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**Cultural Transnationalism and The Arab Uprisings:  
Migrating Artists from Syria to Europe**

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*Statement under oath*

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## Summary

The relationships between transnationalism and culture heighten issues of cultural freedom. In the last five years, a phenomenon of migrants' life stories being shown on European stages has urged an anthropological query on artists' transnational cultural experiences, which comprises the intersectionality of politics, art, and migration in postulating a bottom-up approach to transnationalism. Before and after settling in Europe, performing arts communities from Syria and other Arab countries ventured to stand against hegemonies over freedoms by emphasizing discussions around nationalism, interculturalism, and multiculturalism. A wide range of studies on migrant artists generally lack socio-anthropological and historically specific interpretations that connect artists' existential subjectivities and free will with means of nationalizing, denationalizing, and decolonizing the transnational spaces they inhabit.

This dissertation highlights Arab performing arts transnational cultural experiences, incorporating how imperialism and its subsequent global systems, as well as authoritative regimes, and solidarity spaces influenced mobility and development of subjectivity of artists from Syria who arrived in Europe. It examines how intercultural practices embedded within the different geopolitical realities that artists experienced in their homelands and host societies affected their existential passion for freedom. To this end, the research theorizes that artists' transnational cultural experiences are hegemonized by a multi-scalar power structure of the global and nation-states' cultural and migration policies and performing arts aesthetics politics. Three topics were operationalized to achieve the theorizing: Artist's homemaking trajectories, their performance relational aesthetics, and their subjective performativity in a post-migrant discourse. These topics enabled a theoretical discussion regarding an existential understanding of transnational performing arts. Artists' transnational cultural experiences are cases of interculturalism, which hamper artists' holistic subjectivity representations on stage, and limit their investigation beyond their subject towards its free will. This dissertation employs several qualitative research material collection and analysis methods, combining reflexivity and immersion to achieve a multi-sited, non-Western-oriented approach to transnationalism. It challenges hegemonic conceptions related to cultural transnationalism.

## Acknowledgment

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many individuals. The first idea of researching performing artists' experiences belongs to extended moments of dance, acting, and singing I spent with the first artist I met in my life, my father, whether at home or when I was a child accompanying him in the different performances at towns in and around Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jenin. My father's spirit will always accompany my paths and enrich them. My mother's diligence and hard work outside and inside the house and her wisdom of social life have planted an anthropological sense in me to embark on this research. My parents and sisters added realism and enthusiasm to my ideas in this dissertation.

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# 1. Introduction

In the summer of 2015, while on a short visit to Germany, I passed by a central station where shocked-looking groups of people with backpacks were deboarding the buses. I had a familiar irritation in my chest and my feet felt heavy. I turned and saw more people in fear and shock, while many others approached to lend a hand. The day passed with both ease and unease, but it ended in a ruin bar, where a performance group was singing and playing music. They spoke my language, so I could understand what they said. Those standing near me did not seem to understand, but they danced with the rhythm and cheered.

A year later, May Skaf, a Syrian actress, stood on a podium performing in *Letter from Tigers to Humanity*. This monodrama turned out to be a collaboration between the Center for Political Beauty (CPB), May Skaf, and the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. In this provocative political theater piece, the CPB threatened to have refugees be devoured by tigers in Berlin if the government were to forbid 100 Syrian asylum seekers from entry into Germany. The collective had planned to fly them illegally from Izmir into Berlin on a specially chartered plane on June 28, 2016.

After Air Berlin canceled the flight on Tuesday morning, the tigers feeding was scheduled for that same evening at the Maxim Gorki Theater. The producer sought volunteers through the campaign's website, where he claimed to have already found at least one refugee ready to be devoured. The refugee allegedly prepared to sacrifice herself was May Skaf. However, instead of jumping into the cage, she delivered a speech in the form of a performance. Skaf later described to me the long process of collaboration with the writer and producer of the performance. She was pleased by the experience. Not only had the performance and script tackled all the issues she wanted to address, but they even impacted parliamentary decisions. She noted:

“It was my only chance to say what I wanted, to tell the whole world. I wanted to emphasize the word "Europe" and its supremacy and its politics toward refugees at borders. I did not want to beg. I wanted everything to be real. The tigers' part of the

performance was the part I liked least because it was not real, and I wanted everything to be real. [...] When I saw the tigers, I realized that I had the same white hair on me that it had on its body. They [the artistic team] liked the idea and planned the accessories to look tiger-like. What I did was about me being a refugee actress, talking about my journey. I call it a resume; it tells my story. The performance delivered a political message but also spoke of me as a refugee, my experience. I was not acting, and I meant every word I said from my heart. The audience could feel that I was not acting, too. I did not hear any clapping right at the end of the show. The audience took a while to realize that it was the product of a show where they would clap.” (Skaf 2017)

Since this performance and the day at the station, I have seen theater chasing migrants’ realities. There has been a growing interest in performing arts productions by refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. Forms of verbatim and documentary theater have become a political tool for solidarity. I kept Skaf’s performance in mind whenever I attended a performance by an artist arriving from Syria. I tried to understand what was unique about these performing artists’ cultural experiences in Europe. Who has the right to tell a personal story, and can stories stand against robust systems of unbeatable narratives and representations? As a Palestinian, I had several questions come to mind. For instance, when would a Palestinian artist get to stand freely in a world-renowned theater and say whatever she decided to say? Or an Iraqi? Or a Native American? I also wanted to know how their experiences were like or different from those of nomad artists or migrants who were not artists. For years after 2017, there were policies in Europe to enhance artists’ cultural participation, such as funding ensembles for migrant artists in Germany, governmental funding for artists in Austria, France and Belgium, and programs in Sweden that kept the wheel of solidarity art rolling. In July 2018, Skaf passed away, but many other artists continued to find ways to perform. By 2019, I noticed that the intensity of artists’ engagement was starting to fade, and some ensembles had already been dissolved. In the 2020–2021 global COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the news barely mentioned any significant theater programs, whether related or not to exile, open borders, or collectives. Theater buildings of all ideologies became deserted spaces, and artists either stayed aside and waited, or they shifted their corporeal reality to virtual spaces.

This research dissertation provides my testimony of a five-year ethnographic journey within the performing artists' community migrating from Syria, a community whose biographies became a phenomenon on European stages. It plows the "Refugee Welcome" soil to understand the socio-anthropological aspects of people's transnational cultural experiences, especially those considered "creative," as artists, and their representations. As Edward Said (2013) explained, "to represent someone or even something has now become an endeavor as complex and as problematic as an asymptote, with consequences for certainty and decidability as fraught with difficulties as can be imagined" (285). During this journey, I realized that cultural transnationalism is filled with representations that illuminate but also sometimes suppress much of what subjects want their appearance to be.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Transnationalism as a Global Phenomenon

The growing area of transnationalism operates through various modernist and contemporary fields of study. It is relevant in capitalist imperialism studies, where it reveals multiple designs that cut across national boundaries, dividing and defining national identities (Bamyeh 1998, 2000, Sklair 2000, Robinson 2004, Doyle 2010). It is also important in regionalism and nationalism studies (Shami 1996, Doyle 2010), as well as globalization and cosmopolitanism (Bhabha 1996, Balibar 2005, Euben 2013, Go and Krause 2016, Doyle 2010), including social and political movements (Struna 2009). Transnationalism is also linked to diasporic and integration studies (Van Oudenhoven and Ward 2012) and decolonization and citizenship studies (Nye and Keohane 1971, Faist 2000, Cox 2017, Petersen 2020). Its spatial and systematic nature concretizes as theorizing (Castles 2006) or an approach (Hall 2020), and sometimes as an agenda (Vertovec 2001) that results from the experience of a connection or link. The link can be geographical, temporal, or ideological, incubating a trans- or cross-border functional integration of processes (Clavin 2005). It creates relationships between individuals and institutions, groups, and networks beyond nation-state boundaries (Pries 1999, Shaffer 2012). At the personal level, these processes link a country of origin with other countries through the building of social fields (Glick Schiller et al. 1992), which serve as a nexus of economic, political, and sociocultural activities taking place under several powers, including government rule. Immigrants who build and inhabit social fields are designated "transmigrants" (ibid: 1). Migrant transnationalism is defined as "the process by which transmigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic, and political relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, and through which they create transnational social fields that cross national borders" (Basch et al. 1994: 6). These links include the acculturation<sup>1</sup> strategies of integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry 1997 In Van Oudenhoven and Ward 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> Acculturation refers to changes arising from intercultural contact (Van Oudenhoven and Ward 2012: 83).

Transnationalism as a theoretical perspective is seen as a non-universal, non-novel grassroots social phenomenon concerned with individuals and institutions (Portes 2003, Vertovec 2003). It recreates world systems and spatialities by tackling the cultural flow around racism and supremacy and generates perspectives on global social and political transformations. For instance, Vertovec (2004) examined how sociocultural institutions and migrants' cross-border relationships constituted such transformations. As transmigrants continue to connect with new cultures and globally oriented institutions, they experience dually oriented nationalities and citizenships, which do not bring significant societal transformations to the receiving countries, but which do create a dialectical opposition between world systems. The theoretical perspective of transnationalism considers this opposition—and the transformation it implies—to be centered on the modernist perception of the relationship between "others" and "difference," but with a global effect. Appadurai (1996) described this relationship through the concept of cultural experiences, which are connections or exchanges that reveal contrasts and evoke comparisons, adding that "difference concern[s] something local, embodied and significant" (12). As such, culture becomes less the property of individuals or groups, but more a "heuristic device to talk about difference" and create consciousness<sup>2</sup> (Appadurai 1996:13). It becomes a transformative dimension of transnationalism, comprising layers of tensions on a global level. According to Said (2013), these tensions resemble "zones of control or abandonment, of recollection and of forgetting, of force or dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing, all taking place in the global history that is our element" (304). Cultural transnationalism becomes a device that deals with the differences and tensions that transmigrants face both internally and externally.

From this global perspective, several scholars have described transnationalism as a link between individuals and nation-states<sup>3</sup> beyond their geographies (Abu-Lughod 1989, Glick

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<sup>2</sup> According to Appadurai, culturalism is 'the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics. It is frequently associated with extraterritorial histories and memories, sometimes with refugee status and exile, and almost always with struggle for stronger recognition from existing nation-states and from transnational bodies. Culturalism is the form that cultural differences tend to take place in the era of mass mediation, migration and globalization' (15).

<sup>3</sup> By the 20th century the concept of nation-state embodied a series of ideological constructions including scientific rationality, the economic role of the State, the institutionalization of economic calculations, and modernism (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 15).

Schiller et al. 1995, Vertovec 1999, Mandel 2003). Despite their centrality to the description, there were attempts to "unthink" nation-states' centrism to achieve a more global understanding of the social fields that emerge from transnationalism (Wallerstein in Go and Krause 2016). Van Oudenhoven and Ward (2012) suggested that such decentrism is due to the changing demography in the receiving countries caused by an influx of several generations of immigrants and shrinking native populations. It is also due to the emergence of global culture, which has transformed dominant cultures through the rising economic and cultural importance of megacities. Appadurai (1996) proposed understanding relationships of individuals with nation-states as akin to those between ethnoscapas (individuals inhabiting shifting worlds, such as migrants) and ideoscapas (representing freedom and sovereignty). These landscapes shape the global cultural economy and provoke disjunctures between the economy, culture, and politics at the nation-state level, leading to an unthinking of the nation-state's centrality. However, the inequalities and power relations applied within these landscapes bring judgment back into the nation-states' governments' grasp (Shaffer 2012). As such, when Go and Krause (2016) concluded that "transnational processes are part of how an order is reproduced and power is exercised" (15), they were stating that the behaviors of cultural agents within social fields—in this case the transmigrants—are governed by the various global capitalist powers exercised within those fields, including the nation-state.

More specifically, unthinking the nation-state from the global understanding of cultural transnationalism's social fields involves considering migrants' cultural freedom, including conversations regarding their states of citizenship. Appadurai (1996) proposed that the nation-state's continued crisis was due to its growing clash with the post-national order, which substituted the nation-state's formation, including identities and loyalties, with global ones. The post-national order aims to inhibit nation-states' ability to monopolize their formation, leading to the deterritorialization of populations. In such cases, cultural freedom does not presuppose the nation-states' existence. In fact, the notion of cultural freedom poses a heightened challenge in citizenship studies' handling of the nation-state crisis through topics such as exile, refuge, and migration. These states of being illustrate how transmigrants recreate powerful territorial attachments to their homeland. According to some scholars, these attachments are localized in

the receiving countries, thereby bounding, and defining social life in a way that interrupts the flow of modern capitalism processes (Appadurai 1996, Dirlik 1996). Van Oudenhoven and Ward (2012) provided that in terms of homeland attachments' post-national imaginary, these attachments enable migrants to overcome the nation-state's intolerance of differences while still benefiting and benefiting from the nation-state. Thus, by facilitating faster, cheaper forms of communication and travel, these ties are viewed as creating "win-win-win scenarios" (91) that benefit both the sending and receiving countries, as well as the travelers themselves. However, this scenario of unthinking nation-states from the global perspective of social fields cannot be realized without understanding the transnational cultural experience's impact on travelers' cultural freedom. Comprehending this impact can help us explain how cultural freedom is infused into from-below transnational activism. It becomes a source of an alternative cosmopolitanism that stands against the monopolization and centralization of capital by calling for human rights, regardless of citizenship status (Smith 1992, Smith and Guarnizo 1998). This dissertation emerges from discussions regarding the connection between cultural freedom and from-below cultural transnationalism.

One reason for envisioning transnationalism as a social phenomenon related to capitalist solutions and salvation is the past three decades' massive refugee flow toward what is known as the Global North. This migration phenomenon is contextualized within people's urge for freedom through social and political transformations in the era of globalization, beyond the nation-states they fled. Migrants' primary motivation for leaving their homeland nation-states is to find opportunities beyond what they endured under authoritative regimes, impoverished economic systems, and war zones such as Somalia, Eritrea, Albania, Libya, Iraq, and Syria. Migrants have been crossing borders and waiting at borderlands. Some of them were waiting in Europe—for instance, in Turkey, Greece, and Hungary—until some European countries opened their borders to welcome the masses following the Dublin II agreement in 2013 concerning refugees. Scholars such as Portes (2003), Basch (2005), and Sassen (1998) have acknowledged that a global perspective on transnationalism must include the social, political, and cultural dimensions of these migrants' experiences. Economic, political, and sociocultural interconnections within the European host societies have enabled migrants to settle there, and

any ties they created with their original countries have fed their attempts to create their territory in the new place. Among these masses are migrant artists who left Syria after the Syrian uprising devolved into war. They comprise, among numerous others, Syrians and Palestinian Syrians who are professionals in theater and dance and whose migratory experiences are similar to those of others who have had to leave the Arab area.

Scholars on these migrants' condition have maintained that the interplay of their historical and structural conditions and their home and host societies' ideologies is bound within a global capitalist system that is unable to secure their new settings' social, cultural, and economic bases, challenging their likelihood of establishing a transnational existence (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 9). These scholars assumed that the cultural flow that took place through these transnational migrants' daily lives was centered around their life stories. These stories become the material inflow, and the various representations of these stories become the medium of interaction around their situation. Meerzon et al. (2020) argued that these stories, when presented in documentary theater, evoke stranger fetishism and lead to what Cox (2014) described as the "mythopoetics of migration." As such, the many works of literature, theater, dance, music, and cinema or documentary that are introducing "otherness" and "differences" in the context of migrant artists coming from Syria, as well as issues of nation-states' centrism and migrant stories, can plausibly collectively explain the transnational cultural experiences of artists in Europe. One way to provide such an explanation is through the presentation of the phenomenon of migrants' life stories on European stages over the past five years. Thus, a significance of this dissertation lies in its attempt to answer several anthropological queries regarding the impact of this global migration phenomenon on artists' cultural freedom.

### **2.1.1 Arab Transnationalism and Decolonization**

Understanding the transnational cultural experiences of Arab migrants in Europe is related to transnationalism as a global phenomenon in the Arab area. Studies of transnationalism in the Arab area have been developed through fields ranging from Orientalist perspectives to those incorporating neocolonialism or neoliberalism, as well as through counterarguments to these perspectives. The majority of such studies have focused on

transnational ties linked to religion and politics, economy, and migration. Haynes (2001), in *"Transnational Religious Actors and International Politics,"* examined phenomena related to transnational religious actors beyond Arab state hegemony before the eighteenth century. Haynes claimed that Islamic radicals and the Catholic Church had been influential in some Arab national contexts by undermining governmental authority, yet they were less of a threat to state sovereignty in their defiance of colonialism. In *"Recent Perspectives on Christianity in the Modern Arab World,"* Robson (2011) perceived Christianity in the Arab area as one unit, consistently referring to an Arab Christian church when examining past reluctance to deal with the modern history of Christianity in the Arab area as a representation of a transnational identity. Other studies have also dealt with Islam as one unit, describing the connotations of "Ummah" as a transnational collective that serves mainly to promote people's cultural behaviors under the prevailing Islamic culture. Connected to this collective is the corpus of recently produced knowledge focused on Islam as a religion, terrorism, and the post-9/11 era, including studies refuting these themes' dominant essentializing discourse (Salih 2004, Grillo 2006, Samad et al. 2007, Vertovec 2009). Shami (1996) noted that, historically, transnationalism has contributed to disseminating Islam as a trans-state, trans-societal phenomenon diversified via reproduction through the "circulation of goods and people" (17). Shami also maintained that Islam participated in creating a transnational world through the global entities that produced and interacted with it.

Likewise, some studies have discussed the transnational affiliations of Judaism in the Arab area. Shohat (2003) examined some of the foundational premises of Zionist discourse concerning Arab Jews by dismantling several master narratives of both Arab and Jewish origins. Shohat explained that Arab Jewish communities, called Mizrahim, have been partly invented within Zionism. Nonetheless, Zionism refuses to accept the collective naturalization of Arab Jews within Jewish nationalism. As a transnational group, Mizrahim are actively reinventing their identity toward a critical Mizrahi scholarship on the movement's continuities and discontinuities across borders and on its multicultural inquiries. Such transnational aspects of religion in the Arab area contribute to its heterogeneity and reestablish common political grounds of mixed nationality, coloniality, and post- and neocolonialism.

In addition to religion, the twentieth century's complex political histories in the Arab area demonstrate regional, ethnic, and socio-economic transnational affiliations, which have promoted cross-border connections regarding political and religious causes, as well as the case of Palestine. Regionally, the Pan-Arabism movement has been active against colonialism and has promoted exchange between Arab communities (Mandel 2003, Mason 2011). This movement has produced religious discourses that legitimize practices of social and cultural activism and has given ground to some of the cultural avant-gardes against globalization. For example, Hernández and Paonessa (2018) studied the transnational extension of anarchism across the Mediterranean and its localizing potential in Egypt's political culture and philosophy. However, Khuri-Makdisi (2010) stressed in her book *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914*, that the 19th-century Arab Nahda (Renaissance) and Arab anarchism were part of a revolutionary regional nationalist and predominantly bourgeois movement of Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals and immigrants that was unconnected to global ideological upheavals (Tamari 2011). In history scholarship, there are studies which focused on political aspects to describe social and cultural transnational history. For example, proposing Algeria as a case study in transnational cultural formation in (post)colonial periods, Patrick Crowley (2017), in his edited book *Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism, 1988–2015*, attempted to challenge political discourses that homogenized Algeria by examining the national, post-national, and transnational actors that contributed to Algerian politics. In one chapter, a contributing scholar looked at how modern sports, as a transnational phenomenon, were appropriated by local actors, resulting in multiple contradictions with traditional social formations (Dine 2017). Other contributions discussed the trans-colonial novel and described a multidirectional understanding of Algeria's autocratic postcolonial rules (Harrison 2017). In documentations regarding ethnicities under authoritative unifying cultures, the Arab repertoire documentation includes ethnicities such as Dursi, Kurdish, and Amazigh. Such documentation portrays ethnicities' religious connections and their role in the political struggle against colonialism (Madani 2003, Ferro 2019, Salih 2020), focusing less on other transnational connections they may have practiced across the Arab area.

One crucial topic that connects the diverse fields of religious, economic, colonial, and migratory studies, both regionally and globally, is the question of Palestine. Some studies have introduced it as a transnational issue (Mandel 2003, Salih 2013, Richter-Devroe et al., 2018). The population was uprooted from its home in 1948 and spread out into surrounding countries, where, ever since, it has been relatively engaged in the social and political regulatory schemes of migrants in the Arab host countries. The question of Palestine has been central to the Arab national plan of anti-colonization and has religious specificity for Arabs; together, these traits have encouraged the formation of a new transnational collective identification (Mandel 2003, Said 2013, Choueiri 2016). This emerging collective sentiment among Arabs has turned into transnational coalitions, organizations, and political entities, such as the League of Arab States, established in 1945, which shared some slogans with the pan-Arabism movement. Chamberlain (2011) noted that, having emerged from the Palestinian diaspora, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) managed to gain international recognition as a group of resistance fighters rather than as a refugee group. Within the Arab landscape, its members claimed legitimacy as a transnational cultural resistance movement against colonial oppression and were declared the new vanguard of the Arab Revolution (Nashif 2016).

In this dissertation, the question of Palestine extends the understanding of transnationalism beyond a dualistic nation-state relationship. Many artists who have ended up in Europe as refugees from Syria already held the legal status of non-citizens in Syria when they arrived in Europe. As second-generation refugees from Palestine who migrated to a European country, they have resumed their stateless legal situation, which provides a relatively new perspective of transgenerational transnationalism (Breyley 2016). They are referred to as Palestinian-Syrians in this study, as this is how these artists have defined themselves; they hold sentiments, memories, and ties connected to two nation-states (Palestine and Syria). Some even mentioned that refugees' legal or resident status in a European country, once achieved, might help reinforce their ties with Palestine and grant them their existential wish for the right to return.

However, the collective sentiment around the question of Palestine has not overcome the authoritative interests of the Arab nation-states' regimes. These nationalist interests have

led to controlled mobility between Arab countries (more in forthcoming sections). For example, in many Arab countries, the issuance of visas to Syrians and Iraqis is even less possible than before the occupation of Iraq and Syrian displacement to prevent the spread of chaos. For Palestinians, since 1948, there have been restrictions and bans on mobility between the Arab countries. The only possibility for transnational connections for Palestinian and Syrian citizens is through cultural activities that stress belonging and return inside the refugee camps. These camps were established in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon for displaced Palestinian communities after the occupation of Palestine in 1948, and in Jordan and Lebanon for Syrians after the uprising in 2011. Such states of refuge in the Arab area hamper individuals' ability to encounter the cultural differences and heterogeneity of the Arab area, and at the same time refute neocolonial claims about the homogeneity of the Arab area and monolithic representations of Arabs. The Arab countries' conditions, which include the recent occupation of Iraq and the long-term occupation of Palestine, as well as the neoliberalism of most Arab countries, are obstacles to a positive approach to transnationalism, where exchange would bring a win-win-win scenario. The ability to establish social fields that incubate cultural exchanges or encounters is always dependent upon and hampered by the political authorities of borders, occupations, and formal cultural channels. As such, transnationalism in the Arab area is entangled with the complex affiliations of nation-states and global powers.

Over the last three decades, Arab transnational affiliations have developed through economic ties, which have trumped some of the religious, political, regional, and ethnic affiliations. They relied on neoliberal formations aimed at achieving global developmental goals by following global economic, social, and political trends of capitalism and linking Arabs regionally and internationally (Haddad 2016). They supported programs under the World Bank's patronage or first-world countries, multinational firms, and entrepreneurship hubs. They also formed localized editions of international bodies, such as the United Nations Economic Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA). Arab regional counterparts to these affiliations, such as the A.M. Qattan Foundation, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture AFAC, Etijahat, and the Arab Education Forum, have formed civil society coalitions disconnected from the Arab nation-states' governments. Their programs aim to create transnational cultural ties between artists and

communities that go beyond borders and cultural policies in the Arab area. These affiliations have a considerable effect on transnational performing arts practices, as shown later in this dissertation.

The above general mapping of Arab transnational experiences demonstrates the various mobility complications, intercultural exchanges, and entanglements with nation-states and global powers that affect migrants' liminality. The last decade's border crisis, resulting from Syrian displacement, accentuated the problematic sites of liminality in the Arab countries, mainly in Lebanon and Jordan. By appearing in this dissertation as borderlands<sup>4</sup>, Arab countries hosting Syrian refugees did not form decolonization hubs for displaced people. In contrast, they reproduced forms of repression, social formation, and global economic neoliberal challenges in which artists or migrants did not have the option to leave personal issues behind. The displaced communities from Syria face mixed feelings when confronting collective Arab sentiment and the reality of non-hospitality at the borderlands. This perspective allows for a problematizing of borderlands as an Arab transnational issue; where geographical shifts do not contribute to liminality, these borderlands become localized hubs of non-liminal exiles. As such, the transnational experience of Arabs in borderlands cannot contribute to a transnationalism model that feeds into the capitalist aspects of globalization and maintains a challenge to advocating for the exile's state of liminality. Moreover, transnational activism at borderlands does not bring radical approaches that produce alternatives or achieve decolonization; instead, it plays within the circumference of neoliberal approaches. The complexity of studying cultural transnationalism in the Arab area postulates a multi-layered understanding of the historical experience, which comprises intersecting factors of local and global politics, art, and migration. All of these need to be addressed whenever any one of them is considered, reflecting the importance of an intersectional approach to studying Arab performing artists' transnational cultural experiences.

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<sup>4</sup> As temporary stops, these neighbouring countries have become borderlands, which include multi-layered socio-political and cultural ideological and political governmentality spaces of affiliations related to the homeland and neighbouring nation-states.

Of greatest interest to this dissertation is achieving an intersectional approach by studying Arab transnational experiences during the migratory wave toward Western countries over the past two decades. The majority of European transnational studies of Arab communities have focused on how cultural differences are managed through global economy, racism, anti-immigration sentiment, and anti-multiculturalism (Arat-Koç 2017) and have examined the extent to which transnational identity formations around politics and religion are loyal to the Western host nation-states (Shaffer 2012). For example, Breyley (2016) looked at how Moroccan migrants in Turkey used virtual mobility to enhance their transnational connections and relationships to avoid confronting the differences they encountered by being in a new place. Salamandra (2002) conducted an ethnography of Gulf Arab London as a non-diasporic instance of transnationalism, as it has recreated the mediation industries of the Arab Gulf culture and heritage. The study revealed that experts in transnationally connected networks participated in constructing local products relevant to the Gulf heritage and culture in London, exhibitions such as *The Islamic art market*, *The book market*, and the *Bahraini Prison Art* project. Claiming that the Gulf Arabs do not actually migrate to London, but rather have an economic relationship that is both transnational—involving the flow of people, products, and expertise across nations—and global—applying an international marketplace engulfed within the Gulf Cooperation Council. Thus, a (post-)imperialist symbiosis of elites who live on marketing Arabian heritage has emerged. These marketing agents become mediators between Gulf Arab heritage and the culture industry, straddling cultural differences in global cities.

This dissertation achieves an ethnographic anthropology on a state of migration where migrants have interculturally engaged with the host, and where the transnational cultural experiences of migrant artists arriving from Syria have produced migrant life stories on European stages. The research aims to define these experiences and examine them through an intersectional approach to Arab national, postcolonial, and neo-colonial political influences. It looks at these influences on migrants' personal experiences, life stories, trajectories, and their strategies of coping with robust regimes that operate on their living and artistic experiences at home and as they began their migration journey. It aims to bring the life experiences and

behaviors of the migrating artists to the forefront of understanding the development of their subjectivities, following a from-below approach to transnationalism.

### **2.1.2 Summary**

In sum, this section has provided an overview of transnationalism as a global social phenomenon that is connected with transmigrants' cultural freedom. It defines the research community, comprised of migrant artists from Syria, including Palestinian Syrian artists, their life stories on European stages, as cases of cultural transnationalism. This section also described the connection between culture and transnationalism through the relationship between cultural agents' freedom and nation-states, in line with studies on transnational communities within the Arab area. Some studies have used the intersection of religious, political, and economic orientations to localize capitalism's globalized agenda. Other studies have noted that while transnationalism in the Arab area is a modernizing, anti-racial device, conversely, it also defies colonial generalizations imposed upon Arabs' transnational experiences. However, Arab nation-states' authoritative interests and their ban on cultural mobility, which overpowered any anticolonial schemes, left the Arab area unable to stand against capitalism's neocolonial and neoliberal aspects. Transmigrant artists, under this dual pressure of coloniality and authority, could not achieve the decolonization of their transnational spaces at borderlands. Thus, they were unable to transcend the binary relationship between the Global South and North and its tensions. The history of transnationalism in the Arab area challenges a positive view of transnationalism and extends its scope to influences on transnational cultural experiences beyond the Arab area.

The many studies on Arab transnational communities lack case-specific socio-anthropological understandings of transnational experiences that take an intersectional approach to politics, art, and migration and consider the historical specificity of the Arab area. Therefore, this dissertation is a response to the need to incorporate how imperialism and its proceeding global political systems, as well as authoritative regimes, influenced artists' mobility and cultural exchange in and beyond the Arab area. Moreover, there is a need to understand the plurality of identities emerging in the Arab area—beyond the religious and political—

including those related to gender, class, ethnicity, age, and the development of subjectivities. Such an understanding relies on intersubjectivity and intercultural processes within the authoritative frame of nation-states at the Arab area and beyond. The dissertation pays attention to historical and transnational experiences in the Arab area and considers these experiences a constituting element of artists' transnational cultural experiences in Europe. The following section demonstrates the link between performing arts and the overall socio-political regimes in promoting cultural freedom in the Arab area.

## 2.2 Global Perspectives on Transnational Performing Arts

The concept of cultural freedom and the performing arts extends beyond the Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF), established in Berlin in 1950 (Baumol et al. 1965, McCarthy 2001). Some studies on performing arts in the Arab area have highlighted conservative forms, such as those connected to politics and religion, and reflect upon class, ethnicity, and gender issues (Totah 2013, 2020). Other studies demonstrated the performing arts under neocolonialism (Rowe 2008, Musleh 2011, Rivers 2015). Other studies invoked the question of ethics (Tinius 2017), and several efforts have promoted the universality of art and its ability to bridge differences and the specificities of cultures to serve as a transformative political tool. These understandings constitute contemporary cultural theory, which incorporates a syncretism that widens cultural practices' horizons and extends universalism (Chaudhuri 2002, Bhabha 2012, Alvarez et al. 2018, Meerzon 2018). Universal performing arts practice makes the world its arena and deals with questions of nationalism, resistance, and resilience, as well as questions of interculturalism, multiculturalism, and transculturalism. Through these practices, cultural freedom results from understanding, reworking, and sometimes attempting to eliminate or illuminate the boundaries between cultures by encountering cultural differences. As such, artists' transnational cultural experiences revolve around encountering differences through intercultural, multicultural, and transcultural media. More specifically, the performing arts provide artists with an intercultural opportunity that is different from those afforded to non-artist migrants.

Contemporary cultural theory's primary focus is the self and its subjectivity development through cultural practice. A multilayered understanding of transnational cultural practice invokes aspects in which the self is identified within the experience of interculturalism, which differs from transculturalism and multiculturalism. Interculturalism relates to or takes place between two different cultures. It is different from multiculturalism, which relates to or takes place between several different cultures. It is also different from transculturalism, which extends through more than one human culture. Furthermore, transculturalism differs from transnationalism in that transnationalism is a process between or beyond national boundaries involving several nations or nationalities. Transnationalism may comprise many of these

processes within its understanding, yet its scholarship mainly emphasizes interculturalism and border studies. As a concept, cultural freedom becomes useful in transnationalism approaches to the performing arts, as it can help unpack migrants' intercultural practices to examine their impact on artists' subjectivities.

The literature on interculturalism understands it as a process of celebrating difference by seeking to utilize encounters with difference. As a concept that emerged from Western artists' travels beyond their countries' borders, interculturalism was defined by Holledge and Tompkins (2000) as processes around genres, subjects, artworks, and audiences that find the boundaries between cultures through intercultural encounters. They saw interculturalism as an aesthetic, apolitical discourse that becomes political through the misrepresentation and appropriation of culture, where agents are constantly challenged to redefine their cultural identities. Moreover, they proposed the "self" as the context in which culture becomes a device for revealing difference. Through an intercultural practice, various subjectivities interact around the differences between them, working toward the collaborative formation of an intersubjective performance. Such intercultural practices lead to the restructuring of original formulations centered on "otherness" and "difference" and incorporate transnational social phenomena (Chaudhuri 2002).

In contrast, other scholars have understood interculturalism as a process of confrontation. Bharucha (2000) contributed to interculturalism what he considered to be missing in the postcolonial scholarly work around the decolonized space. For him, intracultural (as opposed to intercultural) performance practices and self-criticism result from the noting of disparities within the same nation by unprivileged travelers who are affected by the age of globalization. Thus, his understanding of interculturalism decentralizes the hegemony of Western cultural forms. Similarly, Birringer (2000) introduced the notion of "transcultural imaginaries," which refers to encounters and collaborative performances that rework the conceptual structure of collaborating against all sorts of borders. For him, only when theatrical institutions are incorporated into the medium of collaboration, interculturalism is achieved. As a form of confrontation, Zarrilli's (1994) interculturalism includes perceiving the performance as a cultural negotiation of meanings and experiences rather than a cultural expression.

By following these confrontational views of interculturalism, we can find numerous examples of interculturalism in transnational performing arts' which puts discussions regarding nation-states' hegemonies at its center of activity. These examples demonstrate that interculturalism enables discussions of authoritative entities, such as Europeanization<sup>5</sup>, Western centrism, and other centrisms in managing cultural difference issues. In a study on Dominican performance productions in the U.S. and in other Latin American countries, performance was shown to provide a space that enabled authors, actors, and audiences to recreate homes and discuss issues beyond the cultural boundaries of the host country (Stevens 2010). Stevens (2010) concluded that, through these productions, Dominican identity formations become diverse and deterritorialized. Despite that transnational performances are not as pervasive as larger economy markets, "the performance event offers a unique setting where new styles and ideologies are 'rehearsed' in front of a collective body of people who may identify or disidentify with them" (Stevens 2010: 31). Ferrari's (2017) study on intercultural approaches to theater in Asia examined the Toki Experimental Project (One Table, Two Chairs). The project facilitated the formation of trans-Asian alliances below and beyond the nation-state's scope through cross-border grassroots exchange on a micro or "minor" scale. Ferrari described the project as "a transnational practice of deconstruction, hybridization, and cross-fertilization of National Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) traditions through the lens of contemporary performance" (142). This vision frames Asia as a methodological hub that requires the deterritorialization of the prevailing binary structures of East and West and the decolonization and deimperialization of societal structures. Perceiving Asia as a method lends significance to the Toki Project as a critical articulation and creative framework that trumps Western-centric predispositions toward dominant knowledge structures.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Varney (2006:4) "Europeanisation, like globalisation, is a contestable term, seen by Wallace as an umbrella term that is greater than the European Union that on this understanding becomes one "transnational" institution among others such as NATO. Europeanisation appeals to transnational and postnationalist sensibilities in contemporary Europe. Europeanisation is understood as the expansion of cross-border connections among European nations, an increasing awareness of Europe as a regional grouping with a relation to globalisation, and a multiplicity of legal, monetary, territorial, governmental, and cultural issues and their management".

Moreover, Varney (2006) investigated transnationalism in three German-language theater works set within the broader context of Europeanization in post-communist Europe. Varney argued that the performance stage itself came to resemble a nation in which "national life" (18) was practiced. By maintaining that cultural theatrical and performative representations enabled nation-states to negotiate Europeanization processes, the image of the transmigrants as the Other made the negotiation more visible. As a result, nation-states stigmatize transnationalism among the nation-state's marginalized and ethnic groups. Also, by proposing placement of the non-European Other on the national stage as an intercultural practice, Varney noted that Eurocentrism is around differences related to anti-foreigner sentiment shown in the performance through the irregular forces which participate in the process of Europeanization. Performances putting refugees and transmigrants on stage enact the politics of exclusion that turn Eurocentrism into a process of displacement, and by doing so, they reveal the challenges of the postnational era. As such, this study, and the ones before, define cultural transnationalism as being a connector between interculturalism and transnationalism in the performing arts space.

Beyond the nation-state's hegemonies, cultural transnationalism includes a global economic understanding of transnational cultural experiences. In an editorial in an issue of the International Federation for Theatre Research's *Theatre, Transnationalism and Economy*, Canning (2014) set a goal for engaged scholars of theater and performance "to explore how the 2008 worldwide economic crisis brought scholars of theater and performance to re-examine how neoliberalism, economic nomadism, and transnationalism affect artistic practices" (165). One contribution to that issue demonstrated how performance productively depicted the practices of the globalized movement of capital, culture, and people and the substitution of the national, which continued to reinscribe itself in the global, and turned these practices into a long-standing performative (Chambers 2014). Others in the issue noted how the body had become a transnational product by showing how one character became a cultural diplomat through intercultural translation (MacDonald and Halman 2014), as well as how geography had become a medium for maintaining economies of class and power (González 2014). However, performance also forced manipulations of gains and losses to rethink local, national, and global

identities (Mezur 2014). Rogers' (2014) book, *Performing Asian Transnationalisms: Theatre, Identity, and the Geographies of Performance*, focuses on how the recontextualization of theatrical plays through border-crossing allows practitioners and audiences to experience multi-contextual and intercultural explorations of identities, thereby achieving intercultural links between audiences and practitioners. However, by exploring a wide range of experiences, organizations, and events may also fail to achieve interculturalism (Smith 2016).

