announced but did not sustain due to insufficient support:

- For instance, the Arab Online Theatre Media Cooperative, which was established in collaboration with five Arab theatrical websites, disappeared, and there have been no updates about it.
- Similarly, the Scenographers Network, launched by the Arab Theatre Institute, also faded away, and there has been no activity or news regarding it.
- The Arab Theatre Professionals Network in the diaspora, introduced during the sixth edition of the Arab Festival in Arabi in 2014 and in Morocco in 2015, seems to have vanished without a trace.
- The same fate befell the project to unify Arab theatre critics into a single entity.
- The same goes for the Institute's plans to collaborate with Arab theatre researchers. There appears to be no progress on that front either.

All of these projects/aspirations typically begin with a grand start, only to fade away as if they never existed. So, the pressing question remains: Why do these projects vanish? And who is responsible for their disappearance? These inquiries have lingered without answers up to this day.

In addition to the Arab Theatre Institute's endeavors, a non-governmental and non-profit organization dedicated to Arab theatre, there is the Department of Culture and Media in the Emirate of Sharjah. This department oversees institutional cultural initiatives by designing and supervising the execution of daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual activity programs. According to the department's official website, these activities are coordinated among various departments and sections, including:

- Administrative Affairs Management, along with its branch
- offices in the Eastern Region, including: Khorfakkan,
- Kalba, Dibba Al-Hisn, and Wadi Al-Helu.
- Studies and Publishing Management.
- Theatre Management.
- Cultural Affairs Management.
- Information Technology Department.
- Media Department.
- Public Relations Department.
- Accounts Department.
- The department also presents various awards, such as :
- Sharjah Award for Arab Culture - UNESCO.
- Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity.
- Theatre Awards.
- Sharjah Award for Arab Poetry.
- The department organizes several theatre festivals, including:
- Sharjah Gulf Theatre Festival, established in 2015.
- Sharjah Arab Theatre Forum: an annual intellectual gathering that delves into the developments in Arab theatre, featuring discussions on various topics and hosting influential figures from the theatre community, spanning different generations and artistic perspectives.
- Sharjah School Theatre Festival.
- Kalba Short Plays Festival: an open platform for budding talents to explore the world of theatrical directing. It was
- inaugurated in September 2012.
- Sharjah Research in Theatre Forum: This forum focuses on contemporary theatrical research in the Arab world, keeping abreast of global theatrical trends through in depth readings and discussions.
- Scout Theatre Festival: The inaugural edition of the festival
- took place in December 2011 in collaboration with the
- Sharjah Scouts Commission. It aims to discover scouting-affiliated theatrical talents from across the country.
-
- Khorfakkan Theatre Festival: The first edition of the festival was held in January 2014 in the city of Khorfakkan.
- Sharjah Theatre Days: This cultural theatrical event has celebrated over thirty editions. Held annually under thpatronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, the event showcases theatrical troupe from the Emirates and is overseen by a committee comprising specialized juries. The event attracts theatrical scholars, writers, and renowned actors (both pioneers and stars) from diverse Arab and foreign countries, engaging in theatrical performances, practical workshops, associated intellectual seminars, open discussions, and dialogues.
- Sharjah Desert Theatre Festival, discussed at the beginning of this research.
- Additionally, there are events such as the Sharjah Arab
- Poetry Festival, Nabati Poetry Festival, Sharjah Calligraphy
- Forum, Islamic Arts Festival, and Sharjah Young Poets Forum.

Besides the Arab Theatre Institute and the cultural initiatives of the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information, there is the Theatre and Performing Arts Commission in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, established in February 2020. This commission is responsible for a wide range of performing arts, including theater, dance, circus performances, improvisational comedy, street shows, movement-based performances, ballet, and opera. Its work involves revitalizing theaters, ensuring the quality of the presented content, promoting prolific production, and fostering a culture of performing arts to become an essential part of the national cultural landscape.

DIGITALIZATION

We cannot really talk about the digitalization of theater in the Gulf because, up until now, it is been almost non-existent. Even when Emirati director Mohammed Al Ameri used a screen as a backdrop in the play "Ghassah wa obur" written by Taghreed Al-Daoud and showcased at the Tenth Arab Theater Festival in Tunisia in 2009, this use of technology stands out as a clear example. However, what's worth mentioning in this context is that the Arab Institute, from its inception, has heavily relied on social media to share everything happening at its festivals–from performances to seminars. This includes events both within the festivals and in dedicated seminars and conferences focused on theater.

Moreover, they've taken to putting books and writings on CDs, distributing them on the sidelines of the festivals. Especially during the challenging times the world faced with the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, the Institute initiated regular online sessions through social media that are still ongoing, titled "Read Arab Institute Books"

The "Read Arab Theater Institute Books" program is an interactive online series conducted via Zoom. It was launched by the Arab Theater Institute in August 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The program is hosted by playwright Abdul Jabbar Khamran, who joined the institute in late 2019 as the media officer. Khamran collaborates with Dr. Youssef Al Eidabi, the institute's publication and documentation officer. The program showcases various theatrical books published by the institute. For each book, the author was invited alongside theater researchers to provide an overview of the book's content. Subsequently, a participatory discussion was facilitated with audience members, who contributed their perspectives, analytical observations, and supplementary interpretations. As of August 2022, the program has aired nineteen episodes. Despite its focus on books released by the Arab Theater Institute, the series has proven to be highly valuable.

ARAB THEATER INSTITUTE ONLINE PLATFORMS:

Official Website: [http://www.atitheatre.ae]
Arab Theatre Magazine: [http://atmag.ae]
Sheikh Dr. Sultan Al Qasimi Award for Best Arab Theatrical Work:
[award.ae-http://ati/]

Award's Facebook Group:
[https://www.facebook.com/groups/174846329303415/]

Official Facebook Page:
[https://www.facebook.com/arabth]

Arab Theatre Institute Television Channel.

1 Translated by: Hicham Boughaba. Reviewed and coordinated by: Abdelbaar Mounadi Idrissi

2 بشار عليوي، قراءة لمسرح العراقي.. بعد التغيير، مسرح ما بعد 4/9/2003، دار ومكتبة عدنان للطباعة والنشر، 2015، صفحة 20.

3 بعد سنوات الإهمال وعزوف الجمهور.. هل يعود المسرح العراقي إلى الواجهة؟ علي جاسم السواد - نصار الحاج/وكالة الأنباء العراقية (واع)، السبت 23 أكتوبر، 2021.

4 صلاح الخرسان، صفحات من تاريخ الحركة الشيوعية في العراق، دار الفرات، بيروت، 1993، ص163.

5 صلاح الخرسان، المصدر السابق، ص 163.

6 صفاء ذياب، جريدة القدس العربي، الصفحة الثقافية، 19-09-2016.

7 المصدر السابق نفسه، مع اختلاف في تسلسل متن المقال.

8 كاظم لازم، المسرح العراقي يبحث عن جمهور، موقع اصدقاء راديو الحرية وجلسة سمر، بغداد، 02/10/2011.

9 Ibid.

10 سامي عبد الحميد، الموقع الرئيسي لمؤسسة الحوار المتمدن العراقي، الحوار المتمدن-العدد: 7188 - 2022 / 3 / 12.

11 In 1953, the founder of Iraqi theater, artist Hakki Chabli, produced 'Julius Cesar' (...), 'Othello' was produced by Jasim al-Aboudi for the students of the Fine Arts Institute, 'The Merchant of Venice' (1965) produced by Samy Abdulhamid (...), 'Julius Cesar' (1965), produced by Jaafar As-Saadi, 'Romeo and Juliet' (1972), produced by Muhsine al-Azzawi, 'Hamlet' turned into 'Hamlet Arabized' performed by the Modern Theater Troupe (1973) ... (Source: سامي عبد الحميد، جريدة المدى العراقية، شكسبير في المسرح العراقي، 2017/01/09)
In addition to that, there is 'Othello', which the Iraqi poet, Yousef As-Saigh adapted into "Dazdemounah' (1989) by modernizing the play's events and turned it from a 17th century play into a 20th century one. It was produced by the great Ibrahim Jalal, who also presented Brecht's 'Mr Puntila and His Man Matti' (1974), for whose preparation and Iraqization he tasked the Iraqi poet, Sadiq As-Saigh, who produced it under the new title 'The Baik and the Driver' after having put it in the Baghdadi dialect, being the closest to all other dialects in Iraq. In addition to those, we cannot overlook the experience of Salah al-Qassab, who interpreted Shakespeare and Anton Chekhov's works, by transforming the dramatic text from its literary form into a poetic image..., as well as other producers and playwrights who have dealt with international and Arab texts alike as a priority in these wor's orientation and openness to the global dramatic phenomenon in general.

12 The Atabic genre of Maqāmāt, as in the play 'My Long-lasting Sorrow in Maqāmāt al-Harīrī', including in it scenes from al-Jāḥiz's 'Al-Bukhalā' and 'al-Bayān wa Tabyīn', and 'The Book of Animals'. as well as Rāghib al-Asfahānī's 'Al-Aghānī', and Maqāmāt al-Hamaḍānī'.

13 In the first step he took in experimentation in (searching within written heritage for a performative form or a celebratory ritual that has dramatic roots) as in (Theater Show Guidebook) and in his play (tales and Evens from Heritage Gatherings) in 1976. In (Once Upon a Time), which was presented in 1977, he adopted local folklore, instead of digging in written Arab or Islamic heritage. The play's producer, Muhammad Al Qassim, considered it in (The Show Guidebook) as a step towards instituting a folk theater show).

14 They include: 'The House of Bernarda Alba' by the Spanish dramatist Federico García Lorca, 'Dream of a Summer Night' (1982) [sic.], 'Cleopatra' (1986), 'Othello in the Kitchen' (1996), 'The Rituals of Slumber and Blood' an adaptation of Macbeth (2000), 'The Hairy Ape' by Eugene O'Neill, 'Antigone' by Sophocles. In the Arab world, there is 'The Black Revolution' by Mouain Bsissou, and, locally, there is 'The Key' by Youssef al-Ani.

15 سعد عزيز عبد الصاحب، قراءات في المسرح العراقي المعاصر، صدر عن دار الشؤون الثقافية العامة، عام 2021، بغداد، الفصل الأول صفحة 1.

16 An excerpt from Paradise Opens Late (الجنة تفتح أبوابها متأخرة) by Falah Shakir, produced by Musine Al Ali 9/15/1999, starring: Jawad Shakraji, Raid Muhsine, Shada Taha Salim (National Acting Troupe), performed at al-Rashid Theater.

17 Published in 2016, by The House of Cultural Affairs, in Mithal Ghazi's Anthology entitled 'Joseph's Blood', which included five plays: Joseph's Blood, Open the Gates, A Rainy Night, Oh Weakness, Your Name is the Woman, and Waiting for Vladimir.

18 موقع الناقد العراقي، رنا محمد نزار، بتاريخ 2016/03/09.

19 بشار طعمة، اسم الكتاب: الفرقة القومية للتمثيل 1960 ولغاية 1990، المطبعة، مكتبة فضاءات مسرحية، 2021، صفحة 21.

20 This means that the Federation is the main producer of their works.

21 عادل كوركيس، استطلاع الفرق المسرحية الاهلية واقعها.. همومها.. تطلعاتها، كتب الاستطلاع/ عباس الخفاجي، في موقع الصدى نت، elsada.net/contacte، بدون تاريخ.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, 21.

24 Baghdad Theater, Modern Art Troupe, now turned into a storage space for grains and a landfill.

25 From a correspondence I had with her about production and the situation of Iraqi actors and intellectuals during that period.

26 Ibid.

27 An interview with Iraqi artist, Aziz Khayoun, on the sidelines of the Cairo Experimental Theater Festival, 09/05/2022.

28 سعد عزيز عبد الصاحب، الجدل في المسرح المعاصر، دراسة في تنوع الخطاب الفلسفي، من اصدارات مهرجان العراق الوطني للمسرح، بغداد، 2019، صفحة 93_94.

29 A group of young militant Iraqi poets, among whose founders, we can mention: Mazin Al-Maamouri, poet and artist, Kazim Khinjar, Ali Darb, Mumammad Karim, actor and poet, Ahmed Diaa...

30 جريد العرب، الصدارة الاربعاء 2016/08/03.

31 جريدة القدس العربي، "ميليشيا الثقافة" في العراق: شعر شاب يخاطب "تركة" الاحتلال، 29 أبريل 2016.

32 Ibid.

33 An ancient Summarian city built on the shores of a lake located 17 KM south of Babylon city. Borsippa is located in the Babylon Governorate in Iraq. Boursippa included a Ziggurat that still exists today. According to the Talmud, it is thought that this Ziggurat is the Tower of Babylon that is mentioned in the Torah, and is thought to have been built for the God Nabu, the Babylonian God of writing and wisdom, son of Marduk (Wikipedia).

34 From an interview with the director of these shows, written and produced by Abbas Rahak, during the writing process of this article.

35 From the same interview.

36 حليم هاتف، المسرح العراقي بعد 2003 وعودة المسرح التجاري، الموقع الرئيسي لمؤسسة الحوار المتمدن-العدد: 3836، 31-08-2012.

37 ماجد درندش، تجليات النص المسرحي الاحتجاجي، فضاءات، مجلة ثقافية صدرت عن المؤتمر المسرحي العراقي المنعقد في مدينة البصرة العراقية، بتاريخ 19 آب 2017.

38 A game practiced by children to sharpen their intelligence, it adopts destruction and rebuilding as methods, and used by producer and playwright, Majid Darandash as a technique in the form and content of the text.

39 Panodrama is a term coined by Majid Darandash, combining the two terms: panorama and monodrama.

40 ماجد درندش، تجليات النص المسرحي الاحتجاجي، المصدر السابق نفسه.

41 د: محمد حسين حبيب، مسرحية (فيس بوك) وتقانة المسرح الرقمي، موقع إيلاف الالكتروني، السبت 02 أبريل 2011.

42 Ibid.

43 د. أحمد محمد عبد الأمير، "الظل الرقمي في مسرح خيال الظل (السندباد انموذجا)"، وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي، جامعة بابل، كلية الفنون الجميلة، قسم الفنون المسرحية، عام 2018.

44 مروان ياسين الدليمي، المسرح العراقي: تحديات العولمة الرقمية وتقنيات العرض التقليدية، جريدة القدس العربي، السبت، 21 يناير، 2023.

45 In an article by "Mohammed Ould Mohamed Salem" titled "Gulf Theater: Similar Paths and Choices" published in Al Khaleej newspaper's Cultural Supplement on February 16, 2015.

46 Dr. Abbas Hassan Al-Qassab, in his book "Utilizing Folk Heritage in Bahraini Theater" released by the Arab Institute for Theater in 2020, on page 15.

47 Theater History in Kuwait, featured on the Arab Institute for Theater's website under the "Focus on Arab Theater" program, dated March 7, 2018.

48 Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

49 Dhi Qar Day marks the victory of the Arabs over the Persians. According to Al-Isfahani in his book "Al-Aghani" this historical event took place during the time of Prophet Muhammad in Iraq, where the Arabs triumphed over the Persians. The conflict arose when Khosrow Anushiruwan became infuriated with Nu'man ibn Mundhir, the ruler of Al-Hirah. Nu'man sought refuge with Hani ibn Mas'ud al-Shaybani, entrusting him with his family, wealth, and weapons. Later, Nu'man surrendered to Khosrow, who imprisoned and eventually killed him. Khosrow then demanded Nu'man's trust from Hani ibn Mas'ud, but Hani, in an act of defiance, refused to comply, leading to Khosrow's anger against the Banu Shayban. Determined to eradicate them, Khosrow assembled a formidable army of Persian Asawira led by Hamir Zojalabzain, along with allied Arab tribes such as Tughlab, Namr ibn Qasit, Qada'a, and Iyad. The leadership of these tribes was entrusted to Iyas ibn Qubaisah al-Ta'i, accompanied by his battalions, Shabaa and Dawsar. Upon learning of the threat, the Banu Shayban sought refuge with the tribes of Bakr ibn Wa'il. Some groups from these tribes came to their aid, seeking advice from Hanthala ibn Sayyar al-Ajli. They collectively decided to confront the Persian army at the battlefield of Dhi Qar, near Bakr ibn Wa'il, close to the location of Kufa (Wikipedia).

50 Abdullah Al-Mudhni, from "The Judge by the Order of God" to "Kursi Ateej" as featured in Al-Ayyam newspaper, issue 9055, on Friday, January 24, 2014, corresponding to Rabi' al-Awwal 22, 1435.

51 Al-Bayan Newspaper, dated November 27, 2006:* In a review by Abdulilah Abdulqader, he explores Saeed Mohammed Al-Sayyabi's book, "Utilizing Folk Literature in Gulf Theater Texts" published by the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information in 2005.

52 Al-Bayan Newspaper, same source.

53 Al-Watan Newspaper, Oman: Sheikha bint Abdullah provides insights in her review of Mohammed Al-Habsi's "Theatrical Movement in Oman" dated March 26, 2017.

54 Dr. Abdulilah: On Monday, July 11, 2022, he highlights the key stages of theater development in the UAE at the Jamil bin Jawairib Center.

55 Ahmed Al-Majid's insight: Featured in the Gulf Culture supplement, he discusses Kuwaiti theater's evolution from improvisation to grounding on August 22, 2008.

56 Mohammed Ould Mohammed Salem: In the same source, he delves into "Gulf Theater... Similarities in Paths and Choices."

57 Abdul Karim Al-Hajrawi's perspective: Opinions about the origin and developmental stages of Saudi theater are discussed in Independent Arabia's Culture section on Wednesday, March 2, 2022.

58 Gulf Theater: Balancing Identity and Openness: Explored on the Arab cultural platform, Third Bank.

59 Same source.

60 Same source.

61 Ammon News, Jordan: On December 10-12, 2019.

62 Department of Culture in the Emirate of Sharjah's website: Check the homepage for programs, including the "Sharjah Desert Theater Festival."

63 Theater and Audience in the Arab Gulf: Presented in Theater Talk by Abdulaziz Al-Sarei on the Arab Theater Institute's website, in articles dated June 19, 2013.

64 Mohammed Al-Hamamsi's take: In the Al-Arab London Newspaper on January 24, 2023, he explores how Gulf Theater seamlessly blends authenticity with modernity.

65 Al-Mukhtasar Al-Mufid: Part of the series on Contemporary Arab Theater, Issue 11, focusing on Kuwaiti Theater. Compiled by Dr. Suleiman Al-Shatti. Published by the Arab Theater Institute - General Secretariat, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2009, covering pages 20-21.

66 Same source, page 5.

67 Same source, page 21.

68 Same source, page 28.

69 Same source, page 31.

70 Gulf Cultural Supplement: Dated August 22, 2008, featuring "Kuwaiti Theater: From Improvisation to Foundation."

71 Dr. Abbas Hasan Al-Qasab: In his 2020 book "Harnessing Folk Heritage in Bahraini Theater" published by the Arab Theater Institute, on page 32.

72 Bahraini Theater: Compiled by Khalifa Al-Areedi, part of the New Arab Theater series, Issue 3, 2009. Published by the Arab Theater Institute - General Secretariat, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, on page 9.

73 Same source, page 11.

74 Same source, page 32.

75 Same source, page 45.

76 Arab Theater Institute Series, Issue 05, 2009: Titled "Theater in Saudi Arabia" compiled by Dr. Mohammed Al-Otheim, on page 4.

77 Al-Shorouq Newspaper: An interview with Mohammed Boujsoum by Taha Abdul Rahman, dated March 31, 2022.

78 Contemporary Arab Theatrical Direction: Paths and Experiences. Edited by Mohammed Saif, Omar Fartat, and Muntajib Saqr. Published by the Art PublishingHouse...

79 Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed Magazine, Kuwaiti Theater History: Arab Intersections, Kuwait, December 8, 2020.

80 Contemporary Arab Theatrical Direction, Paths, and Experiences, Prepared, Supervised, and Edited by: Mohammed Saif, Omar Fartat, Montage Saqr, from the House of Arts and Literature Publishing for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Iraq/Basra, 2022, Page 24."

81 Emad Al-Shanfari, Theatre Magazine, issued by the Sharjah Theatre Days Festival, in its 29th edition, 2019, page 101.

82 We based our information about the organization on their official Arab website, where you can find a lot of detailed information.

83 The website of the Theater and Performing Arts Institute in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

PERFORMING ARTS IN EGYPT

by Pauline Donizeau & Ons Trabelsi



Introduction

1. Historical and Political Contextualization

From an aesthetic point of view, from its very beginnings, the theater is linked to an essential value of Arab reformist ideas: *at-tamadun*, the modernization of morals and ideas. *Al-masraḥ*, modern Arab theater represents an important aspect of this modernization and the political, ideological, and identity-related questions it raises. Aesthetic questions are then raised about the approach to Western literature and Arab production, oscillating between a radical break with classical rules and a return to the past, a slavish imitation of imported models or a return to the sources in an attempt to find forms capable of expressing the new political and social aspirations. These interrogations are contradictory only in appearance and are reflected in two complementary and parallel trends commonly referred to as *Iḥyā'* and *Iqtibās*.[1] It should be noted that few works fall exclusively into one trend or the other. The two visions, far from being opposites, are complementary and represent two sides of the same coin. They develop in parallel and sometimes coexist in a single work.[2] This fusion between *Iḥyā'* and *Iqtibās*, the valorization of heritage and the adaptation of foreign literature and arts to one's own culture are perceptible in the performing arts as early as the first Syrian-Egyptian model bearing the seeds of the future directions of the theatrical genre in the Arab region. The Syrian-Egyptian model was developed in the second half of the nineteenth century; it came from the association of Syrian[3] and Egyptian troupes performing in the theaters of Khedive Egypt from 1869[4] and experimenting with different combinations between the adoption of new scenic devices, the systematic integration of singing and traditional forms, and the adaptation of the Western repertoire by arranging the text and language according to the scenic, drama, political, religious and social necessities. Let us recall that the Egyptian troupes represent the starting point for a whole movement of modern theater in the Arab countries. This model was confronted from the very first tours outside Egyptian cities by the incomprehension of the public because of the language and the subjects tackled; and it was met with the disapproval of conservative circles that condemned the drama art itself.

From these different mixtures, several issues emerge that are often presented as opposing dualities: heritage-borrowing, modern-traditional, past-present, local-foreign, literal Arabic-dialectal. This series of oppositions often obscures the now obvious fusion between the local and the foreign, the modern and the ancient, and rarely considers that heritage refers to traditional forms of performance and also to the repertoire constructed through translations and adaptations borrowed from world drama literature.

These questions that create fixed categories, in addition to foreign cultural policies feeding these oppositions (by subsidizing traditional/thematic arts),[5] and the lack of a clear and effective national cultural policy, combined with the different political contexts, are elements among others that hinder the establishment of a structured and continuous drama model. This configuration therefore prevents us from seeing and thinking about a history of Egyptian drama literature that would take into account the elements inherent in its birth and evolution: from these traditional forms to the adoption of modern forms, from translation to writing through rewriting and adaptation, from the adoption of modern devices to the reappropriation of the stage heritage.

These aesthetic elements are anchored in Egypt in a specific institutional framework, especially since the 1950s. In a European Union report on culture in Egypt published in 2014, it is rightly pointed out: *"The Ministry of Culture is paradoxically both at the center and the margins of the cultural sector in Egypt"*[6] Egypt has well-established public institutions for culture in general, and the performing arts in particular, inherited from the Nasserite era. Thus, in Egypt, there is a public theater (even if some artists prefer to speak of a "state theater")[7] that is omnipresent, interventionist, and conducts a cultural policy at the service of the regime, employing thousands of civil servants, and ensuring both a part of the financing and the close surveillance of cultural activities in the country. Yet the Ministry of Culture is also a "marginal" actor in culture. In fact, few of the public theater's productions are visible outside Egypt's borders. Their artistic quality can be judged as low for several reasons (in particular outdated training methods, a lack of means, a lack of creative freedom limiting initiatives). Thus, in this study, we will consider the public sector, as well as the private sector or commercial theater that appeared in the 1970s with the opening of the country to liberalism (the two sectors are in fact quite close since the presidency of Mubarak). We will especially focus on the independent theater. Emerging at the end of the 1980s among young artists, often trained abroad, dissatisfied with the Egyptian theatrical landscape and sometimes politically committed, independent theater has since emerged as the most promising sector of the Egyptian artistic scene. However, it is also the most precarious; therefore, it deserves attention in the course of our exposition of the situation of theater in Egypt from the end of the 2010s to the present day.

2. Positioning of Performance Art in Relation to Local Heritages/ Cultures

The opposition–or rather, as we shall see, the dialectic–between past and present, heritage and contemporary, is fundamental to understanding the performing arts in Egypt. Heritage is very important, both in the public sector and among independent artists, but the approach to the past is not the same.

In the public sector and state cultural policies, the past and heritage are put in a central position. Hosni Mubarak had reinforced this orientation throughout his presidency (1981-2011). The ancient heritage is privileged for the tourism sector. In the performing arts sector, and the theater in particular, the colonial theatrical architecture of the late nineteenth century and the dramaturgies of the beginnings of the twentieth century remain a reference. This systematic and often highlighted reference to the ancient heritage and to the Khedivial era can be found, for example, in the first lines one reads on the official website of the Ministry of Culture on the presentation and history of the Egyptian Opera:

"Opera is not an art form distant from the taste of Easterners or Egyptians in particular. Ancient Egyptian history is filled with musical models accompanied by dramatic performance and poetry. The walls of temples are engraved with remarkable depictions of many ancient Egyptian celebrations, showing the great importance placed on music, singing, and dance. So much so that they invented many musical instruments out of a deep love for music — among them the famous harp, which underwent various developments until it evolved into what is now the Eastern oud.

The story of the establishment of the old opera house is closely linked to the inauguration of the Suez Canal during the reign of Khedive Ismail, who was passionate about the arts. Hence, it was named the Khedivial Opera House. Due to Khedive Ismail's love for fine art and his deep passion for it, he wanted the Khedivial Opera House to be an architectural masterpiece on par with its counterparts around the world. [...] Even before the construction was completed, the great ruler had begun preparing a unique artistic heritage for his new opera house that would first and foremost reflect Egypt's glorious past. He asked Mariette Pasha to select a story from the pages of ancient Egyptian history that could serve as the basis for a poetic drama"

The "golden age" of the 1950s and 1960s (when the Egyptian state largely encouraged and supported culture as much as it relied on it to disseminate the values of the young Egyptian Republic, resulting in prolific production in drama, film, and song) is also claimed as a national legacy that gave Egypt a drama repertoire. An actor who studied acting at the Academy of Arts (a public arts training institute) in the late 2010s recounts that some very old professors are kept in their positions only because they dated or were colleagues in the 1950s and 1960s of iconic playwrights such as Alfred Farag (1929-2005) or Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987).[8]

Similarly, in a 2011 article, journalist Joseph Fahim states about the state of theater on the eve of the revolution: *"Theater education remained stuck in outdated Soviet methods.*[9] He is referring to the proximity between the Nasserite government and the USSR, which resulted–for our purposes–in the arrival of Russian teachers and the importation of a certain mode of theater education.

In 2014 and after the revolutionary episode, the "new" regime put in place is continuing in this direction. Heritage is thus at the heart of "Egypt's Vision 2030" program revealed in 2020. This vision sets back a series of objectives for cultural development, the first being *"reviewing laws and legislations related to cultural industries and heritage protection"* and the sixth *"protecting, maintaining, and developing heritage crafts"*[10]

The European Union report published in 2014 reminds us that Egypt is mostly perceived abroad through the prism of its heritage. Yet, cultural actors seek to claim a contemporary cultural identity (especially since the 2011 revolution specifies the report in question, but this was already true in the case of independent artists since the 1990s), where some of the cultural activists have sought to give the world an image of "current" Egypt. There is a division between the State seeking to maintain Egyptian culture in a past-oriented imaginary, while the independent sphere seeks a stronger relationship to the contemporary and to the avant-garde.

3.Contemporaneousness

However, if one observes independent works, they appear more complex. In order to speak of the present, of current events, artists also borrow from their heritage, both in terms of themes and aesthetics, and thus anchor their contemporaneity in their heritage. Generally speaking, the dialogue between past and present is at the heart of contemporary Egyptian creation.

Thus, for example, there are many accounts of performances of traditional Aragoz puppets in occupied Tahrir Square in 2011.[11] Hassan El Geretly, director and educator, also reports that the El-Warsha company, of which he is the founder (in 1987, it was the first Egyptian company claiming to be "independent") and director, recited in the square excerpts from the Hilalian Gesture, a medieval epic, some passages of which took on a new meaning in the political context. The company also invited *taḥṭīb* dancers, a "stick art" or martial art native to Upper Egypt, to perform in Tahrir Square during the 18-day occupation in 2011. This is both "folklore" and an art practiced until today in Upper Egypt, and taking on a new meaning–since it is a dance metaphorizing the fight–in the current revolutionary events. It is not a question of staging of the folklore with its traditional meaning as "the whole of traditions, legends, songs, and dances composing a popular inheritance of a certain region"[12] but rather an inscription in a continuity through an art that is both traditional and contemporary. In fact, Egyptian popular heritage enhancement is a central element of Geretly's work since the foundation of El-Warsha. It is as much about preserving it as it is about showing its actuality. The *tahtīb* show is an example staged by El-Warsha in the service of an actualization and a reappropriation of this art and its symbolism. It is a choice that joins the aesthetics and the repertoire of the troupe showing the continuity between the past and the present and pointing out in passing the erroneous idea of a clear break between heritage and modernity. This widespread idea leads to a quasi-systematic classification of shows into two distinct categories: shows that are in continuity with the popular and traditional arts, and others that claim to be modern. How can we talk about shows that are in a broader perspective and that get out of these often limiting considerations and respond to archaizing and exoticizing expectations? Such expectations confine creativity within rigid labels. They reduce the potential for broader interpretations, focusing only on aspects that reinforce a particular image of Egypt—one constructed by heritage narratives both locally and globally. Moreover, Hassan El Geretly[13] raises this difficulty relating to the image of Egypt abroad assimilated to a folklore. When talking about the programming of the show *Haeeshek (I (will (over)live you…)*, a variation of the *Nights* (Layali) of El-Warsha at the Avignon Festival in 2014 and the conditioned reception of his show, Geretly claims that the same show in Egypt and Avignon does not have the same audience, nor the same reception, nor the same relationship to this staged heritage. He speaks about his show in these terms, "The troupe on stage is the country on stage" However, the festival programmer says, "I bring Egypt" According to Geretly, "the country on stage" evokes the number, the diversity, the nuances, and the particularities presented by the troupe and the show; he asserts, "But we do not represent Egypt...but we reflect Egypt in a certain way"[14]

Karima Mansour,[15] founder of the MAAT company for contemporary arts (1999) and art director of the Cairo Center for Contemporary Dance (2012),[16] evokes this expectation from the foreign public by giving the example of a spectator who, although she knew she was attending a contemporary dance performance, came to the end of the performance to express her disappointment at the absence of "belly dance". Mansour points out that this framework imposed on the reception hinders the inscription of contemporary dance in Egypt in its own trajectory of evolution and freezes it in a single moment of its history. Thus, the creations of contemporary dances, which are not considered as a local art, anchored in the history of the country are not valued. And this amalgam is further fed by the adoption of this idea and its development by the Egyptian artists and spectators themselves; we often hear that it is a foreign and imported art: "Contemporary dance is 'not our dance'."[17] It is then necessary to appropriate themes and aesthetics "validated" by these considerations and to conform to them. Many artists play this game, described as "dangerous" by Karima Mansour, which threatens artistic integrity and makes closes down on creative perspectives. Evoking the notions of heritage and transmission can thus put the artist in narrow classifications and labels that considerably reduce their field of creation and the reception of their work. Through here approach, Karima Mansour gives an interesting dimension to this question. She shifts the question of the direct or indirect relationship between creation and heritage by putting the body at the center of her reflection. The staged body is inseparable from its heritage: It is not an external element or a kind of accessory added in order to be part of a process of transmission or affirmation of identity, but an endogenous element, intrinsic to this performing body:

> *"Whether I like it or not, and despite anyone, yes, there is a strong connection between my work and the Egyptian cultural and artistic heritage for a very simple reason: I am Egyptian and I stage Egyptian bodies in which all these elements reside. I did not have to make a show in which I dress the dancers and actors in a galabia, make them hold a scepter and make them walk 'Walk like an Egyptian' for my show to be Egyptian."*[18]

These experiences lead us to revisit the outdated definitions and fixed concepts[19] used to write the history of performing arts in Egypt and the Arab region.

Sometimes heritage is not only Egyptian, but also borrowed from European aesthetics that are reappropriated in a certain context (a phenomenon that renders obsolete an overly simplistic opposition between neo-colonial influence and local heritage). In its eponymous show (April 2011), the Tahrir Monologues collective presents on stage testimonies of the revolution, which they also name *"storytelling"* referring to an Anglo-Saxon style, but also *"al-ḥikāyāt"* recalling the traditional figure of the Arab storyteller *"al-ḥakawātī."* In works like *No Time for Art* (2011) and *Lessons in Revolting* (2011), Laila Soliman employs documentary theater strategies, influenced by her collaboration with Rimini Protokoll (*Radio Muezzin*, 2008) and the theories of Peter Weiss (*Notes on Documentary Theater*, 1968).[20] In 2012, Nora Amin takes up the "Egyptian Project for the Theater of the Oppressed", directly inspired by the Theater of the Oppressed imagined in Brazil from the late 1960s as a political theater in the context of the military dictatorship. Lastly, citing one last example, the street art collective *Maḥaṭāt lil-fan* offers street performances in 2015 in the north of Egypt (Delta region): Performers set up on village balconies and sing classical Egyptian songs mixed in with French and Italian opera tunes.

Thematically, we also find these borrowings from the past that take on a different meaning in the contemporary context–in the manner of the aforementioned Geste hilalienne sung in Tahrir Square. Laila Soliman's work in the shows *Hawa el-horreya* (2014) and *Zig Zig* (2016) is quite exemplary in this sense. In the first, she uses the historical detour to reflect on the competition of national memories and narratives, drawing on the popular revolt of 1917 in Egypt against British occupation, completely forgotten in favor of the nationalist revolution of 1919. In the second, she focuses on a specific episode of this revolt of 1917: the rape of women in the village of Nazlat al-Shobbak, to evoke in filigree the harassment suffered by Egyptian women until today.

Finally, the dialogue between past and present, heritage and contemporary, in independent arts in Egypt, is also visible in the choice of spaces and venues. If new places have been created since 2000 (such as, in Cairo: Room Art Space, Makan, Osiris, Dawar Arts, Darb 1718, as well as the concept of artistic "coffeehouses" which are multiplying in the posh districts of Cairo), we also notice a will to emphasize the historical places of culture and in particular two spaces in the Egyptian capital: the city center and medieval Cairo. The production company Orient Productions, headed by director Ahmed El Attar, is located in Emad Eddin Street in the heart of the Ezbekkieh district, which in the nineteenth century hosted the first "European-style" theaters and later, cabarets. The D-CAF festival offices, also founded by Attar in 2012, are also located in downtown Cairo buildings that are currently being rehabilitated. Some of the festival's performances, but also other cultural events, are held each year in rehabilitated and renovated historical buildings in medieval/Islamic Cairo, often in collaboration with European institutes under the pretext of "patronage" "invitations" or "partnerships": *beyt al-sināry, beyt al-mi'mār, maq'ad* of Sultan Qatbay.

Hence, if an opposition between heritage and contemporary exists, the reality is more complex and must be nuanced. The independent sector does not radically reject heritage, but it does not take on the same meaning as in public policies. The official sector fixates on the past and heritage *(al-zaman al-gamil)*, yet only to keep it at a distance—reducing it to an object of contemplation, deliberately severed from the present. A telling example is Khaled Galal's 2008 play *Qahwa Sada*, staged at the state-run el-Hanager Theater, which consolidates this reactionary nostalgia by insisting that in Egypt, everything was "better before" In this sense, it would be a mimetic exercise, seeking to reproduce or perpetuate the past. Conversely, the independent sector proposes a hybridization between heritage and contemporary, blurring the boundaries, and exhibits the past as an object/support for political reflection, in order to bring together past and present, local and imported heritage. The heritage is thus claimed to be reinvented. It can serve at the same time, in a skillful way, to thwart censorship, to produce new aesthetic proposals, or to propose a new meaning in a specific historical-political context. Accordingly, one can therefore speak, without opposing inheritance and contemporaneity, of plural relations to the inheritance and of multiple modernities.

4. Ecosystems and Economic Models

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THEATER: CLOSE LINKS

In Egypt, the state appears to be an important actor in culture. This is the case from a production perspective, although it remains poorly funded in terms of the overall state budget: in 2017-2018, the culture budget represented 0.23% of the total state budget, 92.5% of which actually went to Ministry of Culture employee salaries. The budget for cultural activities amounted to 160 million Egyptian pounds (LE) or 1.85 piasters per citizen.[21] Production and dissemination are carried out by national theaters: there are a dozen or so in the country, but they are limited to the major cities, Cairo and Alexandria. In the other governorates and medium-sized cities, there are Palaces of Culture *(qūsūr al-thaqāfa)*, which are not places of production/creation, but are intended to disseminate creations from the center to the periphery (this is a legacy of the Nasserite ideology).

Since the 1970s, Egypt has been distinguished by the importance of its private theater sector. With a tradition of boulevard theater since the beginning of the twentieth century, commercial theater regained an important position under the presidency of Sadat (1970-1981), and it still remains relatively dynamic. Indeed, the new conservative ideology of Anwar Sadat led to an "almost total neglect of the theater"[22] and to fill this void, Egypt experienced the development and expansion of comedies and particularly musicals with a commercial vocation attracting an audience from, mostly from the Arab Emirates.[23] Egypt is the only country in the Arab region to attract an audience from other countries in the region. And it is the main country that has a theater that lives off its box office; therefore, its theater is economically autonomous. Private theater functions more or less like the commercial film industry: comedies with headliners, usually scheduled for release on holidays, especially the Eid holidays, attracting a large local audience and being well received abroad, apart from the traditional festival channels, in some Gulf countries.

Faced with the success of the private commercial theater, the government sought to mimic the model. Close collaboration between the public and private sectors then became widespread under Mubarak. The government led by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi since 2014 has tried to renew this dynamic, and even accentuate it. The Egyptian government has, as a result, recently announced the rehabilitation of a cultural center named *Soor magra el oyoun* presented as the result of a public/private collaboration.[24]

After the pandemic, public theater returned, for the 2021 season, with about twenty new plays produced by *al-Bayt al-fanni lil masraḥ*; 43 plays were exhibited to the public resulting in 900 performances and hosting more than 75,000 spectators between Cairo and Alexandria. In the provinces, there were 105 performances.[25] Yahya el Fakharani's last play is a perfect example of this model of collaboration between public and private theater and its dissemination in Saudi Arabia. El Fakharani performs "*Yāma fi el girāb ya ḥāwī*"[26] a play already produced and presented by the public theater, in private theaters between Cairo and Alexandria and then in a private theater in Riyadh.[27] Several other shows are presented in private theaters in Riyadh[28] and underline the emergence of this new Saudi cultural actor to be taken into account in the Arab theater economy. The same article presents the theater of the famous actor and director Mohamed Sobhi as a model of local success and as almost the only theater with real programming and a clear vision, as well as a stable troupe that shows in a stable and continuous manner. And this success can be seen through the "great success" of his latest play: *Nujūm al-ḍoḥr*, performed on the stages of his own theater Madinat Sunbul. In this play, "Sobhi saves the face of the private sector"[29]

The model of cooperation between private and public theater from the point of view of creation and funding remains a common model in Egypt. Consequently, we realize through Mazen el Gharabawi[30] or Amru Qabil' experience,[31] that there is funding from the Ministry of Culture, other Egyptian and foreign cultural and artistic organizations, small independent companies, and self-funding.[32]

The arrival of new foreign actors is another fact that characterizes the current dynamics between public and private theater (which, as we understand it, now tend to merge almost completely). From a production point of view, collaboration with other states to finance culture is a solution that had been put in place notably during the brief presidency of President Mohamed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood (2012-2013). He tried to rely on Qatar. This partnership did not last, even when the Gulf remains an important economic partner for Egypt. The recent arrival of Saudi Arabia on the market creates a new alternative for the dissemination of private and public theater. The third edition of *"Mawsem al -Riād 2022"*[33] consisted largely of Egyptian or Saudi comedies; they were performed by mainstream television and film stars, whose fame is recognized throughout the Arab region. These performances suggest the importance of this new movement of exported private theater: *Ḥatta lā yaṭīr al-dukān* with Dorra Zarrouk, Akram Husni, Bayumi Fouad, *Sāʿat amal* with Shaima Seif, *El-Weš ettānī* with Mona Zaki, Ahmed Rezq, *El Bank Saraqū* with Karim Maḥmud Abdel Aziz... The comedies produced through this model of theater attract a large audience and do well both inside and outside Egypt.

4.1 INDEPENDENT THEATER: A DIFFICULT SURVIVAL

Since the 1990s, cultural policy has been taken over by actors other than the State: civil society (private and/or so-called "independent" structures). The economic model of artists and independent companies is precarious. The State exerts significant pressure without proposing a permanent solution, and/or uses the financial argument to deploy its surveillance. Hence, the legal system obliges artists to constitute themselves as companies in order to work. Practitioners must be registered in an artist union, where they pay a contribution/membership as well as a 20% tax levied by the union they belong to on their productions. All this is legally obligatory, but also necessary if the artist/company wishes to receive a subsidy at some point, thus counting on the state in the mounting of a production. It is also the case to play in a public sector hall.

It is therefore not surprising to see that since the 1990s independent artists have sought other partners and other sources of funding, but also other outlets for their shows, which actually tour extremely little in their countries. Since 2014, the harshness of the regime has almost systematically forced artists not affiliated with the regime to resort to sources of funding outside the Egyptian state sphere, and to hope for distribution channels abroad, and in particular Europe.

From the point of view of financing / production, different strategies are emerging.

First, the use of equity capital. This remains rare and the financial manna remains limited. As a result, it is difficult to entirely finance productions in this way. However, the majority of artists practice another professional activity in order to earn their living. In this regaqrd, their personal earnings allow them to carry out an artistic activity. For example, director Hani el-Metenawi worked for a long time as a volleyball teacher in addition to his directing activity to support himself.[34]

For the most part, and in terms of production, artists turn to foreign funding, and in particular European funding. In addition to foreign institutes (French Institute of Egypt, Goethe Institute, British Council, etc.) that finance one-off projects, artists can directly apply for funds managed by the European Union; for example, the Anna Lindh Foundation, founded in 2002 on an initiative of the European Union, is based in Alexandria and is part of the Euromed project. It is worth noting that the 2014 EU report from 2014 mentions a roundtable discussion with independent artists in Egypt where the Anna Lindh Foundation was "strongly criticized." There is the Young Arab Theater Fund[35] (now *Mophradat* since 2015), created in Belgium, which is a non-profit association funded by both private companies and through European Union funds. It works on the principle of calls for projects, awarding a grant to the winners every year. Lastly, there's the Art Theater Training Center[36] (ATTC) based in Beirut; it is an educational objective that organizes training workshops for the different professions on stage; it also provides material support. Without going through these massive and supranational structures, which often finance one-off projects, artists can also find funding (sometimes a little more permanent) by developing a link with a particular state (for example the Swedish fund on which the El-Warsha company relied on for several years before it was terminated in 2020 due to "strategic reorientation" from the Swedish side). There are partnerships that have been established between an artist/company and a theater or an artist abroad. For example, Ahmed El Attar has his links with the MC 93 in Bobigny; Laila Soliman has a partnership with the Royal Court Theater in London (these artists have more diversified partnerships, but we mention them as examples of partnerships that have proven to be prolific).

This money may come directly from institutions, or it may be channeled through national, local, or international NGOs and associations. Since the 2000s, many cultural associations and foundations have emerged, combining a regional anchorage with a regional and transnational dimension to their networks and actions–to the point that French researcher Franck Mermier sees them as new faces of pan-Arabism, which he calls "alternative cultural pan-Arabism."[37] Above all, they are of major importance for artists with a desire for independence who are trapped in authoritarian states–and in this respect the Young Arab Theater Fund has been a pioneer. Alongside the Arab Fund for Art and Culture, founded in 2007, other associations support and finance art creation and research in the Arab region.

One example is the non-profit association *Al-Mawred al-thaqafy*[38] founded in 2004 and based in Cairo until 2014, which organizes transnational partnerships between artists in the region, focusing particularly on Arab cultural heritage and traditional arts. Al-Mawred provides scholarships to young artists, in addition to organizing cultural events. Although it was very active during the Egyptian revolution, at the end of 2014 the association decided to cease its activities in the country. It took this decision after being subjected to numerous pressures from the Egyptian government. The association has been based in Beirut since 2015.

The Tamasi project[39] is also noteworthy: It is a platform created in 2008 that brings together eleven arts organizations across the Middle East whose members are based in Egypt,[40] Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon and who, each year, contribute money to the platform; this pooled money is then used to fund one or more artistic projects chosen each year through voting by its member.

It should be noted that the share of these associations in the funding of independent and extra-governmental projects is dominant. This is particularly the case for AFAC, a fund whose main beneficiaries were Egyptian artists, second only to the Lebanese between 2010 and 2021 (Morocco ranks 3rd, Syria ranks 4th). Between 2010 and 2021, out of the 245 Egyptian artists and institutions that applied for financial assistance from AFAC, their applications averaged of 67% of the total project budget. This share suggest that AFAC appears to be a major resource, and even the only one for a number of them. The share of funding requested from LACAC from individuals has been steady throughout the decade. It tended to drop in 2020 from institutions–which leads us to think about the emergence of other funders. There are also spikes in grant requests in 2013, 2014, and 2020, suggesting that AFAC is a resource institution for artists in circumstances of political unrest or when other funders such as the state or foreign institutes decrease their funding (military takeover in 2013-2014, Covid-19 crisis in 2020).

Furthermore, the 2017 NGO regulation law[41] enacted by the Egyptian government has had deleterious consequences for many artists and companies.

Rarely can artists create a more perennial model, such as a production company. Some artists have set up production structures on the private model (for example Orient Productions founded by Ahmed El-Attar in 2007). But it is very rare, and it requires support and sizable seed capital. The advantage is that the company can finance the productions of an affiliated company (The Temple / *el-Maabad* company in the case of Orient Productions) and diversify its economic model; it can also produce for other local or national companies. However, these companies themselves operate with foreign funds.

Finally, although the independent movement was precisely built on the bangs of government circuits, some artists make use of state funding. In particular, there is a system of festivals and prizes that was put in place under Mubarak and continues under the current regime. Obtaining an award allows one to obtain one-time funding. In this respect, it should be pointed out that there is a real porosity in Egypt between the different sectors. We have already mentioned the public/private collusion, but the omnipresence and omnipotence of the Egyptian State in terms of funding and cultural structures also produces artists, companies, or places with a hybrid status. Some artists are "independent" by default, waiting to be integrated into the very closed circle of public theater. Conversely, the State sometimes seeks to recover independent initiatives. The el-Hanager art center in Cairo is an example of this grey area. It was conceived by Mubarak's Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosni, at the end of the 1980s, as a place dedicated to the young generation of Egyptian artists; it was supposed to create an experimental and independent theater with government funds. The direction was, at first, proposed to Hassan El Geretly. It was a strong gesture, since he embodies the independent theater. However, disagreements led to a split between the ministry and the director, who eventually withdrew, denouncing incompetence and corruption within the project. In 1993, the direction of the place was entrusted to the academic Hoda Wasfi. The programming was consensual and gave room for artists from the younger generation. Wasfi is also the Fes-

tival of Independent Theater initiator. The art center remains, nevertheless, controlled and financed by the State. For the past ten years, it can no longer really be considered as an independent place. It remains the example of these grey areas, numerous in the Egyptian theater sector.

When artists funded by AFAC over the past ten years were asked about the source of funding for their productions, foreign institutes were the main source of funding, followed by national NGOs, almost equally with regional and international NGOs. Of the 17 artists (or companies) interviewed for the survey, 14 also participated in the financing of their creations by mobilizing their own funds. It should be pointed out that this is most often project-based funding, and not ongoing and permanent funding.

In a 2021 dissertation, researcher Reem Khedr points out the need to monitor private sponsor investment in Egypt's cultural sector, especially among independents. She also writes, quite rightly:

> *"The word 'independent' is quite controversial and perhaps 'interdependent' is more accurate considering the independent scene is dependent on funds from the government sector, the private sector, and donors"*[42]

From a distribution point of view, the situation is also complicated. Indeed, independent artists do not have access to the infrastructures of the national theater, except occasionally during festivals, or in particular structures like the Hanager theater. Therefore, artists must perform in independent venues. If there are several of them, especially in the big cities (see below), they are often not identified by the majority of the public, and the audiences are limited.

From a national dissemination point of view, independent festivals that emerged during the revolution (Lazem Masrah in Alexandria, Al-fan midan or D-CAF in Cairo, to name the main ones, but there were about twenty of them at the time in all disciplines) have almost all disappeared after 2014 and the installation of President Sisi's regime.[43] To this day, national and local distribution channels are blocked for both economic and censorship reasons.[44] There are numerous economic reasons. First, performance space must often be rented, and the rates can be prohibitive. For example, to rent the Falaki Theater in downtown Cairo costs 16,000 Egyptian pounds per day (plus the salaries of the technicians and actors and actresses). When he took over the management of the Rawabet Theater in 2020, Ahmed El Attar decided to lower this rate and rented the theater to companies for 4,000 Egyptian pounds/day (all included: theater, quality technical equipment, staff including technicians and ushers), which is still a high amount for companies that, as we have seen, have difficulty making ends meet. Consequently, these rates limit the number of performances. On the other hand, economic dissuasion also comes from the government. To charge for a performance, you have to declare it to the Ministry of Labor; and the organizer pays a tax on the number of tickets they assume they will sell (they can ask for a refund if they overestimate, but it takes a long time to be processed). The organizer also has to pay taxes on all the actors and actresses. This situation is a deterrent because it is also extremely linked to censorship. If a show is announced, its text has to pass through the censorship office, and then inspectors see the performance. At times, the audience denounces a play. In July 2010, the BuSSy project, which was founded in 2006 by Sondos Shabayek and inspired by Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*, addressed gender issues and the position of women in Egypt. It was censored after the Supreme Council of Culture "received complaints from journalists and members of the public who were offended by the boldness of the content."[45] In February 2018, the six actors in the play *Suleiman Khater*, along with playwright Waleed Atef and director Ahmed el-Garhy, were arrested and imprisoned pending trial following the presentation of their play at the Shooting Club in Giza and anonymous denunciations from spectators.[46] As a result, it is understandable that any play with transgressive or critical potential cannot pass through this circuit. If artists take the risk of performing, it is often for one or two performances, so that it remains confidential. Also, from the point of view of distribution, it is understandable that it is extremely difficult to present shows in Egypt–for political reasons. And even when the show does not expose the artists to political risk, it is difficult for economic reasons. It should be noted, however, that artists are more exposed if they perform in large cities. This suggests that surveillance is tighter in Cairo than in Alexandria, and even less in peripheral regions.

Independent artists must, therefore, either accept to play a few times or seek distribution channels outside Egypt. Since many of the neighboring Arab countries face similar problems to those mentioned above, artists most often turn to Europe, and more rarely to the United States (as in the case of Dalia Basiouny, for example). If some shows have been integrated into national theater programs, it is most often in festivals that the shows are presented. When it is a question of generic festivals, shows can play on tours. But Egyptian artists are also often part of thematic festivals (centered on the dramaturgies of the Mediterranean for example) which generally open up fewer prospects for further scheduling.

These business models, which rely on a wide variety of funding sources, as well as the lack of distribution opportunities, pose many problems for artists and independent companies.

First of all, there is a lack of *sustainability* (durability/stability), which is a major problem. This problem prevents artists from projecting themselves in the long term, from thinking about projects over time, and therefore from developing an artistic, aesthetic, social, and even political project. This lack of sustainability is of course also due to the policies of surveillance and censorship that can abruptly put an end to certain projects, or cut off private and/or foreign funds for political reasons. Artists are often forced into a form of improvisation–not knowing what form a show will finally take, or not knowing from one day to the next where it will be presented and in front of which audience. At the same time, this gives them a great capacity to adapt.

The other major problem is that of encouraging individualism and increasing competition among Egyptian artists–who are already not so many in number. Funding is reserved for artists who are integrated into networks, who also have a mastery of administrative criteria. Reem Khedr emphasizes:

> *"Each of these funding institutions work with people who know how to fill out a call for funds application, know how to write proposals, and fluently speak foreign languages. Even when they arrange focus groups, they conduct them with the same kind of people, hence, the same results are reproduced."*[47]

Accordingly, the modes of financing the performing arts in Egypt over the past 15 years have depended on the status of the artists (private/public/independent), but above all–and this seems to be increasing over the past decade–on each artist and on the personal links established with national or foreign institutions, and therefore on individual strategies. There are stark inequalities among artists, and we can also question the growing dependence of independent artists on foreign authorities caused by an authoritarian political context. In this context, we note a dynamic of dissemination that has developed in recent years: Egyptian artists (and Arab artists in general) from the independent scene are featured more in Europe. However, investment in co-production remains limited. Egypt's cultural institutions systematically withhold robust financial backing from contemporary artists, relegating them to precarious, ad-hoc support structures.

5. Right to Culture, Alliances and Networks

In theory, access to culture is guaranteed by the 2014 Egyptian Constitution. Article 48 states:

> *Every citizen has the right to culture. It is guaranteed by the State, which ensures its support and allows access to the various cultural products, to the different categories of the people, without distinction as to financial capacity or geographical or other situation. The State pays special attention to remote regions and to the most disadvantaged categories.*[48]

These assertions of the right to culture can be found in government programs, particularly Egypt's Vision 2030, which includes the following objectives for culture: "Develop and restructure the cultural system" and "increase the efficiency of the cultural services infrastructure and expand its reach"[49]

However, culture remains difficult to access in Egypt. We will first try to identify the obstacles before noting some encouraging points in the access to culture.

The first obstacle that we can distinguish is linked to the extreme centralization of Egypt, where 80% of art and cultural events take place in Cairo; 15% take place in Alexandria, with the rest of the immense country sharing the remaining 5%.[50] This obviously creates an inequality of the populations in front of the cultural offer, and we note in particular a cleavage between the rural and urban public.

However, even when the shows are more important in the cities, particularly Cairo and Alexandria, there are other problems. One of the major bottlenecks is that of information and accessibility to culture, and in particular to dance and theater independent sphere. These two elements turn out to be closely linked. The access to information problem is related to several things: theaters, for example–public, private, and even independent–do not have effective communication services. It is not easy, therefore, to get information about the shows, except for a few inserts in the official press that relay the shows on the bill in the national theaters (but not always in an exhaustive way) and the posters on the facades of the theaters in question. When it comes to the independent scene, communication is mostly done through social networks, which poses the problem of a limited audience (you have to "follow" the page of a place or a company to know what is going on). In addition, Egypt does not have a theater "season" Scheduling is done on an ad hoc basis, and one cannot know in advance what will be presented. Ahmed El Attar has identified this problem and since September 2021 he managed to set up programs for two, three, or four consecutive months at the Rawabet Theater in Cairo.[51]

National theaters, and some private theaters, are known and easily identifiable by their street address; however, this is not the case for independent theaters. Often perched on the floors of buildings (such as the El-Warsha company's theater in downtown Cairo) or in basements (Room Art Space), for example, it is difficult to access the shows presented there if the spectator does not already know the place. Consequently, the question of information on the cultural agenda and its accessibility are linked.

It should be noted that between 2011 and 2013, thanks to the revolutionary effervescence and the suspension of control authorities, many artists or collectives were able–and chose–to perform in the streets, mingling with the occupations and demonstrations.[52] Some festivals also chose this format, such as the well-named *Al-fan midan* ("art is a place") street festival. But the return to authoritarian order in the summer of 2013, as well as laws such as the law regulating public gatherings passed in November 2013 (even though it was primarily aimed at political and not artistic gatherings) quickly put an end to these initiatives, which for a time allowed artists to reach a wider audience, and Egyptians in the streets to have easy access to artistic proposals.

Another important point is the price of tickets. With expensive tickets, the private theater becomes reserved for the elite. In independent theaters, after the revolution, artists took into account a necessary democratization of access to culture and tried to pass attractive prices (D-CAF was able to lower the price of tickets to five pounds and even organized free events), but with inflation and currency devaluation, prices have been on the rise since 2016. And when practitioners play by the rules and pay taxes accordingly, then the prices go up even further. In May 2021, a seat for a play at the American University was 100 LE, and in the same week it cost 120 LE for a play at the Rawabet Theater.

The last point is that of structural inequalities in access to culture in general, and to the theater in particular, when it comes to education. Education often leads to culture. However, the weakness of the public school system in Egypt often does not allow access to contemporary creation. The Egyptian theatrical/literary repertoire also suffers from limited access. In general, culture in school programs is constantly being marginalized (savings in public education, decrease of artistic quality which repels private teachers…it is a vicious circle).

In this context, which leads to pessimism, there are some positive points to note. In the late 2000s, and just before the revolution, the emergence of open stages (such as the *Mashrou3 al-Mareekh* led by Mariam el-Quessny from 2009 onwards, for example) provides a good model of democratization of access to culture, which was affirmed in the street initiatives during the revolutionary period. While producing art in the street seems impossible at the moment in Egypt, places like cultural cafes can host such events (open-mics, sharing of experiences, storytelling, etc).

Since 2013, theater therapy seems to have gained importance in Egypt, as in the regular *playback theater* sessions offered by the Dawar Arts Center in downtown Cairo. It should be noted, however, that these are more personal development methods than real artistic offerings.

Perhaps more interestingly, we note that some artists or companies have developed a local and territorial anchorage, establishing

themselves in specific territories, and linking their activities to the local population. For example, Hassan El Geretly helped found the Mallawi Center in Minya, Middle Egypt, where the art of *taḥṭīb* is taught. By offering *taḥṭīb* training as much as performances, the Mallawi center is a meeting place in this small town, and it is the only cultural alternative to the local state cultural center. As for the El-Kousha company, it is based in the small village of Tunis, in the Fayoum oasis. This is where the company members make and store some of their puppets, and in part the giant puppets caricaturing SCAF generals and Islamists that they paraded through the streets of Cairo between 2012 and 2014. Finally, to a certain extent, one could say that Ahmed El-Attar has anchored himself locally in downtown Cairo, where his various activities are concentrated (rehearsal rooms at the Emad Eddin studio, Orient Production offices, Rawabet theater, D-CAF festival headquarters, etc.). He holds a space that seeks to revitalize culture, while emphasizing the specificity of this urban space. His space was once a former center of Egyptian culture, of the colonial elite, and today it is in a working class neighborhood.

Finally, we note the existence of some rather particular places, which escape the public/private/independent divide and are densely frequented by populations of diverse social origins, such as the Biblioteca Alexandrina in Alexandria, the Jesuit Cultural Center (especially the one in Alexandria), and the Saqiet el-Sawi Cultural Center in Cairo.

As for the alliances and networks established by Egyptian artists, the phenomenon must be questioned on different scales: international, regional, and local–which sometimes overlap and intersect.

On an international scale, two elements stand out. On the one hand, there are links with specific foreign cultural actors and structures; these alliances are often based on interpersonal links built over the long term, which we have already mentioned in the section devoted to economic models. On the other hand, the role played by international NGOs is essential; this role brings into play a dialectic between the global and the local. Many NGOs have access to international funds, but their branches act at the local level.

