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Lebanese Prison Drama & Therapeutic Space: Zeina Daccache's *Scheherazade in Baabda*

By Zeina Salame

Abstract

Zeina Daccache develops social justice theatre projects with marginalized communities through an organization she founded and runs, Catharsis - Lebanese Center for Drama Therapy. Her work with prisoners, in addition to its healing influence on the inmates, has effectively motivated policy change. Daccache sets these productions in the actual prison spaces, inviting the audiences into the world of the imprisoned. She also films a performance of each play and releases the dvd, sharing the product even more publicly and broadening the reach of the work. At a women's prison in Baabda, she directed a devised storytelling project, *Scheherazade in Baabda*. In this riveting piece, Daccache makes especially bold use of the prison space as a part of the dialogue, blurring the divisions between insider and outsider, and obliging the audience to consider "the prisoner" as relatable, present, and human. It denounces antifeminist laws and social frameworks responsible for the imprisonment of many women, replacing these interned storytellers as members of community. In her site-specific work, Daccache calls on the physical limits, boundaries, and instruction of the space of prison to contribute to the stories. By engaging with place and audience in this way, her projects disrupt existing narratives of these sites and of the people living there. Tapping into the politics of space, place, and site through drama therapy, Daccache presents the stories of "people with something in their gut, something concrete to say," generating productions that make more concrete the identity of the prison itself, and what it means to be imprisoned, calling for and inspiring dramatic social change (*12 Angry Lebanese* 103).

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The North American Drama Therapy Association explains on their website that “Drama therapy is the intentional use of drama and/or theater processes to achieve therapeutic goals. Drama therapy is active and experiential. This approach can provide the context for participants to tell their stories, set goals and solve problems, express feelings, or achieve catharsis.” The notion of “catharsis” clearly served as inspiration for one esteemed NADTA member, Zeina Daccache, founder and Executive Director of Catharsis - Lebanese Center for Drama Therapy. In an email exchange with me, Daccache provided a brief biography of herself, as well as a short profile on Catharsis. Daccache holds degrees in Theater Studies and Clinical Psychology, as well as registration and board certification as a drama therapist and trainer with the North American Drama Therapy Association, working as a drama therapist, play director, and documentary film maker.

Founded in 2007 and the first of its kind in Lebanon and in the Arab Region, Catharsis is a non-profit organization through which Daccache works with groups she perceives to be underrepresented in her community. This has included projects with “at-risk youth, women suffering from domestic violence, patients in psychiatric hospitals, prison inmates, refugees,” and people in substance abuse recovery (“About Catharsis”). Her work in prisons weaves drama therapy with site-specific practice, the added attention to locale motivating necessary critique on the socio-political atmosphere of the prisons and the country. That commentary reveals the nation as the meta-setting for a greater project in social justice. Her work in the men’s prison at Roumieh calls out poor

prison conditions, administrative hurdles, and a societal obligation to rehabilitate prisoners, rather than ignore them. Her work in the women's prison at Baabda – the work at the center of this study – takes this scrutiny of society even further, expressly denouncing the antifeminist laws responsible for the incarceration of so many women.

Her most recent project, also at the men's prison in Roumieh, returns to expose the realities of two different kinds of life sentences – those for prisoners living with mental illness who must stay until they are “cured” of their “insanity,”¹ and those for men awaiting execution on death row. In *Staging Place*, theatre scholar Una Chaudhuri describes “the characterization of place as a problem,” or “geopathology” (xii). This “incessant dialogue between belonging and exile, home and homelessness” comes out of wrestling with “the painful politics” and “problem” of place. Chaudhuri names experiences through which site of dwelling becomes unsettled, such as “exile,” “displacements,” and other types of “betrayal of place” (14-15). The problem of place depicted in Daccache's site-specific prison drama projects is that to live as a prisoner is to live in exile in one's own homeland. Both trapped-in and separate-from home, prisoners are confined to it and yet detained from it. They exist, local and banished, dis-placed, both home and not-at-home. Practicing drama therapy supports the imprisoned with whom Daccache works in feeling more stable in their senses of self, and so more at home in their own bodies. Bringing audience to the home-place of prison positions outsiders on the inside to witness, and re-replaces the prisoner in community.

