

PERFORMING THE RESURRECTION:
AL-BA‘Ī BY NORA AMIN (NŪRĀ AMĪN)

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This article is an analysis of the performance piece al-Ba‘ī (The Resurrection) – written, directed and performed by Nora Amin – in the perspective of a dance ritual, with all its meanings (loss, de-humanisation, oneness and survival), and through all its languages (words, gestures, lights and sounds). The aim of this study is to underline the use of all these artistic tools to resist pain, trauma and death, while at the same time rebuilding the self and the social fabric, through the sharing of memories, emotions and feelings. Every aspect of this ritual, created by the Egyptian artist following the loss of her partner in the Beni Suef fire, is associated with the idea of healing after involving others in her own suffering, which is not only an individual pain but also a collective one.

Introduction

This article is part of a wider project that concerns different kinds of resistance practices in Arab societies, and intends to analyse different artistic and literary languages used by artists and scholars to express the feelings and the practices of *al-muqāwamah* and to represent a different vision of the social and political reality. In this frame, I chose to put the focus on an interesting case study of the Egyptian contemporary theatre. In fact, over the last three decades, independent theatre troupes have played an important role in re-shaping the Egyptian cultural field through experimental artistic approaches. They have affirmed the importance of freedom of expression in content and in practice, using many different means to avoid censorship, to find financial backing and to convey their message to the audience¹.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the functions of the different kinds of artistic languages used as a means of resistance in contemporary Egyptian theatre, presenting as a case study the performance *al-Ba‘ī* (The Resurrection) created by Nora Amin (Nūrā Amīn)². The complexity of this study is

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¹ About the use of theatrical art in political and social issues see: Amin 2000; Soliman 2011; Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Mehta 2014; Youssef and Golson 2018.

² The text *al-Ba‘ī* by Nora Amin has not been published yet, as well as the Introduction and the Presentation form of the performance, which I refer to in this article. The indication of the year 2016 (a and b) in the References refers to the date of the performance here considered.

the variety of languages present in the subject analysed: body and gestures, voice and music, colours and sounds, written and oral language. This is not only a theatrical work – it may also be considered as a study of everyday practices of resistance from below, and also as a therapeutic approach to re-building the self and surviving death and loss. What Nora wrote in the short introduction to the text – which we can properly define a poem – may help to understand the context in which this performance was conceived and was born, and what steps led the artist to achieving the power to resist and re-exist.

On 5th September 2005, a fire broke out during a performance at the Beni Suef³ Cultural Palace theatre. Several spectators died and many others were injured. Many of the fatalities were due not only to the fire itself, but also to insufficient security standards in the building, the late arrival of rescue services, and inadequate public health structures (Suriano 2010: 112-114). This catastrophe was a shock for Egyptian artists, writers and intellectuals, who were united in calling for justice and truth for the victims and their families⁴. They all felt that the Egyptian State did not care about the lives and health of its citizens, disregard theatrical community and its audience:

في عام ٢٠٠٥ نشب حريق في أحد المسارح بجنوب مصر، توفي على أثره وأصيب سبعون مسرحيا. كان من الممكن إنقاذهم لولا أن الإنسان كان قد فقد قيمته وفقدت الحياة معنى الكرامة الإنسانية⁵.

The Committee *5th September* accused many authorities in connection with the tragedy, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Interior Affairs and the Governor of the Beni Suef district. They demanded answers about the serious shortcomings of the rescue operation, as well as compensation and recognition for the victims and their families. They also demanded that those responsible be brought to trial (Committee *5th September* 2010; Lindholm 2006).

Following the Beni Suef fire and the subsequent demonstrations and criticism against the government, there was a crackdown on independent troupes and on theatrical venues where they were allowed to put on plays, even public theatres with links to them, such as *al-Markaz al-Hanager* (al-Markaz al-Hanāḡir li ‘l-funūn) (Suriano 2010: 138-141).

³ Beni Suef is a small city 150 kilometres south of Cairo.