Many NGOs finance cultural projects in connection with social development projects and in conjunction with local associations–what we could call "cultural action" Artistic projects are, therefore, backed by social initiatives which often also condition their financing. One example is Samu Social International, which calls on artists to conduct theater workshops with street children and groups of isolated women. In this case, it is an NGO that calls on artists. Another example is the Outa Hamra clown collective, which performs almost exclusively with specific and disadvantaged populations; for example, it performs in underprivileged neighborhoods of Cairo in cooperation with refugee populations from Syria, Eritrea, or Somalia ("*Going to the Neighbor's house*" project, 2014) in collaboration with humanitarian associations and UNICEF.[53]

This has both advantages and disadvantages. When it comes to the advantages, it allows artists to reach new audiences[54] and to benefit from international funding while preserving a local base. However, for these projects to obtain these funds, the projects need to have a social aspect. Artistic ambitions are therefore necessarily linked to a social component, which may in turn be linked to a specific agenda particular to the NGO ("*For instance, they impose tackling a topic like 'women in power' to be eligible for the grant even though arts should be free to discuss what it wants to discuss*" said an art director in July 2022).[55]

On a regional scale, some artists have established links with other companies or other cultural structures. For example, the El-Warsha company has collaborated for several years with the Jordanian company Fawanis, and continues to participate each year in the storytelling festival in Amman. Another example, within the framework of the D-CAF festival created in 2012, Ahmed El Attar has organized an "Arab Focus" since 2013, inviting Arab artists to come and perform. Each year, this focus is organized between Cairo where D-CAF takes place and a cultural structure in another city hosting the Focus (the Sunflower Theater in Beirut in 2016, Edinburgh in 2017, at the Jean Vilar Theater in Vitry-sur-Scène in 2021). This Focus aims in particular to invite foreign producers (mostly European to date) to attend the shows (and therefore eventually feature them).

(It is in fact the creations of the national theater, and of the private theater, that seem to be the best integrated on a regional scale).

On a local scale, it should be noted that during the revolution, companies and artists tended to collaborate to create events together (festivals or even political events, such as the occupation of the Ministry of Culture in Zamalek by artists of all disciplines, both affiliated with the public theater and independent, in the spring of 2013 to protest the government's cultural policy).

We have already mentioned the integration of certain companies in specific territories, at the level of regions, villages, or neighborhoods. In this respect, we can ask ourselves whether the reclosure of the country under the Sisi government, and then the Covid-19 crisis, have encouraged a return to the local. Two examples might lead us to believe that artists have sought to reintegrate themselves into a local ecosystem. The first example is Ahmed El Attar, who took over the direction of the Rawabet Theater in downtown Cairo. Yet this is not directly related to the pandemic, but rather to an artistic and political project with local anchoring. The other example is Hassan El Geretly, who had to find local partnerships to continue creating and financing the El-Warsha company while European tours were cancelled and funding was cut. He gave several performances financed by the food company Isis.[56]

There again seems to be a significant disparity between the public and private sectors on the one hand, and the independent sector on the other. In the case of independent artists, international alliances (and in particular with European countries) are the most important, but there is also a desire for local anchoring. For artists from the public and private sectors, regional alliances are more important, in particular the links that are being forged with Gulf countries in terms of funding and distribution.

6. Digitalization

We will distinguish here the use of the digital tools by Egyptian artists (in a first time) and the intermediality in performances (in a second time).

First of all, and in general, if we consider the performing arts as a whole and all sectors (public/private/independent), we can say that the management of online communication tools is very weak in Egypt. In general, it is very difficult to find information online about shows, theaters, artists, and companies.

The national theaters, as mentioned earlier, do not have websites; at most, they have Facebook pages that are poorly updated.

Independent artists have developed more online communication, on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in particular. Some venues and companies even have websites–the Contemporary Dance Center in Cairo[57] or Orient Productions,[58] for example. As far as festival events are concerned,[59] websites exist, but they are updated and live only for the duration of the events. Sometimes, they have partial or erroneous information until the day before a performance.

Rézodanse, an independent cultural center founded in 2008 to promote dance creation, based in Alexandria,[60] participates in larger online projects. For example, they are present on the Citerne.live platform set up by Lebanese artists Omar Rajeh and Mia Habis, broadcasting live performances and also serving as an archive.[61] Rézodanse is thus attached to a large-scale digital project, but is not at the base of the initiative.

This is probably linked to an insufficient consideration of digital issues. It is also linked to the political context, where the government closely monitors all alternative or marginal places of expression. This monitoring includes artistic productions. While it has been said that Mubarak's government did not sufficiently take into account the scope of social networks and digital technology during the 2000s,[62] this is not the case with the Sisi government. The Sisi government has developed means to monitor online content.

The pandemic seems to have slightly shifted the lines. The state has implemented the "Stay at Home… Culture is in your hands" plan, making available free online recordings of theater and opera performances via the Egyptian Ministry of Culture's Youtube page. The 2020 edition of the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theater (CIFET) was held in a hybrid format: Egyptian performances were performed physically on stage, while invited foreign performances were held online.

On the side of the independent scene, the pandemic and the drop in funding has pushed Hassan El Geretly to launch a major campaign to raise funds. This campaign went through the traditional media (the press, in particular, with an article in the newspaper Al-Ahram–on February 17, 2021). His campaign was also promoted via social networks on his Facebook page, and through France 24 television channel.

As far as intermediality on Egyptian stages is concerned, it developed strongly during the revolution. During the revolution, the theater became, like the online press, a means of chronicling and documenting the ongoing events. The rise of documentary theater has encouraged the use of audiovisual materials on stage, especially content found online. This is the case with artists who were already practicing it, such as Laila Soliman, a director since 2004 who collaborated with the German collective Rimini Protokoll in 2008 before committing herself strictly to documentary theater. But this is also the case with the amateur groups that have taken up theater at the event. The Askar Kazeboon project, for example, is completely based on content available online, arranged/edited and then projected in pirate sessions on screens set up in different neighborhoods in Cairo, and then all over Egypt, in what they call "campaigns" (*Askar Kazeboon*, 2001; *Kazeboon - Sâriqîn 'aishnâ*, 2012; *Kazeboon - bi ism ad-din*, 2012-2013). The material resulting from the editing is then put back online[63] so that it can be reused in subsequent sessions, including by citizens who are not members of the collective, but wish to use the content produced to carry out actions and become activists.

In summary, from the point of view of intermedial aesthetics as well as the use of social networks for the diffusion of performances, the 2011 revolution marks a major turning point. First of all, artists are using audio-visual content, and in particular that available online, in their performances. Consequently, we can speak of true intermedial or digital aesthetics, envisaged and invented most often from a militant perspective. Moreover, performing artists collaborate with online activist or citizen-journalist collectives; this is Laila Soliman's case, who collaborates with the video and activist collective Mosireen in 2011. Similarly with the Kazeboon collective, they are present both online *and* in the public space. Finally, the Internet is becoming a place for the dissemination of content, allowing artists to broadcast the footage of their performances in order to reach a wider audience.

However, since 2014, the effects of digitalization seem to have stagnated; this stagnation seems to be mainly due to the Egyptian government monitoring online content since 2014; this surveillance no longer makes the Internet a safe space for independent artists. Moreover, we notice that videos of committed performances have disappeared from the web–Laila Soliman's Vimeo account has been emptied of the majority of her videos, and the Al Kousha collective website and its giant puppets caricaturing Egyptian political leaders has been removed, among other examples. The share of documentary theater, probably considered essentially too political, has largely decreased in Egyptian production. It is then probably (paradoxically?) on the side of the national and private theater scenes that the main changes have taken place.

Nevertheless, we must underline the *Wizara* initiative, an online platform presented as "the first Web-based ecosystem and creative studio built by artists for artists" co-created by the choreographer Adham Hafez and the performer and poet Mona Gamil.[64] *Wizara* allows the linking of artists throughout the world via the means available online. In addition, Adham Hafez puts the links between the stage and the digital world at the heart of his work. He is also a member of the multidisciplinary platform HaRaKa.[65]



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- Interview with Hani el-Metenawi, director,February 2013.
- Interview with Mr. H., actor, November 2019.
- Interview with Ahmed El Attar, director of the company al-Ma'bad/The Temple, May 2021.
- Interview with Hassan El Geretly, director of the company El Warsha, May 2021.
- Interview with Hassan El Geretly, 1er July 2022.
- Interview with Karima Mansur, choreographer and director of the Cairo Contemporary Dance Center, 27 July 2022.

1 The first of these terms *"Ihyā'"* means "to revive" "to vivify" and promotes a return to the essential rules bequeathed by the Ancients, a desire to revive the inherited heritage in order to reinvent and restore it. The second is a borrowing movement. The term *Iqtibās* literally means "to light one's fire at another's" and metaphorically "to borrow passages from an author". It consists of taking inspiration from European literary works, adapting them or imitating them.

2 Boutros Hallaq, Heidi Toelle, *Histoire de la littérature arabe moderne*, Tome I, 1800-1945 (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007), 116.

3 The theater in Syria and Lebanon remains confined to the friendly, family circle and the local elites. To escape Ottoman censorship and conservative circles hostile to new forms of expression, a movement of exodus to Egypt initiated by intellectuals takes shape. Al-Qabbānī, for example, was forced by the riots sparked by the Sheikhs to close his theater before leaving Damascus. A dozen troupes were thus born, in Egypt between 1870 and the First World War, as a result of this movement of Syrian-Lebanese playwrights, journalists, and translators attracted by the economic prosperity under Ismail Pasha, by a certain artistic freedom, and by the construction of new theaters and opera houses. See Salīm Naqqāš, "fawā'id al-riwāyāt wa al-tiyātrāt" *al- Jinān*, vol.XV, August 1875.

4 For a broader idea of theatrical life under Khedive Ismail, see Ons Trabelsi, "The Rise of Western Theater in Khedive Egypt and the Early Aspirations of Egyptians for a Modern Arab Theater" *Horizons/Theatre*, n° 12 (Bordeaux: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2018), 27-46.

5 Sarah Enany, "Egyptian Theatre in Suspense after January 25" in Rolf C. Hemke, *Theatre in the Arab World* (Tunis: Sud Editions, 2015), 13.

6 Damien Helly, "Preparatory action. Culture in EU external relations" "Egypt country report" March 26, 2014, https://www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/downloader/download-file?file=2016/08/Egypt_report52.pdf

7 Expression used by Egyptian actress, company director, and journalist Nora Amin in a paper entitled "The Representation of the Female in Egyptian Theater: the Puppet and the Warrior" held at the conference "Les Arts du spectacle au féminin" Université Bordeaux-Montaigne, October 23-25, 2018. Unpublished text

8 Interview conducted with Mr. H., actor, November 2019.

9 Joseph Fahim, "Roots in the sand: a timeline of Egyptian theatre" *American Theatre*, May 10, 2015, http://www.american-theatre.org/2014/05/10/roots-in-the-sand-a-timeline-of-egyptian-theatre/

10 See Egypt's Vision 2030 website: https://mped.gov.eg/EgyptVision?lang=en

11 Rebekah Maggor, "Introduction" in Mohammed Albakry and Rebekah Maggor, *Tahrir Tales: plays from the Egyptian Revolution* (London: Seagull Books, 2016), 12-29.

12 Marie Elias and Hanan Kassab-Hassan, *Dictionary of Theatre, Terms and Concepts of Theatre and Performing Arts, Arabic, English, French* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 199), 249.

13 Interview with Hassan El Geretly, director of the El Warsha company, 1er July 2022.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Interview with Karima Mansour, choreographer and founder of the Cairo Contemporary Dance Center, July 27, 2022 (by Ons Trabelsi)

16 CCDC- Maat dance Company: https://ccdc.dance/Home

17 Interview with Karima Mansour, *op.cit*.

18 سواء أردت أو لم أرد ورغم أنف أي حد، أيوة هناك علاقة وطيدة بحكم بسيط جدا،إنه أنا مصرية و أتعامل مع أجساد مصرية و اللتي هي كامن فيها كل هذه الأشياء. أنا مش لازم أعمل عرض ألبّس فيه العارضين يتوعي و الراقصين و الممثلين جلبية و "Walk like an Egyptian" و أخليهم يمشو صولجان. أمسّكهم عشان يبقى العرض مصري

19 المسرح، عدد 35 أغسطس 2022، دائرة الثقافة الشارقة، الإمارات العربية المتحدة فوزية ضيف الله،"هل يحتاج مسرحنا إلى رجة مفاهمية؟ "ص.

20 Pauline Donizeau, "Transferts des esthétiques politiques du théâtre européen dans le contexte égyptien chez Laila Soliman et Ahmed El-Attar" *Horizons/Théâtre* n°12, 2018, 85-96.

21 Reem Khedr, "Challenges facing independent cultural actors. The case of Egypt" (PhD diss., American University of Cairo, 2021).

22 Sarah Enany, "Egyptian theater in limbo after January 25" 14.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Reem Khedr, *"Challenges facing independent cultural actors"*.

25 حصاد المسرح المصرى 2021"، اليوم السابع،03 يناير، 2022

26 ياما في الجراب يا حاوي "

27 *Ibid.*

28 هاني رمزي" ابو العربي"/ مهمد هنيدي" سلام مربع"

29 مسرح محمد صبحي يحفظ ماء الوجه للقطاع الخاص

30 Mazen el Gharabawi: Egyptian actor and director, among his notable plays: *al-Zīr Salim, Ḥolm laylat Ṣīf , Hamlet bil maqlūb*. He is also the founder and chairman of the Sharm el-Sheikh International Youth Theater Festival.

31 Amru Qabil: Egyptian actor and director, founder and president of the International Forum of University Theater in Cairo.

32 محمد سيف، عمر فرتات،منتجب صقر، الإخراج المسرحي العربي المعاصر، البصرة، دار الفنون و الآداب، 199,2022

33 مسرحيات موسم الرياض 2022.. نجوم ومفاجآت بالجملة"العين الإخبارية،2022/10/19 : https://al-ain.com/article/plays-riyadh-season-2022

34 Interview with Hani el-Metenawi, director, February 1 and 2013.
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35 See the site : https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/fr/node/1284

36 See : https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/fr/node/1510

37 Franck Mermier, "Arab Cultural Foundations and the Metamorphoses of Pan-Arabism" *Arabian Humanities*, n° 7, 2016, http://journals.openedition.org/cy/3146.

38 See : https://mawred.org/

39 See : https://tamasicollective.org/en/

40 In Egypt, the company The Temple (Ahmed El Attar) and El Warsha (Hassan El Geretly) are members.

41 For more details on this law, see for example the press release of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: https://www.ohchr.org/fr/press-releases/2017/05/repressive-new-ngo-law-deeply-damaging-human-rights-egypt-zeid

42 Reem Khedr, *"Challenges facing independent cultural actors. The case of Egypt"*, 73.

43 Donizeau Pauline, "Ces derniers festivals indépendants en Égypte", *Orient XXI* [en ligne], 22/03/2019: https://orientxxi.info/lu-vu-entendu/les-derniers-festivals-independants-en-egypte,2981

44 On this point see, among others: Human Rights Watch, "Egyptian Government Against Freedom of Expression" August 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/16/egypt-campaign-crush-artistic-freedom But also: Maxa Zoller, "Q&A with Egypt's head of censorship, Ahmed Awaad" *Mada Masr*, January 22 2014, https://madamasr.com/en/2014/01/22/feature/culture/qa-with-egypts-head-of-censorship-ahmed-awaad/

45 Nadine Emile, "I will stifle it!", *Egypt Independent*, July 10 2010, http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/55149

46 Egypt Today (staff), "Suleiman Khater play creators sentenced to 2-months suspended prison" Egypt today, July 26 2018, https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/54717/Suleiman-Khater-play-creators-sentenced-to-2-month-suspended-prison

47 Reem Khedr, "Challenges facing independent cultural actors. The case of *Egypt*", 56.

48 https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/fr/eg/eg060fr.pdf

49 http://egypt2030.gov.eg/

50 Reem Khedr, "Challenges facing independent cultural actors. The case of Egypt", 6.

51 Interview with Ahmed El Attar , director of the company al-Maabad / The Temple, May 2021.

52 Heba el-Abbadi and Sally Hammouda, "From spectators to spect-actors. All Tahrir's a stage" in Aaltonen S., Ibrahim A., Rewriting Narratives in Egyptian Theater. Translation, Performance, Politics (New York, London: Routledge Advances in Theater and Performance studies, 2016), 180-200.

53 https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/35/93573/AboutUs.aspx

54 Reem Khedr, "Challenges facing independent cultural actors. The case of Egypt", 71.

55 *Ibid.* p. 54.

56 Interview with Hassan El Geretly, May 2021.

57 https://www.cairocontemporarydancecenter.com/Home

58 http://orientproductions.org/

59 For example, the Dowtown Cairo Art Festival (https://d-caf.org/) or the Lazem Masrah Festival (http://theatermust.com/)

60 https://rezodanseegypte.com/

61 https://www.citerne.live/fr/people/centre-rezodanse-egypte

62 Pierre Depaz, Pauline Donizeau, "Revolutionary countercultures: cultural activism and new media in Egypt in Revolution" Les Cahiers Interdisciplinaires de Recherche en Communication Audiovisuelle, n° 27, 2018, 93-112.

63 Notably on the Youtube page of the collective (some videos have been removed so far): https://www.youtube.com/@3askarKazeboon/playlists

64 https://www.wizara.io/

65 https://www.harakaplatform.com

PERFORMING ARTS IN THE MAGHREB

by Trabelsi Ons & Ziou Ziou Abdeslam

Morocco, Algeria & Tunisia



Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the theater scene, then under construction in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, was situated, to varying degrees, between a European drama model imposed by the French colonial presence and an Arab model claimed to assert its identity and its belonging to the Arab-Muslim culture. These two models are not clearly separated and interconnect on several levels. The majority of the public discovers Western theater through the performances of Syrian-Egyptian troupes in a version rewritten according to an aesthetic specific to these troupes. Western theater, especially French and Italian, is presented in two forms: a direct form presented by European companies especially for their community mainly staging new plays performed on European stages, and an indirect form, Arabized and adapted to an Arabic-speaking audience, presented by Syrian-Egyptian companies. The emerging Maghrebian troupes took up the main pieces of the repertoire performed by the troupes from Egypt.[1] The various attempts to appropriate the Syrian-Egyptian repertoire encountered several difficulties relating to the problem of language, the choice of pieces and the precarious and marginal conditions in which the troupes evolved under the French occupation.

The relationship to heritage and the resulting hybridization is at the heart of the artistic creation of the performative arts in the Maghreb in the post-colonial period. The theater movement of the 70s and 80s represented by the directors Tayeb Saddiki and Ahmed Tayeb Laalej in Morocco, Abdelkader Alloula and Mohamed Benaïssa in Algeria, Azzedine Madani and Mouncef Souissi in Tunisia solicits ancient forms of performance in their theatrical creations. The performative arts mobilize popular or ancient forms, to create a theater that "works" that is to say that interacts and attracts a large enough audience, a theater that listens to people and speaks to them.[2] The mobilization of popular practices also has a political aim of opening the theater to its environment and the expression of its problems. The common denominator between these experiences is the desire to build "national theaters" in an effort to liquidate the colonial legacy. They join the whole of the artistic collectives (visual arts, cinema, literature, architecture), which will fight for the construction of national artistic forms.

As far as dance and contemporary circus are concerned, due to their recent emergence in the Maghreb, the problem of the relationship with heritage is posed differently; theater has a fairly important historical basis in the Maghreb countries, whereas dance and circus saw their effective development at the beginning of the new millennium, through the efforts of individuals, dancers and circus groups. Thus, dance and circus do not have the historicity that has allowed the development of multiple experimentation in connection with the heritages. Because of their recent history, contemporary dance faces more or less the same problems in the Maghreb countries (mainly in Tunisia and Morocco, where the scene is already well developed).

These different performative experiences have heterogeneous aesthetics and multiple sources. It is important to distinguish the approaches and their relationship to heritage. Some directors will look for ancestral forms or ancient canvases and put them on stage in a modern device–an action of exhumation and actualization of the heritage for the benefit of a contemporary expression. Others will stage inherited elements still visible in society in several initial or modified forms. The work is then done essentially through an appropriation that is continuously charged with a new connotation. These practices remain nevertheless very perilous. The risk of falling into superficiality is big. The enterprise of relieving a form or an expression of its primary meaning is difficult and requires a particular sensitivity and a thorough knowledge of the object studied, of its history, and of its anchoring in the society in question.[3] It is also necessary to be very attentive to the classification of the tendencies and the devices. The heritage of popular forms in Maghrebian societies is not at odds with modern life. Thus, heritage is also perceived as a "contemporary reservoir" that is constantly updated and not as a dusty legacy that some authors dig up in favor of an apology for tradition and the preservation of a common heritage. The popular practices are narrations, tools, forms of representation that mobilize the artists to dialogue with the contemporary forms.

Contempo-rariness

THINKING ABOUT CONTINUITY DIFFERENTLY:" ENGAGEMENT WITH HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF CREATION IN CONTEMPORARY THEATER IN THE MAGHREB

The Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian theater scenes, although crossed by distinct dynamics, converge towards an important point: the development of experimental theater championed by a new generation of theater women and men. These new forms are not in rupture with the previous generations. They are situated in the dialectic of the incorporation of the previous forms and their overcoming. The new forms incorporate the experimentation of the postcolonial generations with the popular forms. At the same time they exceed them through the solicitation of new mediums, the adoption of a new relationship to the theatrical text, and by being more registered in contemporary realities.[4] Other themes and aesthetics have emerged in the last two decades, such as questions of violence (sexual, social, labor, etc.), gender issues, the discomfort of living in societies with widespread inequalities, questions of migration and border crossing, and the relationship of the artist to society.

Morocco

According to researcher Omar Fertat, there are three major drama forms in contemporary Moroccan creation: a boulevard theater mainly represented by the "National Theater Troupe" stand up and one man show actors–we can refer to the success of the Humouraji Troupe;[5] then "a so-called serious, experimental theater animated by professionals and amateurs trained in the theater professions"[6] This experimental scene is mainly animated by the laureates of the ISADAC (Institut Supérieur d'Art Dramatique et d'Animation Culturelle) and by the university theater community. These forms have also been favored by the creation aids of the Ministry of Culture. This experimental theater is defined by the researcher Ahmed Massaïa as being part of a category where "research and experimentation predominate and whose particularity is to claim to be a collective of artists from different backgrounds and different sensibilities who propose a theater where experimentation and research are evident [...]."[7] Popular performative practices will be mobilized as part of a general writing of a piece rather than as a specific theme of theatrical engagement. Examples include Kabaret Chikhate's performances of Jawk at-tamtil al bidawi,[8] Amine Nassour's performances including the play Chabika 2019) شابكة bearing the text على باب الوزير by Abdelkrim Berrechid;[9] the show بلا سمية Bla Smiya (2017) by Ahmed Hamoud,[10] as well as the play Boujloud (2022) by Kenza Berrada.[11] The directors of these shows privilege the aesthetic or formal aspect by following a way of doing things initiated by Tayeb Saddiki giving importance to the form first. However, the Kenza Berrada show, represents an exception because the content and the message are very important; it is about the issue of rape and incest evoking images in the form the traditional figure of Bilamaouen. The play Janazat Rajoul (2020)[12] by Moroccan director Ismail El Falahi[13] informs us about the use of heritage as a form that deals with societal issues through an intimate experience. This play uses a dynamic monologue to shed light on a piece of Tarek's life performed by the actor Reda Redouane, who over the course of his evolution will become a follower and master of the Aïta.[14] The main character will sing, play the Aïta, talk about his fortuitous encounter with this art, discuss its forms, and present research on this musical genre. When Tarek finally begins to make a living from his art, he learns that he is suffering from cancer, which leads to his sudden death. The death is one minute from a 45-minute show; this minute materializes the sudden disappearance of a loved one who was known having a tremendous burst of life. The Aïta is used in this case as part of the narrative and the staging to deal with a more intimate subject, which is the stupefaction in front of sudden death due to an illness.

Stage experimentation, the use of different mediums, and the inscription in the artists' lived reality are the main characteristics of contemporary creations in Morocco. The directors use different media (sound, video, dance, meta-voice) focusing mainly on new forms of writing, scenography, and relationship with the public. According to the director Mohamed El Horr, the goal of his work is to "create a theater that can speak to everyone, a popular theater without falling into populism, and an experimental theater without falling into elitism"[15] Within this framework, the plays presented at the National Theater Festival in Tetouan, Morocco in January 2023–such as the play "Hadaik al assrar" (2022)[16] by director Mohammed El Horr and Chattara (2022)[17] by director Amine Nassour–are theatrical proposals mixing scenic experimentation and popular theater by using intermediality.

The play Brenda,[18] which won the prize for best theatrical performance at the 29th edition of the Jordan Theater Festival in October 2022,[19] represents this new form of theatrical experimentation carried by a new generation quite well. Directed by Amine Sahel, the play is inspired by a famous Hip Hop song by the American rapper Tupac and adapted to the Moroccan reality. This rap song tells the story of a young single mother in an American ghetto. The play tells the story of a young Moroccan woman through a polyphony of voices, from her childhood, through her love affairs, her adolescence, and her entry into adult life. The actors mobilize various theatrical registers, rap, dance, monologues, and speak a contemporary language. The themes and aesthetics of this play are quite typical of the concerns of contemporary theater groups that address head-on violence and the unspoken family themes. The theater becomes a space where conflicts and tensions present in society are manifested, and in the words of playwright Driss Ksikes, the theater acts as an "energy (that) helps to capture the pulse of an era"[20]

An important dynamic of female directors has been developing in Morocco for three decades. Asmaa Houri, Naïma Zitane, Latifa Ahrare, Kenza Berrada, Fatima Zahla Lahouitar, as well as academics such as Zohra Makach, are building a theater that places the questions of the body and the place of women in society as central to theater works in Morocco. From October 25 to 30, 2022, the Jassad International Festival of Women Stage Directors was held in Rabat,[21] featuring plays directed exclusively by women. Zohra Makach, academic and a theater woman, said in the proceedings of the "Profession Conference: Woman of Theater": "What women think to bring new to the theater is this "other" of their intimate experience. Another way of feeling with their entrails, another relation to the things of life, to the tragedy of everyday life, another vision, an intuitive knowledge of the beings, a deeper plunge in the introspection.[22] The play Kharif (2018)[23] by Asmaa Houri was performed during this festival; Kharif represents the struggle of a woman with cancer. The director will grapple with the text of this play, written by her late sister Fatima Houri, striving through staging and rewriting to shape it into "a symbolic dramatic form—one that develops a vision granting ample space to the invisible, the imaginary, and the poetic."[24] Researcher Ahmad Massaïa comments on the play Kharif: "It is a show that celebrates the body through dance and movement and transmits a series of images that, constantly, supplant the text"[25] Theater men and women in Maghreb approach the body, the place of the woman in the Moroccan society, as well as societal violence themes the most; this trend indicates the results of the questionnaire elaborated within the framework of this research (cf table page 14 - to put definitive page in final report)

Algeria

In 2003, during the year of Algeria in France, a significant number of plays mobilizing authors such as Abdelkader Alloula or Kateb Yacine will be exhibited in Algeria and France. After nearly a decade marked by civil war violence–which led to the assassination of Abdelkader Alloula in 1994 and Azzedine Medjoubi, director of the National Theater of Algiers, in 1995– the celebration of these authors marks a turning point in theatrical practice in Algeria. However, many criticisms will emerge stipulating that: "[...] the selection favored the Algerian theater of the past and the current entrenched, bureaucratic, and on the whole backward-looking official national theaters, while paying little attention to the new generation of theater artists who had appeared at the turn of the century, and whose work, in general, broke fairly sharply from their predecessors."[26] Algerian contemporary directors and playwrights amply recognize the place of the great names of the Maghrebian performing arts; new forms are emerging in Algeria trying to open new possibilities of innovation.[27] The context of this research questioned the relationship between contemporary theater and legacies. According to Rihab Alloula from the Algerian Troupe Istijmam, nowadays, it is very difficult with the evolution of communication technologies to give a central role to the goual and/or to the popular forms.[28] Questioned about the troupe relationship to the Algerian director and playwright Abdelkader Alloula's works, she replied that what interests them in these theatrical forms is "the narrative, the way of telling stories [...]." The troupe begins a kind of dialogue with these forms, "not in refusal, nor in opposition, rather in renewed dialogue with the old forms. There are many things to take at the level of the writing and the dramaturgy. [...] There, in 2019 (with the creation of the play Al Jouad directed by Jamil Benhamamouch) we have completely shaken this form, a new look, not critical, but rather that pushes us and that question these forms, [...] we see these works in a new light to confront them according to the time, [...] and think the continuity otherwise."[29]

It is in this sense that the troupe will resume Al-Jouad, a Abdelkader Alloula masterpiece, revisiting it from top to bottom through new scenography and staging.[30] The comparison between the two plays is edifying in terms of the ability to transmit a theatrical heritage by adapting it to the language of the time and addressing its contemporary aesthetics. The opening scene is a song found in the original play performed in reggae with a collective song. Later on, the different scenes of the play will be presented in a refined scenographic device giving even more strength to the text and the actors' performance. The impetus to return to the foundational texts of figures like Mohamed Dib—exemplified by troupes such as Istijmam and the Great House of Tlemcen—stems from an urgency to restore a cultural legacy disrupted by Algeria's Black Decade.[31]

It develops independent initiatives like the Istijmam company in Oran or the Great House of Tlemcen company. These troupes will readapt Algerian theater classics; they will also take an interest in more poetic, personal, and psychological theater forms involving few characters with influences from authors such as Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. All of these dynamics are linked together through meetings and festivals. Thus, the first piece of the troupe Istijmam was created in collaboration and partnership with the Great House of Tlemcen theater company in 2009. The links between the two entities lead to work logic and collective creation. The play Al Batima (2009), mounted by the theater group of the Grande Maison de Tlemcen addresses the issue of social masks and the intertwining of the social and the intimate. According to Fawzi Kara, this piece tends to play on the societal contradictions between the intimate and social worlds. This piece joins a set of creations that will mainly focus on the experience of Algerians, expressing a general discomfort of living in a society crossed by multiple contradictory and conflicting dynamics.

In a recent intervention, Bouziane Ben Achour,[32] researcher and Algerian theater fellow, indicates that the concern over contemporary Algerian reality is the main orientation of contemporary Algerian theater carried by independent dynamics, such as the amateur theater and theatrical cooperatives. These dynamics will make use of theatrical experimentation and extract substance from their creation deploying forms inscribed in Algerian reality.

The plays Fini la tchatche (Mabqat hadra, 2017) by Mohamed Cherchel and Baccalaureate (2018) by Azzedine Abbar represent the new trends of Algerian theater according to researcher Mohamed Kali.[33] These two pieces that won the grand prize of the National Festival of Professional Theater (TNEP) in Algeria are works "where the verbal language is also no longer the main element around which scenic writing is structured. It is a show that does not tell; it is lived as an adventure because of the emotional discharges it releases through the visual."[34] All these new forms have support from a common denominator that is "in both cases the parable refers to an Algeria mired in a multidimensional crisis (political, economic, cultural, identity).[35] Evolving in a context that requires the overcoming of theatrical forms based on texts, texts and listening to the public–including Abdelkader Alloula's work–these new forms appeared in the mid-2000s. They aim to create a theater that is "busy exploring all genres and gorging itself with an aesthetic of seduction by opening up to choreography, scenography, lighting effects, and audiovisual arts"[36]

In a similar vein, the play GPS (2019)[37] by Mohamed Cherchel, winner of the Sheikh Sultan Bin Muhammad Al Qasimi Award for Best Theater Work 2020 in the Arab region, takes the radical step of eliminating all verbal exchanges within the play. The director says: "There is a metaphor of images, [...] I have mostly eliminated verbal action. The dialogue does not exist, but the text exists and the story and the conflicts are there. So the audience will be able to understand the story through emotions."[38] In a purified scenographic device the actors play a story without saying words; they express themselves through onomatopoeia, music, and actors' body movements. By mobilizing different mediums such as music, lighting, and body movements, the play is meant to be universal in its understanding and transmission. Produced by the Algerian National Theater (2019), this piece "brings humor and seriousness" It deals with "modern man lost between his ideas, his principles, his attitudes, and by time."[39]

Istijmam Company, Oran, Algeria:

Istijmam is a theater company created in 2007 by young theater lovers whose desire is to conduct theater research inspired by multiple forms of artistic expression drawn from popular Algerian culture. Its research, essentially carried out in the laboratory, questions basic issues such as the actor-viewer relationship, text-representation, and theater and society. Various methods have been the subject of training workshops and have constituted a fundamental contribution both theoretically and practically, particularly those of Constantin STANISLAVSKI, Jerzy GROTOWSKI, and Peter BROOK.

His practice focuses on the creation and dissemination of theater shows such as L'astuce in 2008 (Tlemcen, Algeria), Et'teffah in 2009 (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), Djelloul il Reflessivo in 2010 (Rome, Italy), Qissas Nesin in 2011 (Oran, Algeria), Apples in 2016 (United States of America), Al Jouad (2019).

Website : https://www.cie-istijmam.com/
Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6AxFpG8EU_r0LxYbM71bvQ/featured
Facebook: https://fr-fr.facebook.com/istijmam/

Tunisia

Under Ben Ali's regime, freedom of expression and creative spaces were limited to the redundancy of the same artistic forms and subjects. The political situation was rarely present on the Tunisian theater scene. "Political criticism" was done through pictorial language, metaphors, and through several forms allowing to evoke the problems of Tunisians while avoiding censorship. The Tawfiq Jebali theater and in particular the set of comic and critical plays known as the saga of Klem Ellil is a fine example of the manipulation of language, the mastery of the Tunisian dialect, and the exploration of its possibilities of creation and detour. "Democracy" "criticism" and "freedom of expression" often become words drowned in a humorous context, presented through "marginal" characters in order to remove their primary explicit political meaning. The revolution upsets the established order, changes the political situation in Tunisia, and brings out new ideas. It also occurs at the level of language by the acquisition of a new vocabulary and by a liberation of the word. Rid of the old barriers to freedom of expression, the playwrights then question the immediate history, still misunderstood, through the experimentation of new scenic and linguistic devices. As for spectators, they can be in adhesion or in opposition, since from now on, they become spectators free to choose and to express their point of view. Their position is no longer limited to the decoding of the implicit. The Jaibi and Baccar theater after the revolution, only continues and confirms its bias for direct speech, where the religious and political lexicon are mixed and invade the scene. After the revolution, theater is characterized by the emergence of new themes often inspired by political and religious realities taking a new and growing place in Tunisian daily life. The rise of the jihadist movement is thus staged for example through La fuitede Ghazi Zaghbani (2017), adaptation in Tunisian dialect of a play by Hassan Mili written in French under the title of La P...savante (2014). The play tells of an unlikely encounter between an extremist apprentice and a prostitute. Trapped in the framework of their situations, the two characters find themselves forced to communicate. As part of an acerbic and cynical socio-political critique, the play ʿala hawaq,[40] by Tawfik Jebali, deals with several topics and draws from a variety of conflated sources: religious texts, philosophical texts Tahāfut al- falāsifa of al-Ġazāli, the character of Freud or shocking sundry facts such as the beheading of a shepherd and his brother (Mount Mghilla 2015) claimed by the terrorist group Jund al-Khalifa. The play is a set of scenes separated in terms of themes and characters but linked together by the music played on stage, the recurring return of some characters such as the clown and the poet as well as the resumption of some scenographic elements (chairs, carts, white walls). Other events and current events that have marked the Tunisians in recent years will be staged. The 144 young Tunisians and sub-Saharans who perished off the island of Kerkennah, the parents who waited in front of the morgue for the publication of the names of the corpses ... These daily tragedies, trivialized by their frequency, inspire the play by Naoufel Azara, 144 purple colors of the Big Blue[41] (144 qaṭra fi bḥar). A national theme that fits into a global issue and claims the universal right to freedom of movement. The staging of national tragedies is also addressed by Memory–Ḍākira by Slim Sanhaji and Sabah Bouzouita.[42] Inspired by Ariel Dorfman's The Girl and the Death, the play questions, in a no exit encounter between victim and torturer, torture, human rights violations, injustice, truth, testimonies, madness the loss of reference points, memory and its transmission.[43] Essia Jaibi's play Mrs. M. stages a displacement of memory's problematic, offering a "spatial experiment that playfully and subtly interrogates the notion of right distance—or 'right memory.'"[44] Themes that are still taboo in society and on the Tunisian scene include the play Flagranti performed at the last edition of Dream City and co-produced by the two associations "Mawjoudin We Exist" and "Art Rue" The play adopts a tone that is both free and didactic; it deals with the difficulties sexual minorities face living in a society that remains, all the same, conservative. The play evokes the abusive treatment of torture through the law criminalizing homosexuality and evokes the article 230 of the penal code still punishable by three years of imprisonment for people "practicing sodomy and lesbianism"[45] Before her latest works, Essia Jaibi explored new possibilities by leaving the defined frameworks of the stage and by opening her play towards other disciplines. Consequently, Tunis sur le Divan (2015) is a socio-artistic experience in the public space, resulting from a Franco-Tunisian collaboration with the National Agency of Urban Psychoanalysis. It is a performance mixing science and art based on a large field survey, as well as staging and scenography of the collected results.[46] During "La Nuit des Étoiles" (2016-2017), the public is invited, over the course of two nights, to follow a path in the Khaznadar Palace in el Halfaouine, and to discover performances, concerts, and installations. The exploration of the possibilities offered by urban spaces and the development of hybrid models, their spaces, and their circulations are also reflected in the show Blind Spot represented in Tunis at the Barracks Al-Attarine (January 2022), which is the result of a collaboration between the Tunisian actress Mouna Ben Haj Zekri and the Syrian director Brahim Jumaa; this show was born from an epistolary exchange that begun in 2019; it explores the relationship with meetings, loneliness, and silence. This collaboration in the writing of the text also characterizes the latest play by director Nizar Saidi, Ta'ihūn/ Dark Side.[47] The show's text, which was awarded the Prize for Best Text at the last edition of the Carthage Theater Days, is co-written with the author, teacher and playwright, Abdelhalim Messaoudi. Moreover, the call for the presence of a playwright announces the adoption of new practices that recognize the importance of the work of the latter in the construction of a show. Through a matricide committed by a teenage girl and the broadcasting of a video of her explaining the reasons for her crime, a series of chases is triggered on stage exposing the subjective, self-serving, and perilous treatment of the media. The work points out, through these embedded crimes, the dangers that threaten society and in particular young people who have lost their bearings and horizons.

CONTEMPORARY DANCE AND CIRCUS IN THE MAGHREB.

According to Mariem Guellouz, researcher, performer, and director of the Carthage Choreographic Days (2017-2021), there are two major trends in contemporary dance in the Maghreb. The first "includes choreographers who are in the wake of Western body techniques, which they adopt, rework, and transmit" They draw from the artistic vocabulary of Western contemporary dance to create choreographies freed from popular cultures and focus more on the logic of thought/dance, "that is to say, a way of being, of thinking about art and its relationship to contemporaneity"[48] The second tendency "concerns the choreographers of popular dances which, in a work of deconstruction, emerge new and contemporary forms of the traditional techniques"[49] This second form of dances will take the questions of the popular dances in hand to enter in dialogue with them. The first purpose is to safeguard and transmission them in front of the discourse of their disappearance. Thereafter, forms of reinvention will see the light of day that place popular practices and their deconstruction/reappropriation at the heart of the work of creation.[50]

In a context with lack of training structures in contemporary dance in the Maghreb, the dancers generally come from the milieu of classical dance (ballet company in Tunisia and classical dance school in Morocco) and break dance. The heritages here are linked to the forms that develop in the urban margins and that express an irruption of the body in the public space. The urban art of breakdance has been an important source of training for dancers in the various Maghrebian collectives. According to Mariem Guellouz, the development of dance collectives during the 2000s in the Maghreb is very much linked to questions of filiation to great choreographers structuring the field of the discipline.[51] The dancers will say that they come from the school of "flen" or "flana" (school of Meriem Jazouli or Tawfiq Benghrib in Morocco; Siham Benkhoudja or Imad Jemaâ for Tunisia). In a context lacking formal training spaces for contemporary dance, aesthetic practices instead follow the artistic dynamics pioneered by the founders of historical dance companies.

Malek Sbai, performer, choreographer, and artistic director of the Opera Theater of the City of Culture in Tunis, tells us that: "Contemporary dance remains a Western form / exogenous form, there is a possibility to draw from the popular heritage, but as a form, not an end in itself, the dialogue with the heritages, but as a possible form of creation" Unlike the pioneers of performing arts, popular forms are not treated as foundational to creation—nor as a creative subject in their own right. The choreographers and dancers mobilize their multiple resources; they become a form integrated in the writing of the choreography. Thus, as Cyrinne Douss, Tunisian performer and choreographer, tells us, legacies can be used, "to deconstruct something, re-interrogate this material not to work with it."[52] She continues by indicating that, "The legacies, we work with consciously or unconsciously, cross the body, they are inscribed in the body, they remain and become a medium not a basis for creation." Therefore, heritages are invested by contemporary dancers as part of a set of a repertoire that they may mobilize in their work.

In the contemporary dance field, the problem of aesthetics and themes is addressed in another area than the use of heritage. According to S.H., Moroccan performer and choreographer, there is a significant lack in choreographic works in the Maghreb due to the lack of training in writing and choreographic staging. The observation is shared by Malek Sbaï who speaks of a deficit of quality in contemporary works in Tunisia. The concern is that artists no longer speak a language that the public understands (by resorting to heritage); artists create a narrative of bodies and movement that share these sensitivities. According to Said, dancers and choreographers have highly developed technical training in movement–which leads many Western companies to come and learns from Moroccan troupes; but there is still a major issue in the development of language and choreographic writing. This observation is shared by the dancers-choreographers we met for this research; they point out that the lack of time and means to create quality pieces is the major handicap of choreographic creation in the Maghreb. Speaking of his experience within the company 2Kfar, as part of researcher Amance Riqouis Tilmont's thesis, the performance artist Younes Atban said that: "The mistake we made (within the troupe) is that we actually created dancers, but not artists"[53]

There are a few professional dance troupes in Morocco. Among the important choreographic experiences in Morocco are Taoufiq Izediou's work around the festival On Marche, Khalid Benghrib's work within the company 2KFar and Col'Jam's work in Casablanca, as well as Meryem Jazouli's work.[54] These artists and companies initiate dance projects on their territory, allowing them to train dancers, to produce contemporary dance performances, and to organize festivals to give opportunities for the dissemination of contemporary dance in Morocco. Following Amance Riquois Tilmont's reflection, there is a paradoxical dynamic of expansion and stagnation of contemporary dance in Morocco and more widely in the Maghreb. There is a certain dynamic of development of dancer-choreographer projects (the project dance fusion,[55] the collectives initiated and created within the Uzine in Casablanca, the project Hayou Raqs in Tunisia, and the development of the choreographic Days of Carthage), which meets a stagnation due to the lack of means, recognition, and place for the formation and perennial diffusion of contemporary dance. Malek Sbai has this to say in this regard: "There is a kind of glass ceiling in the creation and development of the environment where beyond a critical threshold, either we go abroad, or we stop, or we start over"[56] This glass ceiling prevents choreographic creation from developing does not mean the absence of creation dynamics. The Festival of Choreographic Meetings in Casablanca, organized by the company Col'Jam,[57] was very well attended by a public of young dancers who come to each new creation. There is a strong dynamic of dancers such as the collective We the Lions,[58] as well as the collective Liquid Bridge, which organizes workshops and night events specialized around dance in Casablanca.

Tunisia's contemporary dance landscape has evolved dramatically, spurred by the Opera Theater's new dance troupe and the introduction of the Carthage Choreographic Days. Within the City of Culture in Tunis, a dance troupe has developed that includes between 17 and 20 dancers who have a fixed salary, proper rehearsal conditions, and production means that allow them to make a living from their work as dancers. The City of Culture dance troupe produces at most "two shows per year with very few tours and no room for annual scheduling; it is a place that cannot face all the problems in the environment"[59] as indicated by the

Opera Theater art director, Malek Sbai. She also talks about the situation of stagnation, where "the dancers are in a particular position where they are afraid to leave this system that saves them from precariousness, and the desire to explode this framework, to create new things with more freedom and possibility of action"[60] The Carthage Choreographic Days in Tunis have been organized in Tunis since 2018. It is a festival that gives the opportunity to several dance troupes to show their work. Supported by the Ministry of Culture, it is "a South-South festival, whose priority is to give Arab and African troops an opportunity to show their work" its former director Mariem Guellouz affirms.[61] The development of this festival participates in the idea of creating an audience for contemporary dance in Tunisia that can then attend the productions and shows of other contemporary dance troupes.

Circus

Contemporary forms of circus in Morocco and Tunisia were born at the beginning of the millennium thanks to efforts of individuals committed to the development of the scene. The Acrobatic Group of Tangier was created thanks to the effort of the cultural actress Sannaa El Kamouni, who accompanied a group of Moroccan acrobats in forming their group. The Shemsy circus school located in Salé has also widely participated in the creation of a contemporary scene in Morocco. Founded in 1999, this school significantly offers a diploma recognized by the public authorities since 2009. In Tunisia, it is under the direction of Mohamed Driss that the National Theater founded a circus school in partnership with French contemporary circus centers. Just like dance or contemporary theater, contemporary circus maintains an important relationship with heritage, especially in Morocco where there are ancestral forms of acrobatics practiced by groups, the most famous of which is that of Sidi Hmed ould Moussa.

The main Moroccan troupe, the Acrobatic Group of Tangier, was created through a dialogue between Moroccan and Western contemporary forms of acrobatics. In 2003, Sanae El Kammouni, the troupe's administrator, invited circus artist Aurélien Borry to come and work with a group of Moroccan acrobats from the Hammich family, who perform the acrobatics of Sidi Hmed ould Moussa. For Ms. El Kammouni, the Moroccan acrobats have a real know-how that needed to be shared with contemporary circus forms to create a hybrid and universal show. From this encounter, the Tangier Acrobatic Group was born, and it toured European and world stages with this hybrid creation. The formula was later replicated with other directors, who put popular practices in dialogue with international contemporary creation. The troupe's latest show, Fiq (2021), is a production that mobilizes through its scenography a set of codes and colors of Moroccan popular culture created by the Moroccan photographer and scenographer Hassan Hajjaj.[62]

Other themes emerged in the work of contemporary circus troupes in Morocco. Thus, the company Colokolo addresses the "very masculine character of the cafe terraces in Morocco" in its show Café Noss Noss; this show was then the "subject of borders between countries, the question of mobility of artists and the visa system" in their high-flying creation Chouf le Ciel. This show came before shedding light on popular shows in their latest work in progress Reqqas. The Reqqas in Amazigh is the messenger who transmits the message between two groups or two entities, a kind of courier. The circus troupe combined different themes from their immediate environment before attempting a dialogue with the popular practice of Reqqas.

In Tangier, a Moroccan circus troupe organized as a cultural cooperative called Momkin[63] was founded. Resulting from the artistic and cultural workshops of the Darna association, this cooperative was created in 2008 from around five young artists from Tangier. Independently, they develop a series of artistic projects in the region of Tangier-Tetouan. The members of the cooperative work throughout the year to give circus classes in different areas in Tangier. They build partnerships with different organizations from the city to receive funding in exchange for the animation of circus workshops. At the same time, they take advantage of the know-how of these members to build their own demountable stage. Afterwards, they use their savings to rent a truck and tour different souks of the Jbala region north of Morocco.[64] Their objective was to return to their village of origin to show what they had learned and to show the youth in their village that artistic activity is possible. They toured five souks, which represented an important collective dynamic, as well as a way to respond to the lack of space to perform their shows. Since then, the cooperative continued to hold circuses in different places in Tangier, showing that if ideal conditions are not met, it is nevertheless ممكن to bring performative art forms to life independently. Subsequently, during the confinement the troupe will embark on the crazy project of building a circus tent. They put to use their know-how and tap into the mutual aid of their community. There are three circus tents in Morocco, one at the Shemsy school, another in Casablanca at the Théâtre Nomade, and the one built by Momkin members.

In the early 2000s, as part of the inauguration ceremony of the Mediterranean Olympic Games in Tunisia, a circus show was put together in a collaboration between young dancers and gymnasts and the CNC of Roissy. Thereafter, capitalizing on this momentum, a circus school was established under the leadership of the then-director, Mohamed Driss, within the National Theater in Halfaouine. The Halfaouine circus school first generation, which was part the circus Houda Riahi, began in 2003; thirteen students were selected and accompanied by the Rosny-sous-Bois (France) circus school. In 2009, at the end of their studies, they produced the piece Halfaouine, that they toured for two years, performing approximately 80 shows abroad.[65] Following the Revolution in 2011, the circus school closed. All the members from this troupe were orphaned and left with no creative space. According to Houda Riahi, members invested in other private places to develop their practice. As a result, the circus withered pushing circus artists to reorient themselves towards other forms of art, or take the exile road towards Europe or North America.

Although dance and contemporary circus have recently come about in Tunisia, they have triggered different dynamics within the performing arts milieu. Despite the lack of training structures affecting production, it remains vibrant and substantial. Circus and dance troupes find themselves with a double constraint between freedom of creation without the limits of academic centrality and the lack of quality due to the absence of training in choreographic writing. A space like the Uzine and the American Art Center in Casablanca is an important breeding ground for dancers in the various troupes operating in Morocco.

CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTION THEMES

By analyzing questionnaire answers and by attending different performances over the last eight months, it appears that societal issues arising from the creators' environment is one of the main themes of action and production in Maghreb's performative arts field. To the question of :

هل تحدد القضايا الراهنة داخل مُجتمعكم.ن أو في أماكن أخرى مواضيع اشتغالكم.ن الفني ؟ / *Do current issues within your community or in other areas determine the topics of your artistic work?*

All respondents from the Maghreb answered "yes". It is the only question in the questionnaire that was answered unanimously. The issues that run through societies where for artists, directors, and choreographers the major issues in shows. By analyzing the answers to the questionnaires, it shows there are seven major categories of creative themes that are linked to the society where artists live:

- *Issues related to social and economic rights; issues of dignity and social change/corruption (18)*
- *The question of gender, the body and violence against women*
- *The issue of borders and migration (legal, illegal, visa, desire to leave) (12)*
- *The question of otherness and respect for minorities (gender, racial, social, etc.) (9)*
- *Individual freedoms and expression (7)*
- *Family issues and generational breakdown (5)*
- *The relationship between society and the artist (4)*

Although the sample does not represent all the artists in Maghreb's performing arts field, it nevertheless gives us an idea of the types of themes addressed. Themes with strong social connotations that address the discomfort of living in societies crossed by multiple power relations are the common denominator in these shows.

Source:
The AFAC questionnaire
Azdem Mehdi, Youness Jouilil and Mohamed Sammouni. 2023. Quantitative research on creative practices in the Arab region: Performing arts. For AFAC / Beirut, Lebanon.

Ecosystem Of The Performing Arts In The Maghreb

In Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, the performing arts sector is extremely dependent on public funding. While each country has its own cultural policy that responds to its own internal problems, the common denominator in the professional field of performing arts in the Maghreb–where the State is the main investor in culture–is the precariousness of the material conditions of productions. Limited public funding in culture is added to a set of structural factors that are related to the absence of a dissemination ecosystem (professional presenter, technician, coordinated network of performance venues), the absence of technician and cultural manager training, and the absence of mediation and communication work on performing arts activities. Given the lack of information and the important risk factor in performing arts projects, the private market for production and dissemination remains limited. The sector thus finds itself in precarious situations that handicap its evolution. This causes fragility in the functioning of structures; and it causes obstacles to the professional evolution of the performing arts structures in the Maghreb.

In this section, we will analyze the share of funding for the performing arts in public cultural policies by comparing it with the interviewed actors' discourse. Then, we will focus on the independent artistic dynamics to describe their production and diffusion ecosystem.

PUBLIC POLICY OF CULTURE IN THE MAGHREB (2018 / 2022)

One of the aspects of the research was the difficulty of gathering data on cultural policies in the Maghreb. The main sources are reports produced within the framework of the Med culture project[66] and the finance bills of the countries in question. The main limitation of these sources of data is that the finance bills reveal the credit released by the state budget, not actual expenditures.

PUBLIC POLICIES OF CULTURE IN MOROCCO

From 2018 to 2022, the Ministry of Culture budget increased by 25%, from $69.9 million[67] (Dhs 736 million) in 2018 to $88.6 million (Dhs 925 million) in 2022. This increase remains relative since, by observing the share of the culture budget in the general budget of the State, it appears that there is a stabilization, or even a slight decrease from 2018 to 2022. In 2018, the culture budget represented 0.29% of the State budget, whereas it only represented 0.25% in 2022.[68]

The budget for culture and the share of funding for the performing arts remain quite low. The Ministry's subsidies for theater and choreographic and performing arts for 2022 represent 1.3% of the Ministry of Culture's overall budget ($1.17 million or 12.23 million dirham for the first phase of funding).[69] The allocated amount for choreographic and performing arts was $26,819 (0.28 M Dhs). In 2018, the amount allocated to grants for theater and choreographic arts represented $0.87M (Dhs 9.63M).[70] This amount also represented 1.3% of the budget of the Ministry of Culture. We note here a relative stability in subsidies to the performing arts sectors in terms of their volume in the general culture budget.

The support fund for theater production and dissemination has existed since the early 2000s.[71] The aim of this fund was to support production by granting subsidies to professional troupes and to support dissemination through the purchase and programming of theater shows.[72] Researcher Ahmad Massaïa indicates that these support mechanisms have had a definite impact on the Moroccan theater through their pedagogical, artistic, and economic functions. The pedagogical function is to create a professional dynamic within the theater groups and to encourage young artists: "to organize themselves into professional groups subject to well-defined specifications"[73] The artistic function was to ensure respect for the different professions related to theater production by allowing remuneration and distinction between the different tasks. The economic function resides in offering theater groups, which live in a context of "contingency and precariousness"[74] optimal conditions for their production and to help its diffusion. Funding is provided to individuals, associations, and production companies. Since 2022, all of these grant applications are made online through a dedicated digital portal.[75]

The State is the primary investor in performing arts. It is an important actor in financing production and the provision of performance venues. In this context, there is a strong dependence on funds to support production and distribution. As the theater artist Boussekhane al Zitouni tells us:

> في تجربتي منذ ٢٠٠٠ ظلت وزارة الثقافة هي المصدر الأساسي، وأحيانا الوحيد الذي اعتمدت عليه في تمويل إنتاج العرض المسرحي بما يعرف بالدعم المسرحي بإكراهاته الكثيرة ومحدودية أثره في تمكين المسرح من دعم لا يحد المتخيل أو يضع قيودا على انطلاق العملية الإبداعية. علما أن المسرح المغربي افتقد لأسباب كثيرة لداعمه الرئيس :الجمهور.[76]

Beyond the financial questions, there is a demand for recognition from performative arts actors from the State. This recognition is required to give value to the work carried out by these cultural actors; according to them, this recognition can be translated into the installation of a true cultural policy. This cultural policy should provide training, aid for production, diffusion, and finally artistic education to widen the demand for cultural shows.

PUBLIC POLICIES OF CULTURE IN ALGERIA

In 2022, the Ministry of Culture's operating budget was 124.47M dollars[77] (16,097M dinars). It has seen a slight increase compared to 2018 when the culture budget was 112.36M dollars (15,272M dinars). The share of culture in the general state budget has experienced relative stability from 0.3% in 2018 to 0.25% in 2022. The share of funding for cultural associations has remained relatively low in 2022 representing 0.43% of the budget for culture. The analysis of the budgets granted to the Ministry of Culture[78] between 2018 and 2022 indicates that the same amount was granted as a subsidy to cultural associations (70,000,000 // 0.515M$). According to researcher Ammar Kessab, "The cultural sector in Algeria is mostly financed by the state."[79] The state is the primary funder of culture, particularly in the field of performing arts. In the field of theater, the State, through its various regional theaters, remains the primary actor in the development of theatrical activity.[80] The independent sector plays, according to Ammar Kessab, a minor role in the development of a cultural policy in performing arts. It benefits from little funding and suffers from a restrictive legislative framework in terms of foreign funding.

Algeria: law of associations in 2012 [81]

In January 2012, a new law on associations was implemented in Algeria. It introduced the framework for prior agreements and international cooperation in Articles 23 and 30. In Article 30, it prohibits associations from financing through foreign legations and NGOs unless there is "prior approval of the competent authorities"[82] This law has had an effect on the development of cultural activities in Algeria, making the State the sole provider of funding and subsidies to associations. According to an actress in the performing arts field in Algeria, this law also has the effect of slowing down the activity of many independent theater groups and companies. When the law was promulgated, they were asked to renew all their legal administrative documents. For associations, this meant starting from scratch and restarting all the work of associations that had been active, known, and recognized by authorities since 2008,. As a matter of principle, associations refused to renew all of their documents and information. They quickly found themselves in a situation of administrative insecurity, particularly in terms of receiving funds. According to another Algerian actor, very few associations that have taken the necessary steps have been able to obtain an authorization to receive funds. The procedures take a lot of time and generally remain unanswered. This legal reality prevents many associations or collectives from applying for foreign funding, including AFAC's. This legal situation explains in large part the very modest number of AFAC funding recipients since the creation of the performing arts program. Since 2007, no Algerian structure has been able to benefit from the AFAC performing art program, and only ten applications have been submitted over this period.[83] This reality requires further research by AFAC to try to understand the difficulty and limitations of Algerian structure applications for AFAC funding.

PUBLIC POLICIES OF CULTURE IN TUNISIA

In 2022, the budget allocated to the mission of cultural affairs in Tunisia was $119 million[84] (372 million dinar).[85] The operating budget represents 88% of the general budget for culture in Tunisia. The share of culture in the general state budget has remained constant from 2018 to 2022 representing 0.78% in 2022 up from 0.74% in 2018.[86] Regarding support for the performing arts in Tunisia, there is a fund to encourage literary and artistic productions, which supports the creation of works in various fields including theater and dance. This funding is granted, says Mariem Guellouz, in the form of calls for projects and delivered in two installments depending on the progress of the project.[87]

In 2021, the amount of subsidies to the theater sector reached $1.9 million (6.163 million dinar), including approximately $0.58 million (1.8 million dtn) for supporting productions in Tunisian theater and nearly $0.77 million (2.4 million dtn) for the purchase of shows.[88] Regarding choreographic arts, support for production reached $0.138 million (430,000 dtn) in 2021. All of these support measures together represent nearly $1.49 million (4.63 million dtn) in 2021, or 1.2% of the 2021 culture budget–the figures for 2022 are not available on the Tunisian Ministry of Finance website. The share of funding for performing arts remains very small. The funding situation for performing arts also creates a high dependence on very limited funding. According to the BIAT Report on Cultural and Creative Industries in Tunisia, the dominant role of the state has negative repercussions on the arts community:

"The state has continued to pump money into a small set of already existing talent. It is becoming increasingly difficult to expand this circle because the budget cannot increase indefinitely. Because of this limitation, its expectation of return on investment increases and it takes less and less risk (natural behavior of a private and not public actor). Talents have developed a dependence on the State and have little capacity to be financed outside this source."[89]

One of the important budget items for the Tunisian Ministry of Culture is the City of Culture in Tunis. The City of Culture Chedli Klibi is a cultural complex located in Tunis city center. Inaugurated with great fanfare on March 21, 2018, it has become an important player in culture's public policy. The city hosts several cultural spaces and institutions including Tunis ballet and contemporary dance, the National Center for Drama Arts, the theater of young creators, the theater of the regions, the opera theater, the ballet of the Tunis opera, the national music troupe and the national popular arts troupe. Regarding the pole created for choreography and dance, the Minister of Cultural Affairs Mohamed Zine El Abidine emphasized at the inauguration that it was "a recognition for marginalized artists and dancers"[90] He adds that the pillar of theater is the foundation of the national center for drama arts; the center's aim is to centralize the already existing six regional drama centers.[91] Nevertheless, the institution remains a state institution that has a labyrinthine of an administrative process. A co-production between the artist-choreographer Nawal Skandrani and the Opera Theater is an example.[92] It was a co-production between the theater and the artist where the theater offers, or is supposed to offer, the production and rehearsal spaces. These include 12 performances over three years, i.e. four performances per year. The artist receives a subsidy from the Ministry of Culture and a second one from the National Tourism Office. However, to legally receive these funds, the artist must call upon a cultural association (in this case, association of art and environment–Art en vie). The status of the association facilitates with paying external provider invoices (captation, technicians, transportation). The dancers and performers (Black en White Circus) are paid in the form of contracts with the artist, where it is indicated that they are responsible for paying their own expenses (health coverage and social security / taxes). Acting as executive producer, the artist collects modest proceeds from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs for the show's distribution to drama centers under festival agreements, then remits payment to the opera house. However, the ministry buys these shows without taking into account the real cost of travel to the regions and all the logistics that factor in the show's implementation.