The political potency in Daccache's work comes from the ways it integrates elements of “performance,” “place,” and “public,” staging personal performances in working prisons, inviting public audiences to

¹ This is text that Daccache uses on promotional materials for the project which she interpreted from actual policy language.

attend (McLucas qtd. in Pearson 37). In the description of Catharsis Daccache sent me, she explained that this work “gives special populations a tool for self-advocacy, thereby communicating their message to the society and decision makers.” She also describes her feeling that “the resulting performances would need to be constructed from the actors’ words, stories, experiences, reflections, hopes, dreams, and that by incorporating these sources into the plays, the performances could lead to real change” (“The Unheard” 228). Inmates get to speak, directly to people in power to make decisions, about their own fates. They get a say in their futures. In combining that activist spirit with autobiography and the politics of site, the brick and mortar of the prisons amplify, rather than muffle, the voices of the prisoner/performers, and the prison too begins to communicate. The presence of not-imprisoned spectators grants the prisoner/performer an audience of citizens who can react to life inside the walls, outside of them. Through the transactions with space and audience which occur in performance, this work reconnects prisoners with community and society from which circumstance, law, and government left them alienated. In Daccache’s chapter entitled, “The Unheard Stories of Those Forgotten Behind Bars in Lebanon” in *The Self in Performance*, she explains:

Working as a drama therapist in various settings in Lebanon, I have directed plays with marginalized groups based on their personal experiences, and witnessed the healing power of self-revelatory performance not only for the targeted groups but also for the Lebanese audience: that is, for society as a whole. The work has had the intention – and the effect – of challenging the unjust laws applied in Lebanon against prison inmates, migrant domestic workers, and other beneficiaries, who for the first time here, reflecting on their own lives, stand up before numerous audiences

(including governmental figures), and bare their personal stories to heal their own wounds– and those of their community. (227)

The process Daccache describes enables performers to re-make that place of prison for themselves, their audience, and their surrounding community. By remaking prison, they remake prisoner – who transforms to performer, storyteller, and neighbor. Each of the plays is also recorded on film and released publicly; these were the primary sources I used to analyze the productions and performances. While the differences between live theatre and filmed live theatre are notable, that difference is secondary to the analysis of the performative content and relationship between actor, space, and audience. With that in mind, I will explore Daccache’s strategies in *Scheherazade² in Baabda* and how that project makes especially vivid and meaningful use of the prison. Addressing how site intensifies the influence of Daccache’s and Catharsis’s political activism and drama therapy work, I offer a close reading of this project, paying special attention to power of site to evoke, the ability of space and place to inform and extract story, and how these strategies help reintroduce and include inmates/performers in community.

SCHEHERAZADE IN BAABDA

Scheherazade in Baabda, a performance text devised from personal story and documented on film in *Scheherazade’s Diary*, makes profoundly meaningful use of space, place, and story. The intricate story-weaving style of dialogue involves performer with space and spectator, amplifying its impact on the audience. Space has stories of its own. Those stories emanate from space and “those co-existing and multiple narrative contexts, histories, journeys, and bodily efforts that are involved in the finding and founding of place are animated by, and find a place within,

² “Scheherazade” and “Sheherazade” are both accepted spellings of this name. Use varies herein with respect to the quote being cited.

performance” (Pearson 110). Through performance, the politics of place show themselves. That political charge of the location/performance site provokes new connections to and experiences of the story. Site both evokes and extracts meaning, exposing the layers of place to the audience. Enmeshing the theatrical with lived and site-based experience generates uniquely emotional spectacle. The spectacle includes not just what we see but what is read based on the combination of context, history, journey, and body. All these texts work together through performance to reveal multifaceted truths about prison, law, power systems, and the people operating within them. This further rewrites the place for the performers. Daccache explains:

Most of these women were there because of the patriarchal society in which we live. Nine out of the 25 who joined the drama therapy sessions had killed their husbands, as there was no law to protect them from domestic violence; six were there for adultery, which is regarded as a crime in Lebanon. (Although the law applies for both men and women, no man has ever been incarcerated for committing adultery.) The rest were there for drugs, stealing, etc. Early marriage was a common experience for almost 90 percent of them. Some had been forced to marry at the age of 12 or 14. They had a deep desire to communicate their stories to the outside world, in order to make sense of the lives they had led. (“The Unheard” 234-35)

Daccache brought the outside world into the prison to hear the women’s stories. In the play on film, we have an opportunity to follow the audience in through the prison gates. The midday sun shines brightly over the district of Baabda, Beirut. Politicians, scholars, and socialites are quickly searched by camouflage-clad police at the iron gates as this

experience, in the words of one esteemed guest, “opens the doors of the prison for the public opinion” (Scheherazade). Upon entering Baabda’s women’s prison, they navigate their way up the angled stairwell of a white cinderblock passageway. A soft, pink glow washes over the walls, lined by twenty women. Wearing all black, long-sleeved shirts, and satin harem pants, the women silently greet their company. The brightly colored, gauzy organza scarves covering their hair hang past their knees and decorate the audience’s ascent to the performance space. The audience files into the center of an artless cement room and take their seats, which face in several directions. Bright red iron bars line the perimeter. The Scheherazades amble into the space, surrounding the audience on an elevated platform runway that wraps around the seating area. Some stand in their places; others sit on white plastic garden chairs. A gentle melody underscores the following warm and inquisitive direct address to this group of audience-guests, informing them of the rules of the space:

It is forbidden to touch the remote control.

It is forbidden to touch the lighter.

Cell phones are forbidden.

It is forbidden to be ill after 5:00pm.

It is forbidden to do anything without the room delegate permission.

How does the new 50 000 bill look like [sic]?

I am happy you are here!

It is forbidden to go to the toilets during the show.

But if you have to, put some slippers on and go!

I am a mother and I miss my children.

What are you doing outside? It is forbidden to walk outside the prison cells!

It is forbidden to wear earrings.
Are you wearing makeup? Makeup is forbidden!
High heels are forbidden!
I like what you are wearing! Is this the fashion now outside?
Did your parents learn that you're here?
I miss seeing the sun without bars.
Is food tasty in glass dishes?
Do I still look like a woman?
Do you think my daughter still remembers how I look like?
I miss my dad.
How did you feel when you came in here?
How did I feel? Well, It's [sic] hard to feel in here.
Would you take me with you when you leave?
I am a mother and I miss my children.
What will you say after you leave? (Scheherazade)³

In this piece of text, the storytellers offer instructions for layers upon layers of the spaces they inhabit – serving at once as place of performance, their homes, and their lives. They suggest a message that this place of regulation, this prison in which they live, stripped of those basic freedoms that make them human, welcomes us – the outsiders – to come and go as we please. This place, a place in which they live cut-off from loved ones, forbids them from everything they used to know as a part of life.

Relating to the circumstances helps an audience to understand and share the feelings of the characters in a play. By speaking from personal, lived experience, the inmate performers in this project appeal to the

³ The stories, all performed in Arabic, are translated to English on the DVD documenting the project. Some typographical and grammar errors were present in the film's translations. I have included those as they appear in the film's subtitles.

audience members. Being born a woman punishes her, sometimes criminally, over the course of her life. Feeling confined by antifeminist circumstances is an experience to which women watching can connect. *Scheherazade in Baabda* addresses such stories. The work took place over ten months of workshops and rehearsals and “highlight[s] both the difficult conditions in which women detainees live and the increased vulnerability as women living in a conservative and patriarchal society” (Catharsis). All of the female storytellers, or ‘Scheherazades,’ tell “authentic life stories that invariably end up with the heroine behind bars... open[ing] the door on violence which has been suffered before being committed” (Catharsis). Stories of domestic violence and sexual assault, both legal by husbands against wives in Lebanon at the time of this project, as well as tales of drug abuse and poverty, make up the text. The personal histories of the women who occupy Baabda prison are excavated, theatrically reinterpreted, and shared by the women themselves, allowing them to “lash out at the country’s patriarchal system and twisted view of women . . . in a country that does not criminalize this type of abuse” (Catharsis). In the play, one Baabda Scheherazade proclaims that a “man is born free from a woman’s womb,” the womb being the prison from which he is released but suggesting the opposite to be true of women. She is born into the prison of woman-ness, carrying her own prison in her body and living shackled to its politics. Through the process of uttering their experiences, the performers reclaim their rights to themselves. They take back their bodies from foreign possession imposed upon them by their abusers. The storytellers reject the instructions of society on their bodies by calling out those responsible for violent offenses against them.

