Performing Self-sacrifice, Despite Everything or Despite Oneself? *Embodying a Necropolitical Space of Appearance in the Tunisian Revolution*

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Real size black and white silhouettes appeared, dispersed in different alleys in Tunis, during the ongoing protests in March 2011. The struggling masses could now tangibly relate to its martyrs, as the existential offer of young carpenters, teachers, street vendors and the unemployed from Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa and Tunis finally gained an appropriate and magnifying presence in public space. Bilel Kaltoun, the artist behind "The Zoo Project" was struck by the story of Mohammed Hanchi, a young man who lost his life from a stray bullet during the revolution. By visually revitalizing Hanchi's presence, Kaltoun vividly reintroduced the contours of sacrifice in the ongoing battle for freedom and dignity. The "Zoo Project" not only illustrated what was in vain being obscured by a defragmenting regime, but made relational the life of the departed, still able to witness

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M. Gržinić, A. Stojnić (eds.), *Shifting Corporealities in Contemporary Performance*, Avant-Gardes in Performance,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78343-7_14

the ongoing struggle. In this chapter, I argue that self-sacrifice, as visualized by the "Zoo Project," has the potential to bring a space into being that one could call a necropolitical space of appearance. Such a space of appearance, brought into being by bodily sacrifice, and thus by the disruption of biopolitical power and the diversion of necropolitical power through a productive and constitutive relation with the departed, carries the potential to rethink and reimagine fundamentally a given body politic. This volatile revolutionary space will be analyzed through the lens of performance, putting forward the wounded body of the muhammishin (the marginalized), as a moving object but also as an agent of power. The revolution and the possible liberation processes it entailed are not only captivating when seen as a collective choreography, but also as a historical volatile space that inspired artists and dancers to engage with. Revolutionary dynamics; indeed, pushed artists, theater makers, freerunners and dancers to invest the streets with nothing more than their moving bodies, disrupting the normative rhythm of daily life. The documentary directed by Maxime Avon, "Ceci est mon corps," is witness to this bodily reinvestment of public space. However, not only individual artists put their body in danger by acting, running, jumping and dancing in the streets. Different collectives such as Fanni Raghman Anni (My Art in Spite of Myself) and Danseurs-Citoyens (Citizen-Dancers) invested their urban environment during the sometimes physical battlefield for a new constitution. My understanding of the performance of self-sacrifice is not only a theoretical one, but is firmly grounded in an ethnographic analysis of these two young artist collectives explicitly engaging in the revolution by performing and dancing in the streets. During the summer of 2014, I followed the work of both collectives. The performances that were the subject of our ethnographic endeavor emerged in the historical battlefield of defragmentation and regional and religious division that came to the fore after the toppling of the autocratic president. Through a bodily engagement in different interventions in public space and in-depth interviews with different members of both collectives, I was able not only to conceptualize what I coin a necropolitical space of appearance, but through this inductive conception to also grasp their political motivations and strategies. After a brief introduction to the work of both collectives, I will analyze how their performances relate to self-sacrifice on the one hand and to the emerging regional and religious defragmentation on the other. The performances of both collectives will be approached as performed necropolitical spaces of appearance that, to some extent, found munitions in their artistic practice

to contribute to the reconfiguration of the space of politics and go to a certain extend beyond the prevailing binary between Modernism and Islamism. Bodily performances—and dance in particular—have the potential to go beyond normative concepts, linguistic forms and discourses, to understand and explain social realities better than any sociological treaty could ever be able to.[1]

After the euphoria that went along with the toppling of the autocrat settled down, students of the Higher Institute of Dramatic and Fine Arts in Tunis were looking for ways to continue their revolutionary engagement. On 25 August 2011 their collective was founded, and their first performance was a fact. With Fanni Raghman Anni these students build up a recognizable corporeal language, putting forward their bodies in public space as mobile sculptures. The collective defines itself as a group of unemployed youngsters marginalized in different artistic domains. Connecting different forms related to visual arts, drama, action-painting and contemporary dance, they nevertheless reject every reference to any art historical or current and repudiate all existing art philosophical concepts or policy categorizations. The collective chose bodily performance over words and discourses to create a free space for critical reflection. They consider their practice as a new way to resist, not as art, and themselves as revolutionary fighters, not as artists. With this powerful paradox they are confusing and creating a distance from the institutionalized spheres of media, art and politics.[2]

Danseurs-Citoyens, the second collective I followed in the summer of 2014, also only emerged after the dictator was ousted, as a collective of engaged dancers who invest the streets with spontaneous unannounced performances. The collective gained popularity with the broader public through a series of four Internet videos entitled "I'll dance, despite everything," that kicked off online in November 2012. The first two videos of the series capture the founders of the collective and their friends dancing in the streets of the capital, on the stairs of the municipal theater, behind a police van or on the main avenue behind military barbed wire, at the Kasbah or close to the Ministry of the Interior. Their movement integrated the codified movements of classical ballet, hip-hop and contempo-

[1] Hafsi Bedhioufi, "Danse des hommes et transgressions sociales," *Cultures et sociétés* (2010), 93–101.

[2] Most of the performances of Fanni Raghman Anni are captured on video, uploaded and available on the internet: https://www.youtube.com/user/seif3644/.

rary dance. In the two last videos of the series, the concept took a participatory turn, integrating more traditional rhythmical elements. They conceive their interventions as participatory and natural expressions, mostly without any mise-en-scène, that use the body as a weapon of resistance and dance to reappropriate the streets and public space.[3] In sum, both Fanni Raghman Anni and Danseurs-Citoyens put their bodies in danger by performing in the streets in a context of regional and religious division. However, as we will see, both thematize sacrifice and deal with the emerging religious division in very different ways.

No More Fear

The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a marginalized young man in the southern interior of Tunisia in December 2010 triggered a diversion of the prevailing fear. The angst towards the authoritarian police state changed into anger and resistance. The masses irrefutably put their bodies in danger, as a radical statement of refusal and suspension of the prevailing political fealty. They stood up to demand dignity and freedom. After the first peaceful protesters were killed, people lost all doubts.