SUMMARY OF THE THREE COUNTRIES

According to sociologist Howard Becker, "The importance of public support is a function of the share it represents in the total resources available to artistic production"[93] In the Maghreb countries case, in most cases public support represents the only resource available to production and dissemination in the performing arts. This situation explains the ambivalence existing between the relative autonomy of the structures of performative art and their dependence on State financing. According to Cyrine Douss, Tunisian performer and choreographer, "Choreographic aid is assimilated with social aid rather than artistic aid based on artistic criteria."[94] Production and dissemination subsidies become ways of responding to the precarious situations in which artists and producers find themselves. This subsidy does not develop the aesthetic value and the intrinsic production, but it allows cultural actors to live for the short time during state aid. This reality, shared by all the actors in the Maghreb, has the immediate effect of creating situations of dependence, where States

distribute subsidies without accountability or support for a performing arts milieu in pain. According to Malek Sbai, Théâtre de l'Opéra de Tunis art director, the logic becomes "to make plays because there is funding [...] the legitimacy of the work comes from the suffering and precarious condition of the structures of the performing arts."[95] Public funding creates a relationship of dependence that prevents the different troupes from seeking other types of funding.

In addition, the funding logic focuses on production and the provision of funds. Once produced, the shows rarely tour, creating an economic model that is based on financing productions, not on buying shows. The Maghreb states create dependencies here that are specific to monopolistic markets, where artists seek to finance one production after another, rather than making production sustainable and creating an economic model.

On the other hand, grant funding is not sufficient in itself to cover production and dissemination costs. According to the Moroccan contemporary dance company Col'Jam, the funding they receive barely allows them to pay their collaborators and technical partners for the projects they produce. The amount received does not allow the artist to develop a project with time to dedicate to the production itself. This type of financing creates the multiplication of projects with a very limited life span, where the objective is to produce works for financing. This logic reverses the usual logic of production, which is to produce works for diffusion to a wider public.

This observation does not prevent the development of important dynamics in the Maghreb performing arts field. Today, there are many independent structures that try as best they can to bring performative practices to life within Maghreb societies by tapping into different resources. Their dynamics represent the real Maghreb countries' cultural policy.

- The odyssey of the independent cultural structures in the Maghreb–Characteristics of production and diffusion of independent cultural structures (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia):

In addition to official troupes dependent on national and regional institutions, there are many independent structures in Maghreb's performing arts field. Organized as associations, informal groups, production companies, or cultural cooperatives, independent cultural structures are the primary target of funding from the Performing Arts Program of the Arab Fund for Art and Culture. These organizations are a group of people who organize themselves collectively to animate artistic and cultural initiatives/spaces on local or national territory. They do not emanate from public institutions; they are independent in their decision making, in their strategy, in the deployment of their activities. Their main objective is to live from their art and culture (economic model, professionalization, cultural workers). They are in a particular position because they claim, on the one hand their production autonomy, while being strongly dependent on national or foreign funding. They oscillate between professionalism, amateurism, and voluntary work depending on the mode of production and diffusion of their work.

Cultural production economies are characterized by a gap between production and dissemination. Performing arts companies always find opportunities to produce their pieces, although the conditions are not always appropriate (public funding, self-financing, patronage, private partnership). The major problem lies in the fact of making this production live and in finding an economic model that can make the troupes earn a living from its diffusion. The difficulty of diffusion of the works comes from a set of heterogeneous factors that we will try to detail in the study by focusing on independent cultural structures' production and diffusion modes of organization. Analysis will be based on the questionnaire in addition to the qualitative interviews that were carried out for this research.

Mode of organization of independent cultural structures

Independent cultural structures are organized in associations, in cultural cooperatives and as SARLs. Having an association status is the first choice for these structures. Generally, after beginning as an informal collective, the group adopts the association form to structure itself ; this structure allows it to be able to respond to requests for financing and to ask for rehearsal/diffusion locations. The majority of these associations have three to ten active members.[96] Legal existence through an association determines an economic model that is mainly based on receiving subsidies and/or self-financing. Some troupe members have the self-entrepreneurs status and can invoice services on an individual basis. These troupes and collectives generally come from:

- Training institutes: In Morocco's case the ISADAC for theater and Shemsy school for the circus.

- Large regional institutions or foundations: In Algeria, theater dynamics in the west of the country revolves around La Grande Maison in Tlemcen, the Abdelkader Alloula Foundation in Oran, and Mostaganem and Sidi bel Abbés regional theaters. In Morocco, the TAZI foundation Uzine space gathers an important number of dancers and choreographers as well as the theater company of the oppressed Gorara. The Opera Theater in Tunis fits under this classification.

- Foreign institutes: In Morocco, particularly in contemporary dance and theater fields, the French institutes in Casablanca and Rabat have made a considerable effort to support performance art forms. In Tunisia, the French institutes in Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax, the Goethe Institute and the general delegation of Wallonia-Brussels also have notable and permanent activities. There are six French institutes in Algeria.

A single troupe, in most cases a single person (project manager, troupe director, or choreographer/director), can fill the entire value chain of culture. He/she takes care of training by engaging a group of actors, dancers, or circus performers around him/her. The trained people join the troupe's shows. This person takes care of production, writing, directing, and scenography. They take care of the production by seeking funding from public institutions, foreign institutes, art and culture foundations, and national and international donors. Then, they give workshops for children in a private school, to be able to bring in some money to pay their direct expenses. They also organize a festival, to be able to perform their own shows and to have other shows performed. Festivals provide them with material to report on. During festivals, they takes care of the artistic, executive, and technical directions, sometimes even cleaning and setting up. They try, if they have time, to take care of communication and diffusion by looking for theaters to play in. They also take care of calling the ministries and the regional directorates of culture to find out when the grant, requested more than a year ago, will be released. They do the narrative and financial reports for international funders–including AFAC.[97] Performing arts structures in the Maghreb have a resource at their disposal for the development of their projects: energy and passion. All the interviews with the actors indicate that the only rational explanation for the persistence of work in these conditions is the desire to earn a living from their passion. Except that passion is an exhaustible resource. Its overexploitation creates situations of precariousness and frustration that lead to overall fatigue and the exhaustion of creative collectives.

The immediate consequence of this situation is the lack of transmission of collective dynamics. It leads to a tabula rasa logic, where each structure starts from scratch without really benefiting from previous experiences. If we add the lack of documentation of these dynamics to make them available to others and thus allow the accumulation of experiences, the organizational forms of independent cultural structures lead to an atomization of individual and collective experiences.

Mode of production and creation of independent cultural structures

The economic models of production and creation of ICS are financed through public and foreign funding, self-financing, and social work (workshops in cultural centers, humanitarian projects, workshops in private schools, paid work), and then the sale of work at festivals or particular national, regional, and international events.[98] Regarding the institution financing (national and foreign), of the 32 affirmative answers, these sources of financing come mainly from:

- *The Maghreb countries official institutions* (22/32) mainly through public funding of the performing arts sector. In Algeria, it remains the only source of financing.
- *Foreign institutes* (21/ 32): In the contemporary dance or contemporary theater in French field, the French Institute has been a pillar in these fields. It has been able to host troupes for creative residencies and to help finance festivals and/or public events. It also represents one of the only purchasers of choreographic works in Morocco. There is the financing of cooperation agencies (Pro-Helvetia, Enabel (Belgian cooperation agency) and consortiums such as EUNIC, a gathering of foreign institutes and European embassies.
- *International NGOs* (20/32): according to Naima Zitane, the founding of the Aquarium Theater in Rabat was only possible thanks to the financing of the Global Fund for Women, which made it possible to start the process.[99] The works are sometimes funded by international human rights NGOs. Other international NGOs/funds such as Al Mawred al Thaqafy and the Arab Fund For Art and Culture (AFAC) represent an important source of funding for independent cultural structures in the Maghreb, mainly Morocco and Tunisia. Since 2007, nearly $507,030 has been spent on 40 performance art projects in Morocco and Tunisia, with an average of $12,675 per project.

On the question of other alternative sources of financing, there is a strong presence of self-financing. In the Performing Art questionnaire responses, the majority of Maghrebian structures (30/36) indicated that they resort to self-financing for their activities. These sources of self-financing are diverse. For the show Ajouad in 2019, the theater company Istijmam used crowdfunding to mobilize sources of self-financing around it. The Col'Jam Company in Morocco has always resorted to self-financing to finance its productions or the festivals it organizes. The 2014 tour of the Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger in Morocco was entirely financed through their personal resources according to Sanaa Kamouni. Moroccan director Asmaa Houri, for her part, indicates that:

"وقد ألجأ أيضا للإنتاج الذاتي عبر جمعية مسرح أنفاس إذا ما تعذر التعاون مع موم على أن ألجأ بعد اكتمال العملية الإنتاجية لنفس المتعاونين في عملية توزيع العرض وتقديمه."[100]

Another very important source of financing for independent cultural structures in the Maghreb is social work as well as remuneration from workshop animation and/or paid activities carried out alongside creative work. International donors impose a social dimension to the artistic practice in their projects. For example, the actors will develop projects for the development of artistic practice in marginalized neighborhoods–for example, the Hayyou Raqs association in Tunisia. They also develop dance workshops for the youth as extracurricular activities in private schools or private cultural centers. These sources of financing make it possible to ensure artist incomes pay for their fixed loads and it allows them to be remain–voluntarily–in their own artistic domain. The members of the Istijmam company in Algeria all have professional activities in addition to their theater activities. The Tunisian performer and choreographer Cyrinne Douss continuously worked as a dance teacher and/or in social projects. The founding members of the company Col'Jam spend their time alternating between their paid work as dance teachers in schools and their creative work in the arts.

Project-based work

Faced with the absence of structural financing that would allow them to cover the direct fixed costs of the troupes (employees, rentals, various materials, and consumables), independent structures work mainly on a project by project basis. Project require an organization and skills that are generally concentrated in one person within the troupe, thus creating imbalances in access to information and power dynamics. The logic of project-based funding, which has a defined time frame, requires ICS to think about the project before doing it, which creates frustration within teams and a tendency to accelerate and "rush the work" One of the major risks associated with this form of financing is that it becomes a service provider for funders and public funds. The funding directs the forms of production that are short-lived and targeted according to the expectations and objectives of the funders. (Gorara, June 24, 2022)

One of the other aspects emanating from the interviews is the lack of time to devote to a production. Caught between the various funding procedures, workshop facilitation, and the setting up and development of artistic projects with a social purpose, artists and producers find little time for their own work. This dynamic has the immediate effect of extreme frustration and the poor quality of art production that is pressed for time. The Moroccan director Mohamed El Horr says that there is a need for two years of funding to develop a production rather than the 20 days granted by the Ministry of Culture. The conditions of production determine their quality and that can be perceived in contemporary productions.

Mode of diffusion of the independent cultural structures

During the African Forum of Social Theater, which brought together groups, individuals, and troupes from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Senegal, Mauritania, and Togo, one of the participants raised the question of funding and its relationship to the public. A major problem for groups involved in social theater is the fact that they finance themselves for their audiences, meaning that they obtain funding to produce plays and then perform them in front of an audience that is invited–free of charge. This leads to financing the audience themselves, whereas the logic of dissemination would have it that the audience finances the shows they watch. This inverted financing of production is one of the harmful effects of structures that depend on public subsidies, since they do not build an economic model based on the diffusion of their work.

The extreme concentration of all the activities in the cultural value chains in one or even two people creates situations of rupture giving rise to the creation of what we call, in the framework of this research, the shooting star model. The projects initially exhibit creativity. This creative work is generally financed by a public grant or a grant from a foreign institute. Then, the production is performed two to three times and enjoys a few dates of diffusion. Afterwards, either this creation goes on tour abroad, or the troupe restarts from scratch and goes through the same process to finance a new production. This arrangement is generally a source of conflict, exhaustion of the collective dynamic, or real suffering, which leads to troupe dissolution, disappearance and the re-creation of other dynamics elsewhere. The lack of diffusion that allows productions to survive slows down the creative dynamics and participates in their dilution. The company Col'Jam in Morocco performs their production between three and five times a year before moving on to a new production.[101] Cyrinne Douss's show Zwez[102] performed only seven times before the production of the next piece–a number that remains important given the lack of means and venues for performing dance shows. The Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger remains the only structure that has an economic model that allows the troupe to make a living from its performances. Their show tours internationally for two to three years before starting a new performance. This is mainly due to the fact that the troupe is part of an international touring network and they have their legal existence registered in France where they benefit from production support and show purchases from various national circus centers, and both regional and national theaters.[103]

One of the other important aspects of diffusion in the Maghreb remains the festivals. The overwhelming majority of the solicited organizations show their productions in festivals that they organize or festivals they are invited to. Thus, festivals are not just a fad that passes through the performing arts community, but a necessity to be able to perform and show their work. Dance, theater, and circus festivals in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia are generally the only places where artists can perform their shows. A circus troupe like Colokolo in Morocco only performed its show Chouf le ciel–where it has performed on more than twenty show dates in Europe–as part of the Karacena circus biennial taking place in Salé and Rabat in August 2022. With regards Istijmam in Oran, their latest show Al Jouwad could only be performed twice at the theater of Oran in 2019. Their financing was done through participatory funding and support from the wilaya of Oran. The production involved a substantial budget where part of the team came from France and with a lot of effort put into the scenography. The diffusion of the play could not be done because of its high cost and the impossibility of playing in other theaters.

Festivals are more than a place of entertainment, a space for the performance, and a show for the actors. Festivals are the place to show one's own productions or those of other troupes. Their primary importance is they are also an opportunity to perform and to have others perform. In theater, in dance, and to a lesser degree in circus, festivals remain the only possibility to show a production and to make it interact with an audience. In the framework of this research, all the theater shows that we have been able to see have been during festivals (African Forum of Social Theater in Casablanca in June 2022; Blanc'art Festival in October 2022; Choreographic Encounter in Casablanca in September 2022; Dream City in Tunis in September 2022; National Festival of Moroccan Theater in Tetouan in December 2022; Festival of the Arab Institute of Theater in Casablanca in January 2023).

The problems of dissemination also stem from a lack of training and skills in the arts and culture sector. Very few professional presenters exist, capable of putting together a tour, negotiating contracts, selling the show to private and/or public venues. According to Sanaa Kamouni from the Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger, the greatest difficulty she encounters in disseminating the group's shows in Morocco is the lack of qualified personnel in both the technical and managerial aspects.[104]

For his part, Rihab Alloula of the Istijmam company in Algeria, points out that the lack of diffusion also comes from a lack of effort in the mediation towards the public. The effort of seeking the public either through effective communication, or by the expansion of theater education in the centers and cultural networks, hold back the diffusion of productions which do not attract an audience. The difficulties of communication are also important in the lack of diffusion of the works. In the framework of this research we have systematically noticed that communication about a play, a dance festival, or a meeting around the performing arts are announced one week at the earliest before the beginning of the event. Sometimes it is extremely difficult to get access to information. Word of mouth is usually one of the only effective ways to spread the word.

The independent cultural structures represent, for the Maghreb (mainly in Morocco and Tunisia), the spearheads of the cultural policy. They allow, according to their means, to bring to life performing arts productions. They handle training and diffusion of these art forms within society. Their artisanal efforts erect an ecosystem of production that allows a group of young people to consider the possibility of engaging in these art forms. Precariousness can also be a means of freeing themselves from the classic guardianships and thus allowing the emergence of creative dynamics anchored in the reality of the societies they live in. They also allow artists to think, imagine, and create new forms of diffusion.

Right To Culture, Networks And Audiences

The right to culture and to intellectual and artistic creation is present in the constitutions of all three Maghreb countries. In Morocco, Article 26 of the 2011 constitution states that: "The public authorities shall provide, by appropriate means, their support for the development of cultural and artistic creation, scientific and technical research, and the promotion of sport. They shall encourage the development and organization of these sectors independently and on a precise democratic and professional basis."[105] In Algeria, the constitutional revision in 2020 of the 1996 constitution clearly states in Article 45 that: "Article 45. The right to culture is guaranteed to the citizen. The State protects the tangible and intangible national cultural heritage and works to safeguard it.[...]"[106] For its part , Tunisia in its 2014 constitution states in Article 42 that: "The freedom of creation is guaranteed. The state encourages cultural creation and supports the national culture in its rootedness and diversity and its renewal in what enshrines the values of tolerance and the rejection of violence, openness to different cultures and dialogue between civilizations."[107]

All constitutions give citizens the right to benefit from cultural rights by supporting creativity and the promotion of the arts. All Maghreb countries have ratified the 2005 IFCD Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (Tunisia (2007), Morocco (2013), Algeria (2015); they are all engaged in the work of promoting cultural diversity at UNESCO/[108] Public discourses place culture and creative work as a central element of general state policies. Nevertheless, the reality of the policies and budget committed by the different ministries of culture in the Maghreb tend to relativize the preponderance of these discourses. The question of cultural rights stems from international references and is posed with acuity in political contexts that give little importance to artistic practice. Thus, to gauge the application of the discourse of cultural rights, it would be necessary to look at the efforts made in the areas of accessibility of cultural shows on offer; there is also the question of artistic and professional education, as well as networks and alliances created within the performing arts.

In the performing arts field, the notion of audience accessibility to the produced works is at the heart of actors' interrogations. The people interviewed for this research agree on the need to meet the public as the main goal of any artistic work. In Algeria, the Istijmam company will try, during the diffusion of the play El Tefa7 inspired by Abdelkader Alloula's repertoire, to advertise their show in public spaces. To this effect Rihab Alloula has this to say: "The general public does not go to the theater, for the Tefa7 play we try to go to the public; every time, in a city, before the show, the day before or early on the same morning, we went out, we took bnader, we went to the people, to pass on the information and to sing so that the public attends our play"[107] Faced with the fact that theaters are not accessible to a large public, a strong movement was created to go and meet this public outside theaters.

Acting as a response to the "museumization" of the halqa in Moroccan theater and its confinement to theaters, troupes practicing street art, social theater, and theater of the oppressed will explore this powerful tool in practical ways as part of their activities. Having developed in the wake of the post-2011 freedom of speech movement, the Theater of the Oppressed troupe in Casablanca[109] and Les artivistes in Tunis[110] use the halqa and hakawati as a transcription of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed. The joker character in Augusto Boal's device greatly echoes the Hlaïki existing in Moroccan public squares. They rearrange the whole political and liberating potential of the word they use in their interventions in public spaces by referring to this character. From this effort, a theater called Social Theater was born, defined as a way to link theatrical practices to open spaces. Social theater maintains the heritage of different theatrical forms such as Brecht's theater, the commedia dell art and Augusto Boal's theater. All three forms have that they give consideration to the receivers of the theater work in common. They create a form of theater that goes to meeting the public to make the performative practice accessible. Thus, we see the development through social theaters of theatrical forms that dialogue directly with forms of popular heritage inspired by the work of the hlaïqi.

In Algeria, there is a national theater in Algiers and 17 regional theaters. In Morocco, the Ministry of Culture in its "Guide des salles de Théâtre" counts nearly 100 theaters in Morocco, 34 of which are managed by the Ministry.[111] According to the actors interviewed, the accessibility of theaters problem is not due to their low number. Theaters are abundant, and in the case of Morocco and Algeria well distributed over the country. There is also an audience for theater, especially during festivals. According to Fawzi Kara of the Grande Maison in Tlemcen, an amateur troupe can access regional theaters in Algeria. In Morocco although it involves several administrative procedures, to access rooms for shows is not impossible. The major difficulty lies in the impossibility for these theaters to take charge of the proposed shows and to do the mediation and communication. In Morocco, apart from the Mohamed 5 National Theater, very few public theaters have a dedicated communication and mediation team. According to Malek Sbai, the Théâtre de l'Opéra in Tunis does not have a presenter or a person dedicated to questions of mediation and communication with the public. In Algeria, Rihab Alloula indicates that one of the major problems of accessibility to the public is the lack of information and the weak communication around performing arts activities. The lack of accessibility, a cornerstone of cultural rights, is linked to efforts made to meet the public and to integrate them into the theater programs and performance spaces.

Performing arts, because of their particular set-up, require a set of material resources necessary for their deployment. Theater needs a particular infrastructure in terms of performance space and distribution network. Dance needs rehearsal and performance space. Circus needs high ceilings and a space equipped for experimentation. There are three circus tents in Morocco. The circus hall at the Halfaouine theater in Tunisia was closed following the 2011 revolution and the dismissal of the theater's director Mohamed Driss. The notion of cultural rights lies first and foremost in the right to access creative spaces for artists. The absence of a creative ecosystem is a major handicap to cultural rights.

One of the other aspects underlined by the actors is the necessity of art education to create an audience for the performing arts. For contemporary dance in Tunisia, Cyrinne Douss indicates that: "There is an audience for dance, but it remains limited; everything remains to be done with a minimum of art education and contact of an audience with contemporary dance forms"[112] The effort for art education in schools and secondary schools remains fundamental to accustom an audience to productions. Very few art programs in the Maghreb reserve time for encounters with young school audiences. Plays are rarely performed in educational spaces, and partnerships with schools are very limited. However, creating an audience involves bringing potential spectators into contact with the public.

From a higher education point of view, there is a school of drama arts in Morocco (ISADAC), a school in Algeria (ISMAS), and an institute of drama arts in Tunisia. The lack of availability for training in the performing arts is another aspect of cultural rights that is lacking. In the contemporary dance field, there are no public schools that offer it in the Maghreb. Dancers are generally recruited through informal training and self-training circles. Yet according to UNESCO, arts education is fundamental to creating citizens with access to the performing arts.

As far as alliances and networks in the performing arts are concerned, there are different levels depending on the local, national, and regional scale.

On a local and national scale, there is a real collaboration problem between the performing arts organizations. Production conditions push actors to struggle with their own problems without creating collective dynamics. Conflicts between people is a reality that makes artists collaborate very little together. There is what we call in this research, a recognition wound. Faced with the precarious conditions of creation and the lack of recognition from the State towards the practices of performative art, narcissistic wounds are born from the collaboration of different dynamics. This recognition wound is generally expressed in latent conflicts between directors and choreographers, one seeking the perpetual recognition of the other. Nevertheless, the young generation remains much less affected by these dynamics, and proper collective actions are emerging in the Maghreb countries.

At the regional level, the African forum of social theater[113] remains a typical example of a successful dynamic of collective alliance. Constituted by groups of theaters doing theater of the oppressed or street theater, it brings together troupes from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Mauritania, Senegal, and Togo. This program, financed by the NACP-AFAC Region, allowed actors to meet by exchanging experiences of each of their organizations. Meetings were organized in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco. Before each meeting, research was commissioned from local researchers to inform the collective dynamic by collecting knowledge about social theater. This research effort created bridges between the university and the art practitioners. Subsequently, Egyptian, Tunisian, and Moroccan actors from the troupe directed by Hosni Moukhliss created an i7tirak play. It deals with the illegal migration issue, featuring actors waiting to take a boat to make a clandestine journey to Europe. This piece expresses, through the polyphony of the actors' origins present in its creation (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco), the uneasiness spanning across these countries' youth. This piece's creation process is also exemplary. The actors and the director first started to work on individual monologues by meeting online. Later, they met in Casablanca, Morocco, to put together the play and to share the work they had started online. The play resulting from this work, with its refined scenography, was a real success with the public. This play was performed three times in Morocco (including twice in a public space) and five times in Tunisia. This type of structuring project combining in-depth exchange, academic research, and collective creation is an important example of network creation operating at the level of the North Africa/Africa region.

Digitalization

In the questionnaire accompanying this research, 86% (31 out of 36) of the surveyed entities from the Maghreb believe that the performing arts sector must take digitalization into consideration in their work. The questionnaire also indicates that 63% (23 out of 36) have already used digital media in their performances (see Appendix 3 and 4).[114] The place of digitalization and the use of digital arts in productions is a subject of interest on the part of creators in the field of performing arts in the Maghreb. However, the digital approach in performing arts in the Maghreb remains "a recent issue that requires an effort on the level of art research and experimentation"[115] indicates Mahmoud Chahdi. Although various technologies (mainly sound and video) have already been used in theater and choreographic performances in the Maghreb, the interaction between digital art and performative production is still at the experimentation stage, and it is used as a medium in productions. Accordingly, digital technologies participate in the diversification of performative expressions, but they remain very much in the minority in the performative arts field in the Maghreb.

The use of new technologies takes place at different levels of production in performative arts in the Maghreb. It can be used in the performances themselves by resorting to intermediality and interactive technologies, and it can also be used to disseminate the works to a large audience.

During the International Festival of Video Arts (FIAV) organized in Casablanca in November 2022, the show 6D that mixed contemporary dance and digital arts was created by the company Col'Jam. Using different media such as interactive video or mapping, the creation was the result of a residency that took place during the festival with the artists of the Barcelona collective Kònic thtr. The production combined four dancers performing aerial dance with the use of interactive technologies. Digital arts are considered a way to open the fields of creation in contemporary dance by giving the possibility to collaborate with other artists from the digital world. In this regard, the company Col'Jam developed a show entitled "Marayya Arrouh" (2022), which is a "hybridization between the body and the digital, dance and interactive image"[116]

In the theater sector, the dialogue with digital arts is also recent, although the Maghrebian theater has long interacted with different digital technologies such as sound and video. According to researcher Mahmoud Chahdi, digital arts allow theater works to "conquer new scientific and artistic technical horizons through a logic of creativity"[117] Dialogue with the digital arts is also a way for artists to "provoke experiences that border on the limits of conventional values of theater practice, enriches reflection, and challenges certain stagnations in aesthetic and conceptual choices"[118] In his article, Mahmoud Chahdi analyzes the interactivity between digital art and theater representations in three Moroccan plays: Prise de parole by Issam El Yousfi, Hémorragie by Omar Alaoui, and Hadda by Jaouad Essounani. Chahdi says, "The device chosen within these shows is essentially based on the interaction between the various digital media and the presence of actors as the focus of the theater practice–without seeking to replace or multiply them without their physical presence on stage. This approach is based on the emotional and gestural extension of actors, putting forward the dramaturgy of the text as one of the fundamental meanings within a hybrid scenic device integrating devices of various media: digital, cinematographic, etc."[119] Nevertheless, as Mahmoud Chahdi indicates, "the theater sec-

tor's economy and the place granted to digital artists within the process of the production still do not allow a whole software installation and technical tools conceived especially for a spectacle or for theater in general"[120] Therefore, one of the development tracks in the production field in performative arts is to support and to encourage performative arts dialogue with the digital arts.

As far as hybrid shows and online screenings are concerned, it is clear that they have developed as occasional alternatives to avoid restrictions on travel and gatherings imposed by the pandemic. Regarding the use of digitalization in the dissemination of works, the organizations that responded to the questionnaire indicate that 70% of respondents (25 out of 36) have already disseminated their works on digital platforms (Annex 5). An overwhelming majority of these organizations (24 out of 25) have started to diffuse their works on digital platforms following the Covid-19 pandemic (Appendix 6). The various confinements due to the pandemic have encouraged performing arts organizations in the Maghreb to disseminate their work on digital platforms as a means of continuing to reach their audiences and present their work. It can be said that these conditions have accelerated the process of performance digitization. As a result, digital platforms promote art performances to communicate with audiences and to disseminate artists' work. But will theaters keep and offer these hybrid performances as an integral part of their programming, or will they continue to consider them as emergency solutions? At the moment digitization is closely linked to the crisis context and risks the value of the performances; even if in this article for example, about the representation of the Tunisian play Memories, there is encouragement for the shows in their digital version: "A play that falls at the right time and will be followed soon at the International Festival of Hammamet in its digital version. A choice imposed by the health crisis, which opens, moreover, new opportunities for the living arts. An adventure worth trying"[121] The Choreographic Days of Carthage have also opted for a hybrid version for the 2021 edition, where a significant number of national and foreign performances were played on stage and transmitted live.

All of the surveyed organizations depend on social media to inform and mobilize their audiences. Independent cultural organizations make a significant effort to communicate their activities on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Some organizations have their own websites where they display their past and future activities. The use of social media and digital platforms in terms of disseminating performances remains underdeveloped. Online theater inherits the limited communication of indoor theater. This communication is targeted and aimed, for the most part, at a well-informed audience, who usually take it on themselves to seek information on shows. In the absence of a national media, this form of communication restricts the audience reach. Indeed, in the framework of this research we faced difficulties in accessing the different performances of performative art in Morocco and Tunisia. Once integrated into the communication network of the different organizations, we were able to access more information. There is a real lack of national dissemination of activities and performances, especially since festivals and different national events usually communicate a few days before the beginning of activities. One of the ways of thinking about the development of the performing arts sector would be to create digital platforms centralizing information and proposing the diffusion of creations to a wider public.

Let's note the initiative, still timid, of the platform Artify,[122] which has integrated theater programs. This kind of space allows easy access to the plays and reaches a wider audience. In this regard, the Youtube page, Arab Theater Institute, includes a large number of plays from the Maghreb and the Arab region. Encouraging the recording of quality performances and their dissemination online can also be an interesting development path for the dissemination of performance art forms within society.

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Tunisia : Mariem Guellouz - interview conducted on 25/07/2022 // Houda Riahi - interview conducted on 05/11/2022 // Malek Sebai - interview conducted on 03/10/2022 // Malak Benkhalifa - interview conducted on 21/10/2022 // Cyrinne Douss - interview conducted on 15/10/2022

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Appendixes

TABLE 1

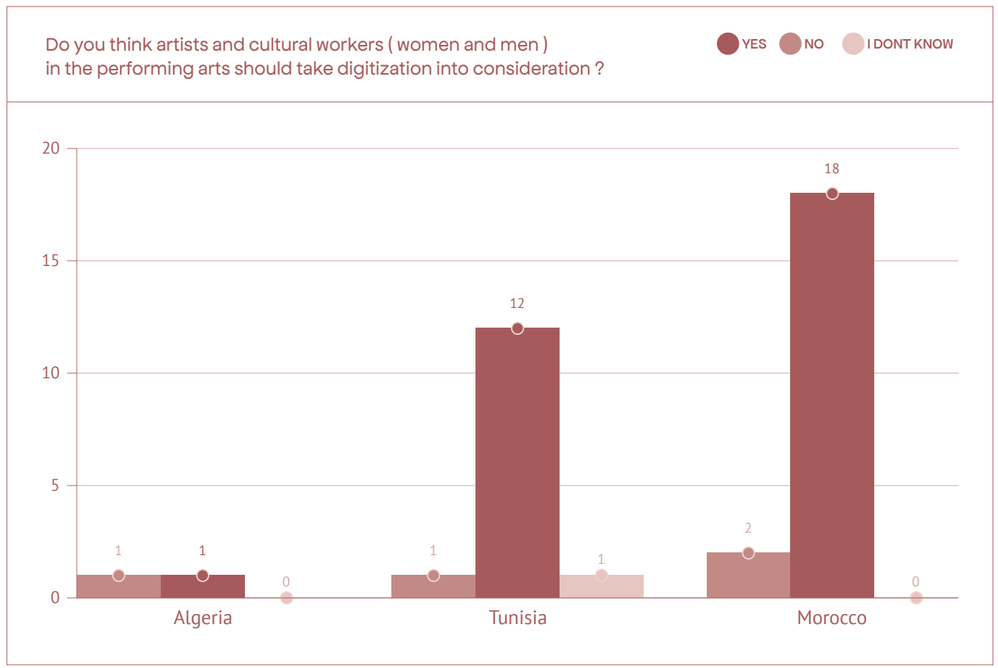
		Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Total
If yes, what institutions have you dealt	Official Institutions in your country	2	10	10	22
	Private Institutions in your country	0	9	7	16
	Foreign cultural institutes in your country	1	14	6	21
	National NGOs	0	13	7	20
	Regional NGOs	0	3	5	8
	International NGOs	0	13	7	20
	Other	0	1	1	2
Total		2	18	11	31

TABLE 2

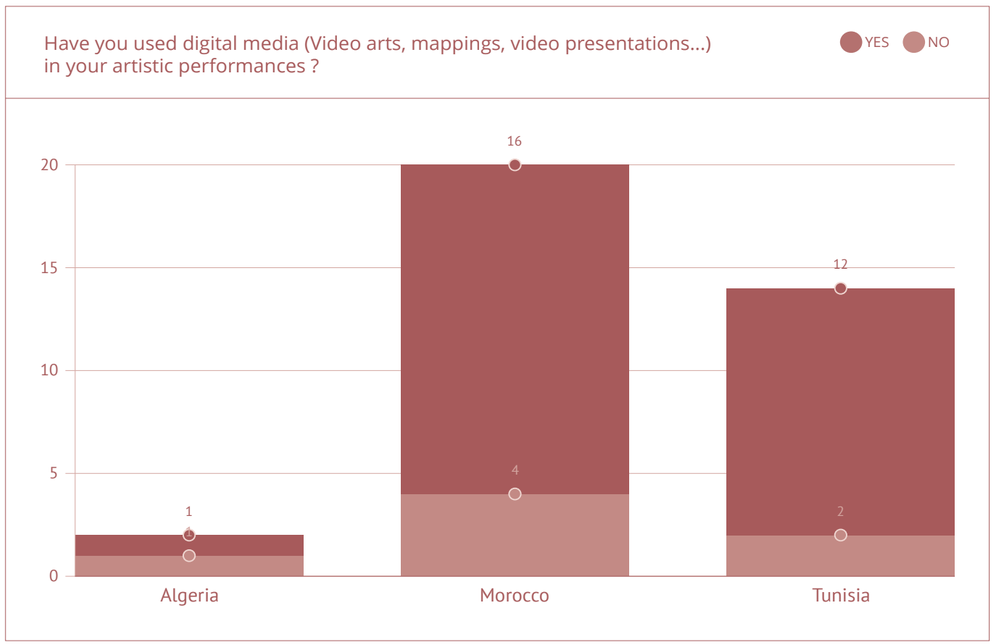
Number of auditoriums and/or theaters in the Maghreb: Table made by Azdem Mehdi.

Countries	Overview	Ref
Morocco	61 theaters (local authorities)// 41cultural houses (state)//30 independent cultural centers // 30 private movie theaters// 11 open air theatre // 610 Youth houses // 1 public drama school// 1 circus school// 13 French Institutes// 9 Cervantes Institutes// 2 Goethe Institutes (before 2020)	Mehdi AZDEM, Sabrina KAMILI, Driss KSIKES Quelles transformations pour les Industries Culturelles et Créatives au Maroc ? Etude de terrain. Janvier 2020. (2021) pp: 214 – 213
Algeria	10 public theaters// 47 public movie theaters// 3 public cultural palace// 36 public cultural houses // 6 French Institutes (before 2017)	Med culture – Country Report Algérie 2018) 2018) p.15
Tunisia	49 theaters// 1 house opera// 18 movie theaters// 230 cultural houses (before 2 (2020 public drama schools // 3 French Institutes (before 2021)	BIAT Tunisie - Etat des lieux des industries culturelles et créatives en Tunisie : un potentiel à amorcer Novembre 2018) p.7 Université (2021) p.9

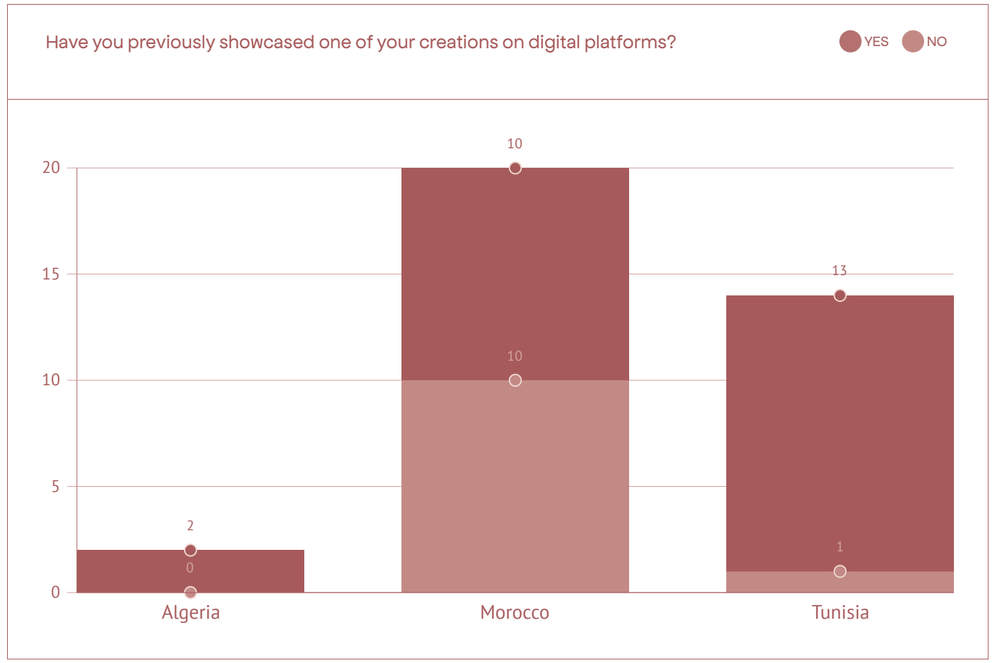
APPENDIX 3



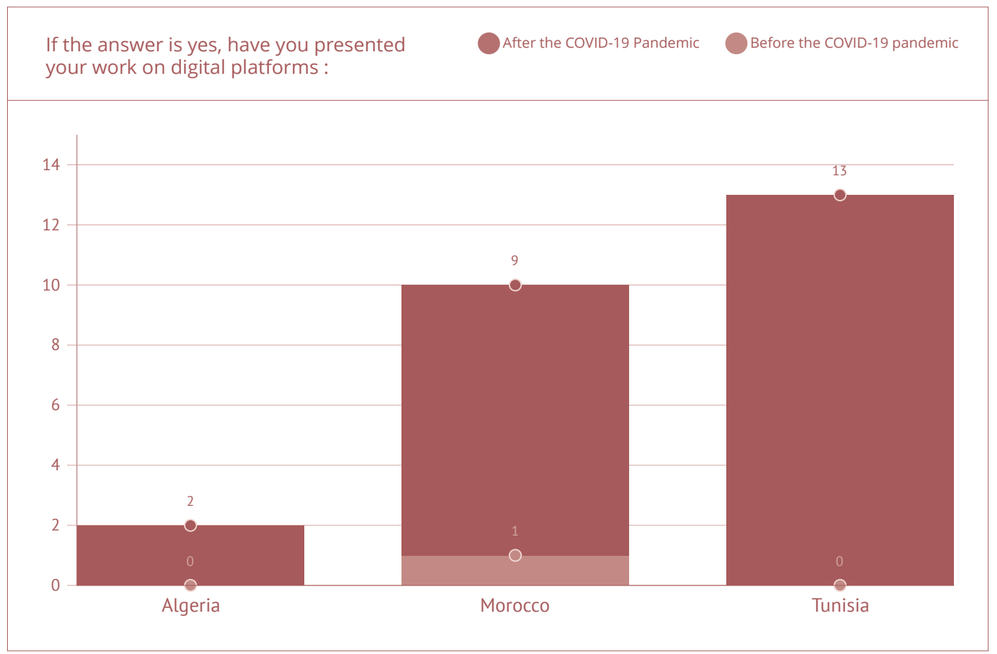
APPENDIX 4



APPENDIX 5



APPENDIX 6



1 A varied repertoire: *Salab al-Din al-Ayyubi , Hamlet, Othello, El Cid, Haroun el-Rachid , Romeo and Juliet, Esther.*

2 *"The fundamental concern for me is that this theatre (the halqa) functions extremely well for its public, for its culture, and there are quite specific characteristics which constitute this theatre." (Amine, Carlson 2012) p.161.*

3 For example: the work of Fadhel el Jaziri on the shows of *al-Hadhra* from 1991.

4 See the intervention of Khalid Amine from 20:35 to 46:28 during the colloquium on the Moroccan theater during the Festival of the Arab Theater Institute: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rifw8BU6mRI

5 "L'usine à rire" by the Humouraji troupe on tour in Morocco https://fr.le360.ma/culture/lusine-a-rire-de-la-troupe-humouraji-en-tournee-au-maroc-264522

6 Omar FERTAT, "The contemporary Moroccan scene and the emergence of new aesthetics", *Théâtre/ Public*, n° 233, "Political scenes from the Maghreb to the Middle East" (2019)

7 Ahmed Massaia: *A theater of rupture. Essay on young contemporary creation*. Virgule Éditions, 2021 p. 117.

8 https://www.instagram.com/kabarehcheikhats/?hl=fr

9 Chabika شابكة piece : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-AS1IqxJT0

10 https://urlz.fr/ku7C "مسرحية "بلا سمية" لفرقة داهاواسا تُعيد الإنسان إلى أصوله لأجل أن يواجه حاضره بشكل أفضل"

11 https://www.festivaljassad.com/docs/Kenza.pdf,

12 Piece seen during the Blanc'art festival on 25/10/2022

13 Ismail Fallahi president of the association "CATHARSIS" laureate of the Russian theater school "Tomorrow Spring" Minsk-Belarus, and holder of a professional degree in theater studies at the FLSH Ben Msik in 2012 and this after 5 years of studies of dramatic art at the conservatory of Casablanca and training in performing arts at the school "Circo netzwerk für zirkuskünste" Hanover-Germany. (source : https://actinginstitute.ma/team/ismail-elfallahi/)

14 Poetic and musical art, it is a popular Moroccan musical genre.

15 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZ0shKU9iOI timeline 02:37:30

16 Mohamed El Horr "Hadaik al assrar" (2022) مسرحية حدائق الأسرار: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qr95LUyv-u8 . This play won 4 awards at the Carthage Theatre Days (2022) including the best work.

17 Amine Nassour Chattara (2022) مسرحية شا طا را https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49YOobjxkig . This play won the grand prize at the 29th edition of the Cairo International Experimental Theater Festival (2022). . This play won 4 awards at the Carthage Theatre Days (2022) including the best work.

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19 https://urlz.fr/kpyK

20 Driss Ksikes "The theater as energy helps to capture the pulse of an era": Interview with Driss Ksikes Omar Fertat, Expressions maghrébines, Volume 21, Number 1, Summer 2022, pp. 205-214

21 https://www.festivaljassad.com/

22 Zohra Makach "Ecrire au Féminin au Maroc" in Actes du colloque Internationale Profession : Femme de théaâtre - Ed . Festival International des Femmes Metteuses en Scène- Jasad, under the direction of Issam El Yousfi. p . 17

23 Kharif مسرحية الخريف Asmae Houri (2008): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sthPt-ojM9U

24 Asmaa Houri in Actes du colloque Internationale Profession : Femme de théaâtre - Ed . International Festival of Women Stage Directors - Jasad, under the direction of Issam El Yousfi.

25 Ahmed Massaïa (2021) p. 214

26 Khalid Amine, Marvin Carlson, (2012) p. 187.

27 *"While the names of Yacine, Alloula, Kaki, andvothers remain honored, and theatres across Algeria bear these names, their style of theatre, concerned with the dynamics of social life and with a strong political orientation, has been little seen in the new century. Instead a much more varied theatre scene has appeared, including more classic revivals, and a more poetic, personal, and psychological theatre, often with traces of Ionesco or Beckett"* Khalid Amine, Marvin Carlson, (2012) p.187

28 Interview Rihab Alloula: "Doing the goual outside no longer works f' 3assr digital, a form that has had its day, but what can we learn from these men and women who have made the Algerian theater?"

29 Rihab Alloula - Troupe Istijmam interview conducted on 08/09/2022

30 EL AJOUAD show - مسرحية الأجواد (Istijmam - Oran 2019) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JS1S9-MuNVA

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32 https://www.themaghribpodcast.com/2018/09/rencontre-avec-bouziane-ben-achour.html

33 Mohammed Kali. "Algerian theater to the test of languages. The weight of the contingencies of History" *Théâtre/ Public*, n° 233. "Political scenes from the Maghreb to the Middle East" (2019)

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42 *Memoir*, "Days of the Opera Theatre of Tunis in Paris", October 21, 2022.

43 Excerpt "I don't want to and I mustn't forget / I need a confession.../ A confession equal to the pain I've suffered."

44 Sihem Sidaoui, Essia Jaibi's "Madame M." in search of the right distance, Nawaat, March 25, 2019.

45 Olfa Belhassine, "Flagranti" by Essia Jaibi: an intense and breathtaking piece, La Presse, 06 October 2022.

46 Essia Jaibi, Jamaity, The Tunisian Civil Society Platform, 2022.

47 Show seen at the Carthage Theatre Days, Tunis, Fourth Art, December 04, 2022.

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49 Mariem Guellouz, "From contemporary dance in the Maghreb to a Maghrebian contemporary dance" *Marges* [Online], 16 | 2013, p.65.

50 Mariem Guellouz (2013) p. 67.

51 Interview with Mariem Guellouz 25/07/ 2022

52 Interview with Cyrinne Douss 15/10/2022

53 Amance Riquois Tilmont, Contemporary dance in Morocco: systems of representation, issues of identification and recognition - Thesis Master 2 experimentations and research in the performing arts - under the direction of Omar Fertat - Université Bordeaux Montaigne 2019-2020

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56 Interview Malek Sbai - 03/10/2022

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60 Interview Malek Sbai - 03/10/2022

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67 Exchange rate Central Bank of Morocco on 30/12/2022: 1 dollar = 10.44 dhs

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91 Ibid.

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93 Becker (Howard S.). The worlds of the art. Paris, Flammarion, 1988, page 195.

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97 Synthesis of the analysis of the interviews, see list in appendix.

98 See table 1 in the appendix.

99 See Naima Zitane's intervention https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZ0shKU9iOI from 20:01.

100 عمر فرتات محمد سيف منتجب صقر الاخراج المسرحي العربي المعاصر. مسارات و تجارب. دار الفنون والأداب - مركز آنا للأبحاث والترجمة . 2022

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106 http://www.tunisie-constitution.org/fr/article-42-0

107 https://fr.unesco.org/creativity/countries

108 Interview Rihab Alloula 08/09/2022

109 https://gorara.org/fr/

110 https://fr-fr.facebook.com/lesartivistes/

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PERFORMING ARTS & ARAB DIASPORA IN EUROPE

by Omar Fertat



Introduction

Our study will focus on the performing arts and the Arab diaspora in Europe. Compared to other European countries, for historical and geopolitical reasons, most Arab diaspora performing art works are visible and exist in France and Germany. France, because it is the European country with the largest Arab community (mostly Maghrebi), whose members, coming from the French colonies began to arrive in France as early as the nineteenth century. As for Germany, it has experienced the largest wave of Arab immigration of the twenty-first century (the 2010s) after its leaders decided to welcome a large number of Syrian refugees fleeing the war. It is therefore quite logical that these two countries have a significant diasporic theater activity, more visible and more present than in other European countries. We will mention, when necessary, other Arab diasporic experiences located in other European countries such as Belgium, Italy, Sweden, or England.

This paper is divided into four chapters that will be devoted to phenomena or experiences, in terms of performing arts, that are significant in relation to the Arab diaspora. The first chapter will be devoted to "hip-hop dance and contemporary dance" an artistic field where several artists of Arab origin, especially Maghrebi, have become world stars; the second chapter will focus on the "one man show" and stand up a sector that is widely invested in by the Maghrebi community in France and Belgium; The third chapter will deal with "diasporic or post-migration theater" a concept developed in Germany to designate the theater animated and conceived by immigrants and their children, especially those originating from the Middle East and more precisely from Syria. This theater is supported by the European Union within the framework of several actions that aim at "integration through culture". For this reason, a whole network supporting this kind of drama productions is currently being set up throughout Europe. The last chapter will be devoted to "experiences led by Arab artists or artists of Arab origin who have distinguished themselves in the field of contemporary theater in Europe" whose actors carry out original experiences without constituting a current or homogeneous network. The only thing they have in common is that they currently enjoy great fame and benefit from very important material conditions.

Our study is a kind of panorama of the Arab diasporic performing arts through its most important and outstanding trends and experiences. The study evokes these artistic experiences by focusing on those of the most important and most outstanding artists in each field.

During this study, the four axes proposed by the project team will be made explicit and pointed out each time. Whether it be the networks in which Arab artists evolve, the material support they receive in terms of production and performance venues, the place that legacies occupy in their works, their relationship to modernity and their commitment as cultural actors in the societies in which they evolve...

ARAB DIASPORA IN EUROPE

For our purposes, the meaning of the word diaspora is the one formulated by Gabriel Sheffer, according to whom this term "designates, in its politico-sociological meaning, the geographical dispersion of ethnic groups which, forced to live separated from the group to which they belong, have been integrated as a minority, in whatever way, in a different society and are confronted, because of their dual membership, with serious problems in their search for identity and in the clarification of their interests"[1].

The presence of Arab populations in Western countries and throughout the world is essentially due to migration. Their physical displacement has taken many forms: exile, travel for study, enlistment by foreign countries in the colonial framework, economic migration, etc. The causes of these migrations have varied over time. While for a long time the bulk of migratory movements took place within Arab countries (intra-Arab immigration), from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Arab immigration took a different turn. Due to several factors, colonization, job opportunities, migration policy, etc., America and Europe became the new destinations for Arab migrants.

Historically, Arab emigration to Europe has been directed towards two countries: the United Kingdom and France, both former colonial powers of the Arab region. In Britain, the main component of Arab migrants is from the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, and Syria), while in France they mostly come from the Maghreb.

Arab emigration went on and spread to other European countries and spread further. First, Western European countries, such as Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, resumed Arab immigration, as did the Scandinavian countries. Mediterranean Europe (Spain, Italy, and Greece), on the other hand, was until the 1970s composed of labor-sending countries. It became a receiving region for Arab migrants only much later.

France, Main European Host Country for Arab Migrants

As a colony and also as a French department, Algeria was the first Arab country to provide workers to France, and this happened as early as the nineteenth century. During the First World War (1914-1918), thousands of people joined France. This time they did not only come from Algeria, but also from Morocco, Tunisia, and the colonies of Black Africa, called by France to reinforce the French army, but also to replace the French workers mobilized and sent to the front.

In the aftermath of the war, France needed manpower to rebuild its economy. The local labor force was insufficient, so it was in the colonies, particularly Algeria, that the country found the solution once again. At the end of World War II, the French government encouraged immigration of North Africans to France, as well as from Spain, Italy, and Portugal.

After the independence of the Maghreb countries (1956 for Morocco and Tunisia, 1962 for Algeria), France signed agreements concerning immigration with each of the three Maghreb countries, as it had done with other countries (Spain, Italy, and Yugoslavia). Through these agreements, Maghrebi immigration to France was regulated by legislation that set annual quotas.

Nowadays, if some sources mention about four million North Africans in Europe, other sources believe their number is much higher and exceeds five million. In France alone, if we take into consideration those who have acquired French nationality, the number easily reaches four million. The rest are unevenly distributed among other countries, with more than 150,000 immigrants in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The Maghrebi constitute the largest Arab immigrant community from the Middle East in Europe, except in Great Britain.

In Europe, the vast majority of Arab immigrants were initially unqualified, even illiterate, from mountainous and rural areas. Initially employed in construction, factories, mines, etc., over time their activities diversified to include all economic activities.

Two major elements have contributed to this diversification: rootedness in the host society and family reunification, which has modified this working-class immigration par excellence. As a result, a category of descendants of Arab migrants has emerged, grouped together under a highly questionable name: "second generation" or even "third generation"

In addition to labor migration, there was a large immigration of intellectuals who left their countries of origin. This category of migrants had grown with the number of Arab students sent by their governments to Europe or elsewhere for higher education and who, at the end of their degrees, never returned to their country of origin.

Germany is the First Country of Settlement of Syrians in Europe

The armed conflict that has ravaged Syria since 2011 has displaced more than half of the country's population, including nearly six million refugees outside its borders. About one million have found refuge in Europe. Germany is by far the largest country of settlement for Syrians in Europe, with about 700,000 refugees arriving since 2011. German authorities and civil society have shown undeniable warmth in offering hospitality to Syrian refugees in the summer of 2015.

The second largest country of settlement for Syrian refugees in Europe is Sweden, with nearly 150,000 Syrians welcomed since 2011. France has been far less welcoming, with approximately 20,000 Syrians granted legal protection since 2011, some of whom were already living in the country.

"Immigrant" Theater in France

"Theater has played an often underestimated role in the history of the "immigrant cause" movement. It has not only been a means of political or cultural expression, but also a tool for mobilization and militant training. In fact, the theatrical practice participates in a repertoire of militant action in its own right" writes Samir Hadj Belgacem.

It is at the beginning of the seventies, in the wake of the claims left by the cataclysm of 1968 that rose up in France, where the immigration theater appeared. This label primarily featured Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan directors and actors, who mostly came from the Maghrebi immigrant population that arrived in France in the 1960s. Long deprived of their own artistic voice, these populations only had, until then, a very distant relationship with the hexagonal culture and the theater in particular.

The cultural agitation of the spring of '68, the occupation of workplaces, the wild attempts at theater in the factory, practices that were highly contentious and political, the experiments and slogans in favor of a greater integration of disadvantaged immigrant populations, are undoubtedly the essential factors that favored the emergence, a few years later, of a few marginal troupes, whose political, as well as cultural purpose, was to invent a popular theater for immigrant workers and their families.

In the history of immigrant theater, Yacine Kateb and his troupe are often considered precursors. However, experiments in immigrant theater were conducted as early as the 1960s, notably in the Baumettes prison in Marseille, where Mohammed Boudia, a member of the FLN and a playwright, created the play *Naissance* with several prisoners. Mustapha Kateb also participated in the FLN troupe before becoming, in 1963, the first director of the Théâtre national d'Alger (TNA).

The year 1973 seems to mark a turning point. Marked by important hunger strikes carried out for the regularization of undocumented workers, as well as by struggles against racism and conflicts in homes and factories, 1973 witnessed the birth of a large number of theater groups that heavily rely on immigrant worker struggles. To name but a few, there was the Garcia Lorca (Spanish), Encontro portugues (Portuguese), Semente (Portuguese), 14 avril (Franco-Spanish), and Théâtre ouvrier Issy les Moulineaux (Portuguese). There were troupes among these that were composed of Arab workers such as Le C.A.D.C.A.F (Lebanese-Maghrebian) and the Al Assifa (Franco-Maghrebian) troupe.

Groups are formed almost everywhere in France, even when there is a clear concentration of troupes in the Paris region. They are either under the framework of an association, or as an extension of the political and militant activity of the members, or at the very heart of immigrant struggles: "The theater, like all the other means of cultural expression used by workers, expresses their life, their struggle, their claims, and their just aspirations. Immigrant worker struggles become the basis for the formation of these troupes, as evidenced by the Al Assifa troupe experience. This troupe formed after a meeting on a site where a strike took place. In the beginning, the Al Assifa troupe ("the storm" in reference to the armed wing of the Palestinian liberation movement) was composed of workers; Mokhtar Bachiri, one of the founders, was also a spokesman for the MTA (The Movement of Arab Workers). Established in Barbès, it offers popular theater that is part of a process of mobilization and awareness. In 1974, the troupe created the play *Ça travaille, ça travaille, mais ça ferme sa gueule*. It performed in cafés, workers' homes, in factories that were on strike and in the street.

The political experience acts as the matrix of this theater, whose contribution to militant work was its seed capital. Consequently, no troupe came about without first expressing a struggle, its claims, and its aspirations. The stage is used for its power of expression, to present immigrant struggles and their daily lives.

The theater is also the tool of several organizations linked to militant networks for the "immigrant cause" The Maison des travailleurs immigrés (MTI), created in 1973 with the support of the Cimade and co-organized by the main immigrant worker associations, organized film screenings and theater performances. In 1975, it launched the Festival de théâtre populaire des travailleurs immigrés (FTPTI), whose first edition in Suresnes, constituted a moment of unprecedented visibility for troupes scattered throughout the country and representing the main immigrant populations in France. The Festival distinguished itself by refusing to receive funding from the National Office for the Cultural Promotion of Immigrants and the FAS.

The 80's: the Emergence of a Butter Scene

The 1980s were a time when some companies ceased their activities, due to a lack of funding and a lack of professional prospects; they also ceased their work when troupes bringing together immigrant children explored new issues.

Most of the companies from the 1970s did not survive the turn of the 1980s; it was necessary to take the theater of immigrants out of its community ghetto; by removing it from its comfort zone, it could be seen by the French public. We then witnessed a general awareness on the part of these groups; making theater that speaks about immigrants to immigrants has its limits. From then on, the challenge was to make a wider public discover and share immigrant problems in life; immigrant theater needed to work for meeting the public, which could help arrive at a mutual understanding. These could be regarded as steps towards "integration" In France, integration is a notion that came about at the beginning of the Eighties. Politically, this awareness coincided with the election of the socialist François Mitterrand as President in 1981; in addition, Jack Lang was appointed as Minister of Culture; and there was the emergence of anti-racist, civic movements such as SOS Racisme. SOS Racisme brought together many artists and young people around the theme, better integration of immigrant populations and their children who were born in France. The context changes and offers opportunities for theater groups "from North African immigration" which are associated with the "cultural integration policy"

The public recognition of immigrant children after the "March for Equality and Against Racism" in 1983 led to an institutional opening and to the development of a beur scene. This led to the emergence of shows written and staged by young North Africans born in France on French stages; they often used humor and derision to tell of the joys and sorrows of sitting between two chairs, between family tradition and the reality of the suburbs. The most striking example is undoubtedly the comedian Smaïn; Smaïn has become very popular in France; on stage and in the cinema he impersonates outrageous beurs characters switching between delinquency, suburban *gouaille*, and heart rendering; Smaïn uses a city slang that mixes verlan, Arabic expressions, and English words borrowed from the everlasting myth of American cinema. Therefore, one of the Parisian boulevard successes in 1994 was Molière's Fourberies de Scapin, revised and edited by Smaïn as a young beur valet from the slums; his character was as caricatural as it was moronic.

Even if some talents are asserting themselves here and there in the theater (often as individuals and not as representatives of a hypothetical "beur culture"), many authors or

directors find it difficult to be recognized as artists in their own right who would make another voice heard. Some even claim that, outside the mold of cultural assimilation, it is difficult to even find a modest place in the official cultural circuits in France. When they are invited to perform in a theater festival, it is often for social integration reasons and questions of sociological balance; their featuring is more for "political pretext" than aesthetic choices defended by these Franco-Maghrebi troupes; these troupes's work is often neglected by drama critics. In this context where there is Beur exoticism, it is sometimes a dangerous value recreating the sacrosanct ghetto of integration; in this regard, Nedjma Theater's path, although still marginal, is unique.

Refusing the "beur" label, Moussa Lebkiri has made, over the course of his productions (about fifteen to date), a place of his own among the permanent Mediterranean theater groups in France. Exhibiting his shows all over France, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, and Morocco, he claims a mixed public made up of intellectuals, teachers, and French people curious about cultural differences: "Every year, when I play in the Off of Avignon, I know that I no longer touch the immigrant spectator from my beginnings; I no longer go to meet them, I play shows and tour in different, conventional places where immigrants do not necessarily have access." He agrees that he occupies a marginal place in the French theater landscape: "I do not have a complex from it. It is true that some organizers are living colonialist dreams when they select one of my shows. There is a lot of work to be done on educating the French public. That is partly my group's goal; my group continues to assert a Kabyle, Maghrebian, and more broadly Mediterranean identity.