Different environments denote different social instruction, helping to generate an evocative pattern of forgetting and remembering. The

sites, spaces, and places engaged in the world of the play contribute uniquely to the audience's experience of the story: within the walls of the ladies' prison promenade (the performance space), enclosed in Baabda prison, in the city of Baabda, which is a district of Beirut, in the country of Lebanon. The audience is able to map these areas in their minds and that map calls out to the complicity of society in the storytellers' circumstances. Daccache asks the spectator to pay attention to the implications of site by detailing each location's particulars in the text. One monologue offers a description of the space in vivid detail:

This . . . is . . . the promenade
Ok, now you are seeing it as a theatre stage
But usually . . . Here . . . Here . . . There are 100 women chatting . . .
Blablabla
Radish bags on this side . . . Onion bags on the other side . . .
Washing dishes in this corner . . . Cooking in the other corner . . .
And a laundry line here in the middle
I couldn't take it anymore . . . so I went back down
-Please, check my room reservation!
-Go to room number 3
Nice! I have a room now . . . I am so happy . . .
Would you hand me the keys please?
Ah! No Key? A card perhaps? An electronic card maybe?
The key turned out to be an iron stick that big
Tric . . . you are inside
Trac . . . the door is locked
I went inside and sat down . . .
A woman comes near and sits on my right . . . Another on [sic]
comes on my left . . . one from behind and one from above . . .

The room was neither single nor double
We were 24 in the same room
Wow! How nice! We share . . .
I got up to see what else was in the room
I discovered the toilet here
And facing it the Jacuzzi where you take a shower
This way . . . you can . . . but this way . . .you cannot . . .
So if you want to rub your back You [sic] just have to call: "Samira!
Come and rub my back ..." (Scheherazade)

As the spectators take in this speech, they realize they are seated in the actual space described. The performers use direct address and eye contact with the audience. The audience can also see one another. In this moment, a large number of people are crowded into this small area. Noting this guides the audience to consider the large number of inmates who occupy this space daily. The woman speaking energetically moves about the stage, indicating the scale of areas, all tight and uncomfortable, physically animating what she describes for the audience. The meticulous attention to detail in the story allows for members of the audience to imagine themselves experiencing the event she describes. That depiction of the function of the space to the audience, at the same time during which they occupy it, helps the audience realize the dehumanizing qualities of the prison's conditions. The speaker does all of this quite comically, and her humorous tone makes her likable, approachable, and not at all criminal to the spectator. She occasionally falters on her lines and recovers through clever improvisation. She charms them with her story. The spectator forgets and remembers her as a criminal and prisoner through the course of this. That process of forgetting and remembering re-humanizes her to the audience.

Re-humanizing these women to the audience requires empathy. No matter how sympathetic the stories, the separation of insider and outsider keeps “them” separate from “us,” shielding the audience from the discomfort of being involved. Encouraging relationships fosters familiarity and then the potential for more personal connection to these stories. Relationships are place-makers, locating us in one another’s lives. Shared memory and story help generate relationships. Objects inspire memory and story; in theatre, it is the relationship to a person that turns an object into a prop. That object, when meaningful to the speaker, inspires a story she may then disclose to the audience, making her more than inmate as the audience transforms into confidantes. That relationship re-places her in community. The first series of monologues shared are devised from true stories inspired by objects that hold specific meaning to each storyteller. Alternating among the group of speakers, the audiences’ attention (guided by lighting) transitions back and forth from story to story, until each speech reaches completion. The film does not clarify whether the objects used in the production are the actual objects about which each woman speaks, or props intended to represent the originals. However, the impact is the same for the audience. The very human stories of pain, loss, and abuse shared by each woman – inspired by a child’s dress, a seashell, a juice box, a rose, and others – remind the spectators of the lives each woman lived before incarceration. This recalls the agency of the prison space and the manner in which it acts to suppress these narratives. By bringing these objects into the performance space, the performers both liven the objects and call attention to themselves as humans co-existing in the space, re-humanizing their identities to the spectators and demonstrating the unforgettable life behind the walls, a crucial goal of the event.