> "No more fear" was a promise made in the very moment when the wall of trepidation broke down. This moment is best illustrated by the iconic picture of an old man sitting on one knee in the middle of the Avenue Bourguiba, with a cigarette in his mouth, holding a baguette in his hand like a gun pointed towards a group of police officers. The most substantial achievement of the revolution was "the obliteration of the fear factor."[4]

The masses lost their fear and put their bodies at the forefront of what would become a liberation struggle. The bodily diversion triggered by sacrifice culminated in a collective choreography of one-hand movement, on the main avenue of the capital. Bodies spontaneously assembled in front of the Ministry of the Interior, the nervous system and central site of regulation of the regime. "Dégage!": this one collective-performative

[3] Most of the performances of Danseurs-Citoyens are captured on video, uploaded and available on the internet https://www.youtube.com/user/bahriben/.

[4] Joseph A. Massad, "Love, Fear, and the Arab Spring," *Public Culture*, Vol. 26, no. 1, Durham: Duke University, 2014, 128.

movement, translated in one performative word, toppled the dictator and planted the seeds of a possible regime change. A symbolic image held by some, depicting the face of Bouazizi pasted on the body of the ousted president, powerfully illustrates the dignifying aspirations of the masses, turning the body politic inside out, placing the excluded at its head.

In the following episode, the marginalized people of the southern interior who travelled with "The Caravan of Liberation" to the center of power, occupied the symbolic Kasbah square until the demand of the complete dissolution of the political structures in power was met. The performed occupation by the interdependent collective of bodies defying the remnants of the beheaded body politic was a key element in the protest that resulted in the consequent shifts of power, the abrogation of the constitution and the partial dissolution of the existing political structures. However, after the first democratic elections in the history of the country and once a new constitution had to be written, the new singular and coherent collective body as quickly defragmented as it was formed, and regional and religious divisions emerged.[5] Gendered, ideological and class tensions came to the surface.[6] A discursive and sometimes physical battle came to the fore to influence the process of revolutionary constitution and state building. To fully understand these dynamics of redivision during this theater of constitution, it is not only necessary to reconsider the sacrificed body as a locus of power and imagination, but also as a battlefield where different forces fight over history and over a common present and possible futures.[7]

A Necropolitical Space of Appearance

> *Mad is the person who burns himself like incense for the sake of this foolish and ignorant people and, my friend, I am that mad person.*[8] (Abu al-Qasim Al-Shabbi)

[5] Nadia Marzouki, "From People to Citizens in Tunisia," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 2011, 259.

[6] Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime, "Introduction," eds. F.S. Hasso and Z. Salime, *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, Duke University Press, 2016.

[7] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, Vol. 9 (2011).

[8] This is a fragment of a letter by Abu al-Qasim Al-Shabbi to his friend. See: Shabbi, *The Complete Work*, Vol. 2, Tunis: al-Dar al-Tunisiyah lil-Nashr, 1984, 254.

Performing a Revolution

Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi was not the first one to set himself ablaze, let alone to push his body to the fore as a weapon of political contention.[9] As the above cited fragment of a letter of the renowned poet Abu al-Qasim Al-Shabbi shows, self-immolation was already commonly propagated as an honorable albeit poetic act of political resistance during the struggle for national liberation. During this struggle, the political productivity of sacrifice strongly shaped an Islamic understanding of Tunisia as a sovereign nation.[10] Since independence, the lively cost of the liberation movement is symbolically remembered through an annual commemoration of the bloodily suppressed uprising of April 9, 1938. Every year on April 9, the Tunisian national flag covers the tombs of the martyrs on the esplanade of the monument of the martyrs of Sejoumi.

Although the process of martyrization Bouazizi underwent, constructing a death narrative to forge a sense of post-revolutionary national

[9] During the last decade of Ben Ali's rule, oppositional forces had regularly recourse to their body as the ultimate weapon of protest against the regime, as countless activists resorted to the method of hunger strike. This wave of enduring hunger strikes not always ended successfully and sometimes even continued until death liberated activists from the prevailing dehumanizing conditions in or outside prison. Not only fatal hunger strikes were common in the period preceding the revolution. Already in 2008, following corrupted recruitment methods by the Gafsa Phosphates Company, inhabitants of the mining center of the Gafsa region massively took the streets during six consecutive months, which resulted in hundreds of imprisonments, dozens of wounded and three dead. Contrary to what is commonly acknowledged, Bouazizi was not even the first fatal self-immolation in the period preceding the Tunisian Revolution. In March 2010, Abdessalem Trimech set himself on fire in front of the building of the general secretary of Monastir after having protested in vain against the repeal of his vending license. The young man was also an itinerant salesman, who was hindered in his work by the municipal administration. While in the hospital, angry locals clashed with the police. Tens of thousands appeared at his funeral that ended in a demonstration of hundreds against the government. Slogans relating to burning political and economic issues were shouted and symbols of authority were attacked by the moving crowd. The protests however only lasted one day. Approximatively a month before Bouazizi, a young man from Metlaoui, Chams Eddine Heni had his turn. After a futile fight with his father over money, for he needed to burn his papers and go to Italy, he kept the honors to himself. Heni was one of the seven young Tunisians who died through self-immolation between Trimech and Bouazizi. Remarkably, already in 2006, Sami Tlili envisioned self-immolation as an ultimate act of resistance, albeit in a fictional way in his short film *Sans Plomb* ("Unloaded") captured the general mood of everyday desperation that caught the youth in the 2000s.

[10] Mary D. Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

collectivity,[11] was certainly ambiguous,[12] it highlights the importance of self-sacrifice in a revolutionary context. Without romanticizing the initial act of self-immolation that triggered the revolution, it can be considered a spontaneous, solitary but political performance.[13] A performance that communicated in the right way, at the right moment, in the right place, the social and cultural conditions that motivated the revolution. Moreover, not only the act of self-immolation, but the revolutionary movement in its totality can be discerned as an embodied performance. In the context of modern theater studies, performance studies broadened the concept of theater to the realm of social science, allowing the application of theater theories to the analysis of political performances.[14] The revolution brought our academic gaze down from the intellectual ivory tower to the corporeal and by doing so rehabilitated the necessary agency to the body and the masses.[15] This humble broadening was productive for the analysis of the Egyptian revolution, but to a lesser extent for the Tunisian one.[16] Through the lens of performance studies, political events such as revolutions do not happen spontaneously. Politics are directed and performed. In this political performance, one can discern two distinguished theaters. First, the theater of legitimacy is a carefully constructed theater built on an architecture and artifice of domination, where scripted roles are played out, reinforcing established hierarchies as a part of the natural order of things. The second one is the theater of self-constitution, the theater of the struggling people in all its diversity, its civil society, its intellectuals and leaders. During a revolution, the resilience of the established repertoire of the theater of legitimacy is being challenged by its diversion, in function of the reordering of power, bringing a new order into being. Although both theaters, certainly the theater of self-constitution, can appear unscripted,

[11] Amira Mittermaier, "Death and Martyrdom in the Arab Uprisings: An Introduction," *Ethnos*, Vol. 80, no. 5 (2015), 583–604.

