

THE ANTHROPO-SUFI DRAMA PERFORMANCE: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIMENSION AND IMAGE STYLIZATION

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This article focuses on a new methodology for transformation of a specific aspect of the North African heritage (specifically Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) – Sufi Hadra Ceremony, into a theatrical performance, known as the Anthro-Sufi Drama Performance. This type of performance reconciles with the Western theatrical stage without Aristotelian domination in its final form. The principles and steps of this transformation process have been structured on the basis of combination of anthropological and theatrical spheres. The research was developed by the application of analytical method, cultural-historical analysis, formal and stylistic analysis, and comparative analysis, as well as experimental and descriptive methods used to define the main features of an Anthro-Sufi Drama Performance.

Key words: *Anthro-Sufi Drama, Sufi Hadra, Stylization of theatrical image, Non-Aristotelianism, North African Pre-theatrical form*

Based on history of the world theater, the Western theater knew many stylistic and methodological changes and innovations, whether in writing or at the level of image and performance. That was based on the vertical dialogues and the liturgical theater in the beginning of the Greek theatrical tradition, which was represented by the religious practices to the god Dionysus. They were called as Dithyramb and Satiran hymns [6, p. 16]. The tradition had moved on to the horizontal dialogues and Aristotelian dramatic approaches. Later these were followed by the theatrical transformations of the Renaissance and the developing hegemony of Classical theater, which was divided into many schools. Finally, the entirety of the 20th century theatrical experiences had formed the features of modern theater and post-modern theater.

This process had started from the experiences of Konstantin Stanislavsky in realism to Vsevolod Meyerhold's counter-experiment in biomechanics and theatrical stylization. These had been the concepts that had established and opened the wide doors for a Western theatrical wave that had drawn the inspiration and shaped its image from the aesthetics of the Orient. The most outstanding Western theatrical experiments of that time were: Antonin Artaud and his "Torture Theater", the "Epic Theater" of Bertolt Brecht, the "Poor Theater" of Jerzy Grotowsky, the "Theater Anthropology" and "The Third Theater" of Eugenio Barba, as well as Peter Brook's theatrical experiments with orientalism, the most important of which is the Mahabharata performance in the 1980s [8, p. 203].

At the same time, the Oriental world, including the Arab regions, had entered in the cycle of research on their history of theatrical practices. Their forgotten civilizations, cultural and artistic legacy had become the foundation for the research. However, it was influenced by the system of standards imposed by the West as a reference base, namely Aristotelianism. The results had shown, the Arab world had no authentic theatrical tradition, and the theatrical productions of this region had been derived from the Western theatrical tradition. In this case, it looked like only the Western system had rights to make rules and models for the theatrical paradigm.

However, we should not forget that the beginning of theater in general had roots coming from the purely anthropological human practices that did not accept affiliation and could not be confined to one template. For instance, the Maghreb theatrical practice is considered as a derivation of ancient anthropological religious practices.

It is necessary to accept the idea that every type of cultural heritage or artistic practice as performative forms that differ from the Aristotelian theatrical model is called as a non-Aristotelian performance, because it is different in its essence, not because it is different from the ideal model of the Western theater. On the other hand, as is well known that many countries in the Arab world have many theatrical buildings inherited from the period of Western colonialism, especially in the North African countries: Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. To combine these two types of artistic heritage: Western theatrical buildings and Oriental anthropological practices as performative forms as they are, would be fundamentally wrong.

It is more appropriate to stylize the theatrical image from the local anthropological performative forms and represent them on the European theatrical stages that exist in many Arab countries, and not vice versa. This can be done by using the anthropological cultural heritage, following the experience of Intercultural theater in the West and the local theatrical experiences of the East called the "Interweaving Performance Cultures". But the process of stylization should be done without Western theatrical domination or local isolation. This process represents the continuation of theatrical initiatives and experiences of Abdelkader Aloula in Algeria, Ezzedine Al Madani in Tunisia, Tayeb Al Seddiqi in Morocco, Youssef Aidabi in Sudan.

However, the new theatrical experience based on the stylization of the theatrical images of the Oriental anthropological practices is focused on the balance between the Eastern and Western theatrical and artistic heritage, because the East and the West are separated by only an imaginary line created by a colonial history, according to Professor Edward Said, who wrote: "People are the ones who created and manufactured localities, regions and geographical sectors such as the East and the West. Each of them is a geo-cultural entity, not to mention being a historical entity." [10, p. 51].