HIP-HOP AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE

Hip-Hop Dance (France)

After the United States, France is considered as hip-hop's second home. While empowering this culture, it has experienced and continues to experience phenomenal growth. Some researchers explain the easy and rapid implantation of hip-hop culture through its various components in France by the very tense situation that young people in French housing estates, especially those who are originally immigrants, were living. This precarious social situation was due as much to mass unemployment, which began in the 1980s and from which the working classes were the first and hardest hit, to the various manifestations of racism, exclusion, and rejection they suffered from.

If some young people opted for modes of action with a political nature, as was the case with the "March for Equality and Against Racism" better known as the "March of the Beurs" this March witnessed hundreds of thousands of young French people from North African and African origin marching to demonstrate their anger at the injustice they were suffering. Other young people from disadvantaged working-class neighborhoods chose hip-hop because they saw it as an original and accessible mode of expression that perfectly corresponded to them and expressed this same anger and say in their own way. During the 1980s, hip-hop enjoyed a large media audience because this new phenomenon soon aroused media interest; the media saw in it a novelty and an urban expression representative of a very specific social category–working-class neighborhoods and "children of Afro-Maghrebin" immigration. Programs that were exclusively devoted to hip-hop were going to be scheduled on the biggest national channels.

The hip-hop culture actors were mostly Arab and African immigrants. Because of the gap between their practices and the dominant cultural norm, they were aware that in order for their art to continue to exist, it was absolutely necessary for them to be accepted and, above all, to have legitimacy. To reach this legitimacy, it was necessary that this urban culture knew a process of "artification" which will produce an art to share, and it will reach the places of legitimization.

This artification[2] took place thanks to particular political circumstances that saw the election of a socialist president, François Mitterrand, and the accession of the French left to power. The new leaders, from the 1980s onwards, put in place public action mechanisms and a policy aimed at the democratization of culture and "integration through culture" Street art, including

hip-hop disciplines, were the first beneficiaries of this public policy, which was also called "hip-hop public policy"

Among the hip-hop disciplines, dance, referred to in its early days as *Smurf*, was institutionalized in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This artistic expression benefits from an institutional context that is favorable to emerging choreographic forms. Dance even became synonymous with the accession of hip-hop to official recognition and the object of study par excellence for all those who want to understand and explain the process of artification of an art and a culture once considered a passing fad and a product that did not deserve being labeled as art.

Unlike other hip-hop disciplines that claimed a form of purity and resisted any transformation outside the culture of origin, dance has been open to similar dance forms. Educators promoted this openness from the beginning; by having young people work with contemporary choreographers, educators became mediators in the world of theater and dance; they sometimes became the first directors of companies.

This opening inevitably implied important changes in the way young dance artists approached their arts; they gradually moved from individual performances to the construction of a collective dramaturgy; they also shifted from demonstration to representation, and from improvisation to objectification. According to Virginie Milliot, it is a question of the passage from an oral dance to a written art (choreographic).

Hip Hop dance legitimization and artification could not be accomplished without the mediation from the holders of cultural capital at the head of legitimate cultural institutions; these people control dissemination means, programming, and funding; they chose to support Hip Hop dancers and choreographers. Their role as cultural intermediaries is one of intermediation in social legitimacy.

Once the artistic, social recognition, and legitimization phase is over, comes the no less important stage of professionalization; professionalization allows certain major actors of this dance to be financially comfortable. The last phase in Hip Hop dance artification is, according to Shapiro, "the emergence of the author figure."

The institutionalization of hip-hop has been accompanied by "injunctions to aesthetic hybridization" with more legitimate cultural forms; it is the only way to achieve lasting institutional recognition.[3] Additionally, it is in the dance field that this intercultural practice is most notable.

The promoted works are those that comply with the necessary formal criteria to be able to claim being inserted in legitimate institutional diffusion networks, and in particular theaters and operas. They are generally shows that follow a stage format (scripted works organized in a "tableaux" wearing costumes, ad hoc set designs, articulation of the choreography with a light and musical framework managed from the control room, with a duration between one and two hours). From an aesthetic point of view, the movements are generally borrowed from legitimate choreographic genres such as contemporary dance or traditional dances.

This evolution of the practice generated new aesthetics; it deeply transformed the practice of hip-hop dance; hip hop's young adepts had to conform to the taste of the public of theaters. This public exceeds figures of their first mode of expression; it also "goes out of the social" They detach the their creations' signifieds from their own experience, to extract themselves from their "particularistic belongings"[4] to open themselves to a formal presumed universal logic.

These forms will open up not only to other dances, but also to other artistic expressions such as theater.

After this brief contextualization, we understand why young French people of North African origin or from North African immigration have massively invested in this artistic field. Today, the greatest representatives of this discipline are Maghrebi artists named Farid Berki, Mourad Merzouki, Kader Attou, Hamid Ben Mahi, and Fouad Boussouf.

Before presenting some of these actors' work, let us point out a very important fact. These young artists have held, or still hold today, very important positions of responsibility with an "official" nature. Mourad Merzouki was, from 2008 to 2022, director of the Centre chorégraphique national de Créteil et du Val-de-Marne; Kader Attou was, from 2008 to 2022, director of the Centre chorégraphique national de La Rochelle; and Fouad Boussouf was appointed director of the Centre chorégraphique national du Havre-Normandie in 2022.

The first remark we can make is that these artists' experiences have been around for quite some time since most of them started their careers as dancers and then as choreographers at a young age. They have an average of about thirty years of practice. All of them come from the hip-hop scene and have succeeded in imposing themselves on the French and international scene by proposing original works whose main characteristic is hybridity. That is to say that in their works several styles of dance and various disciplines are crossed. This is certainly the result of this "injunction to hybridize" the only way, indicated by the establishment, to legitimize this art born in the street.

The Hip-Hop Scene Being Tested by Hybridization: the Farid Berki Example

To illustrate our point, as far as the artistic hybrid is concerned, we are going to focus on some of Farid Berki's works. Berki is considered as the pioneer of this new hip-hop scene, which shaped hip-hop dance by making it reach the ranks of artistic work; it provided letters of nobility to this street dance, which was considered for a long time as an underdeveloped product of a marginalized and alienated social category.

Farid Berki created the group "Melting Spot" in 1994 and was quickly noticed thanks to his first production *Fantazia*; in *Fantazia*, he used 200 m2 of painted canvas. Hoping to break the codes of a dance long associated with physical performance and battles, he showed great audacity by combining hip-hop dance and flamenco. Three years later in 1998, he renewed the experience with Petrushka; in his press kit, he presented it as a "choreographic detour for five dancers from a picturesque plot inspired by Russian folklore by proposing a singular reading of classical ballet." Fardi Berki set his sights on one of the most emblematic Russian ballets created by the famous Daghlilev. The latter also aspired to renew the romantic ballet by opening up to other art forms and by trying to propose creations where music, choreography, and scenery are harmoniously associated. *Petrushka* is also considered one of the masterpieces of the Russian choreographer Fokin, who chose Stravinsky's music to accompany it.

However, Farid Berki's opening does not only concern other styles of dance and music, but it also touches on other art forms in general. In 2004, the French choreographer decided to put into dance the universe of martial arts, which had always fascinated him. For this show, *Six fous… en quête de hauteur (Six fools… in search of height)*, he chose a fable for his show of an old Chinese legend; in the legend, an emperor submits each of his six boys to a 600-day ordeal confronted with their desire to succeed his throne. For the martial arts part, he called upon one of China's greatest martial arts specialists, Yuen Wo Ping; Ping is credited with setting up the fights in the *Matrix* film. The

show also takes place in a fantastic setting created by comic book artist François Schuitten. In order to fully immerse themselves in Chinese culture, Berki and his nine dancers even traveled to Shanghai where they were hosted at the Theater Academy.[5]

In the piece *Oud* (2005), "duet for an actor and a dancer" mimes and burlesque gestures, on one side, and dance and rhythmic movements on the other, the piece punctuates and sets the tone for this extravagantly comic burlesque show; in some ways the show reminds us of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. This duo was formed by choreographer Farid Berki and actor Christophe Jean. The theater is convened by Farid Berki in one of his latest pieces *Hip-hop Aura* (2009)–an illustrated and unbridled conference around the unlikely history of hip-hop. It was a non-academic conference animated by an actor and illustrated by two dancers. This piece is a dive into the history of hip-hop through the subjective eyes of Farid Berki. Breaking down the clichés of this discipline, Farid Berki, delivers another almost utopian history of this urban dance. In his piece different arts, cultures, and geographies mix, intertwine, and merge to give birth to a hybrid art that does not recognize the imposed borders between these different expressions.[6]

LINKS WITH THE ARAB HERITAGE

The reference to the Maghreb and Arab heritage is present in the works of some of these choreographers. Within this framework of aesthetic exchange, crossbreeding, and artistic hybridization—particularly between hip-hop dance and other art forms—the aforementioned artists readily draw from Arab and Maghrebian ancestral cultures. They seek new rhythms and sounds that can enrich their urban dance practice. It is at the level of bodies, rhythms, and the sonorities that this work on the heritage is accomplished.

Fouad Boussouf is one of the artists that is part of this new scene who worked the most on Arab heritage. He says:

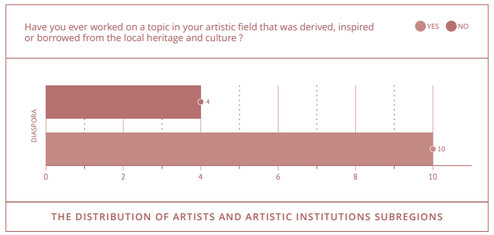
> *"During my childhood, I was rocked by the great classics of Arab music. Tinged with nostalgia, it sends me back to an imagination built of sweet and innocent memories, in total contrast to my adolescence, punctuated by music and hip-hop dance. Today I want to question this double culture, a heritage that is at the same time societal, linguistic, and musical through my choreographic writing. The recent events, grouped under the name of 'Arab Spring' have been a trigger for this choice. For me, it is a question of addressing the question of revolutions of the spirit and the metamorphosis that take place in the body. This gives rise to a metamorphosis shaped by breath, rhythm, repetition, and the collective body. The individuals turn in circles to better find themselves, at the same time, the same universe, savoring the pleasure of the continuous and infinite movement, a quest for balance."*[7]

Thus, the Moroccan-born artist created a triptych composed of *Transe* (2013), *Näss* (2018), and *Oüm* (2020) that he devoted to the Arab region, where he highlights certain elements of Arab-Muslim heritage. On creating *Transe*, Fouad Boussouf says *"I was inspired by the rites of North Africa and the contemplative gestures of the dervishes. The trance, this second state that moves us to another place…"*[8] This show was produced in 2013 following the "Arab Spring" it blends Mahmoud Darwich's poetry with a collective organic ritual that borders on ecstasy. The continuous push of the starting entity is carried by powerful music, which mixes electronic and classical Arabic melodies.

As for the second show, *Näss*, the choreographer states that he *"composed it as a breath, both physical and mystical, which reminds me of the need to be firmly anchored to one's land in order to better feel its vibrations." Näss* pays choreographic homage to the musical group Nass el Ghiwane, which in the 1970s fused sub-Saharan tradition, Gnawa singing, electric sounds, and Anglo-Saxon pop. Lastly, in *Oüm* (2020), he pays a vibrant tribute to Oum Kalthoum, the Egyptian diva of Arabic song, and Omar Khayyam, the Persian writer whose poems she sings celebrating drunkenness and trance.

This desire to reappropriate "a past of origins" is present in the other artists mentioned above. Hamid Ben Mahi, dancer-choreographer of Algerian origin, director of the group "Hors Série" produces the show *Yellel* (2019) where he is accompanied by five dancers; he operates a crossing of the various forms of artistic and traditional oriental expressions: the music, the dances, but also the codes, the colors, the symbols, the writings… In *Beautiful Djazaïr* (2011), there is a scene where he questions Algerian colonial past and the place that this history occupies in the memory of the Algerians.

We also noticed that these choreographers are keen to establish links with their countries of origin or even with other countries of the Maghreb and the Arab region through collaborations with local artists or by performing in these countries. Kader Attou staged *Douar* (2003) using young Algerian dancers. He did it again by producing, with Mourad Merzouki, in Morocco, (2016). *Danser Casa* was a show performed by seven dancers and a Moroccan dancer who was selected from 200 hip-hoppers who auditioned. As for Fouad Boussouf, he regularly organizes residencies in Morocco and has recently (2022) toured several cities in the kingdom with his show *Näss*.



THE DISTRIBUTION OF ARTISTS AND ARTISTIC INSTITUTIONS SUBREGIONS

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

First of all, it should be noted that the most important figures representing this artistic sensibility are well established in the French cultural landscape. They enjoy notoriety and a support from French national and local authorities. As mentioned above, some of them are at the head of National Choreographic Centers, which are prestigious public establishments with great means at their disposal. These artists have even become a kind of trademark in France because they have succeeded in imposing a particular style of dance that is exported abroad. This is why their shows are well known and are even broadcasted on French national channels. In fact, the shows of Kader Attou, Mourad Merzouki, Fouad Boussouf, Hamid ben Mahi, and Farid Berki are played in the largest theaters including national theater stages where they have, for several decades, found their place alongside the most prestigious theatrical pieces. These shows are also disseminated internationally by featuring in festivals and dance meetings that are dedicated to hip-hop or contemporary dance, such as the renown Montpellier Dance Festival, the Dance Biennial in Lyon, and International Dance Festival of Wolfsburg. In addition, actors in this new contemporary dance scene organize several festivals and meetings such as the Kalypso festival and the Karavel festival that were founded by Mourad Merzouki in 2016, or the Shak festival founded by Kader Attou in 2016.

In terms of production, hip-hop shows benefit from available financial support. National choreographic centers directed

by artists from this discipline (the CCN of La Rochelle, Marne la Vallée du Havre) are in positions to aid hip-hop artists. CCN produces shows and offers residencies to young groups. Festivals and meetings are also good springboards for groups since they participate in the production of shows. It must be said that there is, thanks to the action of the most important figures in this discipline, a solid network of festivals and meetings that benefit from support on behalf of state institutions (regional councils, territorial collectivities, cultural centers, national or private theaters and choreographic centers etc.) If we take, for example, the spectacle *Näss*, by Fouad Boussouf, on the technical card it mentions that it was co-produced by: *Théâtre Jean Vilar - Vitry-sur-Seine / Le Prisme - Élancourt / Institut du Monde Arabe - Tourcoing / Fontenay-en-Scènes - Fontenay-sous-bois / Théâtre des Bergeries - Noisy-le-Sec / La Briqueterie - CDCN du Val-de-Marne / Le FLOW - Pôle Culture Ville de Lille / Institut Français de Marrakech.*

DIGITALIZATION AND DIGITAL BROADCASTING

We have noticed that digital techniques are not used much in hip-hop shows. Everything is focused on body performances and their movement on stage, which are highlighted by classical scenographies based on light and sound effects.

Finally, as far as digital distribution is concerned, during our research we noticed that the majority of artists have very elaborate and professional digital portals that portray their works (with video excerpts), tour agendas, teams, press kits, etc.

In this field, women, if they are present as dancers, are not present as directors of groups or important institutions such as the CCN.

CONTEMPORARY DANCE (FRANCE-BELGIUM-NETHERLANDS)

Contemporary dance is the other artistic field where there is a noticeable presence of artists from Arab origin. If there is one difference that can be highlighted in relation to actors from Arab origin in the hip-hop scene, it is that contemporary dance performers were not all born in or arrived very young to France. Many of them are "defectors" who arrived to their host countries as adults. The main reason is that there was no viable dance space in Arab countries where those who wanted to pursue a career as dancers could develop and evolve, especially for males. Moreover, many of these dancers start their career by doing training courses in Europe where some of them settle permanently. It is perhaps for this reason that the question of heritage and inheritance are very present in their works and constitute some of the major themes of their artistic reflections.

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui: world icon of contemporary dance

Among this category of artists, the name that first comes to mind is Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui; today, Cherkaoui is regarded as one of the icons in this discipline; his works are successful internationally. In 2010, his trilogy *Foi, Mythe, Babel*, attracted 20,000 spectators in Paris. Two years earlier, in Avignon, tickets for *Sutra* were selling for 200 euros on the black market.

Of Moroccan origin through his father, who arrived from Tangier in the 1960s immigration wave, and and from a Flemish mother, Cherkaoui grew up in Belgium. In 1995, the dancer received the first prize for the best Belgian dance solo in Ghent, a competition launched by Alain Platel, and joined the Ballets contemporains de la Belgique.

After starting out as a dancer and singer in variety shows on Belgian television, he did his professional training in contemporary dance at the P.A.R.T.S. from 1996 to 1999, which was founded by choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. In parallel to his contemporary training, he worked with hip-hop and modern jazz groups in Belgium. His style remains marked by this period; he was exceptionally flexible and likened to a contortionist. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is part of this young generation of Dutch and French speaking artists who represented a new wave in the Belgian and European choreographic art scene. Awarded the Barclay Theater Award in 2000 and the Nijinsky Prize as a choreographer (2002), the contemporary dancer stood out from the crowd thanks to a style that blended fluidity and poetry. In 2000, he launched into choreography with *Rien de rien*, which immediately established him as a choreographer who mixed theater, dance, and music. He associated musicians with his works, from the Moroccan ensemble Weshsm to the traditional music group Micrologus.

In 2010, he founded his own company in Antwerp called "Eastman" The same year, he writes, in collaboration with Damien Jalet, the show *Babel (Words)*, which was a great success. The shows followed one another with similar success and artistic requirement. Since the foundation of his company in 2010, Cherkaoui has written, among others, *Play, TeZukA, Puz/zle, 4D, Fractus V, Session, and 3S* under the auspices of his company.

In 2013, he was commissioned by the Paris Opera Ballet to revisit Maurice Rave's *Bolero*. In 2015 he became the Royal Ballet of Flanders art director in Antwerp, where he wrote and produced *Fall* (2015), *Exhibition* (2016), and *Requiem* (2017). He regularly collaborates with Damien Jalet, most notably for *Foi* (2003), *Myth* (2017), *Babel (words)* (2010), and *Boléro* (2013). In 2016, the organizers of the Festival d'Avignon's 70th edition, chose him to present in the Cour d'honneur of the Palais des Papes the revival of his show *Babel*.

In 2021, the Belgian-Moroccan choreographer was appointed as director of the prestigious Grand Théâtre de Genève ballet; his tenure begins in 2022.

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's style always opted for an eclectic and varied art by crossing aesthetics. His heterogeneous and cosmopolitan work is open to all dances, whether it be that of the flamenco Maria Pagés, the kung-fu of the Shaolin monks, or those of Akram Khan and the Indian Shantala Shivalingappa, and various other arts (theater, music, calligraphy...). Cherkaoui was also influenced by the German Pina Bausch and mangaka Osamu Tezuka. His works are nourished by numerous collaborations: In 2008, he danced with Shaolin monks in *Sutra*; then he invited Chinese dancer Yabin Wang for *Genesis* in 2014; and two years later, he summoned dancers from the circus world, flamenco, and hip-hop for *Fractus V*. His curiosity has been a remedy that prevented his art from being static, both in terms of gesture and in terms of its content.

Even if, in general, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui tends to address universal issues in his shows, such as spirituality, the human condition, and mythology, he sometimes draws on Arab-Muslim heritage in certain works; this was the case for the show *Origine* (2008), which combines medieval Christian repertoire, to which Hildegarde de Bingen's pieces belong, and Rabia al-Adawiyya vocalizations, an Arab Sufi mystic from the eighth century.

When he answered the question, "What did you choose to keep from your father's Moroccan culture?" Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui said: "The calligraphy, the relationship to fluidity, looking from right to left. In Europe, we read from left to right. But I've always tended to read backwards."[9] He adds that his quest for extreme fluidity, which sometimes annoys Europeans,

comes from his culture or his Arab subconscious. "In *Orbo Novo*, for example, the dance is very liquid. It looks like waves. My art has something very undulating, which comes from the belly and the pelvis.[10] All these elements come from the Mediterranean. Contemporary dance rejects this sensuality. It mobilizes the arms, the legs, but never the pelvis"

Héla Fattoumi

Among other important names that have marked and still mark contemporary dance in Europe there is Héla Fattoumi (Franco-Tunisian); with her partner, Éric Lamoureux, they directed the National Choreographic Center of Caen Lower Normandy (2004-2015); since 2015 she directed the National Choreographic Center of Franche-Comté in Belfort. From 2001 to 2004, Héla Fattoumi became vice-president of the Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques (SACD). From 2006 to 2008, she was president of the ACCN (Association des Centres chorégraphiques nationaux). In 2013, Héla Fattoumi was elected president of the Syndeac. Appointed director of the Centre chorégraphique national de Caen Basse-Normandie in 2004, Héla Fattoumi and Éric Lamoureux continued to develop an original body of work, tackling in their shows many subjects related to the Arab region: La Madâ'a (2004) with the Joubran brothers, Palestinian oudists; *La Danse de Pièze* (2006), around the notion of "homosensuality" in the Arab-Muslim world; *1000 départs de muscles* (2007); *Manta*, a solo created at the Montpellier Danse Festival 2009 and *Lost in Burqa* (2011), a performance for eight performers at the Danse d'Ailleurs #6 Festival, based on the issue of wearing the Islamic veil. In 2005, they initiated the "Danse d'ailleurs" festival, the first four editions of which were devoted to artists from Africa; then they expanded to Asia, and the festival has since become a biennial event.

Abou Lagraa and Nawal Aït Benalla

We can also mention the couple Abousefiane Lagraa (dancer and choreographer of Algerian origin) and Nawal Aït Benalla (dancer and choreographer of Moroccan origin) who do remarkable work in France. Abousefiane Lagraa was named best dancer of the year in 2009 by the "International Movimentos Dance Prize" Born in 1970 in Annonay to Algerian parents, Abousefiane Lagraa first studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Lyon, prior to beginning his dance career in Germany at the Frankfurt Dance Theater from 1993 to 1996. The following year in 1997, he received the second prize for interpretation at the International Contemporary Dance Competition in Paris and founded his own group "La Baraka" which has worked with the CCN Ballet de Lorraine and the CNDC in Angers. In 2006, the Ballet de l'Opéra National de Paris commissioned him to create his first work *Le souffle du temps*. In 2008, he worked on the elaboration of a cultural bridge between France and Algeria at the request of the Algerian Minister of Culture. He organized the closing show of the second Panafrican Festival of Algiers in 2009.

Born in Safi, Morocco, to a Berber father and a French mother, Nawal Aït Benalla moved to France with her parents at the age of eight. She was introduced to classical dance by chance. This coincidence was a revelation. At the age of 19, she made the choice to move to Paris. In Paris she opened herself to jazz and contemporary dance. She joined the Armstrong Jazz Ballet, where she worked with choreographers Matt Mattox, Georges Momboye, and Wayne Barbaste. Then she went on a world tour between 2000 and 2001 with DJ Laurent Garnier, which was an incredible experience. She performed on the biggest electronic music stages in front of thousands of spectators in Berlin, Paris, and Reykjavik to mention but a few.

In 2003, she met Peter Goss and intensively followed his contemporary dance and yoga classes. Precision, research, and analysis of the movement were the path she took; this path quickly led her to the question of studies aimed at transmission. In 2005, she obtained the state diploma of dance teacher from the CND of Pantin, Paris. From then on Nawal Aït Benalla knew that her rightful place was within contemporary choreographic art. In 2008, for the Biennale de la Danse de Lyon, she wrote, with Abousefiane Lagraa, the duet *D'Eux Sens*–a piece based on the poems of Omar Khayyām. She travelled together with Lagraa throughout Europe until 2011.

In 2009, the couple founded the first Contemporary Ballet of Algiers. After a national audition that brought together 400 candidates, they decided to select eight young hip-hop dancers; in 2010, with these eight dancers they wrote the show *Nya* (which means in Arabic "to trust life") and played it at the National Theater of Algiers. This show was a great success and won the Prix de la Critique for best choreography in 2011. In 2013, Abou Lagraa wrote *El Djoudour* (The Roots), a piece for fourteen dancers and a singer, for the opening of Marseille-Provence 2013, which part of the designation of the city of Marseille as European Capital of Culture.

Acclaimed by the public, professionals, and the press, the group "Baraka & La Chapelle" co-directed since 2018 by Abousefiane and Nawal Lagraa, performed on the largest stages in France; they also performed abroad in Spain, Germany, Italy, Algeria, Tunisia, the United States, Eastern Europe, and Asia. It now has more than 30 pieces in its repertoire, offers an original work per season, and shows 30 performances per year, both in France and internationally.

Since 2018, the couple has had a fixed venue, the Chapelle Sainte-Marie; it is a new venue dedicated to dance in Annonay where they exhibit their shows, carry out awareness campaigns, and support artists.

Radouane El Meddeb

Even if he has a predilection for dance, El Meddeb's art is located on the edge of two worlds: theater and dance. He pursued his studies at the Higher Institute of Drama Art in Tunis where he graduated first in his class. There followed a period of intense activity during which he participated as an actor in several plays under the direction of some of the most famous Tunisian directors, such as Fader Jaïbi, Taoufik Jebali and Mohamed Driss. El Meddeb also played a few roles in cinema.[11] He was a talented actor; he was consecrated "young hope of Tunisian theater" in 1996 by the Tunisian section of the International Institute of Theater. The same year, at the age of 26, he was recruited as an actor in the National Theater of Toulouse training and research workshop under the direction of Jacques Rosner. It was in France that he fully realized his potential. He directed and danced his first solo *Pour en finir avec moi* for the Rencontres chorégraphiques de Carthage. This show was spotted by professionals; it was a turning point in his career. He then multiplied his works in France. The following year he wrote the solo *Hûwà*, (Ce lui), for Montpellier Danse 2006. In 2007, he joined the *1000 Départs de Muscles* cast, a performance by Héla Fattoumi and Éric Lamoureux. In 2008, he presented his work *Quelqu'un va danser* for the Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis. That same year, he conceived the performance *Je danse et je vous en donne à bouffer* at the Centre National de la Danse in Pantin (CND). In 2010, at the CND he wrote his first group piece *Ce que nous sommes*, with five dancers; this piece toured

throughout France for two years. In December 2010, he collaborated with Stéphane Gombert for *Chant d'amour*, a performance based on a novel and a film by Jean Genet; they showed it at the Collectif 12 in Mantes la Jolie. In January 2011, Radhouane El Meddeb became an associate artist at Centquatre-Paris. He presented *A l'Étroit* in March 2011, a performance initiated by the festival Concordanse(s) and in collaboration with author Philippe Adam. He directed the performance *Tunis, on January 14, 2011* at the Beirut Art Center in Lebanon for Meeting Point 6. In July 2012 at the Montpellier Danse festival, he performed and danced the solo *Sous leurs pieds, le paradis*, which he co-wrote the choreography with Thomas Lebrun. In 2014, he wrote *Au temps où les Arabes dansaient*, a piece for four dancers at the Festival CDC de Toulouse and the Centquatre-Paris. In 2019, he performed *Swan Lake* with the Ballet de l'Opéra national du Rhin, presented at the Théâtre national de Chaillot, in addition to a piece for three dancers and a pianist, Amour-s, Lorsque l'amour vous fait signe, suivez-le for the Rencontres chorégraphiques internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis.

The Tunisian artist, who became a naturalized French citizen in 2008, is one of the artists who have most used Arab heritage in their performances. In these three shows *Je danse et je vous donne à bouffer, Sous leurs pieds le paradis,* and *Au temps où les Arabes dansaient* the references to the history and culture of the Maghreb and Arab are omnipresent.

In *Je danse et je vous en donne à bouffer* El Meddeb (the choreographer) describes it as a "culinary performance" He associates two arts that he claims to love: dance and cooking. These are two fields that are typically considered feminine in the Arab region as. He says he wants to restore an intimate atmosphere that he felt during his childhood. He breaks the codes by appropriating an art considered as exclusively feminine by Arab societies. It is the couscous, this typically Maghrebian dish, which is at the center of this performance; the performance lasts for its cooking time. While preparing this dish on stage, Radhouane el Meddeb performs dances accompanied by traditional Tunisian music. He deconstructs the Maghrebian dance to propose a more modern and personal version. In the second show, *Sous leurs pieds le paradis (Under their feet, paradise)*, the artist set himself a serious challenge–to dance for 55 minutes without interruption to one of the most emblematic songs of the Arab repertoire, *al Atlal* (the ruins), sung by the greatest singer in the history of Arab music, Oum Kalthoum, nicknamed the star of the East.

El Meddeb says that *Sous leurs pieds le paradis* is a "tribute to the singer and everything she stood for. This piece is not only a tribute to Oum Kalthoum, but it is also a celebration of femininity and the Arab woman.

Nevertheless, we can say that through the selected title: *"Under their feet, the paradise"* Radhouane el Meddeb gives a clear reading track that places this show deliberately on women's side. The title is inspired by the work of the author of the book, *"Under Their Feet Paradise"*. It is a work that deliberately places women as accomplished, socially autonomous, and totally free human beings. Without a doubt, this title is inspired by a *hadith* of the prophet Mohammed where he affirmed that "paradise is under the feet of mothers" The title assumes motherhood is the essential quality of a woman, and that a woman's primary role in a society is to raise children.

This celebration of women and femininity was conveyed on stage through multiple elements, starting with gesture. The Tunisian artist did not hesitate to deploy a whole range of gestures and movements drawn from the female Arab register, from the delicate way of moving their hands, to the virtuosity that requires the execution of oriental dances, to the intense effort that requires the trance, where some women perform them during ritual vigils. The artist does not hesitate to transgress the rules and societal codes with premeditation, especially when he makes youyous, a gesture reserved only for women, while closing his mouth and hiding his gender. It is as if he is telling the viewer that he is doing this gesture despite the fact that as a a man it is forbidden.

Finally, *Au temps où les Arabes dansaient*, created in 2014, is a hymn to dance and freedom. Once again Radhouane el Meddeb breaks the rules imposed by a patriarchal Arab society that forbids dancing and the exaltation of bodies. The five male dancers who perform this show tackle a taboo, dancing like women, that is, performing oriental dances using their pelvis in an unmistakable way to denounce all the prohibitions that surround the use of this part of the body by men. The Tunisian choreographer says he is nostalgic for the 1950s, which was the golden age of Arab dance, especially in Egypt. He pays tribute to Egyptian dancers by displaying a large background photo of Samia Gamal on stage.

After several decades of performances away from Tunisia, Radhoaune el Meddeb reconnects with his native country by collaborating with Tunisian artists; they perform the spectacle *Face à la mer, so that tears become bursts of laughter*, which was performed at the Avignon Festival 2017 and in Tunisia.

> *"I decide today to 'return,' with my new language, with my new being, to this country that is changing, that I know so little about. Like a reconciliation, this journey is sweet, but it is also a way to go beyond oneself and to push the limits, once again, as one crosses borders, as one plays with identities. It is also a consolation, this disturbing gesture of taking oneself in the arms, of letting oneself be moved by the others who console"*[12] *asserts Radhoane el Meddeb.*

Some actors of Arab origin in contemporary dance in Europe have brilliant careers and enjoy great visibility at the international level. Others, like Hella Fattoumi and Nawal Aït Benalla, are committed to training and transmission. Moreover, we note in passing that women are much more present, as leaders, choreographers, and troupe leaders, than in the hip-hop field. As for the actors on the hip-hop scene, those invested in contemporary dance benefit from the material support of national and European public institutions; they evolve through important national and international networks–those of contemporary dance and art. Some of them direct CNNs (Héla Fattoumi, co-director of the Centre chorégraphique national de Franche-Comté, and the young Mehdi Kerkouche, who has been named director of the Centre chorégraphique national (CCN) de Créteil et du Val-de-Marne). This ensures them a wide diffusion. We also noted that the question of heritage is very present in their work, especially since some of these actors arrived to Europe as adults. They do not hesitate to establish links with their countries of origin by initiating artist collaborations or by being at the center of important projects such as the Ballet contemporain d'Alger initiated by Abousefiane and Nawal Lagraa.

Stand-Ups And One-Man Shows

In terms of comedy, there is a cafe theater tradition in France that has long been dominated by white men. They did not hesitate to draw inspiration from colonial imaginations to offer caricature performances by reproducing clichés of the black or Arab man on stage. The most famous example is that of the French comedian Michel Leeb, whose shows "The Jungle Grocer" (1995) and "The African" (1984) perfectly illustrate the type of representations that were made of ethnic minorities from French colonies. He has been described as "the clown who amuses the whites, and above all the savage, the primitive close to nature" (S. Hall)

In the 1980s, thanks to the political events that France experienced, notably the "March for Equality and Against Racism" nicknamed the "march of the beurs" by the media, and also the accession of the socialists to power, we begin to note some timid attempts to express another otherness. The person who embodied this trend was the Algerian-born comedian Smaïn, who was once told, "There is no such thing as an Arab artist"[13] He succeeded in becoming one of the recognized humorists and in his sketches such as "le beur président" tried to reappropriate certain stereotypes by playing with them and making them humorous. Nevertheless, Smaïn never succeeded in embodying other characters than those of the nice Arab who, despite everything, conveyed all the clichés that one lent to him: dishonety, theft, etc. However, this artist represented an exception. In the famous television show hosted by Philippe Gouvard "les Grosses têtes" a show where many comedians make the headlines, Smaïn was the only one of Arab origin. It was as if there was no space for ethnic minorities' humor, or young people from the periphery. The rare spaces where they could express their talents were either school or local and regional improvisation competitions where a certain number of comedians of immigrant origin, headed by Jamel Debbouz, pass through.

Initially, the media played an important role in the emergence of these new artistic forms and gave them the necessary visibility in French society to discover and adopt them.

Over the last fifteen years, we have seen a resurgence of comedians, most of whom are from the Maghreb" says director Etienne de Balasy. Jamel Debbouze has opened the door for them, and humor has become a social elevator.[14]

From the 2000s onwards, a new era in the French comedy scene began, marked by "New Ethnicities" This period witnessed "a multiplicity of identity experiences and subjective experiences from the world" Jamel Debouzz played a central role in the emergence of these new aesthetics and expressions, thanks to his show Jamel Comedy Club (2006). His show was inspired by the American show Def Comedy Jam by Russel Sommons (1990). This show became a springboard and a showcase for artists; the vast majority of these artists were from the suburbs and of non-European origin; they would never have had such an opportunity had they tried to go through traditional channels. Each artist, without props or disguise, had to present a 5-minute mini-show where he or she addressed the audience directly. It is a stand-up style that imposed itself. Some people define stand-up as "an accomplished form of self-telling"

What happened next was very important because in 2008 Jamel Debbouz opened his own theater, the Comedy Club. He continued the experience he started on TV. The objective of this new theater, located in an old Parisian cinema, was to welcome young comedic talents and to allow them to be known on the national scene. This was an important event because it was the first time that an artist from a minority background became the owner of a theater; therefore, to use Marxist terminology, he became the owner of his own means of production. As a result, he gained a certain freedom to make his own choices and to promote talented artists who would never, because of their ethnic origin or social status, have been able to perform elsewhere. This is not yet the case in the field of hip-hop, which still depends on state institutions that predominantly finance it.

SOME EXAMPLES

Nawell Madani (Belgium)

Of Algerian origin, Nawell Madani grew up in Belgium in the municipality of Watermael-Boitsfort, south of Brussels. She moved to Paris at the age of 21 with the ambition of becoming a professional choreographer and dancer. She experienced financial difficulties, returned to Belgium, and then moved back to the French capital.

She discovered theater and wanted to become an actress. At the end of 2008, she joined Studio Pygmalion where she trained for several months. She also attended Damien Acoca's classes and "Laboratoire de l'Acteur" classes that were directed by Hélène Zidi-Chéruy. She was spotted in a small theater *Le Pranzo* by the Jamel Comedy Club art director, who invited her to audition to join the team founded by Jamel Debbouze. The only woman selected to join the troupe, Nawell Madani made her debut as a comedian in September 2011. She left the Jamel Comedy Club six months later.

In September 2012, she joined the *Grand Journal* as a columnist; they were searching for new talent. In 2013, she then founded the Jam'Girls collective; it was a TV show that brought together a new generation of female comedians; it was broadcast on Chérie 25 and Comédie. She launched her first one-woman show in 2013: *C'est moi la plus belge*, at the Feux de la rampe and then at the Palais des Glaces in Paris; she toured the Zeniths in France and performed at the Trianon complete three times. She also spent a month-long residency at the Comédia theater in Paris; she finished with a bang at the Olympia. She tackled taboo subjects, such as Maghrebi women virginity and homosexuality. In July 2014, she participated in the Just for Laughs festival in Montreal, Canada.

In 2015, she was awarded at the Crystal Globes for the category of Best One-Man Show. She acted in the film *Alibi.com*, released in theaters on February 15, 2017; a few months later, on November 29, she directed and released her first film, *C'est tout pour moi*; her film was inspired by her personal story where she played the lead role alongside François Berléand.

Amelle Chahbi (France)

Born on August 21, 1980 in Paris, Chahbi is a French actress, playwright, and director.

Revealed by her participation in the Jamel Comedy Club, she affirmed her status on stage as a performer and co-writer of the play *Amour sur place ou à emporter*, which was performed between 2011 and 2013 in Paris.

Of Moroccan origin, Amelle Chahbi isfut trained at the Béatrice Brout International Theater School, the Paris Improvisation Theater League, and the Marais Dance Center. She made her debut on the Comédie! channel, then was discovered by the public on Canal +, under the direction of Dominique Farrugia, as Miss Weather.

She scoured Paris's open stages to find a place to perform; one day, she decided with her friends to form the Barres de rires troupe, which later became the Jamel Comedy Club. The show launched on Canal + in the summer of 2006, and it was a commercial success. It put all the comedians in the spotlight.

The comedienne was forged on stage with her flagship sketch *Les Michetonneuses* by opening for Jamel Debbouze and Tomer Sisley. She toured with the troupe in France, Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, and England. The band of comedians left the show at the end of the third season, during the summer of 2008, to focus on their solo shows. Nevertheless, they reunited for several projects that were unveiled in 2009. Chahbi played a scatterbrained and superficial version of herself in the series Inside Jamel Comedy Club, co-created by Fabrice Eboué.

In 2010, she played the female lead in the French-Belgian film *Les barons* alongside Nader Boussandel and Édouard Baer, directed by Nabil Ben Yadir.

In 2013, she became a director by adapting her successful play *Amour sur place ou à emporter* into a film with a same title, which garnered 412,282 viewers. At the same time, the actress was nominated for the Beaumarchais Prize in the Cherub category, a prize intended for theater revelations and favorites.

In 2008, Karim Kachour, aided by Kader Aoun, founded the Paname Art Café in Paris. This bar-restaurant offered daily stand-up shows that helped launch many comedians such as Fary, Lenny Mbunga, and Hakim Jemili. Similarly, comedy shows multiplied in Paris and in big provincial cities. Among the main ones, there was One More Joke and Dimanche Marrant (performed in 2016) and 33 Comedy

Other stand-up artists of Arab origin

Selim Ghommidh, Malek Belkhodja, Meni Gilliger, Mehdi Bachtarzi, Ines Reg, the Compte Boudrbala, Nadia Roz, Samia Orosemane

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Stand-up or one-man shows proposed by young comedians of Arab origin are produced by private institutions, production companies, private theaters, TV channels (M6 for example, which co-produces the Marrakech Laughter Festival of Jamel Debbouze), or private radio stations specialized in comedy, and, of course, ticketing agencies. They were present in the most prestigious humor festivals such as Just for Laughs in Montreal, Voo Rire in Liege, and Montreux Laugh Festival. Even the Arab region Institute founded its festival, the IMA Comedy Club, whose last edition (2022) hosted a large number of Arab stand-ups like Kamel Abdat, Karim Duval, Malika Sadykova, Mourad Winter, Oualas, Redouane Behache, Meryem Benoua, and Sabrine Zayani.

Some comedians leveraged their success to earn substantial incomes, and more doors opened for them in their careers, mostly from TV and film. This financial success allows them to have a certain autonomy and to self-produce or even produce other artists. In addition to producing films and television series (Jamel Debbouze's production company Kissman produced several artists), some artists start their own theaters or even comedy schools, as is the case of the Belgian-Algerian actress Nawell Madani who opened a stand-up school in Brussels. The stand-up scene has spread in Arab countries, especially in the Maghreb where comedians from the diaspora often travel. Some actors like Jamel Debbouz have even initiated projects in their home countries. Case in point is Jamel Comedy Club Morocco, the Moroccan version of the French show, which broadcast on the Moroccan public channel 2M. These successful diaspora comedians serve as models for young Maghrebians and Arabs; these rising stars do not hesitate to imitate them, and they take part in the emergence of a new comedy scene in Arab countries that is very successful.

ON THE HUMOR OF STAND UP

Like their stage "godfather" comedians of the Canal Plus show Jamel Comedy Club offer the general public a particular kind of humor that breaks with the tradition of French audiovisual comedy from the last thirty years. Although accessible to all audiences, their humor is tinged with references to the reality of most working-class French neighborhoods. Like all comedians who in order to elicit laughter, they insert authentic slices of life from their own experiences or from statements made by those close to them. For instance, Patson, Amelle, and others introduce, often with the use of particular accents, singular phrasing and specific terms, sociocultural and sociolinguistic shifts specific to the reality of the modest social classes–with, in particular, the use of foreign words and the use of the verlan.

The JCC (Jamel Comedy Club) comedy genre is largely inspired by stand-up comedy, whose humor is based on the comedian on stage establishing a complicit interaction with the audience, giving the impression that it is more of an improvised discussion and less of a recited text. Comedians jump from one subject to another at the risk of connecting stories that have nothing to do with each other. Far from producing an exclusively "community" humor, the main comedians of this scene address themselves, at first, to an audience living in working-class neighborhoods, in order to have a better reach. At a later stage, they seek out audiences that do not live in working-class neighborhoods. The first audience serves as a sort of prescriber audience, while the second audience is a follower.

"In tracing a few stand-up performances by renewed Maghrebi comedians such as Malik Bentalha (Morocco-Algeria), Nawell Madani (Algeria), and Samia Orosemane (Tunisia), I argue that these comedians play on the tension-laden history that binds the *Mashreq* and *Maghreb* together, while addressing polemical themes that blur the boundary between the secular and the religious, the taboo and the norm, the ex-colonizer and the ex-colonized. This link between comedy and tragedy is successfully mediated through the adoption and strategic adaptation of stand-up comedy tradition; undoubtedly, the reciprocity of gaze, clever repartee, and repertoire of gestures are synchronized with a Maghrebi accent, African accoutrements, and Maghrebi jokes. By interweaving humor and past tragedies, I am not suggesting that Maghrebi comedians in Europe are mocking colonialism and precarity, but rather I am arguing that these comedians, as *Mashreq* and Maghrebi natives, are rejecting the pauperization of today's entertainment industry from the memory of past calamities"[15] writes Yousra Sbaihi.

In short, this last decade, European stages, especially French-speaking ones, have witnessed the arrival of a new generation of comedians who have chosen stand-up as a mode of expression; and a large part of them are from the Arab and African diaspora. One only has to look at the programs of prestigious festivals such as the Montreux Comedy Festival in Switzerland, the Just for Laughs Festival in Montreal, the Colmar Humor Festival, or the now famous Marrakech Laughter Festival founded by Jamel Debbouz, to notice the strong presence of comedians of Arab origin. Some comedians, since they are very present, have become stars who fill theaters and have even become TV and movie stars.

The new comedians of Maghrebian origin propose a visible and asserted Arabness on stage, but it is inscribed in French culture.

DIGITALIZATION AND DIGITAL BROADCASTING

Even if digital techniques are rarely used in their shows, which are characterized by a certain minimalism, stand-up actors or one-man show scenes invest massively in social media. They make wonderful use of all the possibilities offered by the web and the new digital media. They take part in online broadcasting, whether via platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or their own pages and websites; these mediums are an effective way to disseminate their shows and maintain links with their audience. Moreover, some of their careers kicked off thanks to the Internet and social media, as is the case for the comedian of Algerian origin, Ines Reg; she became famous thanks to her sketches she broadcast on YouTube and Dailymotion, such as "C'est quand que tu vas mettre des paillettes dans ma vie Kévin" (When are you going to put glitter in my life?); this sketch led to her meteoric rise, and it has surpassed one million views.

Others, like the comedian Haroun, described as the "sniper of French stand-up" by the magazine *Les Inrocks*, have even invented new modes of performance and communication. In fact, he came up with "Pasquinade." Never short of ideas, the stand-up reinvents the practice of humor, offering new content, developing a close link with their audience via social media or broadcasting free online live shows. It is therefore quite natural that in September 2019, Haroun creates, with his team, his own video platform, Pasquinade (the word, aged, refers to a satirical pamphlet or the facetiousness of a jester). The sites where he proposes his shows (En vrac, etc.) without an intermediary, without publicity, and without comment, is a space of total artistic freedom: "I did not want to write with a chain or a platform which would have stipulated to me what I have the right to say or not say. I wanted to be free, and the only way to be free was to create my own tools."[16]

Thus, the site presents itself as a large digital theater that welcomes spectators who can choose their shows and watch them online in exchange for payment. Everyone can support and help the comedian of their choice. Haroun has also set up a new way of collaborating with his audience; he asks the inhabitants of cities where he performs to communicate ideas or subjects they would like him to address on stage.

THE LEGACY

The question of heritage is present in stand-up and one-man shows but in a different way than in hip-hop or contemporary dance. Actually, young French, Belgian, or even Quebecois people of Arab origin deal with this question through their relationships with their immigrant parents and the country of origin they visit from time to time. It is an immediate relationship with the origins through childhood or adulthood experiences, often told on stage with humor, but with gravity at the same time. Among the stories that are often told in these shows, we find those that relate to the gap between a culture of origin with Arab-Muslim references and that of the host country; whether this relationship is through immigrant parents, often illiterate, who do not manage to integrate into a society that carries different values, or through their own experiences; their feelings go in a the opposite direction. They experience a gap as Westernized Arabs compared to the citizens of their country of origin. Their comments often include a social critique of certain aspects of the culture of origin such as social relations, religiosity, and the status of the Arab woman. In their shows they often denounce racism, an issue that affects them closely, and the non-recognition of their parents' and grandparents' of Arab origin culture.

Diasporic Or Post-Migration Theater

In an interview with Iraqi director and actor Karim Rashed, who has been living in exile in Sweden for 20 years, he said: "I think we can classify Arab playwrights in the diaspora into three categories. The first category includes a group of playwrights who have not been able to integrate into their host countries either because of their advanced age or lack of proficiency in the host country's language. The second group includes playwrights who create Arabic-language shows for the Arab community. They have remained confined to this margin. And a third category that includes a small number of artists who have been able to join the European professional milieu." It is this last category that will be discussed.

IN GERMANY

Because of the multiple civil wars that some Arab countries have experienced following the popular uprisings described by some media outlets as the "Arab Spring" Europe has seen a large number of refugees fleeing these wars. Their reception has not always been easy. Some Western countries have put up a lot of barriers to welcome as few refugees as possible, while others, like Germany, have been more open.

In 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany had a "national duty" to grant asylum to victims of the Middle East impacted by war. Two years after this declaration more than one million refugees were welcomed in Germany, half of whom were of Syrian origin. The arrival of this new Arab diaspora, mostly Middle Eastern, which settled in Europe has had a definite influence, not to say enormous, which has manifested itself at several levels, on the host countries. As far as the performing arts are concerned, our subject of study, it is in Germany that artists from this new wave of immigration have had the most opportunities. It is in this same country that new concepts such as "post-migration theater" were born.

As early as the 1980s, German municipal public institutions such as the Theater an der Ruhr in Mülheim or the Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin had already begun arts collaborations with migrants. With the desire to give artists with a migrant background a voice, the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theater developed an artistic and political practice based on the term "post-migrant theater" This took place under the directorship of Shermin Langhoff from 2008 to 2013, before she took over the Maxim Gorki Theater directorship in Berlin with Jens Hillje. The term reflects a cross-cultural and hybrid vision of German society, a utopia realized in the practice of this independent theater based in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin.

"Post-Migrant Theater" invites us to rethink migration by pointing to a new perspective, which implies that collective and individual history is permeated by it.

The aim was to assert the heterogeneity of society. The term spread very quickly in Europe, and the Naunynstraße theater became a rapid success, playing an important role in the affirmation and development of innovative political theater by people

with a migrant background. The success of Shermin Langhoff's experiment at the Ballhaus, who herself descended from a Turkish immigrant family, led to her appointment as director of Berlin's renowned Maxim Gorki Theater; as Gorki director, she quickly oriented the theater towards contemporary social concerns, particularly those of minority groups.

When the new waves of emigrants began to arrive in Berlin, the Gorki was thus already oriented towards their concerns and it immediately became a major center in Germany for Arab diaspora performances. In November 2016, Shermin Langhoff recruited six professional exiled actors from Syria, Palestine, and Afghanistan[17] to form the "Exile Theater." She installed this theater at the Maxim Gorki, and she obtained funding from the German government and private foundations. The actors were included in the regular Gorky productions; they were also present in two productions performed by them each year. The performances were based on their own and others' diasporic experiences. The first of these productions, *Winter Journey*, was exhibited in November 2017. It was a great success in Berlin. It also toured seven major German-speaking countries. The text is in German, English, and Arabic, with subtitles in all three languages. Germany's second largest theater city, Munich, is also a leader in diasporic theater. In October 2015, the Munich Kammerspiel hosted an Open Border Congress; it was dedicated to exploring how to open up theater to refugees from foreign theaters, who were forced to flee their home countries and production institutions. As a result, the Open Border Ensemble came about; in the 2017-2018 season, the Open Border Ensemble invited four refugee theater artists from Damascus, Syria, who worked with the Kammerspiele ensemble and also produced their own shows. The first of these, Miunickh-Damas (Stories from a City) "is an installation-performance, where some public spaces in Munich were temporarily transformed into a street corner in Damascus"

The Theater an der Ruhr has also been involved in international cultural work since its foundation in the 1980s. Thanks to Roberto Ciulli's long-standing commitment to the dialogue of cultures, an international network emerged which, within the framework of the "Silk Road" project, led to particularly intense connections with the artistic and theatrical scene in the Arab region.

The Theater an der Ruhr in Mülheim organizes a theater festival that hosts Arab shows produced by Arab artists such as *Carnivorous* by the Lebanese Issam Bou Khaled, *X-Adra* by the Syrian Ramzy Choukair, *Kharif - Herbst* by the Iraqi Sameem Hasab Allah (after *Haute Surveillance* by Genet), and *Ya Kebir* by the Syrian collective Ma'louba. The theater has received several Syrian artists in residence, such as Wihad Sulaiman, who in his show *Existence* intertwines the destinies of four people on the threshold of war; it also hosted the "Berliner" by Wasim Ghrioui, who tells the story of people in a neighborhood somewhere in Damascus before the war with precise observation and subtle irony in *TIN PIT-im Nirgendwo einer fremden Stadt* (TIN PIT-in the void of a foreign city).

Among the representative experiences of this diasporic or post-migrant theater that was born in the Theater an der Ruhr in Mülheim, we can mention the "Ma'louba Collective" This collective presents itself as "an intercultural theatrical laboratory" It is led by three Syrian artists, Rafat Alzakout, Muda Alhaggi, and Amal Omran, who are also the art directors.

The founding of this collective "is a reaction to the need to put the Arab language and culture in a different light and to help provide natural opportunities for artists from this region within our cultural landscape"[18]

In its theater productions, the Ma'luba collective questions the political and social situation in the Arab region in the context of recent events. It also offers other artistic projects with thematic interest, such as installations, exhibitions, and workshops; it accompanies theater productions to question the taboos of Syrian and Arab society and their condition as exiles. The collective showed *Ḥubbuk nār (Your love is Fire)* and *Days in the sun* by Mudar Alhaggi, and *Ya Kebir* by Amal Omran and Rafat Alzakout.

Finally, let's mention one of the few events dedicated to Arab theater in Germany, "Arabisches Theatertreffen"/"The Arab Theater Meetings in Hannover" The genesis of these meetings is linked to the Arab revolutions of 2011 and 2012. During the first event (2012), about 80 young theater professionals, mainly from North African countries, came together and were able to present their highly political productions to a German-speaking audience for the first time. After this great success, the event was then organized in 2014 under the title "Women's Awakening" and in 2017 it was titled "Refuge" and was more professional than its predecessors. For the fourth edition (2022), the organizers selected the theme "The heritage: visions, realities, and perspectives" Eight theater performances from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, and Kuwait, in addition to a joint production between the Pavilion and the Workshop Theater in Hanover, were presented. Thus, the German audience was able to attend: *iMedia* show by Suleiman Al-Bassam (Kuwait), *Another Sky* by Mohamed El Horr (Morocco), Jew by Hamadi Wahaibi (Tunisia), *The Last 15 Seconds* by Majdi Abu Matar (Lebanon- Canada), *"The Pain of the Universe"* by Lina Itani (Lebanon- France), *"For Heaven, Icarus"* by Ahmed Ezzat Al-Alfi (Egypt-Germany), *"GPS"* by Mohamed Cherchell (the show could not be presented due to the delay of German visas for the GPS team artists–the show presented a video), and *"The Second Edition 2045"* by Younes Atban (Morocco-Germany).

FRANCE

As mentioned above, it is thanks to the political commitment of a few theater women and men who have succeeded in mobilizing important public funds; in addition, because of German public policy in favor of integration of exiles and immigrants that Arab artists in exile today enjoy better visibility; consequently, they evolve under favorable material conditions that allow them to experiment with new ways of writing. In France, the situation is a little different. First of all, we noticed during our research that actions in the field of Arab theater and dance were addressed to Arab artists living in France as well as Arab countries. Even the majority of these actions were in favor of the latter; secondly, the initiatives in favor of Arab artists, whether they are in exile or not, are contextual. They are not part of a long-term strategy; unlike in Germany, they are not part of a global public policy. Accordingly, we listed a number of events organized by theaters or associations that only lasted for a season or two. We can cite the Théâtre Jean Vilar in Vitry-sur-Seine, directed by Nathalie Huerta, which in collaboration with the Arab Arts Focus association in Paris and Orient Productions in Cairo, organized, in 2021, "a focus on artist works in the Arab region" According to the organizers, this "offers a nice overview of the scenes that are still struggling. This event was an opportunity for the French public to discover the works of Arab artists such as Anglo-Lebanese Tanya El Khoury with *Cultural Exchange Rate*; Lebanese choreographer Ali Chahrour with *The Love Behind My Eyes*; Moroccan choreographer Taoufiq Izeddiou with *Hmadcha*; Egyptian Shaymaa Shoukry with *Fighting*; director of the Palestinian theater of Haifa Bashar Murkus with *Hash*; Leyla Rabih with *Traverses*; and Chrystèle Khodr with *Augures*.

Let's also mention the TAMAM–Theater of the Arts of the Arab region and the Mediterranean[19]–association Arab regionfounded in 2010 by Aline Gemayel, a Lebanese journalist who has been living in Avignon for the past 10 years; in collaboration with the Avignon Festival, she proposed, during the days of this world event, a program including Arab shows and master classes of theater immersion in favor of students from both sides of the Mediterranean, as well as practical workshops. Unfortunately, according to our research, the last major event the association organized was in 2015; this event included two shows designed and directed by the Tunisian playwright, director, and author Meriam Bousselmi: *Truth Box*, "theatrical installation, mobile confessional" and *What the Dictator did not say*, "immersive installation around the discourses of manipulation" The latest activities reported on their Facebook page, date from 2017; they are about theater immersion master classes.

Additionally, on the international francophone scene, there is the Le TRAMAC theater; the theater was founded in 1985 by Gabriel Garran; it is the only theater entirely dedicated to contemporary francophone performances in France. This establishment, which folded in 2019, hosted and produced from time to time theater and dance shows by Arab artists. Reacting to the Arab Spring, TARMAC officials dedicated the 2017 edition of the "Traversées" event to Arab performing arts (Traversée du monde arabe). On this occasion, artists who were considered as "avant-garde" were invited; these artists included Egyptian Mohamed El Attar, who showed *On the importance of being an Arab*, two Tunisian dancer-choreographers living in France, Hafiz Dhaou and Aicha M'Barek, *Sacré Printemps!* Tunisian Meriam Bousselmi *Truth Box*, Moroccan director Karim Troussi *La Civilisation, ma mère!…* and Lebanese choreographer Ali Chahrour *Fatmeh*, a piece adapted from a novel by Driss Chraïbi.

However, there were other more permanent events such as the Arabesques festival that takes place every year in Montpellier; this festival celebrated its 17th edition in 2022. The introduction on the festival website talks about the festival: "Founded in 2006 by the association UNi'SONS, the Arabesques festival encourages the visibility of Arab artists and promotes intercultural dialogue. It is now the most important festival in Europe dedicated to the arts in the Arab region. The festival offers a multidisciplinary program mixing music, theater, storytelling, cinema, dance, humor, and calligraphy…to enhance culture in the Arab region, from its traditional artistic expressions to its contemporary forms. Arabesques has become an unmissable event where both emerging artists and "living legends" meet.[20] UNi'SONS also organizes, in addition to the annual festival, 'La Caravane Arabesques,' which is an arts program that follows the festival and travels to different places in France"

We noticed that it is music that occupies the most slots in this festival. This event is mainly addressed to the general public, with calligraphy, oriental cakes, and crafts stands. In the last edition (2022), theater was represented by only a few artists including three stand-ups of Arab origin and the Moroccan show *Cabaret Chikhat*.

Another French platform that has played and still plays an important role in the dissemination and promotion of Arab artistic creations is La Friche la Belle de Mai.

Founded in 1992 in Marseille, the Friche la Belle de Mai is a place of creation and innovation, a "Third-Place" representing a new cultural and urban model. It is both a working space for its 70 resident structures (350 artists, producers, and employees who work there every day) and a place for dissemination (600 public artistic proposals per year, from workshops for young audiences to the biggest festivals). This establishment has welcomed and produced a significant number of Arab artists or artists of Arab origin.

The Friche la Belle de Mai has organized several events to give contemporary Arab theater visibility such as *Hiwarat* (dialogue in Arabic) in 2013. Meetings centered on contemporary Arab dramaturgies, which were the result of three years of work with Palestinians from Al Harah Teater, Tunisians from El Teatro, and Lebanese from Shams. After selecting, translating, and publishing four contemporary Arabic plays collected in a dozen countries, they were performed on stage. The four plays were *Hello wants to say hello* by the Lebanese Tarek Bacha, *Bye Bye Gillo* written by Moroccan Adnan Taha and directed by Palestinian Bashar Murkus, *N'enterrez pas trop vite Big Brother* written by Moroccan author Driss Ksikes and directed by Catherine Marnas.

Furthermore, there is Les Rencontres à l'échelle - Bancs Publics, a resident structure of the Friche Belle de Mai, which is dedicated to contemporary forms of performing arts, theater, dance, and performance, all of which are bearers of a narrative of otherness.

This event (Les Rencontres à l'échelle - Bancs Publics), directed by Julie Kretzschmar, aims to be "a crossroads that encourages the discovery of artists and authors who are not often identified in Europe. A festival bearing the singularity of a Fabrique des Suds, which is a singular, plural, and non-hierarchical creation space, intertwines Marseille, Mediterranean countries, Africa, and multiple anchoring points in its diaspora"[21] This institution welcomed and accompanied several Arab artists such as Ali Chahrour, Petra Serhal, and Ali, whose show it produces, *Under a Low Sky*. In 2022, the 17th edition of the festival will take place.