Physically interacting with the architecture of the space takes advantage of the prison-as-theatre set, giving the performers power over the space by taking it over to communicate their own stories. Instead of trying to make the space invisible or work around it, they name it, call it out, and feature it. Several of the show's vignettes make direct use of the built-in bars. A fortune-teller interacts directly with an audience member, reaching through the bars with playing cards, engaging with her by name. In another sequence, several of the women again reach through the bars, their bodies and faces hidden behind black cloth. Nameless, faceless hands appear from between the bars, animated with distinct personalities and holding various objects – these moments pictorialize that there are many unseen and partially-seen individuals within the prison. Songs delivered from behind the bars draw focus to the unexpectedly and hauntingly talented women singing them. Additionally, an entire sequence of the play revolves around a window. Common, inexpensive cranberry-colored curtains cover all the windows in the space. One of the women yanks them open. The sun pours into the space. The audience squints to adjust to the change, a reminder of the difference between inside and freedom. A group of the women take their places around that window. They take turns stepping up to it, looking out, and sharing a personal story. Clutching the bars, caressing them, coaxing the window to open up to the world, the women engage with their immediate physical world and reinforce the way they are disengaged from the world outside those bright red iron bars, opening up the notion of “prisoner” for the audience. This window, decorated by those same bars and an additional steel wire cage, teases the women looking out. It reminds observers of the performers' locked-inside-ness.

The performer-spectator relationship re-inscribes space and replaces the people as members of the same community. Throughout the

play and in many of the lines of text, the inmates describe their living conditions in the prison, reminding the audience that they obviously live there. After the play's curtain call, Zeina Daccache invites the audience to stay for coffee and dessert with the cast. Most did. Daccache discusses her inspiration to take on prison drama, saying that she "wanted to change the ways in which the public perceived prisoners, to foster a view of prisoners as real people combatting stereotypes and misperceptions that label them sinners, criminals, or losers" (*12 Angry Lebanese* 105). By socializing the performers with the audience in this way, the prisoners become hostesses and the prison re-inscribed as "home." By engaging with audience as guest and prison as dwelling, the project asks the audience to feel a new way about these women, a feeling informed by a gesture of hospitality. It asks them to consider, "what if this was me and this prison was my home?"

THERAPEUTIC SPACE & BODY AS SITE

Bodies carry the weight of lived experience, us laboring against its gravity. When bodies become sites of performance, that force or pressure is released by the act of utterance, transforming that body into a more therapeutic setting than one whose identity is ignored or forced into silence. The ways site-specific performance aids in "emphasizing embodiment allows us to identify and underscore the important element of human agency in both the physical construction as well as the social production of place" (Sen 4). By featuring, indicating, and calling attention to all present bodies in this specific space (spectator and performer), the Scheherazades ask the audience to acknowledge their rights over their own bodies and the applicability of that to women in another kind of prison, one made up of gender bias.

Performing contrary gender roles further reclaims the notion of body. In one sequence, a woman narrates the inner monologue of a

“husband,” played by another woman wearing coveralls, a backwards cap, and sitting slumped in a chair. His wife is invisible to us. We see her only through the criticism and abuse he hurls at her. She represents many of the Scheherazades. This offers an example of the way in which “bodies are constructed as masculine or feminine, weak or powerful, as expressions of social differences and as manifestations of our needs, desires, and emotions” (Curtis 23). By being born with a body that is male, the “man” must behave in a manner considered by society to be masculine. That dictate often includes the degradation of women. The converse, true for women, is the crime of womanhood around which the play revolves. The “translator” (played by woman as woman) reveals the insecure thought process or inner monologue behind the actual words coming out of the husband’s mouth. This sequence succeeds with great comic effect while additionally exposing the problem of socially constructed gender identity. Comparative literature scholar and novelist Eva Sallis’s *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass*, offers this explanation of the power dynamics in the Scheherazade narrative:

