

Playing with Pedagogy: Theater as Apprenticeship at the Numidya Cultural Association in Oran, Algeria

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Abstract: Theatrical activities at the Numidya Cultural Association in Oran, Algeria helped bring into being an Amazigh community of practice. Playwright and director Djamel Benaouf drew on pedagogical techniques from *halqa*-style theater to train inexperienced actors, some of whom barely spoke Tamazight, to perform his play *Aneggaru ad yerr tabburt: Yeččur wesqif n ttmana* (The last one closes the door; the asylum is full) at the Regional Theater of Oran. By using techniques of voicing and embodied repetition, Benaouf fostered an apprenticeship style of learning that could accommodate variable levels of expertise and experience. In so doing, he enabled actors to form a community of practice that became instrumental to both the troupe's and the play's success.

Keywords: Amazigh Theater, Algeria, *Halqa*, Community of Practice, Rehearsal.

It was a cool Friday in the western Algerian port city of Oran in March of 2009. The midday prayers had just been broadcast over loudspeakers mounted on mosques across the city. That was my signal to head over to the Numidya Cultural Association, where I gathered with members of the Tigawt d Wawal (Action and Word) theater troupe each Friday afternoon. They were working on the play *Aneggaru ad yerr tabburt: Yeččur wesqif n ttmana* (The last one closes the door; the asylum is full; henceforth *Aneggaru*). The play had been written by their leader Djamel Benaouf – novelist and playwright, Tamazight language instructor, and theater director. The troupe would be staging *Aneggaru* at the Regional Theater of Oran (TRO), the area's largest and most prestigious theater, later that summer. I was interested in their rehearsal process, and they graciously allowed me to join them as they worked through the play. I was also present for the performance and for a post-show debriefing. I discussed the play at length with Benaouf, and spoke individually with every troupe member.

Aneggaru ad yerr tabburt starts and ends in a cemetery – a fitting location given that Benaouf developed the play in the aftermath of Algeria's tragic Dark Decade (1992-2000), during which as many as 250,000 Algerians lost

their lives.¹ Benaouf sought to pay homage to the dozens of intellectuals and artists² who had been assassinated during “*la décennie*” (“the decade”), as Algerians call the period, as well as to those who had come before. Using the Dark Decade’s tragic losses as a springboard, Benaouf envisioned the play as a way to honor the legacy of 20th-century Algerian cultural creators. The script is essentially a “Who’s Who” of Algerian popular culture, built around a dense intertextual web of citations to their works. As the play opens, long-dead artists emerge from their tombs, manage to get past the cemetery’s guardian, and go out into the world. As they wander through contemporary Algerian society, they enact scenes inspired by plays, novels, and songs created by Berberophone and Arabophone playwrights, actors, and musicians over the course of the 20th century.

Some of the references in *Aneggaru* are widely known across Algeria, such as hit songs by the Amazigh singers Lounes Ait Menguellat, Idir, Ferhat, Matoub Lounes and popular rai singers such as Cheb Khaled. But many were more obscure, referring to poets and plays unfamiliar even to many of the actors. As an outsider, I initially found the script almost impenetrable, for it relies on a precise knowledge of particular scenes and even specific lines drawn from works that only those with access to elite and sometimes ephemeral cultural productions would be able to readily call up. For instance, one three-minute scene midway through the play tells a story built almost entirely out of titles of literary works or songs, names of characters, or lines from scenes. Algerian writers whose works are referenced in this short section alone include Toufiq El Hakim, Mohamed Ben Guettaf, Benameur Bakhti, Bouziane Ben Achour, Mohand Ittighilem, Fouzia Ait El-Hadj, Abdelkader Alloula, Mouloud Mammeri, and Azeddine Medjoubi. Benaouf explained to me that in this scene, he was intending to contrast these men and women of culture with terrorist or fanatical groups, whose presence in the scene was similarly condensed to single (albeit, in this case, well-known) referents such as “Raïs and Bentalha” (the names of two villages whose inhabitants were almost all massacred by terrorists in 1997). I would soon discover that the actors of Numidya did not understand the script much better than I did. “You’ll have to ask Djamel,” Hamid, the most experienced troupe member, told me when I asked him about the meaning of the play: “Djamel’s plays are enigmas (...). It’s hard, heavy.” Another concurred: “It’s really complex. We

1. Figures commonly cited range from 100,000 to 250,000. As James McDougall notes, the inability to determine an official death toll speaks to the uncertainty surrounding the events. See *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 290-95.

2. “Artists” is an inexact translation of the French “les artistes” – in Darija, *layartist* – a term that refers to any cultural practitioners, including poets, playwrights, novelists, singers, and musicians.

act, but we don't understand." All most of them could articulate about the play was that it constituted an homage to Algerian artists.