From 2016 to 2017, the Friche la Belle de Mai also hosted *Performance(s) between two shores*, a Euro-Mediterranean project coordinated by Les Bancs Publics and supported by the European Commission as part of the Culture Europe Creative program. "Based on a call for artists from the Arab region who recently settled in Europe, the project unfolds around hosting in residence, production, and dissemination of three performances. It aims to work toward the professionalization of these artists and facilitate knowledge sharing and skills development between six cultural organizations"

Moreover, there is the "Arab Scenes; University Meetings on Performing Arts in the Arab region" a biennial event initiated by Omar Fertat in 2016. Fertat is a teacher at the University of Bordeaux Montaigne; the event's goal is to create a space for exchange between artists and researchers on the one hand and between cultural actors from the Arab region and Europe on the other. This event is structured around an international symposium that takes place every two years where it is devoted to a given theme (the last edition was devoted to "Transformations and mutations in the Arab performing arts"), round tables, meetings with Arab artists, theater workshops, and a show. Among the artists who have been hosted in this event are Jalila Baccar (Tunisia), Driss Ksikes, Zohra Makach, Mohamed Kaouti, Asmaa Houri, Mahmoud Chahdi, Jaouad Essounani (Morocco), Nora Amine (Egypt), Slimane Ben Aïssa (Algeria-France), Amre Sawah and Bissan Cherif (Syrian refugees in France), Mohamed Sef (Iraq-France), Diya Hijazi (Syria-Sweden), and Ahmed Tobasi (Palestine). The 2024 edition was the fourth edition.

EXAMPLE OF AN EXILED ARTIST WHO SUCCEEDS IN EUROPE: WAËL ALI

Among Syrian artists in exile in France who have distinguished themselves in recent years by producing compelling works is Syrian artist Waël Ali who settled in France in 2007.

Syrian writer and director Waël Ali was born in 1979. In 2004 he graduated from the Higher Institute of Performing Arts in Damascus. He then obtained his Master's degree in Performing Arts at the University Louis Lumière of Lyon II where he enrolled in a PhD program.

Between 2003 and 2006, Waël worked as a dramaturge and speaker in an interactive theater project in Syria where he co-directed and led training sessions in various Syrian provinces. During this same period, he worked in Damascus as a dramaturge with the "Studio Théâtre" collective, notably on the show *L'Affiche* by Philippe Ducros. Since 2010, Waël has written several pieces for the theater and participates in interdisciplinary arts projects.

He made a name for himself in 2014 with his first play in France *Je ne me souviens plus*; in this play he directed the former political prisoner and musician Hassan Abd Alrahman. In his second play *Sous un ciel bas* (2019), Waël Ali addressed the question of an exiled artist in times of war by staging the figure of Jamal, a Syrian documentary filmmaker in his forties like Waël, who has been living in France for several years. He feels trapped in a situation that prevents him from creating images, "how can I look, just look at the present when I no longer have a past that belongs to me"[22] he says.

Obsessed by the idea of the loss of his past, powerless in the face of the disappearance of the abandoned or destroyed places of his memory, he also sees his friends scattered around the world. "Jamal really exists, he is a filmmaker friend who does not make films, he waits for the war to end" explains Waël Ali. There is Jamal, the filmmaker who no longer makes videos, and Waël, his writer friend, a man of the theater, who produces plays. *Under a Low Sky* speaks of an artist in exile and of his status as an artist from a country at war. Ali writes about the legitimacy of writing and the paradoxical relationship between theater and politics during a war that never ends.

In this show, Waël Ali brings together two forms of writing, two registers, the intimate and the political, which create a dialogue between a multitude of views and several temporalities that converge on the same object: a territory that is always on the run.

In 2017 Waël Ali co-produced with Lebanese actress, author, and director Chrystèle Khodr *Titre provisoire*.

"Nourished by his experience of interactive theater–highly developed in Syria since the 2000s, this practice is inspired by Brazilian Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed techniques–as well as by Western and Lebanese post-war documentary theater, Waël Ali develops a hybrid form–a theater that documents its own powerlessness through different means, human and technological. Camera in hand, Waël Ali films himself expressing his difficulties in making the slightest choices. While, almost mute, Chrystèle Khodr listens to the soundtrack recorded by her uncle. The technicians and other collaborators–Hassan Al Balkhi, Toni Geitani, and Khaled Yassine, who were introduced at the beginning of the show by Waël Ali–remain silent around a table. All of them were simultaneously at the heart of the performance in progress and cut off from it in a certain way.[23]

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Some Arab artists in exile benefit from important material aid from certain private and public institutions, especially in Germany where several theaters, such as the Gorky, the Theater an der Ruhr or the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, have committed themselves to the minorities in exile cause; these include nationals from Arab countries at war, namely Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. In fact, theater women and men from these war-torn countries have benefited from the implementation of European public policies in favor of exiles; these policies aim to remedy the assimilation problems they may encounter trying to integrate into societies that are foreign to them.

At the institutional level, the European Union has always recognized culture as an important tool for promoting democracy, civil rights, and social cohesion. The European Commission has repeatedly insisted on the concept of "cultural diplomacy" to emphasize that the preservation of cultural heritage and diversity is an important instrument for the consolidation of social cohabitation and inclusion, as well as a tool to prevent the development of social disintegration and exclusion.

Undoubtedly, the recent history of European cultural cooperation, which began in the 1980s, has recently integrated new forms of partnership with initiatives from its networks and individual artists. French, German, and Italian art and culture professionals have used the European Union's Culture program to launch transnational initiatives, while local and regional actors have launched important funding campaigns for various projects concerning post-migrant or diasporic theater. In Sweden, the Arabiska Teatern in Stockholm presents plays in Arabic for an Arabic-speaking audience, based on the ideas and artistic will of Arabic-speaking performers. In Belgium, Bozar (Palais des Beaux-Arts),[24] in France Les Bancs Publics, both artist residencies and the festival at Friche la Belle de Mai in Marseille, Shubbak in London, Dancing on the Edge in Amsterdam, and recently the Napoli Teatro Festival in Italy, have dedicated several residencies, productions, and stagings to Arab theater produced outside their national borders. AFAC has also financed some of the structures previously mentioned, such as TAMAM and "Arabiska Teatern" and some artists from the diaspora, for instance Waël Ali.

Waël Ali's *Under a Low Sky*, for example, was financially supported by the European Commission as part of the Europe Creativity program and has been performed at La Friche la Belle de Mai in Marseille, the Napoli Teatro Festival in Italy, Shubbak in London, Bozar in Belgium, and Dancing on the Edge in Amsterdam.

ABOUT THE SYRIAN EXILED ARTISTS

Theater artists experience forced exile as a heartbreak. "They were trained with the idea of changing society. Then the historical moment came and the revolution was usurped from those who started it. Since then, they feel guilty for having left Syria, having grown up with the idea that the intellectual must be at the forefront of the struggle" explains Hanan Kassab Hassan, former director of the Higher Institute of Drama Arts in Damascus– an institution where all contemporary Syrian playwrights have passed through.

		Official institutions in your country	Private institutions in your country	Foreign cultural institutes in your country	National NGOs	Regional NGOs	Inter-national NGOs	Other	Total
If yes, what institutions have you dealt with to support the production of your artworks ?	Diaspora	9	8	8	5	2	4	2	12
Total		9	8	8	5	2	4	2	12

Whether they are from Lebanon, France, or Germany, the survival of the theater is an obvious need: "We are looking for answers to what is happening to us through our art" summarizes Omar Abu Saada. Many artists in exile use theater to inform foreign audiences about Syrian reality, far from summarized media reports. Far from their homeland, through theater they find a way to maintain the umbilical cord: "Working on shows that take place in Syria is a way of staying there. A form of documentary theater has developed after the beginning of the revolution; there is a will to show, to tell things as they are on the spot. This led to works like *Could you please look into the camera?* says Jumana el-Yasiri, a graduate of the Higher Institute of Drama Arts in Damascus who has been living in France for five years.

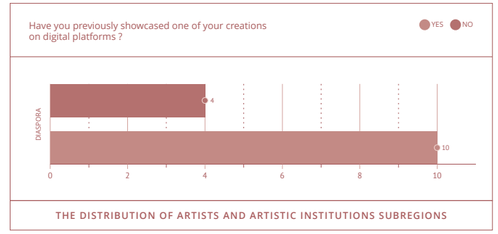
As far as the professional Syrian theater productions in exile is concerned, it is in exile that the true writing of history is freely expressed. Consequently, a form of documentary theater appears that not only retranscribes current events, but it also reflects the cultural and aesthetic changes that accompany the current transformations in the region. These transformations include texts, images, videos, sounds, and also work on a language that tries to get as close as possible to the one that testifies from daily life, and which is none other than that of social media.

Today Mohamad al-Attar's, Modar Hajji's, Abdullah al-Kafri's, Waël Ali's, among others, plays are mainly seen by a non-Syrian audience; and this reality that confronts these authors, pushes them to constantly question the very function and potential impact of their writing on the ongoing and long-term events; therefore, they find themselves in a phase of constant research and experimentation where the foundations of Syrian theater are probably being laid.

THE PLACE OF DIGITALIZATION IN THE WORKS PRODUCED BY EXILED OR REFUGEE ARTISTS IN EUROPE

The diasporic or post-migrant theater animated by Arab refugees or exiles gives an important place for new technologies and digitalization. This is due to several reasons. First of all, they evolve professionally where the use of new technical means becomes commonplace. In addition, most of these theater men and women collaborate with European technicians and artists. From an aesthetic point of view, their works are part of postmodern drama currents, such as visual theater, or image theater, or even intermedia theater. Furthermore, videos and images occupy a central place in many of their works. Some even speak of a new documentary theater. They want to be witnesses to a delicate period in their countries' history; hence, they are giving themselves up to a kind of archiving which constitutes an indelible trace of what they are living. These artists deliver an important reflection on the place of the image in the theater and the preservation of the memory. Some of them, like Waël Ali, in *Sous un ciel bas* or in *Titre provisoire*, show great ingenuity in the use of new digital technologies.

As for the place of legacies in their work, it is often expressed in an indirect way or in filigree. The urgency of saying predominates their work. In their plays, most of them deal with the actuality of the war and exile that they live in far from their native country.



THE DISTRIBUTION OF ARTISTS AND ARTISTIC INSTITUTIONS SUBREGIONS

ARAB PLAYWRIGHTS WHO HAVE INTERNATIONAL OR NATIONAL VISIBILITY IN THE HOST COUNTRIES

Finally, we should mention the names of a few playwrights of Arab origin who are renown in their host countries, and even internationally. These artists, without constituting a homogeneous current, can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The most famous of them is Lebanese-Quebecer Wajdi Mouawad, director, playwright, actor, art director, visual artist, and filmmaker, who currently directs the prestigious Théâtre national de la Colline in Paris. He is one of the few Arab playwrights who have given several performances at the Avignon Festival: *Littoral* (1999) and *Seuls* (2008). He became an associate artist in 2009 by presenting his quartet *Le Sang des Promesses: Littoral, Incendies, Forêts and Ciels*. He is a very active artist with more than twenty plays to his name, and some forty productions, as well as seven essays. He directed the film Incendie based on his play of the same name; he also directed two operas: *L'Enlèvement au sérail* by Mozart, at the Opéra National de Lyon, (2016) and *Œdipe* by Georges Enesco, at the Opéra National de Paris, (2021).

He has received several awards including the Governor General's Literary Award in the theater category for *Littoral*, the Molière for the best French-speaking author, which he refused (2005), the Belgian Critics' Prize for the best play for *Incendies* (2007), the Grand prix du théâtre de l'Académie française (2009), the Grand prix de littérature dramatique awarded under the aegis of ARTCENA (2019), European Drama Award given by Schauspiel Stuttgart, the theater section of the National Theater of Stuttgart, for all his drama work (2020).

Additionally, there is a young author in his forties who has made a lot of noise lately, the Franco-Moroccan Mohamed el Khatib. This playwright comes from a Moroccan family of five children. After a brief career as a footballer, he turned to sociology; he studied in hypokhâgne and khâgne, then joined Sciences Po and obtained a DEA in geography in Mexico. At the same time, he became a cultural reports editor for the Mexican edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*. He then began his thesis on theater criticism in the national press. At the University of Artois in Liévin, he is an associate artist at the SHERPA sociology laboratory. At the same time, he organized theater camps for underprivileged youth at the Avignon Festival with the CEMÉA.

He founded the Zirlib collective in 2008 based on the following premise: aesthetics is not without political meaning. He wrote and produced his first piece *A l'abri de rien* in 2015, then *Sheep* in 2016. In 2014, during a research residency at L'L - Brussels (research laboratory for contemporary creation), he affirmed his theater talent with *Finir en beauté*, a play about the death of his mother for which he was awarded the Grand Prix de littérature dramatique in October 2016. In 2014, he directed *Moi, Corinne Dadat*, the story of a cleaning lady he met while leading theater workshops at the Sainte-Marie high school in Bourges. In 2017, he wrote *C'est la vie*, whose text won an award from the French Academy; it is a play with two actors who have lost a child. The play swings between fiction and reality. The same year, he brought 58 Racing Club de Lens fans on stage for *Stadium*, implanting the universe of the stadium in the theater and invited filmmaker Alain Cavalier in Conversation.

Mohamed El Khatib continued his research on family and inheritance with his film *Renault 12*, an initiatory road movie between Orleans and Tangiers. *La Dispute* brings together eight-year-olds who testify to the separation of their parents. In 2019, he wrote *L'Acteur fragile*, a monologue for Éric Elmosnino, where he testifies about the paradox of being an actor. His last play, *Boule à neige*, in 2020, with the historian Patrick Boucheron, questions, through the origin and the trajectory of the snow globe, the relationship between kitsch, art history, and the placing of the world under a bell.

His work consists of mixing actors and non-professionals on stage with a high degree of authenticity; his work can be linked to artists such as the Berlin group, Milo Rau, Jérôme Bel, or Michel Schweizer. His pieces are born from encounters and exchanges, confronting the most banal everyday life with a demanding aesthetic.

The Arab Diaspora In Other Countries

There are of course other Arab artists in the other European and American countries, in particular in England and in Italy; however, their action and visibility remain limited. Few are those who have succeeded in imposing themselves as those we have mentioned above. However, there are artists like the Anglo-Iraqi playwright Hassan Abdulrazzak who, while having completed his scientific studies (he holds a doctorate in molecular biology), has invested himself in writing for the theater. Hassan's first play, *Baghdad Wedding*, based on long interviews in Cairo with revolutionaries and soldiers, journalists and cab drivers was performed at the Soho Theater in 2007 with great success. It has subsequently had productions in Australia and India and has also been broadcast on BBC Radio. His play *The Prophet*, was performed at the Gate Theater in 2012. He was commissioned by the Kevin Spacey Foundation to write *Dhow Under The Sun*, a play for 35 young actors, which was staged in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (January 2015). His play *Love, Bombs, and Apples* premiered at the Arcola Theater as part of the Shubbak Festival in July 2015. It then featured at the Arcola Theater in 2016 as part of a national tour in the UK. His play *And Here I Am* dwells on the life story of a Palestinian fighter turned artist; it was part of the 2017 Shubbak Festival. He has translated numerous plays into Arabic, including Chronicles of a City We Never Knew by Waël Kadour (reading at Gate Theater 2019), Voluntary Work by Laila Soliman (reading at the Royal Court Theater 2012), and 603 by Imad Farajin (reading at the Royal Court Theater 2008).

He is a recipient of the George Devine, Meyer-Whitworth, and Pearson Theater Awards as well as the Arab British Center Award for Culture. His play Love, Bombs, and Apples won the Bay Area Theater Award in 2018 and And Here I Am won the Best Monodrama Award at the 2019 Sharm El Sheikh International Youth Theater Festival. He was a Sundance Theater Lab fellow in 2020.

Lastly, there is another Arab playwright living in Canada who recently past away and who was very active and invested in theater. The Lebanese-Canadian Majdi Abou Matar was the famous Tunisian artist Azzedin Guennoun's student. He was a director, actor, and dancer by training. He moved to Canada when his wife was accepted at the University of Waterloo to pursue her PhD. Wanting to pursue his career in Canada as an artist, he was auditioned by various theater companies in southern Ontario. However, after receiving the same criticisms over and over again, hearing that his accent was too thick or that he "didn't look the part" Majdi decided to create a group that would become a platform for all artists who felt marginalized, racialized, and displaced. As a result, the IMPACT Festival was founded. It is a bi-annual theater festival held in Kitchener, Ontario since 2009. It featured productions from around the world; but it also gave local artists the opportunity to showcase their work. The festival created a model for how other communities across Canada could showcase marginalized and racialized communities' work.

With the help of the Syrian actress Nada Homsi, he staged shows in Arabic that were very successful, even in Arab countries. The play *The Last 15 Seconds*, which tells the story of the last days of the great filmmaker Mahmoud al Aqad before his death from a terrorist attack, has been the most appreciated by critics. His latest piece was *Body 13* (2013), where he addressed the sexual identity issue.

Conclusion

When reviewing the Arab diasporic performing arts in Europe, it is clear that their animators are strongly present in two countries: France and Germany, and to a lesser extent in Belgium and the Netherlands when it comes to contemporary dance. In other European countries where the concentration of Arab

populations is less important, the performances proposed by the Arab diaspora are less visible. In recent years, thanks to the European Union's global policy in favor of the integration of exiles, some countries, such as Italy, have begun to pay more attention to foreign communities, including Arab minorities, which has resulted in some Arab artists works' visibility.

This study explains that it is the important concentration of the Arab communities in France and Germany, due to the colonial past of France and due to Germany's reception policy in favor of Syrian immigrants, which allowed the emergence of certain arts and performative currents or tendencies. Arab artists or of Arab origin played an important role in these trends. France, as early as the nineteenth century, welcomed the first Maghrebi immigrants from its colonies; hence, it was natural the country witnessed the first attempts of diasporic drama expressions. These expressions are what some researchers described as the "theater of immigration" It is a theater fulfilled by Maghrebi immigrant workers; through this theater they tried to take the floor, which was confiscated from them. They claimed the right to dignity and better living conditions through this theater. Starting in the late 1970s, this artistic phenomenon, which was born within union organizations and thanks to the support of organizations involved in the defense of the immigrant cause, gradually ran out of steam. Second and third (Maghreb) generations, composed of children and grandchildren from the first North African immigrants, continued the fight but in other forms; they tried to widen their audience beyond immigrant communities. And they pushed for other demands such as the right to equality, the fight against racism, etc. However, despite their efforts, and due to a lack of means and public policy in their favor, their plays and works remained marginalized in a society that had difficulty accepting them as full-fledged French citizens.

It wasn't until the 1990s that an unprecedented artistic phenomenon, imported from the United States, emerged in French society and was very successful, especially among immigrant children. It was hip-hop culture (rap, graph, dance). Hip-hop was an urban culture with a protesting essence. It was very quickly adopted by "young people of the cities" a majority of which were French of Arab origin, or by "the third generation of immigrants" The arrival to power of the Socialists during the 1980s played an important role in the recognition of this new culture and its actors. For this reason, especially in the field of dance, artists of Arab origin from working-class backgrounds were able to achieve notoriety and a certain "legitimization." To do so, they had to respond to a kind of "injunction to hybridize" which consisted in transforming their art, their basic dance, by integrating other dances and other "more legitimate" art forms that were accepted and recognized by the host society. This gave rise to a new hybrid, mixed and creolized shows that were met with great success, not only in France, but internationally. Moreover, this new art form benefited from public authorities' support who, in an unprecedented move, appointed directors from Arab minorities to head National Choreographic Centers, prestigious public establishments. Directors played the role of transmitters and promoters of this creolized hip-hop culture; they trained new generations and disseminated their works on a larger scale, particularly in their countries of origin.

Contemporary dance, perhaps because it is a relatively recent artistic field and more open to foreign influences, has also seen the emergence of certain artists from the Arab diaspora: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Héla Fattoumi, and Radhouane el Meddeb or Nasser Martin-Gousset are today, alongside other dancers from minorities such as Akram Khan, Hofesh Shechter, or Ohad Naharin, some of the most eminent representatives of this discipline. Unlike the new hip-hop scene, not all contemporary dancers are Europeans from Arab origins, i.e., born in or arrived in Europe at a very young age. A number of them arrived in Europe as adults. These artists propose original works which, while translating an artistic sensitivity drawn from their cultures of origin, are part of a modern approach that tends towards universality. Today, these artists enjoy great recognition. Some of them, such as Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui or Héla Fatoumi, hold important management positions in European institutions.

The other field where members of the Arab diaspora, especially those of the third and fourth generations, are making a name for themselves, especially in France and Belgium, is stand-up comedy and one-man shows. A field that was, like hip-hop, imported from the United States; it was born on the fringe before it became famous. If hip-hop dance started in suburbs' streets on the edges of big cities, these new kinds of comedy shows appeared in the media, and more precisely on private television channels, such as Canal Plus. This media coverage contributed to the emergence of a generation of comedians of North African origin who, little by little, succeeded in imposing themselves on the European comedy scene, especially the French-speaking ones. Some of them, such as Jamel Debbouz or Nawell Madani, have become prime attractions in theater, cinema, and television. Benefiting from important means, thanks to private producers of shows or cinema, such as Kader Aoun, who do not hesitate to invest big sums, many actors of the new comedy scene, have launched ambitious projects. These projects include the founding of a stand-up school, the production of films and shows, the creation of television programs or, for some, the opening of their own theaters. Today, digital distribution platforms such as Netflix or Amazon Prime do not hesitate to produce certain comedians such as Haroun or Nawell Madani. Surfing on the wave, the same platforms even offer programs dedicated to stand-up comedy. This generation of 2.0 comedians, as some media call them, is taking advantage of social media and the possibilities they offer. They take advantage of these mediums to broadcast their shows, which they sometimes adapt to these new broadcasting channels, such as short capsules, and to create a direct interaction with their fans and followers. According to this research, we found that it is in this field, the new comedy scene, especially in France, that the largest number of artists from the Arab diaspora, especially Maghreb, are evolving quantitatively.

If artists from the Arab diaspora are well represented in the fields of contemporary dance and comedy, they are less represented in theater. Granted, few theater men and women, such as Wajdi Muawad, Théâtre de la Colline director in Paris, are at the head of important establishments dedicated to the fourth art. Some attempts that were undertaken in the framework of "immigration theater" or "beur theater" during the 60s, 70s, and even 80s, were not crowned with success due to lack of recognition and support from the Establishment. Perhaps the European theater world, with its long history, is a closed circle that is difficult to penetrate, especially when one comes from other cultures and distant lands. In these host countries, one can be inspired by foreign cultures, like Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine, but artists from these same cultures are rarely given the chance to create and propose their own works. Slimane Benaïssa, an Algerian playwright exiled in France since the 1990s, told us about the great difficulties he encounters in writing and being accepted in the French circuits. For lack of means, he turned to writing like many other playwrights of North African origin. For this reason, Karim Rached, a theater man of Iraqi origin exiled in Sweden for more than twenty years, faces the same difficulties; he says that few theater men and women from the Arab diaspora

manage to have professional careers and impose themselves as important figures in the cultural and artistic circles of Europe.

Nevertheless, in recent years, due to the massive arrival of Syrian refugees fleeing the war, especially to Germany, and thanks to the implementation of new public policies, especially at the European Union level and in Germany, in favor of integrating exiles and immigrants, a noticeable change has taken place. A European network bringing together several institutions and organizations engaged in the struggle for a better representation of minorities in the European artistic field and for a rapprochement between European artists and their Arab counterparts, has begun in recent years to open up creative spaces for Arab artists or artists from the Arab diaspora. This "unofficial" network, whose members are in Sweden (the Arabiska Teatern in Stockholm), Belgium (the Bozar-Palais des Beaux-Arts or the Goethe-Institut in Brussels), France (Les Bancs Publics, La Friche la Belle de Mai in Marseilles, The Arab region Institute in Paris), England (the Shubbak in London), Holland (the Dancing on the Edge in Amsterdam), Germany (the Gorki, the Theater an der Ruhr or the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, the Theater an der Ruhr of Mülheim), and in Italy (the Napoli Teatro Festival), dedicate slots, within the framework of programs financed by the European Union, to Arab performing arts; these performances may be produced outside each country's national borders as in Europe. They can be produced during residencies; this network offers them spaces of diffusion, creation, and collaboration.

It is thanks to this new situation that groups and collectives of artists from the Arab diaspora, such as the "Open Border Ensemble" or the "Collectif Ma'louba" have been able to see the light of day; they have been able to offer their performances, and their experiences could be emphasized. This is also the case for artists residing in Europe or in their countries of origin, such as Mohamad al-Attar, Modar Hajji, Abdullah al-Kafri, Waël Ali, Ali Chahrour, Leïla Solimane, Hassan el Gretly, the Malas brothers, Bissane al Charif, and Omar Abu Saada.

Nevertheless, we conclude our remarks by saying that unlike the Arab artists who arrived in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and who did not have the opportunity to create and present their work to European audiences, in recent times, artists from the Arab diaspora are beginning to enjoy more space and visibility in the European arts field. This exposure is primarily due to political and ideological reasons. The consequences of the popular revolts in certain Arab countries and the civil wars that followed forced a large part of these populations to go into exile in Europe; this sequence of events largely explains the interest that has been shown in certain artists who, in the eyes of their backers and supporters, embody a "democratic opposition" to authoritarian regimes. Moreover, when one closely looks at the shows produced by these selected artists, one realizes that their main themes revolve around war and being in exile. A political theater has developed with a documentary character; this theater is a testimony that stages the suffering and injustices suffered by a population that is the victim of its bloodthirsty leaders' madness. The European Union mobilized so much money and means to support this kind of work. Was it ultimately a way to ease its conscience in the face of the ignominy of a European policy that has caused, in part, such a reality? Was it to safeguard its economic and strategic interests? Is it the European Union's way of justifying its eyes being closed to the abuses and crimes of these same dictators that are denounced in these shows? Will this policy in favor of these artists, which finds its reasons in political and ideological considerations, last indefinitely? Then there is the question of immigration and exiles, which has arisen because of the massive arrival of Syrians on European soil: how will they cope, in the face of the rise of anti-immigration extremism in Europe and the rise of some parties (Italy, for example)? With these artists continue to benefit from the means granted by the European States?

Researcher Hanan Kassab Hassan says:

> *"Donor enthusiasm (those who used to finance Syrian artists' performances) is finally waning. European compassion towards Syrian refugees is mixed with exasperation with the new waves of migrants invading Europe. We must not forget the co-financing that has led to unprecedented unemployment in the world of theater. This makes it increasingly difficult for refugee artists to work in a European cultural landscape exhausted from economic crises."*[25]

Perhaps theater men and women from the Arab diaspora, while taking advantage of the current situation, must set up parallel networks built around solid and sustainable arts projects that are not only responses to the specifications of certain donors. They need to explore other artistic horizons that go beyond the single issue of identity and only immediate concerns related to war and being in exile. It will also be necessary to give the opportunity to other less visible Arab artists, which are immensely talented; these artists carry other aesthetics and explore other universes and imagery. It is always the same Arab artists who benefit from the opportunities offered by European organizations and institutions. And this is perhaps one of the important roles that AFAC can play by supporting arts projects for theater men and women, performers, and choreographers from the Arab diaspora; this pool of artists typically receive less support, and they are less visible despite their talent. They propose original works that are not necessarily in line with the demand of some European donors or in line with the times. This line of action can also focus on visibility in Europe and in the world of quality works produced in the Arab region that deserve to be known and exposed to an international audience. Apart from a few rare meetings, there is no space for creation and work bringing together Arab artists from both sides of the Mediterranean. It is really important and vital to set up such spaces, which will constitute "third spaces" These spaces are a kind of incubation for arts projects and original ideas; they are likely to give impetus to an Arab production that is not visible in Europe and in the world.

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1 Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics. At Home Abroad*, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

2 Nathalie Heinich, Roberta Shapiro (eds.), *De l'artification. Enquêtes sur le passage à l'art*, Paris, EHESS, coll. "Cas de figure" 2012, 336 p.

3 He goes even further to say that actors who do not meet these requirements are simply excluded and marginalized. He especially cites the example of some rappers who, because they wanted to preserve the original purity of their art, were excluded from festivals and media spaces.

4 Virginie Millot, "Vers une intégration pluraliste" *Les cahiers millénaires*, no 19, supplement, Lyon, February 2000.

5 Co-produced by Cie Melting Spot, Le Bateau Feu-Scène nationale de Dunkerque and Lille 2004, Six fous en quête de hauteur also benefited from a sponsorship action by La Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations.

6 In 2010, this creation was the subject of a remix version which is part of the project entitled *Des légendes du Hip Hop à la danse d'aujourd'hui (Hip Hop legends in today's dance)*, led by Kader Attou, Director of the CCN of La Rochelle/Poitou Charentes.

7 https://www.numeridanse.tv/themas/expositions/fouad-boussouf

8 https://www.numeridanse.tv/themas/expositions/fouad-boussouf

9 https://www.jeuneafrique.com/175231/societe/sidi-larbi-cherkaoui-dans-l-islam-c-est-la-danse-le-plus-important/

10 *Ibdem.*

11 He played in two films by Férid Boughedir *Un été à la Goulette* and Halfaouine, l'enfant des terrasses.

12 https://www.institutfrancais.de/fr/hamburg/event/radhouane-el-meddeb-face-la-mer-pour-que-les-larmes-deviennent-des-eclats-de-rire

13 *Smaïn, Je reviens me chercher*, Éd Michel Laffon, Paris, 2001.

14 https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/910487/culture/entre-tabous-et-cliches-les-humoristes-dorigine-maghrebine-se-sont-fait-une-place-dans-le-stand-up-francais/

15 Yousra Sbaihi, "Comedy for the memorization of atrocities: Maghrebi comedians on European stages" [https://trafo.hypotheses.org/40900 8 on]

16 https://www.haroun.fr/#pasquinade

17 The six actors are: Maryam Abu Khaled , Mazen Aljubbeh , Karim Daoud, Kenda Hmeidan and Kinan Hmeidan .

18 https://www-gorki-de.translate.goog/en/company/collectivemalouba?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=fr&_x_tr_hl=fr&_x_tr_pto=sc

19 Tamam received funding from AFAC.

20 https://www.festivalarabesques.fr/festival

21 https://www.lesrencontresalechelle.com/a-propos/les-bancs-publics

22 https://www.lesrencontresalechelle.com/productions/sous-un-ciel-bas.

23 https://sceneweb.fr/chrystele-khodr-wael-ali-theatre-exil/

24 In partnership with the Goethe Institute in Brussels, Bozar launched the "Halaqat" project in 2021, financed in part by the European Union, through which they intend to "strengthen the meeting points between the Arab world and Europe and build bridges between the two regions". Residencies and creative spaces are offered to Arab artists selected, following a call for projects, in the fields of visual arts, music, cinema and performance.

25 Hanan Kassab Hassan, "Le théâtre pour survivre : réflexions autour de la production théâtrale syrienne" Alternatives théâtrales, n° 147, dossier : "Scènes contemporaines des mondes arabes, 2022., p. 20-23



PERFORMING ARTS IN THE LEVANT

by Astrid Chabrat-Kajdan

Palestine & Lebanon
2007 - 2022


DANSE

Introduction

The fragmentation of Palestinian society has given rise to distinct poles of artistic production, with performing arts addressing divergent issues depending on whether they emerge from the Occupied Territories, Jerusalem, Gaza, or Israel. In Palestine, the 1993 Oslo Accords marked a turning point for Palestinian society and the performing arts. This turning point was both internal and international. Performing arts institutions and artists are mainly supported by foreign donors and in particular by the European Union, its institutions and member states. Foreign donors, through their investment in a development policy in Palestine, have in a way enabled the birth of a "permanent theater industry"[1] However, the performing arts have been experiencing a major turning point since 2019; in addition to the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences on the sector,[2] the European Union has added an anti-terrorist clause to its funding.[3] The vast majority of performing arts organizations refuse to submit to this clause because they believe it violates freedom of speech.[4] As a result, they are no longer able to receive EU funds, which were the most important funds in terms of their amounts.[5]

In Lebanon, successive and crescendoing financial crises form the conjuncture that the Lebanese society is going through. In 2006, the war between Israel and Hezbollah broke out; Lebanon, already weakened by the civil war (1975-1990), experienced a massive financial crisis from 2007 to 2010. Since 2011, the country has had the highest refugee-to-population ratio in the world. The majority of refugees are Syrian (about 1.5 million[6]) and Palestinian (about 400,000[7]). Most Palestinians were exiled following the 1948 Nakba and the 1967 Six Day War; Syrian refugees have been arriving since 2011, when the escalation of violence in Syria began. The country experienced another crisis between 2014 and 2016; it was described as "political paralysis" and caused by parliament that was in fact "an empty shell" "When the rubbish dump receiving Beirut's garbage closed and rubbish accumulated in the capital, the rubbish crisis in the summer of 2015 was added to the electricity, water, and refugee crises"[8] Three years later, in response to a multifaceted crisis, uprisings took place from October 2019 against "years and years of corruption"[9] The crisis was further intensified by the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic and compounded by the explosion at the Beirut port on August 4, 2020. This crisis is unprecedented. It is not only economic, but also political and social. With inflation rates in double and triple figures and a record devaluation of the Lebanese pound, today many Lebanese survive thanks to their families in the diaspora who send them hard currency.[10] Performing arts are very strongly affected since the crisis threatens the base and sustainability of the activity.

Whether it is the Lebanese Ministry of Culture or that of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), their role is very limited when it comes to the performing arts. Cultural actors are suspicious, critical, and even in opposition to them.[11] Authorities' involvement is constrained not only by budgetary limitations, but also by the level of attention they dedicate to culture and its perceived necessity within Palestinian and Lebanese societies. The jurisdiction of the PNA and its Ministry of Culture is also geographically limited since the Oslo Accords fragmented Palestine and marginalized East Jerusalem. Theaters, groups, and artists based in East Jerusalem cannot receive grants from their parent (Palestinian) ministry since the city is administered by Israel. In Palestine as in Lebanon, the allocated amounts do not cover entire productions and organizations. In both cases, there is no formulated and systematized cultural policy.[12] It is, therefore, Palestinian and Lebanese civil societies that carry the performing arts sector with an undeniable force.

The links between performing arts and regional, national, and local heritage are active in Lebanon and Palestine on several levels. First of all, local forms of performance persist and still gather numerous and regular audiences. This is the case in Palestine with the popular dance troupe El-Funoun, which promotes the traditional dabke dance, while the art of storytelling (El Hakawati) and shadow theater (Sanduk El Ajab) is disseminated by the Assera theater, which travels the roads of Palestine with these local forms. Between 2013 and 2022, Beirut's Metro al Madina's Hishik Bishik became a cultural fixture, reinterpreting early twentieth -century Egyptian cabaret for packed and regular contemporary audiences. Additionally, since 1968, the Caracalla troupe disseminates traditional Lebanese dance throughout the world, claiming a mixture of Eastern and Western influences. In November 2022, The Lebanese International Theater Festival for Storytelling organized by Tiro Association for Arts (TAA) and led by Kassem Istanbouli, was held at the National Theater of Tripoli. The festival held its fourth edition in 2022 to the public's delight. "There is nothing better than stories, especially folktales narrated by outstanding storytellers that were performing in front of us"[13]

If these many forms are widespread, the recourse to local heritage is partial and integrated in performing arts through the use of set elements, traditional music, culinary highlights of the culture and crafts, the use of character types,[14] and representation in historical sites.[15] If these elements of local and shared culture play a unifying role and even a form of seduction for the public, their use "is always connected to the artistic needs of each play"[16]

Heritage is transfigured and infused in current productions. At the same time, in 1977, two groups were founded, one in Jerusalem under the aegis of François Abu Salem, the second in Beirut under the aegis of Roger Assaf. "It is not by chance that in Palestine and Lebanon, without knowing each other, two groups called El-Hakawati were born in the same year. We were not doing the same work, but there is this element of the storyteller which is very essential and continues to be so even if not necessarily in a conscious way"[17] The storyteller figure, above all its reference and use by these two pioneering groups that participated in the theater movement in their respective countries, continues to nourish current creators. The use or reference to the storyteller is therefore "conscious or unconscious"[18] direct–through the use of a single character-narrator–or indirect–through the legacy that these companies leave to artists. From these elements of local art and culture, vast work is carried out to complexify and "to evolve the theater forms."[19]

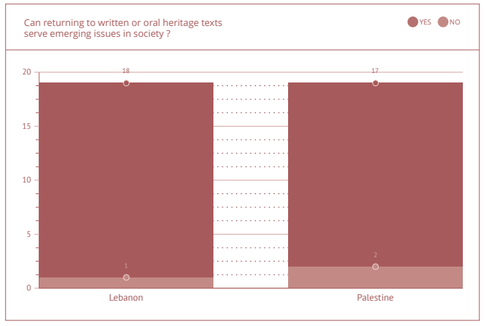
Contemporariness

Among the performing arts, theater occupies by far first place in Lebanon and Palestine. Most of the plays staged are from contemporary theater texts and are mostly written by the directors. The texts are therefore written before the rehearsals. Then they are practiced on stage. Or they are written through the stage writing. Drama writing is for this reason almost systematically linked to the creation of a show. Since playwriting is not an activity in its own right and the publication of plays is very rare, these are also two more reasons writing is linked to new shows. If plays are published, they tend to be in anthologies and often in foreign languages. They are in the context of co-productions and partnerships with institutions outside the country, such as the Royal Court in London. The use of Arabic repertoire is also a common practice,[20] but few Arabic plays are staged and the sources are mostly from literature, such as novels[21] or poems;[22] they are then adapted for the stage.[23] Adapting texts is a widespread practice. It is not only practiced on non-theatrical Arab texts, but also on European ones. Sometimes they are theatrical texts; for instance George Ibrahim, director of the Al Kasaba Theater in Ramallah, is known in Palestine for his numerous adaptations, including those of Brecht and Shakespeare.[24] Some are not theater texts; for example, Caroline Hatem adapted Les Justes by Albert Camus in Lebanon in 2022. If the text is a theater text, artists still adapt it by recontextualizing it in the Palestinian or Lebanese political context.[25] This practice–adaptation through recontextualization–is a common practice shared with other Arab countries.[26]

Links to the European repertoire, aesthetics, and trends are numerous. In Lebanon, a large number of performing artists are graduates from the Lebanese Public University. Active artists' backgrounds, who are well-known by regional or international funders, reveal that they have continued their studies outside Lebanon, most often in Europe.[27] These years of study in Europe are aimed at deepening and specializing their training; their year in Europe testify to the European influences that nourish them. Due to the absence of theater studies in Palestinian universities and national performing arts schools, Palestinian theaters in the West Bank are setting up their own schools that range from regular workshops, evening classes, and to permanent programs. Many of the works that make up their programs are European. Various workshops that make up the training are regularly given by European artists. In addition, co-productions that include a partly European and partly Palestinian team constitute a significant part of professional productions in Palestinian theaters. For these reasons the Palestinian and Lebanese scenes are intertwined at different levels with the European scene.

The monodrama form is becoming more and more prevalent on the Palestinian and Lebanese stages, but more exponentially in Palestine. Over the past two decades, monodrama has spread and multiplied among Palestinian artists in both Palestine and Occupied Palestine. The use of this form may first of all be a response to the challenges and difficulties of production and the possibility of mobility of play outside conventional theater spaces; this trend can also be observed in Lebanon. It is above all a way of telling a story and of talking about oneself. The theater monologue refers to the storyteller figure through its modes of transmission; monologue has its specificities; it directly addresses the audience.[28] In Lebanon, monologues are also performed following Hanane Haj Ali's example; she performed Jogging, which was first exhibited in 2017. It featured at the Avignon Festival in July 2022. However, the format where there is only one actor on stage is better expressed through stand-up. In 2018, the Awkward Comedy Club was founded by Dany Abou Jaoudé and Andrew Hariz. The club offers open stages and regular programming that is mostly held at the Ked Theater in Beirut. This platform helps nurture the emerging stand-up comedy culture in Lebanon. It brings out artists such as John Ackhar, Nour Hajjar, and Shaden Fakih.

Apart from theater and stand up for Lebanon, other performing arts such as dance and circus are somewhat behind. When festivals are set up, there are no stages dedicated to dance or circus in Palestine and Lebanon. The artists of these disciplines, therefore, work in venues dedicated to theater. However, the different performing arts have a strong presence theater. In Lebanon, there is great attention paid to movement,[29] as well as experimental forms close to contemporary arts that enrich the theater scene.[30] The Kahraba Collective[31] was in 2007; it proposes multidisciplinary works. If puppetry has an important place in the productions, the collective's whole repertoire is a combination of different performing arts, music, and visual arts.[32] In Palestine, the scene is characterized by a strong generic hybridity. "That's very important, dance is very important, singing is very important. I mean, 90 percent of our productions, they have singing somehow.[33]" The presence of musicians or singers on the stage is frequent; moments of choreography or acrobatics are also common. Multidisciplinarity is inherent to theater practiced in Palestine. "We utilize different art forms all the time. We do not really stick to one form"[34] Performing arts, and sometimes visual arts, in Palestine and in Lebanon, share the stage with theater, both in terms of location and aesthetic.



Regardless of the use of local heritage,[35] classics, or European aesthetics, in Palestine and in Lebanon, performances raise social and political issues.[36] Theater is considered as "the place for dialogue and it is on its stage that public opinion is shaped"[37] This is a characteristic that can be attributed to the Lebanese and Palestinian scene and constitutes their shared specificity. In addition to social and societal issues, issues related to the occupation situation are often addressed head-on in Palestine. Even when using plays from Arab or European repertoires, occupation and colonization can be addressed in an analogous way. Artists on the Lebanese scene differ from those in Palestine by claiming to address "universal"[38] issues and by playing more on the dramaturgical detour. The detour can be defined as an art or a strategy which, according to Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, consists in "moving away from reality, creating a gap, and addressing issues from a different and foreign point of view in order to better recognize them"[39] In this respect, Lebanese artists are close to the Palestinian scene in Occupied Palestine. They mobilize "experimental forms"[40] or "detour-forms"[41] –which, for example, privilege the visual aspect following the example of MILK (2022) by Bashar Murkus–in order to approach, through "a forceful return"[42] a reality "that we no longer see"[43] or that is too complex to be seen.

Ecosystems and Economic Models

In Palestine, it is mainly foreign funds, especially European Union funds, from its institutions and member states, that feed the cultural sector and performing arts.[44] In order to receive these funds and especially the most important ones, artists have to constitute themselves as non-governmental organizations (NGO) and register with the Palestinian Authority.[45] Performing arts is, therefore, mainly carried out by organizations that operate with a regular or even permanent troupe where freelance artists are added according to specific project needs. The Palestinian National Theater (PNT) in Jerusalem, established in 1984 by the El-Hakawati group, is an exception. This theater runs without a troupe, and it remains open to independent directors. Teams are made up of an administrative, technical, and an artistic part; and the directorship is carried out in a binomial general manager/artistic director. Before the pandemic and European Union funding restrictions, the most important organization teams ranged from five to twelve permanent members.[46] Without exception, theaters have significantly reduced their membership as a result of what can be described as a two-pronged crisis in the sector. The funds injected into the performing arts in Palestine have had an ambivalent effect. They allow teams to continuously operate, but they are subject to strict specifications. First, cultural NGOs are subject to methodological criteria established by international donors "to ensure an annual external financial and administrative audit, as well as a regular evaluation of projects and missions"[47] They are also subject to political criteria, namely "the requirement of neutrality"[48] This requirement counters cultural actors' political agendas. It may conflict with their artistic activities[49] and their relationship with the audience.

The five main theater companies are also the five main performance venues (Freedom Theater in Jenin refugee camp, Ashtar Theater and Al-Kasaba Theaters in Ramallah, Al-Harah Theater in Beit Jala, PNT in Jerusalem).[50] They mainly program their own works and may feature each other's programs. They program other groups and artists on an ad hoc basis. Shows mainly take on small, inexpensive forms. Establishing an annual program in advance is not possible for these organizations. The cultural centers–which also have an NGO status–offer multidisciplinary activities and programs, such as the Yabous Cultural Center in East Jerusalem, the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah, the Popular Art Center in Al-Bireh, and Hamadah Cultural Center. They are quite a few, and some of them participate in national art and cultural programs.[51] In the Occupied Territories, it is the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival (RCDF), founded in 2016 by Sareyyet Ramallah. The festival is the main stage for contemporary dance. "It plays a catalytic role in the professionalization of young dancers, notably through projects and collaborations it attracts [and] it is almost the only time of the year when contemporary dance is presented to the public in the West Bank"[52] The theaters each have their own festivals. Their programs make room for other forms of performing arts, such as the puppet festival at the PNT and the Yalla Yalla Street Festival, which showcases street art, by Al-Harah Theater.

In Occupied Palestine, the theaters that welcome and are intended for Palestinian performances are the Arab-Hebrew Theater, which was established in 1998 in Jaffa. It advocates dialogue between the two cultures. There is the Al-Midan Theater in Haifa. It was founded in 1994, and it is exclusively dedicated to Palestinian theater. It is subsidized by the Israeli Haifa municipality and Israeli Ministry of Culture. In addition, there is the Kashabe Ensemble that was founded in Haifa in 2015 by a group that was born four years earlier and directed by Bashar Murkus. Khashabe is the only Palestinian theater in Occupied Palestine completely independent from Israeli funding. In Occupied Palestine, Palestinian freelance artists are left to their own devices on several levels. They are sometimes unable to receive Palestinian and Israeli funding. When they do receive funding or material support from Israeli institutions or festivals, they may be marginalized by Arab arts programs and regional funds. This marginalization makes them turn to Europe. Europe is more inclined to their complex status.[53]

In Lebanon, more artists operate individually.[54] Groups and collectives have a non-profit association status. The Lebanese state's budget for culture is $33 million (2020), or 0.24% of the state budget.[55] Receiving less support from European funds and programs than Palestine, performing arts in Lebanon is mostly supported by regional funds (Cultural Resource, Al Mawred al Thaqafy), the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), Mophradat, foundations, and potentially private funds (banks, insurance companies, patrons). Lebanese artists have to acquire multiple skills and act on several levels simultaneously. They are compared to "octopuses"[56] according to Hanane Haj Ali; production, creation, communication, and diffusion are in fact intertwined and under the project leader's responsibility, or the director, or the choreographer. Rehearsal time with the whole team is limited and does not extend from morning to night because artists must generate income; cash advances before rehearsals are rare. The required skills to perform these various tasks are exclusionary; they discourage writers who end up substituting for "non-existent" production and distribution chains.[57]

Foreign cultural centers in Lebanon play a significant role in supporting and networking for performing arts. Few funds are directly allocated for production, with the recent exception of a production fund from the British Council.[58] When there is a venue like the French Institute, the program is more cinematic, and the performances are mainly (in) French. Municipality initiatives sometimes succeed in filling in for this lack of resources, especially in Beirut. In Beirut there is a concentration of cultural events and facilities. When municipalities invest based on their will and their financial means, it creates inequalities between different regions; this trend does not help in the creation of a national cultural policy. The private sector may be involved in the performing arts, but it focuses almost exclusively on specific large-scale events. Thus, only the grand festivals–the Beiteddine Art Festival, the Baalbeck International Festival, the Byblos International Festival–absorb considerable funds; their budgets exceed the total annual private and public funds allocated to the performing arts.[59] These festivals are a showcase for the outside world; the Ministry of Tourism is involved; municipalities are

also involved; in addition, they rely on donations from wealthy and notable individuals. Faced with this contrast, Emmanuel Haddad divides Lebanese performing arts scene between a "Prestige Scene" and a "Precarious Scene"[60]

There are about twenty-five theaters in Lebanon today.[61] The main venues are concentrated in Beirut: Al Madina, Metro Al Madina,[62] Shams Cultural Center, Ked, and Monot Theater (that is linked to Saint Joseph University), and the Gemmayzeh Theater (that is linked to the Sacred Heart College). Today, three theaters bear the name "National Theater" and this label does not mean they receive support from public authorities. For example, there is the National Theater of Tyre, Nabatiyeh, and the latest one founded on August 27, 2022, in Tripoli. The Tripoli theater was founded by the Tiro Art Association (TAA), which is run by the artist Kassem Istanbouli. They are financed through local and international donations. Istanbouli claims all three (Tyre, Nabatieh, and Tripoli) theaters are part of a theater decentralization trend. Since 2016, there is the Hammana Artist House in the town Hammana. Hamman is located half an hour east of Beirut in the Mount Lebanon region. The Kahraba Collective provides the venue's artistic direction; it is both an artist residence and a performance space.

As far as theaters in Lebanon are concerned, they mainly function as a physical space for public performances. They are not supported by their supervising ministry. Only the Al Madina theater has been able to benefit from a public subsidy in the past, but this subsidy only covered a small part of its annual costs. The venues, therefore, operate by renting rooms during the day for rehearsals and in the evening for performances. Attracting a large audience is a major challenge for artists and groups who perform there; their income depends on ticket sales. In Lebanon, performing arts programs–apart from festivals–are, therefore, irregular and depend on the financial means available to the groups before their productions. This situation leads artists and collectives to rehearse in informal, private venues that are neither adequate nor technically equipped. Or it forces artists to acquire their own venue like the Zoukak company, which opened Zoukak Studio in 2017. The Beirut Port explosion, the economic crisis, and the fuel and electricity crisis have greatly affected performance venues. Venues such as Al-Madina and the Shams Cultural Center in Beirut struggled to stay open and reopen. The Beirut Port explosion destroyed certain places; venues like Ked and Gemmayze theater had to be rebuilt. For all these reasons, part of the performing arts activities tend to move to informal venues that host arts programs; they move venues that are located in Beirut and outside of Beirut, such as cafes, hotels, old private houses, and even nightclubs. Since these places are not performance halls, programs focus on readings, stand up, and one-person shows.

In both Palestine and Lebanon there is a lack or absence of operating funds for groups (with or without venues). Artists work on project-based funding, which is characterized by a distribution by specific projects with a limited timeframe. It implies that there is a race for projects by the sector's actors in order for them to survive. Without operating funds that cover rent, bills, and salaries for permanent staff or an administrative team, artists must take a cut of the money received for one project in order to survive until the next. Teams are sometimes forced to accept a project or apply despite criteria they do not like in order to continue to practice the performing arts as a profession. In these different production contexts, both in Lebanon and in Palestine, the presence of qualified people or trainings to become qualified, as production and distribution managers,[63] is a necessity for the development of the sector. In both cases, the lack of operating funds, project-based funding, and political and methodological criteria, lead to the current fund distribution system's failure. This system is not able to guarantee the sustainability of organizations and the professionalization of artists.

What institutions have you dealt with ?	Private institutions	Foreign cultural institutions	Official institutions	National NGOs	Regional NGOs	International NGOs	Other	Total
Lebanon	10	11	5	9	11	7	0	16
Palestine	7	9	10	14	10	13	1	19
Total	17	20	15	23	21	20	1	35

Rights to Culture, Alliances & Networks

RIGHTS TO CULTURE

Threats to cultural rights are made to both artists and audiences in Lebanon, Palestine, and for Palestinians living in Occupied Palestine. In Lebanon, censorship against artists is active and is exercised by public institutions since a decree dating back to 1977. "Permission to perform"[64] is granted in Lebanon by the General Directorate of Security. The theater is the only exposed medium of the performing arts because censorship is exercised on a text that must pass through General Security before a performance. This process is supposed to be imperative to produce a play with an audience; artists who submit their text must pay one hundred euros for its reading. The only exception is that it cannot be applied to published texts; but publishing for theater is almost non-existent in Lebanon. The General Security Directorate inspects the text, and it can effectively decide on banning performances and its showing on stage. The General Security Directorate has a lot of leeway; the legislative decree governing censorship does not stipulate specific criteria. The general themes that are subject to censorship are sexuality, religion, and politics.[65] However, many artists seek subterfuges or refuse to present their texts to the censorship bureau. They take great risks that can lead them "to appearing at the military tribunal"[66] Although censorship is more focused on cinema and is weaker due to the public authorities' legitimacy crisis in the last five years, refraining from submitting is only viable if the artists do not plan to hold a national tour. In this case, artists take part in an international tour. Finally, the risk incurred is also, and sometimes worse, directed at the venues that feature the works since they could be threatened with closure. Public places that re not dedicated to performing arts such as bars are face a lesser risk; hence, many independent artists perform there.

In Palestine and Israel, artists are no longer subject to censorship–officially. In the Palestinian Territories, the Palestinian Authority does not exercise censorship, but some artists and organizations may feel subject to informal censorship. During an artistic stroll at the International Youth Festival organized by the Ashtar Theater in July 2022, the theater's artists and the audience were physically assaulted by an unidentified group of people. The motive for the attack was the use of a colored puppet falsely identified as bearing the colors of the LGBT flag.[67] According to the Ashtar Theater, the attack itself is not the main and only problem. However, the Palestinian Authority did not take a clear position and did not concretely defend artists and the public at the time. This ambiguity calls into question its role in protecting and defending artists, art and culture more broadly, and is "one of the attempts [...] to impose censorship on culture"[68] In Jerusalem, organizations and artists face multiple challenges, even though censorship by Israeli authorities ended in the early 1990s.[69] Since the city is administered by Israel, the PNT has been raided several times by the army to close it down and prevent events from taking place simply because they were deemed political. Artists who want to travel from the West Bank to Jerusalem must obtain a permit from Israeli authorities. Any mention of the resistance in communication or works of the PNA can result in the play being banned and venues being closed. Finally, plays that mention or deal with sensitive political events or that address Palestinians as a resistance and freedom fighters are unlikely to be performed in Jerusalem.[70]

Palestinian performances produced in Occupied Palestine are not directly subject to censorship, but in case of the play Parallel Time (2014), by Bashar Murkus, it revealed "the limits to Palestinian public performances in Occupied Palestine"[71] Produced by the Al-Midan Theater, the play was excluded from the Israeli Repertoire Commission in 2015, "a joint fund of the Israeli Ministries of Culture and Education"[72] This was followed by threats to freeze the theater's subsidies if it did not cancel the play's performances; they were accused being "apologetic toward Palestinian terrorism against the Israeli state" Cuts in subsidies followed and weakened the Al-Midan theater for several years until it closed due to lack of funding. This case reveals the form of censorship exercised by the Israeli authorities on Palestinian works in Occupied Palestine; it also highlights the complex issues in Palestinian presence "in Israeli society and, even more, of their recognition as citizens"[73]

The question of the public's cultural rights is focused both in Lebanon and in Palestine on the public's access to performing arts. In Lebanon, it is the decentralization issue (from Beirut) that is at stake. In Palestine, it is the fight against society's fragmentation that fed by the fragmentation of the territory. In both countries, marginalized population's access to the arts is a challenge taken on by artists. In Palestine, the practice of participatory and mobile theatrical forms such as Playback Theater or Forum Theater represents an alternative to the fragmentation of the territory and the marginalization of certain populations such as those in Gaza or in West Bank refugee camps. Because these forms are performed in a rudimentary technical device, they reach segments of the population that would not usually be able to go to theaters, especially those within refugee camps.[74] Additionally, there is a strong involvement in hospitals through Red Noses Palestine. Important actors in Palestinian theater are members and active in Red Noses, which consists of clowns working with children in Palestinian hospitals. Children and youth are not relegated to the background. Performing arts organizations put together festivals, workshops, and specific programs that address and cater to children. "A large percentage of cultural NGOs's activities are directed towards children–about 52% of Palestinians are under the age of 18–in the form of art education, or education through art"[75] Artists play a major role with different audiences; and they are not subject to the criticisms usually directed at Palestinian NGOs, such as the depolitization of their missions.

In Lebanon, since the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011, many artist initiatives cater to them. They range from the creation of amateur theater groups, workshops, and training to the participation in projects mixing amateurs and professionals. The objectives are sometimes therapeutic and involve NGOs in the process. Others aim at challenging the public authorities. Some initiatives are aimed at Lebanese; their aim is to contribute to changing the prejudices amongst Lebanese toward Syrian refugees in Lebanon.[76] Since 2008, the association Clown Me In, founded by Sabine Choucair, has been working with children and adults in refugee camps. They also work throughout Lebanon and abroad. Their moto is using art as therapy and advocating the "artivism" approach.

Although artists, both in Lebanon and in Palestine, are involved with different audiences, they may regret that funds are allocated under the guise of social or even humanitarian objec-

tives.[77] There is a substantial shortage of funds intended for performances; the few available funds have the sole objective of artistic excellence.[78] It is therefore with regard to the development of the performing arts in themselves (and sometimes exclusively) that a commitment is necessary. Another paradox when it comes to NGOs financial investments and foreign countries' interventions with marginalized populations is highlighted by the Palestinian author and director Mirna Sakhleh. "By conditioning funding for initiatives dedicated to specific populations, remote or in difficulty, city inhabitants are left out of many projects. These funds do not allow for the expansion and regularization of an audience "that will go to the theater and buy a ticket"[79]

ALLIANCES & NETWORKS

In Palestine, institutions and artists are forming a lot of networks[80] with the objective of protecting and improving the cultural sector. Thus, PPAN, the Palestinian Performing Arts Network was established in 2015. It brings together organizations from the circus, dance, theater, and music.[81] PPAN is registered with the Ministry of Interior. It connects Palestinian arts NGOs that have the aim of making common demands both in terms of funding and cultural policies. To address the specific needs of organizations based in Jerusalem, such as the city's marginalization from other Palestinian cities and the inability to receive support from their ministries, the Shafaq network[82] was established in 2015. The network's operational objectives are to organize concrete projects with co-financing from different organizations in the network. It includes contemporary art and music organizations. It also includes the Yabous Cultural Center and more recently, the PNT. Lastly, in 2016, a transnational Palestinian art collective called "An Identity in a Laboratory" was established by the PNT in Jerusalem and the Kashabe Theater based in Haifa, Occupied Palestine. Its aim is to produce plays that question Palestine and Palestinian identity. It is distinguished by the fact that it brings together Palestinians from Occupied Palestine, Jerusalem, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Diaspora, whether they are in Europe or refugees in camps in neighboring Arab countries.

In Lebanon, the constitution of organized and permanent networks is less formal. However, group work and the pooling of resources and people is a sine qua non condition for the development of any activity. However, the various political and economic crises tend to destroy, slow down, or block initiatives. Alliances between artists and between organizations form and re-form and constitute an essential mobilizing force for the sector.[83] Nevertheless, Kassem Istanbouli co-founded with cultural actors from Arab countries, the Arab Culture and Arts Network (ACAN) in 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic's impact of the on the arts sector.[84] ACAN aims to "to enable cultural communities among themselves for networking and cooperation, support creativity, encourage exchange and grants for creative works, and improve policies supporting culture and arts in the Arab region"[85] The Network for Cultural Outreach (NCO) is made up of three organizations, Yazan, Yaraqa, and Clown Me In, respectively theater, dance, and clown. This network is funded by Culture Resource and the European Union. It works towards the decentralization of performing arts. However, it also fulfills a mission towards Lebanese artists. "Most importantly in Lebanon today, we are looking forward to providing artists with job opportunities that last year round, allowing them to make a regular living from their art, to practice it, to develop their craft, and take part in the professionalization of the theater and performance arts sector at large"[86]

In terms of international networks, international artistic collaborations prevail in Lebanon and Palestine, although they are more structural in Palestine due to the numerous funding channels and programs set up by the European Union and their member states for development in the Palestinian Territories. They take different forms and range from a simple workshop given by a European artist or author to the co-production and co-writing of plays. These collaborations allow for exporting works and sometimes give them access to institutional or even prestigious European stages. A European artist can intervene alone or through an institution that he is a member of or he directs. If he is the head of a European institution, the funds it receives mainly come from his country's Ministry of Culture. In the case of a small group or a single artist, they are often subsidized by European programs and/or their country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs through cultural centers. These differences influence the financial possibilities of partnerships; they also influence which venues when touring in Europe. In Lebanon, the interest in these collaborations lies first and foremost in the possibility of circulating works outside the country. With regard to international co-productions and co-writing, artists also mention the objective of filling the technical aspects and missing functions within their team, such as sound or light technicians.[87] However, in Lebanon with the same goal, Ettijahat-Independent Culture and the Drosos Foundation established MAHARAT: Building Careers in Performing Arts, a training program dedicated to technical functions such as sound, light, and functions related to stage management. Beyond these partnerships, organizations in Palestine are often interconnected internationally, either through participation in international networks or structurally. The Freedom Theater, for example, was co-founded in Jenin refugee camp in 2006 by Juliano Mer Khamis, the son of an Israeli mother and a Palestinian father, Zakaria Zubeidi, a fighter in the Al Aqsa Brigades, and Jonhatan Stanzcak, a Swedish national. In addition, the theater has an honorary board with international figures. These measures may be essential to protect the theaters from closure threats and Israeli military raids.