The equilibrium between male and female is vital to a balanced reading of the stories. Male and female are story constructs - quite basic ones. If Sheherazade is presented as disadvantaged and weak, then within the actual tales the nature of her presence changes, as does her reason for telling of a given incident. This is easily demonstrated; a tale of a powerful woman has a very different meaning when told by a trapped woman, than when it is told by a powerful woman. (103)

In this production, all of the stories are shared by trapped women, part of a wider story of woman as trapped in patriarchy. Theatre as a form, and the play’s design, position the Scheherazades in positions of dominance within those stories. This push-pull between woman and power is

amplified by the manipulation of gender presentation, revealing another layer of socially constructed power dynamics. The man character in the scene described above must abuse his wife because that makes him feel manlier in this society. With a woman playing the man, and the spectator obviously being aware of this, the female body performs the source of her own trauma.

Richard Schechner asks, “What are the ways in which theater can be / ought to be / is therapeutic?” and “In what way is an art that is acting also an acting out and/or an acting through?” (196). In Daccache’s project, the acting-out of personal stories allows the inmates to act through the pain of their experiences. Acting through the vessel of their bodies transforms the body into a site of performance. Through acting, reacting, and reenacting, performance allows for the body to be a theatrical space for drama therapy. The therapeutic impact of this experience swells through reminders of the space of prison built into the performance, and the resulting audience realizations of the women’s socially-imposed powerlessness over their own bodies. Throughout the production, each woman in *Scheherazade in Baabda* performs her personal stories, in her own body and with a particular awareness of that body. She offers “the body” a role in the conversation of site. Many of the stories revolve around childhoods and lifetimes of assault and abuse. Memory plays a role in the production of place (Sen 12). The women of Baabda’s prison share memories of events having taken place on their bodies and through their bodies, through performance. Remembering replaces the subject at past site. The body holds on to and carries the impact of the past into the present. If the body is present, the past exists in the present through its existence in that body. In this way, the body becomes a site. Performance calls attention to body as place and exposes the hidden histories alive in the bodies and the prison, further informing the site’s identity for the

audience. The ability to relive experiences through the container and structure of theatre's form expels the stories from captivity and gives each woman an opportunity to disclose her experience, offering a return towards agency.

Violation of the body destabilizes the sense of its ownership. Those affected women, now incarcerated, lack additional freedoms of choice with body. This double jeopardy traps the women in a place of oppression. The body "bears the traces of the places it has known. These traces are continually laid down in the body, being sedimented there" (Pearson 110-111). When the body has known trauma, the damage intrudes and festers. Drawing from lived experience in devising story and performance, then enacting it oneself, makes body 'site.' Those traces of traumatic place reform in sharing experience on one's own terms, releasing oppressive pressures from the body. In this way, "performing itself becomes a kind of therapeutic activity. The inner life of theater becomes the theater's subject" (Schechner 226). The inner lives of these women, shared through theatre in this particular space and for an audience, make the inner life of the prisoners, and the prison itself, as much a subject of the work as the women. As these women tell about what happens on the inside – of their bodies, their lives, and the prison walls – they get that inside out, literally through body and voice. Telling discloses their traumas. By embodying story, they disembody the trauma and reclaim themselves. This process also served in addressing fear and isolation, and generating a sense of community. Daccache explains:

In the end, when all the bits and pieces of the stories were dramaturgically embroidered into one text, the group chose one or two persons to say the text in front of the audience. So the monologue would hold the stories of nine women, as if it was a single story. It was made clear to the audience from the beginning

of the show that the texts they are going to hear are a compilation of many stories blended as one. ("The Unheard" 236)

The women speak individually and together. Each one uses her unique voice as they are speaking as one. Both distinct and unified in this moment, they generate a sense of community important to the therapeutic experience.