In sum, the literature on transnational performing arts frames the study of cultural transnationalism as a field that incorporates several encounters within and beyond the borders of nation-states and around multilayered intercultural practices. Among these encounters are those related to identity politics surrounding individual subjectivities. The field has shown the role of performing arts in the production, negotiation, and confrontation of local and global cultural practices, while highlighting the specific and collective particularities of performance aesthetics and the various hegemonies participating in its governmentality. Foregrounding such peculiarities becomes, through various intercultural, transcultural, and multicultural means, a tool for political transformation that seeks to eliminate the binaries between East and West and points out failures of interculturalism in the context of globalization. However, the literature on transnational performing arts does not connect the subjectivities and freedoms of the performing artists themselves and their search for the nationalization or denationalization, decolonization, and decapitalization of the spaces they inhabit. This dissertation aims to examine the transnational cultural experiences of artists towards achieving this. Before moving in that direction, however, the following subsection will discuss several attempts among Arab performing arts communities to stand against the nation-state and global hegemonies on freedom through performing arts in last few decades of the past century.

### 2.2.1 Arab Perspectives on Transnational Performing Art

The transnational approach to theater and dance is clearly visible in the forms and styles of performance in the western Asia, mainly the Arab area, during the centuries before the Sykes-Picot Agreement<sup>6</sup>(1916). For example, shadow theater, thought to have originated in East Asia, has been widely used in the Arab area (Totah 2013), and the folkloric dance *Dabkeh* shares similarities with folkloric dance styles in Greece, Armenia, and other places. As they were linked to the political authorities, artistic collaborations in the Arab area were connected to the Ottoman Empire's facilities and were centered around its vast geography. The extent to which these collaborations were interculturally and transculturally oriented might be an exciting point of exploration in other research ventures.

The main point of departure for the current research is the era following the creation of the Arab nation-state and the age of modernism, which extended harmoniously from the preceding eras' repertoires. Much of the twentieth-century transnational performing arts were promoted via patronage that revolved around governmental and non-governmental connections and reflected the socio-political situation, mobility, territoriality of production, and freedom margins. For example, from 1962 to 1966, Syrian and Lebanese trainers of folkloric dance and theater, such as Lebanese Geita Salameh and Marwan Khoury and Syrian Adnan Hanini, visited Palestine for summer festivals organized by municipalities (Totah 2013). The post-1967 war drama in film collaborations focused on pan-Arab topics. The Syrian–Egyptian unity, the United Arab Republic (1972–1977), enhanced artistic connections in trainings and co-production between the two countries. The unity was accompanied by a wave of Egyptian–Syrian cinema productions comprising joint casts from both countries that aimed to criticize or distract the population from the nation-states' defeat. Moreover, productions taking place in Palestinian refugee camps since 1948 in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan have included themes connected to freedom, unity, and return to the original nation-state of Palestine (Hamid 1975,

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<sup>6</sup> It is the famous treaty between the United Kingdom and France colonies with assent from the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Italy to define their sphere of influence and control through the partition of the Ottoman Empire.

Rubenburg 1983). Nevertheless, these transnational waves in the performing arts could not escape the grip of the governments and regimes, and therefore reflected transnational performance's political role under colonial and authoritative regimes in Arab countries, and limited artists' free will.

However, to break from the patronage of nation-states of performing arts, in the past two decades, transnational non-governmental, non-for-profit networks and initiatives have emerged in response to the cultural issues in the Arab area and the crises that arose following the Arab uprisings. These networks are disconnected from the political regimes, and many of them receive direct financial support from transnational international non-governmental organizations or first-world governmental support for development bodies in Arab countries within their extended neocolonial networks. Founded in 2006, with its main office in Lebanon, MASAHAAT (Landscapes) is a non-governmental dance network that offers a transnational revolutionary program to develop strong relationships between individual artists, dance associations, and companies, apart from mainstream cultural collaborations. The network focuses on exchanging and developing collaborative projects between artists from different cultural, social, and artistic backgrounds to develop a new perspective on artistic creation that is not limited to a country's borders. Unfortunately, the mobility of network members from Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt was distorted by strictly regulated border regimes between the Arab countries following the uprisings, which threatened the network's essence.

In 2014, ASHTAR<sup>7</sup> Theatre, located in Palestine, launched the project *The Syrian Monologues*; this was based on its experience with *The Gaza Monologues* project<sup>8</sup> in 2010, but focused instead on Syrian refugees in Amman. In this initiative, ASHTAR worked with 120 refugees of different ages, twenty-two of whom wrote their own monologues. A forum play

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ashtar-theatre.org/the-syrian-monologues.html>

<sup>8</sup> In this project, youth from Gaza have written testimonies about their experiences of the Israeli aggression on Gaza and the siege. 'The Gaza Monologues' were translated into 18 languages and afterwards distributed to over 36 countries. More than 1,700 young people performed them, which drew great awareness to what has been happening to the people in the Gaza Strip and attempted to break the misleading status of individuals who turned into a bare numerical figure of casualties. 'The Gaza Monologues' project was also an important tool for young Gazans to cope with traumas they have been dealing with since the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.

about the refugees' lives in the city of Amman was presented with twelve of the initiative's participants. The project aimed to raise the voices of Syrian refugees, share their stories of agony and displacement, and depict their longing to return to their homes. In addition to these relatively massive non-governmental projects, there have been smaller-scale collaborations, such as the 2012 Egyptian–Palestinian musical co-productions between the Eskenderella and Yalalan bands, as well as the collaboration with Syrian and Palestinian-Syrian artists at the Lebanese for-profit dance group Karakala. Moreover, there were other initiatives for transnational collaborations in Lebanon through Syrian theater groups that continued their Lebanon activities after the uprising, such as Sima Groupe and the Koon Theatre Collective's contemporary dance company. These initiatives and projects have been subject to government surveillance and monitoring, which has maintained tension between transnational performing arts and nation-states. Such performing arts activism have led to the formation of an alternative Arab collective in the field of performing arts.

Moreover, studies on the profit sites of transnational cultural activities have shown further evidence of transnational performing arts affiliations as alternative spaces. Through examining the realm of Arab popular music in the Arab area, Choucair et al. (2004) demonstrated that the proliferation of media in the past four decades, including transnational satellite TV channels, has helped populations to connect beyond their nation-states' control and borders through popular music and forms of art that they can consume easily. The connection has reactivated dialect and modern standard Arabic usage and reinforced collective Arab sentiment, and artists have become agents for social and political change through their popular music production. Delivered through an accessible, easy-to-understand medium, their productions could address collective Arab audiences through themes that tie them together as a community. However, over time, the satellite channels have been monopolized by governments in the interest of certain hegemonies related to the rise of capitalist schemes in the Gulf countries and elsewhere in the Arab area. These schemes have enabled a proliferation of the privatization of the satellite channels and their dependency on capitalism's hegemony (Elouardaoui 2013). As a result, this medium has fallen back under the grip of nation-states' governments.

In recent uprisings, such as those in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, art has invoked other alternative Arab collectives, aiming to reclaim freedoms and individuals' free will. Hip-hop culture has grounded itself deeply in the local, penetrating Arab youth communities, and contributed to transnational solidarity mobilization across the Arab countries. Indeed, as Ibrahim (2017) noted, hip-hop was widely used during the Tunisian uprising. El General's singer had produced the song "Rais Leblad" ("Mr. President"), which became a very popular tool for criticizing the regime in Tunisia and was transmitted widely across Tunisia and Cairo. Later, art forms helped promote the social and political messages of the uprising through social media (Ghannam 2011, Al-Jenaibi 2014). Transnational satellite channels, unavoidably, then contributed to further expansion of the uprising networks by disseminating widely and persistently the influential and sentimental hymn of the uprisings "al Shab yurid 'isqat al nizam" ("The people want to bring down the regime"). The hymn carried the social and cultural capital of the oppressed across borders and reflected a rebellious transnational collective. As a result of this performative chant, a transnational connection was made through the feeling of defying dictatorship and seeking freedom, becoming one of the defining elements of post-Arab spring communities. Following these uprisings, other phenomena appeared in transnational communities. Among these were widespread (for-profit) productions, which resumed in 2015 in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, where a proportional number of Syrian artists collaborated with Lebanese and Egyptian artists on joint projects (more in manuscript 2), which had not been seen before.

In this dissertation, the point of greatest interest is the enhanced collaboration with artists in Europe through cultural participation in joint projects with artists from various backgrounds or the establishment of performances around the experiences of migrants from the Arab area in European spaces, which are more attentive to human rights and freedom. Among these are the Collective Ma'louba ensemble, the band Yalla, the Open Border Ensemble (OBE) in Germany, and the Arabesque Sweden performance group, as well as other productions not affiliated with one ensemble but rather based on production series, such as Laila Rabih's *Chronicle of an Orphan Revolution* (2018), Sulaiman Albassam's *In the Eruptive Mode* (2017), Wael Ali's *Reine Formsache* (2019), and Omar Abu Sada's *Ifigenia* (2017). Theatrical institutions

in Europe have hosted these collaborations as a show of solidarity. The Yalla band is a project initiated by Schauspiel Hannover to bring together, around the theater, people of different nationalities who reside in Germany, particularly Hannover. The theater's website introduces the project in three languages: German, English, and Arabic. Interestingly, there are some differences in how the group is introduced in the three versions. In Arabic, the group is said to have been initiated to bring together new and old inhabitants of Hannover. In German, it invites locals and young immigrants to meet. In English, the introduction is very general; it brings together young members of the group (without specifying who they are) and international professional artists to develop a creative art project. The Theater An der Ruhr's website states that, against the backdrop of recent rebellions, Collective Ma'louba's theater productions question the political and social condition of the Arab world and penetrate the taboo zones of Syrian and Arab society. The establishment of a collective Arabian Theater, Collective Ma'louba, is a response to the need to show the Arabic language and culture in a different light and to give artists from this region natural opportunities within the German cultural landscape. The Münchner Kammerspiele presents the OBE as a form of "investing in diversity and broadening cultural and aesthetic discourses for a new experiential, collaborative path by resisting borders and artist(ic) isolation and giving space to different narratives from cultural and socio-political contexts to emerge, be shared and negotiated in the democratic, open, and analytical setting theater offers." The Gorki Theater created the "Exil Ensemble" in a refugee academy that provided German language and integration courses alongside theater productions. These transnational performing arts experiences bring new perspectives related to language, host societies' power relations, and artists' freedoms within their media. These perspectives further contribute to our understanding of the transnational cultural experiences of migrant artists in Europe and aspects of their cultural freedom.

## 2.2.2 Summary

In sum, both global and Arab transnational performing arts have played a role in expanding the margins of negotiating nation-states' socio-political schemes. In the Arab area, Pan-Arabism has been confronted by the area's rigidly authoritative cultural and border policies, and colonial schemes have persisted in neocolonial forms. However, individual transnational initiatives in the performing arts emerged as a challenge to these authoritative and colonial perceptions and were further promoted through transnational uprising communities in 2011 and thereafter. Due to various forms of displacement in the Arab area over the past several decades, these initiatives have incorporated new cultural exchange perspectives beyond the nation-state and colonial power forms. However, tensions between the patronage of nation-states and internationally extended affiliations within the performing arts sectors revealed cleavages in Arab border policies towards performing arts. These tensions, which obstructed the processes of interculturalism and multiculturalism in the Arab area, were exacerbated by the Arab uprisings.

In the past five years, migrant performing artists have introduced yet another perspective of interculturalism, one that is spatially and systematically concerned with being practiced transnationally in the West. Transmigrant performing arts phenomena on European stages facilitate our understanding of the transnational cultural experiences of migrants, which include Orientalism and neocolonialism, when combined and practiced amidst cultural participation discourses within Europe. In abiding by the host societies' cultural policies of integration, artists appear to express a deeper urgency, highlighting our need to understand their subjective development and the means through which they handle the socio-political aspects of their experiences, both in the original and host countries. These cultural policies are formulated in non-authoritative nation-states and supposedly colonially free structures. Artists' joining the cultural integration programs are supposed to be able to resume their journey towards their free will. For this probability, this dissertation emerges from the need for theorizing on transnational Arab communities in the field of performing art, with the goal of explaining how the different geopolitical realities that result from artists' transnational cultural experiences in the homeland and in host societies affect their search for freedom, as well as

examining these artists' contribution to the decolonization of performing arts from forms of nationalism and global powers. The next sections of the dissertation examine artists' transnational cultural experiences in Europe in terms of artists' free will by analyzing the intersecting fields of these experiences.

### **3. Research Significance, Question, and Method**

Qualitative research on transnational cultural experiences of performing artists in Europe enables us to sense the multiple realities that the migrant artists experience, and describe their social world, and develop explanatory models and theories about it. This study's significance emerges from a socio-anthropological and political connection between cultural and artistic practices and the transnational spaces where they are practiced. It deconstructs to re-examine discourses around the notion of refuge, including citizenship, integration, solidarity, cosmopolitanism through first-hand experiences. The research provides a truthful demonstration of how research participants derive meanings from their surroundings and how their meanings influence their behaviors and their overall representation.

#### **3.1 Research Question**

By posing the overarching research question about performing artists' transnational cultural experiences, the research material subsequently revealed that the intercultural practice analysis is impacted by nation-states policies, performing arts aesthetics, and artists' subjectivities development. Three operational topics were induced: homemaking, performance relational aesthetics, and performativity in a post-migrant discourse, all connected with integration and solidarity concepts. The topics enabled grounding theorizing regarding artists' life stories before and across their migration journey. The theorizing focuses on artists' transnational subjectivities and contributes a new understanding to the concept of transnational theatre. It generates a query area in the study of transnationalism that relies on the intersectionality between art, politics, and the subject, which impact the experience of artists becoming migrants.

#### **3.2 Methods and Research Material**

A transnational approach to performing arts and migration has changed our perspective on cross-border social and cultural processes and enriched our conceptual repertoire in describing them. It has also significantly reframed research methods and methodologies

(Apitzsch and Siouti 2015, Cassell and Symon 2012). Accordingly, several qualitative research material collection and analysis methods are used in the different manuscripts presented here. Biographical interviews analysis was used in all manuscripts, and empirical knowledge methods based on apprenticeship and participant observation were combined in manuscripts (2, 3). This section presents the research material and methods used in this dissertation and provides methodological reflections on the empirical transnational migration performing arts research.

### **3.2.1 Research Material**

This dissertation looks at Syrian and Palestinian Syrian performing artists in theatre and dance within the context of international migration. The migration wave from Syria is a recent phenomenon shown to have a substantial performing artists component (Ghanem 2019, Halasa et al. 2014, Houssami 2015). What makes the Syrian and Palestinian Syrian performing artists community a compelling case for research is their ability to reflect on social and political experiences and represent the broad migrating community on stages and public spaces. They demonstrate entanglements of performing arts and migration from such a politically and socially complex Arab area. Their life stories and the stories documented on their lives in Europe appear to be particularly suited for exploring interrelationships between different migration regimes, cultural politics of diversity, and intercultural experiences encountering artists beyond nation-states boundaries. Given the difficulty of defining migrant performing artists and differentiating them from nomad artists throughout the dissertation, an analytical decision to include artists forced to leave Syria and currently live in several European countries was taken.

#### *Sampling*

The research is based on snowball sampling. Aware of this group's heterogeneity concerning age and their artistic experience, the dissertation tackles biographies of sixteen artists through a chain of referrals based on the social network that the researcher initiated with one artist. The artist was willing to refer to other artists who could potentially contribute to the study. The researcher was led to more than twenty-two artists but decided to give a quota to

pin only the artists who have at least five years of experience in performing arts. As a result, the research ended up focusing on sixteen artists.

The collection of biographies as a process is connected to the researcher's biography too. As a Palestinian researcher, I share the same mother language with the artists and have a cultural background intertwined with theirs. I am also part of an informal social-cultural network of the Arab cultural scene which enabled me a smooth communication with the artists. Thus, my approaching strategy of artists comprised several components. The first is that my means to approach the research participants relied on mutual cultural heritage in the nineteenth century and after. The second component is related to virtual social networks. Approaching artists was done through individual channels and was facilitated through communications via social media including email, Facebook, and Whatsapp. In many cases, after approaching the artists via social media, I met them after attending a performance, showing interest in providing an opinion. Sometimes we sat for a drink, and we chatted about the performance, otherwise we met later to reflect on the show or hear their further plans, plan, and conduct the interview.

The sample comprises artists who left Syria under fake names and others who were initially banned from travel but were subsequently forced to leave. Thirteen artists smuggled or found a way out via work missions in a neighboring country. Either they could not return due to personal issues with the regime authorities or could return but decided to remain outside the country. Two artists are Palestinian Syrians. Eight of the artists are women. All artists had over five years of professional experience in dance and theatre, completing five productions before leaving Syria. Their experiences varied between modern theatre, folkloric, modern, and contemporary dance. The artists stayed in the neighboring borderlands for up to two years before they found a way out to Europe. All the interviews and research material-gathering took place in Europe.

### *Collecting Research Material*

The research has two methodological streams, and both streams are part of an overall ethnography, which I conducted in Europe, mainly in Germany between 2016 and 2021. One of the streams deals with artists' biographies collected via semi-structured interviews conducted

over two years (2017-2019). The interview guideline covered artists' life stories narrated by them. In my introduction at each interview, I informed the artists about previous research related to the Palestinian performing arts scene in the late twentieth century until recent times. It enabled mutual sharing of knowledge about artists in common and performances we both recognize. Following my introduction, the artists provided an extensive display of personal stories about the interview's central question, "every one of us has a story, what is your story?". Most of the artists focused on stories attached to their engagement in art and theatre until today. Later, I was able to add follow-up questions that encouraged further openness to share stories. Interviewing artists was conducted at their workspaces, a theatre, a café, where the surrounding majority spoke another language. The language, in my opinion, also furthered the harmony in the interview. Biographies collected in this manner are described by Rosenthal (1997) as the narrated life stories where the present meaning of experiences are demonstrated by artists and include temporal order of the life story in the present time of narrating it or presenting it.

The other empirical stream findings stem from an ethnographic apprenticeship within the performing arts scene in Germany and beyond, where interviews, discussions during multiple meetings, and participant observations at two creative processes of two ensembles: the Münchner Kammerspiele and Schauspiel Hannover. By collecting the research material during the ethnography, it is meant the overall observations of artists' theatre productions in the various regions of Germany and beyond, in-depth semi-constructed biographical interviews with them, and close contact with their opinions and reflections on local and universal issues in person and through their virtual social forums, mainly on Facebook. At the Münchner Kammerspiele, the intention was to observe the theatrical productions, but my role naturally evolved into a practice research approach, where I was an observer, then a translator, and an advisor on dramaturgy as I was called. The experience developed into an apprenticeship method, which naturally fits into my empirical method because it added to my understanding of the concept of interculturalism and transnational theatre. It also added to the ensemble a dramaturgical and communicative benefit. It was a learning experience for all members of the group who practiced this transnational theatre experience. The apprenticeship contributed in-

depth understanding of the observed moments and enabled rechecking of analysed moments and interviews. It provided a verification method where I revisited my reflections and field notes whenever I wanted to check the reasonability of the analysed material.

For the analysis, I focused on the ethnographic part of the apprenticeship at the Münchner Kammerspiele apprenticeship, concentrating on the Open Border Ensemble OBE. The four months apprenticeship (January- May 2018) included daily contact with artists, where we spoke about the performance being prepared, how to cope with the weather, their living conditions in the new city, shared food, and attended other performances. During rehearsals, I was welcomed by the project team to observe by attending regularly. I was initially silently sitting at the side taking notes only and helped with some translations. I was present daily with my notebook, which I did not hide from others. I was willing several times to answer questions about it and its content. Speaking the language of the artists maintained unintentional bondage between us. However, on the third day of rehearsal, I was asked to shift my role into a translator (Arabic-English-Arabic) due to the translator's dysfunction (German- Arabic-German). The silenced notetaking observant role shifted into an active translator-cultural mediator role of the daily one-one meetings, group improvisations, and some texts. I wrote my reflections and notes during breaks or after the rehearsal session. I was intended to do the translations until another translator is found, but the project team was pleased with some facilitation, as the director called it, that I have done regarding the social-political context. The artists started to get used to my interpreting style and have already broken the ice with me to ask and comment on things freely. Some artists expressed that my presence gave a sense of home, especially by the jokes and songs shared. I was then asked to join the stage as a translator in the finals, but I expressed that it will not be possible.

Later in the last two weeks before the premiere, the team invented a wooden machine for translation, as a solution to the problem of translation in a tri-lingual performance. The wooden machine replaced me on the rehearsals. I went back to be an observer. Three days before the premiere, the director decided to 'activate your role,' and I was again reactivated in the final rehearsals. I helped finalize the Arabic side of the texts, provided translations and some

dramaturgical content advisory. By being directly implicated in the creative process, I was able to enrich the content with ethnographic notes with a highly contextual understanding.

### **3.2.2 Analysis Method**

Analysis of the research material followed a strategy that combined several methods. The first method is the biographical narrative analysis, which emerged from phenomenological narration (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2002), and biographical case reconstruction (Rosenthal 1997). They mainly connect the individual with institutional aspects of society by reconstructing narratives, abducting cases, and analyzing single cases sequentially, seeking to reveal social macrostructures' impact on the biographical interviews' process structures. However, I combined it with open-coding of the biographies, the notes on the observation, the reflections resulting from the apprenticeship and empirical knowledge induced from the experience with OBE to examine how the analytic interpretations of single cases are generalizable to the rest of cases and the observed material of the apprenticeship. Open coding is a common method in the grounded theory that enables exposure of ideas and meanings in the research material. It includes labeling concepts, defining, and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions, aiming to distinguish between narrations and argumentations and the degree of abstractness in biographies or observed moments. As a result, new social and cultural perspectives emerged, including what Apitzsch and Siouti (2007) described as 'qualitative different hybrid content, a hybrid, and multiple identity formations' (77) that are shown as strategies, trajectories, action schemes, and creative transformations within the various results of the research. Combining both analysis methods encouraged finding out how transnational social spaces are constituted through the biographies of migrant artists by inducing choices, argumentations, processes, and trajectories and abstracting them in relationship with concepts of home, memory, integration, citizenship, and solidarity.

Manuscripts one and two relied on open-coding biographies, which were then formulated and strengthened through using single case models of analysis and ethnographic notes analysis. In each of these manuscripts, two case studies biographies were used in single sequential analysis. After formulating the induced findings, they were then re-examined with

the rest of the artists' cases by comparing the "narrated life stories" of the two case studies with those of the remaining artists. As such, the process consisted of open-coding of all interviews, single-case model analysis about the induced codes, and then re-examining of results with the other interviews. Through such an empirically grounded approach, the manuscripts describe the artist-identified experienced events processes, how artists structured them through actions and led creative transformations. They also comprise proof of results through dealing with the narrative, argumentative, and descriptive excerpts from artists' interviews.

Manuscript three relied on the ethnographic notes of observed moments at the creative process of OBE and on open-coded analysis. The induced knowledge about artists' experiences was also re-examined with the artists' interviews. Following similar examination strategies, manuscript four focused on an in-depth analysis of narratives of one performing artist. Although manuscript five constitutes the concluding theorizing of the research, there was constant referencing proof to a case study of one of the performing artists interviews. As such, this dissertation relates to Symbolic Interactionism, which refers to Weber's focus on people's actions and engagement with others and viewing humans as living in a world where its meaning is created through individuals' social interaction. It perceives individuals' potential as agents and views social reality from their perspectives, which result from interacting with others and constantly negotiating and interpreting meanings of this interaction (Blumer 2012, Hamnersley 1992). The following subsection outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the research material and methods of analysis used in this dissertation against the backdrop of some methodological considerations of transnational migration research.

### **3.2.3 Methodological Considerations on Reflexivity and Immersion**

As the author of this dissertation, I have been engaging myself with questions that not only concern my indulgence with the artists' group but also about my position as a presenter of their situation in research disciplines. I was aware of the local, personal, or professional aspects pertinent to my social and cultural background. My anthropological representation relates to Said's description 'bear[ing] as much on the presenter's world as on who or what is represented' (303). My anthropological lens is dispersed in the totality of imperial history,

modern condition, and postmodern gaze, all accumulating to draw my understanding of both the artists and my transnational experience.

My methodological approach is about creating a counternarrative that perceives the transnational performance experience from a non-western perspective. As a result of modernism, western anthropology almost only focuses on realizing the other in its aesthetics and explanations. Contrary, I aimed to include, to my understanding of smaller local narratives that may appear relevant to postmodernism, my non-European world of perception. I aimed at transforming artists' narratives and my narrative into an activity in which politics, aesthetics, history, and interpretation converged. My ethnography is an attempt to what Said (2013) calls 'continuing, protracted, and sustained adversarial resistance to the discipline and the praxis of anthropology (as representative of "outside" power) itself' (299). The research's grounded approach has broken the 'relationship of force between the outside Western ethnographer-observer and a primitive, or at least different but certainly weaker and less developed, non-Western society' (296). What is significant about this research is that it induces conclusions on nationalism and subjectivity, which emerged as a need to respond to my ethnographic experience. Exile, gender and resilience, and homemaking have become tools to reveal the relationships leading to my conclusions.

Since the beginning of my research journey, I felt in a time capsule that took me back to Palestine and brought me back to Germany, then took me to Damascus and brought me back to Germany, and then back to Germany during the thirties of the past century and back to understand the various realities around the concept of nationalism. The concept provoked much of the analysis and understanding of the performance of transmigrants in Europe nowadays. The grounded theory approach to the research could not separate me but somehow got me in closer encounter with the assumptions and preconceptions I brought to the experience as an ethnographer. By constantly contemplating and rethinking my conceptions, I attempted to define transnationalism from below while paying attention to the artists' historical specificity in focus. While doing that, I have combined an approach of reflexivity and immersion in methodologies tackling multi-sited and non-western oriented approaches to studying

transnationalism. My methodology contributed to breaking binaries and hegemonic conceptions when studying transnational conceptions. In the following, the dissertation demonstrates aspects of reflexive ethnographic anthropology in studying various realities defused within the transnational performing arts experience in hand.

### *Translator as a mediator between realities*

A reflexive reality emerged from the immersion within the apprenticeship, during my shifting roles between an observer and a participant. My immersion is un-unbiased by my cultural, linguistic, and political background. The active role I played in mediating the relationships and understandings between the artists and the team and the improvised topics demonstrate a different reality than that of the observer. For the translation, my active role brought different reality than that of the silent but un-ignored central position of the 'wooden' translation machine replacing me on stage. Despite the many distortions that any translation process could cause in a theatre performance, all members have accepted the reality that translation is central to this performance, dare to speak to any other similar transnational work environment. I engaged myself fully with the translation during the rehearsals to the extent that I was once told, *'You are almost acting while translating, danced as I did while translating, and you even sang it.'* I have realized that translation is central to my research, which established closer contact with the material improvised, the emotional state of the person I am translating, and a trust relationship with the team that facilitated observation and later on interviewing. This has granted my apprenticeship the mutual learning experience aspect.

From a reflexive perspective, translation was essential to creating a common ground for the ensemble but was time-consuming and interruptive to the improvisation processes. I felt introducing the scenes in some parts and cutting their emotional flaws in others. In other places, I made communication more accessible and socio-political context understandable. However, a human translator who will not be present on stage was challenging to the dramaturg and artistic choices. The very rehearsals about memories and personal stories shifted once the silent, but the wooden machine's unavoidable central position replaced the translator on stage. The machine was physically and symbolically huge enough to drive improvisations to revolve around

it, bringing stories around the wooden element's story. The wooden machine has in a way conquered the space on stage and obliged the artistic team to find a way to adapt to its physical and symbolic presence, being the elephant in the room. Nothing was discussed about the machine's usefulness by the artists, but they all engaged in finding ways to improvise around its presence. Their memories about machines, and reputation of German machines, were brought to the improvisation process. Here, I realized the shift from intersubjective connections concerned with subjectivity development in the intercultural space to post-migrant-led intersubjective connections that constitute what will represent artists on stage. A shift moving the intercultural self-exploring medium to an intercultural self-exploring medium that is led by the context demand. This context demand that aims to create a space of beyondness (the post-migrant space) yet leaves behind an essential component of the self; the one being explored in the process before the machine appeared. To try and avoid the centrality of the machine and to create mediation between the Arab artists and the audience, the director led the improvisation process towards having the German actor play the interpreter's role to the audience in addition to the machine (manuscript three).

Among these mediality processes in this intercultural experience, the translator's role as a cultural mediator between the German and non-German participants (whether it was me or the German artist) was crucial in creating a bridge between ideas, inviting similar grounds where thinking and ideas could emerge, and enabling artists to focus on other aesthetics connected to style, improvised moments, and contents. Yet on a further level, many parts of the improvisations focused on non-German artists interpreting (though different styles of their choice) what their colleagues produce in the dramatic moment for reasons of solidarity or mockery or playfulness in the improvisation mode. The whole performance ended up being a mediality space of the various ideas and memories of artists to each other, to them, and to the audience. However in some cases, the artists preferred not to interpret or mediate or use a mediation but rather improvise beyond what their colleagues and the translation produced. Improvising beyond the system of the rehearsals, however, still required further translation and cultural explanations.

### *Observer as a mediator of intercultural spaces*

Three spots in the creative process contributed to my ethnography's anthropological understanding through reflexivity and immersion. They are the general rehearsal location, the smoking corner, and the ice-breaking game corner within it. The rehearsal location and performance locations were outside the theatre premises, in the suburbs of the city. The choice of the location, which the theatre administration made, was intentional, and almost all members of the artistic team complained, to me but then to the theatre administration after my encouragement, about its remoteness and inability to create intercultural spaces of the ensemble with the other ensemble members of the theatre institution. Despite artists' complaints, the answer was always that there was nothing to be done about it. Within the rehearsal location, the ice-breaking corner was created. It comprised a space where the artistic team played a 'game' invented by one of the performers to encourage daily exercise before the rehearsal began. The performer who invented it left the project because of what was explained to me due to not being satisfied with the production's solidarity approach. The game is based on a ball and four connected squares drawn on the floor, forming one big square. Four artists or team members could play at a time, where each, including me, stood in one of the squares and had to make sure to pass the ball with one hand to the one in the next square without touching the ground twice and touching the body. The game, independent of language, built a solid communicative channel between the artists and revealed challenges among them at other times. Bounded by the need to exercise before the rehearsal, the game being regularly played have enhanced the communication between the members and helped solve some unease moments. The game formed an intercultural issue solvent and an energetic vein to the highly un-liked and cold rehearsal location. The game routine continuation despite that its inventor left brought to my mind, most probably to others' minds, the reasons for his leave. The game is based on complementary efforts and competence of the players, whereas the play was based on mediality.

Lastly, the ensemble created another corner at the rehearsal location, which is the smoking corner. In addition to the artistic team's official meeting table, this alternative space revealed unofficial tensions that emerged during the creative process. The moving to the smoking corner was usually done by artists due to a cigarette need. However, it enabled me to observe a split between the Arab-speaking groups and the German-speaking groups. These splits were spontaneous at times and are intentional at others to discuss dissatisfactory issues. The smoking room eased the shifting of the language at the smoking corner (mostly spoken Arabic) and at the meeting table (mostly spoken German). Whenever the split happened, it appeared to me as a mechanism to handle intercultural disparities.

Moreover, another layer was added to my explanation of the smoking corner when the female Arab-speaking artist joined the team and started to visit the smoking corner for a cigarette. As tensions with the female artist heightened on a professional, character basis, her visits continued to the smoking corner, but the male participants' visits seemed to have halted and shifted to the men-changing room. As an Arab-speaking member of the team, I was once invited for a private talk with the female participants in the smoking corner concerning the fact that she cannot find means of communication with the male performers. Haunted by preconceptions about gender relations, I played a supporter role, pushing that she continues until the end despite the various pressures. I was also invited to the men-changing room to discuss male artists' dissatisfaction with the director's strategy, the female artist, and some translations with the dramaturg. There, I played a listener role, and encouraged that they speak out what they need to say. The smoking corner enabled me to realize that even within an environment of solidarity, there reside several canonizations and categorizations that play a role in the intercultural experience. Several chit-chats with the German speaking group members revealed other tensions on perceptions of things and mechanisms, but these were never brought to the official table nor the smoking corner.

In summary, the translator and observer roles I played during my immersion and apprenticeship at the theatre project contributed to shaping the research outcome and formulating my strategies in analyzing the subject of migrant artists. The transcultural and

intercultural, and cultural issues that the three locations and the relational space between them illuminated the fact that post migrant spaces comprise components of analysis beyond the mere living together experience and related to the history of artists' subjective experiences and my experience in the field of performing arts. Moreover, the intercultural context's translation issue is a salient component to directing, manipulating, and leading difference management mechanisms. The following section will demonstrate the results of the ethnography and biographical interviews using both methodological streams. It displays the findings on transnational cultural experiences of artists.

## 4. Research Results

### 4.1 Home-making and Integration

The research induced several understandings about how artists' engagement in transnational social fields led to deriving meanings about 'home', including their state of familiarity, forms of security, and career-making. Being forced to migrate, the immediacy and urgency of leaving Syria led artists' biographic constructions and their immersion within creative processes to revolve around attempting to recreate home in the new place. Manuscripts one and two connect the spatialities that artists experienced: homeland, borderlands, and a host country, with the relational dynamics used to re-establish a new home. Artists' relational dynamics comprised agencies to cope with the newness imposed in the transnational space. Both manuscripts allude to a multi-scalar social field (Glick Schiller 2018), which include the intersecting power dynamics of individuals with the migration authorities and political regimes, as well as forms of institutional support they receive, and their social and cultural capitals, and discourses on art's global economy, and language as a communication tool in transnational relational aesthetics. Considerable parts of artists' biographic and artistic experiences revealed home-making trajectories, which revolved around their daily and artistic behaviors, choices, and encounters within these multi-scalar social fields.

The first manuscript *Negotiating 'Home': Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Borderlands*<sup>9</sup>, provides that artists' relational dynamics comprised a trajectory of emotional identification within borderlands and a disentanglement trajectory from prior understandings and networks. Their trajectories appeared contradictory but referred to migrant artists' confrontation and negotiations while constructing a new home in the transnational space. As they compromised their careers to identify with the borderland's necessities, they have consequently produced new understandings about networks of peers and professions that obstructed their integration. As a result, artists' trajectories challenged the potential of their

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<sup>9</sup> This manuscript is published through the Civil Society Review peer-reviewed Journal: Totah, Ruba. "Negotiating "Home:" Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Borderlands." 2020.

integration in borderlands, and their homemaking became a transformative relationship, where 'home' turned into a tool for creating the order required to achieve security, career progression, and belonging in an unstable borderland. Using home this way enabled artists' trajectories to negotiate the temporality and spatiality of territorialization and eliminate its control mechanisms through inclusion and exclusion. Artists' home-making trajectories were constitutive of their agencies to maintain their free will despite the Borderlands migration and integration regulations.

The second manuscript *Negotiating 'Home' Borders: Creative Processes Hosting Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Europe*<sup>10</sup>, extends the induction of artists' relational dynamics in the multi-scalar social field in Europe. They comprised trajectories of home-making through immersion within creative processes in a European migration context. The creative processes were mainly organized to produce verbatim, documentary theatre, and aesthetics of building a multi-relational Doublement and an interactive documentary experience that focus on artists' personal experience of the migration journey. Relying on dialogical and experiential repetitive patterns resulting from their intercultural experience, the artists continued to identify with the creative processes' transnational realities. The identification trajectory enabled the relational spaces to reconstruct artists' understanding of domesticity and familiarity again. The other trajectory is re-entanglement (after disentanglement at borderlands) with the state of origin's figures, memories, and references, which resulted from several subjective and intersubjective relational and spatial confrontations. The creative process enabled artists to continue their attempts to define home through the various familiarities they tried to construct and domesticities they managed to recreate.