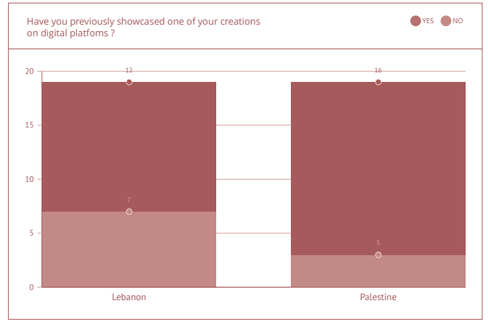
		Co-production	Training	Art Tours	Management help	Capacity building	Technical assistance	Art residencies	Partnership	Other	Total
What is the nature of your relationship ?	Lebanon	8	5	4	5	2	3	6	6	1	12
	Palestine	13	11	11	3	5	4	12	12	2	18
Total		21	16	15	8	7	7	12	8	3	30

Digitalization Effects

COMMUNICATION AND DISTRIBUTION

While the effects of digitization are expressed in different ways and for different purposes,[88] in Palestine and Lebanon the internet as a means of communication with the public is the main tool and this medium was well before Covid-19.[89] Artists announce their shows or activities mainly through social media and targeted invitations sent by email, WhatsApp, or another medium. The internet, and especially social media, is used by project coordinators or organizations in order to fill in for the lack of traditional media relay and communication around their show. Accordingly, social media helps promote a cultural agenda. Organizations, and sometimes independent artists, also present themselves internationally to researchers, funders, and potential partners online. Youtube channels and other online formats such as website are oriented towards the international market. Online campaigns give performers an international presence. For example, the Gemmayze Theater in Beirut organized an online fundraiser following the devastation its premises suffered from the Beirut Port explosion.[90] In Palestine, when the PNT was threatened with closure due to its financial debts, its director Amer Khalil launched online campaigns to raise funds and save his theater in extremis.[91]

Being online also serves as a digital stage. The pandemic did not cause this use, but it clearly reinforced it. During the lockdowns, organizations made recordings of plays that were then published online. Most of them were subtitled to reach a non-Arabic speaking audience.[92] Donations were intended to help organizations survive during the crisis.[93] In Lebanon, Citerne Live, a Maqamat project (a dance group founded in 2020 by Omar Rajeh and Mia Habis) was a digital platform that made videos of dance and sometimes other disciplines available, either live or regular streaming. Interview and roundtable videos were also available. A monthly subscription was required to access and to stream the videos (about $9.70). For live events, one had to purchase a ticket online to get access to the broadcast. This platform aimed at offering a kind of artist asylum for production. Similarly, Basita.live was a platform founded by several cultural actors from Arab countries in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.[94] Basita.live featured a network of artists from different countries; it depended on ticket purchases to replace closed venues. Basita's interest also lies in the fact that the broadcasted works were set to be visible nationally, regionally, and internationally. Beyond a digital scene's purpose as a response to lockdowns, these platforms allowed artists to make themselves known to festival programmers on local and international scenes. They also represented a considerable database and archive that could contribute to the writing of the performing arts movement in Lebanon, Palestine, and Arab countries.



Lastly, going online was a means of breaking down barriers and bringing different populations closer together. This effect happened despite the fragmentation of territory in Palestine and despite the difficulty or even the impossibility of obtaining

visas in Arab countries to travel to Europe. Consequently, the internet constitutes a remarkable space for digital archiving and communication. However, this recourse remains limited in several respects, notably in developing links with the public. If social media is the main means of information, the audience is limited; social media does not allow for diversification and reaching out to new audiences. Similarly, a website cannot replace a real artist showcasing their work to international programmers. For these reasons, the use of online production, broadcast, and communication in Palestine and in Lebanon is first and foremost a means for artists to somewhat remedy the shortcomings and difficulties of the sector.

STAGING MEDIUM AND DRAMATURGICAL TOOL

Firstly, digital can be an immaterial place of creation. In 2013, asFirstly, digital can be an immaterial place of creation. In 2013, as part of a partnership between the Al-Harah Theaterin Beit Jala, Palestine, and the Teatro Dell'Argine in Bologna, Italy, rehearsals for the play Shakespeare's Sisters took place via Skype. The director and playwright, Pietro Floridia, was denied entry into Occupied Palestine and Palestine by Israeli security authorities at Ben Gurion Airport. He was banned from entering the country for five years. The team members, the majority of whom were Palestinian actors, decided with the director to continue with the production. Floridia, therefore, directed the team of actors remotely via Skype. This experience was exceptional, especially since it was seven years before the prevalence of virtual work processes during and in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, another partnership took place and exhibited the remote production, Die Vierte Wand - Im Krieg spielen (The Fourth Wall: Playing at War). This play was adapted by Sorj Chalandon, Suzanne Emond, and Nora Haakh from the novel with the same title. This play was directed by the Belgian Suzanne Emond. It included three Belgian and seven Lebanese actors. The Belgian part of the cast was on stage, while the Lebanese part was filmed during the pandemic and then broadcast during the performance. The creative process was a hybrid one. The piece constituted a conversation between the actors on stage and the actors filmed beforehand. The videos served as the show's dramaturgical springboard

Finally, digital technology made it possible to continue certain training courses for Lebanese and Palestinian students during the pandemic. Courses and follow-ups for their progress took place online, mostly via Zoom. To adapt to the impossibility of gathering an audience, organizations also integrated the production of short films into their pedagogical work. More than a temporary solution to the isolation and cessation of arts activities, some organizations, such as the Al-Harah Theater[95] and the Ashtar Theater[96] in Palestine, chose to keep this medium of work and even include it in their training offer.

The use of digital technology for aesthetic and dramaturgical purposes is widespread in Lebanon and Palestine. Lebanese artists in the performing arts have long made extensive use of video archives—whether documenting the civil war, family histories, or everyday life—alongside digital tools and immersive settings. The interest in and the valorization of the Lebanese visual and contemporary arts on the international scene was reinforced and nourished in the period that followed the Beirut Port explosion.[97] In adaptations of European repertoire plays to the Lebanese context, video allows the work to be relocalized such as in the play Transit by Caroline Hatem, who wished that "we could see Tripoli, the city and its sea"[98]

In Palestine, the use of digital technology could allow the projection of images and archival material in plays that deal with the Palestinian situation and history such as the 2015 staging of The Siege, directed by Palestinian Nabil Al Rae and British Zoe Laferty. The play was written based on the siege of the Basilica of Nativity in Bethlehem in 2002 during the Al-Aqsa intifada. In the play Ventolin of Return, written by Bayan Sbib and directed by Iman Aoun, which toured Palestine in 2022, the author performed her text alone on stage. On stage, Bayan Sbib interacted with seventeen characters that she interpreted–the characters were filmed beforehand and diffused in several places on the stage through a stage projector that was operated by the director during the performance. The actress's score was very precise in order to digitally transform the monologue into a multi-way dialogue. This recent production contributed to the enrichment of the frequent staging of monologues and to the renewal of the storytelling art, both of which were transfigured by digital technology. However, for independent artists, the desire to use digital resources in their performances may be constrained by "limited material and human resources"[99]

Conclusion

The main points of difference between performing arts and their operation in Palestine or Lebanon are primarily due to the particular situation and political context of occupation in Palestine. Palestinian artists are in a unique position in the region; they are isolated from neighboring countries. They find it difficult to travel to other Arab countries. As a result, groups rarely tour the region. It is also difficult for Arab groups to enter Palestine to present their work to Palestinian audiences since they must obtain permission from Israeli authorities. Most of their exchanges are with Europe since collaboration with their Arab counterparts is complex or even impossible.

The frequent use of local heritage by Palestinian artists[100] is explained by their claim of their Arab and specifically Palestinian identity.[101] According to researcher Hallah Nassar, this use is a "vehicle for affirming Palestinian identity and collective memory in the face of cultural annihilation"[102] The question of collective memory is omnipresent in Lebanese and Palestinian performing arts. It differs from one country to the other since it is particularly threatened in Palestine due to the occupation and colonization. It is discussed in Lebanon because of the civil war, its consequences, and the existence of different communities. In Lebanon, the use of experimental and laboratory forms responded to trends in European theater.

In terms of funding and production, it is again the situation in Palestine that marks a fundamental difference from Lebanon (and other Arab states). In both countries, national subsidies are derisory. The Palestinian Territories, however, benefit from significant international aid that ultimately aims to cover their costs. This funding is supposed to ensure institutions' survival. Self-financing and self-production are, therefore, more widespread in Lebanon. However, arts organizations in both countries remain exposed to the criteria of foreign funders, which prevent their autonomy and development. Lebanon and Palestine share the aspect of instability in their current context–both political and artistic. The 2020-2022 financial crisis in Lebanon threatened the entire field of performing arts. Venues were unable to set a price for tickets due to the continually changing exchange rate. The self-production model that prevailed became unthinkable. In October 2022, the Lebanese pound exchange rate to the dollar was 40,000 Lebanese pounds. In terms of financing, there was a strategy to divide the production costs since 5,000 to 10,000 dollars (in 2022,) one could produce a show in proper conditions.[103] With the upheaval in funding that Palestinian organizations are experiencing resulting from the European Union's anti-terrorism clause, practicing performing arts professionally could once again be called into question. It is therefore possible that in the years to come, Palestinian artists will move closer to Lebanese artists in their resourceful way of writing and producing. Unfortunately, this will accentuate the precariousness of the field and lead to a decrease in production. It will also increase the flight of young artists, especially to Europe,[104] which is already being encouraged by Israel's constant threats to their freedom of movement and speech.

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17 Hanane Haj Ali, *op.cit.*

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27 Raymond Hosni, personal interview, July 1, 2022.

28 These include Amer Hlehel's Taha (2014), Ahmed Tobasi's And Here I Am (2017), Hussam Abu Eisheh's Café Zatara (2021), Emile Saba's 2077 Who Wants to Survive (2022).

29 Caroline Hatem, personal interview, July 12, 2022

30 Raymond Hosni, op.cit.

31 The collective is composed of Éric Deniaud, Aurélien Zouki, Marielise Aad, Rima Maroun and Tamara Badreddine.

32 Notably, Puppetry in Voices in the Dark (2009), There was a bird on a tree (2010), Storytelling, dance, object and sound manipulation in Origin of a Tale (2015) ; Masks, music, chants, improvisation, drawing, and bodies in motion in That Whisper in the Darkness of The Night (2018), Ventriloquy, dance, clown and puppetry in Cabaret Migrant (2022).

33 Amer Khalil, personal interview, October 8, 2022.

34 Iman Aoun op.cit.

35 See Data Questionnaire, Quantitative Team, Question "Can returning to written or oral heritage texts serve emerging issues in society?".

36 See Data Questionnaire, Quantitative Team, Question "Do current issues within your community or in other areas determine the topics of your artistic work?".

37 Youmna Jamil, promotional video for the Lebanese International Theater Festival for Storytelling, November 2022, op. cit.

38 Caroline Hatem characterizes her adaptation work by taking on plays whose universal scope she considers "because they allow for the detour", Caroline Hatem, personal interview, July 12, 2022. According to Raymond Hosni, there is no truly Lebanese theatre, but theatre in Lebanon whose scope is often universal and from this stems its export possibilities. Raymond Hosni, personal interview, July 1, 2022.

39 Jean-Pierre Sarrazac "Détour(s)", Lexique du drame moderne et contemporain, J.-P. Sarrazac (dir.), Belval, Éditions Circé, p.60.

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42 Ibid. p.61.

43 Ibid. p.60.

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48 Hala Khamis Nassar, "Conflicting Agendas: Post-Oslo Theatre Caught Between National visions and Western Donors", dans The Freedom Theatre, Performing Cultural Resistance in Palestine, Ola Johansson et Johanna Wallin (dir.), LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2018, p.137.

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56 Hanane Haj Ali op.cit.

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58 Caroline Hatem, op. cit.

59 Emmanuel Haddad, "Cartographie du spectacle vivant contemporain au Liban", op. cit. p.6.

60 Ibid.

61 Arts and culture in Lebanon. Overview of the cultural landscape from the thawra. February , 2022, p.20. Creact4Med-CCI Mapping-Lebanon, cultural infrastructures, p.9

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68 Iman Aoun, op. cit.

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72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Freedom Theatre's Freedom Bus travels from village to village. Ashtar Theatre has also established a branch of its Ramallah theater in Gaza with a Gazan director to make these activities accessible. The Pocket Theatre created by Amer Khalil and Nabil El-Aggar has as a founding principle the mobility of its forms to go and meet the populations in the most remote villages.

75 Fatin Farhat, op.cit.

76 Emmanuel Haddad, op. cit.

77 Amer Khalil, op.cit.

78 Caroline Hatem, op. cit.

79 Mirna Sakhleh, personal interview, October 14, 2022.

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82 The Shafaq network was formed by five cultural organizations in Jerusalem: the Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, the Al Hoash Palestinian Arts Court, the Palestinian National Theater and the Yabous Cultural Center. Recently the network dissolved due to disagreements between the member organizations.

83 Hanane Haj Ali, op. cit.

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85 ACAN Website, About us, [online] https://cultureartsnetwork.com/about-us/, accessed on 3 September 2022.

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87 Caroline Hatem, op. cit.

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92 See Data Questionnaire, Quantitative Team, Question "Have you previously showcased one of your creations on digital platforms?".

93 Some theaters have even set up an online ticket sale to be able to watch the recordings like the Al-Harah theater located in Beit Jala to generate funds through virtual ticketing.

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95 Marina Barham, op.cit.

96 Iman Aoun, op.cit.

97 The Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art in 2022, which is one of the most important contemporary art events in Europe, is directed by a German, Till Fellrath, and a Lebanese, Sam Bardaouil. It is entitled Manifesto of Fragility and honors many Lebanese artists to the point that Lebanon appears as a sub-theme of the biennial.

98 Caroline Hatem, op.cit.

99 Sahar Damoni, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

100 See Data Questionnaire, Quantitative Team, Question "Have you ever worked on a topic in your artistic field that was derived, inspired or borrowed from the local heritage or culture?".Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2020, p. xi.

101 See Data Questionnaire, Quantitative Team, Question "Can returning to written or oral heritage texts serve emerging issues in society?".

102 Hala Khamis Nassar, "Stories from under Occupation: Performing the Palestinian Experience", Theatre Journal, (58), January 2006, p.15-37

103 Jessy Khalil, op. cit.

104 Alaa Abu Garbieh, Mays Assi, op.cit.

Thematic Papers

This section is dedicated to cross-cutting issues that stemmed from our research as determining in the existing or emerging dynamics and need as such a close inquiry both from a theoretical and empirical point of view.

We, hence, decided to focus on four themes : audiences, body and dance, new dramaturgies and public space. We suggested in this direction to two scholars and two experienced practitioners to have an analytical take and highlight critical points to be taken into account in our recommendations.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND PERFORMING ARTS IN THE ARAB REGION:

by Tarik Sabry

Towards an audience-centred perspective

To have great poets there must be great audiences too.
(Walt Whitman in Connor 2013, p: 1)

Playing to no audiences is like listening
for an echo in a place without resonance".
(Stanislavsky in Blau 1990, p: 255)

Statistical approaches to the sentiments
and attitudes of an audience…make mockery of it.
(Blau 1990, p: 356)

A few months ago, I was invited to a theater performance in London which celebrated the life and artistic contribution of Bob Marley. The theater was in the West End of London, Piccadilly Circus, to be precise. The band was terrific and the performer impersonating Bob Marley was nothing short of marvelous. My experience of the event, the performance, and being there in the theater, had caught me off guard. With hindsight, my experience is best described as being mnemonic and affectively multisensorial. In what I can only describe as an Augenblick moment, the live performance had transported me mnemonically to 1980s Morocco, where I grew up. As I joined the Reggae band in singing, I recalled my teenage years in Casablanca. Back then, I used to frequent the medina, a working-class quarter of Casablanca, where most of my lycée friends lived. We would all chip in with a few dirhams each, buy some fresh sardines that Knadi, who never tired of claiming that Bob Marley was a prophet, usually took to the local Baker's to barbecue. Another member of the group would bring some special Moroccan cake, and we'd head for Mriziga, a swimming spot near the port where working class youth congregated at the weekends, and over which the Hassan II Mosque was built in the early 1990s. Bob Marley's music was always in the background. "The Bob" or "le Bob" spelt in Darija as l'Bob, was one of us, the one who gave a voice to the oppressed, the disenfranchised, who yearned for emancipation from the makhzen's authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, and social disciplining. We spoke only in Darija and English. French was frowned upon as the language of middle-class pomp. Speaking English was our semiotic way of transgressing the violence of the colonial sign. The theater performance transported me mnemonically into an affective, multisensorial place where different and contradictory emotions were felt at the same time. As I raised my arms and voice to sing along with the band at the theater, I was approached by a theater attendant to warn me (politely) that I, in singing along with the band, had transgressed theater protocol. My Augenblick experience, and the emotions it had triggered in me, had transgressed the theater qua institution and its archaeology of bourgeois docility. My Augenblick moment gave way to a heterotopic-dysmorphic experience, a tension between ecstatic corporality and what I can only describe as bio-power asphyxia. As my body resisted the theater attendant's disciplining, two British Jamaican women, who sat to my left, joined me in my transgression. They stood up (Get up, stand up!) and danced to the iconic revolutionary song: I shot the Sheriff! The telos of recounting this autobiographic moment/trace of memory speaks to a double absence. The first absence is inherent to the act of "absenting" (making absent) affective, multisensorial, aesthetic bodies, which are instead replaced, thanks to technologies of institutional discipline, by the act of "presenting" (making present) docile bodies. This, in turn, confines aesthetic experience to a choreographed regimentation, which denies it its aliveness in the world. The second absence lies in the field of Arab cultural studies. The question of aesthetic experience remains at the margins of scholarship in the nascent field of Arab cultural studies, and also in the compendium of research on the performing arts in the Arab region as a whole. This, I argue, is largely due to a detrimental lack of engagement with the question of audiences in the Arab region, both in academic scholarship and in cultural policy circles, where art audiences remain largely under-valued. When performance arts audiences are researched, it is mostly through the lens of quantitative methods, the survey being a key example. While quantitative methods have their merits, they are not equipped to examine audiences' aesthetic experiences. Audience research, in this context, emerges as a power game that is governed by the rules of cultural capital, in which "powerful cultural gatekeepers have a vested interest in silencing audiences" and, therefore, in undermining audience research. (Walmsley, 2019: 18)

In this chapter, I engage with aesthetic experience as a central hermeneutic endeavor. I argue that a critical engagement with Arab performing arts audiences' aesthetic experiences necessitates both an archaeological maneuver and a re-articulation of two keywords: "experience" and "everyday" I also advance the notion that allowing the audiences for performing arts in the Arab region to speak may be a step towards democratizing the triangular meaning making process among the performer, the audience, and the art institution, and a means towards dislocating, if not liberating, the categories' culture, art, performance, and experience, from their teleological articulations. This chapter rehearses the following questions: How do we redefine aesthetic experience in ways that transcend the totalizing discourses of the "everyday" and "experience" as specific ways of being in the world that fuse human subjects with aesthetic objects? What languages and discourses can we use to describe the aesthetic experiences of performing arts audiences in the Arab region? What methodology should we incorporate to interpret such experiences? How can performing arts in the Arab region prompt reflexive and "agential responses in audiences?"[1] What can ethnographic approaches teach us about the materiality of aesthetic experience and its transformative potential to animate audiences' imagination? What can arts institutions in the Arab region learn from an audience-centered approach that champions audience enrichment and immersive aesthetics? Finally, how can performing arts institutions in the Arab region rethink their relation to audiences in the digital age, in which audiences seek more transformative connections with arts and artists?

Thinking Performing Arts Audiences Authentically

How do we make sure the future of performing arts in the Arab region includes the audience in an authentic way? (Walmsley, 2019: 18). This question invites a rearticulation of theoretical notions that have long reached transcendence as explanatory tools, but which need subverting and reenergizing, lest we merely reproduce older discourse and language. To think systematically about the notion of the audience, in the context of performing arts in the Arab region, requires a rearticulation of the notions of the everyday and experience in a conjunctional way, especially since the two notions form a relational logical whole. The everyday, Lefebvre argued, is "not only a concept, but one that may be used as a guide-line for an understanding of society" (Lefebvre, [1984], 1991: 28) There are different interpretations of the everyday, some see it as a site of control and ideology, others champion it as a site of participation, co-creation, resistance, and audience reflexivity. The iron cage of a false rationality, advanced Adorno and Horkheimer, "leaches all originality from everyday life, leaving an empty husk of false gods, false goods, and false desires…Even during their leisure time, … consumers must orient themselves according to the unity of production" (Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment 1947, p.98) In Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle, everyday

life is a mere "negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself" (Debord, 1994: 14) The spectacle, observes Debord, is "not a collection of images, but a social relation among persons, mediated by Images…the spectacle understood in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production…it is not a supplement to the real world…It is the heart of unrealism of the real society" (ibid.) However, to limit articulations of the everyday to discourses of inauthenticity, "false consciousness" and the "hyper-real" (if we factor in the work of Baudrillard), is to narrow our understanding of the everyday to an ideological positioning. Totalizing accounts of the everyday, which one can easily trace to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, drew much from French structuralism: to be precise, from Althusser, whom Paddy Scannell describes as the "Pope of structuralist Marxism" For Althusser, "lived experience cannot be taken as the ground for anything because it is unconscious in a double sense: it is unreflective… And it is also unconscious in psychoanalytical terms, and therefore cannot account for itself" (Scannell in Sabry, 2007a: 12) Positioning the everyday and "lived experience" along this line of hermeneutics clearly limits what can be said about the everyday, about performing arts, and certainly has serious implications for the ways in which we interpret aesthetic experience. Michel de Certeau (1984) objects to totalizing theories of the everyday, and he argues that there is always a potential for resistance within the tactical times of everyday life. A more nuanced critique of everyday life, summed up lucidly here by Gardiner, comes from Lefebvre who argued against

> *denouncing the habitualized illusions and foibles of daily life as a form of 'false consciousness', so as to proffer an unequivocal and universal truth through some definitive flash of insight. The 'bad' everyday is, after all, always bound up with the 'good' everyday – which is not to say that we cannot exercise analytical and value judgements about the differences between them. Rather, critique as Lefebvre understands it is about opening ourselves up to multiple possibilities, in order to embrace a myriad of alternative ways of thinking and living. (Gardiner, 2004: 247)*

Another nuanced critique of the everyday–one that combines an ideology critique with a culturalist positioning–is advocated by Raymond Williams (1961, 1987), who takes lived experience as the ground for a conscious and reflective analysis of culture. (See also the work of F.R. Leavis and Richard Hoggart (1930s-1950s).) Other scholars who champion the paradigm of audience "participation" modestly define it as an unfinished event, but acknowledge, nonetheless, its democratic potential. (See Carpentier and Jenkins 2013.) In this chapter, I subscribe to neither the totalizing nor the participatory paradigms of audience research. Instead, I take my cue from Roger Silverstone, for whom the everyday is best articulated through paradoxical categories and meanings. These, Silverstone advances, "are in constant conflict, and they can be observed in both everyday behavior and in 'the forces of structure' (i.e.) those of domination and those of resistance" (Silverstone, 1994: 164) Silverstone gets to the crux of the matter by arguing that we are in fact confronted with a different kind of empirical problem, "which is not to discover presence or absence, activity or passivity, but on the contrary to understand engagement" (Silverstone, 1994: 169-70) Those who speak for and about the performing arts in the Arab region, be it the art institution, the funding body, the academic, or the initiator of cultural policy, tend to define the audiences of the arts without much care for studying or researching these audiences. Performing arts audiences and their positions/aesthetic experiences are often assumed. As Blau candidly put it: "We simply do not know, in any reliable–no less ideal or accountable–sense who is there nor, in the absence of the classical subject, where to look. We are, despite this, still likely to generalize…about what the audience, with its disparate, cross-purposed, alienated, and incalculable perceptions, feels and felt"[2] When we assume that the position of the audience prevails as a strategy, definitions of the audience tend to succumb to a transcendent and quiet metaphysical discourse about art, culture, and society that is rarely disturbed or questioned. Allowing the audiences of the performing arts in the Arab region to speak, as I have advanced at the start of this chapter, has the potential to democratize the triangular meaning making process among the performer, the audience, and the art institution, helping, in the meantime, to dismantle the categories: culture, art, the everyday and experience, from their teleological articulations. Here, I am arguing for the empirical study of performing arts audiences in the Arab region as a precursor to an epistemic maneuver that will allow us to rearticulate, in a much more critical way, key words such as art, aesthetics, culture, and audiences, in the Arab region context. I also make this argument because audiences' responses and aesthetic experiences are creative acts in themselves (Sedgman, 2016).

Fifty years of "subculture theory" in the West have provided a rich repertoire, and this saw a paradigmatic shift from the 1950s and 1960s onwards, in which the dominant readings focused on "the sociological" as a determining factor in the study of youth culture, to cultural, "predominantly Marxist, class-based, and ethnographic approaches in the 1970s; to an emphasis on semiotic readings in the late 1970s and 1980s, and on to a postmodern identification of 'post-subcultures'" (Sabry and Ftouni 2017) "Subculture" Hebdige argued, "is always mediated: inflected by the historical context in which it is encountered; posited upon a specific ideological field which gives it a particular life and particular meanings" (Hebdige, 1979: 80) To go further than Hebdige, we must not stop short at just historicizing the subcultural ritual, we also need to be careful to not ignore the quiet, and often teleological, plane upon which we rely to interpret and define notions of experience, the everyday, art and culture. To this end, in our pursuit of thinking about the question of performing arts in the Arab region, we must first liberate the notions of Arab audiences, Arab arts and cultures from the discursive languages, through use of which they have been defined and interpreted. This hermeneutic endeavor can only materialize if, and when, we subscribe to the democratization of the interpretive process by acknowledging audiences' role in the creative process. Allowing for an "aesthetics of invitation" (see White, 2013 in Walmsley 2019: 84) and by inviting audiences to participate in meaning making processes, democratizes the creative and meaning-making process and liberates the aesthetic experience to allow it to feel and think affectively about the world. The audience-centered approach is now even more timely as Arab performing arts audiences in the digital age, as a recent Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) survey (Azdem, Jouilil and Sammouni 2023) shows, seek more dialogical forms of communication with the performing artists. As we learn from Machon (2013), performing arts audiences, in the age of the Internet, are hungry for "visceral experiences" and for spaces that re-invigorate human interaction and exchange.[3]

Performing Arts and Spaces of Heterotopy

As we democratize the co-creative artistic process by making Arab performing audiences central to the hermeneutic endeavor and to the complex temporality to which this approach gives birth, and while we remain conscious of the need to separate interpretations of art, performance, experience, and audiences from their metaphysical discourses, we also cannot ignore "the place" of performance, as a contentious and "geometric" category (Augé 1995). In his famous ethnographic analysis of cultural taste in France, Bourdieu (1991) demonstrated how "arts venues act as physical manifestations of cultural capital and habitus and can [therefore] elicit profound feelings of unworthiness and incompetence"[4] As Alan Brown observed: "Inviting audiences to spaces they do not want to visit is a losing proposition, especially when they do show up and feel out of place"[5] Heim's research (2016) highlights the communitarian value of arts venues, and it reinforces the inherently relational nature of the performing arts: "Arts venues have the potential to become community spaces (Heim 2016: p, 123 in Walmsley, 2019: 102)" The spectator, we also learn from Bennett (1997), "cannot experience pleasure without experiencing its limits"[6] According to a recent empirical study by Azdam, Kamili and Ksikes (2022: 93), which focuses on changes in cultural production in Morocco, only a very small number from potential audiences attend performing arts venues, of which 10.2% attend theater, 10% attend the circus, 7.2% attend dance events, 6.1% attend stand-up comedy shows, and 174% attend street shows. Whilst the numbers do not tell us much, neither about the demographics, nor these audiences' habits, they clearly demonstrate, however, the Moroccan audiences' preference for the carnivalesque, or at least for open performance spaces. The study also shows how a considerable number of performing arts events in Morocco are hosted by French and other European cultural centers. These heterotopic spaces, however, tend to impose on the audience a neo-colonial politesse, language, and etiquette that are only accessible at the level of habitus to the intelligentsia (who are mainly French speakers); the "well-behaved" middle and upper middle classes. Rather than democratizing the arts, these heterotopic spaces tend to police the boundaries of the arts and to impoverish thereafter the potentialities of aesthetic performance/experience as a communal space (See Heim 2016.). In this instance, the art institution denies audiences who may feel alienated in these spaces the numinous hypertrophic behaviors and affective aesthetic experiences that de-sacralize society and transform audiences' experiences in the world.[7] In a report on art and public spaces in the Arab region, Dussollier (2017) demonstrates, using different examples from the Arab region,[8] how a good number of Arab civil society initiatives and actors have, since 2000, been encouraging the urbanization of performing arts in the Arab region in order to create new spaces of citizenship. While this is a very interesting development, and while other commentators warn of authoritarianism's suppression of civil society groups and the subservience of Arab art and cultural organizations to neo-liberal models,[9] the question of who benefits from the arts in the Arab region remains unanswered without qualitative audience research. A failure to make the performing arts audiences central is likely to further camouflage the workings of the neo-liberal market structures to which the arts are subservient, and to the "governmentality" strategies deployed by the Arab states to discipline aesthetic creativity and experience. As things stand, the Arab performing arts audience in the Arab region seems to represent a mere "hypothetical construct and is simply part of a theoretical metalanguage"[10] Taking my cue, yet again, from Silverstone (1994), I argue that what we are confronted with here is a qualitative, empirical task: to critically examine how audiences in the Arab region engage with performing arts.

Towards a Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience

Meaning, argued De Marinis, "does not exist in the arts event/object itself, or in the intentions of the artist, but rather in the perceiver's historically and culturally constituted horizons of understanding"[11] A policy shift in the arts in the Arab region towards an audience-centered model has to go hand in hand with a paradigmatic shift at the level of research methods, moving away from a reliance on big data and the quantification of arts audiences to engaging in qualitative ethnographic methodologies including "anecdotal exchanges between team members and audience participants collected in a casual, interpersonal way"[12] "If we cannot 'measure' an audience member's engagement through the depth, creativity, and passion of her interpretation of our work" argues Conner, "we are misunderstanding the very function of art in society"[13] So, what methods should we use to study the "magical potency"; the embodied and active spectatorship that brings aesthetic experience to the fore? Before I rehearse this methodological question, I'd like to turn to the notion of aesthetic experience and rehearse ways of taking it out of its discourse. This is important, because the methodological question, in this context, cannot be detached from an apriori rationalization, if not, from a complexification of experience as a category. What kind of hermeneutics will performing Arab arts institutions and scholars utilize in studying Arab audiences' aesthetic experiences? Will the dominant paradigms in the critiques of the ideology, and their totalizing accounts of everyday life and experience, do? Must we not submit such hermeneutics to a phenomenological distance as a default position for thinking about the world? Here, I take my cue from the media phenomenologist, Paddy Scannell, who defines phenomenology in his book, Television and the Meaning of Live (2014), as being: "firmly committed to a view that thinking begins by looking outwards not inwards. In an originary sense we are moved (are summoned) to thinking by looking at the world…where thinking begins and ends"[14] Opting for a dialectical phenomenological method (as a way of philosophizing about performing arts audiences in the Arab region), unhinged by teleology or any mad discourse of identity, I argue, can let us not only into the materiality of aesthetic experience, but also, as a default position, into the hidden structures and interior intentions that underpin the performing arts in the Arab region. Anyone who has tried to do audience research for any length of time will be able to tell you that the real, as Levinas lucidly observed, "must be determined not only in its historical objectivity, but also in its inner intentions, in the mystery that interrupts the continuity of historical time (Levinas,

Totality and Infinity, in Gaston, 2006: 5)" Thinking about the audience and aesthetic experience through a dialectical, rather than a reductionist, phenomenology, allows us to think outside the ideology critique and its hermeneutics of suspicion, and outside also of agential discourses of participation. This would also mean the ability to think about aesthetic experience outside the teleologies of becoming and of mad identity, as Khatibi put it in his double critique (2019). Equally important, it also allows us to think outside the "proper boundaries of phenomenology" (Smith, 2016: 13) and its privileging of presence. Our default position for thinking about experience must be filtered through an "interrupted phenomenology (Derrida, 1999: 8)" lest we glibly give in to dogmatic thinking about the relationship between art and its audiences. In his article, "Cultural Studies: Which paradigm?" Paddy Scannell (2015) provides a phenomenological interpretation of the category experience:

> *The content of lived experience is life (what else?). But what does that mean if not the experience of being alive and living in the world? Experience is the word for the immediate encounter with existence (with being alive and living in the world) that is common to every individual human being—it is the term that captures how we (human beings) encounter life; our own life and the life of the world (the living world) as a whole. We encounter the world in, through and as our experience of it. Experience (as lived) is the irreducible, primary, fundamental, and immediate encounter with reality, if by that is meant something like the real experience of what it is to be alive and living in the real world in real time and in a real place with other real people (like, in each case, me). (Scannell, 2015, p: 651)*

In delineating this phenomenological interpretation, Scannell positions experience, in the first place, as an existential, rather than as a scientific, social, or cultural category. Experience, in this context, is common to all humanity. It is also, unlike knowledge, non-transferable. "Experience" observes Paddy Scannell, "is not in the first place a scientific or sociological fact but an existential fact". (Scannell 2015: 651). To take my cue from this phenomenological interpretation, I'd like to argue that aesthetic experience is not a theoretical category, but a multi-sensorial lived experience; the result of an encounter with the artistic object, just as I did in my mnemonic experience, which was triggered by Bob Marley's revolutionary music. My Augenblick moment had nothing to do with theory, nor can I say it was cultural or social. It was an existential moment, perhaps a transcendental moment, a feeling and an emotion that language and writing are incapable of describing. My Augenblick moment is. in the first place and before anything else, a phenomenological moment. The music or performance that really gets to us is always inexpressible. It is the moment in which life comes to life, fully, totally, and all at once, in that little moment. That is what an aesthetic experience must feel. The Augenblick is the way in which we, as humans, escape from ordinary, everyday humdrum existence; one of Heidegger's most difficult notions. My Augenblick moment (which I can only describe as an aesthetic phenomenological experience) is a way out of ordinary existence, and ordinary time. Also, like any lived experience, aesthetic experience is not transferable because it is affectively lived and experienced by us who make the encounter. However, this is not to say that aesthetic experience is entirely unique to me. Aesthetic experience is dialectical, because it is also shared and shareable, even when we do not always have similar aesthetic experiences or Augenblicken (See Scannell 2015).

Conner (2013) calls for a re-conceptualization of the arts appreciation model of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which the audience is conceived as a learning community where it is "providing the resources for arts workers and audiences to connect through a rich and complex conversation about the meaning and value of the arts in their lives" (Conner: 2013: 137). Conner (2013: 156-158) recommended five values to instill an audience-centered model based on discussion and 'arts talk'. a) We need to make [the] environment hospitable by deliberately desacralizing the normative etiquette and participatory boundaries of an existing space. b) We also need to acknowledge the audiences' main concerns, or what Freire (1997) termed themes. c) We need to honor emotion and the affective experience of the audience, and d) embrace the inherent subjectivity of the arts by encouraging open, rather than closed, texts. Finally, e) we need to work toward building community partnerships by letting go of institutional control. For these values to be operationalized in our pursuit of an audience-centered approach, Conner proposes values that encourage "the citizen-audience to start talking about the arts" (Conner, 2013: 138). This process ought to be followed up by opportunities for audiences to express their opinions respectfully and democratically regarding what they've seen, heard, and felt. "The more arts workers accept and encourage this idea", argued Conner, "the healthier the arts industry will be" (Ibid.).

Marketing Performing Arts: New Trends

In today's arts marketing there's a move towards cultures of audience centricity. Increasing social participation using digital communications technologies has also led to a paradigm shift in arts marketing, moving from notions of consumption to engagement and enrichment. How do we market performing arts to audiences in the Arab region? There is certainly a need for an audience-centered paradigm for performance arts' marketing that is fit for the contemporary arts in the Arab region. Performing arts scholars and organizations continue to reject outmoded principles of marketing and adopt a more engagement-based approach (Walmsley 2019: 363). Traditionally, the focus has tended to fall on the marketing, rather than on the arts. Arts marketing, Walmsley argues, has passed its sell-by date: 'having alienated art and audiences for decades, it is now finally being supplanted by the advent of socio-cultural phenomena such as co-creation and by the technological advancements that facilitate these developments' (ibid). According to both Walmsley and Conner, we are witnessing a paradigm shift in arts marketing, in which, in the second decade of the Twenty-first century, consumers 'are demanding an increasingly participatory role in both production and meaning-making processes (ibid, 365). Marketing, adds Walmsley, 'has become more about people than data; it is increasingly relational in that it takes place through various forms of dialogue with audiences...it involves more than "anticipating customers' needs': it requires the inspiration to delight audiences by communicating the potential for lasting and meaningful experiences' (Ibid, p, 369). So, what we are witnessing, in the performing arts industries in Europe and North America, is a shift from consumption to enrichment. To put this within an historical context, I go back to Ruth Rentschler's arts marketing historical framework[15] (1998), starting with the foundational period (1975-1984) when the arts sector led by North America started to diversify its offer, engage with audience analysis, and think about the protentional benefits of marketing. In the professionalization period (1985-1994), arts organizations started recruiting dedicated marketing staff and established whole marketing departments, thus responding to funders' increasing demands for stronger management and greater accountability. Here, arts marketing started to come of age as an academic field. The rediscovery period (from 1995), according to Rentschler's historical framework, was a time when performing artists and organizations started to collaborate, to co-produce and to co-create with their audiences and the wider communities. In an earlier article, Connor (2004) delineates an ethical audience enrichment programme that relocates power dynamics from the traditional producers of art to the audiences. As Conner observed: "A viable philosophy and practice of audience enrichment is centered on the assumption that what an audience really wants is the opportunity to co-author the arts experience. They do not want to be told what the art means. They want the opportunity to participate – in an intelligent and responsible way – in telling its meaning. Below, I describe, and quote in full, Conner's proposed set of values for building audience enrichment programming.[16]

- A Golden Rule: people want to talk through their reactions (i.e., feelings, confusion, passion, disinterest, disgust, pleasure). Talking is a way of processing an opinion. If there is no opportunity to talk, there is likely to be no "opinion" other than a vaguely expressed sense of disengagement.
- Leave the arts programming alone. Cultural participation should not interfere with the need and desire amongst arts producers to program challenging work (whether "challenging" means something with a new form, or something from another culture or time). True audience enrichment does not mean choosing art objects that are easy to understand, or that stand lower on the highbrow lowbrow ladder. True audience enrichment means providing the tools and venues for including the audience more effectively in the total arts experience — whatever its nature.
- Leave the art object alone. Nobody, including the artist, should be put in the position of dictating what a work of art "means" Instead, validate the arts experience by acknowledging the role the audience plays in co-authoring its meaning.
- Learning really is a life-long enjoyment. A great deal of attention, money and human resources has been poured into "arts education" programming for children. It's important to acknowledge that adult audiences also seek to learn "in and through" the arts. Knowledge equals enjoyment, because it equals power.
- True audience enrichment is not "audience development" Marketing strategies for "developing" (that is, increasing in numbers) an audience for a given organization may be valuable, but they are not the same as enrichment. In traditional audience development strategies, the audience member has been objectified, and remains objectified, throughout the "development" process. True enrichment programs individualize the people who make up the audience.
- Enrichment is not just a word — it's a value. An arts organization interested in building participation in a meaningful way will have to commit serious resources to the notion of audience enrichment. Audience enrichment is like walking a tightrope. If you pretend, you fall.
- Effective audience enrichment practices will dismantle the notion of art object and art maker as being an "enlightener" and will replace it with the ideal of the art object and the art maker as participants in a civic dialogue. This implies a redistribution of power. Some artists and some arts executives will resist this.

SOME GOOD PRACTICES

- Go into the audience and find a point of connection, then use that connection to pull the audience towards a new level of understanding.
- Break down the high art/low art hierarchy by endowing all arts experiences (and thus all responsible opinions) with importance.
- Infuse audiences with the ideal of art as a tool for thinking, living, and enjoying life. Offer audiences the possibility that art is a means to another, more relevant end, like the general good of the community.
- Provide guidance in how to look at art and artmaking. Organizations that can give their audience aid as to how to make thoughtful observations will be highly rewarded. Organizations that acknowledge the difficulty of looking at (or hearing, etc.) something new (in form, function, or theme) will be highly rewarded.
- Mediation in the arts experience is often necessary. Mediation can be a very good thing. Most aspects of our society require some form of mediation, even those based on metaphor... In the arts industry, anti-mediation rhetoric often appears in avant-garde clothing, however, it is, in reality, a conservative fox.
- Trust audiences to have a meaningful response. If you sponsor a talk-back program in which an expert of some kind (a scholar, a critic, an artist) comes out and bullies the audience, then you don't really trust them, and you probably aren't truly interested in their response. And they won't return.

CODA

I return to the question of method as a means by which to emphasize, in this modest intervention (a rehearsal), the urgent need for systematic thinking about the arts in the Arab region that constitutes, and is constituted through, the logic of a relational totality. Here, I borrow the Heideggerian category 'involvement-whole', to allude to the complex ontic relations that exist between art, affect, experience, structures of feeling, the sensorial, everyday life, being-with, institutions, culture and performance, and the everyday contexts in which these relations come into being as an ontological totality. Silencing the performing arts audiences (rendering them either docile or invisible) suits the authoritarian Arab states and their neo-liberal apparatuses. It is only through engagement with this ontic totality that we can begin to critically engage with the question of art in the context of the Arab region today. Allowing audiences to speak, I have argued in this chapter, will not only allow for the democratization of the triangular meaning making process between the performer, the audience, and the art institution, it is also a strategy for dislocating, if not liberating the categories: culture, art, performance and aesthetic experience, from the shackles of governmentality and the neo-liberal marketing structures that remain more concerned with the datafication of audiences and never with creating spaces in which they can speak about or recount their Augenblick moments.

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1 See Alexander, Jeffrey 2008, "Iconic experience in art and life: Surface/Depth beginning with Giacometti's *Standing Woman, Theory, Culture and Society* 25(5): 1-19.

2 Blau, 1990, pp: 355-356.

3 Josephine Machon (2013), p: 72 in Walmsley 2019: 87.

4 Walmsley 2019: 93.

5 Brown 2013: 53 in Walmsley 2019: 83.

6 Bennett 1997: 73 in Walmsley 2019: 195.

7 See Turner, 1982, p: 10.

8 Examples from this report include SHAMS and Bayreuth Art Centre, Le Garage Gudran, El-Medina Theatre in Alexandria, Emad El-Din Studio and Mahatat in Cairo, Dream City in Tunis and Racine, and La Fabrique Culturelle des Anciens Abattoirs de Casablanca.

9 See Gana, Zidane, Morin and Gabsi 2017 in Downey, Anthony (ed.) 2017, *Future Imperfect: Contemporary Art Practices and Cultural Institutions in the Middle East*.

10 See Marco De Marinis 1987, p: 102 in Walmsley, 2019, p: 110.

11 Gadamar in Conner 2013, p: 1.

12 Conner, 2013, p: 142.

13 Ibid.

14 Scannell, 2014: 5.

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16 https://www.giarts.org/article/who-gets-tell-meaning



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NEW DRAMATURGY: CASES AND CHANGES

by Kamal Khalladi



G. Deleuze casts doubt on the concept of essence and prefers to consider concepts in their ongoing, moving, and changing plurality rather than as a set of interactive combinations of different components and elements. He realizes that the essence of concepts does not lie in their preexistence as mental images, but in their existence as living entities, continuously in construction and productive and fruitful dynamism.[1] On the basis of these considerations, it is no longer possible to talk about a kind of elevated standard dramaturgy, but about an open practice, questioning and producing thoughts. However, what do we mean exactly when we talk about the new dramaturgy? Do we mean a totally new dramaturgy superseding the traditional dramaturgy which has exhausted all its expressive potentials? Are we just witnessing a resumption phase in which the upcoming dramaturgy forms reflect the preceding ones and the current forms foretell the future ones? Do we really have replacement with all what it involves in terms of omission and removal or just transformation and all what it involves in terms movement and lasting effect?

How Can We Understand New Dramaturgy?

THE NEW DRAMATURGY BETWEEN TRANSFORMATION AND REPLACEMENT

This question is related to our logical thinking about the nature of this concept and the way we view it. Our understanding of the new dramaturgy is related, in our opinion, to a necessary preliminary understanding which cannot be undermined, i.e., our conception of newness.

Generally, there are two hypotheses: we understand newness either as change or as replacement.

> *"Change" means here the abandonment of one thing for another instead and moving from one place to another. It is movement and mobility at the same time. What changes does not fade away completely and extinguish, but turns into another version and another form. Such change may imply resumption and continuity and may stand for difference and incongruity when driven to its extreme degree. It cannot be an unmeaningful rupture but stands probably for remnants of presence and signs of absence. Change always involves remnants and about this Abdeslam Benabdelali says: "Change is the remnant; it is neither junction nor connection, nor absolute disconnection; it is continuity which does not slacken and disconnection which does not stop; it is neither death nor annihilation, nor an eternal life"*[2]

By replacement, we mean elimination, change and deviation. Replacement does not originate from difference as it may appear, but from variation and disparity because difference does not refer to the instance of creating distance between participants as this seems self-evident. What is more important, in fact, is that difference brings people together to the same extent as it maintains distance between them.[3] In replacement, relationships are viewed only in terms of distance, gaps, and ruptures. It encompasses in its innermost meaning a wild inclination for difference in which transformation is constrained and the remnants fade away.[4]

From our understanding of newness, two contradictory assumptions can be made about the new dramaturgy:

- First, that the new dramaturgy is totally new; it comes into existence to replace another dramaturgy that has existed and vanished. In its new version it has nothing to do with the previous one. It is a point in a straight line along which we cannot move but forward and where there is no room for previous proofs. According to this conception of replacement, we can glean that the new dramaturgy can either be eternal, final, irreplaceable, a complete and ideal version, the quasi-essence of the concept, or that it is awaiting another version, a more serious one to be removed and replaced.
- Second, that the new dramaturgy is the remnant in which the previous meets the next, and that what may seem to be new may be, in one of its manifestations, only a transformation of a previous proof. This version of dramaturgy may see nothing wrong in returning to the drama sediments. It expresses its existence in the present and builds its future existence at the same time. According to this line of reasoning, we are in the presence of a case of ceaseless change; a game in which no sooner are borders determined than they fade away again; no sooner standards are set than they are called into question. It is a transition point in which secession is implied in the continuity of communication and even required.

It is according to this second assumption that we conceive the new dramaturgy. Dramaturgy is in its essence and its forms of existence a mere change which presages another one, a continuous process of construction, a crossing and interaction point. In Edgar Moran's words, it is separation which occurs after connection.[5] We opt for this interpretation for at least three reasons:

- The first is related to the way we view theater and according to which the concept of dramaturgy that we frame finds its ideal activation. We tend to believe that the drama theory is a long history of revisions and reconsiderations of previous proofs; it is the history of prolific and productive dialogue between theorists and parties to the theory, be it distant or ancient. For example, we can understand Brecht's theater only through a revision of Aristotelian theater, and we can understand the interpretations of Meyerhold concerning the training of actors only as effective and vivid calls into question of Stanislavsky's method.
- The second reason is related to the nature of concepts. Their distinctive features, in general, are not rigid, but keep their mobility even at their highest degree of steadiness. The migration of concepts and their readiness for re-formation is one of their most distinctive features. We can give as an example on this issue what is referred to by Erica Fisher Licht concerning the migration of the German-born concept "interweaving" into Arabic through translation. She adds that Khalid Amin has infused this translation with a dose of double-criticism as he has received it from Abdelkébir Khatibi.[6]
- The third reason is related to the concept of dramaturgy itself since we cannot, nowadays, talk about authentic standard dramaturgy, but rather about an open and hybrid practice. We talk about dramaturgies (in the plural form), holistic and comprehensive dramaturgies. Dramaturgy has transcended its limits as its extension

includes, nowadays, dance dramaturgy, circus dramaturgy, movie dramaturgy, and digital dramaturgy.

BETWEEN DRAMATURGY AND NEW DRAMATURGY

The concept of dramaturgy is considered as a slippery concept. It is an open question that does not accept a final and definitive answer. It made its first appearance on the theater ground and, henceforth, inherited its composition and complexity from theater.

Generally, dramaturgy has been approached from two different perspectives; one is broad, and the other one is narrow.

The first approach is narrow because it is concerned with dramaturgy as coexistence and evolvement within the theoretical framework of dramaturgy. At this junction, we can see the intersection between two basic essential meanings. Joseph Danan traces back the history of the term "dramaturgy"[7] and manages to decipher the following meanings:

1.The art of building drama texts;
2.The process of bridging the gap between the text and its performance.

Naturally, we can easily notice that the two meanings refer to different phases in the history of writings about theater. From the first meaning, we can decipher the textual centralization; and from the second, the awareness of the issue of performance and an attempt to liberate the stage from this centrality. It remains that the complexity of the concept imposes on us prudence so as not be drifted by hasty interpretations according to which the second meaning emerges in a subsequent phase in which the first meaning has exhausted the reasons of its existence. Florence Dupont,[8] for example, mentions that Greek theater writing needs a prior engagement in performance. This means that the current well-known version, which implies the priority and continuity of the text, the transformation and disappearance of performance is simply a casual version, preceded by another version, which requires the inversion of the components of the equation, and, henceforth, results in turning performance into the stable permanent element and the text into the variable and ephemeral component.[9]

It is worth noting here that the second meaning does not revoke the first. B. Dort prefers to tackle the cognitive dimension of dramaturgy only by expanding the period of performance first to include the construction of the text, its production, and reception and second by avoiding any chronological ordering of these three phases. Performance does not necessarily come after text construction as it is contained in it and the moment of reception is preemptory and deeply rooted in the details of the two phases and does not occur simply when facing the audience.[10]

We consider the first meaning as broader because the concept of dramaturgy appears in new areas and is approached from new perspectives without necessarily completely turning away from theater. We rather assume that the concept has been able to expand beyond the narrow meanings when it has managed to free itself from norms and standards as G E Lessing put it: "I remind my readers that I cannot claim that in these papers I introduce a drama system. I do not have to give a final opinion on all difficulties that I have divulged here. My ideas may not be expressed in a systematic way; they may also be contradictory, which does not matter. They are ideas with which readers can start with in order to find what they think about. What I simply look for is to plant seeds of knowledge"[11]

With Lessing, dramaturgy became a process of thinking and difference and no longer an elevated drama system. It is knowledge and as such it is never final. Its history is henceforth the history of revisions and not the history of authenticity; history of repetition and copies and not of models.

Since then, the influx of ideas on dramaturgy led to the appearance of dramaturgy in the plural form, to account for the plurality that we can detect in its different aspects. It is a plurality which marks the coexistence of different practices and forms of expression, which are sometimes incoherent. It is also plurality from the angle of the drama text when it is erected on non-drama or unconventional bases. It is plurality from the perspective of those who fulfill the function of dramatists. We have now dramaturgic actors, dramaturgic music, dramaturgic scenographer and dramaturgic spectator, with all what they imply in terms of multiplicity of the tools they make use of. We can also notice another plurality that results from the migration of the concept and the resulting expansion of its original intention to include dance dramaturgy, circus dramaturgy, movie dramaturgy, and multimedia dramaturgy…"dramaturgy has since a long time ago become any artistic innovation, be it a theatrical performance or the organization of a party. We show interest in dramaturgy even when we are not really interested in it. We come to see it in anything anywhere, in continuity…"[12]

The new dramaturgy necessarily belongs to this sphere of broad understanding and to the turning point at which the concept resurrects into plurality, which does not only focus on the congruity and fusion of its components, but also on their incongruity. It remains that we do not have to conceive the new dramaturgy as a completely casual moment, definitely separated from the traditional dramaturgy. It is not a stable permanent and definitive model or a transcendent standard and authority. It is not a legendary point in time; it is the dynamics of connection and disconnection. It belongs to the present, past, and future at the same time. It sees no harm in inventing what makes it incongruous with its old sediments. It seeks its own torture by founding its problematics along the borderlines in attempt to reach an ideal equilibrium drawing upon the productive and prolific plurality without turning into an umbrella covering and sponging come what may.

M. Van Kerkhoven gives the following ideal definition of the third millennium dramaturgy:

> *"Dramaturgy is the construction of bridges; it is responsible for everything; before being anything else, it is a continuous inward and outward movement; it is preparation for diving into the work and leaving it when needed…"*[13]

THE NEW DRAMATURGY AND THE END OF MIMESIS

Stanaton Garner underlines that mimesis was first traditionally used to mean the act of imitation, and secondly the representative link established by the artistic work with the world that it meticulously simulates. It is subject to the cultural, aesthetic, and other congruities.[14] Some conceptions of new dramaturgy are based on the end of mimesis. Some questions that should be raised: Has dramaturgy really vanished? Is it possible for dramaturgy to actually vanish? Here, we take into consideration what the word "end" implies in terms of inevitable demise and the total disappearance of remnants.

According to J. Danan, mimesis has retained its components in one way or another within the theatrical performance and it is difficult to find a theatrical performance totally free from mimesis. There is always what we can call the "remnants" of the possible acting representation. It suffices here to search the origins of what has been done on stage to uncover the threads

and origins of mimesis, the threads and remnants of the possible representation.

Based on this assumption, Danan refers to the historical performance by Marina Abramovic in 1995 in "Cleaning the mirror" staged in a New York museum. The actress remains scrapping the skeleton of a calf, from beginning to end. The performance lasts many hours and the basin in which she soaks the rag turns red and her dress is stained with red patches. She ends her performance weeping.[15]

Regarding the performance, Danan considers that even though the actor performs behind the elements of her presence, deliberately interrupting the representation and the mimesis lines, the performance still encompasses the symbolizing and metaphorical force of things. In this performance, we can easily decipher an image and representation of ethnic cleansing that took place in Bosnia.[16]

To understand J. Canan's conceptions of the hidden forms of existence of mimesis, we refer to P. Ricoeur, who considers mimesis as continuity, against another more common concept, declared or undeclared, intended or unintended, and which considers it as a structure. According to Ricoeur, what matters in the translation of mimesis is not to consider it as an imitation or representation, but rather as "the efficiency of mimesis or the efficiency of the process of imitating or representing something. Therefore, mimesis or imitation should be understood in terms of its moving meaning–performing and turning into performance acts"[17]

Ricoeur conceives mimesis as effectiveness, dynamism, and mobility, against a stable and a-temporal anachronic model. We cannot understand this dynamic aspect of mimesis by only referring to the dynamism of representation, which represents the essence of mimesis. In this respect, the genealogy of the concept of representation presented by Khalid Amin provides us with a rich material that enables us to test this moving nature of representation.

Representation requires in its comprehensiveness two separate units requiring construction according to two different patterns, one feeding into another; one becomes the determined place, whereas the other becomes the determined environment. If representation is the act of representing something, this act can be accomplished only through the mediation of units symbolically built not standing for the thing in itself. These structural constructions which represent the core of the theatrical acts may take the form of words or non-verbal signs, images, or gestural expressions. Moreover, the unstable moving nature of the act of representation unfolds itself through the factors of pressure and frustration, through omission, suppressions, and oblivion. There is always something omitted, removed, and a kind of exaggeration and chauvinism in the removal which makes representation possible.[18]

Representation announces itself through eternally variegating factors and also through the necessary distance between its extremes. Therefore it is always present even in cases where we imagine it has been removed: "The predilection of representation for removal resides in its origin, and as a matter of consequence the origin remains continuously present in the end product"[19]

Therefore, the dramaturgy of spectators cannot exist definitively once for all, as there is no immaculate audience. Moreover, dramaturgy can only be achieved through a relentless pursuit towards removing tensions between the audience and the actors.

With this removal of tensions called for by Joseph Danan, we mean the capacity to establish links between the two banks; the bank of spectators and the bank of actors and the non-submission to fanciful simplifications based on their antagonism in the sense that one can exist only when it has superseded another and acts in its stead and place. To substantiate his argument, Danan gives the example of the spectacular performance, "Inferno" by one of the best known modern public dramaturgs, R Catsellucci. "The beginning of the show is known; Castellucci comes on stage, walks alone towards the audience…and gives his name 'Romeo Castelluchi.[20] Afterwards, someone helps him wear a reinforced protection suit, and then the seven dogs are released. Three of them attacked him savagely forcing him down on the floor. They tear into pieces his clothes (face and hands are unprotected). He shouted and the dogs disappear"[21]

When Romeo announces his true identity before the audience and the dogs are released and attack him on stage, and when the dogs try to tear his clothes to bite him, all these things happen in reality; and this is what the performer intended. He wanted to put himself in danger directly before the audience. Performance, here, eliminates any possibility for the performance to expand beyond the time and place where it occurs. It is neither the representation of something else, nor the reference to another source. What takes place on stage and what the actor does are enough, and there is nothing that comes after. So we are in the presence of dramaturgy that dispenses of the intention to represent something.

Danan, in turn, does not cast doubt on the idea that the moment we are talking about is a moment purely devoted to spectators. What happens and the subsequent sections of the show bear witness to this. However, the power of the performance moment should not make us undermine the other moment that Danan terms as "the metaphorical power of stage." "It remains that the power of moment does not remove the other power. On the contrary, it deviates with the slipping of time and turns into a metaphorical power of stage. The more outright and powerful is what is being represented on its time, stronger becomes this metaphorical power of stage that opens the door wide open to meaning, paving the way for interpretation.."[22]

By requiring interpretation, modern performance is constrained many times; it leaves the door open for writing before the spectator who is engaged in reviving words and elements, including those which used to be left to the discretion of spectators. We cannot experience Castelucci's performance, drawing inspiration from Dante's hell, without evoking things that we know about this hell. "The spectator returns (from hell) with a set of impressions, feelings comparable with those they go through in their lived experience. They accompany them for years and years and maybe throughout their whole life. It is probably in this way that we experience theater: it requires to be lived in the present, but its value is determined through the effect it produces"[23]

In the same vein, Stanaton Garner points out the mistake we make when we limit the act of mimesis to the doer of the act of mimesis (the poet, author, and actor) disregarding the contribution of the spectator, who in his turn intervenes to delimit the scope of mimesis. In this way, mimesis becomes a sensorial work enabling for communication with the world"[24]

We can notice these observations on mimesis in Arabic dramaturgy; for instance, it is evident in the theater performance "Who's afraid of representation?" by Rabih Mroué and Lina Saneh. The two actors come on stage and engage in a game where Lina opens a book, randomly chooses a page, and Rabih takes a chronometer to measure her speaking time. The book

deals with a number of body artists. The dialogue takes place in this way:

> *Lina: Gina Bayn 27*
> *Rabih: You have 27 seconds. You can start.*
> *Lina/Gina Bayn: I presented my artistic works, the most important ones between 1968 and 1975…I barmed myself, I punched myself, causing my blood to trickle. I came peacefully, I put blades on each step of the ladder, I put off my shoes and climbed the ladder, barefooted…*
> *Rabih: Time is up.*
> *(Lina arbitrarily chose another page.)* [25]

Beginning with the title, the performance poses the problems of spectacle and spectators; it presents itself as dramaturgy of radical theater performance breaking with the components of performance. The two performers use their real names; they do not play any role or any character; they do not perform any drama acts or conflicts. Gradually, the drama cues about Hasan Mamoun unfold. He, one day, goes to his office and kills eight colleagues and injures forty others. What unfolds is the Lebanese civil war and the story of the Lebanese body, which is forced to be anything except itself. Behind the frustration of the theater representation and its components, the dramaturgical continuity reveals that Rabih Mroué has two roles: first he wants to show to the public that he is Rabih Mroué and nobody else and that he plays the role of Hasan Mamoun. He substitutes the roles with the basic intent to show who he is. He even wants to give the illusion that he has no idea whatsoever about this character. He does not do that only for the sole purpose of eliciting the reaction of the public and making them construct their own judgements on the character and the theme. If the stage does not depict clashes or tensions, it generates them among the spectators. The two actors, Rabih Mroué and Lina Saleh, act according to the symbolic tri-articulation "image, word, and body" to blur the borders between the spectators and the spectacle. Can the body be itself when standing before the public? Does Lina randomly find the pages? Before that, how does this book fall into her hands? What is the story between the artist's body and Hasan Mamoun? This dramaturgy works on blurring the lines and calls into question the connecting and disconnecting zones between imagination and reality; imagination is no more than the creation of a fictitious world. In front of a real world, it comes to reshape what is real; it becomes a method for changing the patterns of the sensorial present, and it builds new relationships between the reality and what appears on it; it also builds a relationship between what belongs to the public and what belongs to the private.