By bringing attention to bodies in the space, the prison becomes an inescapable place, this time for the audience. While it is the prisoners who cannot exit, now the audience cannot unknow the accounts they have witnessed and that lives exist behind those walls. This "embodied placemaking underscores the human element upon which place hinges, and in using it we posit that a study of place that omits consideration of the bodies that engage its terms remains incomplete" (Sen 5). The place of prison is designed then defined by its function to contain the imprisoned. Without a prisoner, 'prison' is just 'building.' By the women repeatedly describing their lives inside that prison, they both affirm its existence and redefine it for the audience, unmaking it by making themselves present as more-than-prisoner.

Ironic references to place are built into the text for comic effect and reveal to spectators the inhumane conditions of the space. Several speeches and scenes refer to the prison as "the Kingdom of Baabda." The audience, prompted to observe the distinct lack of palatial resemblance, re-place themselves and their storyteller in the prison. That earlier listing of the rules of the space is later juxtaposed with the rules of the kingdom, this royal metaphor serving as a reminder of the parallel story of Scheherazade from which they draw inspiration. Theatre holds unique potential to disrupt the social instruction of a space. The prison directs different cues to outsiders and insiders: Outside? Pass by, ignore, and stay out. Inside? Wait, obey, and repent. By manipulating how 'outside' and

'inside' are read by the audience, Daccache reactivates the inmate/performers as members of communities, engaging the emotional insides of those living inside the prison, and supporting the process of acting out personal stories. That act of inclusion suggests the need for societal intervention and greater obligation to this subset of our community.

The play's final sequence physically positions the women similarly to the opening. However, this time, it features the women listing their new rules of order:

I won't say to my son anymore: "I'd die for you! Your wishes are my command!"

I wish I was told "no" when I was younger

I don't want my son to do to me as I did to my mother

No more self-destroying mistakes

I want to be a woman again / I'm tired of playing the role of a man in my life

I won't look down anymore / I will hold my head high

If my son ever beats his wife, I would take her side, not his.

I had never known freedom until I entered prison

I allowed my husband to cross limits

I wish we have [sic] met you elsewhere

We will never forget you

Visit us again!

If my fate could change / History could change too

If my fate could change / History could change too

If my fate could change / History could change too

(Scheherazade)

The entire ensemble chants those last three lines, resounding doubly as curtain call and call to action. These resolutions of self work not as apologies but as goals, reflecting a newly embodied confidence and communicating a spirit of feminism and kinship as women.

The fictional Scheherazade muse for *Scherazade in Baabda* told stories for 1001 nights to save her own life and the lives of the many virgins condemned to death by the fickle and fatal favor of King Shahryar. Daccache's version boasts, "there is no Shahryar here." Each woman, rather than telling a story in order to survive, shares her story of survival through the abusive and patriarchal biases and laws contributing to her presence here, again pointing towards the significance of place to inform performance. The less than 90-minute-long experience, as compared to the great many nights Scheherazade told stories, implicitly contrasts the time the audience spends in this place versus the many more nights these women will remain imprisoned. The text cements a beckoning to spectators to respond with action through the closing line of the play's opening sequence, "What will you do when you leave?" The general upbeat tone of the vignettes, blended with the dark content of the stories, reinforce the absurdity of the circumstances and need for change. Arab American literature and performance scholar Somaya Sami Sabry describes the metaphor of Scheherazade in Arab women's storytelling, explaining that "it is important to point out that transformation and change are central to Scheherazade's narrative because she tells the story with the goal of change in mind" (50). By inviting audiences into the prison, Daccache includes the spectators in the space as witnesses to those women previously "forgotten behind bars" (as they describe themselves in the text) but whose existences are now undeniable. In this work, Daccache intentionally combats that crime of being woman to which the Scheherazades refer and have lived. Here, listening required activation

of the audience; they are already doing by attending. By calling outside witnesses to hear what happens inside, the boundaries of prison walls fracture, with those cracks leaving space for action.