[12] Joel Rozen, "Civics Lesson: Ambivalence, Contestation, and Curricular Change in Tunisia," *Ethnos*, Vol. 80, no. 5 (2015), 605–629.

[13] Banu Bargu, "Why Did Bouazizi Burn Himself? The Politics of Fate and Fatal Politics," *Constellations*, Vol. 23 (2016), 27–36; See also: Jacob Uzell, "Biopolitics of the Self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi," *e-International Relations*, Vol. 7 (Nov. 2012), www.e-ir.info/2012/11/07/biopolitics-of-the-self-immolation-of-mohamed-bouazizi.

[14] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

[15] Tarik Sabry, "On Historicism, the Aporia of Time and the Arab Revolutions," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, Vol. 5 (2012), 80–85.

[16] Rafika Zahrouni, "The Tunisian Revolution and the Dialectics of Theatre and Reality," *Theater Research International*, Vol. 38 (2013), 148–157.

they have a particular dramaturgy and draw their actions and discourses from a repertoire or contribute to a newly constructed repertoire through a structured script, choreography and mise-en-scène. Symbols are reinvented and embodied for an audience on a certain setting or stage. In this light, a revolution is not something that happens spontaneously, but is also consciously brought into being through performance. Looking at the revolution through the lens of performance helps us grasp the ways in which political power has been bodily constituted, projected, received, accepted, and challenged.[17]

Embodied Performance

What is striking about any revolution when looked at from the perspective of performance is its strong embodiment. The glorification of social media as the *primum movens* of the historical shift Tunisia is going through, however, virtually disembodied our view of a complex reality, allowing too often for the body to be neglected as a mediating instance. Media need bodies in the street as much as the street requires media to exist globally.[18] However, through the over-emphasis of the allegedly central role of social media, the embodiment of the revolution together with the violence and bloody sacrifice that conditioned this revolution is too often neglected. Notwithstanding that the Internet can indisputably be regarded as an important new communication instrument and one of the different public political spheres of dissidence,[19] we need to reconsider the body not only as a site of biopolitical subjectivation, but also as a critical medium of political contestation.[20] The performance of self-sacrifice is a potent form of disruption of the expected cooperation of the body within a biopolitical power constellation or even "an extreme manifestation of radical—biopolitical—insurgency, echoed in the main slogan of the revolution, 'If the people one day decide they want life.'"[21] Within a biopolitical imperative

[17] Charles Tripp, "Performing the Public: Theatres of Power in the Middle East," *Constellations*, Vol. 20, no. 2 (2013), 203–216.

[18] Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

[19] Miriyam Aouragh, "Framing the Internet in the Arab Revolutions: Myth Meets Modernity," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 52, no. 1 (2012), 148–156.

[20] Marwan Kraidy, *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World*, Harvard University Press, 2016.

[21] Marwan Kraidy, "The Revolutionary Body Politic: Preliminary Thoughts on a Neglected Medium in the Arab Uprisings," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, Vol. 5 (2012), 43.

bodies must constantly be managed, governed and controlled, bodies are therefore at the same time the strongest medium to enact protest.[22]

Relying on Foucault, the authoritarian regime in Tunisia can indeed be defined as an intensive biopolitical regime, where disciplinary techniques of surveillance and governmentality are entangled with sovereign logics of exceptionality and decisionism.[23] In this powerful entanglement, different actors get ascribed distinct roles, ensuring every-body involved on all levels of this entanglement to act out their parts, reproducing the neoliberal attitudes, power relations, and hierarchies.[24] Biopower is thus "the kind of power that manages people as bare life and decides which are worth continuing and which deserve death."[25] Since Tunisia signed its "structural adjustment plan" with the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in 1986 and ten years later its "association agreement" with the European Union to assure the installation of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone, Tunisia was frequently endorsed as an advanced and flourishing state on the road to progress and democracy. The script of the world bank and the IMF, staged by the European Union, investors and policymakers contributes to a general belief in the "economic miracle" realized by the Tunisian authorities. Tunisians loyal to the regime were included in the miraculous theater of legitimacy, which guaranteed security, employment and growth. Exclusion, or the mere threat of being cut off from this so-called progress forced people into fealty by pro-active support or habitual obedience. Authority and power were interwoven into every aspect of everyday life and to exceptional instances of the power over life and death. Behind this façade of legitimacy, there was a harsh reality of growing disparity, as an increasing group of people were not only left out from the contemporary material gains of this "economic miracle," but also historically excluded from its cultural and social articulation through the

[22] Ibid.

[23] Béatrice Hibou, *La force de l'obéissance: Économie politique de la répression en Tunisie*, Paris: La Découverte, 2006. See also: Kraidy, *The Naked Blogger of Cairo*; Illan Wall, "A Different Constituent Power: Agamben & Tunisia," *New Critical Legal Thinking: Law and the Political*, Abingdon: Birkbeck Law Press/Routledge, 2012; Hanna Samir Kassab, "The Power of Emotion: Examining the Self-Immolationof Mohamad Bouazizi, the Arab Revolution and International Politics," *Perspectivas Internacionales*, Vol. 8, no.1 (2013), 9–39.

[24] Tripp, "Performing the Public: Theatres of power in the Middle East."