Moreover, the creative process provided an artistic, unconventional space to connect the transnational circumstances with the relational aesthetics of migration art. Such connections differentiate the migrant artist from a migrant, where migrant artists' home-making becomes a process of crossing the multi-spatial boundaries of what 'home' generally indicates and

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<sup>10</sup> This manuscript is published through the European Journal of Theatre and Performance, EASTAP peer-reviewed Journal: Totah, R. Negotiating 'Home' Borders: Creative Processes Hosting Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Europe. European Journal of Theatre and Performance (2020). 1(2).

reconstructing them again intersubjectively through artistic processes of documentary theater. In the manuscript this is referred to as third space of relational experience. Immersion in creative processes utilized home as a tool but dealt with it as something distant and separate and can be 'worked on,' changed, or exist in a non-ordinary sphere of socio-cultural reality. The multi-relational aesthetic space at the creative process enabled migrant artists to examine the concept of home beyond its legal and diasporic understanding and extended its dynamic nature to recreate it through living together in the post-migrant theater. As such, integration became a negotiation space of memory through trans-subjectivities and intersubjectivities rather than endorsements. In this space, the artists re-constructed the sense of citizenship by including new identifications that do not indicate direct functionality from individual migrants but rather a constant negotiation of them. If cultural citizenship connects the use of appropriate resources to foster citizenship — where creativity and symbols use art to construct individual livings — art becomes a link between migrants' claims for citizenship and the national perspective, promoting active participation within the national culture. As such, artists' home-making trajectories were a constitutive part of their agencies to negotiate aspects of their free will within intercultural spaces of solidarity comprising post-migrant visions of theater and forms citizenships in the European host societies.

## 4.2 Relational Aesthetics of Creative Processes and Solidarity

In addition to homemaking, the transnational cultural experience of migrant performing artists includes relational dynamics around the aesthetics of performance productions. The second manuscript demonstrates how the creative process is central in explaining how artists defined their home-making trajectories. More connected to the aesthetics, the third manuscript, *Theater against Borders: 'Miunikh–Damaskus'—A Case Study in Solidarity*<sup>11</sup>, provides a micro-analysis of a living-together experience — the OBE case study at the Münchner Kammerspiele in Germany. The case of OBE is part of theatrical institutions' support of post-

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<sup>11</sup> This manuscript is published through the Arts Journal, peer-reviewed Journal co-authored with Krystal Khoury: Totah, Ruba, and Krystal Khoury. "Theater against Borders: 'Miunikh–Damaskus'—A Case Study in Solidarity." Arts. Vol. 7. No. 4. Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2018.

migrant performances, which has a concrete social perspective of solidarity. The manuscript describes how artists experienced intercultural relational dynamics within the creative process. Their experience served a syncretism of realities and cultures, which is popular in post-migrant performance scholarship as 'third space' of beyondness. It reflects on artists' multi-layered artistic strategies of coping in a migration situation. Strategies for creating this third space are improvisation and translation, which demonstrate the mechanisms through which a transborder theater experience is built up, constantly shifting between drawing limits and then crossing limitations between the self and the others. Improvisation is about creating and reusing stories and situations, whereas translation is about communicating and connecting people and raising challenges, understandings, and ideas. They involve the self and the other, and they both function as strategies to transform the creative process into the third space of a relational experience. It is an experience of disorder and confusion where agents have to confront themselves simultaneously and encounter others, reconsidering their habitual routines. It is within this relational tension that an intercultural reality unfolds. It starts being constructed as soon as the stories, outspoken and traveling across a geographical boundary, are shared, multiplied, and transformed. Throughout this process, the artists were urged to rethink, be more aware of what they present and represent, and contemplate to find motivations to redefine themselves in a new place that is in motion. Manuscripts two and four refer to other artistic styles the artists needed to construct this space, including character-Doublement and character-embodiment.

Manuscript three also demonstrates how the third space strategies contributed to solidarity. Through perceiving improvisation as an opportunity to deviate from a system, this strategy opened possibilities for new representations, affiliations, and solidarity. Moreover, shown as a subject constituting process, translation in post-migrant performance mediums shuttled between the interior and the exterior, in the self and the other of its members, enabling a better understanding of artists' emerging representations. Over time, the solidarity space aided by this medium of translation is no longer in finding common space between artists and experiencing and learning from each other within a third space. Solidarity in the Miunikh–Damascus theatrical experience is thus stretched beyond common grounds to interpersonal

practice over an extended period. It stresses that within a single encounter practice over a period resides various representing mediums that individuals' agency guide. However, relational aesthetics within this solidarity approach, being subject to conditional funding and limited duration, they conditioned the migration phenomenon to a limited temporary social determinant and limited the space for broader and larger solidarity and hampered attempts of achieving individual free will.

### **4.3 Cognition of Performativity, Resilience, Freedom**

Manuscripts one, two, and three relied on the subjective, intersubjective, and trans subjective experiences of artists to induce processes of homemaking and relational aesthetics. They sparked further attention to exploring processes of an artist's subject formation. Manuscripts four and five continued to seek meanings about artists' standpoints and understandings of their behaviors and relational dynamics through their biographic narrations. By addressing artists' subjectivities concerning biopolitics and nationalism, the manuscripts provide that transnational theater is shown as a challenge to their biographic representations and that artists' life stories offer explanations regarding their existence, migratory aesthetics, and institutional entanglements moving beyond European-oriented solidarity discourses. The manuscripts utilize the first three manuscripts' findings regarding artists' transnational experience to provide a socio-political and existentialist reading of transnational theater in Europe. They also provide new case studies to describe how, by engaging in local and transnational social fields, artists generated biographical paradoxes to establish transnational investigative subjectivities.

Manuscript four *No Room for Bare life on Stage: The Biopolitics of Syrian Migrant Artists*<sup>12</sup> provides a biographical understanding of past and on-ground biopolitics at several nation-states' regimes. The manuscript induces aspects of artists' performativity beyond the limitations of the

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<sup>12</sup>This manuscript is published through the *Borders in Perspective Journal*, a peer-reviewed Journal: Totah, Ruba. "No Room for Bare Life on Stage: Biopolitics of Syrian Migrant Artists Performativity". Astrid M. Fellner, Eva Nossem, and Tetyana Ostapchuk (eds.) *Borders in Perspective. The Biopolitics of Borders in Time of Crisis*. Vol. 7. [forthcoming 2021]

host societies' politics and the border crossing experience and their inhibiting schemes of a Syrian migrant artist's figure. Since representations of migrant artists' biographies focus on political understandings connected with and limited to the crossing of borders and integration issues in European societies, they confine migrant artists to exoticization, biographical voyeurism, and debates of ontological worthiness. Such representations disregard momentous attributes of artists' performativity and minimize subjective schemes of their artistic identities' formations.

The manuscript explains how artists perform their life stories to become Syrian migrant artists, borrowing Beauvoir's term 'becoming' (Butler 1985; Tedd 2008). Artists' performativity refers to their overall narrated life experience, which includes their profession and gender, and legal status, making the biographical representations of Syrian migrants part of the artists' cognition process. Their consciousness becomes a process of connecting inner with outer performative attributes, contributing to the emergence of the Syrian migrant artist subject and its current appearance. Suppose this subject is constantly politically represented by how artists narrated their life stories, reconstructed their life histories, or produced their biographies. In that case, a biography representation of a migrant artist relates to the migrant artist subject's state of becoming itself. It becomes the object of a Syrian migrant artist's 'surpassing' in that the Syrian migrant artist is in constant need to know about itself through its other, its biography.

The manuscript also demonstrates the governmentality apparatus of artists' performance of their subject and the constantly emerging consciousness resulting from reconsidering and transforming their understanding of the multi-scalar social fields' power structure regulations. These shifts in consciousness, resulting from interacting with powers, explain that being a Syrian artist is not something one is. However, it is something that one does or constantly performs while interacting with various authorities despite the geographical location and time. By being performative, a Syrian artist can constantly transform narrations of a life history to introduce various understandings of authoritative practices and produce various biographies. As such, the biography constructions established artists' biographies as performative acts, including the counter-performative attributes describing the artist's resilience mechanism facing national powers of dictatorship and patriarchy. The biography

constructions also provided that interchanging set of memories explain that being a migrant artist is also performative and that there is no natural Syrian migrant artist, which preexisted migration policies and border controls and integration programs. By explaining migrants' resilience attributes as a continuous reshaping and confronting with fixed representations at home and outside it, there is a recall of Arendt's (1973:281) argument that the 'naked man' figure is a human who breaks the relationship between man and citizenship and who is unbound by human rights or international policies. As such, artists' performativity in a transnational context explains how they confront the transnational spaces' citizenship powers. It also iterates what Agamben (1995) calls 'bare life' where there is a part of being human that no security measure can protect.

Moreover, artists' successive confrontations include a structure of desire that widens biography representations' space, including transformative, contrasting, and performative ways of introducing multiple understandings of ethical and political change. Accumulating on that, Syrian migrant artists' cognition of their performativity embrace biography as part of a migrant's subject. It constitutes the subject's alterity, the desired object. Attempting to transform the biographical explanations of migrants questions the post-migrant and post heimat (home) euro-centric limitations. It questions their missions of seeking diversity of European societies representation by inviting dialogue issues related to the subject's pre-migrant state and its governmentality, including colonial and global political topics. Artists use their biographies as an object of tactics, and they use the theater ensembles within post-migrant spaces as opportunities for representation (the space of the other). However, continuing to seize the opportunity to provide their objects within these spaces, repeat a performative routine that congeals their objects into a representation specifically connected with these spaces. Therefore, the post-migrant representation demands are becoming additional authoritative inscriptions of artists' experiences. The bare life situation describes the state where a Syrian migrant artist negotiates insecurities and resilience opportunities between subjectivity and post-migrant, post-heimat (citizenship) calls of diversity. The manuscript illustrates that post-migrant visions of diversity provide a space for these biographies' representations. However, by neglecting the various biopolitical influences on artists' performativity, they transform into a challenge

themselves. Artists' resilience mechanisms maintain generating biographic productions attempting to disconnect with subjective and with citizenship representations.

The fifth and last manuscript, *Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe*<sup>13</sup>, concretizes previous findings to theorize about the multiple holistic cognitive, relational, and biopolitical processes that artists experience. Through concluding that these processes transform their subject when handling dynamics such as gender, race, and nationalism, the manuscript examines how migrant artists' transnational subjectivities reveal that putting their biographies on stage act against their free will, relying on Sartre's conclusion on "being condemned to be free" (Sartre and Baskin 1965: 63). It demonstrates the extent that their life trajectories reproduce biographical paradoxes and influence artists' free will. It also negotiates the European-oriented understanding of transnational theater by introducing artists' relational dynamics as a subaltern group where its members' biographical paradoxes continuously and transnationally restructure their consciousness of the self and belonging, relying on the past.

The manuscript also demonstrates how artists' immersions within the transnational social spaces influence artists' consciousness of their inclusion and free will. The transnational social fields comprise layers of biographical paradoxes that recreate artists' consciousness of the self and maintains confrontations with the past. Spatial, temporal, and imaginative creative processes constitute an internal movement of the self that resists a fixed definition of home and belonging and transcends the artists' self beyond their subjects. Engulfed by these social fields' power structure that hampers artists' holistic subjectivity representativeness on stages, the power structure limits artists' investigation beyond their subject towards its freedom. Hence, if theatrical institutions' inclusion processes are steered by funding and cultural diversity politics, then despite advocating for their free will, artists' relational dynamics in the transnational space amalgamate with inclusion visions sought by the creative space organizers. Also, as Artists' resilience mechanisms cannot break from the confederated state with the solidarity and

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<sup>13</sup> This manuscript is published through the Critical Stages/Scènes critiques, The IATC journal/Revue de l'AICT peer-reviewed Journal: Ruba Totah. « Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe.» Critical Stages/ Scènes critiques, vol #23. Copyright (2021).

inclusion policies that direct, moderate, and lead their exile participation, their choices are not directed towards their freedom but rather towards confederation with these inclusion spaces.

Extending from a transnational relational site of contemporaneity that situates artists' transnational subjectivities within the active phase of their freedom, artists' transnational subjectivity includes all interactions through trajectories and strategies around social, political, and economical local and globalized conceptions of art, marking artists' life projects as a process of extending the self towards what they imagined about their lives. However, through hampering artists' holistic subjectivity development representation on stage, the power structure limits artists' investigation beyond their subject towards its free will. Moreover, in uniting with solidarity visions of the post-migrant spaces, artists' choices do not accomplish the wishing dream of freedoms before, during, and after their uprising.

## **5. Intersectionality in Transnational Arab Performing Artists Experiences**

The dissertation has been accumulating its results that achieved an intersectional analysis in art, politics, and migration fields towards the concept of freedom or free will. Freedom as a concept has been at the core of discussions following the Cold War, especially the discussions about postcolonialism, neocolonialism, nationalism, and neoliberalism (Fanon 1968). Aspects of cultural freedom in this dissertation include economic, personal, media, movement freedom, freedom of information, and freedom in the context of liberation from occupation. The dissertation's manuscripts provided that performing arts aesthetics, local and transnational migration policies, and constructions of artists' subjectivities under paradoxes of nationalism have been the salient divisions constituting the transnational cultural experience that contributes to an individual's subjective experience achieving one's free will. The following subsections further elaborate on how this dissertation theoretically tailors the three sections of artists' transnational cultural experience, building on its theorization on their contribution to their free will.

### **5.1 Relational Aesthetics and Transnational Cultural Experiences of Artists**

Bourriaud (2002) provided extended explanations on how relational aesthetics is a modernist form of art relations, participation, and exchange that advocates social change. By calling the artwork a 'social interstice' (ibid 5), he proposed that relational aesthetics seek to expand the understanding of art by inviting the human relations around it, including its production and its reception, instead of limiting it to independent and private symbolic spaces (ibid: 5). In contrast to society's increasing functionality against finding relational spaces under the current world contingencies, artwork can create such a relational space. Art becomes a form that involves intersubjective encounters resulting from being-together themes. Politically, this art form situates relational aesthetics around it in the liminal space between aesthetics and

politics and rejects aesthetic autonomy that distinguishes pure and political art. Thus, art as a political form turns relational aesthetics into a process that resists art commodification by the cultural industry. The transnational cultural experience of migrant artists becomes relational through their intercultural experiences, which comprise their intersubjective encounters around sorts of boundaries and physical borders and their connections with their original country. The social fields they create during their transnational experiences hosts their relational space where all the aesthetical dynamics around recreating 'Home' and producing their biographies and developing their subjectivity takes place.

Moreover, what Bourriaud expresses as the being-together experience provides that a relationship between individuals is the central component of the relational art forms they develop. 'The behaviors resulting from the struggle with others, through addressing them and interacting with them, constitute each individual's form of art and his 'being' in this art form' (8). The form of relationships that emerge between individuals resemble interactions and dialogue between their subjectivities. As the dialogue begins, negotiations and confrontations around the self and the environment start to form the artistic practice's quintessence. The responsibility that artists hold towards others in this dialogue is their representation of the artwork's desired world, which constitutes its meaning. Their responsibility is of the possibilities of creating encounters through the artwork, where to create exchange around it and produce its meaning. By stressing the utility of art as a social practice and a free association with others rather than an explorable content, Bourriaud resumes:

"Reintroducing the idea of plurality, for contemporary culture hailing from modernity, means inventing ways of being together, forms of interaction that go beyond the inevitability of the families, ghettos of technological user-friendliness, and collective institutions on offer. We can only extend modernity to our advantage by going beyond the struggles it has bequeathed us. In our post-industrial societies, the most pressing thing is no longer the emancipation of individuals, but the freeing-up of inter-human communications, the dimensional emancipation of existence." (27)

By connecting this theorizing with the intercultural space where the transnational cultural experiences of artists take place, the concept of subjectivity become central to the

relational aesthetics. Borriaud provides that the future of art becomes an instrument to emancipate intersubjectivity forms. It relies on the efforts introduced by Guattari to denaturalize and deterritorialized subjectivity being 'dependent on a mental superstructure and points to the liberation of possibilities' (42). Guattari's approach is closer to the structuralist approach, which does not consider subjectivity a transcendence goal, neither does it aim to reveal what lies beneath institutions contributing to its construction. According to Guattari, subjectivity is "the set of relations that are created between the individual and the vehicles of subjectivity he comes across, be they individual or collective, human or inhuman. In the artists' case, their subjectivities come across vehicles that produce their biographic representation. It is all the conditions making it possible for the individual and collective agencies to be in a position "to emerge as sui-referential existential territory, adjacent to or in a relation with an otherness that is itself subjective" (42).

In the same sense, Wannous (1996) views theater as a 'Social Event' where the bondage between an actor and the audience leads to the theatrical phenomenon. The event entails understanding the audience's needs in theater-making, constructing the message to be transmitted to them, and defining a specific genre and the collective approach to formulate this message theatrically. While collective work is essential to achieve this social event, it could be based on how each involved would do what is entailed for him or her to do. However, Wannous considers that theater production creates a fertile collective feed. It is not merely collecting individual efforts but also creating a rich dialogues and collaborative creation that gradually reveal the group's identity. As the relational dynamics of the performing artists' transnational experience in this dissertation constitute the social interstice or the social event. Interaction around artists' legal, cultural, and social status occurs through their homemaking trajectories and their biopolitics performativity. These interactions contribute to their biographic representations on stage and to producing its meanings. However, by recreating this social interstice throughout their migration journey, the artists aimed to reclaim their free will but could not achieve it under the power structure of the social fields they inhabited. This means that the transnational relational dynamics of togetherness in a relational aesthetic space, in the

here and now, is constantly confronted by the social fields' powers where they take place and do not achieve utopia.

Moreover, if the confrontation happening at the transnational social space contrasts with the theorizing of Bourriaud about togetherness, then it would be similar to what Bishop (2004, 2005) describes in the concept of antagonist aesthetic. While Bourriaud defines artists' role as only seeking temporary solutions to the here and now through togetherness, Bishop (2004) suggests that Bourriaud's defense of relational aesthetics relies on culture being an ideology of nation-states, which does not reflect society but produces it (63). She calls for questioning the quality of the relationships in "relational aesthetics" and the democratic meaning behind the dialogue it creates. She introduces another perception of subjectivity by Laclau and Mouffe, who assumed that subjectivity is dependent on a process of identification that is 'not a self-transparent, rational, and pure presence, but is irremediably decentered and incomplete' (66). She defends the concept of antagonism, which makes the relationship between the self and the other clearer. It reveals that 'the presence of what is not me renders my identity precarious and vulnerable, and the threat that the other represents transforms my sense of self into something questionable' (66). Antagonistic aesthetics reveals sorts of tensions, exploitations, subversions, and works against the quality.

The migrant performing artists' relational dynamics comprise aspects of the antagonism that Bishop describes but do not aesthetically achieve it. They are situated in an intercultural transnational context, where more than one level combines to create the being-together experience. Emerging from multiple realities, the relational dynamics that artists experience in the transnational social field were antagonistic on many levels, including peer artists, the director, and the audiences. Their dynamics consisted of intercultural strategies where the artists have shown to have responsibility for the encounter. However, confederation with solidarity discourses and performativity of its biopolitics stood against the creative process capability to excel with the antagonistic relational aesthetic spaces that may transcend artists' subjects towards their freedom. As such, understanding the antagonistic aesthetics of a social event need to achieve intersectionality with a political understanding that incorporates power

dynamics and the transnational social field of artists' experiences to target intercultural relationships between artists better.

## **5.2 Post-migration, Post-Heimat, Solidarity and Biopolitics**

In addition to the need for an intersectional understanding of relational aesthetics that includes politics, the manuscripts contribute to an understanding of heated migratory concepts in theater practice in Europe, such as post-migrant and post-Heimat (Home), from a transnational and ontological perspective. Postmigration has been introduced as an analytical framework on the dynamics of globalized societies such as European societies. It emphasizes citizenship by promoting a space for negotiation between cultural encounters while being together within the same society and a space for sharing democratic values centered on diversity. It focuses on the processes constituting this space after the migration (Foroutan 2019; Petersen 2020; Petersen and Schramm 2017). Postmigrant theater visions generally question existing knowledge frameworks related to migrants by inspiring new understandings and voicing migrants in the theater. In a study on theater and migration, Sharifi (2016) proposes that the European theater's main challenge has long been its ability to create diversity within its structures and audiences and its accessibility by everyone. In Germany, state theaters were exclusive and closed to national interests, and the independent theaters were less diverse until the late nineties when more practices opened up to diversity. Migratory aesthetics became the medium of experimentation apart from associations and labelings, where the post-migrant perspective of society represents the unheard and the unseen perspectives of a society. Recent voices for a transcultural theater called for a third space "to rethink forms of presentation and open new possibilities" (ibid: 401), and calls for "the translation of cultural differences, [Where] cultures are constituted externally as processes of overlapping and mixing" (Ibid).

However, the postmigrant space focuses on European societies' needs and interpretations for diversity and citizenship. As the space is centered on eliminating prejudices and discriminations, it situates the artistic material that the artists produce within frames of diversity in the host society and neglects artists' other subjective concerns. The manuscripts revealed that such theater space has failed to enable artists to restructure their biography

beyond their compliance with authoritative regimes that they experience transnationally. Therefore, the Syrian migrant artist biography becomes an object inhibited by compliance with this space's citizenship obligations. As the concept of migratory aesthetics (Bal 2015) tends to shift the focus from artists to the artwork itself and its audience's aesthetic experience, it aimed to avoid the exclusionary effect of the concept 'migrant theater,' 'migrant art,' where artists are considered outsiders. If these artworks constituted the produced biographies on an artist's life history, which the manuscripts found that they form the artist's alterity, then attempting to avoid this exclusion, a great deal of the artist's subject is neglected.

### **5.3 Transnational Subjectivity, Freedom (Free Will)**

The intersection between relational aesthetics, politics and migration in artists transnational cultural experiences constitute their subjectivity, which demonstrates their state of free will. Such philosophical aspects combine transnationalism from below with existential perspectives of artists' human experience where their desires create a link between artists' past, their present and their view of the future, and their choices about the link with their original and host countries. Freedom, being an existential passion, drives individuals' infinite relationship and interest to themselves and their destinies and their sustained effort of becoming or reaching the finite (in Sartre and Baskin 1965:5). This passion for freedom is bounded by Heidegger's description of the 'Ecstasy of Time' (16) which inspires, impassionates, and animates individuals about their present. Heidegger expresses that individuals strive through the phrase 'we have to find ourselves,' which implies futurity in its 'we have to' part, and both pastness and futurity in the 'ourselves' part. As such, individuals' being, before and behind the self, constitutes at the same time the self. The ecstasy of time is the product of the juncture between individuals' future and their past. For migrant Syrian artists, the ecstasy of time defines their transnational philosophy. It constitutes a transnational cultural project of 'becoming' which is based on memory, interaction in the country where they arrived, and passion for freedom, which began in their original country and accompanied them to where they settled. This ecstasy of time constitutes the existential aspect of cultural transnationalism as a social phenomenon centered around the passion for freedom.

The famous phrase by Sartre, 'man is condemned to be free,' incorporates characteristics that pertain to this transnational philosophy of migrant artists. According to Sartre, in its ordinary sense, it includes responsibility, which is a 'consciousness of being the incontestable author of an event or an object' (63). In this sense, Sartre describes the responsibility of individual being-for-itself as overwhelming because it assumes the situations with its peculiar coefficient of adversity wholly, and nothing outside the self can make this assumption and thus take such responsibility. Artists transnational philosophy in the dissertation combines their relational aesthetics and their strive for freedom to achieve the state of 'being-for-itself'. They take responsibility of producing meanings of home, artworks or art performances, and the self. It is similar to what Sartre describes as the responsibility of engaging in a war, 'I am this war' (65). It is that the war is my choice despite the various shapes of me participating in it, and it is the responsibility one holds of this reality; that the war is his. By taking responsibility for the consequences of the choices following their displacements, home-making trajectories and strategies become artists' choices despite their free will in making them. Their relational dynamics within the creative processes become an aspect of their responsibility to create an encounter that produces meaning possibilities of their artwork. Their trajectories and strategies and relational dynamics form the empirical situation where artists practiced their desire and responsibility for their free will. This situation turned these artists' realization of their being into a desire of a mode of being and their transnational cultural experience becomes their means to continuously create this experience's possibilities. Sartre resumes, "For freedom is nothing other than a choice which creates for itself its possibilities" (72).

The dissertation demonstrates that by intersectional analysis of artistic, national, and migratory experience, performing artists from Syria engaged with the post-migrant solidarity spaces at the countries where they ended, and are thus held responsible for the confederation with these spaces against their free will. Through displaying the complexity of nationalism and the Arab performing arts, the dissertation induces a problematic site of contemporaneity that artists experienced throughout their displacement journey. Their survival trajectories at the borderlands and in Europe provide a transnational aspect to the problematic position of the contemporaneity of their relationship with nationalism. Within this position, artists recreated

their self-consciousness towards the struggle for freedom from nationalism framings. Their trajectories reproduced biographical paradoxes where, as a subaltern group, artists' relational dynamics continuously and transnationally restructured their consciousness of the self and belonging, relying on the past and confronting it. The biographical paradox influenced artists' consciousness development through spatial, temporal, and imaginative processes. However, as their trajectories are engulfed by the power structure of the social fields created through their transnational experience, this power hampers artists' holistic subjectivity representation on stage and their desire to investigate their future or their freedom.

## 6. General Summary

This dissertation has limitations of language and funding. I have been very keen to learn the German language to engage with cultural policy dynamics in the German theater scene or the scholarly contributions in German concerning the theater practice with refugees. However, with an intermediate German language level, this was still not possible. I was also keen to participate more in intermediary cultural venues, but that was not possible given my non-fluent German language level. Engaging in such venues and reading such literature could have added another level to my research, even if it did not affect the various analyses and understandings sought to answer my research question. This research dissertation's validity emanates from its strong dialogical orientation with research participants, through engagement with the Post-Heimat network encounters, and engagement with theater institutions. Through dialogism, I did not view research in terms of describing other worlds from the outside, but in terms of an encounter or interaction between different worlds, minding an ethical imperative to be true to and respect other people's lived worlds and realities. The dissertation provides self-reflexive, poly-vocal, and truthful spaces to the research participants and me. The dissertation also comprises deconstructive validity through managing to unravel social tropes and discourses that, over time, have come to pass for a 'truth' about the world, such as the post-migration discourses of solidarity. Future work could possibly focus on expanding scope towards a new research question that invite concurrent aspect of migrant artists' stay in the host countries, especially their resilience during the Covid-19 crisis. This question could tackle the development of the 'Refugee Welcome' movement in present day and how it has reflected on performing arts activism.

## **7. Manuscripts**

### **Manuscript 1: Negotiating "Home:" Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Borderlands**

This manuscript is published through the Civil Society Review peer-reviewed Journal: Totah, Ruba. "Negotiating "Home:" Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Borderlands." 2020.

# **Negotiating “Home:” Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Borderlands**

**Ruba Totah**

## **Abstract**

Since 2012, the escalation of the Syrian conflict has forced the displacement of millions of Syrians into neighboring countries, as well as Europe. Tens of artists moved out of Syria due to scarce employment opportunities and restrictions associated with working under oppressive regimes. Some of the interlocutors in this research emphasised their attempts to stay in Arab countries and reconstruct their “home” by resuming artistic careers, but ultimately decided to move to Europe, while others favoured leaving directly. This paper examines how, in the case of 16 artists’ narrated life stories, various cultural institutions’ support, life trajectories, and relational dynamics come together to influence home-making opportunities in Arab transit countries. It addresses the challenges, potentials, and implications of home-making attempts of displaced performing artists.

## Introduction

In 2005, the global community adopted the Universal Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, aiming to boost cultural industries around the world. Sixteen Arab countries ratified this convention and other cultural policies,<sup>1</sup> in order to enhance artist's mobility and cultural exchange. Shared language and cultural references held opportunities for transnational cooperation in performing arts, especially in theatre, dance, and music. However, continuing mobility restrictions<sup>2</sup> and repression of diversity in political productions exposed Arab regimes' pseudo-commitment to the exchange of arts. As of 2011, more and more Syrians became displaced, and challenges faced in refugeehood were exacerbated by restrictive policies<sup>3</sup> adopted in 2014 on their mobility, residence, and work.<sup>4</sup> This, in turn, provided insight on the various actors in the current Arab cultural production scene and shaped artists' trajectories. Among the displaced were performing artists who played a major role in the Arab contemporary creative scene. They have promoted political and humanitarian discourses of conflict, its cultural

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<sup>1</sup> The Arab Cultural Unity Charter 1964 and ALESCO 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Until the Arab uprising era in 2010, Arab borders policies obstructed rather than encouraged the mobility of artists. See: Mona Merhi, "Syrian Art Production Support Models and Sustainability Challenges," Website, *Ettijahat*, December 2018, available at: <https://www.ettijahat.org/page/801> [last accessed 21 March 2019].

<sup>3</sup> Arab countries ratified the non-binding Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018, except for Lebanon and Jordan, which both did not sign the Refugee Convention in 1951. They consider the arriving masses as guests, not legal refugees. Lebanon declared that the crisis is not to be governed by law, but by governmental decisions. Due to restrictive residency policies, 70% of Syrian refugees did not have valid legal stay in the country, and 90% of Palestinian refugees from Syria lacked valid residency documents. See: Carole AlSharabati and Jihad Nammour, "Survey on Perceptions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," Beirut, *Institut Des Sciences Politiques - USJ*, 2015, available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/45083> [last accessed 21 March 2019]; Sally Abi Khalil and Valentina Bacchin, "Lebanon: Looking ahead in times of crisis," *Oxfam Discussion Papers*, Beirut, Oxfam, 2015, p.1-40, available at: [https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/dp-lebanon-looking-ahead-time-crisis-141215-en\\_0.pdf](https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/file_attachments/dp-lebanon-looking-ahead-time-crisis-141215-en_0.pdf) [last accessed 21 March 2019].

<sup>4</sup> Maja Janmyr, "The legal status of refugees in Lebanon," *Working Paper*, Beirut, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2016, p.1-20, available at: [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/working\\_papers/2015-2016/20160331\\_Maja\\_Janmyr.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/working_papers/2015-2016/20160331_Maja_Janmyr.pdf) [last accessed 20 March 2019]; Susan F. Martin, Rochelle Davis, Grace Benton, and Zoya Walianny, "International Responsibility-Sharing for Refugees," *Knomad Working paper*, 2018, Vol. 1(32), p.1-46; Lebanon Support, "Formal Informality, Brokering Mechanisms, and Illegality. The Impact of the Lebanese State's Policies on Syrian Refugees' Daily Lives," Beirut, *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, 2016, available at: <https://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/formal-informality-brokering-mechanisms-and-illegality-impact-lebanese-state%E2%80%99s-policies> [last accessed 21 March 2019].

imaginary,<sup>5</sup> and myth-making, and have been subjected to an extended marginalisation of culture<sup>6</sup> which caused cuts in budget<sup>7</sup> allocated for the art sector in a context of conflict.

Similar to millions of displaced Syrians, performing artists who were forced to move to Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, or Egypt, searched for a secure place. They did so by resuming their art, by networking, and by familiarising themselves with a new country and context. Among those were Palestinian Syrian performing artists, descendants of initially displaced Palestinian communities to Syria.<sup>8</sup> Most of the sixteen artists applied for residency permits and sought employment within the local formal art market, or resorted to other means of (informal) livelihoods. In order to get legal residency, artists depended mainly on personal, and informal transnational networks established long before the Syrian uprising. These networks created job opportunities in neighboring cultural arenas.

However, in 2015, many Arab countries closed their borders to all refugees coming from Syria<sup>9</sup> These political measures further disrupted artistic productions,<sup>10</sup> and many artists found themselves trapped in Syria, with limited opportunities to work, due to censored freedom of expression, and risks of persecution by the regime or its allies. By then, notably as many refugees fled to Europe,<sup>11</sup> Arab countries transformed into “borderlands,”<sup>12</sup> becoming temporary transit points for some artists.<sup>13</sup> Borderlands are generally described<sup>14</sup> as regions at both sides of a border, that have specific social and economic connections. However, Hess and Kasparek

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural imaginary refers to the images and discursive forms through which a cultural community articulates itself and connects with its collective identity formation. See: Steve Spencer, *Race and ethnicity: Culture, identity, and representation*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Mona Merhi, *op.cit.*, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> The Syrian government minimised its - already relatively low - cultural budget by 25%.

<sup>8</sup> The number of Palestinian refugees in Syria before the uprising in 2011 was around 600,000 refugees. See: Maher Charif, “Palestinian refugees in Syria Fully integrated, for Better and for Worse,” Website, *Palestinian Journeys*, n.d., available at: <https://www.paljourneys.org/en/timeline/highlight/6591/palestinian-refugees-syria> [last accessed March 21 2019]. Moving to Arab countries was more challenging to them because they moved with refugee documents rather than passports.

<sup>9</sup> Maja Janmyr, *op.cit.*, 2016; Susan F. Martin, Rochelle Davis, Grace Benton, and Zoya Walianny, *op.cit.*, 2018; Lebanon Support, *op.cit.*, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Some artists pointed to opportunities relevant to political positions.

<sup>11</sup> Europe became an option to Syrians following the Dublin III agreement, which aimed to ensure equal acceptance of asylum seekers by member states of the European Union.

<sup>12</sup> In the case of the Arab countries analysed in this paper, notably in the light of Syrian arrivals, the links and relationships were not only limited to areas near the border, but entailed whole countries. As such, in this paper, countries will be analysed as borderland regions. Balibar describes borderlands not as small regions but as larger “overlapping open regions.” Etienne Balibar, “Europe as borderland,” *Environment and planning D: Society and space*, 2009, Vol. 27(2), p.190-215.

<sup>13</sup> Artists consider Europe as a liberal haven and a wider art market, but language barriers persisted, and many did not consider Europe as a destination when they first left Syria. Interviews with a male Syrian producer in Berlin, 2018, and with a male Syrian singer and actor in Munich, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Susan F. Martin, Rochelle Davis, Grace Benton, and Zoya Walianny, *op.cit.*, 2018; Daniel Meier, “Introduction to the Special Issue: Bordering the Middle East,” *Geopolitics*, 2018, Vol. 23(3), p. 495-504.

analyse borders as “mobile, fluid, selective, and differentiated,”<sup>15</sup> and Widdis explains that they are a “physical, ideological, and geographical construct, a region of intersection that is sensitive to internal and external forces that both integrate and differentiate communities and eras on both sides of the boundary line.”<sup>16</sup> For example, Lebanon shares a border with Syria, and its *entire* geographical space, not only regions close to the borders, was opened to displaced Syrians following the uprising in 2011. Moreover, both the Lebanese and the displaced communities engaged in social and economic relations inside Lebanon. This was also the case in Jordan and Egypt. Therefore, this paper analyses these entire countries as borderlands. Additionally, this paper illustrates that these borderlands are influenced by both local and international dynamics. Such dynamics usually integrate and differentiate communities, offer spaces for confrontation, for identity formation, and for subverting borders.<sup>17</sup> For forcibly displaced artists, their life experiences are impacted notably by relational dynamics of making a new home across nation-state borders.

This research focuses on those who tried to reconstruct a home in (borderland) Arab countries, before deciding to leave for Europe, by analysing their home-making attempts – which include processes of creating familiarity, belonging and resuming career – as well as processes of integration, and policies impacting mobility. In previous literature, “home” is conceived as a relationship, characterised as a spatio-temporal socio-cultural order that creates orientation between people and their environment. It also includes feelings of security, belonging, and familiarity acquired through patterns of experience and behavior.<sup>18</sup> Additionally home-making involves describing the self in a new ordered place, and may represent a socially desired identity, rather than an individual one. It therefore reflects both collective ideology and authentic personal experience.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, this paper investigates how civil society actors and for-profit production companies created a transnational relational space within the borderlands.

This paper builds on recent transnational migration studies focusing on nation states’ border regulation power, individuals’ trajectories within the border regulation power, and migration as

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<sup>15</sup> Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasperek, “Under Control? Or Border (as) Conflict: Reflections on the European Border Regime,” *Social Inclusion*, 2017, Vol. 5(3), p.58-68.

<sup>16</sup> Randy William Widdis, “Crossing an intellectual and geographic border: the importance of migration in shaping the Canadian-American borderlands at the turn of the twentieth century,” *Social Science History*, 2010, Vol. 34(4), p.445-497.

<sup>17</sup> Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasperek, *op.cit.*, 2017, p.5.

<sup>18</sup> Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 1992, Vol. 7(1), p.6-23; Vasiliki Theocharidou, Gary Clapton, and Lorraine Waterhouse, “Lost in Transition? Lived Experiences of Unaccompanied Afghan Minors in Greece,” Master’s thesis, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 2016, available at: <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/22944> [last accessed 20 February 2019]; Kimiko Suda, “A Room of One’s Own: Highly Educated Migrants Strategies for Creating Home in Guangzhou,” *Population, Space and Place*, 2014, Vol. 22(2), p.146-157.