Beyond the cultural references, some of the actors did not master the basics of the Tamazight language in which the play was written. When I first arrived at a rehearsal of the troupe in December of 2008, I found Benaouf working with three actors: two men and a young woman. They were engaged in a table reading (*lecture italienne*) of a script. In an ordinary table reading, each actor would take the part of a character, reading that character's lines aloud. Here, however, Benaouf would read a line first, and the actors would repeat it back. On one level, this was not unusual, as the Tamazight language is not regularly taught in Algeria. Even those who speak the language fluently have little to no practice reading it. But despite Benaouf's help, the young woman – who would end up being cast in *Aneggaru* in a not insignificant role – could barely pronounce the language. She stumbled over a basic word like *akka* ("here"), failing to emphasize the *shadda* on the consonant despite hearing it repeatedly. Though her parents were Kabyle, she had been raised in Oran. A native Darija speaker, she struggled just to pronounce the Tamazight language. She was not alone: of the nine more or less regular troupe members, only three – those who were raised in Kabylia and came to Oran as young adults – were fluent in Kabyle, and one actor didn't speak the language at all. Whereas the script portrays a seamless weaving of material in Tamazight and Darija (Algerian Arabic) into a celebration of Algerian popular culture, the rehearsal process revealed a lack of linguistic and cultural fluency that such a project would ideally entail. Further, nearly half the troupe members had not previously acted, and some displayed little aptitude for acting: they were not skilled at verbal projection and did not master the gestural repertoire and bodily demeanor that acting entails. Yet they were about to go on stage before a sizable audience at the Regional Theater of Oran.

Given that the actors by and large told me that they did not really understand the script they were performing, that in some cases they could not even pronounce their lines, and that many had little or no experience on stage, what was at stake for them in participating in this performance? What might have motivated them to show up week after week to learn this challenging play? As I would eventually discover, asking the actors about the play's meaning was the wrong question. My question implied my own bias that the play should address overarching concerns that could be metadiscursively articulated. The actors, in contrast, understood sections of the play in more granular, experience-based terms. They were also invested in the rehearsal and performance processes in their own right. They showed up not to dissect the

referents of a script but to rehearse, engaging together in vocal and embodied forms of work.

In what follows, I consider the structure of the script as it articulates with the pedagogical labor being accomplished in rehearsals. I do so by way of the *ḥalqa*, a popular style of North African theater based in marketplace performance. By using *ḥalqa* techniques of voicing and embodied repetition as pedagogical tools, Benaouf fostered an apprenticeship style of learning that could accommodate variable levels of expertise and experience. In so doing, he enabled actors to form a community of practice³ that became instrumental to both the troupe's and the play's success.

Ḥalqa Theater

Historically, the *ḥalqa* in North Africa constituted the part of the outdoor market (*sūq*) devoted to performance and storytelling.⁴ Prominent among the performers in the *ḥalqa* was a *goual*, or storyteller.⁵ As a solo performer, the *goual* would simultaneously narrate a tale and play all the parts. Beginning in the 1960s, *ḥalqa*-style theater was taken up by contemporary North African playwrights and adapted for a proscenium stage. When they did so, they split apart the *goual*'s role. Whereas the marketplace *goual* had moved artfully between third-person narration and first-person voicing of the characters in his tale, the new playwrights turned the *goual* into a narrator who played alongside the characters whose activities he described. Algerian playwright Ould Abderrahmane Kaki was among the first to do so, positioning the *goual* as a storyteller while constituting the actors as a kind of Greek chorus. The "chorus" would repeat, generally in unison, some of the narrator's words. They would also embody or act out the tale as the *goual* described it. Other prominent North African playwrights who developed the *goual*-plus-chorus

3. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

4. On the traditional *ḥalqa*, see (among others) Abdelkader Alloula, "La représentation du type non-Aristotélicien dans l'activité théâtrale en Algérie," in *En mémoire du futur: Pour Abdelkader Alloula*, ed. Malek Alloula (France: Actes Sud/Sindbad, 1997); Khalid Amine, "Crossing Borders: Al-ḥalqa Performance in Morocco from the Open Space to the Theatre Building," *TDR* 45, 2 (2001): 55-69; Khalid Amine and Marvin Carlson, *The Theatres of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia: Performance Traditions of the Maghreb* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Abdelkrim Berrechid, "Morocco (Overview)," in *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theater, Volume 4: The Arab World*, eds. Ghassan Maleh and Farouk Ohan (London: Routledge, 1999); Ahmed Cheniki, *Le théâtre en Algérie: Histoire et enjeux* (Aix-en-Provence, France: Edisud, 2002), idem, *Vérités du théâtre en Algérie* (Oran, Algeria: Editions Dar El Gharb, 2006); Jane Goodman, *Staging Cultural Encounters: Algerian Actors Tour the United States* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2020); Deborah Kapchan, "Performance," *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): 479-508, idem, *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

5. I retain the conventional spelling of *goual*. If transcribed using contemporary conventions, it would be *guwwāl*.

form were (in Algeria) Kateb Yacine, Slimane Ben Aissa, and Abdelkader Alloula and (in Morocco) Tayeb Saddiki.⁶

Djamel Benaouf adopted the *goual*-plus-chorus form when he brought *Aneggaru* to Tigawt d Wawal. Repetition and embodiment, widely used techniques in *halqa*-style theater, became the pedagogical tools he drew on. Benaouf's *halqa*-inspired pedagogy can be likened to the style of learning via apprenticeship that Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger describe. From this perspective, learning occurs primarily through a "common ability to co-participate" rather than by acquiring a "commonality of symbolic or referential structures."⁷ Such communities form through an emergent framework of social participation rather than via propositional or conceptual knowledge alone.⁸

To foreground repetition and embodied performance is not to say, of course, that ideological work was not also present. Before turning to the specific rehearsal performance practices through which the troupe's learning took place, I offer a brief history of the Numidya Cultural Association under whose auspices they were working.