[25] Marwan Kraidy, "The Revolutionary Body Politic: Preliminary Thoughts on a Neglected Medium in the Arab Uprisings," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, Vol. 5 (2012), 43.

secular modernization processes enforced by the respective postcolonial regimes.[26] As we will see, under these circumstances, life is not only subjugated to disciplinary- and biopower but also to the power of death, i.e., necropower.[27]

Emerging from the shadow zone of the hinterlands or "the zone of non-being,"[28] the "muhammishin"[29] appears in full daylight in the center of power. However, used in a derogatory sense, the term can be reclaimed in a Fanonian way to refer to the disenfranchised, who are rightly considered the protagonists of the revolution, as through their (en)countered violence with the security forces, they engaged the rest of society in a revolutionary drive. The marginalized is not a stranger to Tunisian history, he or she is "not *anybody*…but *some-body*" that can historically be perceive as "a body out of place"[30] or as an "unruly body out of order."[31] A body for which its social conditions prevent properly moving and breathing.[32] A claustrophobic body that has a "sense of being trapped, of having no way out."[33] A figuratively amputated, dismembered and castrated body.[34] A body that, when asleep, continuously dreams of jumping, swimming, running, climbing and laughing, but is constantly on its guard and in a continuous state of muscular contraction when awake.[35] An asphyxiated body[36] whose breathing is not only "observed" but "occupied", therefore the breathing of the muhammishin is "combat breathing."[37] Not a well-delineated and defined historical

[26] Fabio Merone and Francesco Cavatorta, "Salafist Movement and Sheikh-ism in the Tunisian Democratic Transition," *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 5 (2013), 1–23.

[27] Achile Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, no. 1, Durham: Duke University, 2003.

[28] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Grove Press, 1952 [2008], 2.

[29] Merone and Cavatorta, "Salafist Movement and Sheikh-ism in the Tunisian Democratic Transition".

[30] Sarah Ahmed, "Embodying Strangers," *Body Matters*, eds. A. Horner and A. Kearne, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, 55.

[31] Hasso and Salime, *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, 12–15.

[32] Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

[33] Michael Marcusa, "Potholes in the Road to Revolution," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 2014, 19.

[34] Hourya Bentouhami, "L'emprise du corps: Fanon à l'aune de la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty," *Cahiers Philosophiques*, Vol. 3 (2014), 34–46.

[35] Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre in: F. Fanon, Œuvres, Paris, La Découverte, 2011.*

[36] Bentouhami, "L'emprise du corps: Fanon à l'aune de la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty."

[37] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, New York: Grove Press, 1967, 65.

and ideological program, but the impossibility of breathing, often referred to in Tunisian as "Makhnouk", becomes the *primum movens* of revolt.

The marginalized lives under the constant threat of exclusion from the protection of the postcolonial regime, a violent exclusion, accompanied by torture, disappearance, exile or social death.[38] Social death can in this light be discerned as the full and public exclusion of healthcare, public services or the labor market,[39] or in a more structural understanding of violence, as a possible "form of death-in-life."[40] A "perpetual lived contradiction"[41] that leaves the muhammishin no choice that can result in a livable life, doomed "to suffer death […] at the heart of life itself."[42] Social death is closely tied to the denial of the fundamental rights over one's own body and the loss of any political status, or simply to the "expulsion from humanity altogether."[43] As argued by Fanon, life is not the "flowering or a development of an essential productiveness" but "a permanent struggle" against an "omnipresent" "ever-menacing" "incomplete" but "close and contagious" death.[44] In sum, for the muhammishin "to live is not to die" and "to exist is to maintain life."[45]

If social death is "the paradox of dying while alive,"[46] it is through the self-honorable impulse to end the paradox of social death that we must understand how the fatal destruction of more than 300 struggling bodies gave life to the revolution. As it is through the unfolding of life that power establishes its dominion, Foucault saw death as a moment to escape power's limit and suicide as: "a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone…had the right to exercise…it testifies to the individual and the private right to die, at the borders and the interstices of power that was exercised over life."[47] This is why for Hibou[48] the only freedom left for the muhammishin to constitute themselves as subjects in the hope to

[38] Hibou, *La force de l'obéissance: Économie politique de la répression en Tunisie.*

[39] Illan Wall, "A Different Constituent Power: Agamben & Tunisia," *New Critical Legal Thinking: Law and the Political*, Abingdon: Birkbeck Law Press/Routledge, 2012.

[40] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 21.

[41] Judith Butler, "Violence, Non-Violence: Sartre on Fanon," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 27, no.1 (2006), 3–24.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Mbembe, "Necropolitics."

[44] Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 128.

[45] Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 671.

[46] Butler, "Violence, Non-Violence: Sartre on Fanon."

[47] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One: An introduction*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

[48] Hibou, *La force de l'obéissance: Économie politique de la répression en Tunisie.*

finally live is the gesture of turning against themselves, to the only thing they have left, to their bodies. Following Murray,[49] the disruption of the sovereign and biopolitical order by self-sacrifice not only destroys the very conditions for biopolitical regulation and control but also produces extra-discursive or even non-discursive effects outside the biopolitical logic of everyday life. Through self-sacrifice, the body is diverted as agent of power and regains a sense of dignity, as the structural violence inflicted on the body is seized, given a new turn and changes direction.[50] The body becomes a weapon of what Banu Bargu[51] aptly names "necro-resistance," that is a weapon that "negates life and turns death against the power regime, engaging in an ultimate refusal of bio sovereign domination" and by doings so "transforms the body from a site of subjection to a site of insurgency, which by self-destruction presents death as a counter conduct to the administration of life." As stated by Paul Gilroy, death can be agency.[52] Self-sacrifice then not only creates the possibility to escape the limits of power, the produced necropolitical effects can open up a space to pave the way for new political subjectivities and relationalities. The subversive power of death paradoxically has the potential to give life to new ways of being and relating, to a liberated and dignified body politics.

For the Sake of the People

Self-sacrifice can thus bring into being a necropolitical space of appearance that carries the potentiality to rethink and reimagine fundamentally the organization and structure of a political system. As stated by Hannah Arendt[53] and critically reworked by Judith Butler, acting and speaking together in the streets can bring into being a space of appearance that opens up time and space outside and against the temporality and established architecture of a given regime, that reconfigures what is regarded public and redefines the space of politics. Analyzing the differences between the private and the public realm, Arendt introduced the concept

[49] Stuart J. Murray, "Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life," *Polygraph*, Vol. 18 (2006), 191–215.

