

LOOKING BACK AT THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION: 'AWDAT DĀNTŪN (A SCAR WITHOUT SKIN)

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Centering itself on the rehearsal space of Georg Büchner's Danton's Death, 'Awdat Dāntūn (The Return of Danton, 2021) by Syrian playwright Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī (Mudar Alhaggi) unfolds in the form of meta-theatre in conversation with the momentum of the Syrian uprising and the personal narratives of exile of a group of Syrian artists. I argue that Danton's Death becomes a prosthetic memory – if I want to reroute Alison Landsberg's term: rather than being a remembrance that suggests different levels of social justice, Büchner's text manifests itself as an impasse. While tinkering with trauma studies, I claim that the inter-textuality of Büchner's/al-Ḥaḡḡī's text is curated by both un-utterance and spatial withdrawals: I therefore intend to highlight the ways with which un-utterance can be analyzed as an act of (non-)remembrance while introducing the concept of "A Scar without Skin" (plaie sans peau).

When I looked at the drawings illustrating the Reign of Terror like the image of the severed heads held up next to the guillotine, I could stare at the image, looking at every detail... at the same time, I couldn't look at a single image coming from Syria... I noticed that as I read and researched the subject my mind would wonder... I would think... as if I relied on *Danton's Death* to find the answers for the difficult questions that the Syrian revolution posed. What does a revolution mean..what does it mean that a revolution succeeds or fails...¹.

The former lines are excerpts from 'Awdat Dāntūn (The Return of Danton), a performance written by the Syrian playwright Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī (Mudar Alhaggi) and produced in Germany in 2021². Preceded by *Ḥubbuk nār* (Your Love Is Fire) which premiered in Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2017, *Ayyām fī 'l-šams* (Days in The Sun, 2018) and *Iḡrā' šaklī* (Just Formality,

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¹ Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī, 'Awdat Dāntūn, unpublished text, p. 20. The translated version was provided by the playwright in word document.

² 'Awdat Dāntūn is directed by 'Umar al-'Iryān (Omar Elerian) and performed by the following actors: Amal 'Umrān (Amal Omran), Muḥammad Āl Rašī (Mohamed Alrashi), Muḥammad Dībū (Mohammad Dibo), and Kinān Ḥumaydān (Kinan Hmeidan), and it is produced by Collective Ma'louba (*Maqlūbah*) and Theatre an der Ruhr in co-production with Shubbak Festival London in cooperation with Maxim Gorki Theatre and Münchner Kammerspiele.

2019), *‘Awdat Dāntūn* is the playwright’s fourth text since his relocation to Germany in 2015 and the Collective Ma’louba’s fifth production³.

Like many others of his compatriots, Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī sought asylum following the open-door policy initiated by former chancellor Angela Merkel in 2015. Syrian refugeehood became a central theme for many German stages that hosted displaced artists for a significant amount of time before the Russian-Ukrainian war erupted. Two salient examples are the Exile Ensemble and Collective Ma’louba founded respectively in 2016 and 2017. While the first, composed of Syrian artists Māzin al-Ġubbah (Mazen Aljubba/Mazen Aljubbeh), Ayham Maḡīd Āḡā (Ayham Majid Agha), Kindā Ḥumaydān (Kenda Hmeidan), and Ḥusayn al-Šāḡilī (Hussein Al-Shatheli), tackled issues of asylum and narratives of war bringing together a multi-national group of German, Syrian and other displaced artists from the world, Collective Ma’louba, co-founded by Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī, gathered a group of Syrian playwrights and actors living in Germany and France like Wā’il Qaddūr (Wael Kadour), Wā’il ‘Alī (Wael Ali), Amal ‘Umrān, and others.

The plot of the unpublished text *‘Awdat Dāntūn* written in Arabic – unfolding in the form of meta-theatre – centres around the rehearsal space of Karl Georg Büchner’s play *Danton’s Death* (or. *Dantons Tod*, 1835): what the audience will be exposed to, however, is a continuously disrupted rehearsal for a ten-minute presentation in order to get the needed funding for the production.

The present essay ponders, through al-Ḥaḡḡī’s text, on the revolutions, coups, and dissent movements when enacted as haunting processes: while discussing al-Ḥaḡḡī’s writing, I consider how intertextuality is curated by both un-utterance and spatial withdrawals. The incapability of speech and elocution about the Syrian revolution is compelling to look at in contiguity with the trauma studies literature while not disregarding the implications of the repressed political history in Syria. I thus examine the ways with which spatial withdrawals and un-utterance weave together an impossibility of creating a narrative of the Syrian revolution, hence veering towards what I like to call “A Scar without Skin”.

To this end, I indulge in a close reading of *‘Awdat Dāntūn* while creating an interdisciplinary framework connecting spatial studies and the pathological phenomena of selective aphasia to trauma and memory studies. I thus decorticate separately the text within those frameworks to gradually weave the concept of “A Scar without Skin”. While being in conversation with the scholarship of Henri Lefebvre, Anne Ubersfeld, Patrice Pavis, Mārī Ilyās (Marie Elias), Ḥanān Qaṣṣāb Ḥasan (Hanane Kassab Hassan),

³ Wadī‘ah al-Firzī, *Walking a Tightrope: Syrian Theatre in Germany*, in “Syria Untold”, 21/06/2021, available at: <https://syriauntold.com/2021/06/21/walking-a-tightrope-syrian-theatre-in-germany/> (last accessed 22 October 2023).

and others, I examine first the different maneuverings of space in al-Ḥaḡḡī's work. I argue that despite the fact that the materiality of the stage is fully present, there seems to be a level of spatial withdrawal announcing failure of all spaces – the stage space, the dramatic space, the theatre space, and the revolution as a representational space. I then relate the spatial failure to “un-utterance” and “selective aphasia”, two idioms I use to observe the main character's inability to reflect on the Syrian revolution while using the French revolution as a foil. Through Alison Landsberg's concept of “prosthetic memory”, I study how the intertextuality of Büchner's text within al-Ḥaḡḡī's writing foments the landscapes of un-utterance and selective aphasia. It is thus the conglomeration of spatial failure and un-utterance that are finally studied within a non-Eurocentric framework of trauma studies represented in Nouri Gana's literature. While inviting history and refugeehood into the conversation, this essay argues that amid the recurrent landscapes of internal political upheavals strengthened by impunity, space not only signifies a withdrawal, but also indicates a failure of representation on the stage; it cultivates un-utterance, and hence leads to the concept of “A Scar without Skin”.

Disrupting the Theatrical Process

Many performances reflected upon the challenging act of looking back at the post-uprising Syria after it had become a site of violence and war. This challenge wins more complexity when faced with the destabilization of the concepts of space and place in plays written or performed by artists in exile: the idea of “home” is uncanny in a considerable number of performances. *Ūfirdūs – 'Arḍ al-alam wa 'l-sa 'ādah al-ḡayr muktamil/Overdose – The Unfinished Show of Pain and Joy* (Berlin 2021), a devised production gathering Syrian and German artists, exemplifies a rupture of the Syrian artists/characters with the concept of homecoming. Amal 'Umrān – parallelly impersonating Antigone and herself – asks: «How do we get home? We do not know»⁴. Bayān (Bayan) – another actress – completes the image of losing the safety of both home and the world by stating the following: «The home thing is difficult. There used to be one. With a children's room and everything. And then it was lost. And then it hurt. And then came the fear. And then I asked myself, shouldn't the whole world be my home now? The world is not so easily lost. At least that's what I thought. But now I'm not so sure...»⁵.