Numidya Cultural Association: A Brief History

The Numidya Cultural Association was founded in 1979 as an UNJA-affiliated⁹ soccer club, "Les cavaliers de la Numidie." Its mission was to mobilize young Kabyles of Oran; soccer provided cover for political work that could not have been accomplished overtly in the 1970s and early 1980s. In the early 1990s, following changes to the Algerian law on associations that accompanied the state's attempted transition to a multiparty system,¹⁰ the association reformed as the Numidya Cultural and Sports Collective, and it

6. On the development of contemporary *halqa*-style theater in Algeria and Morocco, see (among others) Amine, "Crossing Borders;" Amine and Carlson, *The Theatres of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia*; Abdelkrim Berrechid, *Hudūdu al-Kāini Walmumkini fī al-Masrah al-Iḥtifālī* (The Limits of the Given and the Possible in Festive Theater) (Casablanca, Morocco: Dar Athaqafa, 1985); Berrechid, "Morocco (Overview);" Abdelmajid Hannoum, "The Storyteller," *Mediterraneans/Méditerranéennes* 11, 42 (2000): 189-93; Cleo Jay, "Playing the Berber: The Performance of Amazigh Identities in Contemporary Morocco," *The Journal of North African Studies* 21, 1 (2016b): 68-80; Abdelmadjid Kaouah, "La 'Halqa': Un théâtre complet," in *Abdelkader Alloula: Vingt ans déjà!* edited by Nouredine Saâdi, 17-31 (Algiers, Algeria: Les éditions Apic, 2014).

7. William F. Hanks, "Foreword," in *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21-22.

8. Hanks, "Foreword," 14.

9. The acronym UNJA refers to the Union Nationale de la Jeunesse Algérienne, an FLN-affiliated youth organization. It was not possible to form a youth association without an UNJA affiliation at that time.

10. Algerian law 87-15 of July 21, 1987 granted the right to form locally based, nonpolitical associations without prior governmental authorization.

was recognized in 1991 as an official cultural association.¹¹ In 2003, Numidya reconfigured again under a new law specifying that associations could have only a single focus. At that point, Numidya dropped its affiliation with soccer and became a purely cultural association.

According to its 1990 statutes, the goals of the association were to “preserve and promote Amazigh cultural heritage in all its diversity.” Like other Amazigh associations, Numidya drew on the common nationalist rhetoric that knits history, culture, and language into a story of an Amazigh *ethnie*: “a named unit of population with common ancestry myths and historical memories, elements of shared culture, some links with a historic territory and some measure of solidarity at least among [its] elites.”¹² Numidya sought to accomplish its goals by organizing cultural activities and workshops, creating music and theater troupes, editing newsletters and books, or organizing cultural excursions.¹³ Like many Algerian cultural associations, Numidya also brought community members together around days of homage for leading cultural figures, such as commemorating the lives of novelist and cultural leader Mouloud Mammeri or Kabyle poet Si Mohand U M’Hand. The association has self-produced several journals, including, in the early years, *War-isem*. On April 20, 1990 (a symbolic date commemorating Algeria’s Berber Spring or Tafsut Imazighen), a new journal, *Azul*, was inaugurated.

Like other associations, Numidya has positioned itself at scalar levels that range from local to national and transnational.¹⁴ Locally, it has worked with other Oran-based associations (such as *Asirem*) and has been a frequent collaborator in youth-based activities organized by the city or the wilaya of Oran, such as the Regional Seminar on Youth organized in 1993 in nearby Aïn Turk by the Directorate for Promotion of Youth (Direction de la Promotion de la Jeunesse).¹⁵ Numidya has worked with the Palais de la Culture et des

11. The association held its first official general assembly on September 13, 1990, with 20 founding members, and submitted its demand for accreditation to the Wilaya of Oran five days later. Numidya received its accreditation on October 1, 1991 (agrément 24-91).

12. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2011), 7-8, citing Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995), 59.

13. Statuts, Association Culturelle et Sportive Numidie. Tiddukla Tadelsant Tanaddalt. *Azul*, no. 8. July 1992, Numidya archives.

14. See Paul Silverstein, “Martyrs and Patriots: Ethnic, National and Transnational Dimensions of Kabyle Politics,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 8, 1 (2003): 87-111; idem, “Masquerade Politics: Race, Islam and the Scale of Amazigh Activism in Southeastern Morocco,” *Nations and Nationalism* 17, 1 (2011): 65-84.

15. Two members of the Numidya association participated in the Regional Seminar of Youth in Aïn Turk, Algeria, on July 22, 1993, organized by the Director of the Promotion of Youth. *Bilan Moral de l’Association Culturelle et Sportive Numidya Année 1993*, December 15, 1993, Numidya archives.

Arts in Oran, as well as with university-based associations.¹⁶ Its annual Yennayer Cous-Cous Festival, for instance, has been partially underwritten by the Palais de la Culture. While Numidya's archives testify to generally good working relationships with the authorities in Oran, they also reveal occasional moments of tension, such as the cancellation of a planned day in memory of assassinated Kabyle singer Matoub Lounes in July 1998 due to lack of authorization from the wilaya¹⁷ or the refusal of authorization for a demonstration for Tamazight on January 22, 1994.¹⁸



Fig. 1: Entrance to the Numidya Cultural Association in Oran, Algeria.

16. Numidya's annual report from 1993 indicates that the association carried out activities with the Asirem Cultural Association, the Palace of Arts and Culture in Oran, and the Université des Sciences et de la Technologie d'Oran (U.S.T.O.). *Bilan Moral de l'Association Culturelle et Sportive Numidya Année 1993*, December 15, 1993, Numidya archives.

17. In what appears to be a handwritten draft of a press release or similar kind of public announcement, the association indicates that it had planned a day of homage for Kabyle singer Matoub Lounes, who had been assassinated June 25, 1998. The day of homage was scheduled in conjunction with Algerian Independence Day, July 5, 1998. It had to be cancelled at the last minute due to lack of authorization from the Wilaya of Oran, an act that the association roundly condemned, Numidya archives.

18. This refusal to grant a permit for a public demonstration may have had as much to do with the rise of terrorism than with Tamazight per se, although this is not how Numidya framed it. "Communiqué: Rassemblement pour "Tamazight" annulé à Oran," *Le Soir d'Algérie* no. 1042, January 26, (1994): 48, Numidya archives.



Fig. 2: “Numidya Cultural Association welcomes you” in Tamazight, Arabic, and French.

At a national scale, Numidya has been involved with the Federation of Amazigh Cultural Associations (Agraw Adelsan Amazigh), centered in Tizi Ouzou,¹⁹ and has hosted Amazigh groups visiting from the Kabyle cities Tizi-Ouzou and Bejaia. The association’s theatrical troupes have performed regularly at festivals located in Kabylia. Numidya members also discussed whether to participate in a seminar organized by the Haut Commissariat d’Amazighité (HCA) in 1996.²⁰ More informally, some members of Numidya travel regularly to their home villages in Kabylia, where they participate in activities sponsored by local associations in the regions of Tizi-Ouzou, Bejaia, Boumerdes, and Ighil Ali. While most of Numidya’s activities are Algeria-based, the association did issue a statement on May 2, 1995, condemning the suspension of Moroccan Amazigh activists for teaching Tamazight (Ali Iken, Ali Hareherras, and Taous Mbarek).²¹ In a similar vein, the association organized a round table on May 7, 1998, for the Moroccan prisoners (*détenus*) of Goulmima.²² It has also periodically positioned itself in relation to wider

19. On April 4, 1993, the Numidya Association sent one member to attend the General Assembly of the National Federation of Amazigh Cultural Associations (Agraw Adelsan Amazigh), held in Tizi-Ouzou. *Bilan Moral de l’Association Culturelle et Sportive Numidya Année 1993*, December 15, 1993, Numidya archives.

20. On December 15, 1995, the Association’s 12-member Executive Committee (*Comité Directeur*) met to discuss, among other agenda items, whether to send a member to the upcoming seminar organized by the Haut Commissariat d’Amazighité. No one objected, and one member agreed to contact the HCA on Numidya’s behalf. It is unclear whether any members did, in fact, attend this seminar, Numidya archives.

21. Declaration “Contre l’arbitraire” signed by 8 Oran-based organizations including Numidya on May 2, 1995. The Declaration expresses consternation that three previously arrested Moroccan Tamazight teachers were still not being allowed into the classroom, even after the speech by Moroccan King Hassan II on August 20, 1994 promoting the teaching of Tamazight in the schools, Numidya archives.

22. *Bilan Moral semestriel de l’Année 1998*. June 26, 1998. Tiddukla Tadelant Tanaddalt Numidya/ Association Culturelle et Sportive Numidya, Numidya archives.

issues of human and minority rights, for example, by issuing statements regarding Tamazight on the International Day of Human Rights.²³

Internally, the work of Numidya has been organized through four commissions: Artistic, Scientific, Literary, and Sports. Theater falls under the “artistic” rubric. Tigawt d Wawal was the second theater troupe to operate under the auspices of Numidya. The first, Tafrafa, started in 1992, put on a play and several skits, and disbanded a couple years later. In 1997, Tafrara was reincarnated and performed in the annual Festival of Amazigh Theater in Tizi-Ouzou, where they earned the Jury Prize (*prix du jury*) in 1998 and the 2nd Jury Prize in 1999. Tafrara also produced an operette in homage of Matoub Lounes in September 1998. In 2000, key members left Oran for France, and the troupe again disbanded. Numidya was then without a theater troupe until the end of 2003, when Djamel Benaouf formed Tigawt d Wawal and began mounting his own plays.

In focusing on theater as a site for promotion of Amazigh culture and identity, Numidya’s work aligns with that of troupes across Algeria and Morocco. In Morocco, Cleo Jay²⁴ has described the way theater troupes have developed productions that alternately explore Berber histories and traditions and engage with wider debates about the place of Amazigh identity in contemporary society. In both Algeria and Morocco, annual festivals of Amazigh theater provide a venue where the work of troupes like Tigawt d Wawal can be showcased.²⁵ Because of its location in the Arabophone city of Oran as well as Benaouf’s own cosmopolitan vision, Tigawt d Wawal has featured works that valorize Algeria’s cultural diversity, with *Aneggaru* itself featuring both Arabophone and Berberophone artists and opening with a scene staged in both Darija and Tamazight.