⁴ For more details about the Beni Suef fire and its social, political and artistic consequences see: ‘Allām 2005; Halim 2005a and 2005b; Selaiha, 2006; Suriano 2010; Bassiouny 2015; Amin 2020.

⁵ «In 2005, a fire broke out in a theatre in southern Egypt and in the end 70 members of the theatre world died. It would have been possible to save them if the human being had not lost its value and life had not lost the meaning of human dignity» (Amin 2016b).

It was a humanitarian, artistic and social catastrophe, which traumatised all civil society in Egypt, but it was also a driving force behind organised protests against corruption, malfunction and repression by the State.

From Collective to Individual Trauma, from Personal to Social Healing

In the specific case of Nora Amin, social trauma must be added to personal trauma, because one of the victims of the Beni Suef fire was stage writer, theatre director and critic Saleh Saad (Ṣāliḥ Saʿd). He was her partner and the father of her daughter: «The man I loved and with whom I was a companion until the days before he was struck by his fate»⁶. In order to face the psychological consequences of the loss and death of her beloved, Amin continued her artistic journey, and in 2007 she created a workshop with a group of female survivors of the civil war in Sudan focusing on storytelling and memories. Considering how women are able to preserve memory and revive love and a spiritual connection, as holders of family stories, she used this as a tool for «healing from pain and surviving death through sharing and faith in life and love»⁷.

Over the next eight years, the initial project, entitled *Life for Memory* (*Ḥayāh li 'l-ḍikrā*), was enriched through several encounters and contributions, addressing situations of suffering linked to traumatic experiences. This led to the performance piece *al-Baʿt*, written, directed and performed by the author, who also designed the set and the costumes. Original music was created by Nader Sami (Nādir Sāmī) and Ramz Sabry (Ramz Ṣabrī), members of Nora's *Lamusica* Independent Theatre Group.

It is a solo dance performance with a recorded poetic monologue. The first part is written from the point of view of Saleh, in first person, as a message for his lover and their daughter, while the second part shows us Nora's feelings and perspective. The four sections that make up the text are recited during four of the six scenes, while the first and last are voiceless.

The piece was born out of the author/performer's individual experience and her personal suffering, and takes spectators through a ritual that allows them to share the emotions⁸. The biographical performance, created in order to cope with a personal tragedy, grew to another perspective in 2007 and became a «universal testimony»: every spectator becomes a witness to the trauma and a participant in the healing ritual (Amin 2020). Individual memory becomes part of a collective history, in an attempt to produce an alternative discourse to the official one, which often manipulates or denies reality. Sharing personal memories in a ritual helps to create a new compre-

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ For more details about theatre as a tool of healing and self-rebuilding in post-traumatic condition, see: Lehmann 1999; Pewny 2003.

hension of otherness and self, and allows us to build a social conscience. As Paul Ricoeur wrote about individual and collective memory: «Does there not exist an intermediate level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete changes operate between the living memory of individual persons and the public memory of the communities to which we belong?» (Ricoeur 2009: 131).

So, we can note that the ideal movement of this theatrical work is circular: it shifts from collective shock to individual suffering, and from the personal attempt to overcome this trauma Amin reaches a common purpose of social recovery.

In this respect, I decided to analyse in detail the performance that was held and recorded at *Falcone-Borsellino Hall* in Ragusa (Italy) in 2016⁹.

The Performance and the Text

The opening scene features a stage with black backdrop and wings. The lone actress is dressed in black and her hair is tied up. A blue light illuminates the stage, and sounds can be heard of clanking, glass breaking, screaming and steam puffing. The performer’s movements are jerky, as if she were trying in vain to escape forwards or backwards, then changing quickly to try another direction. Her body appears to be struggling against external forces that keep her trapped in and impede her movements: «The image is one of movement where I’m trying, it’s about an attempt, I keep trying, trying to deal with the pressure of those sounds, trying to escape, trying to resist, trying to fight, and it becomes almost impossible. But I sort of emphasise the image of a body that is engaged, imprisoned under pressure and trying to escape, to find the way for life»¹⁰.