Another iteration of spatial uncanniness can be witnessed through performances staged in total or partial darkness like *al-Markaz* (The Center) by director Sārī Muṣṭafā (Sari Mustafa) and *Ḥadā'iq al-kalām* (Gardens Speak)

⁴ I. Bartz et al., *Overdose-The Unfinished Show of Pain and Joy*, unpublished text, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

by Tāniyā al-Ḥūrī (Tania El-Khoury) – Beirut, 2014. The stage in other cases transforms to be the visceral intimate area where interiority occurs within the few cubic centimetres inside the skull as manifested through *Mu'ānaqāt* (Embraces), choreographed and directed by Nūrā Murād (Noura Murad) – Damascus, 2018.

In many cases, the stage as a dramatic place often questions its tools of representation. Presented for the first time in 2021, *Awdat Dāntūn* is introduced by Collective Ma'louba as «a contemporary exploration of how the dynamics of political revolutions [...] can be reflected within the politics of the rehearsal room»⁶.

Rehearsing the controversial scenes gathering Büchner's main characters Danton and Robespierre, the text resituates the “reign of terror” of the French revolution as an unfolding experience that conjectures with the daily life issues of the rehearsing team of actors, director, and dramaturg. Iyās, the company's director – following his belief that the German classic will secure the needed funding – counters a previous plan he had with the playwright Rahaf (now turned a dramaturg) to write a new play. As the company members wrestle with Büchner's intense dialogues, the actors are subsumed with their everyday life challenges of integrating themselves in a new country while equally being trapped in their dissatisfaction with the roles assigned to them by Iyās. The director and the dramaturg Rahaf on the other hand nurture throughout the play a contentious relationship whereby the latter asks the former to justify his choice when relying on Büchner's text. The recurrent question «What links the Syrian revolution to the French revolution» will remain impervious to definitive answers until the end of the performance.

As the plot tracks the daily ordeals of the company to get funding for mounting the performance, al-Ḥaḡḡī's “political drama” sutures an interconnected line of events reflecting multiple sets of failures⁷. Whereas the rehearsal space fails, the space of the Syrian revolution is situated within an uncanniness of representation. The mirroring between the failure of the rehearsal space and the failure of recalling and representing the Syrian revolution is refracted into shattering pieces highlighting the emerging problems of being a displaced artist in a foreign land. Such patchwork is suggested while hueing towards a politics of spatial withdrawal.

As Andrew Newman in his essay *A Metaphysical Introduction to a Relational Theory of Space* (1989) argues for “space” as a “void” and “place” as that which can be «difficult to [...] be defined»⁸, Gaston Bachelard in *The*

⁶ *The Return of Danton*, Muenchner Kammerspiele's platform, available at: <https://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/en/programm/7520-the-return-of-danton> (accessed 20 September 2022).

⁷ *Ibid.*

Poetics of Space (1994) posits that the former is everything⁹. While the first creates a nuance “between mathematics and the representation of mathematics”¹⁰, hence questioning Newton’s absolute space, the second argues that memories are fixed in space as «[f]or a knowledge of intimacy, localization in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than determination of dates»¹¹. Within the ontological explanation of Newman and the felicitous poetic interpretation of Bachelard, many theories lay related to spatial dynamics in different epistemological fields. Particularly telling in the context of the present research is Michel de Certeau’s understanding of the nuances between place and space. Place is seen as the proper of an order, with everything in its place and a place for everything. Space, on the other hand, is indicative of movement in relation to place and is compared to the actual speaking of the word: «In short, *space is a practiced place*»¹². Such a view of space as *practicum* inspired by the performativity of words and social interaction finds its pre-reverberations in Henri Lefebvre’s oeuvre. In his monograph *Production of Space* (1974), he defines social space through three main paradigms: *spatial practice*, *representations of space*, and *representational space*¹³. Although in *‘Awdat Dāntūn* the spatial practice as a per-

⁸ A. Newman, *A Metaphysical Introduction to a Relational Theory of Space*, in “The Philosophical Quarterly”, 39, 155 (Apr., 1989), p. 213, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2219639> (last accessed 22 October 2023).

⁹ G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts 1994, p. 9.

¹⁰ A. Newman, *A Metaphysical Introduction to a Relational Theory of Space*, cit. According to Newman, «Newton’s view of absolute space is guided by mathematics which treats points of space and regions of space as objects which are as real as anything else» (*Ibid.*, p. 219). Newman «argued that a point, even a point of matter, is not a real unit; and even if it were something real, an aggregate of points could not in itself provide a notion of distance» (*Ibid.*). He «suggested instead a notion of space as the void, which is a metaphysical notion, and has, as far as [he] know[s], no mathematical representation» (*Ibid.*). According to Newman the void allows to have a «relational account of the points of space for which space does not vanish when the objects vanish. The void, having no structure, provides no notion of absolute velocity, and is therefore essentially immobile» (*Ibid.*).

¹¹ G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, cit., p. 9.

¹² M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Translated by S. Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984, p. 117.

¹³ While the *spatial practice* «embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation [...] [and] ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion», *representations of space* is explained as the “order” imposed by the relations of production hence affecting knowledge, signs, and codes (H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith, Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford 1991, p. 33). Tompkins understands *representations of space* as the place where «culture’s social power and

ceived space – the place which is proper of an order – is fully present, both conceived (representations of space) and lived spaces (representational space) witness different levels of dysfunctionality. Thus, I name the term “spatial withdrawal”, while referring to few concepts suggested by Michael Issacharoff, Anne Ubersfeld, Patrice Pavis, and others, to delineate that such paradigms of spatial reckonings are often fraught and incomplete in the context of al-Ḥaḡḡī’s and his characters’ attempts to stage the revolutions¹⁴. Although the spatial practice of the performance is physically situated in the rehearsal room, the dramatic space constantly echoes its failure while evoking the systemic alienation suggested by the theatre space. As proposed by the

authority are located and reinforced» (J. Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke 2007, p. 3). *Representational spaces*, on the other hand, are «complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art [...]». (H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, cit., p. 33). To elucidate further his paradigms, Lefebvre suggests what he calls «the perceived-conceived-lived triad» (*Ibid.*, p. 40). *The perceived space* – highlighting physical and materialist aspects – falls under the paradigm of spatial practice. *The conceived space* aligned with the paradigm of representations of space underpins mental and idealistic processes. *The lived space* related to the paradigm of representational space is a social process that combines both materialism and idealism.

¹⁴ A “non-place” (*non-lieu*) is situated for de Certeau in the myth («the myth tells the nowhere»: M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, cit., p. 150). He describes the stories of miracles as nowhere, a utopia, both of which stand in contradiction to Marc Augé’s perception of the “non-place”. Published in 1992, Marc Augé’s *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* foregrounds the transformations of space significations in the era of super-modernity. “Non-places” can be explained as non-localized entities in time and space. In that sense, high-speed roads, railways, grand commercial centres, and the «extended transit camps where the planet’s refugees are parked» are perceived by Augé as non-places (M. Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Translated by J. Howe, Verso, London-New York 1995, p. 34). While “places” can be characterized as «relational, historical, and concerned with identity», non-places are situated as the anti-dote of relationality, historicism, and identity representations. (*Ibid.*, p. 77). They are perceived as non-anthropological spaces that «do not integrate the earlier place». (*Ibid.*, p. 78). Yet, Augé reminds his reader that both places and non-places do not exist in a pure form: while «the first is never erased, the second never totally completed». (*Ibid.*, p. 79). As Edward Soja theorizes space as «a multi-layered geography of socially created and differentiated nodal regions nesting at many different scales around the mobile personal spaces of the human body and the more fixed communal locales of settlements» (quoted in S. Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, Routledge, London-New York 2016, 1st ed., Chap. 2), he coins the term “Third Space” where everything comes together: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the

Syrian scholars Ḥanān Qaṣṣāb Ḥasan and Mārī Ilyās, who relate Ubersfeld's theatre space (*lieu théâtral*) to the realm of the society – i.e. the city/village/church/factory surrounding it –, what is revealed in al-Ḥaḡḡī's text is the disruption of the rehearsal environment by the new requirements of producing theatre in Germany¹⁵.