<sup>19</sup> Kimberly Dovey, “Home and Homelessness,” In Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner (eds.), *Home Environments*, Boston, Springer, 1985, p. 33-64.

a driving force.<sup>20</sup> A trajectory is considered here as a temporally ordered intervention of social and subjective processes, in the form of life events and transitions.<sup>21</sup> Trajectories in transition cease to reflect interventions but rather focus on relational dynamics and negotiations of binaries within those interventions. Therefore, the paper examines the relationship between artists' home-making trajectories and the challenges of migrating towards other Arab countries. Also, unlike studies on protracted uncertainty, which focus on coping mechanisms and "waiting,"<sup>22</sup> this paper describes the temporal experience of displaced artists in their host Arab countries in order to analyse their home-(un)making mechanisms. The paper highlights these dynamics while considering migrant artists' cultural activism in recent years.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the paper analyses how Arab art aesthetics, and state policies, impact (or shape) these dynamics.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mirjana Morokvasic, "Transnational Mobility and Gender: A View from Post-wall Europe," *Crossing Borders and Shifting Boundaries*, 2003, Vol. 1, p.101-133; Thomas Faist and Başak Bilecen, "Transnationalism – Updated," *COMCAD Working Papers 158*, Bielefeld, Universität Fakultät Für Soziologie, Centre on Migration, Citizenship, and Development (COMCAD), 2017, available at: <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-55393-5> [last accessed 10 April 2019]; Sabine Hess, "Border Crossing as Act of Resistance: The Autonomy of Migration as Theoretical Intervention into Border Studies," In Martin Butler, Paul Mecheril, Lea Brenningmeyer (eds.), *Resistance, Subjects, Representations, Contexts*, Bielefeld, Bielefeld Verlag, 2017, p.87-100; Nina Glick Schiller, "Theorizing Transnational Migration in Our Times," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 2018, Vol. 8(4), p. 201-212; Hein De Haas, Katharina Natter, and Simona Vezzoli, "Growing Restrictiveness or Changing Selection? The Nature and Evolution of Migration Policies," *International Migration Review*, 2018, Vol. 52(2), p. 324-367.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Riemann and Fritz Schütze, "Trajectory" as a basic theoretical concept for analyzing suffering and disorderly social processes," in D. R. Maines (Ed.), *Social organization and social process: essays in honor of Anselm Strauss*, New York, De Gruyter, 1991, p.333-357; Ursula Apitzsch, Lena Inowlocki, and Maria Kontos, "The method of biographical policy evaluation," In Ursula Apitzsch and Maria Kontos (eds.), *Self-Employment Activities of Women and Minorities*, 2008, p. 12-18; Matthias Wingens, *A Life-course Perspective on Migration and Integration*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine Brun, "Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement," *Social Analysis*, 2015, Vol. 59(1), p.19-37.

<sup>23</sup> Lígia Ferro, Pedro Abrantes, Luisa Veloso, and João Teixeira Lopes, "Learning How to Work in the Arts Field In Portugal: A Biographical Approach To The Migrant Artists' Trajectories," *RUDN Journal of Sociology*, 2018, Vol. 18(3), p. 507-520; Azadeh Sharifi, "Theatre and Migration Documentation, Influences and Perspectives in European Theatre," *Independent Theatre in Contemporary Europe*, Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, rhetoric, and symbols in contemporary Syria: With a new preface*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1999; Rania Jawad, *Theatre Encounters: A Politics of Performance in Palestine*, New York University, 2013; Ruba Totah, "Performing Arts and Social Change under Colonialism in in Palestine during the period 1960-2012: view on impact of religiosity and class on gender relations in performing art," Thesis, Birzeit, Birzeit University, 2013, available at: [https://fada.birzeit.edu/bitstream/20.500.11889/1424/1/thesis\\_13102015\\_92219.pdf](https://fada.birzeit.edu/bitstream/20.500.11889/1424/1/thesis_13102015_92219.pdf) [Last accessed 6 April 2019]; Samer Al Saber, "Stages of Homeland: Remembered Ghosts – Haunted Memories," Website, *Jadaliyya*, April 2017, available at: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/34147/Stages-of-Homeland-Remembered-Ghosts-%E2%80%93-Haunted-Memories> [last accessed 6 April 2019]; Ruba Totah and Krystal Khoury, "Theater against Borders: 'Miunikh–Damaskus'—A Case Study in Solidarity," *Arts*, 2018, Vol. 7(4), p. 90; Basma El Hussein, "حل

Specifically, this paper provides a socio-anthropological analysis of the lives of displaced performing artists attempting to create and join cultural social fields in Arab host states.

The paper uses transnational biographical interview analysis,<sup>25</sup> to collect and analyse the narratives of 16 artists forced to leave Syria. It also relies on what Hess introduced as an “ethnographic regime approach”<sup>26</sup> to analyse migrants’ “transit biographies.” Semi-structured interviews were conducted over two years (2017-2019) with artists currently living in several European countries. The group of artists in this study is heterogeneous. The artists, aged between 25 and 55, originated from various districts within Syria, with at least half of them from Damascus and with a minimum of five years of professional experience in the performing arts. Two artists were Palestinian Syrians, eight were women. The results relied on a comparison of “narrated life stories” of two case studies with those of the remaining artists. Using an empirically grounded approach, the paper describes the artist-identified experienced events processes, how artists structured those processes through actions, and led creative transformations. It comprises formal textual analysis, which deals with the narrative, argumentative, and descriptive excerpts from artist interviews.

This paper will first introduce actors providing economic and social support to artists. It then analyses sixteen artists’ lived experiences to outline the relational dynamics of their home-making processes during migration, in an attempt to provide a subjective understanding of artists’ integration processes in Arab countries.

### **Institutional Support for Migrant Artists in Arab Countries: the Impact of Legal Residency Restrictions**

Twentieth-century art exchanges between Arab countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Palestine<sup>27</sup> were the result of unifications, colonial forced displacements, and civil wars. Until 2011, each nation-states’ political and border regimes imposed tariffs on art materials and surveilled content to such an extent that it inhibited international co-productions. Consequently, the Arab performing arts industry was modest and lacked diversity. The various artistic styles shrunk into analogous art patterns, serving the dominant formal cultural output of the national regimes.<sup>28</sup>

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الفنون,” Website, *Jadaliyya*, 15 February 2018, available at: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/35206/حال-الفنون> [last accessed 6 April 2019]; Mona Merhi, *op.cit.*, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> “Biographicity” refers to a personal journey of self-development and connection to the social structure, including the ability to shape and reshape one’s story about society. Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon, *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, London, SAGE, 2012; Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, London, Sage Publications, 2014; Ursula Apitzsch and Irini Siouti, “Transnational Biographies,” *Zeitschrift Für Qualitative Forschung*, 2015, Vol. 15(1-2), p. 12-23.

<sup>26</sup> Sabine Hess, “De-naturalising transit migration. Theory and methods of ethnographic regime analysis,” *Population, Space and Place*, 2010, Vol. 18(4), p. 428-440.

<sup>27</sup> Palestine’s borders were complicated by policies as of 1948. Colonial and Arab borders policies clashed and changed rapidly over the decades.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk. “The Arab Spring: A fourth wave of democratization?,” *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 2016, Vol. 25(1), p.52-69.

Against this backdrop of restrictive political contexts, spurred by constraining migration policies, two groups of actors continued to support displaced artists in Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan. The first group consists of non-profit institutions, such as cultural civil society organisations, and regional, and international cultural institutions, that reaffirmed the need for art during conflict. Arab cultural institutions attempt to remain independent from governments, and create spaces of freedom of expression for artists, such as the Cultural Resource,<sup>29</sup> the Arab Cultural Fund (AFAC),<sup>30</sup> Ettijahat-Independent Culture,<sup>31</sup> and the Arab Education Forum.<sup>32</sup> These institutions enabled artists to regain access to the Arab art scene<sup>33</sup> by introducing additional programs in 2012, that support productions, grant regional travel funds, and promote collaboration and exchanges among artists. Despite these programs, these institutions have not managed to overcome restrictive residence and labour policies for artists in host countries. In addition, they were constrained by Arab governments' marginalisation of culture and oppressive responses to opposition expressed through art. This group also consists of international cultural institutions,<sup>34</sup> such as the Goethe Institute (GI), the British Council, and the Ford Foundation, which have continued their historical and liberal relationship with the Arab culture sector in the neo-colonial era. They have promoted regional institutions' missions, implemented some programs, and facilitated artist mobility outside the Arab countries.<sup>35</sup>

The second group, which provides support for the creative production scene, consists of the for-profit drama and performance companies that lead mainstream Arab TV drama and entertainment, which have managed to create a new mainstream Pan-Arab trend in the drama industry. Contracted Syrian artists starring with Lebanese or Egyptian artists are known to receive the highest wages and viewing rates, granting them enough capital and prestige to obtain

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<sup>29</sup> The Cultural Resource provides four grants to artists. These include the *Red Zone* grant which is an international platform for artists to present their work on topics related to borders, displacement, censorship, and other currently globally relevant ideas. See: Al Mawred Al Thaqafy, Website, *Al Mawred Al Thaqafy*, available at: <http://mawred.org/> [last accessed 27 February 2019].

<sup>30</sup> The Arab Cultural Fund AFAC provides grants in various artistic fields to individuals or groups. See: Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Website, *Arab Fund for Arts and Culture*, available at: <https://www.arabculturefund.org/> [last accessed 27 February 2019].

<sup>31</sup> Ettijahat-Independent Culture was founded in 2011, it provides programs on *Research Laboratory of Art*, *Create Syria*, *Amaken*, and *Ajyal*. See: Ettijahat, Website, *Ettijahat*, available at: <https://ettijahat.org> [last accessed 27 February 2019].

<sup>32</sup> The Arab Education Forum encourages mobility spaces and experiences exchange through *Safar*, *Hakaya*, *Istikshaf* programs. See: The Arab Education Forum, Website, *The Arab Education Forum*, available at: <http://almoultaqa.com> [last accessed 27 February 2019].

<sup>33</sup> Theatre groups continued their activities in Lebanon, such as the contemporary dance company Sima, the Koon theatre collective, and collaborations between Syrian and Lebanese artists multiplied. See: Emmanuel Haddad, "Contemporary performing arts in Lebanon: an overview," Website, *IETM*, March 2017, available at: <https://www.ietm.org/en/publications> [last accessed 27 February 2019].

<sup>34</sup> The British Council had implemented HOPES since 2016, providing scholarships in arts fields. GI offered scholarships of language studies and exchange of theatre productions since the 1970s. Since 2015, Ford Foundation has been funding the Action for Hope initiative in Lebanon, inviting artists to exhibit in art galleries in the US.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Hanan AlQassab, the former director of Higher Institute of Performing Arts in Syria, Antwerp, 20 October 2017.

long-term residence in Lebanon or Egypt. In Jordan, Syrian musicians joined local bands and were contracted by (music) production companies for entertainment performances.

Artists' engagement with these cultural institutions and for-profit production companies determined their opportunities to get by in their host countries, and to cope with formal residency systems. Hind, a Syrian actress, explains: "I received an acting award in Egypt 2009, and then a job [offered by a production company] enabled me to move to Egypt in 2012."<sup>36</sup> Both her former success and the job opportunity enabled her to leave Syria. Similarly, Nadi, a Palestinian dancer, commented on how his skills, and institutional<sup>37</sup> support and connections enabled him to move within Lebanon, being a Palestinian-Syrian. He explained: "Being affiliated with this institution, [and getting a legal status through them] helped me postpone my military service in Syria for two years, and whenever I passed by a checkpoint in Lebanon, they did not check me because I had a card saying that I worked with this institution."<sup>38</sup>

In other cases, artists emphasised that various factors (e.g. their legal status) impeded on their engagement with cultural institutions, which limited their opportunities to obtain support and benefit from networking. In the case of Maha, a dancer, her Palestinian refugee status prevented her from obtaining access to legal residency. This, in turn, hindered her access to work: "I was also famous in Egypt. I stayed there eight months to find a job. I did several interviews, but no one agreed to hire me. Because in the end, I am a [Palestinian] refugee and I had no legal residency papers in Egypt."<sup>39</sup> Actor Amin also confirmed "I was waiting for my residence papers in Egypt, so I could not work. I had to keep a low profile while waiting, because the Egyptian regime declared Syrians unwelcome after 2016."<sup>40</sup> As such, although some cultural institutions are able to provide a pathway for legal residency for migrant artists, (Palestinian) Syrian artists' lack of residency could also be a *conditio sine qua non*, completely hindering any collaboration, for others.

### **Multi-Scalar Dynamics Affecting Artists in Borderlands**

Beyond the support of for-profit and non-for profit institutions, other factors and power dynamics impact artists' trajectories. These powers function within what Glick Schiller<sup>41</sup> describes a "multi-scalar" social field, which consists of a group of networks of social relationships through which humans exchange and transform practices and resources – processes that are constituted by time and space. This social field plays an important role in shaping refugees' response to displacement, for example by reconstituting their lives. It includes intersecting power dynamics of individuals, and migration authorities, as well as cultural and for-profit institutions. This field consists of three powers that impact the relational dynamics of performing artists within the borderlands, and the support that they receive. First, the allies of

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<sup>36</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

<sup>37</sup> The institution is based in Beirut, and its name is anonymised. It is famous for organising dance theatre that blends Arab with western dance heritage.

<sup>38</sup> Interview by the author with male Palestinian-Syrian dancer, Paris, 1 April 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Interview by the author with female Palestinian-Syrian dancer, Munich, 25 April 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Interview by the author with male Syrian actor, Berlin, 10 April 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, *op.cit.*, 2018, p. 201-212.

the Syrian regime in Arab countries influenced and monitored artists' political involvement in their productions. Artists have produced narratives linked to war, forced movement, and escape, by referring to specific occurrences of the conflict. Their activities were initially tolerated by the political regimes in the area, in line with a discourse of artists being free to tell their stories, and Arab audiences wanting to hear them. However, the political regimes<sup>42</sup> did not tolerate these productions, which narrowed artist's opportunities to work, as expressed by the actress Hind: "[Among those] who are against the regime; no one is working."<sup>43</sup>

The second factor constituting the social field includes artists' personal, social, and cultural capital that they brought along from Syria, which can mainly be linked to the Higher Institute for Theatre Arts (HITA) in Damascus. Syrian drama and TV productions have long been engaging graduates from HITA, whose projects usually gain top viewing rates, and are considered a highlight in the Arab area. Having gained a prestigious inter-Arab reputation, HITA promoted artists social and cultural prestige,<sup>44</sup> and facilitated access to local projects in neighbouring countries, for Syrians who had fled.<sup>45</sup>

Third, new trends in global art marketing and distribution in the borderlands play an active role in the social field. Artists' displacement has prompted international cultural organisations to adopt a more active role to support artists during the crisis. Ebert, the director of the Damascus branch of Goethe Institute (GI) explains, "We feel paralysed, but we find that what we do [in Syria and the neighbouring countries], is a huge responsibility given these circumstances. We want to offer help through education and cultural programs for artists."<sup>46</sup> As such, participation in the global market for displaced artists in borderlands, such as Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan, increased significantly. For example, GI has connected displaced artists with each other and has promoted artistic productions globally. Another GI representative said, "Our aim was to create a platform for Syrian and international artists to engage in dialogue. Several projects are

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<sup>42</sup> Many productions are judged based on artists' political affiliations and not on artistic quality. Selections of works nominated for prizes, invitations to festivals and talk shows in the past ten years mostly include artists affiliated to the political regimes of Syria and Egypt. Artists silent on the conflicts were soon pushed to declare support to one side, based on cooperation with their affiliates.

<sup>43</sup> Interview by the author with the artist, Paris, 1 April 2019.

<sup>44</sup> HITA, founded in 1977, has a leading role in performing arts teaching in the Arab area. All artists in this study engaged with it academically, except for two who were part of other schools in other districts.

<sup>45</sup> Hanan Alhaj Ali, "Introduction to the cultural policy profiles of Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia," *Cultural Policies in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco*, Amsterdam, The European Cultural Foundation, 2010, p.23-25, available at: <https://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/cultural-policies-algeria> [last accessed 20 March 2019].

<sup>46</sup> Opening of a project 'Goethe Damaskus im Exil' in Berlin 2016 shortly after artists arrival from the Arab countries. The project included Syrian and German artists meeting to enhance networking between them after closing GI in Damascus. See: Goethe-Institut, "Eröffnung Goethe-Institut Damaskus | Im Exil - Deutsch," Online video, *Youtube*, October 20, 2016, available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbMW\\_iMLdeQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbMW_iMLdeQ) [last accessed 20 July 2017].

organised in countries such as Lebanon and Turkey, to create perspectives beyond war and crisis.”<sup>47</sup>

Although presented as a humanitarian responsibility, such networks are utilised by organisations such as GI to feed into the international refugee art market by attracting funds and mobilising resources around the art produced by refugees. However, by reviving this market, GI and other international organisations also accumulate a socio-economic capital, which was the result of cultural hybridisation that GI had promoted in the postcolonial era. The historic resourcefulness of the GI in keeping networks, introducing and linking Syrian artists to other international art scenes, has encouraged its role in mediating artists traveling outside the Arab countries when they are no longer able to stay in them. As such, eventually, intentionally or not, institutional support can contribute to artists’ mobility.

In the next section, I will provide an in-depth analysis of artists’ experiences to gain an understanding of how multi-layered power dynamics within the art scene impacted artists’ cognition of borderland regimes and their home-making trajectories.

### **Trajectories of Constructing “Home” in the Borderlands**

After being displaced from Syria, artists initially remained in Arab countries in which they were familiar with the art schools, institutional mechanisms, and the language. This increased the potential for networking opportunities. Artists’ choices were also based on the search for a sense of community with peers in Arab performing arts networks. This emotional bonding provided the basis for establishing a new home. The subjective home-making experiences reveal artists’ diverse attitudes towards the multi-scalar powers they faced, related to (allies of) the Syrian regime; artists’ personal, social, and cultural capital; and new trends in global art marketing and distribution (see previous section). The following excerpts from artists’ biographies provide two specific narratives from migrant artists who spent over a year in an Arab country, one being male (Munir) and one female (Hind). Their narratives are deconstructed into actions, patterns, and arguments around actions, which are then used to explain artists’ life trajectories, including attempts to settle, resume a career, and to create the familiarities of a new home. These trajectories create relationships between the artists and the surrounding institutional and migratory systems. They describe the relational dynamics that emerge in the borderland space regarding the migrant’s agency in actions, arguments, decisions, and self-disclosure. In addition, agency refers to “understanding decision-making, room to maneuver, opportunity structures, and migration trajectories.”<sup>48</sup> This definition explicitly links to institutional support, notably within the opportunity structure of migrant artists.

The following section analyses the extent to which the relational dynamics of transnational space contribute to artists’ home-making in the borderlands.

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<sup>47</sup> Renate Heilmeyer, “Questionnaire on Goethe-Institut Damaskus im Exil,” received by Ruba Totah, 22 June 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Bridget Anderson and Martin Ruhs, “Researching illegality and labour migration,” *Population, Space, and Place*, 2010, Vol.16(3), p.175-179.

### ***Deconstructing Artist Accounts as they Navigate the Multi-Scalar Social Field***

Artists' pathways to establish a home in Arab host countries include patterns of action and cognitive adaptation to new regimes. Hind left Syria following threats and repression by security authorities in 2012. She moved with her daughter to Egypt to pursue an employment contract. Being a single mother in Egypt, in some aspects considered an unstable country, she suffered from a lack of mobility and livelihood insecurity when her contract was not extended. In 2013, she received a new employment offer in Lebanon and moved there with her daughter for a year and a half. In Lebanon, she noticed that joining new projects was difficult due to her stance on the Syrian politics, and she found life there difficult and expensive. She illustrates:

“After a one-and-a-half year stay in Lebanon, I noticed that after the project I had completed, nobody approached me again. I saw others working, and it became clear to me that artists who are against the regime are not welcomed in the Arab or Syrian projects running outside Syria. This realisation became clear to me. [...] It is also less of a headache for the producing companies who avoid contracting us, because eventually they will be interrogated about the reasons why they contracted those from the opposition.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus, financial, personal, and political security were all lacking, rendering long-term settlement in Lebanon unfeasible. She adds: “There is a difference between one artist and the other [...]. I did not reach the point of selling [of my own art], and I never wanted to. I did well-received works that the public admired a lot, but not with the purpose of becoming a seller.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, she applied for asylum with a United Nations agency. She was accepted with a refugee status in France, and left Lebanon.

Munir left Syria before the 2011 uprising, after receiving a job offer in Jordan. He stayed there for four years, received subsequent offers, and shifted from opera to entertainment. This changed as of 2015, when all mobility between Arab countries was restricted for Munir and his family, being Syrians. Yet, returning to Syria, where he faced conscription into the Syrian army, was not an option, either. Unbearable border procedures pushed him to find opportunities to travel to Sweden, to seek asylum:

“I stayed in Amman for two years and worked in the entertainment industry for a living. [...] Then, I received a choir offer with an institution in Jordan: I performed the solo in the performance they produced. [...] After that, I continued working in the entertainment art for months, in Jordan. Over time, however, I realised that my Syrian passport was becoming meaningless through every humiliating and provoking incident with security guards in airports, and everywhere I traveled. I needed to travel for work a lot, so I realised that I needed papers to help me to overcome the mobility hassle, which became unbearably annoying. My sister was already in Sweden, so I went there by plane. There, I

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<sup>49</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

was depressed for almost a year and three months, which had already started in Amman.”<sup>51</sup>

Both Munir’s and Hind’s narratives describe coping with change by taking action. Although institutional support triggered their journeys, safety concerns and prospects of better livelihoods contributed to their attempts to resettle in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Indeed, their resettlement attempts were not anticipated, full of conflicting emotions, transformations, successes and failures, and were reactions to the circumstances unfolding around them. For example, Hind reacted to oppression in Syria by leaving, and when she could no longer stay due to employment and social insecurity in Egypt, she resettled in another Arab country, namely Lebanon. Munir, too, repeatedly attempted to revisit Syria. In order to avoid the army subscription, he switched tactics to get his mother to visit him in Jordan, instead. Furthermore, as his work in the entertainment sector required him to travel to several Arab countries, in a context of increased travel restrictions, he changed fields from opera to entertainment, which he was able to perform without traveling, inside Jordan. The multiple trials and attempts that displaced artists engage with, are qualified here as patterns of actions and reactions. These patterns reflect artists’ agency in searching for socially and politically secure spaces, while trying to secure their career. Such process of agency should not be analysed as “agency in waiting”<sup>52</sup> which refers to a proactive attitude during their temporary stay. Instead, it relates to artists’ active intention of settling in the new place.

Furthermore, Munir’s and Hind’s narratives reveal the capacity of artists to justify their repeated attempts to find stability at the borderlands. Hind emphasised the impact of Syrian political allies on art production and how it contributed to feelings of fear, even in a neighboring country. She elaborates: “I was afraid at any moment, [that the regime or its allies] would play this game [in which they use arts to detect political opponents], and we would become a card in it.”<sup>53</sup> Political alliances repeatedly jeopardised her artistic reputation, not only by denying her work opportunities, but also by (informal) defamation. She also described transformations in gender relations and the challenging gender dynamics of being a single mother in Egypt: “You become the mother, the father, you should be sensational and strong, and create a comfortable atmosphere in the house, which means you become everything, so it was tough.”<sup>54</sup>

Munir provides similar justifications for his actions and reactions in the borderland. He described the art market for Syrians in Arab countries, by using terms such as “humiliating,” “meaningless,” “hassle,” and “unbearably annoying.”<sup>55</sup> His attempts to settle in Arab countries reflected experiences of being subjected to a multi-layered political and economic system of power, for example by being unable to return to Syria out of fear for obligatory military service,

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<sup>51</sup> Interview by the author with male Syrian actor and singer, Munich, 27 May 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Catherine Brun, *op.cit.*, 2015, p.19-37.

<sup>53</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Interview by the author with male Syrian actor and singer, Munich, 27 May 2017.

or by switching to entertainment music productions. Similarly, he argued that mobility restrictions limited his possibilities for institutional support in Jordan.

The next section will examine two different trajectories to reconstruct a new home in Arab countries. Following Riemann and Schütze's definition, a trajectory is considered a temporally ordered intervention of social and subjective processes, in the form of life events and transitions.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Emotional Identification within Borderlands and Career Compromises***

Artists' arguments illustrate emotional identification within the borderlands. Their presence in an Arab country, which was somehow related to cultural and geographic proximity, aroused different emotional states among interviewees.<sup>57</sup> For example, Hind describes Beirut with feelings of nostalgia, by referring to "all the history it holds that connects us [Syrians and Lebanese] since childhood, and the emotions it brings by visiting it."<sup>58</sup> Munir said: "I was close with the people I met in Amman, and I found the art field I was looking for. It was close to Syria, so I could always visit."<sup>59</sup> Both Hind's and Munir's experiences include proximity, shared memories<sup>60</sup> and language in the borderland.

Driven by such emotional identification, artists described their actions as reactions, constructing loops, and formulating them as spatial processes repeating throughout the journey of establishing a secure settlement. In the face of challenges related to migration and changing cultural contexts, emotional identification included compromise, maneuvering, and patience as behavioral patterns of coping with change. Hind searched for security and work in Egypt, and then in Lebanon. She received limited work offers from institutions in Lebanon, due to her political position. By repeatedly identifying with her choices through patterns of compromise and patience, Hind aimed to perceive Lebanon as "home," through building social relations. Her identification within the borderland transforms the borderland into a space enabling negotiation of career and security. Such practices shape home beyond its physical explanation.<sup>61</sup> Munir also exhibits repeated actions to cope with mobility restrictions and fluctuating institutional support. The circuit of his actions, like Hind, describes spatial processes consisting of compromises, transformation, and maneuvering. He maneuvered by transforming his performance style and career choices. This reveals a capacity to transform the borderland into a space that transmutes his artistic identity and career. This spatio-temporal process of repeating compromises,

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<sup>56</sup> Gerhard Riemann and Fritz Schütze, *op.cit.*, 1991; Ursula Apitzsch, Lena Inowlocki, and Maria Kontos, *op.cit.*, 2008; Matthias Wingens, *op.cit.*, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> For decades, the "Arab Homeland" discourse has been promoted in schools and published materials, speeches, etc. This related to Anderson's "imagined community," connected by language mainly, and by religious cultural references promoted by the Arab regimes.

<sup>58</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Interview by the author with male Syrian actor and singer, München, 27 May 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Re-memory as a process of remembering transmitted through family members and in discourses; see: Divya Tolia-Kelly, "Locating processes of identification: Studying the precipitates of re-memory through artifacts in the British Asian home," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 2004, Vol. 29(3), p.314-329.

<sup>61</sup> Alison Blunt and Ann Varley, "Geographies of home," *Cultural Geographies*, 2004, Vol. 11(1), p. 3-6.

movement, and transformations constructed a sense of familiarity, a new understanding that complied with the borderland system.

These behaviors relate to Brun's analysis<sup>62</sup> of protractedly displaced people, who lose certainties about the past and future, while practicing routinised survival strategies in their refuge. Brun explains the importance of temporality in understanding people's experiences of uncertainty, which discourages mobility and settlement in exile. However, artists' repeated domestication of the new space, through social relations and negotiations, seek to re-establish certainties about their situation. Identification is an approach that attempts to reclaim control of living stability and career-building without relying on waiting and hoping, and without relying on strategies like faith, precaution, or avoidance.<sup>63</sup> Rather, it relies on memory and the diverse resources of artists in the borderland.

Other artists also constructed narratives around patterns of identification. Five artists repeated attempts to re-establish a career in several Arab countries, and described processes of compromise, maneuvering, and transformation as home-making tools. Mona, an actress, explained she had "roles in Jordan with contractors whom I always refused to work with, because of the low-quality art they offered. I even lived off the food basket that the humanitarian agencies offered."<sup>64</sup> A dancer described that as a Palestinian Syrian artist, she repeatedly negotiated mobility and residence procedures in the UAE, Lebanon, and Egypt, but still could not find a job. She argued, "this was frustrating to me, but I did not stop trying, because I felt that it is my right to have a place somewhere."<sup>65</sup> Three other artists described how they repeatedly negotiated security systems by moving with fake names and hiding from security services.<sup>66</sup> They compromised critically lowered financial and living conditions in Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon for the sake of the art they were producing. The audience's praise for one of their performances led to financial support from two institutions for some individuals in the group. Ayman, another actor, explains: "one got a fund [...] for writing the script, and the other got another fund for directing it. To find a way to finance the whole project from these two funds, we all stayed in one small house." In these borderlands, artists changed fields, moved location, and followed work offers in an attempt to establish a new home, while maintaining their social and cultural activities and networks. Being in an Arab country enabled faster re-connection to platforms, and professional networks lost through war that could help reclaim their status as artists in a new home.

Thus, they started to identify (accept and emotionally relate) with their new situation of being caught between their home country Syria and their current country of residence. Identifying, allowed them to be able to continue to pursue their careers. Furthermore, it operates as an underlying motivation that infuses a process of transition in understanding of "home" which

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<sup>62</sup> Catherine Brun, *op.cit.*, 2015, p.19-37.

<sup>63</sup> Cindy Horst and Katarzyna Grabska, "Flight and Exile—Uncertainty in the Context of Conflict-Induced Displacement," *Social Analysis*, 2015, Vol. 59(1), p.1-18.

<sup>64</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 1 April 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Interview by the author with female Palestinian-Syrian dancer, Munich, 25 April 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Interview by the author with male Syrian dramaturg, and actor-producer, Berlin, 10, 11 April 2018.

encourages artists' agency in negotiating the multi-scalar power system in the borderlands. It opened pathways for discussion, in order to understand and justify artists' positions and possibilities in their new homes. Spatio-temporal processes of compromise, patience, transformation, and maneuvering are home-making tools that allow artists to construct concepts of survival, security, and mobility. Cultural institutions mediated their access to these home-making tools and processes. These tools describe the relational dynamics between artists and the borderland regime, whereby identification creates a basis for the continued negotiation of representing the self and "home." It describes a borderland home-making space comprising negotiated mixing of both the original home space and new home space.

### ***Disentanglement from Prior Understandings and Networks***

Disentanglement, the second trajectory in home-making attempts, refers to reversed processes that untie actors from a given relationship, whereby such detachment is deliberate and includes transformation. In the borderland, a multi-scalar social field refers to the process through which artists reconstruct their individual and political awareness, as well as peer and institutional networks, while disconnecting from prior understandings. Artists participated in the uprisings and their productions: quotes from their speeches were transmitted widely, which turned them into influential contributors to the popular culture<sup>67</sup> of the uprising. Their participation reinforced their sense of collectivity and connection with peers inside Syria. However, their narrated actions in borderlands describe a process of disentanglement from these connections after displacement. This is due to the fact that they developed new individualistic understandings of themselves (including concepts of belonging, political awareness etc.). Munir said, "In Jordan, I discovered this idea that I can live without a nation-state, without belonging to a religion or nationality, the human aspect of me, not the national."<sup>68</sup> Hind also referred to this disentanglement: "I decided to leave and live my life."<sup>69</sup> Physically leaving their home country caused artists to de-prioritise traditional home-making mechanisms, such as owning a house. Artists developed new realisations of concepts of belonging to, and responsibility toward, their home in their host country.

In addition to individual disconnection, new realisations enabled artists to reconstruct their broader political awareness. Hind selects words like "I noticed," "I realised," "clear to me,"<sup>70</sup> that illustrate her growing agency to decide to end her stay in the borderland. Also, Munir's increased awareness about his legal situation and work opportunities in Jordan aided his decision to leave. The more individual the narration of Munir and Hind became, the more the artists used their time in the borderland to remove themselves from belonging to its space. Artists used institutional support to disentangle from belonging to the borderland, particularly when it enabled them to travel. Institutional actors, which earlier promoted identification with borderland social and power structures, shifted their function to aid artists' disentanglement

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<sup>67</sup> Writers, Singers and songs of the uprising are iconised in the media about the uprising. For example, Memes and audio-visually on social media also contributed to the process of myth making.

<sup>68</sup> Interview by the author with male Syrian actor and singer, Munich, 27 May 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 15 November 2017.

from the system. A university teacher confirms, “we tried to help artists find connections outside the Arab area to facilitate their travel.”<sup>71</sup>

Interviews with other artists demonstrated similar narrative construction regarding disentanglement. By expressing openness to possibilities, some artists weighed their options between freedom of speech in borderland host countries and Europe. Imad, an actor and producer, said, “mediums for artistic expression shrank in the Arab countries and those who stayed, had to abide by governments or the civil society around it. I was [also] subject to this pressure in the United Arab Emirates.”<sup>72</sup> Mona also explained, “In Syria, I managed to have some links to make bureaucracy easier on me, but in Jordan I couldn’t restart my theatre project.”<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, artists referred to peers as distant and functional within the Arab art scene. The more detached artists became from the collective, the more they made decisions to leave the borderland. Disentangling enabled actors’ distance from their roles in constructing a Syrian cultural imaginary and reframed their compromises in establishing a new home. By redefining and rethinking their peers’ roles and influences, artists described disentanglement from prior conceptions about the self and peers. This stimulated a re-negotiation of the self and the other and feelings of belonging in the borderland.

The above analysis of individual narratives illustrates the relational dynamics which enabled artists’ construction of space within borderland regimes. Artists continuously shift between describing actions and their limitations, while drawing on arguments to cross limiting beliefs about the self and others. On the one hand, identification includes artist involvement in situations, procedures, and resource accumulation processes which represent home-making. On the other hand, disentanglement refers to openness to new possibilities, to new understandings of the “self” and the “other,” and new political awareness affecting artists’ dynamic depiction of the borderland as a home. As such, these trajectories – somehow contradictory, but experienced in parallel – transformed the borderland regime into a space of relational experience. It is an experience of transformation of self-understanding, whereby agents must reconsider their habitual routines by simultaneously maneuvering, changing, showing patience, and encountering individuals and systems. Institutions supporting artists at the borderlands played mediating roles in contradictory trajectories – sometimes promoting identification, and other times encouraging disentanglement. It is within this relational turbulence that artists’ home-making and un-making unfolds in a borderland.

## **Conclusion**

Relational dynamics in the experiences of artists in this study correspond to what Gelfand et al.<sup>74</sup> consider as the cognitive process of filtering and remembering of life experiences, which

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Hanan Al Qassab the Former director of Higher Institute of Performing Arts in Syria, location, 20 October 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Interview by the author with male Syrian producer, Munich, 28 April 2018.

<sup>73</sup> Interview by the author with female Syrian actress, Paris, 1 April 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Michele J. Gelfand et. al, “Negotiating Relationally: The Dynamics of the Relational Self in Negotiations,” *Academy of Management Review*, 2006, Vol. 31(2), p.427-451.

envision the self in relation to others. They also correspond to what Al Ariss and Sayed<sup>75</sup> regard as a process including the agency of migrants, as well as the structural and institutional influences shaping their reality. They describe the practical intervention on the concept of the “transnational space” and refer to migrants’ confrontation, negotiation, and identity-shaping within the multi-scalar structure of power at the borderland. These structures often include political alliances, institutional support, the impact of the neo-liberal global market, and artists’ social and cultural capital. Artists’ attempts to construct a new home in this transnational space are shaped by the opportunities and negotiations within this structure.

Thus, this paper contributes to an understanding of home-making trajectories in borderlands being formed by negotiating and rethinking traditionally accepted understandings of career paths and belonging. Embedded in the borderland transnational power structure, institutional support provided opportunities enabling the artists’ negotiations. Analysis of artists’ trajectories at the borderland space revealed that cultural institutions promoted artists’ emotional identification and produced new forms of belonging through career choices. This analysis also showed that cultural institutions at the same time contributed to artist disentanglement from prior social and political understandings and networks, which generated new attitudes towards peer relationships, belonging, and careers.

As a result, home-making trajectories within this borderland space challenge the potential of integration as a concept; i.e. a process of complying with the host society’s social, financial, and language requirements upon individuals.<sup>76</sup> The analysis concludes that, as artists compromised their careers to identify with necessities of the host society, they have consequently produced new understandings about networks of peers and professions, in the society which obstructed their integration. Generally, the temporality of artists’ experiences in borderlands, notably in an increasingly restrictive migration context in Arab areas and beyond, can be analysed as Glick Schiller’s<sup>77</sup> “historical conjuncture.” This entails the social, political, and economic transformations of the post-2011 area and reflects on the role of artists in borderlands.

In addition, artists’ trajectories encourage discussing home-making as a transformative relationship. In this paper, artists’ life trajectories negotiate home as a tool for creating the order required to achieve security, career progression, and belonging. It is a turbulent relational space in the historical conjuncture of the Arab area, which ultimately affects the capabilities of artists, as well as their productions. If, by definition, a boundary maintains territories that control or

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<sup>75</sup> Akram Al-Ariss and Jawad Syed, “Capital Mobilization of Skilled Migrants: A Relational Perspective,” *British Journal of Management*, 2010, Vol. 22(2), p. 286-304.

<sup>76</sup> Matthis Schick et. al, “Challenging future, challenging past the relationship of social integration and psychological impairment in traumatized refugees,” *European Journal of Psycho-traumatology*, 2016, Vol. 7, p.1-9; Erik Snel, Godfried Engbersen, and Arjen Leerkes, “Transnational involvement and social integration,” *Global Networks*, 2006, Vol. 6(3), p. 285-308; Alaster Ager and Alison Strang, “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2008, Vol, 21(2), p.166-191.