In the subsequent scene the light turns red, the actress movements become slower, seeming to represent an inner struggle, underlined by soft, sparse music. At this point, the momentum of the performance is enriched by the recorded voice of the actress reciting the text offstage, as if it were an inner voice, but it could also be the voice of her lover. When the piece was performed in Italy, the same voice also recited the text in Italian. The Italian lines were strategically inserted to accompany the voice in Arabic, just after each Arabic line, like an echo¹¹:

⁹ The performance that was held in Italy includes the Italian version of the text, translated by me from Arabic upon request of the author for the Italian audience. Amin inserted her recorded voice of the Italian text as an echo of her recorded voice of the Arabic text, as I did for the lines of both versions here.

¹⁰ Online interview carried out with the author on August 2020 (unpublished).

¹¹ Italian performances were held in Milan (at the *Cattolica* University) on 4th March 2016, in Ragusa on 30th May 2016 and in Catania (at the *SabirFest*) on 6th October 2018.

<i>Io, amata mia, sono solo</i>	1 أنا يا حبيبتي وحيد
I, my beloved, am alone	
<i>Un reietto e uno straniero</i>	منبوذ وغريب
A misfit and an outsider	
<i>Io sono un eterno gitano</i>	أنا العجري الأبدى
I am an eternal gypsy	
<i>Colui che ansima dietro la morte</i>	اللاهث وراء الموت
The one who gasps for death	
<i>La mia mente è nera</i>	5 عقلي سواد
My mind is black	
<i>E il mio cuore lo divora il ricordo</i>	وقلبي تنهشه الذكرى
And my heart is devoured by the memory	
<i>Io sono il ricordo</i>	أنا الذكرى
I am the memory	
<i>Una vita per il ricordo.</i>	حياة للذكرى.
A life for the memory.	
<i>Il mio viso ha perso i suoi lineamenti</i>	وجهي ضاعت ملامحه
My face has lost its features	
<i>Tra la perdita dell'amore e la non-appartenenza</i>	10 بين فقدان الهوية والانتماء
For the loss of love and my non-belonging	
<i>Non ho più un nome</i>	لم يعد لي اسم
I no longer have a name	
<i>Qualcuno lo ricorda</i>	يتذكره أحد
Someone remembers it	
<i>Saleh Saad.</i>	صالح سعد
Saleh Saad.	
<i>I Paesi mi hanno oltrepassato</i>	تتلقفني البلدان
Countries have gone through me	
<i>Con la tentazione della vita all'estero</i>	15 بغواية الغربية
With the temptation of living abroad	
<i>Con la tentazione della danza, del canto e della passione</i>	بغواية الرقص والغناء والعشق
The temptation of dancing, singing and passion	
<i>Ma la fine arriva inevitabilmente.</i>	لكن النهاية قادمة لا محالة.
But the end inevitably comes.	
<i>La mia testa scoppia dal dolore del Nulla</i>	رأسي يتمزق من ألم العدم
My head explodes with the pain of Nothingness	
<i>Dall'attesa della fine dolorosa.</i>	من إنتظار النهاية المؤلمة.
Waiting for the painful end.	
<i>Attraverso le città nella memoria</i>	20 أوجب مدنا في الذاكرة
In memories I cross the cities	
<i>Inseguo una vita perduta</i>	أقتفي حياة ضائعة
In the steps of a life that's lost	
<i>Io sono l'ultimo discendente dei Gitani</i>	أنا آخر سلالة العجر
I am the last descendent of the Gypsies	
<i>E dopo di me tu, figlia mia</i>	ومن بعدي أنتي يا ابنتي
And after me, you, my daughter	

Il mio consiglio per te...
My advice for you...

ووصيتي لكي ...

In this first part of the poem, some words are accentuated and assume an importance to create an image of Saleh's soul and feelings. He describes himself as a stranger among the others and he emphasises his gypsy origins that will be inherited by his daughter. He addresses her directly, giving her advices about life, which is the duty of a father. The feelings of estrangement (*ġurbah*), loneliness and bereavement fill the text from the very beginning and contribute to establish the mood of the performance itself. Additionally, the repetition of the word «memory» (*dikrà*) and the verb connected to the same Arabic root in lines 6, 7, 8 and 12, allow the audience to focus on one of the main features of this artistic project, and convey the spectator to an intimate dimension of recollection. In keeping with the blackness of the stage and the performer, Saleh's mind is also black, and the audience experiences the mourning atmosphere through different senses.