Until the early 2000s, the theatrical scene inside Syria was seldom dependent on the donor's scheme. Often funded and subsidized by the state, Syrian artists who were ostracized by the network of nepotism had to face a model that was unknown to them in the post-uprising era. Such disparity will initially translate in al-Ḥaḡḡī's text through the contentious relational dy-

real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. With "Third Space", Soja moves away from contingent definitions of space and place and seeks to understand human spatiality in a way that allows for social change. Patrice Pavis – relying on the literature of Anne Ubersfeld, George Banu and R. Durant – draws a specified taxonomy linking theatre to space. He thus marks different spatial paradigms listed as follows: *the dramatic space, Stage space, Theatre space, Gestural space, Textual space, and Inner Space*. Anne Ubersfeld on the other hand makes a clear distinction between theatre space (*lieu théâtral*) and theatrical space (*espace théâtral*). Theatrical space is a general notion to refer to the whole complex function of space in the theatre, an abstraction of theatre space, which is the place of performance, the theatre building (N. Hernando-Real, *Self and Space in the Theater of Susan Glaspell*, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson 2011, p. 13). The Arabic translation of Pavis' dictionary, made by two Syrian Professors in the High Institute of Theatre society, Ḥanān Qaṣṣāb Ḥasan and Mārī Ilyās, displays – interestingly – a more elaborate array of space-stage taxonomies than that of Pavis. The overlap between the theatrical space and the wider space in which it is located has a significance regardless of the nature/genre of the theatrical performance. At the same time, the relations that are formed within the theatrical space between the various spaces that it contains (the dramatic space that is formed on the stage and the spectator's space) have an impact on the setting and meaning of the performance. Such expansion of Ubersfeld's definition speaks to the Arab conception of space that Qaṣṣāb Ḥasan/Ilyās unraveled in their dictionary: they first quoted the *Lisān al-'arab* dictionary – written by the philologist, historian and Islamic scholar Ibn Manẓūr in 1290 – that drew a distinction between space and place. Whereas place holds the meaning of the locus (i.e. in my understanding the placement of objects), a space for Ibn Manẓūr is the vast place of the earth or the empty barrenness in which there is nothing. As for the sociologist Ibn Ḥaldūn, he used the term space in the social sense, which is closer to the concept of space in the contemporary scholarship. Michael Is-sacharoff adds to the existent taxonomy of Ubersfeld what he calls diegetic space versus a mimetic space – hence creating more clarity and specificity in providing tools to analyse dramatic space: while the former is "described", «referred to in the dialogue, and [...] confined to a merely verbal existence», the

namics that link the director to the play's dramaturg. The director's dramaturgical choice of referring to Büchner's text to please the donors reflects the apparatus of producing theatre that reaches much more complicated grounds than those of funding a play: being a Syrian artist in the post-uprising era imposes a set of audience expectations, a level of managing a foreign language on top of integrating oneself in a different system. al-Ḥağğī's work, hence, problematizes the operational system of producing theatre. The specific road map for the integration of the artist overcomes the act of doing art itself.

Such a journey starts, for example, with the stressful letters of the job centre and does not end with language acquisition issues. Rahaf, the dramaturg, emphasizes what she perceives as a «mail phobia»¹⁶. Subsumed by the fear of finding an invitation from the job centre to discuss her career, her moderate understanding of the German language leads her to understand that she received a «job offer from Berlin theatre» as a trainer; however, what is being requested is a demand from a theatre artist who has a lengthy experience in theatre, to join a workshop for refugees as a trainee to learn acting¹⁷. The former confusion – parallelly built on a language *quiproquo* and on identity framing – unravels the disciplining mode of institutions. Rahaf's repulsion from the job centre is antecedent to the moment where she discovers that she was recruited as a trainee rather than a trainer: «I go back to thinking of all the letters I dread in the mail box..I think of the future... I think that the job centre won't leave me alone... I tell myself be patient... but now I no longer have to»¹⁸.

What equally unfurls through the spatial practice of the rehearsal room is a series of absences and erasures of both the diegetic space and mimetic space – particularly when it comes to the Syrian revolution. Any referentiality to the past of the Syrian characters is thus obfuscated: Syria as a nostalgic space, as a comparative professional paradigm is absent. The Syrian revolution, however, is present – only through the text of Büchner while being abstracted, decontextualized, and reframed to occupy the order of ideality and controversial values.

Iyās's dramaturgical choice builds on a tendentious history he has with *Danton's Death*. Imposed by the Higher Institute of the Dramatic Arts in Damascus, the text aroused little interest in the artist's mind: the idea of a revolution in 2001 was obsolete and the language was difficult to grasp. Al-

latter is represented on stage and made visible to an audience (M. Issacharoff, *Discourse as Performance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1989, p. 58).

¹⁵ Ḥanān Qaṣṣāb Ḥasan; Mārī Ilyās, *al-Mu'ğam al-masrahī. Majāhīm wa muṣṭalahāt al-masrah wa funūn al-'arḍ. 'Arabī-īnglīzī-faransī*, Maktabat Lubnān Nāšīrūn, Bayrūt 1997, p.

¹⁶ Muḍar al-Ḥağğī, *'Awdat Dāntūn*, cit., p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

though after 2011 the language remained difficult, Iyās returns to the text because «the revolution that the play is talking about was no longer something imaginary or coming from the depths of history»¹⁹. Iyās's remark will not transport his spectator to the space of the Syrian revolution though: although he admits in the presentation that there is nothing in common between both revolutions, what triggers him is his ability to contemplate the French revolution paintings versus his incapability of doing the same when it comes to the Syrian revolution. The concerns raised by the dramaturg questioning the relationship between the Syrian and the French revolutions will remain unanswered by the director. The tension between both artists, i.e., the director and the dramaturg, will often disrupt the rehearsal process which is equally withheld by the continuous demands of Steve, playing the role of Danton, to have a smoking break.

Hence, what is dramatized instead of the rehearsing of *Danton's Death* is not only the theatre space when it becomes alienating. What is foregrounded is the failure of all spaces – the stage space, the dramatic space, the theatre space, and the revolution as a representational space.

Selective Aphasia: Between the Margins of Speech and Language

Defined medically as a disturbance of the process of comprehending and formulating verbal messages as a result of damage to the central nervous system, selected aphasia becomes in the case of the Syrian revolution a crafted recurrence throughout the play.