<sup>77</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, *op.cit.*, 2018, p. 201-212.

govern goods and people<sup>78</sup> through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, the artists' trajectories to establish a home in the borderland negotiated the temporality and spatiality of this boundary.

In sum, this paper illustrates how, for Syrian and Palestinian Syrian artists in borderlands, institutional actors and relational dynamics influenced their home making opportunities. Artists faced significant challenges in conducting their work, in addition to work and residency permit restrictions. For example, cultural mobility has been historically marginalised and was further repressed following the Syrian uprising. Furthermore, cultural institutions providing support for artists in borderlands provided significant support to artists to resume their work. However, their programs and funds have been limited in scope and duration and are not able to circumvent migration systems. As such, the temporality of their programs limited the space for integration and cultural and creative agency. Moreover, the support of these cultural institutions may have contributed to artists' agency to disentangle themselves from borderland's social networks, by engaging them in global market networks which aid artists in unstable regions. In a borderland regime, representations of artists, refugees, and refugee-artists in transit societies are negotiated. The implications of migration, integration, and diversity are stretched beyond common norms. Further research is encouraged to track, and possibly contrast, negotiation processes of the self and home in countries where artists settled after the borderlands.

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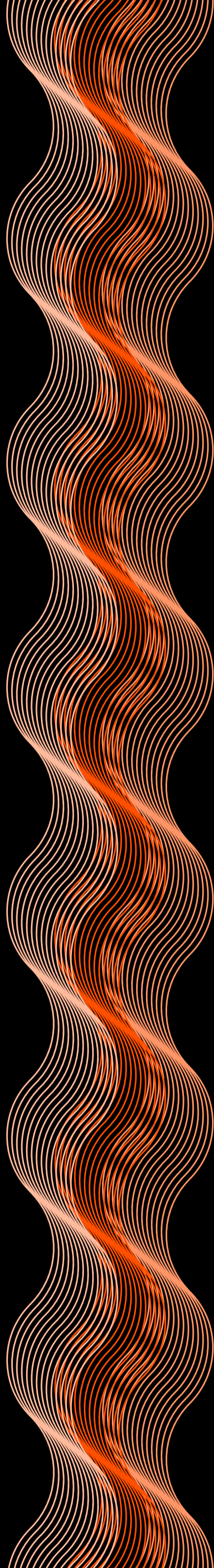
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**Manuscript 2: Negotiating "Home" Borders: Creative Processes hosting Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Europe.**

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# Negotiating 'Home', Borders:

Creative Processes Hosting Syrian  
and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Europe



RUBA TOTAH

# Résumé

Depuis 2015, des centaines d'artistes ont rejoint les masses migrantes de la région arabe avec le soutien d'un individu européen ou d'une affiliation institutionnelle réagissant à la crise des réfugiés. Les solidarités recherchées au sein des scènes européennes du spectacle vivant offrent des cadres à la participation culturelle des artistes, qui transfusent de nouvelles implications socioculturelles sur leur subjectivité dans les processus créatifs. Cet article examine comment, dans le cas de l'engagement des artistes syriens et palestiniens syriens dans les processus créatifs des institutions européennes du spectacle vivant, ces processus s'entrelacent avec les histoires de vie des artistes pour construire une dynamique relationnelle qui influence leurs opportunités de création en Europe.

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# Summary

Since 2015, hundreds of artists have joined the migrating masses from the Arab region with support from various international channels. Solidarity within the European performing arts scenes provided frameworks for artists' cultural participation, which transfused new socio-cultural implications on their subjectivities. This paper examines how, in the case of Syrian and Palestinian Syrian artists' engagement in creative processes at the European performing institutions, these processes influenced their home-making experiences. By using a grounded approach, this paper draws insights from an observed creative process within a professional theatre production in Germany, and an artist's personal experience of involvement in a creative process in France. The paper addresses the implications of such processes for citizenship and the integration of artists in the realm of migration.

## MOTS-CLÉS

Processus de création, mémoire, identification, politiques culturelles, dynamique relationnelle, arts du spectacle arabes en Europe

## KEYWORDS

Creative process, memory, identification, cultural policies, relational dynamics, Arab performing arts in Europe

# Introduction

In 2016, the Global Migration Compact led citizenship policies<sup>1</sup> toward broader transmission of the EU's approach to migration.<sup>2</sup> Citizenship in the practice of this compact regulates legal and socio-cultural transactions between individuals and governments, considering their various particularities. It also regulates a spectrum of cross-border relationships, including the socio-cultural and economic ties,<sup>3</sup> especially those promoted by nation-states' solidarity initiatives or led by international organisations and open markets. Forced migrant Syrian and Palestinian Syrian artists encountered border policies<sup>4</sup> and tangled with international organisations, implementers of the global compact, seeking forms of citizenship outside the Arab region. From one side, artists aimed to transmit both social and cultural capital accumulated before and during the trip, utilising this in the form of shared experiences,

1. EU governments subcontracted affiliate civil societies organizations and theatre institutions to deal with the refugee crisis socially and culturally.

2. Manifestations of this compact have been disrupting the human rights conventions, especially following what Faist (2018) calls 'externalization' of migration control to countries surrounding the EU, which evoked conflicting discussion on citizenship formations amidst this decade's heightened border tensions and solidarity movements with refugees.

3. Thomas Faist, Bařak Bilecen, Karolina Bargłowski and Joanna Jadwiga Sienkiewicz, 'Transnational Social Protection: Migrants' Strategies and Patterns of Inequalities', *Population, Space and Place*, 21 (2015), 193–202 (p. 194).

4. Policies practiced during their transit which investigate their legal status.

skills, and networks, while approaching protection and citizenship in certain destinations. From the other side, ideologies and discourses on forms of migrant citizenship turned shared life stories into an immersed thematic of artists' legal, social, and artistic representations. Notably, in the past five years, many creative processes have been exploring the inclusion of artists' stories within their performance genesis and methodologies, situating both the processes and artists' trajectories within the framework of cultural citizenship and integration.

The multi-layered governance of migrant artists' citizenship influences their life trajectories. A study on artists at borderlands<sup>5</sup> has shown that legal systems challenged their integration in theatre institutions in Arab countries, whereas non-formal actors, including regional and international art organisations, supported their agency to cope with migration systems temporally. However, international organisations eventually aided artists' disentanglement from artistic and economic ties and peer networks, resulting from deteriorating conditions for freedom of expression in the Arab region. These organisations facilitated the movement of artists toward Europe. Accordingly, if migrant artists' encounter with citizenship in Europe falls in this same global frame of human rights governance, where formal and non-formal bodies permeate their engagement with creative processes, this paper focuses on the structure of these processes in Europe. It examines how creative processes impact the life trajectories of artists seeking asylum or stable social and economic ties. On this issue, another study<sup>6</sup> has demonstrated that solidarity approaches in Europe motivated the establishment of adjacent ensemble models in theatre institutions — which many migrant artists joined — and that this enabled the creation of a third space, harbouring

5. Borderlands refer to countries where artists stayed temporarily before moving to Europe, in this case Arab countries and Turkey.

6. Ruba Totah and Krystal Khoury, 'Theater against Borders: "Miunikh-Damaskus" – A Case Study in Solidarity', *Arts*, 7.4 (2018), 1–14 (pp. 10–12).

their agency to negotiate their various representations in the host society. By revisiting these mediums, this paper investigates how they intertwine with artists' life stories to construct relational dynamics around art and influence opportunities of home-making in a transnational space.

This article links three areas of studies to develop an understanding of the relational dynamics within the creative process. It relates to transnational<sup>7</sup> and post-migrant<sup>8</sup> theatre, cultural citizenship<sup>9</sup> studies that examine the relevance of artistic practices to integration policies, and artists strategies for claiming a position in the new creative scenes.<sup>10</sup> It also relates to relational aesthetics,<sup>11</sup> and the genetics of performance

7. Janelle Reinelt, "'What I Came to Say': Raymond Williams, the Sociology of Culture and the Politics of (Performance) Scholarship", *Theatre Research International*, 40.3 (2015), 235–49 (pp. 238–240).

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9. Ricard Zapata-Barrero, 'Diversity and Cultural Policy: Cultural Citizenship as a Tool for Inclusion', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22.4 (2015), 534–52; Emine Fişek, *Aesthetic Citizenship: Immigration and Theater in Twenty-First-Century Paris* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017), pp. 1–30.

10. Cristina Cusenza. 'Artists from Syria in the International Artworld: Mediators of a Universal Humanism', *Arts*, 8.2 (2019), 1–25; Hélène Sechehaye and Marco Martiniello, 'Refugees for Refugees: Musicians between Confinement and Perspectives', *Arts*, 8.1 (2019), 1–16.

11. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), pp. 160–170; Dominic Thomas, 'The Aesthetics of Migration, Relationality, and the Sentimography of Globality', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 59.2 (2019), 165–79; A. Husak, 'Exercising Radical Democracy: The Crisis of Representation and Interactive Documentary as an Agent of Change', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 15 (2018), 16–32; Alex Maskens, 'Micro-Utopias: Anthropological Perspectives on Art, Relationality, and Creativity', *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia*, 5.1 (2016), 5–20.

studies that examine subjectivities and the seeing-making of theatre through its spectacularity,<sup>12</sup> by intriguing agencies curious to difference and encapsulating relational connections between artists of an ensemble.<sup>13</sup> This study is interested in the theatre experience as a solidarity endeavour immersed within the genesis of its creative processes, where life stories are shaping in the 'living together'. This article also relates to home-making studies that describe a process of constructing the domestic — beyond spaces of protracted uncertainty of the displaced — and situates mechanisms of negotiation within the frame of displaced 'waiting'.<sup>14</sup> Through an analysis bringing together these areas, this paper examines the multi-dimensional relations within the creative theatrical processes from the socio-anthropological perspective of art. It provides a microanalysis of a specific situation that took place during the rehearsing process within an established theatre institution<sup>15</sup> in Germany, as well as a narrative from an artist's biographical experience, on another production in France. In both cases, there is a focus on the relational dynamics appearing in the creative process and how they shape a transcultural reality.

**12.** Marco De Marinis, 'New Theatrolgy and Performance Studies: Starting Points Towards a Dialogue', *TDR/The Drama Review*, 55.4 (2011), 64–74 (pp. 68–72).

**13.** Anthony Cordingley and Chiara Montini, 'Genetic translation studies: An Emerging Discipline', *Linguistica Antverpiensia*, 14 (2015); Elvira Crois, 'In Dissensus, We Trust: Prototyping Social Relationships in Participatory Theatre', in *Sharing Society: The Impact of Collaborative Collective Actions in the Transformation of Contemporary Societies*, ed. by Benjamín Tejerina, Cristina Miranda de Almeida and Ignacia Perugorria (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2019), pp. 320–330.

**14.** Cathrine Brun, 'Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement', *Social Analysis*, 59.1 (2015), 19–37.

**15.** This institution opened its doors to widening the borders of its theatre production by including transnational theatre projects, mainly artists from migrant backgrounds. The creative process discussed in this paper yielded in a performance and several other outputs later.

# Sample and method

The paper relies on the analysis of transnational biographical interviews<sup>16</sup> as a method to gather and analyse first-hand qualitative research material from a group of sixteen artists forced to leave Syria after 2012. Personal semi-structured interviews were conducted over two years (2017–2019) with artists currently living in several European countries. The group of artists in this study is heterogeneous: some of them left Syria under fake names, others were banned initially from travel but were subsequently forced to leave.<sup>17</sup> Thirteen artists smuggled or found a way out via work missions in a neighbouring country. Either they could not return due to personal issues with the regime authorities,<sup>18</sup> or could they return but decided to remain outside the country. Two artists are Palestinian Syrians.<sup>19</sup> Eight of the artists are women. All artists had over five years' professional experience in dance and theatre, completing at least five productions before leaving Syria. Their experience varies between modern theatre, folkloric, modern, and contemporary dance. The selected segments are from a creative process in a pop-up documentary theatre piece premiered in Munich May 2018, and from a contemporary dance experience premiered in August 2018. Upon arriving in Europe, the artists obtained various legal statuses.<sup>20</sup>

**16.** Catherine Cassel and Gillian Symon, *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014); Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014); Ursula Apitzsch and Irini Siouti, 'Transnational Biographies', *Zeitschrift Für Qualitative Forschung*, 15.1–2 (2015), 12–23; Barbara Czarniawska, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013).

**17.** Interviews with (anonymous) artists.

**18.** Four artists are due for military service if they return, six of them threatened with imprisonment. Three can return to Syria but chose to stay outside.

**19.** A second-generation Palestinian refugee in Syria after 1948.

**20.** Some artists are refugees, and others are holders of the Syrian passport subject to conditional renewal.

For its results, this paper relies on microanalysis of a ‘narrated life story’ by one artist. It also examines themes that emerged from the life stories of the remaining group of sixteen artists. The author of this article was also directly implicated in one creative theatre process as an observer, enriched with ethnographic notes and a highly contextual understanding brought by three months of immersion. By using an empirical approach embedded in grounded theory, this paper describes the processes of events experienced by artists, and how they structured those processes in actions that pushed forward creative transformations.

## Immersion within creative processes in a migration context

Upon arrival in Europe, the artists discussed in this study found themselves immersed in various creative structures that were more pertinent to the arrival countries’ modes of theatre production; nevertheless, through engagement, they shared commonalities. In principle, these artists were motivated to mediate experiences<sup>21</sup> and stories of old and new citizens of the European cities hosting refugees.<sup>22</sup> In a conversation<sup>23</sup> between a dramaturge and the ensemble,<sup>24</sup> during a creative process in

**21.** Bronowski (1958) defines creative processes as engaging artists personally or collectively within a group toward finding an unexpected common ground to concepts or experiences.

**22.** Yalla ensemble in Schauspiele Hannover, Exile ensemble in Gorki Theater, Berlin.

**23.** Ruba Totah, ‘Observation’ (2018b).

**24.** This ensemble included German, Syrian and Palestinian Syrian artists.

Munich about what the performance is supposed to mean, Fadi, a Syrian artist, explained that it started with open questions about daily routines that developed into interweaving stories of the performance, regardless of the origin of the artists. Motivated by this weaving together of diverse stories, the artists partook in a post-migrant approach towards these creative processes. Fadi added, ‘So, the whole is at the same time talking about actual situations, but also beyond’. These artists’ motivation can be understood through what Carpenter<sup>25</sup> calls cultural generativity, the active and creative use of energies in promoting new understandings in theatrical productions, in ways responsive to one’s identity.

Generative immersion relies on transnational experiences and networks affecting the creative process. Amin, a Syrian artist, explained generating a spontaneous connection: ‘I applied as a production assistant to this theatre. In one of the rehearsals, a colleague joined smoking a cigarette and asked about a paper I held with some script ideas. Two days later, the theatre director asked again about the idea, and if it is possible to send it to him. I did, and they let me direct the play’. Another artist, Ayman, described how a network could be informative about procedures of engagement and thematic perspectives: ‘my wife is affiliated to the theatre, so she shared about how the processes take place and how to apply a concept’. Other artists engaged with theatres based on invitations. Munir explained an extended connection with art producers from Syria: ‘They knew me from before, and already know I work in theatre, and in singing, so they approached’. Nadi, a Palestinian Syrian explained how a network, created initially in Syria around being a refugee there, re-activated later in France when his Palestinian friend introduced him to festivals he could apply to: ‘One day, a friend suggested sending the filmed choreography with dance colleagues to a festival he knew that might like it. After sending it,

**25.** Ina Gäle Carpenter, ‘Memory-Theater as Cultural Generativity: Eslingena: A Musical In Toronto And Riga’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 38.3 (2007), 317–47.

they invited four of us'. These spontaneously or accumulatively generated networks, crossing national and bureaucratic borders, enabled artists to penetrate and take part in the structures of creative processes.

Artists' generative immersion also affects the medium of relational aesthetics.<sup>26</sup> This medium involves multi-relational interactions. Bourriaud explains this medium as being able to generate an intersubjective relationship between artists and spectators and create an alternative form of human connections. Tinius<sup>27</sup> suggests another kind of relationship emerging within this relational medium between the artists and themselves, while De Marinis<sup>28</sup> locates it within the seeing-making theatre process, comprising the invisible dimension<sup>29</sup> of the production wherein artists are studied, and assessed by describing their making and reflecting on their performance. It also includes relationships with the performative thematic, as described in Satzinger's<sup>30</sup> understanding of the creative process, which includes artists' procedures to bring ideas to life within a structure that contributes to their experience. In a post-migrant context, the creative process that Fadi described evolves within a transnational social space,<sup>31</sup> referring to 'pluri-local' interactions crossing state borders and consisting of a combination of social

**26.** A set of artistic practises which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.

**27.** Jonas Tinius, 'Rehearsing Detachment: Refugee Theatre and Dialectical Fiction', *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia*, 5.1 (2016), 21–38.

**28.** De Marinis, pp. 68–72.

**29.** Usually seen in theatre notes and observers' and researchers' work.

**30.** John W. Satzinger, Monica J. Garfield and Murli Nagasundaram, 'The Creative Process: The Effects of Group Memory on Individual Idea Generation', *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 15.4 (1999), 143–60.

**31.** Thomas Faist, 'Migrants as Transnational Development Agents: An Inquiry into the Newest Round of the Migration–Development Nexus', *Population, Space and Place*, 14.1 (2007), 21–42.

and symbolic ties. Therefore, the relational medium expands beyond relations of the 'self', of the 'other', or of the 'thematic', to include transnational and intercultural relationships between artists from various backgrounds. It provides trans-subjective and intersubjective interrogations of the self, the other, and the thematic implicated within the structure of the 'constructed situation'<sup>32</sup> of performative practice. Thus, this medium invites multi-relational connection between art and its performers or spectators. These multi-relational interactions within the medium of creative processes distinguish migrant artists' experiences from other migrant groups, in that they encourage dialogue that shakes off the constraints of migrants' representations and elaborates alternative forms of communication in migration.

These multi-relational interactions within the creative processes create a space for discussing the various hegemonic influences on migrants' citizenship discourses, and transnationalism. This space correlates with what Glick Schiller<sup>33</sup> calls a multi-scalar social field, which includes the power of several intersecting individuals and institutions and combines the migration policies system and the art produced under its influence. First, it comprises the power of global discourses over creative processes involving migrants. Both artists and host institutions have been negotiating their spaces within these discourses. From their side, theatre institutions rely on executing governance mechanisms of human rights<sup>34</sup> when hosting migrant artists within their structures. However,

**32.** Bourriaud, p. 168.

**33.** Nina Glick Schiller, 'Explanatory Frameworks in Transnational Migration Studies: The Missing Multi-Scalar Global Perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38.13 (2015), 2275–82; Nina Glick Schiller and Maja Povrzanovic Frykman, 'Transnational Regimes and Migrant Responses in an Altered Historical Conjuncture', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 8.4 (2018), 199–200.

**34.** Maggie O' Neill, 'Transnational Refugees: The Transformative Role of Art?', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 9.2 (2008); Cusenza, pp. 1–25.

some critics<sup>35</sup> problematise the institutions' capital that forms through their relational aesthetics. Bishop suggests that such theatre productions replace service and goods exchange with an 'experience economy' and with experiences documented on stages. Also, they accumulate institutional capital from solidarity theatre with global migration issues.

From another perspective, in the performance illustrated earlier, the director<sup>36</sup> expands the creative process to include the casting phase as a strategy against discourses inherent to migrants like legal status, expositions of appearance, gender, or political perspective. Against the argument that an artist must be framed as a refugee when producing art in exile, the director conducted two casting activities to select artists coming from Syria. One was in Beirut (for artists residing in Syria) and the other in Germany. They reflected upon the influence on the creative process arising from each location: 'By casting in two cities, we felt it was an intense experience there. For two days, we had dinner together, which built some bonding, whereas here we had a meeting every few days with an artist from a refugee background. So, deciding which artists to invite was part of this whole intensity of production by creating bonds with each of them before considering the legal status'. Also, the director conveyed a stance, through casting, against migrant artists' appearances by selecting a tall blond Syrian artist interested in contemporary music and, against gender stereotypes, by choosing an outspoken female Palestinian Syrian refugee artist, and an open-minded female German artist. Additionally, they selected artists with both refugee and non-refugee legal status to join the ensemble. Making these decisions, the director inserted her, and the theatre's, vision into the creative process, taking a stance against violations of migrants' rights to express stories apart from categories.

**35.** Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), 51–79.

**36.** Ruba Totah, 'Interview' (2018a). Actual names anonymised for purposes of privacy.

From their side, artists within the same ensemble demonstrated their perspective on discourses connected to migration. Hani<sup>37</sup> explained during, the same discussion with the dramaturg, that 'it is more the question of living together', stressing that while news is online, artistic strategies to tackle the migration topic are the concern of collective creation. Undergoing the cast selection stances and the performance theme domination while surrounded by media inflation on the refugee crisis, the artist adhered to the artistic aspect of performance, aiming to ensure a human right for expression. Both the artists and director communicated their stances against the power of global discourses on the creative process.

Second, the power of language as a communication tool in transnational relational aesthetics was likewise significant to the multi-scalar social field. Amin explained that knowing German and English is essential to his work: 'Being good with working in German may have enabled more special offers for me than others who work only in Arabic or English'. Nadim explained hesitance related to language: 'I was hesitant, the language and how it will go, it was difficult. Knowing that there will be a translator was very important'. Moreover, not only did language pose a challenge to some artists and add value to others, it also imposed itself as a critical aesthetic concern on institutional mobilisation in tackling diversity issues. In Germany, one of the dominant discussions in an emerging network<sup>38</sup> of performing arts calling for diversity in performance is the issue of language. The network advocated translation for mediating intercultural codes that emerge in theatre practices, and for turning the creative process into a laboratory of communication. Leen, a half Syrian, half French artist, introduced herself as a mediator in a performance. Rana, too, sharing the same language of the other actresses, was able to

**37.** Ruba Totah, 'Interview' (2018c).

**38.** The network is gathering various peers to promote problems of diversity in theatre and performance making.

build a trust, bonding to speak up personal, sometimes critical, stories and put them on stage. Hani commented on the translator at the creative process he joined, who came from a very close region and that he felt shared the same way of thinking, providing familiarity through her mediation of the language issue with the director and the German actor.

The following sections investigate how, given this multi-scalar social field, artists generative immersion in creative processes led them to construct trajectories of home-making in a transnational reality. This immersion in performative practice included improvisations, decision making, and referencing.

## Syrian and Palestinian Syrian artists in creative processes

### A segment from a participant observation

The following situation<sup>39</sup> took place during a morning rehearsal, two weeks after the beginning of a creative process bringing together German artists with artists coming from Syria. Usually, the rehearsals took place in the morning and then in the evening in a four-hour slot. The theme and the participants were set daily, depending on the content that the director chooses. Most of the rehearsals were collective, and some requested the presence of only two or three performers. Presented

<sup>39</sup>. Ruba Totah, 'Observation' (2018d).

below is one distinct moment involving the director (Director), dramaturge, translator, and two performers from the ensemble: M., a German actress, and K., a Syrian actor:

K. arrived before M.; Director and the dramaturge were there already.

We waited until M. arrived. Director asked them to change before beginning. Director reminded them of the personal stories improvised the day before and the text they discussed on the space in between reality and fiction, then asked them to improvise a description of their rooms and a dream story they had in the city, using a dialogue. K. began. He described his studio in this city as 'a simple, clean and neat room.' 'It looks more like a dream than like a reality,' he said. 'I try not to mess with its neatness.'

M. suggested, 'Why don't you put pictures of your room in Damascus in it?'

K.: My room in Damascus is full of piles of things, CDs, books, a drawer here, a bed where I sleep deep and have dreams.

M.: Aha.

K.: So I like to sit in it to prepare myself to enter my dream or a third world that is not Sham<sup>40</sup> nor this city, that is why I am telling you about this room. How do you sleep at night? Do you dream M.? Or do you not? Do you find yourself ever in a third world?

M.: I do not mix worlds because I don't live in two places, in reality.

I only mix performances I have in the theatre, people who visit me, I mix them. In my sleeping room here you open the door, (movement and acting), and get in.

K.: Maybe I shouldn't because it's your room you enter before me.

M.: It's okay, we get in we close the door. Here is my bed. (feeling) And here is the window.

K.: A big window or small? It is not big.

<sup>40</sup>. A local name for Damascus.

M.: Your big is not my big. Under the bed, we light a candle. (acting)  
The closet, and drawer.

K.: What is the colour of the wall?

M.: Green, not so green but a little bit green. The door and next to it shows the hallway and kitchen. (A pause). Then she continued (with more cheerful voice): And my room in Damascus is so nice (Woaaah), it is a big room, nice.

K.: No I cannot see it (bringing back the calmer mood); Can you explain it to me because I cannot imagine it? Big is like your big or my big?

M.: As your big.

K.: The bed is a circle? Square? And is there a chandelier?

M.: Yes (cheerfulness fades).

K.: It seems you like lights a lot. Do you dream about them?

M.: I do not remember my dream with them, only with the water... also, there is an olive tree in the room.

K.: Do you pick and eat them?

M.: You must be very careful, you need two tools, one to pick and one to collect from the ground. Also, there is a radio hung on the tree.

K.: It works on a battery or wire?

M.: On batteries.

K.: Do you sleep on this bed?

M.: No, on another bed.

K.: Under the bed? Do you have a light?

M.: Yes, I have a candle under the bed.

K.: It does not burn?

M.: They are soft and small; they are not dangerous.

K.: They are safe when you are under the bed, what do you feel?

M.: My head is down because the bed is low (they both lay down), and I sleep, and when I wake up... I don't know if I am dreaming or real.

K.: Are you afraid of dreams?

M.: I don't know, sometimes I don't know if it is a dream or reality.

K.: Me too I don't differentiate, I mix the realities. Okay, now let's get out from under the bed, watch your head, stay low.

M.: Now I want to go to your room.

K.: Which room. Here?

M.: Yes.

K.: My place in here is real. But for me only me, and I am telling you alone now, it's like a very big entrance door to a world called Damenshin. This world has no time, no places, suddenly you find yourself in a swimming pool, then suddenly find yourself in the city-Platz, and suddenly it is dark, then daylight, there is no death in this world. Sometimes when I am in the city-Platz, I feel that am not a stranger to this place, as if I visited it before, maybe because the ground has many stones next to each other and something is old about it that reminds me of Bab Touma in Damascus — same old stones. Sometimes I see people there who look like people from Damascus. I am shocked, where am I now, in Damascus or here? I do not know if you experience the same thing.

M.: Yes, I feel it.

K.: I keep mixing between here or there.

M.: Ya.  
Director interferences...

## Segment from a narrative of biographic experience

Nadi,<sup>41</sup> Palestinian Syrian artist, arrived in Paris in 2016, after leaving Syria to work for some time in Lebanon. Searching for opportunities to resume his dancing career, Nadi persevered to do produce something from the experience he had accumulated. He gathered peers, around twelve, those he worked with before and ended in Germany, and

<sup>41</sup>. Ruba Totah, 'Biographical Interview' (2019).

choreographed a piece over a week, which he filmed, took back to France, edited and shared on Facebook: ‘This piece was about the sense of community that connects us, and at the same time, the state of exile’. Receiving thousands of views, he did not know how to sponsor it further, until a friend asked him to apply for a festival in France. Admiring his work, the festival invited his performance:

I feel I have a whole encyclopaedia of skills I gained back in Lebanon, and before in Syria, and the travels, all made me need to share it. So, my opportunity was that they liked the work, especially that we are a group of contemporary dancers coming from Syria. We agreed to invite-only four of the twelve performers. I had four months only, so I looked for an organisation to support the production, then found one to offer a training space. Way less than I needed and with terrible conditions, I took their support. A small room, where it was tough to jump, so my head would hit the ceiling, and so it was tough to do some hand routines during rehearsals. I trained in the room alone for months, I choreographed a new piece for the festival, and the other performers joined in the last week before the performance. In four days, from 9am until 9pm, we trained on all the moves together. Also, during those months, I worked with a friend in Lebanon who, because he is a friend of mine and a Palestinian as well, prepared two musical pieces for the show. We Skyped many times to discuss the music arrangement. Without this man, it would have been very costly, but he saved me. We performed twice at the festival, outdoor shows. It was hot during August in 2018, and the floor was set on black, our burnt legs reflected on the theme of the piece we produced. It was mainly about the body, and the breath we exhale to reveal the traumas and pain we accumulated in our bodies during our lives. The performers hated me for that and complained that they would not do it again. The reviews though were great, showing admiration for the technique, the theme.

# Trajectories for home-making through creative processes

The segments describe improvisations evoking personal stories. The dialogue between the artists and the biography include mixing between fictive or embodied, and real life personal ‘home’ descriptions, emerging through the practice of ‘living together’. The mixing bridged the relationship between the creative process and the migration experience by choosing to interweave descriptions about real homes and fictive ones. The improvisation space allowed artists to turn the process into a transnational relational creative space, moving between describing their ‘home’ in the past and present, re-imagining it geographically, and encouraging interventions of peers about it. Furthermore, the segments demonstrate subjective reflections on ‘home’ via arguments or decisions, and relational dynamics with peers. The reflections imply structural frames, patterns of choices, and memories sharing to negotiate those settled frames.

The first frame concerns the structure of the creative process in the migration context. Called upon through the festival’s call,<sup>42</sup> as in Nadi’s case, or, as in the observed moment ‘dreams of a fictive home’, proposed by Director as a rehearsal theme at the beginning of each rehearsal session, this frame creates a boundary for the elements of the creative process. It controls or governs artists’ spaces of

<sup>42</sup>. Festivals or ensembles designate the title of their calls or productions in relation to the concept of exile or borders to indicate their interest in raising the topic, usually reflecting their socio-political vision about it.

expression.<sup>43</sup> The second frame concerns artists' relational dynamics, which they generated using the dialogue technique. By recurrently practising those patterns within the aesthetic space, trajectories responding to transnational reality and creative social field emerge.

## The trajectory of identification

Artists relational dynamics comprise two patterns: a repetitive dialogical style which included describing a personal experience, then posing questions about it, and engaging physically in mimicking it. Another repetitive, experiential pattern included proposing an intimate space around a memory and then sharing it publicly by relating it to a common understanding with peers, then creating an interactive experience around it. These dialogical and experiential patterns enabled a subjective mechanism, what Garson<sup>44</sup> calls an open space in documentary performativity, which focuses on the process that is collaborative and dialogic, aiming to extend what people know about themselves. It relates to what Tinius<sup>45</sup> calls a 'dialectical fiction' as a form of actors' reflexivity. Also, it is not only a representational medium but an embodied<sup>46</sup> social practice, an 'expressive enactment'. Its dialogical nature invites exchange and elaboration on reflexivity, and its performative gestures develop its capacity to further meanings and images. Routinising those patterns by collaboratively working on personal stories

**43.** Henk Van Houtum, Olivier Thomas Kramsch and Wolfgang Zierhofer, *Bordering Space* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004); Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Kay Anderson, *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (London: Sage, 2003).

**44.** Cyrielle Garson, 'Does Verbatim Theatre Still Talk the Nation Talk?', *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 6.1 (2018), 206–19 (pp. 210–214).

**45.** Tinius, p. 26.

**46.** Fişek, p. 8.

represents artists' trajectory of identifying with the transnational reality that the creative process provides. It continually attempts to re-construct domesticity and familiarity with what 'home' means.

More specifically, patterns of identification employ choices to infuse the relational dynamics between artists within the aesthetic space. In the observed moment, the artists made several decisions about the improvised storyline. K. chose to share an experience with his place. He chose not to bond with his room in the European city, explaining, 'I try not to mess with its neatness', then decided to employ the room in a vision that suited the rehearsal call for hybridising experiences, and chose to engage his peer artist in this vision. His choices invited others and objects from his memory to the relational space that allowed shifts between fiction and reality, past and present, self and the other. They allowed instrumentalising these shifts to create an understanding of a new home. If displaced people usually lack<sup>47</sup> possibilities to choose familiar and secure places or 'home', in this relational space K. bypassed the original as well as the new place, toward a fictive one that is beyond both, what he called the third world.

Moreover, K. chose a contradictory and multi-spatial description of this place before engaging it with a hybrid vision. At first, he moved between describing it as 'neat', 'real', 'dream room', and then in, between these descriptions, he introduced a messy room in Damascus with many belongings and deep sleep routines. By shifting between geographies, attaching memories to them, and contrasting them, K. practised transcultural remembrance,<sup>48</sup> which explains another level of agency, that of dissemination of memory across and within the national

**47.** Helen Taylor, 'Refugees, the State and the Concept of Home', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 32.2 (2013), 130–52.

**48.** Matthew Graves and Elizabeth Rechiniewski, 'From Collective Memory to Transcultural Remembrance', *PORTAL: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 7.1 (1970), 2–10.

boundaries. Remembrance contributes to ‘*doublement*’<sup>49</sup> in a performance gesture that adds another layer to the relational aesthetics, in a creative migration process which not only deals with the relationship between reality and imagination, but also includes the multi-spatiality related to the past and present and the changing geographies represented by the artists. Multi-spatial *doublement* enabled artists’ identification with the transnational reality to emerge within the creative process. Besides, despite not being a migrant herself, M. made choices about multi-spatial descriptions of her personal space in order to engage it with a hybrid vision. She gained an agency to expand her ‘home’ description in the European city by introducing the re-memory<sup>50</sup> of ‘olive tree’ and ‘radio’ themes which formerly constituted a colleague artist’s memory in Syria. Re-memory construction<sup>51</sup> in M.’s choice created a relational space, where multi-spatial doubling within the performative gesture empowered her to identify with the specific conditions of the creative process.

In Nadi’s case, he demonstrates an agency to identify with what is unusual in the customary conditions of his dance routines, like the size of the studio provided by the institution supporting artists in exile, or the painful floor during the performance. He chose to re-establish new performing conventions that revisited his body’s ability to adapt, creating a relational space that included the body, new situations, and his convictions. To do that, he domesticated the choreography demands to avoid extended hand movements and subdued the pain of stage

49. Tinius, p. 19.

50. Divya Tolia-Kelly, ‘Locating Processes of Identification: Studying the Precipitates of Re-Memory through Artefacts in the British Asian Home’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29.3 (2004), 314–29.

51. Tolia-Kelly presents re-memory as a recall of experience that can be the memory of others as told to us and absorbed within a recurring experience; it describes the self beyond a personal narrative of events and biographical backgrounds.

performance to the real life experience of pain. By expanding what is familiar to his dancing routines in real life, Nadi too utilised choices as a tool to infuse the relational dynamics within the aesthetic space.

The various choices taken by artists created relational spaces that enabled them to re-construct their domestic spaces. This distinguishes an artist migrant possibility from those of a non-artist migrant, in that the multi-spatial *doublement* of creative processes in a migration context empowers emotional, fictive, and real relationships with the self, with others, and with memory objects. They contribute to examining the concept of home beyond its legal and diasporic understandings and extend its dynamic<sup>52</sup> nature by imagining, creating, and changing — as well as losing and moving — homes, to recreate it through ‘living together’ in post-migrant theatre.

## The trajectory of re-entanglement

In addition to identification with the transnational reality through several aesthetic choices, artists were involved again in the dialogical and experiential patterns of creative processes, after a forced movement, where they re-entangled with the state of origin’s figures, memories, and references. Re-entanglement refers to a temporal process where a person struggles to reclaim a forcefully hindered relationship. Within the creative processes, it yielded confrontations to display thoughts about the transnational reality. In the observed moment, M. asked, ‘Why don’t you put pictures of your room in Damascus in it?’. The ‘room in Damascus’ reference asks that the infused dialogue serves to unpack layers of confrontation. One is internal, and K. revealed it

52. Nadje Al-Al. Khaled Koser, *New Approaches to Migration: Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home* (London: Routledge, 2005).

through the comparison between rooms that refer to belonging. It spoke of a boundary with the new place, and his inability to break this boundary in the real world — rather through a fictive third world. The confrontation provoked an agency to re-establish a relational connection with the room, which included remeasuring its meanings and distances from him. Also, the encounter is relational and spatial. By referring to figures from Syria, K. re-entangled with previous places to make an argument about his status in the present situation, mixing people's faces to provoke an urge for connecting with people in the new place and maintaining others from the past. The confrontations appear throughout the observed moment using terms to signify encounter: 'it is a weird feeling that my head does not handle'; 'I am shocked'; and uncertainty, 'maybe anything could pop up'. Moreover, it implies the invitation of the peer artist to join and interact about the confrontation process: 'I do not know if you experience the same thing' and 'that is why I am telling you about it'. Referencing and confrontations within the relational space are tools of an interactive<sup>53</sup> re-entanglement with memories in order to document experiences. They expand boundaries of places and encounters the static nature of a reference, turning it into a concept in motion between past and present and, with peers, making it a tool to re-construct artists' understanding of 'home' in a transnational space.

M. and Nadi document their experiences using similar interactions. M. signified negations within the dialogue after using the re-memory of the olive tree and the radio: 'No, on another bed', 'they are not dangerous', 'I do not know', 'I do not remember', 'no, battery'. The negations unpacked confrontations she experienced when creating a relationship with the references and communicated them with her peer to interact about re-entangling with her control over a space that is supposedly

<sup>53</sup> J. Aston and S. Odorico, 'The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony: Towards a Research Method for Interactive Documentary', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 15 (2018) 63–93; Husak, p. 28.

domestic. Also, Nadi's reference to ties established in the past are repeatedly confronted with available resources. By searching for peers to launch a new dance project in exile, he confronted the lack of access or capabilities to sponsor it. Generally, re-entangling with references from the past (in the case of K.) or unusual situations (in the case of M. and Nadi), created an interactive transnational space with current spatial and temporal relationships, such as peer relations, self-declarations, and home meaning. It constructs what Schechner<sup>54</sup> calls 'the worked-on-behaviour' where artists rely on a reference to distance it and interactively work on it with peers.

The above microanalysis demonstrates the implications of creative processes on artists' subjective understanding of 'home' in a migration context. It reveals relational dynamics emerging in the space of interaction between artists. By permeating artists' life trajectories as they resumed their professional pathways in Europe, those relational dynamics enabled artists to identify and re-entangle with the transnational creative processes during their immersion in several theatre institutions. They formulated through tools that artists used, like choices, references, and confrontations. These tools distinguish those processes by creating a transnational relational aesthetic space where artists practised multi-relational *doublement* and transnational interactive documentary, combining transnational circumstances with the relational aesthetics of migrant artists. They can also distinguish the migrant artist experience from those of other migrant or displaced groups. Artists home-making trajectories provide a continuous shifting between describing places, memories, and belongings, references or confrontations, and describing their limits, then crossing their multi-spatial boundaries toward

<sup>54</sup> Kershaw Baz, Helen Nicholson, Gilli Bush-Bailey and Maggie B Gale, *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (London: Routledge, 2006).

reconstructing them with others. It is an experience of expanding the domestic understanding of the 'self', where agents must simultaneously reference, confront, and open up to new possibilities and meanings of home, reconsidering their habitual routines. It is within this relational turbulence that artists home-making unfolds, in the creative processes at the European stages. Its construction begins with immersion within a theatre institution in Europe.

## DISCUSSION

The relational dynamics discussed here, within the creative processes of migrant artists in Europe, introduce new dimensions to understanding in other fields. While it corresponds with the cognition dynamics<sup>55</sup> to choose and remember life experiences, which implicates envisioning the self as in its relationship to others, this relationship vision is problematised when it is tackled through the structures of the creative process in a migration context, and within its relational aesthetics. Structurally, it engages the performative practical and relational process in theatre to demonstrate a multi-relational space, where the artists, the director, the dramaturge, the observer, and memory objects dynamically interact with external powers to produce a documentary theatre of transnational experience. Aesthetically, it engages the transnational perspective within the post-migrant theatre practices, which reflects on the practicality of the concept of the 'transnational space' and the relational aesthetics emerging between art and the real world. If generative immersion in creative processes relies on transnational networks and relational aesthetics that reflect the various hegemonic

influences on migrants' citizenship discourses and transnationalism, artists home-making trajectories formulate around relational dynamics that negotiate those multi-scalar powers.

The microanalysis of artists' narrative segments above revealed that artists managed, through their trajectories, to negotiate the borders of 'home' by identifying and re-entangling with the transnational reality emerging within the creative process. Their trajectories describe entanglements between 'home', memory, and citizenship works. Home is conceived as a relationship, a spatial, temporal, and a conceptual tool, and a device of home-making, which includes domesticity, belonging, and familiarity, acquired through patterns of experience and behaviour.<sup>56</sup> Artists' trajectories negotiate home as a tool, and the order it requires to achieve familiarity, memory and belonging. Conversely, memory employs emotions to achieve 'theatricalisation' of the world order in a micro situation. Aesthetically, as a 'restored behaviour', memory brings the home as something distant and separate that can be 'worked on', changed, or exist in a non-ordinary sphere of socio-cultural reality, which is primarily symbolic and reflexive, and where the self becomes a trans-individual self that generates choices. In this study, its presentation as a personal, cultural, and emotional reference — a choice, and an object which enabled artists to connect, contrast, and confront what is considered a domestic space — extends its meaning to real life through relations created by the performative practices. Therefore, memory is crucial to constituting the relational dynamics of home-making in creative processes.

Transnationally, memory is a socio-political device<sup>57</sup> that grounds individual and collective cultural heritage stories and resides within the

<sup>56.</sup> See Gupta and Ferguson (1992), Theocharidou (2016), and Suda (2014).

<sup>57.</sup> Tolia-Kelly, p. 322; Alison Blunt, 'Collective Memory and Productive Nostalgia: Anglo-Indian Homemaking at McCluskieganj', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21.6 (2003), 717–38 (p. 719).

<sup>55.</sup> Michele J. Gelfand and others, 'Negotiating Relationally: The Dynamics of the Relational Self in Negotiations', *Academy of Management Review*, 31.2 (2006), 427–51.

material of culture as a signifier of home. It revolves around exploring identities on personal and collective scales, beyond the space of the house, contributing to the various powers of the transnational space within the creative process.<sup>58</sup> If the creative process<sup>58</sup> is a means of expanding methodological and technical horizons, one that transforms<sup>59</sup> the genetics of the text building then, in this study, it turns into a negotiation medium where the agency of the artists' life story and his choices, references, and confrontations in improvisations become part of the memory work. The agency of artists develops despite their geographical background and emerges out of the bridging<sup>60</sup> that the immersion and mediation of stories provide to the crucial role of memory.<sup>61</sup>

Trajectories of artists' home-making within the transnational creative space challenge the sustainability and feasibility of the concept of integration at large — a process of endorsing the host society's social, financial, and linguistic necessities that demands requirements from individuals.<sup>62</sup> The multi-relational aesthetic space creates, instead, a negotiation space of home and memory between the past and future, which promotes trans-subjectivities and intersubjectivities rather than an endorsement. In this space, migrant artists accumulate relational dynamics which re-construct the sense of citizenship by including new identifications that do not indicate direct functionality from individual migrants, but rather a constant negotiation of them. Also, if cultural citizenship

<sup>58</sup>. Eugenio and Savarese, p. 2019.

<sup>59</sup>. Cordingley and Montini, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup>. Crois, pp. 320–330.

<sup>61</sup>. Frederik Le Roy and others, 'Tracing Creation: The Director's Notebook as Genetic Document of the Postdramatic Creative Process', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 26.4 (2016), 468–84.

<sup>62</sup>. Matthias Schick and others, 'Challenging Future, Challenging Past: The Relationship of Social Integration and Psychological Impairment in Traumatized Refugees', *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 7.1 (2016), 28–57.

connects the use of appropriate resources to foster citizenship — where creativity and symbols use art to construct individual livings<sup>63</sup> — art becomes a link between migrants' claims for citizenship and the national perspective of it, which promotes active participation within the national culture. Accordingly, integration in this paper refers to the temporal process of negotiating memories and belongings in a transnational space.

## Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how — in the case of Syrian and Palestinian Syrian artists in creative processes at the European stages — structures of creative processes in a migration context and biographical trajectories, emerging through relational aesthetics of these processes, come together to create the relational space of a home-making experience in Europe. While theatre institutions integrate migrant artists' experiences within their solidarity, cultural citizenship, and integration discourses, several challenges to the European integration approaches of artists were identified. One of those challenges is global discourses on migrant art, and the language of performances, which both artists and theatre institutions have been negotiating for space within. The relational aesthetics in post-migrant theatre experience invest the capital of migrant artists in promoting the human rights discourses of their host institutions, and also in creating a space for migrant artists to negotiate borders of 'home' beyond the relational role of envisioning the 'self' in its relation to others — in its multi-spatiality, and in its shifting between the imaginary and the real. •

<sup>63</sup>. Richard Zapata Barrero, 'Diversity and Cultural Policy: Cultural Citizenship as a Tool for Inclusion', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22.4 (2015b), 534–52.

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### **Manuscript 3: Theater against Borders: 'Miunikh–Damaskus'—A Case Study in Solidarity**

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Article

# Theater against Borders: ‘Miunikh–Damaskus’—A Case Study in Solidarity

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**Abstract:** In 2017, the City Theater of Munich engaged with a policy of diversity, and decided to include Syrian artists and create the Open Border Ensemble. A German and Syrian refugee and non-refugee cast produced the first performance, “Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of one city” (May 2018). This mobile play aimed at minimizing stereotypes and deconstructing essentialist cultural identity prejudices. The paper examines how, in this case study, multilayered artistic strategies and relational dynamics came together to implement a ‘third space’. It addresses the challenges and implications of such theater endeavors regarding solidarity and the representation of the figure of the artists within the realm of the migration and refugee discourse.

**Keywords:** third space; solidarity; postmigrant theater; representation; improvisation; translation; refugee crisis; cultural policies; relational dynamics; creative process

## 1. Introduction

In 2015, the German Federal Government opened its doors to an inflow of refugees after it agreed on a pan-European treaty (Dublin III agreement) aiming for equal acceptance of asylum seekers by the state members of the European Union. A mass movement of people seeking refuge, mainly from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, reached Germany. With a clear political discourse emphasizing on sharing a ‘welcome culture’ (Willkommenspolitik) and activating a policy of integration<sup>1</sup> (Integrationspolitik), the Federal German Government made evident efforts to respond to ethical duties towards refugees, a fact that triggered, in return, critical philosophical public debates on hostility, hospitality, and their limitations (Funk 2016; Jäckle and König 2017). The massive influx of refugees presented a significant social challenge. One way of answering this challenge was to adopt a policy of cultural participation involving local authorities, cultural institutions, as well as independent artists. Artistic activism urged practices of cultural participation. Thus, cities such as Dresden, Göttingen, Hamburg, Mülheim, Berlin, and Munich implemented diverse and numerous artistic as well as sociocultural projects, whether as associative or institutional initiatives<sup>2</sup>. Those projects aimed at bridging people from different backgrounds and stimulating more interaction through art and cultural practices with the people who just arrived. However, a significant shift in policy-making

<sup>1</sup> As stated in the Culture and Media Policy of the German Federal Government 2016: “Our society is being increasingly shaped by migration. Cultural participation is a basic precondition for migrants to be able to understand their new surroundings and to be understood by those around them. That is because cultural participation means social participation. And cultural education can play an important role when it comes to boosting cohesion in a heterogeneous, ethnically diverse society”.

<sup>2</sup> See: [https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=11497:immer-mehr-theater-engagieren-sich-fuer-fluechtlinge&catid=1513:portraet-profil-die-neuen-deutschen&Itemid=85](https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11497:immer-mehr-theater-engagieren-sich-fuer-fluechtlinge&catid=1513:portraet-profil-die-neuen-deutschen&Itemid=85).

occurred when in March 2016 some EU countries decided to close their borders. This shift was accompanied in Germany by the increasing popularity of right-wing political parties that made it to the Bundestag for the first time following the results of the 2017 elections. Those changes were going to have repercussions on the local cultural policy regarding the emergence, support, sustainability, and multiplication of artistic endeavors for or with people moving away from crisis areas and escaping conflict zones, as well as on discourses on solidarity and representation.

This article, in line with recent studies focusing on postmigrant theater (Spencer 2016; Komurcu 2016; Petersen and Schramm 2017; Wilmer 2018), is interested in theater experiences as solidarity endeavors where one surpasses the definition of the 'Other' based on geocultural difference. It investigates theater as a medium for discussing issues beyond migration and the 'Migrant' as the 'Other,' rather focusing on the 'living together' with what this entails as multiple dimensions. Current studies in theater and migration closely examine policies of inclusion in Europe (Sharifi 2016) and performative agency within the realm of refugee cultural and political activism (Bhimji 2015), as well as the variety of strategies, like verbatim and autobiographical documentary theater, for addressing problems of migration and the role of nation-states (Wilmer 2018). This case study wishes to discuss this topic from a socio-anthropological perspective based on a recent theater initiative: The Open Border Ensemble OBE at the Münchner Kammerspiele. It presents a microanalysis of a specific situation that took place during the rehearsing process of the performance "Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of one City", focusing on the relational dynamics emerging out of this living experience and how it shapes a transcultural reality.

## 2. Data and Method

The analysis relies on participatory observation (Malinowski 1922; Cassell 2012; Charmaz 2014) as a method to collect first-hand qualitative data material. Indeed, the authors of this article, researchers Ruba Totah and Dr. Krystal Khoury, were also directly implicated in the abovementioned theater process: Khoury was the artistic director of the project and Totah was the translator and dramaturgy contributor to the theater production. Other than the ethnographic notes, penetrating insights, and highly contextual understanding brought by the three months of immersion, the corpus data included relevant printed and online communication material produced for the project. They used an empirical approach embedded in ground theory to examine one institutional artistic theater project The Open Border Ensemble initiated by The Münchner Kammerspiele in 2017, and a key moment from the creative process of its first theater production, *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City*, as a case study.

## 3. Diverse Institutional Theater Practices

Amidst the shifting political context in Germany in 2015, the art world, including the theater scene, demonstrated various solidarity statements to respond to policies of integration. These statements went hand in hand with initiatives led by artists and cultural operators from the German independent scene following state policies that encouraged cultural participation for integration. Major theater institutions in Germany, like Gorki Theater in Berlin, Schauspiel Hannover, Theater an der Ruhr in Mülheim, Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar, and lately The Münchner Kammerspiele, opened their doors for theater projects with mainly Syrian and Syrian–Palestinian artists newly established in Germany—with the exception of Weimar and the AZDAR Theater ensemble from Afghanistan and Bremen, with the lately multinational Ensemble New Bremen<sup>3</sup>. Those theaters were trying to conceive midterm projects that aimed to go beyond usual one-shot productions where Syrian artists are working as 'guest artists'. Therefore, in continuation with the German theater tradition of 'Ensembles',

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<sup>3</sup> Steptext Company and Bremen Shakespeare Company: A cosmopolitan group of eight performers from Syria, Afghanistan, South Korea, Germany, Colombia, Togo, and Senegal to better reflect the diversity of the city.

they implemented each a different model of theater inclusion depending on their artistic mandates and policies.

Starting in 2016, artists were called to form adjacent groups to those theaters' main ensembles. Maxim Gorki<sup>4</sup> Theater created the *Exil Ensemble*. Following a form of theater refugee artist academy, it provided its members with German language and integration courses as well. Schauspiel Hannover<sup>5</sup> initiated, in 2017, the *Yalla Ensemble* to "bring together, around the theater, people from different nationalities residing in Germany, mainly Hannover." Designed as an inclusive socioartistic project, it wished to give the opportunity to artists from Syria and Iraq to work with local youth from Hannover as regular theater workshops trainers and directors of youth theater plays. The Münchner Kammerspiele<sup>6</sup> founded *The Open Border Ensemble* as an experimental transnational collaborative project to resist borders and artistic isolation by calling artists living in Damascus to join the theater, with the aim to open a space for an exchange of expertise. In Mülheim, the group of artists *Collective Ma'louba* aimed to "establish an Arabic-speaking, international artists' collective ( . . . ) and develop various interdisciplinary projects which focus on producing Arab-speaking theater performance." While the theater institutions themselves artistically manage all of the above, this collective presented a more hierarchy-challenging structure, claiming a kind of autonomy from the Theater an der Ruhr<sup>7</sup> who are only hosting and supporting in the administration of the collective. The analysis of how each theater introduces its ensemble on their website shows the specific and diverse motivations lying behind their creation. It also reveals that providing a space for an encounter is a common interest, despite the differences those theaters have in funding, audience development, and outreach strategies<sup>8</sup>. Those initiatives are not without facing some challenges.

If being part of those ensembles undoubtedly enables Syrian artists to recover their professional activity, the limited local or federal support questions their sustainability. Moreover, on an aesthetical level, operating under the social integration scheme with the 'refugee crisis' in the background, they have been producing—with only a few rare exceptions—narratives linked to war, forced exile, and escape experiences whether by, with, or for refugees. If those narratives complied at the beginning with the artists' needs to tell those stories and the German audience to hear them, this approach was soon revoked by many Syrian artists who started seeing in it stigmatization and labeling of the Syrian artist outside Syria as foremost a 'refugee artist'<sup>9</sup>. It carried assumptions and expectations towards their artistic production, conditioning their freedom of expression and creativity. From that perspective, it becomes interesting to take those ensembles as socio-anthropological laboratories to examine how they put at stake the construction of representations of newly arrived Syrians artists in Germany.

#### 4. The Open Border Ensemble: Theater against Borders

Until the late nineties, when more practices started to open up to diversity, the German state theater was exclusive and closed to national interests, while the independent theater was more diverse. One of the main challenges of the German institutional theater has long been in its ability to create diversity within its structures and audiences, and in its accessibility by everyone (Wilmer 2018; Spencer 2016; Sharifi 2016). This challenge was to be explicitly addressed by the Münchner Kammerspiele new direction starting in 2015 with the arrival of Matthias Lilienthal. The theater decided to work since then with nonwestern directors from Lebanon, Iran, Japan, Greece, Mexico, and Argentina, to name a few, along with German directors. It invited those artists as associés

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://gorki.de/index.php/en/company/exile-ensemble>.

<sup>5</sup> See: [https://www.schauspielhannover.de/index.php?f=07\\_seiten&ID\\_Seite=285](https://www.schauspielhannover.de/index.php?f=07_seiten&ID_Seite=285).

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/munich-welcome-theatre/open-border-ensemble>.

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.collective-malouba.de>.

<sup>8</sup> This is due to the histories of each theater institution, as well as social and political contexts of the regions they are based in.

<sup>9</sup> Interviews conducted with artists: Rania Mliehi (2017), Ayham Agha (2017), Shadi Ali (2017), in the framework of the PhD Research Experiences of Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists' with The Notion of Refuge by Ruba Totah.

to produce performances for the theater repertoire. Moreover, a specific team *Kammer4you* was formed to work on audience development, organizing themed campuses for students, workshops for kids and teenagers, and presentations, after talks and symposiums. Opening up to a broader, younger, socially and culturally more diverse audience than before, the theater's artistic direction aimed at increasing audience curiosity with artistic productions that reflected more significantly on Munich's shifting demography and its culturally diverse social fabric.

As an engaged city theater, the new team of the Münchner Kammerspiele, unlike other German theaters, showed its concern towards the issue of refugees—their arrival, conditions, and new life in Munich—and was their first station in Germany. Indeed, soon after Germany's borders opened in September 2015, the theater organized The Open Border Congress within the frame of wider project<sup>10</sup> called "Munich Welcome Theater" in October 2015. This congress gathered artists, scholars, activists, and "people who have come to Germany as refugees themselves or are simply interested in coping with the social challenges of worldwide migration movements". It called for a "society of the world that defends openness and diversity", a clear statement of solidarity. The theater later continued its active involvement with the issue of migration and exile by establishing the Welcome Café<sup>11</sup> in April 2016. This format, away from an aesthetic positioning, leaned for more urgent social intervention. It made accessible one of the theater stages as a cultural place for local inhabitants and newcomers to meet, share, and access practical information and take part in cultural events, first weekly then monthly. The ongoing collective commitment expressed a common need to build up alternative narratives. In December 2016, this culminated in the production of the Open Border Ensemble Festival with Arabic-speaking artists and theater amateurs, featuring lectures, stage plays, films, and concerts providing momentum to the Café initiative. After the first rush and solidarity urgency, the theater decided out of this experience to give another configuration to The Open Border Ensemble project and develop it further by trying to shape it, based foremost on an aesthetic theatrical vision. The year 2017 was thus a preparatory year, leading to its implementation as such.

The asylum seekers' migration flow incited the theaters in Germany to work more towards inclusiveness and diversity and adopt transcultural approaches as a form of solidarity. In their article "Putting Flesh to the Bone: Looking for Solidarity in Diversity, Here and Now", Oosterlynck et al. (2016) observe that migration challenges solidarity resources, opens debates on new understanding of citizenship, and is classically based on interdependence, shared norms and values, struggle, and encounter. Thinking on a global level, the Münchner Kammerspiele questioned solidarity beyond the national scope, yet still in connection to it. Its interrogation revolved around how it can be in solidarity with other theater scenes, such as the Syrian one, how it can extend the solidarity scope and expand its borders while answering the urges of the German context, and which collaborative modality to trigger. The team perspective was embedded in postmigration discourses channeling the idea that the migration phenomena are a norm even though the heterogeneity they bring into society is still not reflected enough on German institutional theater stages. After auditions in Munich and Beirut, the theater invited Syrian performers—who had completed their theater studies at the High Institute of Dramatic Arts from Damascus, in Syria—to become part of The Open Border Ensemble (OBE). They were to take part in two theater productions, one of which was *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City*, directed by Munich-based German director Jessica Glause. This theater project was conceived for a mobile stage to tour in the open air in the suburbs of Munich, meeting new audiences, often unfamiliar with theater. Along the OBE members, this production included a Syrian–Palestinian guest female performer and a German actress from the Münchner Kammerspiele Ensemble. As such, the creative process became a place for encounter on more than one level, carrying the potential of activating transnational solidarity, shifting its understanding from "the bounded

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<sup>10</sup> This project is funded by Kulturstiftung des Bundes.

<sup>11</sup> An initiative led by Anne Schulz and the Kammer4you team. <https://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/en/staging/welcome-cafe>.

territory of the nation state to the relationally constituted places where diversity is encountered and negotiated" (Oosterlynck et al. 2016).

## 5. Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City—A Case Study for Creating a ‘Third Space’

As its title denotes, *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* is a storytelling theater play attempting to explore the possibilities of building a common space. This space, aiming to rethink forms of presentation and open new possibilities, can be considered as a ‘third space’, to borrow the expression of postmigrant theater scholars (Jeffers 2014; Joseph and Fink 1999; Sharifi 2016). In order to produce the theater piece, director Glause’s creative approach used and combined some autobiographical elements provided by the performers as core material. Being the OBE’s first production, it brought up the issue of Representation—what did the performers coming from Syria at that moment want to share as stories? Moreover, how and to what extent would these stories represent them? How do they want to position themselves in front of a mainstream German audience? The artistic team of this theatrical project included a director and her assistant, a dramaturg, a translator, a costume designer and her assistant, a music composer, a set designer, and five performers. Its creative process lasted three months, from February until April 2018.

In the following, we focus on a specific key situation we have observed during the creative process out of which we identify improvisation and translation as operating strategies in triggering relations between the director and the performers. We describe the relational dynamics that arose out of the creative process regarding agency and encounter—communications, behaviors, decisions, and self-disclosures. By agency, we refer here to the capability and ability of the performers to act for themselves, as well as about others, while having motivations and resources for the act (Kabeer 1999). We then analyze to what extent the relational dynamics contribute to transforming the theater lived experience into a transcultural reality, the third space.

### 5.1. Description of a Key Situation: A Rehearsal Session

The following situation took place a week after the beginning of the creative process, on the eighth day during an evening rehearsal. Usually, the team rehearsed in the morning and then in the evening on a four-hour slot. Afternoons were free so that the OBE actors could attend German language classes. The schedule was set on a daily basis, depending on the content of the rehearsal the director decided. Therefore, if most of the rehearsals were collective, some requested the presence of only two or three performers. The situation describes two distinctive moments. The first moment—Moment 1—includes the director, the translator, and two performers: M., a German actress and K., a Syrian actor from the OBE. The second moment—Moment 2—includes all five performers K., H., F., S., and M., the translator, and the theater director.

#### 5.1.1. Moment 1

K. is late. While waiting for him to arrive, M. is on the phone outside the studio. K. arrives and goes in to wear the rehearsal outfit. M. is still downstairs on the phone. The director Glause is annoyed by this delay. She goes out and calls her: “We are starting!” The two performers gather. Glause takes out a paper with a ‘nice text’ written on it. The text (T), originally in Arabic, is a transcribed story K. has provided in a previous rehearsal. It tells about K.’s own perceptive relationship to the city of Damascus, triggered by the request of the director to talk about Damascus. K. takes a moment to recognize his text and to reconnect with the story told. He then comments: “I guess I am not convinced by it, maybe I should work on it again.” The director replies that it could be modified later after they decide how it will be translated on stage by the other actors. She emphasizes that the final text will be given back to the actors and they can rework on it again together with the dramaturg in separate

meetings<sup>12</sup>. Glause has a version of the text translated into English. She reads it to M. so that she can get familiar with its content.

Then, Glause explains the task to M.: K. will read the text in Arabic and M. has to tell the text in German, finding her translation technique. The translator sitting next to the director outside the stage will translate out loud the text in English to her. The task requires poli-attentivity, since the telling comprises focusing simultaneously on translating the text from English to German and finding ways to express it and make it understood by a non-Arabic speaking viewer. K.'s voice trembles each time he reads the text, a matter that Glause notices. M. shows much hesitation while trying to complete the task. The director regularly interrupts to give directives and comments on the accuracy of the translation and the performativity of the act of translation. At one point, M. pauses. She asks about the language to be used at the end during the performance. She says she feels more comfortable translating directly from Arabic to German without having the English translation. Glause shows that she understands her concern, but points out that the language used during rehearsals is English—understood by all—but agrees that this makes the situation confusing. They repeat without the intervention of the translator, but M. did not write down the English translation, so she struggles in finding her words every time they start over. In the end, Glause breaks in: “You know, two years ago I told a friend that I would like to work internationally, and now it seems uhhh, I’m lost in translation now.” The team takes a break.

### 5.1.2. Moment 2

After the break, the other performers, N., F. and S. arrive. Glause explains the following: The Syrian performers will tell a story concerning themselves and related to Damascus back in 2008<sup>13</sup>. First, Glause asks K. to read his text (T) while others have to tell the story, over again, using their own styles and techniques. They can support, interrupt, retell, or reinterpret the text of K., but only using physical or vocal expression (like singing). K. starts reading his text in Arabic while M. translates it in German based on the English translation provided by the translator outside the stage, like in Moment 1. In parallel, the other three engage themselves in mime, gestures, and movements, expressing what K. is saying without using uttered words. They try out this configuration three times. Each time, the director asks them not to imitate each other nor repeat the technique they have found, but to try to invent their own way of telling the story. N. uses pantomime, S. uses arms and pointed fingers to draw lines in the space, M. mimes with her hands while translating into German what she hears. F. is given a transparent paper and a pen with a projector. Whatever he inscribes will be projected on one side of the stage wall. He starts drawing.

After a sign from the director, N. starts with his story. He tells it in English. He tells how in 2008, he went around in Damascus with his friends following artists who came to visit the city, taking pictures with them. Years later, he showed it to his father, saying: “This is the Damascus that I like not the one now.” Then, it is S.'s turn with the story. She tells, in Arabic, how she was preparing for the championship in Gymnastics in 2008. Suddenly, she pauses with tears in her eyes. She continues her story, weeping. Every time one of them starts telling his personal story, the others are asked to create images with their postures or signs of what is being told, while M.'s task with the help of the translator is to translate in German. While narrating, the performers pause for a moment to allow the translation process. They listen to the translations that are taking place in parallel.

It is F.'s turn. He decides to explain his drawing. A moment of tension arouses: His fellows, except M., show disagreement because he did not follow the director's instruction. Instead of using

<sup>12</sup> It is after several discussions (collective and individual) and many dialogs between the performers, the director, the dramaturg, the artistic director of the OBE, and translator aiming at working on the style and sharpening the meanings transmitted that the director gave the performers a final manuscript. Some adaptations resulted from discussions during rehearsal breaks. A prolonged period of writing extended the creative process before a final manuscript was ready.

<sup>13</sup> In 2008, Syria saw a prosperous moment in its history after the country started to open to the international market. The same year also marks the year of Damascus Arab Cultural Capital, with a vivid cultural program promoting local and international artistic events. This year was chosen by the director because one of the performers mentioned it in his improvisation.

the transparent paper and the projector to translate the stories, he did an incomprehensible drawing. Following this, M. wishes to know what the drawing was about, so F. explains what it represents: The 'Amawi' (Umayyad) square, a landmark in Damascus, with its sword; and Barada river. However, what is inside the river is not fish. Fish has turned into bombs or eyes of dead people. K., who was supposed to have his story drawn by F., is drowning in the river. Moreover, his feet are held by a rope that is growing bigger and bigger, forming what F. calls 'the idea of Syria', 'a big one'.

## 5.2. *Strategies for Constructing a 'Third Space'*

### 5.2.1. Improvisation

In order to construct the performance, Glause's general creative process approach can be summed up as follows: First, she triggers the memory of the actors and actresses in order to bring out personal stories. She then selects the ones relevant to the storyline of the play by trying to combine, as much as possible, common stories from the daily life of the performers in order to find connections between the different places they come from. She then organizes one-to-one meetings for style assertion and discussion. This dialogical approach introduces a relationship between her and the actors away from a direct hierarchy. The themes tackled are related to the city, memories, dreams, and personal perceptions when changing spaces, and this is maybe what characterizes Miunikh–Damaskus stories compared to what Woolley (2017) identifies as the 'asylum story'. Unlike the depicted process by Woolley of constructing an 'asylum story' that results from a process of revisions practiced in a hierarchy by translators and administrative and legal representatives during hearing sessions, the stories of Miunikh–Damaskus move away from this narrative. They focus on offering new images and experiences of Damascene life that are rarely told by the mainstream media. This choice is also related to the fact that other than one performer who has a refugee status that shaped her relationship to the space, the others had just arrived to Munich to work as actors. The narrative was thus constructed around personal stories from a war zone area—which emphasized the transcultural aspect of this theater process. This environment comprises no legal decision maker in front of the narrator, yet relates the Syrian performers in Germany to the refugee crisis in general by the simple fact of being Syrian citizens. They become, like Cox would write, "authorized non-citizens" in the sense of citizens with temporally limited rights to move to and within nations.

This dialogical approach in constructing the narrative calls for a triangulation (Cox 2018) made by most verbatim<sup>14</sup> theater "narrative, validation and innocence (morality of the human story)" in order to guarantee situating the story within a humanizing paradigm and to enable possibilities for imaginative audience engagement. The dialogical approach in the creative process aims at building up trust to achieve this triangulation and make the actors tell more stories easily during rehearsals. It facilitates sharing the stories that would become a creative resource for the performance. It also empowers the director in her leading role and maintains her authority in the triangulation and the formation of the story. It is only after this connection is made that she delivers back to the performers the material selected and reconfigured by her for dual or collective semidirected improvisation sessions.

The observed situation describes one of the rehearsal sessions characterized by a layering of improvisations. Indeed, it builds upon previous days of improvised material, but also creates new ones. Here, improvisation as a theater practice allows personal stories to emerge and be told for the first time as raw material. It also pushes the performers to find creative techniques to transmit those stories beyond language, including the use of drawing to construct other fictional stories inspired by the original personal story. Each actor discloses a personal story. By asking them to repeat the task, the director orients the performers to recreation and to enhance a new way of transmitting the

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<sup>14</sup> According to Cox, it is a subset of documentary theater devised wholly or in part from the words of real people and has oral testimony at its heart. Practitioners of the form often regard their work as intervening in the public record, offering new or alternative accounts of events (145).

story of the other. While she does not play the role of the decision maker who seeks the discoverable truth, as Woolley (2017) calls the 'truth finder', she practiced her role to lead the invention of new means of connecting the stories of the performers together. Repeating opens to them the possibility to re-appropriate their story, disrupting the director's authority, and also to identify or at least to familiarize themselves with the stories of their fellows. However, the director's artistic directives, interposing regularly the flow of the improvisation session to keep up with the storyline, assert back her authority position.

In the interviews led with the performers during the project, K. perceives the use of improvisation as a tool to introduce oneself to the other and vice versa by experimenting with unusual methods. He says it encourages the creation of a comfort zone, opening up for self-experimentation and evaluation, surprise, and self-content. Additionally, unlike his previous professional experiences based on written plays, the improvisation session is led in this process by 'a supportive authority' that continually encourages new ways of expression. While F. sees in the improvisation sessions too much authority, it compromises his free space as an actor. However, he adds that those sessions call for activating practices of adaptation to overcome the challenge.

In Moment 1, the uttered sentence of K.: "I guess I am not convinced by it. Maybe I should work on it again," to which the director responds with "later", reveals a cognitive process encompassing the capability to act even if still concealed in the rhetoric. Indeed, the verb 'guess' indicates the awareness of the actor towards a certain reality, 'convinced' indicates a decision making, and 'work' indicates a possible action. It reveals a confrontation with himself. Similarly, for M., although her hesitation, pause, and questioning in the middle of the exercise denote a certain feeling of discomfort, she takes action by stating that she prefers not having the English translation, a matter that would put her in a struggling position afterward when rehearsing. Although the director justifies the process, she accepts the request of M. Later, in an interview, M. explains that within such a multilingual context and diversity in acting styles and cultural backgrounds, she believes using improvisation, in general, is a difficult experience. However, if it makes it more difficult to cope with the transcultural situation, it also challenges her to break out of her comfort zone and start a process of self-experimentation, activating her abilities to contribute to the needed collective aspect of this particular theater-making experience. In Moment 2, F. follows the task of using drawing while drifting from it at the same time: He does not translate his peer's story, but invents a new one which differentiates him from others, yet puts him in an isolated position regarding his peers who show disagreement. Additionally, while K. tells his story, others are encouraged to support or to interrupt by telling their stories. The actors mostly interrupt and, therefore, the stories do not develop collectively. This repeats when M. stands against his peers' disagreement to share the story of F. They extend the confrontation with the self to include a confrontation with the other. It makes the other a constituent of the confronted self.

Other confrontations described in the interviews are related to external factors to this transcultural improvisation experience. K. says that he is not sure if his stories will be interesting for the audience being put on stage that way: Whether the decisions resulting from confrontations and negotiations he engaged in with peers and with the director to develop this performance will be meaningful to audience. Further, M. described that she needed peer-support from German actors in dealing with such a multicultural project. F. described a need to create imaginative spaces about the city of Munich which could have enriched his improvisations and minimized his alienation from the venues, the city, the audience, and the artistic decisions in the project.

Those confrontation moments can be called endurance-in-the-self moments that are expressed, whether before action (case of K.), or accompanied by action (case of M. and F.), or following the action. They are key instants illustrating processes of agency formation, allowing the performers to have the space to develop their self-image and negotiate it, showing their singularities. This deconstructs the attempt for any collective representation of the 'Syrian Artist'. By doing so, actors expose to the director and the group a subjective representation of themselves. They describe situations where the performers

are actively engaged in the theater process of negotiating their position within the group. They are triggered by the main theater creative tool used throughout this creative process: Improvisation.

More than a creative tool, improvisation operates as a strategy through which the performers are able to position themselves as agents regarding the directive authority and peers. They can activate their agencies, their capacities as individuals to act independently, by expressing, changing, transposing, transforming, and extending stories and standpoints. Improvisation operates as a strategy to regulate the asymmetrical relational configurations (Simmel 1999) and the confrontations emerging between the performers and the director, which determine or limit their decisions as agents, as well as between the performers themselves as a heterogeneous group with different acting approaches and cultural backgrounds. It encourages what Woolley (2017) describes as the hybrid prose formation of stories which results from enhanced agencies in the processes of sharing their stories. It creates a 'third space', which is not the addition of the performers' spaces and the director's space, nor a binary oppositional representation of each, but another emerging space of ongoing tension and negotiation.

### 5.2.2. Translation

With a Syrian and German cast, the Miunikh–Damaskus creative process raised the issue of language. The director openly addressed this matter from the start as a challenge to be surpassed. Sentences such as "How do we manage language together?", "How to avoid misunderstandings?", "How to initiate a space to know each other?", "This will be important for our work, especially that there are three languages," "the most difficult thing is the language now," punctuated her introductory speech on the first day of rehearsals. In this transnational project, German, Arabic, and English—as the common working language—were used. Moreover, aware of the essential role translation plays as a precondition to the construction of any shared space and to facilitate the communication process, the theater direction appointed an interpreter. The interpreter fulfilled many functions, from direct translation to transcription to cultural mediation. She translated the conversations between the director and the performers. She also translated the directives of the director to the Syrian performers during the sessions and what they were improvising. To be able to select the parts she was interested in, the director used a recorder. The interpreter was also responsible for providing a written translation of the recorded selections to the director, who would bring those texts again to the working sessions. Those texts formed the written material based on which the performers would create a scene. Thus, translation comprised technically translating the communication around the artistic material that is mainly facilitating the communication between the director and the Syrian performers, as well as translating to English the content of the material improvised by the performers in Arabic.

In Moment 1, Glause brings a text (T) in its English and Arabic version, narrating a personal story of K. that was recorded during a previous improvisation session. She gives as a task to M. to translate it to German while K. is reciting it in Arabic. Similarly, in Moment 2, she asks the other performers to physically translate the story of K. The session revolves around how to best translate K.'s text on stage using creative methods so that, later on, the German audience understands it. By giving this task to the performers, Glause not only put translation at the core of the communication process between the participants, but also literally put the translation process on stage as one of the main subjects of the theater piece itself. Indeed, to ask the actors to translate becomes a typical task in the following improvisation sessions. By adding layers of translation in the scene (Moment 2), the text goes through a continuous process of transformation of the meaning. The performers attempt to transmit, in their own language, the story of their peer told in another language (M.'s case). They improvise new ways of conveying its content (H. and S.'s case). Moreover, depending on the medium used (body, projector), each time they translated, they added a new layer of comprehension to the extent of creating a new story inspired by it (F.'s case). More than a communication tool, translation operates as a creative strategy in paving the way towards a third common space.