This conception which combines modern dramaturgy with the end of mimesis is hasty and reductive. It can take its validity, in our opinion, only through two corrections:

- First, the elements of mimesis still impose themselves in the new dramaturgy, even when it conceives and deliberately seeks its elimination and negation. It does this only at the outset, with fidelity at its essence as a dynamic process in continuous movement and not as a stable and dead system.
- The end of mimesis cannot be understood but within the limits that dramaturgy can hardly reach; these limits enable us to see that the end of imitation is nearer to utopia and not to the doctrine.

NEW DRAMATURGY POST-DRAMATIC DISCOURSE

H. T. Lehmann founded the project of post-drama theater based on the necessity to undermine traditional drama mimesis; it was based on comprehensiveness, illusion, and representation of the world. These are, in his opinion, elements which belong to logic and not necessarily to drama because what interests Aristotle is the philosophical nature of tragedy. Therefore, mimesis for him is a kind of mathematical equation through which individuals can learn while discovering pleasantly the object of mimesis.[26]

Leman rejects the power of drama as a stable and a restorable, self-contained model. He claims the ability to demarcate the borders of an ideal world, not drawing upon a general conception of reality but on an empirical situation. However, his rejection of mimesis is not irrevocable, maybe because of his awareness of its impossibility. In his discussion on the affinity between the post-drama theater and energy theater mentioned by J.F. Leotard, he starts with an example mentioned by the latter: "I feel a throbbing toothache, I firmly tighten my grip and scrub with my nails the palm of my hand…"[27] Can I say that the my hand movements represent my toothache? He concludes that Leotard talks about a theater that we can start with if we think about a theater beyond the framework of drama. It will not be a theater for meaning, but a theater for spectators; it will be a theater far away from representation. However, this does not mean that it exists without mimesis; it rather does not submit to it; it is not subject to its logic.[28]

Leman adds another example, from A. Artaud, on the persons who are tortured with fire. For him, they do not send to their spectators meanings but signs. It is a question then, according to Leman, of an assimilating, dynamic, and emotional mimesis which varies throughout a logical and aesthetic process as the one referred to by Aderno.[29]

However, the advocacy of a post-drama theater breaking with old theater sediments is met with strong reservations and criticisms. In this respect, we can mention B. Tackels, who puts forward that the concept of post-drama theater has brought what has been expected of it, especially during the period between 1970 and 1990. It enables the description of performances during a specific period in the history of drama by pinpointing its renewed forms and the transformation cues in it. But those who express reservations start with the attempt to project the post-drama model on some modern artistic theatrical forms, which do not necessarily meet the requirements of the authority and affirmativeness of Leman's model. This leaves much room for miscomprehension and even contradiction: "Clearly, the devices that Leman suggests have not been tested in the era that has just ended and I mean the contemporary theatrical forms of the beginning of the third millennium. If we try to implement his theory in the realms of these new drama forms, we will draw a confusing conclusion, as it will show us that it contradicts his hypotheses"[30]

Ch. Weiler agrees with what was put forward by B. Tackels concerning the inefficiency of Leman's model, namely its inability to decipher the codes of third millennium theater. By ignoring the socio-political origins of theatrical spectacles, she points out the reductive nature of Tackels' analysis. By doing this, according to her, he separates theater from one of the main reasons for its existence.[31] In fact, the reservations expressed by B. Tackels and Christel Weiler and others over post-drama theater advocated by H. Leman are not meaningless. Even H. Leman himself, ten years after his book, he published a study where he defends the concept. Even though he shows his irreversible adherence to his thesis and denies his lack of ineligibility to approach the third millennium theater, he recognizes the need to support and enrich it. According to him, the model he proposes is first oriented towards reading drama between the 1970s and 1990s. Therefore, it cannot be comprehensive enough to include the new dramaturgies. Therefore, he proposes five ancillary entries: group work in theater groups, dialogue between society and theater, dance, show, narrative and theatrical speech acts.[32]

Generally, when we think about the discourse of post-drama theater, we notice two totally different patterns of thinking leading to different results:

- First, we think of post-drama theater as a stable model, the elevated one, the final definitive and eternal version, symbolic of the theater which used to be–which resigned and disappeared. There are two flaws in this line of thinking. The first one is methodological in the sense that we quickly realize that the concept of post-drama theater will turn into a loose saying trying to put an end to what distinguishes theater. The concept turns into an umbrella notion. It is described by Patrice Pavis[33] who believes it will be a question of a general idea, which may include everything and mold everything. The descriptions put forward by Leman slouches. The general and vague interpretations are accepted (postmodernism, cryptography, celebration of art as imagination, celebration of art as continuity, incompleteness, variegation, a-texture, de-codification, demolition non-imitation…).[34] The second one is innovative and results in having identical stages, re-patterned dramaturgy, and unilateral thinking about theater and performance. Those who innovate and research theater will find themselves substituting centralization with another one; a new dimension of post-drama discourse will emerge as an inwardly oriented discourse falling under the category of post-colonial discourse. This discourse is brought about by a conception of identity, an inclination towards an essentialization, and a wild management of difference.
- Second, we think of post-drama discourse as a style and not as a model. From this angle, we can perceive the borders of the productive relationship whose threads may be interlaced with the new dramaturgy since the latter has no difficulty in making use of the techniques of post-drama theater. It employs them as being amongst the vast possibilities that are available and not as necessities imposed by the power of the model or an illusion of belonging to any absolute conception of theater. Simply put, escaping the power of the model is the deep idea laying the foundation of the new dramaturgy utopia. When we think about the post-drama theater as a style and not as a new theory in drama, or as an umbrella covering everything, we can then assimilate the depth of what is done for example by the Zoukak Theater Company in Lebanon. The renewal of the theatrical aesthetic and artistic practice is nothing more than the other face of the coin of a social and political commitment. "Hamlet machine" in its 2009 and 2010 versions, is metamorphosed, according to A. Furse, into an effective and convincing tool for expressing the absurdity that prevails in the whole country. The double bet expressed by the producers of the play is not lost; the questioning continues on the position of the performer on stage when facing the reality of failure and loss.[35]

According to the same logic, we can mention the urgent nature to which Nedjma Hadj pays attention to concerning the performances of Leila Souleiman in "the period of the Arab spring" It appears "from the first reading as if it were a documentary theater, but proposes metaphors beyond facts and events. The stage presses us to raise questions and its innovations clash with political questions in anticipation of others related to collective memory and modern history"[36] Similarly, we must remember that Abdemajid El Houss's projections—flooding the stage and punctuating the Bitter Trees performance—do not seek to create idyllic landscapes or theatrical poetry. Instead, they strive to articulate the harsh, incommensurable realities of bodily suffering, whether individual or collective, grasping for what lies beyond the immediate interests of both stage and audience.[37]

The post-drama discourse can be understood as a discourse going beyond drama. It is also, especially, an assimilation of sediments and potentials of the drama forms. Leman himself declares that the post-drama concept will lose reasons for its existence after the definitive disappearance of drama. This will result in the fact that post-drama discourse will fail to define itself far from the contours of drama.[38]

New Dramaturgy Cases and Transformations

The new dramaturgy escapes the power of the model. It prefers to express itself by drawing upon the expansion of the possible and not from the narrowness of the existing. It tends to avoid setting its borders since it is ready at any time to pursue other horizons.

This conceptual framework remains indispensable when analyzing the paradigmatic shifts constitutive of emergent dramaturgical practices, irrespective of their manifestation within conventional theatrical venues or alternative performance spaces. Accordingly, these cases and transformations go through two phases. First, one need to question the current situation of the written text: Are we at the end of the text or shall we return to it? Are we in the presence of new forms of appearance? The second is closer to the betweenness of the new forms of new dramaturgy, variegating from theater through performance, dance, live music, and multimedia. Is it a question of removing or redrawing the borders? How can we understand this new co-existence of these forms and this rich structure compared to the previous coexistence and the previous intermediate situation? How do these dramaturgical transformations affect the experience of the spectators?

THE NEW DRAMATURGY AND THE SITUATION OF THE WRITTEN TEXT

Does theater still tell stories?

J.P. Ryngaert, in a co-authored book with J. Sermon, titled "Theaters of the Twenty First Century: the Beginnings" states in the summary of the first part: "During the last decades of the twentieth century, stories were called into question to the extent that they were reduced to silence in a time when they represented an essential drama component. Afterwards, critics and scholars announced the return of stories…"[39]

According to Ryngaert, doubt has been cast on the role of stories in the dramaturgy, thus undermining it during the last decades. This doubt originates from the ability of the word to express the self and the world. It leaves the door open for faith in the certainty of image and its ability to fill the enormous gap that the selves feel when trying to express themselves inside an ever-changing world. In the new dramaturgy, it is a question of resurrecting stories and rethinking the forms of their management on stage. We are not witnessing the removal of tales, but rather their resurrection and a recreation of the rules of the game that the special uses of the word provide.[40]

In this context, there is a return of Arabic storytelling to represent an effective and basic dramaturgical proposal. We consider this narrative turning point as the resumption of what has been done by Azedine Madani, Tayeb Seddiqi, Abdelkader Aloula, and others who paid due regard to the promises of the Islamic Arabo-Amazigh narrative imagination. To illustrate this return, there is the Egyptian performance "The Storyteller Said" that exploits Arabic storytelling traditions. The performance shifts perspectives, from the story itself, from the storyteller perspective, or from the angle of the relationship between storytelling and the audience for the purpose of reclaiming the female self and redeeming her body and memory. In Mohamed Samir's interpretation of the "The Story Tells" "it is an attempt to combat cultural marginalization that starts from language itself; it speaks in masculine and thus covers the intellectual functions in society to build its own view"[41]

We moved from the new dramaturgy to regain faith in spoken word and in stories. Their return on stage is not a redemption or nostalgic return; rather, it is a new return. It is an ethical return upsetting the narrative sediments and innovates new horizons for disposing of narratives and stories. Theater still tells stories, even when it gives the contrary impression. When it exhibits futile or abandoned things and when it turns its back to traditional themes of importance, theater still tells a story. Even when its public is surprised and they do not understand everything, or they waited until the following day to appraise what they had to understand the day before, theater tells a story. These stories include short, fresh stories, newly fabricated stories, fragmented stories, beautiful stories, stories that are hard to believe, and tales in which the visible conflict does not exist. The irritating submission replaced direct confrontation. The continuous digression becomes the focus, and the fascinating transparency irritates those who want to know everything. The narrator replaces the spectator and witnesses the dialogue exchange. Here, synchronization is the ultimate prize.[42]

According to Ryngaert, stories in the new dramaturgy are no longer blatant; their existence is not overtly expressed; their existence is uncertain, ambiguous, and implicit. Moreover, stories are known for their interest in great narratives. But faith in them has disappeared and a new faith has emerged. This latter faith pays heed to what has fallen from the self, looking for itself in great narratives. Story pays attention to the marginalized, futile, and casual. Authors are no longer interested in the writing of coherent stories whose parts are fused into one unit. They prefer to retain the freshness of tales and exhibit them as a condition, without subjecting them to the guillotine of the plot. They find nothing wrong if these stories are fragmented with many digressions and unclear points of focus. Stories are no longer mere demonstrations of conflicts since they are now more interested in showing characters unable to perform their acts. The traditional link between the character and the act has been disrupted. We are now in the presence of what J.P. Sarrazak labels "impersonnage."[43] In these stories, we distinguish the upsurge of monologue and the absence of borders between monologue and dialogue and the synchronization of symbols.

It is worth referring to the text by Valery Casher, "My Story with Victoria K. and Delphine Serek" or the story "The Yellow Chair" and what its author says about their drama stakes. She underlines, "I wrote this text as if I were excavating for monuments, which gradually appeared and took form out of different small pieces and breaks which are gradually patched. Through them, the text draws the lines underlying the conflicts which shook the country and the region. It basically narrates the story of a woman looking for human and geographical landmarks; she goes to meet another woman, relying on authentic documents, wondering what is the difference between reality and imagination"[44] Between the story of a woman and the story of a city and a region, the contours of the text are drawn revealing its complex unity. This unity employs different narrative techniques, such as directly addressing the audience/reader, engaging in dialogue with them, and the specific use of personal letters, documents, and extracts of archives to give the impression of improvisation. Valery Casher does not pay attention to the chronology of events because we have a story which lacks chronological coherence, in a pledge for redeeming a fragmented memory. This explains why story telling teems with digressions. In Valery's story, the events coexist with the less significant ones. For example, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 coincides with the death of Hugo Herman, the producer of the animated movie, "The Beautiful Blue Danube" The position that Valery Casher takes when narrating Victoria and Delphine Sirik's story corresponds to the narrator's position, according to Walter Benjamins who oscillates between the power of the omniscient author who owns the story and narrates it and the secondary teller who tells the story of the others.[45]

It is a question then–and especially–in the new dramaturgy of how we narrate?

WRITING AND TEXTUAL CONCENTRATION

As Bernard Dort (1960s) long ago observed, a fundamental distinction must be drawn between the dramatic text (texte dramatique) and the theatrical text (texte scénique)–a crucial theoretical differentiation that continues to inform contemporary dramaturgical analysis.[46] The first is characterized by a solid drama structure and the unavoidable return of this structure's components; the second offers itself the possibility to disrupt and shake these components. It even relinquishes some of them without making the text lose its relationship to drama. And it paves the way not only for a different performance, but also for a different concept of theater.

According to this line of reasoning, Joseph Danan establishes that a large part of the new dramaturgy, in its textual dimension, is accomplished through texts which challenge the model imposed by the common well-known structure of the drama text. This textual dramaturgy takes place below the line that Heins Muller came up with in his text "A Painting Under Surveillance"[47] According to J. Danan, it is a question of textual materials which lay the foundation of a new relationship between the two elements of the dichotomy, text, and performance. These textual materials lead to the questioning of the concept of dramaturgy as a process of building drama texts and its courting as a concept bridging the relationship between the text and performance while adding other new dimensions. We are in the presence of new dramaturgies whose efficiency is based on undermining the centrality of text. However, this act of undermining the centrality of text is not the product of hasty reductive understanding, implying the termination of the text, i.e., putting an end to its existence and breaking any possible relationship between the text and the performance. Accordingly, calling into question the centrality of texts means the following:

- Undermining the traditional drama structure that has predominated the writing of drama texts; and for a long period, it represented the standard elevated model without which no drama structure can be right.
- Following contemporary scenographic theory, we might frame this as a shift from text-based dramaturgy to compositional dramaturgy, where the dramatic text becomes a modular component in a larger sensory apparatus rather than a governing structure.
- While body dramaturgy cannot be considered equivalent to text dramaturgy (despite some scholarly attempts to establish equivalence), its practice remains necessarily engaged with textual methodologies, even as it emerges through apparent divergence. This tension is evident in the terminological preferences of practitioners: where N. Sevros employs the language of "tales" Biena Bowesh insists on "body work" As Bowesh demonstrates through choreographic examples–such as the symbolic elevation of a female dancer to a necklace-like positioning–the dancing body articulates its own narrative logic.[48] This interpretive framework helps understand and analyze performances like Beckett's "Krapp's Last Tape" where the constrained physicality (manifest through frustrated gestures, muscular tension, and restricted mobility) becomes both medium and archive of memory, and its movements simultaneously suppress and channel textual/vocal expression.

WHO WRITES?

The answer to this question does not seem to be very clear yet. In the new dramaturgy, the act of writing is no longer typically exclusively reserved to drama writers. Instead, it is a publicly generalized act that is done wholly or partly by the author, on his own or in collaboration with others. New dramaturgy writing tends to combine texts written by deceased or living authors. Dramaturgy writing can be done by dramaturgs. They shift from the mediation between two modes of writing to the adoption of one's own idiosyncratic style. This style can be potentially adopted by the producer, who finds her/himself ready to write under the pressure of production costs. The actor may write his/her own dialogues either under through collective improvisations, or by under an individual writing atmosphere. The spectators are called upon to sign his/her personal writings so long as the new dramaturgy performances have turned away from the illusion of possessing and monopolizing meaning and convincingly exhibit that the future of this meaning should be shared. Therefore, they insist on continuously delaying meaning instead of working on its disclosure. There are, of course, those who prefer to free dramaturgy from the issue of meaning. They liberate dramaturgy by leaving it to the discretion of the public to construct the suitable meanings

In the "Violon Scene" performance by the Moroccan team Aphrodite, we have the accumulation and interrelationship of different writing levels. It begins with the testimonies of single mothers, then the rewriting by actor Amal Ayouch, and ends afterwards by the performance producer, Abdelmajid El Houass.[49] The same thing can be said about "Autumn" The producer receives her sister's memoirs where she writes about her suffering with cancer and her anguish with the husband, an ingrate cheater. Through her production proposal, she stifles this writing to offer the actress and dancer the possibility for choreographic and body writing.[50] However, the performance, "The House" by Charoline Hatim, prefers to remain faithful to the text written by the Lebanese author Arza Khader keeping the same title.[51]

The expansion of the writing concept made by Bruno Talkz in terms of the agent and the affected is based on the essential issue of plurality. The need for plurality is what makes the project of stage writing needed and founded on expanded dramaturgy. There is a nonchalant dismissal that is noticed in the Arab context concerning stage writing. In this dismissal, plurality turns out to be only numerical, a situation where the blood of texts is shed amongst persons without reaching real polyphony. This mode of creative writing fundamentally transcends pragmatic concerns about production constraints and material and budget limitations—it jumps to the imposition of the intellectual property rights and assigning different tasks to individuals. Stage writing is a project and a specific dramaturgical view supported by the special awareness of the need to think about theater and its relationships to the persons in different contexts. It is an industry and an effect at the same time. This means that it is plurality as an industry and as an effect. Consequently, it requires conditions that must be ripened. Otherwise it will turn, in the best situations, into systematic improvisations and in the worst circumstances into standardization, unification, and numeration.[52]

WHAT SHOULD WE WRITE IN THE NEW DRAMATURGY?

Authors of the new dramaturgy still resort to theater repertoire and coalesce with classical ancient texts. For instance, we can mention the latest retrospection of the Kuwaiti drama writer Souleiman Albassam. He resurrects the tragedy "Medea" by Euripides and its concentration on the character Medea, the refugee, who cannot enjoy all her rights in the female community. In traditional drama, this detail is considered an addition, which might be useful for carving out Medea's personality, but it is transformed to become the heart of the drama act. Souleiman Albassam does only what has been done before him by Euridice, namely when he focuses in his text on Medea the knowledgeable, and neglects the rest of the details offered by the Greek legend on this character. He also reports that he has treated classics as dramaturgical accessories. Naturally, the choice of the Kuwaiti dramatist is determined by his belief in the need for bridging the gap between drama and its political and social context.

Inside the new dramaturgy, texts belonging to the present, variegate in their forms of existence and subjects. Each text prefers to converse with drama sediments in its own specific way and to draw a certain understanding that combines the public with the private. These texts also choose their specific language. They may be written in fluent, eloquent Arabic by authors who advocate the focus on language in order to address the audience in the Arab region. In the thirteenth edition of the Arab Theater Festival, a recommendation was made calling for the adoption of drama texts written in Arabic instead of its spoken varieties. There are also texts that are written in spoken languages and local dialects. For example, the Arabic drama anthologies of the third millennium were issued in Arabic and English and wholly written in spoken dialects. Adding to this textual mosaic, there are texts that are written particularly in French and others which vary in their languages.[53]

In addition to the texts which converse with the repertoire and texts which belong to the present, there are texts written on the basis of textual remnants. In this type of writing, the incomplete text meets other incomplete texts, as if this wri-

ting avoids reaching its completeness. In this type of writing, what is narrated in private aspires to be narrated in public. In this connection there is the play "Final cut" by Myriam Saduis of Tunisian origin. This performance is based on a type of writing that combines private and intimate events. The scene's power resides in Treplev and Arkadina's explosive confrontation–from the text "Nurse" by Chekov. According to Myriam Saduis, this section enables her to evoke the violence which has characterized her relationship with her mother on the one hand, and also enables her to be aware of the need to write a text addressing the public and to contemplate politically, instead of eternally bringing to the fore the case of self-hospitalization.[54]

In the new dramaturgy, different texts and different textual genres coexist. For example, a poem can jump onstage to take its place, accompanying the drama or fictional texts. In this type of writing, an unnoticed newspaper article or historical document can become a drama textual material. This was the case with Rabih Mroué. The ordinary routine news and the accessible daily life stories provide raw material for a performance. For instance, in the project "The News Is in the Theater" launched by Driss Ksikess and Jouad Sounani adheres to this type of writing.[55]

It is no longer possible, when talking about the new dramaturgy, to still believe in the centrality of the present act and the relationships between characters and dialogue as essential components in the absolute drama theory. J.P. Sarazak goes so far in his research to sap the transformation movement of dramaturgy by concluding that the factors of anarchy and disorder govern; hence, the long-lasting transformation movement begins. In order to understand the transformation of the drama forms from 1880 until the present, we should evoke a new element which Zondi, Lukach, and Heigl were not able to think of. It is anarchy. We have to evoke it here since Epson, Strindberg, Chekov, and even Sara Kain, Foss Lagers, Danis, did not recall anarchy and disorder factors in the new and contemporary dramaturgy.

If we contemplate the new dramaturgical texts in Arabic, we find that they have inaugurated their adherence to the transformation continuity that we mentioned above. We find some of these features in the text "The House" by Arza Khader. In this piece, since the idea of selling the house emerged, time is mixed up and turns into a lobby where no discrimination is made between the past, the present, and the future. Opportunity is given to characters to find out about themselves; they discover what they can do and what they like or dislike as if these things were not possible before. The paradox is that characters do not recognize themselves while moving forward but while moving backward. In the text, "The Match" Driss Ksikess strives to create a fictitious environment where repetitive attempts are made to return back to the unapproachable past. Here, the speaking functions in the place and instead of acting, as if actors do not speak so as to move the play forward, to complicate it, fix it, and drag it backward. In this way, we are in the presence of characters watching themselves before being watched by spectators.

The New Dramaturgy Betweenness, Media Turn and Public Experience

In one of his articles titled "Dramaturgy as Skill, Function and Verb" L. Switzky expresses his admiration for M. Bleeker's efforts to develop the new understanding of dramaturgy. He mentions her proposal to approach this concept as "a method of viewing, in which one eye is cast on the intrinsic potentials of ideas and matter, while the other is on their ramifications and effects.[59]

According to Switzky the importance Bleeker's proposal lies in the fact that it comes out with dramaturgy becoming a method of examination. This requires "an examination from different angles"[60]

Through this perspective, a kind of dramaturgy emerges as a verb, giving preponderance to liquidity and flexibility typical of verbs compared to nouns. Starting from this flexibility and liquidity, it can be traced to the etymology of the active and vivid nature of dramaturgy. However, this matter can be achieved, according to Switzky, only through thinking, questioning, and criticizing, which are strong dramaturgical verbs, not very different from the construction of stage or the performance of a given role.

Both H. Lehmann and P. Primavesi, in a co-authored article, underline that "the development of modern theater and performance can be delimited through the new media technologies and new perceptional habits. The hybridity of theater, dancing, performance investitures, museums, films, and media arts is growing in importance…"[61]

This development and worsening hybridity cannot be but a change in the way dramaturgy is approached. According to Bleeker, the concept has shifted from the first primitive standards and narrow demarcations to encompass a new method of approaching things. This development is only the consequence of critical thinking and its acute questioning. Accordingly, the new dramaturgy appears as hybrid in its nature, negotiating in its character, and open in its essence. The mission of dramaturge in the twenty-first century and in the period of rapid changes requires "openness and readiness to accept the mission as a stance as regards the changing bases and questioning the forms through which we have been accustomed to view theater…The successful drama experience inside institutions necessitates from us a kind of productive flexibility and a capacity to change the earth on which we stand. We move from literary authenticity to an authenticity based on visual arts and music, from choreography to documents and from the strategy of representing something before the public to a strategy of communication with that public…"[62]

We can identify the features of this betweenness in the new Arabic dramaturgy through two aspects:

- The betweenness that it projects–especially the interwoven expressive forms and the agreed upon shaken

habits of its existence, and the change in areas where their connections can be tightened. Concerning the relationship between drama and music, for example, there are many possible forms of existence and dramaturgical proposals whose components may be compatible or may not attune. In the performance "Imane" by Sidi Laarbi Cherkaoui, the dramaturg conducts a negotiation in three expressive fields (drama, music, and dance), thus giving birth to a rich hybridity. But this negotiation cannot be but the beginning of the dramaturgical continuity where melting and attunement of components represent the essence of drama. Cehrkaoui maintains the idea that drama exists through the scenography of performance where we distinguish, especially between two huge separating fences, the parts and accessories and clothes, keep the characters (Daril ,Joana, Deborah Rainbow, …), and take care of the script. With regards dance, it emerges, according to Cherkaoui, from a broad conception where we differentiate between the dancing body, which works on exhibiting dancing movements, anticipating an ideal technical, expressive, and material capital, and another body "almost quasi-dancing" approaching in its work the actor more than the dancer. This second body performs ordinary movements that he/she repeatedly works on, including addition, omission, and slowness to make them dancing movements. Within the plexus of Cherkaoui's presentation, music emerges as an essential line. The band of musicians, since the beginning of the performance, install themselves on the theater balcony, the highest point at the right of the stage. Their members mix with the performers by the end of the performance. This is how the performance makes us believe in an effective interweaving between dance, music, and drama. It gives birth to a hybrid form that can be referred to as "theatrical dancing"63 Beginning from the same elements, dance, music, and drama, Moroccan producer Asmae Houri, in her play "Autumn" according to a different dramaturgical amalgamation, conducts a negotiation between the three fields to produce another hybrid version that we may refer to as "danced theater" In his choreographic presentation "Potero in the East" the dramaturg Tawfiq Izido begins with fine arts grounds, referring back to 1956, the year that witnessed an imagination hit. It enables the Columbian artist Fernando Potero to mold his subject and style into his Mandoline painting, amplifying its size and dimensions. The painter then founds his style, which specifically consists of drawing thick bodies or various bodies. His paintings become a symbol of the other body, atypical of the different body. More specifically, he refers back to the exhibition of the Columbian artist which he organized in 2005. During that exhibition he was devoted to the drawing of grave violations made by American soldiers in Abu Gharib Prison in Iraq. Petro's paintings give the floor to those who are deprived of this right. It is a visual narrative of an aggrieved body to whom no one listened to. Likewise, Tawfiq Izido bets on exhibiting bodies of a different kind–odd bodies. He exhibits thick bodies that do not belong to the repertoires of classical dancers; they are rounded bodies giving the impression that they are untrained, not having the luxury to show their sculptured muscular bodies. Ezido treats a prisoner body of a special type, the body of a prisoner–unwanted according to the decorum–which continues to expand under the effect of the idealness of the slim body, the athletic body, the young, sensual, and full of inducement. It is confirmed by the world of dance and its history. It is supported by the contemporary consumption machinery. It has become difficult to talk about the dramaturgy of the play "Potero in the East" without this profound betweenness established by Erzidio between dancing and painting. This betweenness leads to a version of dramaturgy where the fine art elements may not overtly appear. The choreographer does not show samples of Potero's paintings or carved puppies, like his carved masterpieces or documentaries exposing his works. It remains difficult to imagine Tawfiq's play separated from Potero's paintings and bodies.

- There is betweenness that cannot be separated from the first-level betweenness. Instead it takes another form of existence, revivified, and intensified by the growing presence of multimedia in contemporary dramaturgical works. We are referring to multimedia. Khalid Amine defines multimedia to mean "combining complexities posed by some works, such as plays by R. Lepage, which make use of several screens to broadcast previously recorded or other live images, adopting strong voice system, and dynamic mechanisms rearranging the theatrical space. This variegation leads to dumping the theatrical space with different and multiple texts, spawning echoes, shaking the usual theatrical semiosis, finding problems with theater performance mechanisms and deepening the cases of betweenness.[65] P. Eckersal et al assign specificity to betweenness when they consider the new dramaturgy as "a field of performance taking position between us, theater, dance, music, and visual arts"[66] P. Eckersal and others understand betweenness as an expanded dramaturgy and a dialectical and innovative continuity. According to this line of reasoning, the word "interaction" is used abundantly amongst those who are interested in making use of multimedia. Even if they constituted a primary focus of new media dramaturgy, their significance cannot be reduced to a superficial or self-evident notion—as though it were achieved merely through the deployment of screens, buttons, and amplified projections. Moreover, media dramaturgy is not the concern with the position of a direct and live broadcast during a performance. Nor is it an attempt to make virtual theater as distant as possible. It is an ongoing process of thinking about "the difficult intricate relationship between the techniques of new multimedia and dramaturgy's function, which requires transforming ideas into reality and awareness of composition and construction"[67] To challenge the interaction issue, C. Bouko discussed the immersive theater experience. According to Bouko, border demolition, or what she terms as demolition of the façade between the audience and performance, is nothing more than a first phase. Interaction in its narrow meaning cannot be immersion. As a matter of consequence, the immersive theater is an experience that begins with the thresholds of interaction. It is distinguished by its sensational sensitivity and the deepening of instant presence and its capacity to disrupt and shake ideas and feelings. It becomes actually and metaphorically a dangerous experience where frontiers fade away between live existence and mediated existence.

It strives to achieve a difficult dramaturgical balance between spectators' freedom and their submission to the immersion experience, and between the dramaturgical cohesion and the freedom of investigation imposed by the experience and the discrimination between the limits of interaction and reaction...[68] Practically speaking, employing media is no longer odd in the Arab dramaturgy. It could be because things are turning the other way round. It is now unusual to find a performance where these new media forms are not employed. However, the togetherness of this employment and dramaturgical effectiveness differs based on the difference in awareness. The difference in awareness shapes the works of its authors. We may find an incoherent ladder with different degrees, uneven, scaling the methods and prudence with which these media are employed. Amongst the performances where this medium melts down within the dramaturgical structure is Tania Khouri's work. Through her Beirut-Based Dictaphone Group, in the play "Stories of Refuge" in 2013 she stages a group of Syrian refugees who have recently illegally arrived to Germany. The group use a hidden camera to document one day of their life in Munich. They manage to produce three films that are first projected in a shipping container that was equipped to simulate the places frequented by refugees. The container was placed on a populated road. Inside the container, whiteness prevails within which the members of the family act and nothing more. The visitors are provided with headphones. They may install themselves on the bed in their preferred position. They can watch the videos projected on the wall. One of the spectators, who happens to be an Iranian from a refugee family, declares that she has always lived the story of her parents' asylum; she felt herself intimately close to the stories she watched. The working groups try through the use of media to immerse the spectator in the combination of the sensorial experience of the refugee instead of contending with the narrative presence, which maybe repetitive and similar in all asylum stories. The demolition of the frontline, which separates the spectator from the performer, was added. When the Iranian spectator gives her testimony and accepts to be recorded it is added to the performance. She gives up her status as a member of the public to become an actor. Only sensorial experience can produce the aspired emotional flow and can build a new comprehension experience for the audience. "From/to the city" is a play by the group Spatula & Barcode, a group of Moroccan teenagers from 2011. This represents a distinct genre of multimedia theater. It is an experience that takes place in Tangier. Participants take taxis in different groups and are driven separately throughout different neighborhoods in Tangier. During their trip, they intercommunicate through their mobile phones and talk about what they encounter and what attracts their attention. Afterwards, they go to a cyber space where they interact through the internet with other people going through a similar experience in different cities around the world. Communication and discussions are done in different directions starting with the food each one eats during the play and the unfolding events and cultural dialogues that also take place... On the basis of these elements one may formulate a simplistic, consumptive, and touristic judgment of this experience. However, its participants insist that they are producing an art simulating real life. They believe they are seeking to strengthen the spirit of the act; they regard walking in the city to be an innovative act since it develops a material and perceptive sense with regards the city. It is against hiding and concealing which increases the excessive seclusion. The play's group made use of media to produce points where we can start to think about what is related to society and all what threatens common life utopia.[69]

Conclusion

When we talk about new dramaturgy, we do not necessarily mean that a new dramaturgy replaces another one. The newness we are talking about here is a newness of transformation and replacement. In fact, it is a question of comprehensive transformation and continuity operating inside a dramaturgy laboratory where the factors of anarchy and chaos become essential on structural basis. It comprehensive transformation and continuity and all that it implies in terms of rejection of the tendencies of unification and standardization. These tendencies used to stand for the sanctity of absolute drama. According to this logic, the textual writing shifts from the solid structure of authorship, unified and integrated, to embark on an expanded horizon of writing. In this way, writing is transformed to become a gathering of systems and a large library of texts. The gap separating the text and the performance is narrowed down. The larger the scope of writing on the side of what is written or who writes, the deeper we head towards an expanded dramaturgy. In this dramaturgy the early and hasty writing and dramaturgy concepts become fogged. This new dramaturgy declares itself through a fruitful and rich betweenness. Our focus here is not on numbering expressive forms as in a catalog, but rather on engaging their plurality to generate new points of encounter—ones that may transcend any single, predetermined mode of expression. Far from the previous centrality, we differentiate inside this betweenness. We differentiate between the prevalence of new media that presage large scale innovation horizons. These innovations shake the illusionary dichotomies elements, such as self and subject, self and the other, center and margin, reality and imagination, presence and representation, real and virtual...These transformations contributed in calling into question the public's position and forcing it to become a partner in the work; and it obliges it to also become an efficient factor in the continuity of the dramaturgy construction.

1 Adil Hidjami (2012). Jiil Deleuze ani alwujud wa al-íkhtilaf Dar Tubqal linashr (pp. 145-150)

2 Abdeslam Benabdelali (2004). Li aqlaniyat Khasira. Dar Tubqal Linashr (p. 51)

3 Abdeslam Benabdelali (2000). Usus Al-Fikr Alfalsafi Al muaasir. Mujawazat almitafiziqia. Dar Tubqal linashr. (p. 96)

4 The concept of primitive difference was first designated by the Moroccan sociologist, Abdelkbir Alkhatibi. He used it when referring to the dual criticism to mean the artificial secession which throws the other away to the absolute outside. Primitive difference, according to Alkhatibi, leads necessarily to the shadows of insane identities. We make use of this term to convey that the process of replacement inherently entails the tendency towards primitive difference which discards the other outside to the absolute.

5 Edgar Moran considers that human knowledge as any knowledge implies is syncretism, separation and communication at the same time. Knowledge of the physical objects implies belonging to the physical world, and knowledge of living phenomena implies belonging to the biological world and knowledge of cultural phenomena implies belonging to the culture. without this syncretism, the separation is absolute and communication is impossible (…). In case there is no separation, there will be no self and there will be no object of knowledge there will be no intrinsic benefit from knowledge and no extrinsic reality of knowledge. This intellectual dichotomy is not annihilated but on the contrary but uncovered through the act of knowledge. This act brings enables communication between the self and knowledge… return to methodology, knowledge of ideas" Youssef Tibs 2013 Dar Ifriqia (p. 212-213)

6 Erica Fischer Lichte min masrah al-muthaqafa ila tnasuji thqafat al-furja (translation by Khalid Amin publications of the international center of performance studies series n 42 2016 (p. 167)

7 Joseph Danan, Qu'est-ce que la Dramaturgie ? Actes Sud-Papiers, Apprendre 28, 2010, p. 5-11.

8 Florence Dupont, Aristote ou le vampire du theater occidental, Editions Flammarion, Paris, 2007, p. 13.

9 Bernard Dort, L'état d'esprit dramaturgique, in theater/Public, n 67, Janvier-Février 1986, p. 8.

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41 Mohamed Samir Elkhatib (2016)

42 Mohamed Samir Khatib: arrawi (ya) min ta'nith adakira ila sina'ati anfurja, an article in the book 'Mun'ataf assardi fi almasrah , awdat funun alhaky khalid amin wa hasan yusfi manshurat al markaz adawli g$vhshj hgtv^; 2016 (p. 154)

43 J-P Ryngaert: theaters du 21 siècle. Op. cit., p. 9

44 J-P Sarrazac : Poétique du drame moderne de Henrik Ibsen à B-M Koltès. Editions du Seuil, 2012, p. 183

45 The text 'my stories with Valery Casher and Delphine Sirik or the story 'the yellow chair obtained the prize of France International 2019. It was translated from French to the Lebanese dialect Christel Khadir and was published as part of the program George Shahada for the support of publication … 2021

46 Walter Benjamin, Œuvres lll, Folio essais, 2000, p. 116.

47 Bernard Dort, in Qu'est ce que la dramaturgie, op. cit., p. 29.

48 Joseph Danan means the text by Heinz Muller which he published in 1984 und the title 'Bildbeschreibung' which literally means the description of the image But it was translated into French under the title 'Paysage sous surveillance'. We preferred to translate it a painting under surveillance to retain the graphic visual elements which represent the point of departure and the core element in Heinz Muller's text. We find in this text the interlock of realms of image and word. The text begins anew each time in which the author tries different new styles and dictions including the omission of the dramatic character in its traditional form, fragmentary writing and the instability of the articulatory moment … what made the text to turn nearly into a literary material penetrated visually philosophically and cinematographically

49 Norbert Sevros, Pina Bausch ou l'art de dresser un poisson rouge, L'arche, Paris, 2016, p. 31.

50 The play Violon scene on real testimonies of single mothers performed by the actress Amal Ayouch and written and produced by the dramaturg Abdelmajid Houass 2007

51 The play 'Autumn' produced by Asmae Houri from Memoirs written by her sister Fatima Houri when struggling against her cancer under a second title Tumor the performance won the prize of the best arabic dramatic world at the festival of Algeria in 2017.

52 The play 'The house' from the text by the Lebanese writer Arza Khader published in the anthology of the third millennium Arabic plays in Dar Nashr Mamduh Udwa translated into English and published by Nich Hern Books and produced by Hatem in 2017.

53 The Kuwaiti dramatist brought back onstage the character Medea Boribidis in a play which still performed in different theaters under the title Médéa in which the actress Hala Imran played the role pf Médéa

54 The anthology was published in its English version in Nick Hern Books in London under the title Plays from the World and included texts : 'the house' by Arza Khader other Egyptian productions by Leila Sliman and 'withdrawal by Mohamed Alattar, and 603 by Imad Frajin and damage by kamal Khaladi . The anthology was also published in its Arabic version at Dar Mamduh Uduan in which we find that all texts are written in dialects of their countries and we may even find switching between different varieties within the same text.

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63 H. Lehmann, P. Primavesi, Dramaturgy on shifting grounds, The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy, p. 179.

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INHABITED BY DANCE

by Nedjma Hadj Benchelabi

Introduction

The performing arts field, a field I have worked in and lived a large part of my life, has constantly provoked and pushed me to explore art practices through their relationships to space, collectivity, and bodily memory. This work, this lived experience, evokes in me, among many others, the question of individuality and community in our contemporary societies. As a participant in these contemporary performance practices, I experienced and witnessed the expression of the political through the vocabularies of the body, as well as the political potential of being in a marginal position. I felt the shifts of the last decade, its revolutions, and its afterlives. As I mentor performances, I perceive alternative ways of being politically engaged; as complexity grows, new connections are made. Formats are reinvented, and global, rather than local questions, are posed to our audiences. The politics of the art practices I am focusing on here are broader, more daring, and less expressive (explicit) than in previous generations, say from the 90s or 2000s. One might wonder if this time we are more united in the search for a different, more just world?

This political expression needs a political format; it requires a way of working that can hold and accompany it. Companionship or mentoring, rather than curatorial practice, is much more able to stay close and true to the political content the artists want to bring forward. Curatorship often remains under the influence of European notions of value, and it is dependent on their expectations and understanding of the politics in our regions. It is dependent on their funding, and it is often only short term backing.

This is why I have redirected my attention from my usual work as a curator, and I started to devote myself to thinking about how we can support creation processes, not only in terms of funds and studio-access, but also in terms of guidance and effective advice in dramaturgy, and project development. The platforms that I initiated with other partners, and mentors, allowed me to measure the pressing need for mentoring. It also made me understand the importance of working in small groups, a format where each artist has the space to reflect individually, collectively, or paired with a mentor on their creation. Secondly, residencies as a format, where artists live and work together in one place, allow exchange and inspiration to flow between different works in progress. This laboratory atmosphere proposes a true alternative to often too restrictive school systems and inaccessible institutions. However, their establishment often remains obstructed by insufficient human and financial resources.

Within these formats, on these platforms, knowledge of artistic practices is conveyed and shared in the studio with ease and confidence. Performing arts practices transcend all conventional comprehension or expectations. It is thus of extreme necessity to start reflecting on the shape of this field, so we can start bringing this contemporary, ever-changing scene the vocabulary, queries, and thought it deserves. With this text I thus hope to demonstrate its richness, its plurality, and relevance, and expose challenges and trends that have and continue to mark the field, in my view. In order to do so I will share the works and routes of choreographers that, in my opinion, allow us to grasp the current reality of creating and working in dance in the MENA/SWANA region today.

Positionality

This paper will concentrate on the choreographers and performers I worked with through years of work as a dramaturg, mentor, and curator. In my work I position myself in a companionship with the choreographer. I am nomadic, reflecting, observing, and thus capturing the essence of the moment and the temporality of the place. This enables me, in a way, to displace notions of time. Sometimes with effort and often with pleasure and passion, this journey through different experiences gave body to an individual and collective commitment, in Marrakech and Cairo in particular, allowing a space to dream, a performative space of the body, questioning the politics of the city. These curatorial experiences have led to many encounters with a young generation of choreographers and performers, a generation that abounds in initiatives, both individualistic and hyper-socialized, where their creativity helped overcome economic and social limitations. This upcoming talent proved to be an innovative generation, open to the world, and at the same time deeply rooted in the local context, whether in Marrakech or Cairo.

Being in Movement is One of the Agents of Freedom!

The performing arts, and in particular the dance field today, should be understood as a site of power struggle. The persistence of colonialism, the current capitalist climate, local forms of dictatorship, militarism, and violent regimes affect the field of dance and the people that participate in it. Throughout my career, politics has always been a defining structure for/influence on the art process. This presents itself in explicit or implicit ways; the political reality and locality of the choreographer imposes itself on the creation process. As a result, politics becomes part of the material that is crafted. In this process, or struggle, systemic violence in contexts of war, conflict, and structures of oppression such as racism, sexism, islamophobia, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, etc.–make themselves known. These modes of oppression affect artists on a personal level. They become part of the questioning when it comes to art, and they challenge them in the process. Artists are, however, not external to these structures, but they are an inherent part of their society. Artists and their work are in a position to expose and question this violence; they are able to provide a voice and invent different possible realities and futures. However, this practice can not be reduced to a body language for healing, or a claim to existence and justice; but it should be understood as a practice that embeds itself in society, just as much as it liberates the self and the others. The power of dance, the power of body language, is the power to imagine, move, and transform our current selves and possibly others. Through these dynamic and vital dance scenes, their performative body liberates them and our own bodies at once. To resist is to create.

Dance as a Space for Alternative Modes of Knowledge Production and Transmission

THE BODY AS A LANGUAGE

The dancers and choreographers enter the stage and break hegemonic (dance) body ideals, as they impose the reality of a diversity of bodies, presences, and singularities. These bodies transgress boundaries as they move from one space to another, from stage to roof, from inherited dance to the modern, from ancestor's gestures and sound towards the present to create and write their dance today. In the creation process, as well as the performance, these movements are shared. As a result, dance creates spaces where alternative modes and vocabularies of knowledge are invented, shared, or transmitted.

The need to move is often described as a fundamental and inherently human characteristic. But the transformation of movement into a vocabulary that ignites our imaginations and opens us up emotions, new dreams, and spaces of freedom: that is the art of choreographers.

PRACTICES AS KNOWLEDGE

Let me explain how these practices should be understood as a particular form of knowledge, and how the transferal of this knowledge becomes fundamental in performing art. Performance art practices, or corporal languages, are not a stand-in; they escape codes and formats through dramaturgical materials. They build a space and a time of subjectivity, defining another aesthetic at the crossroads of political, social, and collective heritage. They are inspired by references and unconquered spaces, not materialized in art, or those known in what we could call "the West" At the same time I experienced how those practices also challenge "the politics of curation"

This is crucial, as choreographic art continues to question our relationship to heritage, and how legacies transpire in contemporary society. They invest artistically and carry the capacity to move beyond received and expected vocabularies, without obliterating predecessors. Dance then becomes a practice that reflects, transmits, and transforms past legacies, making those artists "timekeepers" "memory-makers" or "history-workers" An example is *100 pas* by Taoufiq Izeddiou, a site-specific performance that engages the urban space, charged with history and various symbols. This free performance roots itself in society, into the sensitivity or urban location, and offers us another meaning of that space, outside the daily routine, or the symbolism left by layers of history. The performance contaminates the spaces and these gathered meanings and symbolisms, and adds a new layer to the collective memory of those attending. Performances like *100 pas*, create a collective reflection on the present conditions of the location. More importantly, they demonstrate the ways those histories are inscribed, and how they can be subverted by bodies, bodies with different vibrations that have the capacity to interact with the audience

Challenges and Trends

INSTITUTIONAL NEGLECT: A SPACE OF PRECARITY, OR RADICAL CREATION?

This potential, and value, of contemporary performing arts and dance is structurally disregarded. The performance arts field still misses recognition in most cultural institutional systems in the Arab Region. Local cultural institutions often fail to treat it as a legitimate, representative art form. They continue to reject and suppress its narratives and forms. However, I often experienced this positionality to be the springboard of more transgressive, radical, and inventive creations. Remaining in the mainstream margins then becomes liberating. It ends up being a way of approaching society from a different angle, and influencing it in a more direct, confrontational manner. However, this scarcity of means and support pushes dancers, performers, choreographers and their work in a position of marginality and precarity.

Therefore, it remains a permanent struggle to exist and perform in the arts. "Even if dance is accepted, it is not understood as a form that thinks!" said Taoufiq Izeddiou when discussing his experience as a choreographer in Morocco. In French, Taoufiq insists on the idea of "a dance that thinks" *(la danse qui pense)*. I will also suggest another meaning, "a dance that heals" (la danse qui panse').

The dance that thinks is a conscious practice, one that takes time as it builds up body language. It is a dance that takes in its political environment, that nourishes and is nourished by other artists, and that takes this input, filters it, and conceptualizes it into a body vocabulary. This work is intentional. It is deeply aware that it is constructing an alphabet of gestures.

The dance that heals is a practice where, through self expression, the dancer finds an acceptance and value of their own body. The dance that heals is a movement that asserts these individuals, their bodies, and gestures into their political societies and numerous living environments. At the same time this dance heals in collectivity. It heals in moments when the dance is shared with other dancers or audiences. The dance touches topics, histories, and realities, often sealed away, in fear of opening up old wounds or traumas. When dancers witness, touch, and translate these topics, histories, and realities, their dance starts to sense processes of repair and healing

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TREND

One trend I have witnessed emerge and continues to mark the field is multidisciplinarity, or interdisciplinarity. The Arab dance scene today is a tapestry of different art forms. It contains image and movement, sound design, architecture, and scenography. In this open field, indifferent to the constraints of a discipline, a larger referential framework arises. The existence of this unclassified field, deconstructs the colonial, globalized cultural system. This happens with an astonishingly rich artistic vitality, in terms of cultural and societal diversity and resolutely contemporary artistic and cultural initiatives. Here, the cultural landscape abounds in multidisciplinary projects mainly driven by artists and non-profit cultural organizations, nomadic in nature and almost without structural support. In other words, togetherness is reshaped and re-invented. Sharing becomes a political act, a collective, and a conscious gesture!

Dramaturgy of (Un)conquered Spaces

From my encounters and work with these artists, I reflected on my position as a curator and dramaturge. I propose a dramaturgy that keeps the work open—without a devised script but formed through a collection of ideas. During this process the artist start off with various "collected materials" [and], in the course of the rehearsal process he/she/they observe how the materials behave and develop; only at the end of this entire process do we gradually distinguish a concept, a structure, a more or less clearly outlined form; this structure is by no means known at the start and is by no means definable at the end (Van Kerkhoven, 1997, p. 20-21).

In order to challenge and expand accepted definitions of "contemporary" dance, I will propose three paths of dramaturgical companionships and collaborative positions, inspired by the singularity of each as they appear to me and in dialogue with each artist.

As I understand their choreography through the field of dance, their motto is to deconstruct boundaries and hegemonic understandings within the dance field. Secondly, they, collectively and individually, construct a journey where the language of bodies evokes serenity and subversion, and subliminal messaging emerges between body and mind, inviting us to stand up and move against oppressive systems. Their works are at the intersection of the political and the poetical, and as I have introduced before at the crossroads of multiple disciplines. Text, image, and the physical body share the stage, and take over from one another as each issue finds voice through different materialities

MENTORING & FRAMING EMERGING CHOREOGRAPHERS AND PERFORMERS

My work as a dramaturg and mentor in the framework of the programme *Un-Controlled Gestures*, and *Halaqat* is a clear and conscious desire to focus on supporting art creation.

How did this happen ?

I was invited as dance curator within *D-Caf* Cairo, for the *Arab Art Focus*. At that time in 2016, I sensed at once a very dynamic dance scene and also at the same time the absence of meeting places for artists and their audience in their local contexts. I decided to make a clear and radical choice of voicing young artists from the region, Maghreb and *Machrek*. Doing so, I wish to use this opportunity to confront their works with an audience and also to discover the works in dance from the two sides. Occasions to meet and share works are very rare and I wanted to contribute on this level of sharing and discussing first organically the work when sharing backstages, evenings and rehearsals before performing. After these editions in 2016, and 2018, I started looking for partners that would be willing to support this process and step forward as allies in its 'sense' (des allies de sens). I found a very open and committed team at the Goethe Institut in Cairo that shared the same concerns towards the performing arts field. Previously we worked on another collaboration, as I was curating *Tashweesh* festival, first edition in Cairo on feminism in the Arab world, the second one in Brussels.

From this *Un-Controlled* emerged, a program to mentor young artists from the MENA Region, and offer two residencies for the development of their art proposal. The program provided an opportunity to create and present new performances reflecting the social control exercised over bodies, and the autonomy of the body in its political, economic and interpersonal dimensions.

After our open-call, a selection was made, and we decided to bring the artists together: 1st gathering in Rabat, 2nd gathering as a residency in Cairo and the last one with a public presentation in Tunis (February 2020, just before what happened with lockdown and the pandemic situation). Because of the pandemic, all our dreams to share these creations were postponed, and we moved to digital conversations. It was only in May 2021 that we were able to do a public showing. In November 2021, we could finally present the work at the *Biennial of Dance in Africa* in Marrakech. One of the participating artists, Salma, now continues this journey by presenting her work elsewhere and developing it further.

The main element of this methodology is mentoring and structured feedback. For this I developed a framework to open this guidance to guest visitors based on the need of the artist's proposal (and not the opposite, to define the team and then impose them on the artists at work).

As an example: in the first edition, the Cairo-based choreographer and dancer Salma Salem explored the language of the body through a ritualistic approach that is centred around the womb, thought of as a political organ. The female body has been the object of various obsessions, gazes and control exercised from the outside as well as from the inside. Capturing the energy of the earth through dance, this creation became an ode to the female body. Manal Tass (Casablanca), and Said El Haddaji (Kénitra) were able to find valuable echoes and responses from the audience within the *Biennial* in Marrakech. And further on, in other festivals such as *D-Caf* in Cairo.

After this we continued our work in the form of a second edition of *Uncontrolled-Gestures*, in Cairo and in Berlin (2019-2022), and *Halaqat* in Brussels (2022).. These projects thus grew to become a platform, a safe space to create, explore their concepts, without interference on their freedom to imagine. Many artists expressed their joy and relief of finding again a space to be together physically and one where they could find critical comments and constructive feedback from other participant artists and mentors.

ONGOING JOURNEY WITH CHOREOGRAPHER TAOUFIQ IZEDDIOU

Over the years a deep friendship and partnership grew between Taoufiq and me. We first started working together when I featured his work in Brussels and invited him numerous times to give workshops. Through these collaborations, our conversations, shared passions, and artistic and political desires developed. I became involved in the programming of the *On Marche* festival in Marrakech. Secondly, I accompanied and supported him setting up workshops and training opportunities for young dancers in the region. These workshops were organized as a response to the lack of permanent training. *The Al Mokhtabar* workshops were an example of this initiative, and they showed

signs of potential. After a few years, these workshop sessions grew into a formation, *Nafass*.

We felt this complementarity of profiles. We came from different dance backgrounds. These moments of creation and training also opened up a space where the participants were able to express emotions, of desire and frustration. I experienced intimate exchanges and witnessed great sorrows as young people opened conversations not only on dance, but also on the difficulty of surviving this passion. They opened up on the fear of engaging in a course without pedagogical tools, without structural support, and often without family and societal support.

This was especially clear during a workshop on the theme of "trance" where Taoufiq, Maalem Stitou (a Gnaoui musician) and I, worked closely together. Once again, we witnessed the space of exchange, openness, and transmission these moments foster. *Border Lines* emerged from "Trance" where five dancers from these workshops performed.

These workshops also offer performers the opportunity to experiment and experience different spaces. The *18*, a project in the heart of the *medina* of Marrakech, has a specific soul and a well-defined typology of space. The performers had to think about their work as a function of this particular environment. *18* imposes its structure and atmosphere onto the production. Secondly, since spaces are cramped and verticality is oriented in the center of the house, with an open sky, it almost forces the deployment of movement in proximity.

Another example is the *ESAV* cinema, an open-air place where the presence of the "outdoor" became part of an experiment to capture the sounds of the city and to incorporate the exterior light. Workshops and productions on the one hand create spaces of emotional expression, creation, and transmission, but they also provide opportunities to reflect on the actual physical spaces where we can perform. They also shed light on how these opportunities enrich the process and allow us to think about movement and choreographic writing beyond the usual.

Recently, I had the chance to work as a dramaturg with Taoufiq on *Botero en Orient* (2019) and *Sawtik -Your silence will not protect you* (2022).

Thinking and creating together requires time, humor, and a kind of patient listening on my part to manage capturing and drawing together what can amplify Taoufiq's starting point. This process is continuously nourished and informed by my discussions with the dancers. The dancers are not simply there to exaggerate a choreography. They each have their own personalities and universes that carry and give material to their work. The intimate and the collective (past or present stories) of the dancers vibrate through gestures, movements, and songs to take part in choreographic writing.

Botero en Orient is a creation inspired by the world and work of the Colombian painter Botero, who exaggerates with ingenuity and irony in investigating the human condition. The selection of dancers in *Botero en Orient* considered a layer that questioned the codes and formats of contemporary dance. It searched for an "unexpected" beauty through individual singularities. By "composing" them "scenically" as in Botero's painting, they conjugate themselves, in evolving tableaux, touching beauty, crudeness, and fragility. When working on this piece, we question not only the conventional dancer format, but we also attempt to add layers related to the solitude it might imply in a war time context. It was thus crucial to bring another artistic reference that would tackle this in a subtle way and would complete our narrative. And so there were the sublime words of Lebanese painter and poet Etel Adnan, that formed an essential vocabulary in our work. *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country* and *To Be in a Time of War* are texts that move us through a daily life punctuated by lunch and dinner, food from the fridge to the table, and at the same time, all the while, talking about the atrocities of war and chaos.

Sawtik, focused on the experiences of young people during the two years of the pandemic. In their search for new ways of interacting with others, five dancers move toward a more hopeful future driven by the longing for connection and physical contact.

The art process is an account of a soul's journey. The process is driven by intimate and collective memories, transcending settled narratives, building up a new landscape and a new scenography of our human condition. It becomes a dance performance where gestures become events and where the past breaks through in the present, leading to a renewed life after an enduring global crisis. It is an exploration of our relationship with nature, where the body lost its centrality, to only become a component among others, in the longing for a primary reunification between humanity and the elements. The invention of this new togetherness can be joyful, as well full of pain and fear. It weaves and unweaves, brings tears and heals by singing towards a new freedom (from our text for the announcement of the première in July 2022).

Taoufiq and I consciously chose dancers who experienced the struggles of young artists after the pandemic. The solitude that characterized this period caused many to think about abandoning dance. It was scary to see them going to other fields and jobs just to survive, and thinking that this might be the end of their presence in dance. The participants of this project were: Samaa Wakeem from Haifa, Bibata Maiga Ibrahim from Bamako, Fouad Nafili from Brussels, and Hassan Oumzili and Abdelmounim from Marrakech. All of them were young dancers we had already encountered. We hosted them in workshops, or we were their mentors on their previous works. Bringing them together was difficult. But it was a rewarding experience where we ended up creating a shared space (se toucher à nouveau était très difficile et émouvant). Slowly, building from their common ground and their conflicts, we ended up with a story. We listened to Mariam Makeba and to contemporary singers such as Raja Meziane. We juxtaposed them with the poetry of Audre Lorde. We abided by her words, "Your silence will not protect you"(2017). It was a process of searching for a kind of acceptance of difference and also constructing a new togetherness.

In our collaboration, we always talk about so many projects and challenges all the time and at the same time. Sometimes, I try to structure our conversation and try to stick my friend to our main target (of the moment); but we always deviate and jumble everything together. One day, Taoufiq said, "Don't try, because when I am on stage performing, I go on stage with all my life, my struggle, the festival, the question of dance education in our country, in the Arab region...so we learn to accept it and try to extract the best of our concerns and struggles, each one from his and her position"

EPISODIC AND NECESSARY CONVERSATION WITH ALI CHAHROUR

It's hard for me to say when and how we converse, they are not It is hard for me to say when and how we converse. They are not regular meetings, nor are they linked to a creative agenda. The most important thing between us is to know that I am there. I believe in this conversation. These questions shake me up deeply in terms of the way he conceives performance and in terms of his commitment and his formulation. This is one of our common questions, which is fundamental and which runs not only through his work, but through the whole discipline.

"For me, the question of creation has become inseparable from the context in which it happens. How can a dance built from western techniques, a dance that has forgotten the great stories of the Arab region, mean anything within our physical frame of reference? What is contemporary dance in this region of the Middle East?"

"When creating Leila's Death, Ali decided to work with his aunt, Leila. She is a mourner, a woman one pays to research the dead so that she can write poetic laments that praise their qualities. Her role is to make the living cry by talking about their dead. If she can't make people cry, she is not a good mourner. When I invited her to join me, it was the first time she entered a theater. I asked her to teach me how to dance, to show me her moves, that sadness her body carries within itself from weeping for hundreds of people. As for me, by looking for what moves her, I forgot what I learnt as a dancer.