What is perceived as a spatial withdrawal equally nurtures an interruption of speech and articulation. As highlighted earlier, Iyās, the director, can delineate the pragmatic reasons behind working on *Danton's Death*: it's a strategic decision that might appeal to the donors. Yet, whenever he is asked by Rahaf about the dramatic choice that links the Syrian revolution to *Danton's Death*, he recurrently manages to escape the answer. Although he mentions that the German play is his way «to find the answers for the difficult questions that the Syrian revolution addressed» like «What does a revolution mean...», none of the former were discussed openly²⁰. Introduced as part of a performance, such interrogations are instrumentalized through a rehearsed elocutionary speech to impress the funders rather than really reflecting on the question itself. On the fifth day of the rehearsal, Iyās stood confidently on the stage, holding his note cards while practising his talk intended to be addressed to the donors and while faking a tremendous smile. After making a brief introduction of Georg Büchner, Iyās asked: – in a performative tone rather than a depth intended behind the question raised – «Why this play in

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

particular?»²¹. Although he held his note cards in his hands, and even though he responded in an assertive manner that there were many reasons behind his choice, when he started uttering the main reason according to his own opinion, he stuttered, indulging in silence. He lost his line of thought for seconds before returning to his notes²².

The well-rehearsed overview of the *Death of Danton* was paralleled with the screening of paintings regarding the French revolution playing in the background, whereas the question «Why *Danton's Death*?» was surrounded with a series of interruptions²³: in addition to Rahaf's comment «Is that taken from Wikipedia?»²⁴, three huge question marks appeared on the projection, followed with a screen dysfunctionality²⁵. The former displays overlapping windows on the screensaver, and nonsensical personal images including a photo of Baššār al-Asad whose photograph precedes the moment when Iyās emphasizes his «need to understand»²⁶.

The ruptures of Iyās's speech, including the marking moment of unutterance at the beginning of this scene, cannot be taken in silos nor can the visual treatment be separated from the space of utterance itself. Although Iyās's lines could be read as a sign of a subjective interiority, the slight grin and the elocutionary aspect of his speech in rehearsal mode provide an aspect of intimacy, yet it lands aporetically. A closer examination of Baššār al-Asad's photo projected on the screen showcases his wife's face and all the surrounding figures supplanted by that of Baššār's. While Rahaf's inuendo and the screen dysfunctionality turn a performed intimacy into a rehearsed elocution that invites un-canniness and aporia, the photographic manipulation shifts the paradigm into anti-intimacy and a parody both of which echo the peculiarity of the unanswered question where performativity supplants the real need to understand revolutions.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²² The following are Iyās's lines: «Why this play in particular? For many reasons but the main reason in my opinion is that the play deals with... deals with... (stutters. Silence. He looks at his notes, retrieves his ability to speak again) what could be considered the most important event in the history of Europe and the modern world, namely the French Revolution... specifically the period after the victory of the revolution. The period known as the reign of terror». *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.* See also the performance version.

²⁵ After rejecting her inuendo, Iyās takes some time before continuing his speech. When he starts speaking again in a more subjective tone, the intended background screen images – originally managed by Rahaf – are ruptured by an unintentional screen display error. When he was asking: «What does it mean that a revolution succeeds or fails», Rahaf was grappling with the device where the projection was screening overlapping windows. Muḍar al-Ḥağğī, *ʿAwdat Dāntūn*, cit., p. 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Un-utterance towards the Syrian revolution haunts Iyās throughout the play hence reaching a peak on the eighth day of the rehearsal. When Iyās enters surprisingly the rehearsal room to find both the actors and the dramaturg hallucinating under the influence of weed, he decides to expel all the team members from the stage. After performing Danton's lines in Act 4, scene 3, where he looks at Death as «wretched business» that «apes birth» and while totally being immersed in his role, an unknown voice intervenes to announce Iyās's trial scene for the crime of equally disdaining the stage and oneself²⁷. It will not take too long before knowing that the voice that continuously repeats «I love you and care for you», and perpetually asks about the common elements between the Syrian and the French revolutions, is the voice of the guillotine²⁸. The answerless question leads Iyās to finally approach slowly towards the lunette where he places his head under the sharp blades. The sound of the guillotine's blade is trenchant. Complete blackout.

Whether the guillotine is chosen by Iyās under pressure to escape giving a direct answer or whether it is logically justified by a feeling of guilt, the symbolic act of his life being taken by the voice of a question that keeps on searching for other responses is very telling.

The haunting recurrence of the French/Syrian revolutions' question is reminiscent of the repetitions incurred when a traumatic event takes place. According to Cathy Caruth, the trauma is an «event» that «is not assimilated fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it» for «the event returns, as Freud points out, insistently and against their will»²⁹. The everyday life of Iyās and the other characters of the play is only an extended time lapse before the symptomatic question of the revolution resurrects many times in the form of an answerless question, raised in an ordinary conversation; and other times in the form of a horrifying nightmare. The ordinariness versus the horrifying moment of the guillotine, whereby the same question is addressed, makes the mundanity of the rehearsal space an incubating period; it could also be seen as a feature of latency as suggested by Freud. *Danton's Death*, however, unravels not as a trigger to the traumatic event, but as a “prosthetic memory” that consciously sets the milestones for addressing the topic of the Syrian revolution.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁸ First time, the question was faced with total silence. Within the continuous diverse responses to the multiple times the same question is asked, Iyās mentions that he likes the play and that it will be appreciated by the donors. The guillotine then proceeds with the trial by shifting to all sorts of personal investigations – like Iyās's personal life – and then ends by asking the same question again: «Why you are working on *Danton's Death?*». *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁹ C. Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland 1995, pp. 4-6.

Alison Landsberg coins the term “prosthetic memory” to conceptualize how a technologically produced “inauthentic” or “prosthetic” memory may be capable of progressively partaking in accomplishing larger political and ethical goals while considering the ability of these constructed remembrances to «bring about social justice»³⁰. Drawing on a few films invoking memory work, Landsberg argues that «the commodification of memories» in mass culture has «the potential for a progressive, even radical politics of memory» which she calls «prosthetic memory»³¹. Landsberg finds that «the production and dissemination of memory» is one of «the most dramatic instances of» generating empathy «across racial and ethnic lines»³².

Although Landsberg’s concept might gain more accuracy in fiction and in film production, the rerouting of such a term is salient to uncover the boundaries of representation and remembrance when conjointly linked to the trauma of historical events: thus, the refuge to Büchner’s text will hence reflect as a prosthetic mnemonic impasse whereby values of social justice and negotiations, contestations, and constructions of social meanings are not as distanced to be fictionally introduced as metaphors promising change.

Looking back at the realm of the Syrian revolution is endowed with an atmosphere of uncertainty that could not even spare the momentum of the uprising in its making. Did the Syrian uprising fail? Instead of addressing a similar question, Iyās asks, in his rehearsed speech: «What does a revolution mean, what does it mean that a revolution succeeds or fails», and proceeds further to highlight the necessity to understand what happened³³. When suggested by Rahaf that he might need to explain in his presentation «how he is going to work on the show» and what links both revolutions, Iyās responds

³⁰ A. Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York 2004, pp. 144-145, 158.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149. Landsberg delineates four reasons for coining the term which she opposes to collective memory: first, this memory is not authentic nor natural as it derives from the engagement with mediated representations (like film, visiting a museum, a television show), thus they land on the body as an artificial limb (second) and «like an artificial limb, these memories often mark a trauma». Third, the use of word “prosthetic” signals «their interchangeability and exchangeability and underscores their commodified form». Looking at this commodification as making hidden narratives more accessible, she posits that «the commodified images [...] are not capsules of meaning that spectators swallow whole, but rather the grounds upon which social meanings are negotiated, contested, and sometimes constructed». Fourth, she calls these memories prosthetic to underscore their usefulness; because they feel real, they help to condition how an individual thinks about the world and might be instrumental in generating empathy and articulating an ethical relation to the other. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-149.