Djamel Benaouf: Background and Mission

Benaouf hails from “Lesser Kabylia” (Petite Kabylie, or the northern Kabyle coast, which centers around the city of Bejaia or Bgayet). He was born in 1960 in the storied village of Ighil Ali (birthplace of famed Kabyle

23. Taseghrut (Déclaration). December 8, 1999. Tiddukla Tadsant Tanaddalt Numidya, Numidya archives.

24. Jay, “Playing the Berber.”

25. In Morocco, the Festival of Amazigh Theater has been held regularly in Casablanca since 2006 (Cleo Jay, “Performance and Social Activism in Morocco: The Legacy of Fatima Chebchoub,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19, 5 (2016a): 72. In Algeria, Amazigh theater festivals have been held regularly in various cities including Batna, Bejaia, and Tizi-Ouzou. Amazigh theater has also been featured alongside theater in Arabic (Darija) in such highly visible national festivals such as the annual Festival of Amateur Theater in Mostaganem, Algeria.

writers Jean and Taos Amrouche). His grandfather had migrated to Oran in 1939, working in cafés and restaurants until after the Algerian revolution (1954-1962), when he returned for several years to Kabylia. Benaouf's father subsequently went to Oran in 1962, leaving the young Djamel in Ighil Ali with his paternal grandparents (Djamel was an orphan on his mother's side). In 1966, Djamel's grandparents returned with him to Oran, settling in the city's populist Sidi El Houari neighborhood. Coming from a family of meager resources, Djamel left school early and began working in the clothing industry.

As Benaouf recounted it to me in 2009,²⁶ his first six years in Kabylia were formative ones. Raised monolingually in the Kabyle (*Taqbaylit*) language variety, he recalled the shock he felt when he arrived in Oran and found, as he put it, "another society," one in which his father admonished him not to speak Kabyle outside the house. As he tells it, his early awareness that speaking his language could land him in trouble contributed to his later "prise de conscience" (coming to awareness) as an activist. Towards the end of the 1970s, he discovered the publications of the Paris-based Académie Berbère and started discussing Berber issues with fellow workers in the textile industry in Oran, a majority of whom were Kabyle. By 1980, when the Berber Spring exploded in Kabylia and Algiers, he was already ensconced in a Berberist milieu in Oran, and became one of the founding members of the first Numidya association (Les Cavaliers de la Numidie). He later would learn to read and write Tamazight through unofficial classes with Kamal Naït Zerrad.²⁷ He began working on the publication *Azul*, and eventually became a teacher of Tamazight at Numidya. He also published a novel and a book of poetry, both in Tamazight.²⁸

If Benaouf's activism was fueled by his Berberist surrounds, his interest in theater was sparked by the *halqa*-style performances taking place within his largely Arabophone neighborhood in Oran around the tomb of Sidi El Houari. While he had no formal training in theater or literature, he had witnessed the *halqa* first-hand in the local marketplace. This indigenous form of theater had already served as the foundation for works by renowned playwrights from the Oran and Mostaganem regions of Algeria, including Ould Abderrahmane

26. Personal interview, May 22, 2009.

27. See Kamal Naït-Zerrad, *Manuel de conjugaison kabyle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994); idem, *Dictionnaire des racines berbères* (Peeters, 1997); idem, *Grammaire moderne du kabyle (tajerrumt tatrart n teqbaylit)* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), among others.

28. Djamel Benaouf, *Timlilit n tyermiwin: Ungal: La ville-rencontre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002); idem, *Tujjma Tuzzma Isefra: Nostalgie et remontrances. Recueil de poésies kabyles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

Kaki (1934-1995) and Abdelkader Alloula (1939-1994), both of whom Benaouf counts among the formative influences on his style.²⁹ Benaouf was also inspired by the *théâtre engagé* of Kateb Yacine (1929-1989), particularly in terms of its politicized content.³⁰ Kaki, Alloula, and Yacine were all versed in the works of Eastern bloc theater theorists such as Constantin Stanislavski, Jerzy Grotowski, and Bertolt Brecht, whose approaches Benaouf would also draw on.³¹

The Play: Between Death and Life

Loosely structured as a journey of life and death, *Aneggaru* opens with verses from Kabyle poets and singers including Lounes Aït Menguellat and Matoub Lounes. A phrase from one of Aït Menguellat's songs – “The word, no one kills it; otherwise, man is mortal” – announces the overall emphasis of the play on the transcendence of the verbal arts. Two introductory scenes follow, one in Darija and one in Kabyle. Each starts with the formulaic framing device “once upon a time”: “*Kān ya makān*” in Darija, “*Macahu*” in Kabyle. In putting the two Algerian popular languages side by side, Benaouf was bringing Tamazight into a broader national framework by aligning it with Darija, promoting both as the two “truly Algerian” languages spoken by the people. The Amazigh component then becomes primary: following the opening scenes, the language of the play is almost exclusively Tamazight.