The background sound is an ominous fire crackling, and the movements become more energetic, with the performer clapping her arms and covering her head, communicating a sense of confusion that becomes less pronounced as the actress slowly leaves the stage with the backstage behind her.

In the third scene (ideally connected to the previous one by the offstage voice continuing the monologue) the light turns white, and the actress enters holding a man's black jacket and putting it on. She goes to run away, albeit in a composed way, then suddenly falls to the floor and rolls around in distress. Light, melancholic music, together with disconnected sounds and the crackling fire, accompanies the voice as it continues to recite the words of Saleh. The actress removes the jacket and leaves the stage:

È godere della vita

Is to enjoy life

Del divertimento

Enjoy yourself

Della scrittura di poesie.

Enjoy writing and poetry

E tu che mi hai scritto

And you who have written me

E mi hai dato consistenza

And given me substance

Ti amo

I love you

So che presto ti mancherò

I know that soon you'll miss me

E sarò l'Assenza

I will become Absence

Ma non ho paura

Yet I am not afraid

25 الإستمتاع بالحياة

اللهو

وكتابة الشعر.

وانتي يا من كتبتيني

وتجسديني

30 أحبك

أعرف أنني قريبا سوف أفتقدك

وسوف أكون الفقد

لكني لست خائفا

Non c'è niente là che mi spaventi
There is nothing there that scares me.

لم يعد هناك ما يخيفني.

From lines 25 to 30, there is a series of words with a positive connotation in an ascending climax (life, joy, poetry) reaching a peak with the exclamation «I love you». The idea that she can give substance to her loved one through writing about him is in contrast with the last lines of this section: in lines 31 and 32 there is a recurrence of the same root *faqada*, which means absence or lacking. The last two lines refer to another main feeling in the tragedy, fear (*hawf*), but Saleh denies it by closing the scene with a peremptory sentence: «There is nothing there that scares me».

In the following scene, the actress enters the stage with her back to the audience, then turns around as the sound of the crackling fire, slow but relentless, underlines the movements, which seem to come from the inside before spreading to the limbs, with spasms and silent screams. The whole body expresses an excruciating suffering, which makes it writhe continuously, while the facial features are deformed with pain, and the wide open mouth lets out a choked scream.



During this scene, the offstage voice concludes the part of the poem that expresses the voice of the victim of the tragedy:

Attraverso così

35 وكذا أمر

So I go

E mi avvicino al mio noto destino

أقترب من قدرتي المعلوم

I come closer to my known destiny

Svanirò a poco a poco nella fiamma della Nazione

فسوف أدوب في لهب الوطن

I will gradually disappear in the flames of the Nation

Io sono il gitano reietto.

أنا العجري المنبوذ .

I am the gypsy reject.

al-Minya, Alessandria, Beni Suef

المنيا الأسكندرية ثم بني سويف

al-Minya, Alessandria, Beni Suef

5 Settembre 2005

40 ٥ سبتمبر ٢٠٠٥

5th September 2005

<i>Io sono qua con tutti i compagni</i>	أنا هنا مع كل الرفاق
I am here with all my companions	
<i>Questa nostra ultima destinazione</i>	هذه وجهتنا الأخيرة
This our final destination	
<i>Il nostro teatro</i>	مسرحنا
Our theatre	
<i>La nostra morte</i>	موتنا
Our death	
<i>Che rafforzerà una rivoluzione.</i>	45 الذي سوف يشهد ثورة ..
That will give strength to a revolution.	
<i>Beni Suef 5 settembre 2005.</i>	بني سويف ٥ سبتمبر ٢٠٠٥
Beni Suef 5th September 2005.	

