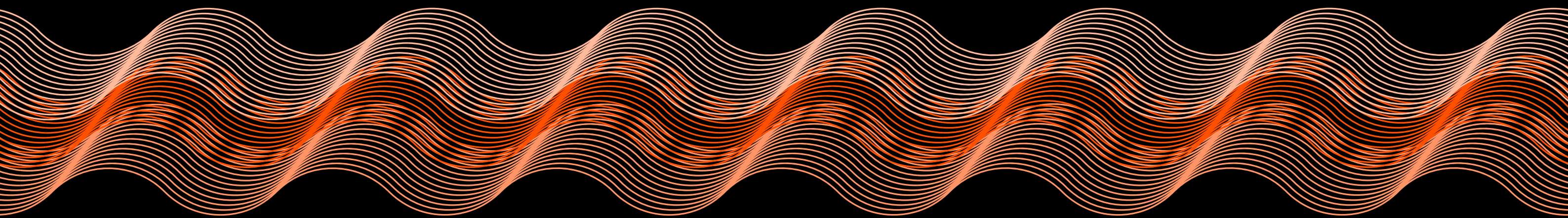# Negotiating 'Home' Borders:

## 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.

# 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.

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# Introduction

In 2016, the Global Migration Compact led citizenship policies[1] toward broader transmission of the EU's approach to migration.[2] 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,[3] 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[4] 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, Başak Bilecen, Karolina Barglowski 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[5] 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[6] 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

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[7] and post-migrant[8] theatre, cultural citizenship[9] studies that examine the relevance of artistic practices to integration policies, and artists strategies for claiming a position in the new creative scenes.[10] It also relates to relational aesthetics,[11] 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).

**8.** Emma Cox, *Theatre & Migration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1–23; Steve Spencer, *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2014); Onur Komurcu, 'Post Migrant Theatre and Cultural Diversity in the Arts: Race, Precarity and Artistic Labor in Berlin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2016), pp. 224–231; Anne Ring Petersen and Moritz Schramm, '(Post-)Migration in the Age of Globalisation: New Challenges to Imagination and Representation', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9.2 (2017), 1–12; Stephan E. Wilmer, *Performing Statelessness in Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

**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.

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

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

studies that examine subjectivities and the seeing-making of theatre through its spectacularity,[12] by intriguing agencies curious to difference and encapsulating relational connections between artists of an ensemble.[13] 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'.[14] 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[15] 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 Theatrology 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 Perugorría (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[16] 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.[17] 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,[18] or could they return but decided to remain outside the country. Two artists are Palestinian Syrians.[19] 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.[20]

**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[21] and stories of old and new citizens of the European cities hosting refugees.[22] In a conversation[23] between a dramaturge and the ensemble,[24] during a creative process in

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[25] 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 late, 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,

**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.

**25.** Inta Gāle 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.[26] 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[27] suggests another kind of relationship emerging within this relational medium between the artists and themselves, while De Marinis[28] locates it within the seeing-making theatre process, comprising the invisible dimension[29] 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[30] 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,[31] referring to 'pluri-local' interactions crossing state borders and consisting of a combination of social

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'[32] 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[33] 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[34] when hosting migrant artists within their structures. However,

**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.

**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[35] 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[36] 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.

From their side, artists within the same ensemble demonstrated their perspective on discourses connected to migration. Hani[37] 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 dominion 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[38] 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

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

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

**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[39] 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

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[40] 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.

**39.** Ruba Totah, 'Observation' (2018d).

**40.** 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 interferes…

## Segment from a narrative of biographic experience

Nadi,[41] 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

41. 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,[42] 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

**42.** 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.[43] 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[44] 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[45] calls a 'dialectical fiction' as a form of actors' reflexivity. Also, it is not only a representational medium but an embodied[46] 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

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[47] 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,[48] which explains another level of agency, that of dissemination of memory across and within the national

**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.

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

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

boundaries. Remembrance contributes to '*doublement*'[49] in a perfor-mance 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 represent-ed 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' de-scription in the European city by introducing the re-memory[50] of 'olive tree' and 'radio' themes which formerly constituted a colleague art-ist's memory in Syria. Re-memory construction[51] in M.'s choice created a relational space, where multi-spatial doubling within the performa-tive 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 un-usual 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, cre-ating 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

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 en-abled 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 con-text 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[52] nature by imagining, creating, and changing — as well as losing and moving — homes, to recreate it through 'living to-gether' 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 move-ment, where they re-entangled with the state of origin's figures, mem-ories, and references. Re-entanglement refers to a temporal process where a person struggles to reclaim a forcefully hindered relation-ship. 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

**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.

**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[53] 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 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[54] 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

**53.** 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.

**54.** 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[55] 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.[56] 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[57] that grounds individual and collective cultural heritage stories and resides within the

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

**56.** See Gupta and Ferguson (1992), Theocharidou (2016), and Suda (2014).

**57.** 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).

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. If the creative process[58] is a means of expanding methodological and technical horizons, one that transforms[59] 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[60] that the immersion and mediation of stories provide to the crucial role of memory.[61]

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.[62] 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 connects the use of appropriate resources to foster citizenship — where creativity and symbols use art to construct individual livings[63] — 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. ●

**58.** Eugenio and Savarese, p. 2019.

**59.** Cordingley and Montini, p. 2.

**60.** Crois, pp. 320–330.

**61.** 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.

**62.** Matthis 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.

**63.** 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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