[50] Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*.

[51] Banon Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*, Columbia University Press, 2014, 85.

[52] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, 1993.

[53] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

of a space of appearance as a precondition for political action. Her metaphoric, transposable and volatile understanding of the polis is detached from any geographical border or physical location. A space of appearance comes about where people act and speak together to organize politically. Spaces of appearance are not tied to a location but brought into being by action and speech, and thus must always be recreated anew wherever individuals gather and deliberate together politically. This re-creation occurs where and whenever bodies gather together through the performance of deeds or the articulation of words. A space of appearance depends on political power to exist, but at the same time generates and perpetuates power by its coming into being. It disappears as soon as it arises, whenever the gathered bodies finish to act out and deliberate public matters.

For a space of appearance to come into being, one body must appear to others and vice versa. The notion of mutually constitutive agency, the role of the Other in the constitution of the Self, is central for our understanding what Charles Tripp designates as "the ontology of performance and performative power."[54] By performing in the street, one gains recognition by other bodies and, through this encounter, also self-recognition. This relationality underlines the fundamental ethical component of a space of appearance. The Self does not only appear *to* the Other as the Other appear *to* the Self, the Self also appears *for* the Other as the Other appears *for* the Self. The body establishes a perspective that the Self cannot contain.[55] This mutuality is further reinforced by collectively performing against the dominant power, defining the mutually constituted collective Self against the Other, as ruler and regime.

The act of self-immolation can thus be discerned as a "spectacular putting to death of the self"[56] that in an honorable way stops its "fatal splintering," a way to prevent the virulent shattering of a self "imperilled by shame and fear […] internally split up and at risk of falling into pieces," a Self that "cannot know itself as a I" as "it has not come to know itself as the 'you' addressed by the other."[57] It concerns an alienated Self that is the historical product of a "systematic negation of the other" to whom "any attribute of humanity has been denied."[58] Paradoxically, its destruction

[54] Ibid.
[55] Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."
[56] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 38.
[57] Butler, "Violence, Non-Violence: Sartre on Fanon," 13–17.
[58] Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 625.

through self-immolation opens up a space for the Other that can lead towards "selfhood, agency and even life."[59] The ethical dimension of sacrifice can thus be discerned as a collective healing process of self-creation, as a death *for* the Other. One sacrifices one Self *for* the Other. One puts one Self to death or is willing to offer one's death, that is, one's life *for* the Other, or as stated by Al-Shabbi "for the sake of this foolish and ignorant people." Hence, relying on a particular ethic or even an aesthetic or bodily sensation,[60] a necropolitical space of appearance has the potential, through this collective healing of the Self, to provoke a "deconstitution of the conditions of social death" and a process of collective bodily self-reconstitution.[61] As the Mohammisshin, it literally and metaphorically liberates itself and brings life into being through sacrifice.

A Liberating Choreography

Fanon saw dance as a form of relaxation that relieves the continuous state of muscular contraction and suffocation, closely connected to processes of purification, and through which prevailing violence is canalized, transformed, and if not expelled at least sublimated.[62] Dance is thus a way to temporally and symbolically externalize the death drive or the necropower in a given situation. It is as such a collective attempt to exorcize, liberate and finally explain and understand oneself. Looking at the revolution through the lens of performance and at artistic interventions in public space as necropolitical spaces of appearance, renders visible what Mbembe[63] coins its "oneiric and aesthetic dimension." A dimension that can be understood as "the rise of man to the highest stage of his symbolic faculties, beginning with the whole body, agitated rhythmically in its limbs and reason by singing and dancing—strident laughter and superabundance of life."[64] When closely analyzing the revolution as a liberating choreography of agitated bodies, it becomes discernible that what makes an embodied performance powerful depends on its form. A performance must speak to an audience, demand attention so that people can identify and relate to

[59] Ibid.

[60] Murray, "Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life."

[61] Butler, "Violence, Non-Violence: Sartre on Fanon," 16–19.

[62] Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*.

[63] Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit. Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée*, Paris: La Découverte, 2010, 19 (my translation).

[64] Ibid.

what is being performed.[65] Starting from an ethnographic analysis of Fanni Raghman Anni and Danseurs-Citoyens, I will consider the embodiment of one of the main political tensions that emerged during the theater of self-constitution. Through their bodily performances, both collectives challenged the violence enacted by Islamist activists during this revolutionary period, albeit both in very different ways. An in-depth qualitative comparison of both collectives will hopefully provide insights that can go beyond the re-emerging antagonism between Islamism and Modernism in our understanding of what is at stake in the Tunisian revolution.

Inspired by Sacrifice: Fanni Raghman Anni

For Fanni Raghman Anni bodily sacrifice is a thematic element in nearly all their performances. We will, however, focus only on three of them: "JaHna," "ShaHid est Messkien (Khawana)" and "W.C." "JaHna," the first defiant performance of Fanni Raghman Anni opens with five bare bodies covered only with white paint and a simple loincloth, chained by their neck and wrists, strolling in the streets. The five aligned performers represent resurrected martyrs and the white paint over their bodies symbolizes their innocence as witnesses of the ongoing revolution. Taking a close look at the situation on the ground after the expulsion of the authoritarian president, the five martyrs wonder if their sacrifice was really worth it. Even though the dictator might have been ousted, their brothers and sisters still seem to be chained and dominated. A bloody fight erupts and red paint flies through the air, not only hitting their white bare bodies, but also bystanders captured by the spontaneous performance. At the end of the performance, the resurrected martyrs lay on the streets, killed for a second time. The title of the performance "JaHna" is a portmanteau of the words "JHanam" (Hell) and "Janna" (Heaven) and reminds us of the paradoxical imbrication of freedom and death.

In the second performance "ShaHid est Messkien (Khawana)" (The martyr is poor (traitors)), Fanni Raghman Anni put forward the still unresolved responsibility of the killing of the martyrs of the revolution through a poetic and expressive concatenation of Tunisian proverbs. The collective was invited on National Television for the show: "Nawartuna" (You make us proud) to perform their poem. But at the last minute they were not allowed on the set, probably (not officially) because of the text on

[65] Tripp, "Performing the Public: Theaters of Power in the Middle East."

their T-shirts, referring to the title of the performance. Officially it was said that their CD malfunctioned. After the show, when they asked for an official explanation, a heavy fight erupted with the production crew. After this incident, they were invited to the private Ettounsiya television station to explain to the spectators about the censorship they underwent on national television, to freely perform and state to their audience that the martyrs are muhammishin, and that not acting against their continuous marginalization would thus be an act of treason.

