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Published: 5/01/2014 01:33 PM | Updated: 7/01/2014 07:48 AM

## "I couldn't say no"

A theoretical analysis of Michel Samaha's testimonies



Because he was "appeased and embarrassed," Michel Samaha was prepared to kill hundreds of Lebanese people. These were the words former Lebanese Minister and Member of Parliament Michel Samaha used in his testimonies to explain why he agreed to transport explosives from Syria into Lebanon. Samaha also implied that he exercised no free will.

Based on these proceedings, artist and writer Chaza Charafeddine and fellow writer Roger Outa presented a reading performance entitled "The Unease of Michel Samaha: An Intervention in a Court Case." The reading, which took place in Beirut Saturday evening, addressed the idea of embarrassment in crime and questioned whether it eliminates responsibility in committing criminal acts.

In August 2012, Michel Samaha was arrested on the charge of preparing for a terrorist attack in northern Lebanon. Based on evidence of his involvement, Samaha admitted to the transporting of explosives in his car from Damascus to Beirut and to liaising with Miled Kfoury, who was supposed to plant the bombs in Tripoli and in Akkar.

According to Charafeddine, during interrogations Samaha insisted that he was not the mastermind behind the terror attack and that he was approached by both Miled Kfoury (later proved to be a double agent) and Major General Ali Mamlouk (the head of the Syrian National Security Bureau) simultaneously for the matter and was therefore a mere mediator between the two.

"When he was asked why he agreed to work with Kfoury," said Charafeddine, "[Samaha] replied, 'for the sake of appeasement.' And when he was asked why he didn't turn down Ali Mamlouk's request to transport the explosives, he replied, 'I was embarrassed and I couldn't say no, so I accepted' so as to not hold himself responsible."

The purpose of the reading, the artist explained, is not to hold Samaha legally accountable for the crime; in her opinion, Samaha has already been convicted and is therefore guilty. However, the intent of the work is to understand and analyze the concept of appeasement and embarrassment when one commits a crime.

The performance was presented in three parts. In the first, Charafeddine recounted Michel Samaha's story based on the testimonies he provided. "And because his testimonies were contradictory," Charafeddine told NOW, "I insisted on building the context of the story around them."

"It is a narrative," she said, "some real life events and others imaginary, weaved together to tell Samaha's story using his own voice through the relaying of events and linking them to the real testimonies."

The second part of the intervention was a theoretical one. Writer Roger Outa analyzed the concept of embarrassment and appeasement by reflecting on the reasoning behind them and compared them to other psychological states of mind, such as shame and guilt.

According to Outa, when an individual feels shame for committing a crime, it implies that he or she may be functioning within a collective whole or a group, and thus may have no personal say in events and decisions. When one feels guilt, he suggested, the individual has achieved independence and thus holds oneself fully accountable. However, when one is embarrassed and does not feel responsible, the individual must be functioning between the two ends, between working within a group and achieving complete independence.

"Embarrassment prevents the person from leaving his group, and at the same time, it

prevents him from achieving complete independence and individuality," Outa said. "This matter is evident in Samaha's political history."

"When he joined the Lebanese Kataeb Party, he sided with Maurice Gemayel's group which was considered a group of leftists functioning within a right-wing party... And during the Lebanese Civil War, he was a mediator between the party and the Syrian regime... and last but not least, he was mediator between Milad Kfoury and Major General Mamlouk," said Outa.

In a PowerPoint presentation, Outa displayed some of Samaha's quotes that demonstrate how he relies on others to make decisions for him.

"Although Samaha admits saying that he suspected Kfoury was trying to implicate him, he went along with it, and although he agreed that the terror act will lead to many deaths, he justifies it, saying, 'I wanted to shock the Lebanese government so that it will take serious measures to control the border and dissociate from Syrian affairs.'"

As the performance approached its end, ahead of the discussion that constituted the third part of the show, the presenters asked whether Samaha's embarrassment is a valid enough reason to eliminate his responsibility for the crime given that it is proven to separate the self from its free will.

"Samaha chose the excuse of 'embarrassment' knowing the toll it has on a society like ours, a society that is divided and because of embarrassment, its members find themselves committing unacceptable acts in order to reconcile between conflicting parties. In such a manner, the Lebanese system overall will be held accountable. Samaha is guilty for merely choosing an excuse that holds the Lebanese overall accountable, if not legally, then theoretically."