Next comes a scene called “The Birth of the Artist,” which features the dead as they emerge from their tombs and prepare to go out into the world. A character called Hendus, representing the artist, appears alongside them as a newborn. Then begin what Benaouf called the four chronologies, each written as an homage to a particular artist: the Arabophone playwrights Ould Abderrahmane Kaki, Azeddine Medjoubi, and Abdelkader Alloula, and the Berberophone playwright and comedian Muhya (Muhend U Yahia). Each chronology embeds both references to that artist's works and related citations drawn from the works of other poets, singers, and playwrights, both Arab and Amazigh. At the end of the play, Hendus dies and the artists return to the cemetery, where they are surprised to discover that 10,000 years have

29. On Kaki, see Abderrahmane Mostefa and Mansour Benchehida, *Kaki: Le dramaturge de l'essentiel* (Algiers, Algeria: Editions Alpha, 2006). On the influence of Brecht on Kaki, see Cheniki, *Vérités du théâtre en Algérie*, chapter 3.

30. For some of these plays, see Kateb Yacine, *Le cercle des représailles* (Paris: Points, 1959), idem, *Boucherie de l'espérance: Oeuvres théâtrales* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1999). See also Abdelkader Djeghloul, *Pleins feux sur Kateb Yacine* (Oran, Algeria: Dar el Gharb, 2004) and N.A., *Colloque international Kateb Yacine: Actes* (Algiers, Algeria: Office des Publications Universitaires, 1990).

31. I discuss the ways Brecht's work was incorporated into contemporary *halqa* theater in Goodman, *Staging Cultural Encounters*.

passed. The play ends with this line: “Things are clear for the first and the last ones (...) [but] the poor intermediaries.” Of course, the “intermediaries” referenced were not only the artists who work to bring out the realities of Algerian life, but also the ordinary people living in troubled times – including Numidya’s actors and audiences.

As is common in contemporary *halqa*-style theater, Benaouf staged the play through a continuous back-and-forth between the narrator, called the “Vieux Mort” (translated awkwardly into English as the “Old Dead One”), and the actors, who variously repeated, punctuated and enacted the narrator’s words. Benaouf himself played the Vieux Mort or narrator; in this role, he had by far the most challenging lines. This *halqa*-based form of voicing was largely what made it possible for actors with virtually no experience and little mastery of the Kabyle language to take part in the performance. The tools of their theatrical apprenticeship included animation, remediation via replication, and embodied or intersemiotic translation.

Animation

The actors were learning to *animate* the text, in Erving Goffman’s sense:³² that is, they were learning to reproduce the script for an audience but bore no responsibility for the text as either *authors* (of the words) or *principals* (of the ideas) (both of those roles were held by Benaouf). At the most basic level, the actors had to reproduce the sounds of the Tamazight language accurately. This form of animation works iconically: reproduce the exact sounds you hear the director make. While animation does not preclude semantic understanding, it does not require it, either (I have engaged it many times myself learning to sing songs in languages I do not understand).³³

The actors were assisted in learning in several ways. First, Benaouf used his own voice and body to show the actors what he wanted them to do. In the early rehearsals, Benaouf would read a line and the actors would recite it back. Success was measured by an actor’s ability to achieve exact replication of the line. While all actors learned via replication, it was especially visible in the case of actors who did not master Kabyle. Here, the actors put into practice quite literally Lave and Wenger’s claim that in apprentice-style learning, participants not only “learn *from* talk” but “learn *to* talk” (emphasis in original).³⁴

32. Erving Goffman, “Footing,” in *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

33. I performed with the world music groups Libana (www.libana.com) and Kaia (www.KaiaSing.com).

34. Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 109.

While animation does not involve responsibility for authorship, it nonetheless entails considerable effort. As Richard Bauman notes, writing about the importance of performance in the transmission of oral texts: “Not only does the mediator [in this case, the actor] bear responsibility for replicating the author’s text correctly, but performance also renders him accountable for reproducing it *well*, marking it as worthy of special communicative care and effort.”³⁵ Proper pronunciation was emphasized in every rehearsal, as Benaouf, sometimes joined by one of the more fluent actors, would correct those who did not speak the language. Given that the play draws from texts composed in a poetic register that is itself somewhat distant from ordinary conversation, learning to reproduce the text was no small feat, particularly given the uneven levels of fluency in the troupe. Actors would sometimes spend hours on a single passage, as Benaouf and the more experienced members would model the correct pronunciation, vocal emphasis, and timing for those who did not master the language.

Second, learning was facilitated for the actors by the form of the text itself. Staged *halqa*-style theater frequently employs repetition by a chorus of a narrator’s words. In his role as the *goual* or storyteller, Benaouf would often read from the text itself, which he held in a large, leather-bound book (reminiscent of classic volumes like *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales*) while standing to the side of the stage. After he recited a text or a poem, the actors would repeat only the last line in a kind of mirroring echo. Here, Benaouf was giving the troupe their lines, and all they had to do was recite them back. Even when Benaouf was not supplying the lines, the actors always performed poetic verse in unison. This meant that if even one actor remembered how a particular text began, he could cue the others. At this level, the more experienced actors assisted the newcomers, serving as intermediaries between Benaouf and the newer actors and facilitating what Lave and Wenger called “learning as participation in communities of practice.”³⁶ In performance, Benaouf, as narrator, essentially cued the actors, describing verbally what they should be enacting on stage. In other words, he provided them with a clear narrative description of the *mise-en-scène* even as the play was unfolding. Benaouf supplied what performance theorists call the narrative event, or the frame for

35. Richard Bauman, *A World of Others’ Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 152.

36. Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 49.

what was happening on stage.³⁷ The actors then embodied the narrated event, acting out what the narrator was describing.