³³ Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī, ‘*Awdat Dāntūn*, cit., p. 20.

that he is not ready to talk about it. After ten years of the Syrian uprising, he confesses that «nothing is clear to [him]»: «There are many things in my head... videos... images... voices... but I am afraid to say something I am not sure about» he adds³⁴.

The realm of uncertainty in Iyās's case goes beyond the quest for a perfectionist accuracy in articulating oneself: in *The Body Keeps The Score* (2014), Bessel van der Kolk explains the conjectures between memory and trauma when the shock is “inescapable” to an extent it causes the system to break down: «When memory traces of the original sounds, images, and sensations are reactivated, the frontal lobe shuts down, including [...] the region necessary to put feelings into words, the region that creates our sense of location in time, and the thalamus, which integrates the raw data of incoming sensations. At this point the emotional brain, which is not under conscious control and cannot communicate in words, takes over»³⁵. Iyās's fragmented attempts to build a narrative liaising both revolutions while recalling the sensory traces of Syria as a space of remembrance reflect a dissociating traumatic experience that constantly perpetuates in different forms to reach the other characters of the play.

Un-utterance is present in the discourse of Steve (Danton) and Riḍā (Robespierre) even though in a less intense manner than that of Iyās. When they were asked by the dramaturg to improvise a speech on the success of a revolution – any given revolution –, both Steve and Riḍā fell into endless rambling. Riḍā, who is not able to bathe himself totally into his character (Robespierre) and who finds that there is something that makes him reject the character, and when trying to improvise a speech following a successful revolution, indulges himself – after a long silence – in a fatuous speech about human dignity and ends by disavowing his improvisation³⁶.

In a similar vein, Steve, when invited to improvise the same exercise, could not but fall into quasi-total aphasia where his tongue remains stuck on

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁵ B.A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Viking, New York 2014, p. 211.

³⁶ Riḍā's line is as follows: «[...] and when I speak of dignity...I speak of freedom... the complete freedom of the will... I am honoured to be your servant, a servant of freedom, a servant of human dignity... a servant of it and a fighter for it and willing to spill my blood for it... so that human dignity triumphs... we must all believe in it... and all of us fight for it. O great people...fuck me... and fuck anyone who says the shit I just said... and fuck you if you believed me... you expect me to defend human dignity? O great people do you know what distinguishes you, what distinguishes us? Patience I swear... We are gifted with patience. God where do we get this patience from? Do you know where we get it from brother Danton?». Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī, *ʿAwdat Dāntūn*, cit., p. 16.

the word «O Great people»³⁷. He suggests playing a musical piece he arranged as a DJ instead.

Riḍā's and Steve's accounts of the Syrian uprising as a space of reflection are seldom found unless through some hints of a yet-to-be soap opera series that Riḍā resists: facing the pressures of his wife to accept a new role in a television series joining actors who are aligned with the Syrian regime, he shares with Steve his continuous dilemma of being in the same soap opera with an actress who «supported the bombing of civilians» or with another actor who is always «saluting the Syrian army and the government» whenever he shows up on the television screen³⁸. Of salient significance is the fact that the limited direct references reminding the Syrian revolution are enacted as part of a drama series negotiations. There seems to be talking about the act of talking about the revolution without really talking about the revolution as an actual realm of events, as emotions that unravel in contiguity with the flesh and blood and touch of historical moments. As if what is going on is an exercise of positionality towards the unspeakable rather than having the stage as a space for sharing a narrative of the Syrian revolution itself.

B.A. van der Kolk references P. Janet who draws a nuance between the “narrative memory” and the “traumatic memory”: whereas an “ordinary memory” is “essentially social”, “adaptive”, thus making «our stories [...] flexible [...] and modified to fit the circumstances»; a traumatic memory is not condensed, its reenactment after being triggered «serves no function». Reenactments are marked as «frozen in time, unchanging, and they are always lonely, humiliating, and alienating experiences»³⁹. The positionality towards the unspeakable, the un-utterance with regards to the revolution, and the unspoken damage as the following lines will show suture, together, impure silences that if conjoined to all the disruptions of the theatrical process and the withdrawals of the theatre space, transform the modality of the stage into that which its reenactments serves no function, the same way as a traumatic memory operates.

The term “dissociation” coined by Janet to describe the status of his patients, is equally fitting to pathologise the selected aphasia – perceived as a «splitting off and isolation of memory imprints»⁴⁰.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ According to his wife, accepting the acting job will improve their financial situation, which causes a great refusal by Riḍā. The great tension with his wife who accuses him of being «the only romantic in the world...as if [he is] the only one in the world who still talks about the revolution» builds up. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁹ B.A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, cit., pp. 214-215.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

Smoking cannabis in *'Awdat Dāntūn* translates into a mode of escapism, a consciously chosen dissociation by all the characters: whenever there is a climactic impasse, a joint is introduced to shift the tension. Such a pattern can be seen first when Rahaf absorbs the disappointment of the letter she received from the job center: Rahaf's silence voices unspoken damage and ends up being absorbed, swallowed, and then curated by techno music. Hence, techno beats transform Rahaf's unspoken damage into a collective ownership by all the remaining characters on stage: thus, damage is a beat that is voiced; yet, it shall never be spoken.

Contamination and Temporality: The Revolution as Injury...

A closer look at the characters' dealings with temporality can be an indicator of the remains of the revolution as an imperceptible wound. It is through temporality markers that the former finds its way to another un-utterance. The year of the uprising – 2011 – is suggested as a life-changing moment for Riḍā, Steve, and Iyās. But the year as such is unobtrusive, and never articulated except for Iyās, who is the only individual who used the term twice as a performative speech act while rehearsing the donor's presentation.

Supplanted by a different mode of temporal measurement, most of the characters use, instead of “2011”, «the past ten years». The personal narratives of the characters add more grist to a temporality that distances itself from the act of uttering “2011”, the year of the Syrian revolution. When Iyās expresses his surprise at the fact that a professional like Riḍā would reject his character, the latter responds that he is equally «surprised that after everything that has happened over the past ten years [... Iyās is] able to be surprised... Besides, what does ‘professional’ even mean?!»⁴¹.

Steve states in front of Rahaf and Iyās – on the fifth day of the rehearsal – that he cannot stop smoking hashish: «I have lived like this for ten years and I am fine. I live my life the way I like it... and I work as a DJ, a job I love, after acting of course... But I'm done with acting. I don't want to do it. Who am I going to act for... in what language...»⁴².

The above passage is indicative not only because the history of his substance use is aligned with the year of the Syrian revolution, but because it is equally evocative of the surrogation of theatre with DJ-ing – i.e., replacing live words on stage with musical arrangements that inhibit speech. He later reacts in an impassionate manner when he is asked to make sacrifices: «I don't want to sacrifice [...] you awakened a dream that I buried for ten years... I don't want to waste another ten years of my life»⁴³.

⁴¹ Muḍar al-Ḥaḡḡī, *'Awdat Dāntūn*, cit., p. 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Such responses in contiguity with un-utterance portray the moment of the uprising as an injury: the conflation between acting and the revolution speaks to a painful dream that should not have been awakened and that is subject to continuous burials. “The past ten years”, a foil term for the uprising and its aftermath years, emphasizes the momentum of the 24th of March 2011 as that which resists signification, as if an antinomy towards acronyms of years and historical temporality is put into place. The implications of the Syrian political history may be challenging to disavow, most particularly the history of coups and defeat in Syria.