Like improvisation, the use of this strategy also shaped the relational dynamics between the director and the performers in a challenging way. The fact of insisting on creating a multilingual theater play where the mother tongues of the participants are different was a way to acknowledge the cultural specificities against assimilation. It empowered their agencies. Although K. could speak English, he systematically chose Arabic in all improvisations. Although M. was not sure of what K. was saying, word-by-word in Arabic, she revoked the translation in English, wanting to improvise/translate directly in German. However, the director's recurrent interruptions were shifting back the power balances to gain her leading position again. A position constantly challenged by the fact of having to write a text with source material in a language she cannot understand (Arabic), translated in another language that is not her mother tongue (English) but that operates as a translanguaging in such a plurilinguistic team. It is by making translation central to the creative process and maintaining a specific collectivity through a shared language that the director practiced her authority. She brought legitimacy to the stories within her play storyline by multiplying them with several languages and bringing a reiterated story opposed to what Woolley described as the 'asylum story' by maintaining aspects of 'home narratives'. Her concluding sentence in Moment 1, 'You know, two years ago I told a friend that I would like to work internationally, and now it seems uhhh, I'm lost in translation now,' reveals the ambivalent nature of translation. Translation enabled the construction of a transcultural space and opened up possibilities to unravel indeed, and sometimes to resolve conflicts arising from oral miscommunication and to go beyond differences, yet it reminds of the presence of those differences. This reminder kept the negotiations between actors and the directive authority ongoing.

In Moment 1, M. pauses the translation and steps out, requisitioning the efficiency of this tool within the creative act, especially that as much as this translation was facilitating the creative process, it was interrupting her creative agency as an actress. Learning the stories of her peers through this translation routine took place amidst recurrent interruptions. However, in the performance on stage, she became an agent of those stories. Translation stimulated self-confrontation moments for M., where she had to develop her role from being an actor into creating a new image of herself of becoming an actor–translator. Meanwhile, K. is confused every time he reads the text and listens to its double translation (English and German). Hearing his own story again confronted him with it and with the director's creative process. Similarly to Moment 2, even if the voice of the translator in the rehearsal space tries to adapt emotionally to the improvised situation, it imposes a certain rhythm: The actors have to systematically stop and listen to the translation while improvising and confronting themselves to their own stories.

In addition, In Moment 2, interpersonal confrontations create situations of 'tremble', 'hesitance', 'pausing', and 'struggling', which influence the communication between actors by continually distorting the messages, emotions, and follow-up processes by the other actors while they create scenes. In Moment 1, M. continues to develop her translation skills without reference to the paper, even though she later describes how difficult the improvisation process was to her. Her resilience was confronting her with cultural difference and preparing her for another confrontation with the audience in the final performance. This confrontation included a new representation of herself as an actor–translator of a multicultural third space. Translation operates as a strategy that regenerates difference and stimulates new positions of performers as agents to constantly negotiate this difference. It enables them to activate their agencies as individuals to give meaning to the shared space of cultural difference negotiations, the 'third space'.

The microanalysis of the observed situation and the identification of the multilayered creative strategies in use demonstrate the mechanisms through which a transborder theater experience is built up, constantly shifting between drawing limits and then crossing limitations between the self and the others. Improvisation is about the creation and recreation of stories and situations, whereas translation is about communicating and connecting people and raising challenges, understandings, and ideas. They involve the self and the other. As such, they both function as strategies to transform the creative process into a third space as a relational experience. It is an experience of disorder and confusion

where agents have to confront themselves simultaneously and encounter with others, reconsidering their habitual routines. It is within this relational tension that a transcultural reality unfolds. It starts being constructed as soon as the stories, outspoken and traveling across a geographical boundary, are shared, multiplied, and transformed. Throughout this process, the performers are urged to rethink, be more aware of what they present and represent, and contemplate to find motivations to redefine themselves in a new place that is in motion.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. *Third Space and Solidarity*

Relational dynamics discussed in the case study correspond to what is seen by [Gelfand et al. \(2006\)](#) as envisioning the self as in its relationship with the other, where negotiation of representation involves both the self and the other. The relational dynamics within this transcultural reality describe practicality on the interventions on the concept of the 'third space', which refer to a medium of new possibilities for translating cultural difference, maintaining plurality, and challenging the authoritative forms of control and challenging binaries ([Joseph and Fink 1999](#); [Sharifi 2016](#)). The third space of OBE is constructed within the framework of the German theater institution solidarity with issues of migration and flight. While solidarity motivates establishing adjacent ensemble models, one main challenge to this solidarity approach is that ensembles, like OBE, are subject to conditional funding and limited duration. This conditions the migration phenomena to a limited temporary social determinant and limits the space for broader and larger solidarity. In an interview, Glause says: "I planned to discuss some issues about the project with the theater administration, but then I realized that this experience is happening only once, it's not happening again." ([Glause 2018](#)) This temporality of engaged practices challenges the sustainability of the concept of the 'here and now'. Temporality can refer to a 'utopian performative' ([Dolan 2002](#)) which creates a temporal space for critique, perspectives, difference, and a practice of the identity of the other through translation and improvisations to negotiate beliefs on the bases of these differences. It stimulates 'a structure of feelings' among actors and actresses as they engage in this temporal space. If solidarity is 'nurtured through the very practices people jointly engage in diverse places' in the here and now ([Oosterlynck et al. 2016](#), p. 12), then temporality becomes essential to the theater as a practice of solidarity. The legal state of authorized noncitizenship and other states of 'unauthorized noncitizenships' (theater makers in exile whose transnational mobility is 'unauthorized') maintains an unsteady ground for joint human-paradigm based practices of solidarity ([Cox 2018](#)). The postmigrant theater scholarly efforts in Germany call for beyondness in critically and reflexively discussing migration in theater and the Open Border Ensemble presents its members within the scope of this beyondness. The above microanalysis proposes improvisation and translation as strategies to create a third space of beyondness, where moments of enduring-in-the-self are practiced in larger temporal and artistic scopes, and where solidarity is continuously constructed within theater relational dynamics.

The theater institutions solidarity statements, as well as the mechanisms of establishing the OBE and third space creation strategies, contribute to the Syrian, the artist, and the refugee-artist figures and representations in German society. In the research on solidarity in diversity, solidarities grow as people practice life experiences together in diverse places, relationally. Being citizens of specific legal entities could be overcome by finding innovative forms of solidarity elsewhere that consider the specific situation of the encountered practice and the time span when this encounter happened ([Oosterlynck et al. 2016](#)). Then, citizenship is defined by acts and interpersonal practices of diverse individuals, their representations, and their varying positions in the society sphere (*ibid.*, p. 13). This case study builds on this political and social perspective of solidarity by stressing that within a single encounter practice over a time span reside various representing mediums that are guided by the agency of individuals.

## 6.2. Third Space Strategies

If improvisation is a strategy for a 'third space' that deals with creating, recreating, and negotiating stories and representations of the Syrian actors of the OBE, improvisation could become a strategy of the overall transnational experience of OBE members in Munich. Cultural participation of Syrian artists in this case study constitutes a nexus of their artistic activism and the disorder/reorder processes of their life routines. In addition to the negotiations they are involved in during the creative process, it includes the simplest personal behaviors that the artists coming to Germany had to reconsider as a consequence of their moving, for example, reorganizing life habits, and moving away from comfort zones: Changing sleep routines, excess sweating while sleep, dropping off phone calls routines and transport habits from and to the workplace. In addition to life habits, they experience an active reorganizing of work conditions and contracting processes, work permits, registration at the city departments, city infrastructural routines, weather conditions, language requirements, and content preparation.

Improvisation is explained by [Montouri \(2003\)](#) as the state when a decision is made to deviate from order, where the best thing to do is to improvise, knowing that there will be a return back to order at some point. Creating a third space can be considered the OBE members' negotiation, deviation medium, from a fixed understanding of the self. This medium is temporal, where encounters are extended and deepened to illuminate the cultural difference in the creative process before a new common understanding is derived or before the deviation ends. This extension may be prolonged until moments of evaluations, contemplation of individual representations are given enough space to occur, and where collective agencies are eventually forming to provide new meanings and new representations of cultural differences. This third space turns the deviant approach into a strategy, which opens possibilities for new representations, affiliations, and solidarity.

In addition to improvisation, the translation strategy contributes to the construction of relational dynamics among OBE members. In literature, the translation layers of the OBE fall into several styles but mainly relate to 'community interpreting', which almost all OBE members practiced in certain moments, and mainly resembles the actor–translator role of the German actor. Community interpretation as a practice of volunteers, untrained bilinguals, friends, and relatives is an active, communicative tool that involves face-to-face interaction and emphasizes the role of the translator as both a language and a social mediator ([Baker and Saldanha 2009](#)). This form of translation is mostly practiced in this case study by the German actress, who eventually transforms the third space into a community space, a social medium of interaction. As the translation strategy coincided with the improvisation process, it managed to create what [Spivak \(2009\)](#) calls an 'intimate act of reading' that closely attempts to comprehend the stories of participants, to realize the limits of the knowledge to translate them. As a strategy, it continuously uncovers confrontations of the self regarding what it realizes as a lack of knowledge about others. It ceases to be a technical activity, but a 'subject-constituting process' which constantly shuttles between interior and exterior, between self and other, between individual and collective ([Bala 2014](#)). Translation in Miunikh–Damaskus shuttles between the interior and the exterior, in the self and the other of its members, enabling a better understanding of emerging representations of artists. Doing so over a period of time, solidarity space aided by this medium of translation is no longer in finding common space between artists, but in the experiencing and learning of each other within a third space. Solidarity in the Miunikh–Damascus theatrical experience is thus stretched beyond common grounds to interpersonal practice over an extended period of time.

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## **Manuscript 4 : No Room for Bare life on Stage : The Biopolitics of Syrian Migrant Artists**

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## No Room for Bare life on Stage: The Biopolitics of Syrian Migrant Artists

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Ruba Totah

**ABSTRACT** Since 2015, many artists have joined migrating people from Syria. After arriving in Europe, their biographies, shared via post-migrant performing art spaces, have been contributing to the political debate on migration. These biographies promote solidarity with Syrian migrants and enhance diversity in the host countries. However, by examining transnational aspects of artists' performativity and resilience mechanisms, they contribute to further understandings of these biographies beyond the limitations of the host societies' politics. This paper examines the biopolitics of Syrian migrant artists' performativity beyond the border crossing experience. It redefines artists' biographic representations through tensions emerging between subjectivities and citizenship demands.

**Keywords**, performativity, biography, resilience, post-migrant theatre, Arab performing arts, biopolitics

## Kein Platz für das nackte Leben auf der Bühne: Biopolitik syrischer Migrantenkünstler Performativität

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**ABSTRACT** Seit 2015 haben sich viele Künstler\*innen den flüchtenden Menschen aus Syrien angeschlossen. Nach ihrer Ankunft in Europa tragen ihre Biographien, die sie in den Räumen der darstellenden Künste nach ihrer Ankunft in Europa teilten, zur politischen Debatte über Migration bei. Diese Biographien fördern die Solidarität mit syrischen Migranten und tragen zu mehr Vielfalt in den Aufnahmeländern bei. „Indem sie jedoch transnationale Aspekte der Performativität und der Resilienzmechanismen von Künstlern untersuchen, tragen sie zu einem erweiterten Verständnis der Migrant\*innen über die Grenzen der Politik der Aufnahmegesellschaften hinaus bei. In diesem Beitrag wird die Biopolitik der Performativität syrischer Migrantenkünstler jenseits der Erfahrung der Grenzüberschreitung untersucht. Indem er die Spannungen zwischen Subjektivitäten und Anforderungen der Staatsbürgerschaft in den Blick nimmt, definiert der Artikel die biografischen Repräsentationen von Künstlern neu.

**Keywords**, Performativität, Biographie, Belastbarkeit, Post-Migranten-Theater, arabische darstellende Kunst, Biopolitik.

## Pas de place pour la vie à nu sur scène : Biopolitique de la performance des artistes migrants syriens

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**ABSTRACT** Depuis 2015, de nombreux artistes ont rejoint les mouvements migratoires migratoires en provenance de Syrie. Après leur arrivée en Europe, leurs biographies, partagées via les espaces artistiques post-migrants, ont contribué au débat politique sur la migration. Ces biographies favorisent la solidarité avec les migrants syriens et renforcent les formes de participation et de diversité culturelles dans les pays d'accueil. Cependant, les mécanismes de performance et de résilience des artistes sont soumis à ces cadres politiques post-migrants. Ce document examine la biopolitique de la performance des artistes migrants syriens au-delà de l'expérience du passage de la frontière. Il redéfinit les représentations biographiques des artistes à travers la relation entre les subjectivités et les demandes de citoyenneté.

**Keywords**, Art du spectacle, Biographie, Résilience, Théâtre post-migrant, Art du spectacle arabe, Biopolitique.

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## **Introduction**

In the past five years, the Syrian displacement challenged social and political regimes of countries hosting hundreds of thousands of displaced people (Dinan et al., 2017; Hess and Kasperek, 2017; Huysmans, 2000). The Syrian migrant figure has been represented widely, particularly within the performing arts scenes in Europe (Baltaci, 2017; Bouziouri, 2019; De Smet et al., 2019; Litvin, 2018; Cox and Wake, 2018; Ragab et al., 2017, Sharifi, 2017; Wilmer, 2018). Many theatres adopted post migrant visions of solidarity and resilience against populist and racist adversities that confront societal changes. They established programs<sup>i</sup> that invite Syrian migrant artists to reflect on their experiences aesthetically (Total and Khoury 2018). By taking part in such theatre programs, performing artists' biographies were able to contribute substantially to the political debate about migration in Europe. One of these performing artists is the Syrian actress Seham (53) who was forced to leave Syria. Since 2015, her life story has been presented in at least three productions, among many others she played at theatres in Germany and France. As documentary theatre, these plays staged Seham's memories of past and current confrontations with forms of authority. By preparing these memories for theatrical use, Seham's life story became a hub for political and cultural relationships emerging between her personal experiences, the theatre institutions' visions, and the host societies' receptivity of the productions. Dynamics of these relationships introduce several powers that influence what Rosenthal (2004) called the dialectic interrelation between experience, memory, and narration in forming a person's biography. They subdued Seham's authority over her life story narrations. The biographical narrations of migrant artists, such as Seham's, contributed to the socio-cultural and aesthetic role of theatre in the debate about migration in Europe (Wilmer, 2018) and introduced self-reflexive cultivations of the migrant state in applied theatre (Tinius, 2015; De Smet et al., 2019). Such representations of biographies negotiate and substantiate public consciousness on migrants seeking asylum (Cox, 2017). However, they focus on political understandings connected with and limited to the crossing of borders and integration issues in European societies. They confine representation of migrant artists to exoticization, biographical voyeurism, and debates of ontological worthiness

(Litvin and Sellman, 2018). As a result, migrant artists' representations, I argue, disregard momentous attributes of artists' performativity and minimize subjective<sup>ii</sup> schemes of their artistic identity formations. Therefore, there is a need for a biographical approach that mirrors past and on-ground biopolitics at several nation-states' regimes where migrants encounter severe citizenship regulations; that is to say an approach comprising biopolitics at borders as well as within migration contexts. Such biographical understandings disclose artists' narration mechanisms beyond host countries' inhibiting schemes of the figure of a Syrian migrant artist. It invites wider circumference of biographic explanations, including resilience, gender, and memory aesthetics, from a transnational perspective.

Through a socio-anthropological analysis of artists' life stories, this paper examines how they perform as Syrian migrant artists and generate resilient and non-resilient attributes to defy, assert, and coexist with authoritative regimes on their life experiences. For Syrian performing artists who became migrants, like Seham, their life histories reflect various modes of movement, including the physical crossing of borders, remnant movements from past experiences, and others related to their inner selves. Situating these movements within the framework of biopolitics explains how artists perform their life stories to become Syrian migrant artists, borrowing Beauvoir's term of 'becoming' (Butler, 1985; Tedd, 2004). Their becoming is not only corporeal; it signifies what Sartre calls the context and medium of all human strivings, where the bodies implicate what is 'beyond' themselves in that they are in constant need for being surpassed (Blau, 1991; Butler, 1985). The paper examines artists' cognition of their performativity by revealing opposites and emerging negations within their practice of 'becoming', whether before or after displacement. Through comprehending these aspects of their performativity, the article offers new venues of their biography understanding.

This paper is in line with studies on biopolitics that examine the link between migrants' endangered bodily experiences and various powers affecting them as they cross borders (Demos, 2013; Ince, 2018; Mansoor, 2010; Sanyal, 2017; Total, 2020a, b). It also extends studies on resilience that describe human behavior following crises or moments of hardships in their daily lives or at workplaces (Bourbeau, 2018; Branicki et al., 2019). By investigating biographies, the article is connected with Butler's (1990, 2009b) concept of

'performativity', which explains gender as a ritual of body practice. By adopting a wider perspective, performativity does not only mean the way an artist does gender or performs it. Neither does it exclusively mean the way theatre is done or performed, nor does it imply that doing theatre is vital to explain the life experiences of artists within creative processes. Performativity, in this paper, refers to artists' overall narrated life experience, which includes their profession and their gender. Aspects of artists' performativity are induced through microanalysis of a specific narrative of a Syrian artist (Seham) who currently lives in Europe. In this way, biographic representations of Syrian migrants become part of the artists' cognition process. My analysis illuminates subjective processes of biography constructions which enable negotiation with these representations. By doing so, the paper contributes to an understanding of heated concepts in theatre practice, such as post-migrant and post-Heimat (Home) from a transnational, and ontological perspective.

## Methodological Approach

The paper relies on the transnational biographical interview analysis (Apitzsch and Siouti, 2015; Cassell and Symon, 2004; Charmaz, 2014; Czarniawska, 2004) as a method to gather and analyze first-hand qualitative research material from a group of sixteen artists forced to leave Syria after 2012. Personal semi-structured interviews were conducted over two years (2017–2019) with artists currently living in several European countries. All artists had over five years' professional experience in dance or theatre, completing at least five productions before leaving Syria. Upon arrival in Europe, the artists obtained various legal statuses and engaged with several theatre institutions. For inducing the results, a microanalysis of an anonymized artist (Seham) narrated life story was carried out, followed by an examination of the resulting themes identified within the life stories of the remaining group of sixteen artists. By using an empirical approach embedded in grounded theory, the processes of events experienced by artists are described, including how they structured these processes in actions that pushed forward creative transformations. There are several references and mentions of experienced events in the analysis. They are presented through what Rosenthal (2004) calls a life story, which refers to the narrated personal life in conversations with the artists in the present time. They are also presented as life history (ibid),

which refers to the lived-through life of an artist. Rosenthal distinguishes both presentations by introducing a relationship between experience and memory with the narration. It connects the past perspective of biographers to the displacement experience and present migrating processes. As such, Seham has constructed her past (life history) by presenting it in her narrative (the life story) in the present.

## The biopolitics of Syrian Migrant Artists' Performativity

Seham's life story is a micro-historic account of the nexus relationships between authoritative regimes and an artist's corporeal experience. These regimes consist of totalitarian governmental institutions, such as in Syria (see Fares, 2014; Kassab, 2015), which produce and enact despotic economic or nationalistic obligations on an artist through contracts or discourses. Others encompass the rigid cultural norms (Sharabi 1985) imposed on the artist. Moreover, they involve applying borders and migration policies' security regulations on the artist's citizenship processes (Totah, 2020a, b). Politics of control by these regimes require certain interactions from individuals. For artists, their interaction infiltrate in their corporeal experiences, which comprise behavioral habits in daily life, at work, or during and after displacement. Substantially, these artists' biographical narrations reflect how their interactions constitute the biopolitics of their lives. Seham's narration exhibited a behavioral tradition performed for more than twenty years since she graduated from theatre school. I watched her perform a play in Berlin in 2017. Propelled by what I perceived as an incest scene<sup>iii</sup> in the play that contrasts with norms prevailing in Arab cultures, I wanted to know about her life history, so I asked for a meeting. Her narration revealed dissatisfaction, for reasons not related to the scene. It provided insight about various exasperating authorities over her life experience, comprising dictatorship, patriarchy, and the power of memory, and borders and migration. The way she has continuously struggled to handle these authorities throughout her life explained and curtailed her discontent with the play.

Her narration provided a synthesis of references and events temporalities that described control over Seham's decisions. She referred to a Syrian theatre system that congealed on the journey of being an artist. 'I felt trapped in a box, and I

wanted to travel and see more theatre.' The theatre system dictated a lust for stardom among its practitioners. '[D]ictatorship caused us, in the [theatre] field, megalomania. It covered the feeling of inferiority that the [Syrian] regime causes.' Later the system reconstituted megalomania transnationally. She referred to the example of the Syrian director of the production I saw in Berlin. The director transgressed and misused her memories, but she could not stop it, as she said, 'There were contracts, and in the end, I was doomed to them'. Besides, the theatre system repressed her desires. Throughout the rehearsals, she complained about exposing part of her memory without dramaturgical revisions, and that the director overlooked several improvisations to rework the material. She explained, 'For me, the performance lacked dramaturgical work, and it simply lacked the story'. Such an authoritative theatre system directed mental and corporeal processes of her memory, her body utilization, and her artistic choices and imagination spaces to comply with its control. Her compliance, while attempting a profession under the totalitarian regime, iterated the control of the regime and caused memory distortion and megalomania, accompanied by continuous frustration.

Moreover, the transnational aspect of the narration regenerated the impact of memory and experience on the biopolitics of Seham's life. She referred to a phone call incident (memory) with her father in Syria. She asked about being accurate in using (experience) a certain memory in the piece, that included him. She said:

*'He told me that there is a memory, and there is a remembrance, so I need to keep this in mind and not to rely on my memory because it could be powerfully misleading. He encouraged me to think about what I would like to remember and why? This question changed my perspective, and I was no longer convinced by this work.'* (Seham, 2019)

The call incident created a dialectical relationship between her past experiences with parents in Syria, including her remembering behavior experienced previously, and currently, and her experiences in narration. The relationship reworked the phone call narration across several temporalities to serve the current verdict about misusing her memories on stage. As such, biopolitics of Seham's life are constituted through continuously connecting geography and past events with present narrations. It comprised compliance with social, political, and economic pressures of authoritative regimes. These pressures established a boundary that limited Seham's behavioral habits. Constant enclosure within such boundary turned them to an

authoritative historical inscription, which engulfed Seham's body within frames congregating the visions that the regimes had about her identity. The inscriptions represent what Foucault calls 'governmentality,' aims to regularize the body's behavioral processes (Davitti, 2018), where Seham's artistic, national, and transnational identity processes became regulated by these regimes. Overall, they shaped the present life history into a specific biography, which is mainly connected to biopolitics.

Thus, practices of governmentality regulated both internal and external processes of Seham's biographic experiences. These practices inhibited Seham's explanations of her biography within physical, global, and objectified explanations of these powers. Externally, they regulated the physical cross-border movement between the East and the West, which implicated the racial control of a migrant's behavior (Stoler, 1997). Besides, they reconstituted her life history within the global refugee art market, which turn the body of the artists into a patriarchal commodity (Totah, 2020b). Also, they objectified authoritative inscriptions within art productions. The play on stage corporeally resembled how Seham is performing the subjection of her body to the authoritative regimes. Internally, these practices evoked a complexity of irritation and defensive feelings, demonstrated in the narrating voice that reflects inner positions on the regulating practices. Performing these inner (suffering) and outer (compliance) behavioral patterns interchangeably as positions, they constitute a consciousness, where an artist constantly reconsiders and transforms understanding of the regulations. These shifts in consciousness and the accompanying positions explain that being a Syrian artist is not something one is, but rather something that one does or constantly performs while interacting with various authorities despite the geographical location and time. The explanation agrees with Bulter's (in Bulter and Salih, 2004) definitions of performativity in that it is not a singular act. It is a repetition, a ritual which achieves its effect through making it natural in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained act. Through being performative, Syrian artists can constantly transform narrations of a life history to introduce various understandings of authoritative practices and produce various possibilities of biographies. As such, the biographical constructions establish biographies as performative acts.

## Performing Transnational Resilience

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In addition to compliance and suffering positions, Seham's narration demonstrated confrontations with the authoritative regimes. The confrontations combined both the inner and outer positions. By referring to a specific incident with her parents, which took place more than 15 years ago, the three of them had a moment of extended truthful confrontation about personal issues, suppressed fears, and pressures. The moment, which was filled with elaborations on patriarchal powers, reflected courage to confront and respect freedom. It helped break away from conventional familial rules and hierarchies, generally characterizing Arab families, because it was based on a decision the three of them made together. Thus, it formed a turning point that disentangled her from the patriarchally organized family system (see Sharabi, 1985; Joseph, 1996), which has societal consequences of asserting patriarchy as a social system. It evoked an agency to challenge these systems. She added, 'I needed this confrontation because I did not want to live in delusion, nor in taboos, in *haram*, or *halal* whatsoever. I decided to be real, and being real makes you undesired [in the Syrian societal context]. It means that what I think is what I say, and I know this is hard because then what I communicate to others might be a taboo for them.' The confrontation incident affected her later work and perceptions profoundly:

*'I did Phèdre<sup>iv</sup> in 2004. Both my parents attended, and I had no fear. I was relieved. I no longer handle any kind of authority over me, or any form of dependency, which we [Syrians] later rebelled against [10 years ago]. For me, rebelling against the rule of the house and society are fundamentals to the extent that without them, you just repeat what [authoritative relations] you were rejecting.'* (Seham, 2019)

The confrontation moment further displayed the performative aspect of Seham's biography under the regulating authority. It revealed an agency to deviate from preset images of a woman as an inferior body that is subject to societal taboos such as honor, fertility, and obedience to patriarchy. In daily behavior, she restyled her body again by ceasing to reiterate typical submissive gender relationships and recurrently attempted to reverse superior attitudes of a group over another. The behavior highly depended on art as an emancipatory practice, which influences professional endeavors. In theatre practice, the agency of artists grows as they join collaborative creative processes because these processes infuse questions about behaviors, intentions, and mischief of characters (Totah, 2020b). They also seek and exemplify transformations of characters, especially in epic theatre (Benjamin, 1968). In Seham's case, the narration described

an implicit agency accumulated through practicing theatre, which enabled her to propose and apply this confrontation with her parents, being figures of patriarchy. By accumulating this agency, new performative attributes are born. They are counter-performative of what constitutes a Syrian artist and function against inscribing her body to the regulated role of femininity being submissive, obedient, and inferior to the male figure. These counter-performative attributes can be described as an artist's mechanism of resilience facing national powers of dictatorship and patriarchy. Attempting to perform these attributes in the homeland, Seham rebutted an expressive model of the rigid cultural meaning of a 'true Syrian,' and the Syrian artist, emphasizing that actually there is no natural Syrian artist who pre-existed governmental, institutional, and patriarchal powers.

Recent migration and management studies introduced resilience as processes of bouncing back from adversities that migrants are facing within professional venues at institutions of the host country (Bourbeau, 2018; Branicki et al., 2019). These processes comprise receptivity, adaptability, reflexivity, and the capacity to learn. Seham's biography revealed that, after the legal status of a migrant, she performed transnational-based confrontations with a dictatorship regime at the workplace. She continuously sought new theatrical experiences with emerging dramaturgs and directors not affiliated to the regime and its idols. It also provided that in response to transnational suppression, Seham resumed attempting to style her body as free from forms of patriarchal and totalitarian subjection by despising exposure of her memory. Agency to confront suppression evoked reflexive attention to questioning what constructs her image in exile and what compelled complying with the contract that guarantees her economic status as a migrant. It included questioning the ethical motivation of receiving her as a migrant in Europe and accepting her as a migrant artist in the European theatre scenes. '[W]hat investments are they intending through us [workers in theatre from diverse backgrounds and languages], why do they fund our works, and why they want the German society, and the Arabic groups in Germany too, to know us?'. Such reconstruction of resilience as an accompanying life position, not limited to the migrant status, embedded resilience within Seham's performativity. It lost its significance as a sole marker of migrants' experiences. Resilience became, in agreement with Branicki et al. (2019), a ritualized repetition of acts bouncing against adversities on various levels of life matters in the biographic construction.

In addition to Seham, other artists' narrations disclosed compliance, suffering, and confrontations or resilience as performative attributes under authoritative regimes. Previous studies (Totah, 2020a, b) on life experiences of migrant artists coming from Syria found that to cope with border and transnational powers, they repeatedly styled their experiences to disentangle from memories and cultural references of the homeland before reaching Europe. They then re-entangled with them again when they reached. The studies also revealed that the artists identified with nation-states regimes, migration policies, and integration programs throughout their life. The dis/re-entanglement and identification formed artists' trajectories to reconstruct themselves 'home' again after displacement. However, the trajectories included compliance with the various powers governing their life and their loss of home. These trajectories regenerated the relation between memory and biopolitics of their lives. At borderlands, memory formed a personal and emotional tool to connect, contrast, and confront with regulating authorities of what constitutes a domestic space. In the course of creative processes in Europe, their memories, like Seham's, became media of negotiating artists' identities, where their agency and their choices, references, remembering, and confrontations in improvisations became part of the memory work that served their confrontations. Therefore, memory evolved as a counter performative resilience mechanism: by recreating their memories, artists continuously connected geography and past events with present narrations to maintain the confrontations with the encountered regimes.

However, if Seham and the other artists engaged in memory work that repeatedly failed to produce an accurate memory, this reiterates that a Syrian migrant artist is constantly and simultaneously constructing the past and present. Memories, being continuously exposed and directed by boundaries of the various powers regulating artists' bodies in homelands, at borders, in borderlands, and in the current destination of their displacement, these artists recapitulated that a biography of a migrant artist relies on a various and interchanging set of memories. Consequently, being a migrant artist is also performative, showing that there is no 'natural' Syrian migrant artist, which pre-exists migration policies and border controls and integration programs. By explaining migrants' resilience attributes as a continuous reshaping and confronting with fixed representations at home and outside it, this explanation recalls Arendt's (1973: 281) argument that the 'naked man' figure

is a human who breaks the relationship between man and citizenship and who is unbound by human rights or international policies. Once given a migrant status, Seham and the artists became bound again with political interpretations. Failing to produce an accurate memory describes artists' attempts to maintain the naked man figure, which continuously questions to shake the biopolitics.

In summary, by demonstrating the performativity of Syrian migrant artists, their biographical constructions provide subjective explanations of their experiences. These include personal compliance, suffering, and confrontations with authoritative regulating regimes. Some of these experiences are contradictory but are taking place simultaneously to produce consciousness of movements that are influencing the 'becoming' of a Syrian migrant artist. It is a process of connecting inner with outer performative attributes, which contributes to the emergence of the Syrian migrant artist subject' and its current appearance. If this subject is constantly represented politically through the many times that the artist narrated their life story, or reconstructs their life history, or produces their biography, then the representation of the biograph of a migrant artist relates to the migrant artist subject's state of becoming itself. Artists' biographic representation becomes the object of a Syrian migrant artist's 'surpassing' in that they are in constant need to know about themselves through their other, and their biography. This object as produced biography can be explained through what Hoskins (2006) calls a 'biographic object' which is connected to the person but is at the same time detached from it. In the next section, I will provide an in-depth analysis of Seham's cognition of the performative attributes of her subject to demonstrate how the subject's desire structure established her biography. The aim is to gain further knowledge of a person's identity, challenging fixed political representation.

## Cognition of Migrant Syrian Artist's Performativity

As the governmentality of becoming a migrant artist stimulated producing a biographical object, cognition of this object includes transnational movements of the Syrian migrant artist subject between at least two sets of cultures and theatre styles.<sup>vi</sup> It comprises layers of desire to explore these theatre styles and the self through them, and one's biography. Fulfilling this desire developed in what Butler (1985) explained as a

synthesis of movement between the subject and its alterity.

In Seham's case, when she was still in Syria, she longed for establishing a new Syrian theatre style: '[M]y aim is to search for a reality Syrian theatre style.' She fulfilled this desire by experiencing as many diverse theatre styles as possible. Later in Europe, she resumed to desire these explorations: 'I am very grateful to have been able to explore my potential in communicating with the women [she worked with on a theatre project] even if we did not speak the same language.' Her desire comprised an arrangement of relations between the conscious actions that motivated learning these styles and unconscious interactions, which related to alterity or lost opportunities that she missed throughout performing herself as a Syrian migrant artist. These movements comprise a desire-structure where the theatre styles represent the other, and where the migrant artist constructs the biographical objects and implements the movement between the self and its alterities. The following is an analysis of Seham's structure of desire to explore new theatre styles across cultures and how the biography of a migrant artist is located within this structure.

## MIGRANT ARTISTS' DESIRE AND ALTERITY

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Seham's structure of desire includes reflexive and intentional conscious and unconscious elements to achieve satisfaction. She started to be reflexive after graduating from the Syrian theatre school when she traveled to explore other<sup>vii</sup> diversified theatre experiences. The main tool of the exploration was her body, which she consciously used in order to eliminate cultural and political boundaries that categorized and limited her theatre explanations.<sup>viii</sup> After several travels, she came to the realization that the boundary eliminating character of theatres seemed to result from their specific philosophical attitude: most theatre schools share a philosophy centered around honesty of the actor in staging a character to serve its transformation throughout the play best. Her travels and experimentations ensued a way of character-embodiment.<sup>ix</sup> It is a process that explains how Seham combined her corporeal experience with her mind and thoughts to fulfill her desire by finding characters in her surrounding life whom she could embody. Then, by connecting with this person through her body and mind, she reproduced that person and herself anew.

*'[T]hrough my research, I do not rely on the plot because this is happening either way. I search for what a character wears, the shoes, do they affect movement or speech. If she reads the Quran, I read and learn about the physical experience of a woman reading the Quran. I need to believe the character to engage in being this character despite all the differences between us. I would never make sacrifices for men in a love story as she would. I know what love is, but I stop and think if it is worth it. There is someone I know, a neighbor of my friend, she complains about her boyfriend, who does not show up. For me, this character wants to be someone else but cannot because she is stuck with that person. It is like she cannot get out of the house. How do I put her on stage, what do I do to my voice and body to help her? Here I rely on my consciousness as an actress. I realize that there is no lying here or even acting because I need to be this character and lead her transformation, or else why would this character be on the stage. This moment of honesty makes the character decide to transform.'* (Seham, 2019)

The process has the effect of what Walter Benjamin (2008: 479) describes as aura, 'the unique apparition of a distance, however near it be'. It describes the unique reproduction of a character and the character embodiment act. The aura of character-embodiment cannot be eliminated because neither the artist nor the character is the same after it happens; they both transform. However, its effect on both, especially the artist, is enchanting because it unconsciously widens the boundaries of the self. Through her narration, Seham stated that she did not only play those embodiments on stage but that she dragged the practice even closer to identify with others in daily life. She revealed other situations where she had daydreams about finding a character-embodiment of people even without putting them on stage. She has been transforming gossiping rituals about people with her friends by finding solutions like those she performs on stage, and sometimes she took real actions. By numerous recurrences of this character-embodiment throughout her life, this process became an unconscious reflexive pattern. It created an inner movement through which Seham surpassed what she knew about herself by things that she did not think she knew. She experienced what Hegel (in Butler and Salih, 2004) calls the rhetorical agency where a subject always knows more than it thinks.

Thus, by desiring diverse theatre styles, she unconsciously discovered dimensions of her own identity. If her behavior tradition constituted inscriptions, then the discovered dimensions of the identity by being reflexive constitute all behaviors that do not fall within this tradition and all that is not governed by biopolitics. She may not have necessarily intended to discover them but she did. In the context of theatre, these discoveries are relational (Bourriaud et al., 2002). They elaborate on artistic meanings through character-embodiment. They also introduce ethical and political change (Tinius, 2015) that serves a new political goal of many European theatre institutions, which call for diversity in theatre practice. By being reflexive, both Seham's consciousness and the object of her desire, which include her biographical object, theatre styles, and the self, are transforming and replacing the static truth of any political representation of a Syrian migrant artist. In this respect, the desire-structure demonstrates that the biography of an artist is constructed through a reflexive pattern of transformations that does not entitle biography to one representation and makes it unable to seek one ethical and political change. It comprises the plurality of changes sought by confrontations with biopolitics, such as the new identity figurations of reflexivity, and the diversity calls of theatres.