The Sufi Hadra as a Non-Aristotelian Form. Hadra is a Sufi term associated with the Islamic world, it is a designation or an expression for collective worshipping (dhikr), circle worshipping and liturgical rituals. The Hadra is performed by those who belong to the Sufi factions and zawiyas, in particular, including the audience willing to participate in this event in general. The Hadra takes place during specific religious occasions or traditional ceremonial banquets, such as those known as zardah or waadah in the North African countries.

According to the Western theatrical concepts, the Sufi Hadra is considered as a pre-theatrical form, and it is classified under the category of non-Aristotelianism if it is referred as a spectacular show. It is based on the images and expressive forms produced and presented in a performative manner for a special type of audience. The Western theatrical practitioners tried to develop the anthropological forms into theatrical forms under the experiments of the "Intercultural theater", with its two versions of "Interweaving theater" and "Multicultural theater". If the Western theatrical practitioners would try to elevate the Hadra to the Western theatrical model, they would transform the Hadra's texts according to the Aristotelian form, which is based on the three unities: the unity of time, space and act. This had happened with the North African theatrical practitioners in the experiences of the Halka theater, which had started with Abd al-Rahman Kaki and continued with Abdelkader Alloula in Algeria.

The Halka is considered as one of the oldest performative forms in the North Africa, it is close to the Hadra concept, like a pre-theatrical form which involves dancing, singing and acting [7, p. 24]. The Halka was used in several theatrical productions directed by Abd al-Rahman Kaki, such as "El guerrab ou El Salhine" (1966). It was adapted from the Bertold Brecht's play "The Good Person of Szechwan". Likewise, this had happened with many works of Abdelkader Alloula, who expressed the influence of Bertolt Brecht's style in several statements such as: "My relationship with Brecht is a permanent and renewed work relationship that does not and will not end." [4, p. 20]. This was also confirmed by Saad Ardash, when he said: "Abdelkader Alloula takes from Brecht his epic, educative side." [2, p. 379]. The Moroccan stage director Tayeb Al Seddiqi had al-

so used the anthropological performative forms Halka and Bissat in his productions such as “The Evening Dinner Party”, he was also following the Brecht’s style [3, p. 172].

From the abovementioned, the majority of North African stage directors and theatrical practitioners had used the anthropological performative forms following the Western theatrical models. Their ways of implanting of pre-theatrical forms on stage were based on the Bertold Brecht’s style, as well as supporting the movement of the “Intercultural theater”. The result of their theatrical experiments was the loss of the Maghreb identity, in addition the productions had turned into the theatrical shows in the Western style but created by the North African stage directors.

However, the objective of this research is the opposite, that is to reproduce the anthropological performative forms on the Western stage without losing its identity and without following the Aristotelian theatrical model. Thus, the previous experiences’ approach was “from the theatrical form to the anthropological form”, however, we are using the opposite way “from the anthropological form to the theatrical form”. That means the theatricalization of the anthropological forms by using the stylization of theatrical image as a working method.

The Stylization of Theatrical Image. The stylization in the theatrical sphere means making an act very specific and precise. The act can be called “stylized” if it was simplified or represented with an emphasis on a certain pattern, based on the methods that contain some minor details. The Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold used stylization in relation to the theatrical sphere in this sense. We can realize this when he expressed his opinion in the essay on the play “The Doll’s House”: “Even in the highest level of naturalism, Vera Komissarzhevskaya has performed the tarantella dance in “The Doll’s House” using her feet to accompany the rhythm. The dance has been created only from a series of simple and tense choreographic expressions.” [9, p. 29].

Although V. Meyerhold had not explicitly mentioned the term “stylization” at that time, he gave an accurate description of the process through the dance of the actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya, who decided not to apply the original movements of the famous tarantella dance, but had simplified it into a series of expressive movements accompanied by a distinctive rhythm. Based on this example we can summarize the process of theatrical image stylization in three points:

1. Simplification of an act and reduction of detail multiplicity to focus on its essence;
2. Expansion of the used expressions;
3. Paying more attention to the rhythm.

We can conclude that stylization is a concept linked to what has been known since the 1960s as “minimalism” in a conditional manner in a theatrical act. This connection of stylization and minimalism can ensure a wider scope for artistic creativity for the performer while maintaining the general rhythm of the show to ensure communication channels between the performance and audience.