In the third and last performance "W.C." (Water Cycle), colors seem to have died. It opens with five bodies dressed in black robes with pointed hats, followed by a sixth one in a white robe waving a colorless Tunisian flag, marching slowly in the direction of a body covered in white cloth lying motionless on a wooden construction in the streets. The sound of the performer's kabkabs, the traditional wooden bathing shoes, breaks the self-imposed silence before somebody screams: "Allah-o Akbar!" The body is lifted by the men in black, elevating the situation to a symbolic funeral. Out of the motionless body a blue clown drenched in clay emerges, aggressively threatening bystanders. Power is resurrected as the clown pulls apart a baby doll with his teeth and steps out of the wooden construction to undress his carriers and smear their bodies with blue clay. In sum, the resurrection of a new tyrant out of the ashes of the sacrificed martyr during the performed colorless national funeral rite reminds the spectator, as often stated by the Egyptian poet Ahmed Fouad Najem, that revolutions tend to devour their children.

The Body as Mediator: Danseurs-Citoyens

Whereas bodily sacrifice is a central element in nearly all of the performances of Fanni Raghman Anni, it is only explicitly present in some of the performances of Danseurs-Citoyens, and this only since the murder of the political opposition figure, Chokri Belaïd.[66] The collective was certainly encouraged by Besma Khalfaoui, Belaïd's widow, when she publicly underlined the necessity to support the youth who dance in the street as a form

[66] Chokri Belaïd was a charismatic and eloquent lawyer and leftist opposition leader under the Ben Ali regime and even more so during the revolution. On February 6, 2013, however, he was fatally shot outside his house in El Menzah, Tunis. His funeral gained national proportions. It was held on February 8 at the Jellaz cemetery and was attended by more than a million people, provoking clashes between police and protesters. This political murder provoked the most severe political crisis since the start of the revolution.

of resistance in a context of national division, in an op-ed for the *Tribune de Genève*.[67] Dozens of online videos have reported the violent reactions of security forces against the impressive but peaceful crowd of millions present at the funeral of Belaïd. One of them, however, was unique, signed by Danseurs-Citoyens. In "Feel it do it," a girl and a boy rise from an anonymous crowd mobilized in the aftermath of the first targeted political murder of the revolution, and perform impromptu dancing in the street indifferent to the tear gas directed at them.[68]

In another video, Danseurs-Citoyens" explicitly pay tribute to Chokri Belaïd. During a manifestation in remembrance of Chokri Belaïd in March 2013, five bodies awoke from the ground, bodily paying tribute to the legacy of the lawyer and political leader and commemorating his unfortunate political death. Surrounded by a circle of spectators, they slowly moved close to the ground, accompanied in the background by the revolutionary poetic words of the late Sghaïer Ouled Ahmed.

In "Resisdance," one of the few choreographies of Danseurs-Citoyens that follows a narrative structure, the sacrifice of one of the enchained dancers plays a pivotal role in the performed historical dynamic of the Tunisian revolution. After the dancers collectively bury and mourn the martyr, the power relation in the performance starts to shift. The enchained dancers regain their power and overthrow their master. The body and its potential suffering and destruction is put forward as a mediator for dignity and an invitation for unity and liberation.

Finally, in the performance "Not to Forget," a dozen young b-boys (breakdancing youth) with a subtle black line dividing their face in two are transporting a wooden box in a precise but open classic contemporary choreography, along the Paris Avenue in the capital of Tunis. Whereas the case was initially the main object shaping their movements, along the way the performers spontaneously interact with the surrounding street furniture, such as a trash bin, a chair of a fortuitous street vendor, the bumper of a passing car. The group then suddenly aligns and rolls on the ground, blocking the metro line in an apparent collective suicidal move. When the collective stands up again and arrives at the end of the avenue, the only women of the group have the honor of opening the box. The choreography ends when the national flag is collectively pulled out of the

[67] Besma Khalfaoui, "Op-ed," *Tribune de Genève* (Mar. 1, 2013).

[68] The video "Feel it do it" was later put offline, but integrated in the edited version "We are just fucking angry! A.C.A.B." This last video has unfortunately also been put offline.

so-far mysterious small trunk. The performance was intended as a tribute to the sacrifice of the soldier martyrs of the national army.[69] The black line dividing the dancing bodies in this last performance is a part of the artistic project by Mouna Jmal Siala. Driven by her fear of what she coins as an emerging "obscurantism" that would "weaken, divide, destabilize the nation and lead to barbarism," she collected profile pictures divided with a black marker of hundreds of different Tunisians she encountered on her way to say "No to division!"[70]

Defragmentation and Division

In the direct aftermath of the ousting of the president, a "Caravan of liberation" marched from different marginalized regions to the center of the capital to demand the total dissolution of the authoritarian power structures still in place. After the first occupation of the Kasbah square, a "Caravan of thanks," that is a four-kilometer-long convoy travelled back from the capital to the symbolic region of Sidi Bousid, to praise the interior regions for their sacrifice. This process of mutual regional reconciliation left an important mark on the minds of those who fought against the re-emerging regional division in the constitutional phase of the revolution. Transregional solidarity was also an essential aspect of the artistic practice of both collectives that explicitly engaged in the marginalized interior and rural areas of Tunisia, bridging the tenacious regional breach.

Through the explosion of the energy of the oppressed youth, Fanni Raghman Anni attacks different cities. They come out in the street and challenge the rhythm of everyday life and its cultural norms anchored in entrenched traditions. The performances of Fanni Raghman Anni were repeated several times in different cities over Tunisia, from Bizerte to Sousse over Gafsa, Nabeul but also in Kef, Tozeur, Kasserine, and even in a small village next to Mount Chaambi.