Third, alongside verbal repetition, the actors learned via embodied translation³⁸ of the text in a form of intersemiotic mediation. Benaouf designed the *mise-en-scène* such that the actors would perform, or mediate through their bodies, the actions as they were narrated in the script, matching their movements and gestures to the narrator's words. Here, too, Benaouf would use his own body as an iconic vector of knowledge transmission, demonstrating precisely what he wanted from the actors. In one case, he showed an actor a photograph taken at a previous performance that illustrated the position he wanted. If these demonstrations were not successful, he would manually reposition the actors on stage. As Ellen Basso elaborated (with regards to Kalapalo regimes of self-cultivation), when the material body emulates the narrative, the body is in effect serving as a translation device, turning experience from private and personal to public and shared.³⁹ Although Numidya's situation differed considerably from what Basso describes for the Kalapalo, her insights about embodied translation usefully illuminate the importance of the body in turning a nearly inaccessible script into a successful staged performance. Approaching the play as a series of embodied "translation events"⁴⁰ shows how the actors, under Benaouf's guidance, reconstituted aspects of their own experience in ways that opened up the script for both themselves and their audiences. As the actors developed a sense of pleasure around these embodied moments, they also were constituting themselves as a community of practice.

Sprinkled throughout the play were popular cultural references that both the actors and their audiences knew well. For instance, toward the beginning of the play, Benaouf as narrator evokes a number of artists who had been imprisoned or assassinated: Chile's Victor Jara, Lebanon's Nazim Hikmet, and Algeria's Bachir Hadj Ali. The group responds by laughing, and the narrator accuses them of making fun of him: "If you are making fun of me, perhaps you want to see some *Mikki* ("Mickey," referring to Mickey Mouse).

37. On narrative and narrated events, see especially Richard Bauman, "Contextualization, Tradition, and the Dialogue of Genres: Icelandic Legends of the *Kraftaskáld*," in *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, eds. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 125-45. Bauman, *A World of Others' Words*; Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* (1990): 59-88.

38. Ellen B. Basso, "Translating "Self-Cultivation,"" in *Translation and Ethnography: The Anthropological Challenge of Intercultural Understanding*, ed. Tullio Maranhão and Bernhard Streck (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 85-101.

39. Basso, "Translating "Self-Cultivation,"" 86.

40. *Ibid.*, 87.

The troupe then acts out a scene between Mickey Mouse and the Pink Panther as the classic Pink Panther music comes over the speakers. Tarzan, Superman, and Charles Darwin are evoked in another early scene: these are among the names that actors throw out when they are trying to determine what to call the newborn artist. Each actor calls out a different name while making that character's standard cry or gesture (for instance, "Darwin" enacts a chimpanzee). Because these were familiar figures, even the inexperienced actors could hold down a minute or two of the *mise-en-scène* on their own. These and other well-known referents served as playful and memorable anchors for the actors, providing moments of familiarity and pleasure in an otherwise dense and challenging text. Benaouf was even able to find a role for the actor who spoke no Kabyle: he played the infant born at the play's beginning and the corpse of the dead artist at the play's end. In these roles, he had no speaking part, but he was on stage for a considerable portion of the *mise-en-scène*, where he did have to follow the Tamazight text at least minimally, learning to recognize key words and turning points.

Some of the play's most successful scenes (as indicated by audience laughter or clapping) included scenes in which the actors enacted activities common in their daily lives. For instance, as the dead come out of their tombs at the play's beginning, they carry out morning preparations: shaving, combing each others' hair, and engaging in forms of children's play. When they encounter the newborn, they portray together a well-known game that Algerians play with babies, singing "uplalic, uplalic" while they pretend to throw the baby in the air and catch him on the way down. In another example, the actors extol the virtues of the guardian of the cemetery from which they escaped, commenting on how well he understood the language of musical instruments. Here, the *halqa*-style pedagogy is especially clear. "He understood the guitar," the narrator (Benaouf) calls out. The troupe responds in unison, "What does the guitar say?" They then make the sound of the guitar while pretending to strum. They follow this format for other instruments, including the tambourine, the trumpet, and the *bendir* (drum). Formulaic repetition, use of call-and-response voicing, and embodied enactment all provided points at which actors could connect to the script. Such moments are woven throughout the performance, punctuating the narrator's recitation of longer and less accessible texts. In these and related scenes, the actors could draw on their own embodied knowledge and experience to stage familiar activities. They did not have to share the playwright's wider critical objectives, or understand which literary works the various scenes were drawn from, in order to portray the scenes.

At the same time, Benaouf made use of the *halqa*-style division of roles between narrator and actors to embed his own critique into the narrator voice. At one point, the actors enact being passengers on a bus, in a short scene inspired by Azeddine Medjoubi's well-known play *Hafila Tafsir*. As the actors move through the bus, the narrator says: "The bus resembles this country: it makes a big racket as it moves. We don't know where it will lead us: toward peace or toward fear. If Medjoubi were still alive, we would have been enlightened."