The final words from the point of view of Saleh are punctual indications of the place and time of his death, a very well-known city and date for the Egyptian audience, repeated twice. He also refers to two other places which hold importance in his life, Alexandria and al-Minya, after remembering his temptation to live abroad and again recalling his nomadic origins. It is important to note, in lines 42, 43 and 44, the personal pronoun suffix *-nā* (our), indicating a shift from the single person to the group, introduced in line 41 when he mentions his group of friends and colleagues. In this perspective, Nora affirms that this is not only an individual loss and a personal grief, but a collective and human tragedy: a huge social wound, which, several years later, contributed to strengthening the 25th January Revolution¹².

It is also interesting to note the use of the nationalist rhetoric when referring to the behaviour of government authorities as the flames of the homeland devoured the bodies of citizens and annihilated their souls. Saleh talks about his «known destiny» because he foresaw his own death some days before the Beni Suef fire, and he described it to his partner in every detail. Nora's trauma was amplified by this prediction, as a worthless warning because they could not avoid that fate.

The next scene opens with the actress holding the same man's jacket as in the previous one. She holds it close to her and begins to dance with it to slow, melancholic music. She kneels down and lays the jacket in front of her, then lets her hair down and is overcome by desperation, striking herself with her hands and bowing repeatedly with jerky movements of her head. The white light surrounds her as she rises and starts to dance slowly with the jacket again, then she lets it fall to the ground as she spins around. After first attempting to run away, she stops and dances alone, removing her baggy black sweater, uncovering her arms. She hints at oriental dance movements

¹² About the link between arts, social spaces and the use of bodies during and after the Egyptian Revolution see: Hussain 2013; Soueif 2013; El-Khatib 2013; Amin 2016c.

(*raqṣ baladī*), while the recorded voice starts to speak for her, expressing her feelings:

<i>Io sono qua</i>	أنا هنا
I am here	
<i>Sono Aisha e Munira</i>	أنا عائشة ومنيرة
I am Aisha and Munira	
<i>Ho già superato la morte e ho visto</i>	لقد عبرت الموت ورأيت
I have faced death and I have seen	
<i>Ti ho visto come un'anima innamorata</i>	50 رأيتك روحا هائمة
I saw you as an enamoured soul	
<i>Calma senza affanno</i>	هادئة بلا لهاث
Calm without effort	
<i>Ti ho visto nel mio corpo</i>	رأيتك في جسدي
I saw you in my body	
<i>E nel mio attaccamento alla vita</i>	وفي تشبثي بالحياة
And in my attachment to life	
<i>Conosco quel momento</i>	أعرف تلك اللحظة
I know that moment	
<i>Quando si sono spezzati i nostri legami</i>	55 عندما تنقطع أوصالنا
When our bond was broken	
<i>E la nostra carne è stata squarciata</i>	ويتمزق لحمنا
And our flesh was torn apart	
<i>Siamo stati scorticati</i>	نتقشر
Our skin ripped off	
<i>E abbiamo perso i nostri nomi</i>	ونفقد أسماءنا
And we lost our names	
<i>Vi vedo, compagni di morte, innamorati della vita</i>	أراكم يا رفاق الموت وعشق الحياة
I see you, companions of death, lovers of life	
<i>Vedo l'amore nel momento in cui esplose una mina in guerra</i>	60 أرى الحب في لحظة تفجر الغم الحرب
I see love in the moment a landmine explodes	
<i>Perché tu sei qua</i>	لأنك هنا
Because you are here	
<i>E la tua immagine è appesa sopra gli alberi e sulle colline</i>	وصورتك معلقة فوق الأشجار وعلى التلال
Your image hangs above the trees and hills	
<i>Sento le mie urla e tu sei sparso – compagno mio –</i>	أسمع صراخي وأنت تتناثر يا رفيقي
I hear my own screams and you are spread out –	
my love –	
<i>Brandelli</i>	أشلاء
In pieces	
<i>Stringo tra le braccia ciò che resta di te</i>	65 أحتضن ما تبقى منك
I hold close what is left of you	
<i>Stringo me stessa</i>	أحتضنني
I hold myself	
<i>Il mio corpo è il ricordo di ciò che resta di te.</i>	جسدي هو ذكري ما تبقى منك.