With the aforementioned performance "Resisdanse," Danseurs-Citoyens engage with a tour in the marginalized interior and rural areas of

[69] In the period following Chokri Belaïd's assassination, Tunisia witnessed an escalation of deadly fights between its military and Jihadi cells (Okba ibn Nafaâ, the al-Qaida cell in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar al-Sharia) hiding on Mount Chaambi in Kasserine near the Tunisia–Algeria border and in Jebel Jelloud in the governorate of Ben Arous.

[70] Jmal Siala, M. 2014, *Non à la division: la photographie citoyenne*, Tunis: Sa'al Editions.

Tunisia, in the souks, markets and medinas of Gafsa, Elkar, Metlaoui, Sbeilta, Mornaguia, Hazaira, Cité Ezzouhour, Meknassi and Kasserine. Their outspoken prejudices about the civilized urban Tunisia versus the rural backward mentality in the villages are severely crushed. They encountered a crowd willing to listen and warmly showing their appreciation. The collective then understood the creative and participatory potential of the Tunisian people, as well as the true reality, not the one constructed by the media who facilitate the regional split.

Although both collectives were deeply affected by a physical attack committed by Islamist activists, each collective developed its own way to deal with the religious rift they were violently confronted with. The viral video series "I'll dance despite everything" that laid the foundation of Danseurs-Citoyens was initially triggered and inspired by an incident during the event "The People Demand Theater" in the course of the World Theater Day in the spring of 2012 in Tunis. On 25 March 2012, the Association for Drama Arts held a celebration. Classic dramatic theater in Renaissance costumes was playing on the stairs of the municipal theater. The same day, Islamists demonstrated for the National Day of the Holy Quran, which was instituted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs after several cases of Koran desecration had caused commotion. The Ministry of Interior gave permits for both demonstrations to be held at the same time. The theater event had to be held between the Municipal Theater and Hotel Africia in Tunis, while the Koran event took place between January 14 Square and the TGM metro station, at the other end of the Bourguiba Avenue. The Islamist protesters however came closer to the theater and several activists attacked the event. They destroyed the first stage, took possession of the second one and chanted back: "The people demand a new caliphate!" They attacked the artists, until the police came and asked the artists to withdraw into the Municipal Theater. There the actors decided to continue their performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, dressed in national white and red. Around the performance, people held the Tunisian flag and banners saying: "Give me theater, and I give you a great people" or "Art is a form of resistance."

The Islamist activists, pushed back by the police, started throwing eggs, mugs and bottles at the artists. In reaction to the violence, a group of artists waved the Tunisian flag and sang the national hymn several times. When tempers flared up, the police interrupted the performance, pushing the actors back into the theater for their security. The activists rushed to

the steps of the theater and knocked heavily on its doors.[71] Artists performing in front of the Municipal Theater were aggressively pushed back by Islamist activists who shouted they had to go back inside their theaters, as the street did not belong to artists anymore.

Inspired by the Deleuzian words of Stéphane Hessel "To create is to resist," Danseurs-Citoyens regards dance as a duty to pass on hope. They use their bodies as weapons of resistance, defending life against obscurantism and retrograde forces that propagate death. Danseurs-Citoyens wants to act against division and their purpose is precisely coexistence. Since they were pushed back between the four walls of the theater during "The People Demand Theater" event they conceived their performance as a spontaneous reaction to a perceived Islamization of public space and reclaimed the streets against obscurantism. They are at war over public space and art, and dance is their weapon. Not only in real life but also on the Internet, they lead a cyberwarfare. Driven by fear, they are fighting with their love for life, against death propagated by Islamists. At the same time, they do not simply want to be a reaction to this perceived Islamization. By combining traditional and more contemporary music and dance, Danseurs-Citoyens leaves an open space at the end of every performance for passers-by to abandon their role as spectators, to become citizen-dancers themselves, and escape the tense political and religious insecurity and pessimism. Using traditional dance, they want to bring the people back to their essential identity of being Tunisian, and the joy of living the good life, despite everything.

Although the founding members of Fanni Raghman Anni were also present during the struggle in the middle of the event "The People Demand Theater," they were not known to the general public until a performance in El Kef was violently interrupted by Islamist activists. After an arson attack on the local theater of El Kef in July 2013, Fanni Raghman Anni showed their solidarity by travelling south to perform "Guetlouh" (They Killed Him), a tribute to the assassinated opposition leader Chokri Belaïd. The collective took the risk even though they were aware of a pos-

[71] Following this symbolic incident, the Interior Ministry banned all demonstrations on the Bourguiba Avenue. During the following national day of the martyrs, people nevertheless tried to occupy the Avenue, but clashes erupted with the police. In the following period, the police found inventive ways to prevent people to gather on the stairs of the Municipal Theater, they for instance occupied it themselves or sometimes allegedly covered the stairs with oil. Finally, before the ban was repealed, a Facebook event gathered hundreds of youngsters for a read-in on the Avenue.

sible confrontation as the central market downtown they chose to perform at is known for its high concentration of Islamist activists. Nineteen bare bodies performing in the streets only covered with a loincloth reminded some of a pilgrimage and considered it a blasphemy. The presence of a banner in the background of the performance with a portrait asking, "Who killed Chokri Belaïd?" worked like a red rag to a bull. The actors were verbally and physically attacked (with glass and stones) and even received death threats. They again had to take refuge in a theater. This event was covered strongly by the media; not because artists were attacked by Islamists, but because the police arrested the artists and not their attackers.[72] The incident took place in a period when the government was accused by the members of the opposition and human rights groups of seeking to curb civil liberties, when journalists and artists questioned the independence of the judiciary system and condemned the frequent attacks by the police on the freedom of (artistic) expression.