As documented by the website of the Syrian Ministry of Defence, the newborn nation witnessed four military coups between 1949 and 1954⁴⁴. Ironically, the former devoted a sub-page for each of the coups withholding those relating to al-Asad family that took place following this era and which were many: the coup of 1962, the coup of the 7th March 1963, the political unrest in Hama in 1964, the coup of the 21st February 1966, the coup of September 1966, the white coup on November 13th 1970 leading to Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad’s acquisition of presidency 3 days later⁴⁵.

Yāsīn al-Ḥāġġ Ṣāliḥ (Yassin Al Haj Saleh), an intellectual, a leftist dissident, and a previous political prisoner, gathered in his monograph entitled *al-Ṭawrah al-mustaḥīlah* (The Impossible Revolution) a series of essays he wrote until 2017. In one of his most optimistic articles where he spoke of the superiority of the Syrian revolutionary subject (June 2011), he emphasizes the act of remembering: «even if the regime overcomes the uprising by force, it will only be the first round in a longer conflict, where the Syrians own from now a practiced memory with extraordinary experiences, that serves as a support vehicle for the future rounds of their struggle for liberation»⁴⁶. In April 2012, he concludes another article with: «We are caught between the jaws of the beast, History. Only our insight and good policy will save us»⁴⁷. In an essay published on the 4th of June 2017, Ṣāliḥ contends that the current political realities «are organically tied to the June defeat»; describing it as a «psychologically and culturally shattering event», Ṣāliḥ pinpoints the 1967 *Naksah* as «a founding moment for the political context in which we have been living for half a century»⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ *The military coups and the return to institutional life*, The Syrian Ministry of Defence, available at: <http://www.mod.gov.sy/index.php?node=554&cat=951> (accessed 10 October 2022).

⁴⁵ P. Seale; M. McConville (with the assistance of), *Asad of Syria: the Struggle for the Middle East*, Tauris, London 1988, p. 268.

⁴⁶ Yāsīn al-Ḥāġġ Ṣāliḥ, *al-Ṭawrah al-mustaḥīlah. al-Ṭawrah, al-ḥarb al-aḥliyyah, wa ’l-ḥarb al-’āmmah fī Sūriyyah*, al-Mu’assasah al-’Arabiyyah li ’l-Dirāsāt wa ’l-Naṣr, Bayrūt 2017, p. 43. Translation is mine.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁸ Yassin al-Haj Saleh, *Defeat and the state: June 1967 and Hafez al-Assad’s Syria*, Translated by Omar El Adl, in “Al-Jumhuriya”, 4 June 2017, available at:

What the *Naksah* enabled is the act of perpetuating silence and cultivating defeat narratives in Syria⁴⁹. Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad, who was the Minister of Defence in 1967, resisted the disclosure of any information about the circumstances of the defeat under the alibi that these «are military secrets!»⁵⁰. Šāliḥ gives the example of Yāsīn Ḥāfiẓ (Yassin Hafez) and Šādiq Ġalāl al-‘Az̄m (Sadiq Jalal Al Azm), two prominent intellectuals who respectively wrote two monographs about the defeat: *al-Hazīmah wa ‘l-īdiyūluġiyā al-mahzūmah* (The Defeat and the Defeated Ideology, 1979) and *al-Naqd al-dātī ba ‘d al-hazīmah* (Self-Criticism After the Defeat, 1969)⁵¹. Defeat became the centre that overshadowed war itself. Šāliḥ writes that «[t]he war almost never happened. The defeat was great, and the war small, or perhaps the defeat was great *because* the war was small»⁵². The truth about what happened

<https://aljumhuriya.net/en/2017/06/04/defeat-and-the-state-june-1967-and-hafez-al-assads-syria/> (accessed 10 December 2021).

⁴⁹ According to Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville, the 5th of June 1967 marks the date when «Israel brought the Arab world to its knees» (P. Seale; M. McConville [with the assistance of], *Asad of Syria: the Struggle for the Middle East*, cit., p. 137). The border tensions between Arabs and Israeli forces were the reason behind what is also known as the June War or the Six-Day War (if one wants to use the Israeli title). Israel’s northern border with Syria was the most contentious spot where both parties fought over territory. It ensued as result of the decision taken by the Arab Summit conference in 1964 to divert the Jordanian River in Syria and Lebanon from Israel’s national water grid. A series of events escalated starting with Israel’s attack of 6 Syrian aircrafts (April 1967), and Ġamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir mobilizing his forces in the Sinai (May 14th) and closing the gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping (May 22nd). The Israeli government had already taken the decision to organize a pre-emptive strike to respond to the creation of PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) in 1965. On the 5th of June, the Israeli defence forces crossed into the Sinai and into the West Bank. Syria, Jordan, and Egypt counter-attacked the same day. Having no air cover for troops and tanks, Syria, Jordan and Egypt ended up by surrendering to a cease-fire on the 10th of June where Egypt lost 10000 soldiers (K.E. Schulze, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Routledge, London-New York 2017, 3rd ed., p. 39), Jordan 6000 and Syria 1000 as opposed to 700 casualties by the Israeli side. Sinai, and a great portion of the Syrian Golan heights were occupied by the Israeli side.

⁵⁰ Yassin al-Haj Saleh, *Defeat and the state: June 1967 and Hafez al-Assad’s Syria*, cit.

⁵¹ Yāsīn Ḥāfiẓ, *al-Hazīmah wa ‘l-īdiyūluġiyā al-mahzūmah*, Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah, Bayrūt 1979 (al-ṭab‘ah al-ūlā); Šādiq Ġalāl al-‘Az̄m, *al-Naqd al-dātī ba ‘d al-hazīmah*, Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah, Bayrūt 1969.

⁵² Yassin al-Haj Saleh, *Defeat and the state: June 1967 and Hafez al-Assad’s Syria*, cit. Šāliḥ alludes to the delusional discourse of victory used by Arab officials and leading people from the all Arab countries to celebrate in the streets while reality is elsewhere: in Syria, on the first day of the war, the military spokesman issued 25 statements that talked about many fake operations and the downfall of 50 Israeli planes, but what actually happened was the destruction of two-thirds of the Syrian

in the June war was never told; no one was held accountable in any of the Arab countries: not a single report was issued. Having the Syrian past as a fertile soil of impunity, what remains could be subsumed in what Šāliḥ calls the «psychological fixation on “the defeat” by the intellectuals who “immortalized” it, the June defeat turned from a national crisis, for which individuals, groups and specific apparatuses might be held responsible, into a collective shame, tarring all its contemporaries; from a politico-military event into a cultural condition; from a historical event to an original sin; and from the realm of the world and existence in the world to the realm of metaphysics»⁵³.

Although the ephemeral achievements of the 2011 Syrian uprising cannot be disregarded, what is in question in al-Ḥaḡḡī's play is both the conscious and the unconscious cognizing of a sedimented repetition of the past as a continuous affect of wordlessness, and as an aporetic ambiguity due to the anxiety towards acknowledging another defeat and aligning oneself with it. Setha Low coins the term “affective climate”, «employed to refer to national and statewide resonances and feelings» which she finds helpful in understanding «how a national level of fear and insecurity promotes and sustains the security state»⁵⁴.

The act of eschewing the subjects' narratives in contiguity with political events and history in its making, builds on a genealogy inviting an institutionalized affective climate of horrific silencing. The regime, perceived by Šāliḥ as an agency for unlimited violence where the horrific abuse of its people is at the root of its “natural policy”, disciplined and surveilled all the forms of utterance for more than half a century⁵⁵. Several plays written following the *Naksah* addressed both the Arab-Israeli conflict and the defeat through metaphors. Although the 1969-1975 phase witnessed an agglomeration of texts where the mere title reflects a battlefield landscape, accounts show that almost all of them relied on a certain maneuvering of space and utterance where the parable was omnipresent hence calling for absentia of a direct insignia to the actual geopolitical landscape⁵⁶.

air force, and the war on the Jordanian front was also limited to minor skirmishes. When the main titles of the Egyptian newspapers were announcing the incursion of the Egyptian armed forces into Israel and the fall of 86 Israeli planes, Israel, on the ground, destroyed the Egyptian air force and began its attack in the north and south of Sinai. 'Imād Būzū, *Mas 'ūliyyat al-i'lām al-'arabī 'an hazīmat 1967*, in “al-Ḥurrah”, 07/06/2019, available at: www.alhurra.com/different-angle/2019/06/07/1967-مسؤولية-الإعلام-العربي-هزيمة (accessed 15 December 2021).

⁵³ Yassin al-Haj Saleh, *Defeat and the state: June 1967 and Hafez al-Assad's Syria*, cit.

⁵⁴ S.M. Low, *Spatializing Culture: the Ethnography of Space and Place*, Routledge, London-New York 2017, p. 158.

⁵⁵ Yāsīn al-Ḥāḡḡī Šāliḥ, *al-Ṭawrah al-mustaḥīlah. al-Ṭawrah, al-ḥarb al-ahliyyah, wa 'l-ḥarb al-'āmmah fī Sūriyyah*, cit., p. 57.

Mamdūh ‘Adwān’s *Muḥākamat al-raḡul alladī lam yuḥārib* (The Trial of the Man Who Didn’t Fight, 1970) «uses Hulagu Khan’s conquest of Arab lands as an opportunity to discuss the failings of Arab leaders in the 1967 War, [and] the condition of Arab peoples before and during the war, and the growing number of refugees in the Arab world»⁵⁷. Muḥammad al-Māḡūṭ’s 1974 production *Day‘at Tišrīn* (October Village) substitutes the Arab-Israeli conflict with a marriage postponement because of the groom’s vineyard theft despite the «promises of the village leaders to reclaim the lost land»⁵⁸. Farḥān Bulbul’s *al-Mumattilūn yatarāšaqūn al-ḥiḡārah* (The Actors Are Throwing Stones, 1975) conveys a play within a play that reconstructs historical events taking place in Mecca with ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. al-Hāšim, the leader of Qurayš tribe, in an era contiguous to the emergence of Islam whereby Abrāhām al-Ḥabašī invaded Mecca with his army and famous elephant. Bulbul’s play adopts the form of meta-theatre where the daily livelihood of actors – including financial struggles and their emotional stories – is in co-existence with the historical narrative of land invasion⁵⁹.

The only play that directly addressed the 1967 defeat was Sa‘d Allāh Wannūs’s *Ḥaflat samar min aḡl ḥamsat ḥazīrān* (Soirée for the Fifth of June, 1969). However, there seems to be an ostracization of the political narrative. Edward Ziter posits that: «In lieu of history [...] the director offers nostalgia. His soirée is not an exploration of recent events but rather a presentation of fetishized imagery designed to soothe a troubled population: nationalistic villagers and the happy folk dancing and singing as they have for countless centuries and will long into the future»⁶⁰.

Albeit the plot of an autocratic director facing a writer/dramaturg insisting on a level of integrity when dramatizing a historical event is a commonality between al-Ḥaḡḡī’s and Wannūs’ texts, the former situates un-utterance within a complex affective climate of institutionalized silencing that is not only inflicted by the Syrian regime. It is rather an affective climate that begins with the alienation caused by operational systems – a

⁵⁶ Ziter mentions *al-Ġurabā‘* (The Strangers, 1974), by ‘Alī ‘Uqlah ‘Arsān, and *Day‘at Tišrīn* (October Village, 1974), by Muḥammad al-Māḡūṭ. E. Ziter, *Political Performance in Syria: From the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2015, p. 85. Ġān Aliksān (Jean Aliksan) also wrote *Kafr Qāsim* (1972) and Farḥān Bulbul was the author of *al-Mumattilūn yatarāšaqūn al-ḥiḡārah* (The Actors Are Throwing Stones, 1975).

⁵⁷ E. Ziter, *Political Performance in Syria: From the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising*, cit., p. 78.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵⁹ Farḥān Bulbul, *al-Mumattilūn yatarāšaqūn al-ḥiḡārah*, Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-‘Arab, Dimašq 1991, p. 44.

⁶⁰ E. Ziter, *Political Performance in Syria: From the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising*, cit., p. 66.

modus operandi of making theatre in Germany – thus causing a loss of feeling and sensing space (a spatial withdrawal) and that ends with an ambiguous feeling towards the uprising (selective aphasia): the revolution remains impervious to narration while it is burdened with a sedimented past of silencing, the act of its utterance is destabilized with “occlusion”, in the words of Nouri Gana.

While examining *Abwāb al-madīnah* (City Gates, 1981), a Lebanese novel by Ilyās Ḥūrī (Elias Khoury), best known for its attempt to forge a new language as it unravels the complexity of absorbing the Tal El Zaatar’s Massacre in the midst of the Civil War, Gana resorts to what he calls the “poetics of occlusion”⁶¹. Exemplified through the literary «experimental narrative techniques ranging from a stylistic obsession with formlessness and fragmentariness to polyphony and, above all, repetition and plotlessness», occlusion is equally identified as “opposing stresses” between «the excess of traumatic event and its unrepresentability; between closure and a resistance to closure; between event and its repetition; between wholeness and fragmentation»⁶². He suggests, referring to Kai Erikson, a type of trauma «recognition that is furnished by estrangement and defamiliarization» that «suspends the existing norms of intelligibility» while «open[ing] them up to the dynamics of empathy and epiphany [...]»⁶³. He thus coins the term *Empiphany* suggesting that only by «becoming unrecognizable to oneself and to others and one’s surroundings – only by undergoing, that is, a limit experience, such as trauma – does one aspire to be transformed and, more important, to transform the existing norms of intelligibility that grant and withhold recognition»⁶⁴.

In *ʿAwdat Dāntūn*, the unrepresentability of the Syrian revolution and its theatrical occlusion do not seek Empiphany. The momentum of the uprising is rather portrayed in a setting where empathy and epiphany are far from the reach of al-Ḥaḡḡī’s characters. The revolution is rather portrayed as an injury where the hope for transforming the existing norms of intelligibility through empathy remains questionable.

