

AND...

PRESS CONFERENCE with Tamara Al Saadi,
July 18 at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- September 27 and 28, 2019, Théâtre Al Madina, Beirut (Lebanon), Lebanon's European Theatre Festival
- October 3, Le Canal Théâtre du Pays de Redon
- October 11, Espace 1789, Saint-Ouen
- October 17 to 19, T2G - Théâtre de Gennevilliers Centre dramatique national
- November 18 and 19, Théâtre Sorano, Toulouse
- November 23 to 27, Le Centquatre-Paris
- December 3 to 6, La Manufacture Centre dramatique national Nancy-Lorraine
- December 13, Espace culturel André Malraux, Le Kremlin-Bicêtre
- January 7 to 10, 2020, La Comédie de Saint-Etienne
- January 21 to 23, La Comédie de Reims
- January 28, Le Vivat, Armentières
- January 31, Théâtre de Chelles
- March 10, POC Pôle culturel d'Alfortville
- March 13, Châteauvallon Scène nationale, Ollioules
- May 14, CIRC Pôle national cirque, Auch

PLACE

Yasmine has forgotten how to read, because her mother tongue is disappearing. A political play based on the author's personal experience, *Place* explores the mental space of a young woman who decides to wade into the story of her family. Torn between her mother's culture, an Iraq which no longer exists, and her present as a "perfectly" assimilated Frenchwoman, Yasmine splits into two. The pared-down scenography—a handful of sand, a few chairs, and a microphone—invites the audience to enter a zone of suspended time, in a bombed out classroom, on the benches of the foreigners department of the police headquarters... Within those memories which resurface by themselves or which she calls on, author and director Tamara Al Saadi looks for words and for history, in order to express her multifaceted identity, those sides of her that have been found again, imposed on her, or lost... "*Place is the story of a quest, of a moment where you can give a name to what you belong to, what you see yourself in, to the point of hurting yourself, of turning mechanisms of domination against yourself.*"

TAMARA AL SAADI

Giving oneself over to words and theatre or to political struggles?

Tamara Al Saadi chooses both. As a French-Iraqi writer, actress, and director, her work is based as much on research in social sciences as on dramatic creation. A graduate of the school of political arts of Sciences Po Paris, she founded the company La Base with Mayya Sanbar and leads theatre workshops in secondary schools in Seine-Saint-Denis, in which she questions the process through which immigration builds community identity. She also co-founded MYST, an interdisciplinary collective whose research focuses on borders in modern conflicts, and is a member of the artistic ensemble of the Comédie de Saint-Etienne. In 2018, she was awarded the prix des Lycéens and the prix du Jury at the Festival Impatience

Place by Tamara Al Saadi, published by éditions Koinè,
is on sale at the bookshop in the Maison Jean Vilar.

73rd
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,700 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tireless and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

FESTIVAL-AVIGNON.COM



#FDA19



FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 73RD

JULY 19 20 21
GYMNASSE DU LYCÉE SAINT-JOSEPH

INTERVIEW WITH TAMARA AL SAADI

Should we see *Place* as an autobiographical play?

Tamara Al Saadi : It all started with a recurring dream I had: I would wake up feeling I'd forgotten words in Arabic. It's strange to be woken up by this feeling of having forgotten something. This loss of words led to larger questions: how did I come to forget my mother tongue, and above all why would I feel so distressed about it? I was ashamed to have forgotten common words, everyday words, in Arabic. Then I remembered memories from school that had to do with the shame of speaking Arabic, and I started looking into what's called assimilation mechanisms. I was very young when I came to France, I didn't speak French at all. I found myself dropped in school, where I learnt as best as I could, and that's when I felt that shame of being a foreigner. We came to France by necessity: while we were visiting family in Europe, the first Gulf War broke out and borders closed, preventing us from going home. We became involuntary exiles. It wasn't our choice. Nor was it a long-term solution. My parents thought it would remain a stage in our lives, not that we would settle here. We lived in a bubble, locked as a family within a strange time-space... Society has a deep influence on people, like a machine that leads to the homogenisation of thought, of imagination, of how you see yourself. In France, we speak way more often of assimilation than of integration. There's a big debate going on about those two words. Assimilation forces you to give up your former cultural background: it's a renunciation for the choice you're making. Integration, on the contrary, is like an addition of cultures, a superposition or reinvention. By creating *Place* based on this feeling of forgetting my mother tongue, I wanted to delve into my own history to find the places where negotiations took place between the inside of the family unit and the outside, like school, the social environment, or everyday racism, both omnipresent and elusive... There's no longer any need for someone else to scold you for what you are, because you do it yourself. Even if the starting point is autobiographical, with this story I try to move from personal questions to much bigger political and social questions.

Your personal history is steeped in a strong cultural duality the audience can see in *Place*.

The first draft of the text, which became the prologue, explores the question of growing up without anyone transmitting you things. The twin figures of the two Yasmynes were born of this reflection; they are two versions of the same woman who coexist, one of them French, the other Iraqi. It all came together as a sort of puzzle, through the association of rewritten memories and real situations: dealing with the administration, having dinner with my family, learning to conjugate "avoir," even fantasy scenes... Each event slowly found its place in the narrative, and the text as you see it today took three years to appear. My life as a young adult was also affected by that duality.

I spent a long time moving between two fundamental preoccupations: I started doing theatre very young, but I was also very active politically. For a long time, I wondered which path I should choose: to "convince" or to "persuade?" I studied both history and political science at university, before joining a drama school. Both sides constantly echoed each other. Eventually, I left to learn more about my parents' culture, in 2016 I went to Baghdad to find the house I lived in as a child. It's only when I got back to France that I was able to finish *Place*. I enrolled into Sciences Po Paris for a MRes in art and politics, then I co-founded MYST, a research and creation collective focusing on borders in contemporary conflicts. Along with Mayya Sanbar, I led workshops in schools, using theatre to explore the question of how immigrants construct their identity. It's all obviously interconnected.

How did the text survive "encountering" the stage for the first time?

What I like most about directing is working with the actors. Everything revolves around directing actors and about how we handle the different situations. Most of the characters I wrote for actors I already knew and loved. I love providing them with a space where they can be exalted, and to think about the situations and the tensions they create on the stage. And what I like best are the silences. Because it's within silence that situations appear, when the silence is like a scream. As for the scenography, I have a preference for stripped down spaces, for the ingenuity of a single set/object that can then be used in as many different ways as you want. For *Place*, we have 40 chairs on the stage. The scenography is extremely simple and can evoke many different situations: a classroom, the waiting room in a French administrative building, a bombing... The costumes can also mean a lot of different things; since the story often takes place within the context of the family, the father and mother wear pyjamas, but the silhouette of the mother can quickly become that of a Greek tragedian, the father can be reminiscent of Saddam Hussein in his uniform, etc. *Place* throws the audience in a permanent back-and-forth between Yasmine 1's Iraqi family and the outside world. The family is made up of five people who barely speak to each other but are linked together by the shared experience of their uprooting. *Place* is about this silent transmission of pain within the context of the family, and it looks at it from the point of view of a child. Yasmine 2, the French version, faces Yasmine 1, who slowly withdraws from the world in which Yasmine 2 moves and which she assimilates. The space that is visible on the stage is actually Yasmine's mental space. That's why the five characters are always onstage, in the background of memories or of the various events that start to happen. The coexistence of those events manifests itself in the superposition of scenes, of presences, of meanings.

—

Interview conducted by Moïra Daland
and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach