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At the [Sonic Acts Academy 2018](#)

Under the Sign of the Test, artist talk with Rana Hamadeh

Rana Hamadeh speaks of *Gregson v. Gilbert* (1783) a story at the center of the opera project that she has been working on and that is ongoing for the coming 2 years.

Why this case is a benchmark case, particularly for the abolition of slavery, is because the insurance company was the side that won the case. However, they did not win because the jury found the killings murder. The jury did not find that it was an absolute necessity to kill the of multiple hundreds of people (those deemed cargo), because it had rained and there was some water left.

So, Hamadeh dares to argue that the abolition of slavery, on a legal level, rests on a technical legal error that allowed the insurance company to win the case.

Her opera obliquely discusses the massacre through the voice of the killer and the legal system that had been legitimating these killings. We assume that there is a voice of the murdered, but we have not heard it; we have no evidence left of it. Behind the voice of the murderer is the ana-voice of those murdered, who can only be understood as a fragmented sonic substance that hovers around the narrating voice, both because and also in spite of that dominant voice.

The testimony lying under the archive is under erasure, a lost archive of erasure. The archive of erasure has been erased, there is a knowledge, but it still lies under, also erased.

What if this document is the first document in all history, in the sense that there is no documental voice that is not constituted through the voice of a killer? There is no legal subject that is constituted outside the voice of the

murderer? There is no citizen that is constituted outside the voice of the murderer?

What does it require to constitute oneself or to emerge as a testimonial subject, not only outside the courts of law, but even further, in place of the legal subject? Ditching subjecthood?

She created an organ book, inspired by the poetic work of poet NourbeSe Philip. During the performance, the work, playing through the 6 six rooms, is interrupted by a telephone ringing, and the voice of the person on the telephone is fragmented through the phone.

There is a great distinction between testimony (rational discourse) and the testimonial and the emergence of the testimonial subject. Rana is not interested in speaking to the ear of the law, but in listening to the irrational, the unspeakable, unmarked and unmarkable. How can that become an ontology that organises us around the notion and question of citizenship and the legal subject?

"The 10 murders of Josephine" is an entire economy of labor and research. There are many people involved in laying down the theoretical groundwork of the project as well as technicians, network designers, programmers, musicians.

Thinking "justice" through the modality of measure, measuring the extent to which one can access the dramatic means of representation, theatre, and, by extension, to the workings of injustice (and its institutions).

Context of "testimonial subject": this idea is rooted in the cultural situation in Lebanon. In her reading, Shia and Shiaism is based very much today on a returning to the unjust killing of Imam Husain. The killing of Husain is the erasure of the oppressed through language and then once again gaining access through language and means of representation and denial.

Every year there is a ceremony in which the Shia take over the streets to re-enact the murder of Husain, killed in Kerbala, in a 10 day battle. There is an orator who orates and narrates every single graphic detail of the murder. The audience are asked to weep or act they are weeping and cut their foreheads at the end. In this back-and-forth, this audience constitutes themselves as subjects who testify, however, outside the court of law.

This is what she examined as testimonial subject, but no longer what she means with her current work.