When the failure of all spaces is foregrounded – including the stage space, the dramatic space, the theatre space, and the revolution as a space of representation, all of which foment a complex assemblage of operational systems – and when selected aphasia is linked to an affective climate of different forms of un-utterances that keep on perpetuating occlusions, empathy and epiphany are unlikely to find their grounds. Where the latter re-

⁶¹ N. Gana, *Trauma ties: chiasmus and community in Lebanese civil war literature*, in G. Buelens; S. Durrant; R. Eaglestone (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary literary and cultural criticism*, Routledge, London-New York 2014, p. 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

mains politically ambiguous, the former is countered by a set of audience expectations that conditions the presence of any emotion within the confines of grief and the fixation on refugee representation. A salient example of unattainable empathy can be found in Iyās's scene with Karina, the German journalist. The following phone conversation is worth quoting at length:

Iyās: Yes I came to Germany by plane... No no boat.. Sorry no boat.. Yes I had a Schengen visa... ya sorry Schengen visa.. Yes it is very good for me to be here in Germany working in German theatre with German artists it is amazing... You cannot imagine how great it is... amazing... wow.. Awesome... yes and specially this project 'the return of Danton' let me tell you why Danton... Because... sorry... ah ok... Now theatre in Syria is very difficult to make theatre in Syria if you are not supporting al-As-sad... so as example I cannot present 'the return of Danton' in Syria you know why... Because... ah ok... Who? The refugees... I don't know if the refugees will come to see our show... I don't know if the refugees go to theatre in Germany... I don't know... I don't know... I don't know... Sorry I did not understand... My opinion... about what?... Integration... Well I think integration is very important yes it is very, very important... I like the integration.. and you see that when you know why I am doing 'the return of Danton' because... ah ok... that is it... ah ok... Thank you... goodbye⁶⁵.

The boat, perceived as the desired space of the foreign gaze when it expects a Syrian displacement narrative on stage, overshadows the original scar of the revolution and restrains the need to understand the original foes that led to displacement within a politics of representation that sets aside any possibilities of communal healing⁶⁶. Fetishizing refugeehood decontextualizes "the pathos of exile" described in the words of Edward Said as that which translates «in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth» where «homecoming is out of question» often due to political constraints⁶⁷. al-Ḥağğī's characters while pinpointing the fetishizing of

⁶⁵ Muḍar al-Ḥağğī, 'Awdat Dāntūn, cit., p. 27.

⁶⁶ Cathy Caruth invites to set aside the insistence on individual pathology in order to consider the larger demands of collective political and historical dynamics because «traumatic experience can never with certainty be reduced to, or framed within, the boundaries of an individual life». C. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1996, 2016, p. 121. For her, trauma is a «dispossession of experience that binds the psyche and the political and social realms to each other». *Ibid.*, p. 123. Caruth's implication of trauma as a collective, a history «multiply and heterogeneously, around the site of a wound» (*Ibid.*, p. 121), refutes the individualization of trauma.

⁶⁷ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2000, p. 179.

the refugee subject and its alienation equally align themselves with Hannah Arendt's view which refuses, in the words of Lyndsey Stonebridge, «to consign the refugee to the position of a quivering supplicant before the law» while equally avoiding to «consign the stateless and rightless to pathos»⁶⁸. Commencing her essay by articulating the sensitivity of Jewish people to being called “refugees”, Arendt problematizes the taxonomy of displacement (immigrants and newcomers) and its socio-political significance in terms of language and law⁶⁹. The politics of identity concealment, although it veers towards a level of assimilationism and undesired optimism, equivalently speaks to social distinctions, to exclusions and persecutions. Stonebridge posits that «for Arendt to claim rights in the name of a putative humanity is to leave intact a concept of rights that speaks only to the caprices of political power. On the other hand, it is because the refugee speaks from within the collapse of an anthropological grounding of rights that this bitter truth is exposed»⁷⁰. Edward Said, on the other hand, draws nuances between the idioms of exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés⁷¹. He hence opposes the “pathos of the exile” to the literary instrumentalization of exile while rendering it into a “motif”. al-Ḥağğī's characters – particularly Iyās and Rahaf – disentangle themselves from the refugee as a nomenclature as it reproduces the “caprices of political power” while cultivating audience expectations, whereas what is equally needed is to process the occlusion of the Syrian revolution.

Conclusion: A Scar without Skin

Although the multiple stages of al-Ḥağğī's text and the political Syrian history tinker with the discourse of trauma studies, and even though the etymology of the idiom “trauma” derives from the Greek word “Wound”,

⁶⁸ L. Stonebridge, *That Which You Are Denying Us: Refugees, Rights and Writing in Arendt*, in G. Buelens; S. Durrant; R. Eaglestone (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory*, cit., pp. 115-121.

⁶⁹ H. Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, Edited by J. Kohn; R.H. Feldman, Schocken Books, New York 2007, p. 264.

⁷⁰ L. Stonebridge, *That Which You Are Denying Us: Refugees, Rights and Writing in Arendt*, cit., p. 121.

⁷¹ While “the exile” – belonging to age-old practice – is identified as the “banished” subject who «lives an anomalous and miserable life with the stigma of being an outsider», a “refugee” on the other hand – a creation of the twentieth-century state – is a political construct «suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance». Said posits that despite its sense of enforcement, «exile carries with it [...] a touch of solitude and spirituality». On the other hand, «expatriates live voluntarily in an alien country», which is the case of many poets and writers (including Hemingway, Fitzgerald). Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, cit., p. 181.

I tend to look at the injury of the revolution – translating through the apparatuses of aphasia and spatial withdrawals – as a scar without skin. Pathologically, a scar is part of the body’s healing mechanism. While skin plays the role of a protector – being the layer that protects from germs and the shield that receives injuries – a scar is a new tissue, made of collagen, created by the body to help reseal the skin when it is injured. Referring to the image of a scar without skin, the injury, the space surrounding the scar where pain spreads, is no longer perceptible. In that sense, the response to the damage is a survival mode, a continuum that avoids perceptibility and pain. Consequently, sealing the scar is impossible due to the absence of skin, and projecting pain is not possible either, due to that same absence.

The absence of skin is not only a metaphor proposing different poetic formulations of un-utterance; a scar without skin invites to reconsider a discourse in trauma studies that privileges “latency”, the efficiency of “narrative-driven closures”, the “collective witnessing” and the Freudian “talking cure” all of which are perceived as Westernized perceptions of trauma⁷². Aligned with A.J. Kabir and Nouri Gana, whose body of work questions the Eurocentrism of trauma studies, a scar without skin draws on the contiguity of spatial withdrawal and un-utterance while landing as a disbelief in the mechanisms of justice implied from a possible cure through telling. It is the occlusion of the Syrian revolution coupled with the ongoing historical narrative recurrence and the regularity with which traumatic events occur, that continuously postpone latency and that “domesticate” the trauma to an extent it becomes the docile child of the subjects’ everyday life. In that sense, constant collective witnessing – when repeated in front of the eyes of the traumatized subjects – becomes a sign of helplessness due to perpetuating injustices.

Similar to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept of “Body without Organs”, a Scar without Skin resists representation⁷³. It is embedded with the system of production while being non-productive at the same time. It feeds on aporetic intensities and on multiplicities, for example, its spatial presence is withdrawn despite the existence of traces of its placeality. It masters the art of voicelessness while resorting to un-utterance as an act of remembrance. It is the Scar without Skin that rejects victimhood while being aware of the assemblage of operational systems, its stage is aligned with the modality of traumatic memory, yet it domesticates trauma while not being fully acclimated to it, nor healed by it. It lands as a temporary protec-

⁷² A.J. Kabir, *Affect, Body, Place Trauma Theory in the World*, in G. Buelens; S. Durrant; R. Eaglestone (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory*, cit., p. 65.

⁷³ G. Deleuze; F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983, p. 8.

tion mode. Its subjects attempt to move forward while not having a clear sense of the past, present, or future. It acknowledges the political ambiguity of the historical narrative, yet, it ostracizes its language. Such maneuvering lands as a choice to avoid the perpetuation of history perceived as the “Jaws of beast”.

Thus, the Syrian revolution is speechless, imageless, and organ-less.