1 - *Scheherazade in Baabda* (Photo Credit Dalia Khammisy – Catharsis – LCDT)

CONCLUSION

Just this December 15th, 2017, Daccache released the play on film version of *Johar . . . Up In the Air*. This May, 2016 drama therapy project came from a return to the men's prison at Roumieh. Loaded with humor, earnest conversation, and painful memory, it includes critique of prison conditions, the consequences of the stigmatization of the mentally ill, and reproach of the government. Inmates perform all the music, poetry, prose, and songs. A noteworthy extension of Daccache's work, *Johar* continues to draw on the players' relationships with prison-as-character, demanding that the audience regularly alternates focus between speaker and site,

since speaker and site are always in active conversation. Outside of the walls of that space, it might be possible to forget the loaded identities of these performers. However, setting the projects inside the prisons summons a seesaw of attention between prisoner/performer, present as both and revealed as person. This disconnects the audience from the world of the play and reminds them of the world in which they live, and its injustices. In this cycle of alienation and orientation, the audience is offered opportunities to self-reflect. Doing so in the prisons manipulates the connections participants and audiences make with that environment. Our relationships to spaces are complex. Here, theatre offered a number of strategies, “entertainment, play, rehabilitation, transformation, and therapy,” which drew out that complexity for the audience (Landy 255, 258). By understanding that intricacy, the audience can relax preconceptions of prisoners as defined by their relationship with the prison, and understand them based on their own stories. A sense of being better understood intensifies the therapeutic experience and site is key to this transaction.

In her bio, Daccache notes that she “believes in the liberating and healing powers of therapy through theater.” Beyond the healing powers for the person, much of Daccache’s work has had a ripple effect in the greater community. She describes her initial hope for the work: “I believed that a performance enacted by prisoners in front of society at large [. . .] based on their own stories, could make a change: in them, in the society, and ultimately, in the policies used against them” (“The Unheard” 229). Daccache sent me a list including some of the more tangible impact of Catharsis’s work:

- “*12 Angry Lebanese* – “succeeded in pushing the government to implement . . . the penal code for the reduction of

sentences based on good behavior that was published in 2002 but never implemented”

- *Johar Up in the Air* “led to 2 draft laws aiming for a suitable Legislation for Mentally ill Inmates & Inmates Sentenced to Life, both submitted to the Lebanese Parliament in Aug 2016 after being signed by 7 Member [sic] of Parliament from different political parties.”
- “*Shebaik Lebaik*, interpreted by Migrant Domestic workers in Lebanon, 2014-2015, [called for . . .] the cancellation of [a regulation . . .] stating that Migrant Domestic Workers are not allowed to have romantic relationships on the Lebanese territory. It was abolished on July 2015.” (“Catharsis” 2017)

Daccache’s prison projects deconstruct “prison” by calling attention to the parts, including those parts that are human. This “site-specific performance engages with site as symbol, site as story-teller, site as structure’ “and the “inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site” (Wilkie, Kwon qtd. in Pearson 8, 12). In *12 Angry Lebanese*, *Scheherazade in Baabda*, and *Johar . . . Up in the Air*, site of detention transformed into performance space, activates and enlivens a prison.

Zeina Daccache’s development and presentation of the stories of “people with something in their gut, something concrete to say” in her Lebanese prison drama projects makes more concrete the identity of the prison itself, and what it means to be imprisoned (*12 Angry Lebanese* 103). In *12 Angry Lebanese*, this effect, while enhanced by the prison, does not fully rely on it. Though the space informs the experience of players and audience alike, it does not participate actively in the *12 Angry Lebanese* narrative that is performed. Site in this case becomes a subliminal rather

than an overt force on the event. Its impact relies more heavily on the identity of the performers as imprisoned, rather than the actual elements of the prison. Constructing a more formal theatre space within the prison masks it, diffusing its force by allowing it to be more easily forgotten. *Scheherazade in Baabda* and *Johar . . . Up in the Air* more boldly embrace the space as a part of their necessary spectacles and contents. Both engage the materiality of the space and in doing so disrupt immaterial instruction. In these, Daccache firmly guides our gaze, temporarily transforming a liminal space with the agenda to solidly re-place its residents, and have them seen, as our neighbors and unobscured members of the community.

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