This connection has been transmitted through the experiences of the modern theater that had adopted different styles to eliminate the idea of illusion in theater. These experiences outstand in the Western theatrical world because they were inspired from the Oriental forms and aesthetics, as had happened in the “Theatre du Soleil” of the French director Ariane Mnouchkine [11, p. 206]. In fact, the majority of Oriental performative forms are based on the general stylization of different elements, it can be found in the Beijing opera, Indian Kathakali, as well as in the Japanese Noh and Kabuki theater. These forms rely on the mask-make up, which apparent color and shape differences express differences of age, gender, or social class, and the use of theatrical accessories is symbolic and subject to the principle of minimalism as well.

This confirms that stylization is not limited to the act in the performance, but also includes all aspects and other theatrical elements for the purpose of stylization of the ritual practices and Oriental performative forms as an image of a specific performance. It can be put in the term of “stylization of theatrical image”, which means the stylization of theatrical performance in all its basic aspects. Based on the abovementioned, we can deduct that the stylization of theatrical image can involve the following seven elements:

1. The focus is on the actor or performer, the work is with the minimum number of theater accessories and decoration (bodies, scenography, space).
2. The flexibility of the actor's or performer's body (the images and forms can be created by using their bodies).
3. The rewriting of the text by the director (the visual technical script).
4. The new role of the director and the general concept of the show, which is different from the classic role of a director in the process of the performance creation.
5. The freedom of choice for the director of the main story (it can be legend, ritual, poetry etc.).
6. The priority of the general rhythm in the show for the director when he is applying his concept. It is essential through the rhythm to link the performers and the audience.
7. The focus is on the activation of the role of the audience.

According to the seven elements, we can stylize the visual part of Sufi Hadra ceremony into a theatrical show on the Western stage. The result will be a new theatrical form which is called the Anthro-Sufi Drama performance. The Anthro-Sufi is a compound word that combines two concepts: anthropology and Sufism. Its meaning is an anthropological vision of the visual part of Sufi Hadra ceremony. Accordingly, the Anthro-Sufi Drama is a complex scientific term that describes the process of stylization of theatrical image based on the visual and anthropological references in the ritual practices of the Arab region. Prior to immersion into the concept of Anthro-Sufi Drama we have to get acquainted to the anthropological dimension of Sufi Hadra ceremony.

The Anthropological Dimension of Sufi Hadra Ceremony. Formally, we can define the concept of Sufi Hadra ceremony as a human behavioral, anthropological, performative aspect of North African cultural heritage based on the spiritual practices developed and accumulated in the region over the centuries.

The main form of Sufi expressions includes many different types of ceremonial performances that seek to create a distinctive unity and harmony between all available elements of the ceremony. This appears as a composite result that is summarized in the concept of the "unity of existence", both material and spiritual, in a unified space and time. The concept of the "unity of existence" is closely connected to the philosophy of pantheism [1, p. 78]. When the practice comes to its end, it turns into a kind of a celebration of the achievement of euphoria. It is based on an individual feeling that is generalized to the community, it causes the spiritual regeneration or liberation from the sources of stress. Moreover, it is a concept that corresponds to the concept of catharsis or purification by stimulating emotions in the theater, and the Sufi practitioners define it as the "degree of Fana".

Practically, many different Sufi rituals are practiced during the major ceremonial and cultural event called the Sufi Hadra ceremony. During the different stages of this celebration, the practitioners strive to reach the highest level of ecstasy, or the so-called degree of Fana. The practitioners achieve the highest degrees of Fana, when they form one unity. This unity stands on the three pillars, they are rhythmic unity, movement unity and spiritual unity. The phase when all the participants form complete unity in rhythm, movement and spirit, it can be summarized in the term of the "unity of existence". It is the stage when the belief reaches its maximum level, that time the physical, concrete world coincides with the metaphysical, intangible world. Then all the tangible and intangible points unite into a single point that represents the collective energy. During the Sufi practitioners' journey towards the Fana, the bodies ferment and transcend the feeling of sensory pain, as a result of the high concentration in a unified movement and feeling. It is the energy that is used to create the magical entertainment performance of the Hadra later, which is known as the Jadba or Derdba in the Maghreb countries, and the Zar or Nuba in other regions such as Egypt and Sudan.