In addition to reflexivity, the structure of desire is unconsciously intentional, as it unconsciously intends to widen self-understanding by inviting ontological disparities (Butler, 1985). Seham's processes of character-embodiment underlined an unconscious surpassing of personal boundaries, such as being an educated and self-esteemed actress, or a Syrian, or an artist, or even a woman. It also shed light on identifying ontological relations with others outside these boundaries. By her identifying with others, she intended a set of actions to make others' experiences like hers. Then, she chose to contribute to these characters' transformation through conscious acts she decided, and by so doing she is satisfied. Her identification took place at two levels: Firstly, the psychological level demonstrated ascribing to herself the characteristics of what is opposite to her. Secondly, the sociological level demonstrated how she included herself to the circle of the social group that the character represented. She explained, 'I need to believe the character to engage in being this character despite all the differences between us.' Through such identification, she transformed the external interactions with characters into internal ones where differences that appear as disparate are

considered part of the ontological integrity of her experience.

Also, she invited ontological relations with opposite representations of her legal status. Through a German woman character-embodiment, she was reproducing herself and the character anew, which in this case was the negation of her status as a migrant in Germany. She explained that dealing with this character was like dealing with any other character, but it served breaking away from racial boundaries. The experience, as she reflected, was illuminating for herself and the audience, especially about the image they both had on being non-German. She commented, 'they were amazed by the role even if I said no German word'. The narration referred to several other negations connected to Seham's status as a migrant, such as a dependency on governmental income or becoming international through her experience. She was handling these negations to find not only an active style of living her body in the world but also a way of resuming her resilience mechanisms.

In summary, the character-embodiment enabled unconscious identification with what she had previously disfavored as other, the negation of her desires, or the undesired features which she separated from her being. By referring to her friend's neighbor who complained about her boyfriend, she explained, 'I realize that there is no lying here or even acting because I need to be this character and lead her transformation'. She achieved the transformation when her body became the hub for those disparities and represented the negating other. The 'I' continued presenting her soul, and the mind connected with the body to serve a transformation through the body. Through performing these negations and seeking their transformation, she shifted the consciousness of both herself and the opposite. Intrinsically, in addition to reflexive patterns of transformation, the desire-structure comprised intentional opposites inclusions that entitled biography to a plurality of representations, which may agree or contrast with the ethical and political change it seeks. It is through being an artist that this turbulent construction of biography is made possible, which constantly introduces a certain representation, as well as its opposite, thus not allowing a fixed political representation.

## MIGRANT ARTISTS' GENDER AND LOSS

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Performativity by Butler (1985) introduced the structure of desire around gender, which explained gender as an active style of living one's body in the world. It plays a central role in the

cultural meaning of the body. Performing one's gender contributes to transforming the consciousness of the self and its alterity. For a Syrian migrant artist like Seham, practicing character-embodiment included imagining, believing, and questioning a female character, which are seen as repeated acts to produce the appearance of a woman as a natural being. This regulatory frame congealed over time as the female character appearance of Seham. However, there are counter-performative attributes which enabled her to confront this frame by mocking the expressive nature of sexual relationships. She explained how she questioned frames related to a father-daughter relationship and homosexual love. She said, '[A]t the time, I defended my right for feelings that are considered taboos like admiring my father. I wanted to rebel against everything'. Her rebellion extended by the confrontation with family frames and by similar embodiments of such questions on stage. She performed other character-embodiments of peers and friends who avoided naturalizing an unregulated performative ritual of their bodies as women and men. Such performance explains her corporeal experience as a mediator of ontological disparities, which includes encounters with gender differences, although she maintains performing her gender as a woman. Repeating the process of utilizing her body to confront with congealed understandings of being a woman is another counter-performative attribute that shakes the substance appearance of a Syrian artist woman and a Syrian migrant artist.

Moreover, despite the reflexive and intentional constituents of her desire to defy regulated behavior of gender, forms of identification do not only relate to desire, but also, as Butler (1995) explains, they contain prohibition, and so they embody the ungrieved loss.<sup>x</sup> In Seham's case and those of the other artists, forms of identification included identification with another gender, different from their appearances, in addition to an identification with different theatre styles and different representations of a biography than the ones they narrated in their life histories. Also, identification encompassed prohibitions of unselected memories in exile and non-compliant performative attributes. It included what was left unperformed as a migrant artist, and in Seham's case, the Syrian migrant artist woman. Therefore, despite the transformed appearances that are achieved through character-embodiment, the characters' new appearances continue to comply, suffer, and confront the powers because they did not achieve a radical turn over on each character-embodiment. Counter-performative attributes and character-embodiment failed to resolve the various sorts of the melancholy of herself and

these characters, even if unconsciously intended. That is to say, the structure of desire, although it expands the boundaries of the self, does not eliminate boundaries on her performativity.

To summarize, the socio-anthropological analysis of the Syrian migrant artist expression enabled us to understand biographies of its holders through their performativity. The micro-historic analysis on the Syrian migrant artist's expression relied on the Hegelian perspective of a subject as a being whose consciousness and relationships are based on doing, recognizing, and continuing a sense of identity. It provided the cognition of biographies as comprising unconscious identifications with alterities and losses, which widen the space of representations of biography to include contrasting, performative and transformative ways of introducing multiple understandings of ethical and political change.

## Discussion

Syrian migrant artists' cognition of their performativity embrace biography as part of a migrant's subject. It constitutes the subject's alterity, the desired object. By connecting with several anthropological interpretations (Hoskins, 2006), an object is perceived to have a biographic connection, such as the biographic connections of humans, and a transformative agency related to the persons who produce and circulate it. By understanding the produced biography of a Syrian migrant artist as a biographic object, which is inhibited within physical, global, and objectified explanations of the biopolitics of the subject, its agency mediates transformations of these explanations and reflects the subject's suffering. Kopytoff (1986) proposes perceiving a biographic object as animated and malleable commodity that is linked to various explanations by humans which result in transformations. For migrant artists, these transformations serve a post-migrant vision of theatre institutions in a migration context.

Post-migration has been introduced as an analytical framework on the dynamics of globalized societies such as European societies. It emphasizes the concept of citizenship through promoting a space for negotiation between cultural encounters while being together within the same society, and a space for sharing democratic values centered on diversity. It focuses on the processes constituting this space that comes after the migration (Foroutan, 2015; Peterson, 2020; Peterson and Shramm, 2017). Post-migrant theatre visions generally question existing frameworks of knowledge related to migrants by inspiring new understandings through voicing migrants in the theater space.

However, the post-migrant space focuses on European societies' needs and interpretations for diversity and citizenship, which are centered on eliminating prejudices and discriminations. It situates the material produced by the artists within frames of diversity in the host society and neglects artists' other subjective concerns.

The analysis revealed that such theatre space has failed to enable artists to restructure their biography beyond their compliance with authoritative regimes that they experience transnationally. Therefore, the biography of the Syrian migrant artist becomes an object inhabited by compliance with the citizenship obligations of this space. Recent post-migrant visions introduced the concept of migratory aesthetics (Bal, 2015) to shift the focus from artists to the artwork itself and the aesthetic experience of its audience. It aimed to avoid the exclusionary effect of the concept called 'migrant theatre' or 'migrant art', where artists are considered as outsiders. These artworks constituted the produced biographies on the artist's life history, which according to the analysis form the alterity of the artist. However, by attempting to avoid this exclusion, a substantial part of the artist's subject is neglected.

Moreover, Gell (1998) links the agency of the biographic object with an ability to stimulate emotional responses. Nevertheless, by accumulating compliance in a post-migrant context, artists' emotional responses are governed and channeled toward the alterity of their subject: the attempt to transform the biographical explanations of migrants questions the post-migrant and post-Heimat (home) perspectives and points out their limitations and eurocentrism. It questions their missions of seeking diversity of European societies representation by inviting to dialogue issues related to the pre-migrant state of the subject, and its governmentality, a reflection which may include colonial and global political topics. Recently, Peterson (2020) combined a post-migration approach with a post-colonial one, bringing together post-colonial issues of oppression and subaltern cultures, difference, and hybridization, with current formations of citizenship from a post-migrant perspective. Such combination includes the various constructions of the migrant's subject and its multiple confrontations. As such, it brings to discussion biopolitics of borders as part of the overall experience of migrants, not as their only experience.

As the agency of the biographical object reflects an agency of the subject for surpassing itself, and as artists have multiple agencies to confront with

biopolitics, artists display their counter-performative resilience as a decolonial confrontation within the post-migrant space. These confrontations, as explained by De Certeau (2004) through his understanding of how culture is consumed, are artists' tactics, their maneuver, within the power's territory, where the space of confrontation is the space of the other. These tactics constitute their way of negotiating and readjusting the post-migrant political representation of migrants. Artists use their biographies as an object of tactics, and they use the theatre ensembles within post-migrant spaces as opportunities for representation of the self, the other, and the other self. However, continuing to seize the opportunity to provide their objects within these spaces repeat a performative routine that congeals their objects into a representation specifically connected with these spaces. Therefore, the post-migrant representation demands are becoming additional authoritative inscriptions of artists' experiences.

The resilience of a Syrian migrant artist subject is perceived as surpassing one's performativity to introduce new attributes that continuously integrate past connections (not only the ones related to displacement) within current narrations to keep recreating new versions of artists' biographic objects beyond crossing the borders. It continues to widen the circumference of artists' identity-making by maintaining identification with what is prohibited, or what is not performed and preserves a balance with the migrant representation. The resilience of Syrian migrant artists proposes a practical understanding of losing home and rights and becoming a 'naked man' as described by Arendt (1973). It also iterates what Agamben (1995) calls 'bare life' where there is a part of being human that no security measure can protect. Artists' confrontations within the post-migrant and post-Heimat (home) spaces, which call for specific political change that neglects part of their subject, constitute their breaking with being humans and with being migrant citizens. By losing homes because of displacement, and by losing identification due to current post-migrant visions that accumulate biopolitics of their experiences, the opportunity of artists to integrate into these host countries is challenged. These circumstances lead humans to stop wanting any integration (Arendt, 1973). The bare life situation describes the state in which a Syrian migrant artist negotiates insecurities and resilience opportunities between subjectivity and post-migrant, post-Heimat (citizenship) calls for diversity.

This paper has illustrated how Syrian migrants generate resilient and non-resilient attributes of compliance, suffering, and confrontation with biopolitics. They provide several biographic potentials, all inhibited by biopolitical explanations. It has also illustrated that post-migrant visions of diversity provide a space for these biographical representations. However, by neglecting the various biopolitical influences on the artists' performativity, they transform into a challenge themselves. The resilience mechanisms of artists continue to generate biographical productions, attempting to

disconnect with both subjective and citizenship representations.

## NOTIZEN – NOTES - NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Münchner Kammerspiele theatre in Germany introduces its Open Border Ensemble goal 'Against a backdrop of crises migration, exile and violence worldwide, the ensemble wants to open up new collaborative paths and oppose artistic isolation.'

<sup>1</sup> For Agamben (2009), subjectivity results from 'the relentless fight' between living beings and non-transcended powers, which can only be resisted by radical ontological indifference.

<sup>1</sup> An Unusual scene of a brother and sister making love, mostly the sister, was deluded by the striking question she was trying to answer about her father being a police officer at the Syrian regime.

<sup>1</sup> It is a French tragedy by Racine.

<sup>1</sup> A subject, being embedded within the concept of subjectivity, it comprises consciousness and awareness of the self and the objects.

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<sup>1</sup> The Syrian theatre style, as she provided, is mainly inspired by the soviet experience.

<sup>1</sup> These boundaries include geographical borders, governmental visions, and racial references.

<sup>1</sup> Brecht and Plessner have argued about the relationship between theatre art and real-life as reflecting each other (Fiebach, 1999).

<sup>1</sup> Butler considers for her theory of the gender question that the structure of desire embodies the ungrieved loss of the homosexual catharsis.

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*<sup>ii</sup> For Agamben (2009), subjectivity results from 'the relentless fight' between living beings and non-transcended powers which can only be resisted by radical ontological indifference.*

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## **Manuscript 5: Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe**

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## Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe

### Abstract

In the last five years, hundreds of forced-migrant performing artists from Arab countries have been scattered throughout bordering countries and Europe. In exile, these artists have been increasingly forced into old and new complexities of nationalism, incorporating relational dynamics in emerging transnational spaces. The complexities have permeated artists' life stories and led to a phenomenon of replicating migrants' biographies on the European stages. By exhibiting aspects of artists' transnational subjectivities around inclusion and exclusion, this paper examines how such subjectivities reveal that migrant artists' biographies on stage act against their freedom, and contributes a variant understanding of transnational theatre.

**Keywords:** Transnational subjectivity, Inclusion, Post-migrant aesthetics, Arab performing arts, Transnational theatre.

### Introduction

The recent migratory wave from Arab countries towards Europe, mainly comprised of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, is well represented in the European performing arts scenes (Cox and Wake 142). By taking part in the outspoken "Welcome Culture," theatre institutions acquired legitimacies encompassing artists arriving to European cities (Wilmer 93, de Andrade and Balme 7). Through artistic collaboration, host theatres demonstrated capacity for establishing adjacent ensembles to provide migrant artists a space for reworking their stories (Wilmer 96). Driven by various motivations, most migrant performing artists from Syria<sup>1</sup> joined these ensembles, producing an assortment of personal stories in the shape of documentary theatre. By accommodating increasing ethical and political curiosity around refugee artists from the Global South (Litvin and Sellman 47, Cox 4), productions tackling migrants' stories spread rapidly and grew into a European stage phenomenon.

The various representations of this phenomenon show how migrants' documentary aesthetics convey solidarity and diversity through culture. Multi-layered perceptions of these aesthetics focus on how they exclude racial referencing (Petersen 8) and avoid ethical discomfort when immersing spectators (Meerzon "Precarious Bodies"<sup>34</sup>, Musca and P. Corrêa 389), and how they involve artists' subjectivities emerging from their travels, which promote theatre as a cultural diplomacy medium (Tinius 271). These migratory aesthetics deal with the distance power of the post-migrant space created between artists and their stories when preparing them for the stage; borrowing Schechner's term, the 'worked-on' life story (Barba and Savarese 235). They do not unravel multiple holistic cognitive, relational, and biopolitical processes that artists experience (Totah "No Room for" 6), which transform their subject when handling dynamics such as nationalism. By omitting considerable portions of artists' subjectivities, institutional aesthetics commodifies artists' biographies (Bishop 64, Kunst 5), mythologises migration by creating the "defaced" migrant figure (Meerzon "Precarious Bodies" 25), and, in effect, dogmatizes solidarity and movements calling for migrants' rights.

Hani(name anonymized) is 37 years old artist currently based in Germany. He commented on the performance poster by the ensemble he joined: "I did not feel anything, or maybe I used to have a specific feeling when I see it at the theatre in Syria. Here it just did not

get me the usual thrill of fear from how the spectators will perceive it.”(Hani) Once life stories are narrated in a creative process, artists construct a reflection that combines creativity with a system of what Sartre defines as subjectivation: “a certain type of internal action, rather than the simple relationship of the subject to itself” (Sartre et al 3). The reflection includes cognisance of relationships between the self and the other within artists’ performativity (Totah “No Room for” 6), which assigns importance to what Kierkegaard calls their “intensity of feelings” (qtd in Sartre and Baskin 7). Hani’s reflection on his experience expresses feelings that lead to what Dahinden defines as transnational subjectivity, which describes the positions artists make to recognise their membership and belonging in a transnational space (1). For Boenisch, these positions comprise self-reflexivity that maintains a distance from the self and can never be identical to its being (16). This paper examines how migrant artists’ transnational subjectivities reveal that putting their biographies on stage act against their free will, relying on Sartre’s conclusion on “being condemned to be free” (Sartre and Baskin 63).

A holistic approach to understanding artists’ biographical narrations incorporates actions, memory, and estrangement connected to home and beyond as central to artists’ transnational subjectivity. It questions Hani and other artists’ inclusion, in homeland and in exile, when attempting to establish a home and career. This approach extends from discussions of the relationship between performing arts and global issues in the Arab region such as national struggles (Totah “Performing the Collective” 124, Nassar 16), postcolonialism (Rowe 7), the resurgent anti-nationalist movements and anti-authoritative regimes (Hussami 8), and exilic theatre (Meerzon “Performing Exile” 295). Addressing artists’ subjectivities contributes to the understanding of transnational theatre as a challenge to their biographic representations. Artists’ life stories offer explanations regarding their existence, migratory aesthetics, and institutional entanglements, moving beyond European-oriented solidarity.

By grounding knowledge from four years of research, this paper relies on participant observations, biographical interviews with sixteen artists, performance attendance, and involvement in networks related to migrant artists in Europe. The research analysis combined several methods<sup>2</sup> in inducing artists’ trajectories and strategies of their lived experiences as artists at home, and in borderlands. Borderlands are temporary stops hosting local and international ideologies that both integrate and differentiate artists as a group. In addition, the analysis induced artists’ trajectories in Europe. “Home” was a central topic of the analysis. This paper utilises various findings generated about the artists’ transnational experience in providing a socio-political and existentialist reading of transnational theatre in Europe.

### **The complexity of Nationalism and Arab Performing Arts**

Although the term “Arab performing arts” invites framing, it is analytically indicative of artists’ spatial relations around complexities of nationalism, which affect their subjectivities. Edward Said provides a multi-layered understanding of Arab nationalism inspired by various literary and artistic experiences. He defines nationalism broadly as an “assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs, and by so doing, it fends off exile, fighting to prevent its ravages” (182). His understanding views nationalism, connected to the concepts of exile and inclusion, as implied within individuals’ relational dynamics such as behaviors, and cognition. Previous research conducted on the transnational cultural experiences of the artists (Totah and Khoury “Theater

against Borders” 5, Totah “Negotiating ‘Home’ Borders” 443, Totah “Negotiating “Home”16) postulated that biographical experiences of artists from Syria incorporated various dynamics around concepts of home and belonging, which include subjective interaction with local and global politics and economy in the form of life trajectories and productions.

Before the Syrian displacement, political topics of inclusion and exclusion in the second half of the twentieth century engaged Arab artists in activism forms. Said explained that Arab’s historical experiences at the intersection between the pre- and post-1948 situation (For more see Rodinson, M., and M. Perl. *Israel and the Arabs*. Penguin, 1973) produced a turning point and revealed a rift in Arab’s historical representation as an entity. Connected with Palestine’s question, the post-1948 condition created a collective Arab national identity of defiance of colonialism, which was not existent earlier (68). This collective ethos coincided with regional identities in every Arab country. Forming a persistent entity, Arabs have collectively experienced exclusion by imperialist projects and dictatorships (Ibrahim “Crises, elites” 305), and populist agendas (Salloukh 53, Ibrahim “The Trouble” 377). At the same time, they experienced inclusion through the continuous flow of nationalist resistance designed for liberation and decolonisation (Kassab 12). Explaining the rift as a historical paradox affecting artistic productions, Said draws a theorizing discussing Arab productions’ “problematic site of contemporaneity,” (68) which describes entanglements of Arab nationalism with their artistic repertoire. He proposes that by creating their present means after 1948, Arabs were restoring their historical continuity, healing ruptures and forging a historical possibility. The “scene” in the Arab dramatic production resembled a continuous sign of “contemporaneity”, where the past half-century productions, including absurdist fiction, theatre, and criticism, transformed into a constant reflection on the rift.

Particularly in Syria, performance productions addressing the 1967 war affirmed the contemporaneity issue by reflecting on totalitarianism. Sadallah Wannous, a Syrian playwright (1941-1997), situates the evolution of the performing arts movement in Syria during the past half-century under a complexity of inclusion against colonialism and authoritarian exclusion. His plays, such as *Soiree for the Fifth of June* (1968), examine a controversial self-imagining of a fragile Syrian national identity. Ziter reflects on *Soiree* and other Wannous manuscripts’ potential for transforming the performance into a rehearsal space of Syrian civil society, which reveal the paradox where defying colonialism and nation-making processes are promoted without freedom of speech and assembly (22). Until the revolt of 2011, performing artists struggled to reveal the paradox by turning productions and criticism into a continuous questioning of the past, and reproducing their consciousness of inclusion.

Such contemporaneity inside Syria was renewed following the Arab uprisings and in exile. Elias Khoury, in his forward to the book *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre*, connects Wannous and fellow artists of his era with the 2011 generation of Syrians attempting to bring hope by readdressing defeats and dictatorships. He proposes that theatre-makers’ involvement in the uprising aimed at actualising humanity through performance (xiii). Amidst deterioration of the revolt into a war, this vision propagated future projects in various directions through artists’ trajectories inside and outside Syria, including survival trajectories connected with artists’ new state of exile. Almost a half-century after Wannous and nine years after the Syrian revolution, Hani reflected:

‘In art, there is a need to play it smart, to avoid a clash with the government’s apparatus and with conservative communities. Here [in exile], I need to play childishly nostalgic, thinking about how people get separated by any means but get united by making war weapons that keep the economy running.’(Hani)

Artists’ survival trajectories provide a transnational aspect to the problematic position of the contemporaneity of Arab nationalism. By emphasising the present tense in projecting his vision about the artist’s role, Hani has spatially and temporally connected visions of the self, memory, and home, including past paradoxes of nationalism and new mechanisms of survival in exile. Unlike the dramatic “scene,” which is static and explainable, artists’ relational dynamics reveal an ongoing transnational biographical paradox between past and present dealing with complexities of inclusion inside and outside their homeland. This paradox’s spatial and temporal aspects produce artists’ unstable consciousness about self and belonging.

Generally, consciousness reflects processes of realising the self, its negations, and alterities, which constitute beings’ subject. Subjectivity, for Agamben, results from relentless fight between living beings and powers, possibly resisted radically (“What is” 14). For Sartre, subjectivity is continuous struggle for the subject’s freedom by distorting fixed understanding about the self (Sartre and Cumming 13), where the subject comprises the consciousness of the self and the objects around it through reflections on the experience of the subject. By relentlessly recreating the self’s consciousness through the various relational dynamics in transnational spaces, artists attempted to resume their struggle for freedom from nationalism framings. Through recreating their consciousness in exile, artists experience what Said calls “exile’s predicament” (189), which causes resistance to acculturation by cultivating a non-indulgent “scrupulous subjectivity.” The following section describes how, by engaging in local and transnational social fields, artists generated biographical paradoxes to establish investigative transnational subjectivities.

### **Transnational Theatre and Arab Artists**

Following their migration, global governance of migratory aesthetics added a layer to the complexity of artists’ inclusion. Criticism provides that performance about migration contributes to maintaining states’ neoliberal sovereignty over networks of migration’s cultural forms and artists’ subjectivities (Pécoud 1630, Hemelryk Donald 9). Kunst addresses capitalism’s reliance on creativity, imagination, and dynamism in promoting performing arts (4), while Zaroulia proposes that migrants’ representations in performance neglect the escalation of conflicts and capitalism (182). By describing instrumentalization of art, these studies situate inclusion practices by institutions and members of the host societies under a global economic system that contributes to an overarching transnational power structure on artists’ subjects and biographical narratives.

For migrant Syrian artists, the structure comprises intersecting dynamics of authoritative theatre systems, migration authorities’ economies, cultural and for-profit institutions that provided networks for artists’ career and mobility, and post-migrant theatre visions (Totah “Negotiating ‘Home’ Borders” 435, Totah “Negotiating “Home”20). The boundaries of this structure governed artists’ performativity through directing mental and corporeal processes of their memories, and artistic choices and imagination—the biopolitics of their lives (Totah “No Room for” 3). Artists’ local and exilic experiences with this structure generated awareness of its

power and of inclusion. Hani's use of "play it smart" and "childishly nostalgic" reflect compliance and confrontations, which, similar to other artists' biographical narrations, provide a reflexive perception of his subjective state of becoming itself. However, by creating awareness of the self against the power structure, artists do not achieve what Sartre calls self-knowledge or complete knowledge about life experiences (Sartre and Cumming 15), but their narrations recreate their consciousness by the constant movement to know more about the self and means of its inclusion. Spatially, artists' biographical narrations were constructed in three multi-scalar transnational spaces: in the homeland; in a bordering country to Syria, and in a European country (Totah "Negotiating 'Home' Borders" 437, Totah "Negotiating 'Home'"21). These spaces nurtured the temporal development of artists' consciousness, turning artists' subjectivities into a continuous transnational biographical paradox around local and global inclusion perceptions throughout artists' life history and not only in Europe. This biographical paradox contributes a new perspective on transnational theatre.

Studies on transnational theatre in Europe situate it within a global perspective of diversity that promotes individuality and cross-border ties. Bullock proposes that transnational theatre operates outside of national criteria and relies on participants from diverse backgrounds unbound to categorising theatre forming an intermediary within a culture that promotes cosmopolitanism as a theatrical vision advancing human rights (364). Balme discusses examples of transnational European theatre development programs in emerging countries outside the West, which invite cultural modernisation and adaptations of Western practices (128). Such programs, Grace contends, enhance artists' transnational subjectivities, but also extend systems of inequality and neocolonialism (9). Closely related, but central to artists' travel experiences, Meerzon introduces cosmopolitan theatre, relying on hypermodernity in turning the performance into a form of critical cosmopolitanism ("Staging Subjectivity" 16). It focuses on encounters around border crossings and aesthetics on the state of divided self.

However, artists' subjectivities development through the transnational social fields introduces a somewhat variant view of transnational theatre, which grounds its understanding in artists' life stories before and across their migration journey, and without seeking to achieve Global North diversity. It demonstrates the extent that their life trajectories reproduce biographical paradoxes and influence artists' free will. It negotiates the European-oriented understanding of transnational theatre by introducing artists' relational dynamics as a subaltern group where its members' biographical paradoxes continuously and transnationally re-structure their consciousness of the self and belonging, relying on the past. The following section demonstrate how artists' immersions within the transnational social spaces influence artists' consciousness of their inclusion and free will.

### **Artists' Transnational Subjectivity**

#### *Home-making and subjectivity.*

Previous research (Totah "Negotiating 'Home' Borders" 445, Totah "Negotiating 'Home'"23) reveals that artists' relational dynamics emerging at the transnational social fields include survival trajectories and strategies to re-establish a "home" that surmounts the national boundary, where they find settlement and belonging. Their trajectories at the borderlands comprise identification with the Arab migration systems through repeating behavioral patterns of compromise, maneuvering, and patience to cope with estrangement. Their trajectories also

include disentanglement from emotional connections to the Arab collective entity and evolved to confronting cultural affiliations. Being contradictory but experienced in parallel, artists' trajectories demonstrate that they struggled to identify past Arab connections that may forge possibilities of finding a new "home." Their inclusion refers to overall Arab historical connections, whereas their exclusion refers to their struggle to materialise these connections.

Artists' consciousness of this paradoxical composition of identification and disentanglement represented a new biographical paradox and a new problematic site of contemporaneity not only for them, but for Arabs after the Arab spring. Through being transformative, artists' trajectories remodeled spatial relationships with the Arab region, going from being a representing entity to an unreachable one, where connections with it comprise layers of physical and internal borders that maintained confrontations with past configurations of this entity. If, as Said believes, the past for a migrant is a complex combination of nationalism and belonging and their opposites, and exile is a process of continually connecting with the past to maintain a critical historical connection (26), then artists' exilic state in Arab countries reignited their skepticism of past Arab nationalism to recreate an awareness of their Arab belonging by developing subjectivities reliant on the past and its inclusion complexities.

By coming to Europe, artists engaged in creative processes that introduced new survival trajectories and reformulated their biographical paradox. Research (Totah "Negotiating 'Home' Borders" 449, Totah "Negotiating "Home"29, Totah "No Room for" 7) states that after disentangling with national connections at the borderlands, artists opted to re-engage with them through transcultural remembrance, which imaginatively connected cultural references and behaviors in homeland with those in the new countries. Creating this imaginative reality, artists established multi-spatial and relational Doublement and character-embodiment, moving between reality and imagination to cope with the power structure, which redefined "home" as something distant which could be changed or exist in an imaginative space that is symbolic and reflexive. Through these techniques, artists generated an imaginative experience of the consciousness, which deepened their biographical paradox. Sartre describes imaginative consciousness as a situation where one cannot act on something but resorts to play-acting to transcend real-world action and reflect on it to produce consciousness about what it becomes (Sartre and Cumming 21). The attempt at reaching this consciousness becomes imaginative but producing a consciousness about it transforms the new thing into an existing thing. Through reflection, the story or the perception about the imagined home becomes the material that the imagination provides to surpass home's meaning, producing an embodying aspect of a home. However, bound by its imaginative consciousness, the story remains resistive and weakens the meaning attributed to home.

To that end, the imagination and the perception of "home" act against each other, providing that whatever consciousness created about the home, or even about the self, concerning home, is equivocal, unstable, and transitory. It is a consciousness of something about home and self, but not the consciousness of the home and the self. Driven by this imaginative consciousness, artists' choices about the self and home contribute to resisting fixed understandings of the self and belonging to the new place and means of their inclusion. Overall, the creative processes become experienced moments of repeatedly generating perceptions and meanings of the self and home and belonging that resist a final consciousness about them, and thus resist a final appearance of their subject on stage. Such resistive composition of the subject

and its appearance—its representation—contribute to artists’ biographical paradox of their past and present and adds a new layer concerned with reality and imagination.

However, beyond artists’ consciousness, representations of their subject on stage provide a new level of resistance. The final performance, which does not necessarily formulate all artists’ possible representations of their subjects made at the creative process, comprises the director’s perception, which resist multiple representations of artists’ subjects by confining them in a single representation of the director’s choice. The director’s strategy of selection aims at achieving diversity, as one director elaborated “I did things intuitively, build trust, and then guide artists to a certain direction that does not repeat stereotypes about them and make it show the collective work done.” Although this strategy complies with the post-migrant vision that avoids exclusionary visions of artists as outsiders (Petersen 8), artists’ imaginative consciousness at the creative process could not resist their final representation on stage. It thus is not able to transcend their representations’ reality. As such, varying strategies between artists and director do not accommodate aspects of artists’ consciousness transformations resulting from the creative processes, leaving the selected representations of the documentary experience lacking aspects of artists’ subjectivity development.

In summary, the transnational social fields comprise layers of biographical paradoxes that recreate artists’ consciousness of the self that maintains confrontations with the past. Spatial, temporal, and imaginative processes constitute an internal movement of the self that resists a fixed definition of home and belonging and transcends the artists’ self beyond their subjects. Engulfed by these social fields’ power structure that hampers artists’ holistic subjectivity representativeness on stages, the power structure limits artists’ investigation beyond their subject towards its freedom.

#### *Solidarity Theatre and Subjectivity.*

Taking part in the transnational power structure, institutions solidarity missions influenced artists’ subjectivity development by orienting their relational dynamics. Among many, the Münchner Kammerspiele provided a transcultural approach to solidarity through establishing the Open Border Ensemble (OBE)<sup>3</sup> that enabled interaction between artists coming from Syria and peers from Germany. The first productions of the OBE *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* is directed by Munich-based German director Jessica Glause. It is a storytelling theater play attempting to explore the possibilities of building a common space between its actors. This theater project was prepared for a mobile stage to tour in the open air in the suburbs of Munich, engaging new audiences, mostly unfamiliar with theater. Along the OBE members, this production included a Syrian–Palestinian guest female performer and a German actress from the Münchner Kammerspiele Ensemble.

Hani commented on taking part in such performance ensembles: “I felt I must share stories about my village caring for trees before the war started, but then I decided to be more realistic and show how we tell such stories to the audience, while war crafts are still being manufactured.” (Hani)

A study (Totah and Khoury “Theater against Borders” 7) demonstrated that such creative processes enabled artists’ agencies to create coping strategies that validated ongoing self and interpersonal confrontations with others and readjusted their political and artistic decisions, and the stories they shared with peers, contributing to creating a shared “third space.” This space

becomes a “seized opportunity” against the strategy of the power structure (de Certeau 219), where artists recreate their consciousness of the self, including its alterity, and generate a resilience. However, if continuous adjustments of their decisions in these spaces end with hampering representations of artists’ holistic subjectivity on stages, the “third spaces” become a medium that hosts congealed practices arising from repeatedly seizing of this opportunity under the authority of the solidarity space. As such, the intercultural dialogue within the solidarity spaces which aims for diversity enhancement push artists’ subjectivities to comply with the solidarity space power.

Within this solidarity space, the resistive nature of artists’ consciousness reformulated their biographical paradoxes ontologically around alterities and negations. Hani’s resilience to the poster reveals that memory is a counter-performative reflexive attribute that connects geography and past events with present narrations against a specific performance he is obliged to naturalise. By studying migrant Syrian artists’ performativity (Totah and Khoury “Theater against Borders”<sup>4</sup>), they demonstrated resilient mechanisms against the power structure. Their resilience reflects a desire that includes conscious actions and unconscious interactions related to alterity or lost opportunities throughout artists’ life stories, which turn their biographical narratives into a movement between the self and its alterities, and their produced biographies into objects resembling their other. Their desires expanded the boundaries of the self through inviting ontological disparities and negations and widened the circumference of their identity-making. These mechanisms involved what Sartre describes as a “tactile experience” (Sartre and Cumming 18), which explains the influence of perception via handling something rather than seeing it. The impact of these mechanisms drives artists’ choices and decisions against the power structures governing their performativity towards their free will. If pursuing free will choices is an urge connected with humanity’s origin of existence, the future of artists’ consciousness development involves dreams about freedom from authoritarianism and dreams about actualising humanity through performance. In this case, their resilience attributes comprise their projects of extending or transcending the self to their freedoms. However, as one study (Totah “No Room for”<sup>9</sup>) also concluded, their desire and resilience attributes do not eliminate larger-scale boundaries on their performativity, leaving no space for what Agamben describes as the “Bare life” (“We Refugees”<sup>116</sup>) state of migrant artists, which constitutes breaking with being migrant citizens by maintaining the tension between artists’ subjectivity development and post-migrant calls for diversity. As such, resilience mechanisms fail to achieve artists’ freedom.

Moreover, by stressing a durable, tactile experience to achieve solidarity through theatre, institutional solidarity approaches effectively come to the forefront. Solidarity practice resulting from artists’ engagement with theatrical institutions becomes more valid when artists’ moments of “enduring-in-the-self” (Totah and Khoury “Theater against Borders”:<sup>11</sup>) are practised in broader temporal and artistic scopes of creative processes. However, recent updates in theatre solidarity spaces shifted against this validity prospect. As of 2019, the OBE members were incorporated within the general ensemble due to funding issues; the same occurred in other institutions. Hence, if theatrical institutions’ inclusion processes are steered by funding and cultural diversity politics, then despite advocating for their free will, artists’ relational dynamics in the transnational space amalgamate with inclusion visions sought by organisers of the creative space, and their resilience mechanisms are not able to break from the confederated state of the solidarity and inclusion policies which direct, moderate, and lead their participation in exile.

Artists' choices are not directed towards their freedom but rather, towards confederation with these inclusion spaces.

## Conclusion

The transnational relational site of contemporaneity situates artists' transnational subjectivities within the active phase of their freedom. Transnational subjectivity includes all interactions through trajectories and strategies around social, political, and economic local and globalised conceptions of art, marking artists' life projects of extending the self towards what they imagined about their lives. However, through hampering artists' holistic subjectivity development representation on stage, the power structure limits artists' investigation beyond their subject towards its free will. Moreover, in uniting with solidarity visions of the post migrant spaces, artists' choices do not accomplish dreamed of freedoms.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This includes Syrians and Palestinian refugees in Syria. See Maher Charif, "Palestinian refugees in Syria Fully integrated, for Better and for Worse," *Palestinian Journeys*, n.d., available at: <https://www.paljourneys.org/en/timeline/highlight/6591/palestinian-refugees-syria>. Last accessed 21 August 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Empirical knowledge and transnational biographical narrative analysis.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de>

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# ERKLÄRUNG

**gemäß § 6 Absatz 2 g) und gemäß § 6 Absatz 2 h) der Promotionsordnung der Fachbereiche 02, 05, 06, 07, 09 und 10 vom 04. April 2016**

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Vorname: Ruba

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## LEBENS LAUF

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## OTHER PUBLICATIONS

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2. Edited Book: **PostHeimat: Migration, Theatre, and Imaginaries of Belonging** (Experiments in Networked Solidarity), Edited by Jonas Tinius and Ruba Totah, 2022.
3. Performing the Collective: Al-Hakawati and Beyond, Jerusalem Quarterly, 124-138.

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I hereby confirm, as part of the Editorial Board of the journal "Civil Society Review", that the following contribution has been reviewed by two independent reviewers in a double-blind peer review procedure:

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Type of manuscript: Article

Title: Theater against Borders: 'Miunikh–Damaskus' – A Case Study in Solidarity

Authors: Ruba Totah \*, Krystel Khoury \*

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UniGR-Center for Border Studies  
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Saarbrücken, 22 March 2021

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of the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), I confirm that the following contribution has been reviewed by the editor of the Essay Section of the journal (Prof. Yana Meerzon ) and an external reader, both experts in the field, and myself, and has been accepted for publication in the June 2021 issue of *Critical Stages/ Scènes critiques*.



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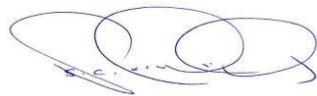
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