My body is the memory of what is left of you.

Io sono te.

I am you.

أنا أنت.

This last part of the poem opens and closes with parallel sentences («I am here»/«I am you»), focusing on the self at the beginning, while at the end the self and the otherness converge into a unity, not only with Saleh but also with others who participate and help to shape the ritual. Nora’s body itself turns into the substantial memory of her beloved, by living through the emotional experience of death and its defeat. She tries to hold on to what is left of him, but there is nothing more than pieces, so she can only hold herself, giving over her entire body to remembrance itself.

The verb «see» (*ra‘a*) recurs five times, in lines 49, 50, 52, 59 and 60, with reference to visions and emotions (for her loved one’s soul, his comrades in death, and her love itself), while as a counterpoint the other sensorial verb «hear» (*sami‘a*) refers to Nora’s screaming while Saleh is passing away, which is something more physical.

When the voice is over, Nora leaves the stage, then returns shortly afterwards carrying a basin full of water. This is the start of the final part of the performance, again lit with the blue light from the opening scene, with the actress kneeling on the ground, placing both hands into the water in front of her. She lets some water fall on her head and face, then on her hair, her breasts and her arms. This is done twice, after which she comes down off the stage, holding the basin, and walks slowly down the aisle between the spectators. She holds the basin out for any spectators who wish to put their hands into the water. The audience reaction is mostly one of great *pathos*, and many spectators lean towards her in order to participate in the silent ritual. When she reaches the back of the theatre, she places the basin on the ground, then returns to the stage and exits. This scene is accompanied only by music. The recorded voice returns only when the actress has left the stage, and it reads a short explanation of the origin of the piece and what it intends to achieve:

إمتزج الجميع بداخلي واحتل جسدي كي يصبح ساحة مؤقتة للمقاومة وليبعث الذكرى ومذاق العشق
والفقد العودة من الموت.¹³

The Value of Colours, Sounds and Water

One of the main colours present in the performance is black, from the set to the performer’s costume. There is a kind of playing with blackness, because in Egypt – as in many other places – it is traditionally related to grief and mourn-

¹³ «Everything is mixed inside me and it has taken over my body, turning it into an arena for resistance and for the resurrection of memory, in order to experience passionate love and loss without the return of death» (Amin, 2016b).

ing: «black here comes as a direct sign and connotation that we are dealing with a dark subject and with death»¹⁴. The second reason for using black is that most of the time, until the second to last scene of the performance, Nora tries not to be clearly defined in terms of gender. She wants to be considered as a human being and not as a woman, so that she can connect herself to the burning body of Saleh, to represent and relive the moment of his death and longing. When she takes off her sweater and uncovers her arms, the audience can see her skin and her breasts, because she wants to retrieve her «own gender and femininity as part of healing and overcoming the whole trauma»¹⁵.

For the same reason, she lets her hair down at that moment, because freeing the hair is another sign of retrieving femininity, and is also a movement that expresses freedom and the removal of restrictions, as well as the movements taken from *baladī* dance. These are all elements that serve to emphasise freedom, celebration and femininity, which do not appear prior to when she lets her hair down. Freeing her hair and baring her arms have a symbolic value, contradicting the expected behaviour of a woman according to social rules in the country. The dance movements, which refer to feminine sensuality, recall the Egyptian tradition, and are used to reconnect to the specific cultural context. While at the beginning of the performance, Nora shifts the focus from specific to universal, at the end she comes back to the opening issue. A free woman with her hair down celebrating a ritual in a spiritual union with someone who is absent recalls visually certain old and popular traditions of feminine ceremonials from all over the world, such as the dancing maenads of ancient Greece.