The reason is that the research has focused on the anthropological aspect of Sufi practices, its aesthetic and behavioral side, is the possibility of transforming these practices into theatrical per-

formances on Western stage. It can happen with the stylization of it following the stylization of the-
atrical image based on the Hadra, without imitating this ceremony or recreating its details on stage,
as the Tunisian director Fadel Jaziri had done. He had reconfigured the lyrical appearance of the
Hadra and mixed it with different Western musical genres on the stage of the Carthage Theater in
Tunisia. Accordingly, the stylization of the ceremonial aspects of Hadra forces us to limit the study
of its behavioral and performative side without delving into its ideology, as exactly had happened in
the Far East. In particular, the China's experience with the Beijing Opera as its various parts. Initial-
ly it was just isolated individual practices in different regions of China, later they were grouped into
a unified presentation. The Beijing Opera had achieved its current form when the four largest Anhui
troupes performed a "Hui Performance" or what is called in Chinese "Huiju" in 1790 in Beijing.

The features of the anthropological images that we can perceive from the visual side of Hadra,
can be resumed in the general harmony between the physical, the acoustic and the spiritual aspects
of Hadra. This general harmony appears among the practitioners and audience. It is expressed in
their movements, voices, communication and a non-verbal dialogue in the form of a series of visual
images that complement the general ritual. Accordingly, to create the same harmony in a similar
theatrical performance that contains the similar visual characteristics of Hadra, we have to outline
the five most important elements in the formation of the Sufi Hadra ceremony:

The Sufi Hadra atmosphere: the organizers of the Hadra event prepare the general atmosphere
before the visitors' arrival, they involve the music, the lighting (including bon-fires, torches, can-
dles etc.) and specific decorations to create a new virtual world that would help the visitors to get
separated from their private lives and later to get them involved into this local new experience.

The "Ritual" Text: it is the guide or instructions (it is done in a form of a short story – hur-
raffa, "legend") that the visitors must know and must respect through all the steps of the Hadra pro-
cess. It will prepare them to follow the performers-morideen and allow them to achieve the visual
and spiritual harmony in the process of Hadra, as a result.

The Sufi performers-morideen: it is clear for the observers of the Sufi-performers in Hadra,
that they embody very specific and professional qualities in terms of body (its flexibility and adap-
tation features), vocal expression and strong commitment to the purposes of Sufi Hadra. Using their
skills, the morideen lead all the visitors to the visual and spiritual harmony.

The Sufi master-muallem: He is the leader of the group of Sufi performers-morideen, and he
has the general vision of the entire process of the Hadra ceremony. He plays an important role as
the person who maintains the general rhythm of Hadra, and he holds a special contact with the per-
formers-morideen through the different communicative codes (vocal and physical), to make sure
that the general mass of Hadra participants achieves its main objective smoothly.

The Reverse Energy: it is the energy that comes from the visitors ("audience") back to the
morideen, that is expressed in diverse actions and reactions, expected or not expected, during the
Hadra ceremony. It helps the morideen to get more energy to support the continuity of the process
to achieve the level of "the unity of existence".

Conclusion. The Anthropo-Sufi Drama performance can be defined as a set of performative
images composed of physical and vocal anthropological expressions. It is also characterized by a
series of stylized anthropological rituals performed on the stage and they are opened for the audi-
ence's participation. Moreover, it is a set of visual imagery concepts that may be connected to the
concept of visual theatre. They can be accepted as the expressions with semantic or non-semantic
codes, so they may convey some meanings and specific concepts in some cases, as well as they can
remain without special meaning and stay only for the sake of visual dramatic expression. Their pur-
pose to make the meanings vague and incomprehensible for the audience is to force them to com-
municate with the show by employing new mechanisms in order to obtain answers that can satisfy
their curiosity. As for the visual dramatic expressions, they are everything that the performer cre-
ates, whether with prior preparation or in an improvisational way. Regarding the dialogues, they can

be practiced in the Anthro-Sufi Drama performances with the idea that their phonetic aspect may not have the meaning (entirely or partially). It is required for the purpose of negating the Aristotelian plot in the case of literary dialogues.

Finally, the purpose of presenting the Anthro-Sufi Drama as a form that opposes the literature theater and supports the idea of a performance theater is the adoption of the stylization of theatrical image method by employing the anthropological practices from the Oriental heritage and transforming them according to the structure of the Western theatrical stage without canceling the Eastern spirit in it.

As a result, the Anthro-Sufi Drama performance is a theatrical form different from the performances based on the Aristotelian dramatic model. However, there might be some similarities in specific aspects, because the origins of theatrical practices are based on the existential human practice related to human anthropological expression.

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