Working with those women allowed me to forge new artistic tools to create a new dance. What I am trying to do in my works is to bring about the raw movement of our cultural references. It is not a rejection of globalization. It is a need to create a regional movement based on references with which I grew up and that contain an infinite field of possibilities, that can be shared with everyone"(Interview with Ali Chahrour, conducted by Francis Cossu, Avignon Festival, 2016)

In The Love Behind My Eyes, the performance is based on a tragic love story from the ninth century. The story is a legend revolving around a love which remains unfulfilled. A forbidden relationship results in great sorrow, so immense and inconsolable that it ends in death. Inspired by the fatality of the broken heart and in the languages of dance, Arabic lyrics, and Islamic mysticism, Chahrour tells of grief and oppression–but also of the unwavering voice of the heart. The Love Behind My Eyes tells an old story about the pain and the protest of a forbidden love, a story that is still important today.

Ali Chahrour's adaptation of the mysterious tale around Bin Daoud allows us to question the story today, to investigate taboos, and to point out how deviations from accepted standards, unfortunately, continue to be dangerous. Translated into body language and a visual experience, Chahrour further expands and updates the legend, turning The Love Behind My Eyes into a metaphor for the subversive potential of language and imagination. (by Anna Bertram, Zurich Theater Festival, 2022)

At the Zurich Spektakel Festival, Ali won a prestigious prize for The Love Behind My Eyes (2022). As one of the jury members, I would like to share with you this words that explain the path Ali is opening and developing:

"With 'The Love Behind My Eyes,' Ali Chahrour invites his audience to access a very intimate space, a world of emotion where love and grief compete, mourning and tenderness intertwine. It is a poetic journey and a deeply political performance, based on an ancient tale, a love story. If legend or reality (it does not matter): it reveals how the past claims its legacy in present life. Movement, score, and body language echo different temporalities at once, weaving a performative experience that is as urgent as it feels eternal. Everything happens in the moment, right now. Everything has already happened. Both are true in this creation, following a nonlinear concept of time.

The careful and virtuosic composition of space, lights, and music highlight the radical tenderness of gestures choreographed in this piece. With breathtaking slowness and precision, it shows two bodies full of sensuality and love, overcome by a great sadness under infinite oppression. The singer on stage–a mother, a mourner–appears as a figure between two worlds, opening a space of acceptance for the lovers' embrace while moving between performers and audience, acting as a witness that demands more from us than voyeurism"

Marrakesh, Brussels, and Cairo, among many others, have, of course, impregnated their sounds, their feel, and political realities on the work I have done here with Ali, Taoufiq, and Salma (and many, many others). What is interesting is that even though the spaces and locality of where we find each other influence our practices; we are committed to create relations and work that can transgress the locality and obstacles of each respective space. I think we work to create networks, artistic expressions, and a vocabulary that are grounded in localized experiences and histories. However, they are free to circulate and carry meaning and relevancy on a transnational, global scope.

It is also incredibly important to note at this point the privilege I hold in my hypermobility, with the right passport in hand; Brussels, Cairo, Marrakesh, and others were never that far away. This privilege is one I hope to use to contribute to creating more connections and dialogues between these places and the people that operate in them. This, however, is not at all the reality of many artists I work with. They are continuously hindered from sharing their work, learning from others, and circulating freely.

Some Recommendations / Conclusion

I want to emphasize **the necessity to stimulate and be part of an ecosystem** through a set of transferable knowledge from one region to another (Middle east to North Africa and SA), to found and increase alliances, and to structure essential transmission between generations.

To enhance this transmission, **we need to document,** record, and archive in ways that allow this transfer and enrich critical constructive discussion in a wider sense. In this sense, interviews, recordings, and video documentation of artistic process are necessary as diaries and documentation of the work that is being done. This dynamic could, in my view, lead to a true archival practice that takes up a space in our histories and presents and could provide resources for the future of performing arts in our region and from the region.

We need to insist on building, repairing, and maintaining **links with the previous generation**. This means to cover previous art achievements that are forgotten in academia and art schools, and hold space for and re-invest in sources of knowledge that nourish a certain conception of the body languages and performing arts, art oeuvres, and pioneers in cinema and visual arts– such as Assia Djebbar, Izza Génini, and Atteyat Al-Abnoudy, and often forgotten emotive art practices.

Finally, continue sustaining the processes of creation in the region. This support has to be a sustainable and durable one, not based on one-time funding of a particular project for one artist or another. Rather, there needs to be an investment in nourishing paths, explorative artistic journeys, and platforms in the long term.



Translated by
Abdelbaar Mounadi Idrissi

PUBLIC SPACE AND THE REQUIREMENTS OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

by Nizar Kchaou

The Experience of Street Theater in Tunisia as a Case-study

Introduction

Thanks to the Tunisian revolution, our streets have been liberated from the security fist and they have been freed of the surveillance of authorities; as the street (as a public space) shifted from a space for repression, expulsion, investigation, and restraining freedoms, to a place of meeting, dialogue, debating, and exchange (a space of public affairs). Several different forms of expression have, therefore, appeared as a new form that brings in artistic alternatives, contributing to a striking spread of street arts, and the creation of a cultural dynamic among engaged youth and the fabric of society. These different forms of expressions contributed, along with other associations and organizations, to the creation of a strong civil society in Tunisia. Among these cultural expressions are street arts, specifically street theater. There are several questions that pose themselves when studying this phenomenon: Is there a concept in street theater? Is street theater an alternative to drama within a theater? What are the characteristics of this genre? Why is street theater associated with the act of protesting? And, does street theater feed on crises and change?

Let us agree first that street theater was not born out of the Tunisian revolution (the cradle of the Arab Spring), but that it found its purpose, reached its peak, and regained its health in the process of the Tunisian revolution. It is clear that youth movements have contributed to shedding light on and defining it because it has some of their traits, such as resistance, struggle, protest, and inciting critical thinking. This genre is based on the central concept of citizenship and defending universal human rights.

There are several definitions of street theater, most of which are inaccurate or, rather, incomplete. Although the practice of street theater is an old art, its theorization remains fairly new. Therefore the path is just beginning for researchers, professors, and experts interested in street theater. Having reached a relative agreement on the existence of a confusion between street theater and theater in the street, the following questions pose themselves: Do all shows outside a theater building count as street theater? Can the experience of Augusto Boal and the theater of the oppressed be called street theater? Is Abdelkader Alloula's experience of "The Veil" a form of street theater? Is the *Halqa* experience in the Jamaa el Fna Square in Morocco a form of street theater? Was the mid-twentieth century gang-theater in the US a form of street theater? In spite of all the efforts exerted in the field, street theater remains a source of confusion between practitioners and the public…

The Development of Cultural Expressions in the Public Space

Amidst the multiplicity of questions and difference of concepts, street theater remains an image of society, depending on the cultures and civilizations these cultures belong to, and depending, especially, on the social nature, political systems, and economic structure... In his book, *The Anthology of Street Theater (Antūlūjya Masraḥ Ash-shāri)*,[1] Dr. Bashar Alliwi defines street theater as "a drama show performed before a random audience outside the theater building..." There are, however, other definitions of the concept, but we will try here to provide a new definition of street theater as "a noble drama action done by people who perform through a clear-cut idea that bears a cause characterized by urgency, stemming from the street and returning to it, getting inspiration from street updates using street components as drama items to make up the show. In this action, the actor seeks to turn pain into hope, and hope into action, provided that the following conditions are available: sound, narration, imagination, audience, flexibility, eloquence, intuition, culture, knowledge, improvisation, interaction, action, reaction, and urgency..." The actor is, therefore, the performer who performs their idea in a surprising and random way before passing citizens, using the street as a space for their show and as an interactive one for debating that idea. The public space (citizen space) also depends on the dialectical relationship between the two ends of communication via direct dialectalism and exchanging positions (feedback)... the actor/performer (the first party "sender"), the actor/receiver (the second party "receiver"), the idea of the show (the message) that leads to the ultimate goal (catharsis) that builds into the highest goal (social change).

STREET THEATER: AN INFLUENTIAL ACTION IN THE PUBLIC SPACE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

Public space (streets, public spaces, squares) is a thorny issue when one looks deeper and gets involved in its interest. When arts intervene in the public space, it is not a simple matter, since, especially contemporary arts, turn the space into a safe zone and make everyone equal in rights and obligations. This does not happen in a direct manner, but rather through providing a friendly and safe environment where people come together as equals.

The Diversity of Voices in the Public Space:

This can be divided into four sections:

- ***Strong and dominant voices:*** those who mostly have the upper hand in controlling the public space and its commercial, residential, security, and parking activities... They represent different social categories, including the police, local authority representatives, real estate entrepreneurs, heads of big families, bandits, wholesalers, factory owners, the clergy, political parties, and political and religious groups.
- ***Weak voices:*** These are the majority of the population. Most of them are shy to intervene in what happens in their streets or the spaces they interact with/in. They limit their reaction to complaining about what is going on. Those include the categories that make up the whole population of those areas other than big families, including workers, passersby, small businesses, and newcomers.
- ***Shifting voices:*** those that are constantly shifting between strong and weak voices, depending on their behavior in the public space. When they act well, they mostly try to attract attention or join the wagon of strong voices, which are most often failed attempts. That applies specifically to teenagers who use loud voices, create fights, or play with fireworks...
- ***Special voices:*** These are the most confused voices in the public space. They are subject to prejudices at times, which are special groups that are politically known as minorities (ethnic, religious, age, or gender).

Controlling the Public Space

In the midst of the huge change that the world is undergoing now as a result of the expansion in liberal politics, especially in third world countries, controlling and remodeling the public space are at their peak, and make up a job that is being handled in two points:

- *Firstly:* making the natural, civil, and heritage public spaces (i.e. beaches, parks, public squares, heritage sites, downtown areas...) unavailable for low income categories, justifying this move by claiming they lack "civilized" behavior among, and thus turning these spaces into spaces for the rich to enjoy,
- *Secondly:* neglecting spaces that are unfit for commercial use and leaving them for strong voices to control and restructure.

Developments

Under such a complex structure, what do street arts, especially theater, do? What can they change? What are their social and economic effects? And what are their benefits to society and decision-makers when they adopt these arts and foster them in public spaces? And why do we seek to support street arts for their economic and social revenue? We are witnessing a weakness in the productive and legal structure of the field, which manifests in a recess in contemporary and folk artistic practices in the public sphere. That leads us to discussing the problematic lack of recognition of street arts as a part of the register of cultural work and folklore.

Variables

Problems: towards state and society	Solutions: street theater is the solution
Disorder	Street theater can contribute to organizing masses and restoring order.
Threatening basic structures and sustainable development	Street theater contributes to improving civilized manners.
Threatening the unity and safety of the country	Street theater allows for expressions related to special (cultural, ethnic, marginalized...) groups.
The elitism of cultural work	Street theater breaks the barriers between cultural actors and their targeted categories and seeks to democratize art and spread happiness and love
Economic depression	Street theater contributes to reviving commercial activity.

Indicators

Economic indicators:

Direct: increasing resources dedicated to producing art works in the street

Indirect: the availability of extra funds in the article for maintaining infrastructure in the state budget

Accumulative indicator:

Increasing taxation in areas where street arts are more active

Social indicators

Direct:

The existence of a transparent and supportive procedural structure

Increasing the number of artists and institutions working in the field of street arts.

Indirect:

Decrease in violence-related complaints

Decrease in protests that block the streets and in mass riots

Accumulative indicator:

Opening a dialogue related to special groups and their positive integration in society

STREET ART: A CHANGE-MAKING ACT IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

Laboratories

The Laboratory for Research and Development of Street Theater at the Culture House of Sulaymaniyah (an academic research unit) was founded on January 10, 2021. The Laboratory for Research and Development of Street Theater is considered one of the exceptional clubs at the Culture House of Sulaymaniyah that brought together many actors in street theater, directed by Mr. Nizar Kchaou, with several other specialists. This laboratory is the first Arab and African one that specializes in street theater. The Laboratory seeks to improve street theater in Tunisia through organizing scientific and academic studies that tackle all aspects of the industry via returning to human sciences such as sociology, philosophy, linguistics, and anthropology. In addition, the Laboratory also seeks to study the aesthetic and intellectual elements that street theater proposes in relation to arts and the street through the relationship between street theater and other arts such as literature, poetry, music, and fine arts... Moreover, the Laboratory seeks to organize intellectual and practical debates and workshops in order to develop and define street theater, considering its particularity and sensitivity in contributing to enriching street arts, as well as being an artistic and aesthetic tool that contributes to developing communities and spreading national theatrical action across the country.

Goals: The Laboratory aims at defining and studying the concepts of, and attempting to develop the practice of street theater across the country through inviting all specialists and actors in this art and organizing encounters, discussions, workshops, training sessions, and shows for studying this artistic action. The laboratory also seeks to archive all studies related to street theater, and follow and contribute to all activities related to street theater, both nationally and internationally. The Laboratory's activities in 2021 included:

- Street theater workshops:
  Workshop 1 (March 2021): led by Mr. Nizar Kchaou
  Workshop 2 (September 2021): Led by Mr. Talal Ayoub
- Organizing a dialogue conference with global specialists in street theater, entitled "Street Theater: Theater of the Future, of the Truth" with Dr. Bashar Aliwi from Iraq, Hussam Missid from Egypt, Dr. Tariq Ribh from Morocco, and director Hassan Qaoud from Palestine.
- Hosting prominent scholars such as:
  sociologist and academic, Mounir Saidani.
  Sociologist Ali Dahiri.
- Organizing an international workshop on street theater in partnership with the International Carthage Festival for Monodrama, led by the Iraqi artist, Sajjad al Joudari and the Kurdish artist, Najat Najm.
- Organizing a discussion with street theater specialist, Mr. Al Kilani Zaqqouba.
- Establishing a partnership with the Tunisian Poetry House.
- Establishing a partnership with the Tunisian Novel House.
- Participating in the El Guettar International Street Theater Forum in Gafsa in October 2021.
- Participating in the Sharm Sheikh International Youth Theater Festival (November 2021).
- Paying homage to artist and director, Mazin Al Gharbawi, the director of the Sharm Sheikh International Youth Theater Festival, and professor and critic, Hussam Missid, with the shield of excellence and creativity in street theater.
- Paying homage to the Iraqi professor and director, Najat Najm, with the shield of excellence and creativity in street theater.
- Organizing discussions with professor Hussam Missid from Egypt, and Mr. Shawkat al Missri, the director of the Cairo International Book Fair, as well as Japanese director, Kaka Moto Isuchi.
- Celebrating the anniversary of founding the Laboratory for Research and Development of Street Theater by inviting Dr. Taoufiq Alaoui to present his book *Towards the Streets*[2] with Dr. Mohammed Moumin and researcher Ayah Ben Mansour, as well as screening Ghassan Qassim's film "To Be".[3]

SPACES

Space and Use of Place

Since the dawn of humanity, humans have always had an interest in place and dealing with it. However, they did not have a clear distinction between space and place, as "primitive thought was incompetent to deduce the idea of space from its experience of the space itself. This idea is composed of what we call 'signifying associations.' The primitive human's conception of space is an image of concrete aspects that refer to places that have an emotional load framed in mythology"[4] They connected space to place, which is "divided into three principal worlds: heaven, earth, and the underworld, which are respectively populated by gods, humans, and the dead"[5] After that, the concept of space evolved with philosophical sciences, where we find synonyms for the word "space" but with the same sense, such as Avicenna's concept of "wilderness"[6] which "means space; thus, both words have the same meaning"[7] "The concept of space as an independent element was not forged by the Greeks, but rather evolved in a clear way with the Arab-Islamic philosophy through acknowledging its existence, which philosophers call (the wilderness, the plain, the where). With those philosophers, space acquired an advanced form of perception and imagination, which constituted a humane relationship in understanding space and

appropriating a conception, albeit procedural, that represents the concept of the containing place, not the influential space that has aesthetic dimensions that can be studied. However, this constitutes an initial and foundational phase in finding conceptions of space and its development, following human development, in its mythological and philosophical dimensions. Nevertheless, it did not catch up with the domain of arts, at least philosophically, but it acquired the structure and mechanism of perception and imagination with philosophers"[8]

Space And Temporal Usage

If not based on space, mathematics are, at least, not void of it; tIf not based on space, mathematics are, at least, not void of it; that is because space is a network of regulated relationships governed by mathematical and physical systems such as the connection between mass, volume, and surface, and movement to time and speed, unlike the Greek philosophy that treated time independently from space; Aristotle considered that time lies outside the self or prior to it; whereas Saint Augustine could not relate time to movement–that is, to the depth of space.[9] Greek philosophy treated the human being as one unit, independent of *time* and place, while mathematics departed "essentially from Man's awareness–and fear–of space, as the history of mathematics is the ontological (existential) history of Man, as well as the philosophies, sciences, and arts that spring from it. Primitive Man (and, accordingly, classicism) perceived space as a bi-dimensional extension, that is why Man lost the experience of depth, which is the origin of imagination"

Space And The Philosophical Usage

A lot of philosophers, thinkers, mathematicians, and physicists have been occupied with the study of the relationship between time and place because they are a connected binary, despite the difference between the perception of time and that of place; time is related to mental perception, while place is linked to sensory recognition. Mental perception may be applied to sensory elements in order to explain and express them.[10] It is also possible to approach "the relationship between time and place with what can be called 'the bare world and the quasi-hidden power;' the world of place is one that is visible, seeable, touchable, and verifiable. Whereas the power of time can be felt via what it does to us, and to people and other elements around us, but we cannot see it in a visible way; time is a quasi-(in)visible power"[11] This intimate relationship leads us to the study and understanding of the theatrical space, as well as the elements and beings in and on it as aesthetic images coming from time phases that may stimulate intellectual connotations and perceptions in the mind of the receiver. Hence, the theatrical space (composed of the general surface, mass, light, void, movement, and the drama action) is a group of semiotic signs, including place, that denote something. In a theater show, the place "is a system of signs that refer to objective facts or mental repercussions, which means that it could be an objective or virtual fact"[12]

Space And The Time-Space Usage

"In theater, space is, just as time is, a complex concept due to the existence of two times and places; the time and place of the show, which, in this case, have a material existence (the space of the show, spectacle, and human gathering, and the extension of the show), and time and place of the drama action being performed on the scene and what they refer to"[13] Consequently, we can define the space of the place as the place where the show takes place (the house, the palace, the café...), and the drama space as the moment when place and time unite, represented in the character at the level of the drama space (events), in the actor at the level of the show space; that is, there is a drama level made up of the character, and there is a show level made up of the actor... For example, *Othello* differs from one show to another; the show space differs depending on the actor presenting it. That means that the show space changes when the audience intervenes in the scene because it is part of the space, while the place is the place of the story (the events of the play and the show place are different); the audience is a part of the drama moment.[14] From here on, we will trace the development of the use of the function of the theatrical place and how it treats the (architecture of) space throughout history, from the beginnings of theater until today.

The Diversity Of Dramatic Spaces Outside The Theater Building

The phenomenon of taking theater outside the Italian Box to people where they are, tackling the political, economic, social, religious, and other issues of society was not born out of a vacuum or of the subjective desires of creators and theater actors, nor was it an act of showing off or competition for fame or individual or moral gain; there are two necessary and definitive reasons behind that phenomenon, especially street theater:

REASONS

The first reason is that shows in the *Italian Box* had become semi-dead, turned into a destination for the elite, lost novelty, and departed from the daily topics of the public towards topics that are distant from the reality of daily lives. In addition, there appeared to be a gap between the actors and the audience; the audience has become negative (the death of the audience). Hence, directors embarked with their shows on a search for that receiving audience, involving it in the drama event, and tackling the most important issues that this audience suffers from in spaces where both performers and receivers function as a whole and as a unit within the show.

The second reason is that the box theater is considered a dead place by some directors; it is not wide enough to contain their ideas and imagination in producing their shows. Therefore, they sought other places where they could produce more aesthetic shows and that are closer to the audience; they went after places that were wider and bigger than the *Italian Box*. Peter Brook comments that "the most important thing is not the place at the theoretical level, but as a tool...if the aim of the play were to create a white, cold world, we would be in an idealistic building. The aim is to, rather, unleash the imagination and push the audience into a world of fantasy. That would be one of the works that should take place outside the theater, on a hill, for instance"[15] There are many things that necessitated offering shows in other spaces that are wider and more inclusive in achieving the desires and ideas of the director. Antonin Artaud has called for "making up the scene, according to the opinions of the theater of cruelty, entailing a space that makes up a container for the event and that has a direct primitive effect on the show; that is, there is no space between the theater and the audience. Therefore, it becomes possible to use barns, grain storage units, closed parking lots, and deserted places, such as

monuments and temples that look like Tibet, on the condition that seats are placed in a way that allows for a part of the event to be purposed for direct participation"[16] Antonin Artaud calls on us to live theater as a reality through motivating the spectators with all their senses. He strongly advocated against burying theater in closed halls by calling for a celebratory and ritualistic theater in order to achieve a theater that is more connected and communicative with its society. This is what Brecht worked on in the epic theater that excites the spectator and liberates them from the negativity that they lived under inside closed halls, where seats were mere sleeping cushions. Brecht used his epic theater to come up with a dialectic relationship between performers and spectators, between accepting and rejecting opinions. Theater is a wide space for awareness, understanding, expression, and change. "Brecht dealt with the aesthetic distance, in order not to include the emotional spectator, and to drag them away from their emotional reaction to contemplate and judge what they see"[17] The idea of demolishing the fourth wall is a call for wider places outside the box and away from all barriers and restrictions that stand between the artist and the spectator, which is what Brecht called for. On the other hand, among the reasons why Eugene Barba used open spaces in most of his shows is "because these spaces are more inclusive in the type of spectators. Shows there are more energetic than those offered in traditional closed theater. In addition, they offer more freedom in creating productive visions and constructing a theatrical form. This insistence on the freedom of form is distinguished by liberation from traditional constraints that have shackled closed theaters. As a result, calls surfaced for a more popular and inclusive theater in content, leading some authors to write special drama texts for open spaces"[18] Another reason why Eugene Barba staged two shows in open spaces outside the *box* was, on the one hand because he was seeking the audience and the spectators to come closer to him; and because the audience, in open spaces, is closer to performers and are among them sometimes. On the other hand, although *box* theater tackles issues that concern a category of the audience or daily humane and social issues, there remains a separating line between the audience and the show, or what is called the "fourth wall" the audience remains negative and mere spectators that do not intervene in the show or change the course of its events. Although there are directors that have broken this wall, the gap is still there; the audience that visits theater shows is not from the general public. These shows still crave the lower income audiences. Pescator proposed several ideas:

1. Theater must be at the service of revolutionary and political movements.
2. Theater instills in its audience the awareness of political rights and the victory of human justice.
3. Theater is a collective art and needs solidarity from artists.
4. Some theatrical adjectives that traditional theater resorts to should be given up.

He sees that "theater addresses the minds and souls of audience to incite them on revolution, in order to achieve change"[19] He applied these ideas in his theater, and they resulted in channeling all of his focus to poor and working classes, which make up the great majority in most societies. By going to them where they are, he would "tour with his theater around factories, services, and big worker gatherings, allowing the workers to see themselves and their problems on stage, taking a new genre of shows outside the box, giving up and destroying most of the old traditional techniques"[20] He used to put everyone in one drama space, turning "the drama text into a strong demonstration of solidarity with the working class that made up the majority of his audience. The actors themselves were from the same class, and it was therefore necessary for them to melt with the audience in order to achieve their common cause" Pescator does not hesitate to use any available possibility to serve his shows, not only to please the audience, but also to invite them to take a position that concerns them.[21] Pescator depended on the audience, which I consider active based on Pescator's idea that the audience is part of the show, and believed they have their own opinions; the audience assimilates the role of horizontal reception whereby they participate in the event and change its direction and the course of its events. This idea stems from Pescator's belief that the show starts with the audience and ends with it; "theater gives [the actors] the chance to melt with the audiences and connect to them by what is happening in the scene; therefore, an event in this theater is directly connected to the audience's problems, making its spectator a person that takes a specific position towards life"[23]

Pescator did not leave any space, gap, or wall between the actors and the audience. He put them within one unique framework, connecting the theater room to drama, or taking it out into open spaces and tackling social or political issues. He was working on getting the audience used to participating through the debates that theater initiates. These debate topics included audiences' political, economic, and social problems. He focused, more than anything else, on the audience and involving it in the show, whether it was on the aesthetic, technical, or other aspects. This methodology would later become one of the most important references adopted by the Brazilian director, Augusto Boal, and his theater that focused primarily on the receiver. Based on the above mentioned elements, we find that most of Pescator's works are closer to street theater, if not, sometimes, touching its focal points, or its main pillars–whether that concerns the actors and their involvement with the audience, and making it part of the show, and a participating member in it, or in what concerns the nature, form, and place of the show. All of these elements attempted to take theater out and look for spectators where they are, dealing with them, and search for wider spaces; this trend paved the way for the appearance of street theater and working on it. It is difficult to specifically define the beginnings of street theater or trace it back to a specific historical period. It differs in its work and concept from one country to another because of the different demographic composition of each country. In addition, problems and issues and the nature of societies are different and variable and multicultural; different societies are pluralistic and have different orientations. However, there is no doubt that street theater that tackles social, political, economic, and religious issues. It is handled differently from one country to another. Street theater in India is different from that of the UK or Iran. What concerns us at this point are the beginnings of real street theater. After seeing the definitions of this art in dictionaries, and after having defined it in a procedural way and agreed that it is a political theater that tackles the heated issues in society in an attempt to pose, discuss, then change social issues, the question now is how did this type of theater start? And why is it outside the box, and specifically in the streets and public spaces?

We previously tackled the theoretical beginning of street theater that was called for and adopted by great international directors who offered their shows outside the box in places where the audience is in one drama space; both the actor and the spectator meet on the same ground. Although there are a lot of different types of theater that take place outside the box, such

as environmental theater, open air theater, the theater of open spaces, ritual theater, mobile theater, the traveling theater, the interactive theater, all the theatrical forms of Augusto Boal, scenic theater, popular theater, the circus, acrobatics, clowns, and all the many other forms that take place outside the Italian box, the question, however, is: what distinguishes them from street theater?

THE BEGINNINGS: (EARLY SIGNS AND STAGES)

We will trace here the real and early beginnings of street theater. There is no doubt that the first and foundational signs of street theater are that it is a purely political theater that tackles political issues that any given society suffers from the most; "it is telling that some directors started their careers in conditions when the cultural scene in their countries was in unstable conditions, especially in the period before, between, and after the two wars due to lack of security and order, and in order to escape the surveillance constraints, as well as the appearance of new ideas and intellectual currents. Those directors showed their unrestricted experiences, and that became distinguished on the international theater scene because they provided drama experiences that canceled what was before them, and were foundational for what came after them when there was an atmosphere of freedom for them to express their inner thoughts and individual opinions"[24] Because of the two world wars and the unusual scenes they had created, cities like Paris, London, Moscow, and other cities and capitals turned into military bases. Citizens were dying in horrible ways in wars they knew nothing about. There was a lack of rule of law and a lack of services. It was accompanied by the inability of government institutions to take action, the spread of death, destruction, killing, looting, and diseases; those conditions left a lot dead, injured, disabled, homeless, starving, and depraved as a result of the breakdown of the economic infrastructure. This painful reality drew a sad image in the minds and souls of a lot of poets, authors, artists, and, especially, the residents of devastated cities. This tragic image, which they witnessed, and probably lived as soldiers, left a reverse effect on their literary styles and artistic and intellectual orientations; many varying anarchical and revolutionary currents, styles, opinions, and schools of thought against traditions appeared during that period.[25] Under these difficult conditions, theater took a different course that can be summarized in four phases:

"Attempts to leave the *Italian box* format and find new places outside, such as housing projects, public squares, cafés, streets, monuments, and deserted places.

Trying to find new ways to build a relationship between theater and its audience based on the importance of audience participation in the event.

Searching for humane characteristics that are more revolutionary, cruel, chaotic, and strange to affect the spectators.

Subjecting theater to drama formulae that stand on regressive stances or sensory philosophies, or ones that have primitive and ritualistic formulae, such as myths and fictitious beliefs"[26]

It is, thus, clear that street theater started as a political reaction; the political conditions and wars shaped it and made it look as a revolutionary theater seeking a life of freedom and dignity for human beings in their society. We note here that street theater shows are more present in societies that lived through wars and social, economic, and religious problems; as street theater shows have always had political topics and conditions both before or after the foundational seventies; members of the "Lotopie" group walked naked in the streets, each of them painted with a different color; that was a political position in an aesthetic design against racism and systemic exclusion. When they poured several liters of blood on a bulldozer that had demolished economic housing units in Canada, that was a purely political position.[27] In light of unstable conditions in certain societies, we think that it is difficult and unnecessary to stage Italian box shows with all their topics. That situation leads to the appearance of street theater, one that has never seen the Italian box or was ever restricted to it. It would be a mistake to say that street theater means taking theater outside the Italian box; street theater cannot be performed on the stage of the Italian box, and vice-versa. Street theater differs in the way it treats the audience by including it within the drama space and events. Italian box shows have their own, unique topics and ways of working, regardless of how different the styles, schools, and approaches might be. Even if they were staged in spaces other than the Italian box, such as the street, that does not make them street theater shows.

In post-revolution Russia, some drama shows appeared called "Lagy Prob" (لاجي بروب); it was a type of theater that was "revolutionary and dialectic, concerned with the updates of political life, trying to bring it closer to the people, and bring the people closer to it, especially the working class" This type of theater is characterized by simplicity, liberty from the control of institutions, and over embellishment of aesthetics; it primarily focuses on the actor and the show space, which were mostly (semi-)public spaces such as stations, squares, prisons, factories, and cafés. It is a folk theater that seeks to blur the borders between art and daily life. Its folk nature lies in the fact that it is composed of folk initiatives that respond to a pressing need to express and exchange opinions regarding political issues. Therefore, this type of theater took interest in the *proletaria*, which was a standard for the experiences of peoples and a benchmark for their positive or negative interaction with the political situation. Starting from the 1940s, this genre started spreading southwards, and westwards towards the USA, which shows that renewal in stage amusements of folk characteristics is conditioned by the spread and exchange of experiences"[28] which is also at the center of the goals of street theater

CHARACTERISTICS: (DRAMATIC ACCESSORIES AND SCENOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS)

The use and adoption of scenographic elements in street theater remains a very important element for their characteristics that serve the show in a very important way. The use of scenography is not recent. It was used in the early beginnings of theater, but it was very simple and basic because it wasn't as developed as it is today. Back then they used the surrounding environments most of the time, such as temples. Whereas now shows take place in the street. The street is full of elements that the actors interact with and employ as scenography in the show. However, other elements are not available in the street. There is no issue with bringing the missing elements, if the actor deems necessary. They become part of the street as well. The question here is whether the scenography used in street theater is a scenography of the street, or the street is a scenography in itself? Everything in the street, as well as anything that is added to it, belongs to the street. Just as the actor deals with the scenography created by the director, they are at the same time dealing with the elements of the street as scenography. Most of the time the scenography of street theater is a moving one; not all of its elements, but most of them are in constant movement; the simplest example of this is the audience, which is considered part of the scenography, is in constant movement, as well as vehicle tires,

and even natural elements, such as the wind, the sun, the rain, and others. In addition, the way of dealing with scenography in street theater is completely different from the way it is handled in the Italian box; it is difficult for scenographic elements to be stable in the street and are obligatory on stage. There are also some scenographic elements of street theater that cannot be used inside the Italian box. It is a big mistake to claim that the scenography of street theater is easier in its working than that of the box, for example:

The place of the show does not necessarily fit all the needs of the supposed show, which requires considerable efforts to provide most of these conditions

Most times, it becomes obligatory to give up some aesthetics and adopt others imposed by the architectural and logistical nature of the space

Dealing with the elements of nature, both wanted and unwanted, according to the weather conditions, and with a lot of caution

The necessity to deal with space goers in a way that does not impede their daily interests, and avoid anything that could bother or annoy them, considering that the street theater audience does not necessarily choose to watch the show, but that the show chooses them

The choice of the show space is a part and parcel of the scenography of the show; it is considered a partner in the making of this type of show

Based on the above, we can answer the question: the street is a scenography, and all scenographic elements that are added to it, belong to it, even if they are strange to it. Before doing anything else, the director has to consider, in staging their work, the possibility of its adaptation to the uniqueness of available spaces, and that its aesthetic structure does not stand on elements that force it to be performed in another place; that way it becomes an independent semantic structure in itself.[29] We will now discuss, in detail, the scenographic elements and how they work within street theater to create the picture within the drama space

The Drama Space:

"The drama space is not part of the daily space, but a limited surface, and a magical circle that is disconnected from the natural and mundane surface; it is where the audience feels the theatrical high effect, because they are attached to the space, leaving behind them their daily life"[30] This state is only achievable in open air theaters, especially in street theater, where the audience is part of the theatrical space; all the movements and dialogues and everything they do is considered part and parcel of the theatrical space because they are outside the theatrical building. The scholar calls the street audience theater "citizen actors" because street theater is a political theater that tackles political, social, or economic issues that have their foundations in politics; the issues tackled by street theater concern a certain community within society in a certain country that is suffering from that issue caused by the downfall of the political situation, or the effects that situation leaves on society; those audience members are, then, citizens, first, and citizen actors as well; "defenders of theatrical revival, Wagner Wabia and Cobo Reinhart, agreed that the space is a multipurpose medium at the service of theatrical arts. It is no longer a surface full of two dimensional decorations that are dazzling by their size and shape. Rather, it is a three-dimensional drama surface that is built and equipped for a theater where the spectator communicates in an intimate way"[31] There have been several attempts that called for taking theater out towards other places in search of a space that is closer to the audience, just as theater was in its beginnings before the advent of separation "with the projects of constructing private theaters in the seventeenth century, where the exclusion of the imaginary world of stage from the audience started"[32] The Swedish director, Adolph Abia, is considered among the first people who called for leaving the box drama. First, by trying to get rid of the inherited separation between the stage and the audience. And second, by attempting to find a sort of drama liberation that contains both the actor and the audience in order to create the sharing and exchange among the audience within that unified space; it is a form of theatrical liberation.[33] Abia's departure from the box's frame is an attempt to bring together the spectator and the actor in one unified and inseparable space. Antonin Artaud also canceled the distance between actors and spectators, stating that "we are canceling both the stage and the hall and substituting them with a unified place without any kind of barrier so that a direct relationship grows between the audience and the play; when the spectator settles within the drama space, they become surrounded and affected by the event"[34] Artaud's statement is another call for getting rid of the box theater in search of other spaces to achieve the rituality that affects the spectator in one way or another"[35] Artaud goes even further to focus on the position of the audience, placing them within the performance zone with the actors moving among them at times; he made both components a unique unity within that ritual space. Hence, Artaud's space became a container for the event with a direct, primitive effect on the show, because there is no barrier between the performance zone and the audience. Therefore, it becomes possible to use barns, grain storage spaces, closed parking lots, and deserted zones as part of the event for the purpose of achieving direct participation in it.[37] On a different note, the street theater space is the widest and biggest drama space; it is a unique space that goes both horizontally and vertically that the ear can pick and where the eye can see everything happening from the performance space on the ground to the dome of the sky with everything it contains (stars, planets, jets, clouds, rain, balloons, skyscrapers...). Street theater is interactive, not only with the receiving audience, but also with the place and space, with their components all for the benefit of the show. Interaction takes place on all levels–sensory, cognitive, and verbal. Take the example of a passing airplane, it can affect the show with its sound; but the actor can also make use of that sound and include it in the show as background music or interact with the passing itself as part of the show. The same applies to the passing of and interaction with a train or a car. Because a street theater show takes place suddenly without prior notification, the audience does not know whether the director had planned those passages beforehand or whether they are mere coincidences.

The Drama Scene

The drama scene is, in turn, an important color in street theater. The view is created within the drama space contained in the place, regardless of the variety of these places (parks, streets, public squares, seashores...). The drama scene is "the spatial environment that hosts the drama show. It must, therefore, be special in form so that it touches the feelings and emotions of the audience to involve it in the image it is expressing"[36] In street theater, the street or show place and its components become the scene for the show, including the elements of decor, colors, lines, and shapes that the director adds to the scene and immerses the actors, making them both one, harmonious, and an interactive unity; the harmony of decors, accessories, and all additional elements create a magical and emotional effect on the audience in order to produce meaning, as well as intellectual and aesthe-

tic denotations. The street theater show should also focus on a certain harmony that exists in the street with the nature of the staged event. The scenes in street theater are also unstable; the street is an eternally moving place where there is traffic, people, rotating billboard advertisements, as well as natural phenomena such as the position of the sun, clouds, rain, and wind...In addition, the scene in street theater is both two-dimensional and three-dimensional, such as billboard screens, and the images and drawings that rotate on them. During the Greek, Roman, and Middle Ages, the scenes depended, mostly, on natural views and, sometimes, used constructed places, such as the facades of buildings and churches. Roman drama employed the big Roman arenas, colosseums, and lakes as places for presenting those shows and competitions. However, religious drama in the Middle Ages won the precedent of founding a new important type of show (spatially). The developed the show surface (known as the environment theater). Consequently, church people benefited from the spatial environment and architecture of the church building itself and employed it for the drama show. Therefore, they were able to simulate the encounter between a religious topic that is reflected by the serenity of the church space and its effects on people as an environment for the show.[38] That is the same case in street theater where the use of the space environment has a big effect on the receiver with the natural and human scenes that it contains. That is how it achieves a realtime effect. The effect is embodied in the harmony and unity of such scenes, and spirituality and effect of the place on the receiver; the effects of both the scene and the place, with the effects (characteristic) this latter has on the receiver, gives audiences an emotional, cognitive, and spiritual effect. In his book "Street Theater and Open Air Theaters" Bim Mason[39] mentions that most theater groups resort to using the surrounding environment.[40]

SCENOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

Decor

Among the elements that street theater has rarely resorted to are the massive decors; the majority of street theater shows try to stay away from using this kind of decors because they could obstruct the view, and because of the difficulty of moving, transporting, and dealing with them in the performance place. However, it is sometimes possible to use posters, images, and painted views as decors in the show because decors "include drawings, buildings, and anything that can contribute in making up the theatrical image, such as accessories.[41] Street theater uses simple and light accessories that are easy to pick, transport, and handle; it uses accessories that are more expressive and meaningful in the show, but the director would, at times, use elements in the street and make the actors deal with them as decor elements. This does not happen randomly; every play has its own special decor; and every writing style has its own patterns. Therefore, the form of the decor and the way it is used must fit the idea and style of the play"[42] The decor in street theater manifests and takes shape with the idea of the play. The director defines and manages what the play requires and what can be worked out in street theater

Costumes

"Costumes refer to the dressing elements that the actors wear, both on their heads and faces"[43] Costumes have several, extremely important roles and functions in every drama show; they also have a role in being part of the scenographic elements such as decor, lighting, and the rest of the accessories of production and embodiment of meaning and denotation. When designing the drama scene, the costumes take a contributive role in the formal aspect, in addition to their function in expressing time, place, and characters. They acquire this aesthetic characteristic from the possibility of expressing through colors and aesthetically contributing to supporting the main idea of the show. This contribution makes up the primary goal that all elements of the show cooperate in featuring.[44] Among the most obvious functions of the costumes are:

1. They contribute in revealing the character's type, historical period, social status, and personal taste.
2. They help construct the drama meaning of the play's events, or they hide them.
3. They show the relationship between the show and the social reality"[45]

Makeup

Makeup is another scenographic element that has a direct connection to the actor and the way their face looks, as well as its connection to the rest of their body. It has several features: (a) functional makeup expresses the mood of the character and defines the features and face lines; (b) aesthetic makeup expresses the performance of the actor/character. Makeup is not less in importance and function from costumes, lighting, and the rest of the scenographic elements. It is closely connected to the element of costumes. Both are related to the actor and their body; they have the ability to define the character's age, gender, belonging, religion, social status, and mood...Makeup's aesthetic value amuses spectators; some makeup could be serious, while other forms of makeup are humorous and meant to amuse the audience and make them laugh. For instance, in Delarti's comedy, costumes are strange and the makeup is humorous, exaggerated, and paints different shapes of weird, funny, and, sometimes, animalistic faces. Makeup is a mobile artistic extension of the drama scene"[46]

Music and Sound Effects

Music is considered the living soul of any drama performance for its power and ability to create the general atmosphere of the play, as well as for its strong connection to the vital actions in an actor's performance. Music expresses the size and sincerity of the feelings and emotions in the performance. When the audio and visual aspects are connected in one unit, they give the spectator the real and credible image of what they feel. Beethoven says that music is the circle that connects the soul and the senses. Holst says that music is the vocal beauty. Both are philosophical and both are poetic and imaginative. The scientific description of music is that it is, according to Mckinson, regulated vibrations in specific moments in a way that the feelings savor and enjoy by listening.[47]

Music is well connected to emotions, feelings, taste, and imagination. It is a language that speaks to the soul. It encompasses feelings of happiness, sadness, agitation, and amusement. Meyerhold says that recitation accompanied by music "is based on the human love for music. If we listen to the text alone, we could get bored more than if the recitation is accompanied by some piano music (...) performance without music is easier because when there is music, we should find a place for it in the performance; but who is responsible for finding that place? It is the actor"[48] Music provides the rhythm for both the play and the actors; the actor's movement must be consistent with the music during the show. That consistency reflects the organization and sequence of the show. The functions of sound effects and music in the drama show are:

- "Music supports the script, expresses the event, and contributes to the creation of the general atmosphere of the show; music is inspired by and from the show, and not alien to it.
- It helps the actor create the mental situation for the the role they play; it helps them express the nature and inner thoughts of the character.
- It helps the audience understand the events by supporting as an important aesthetic and expressive language within the drama show, along with the other artistic elements, to reach the end result through different musical patterns.
- Music mixes and interacts with the other elements in the show and unifies them; it regulates the rhythm in all artistic elements that compose the show.
- It contributes to the creation of harmony and balance between the artistic and vocal aspects of the drama show"[49]

Street Theater Some Attempts in the Tunisian Experience

It may be said that the relationship of theater to its audience is complex, uncertain, and well-connected to the different historical, intellectual, religious, and ideological contexts... that is because the birth and development of theater in Athens was connected to the audience that had always been a judge and a critical authority that could not be surpassed. In addition to that, the open air space where those everlasting works were shown is indicative of the amount of freedom and democracy that the Greeks had. It has become imperative for people in the field of theater to think of new ways to re-establish direct and intimate communication with the audience, and street theater is one of the most important answers in this context. This does not mean that this dramatic genre is a recent one, it is, rather, as old as the ancient societies that held their performances in public spaces, squares, streets, and markets... There are many urgent questions that pose themselves in this context: is street theater a choice or a necessity? Is it an alternative to traditional and conventional theater? How can the audience be attracted to this dramatic form? How does the audience interact with the different shows? When does the audience become excited, and when does it become active in street theater? To what extent can we talk, philosophically and aesthetically, about special poetics of street theater?

The spectator of street theater: from automatic curiosity to effective participation:

If we look at the audience-theater relationship in street theaters in general, we would find that there's a leading line that represents the direct, interactive relationship between the producer and receiver of the show, where the street is a common public space, while its squares are places dedicated to different daily activities that may shift into presenting different performances that attract the attention of spectators who are used to seeing other activities in such spaces. The so-called street theater audience is mostly composed of normal lay people who got trapped by a performance at a certain, unplanned moment. They might just be passing by for some business and come across a dramatic performance, so they stop for a quick look out of curiosity, but they often get immersed in the show, forgetting the original business they were going out for. They might even interact positively with the actors, stories, songs, and dances, and could themselves turn into performers sometimes instead of remaining negative. This means that street theater, unlike the conventional theater inside the box, opens several bridges with the audience, and is resorting to involving it in an effective way in achieving a successful show.

STREET THEATER: A NECESSITY OR A PROTEST?

The Most Important Ideas

Street theater in Tunisia has undergone considerable developments thanks to the efforts of trainers, associations, theater clubs at youth and cultural houses, and university and school spaces that adopted this drama genre. These entities were in search of new performance forms that suit our Tunisian society, because it is closer to people and tackles their problems. It was also chosen by agents and practitioners across the country as a national gain that represents principles of freedom and de-centrality. Street theater is celebrated in Tunisia through the organization of cultural events, forums, and (inter)national festivals that created the possibility for practitioners (both amateurs and professionals) and academics of this artistic expression to meet and search together for ways to develop this practice.

However, despite the great, positive effect that street theater has had on Tunisian society and its collective consciousness, it remained marginalized and unrecognized in light of the disorganization among its practitioners. This state of disorganization made them unprotected and work without any material or moral rights. This situation is made worse by the lack of necessary support to secure transportation and show tools, making practitioners prey to unemployment. In spite of this situation, street theater continued its journey thanks to the striving of its actors and practitioners and their belief in their ability to improve the collective consciousness and artistic taste, as well as contributing to bringing about collective change. Therefore, it seems necessary today to create a collective body that brings together the actors and practitioners of street theater in Tunisia in order to develop the field and ensure its continuity. This effort pushed us to bring the different living forces together under the Tunisian League of Street Theater.[50]

The Most Important Actions

Without delving into the different events that took place before the [2011] *Jasmine Revolution* in Tunisia, some friends and I launched several initiatives:

- Investing in the Kasbah 1+2 protests by collecting cultural suggestions and categorizing artistic expressions in groups
- Performing during protests and demonstrations
- Focusing on the idea of training youth as a fundamental premise to encourage thinking before expressing
- Approaching the act of protesting from its human rights core by depending on the forms of social theater (street theater, forum theater)
- Encouraging the foundation of nuclei for artistic groups and entities
- Participating in the foundation of specialized associations and troupes

- Supporting the presence of the (My Art Against My Will)[51] association in training and orientation events since 2012
- Encouraging the revival of the nuclei of several associations, notably El Guettar Theater Association (Guefsa), and the Apolon Association for Arts and Culture in Ksar Hellal (Monastir)
- Encouraging the creation of new nuclei for new groups in Menzel Bouziane (Sidi Bouzid), Tabraba (Mennouba), El Ouardia (Tunis), Kal'at Al Alndalus (Ariana), Fouchana/Mohammadia (Ben Arouss), and other places like Benzart, El-Kef, Bajja, Jerba…
- Contributing to the foundation of national, regional, and international festivals and encounters
- The most well-known of these activities, on both the Arab and international levels, is the *El Guettar International Street Theater Forum*
- During the 2013-14 Youth Season, we launched the experience of street theater at youth institutions by executing the first part of the theater intervention project included in the stage of theater intervention unit clubs among youth
- During the 2015-16 cultural season, we launched the experience of street theater at cultural institutions by executing the second part of the theater intervention project included in the stage of theater intervention unit clubs in the cultural *milieu*
- After the success of that experience, we submitted to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs a suggestion that was greatly supported by my friend, who was the officer in charge of the General Directorate for Cultural Work, Lasaad Derbali, who helped convince the rest of his colleagues, to include the street theater competition in the section of standard shows so that young people could participate in the national, regional, and international competitions of theater clubs at houses of youth and culture. This suggestion was approved as of the season of 2017-18.
- During the 2019-20 school year, we launched the experience of street theater at educational institutions by executing the third part of the theater intervention project included in the stage of theater intervention unit clubs in the educational *milieu*
- During the 2022-23 academic year, we started executing the fourth part of the theater intervention project included in the stage of theater intervention unit clubs at universities
- Opening up on global experiences and international participations are important tools, among others, to introduce street theater to the world
- We founded the Laboratory for Research and Development of Street Theater at the Culture House of Sulaymaniyah on January 10, 2021, with the aim of doing more research on clarifying the ambiguity of concepts and the well-spread confusions
- Performing before the Committee of Purchases from the Ministry of Culture, under the supervision of theater administration
- Coordinating with the theater administration, represented by Mr. Mounir El Iraqi and agreeing on many issues
- Coordinating with the administration of the Carthage Theater Days (Journées Théâtrales de Carthage), represented by Ms Nissaf ben Hafisa and submitting cooperation proposals
- Coordinating with some drama and performing arts centers on laboratories, workshops, and conferences on street theater
- The official announcement of the foundation of a regulatory structure for street theater, which is the Tunisian League of Street Theater
- Declaring the International Street Theater Day on March 28 and reading the international manifesto on April 28, 2021
- Despite the existence of this structure that regulates the field in a general sense, street theater remains an art that is difficult to the extent of cruelty, especially if we adopt the strict rules of the show away from folklore and the other aspects of comic shows…I believe that public space, especially streets, belongs to citizens and it is not exclusive to the state. The state is a mechanism that is at the hands of citizens.

THE MOST IMPORTANT ATTEMPTS

The Experience of El Guettar Troupe (Gafsa)

El Guettar Theater Association[52] is a non-profit cultural association that was founded in El Guettar in November 2011 in the midst of a difficult political, social, and cultural context in a city that lacks cultural spaces. The Association chose the street as a space for its activities. It aims to supervise and sharpen young people's skills and encourages them to express themselves in all the creative fields. It also aims to implant the culture of associative and voluntary work and make El Guettar a cultural Mecca through the El Guettar International Street Theater Forum.[53]

Founded on November 22, 2011, El Guettar Association has, since then, produced 16 plays (three on stage, and 13 in the street), presented over 350 shows across Tunisia, participated in important international festivals (Morocco, Iraq, Jordan, Algeria, France), received dozens of awards at home and abroad, founded the El Guettar International Street Theater Forum, which has become the most important specialized street theater event in Tunisia and the Arab region, and organized over 20 training camps in theater.

The annual El Guettar International Street Theater Forum, organized in the beginning of every February by the El Guettar Theater Association, is one of the most important specialized cultural events on street theater. The first edition of the forum took place in February 2014, and the second one took place in February 2015. In 2019, it became an international event and received participants from Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon. The foundation of the festival is an attempt to make El Guettar a street theater capital, where street theater has been practiced since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the city's public squares hosted several shows such as "The Haunt of Boujraba"[54] "The Saver of Those Who Are Stuck"[55] and "Your Mother"[56] The Forum also aims to empower individuals, groups, and youth movements to play an effective role in public life and spread values of freedom, appreciation of creativity, critical thinking, and accepting difference through making the public space a place for art and free expression. Its editions have persisted through 2020, 2021, and 2022.

The Experience of the Crossing (عبور) Troupe (El-Kef)

The "Crossing" Association for Theater Creativity was founded in the Spring of 2016, after a break up with members of Jadal Troupe for Drama performance,[57] which I had supervised and led since April 2009. Those members expressed the desire to dissolve the association and create a new one with the same name. So we agreed and their new association lasted for a little less than two years. That is how *Crossing* started and contributed to the revival of the cultural scene by presenting several drama shows (Land of Thirst, A Protest, The Forgotten). However, the troupe chose to dedicating itself to street theater. Street theater was an experience that attracted its members. They presented the first performance entitled "Anger" tackling the struggle between good and evil, and the issue of terrorism that hit our country since the revolution. That performance coincided with the Ministry of Youth and Culture's launching of the national program "Youth against Terrorism" in 2016. The show was presented for the first time in the city of El-Kef as part of that program. That show attracted the attention of the audience and other parties present there, including the then director of the Regional Delegation of Youth and Culture, Mr, Fathi El Boulifi. El Boulifi suggested to the troupe's supervisor, Mouaiz Zaghlami, founding a special festival for street theater. Afterwards, several successive meetings took place at the Delegation's headquarters. They concluded with an agreement on a national festival entitled "Sicca Veneria" which is the old name of El-Kef. The program was to be exclusive to youth institutions. The first edition of the Sicca Veneria National Street Theater Festival would take place November 19-21, 2016. Preparations for it started in June 2016. I prepared the whole program of the Festival. We focused on the celebratory aspects in the opening ceremony, followed by performances, and then the closing ceremony. There was fear of a possible failure of the Festival. But those fears faded away with the participation of sixteen troupes from different parts of the country, where *Crossing* was announced winner at the end of the Festival. After the first edition, we started preparing for the second one. However, things changed with the transfer of the founding delegate of Youth and Culture, Mr. Fathi El Boulifi, and his replacement by another delegate who hindered the organization of the third and fourth editions until the advent of Ms Olfa Dachraoui as the new Delegate in 2019. Dachraoui was from the area, and she resumed the Sicca Veneria Festival a top priority. The second edition, whose theme was *voluntary work*, took place from November 21-23, 2019. Fourteen troupes from Tunisia, one from Libya, and another from Algeria participated. The third edition took place from December 22-24, 2021. It was postponed from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Only nine troupes participated in it because it was a last minute call. The third edition's theme was *Citizenship*. The fourth edition's theme revolved around *undocumented migration*. It took place from December 21-24, 2022. There were 16 participants, with confirmations from Libya, Algeria, and Mauritania.

Street theater performances in the city of El-Kef started on April 9, 2015, with the Jadal Troupe, that I supervised. They performed a show called "Beginning" They followed with other shows (Madness, Homelessness, The People of El Hamri). In March 2016, *Crossing* was founded and has since then performed several shows across the country in provinces such as Tunis, El-Ftar, Guafsa, Sbeitla, Jendouba, Salyana…, and the presented shows included Anger, Chaos, Those, K & N, and the first performance of "Vacuum" which was first performed in the fourth edition of the Sicca Veneria Festival. The Association received several first and second position awards, most of which were at the Sicca Veneria Festival.

The Experience of the Ksar Hellal Troupe (Monastir)

It might not be possible to speak about the Ksar Hellal Street Art Festival project without talking about its special historical context. The post-revolution cultural transformation reconfigured artistic practice from an elitist domain into a youth-led, liberatory movement. Street arts, deeply tied to public space, transcended their role as mere cultural alternatives; they became central to Tunisia's cultural landscape, articulating the ambitions of a generation while redefining collective expression. From this conception that created a renaissance in the cultural scene, came the idea of the Ksar Hellal Street Art Festival that started in 2012 as an initiative by the city's youth. The festival was a preliminary ground that opened the horizon for introducing street arts and their different branches, namely street theater, graffiti, circus, and slam…The festival also worked on developing pioneering young talents and skills in this field through workshops and training sessions.

The Apolon Association for Arts and Culture in Ksar Hellal (Monastir) was founded in October 2012, in the midst of a difficult political, social, and cultural context in a city that suffered from lack of cultural spaces. The association founders chose the name of the Greek god of arts; they imitated the Greeks, who chose culture as a foundation for building their society and developing it in a way that is based on citizenship and human rights values. The association received its legal status in January 2013. But it began its activities in December 2012 with an event called "Street Images" where young professional, amateur, and specialist photographers participated. The show space was one of the squares of Ksar Hellal. This event became the foundation for an annual festival, transforming public squares and streets into stages for artistic expressions that give voice to the people's urgent social and political realities. Central to the association's mission is actualizing cultural decentralization—transforming theory into practice—through unconventional cultural spaces. It further prioritizes youth empowerment through artistic training, skill development, and interdisciplinary innovation. By fostering collaborative networks with local and global partners, it champions open knowledge exchange and creative freedom, embedding a culture of proactive artistic engagement within society.

The Experience of Lankar 17 Troupe, Menzel Bouziane (Sidi Bouzid)

It is known that culture in internal areas has not been a priority in recent years, nor the years before that. It is natural that most of the areas witness a stagnancy in light of the decline of the political and economic situation in the country, despite the importance of the cultural action for its ability to spread awareness, hope, and resistant thinking among the audiences through different art forms–theater, cinema, drawing, photography, dance, and music. There are several artistic domains that open the horizons to actors and activists to improve themselves in spite of the difficulties and frustration they face from audiences and those in charge of cultural affairs for their complicated bureaucratic policies. This has been the Lankar 17 theater troupe's fate since its foundation, struggling against regressive traditions that reign in the Tunisian society. These regressive traditions include prohibition, mockery, and other wide-spread practices. Lankar 17 troupe was founded in 2009 by a group of artists from the area of Menzel Bouziane. They were initially a support center for different arts and artists. The choice of the name for the association has a historical significance because the inhabitants of the city of

Menzel Bouziane used to call the train station “Lankar” while the district of Menzel Bouziane used to be called “Lankar 17” because it is located between the districts of Sind and Meknassi, at an equal distance of 17 km from each of them. In addition, the colonial regime used to name Tunisian areas after their train stations, connecting them with railroads and the number of stations. Therefore the name of the association summarizes a part of the history of the region. The general situation in Tunisia had been unstable. The January 14 Revolution was a turning point for the state altogether. The cultural situation underwent a state of stagnation. A few years passed without any success or progress in achieving this project’s goals, to the extent that some artists started to believe that the idea behind the creation of the association was dead. However, Lankar 17 is an idea, and ideas do not die. Several amateur drama artists who were thirsty for art made some theater attempts as clubs at Youth and Culture Houses under the name of Lankar 17 troupe. They participated in events organized by the Youth House in Menzel Bouziane. In addition, they participated in Ramadan soirees with a few short theater and folklore performances. They began with performing a play called “Basma Ran Away” at the Regional Festival for Amateur Theater at Youth and Culture Houses in 2014. Their cultural and theatrical activity was not limited to the theater club at the Youth House. It extended to Youth Houses in the towns of Sind and Kharchif as a tool to spread the spirit of theater across the poor and impoverished villages that need some happiness, hope, and the joy of watching a play. In addition, the focus was further invested in attempting, repeating, and finding other chances to move, create, and participate in all kinds of national theater festivals: monologue theater, street theater, and theater for seniors at the theater club in the cultural complex in Menzel Bouziane. They participated without forgetting their activism within cultural and charity organizations such as Marafiq, Book Lovers, and senior welfare associations. They featured in charity festivals in rural areas such as Al-I’tizaz, Saada, Kharchif, Kerba, Kellal, El Moch…Both these efforts, participation in voluntary work and different types of theater events, constituted a strong incentive and motive for building, developing, expanding knowledge, learning, and research in order to carry on building projects that they wanted to achieve. These projects and achievements made this troupe start an independent activity by founding a scientific research and development laboratory in the field of of street theater. They also tried to improve street theater artists and the scenography. They also did further research into the characteristics of the street for it to be a prepared space for exhibition and spreading theatrical thought and the love of practicing the art of theater in all Tunisian streets. Lankar 17 was the first troupe interested in street theater that received funding from the Draams Chabab program in its third edition. That fund constituted an important motive in the history of the troupe; it pushed them to produce the biggest street theater work in Tunisia. It was a project that synthesized the results of the scientific laboratory, entitled “The Cage” In terms of continuity, this troupe is considered the first in the number of productions and the number of artists. Moreover, Lankar 17’s history is full of national and international prizes, including 35 national and eight international prizes between 2018 and 2022. This tally excludes the ministerial homages during their participation in (inter)national festivals, especially of street theater, such us the Street Theater Festival in Benzart, the National Street Theater Festival of Ksar Hellal, the International Street Theater in El-Guettar, the Maghrebian Festival of Amateur Theater in Nable, as well as the opening of several national festivals, such as the National Theater Festival, Monsif Soussi, City Lights Festival in Mezzouna, and others. Furthermore, they have been invited to participate in international festivals abroad in Egypt, Morocco, and Iraq. The drama activity of this troupe is still alive and kicking to make history, improve public taste, spread awareness, and strengthen the cultural scene of the country and the region by serious attempts and local, regional, national, and international achievements..

Conclusion

It is imperative to bring together the different actors in street theater, defend them against marginalization, and struggle to acquire a real recognition of this field by the Ministry of Culture and all the other concerned administrations by dedicating a budget to training, production, promotion, and distribution of shows. This shall guarantee a state of democratization of joy and a step towards making street theater a lived reality and recognized by all parties. This step guarantees its continuity by providing a common ground that fits all categories through a short, medium, and long-term national program. This step contributes to the spread of street theater works nationally and abroad. It also helps to do a survey of the festivals and forums dedicated to this art and establishing partnerships with them. This can be achieved by revitalizing civil society—through establishing associations, organizing local to national festivals, and investing in cultural tourism—to advance sustainable development. A key step would be creating a national center dedicated to research and studies in performing arts, encompassing all forms of street performance.



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14 احلام البجاوي : مصدر سابق، ص 112.

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26 طارق الربح : مصدر سابق ، ص 48.

27 طارق الربح : مصدر سابق ، ص 46.

28 طارق الربح : مصدر سابق ، ص 202.

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