The other colour with a prominent presence on the stage is red, which is associated with blood and (like black) with death, and it immediately brings to mind fire. As Nora said in her interview, «red on stage is a very strong colour

¹⁴ Online interview carried out with the author on August 2020 (unpublished).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and it is very disturbing, and it is meant to be like this»¹⁶. With a set devoid of other elements besides the performing body, the colours and the sounds are necessary in order to create the whole landscape of feelings, events and context. The metaphorical value of red on the stage is like a ring of fire imprisoning the body, which becomes a burning body – the audience can imagine the flames devouring it throughout the scene. The sound of the fire during the burning is crucial because it is an effect which, together with red light, can create the illusion: «Having the sound of fire brings both an emotional and a sensorial stimulation that connects the dying, burning, disintegration of the body to the sound. And this is also how we build a kind of crescendo and emotional impact. The weaving of the movement to the sound of the fire becomes gigantic and fills the whole space»¹⁷. Attending the performance, the audience is able to see, hear and feel the burning body of Saleh, and the comprehension of his loved one suffering occurs at a very deep and emotional level in each spectator.

The very first scene has all those factors in the sound, and they also help to create an image of movement which expresses a struggle, as the actress keeps trying to deal with the pressure of those sounds, trying to escape, to resist, to fight, but it seems to be almost physically impossible. It emphasises the image of a body that looks like it is engaged and imprisoned under pressure, and is trying to find a way to survive. The accent on the repetition of attempt and failure is functional to what comes next, when the body becomes total prey for death.

In this framework, we can easily understand the choice of using water as a ritual medium at the very end of the performance. Of course water reconnects to the idea of birth or rebirth, as well as purification. However, the performance is strictly related to fire, so water is the essential opposite: as a counterpoint to the fire that kills, water arrives to put it out. The fire is not only a physical element but also a symbolic one, which disappears when water comes, because of the power of water to resolve trauma and wash away pain. In addition to all these meanings, the substance of water itself seems to be living and to possess its own memory. When spectators put their hands into the bowl, they leave their trace in the water, as did the actress who put her hands in first, dissolving her pain in it. She can share her feelings with others through a physical element: «Because of its fluidity, water is able to receive all those hands, able to hold this memory, even in a symbolic way, so it also becomes the substance that gives togetherness by being individually connected to the water»¹⁸.

This is a performative ritual, created within the performance itself, which brings healing to each spectator who puts their hands into the bowl, going

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

beyond the performance and embracing the personal intimate experience of everyone. In recognising that the water has touched the hands of the people before them, the ritual creates connections and ties between the spectator and the performance, and between all the spectators together.

Conclusion

The text analysed here does not consist of one single form of expression in natural language, in this case poetry, but rather of all elements (gestures, facial expressions, sounds, music, lights and colours) that make up the performance, if we apply, as cultural semiologists, the concept of “text” «to any vehicle of a global meaning (“textual”), whether it be a ritual, a work of figurative art, or a musical composition» (Ivanov; Lotman; Piatigorskij; Toporov; Uspenskij 1973: 194-220).

A ritual is a public act, a moment of sharing by a social group or a community, which implies the participation of each element, even through dramatised/theatrical actions. The closing part of this performance, in which the actress moves among the spectators as they freely choose whether to put their hands into the water or not, definitively characterises the performance as a ritual act, in which the audience is an integral part of the action, and which goes beyond the individual and collective drama.

The sense of catharsis – felt more on an emotional than an intellectual level – is the real objective of this complex and articulated piece, therefore it attempts to involve the senses more than the mind. The choice to place the voice out that reads the introduction illustrating the meaning and the stages of development of the project only at the end of the performance can be explained by this artistic intention. Furthermore, the final words towards the end of the performance, the dedication that Nora places at the end, convey the profound sense of the whole project as an instrument of resistance as well as healing, because it stimulates people to regain and rebuild their own existence: «To all those who have lost their lives, their bodies and their loved ones because of oppressive systems. Together we will continue the *Resurrection*» (Amin 2016b).

This piece aspires to represent a political testimony in support of human dignity and the value that is given to human life. Furthermore, through this circular movement from the collective to the individual, from the personal back to the social, the ritual makes it possible to rebuild the bonds of a heritage common to all humanity of pain, forgiveness, survival and healing.

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