Concluding Reflections

The *halqa* has served as an exceptionally fecund foundation for contemporary North African theater since the mid-twentieth century. It has long worked as a scalar device, pointing alternately to local, national, and global agendas.⁴¹ The *halqa* has resonated with postcolonial re(dis)coveries of tradition as well as with avant-garde or Brechtian theatrical initiatives. What I hope to add to the conversation is the way contemporary *halqa*-style theater also offers concrete pedagogical tools that enable actors of various abilities and levels of experience to come together in a community of practice. The pedagogical processes in the rehearsals and performance of *Aneggaru ad yerr tabburt* – in particular, the degree of vocal and embodied repetition entailed in this form of theater – help to illustrate how a community of practice could take shape among the Numidya actors in the absence of shared mastery of the cultural referents and even the language.

Perhaps Benaouf's pedagogy was also "founded on the hope that what is learned mechanically today may one day make sense," as Mark Münzel put it.⁴² Münzel was describing forms of learning in Koranic (sic) schools, and I do not contend that Benaouf's pedagogy somehow derived from such a model. Yet collective repetition is also a common practice in the Algerian public schools and has been taken up by other troupes.⁴³ In this sense, the actors came together in a community of practice that was also an apprenticeship in Amazighité. By acting in a play that set Amazigh cultural creators and the Tamazight language alongside their Arabophone counterparts, and by performing lines and evoking scenes from Arabic texts in Tamazight translation, the Tigawt d Wawal troupe embodied Benaouf's vision of an Algeria in which Tamazight and Darija could share both a theatrical and a national stage.

41. Goodman, *Staging Cultural Encounters*.

42. Mark Münzel, "The Patience of a Koranic School: Waiting for Light in the Jungle," in *Translation and Ethnography: The Anthropological Challenge of Intercultural Understanding*, eds. Tullio Maranhão and Bernhard Streck (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 102.

43. See Goodman, *Staging Cultural Encounters*, chapter 4.

Acknowledgments

An early draft of this paper was presented at *Berber Societies: New Approaches to Space, Time, and Social Process*, the 2012 American Institute for Maghrib Studies Annual Conference held in Tangier, Morocco. I am grateful to my conference co-organizer Katherine Hoffman for her exceptional leadership and collegiality, to Sarah Levin for her astute discussant comments on my paper, and to all participants for the many stimulating conversations. I also thank Jean Lave for her generous critique of a subsequent draft. Any errors in fact or interpretation are mine alone. I am especially grateful to Djamel Benaouf, the actors in Tigawt d Wawal, and the Numidya Cultural Association of Oran for warmly welcoming me into their community of practice, and to Rabah Boucheneb for translating the play for me from Tamazight to French. The research this article draws on was generously funded by the Fulbright-Hays Program, the American Institute for Maghrib Studies, Indiana University (particularly the New Frontiers in the Arts and Humanities program), and a joint international fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Social Science Research Council, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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تطويع البيداغوجيا: المسرح كتدريب مهني في الجمعية النوميديّة الثقافية بمدينة وهران الجزائرية

ملخص: ساعدت الأنشطة المسرحية في جمعية نوميديّة الثقافية بوهران في الجزائر على خلق ما يسمى بمجتمع الممارسة الأمازيغية. وقد اعتمد الكاتب المسرحي والمخرج جمال بنعوف على تقنيات تربوية من مسرح على طراز الحلقة لتدريب ممثلين عديمي الخبرة، بعضهم لا يتحدث الأمازيغية إلا بصعوبة كبيرة لأداء مسرحيته المعقدة بعنوان: (*Annegarar ad yerr tabburt: Yeccur wesqif n ttmana*) الأخير يغلق الباب؛ استحالة اللجوء) على خشبة المسرح الإقليمي بوهران. ومن خلال استخدام تقنيات التعبير الصوتي والتكرار المتجسد، عزز بنعوف أسلوب التعلم المهني الذي يمكن أن يستوعب مستويات متغيرة من الخبرة والتجربة. ومن خلال القيام بذلك، مكّن الممثلين من تكوين مجتمع من الممارسات التي أصبحت مفيدة لتحقيق النجاح لفائدة الفرقة والمسرحية على حد سواء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المسرح الأمازيغي، الجزائر، الحلقة، مجتمع الممارسة، (بروفة أو ترديد).

Jouer avec la pédagogie: Théâtre en apprentissage à l'Association culturelle Numidya à Oran, Algérie

Résumé: Les activités théâtrales de l'Association culturelle Numidya à Oran, en Algérie, ont contribué à la création d'une communauté de pratique amazighe. Le dramaturge et metteur en scène Djamel Benaouf s'est inspiré des techniques pédagogiques du théâtre de style *halqa* pour former des acteurs inexpérimentés, dont certains parlaient à peine tamazight, pour interpréter sa pièce complexe intitulée: *Annegarar ad yerr tabburt: Yeccur wesqif n ttmana* (Le dernier ferme la porte; l'asile est complet) au Théâtre régional d'Oran. En utilisant des techniques d'expression et de répétition incarnée, Benaouf a favorisé un style d'apprentissage qui pouvait s'adapter à des niveaux variables d'expertise et d'expérience. Ce faisant, il a permis aux acteurs de former une communauté de pratique qui est devenue essentielle au succès de la troupe et de la pièce.

Mots-clés: Théâtre amazigh, Algérie, *halqa*, répétition.