Despite the violent event and the ensuing court case Fanni Raghman Anni choose to stay on view, to resonate with what is living in society and to continue overcoming exclusion by explicitly choosing the side of the oppressed. Even after the attack by Islamist activist in El Kef, they do not consider Islamist activists as their enemies, but as an essential part of their audience and therefore as a part of their performance, as they are conceived as a virus to contaminate and include others. Everyone who even

[72] After having taken refuge in the theater, they called the police. Nevertheless, the police did not intervene, but arrested the artists. The attackers followed them to the police station to file in a complaint. They denounced the show as indecent as the actors were partially naked. In the official complaint filed at the police station, the attackers do not mention any religious motivations. Finally, the artists and not the attackers had to appear in front of the public prosecutor. They were expected to be charged with indecent behavior/public indecency and potential violation of public morals. The collective called on social media for a rally in front of the court of El Kef to defend their (artistic) freedom. Leila Toubel, artistic director of theater El Hamra, formed, together with Azedine Ganoune (El Hamra), Fadel Jaibi (Familia), Raje Benhammar (Mad'art), members of Tahadi (defiance), the El Massar party, and others, a support committee to demand a fair trial and to defend freedom of expression. The general prosecutor questioned the actors charged with "public indecency," a charge that can potentially carry a sentence of up to six months in prison. They were accused of throwing bags of dirt and of being naked in only pilgrim's clothes, which the locals saw as a provocation. The collective denied and countered the accusation. After further police investigation, the tribunal of El Kef finally dismissed the actors. While leaving the court, the accused members of the collective were welcomed by dozens of people chanting the national anthem and repeating their demands with the slogan "El Fan, Horyya, Karama Watania" (Art, Freedom and Dignity for the nation).

just pronounces the name of the collective, be it in a critical or aggressive way, will through the enunciation of its possessive form, appropriate art, despite him/herself.

Their performances take possession of their audience, not only through the pronunciation of the collective's name but through the formal explosion of colors that accompanies each performance, and contaminates and leaves indelible traces not only on their audience, but also on the surrounding private and public property. Some passers-by might hit back with paint, sometimes with words of outrage, empty bottles or stones. Others are moved by and move along with, interact and become part of the performance, despite themselves. Spontaneously performing in the street is an unconditional invitation to others. The performance then becomes a reflection on the collective experience elaborated through an open and unpredictable interaction, without any salute or applause. Standing face to face, staring their audience in the eyes, they provoke, shock and break the prevailing passivity. The performances are radically open and free, without a fixed outcome. Fanni Raghman Anni is fully prepared to sacrifice itself collectively to liberate the way for others. This radical devotion pushes its audience to pose unexpected questions and reconsider themselves and their relation to what and whom they see and experience. The spectator might be disappointed today, tomorrow he will question, and finally he will revolt again too.

Conclusion

Looking at political reality through the lens of performance, as a tense entangelement of a theater of self-constitution and a theater of legitimacy, putting forward the body as a central unit of analysis and aesthetics as an empowering condition, precisely sharpened existing political insights in the Tunisian revolution. After the wall of fear broke down and the autocrats fled the uprising, and after the demand for the dissolution of the power structures in place through the occupation of public space was partially met, the masses left the streets, or at least only sporadically reinvested the streets for punctual mobilizations. While generational, regional and religious divisions regained the surface, aesthetic performances dealing with bodily sacrifice symbolically blew life into a collapsing revolutionary space. Both collectives researched in this paper succeed, albeit symbolically, to make necropolitical spaces of appearance come into being in a context of political division.

Where Fanni Raghman Anni is not only inspired by self-sacrifice, but thematizes it and elaborates a new corporeal language based on its aesthetics, Danseurs-Citoyens reproduce rigid codified corporeal movements such as ballet, breakdance or contemporary dance, and only discursively relates to self-sacrifice. Both practices also enact the youthful potentiality to put the Tunisian people in its diversity back in the center of attention and bridge the generational gap, as was the case in the heyday of the revolution. Also, the regional divide is actively contested and overcome by prioritizing the marginalized interior south of the country over the wealthy coastal regions and capital center.

The obvious point of dissonance between the two collectives lies in the religious division. While both collective were physically attacked by Islamist activists, Danseurs-Citoyens anxiously reinforces the divisions which they are trying to fight by defending life over death and obscurantism, by reducing and expelling religious activism to the sphere of death. Despite everything, the life of the "muhammishin" is again expelled, doomed to remain the outsider and to continue his or her struggle against an omnipresent death. Its body is claustrophobically hemmed in once more, suffocating with the prevailing pressure of social death. On the other hand, Fanni Raghman Anni through their viral and inclusive embodied practice, not only disrupt prevailing biopolitical power, but also divert necropower and transform their bodies into weapons of necroresistance, despite themselves. By persevering in a continuous reimagination of death in their embodied theater of self-constitution, they produce extra-discursive effects outside prevailing biopolitics: to prevent the muhammishin losing the struggle against an omnipresent death; to prevent the Haraga (the contemporary North African nomads) from burning their papers and exsisting border and risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean; to prevent the Jihadi, the radicalized youth, from engaging in a Manichean bloody war; to prevent the Bouazizi, the forlorn ones, from committing suicide and self-immolation. Life cannot be defended against death or obscurantism but only through its total imbrication with freedom and death. A contentious choreography with a collective dramaturgy that united all the people at the same moment in the same space to contest the biopolitical power of the ancient regime could only come into being through self-sacrifice. Not only the collective will to get rid of the dictator constituted the people; the space of appearance that came into being through the collective distress about the destruction of human life, the martyrs of the revolution, mutually constituted the people in all its diversity. The sacrifice of more than 300 unruly

bodies entailed a space where a fundamentally ethical redefinition of the ontological relation between the Self and the Other could take place. Everybody is included by the universalizing power of death in the center of the struggle for a better life. This fundamentally ethical ontological redefinition can plant the seeds for a possible regime change, redefining and restructuring the space of politics, only in relation to the sacrifice of life and the suspension of the paradox of social death.

Every time a necropolitical space of appearance comes into being, it provokes a possible deconstitution of the conditions of social death and a process of collective bodily self-reconstitution, as it is through sacrifice that the muhammishin liberate themselves and paradoxically bring life for the other into being. Citing the poem "Facing the night" of the Haitian writer René Depestre, Frantz Fanon reminds us that it is impossible to engage in art that truly shakes and awakes the people without the "fundamental concession" of "flesh and blood" of "oneself to others" so central in every liberation struggle.[73] These concessions can be regarded as the precondition for any artwork to avoid reproducing prevailing colonial stereotypes, alienated romanticized or exotic images, and to be able to attain the real demystified authentic and present "boiling place where knowledge is prefigured."[74] This "renewed gesture"[75] can then finally relax the prevailing muscular tensions, enhance and dignify the respiratory rhythms, and nourish a take-off of the imagination.

[73] Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 604.
[74] Ibid., 603.
[75] Ibid., 616–617.