Solidarities on the Move:

Transborder Theatre in Europe since 2015

by

Miriam Anna Gartner

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School of English, Drama and Creative Studies

College of Arts and Law

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ABSTRACT

Between the 2015 Long Summer of Migration and the Covid-19 pandemic, as border violence and far-right nationalism surged, theatre projects across Europe developed critical-creative spaces where regimes of exclusion could be documented, questioned, and reimagined. This thesis charts the transnational trajectories of four such performances: *The Jungle* (2017/2018), *Phone Home* (2016), *Azimut Dekolonial* (2019), and *The Walk* (2021). Drawing on scripts, live performances, recordings, set designs, promotion materials, interviews, and reception discourses, I trace an increasingly insistent shift of emphasis: departing from traditional humanitarian frameworks, these performances direct the critical gaze back onto Europe, its governments, and its institutions, inviting audiences to question the legitimacy of migration policies and border categories.

The four productions follow diverse journeys across and beyond Europe. Termed here 'transborder theatre', these expansive, collaborative projects respond to changing political moments, working with different styles and theatrical languages – from immersive stages to digital metatheatre, from walk-through archive installations to itinerant street puppetry. I show how these forms enable the performances to symbolically re-introduce Europe's externalised and unacknowledged border contexts into the immediate time-space. Using interactive, synchronous, and self-referential elements, these theatrical encounters work to implicate audiences and performers in seemingly remote histories of migration and exclusion.

The performances gradually undermine representations that centre on the figure of the refugee/migrant as a humanitarian spectacle, a universalist archetype, or an object of politico-juridical suspicion. Instead, they turn towards more historicised and decolonial critiques of European border regimes, involving perspectives from artists, researchers, activists, and legal experts. By imbuing performances with historical, political, and legal specificity, Europe's new transborder stages offer imaginative ways to reconceptualise contemporary languages of transnational solidarity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

II. *Phone Home* (2016)
Dispersing Border Histories across Europe

III. *Azimut Dekolonial* (2019)
Decolonising Germany's Border Regimes

IV. *The Walk* (2021)
Crossing Borders with Little Amal

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

II. *Phone Home*

III. *Azimut Dekolonial*

IV. *The Walk*

Conclusion

Fig. 48:   Day 3 of *Asylum Tribunal* on Vienna's Judenplatz: the jury, played by Victoria
             Kremer, Amani Abuzahra, Ines Rössl, Noomi Anyanwu, and Ingrid Porzner,
             underneath the Holocaust Memorial.
             Credit: Bettina Frenzel 2022.

Fig. 49:   The open courtroom of *Asylum Tribunal*, with Siegfried Charoux's Lessing
             monument in the back.
             Credit: Bettina Frenzel 2022.

INTRODUCTION

1. Setting the Stage

Since the 2015 Long Summer of Migration, diverse transnational theatre projects across Europe have been creating spaces to expose and trouble the continent's evolving methods of border control and exclusion. This thesis reads recent border histories through four such performances: *The Jungle* (2017/2018), *Phone Home* (2016), *Azimut Dekolonial* (2019), and *The Walk* (2021). Tracing these projects, this study follows a cultural-political timeline between two junctures in European politics and transnational solidarity: it stretches from 2015/2016, a period determined by the escalating Syrian war, the Brexit referendum, and the Trump election, to 2020/2021, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and global lockdowns. Intertwined with a surge in nationalist and neo-fascist politics across and beyond Europe, both these turning points led to rapid reinforcements of border control. Many people on the move, already subjected to systemic criminalisation, detainment, and increasingly violent forms of exclusion, were confronted with drastically worsened conditions. At the same time, both the post-2015 'Refugees Welcome' moment and the post-2020 pandemic context triggered transitions in how transnational solidarities have recently been articulated in artist-activist spaces across Europe. They also generated distinct theatrical forms that have responded and contributed to these shifts – termed here 'transborder theatre'.

As a traditionally itinerant artform, theatre has always been invested in developing languages to address themes of mobility, migration, and border-crossing. As Yana Meerzon and S. E. Wilmer remind us, '[b]y tradition, theatre artists have been mobile and always striven to find

new audiences. Through the centuries, peripatetic artists have taken their work on the road in a variety of forms and manifestations' (2023, 2). This itinerancy has been reflected in varied theatrical formats, including 'pageant wagons, *commedia dell'arte*, touring shows, puppetry, opera, circus, dance, legitimate theatre, and mixed media' (2023, 2). It is no accident that these forms emerged at specific junctures in time and space. As artistic responses to wider sociopolitical contexts, they provided new languages to speak to, and across, forms of exclusion, inequality, and oppression, often in ways that resonated across borders. It is precisely '[i]n times of great physical deprivation,' maintains Marina Warner, that 'the argument needs to be made for the right of access to a life of the mind and creative potential […] to affirm the right of refugees/migrants/arrivals to freedom of thought and imagination—intellectual mobility' (2017, 150). Sometimes, this has meant developing entirely new formats of communicating on stage.[1]

The four contemporary performance projects at the centre of this thesis build on this rich history of border-crossing theatrical forms. These are migrating performances, each existing in various iterations and changing contexts of border governance. *The Jungle* (2017/2018) originated from theatre workshops in the 2015–16 Calais refugee and migrant camp, itself a nexus of diverse (im)mobilities and artistic practices. Developed by two British playwrights and former volunteers in Calais, the performance subsequently travelled across theatres in the UK and the US, with new performance sites still being added to the ongoing production. *Phone Home* (2016) was a trinational piece, created and staged simultaneously between three theatre companies in Athens, Munich, and London. Connecting these sites via on-stage videocalls and online communications, the play became a response to increased border restrictions after the 2015–16 mass displacements and the Brexit referendum. *Azimut Dekolonial* (2019), developed by young theatre makers in

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[1] When, for instance, the improvised babble speak *grammelot* evolved in the 16th century on the travelling stages of *commedia dell'arte* troupes across Italy, France, and Spain, it became a way for actors and audiences to communicate across different dialects and languages (May 2011). This new form turned *commedia dell'arte* into a truly international type of theatre; denounced by the Church as 'the devil's tongue', it allowed companies to disseminate their satirical performances – and the Renaissance ideas they entailed – across geographic contexts (May 2011).

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Hamburg, was the result of multiple transnational research journeys, including to Burkina Faso, Chile, and Nigeria. The production centred on decolonial interventions in German memory politics – longstanding critiques that would, only a few months later, become re-galvanised in the Black Lives Matter protests. After its original run as an immersive installation in Hamburg, the performance was adapted into a moveable stage production for a decolonial performance festival in Berlin. *The Walk* (2021), finally, was an even more overtly itinerant project. Following the extensive border restrictions and theatre closures during the Covid-19 pandemic, this five-month performance festival took place mostly outside. Centred around a giant walking puppet, it encompassed over 140 events across Europe. Following a trail from the Syrian-Turkish border to the UK, *The Walk* traced increasingly restrictive and violent border regimes across Europe in the aftermath of the pandemic. Since 2021, the project has been revisited for subsequent performances in Europe, the US, Canada, and Mexico, with more sites planned for the future.

Spread across a period of over five years, these performance projects present snapshot histories of European border governance and solidarity from the Long Summer of Migration to the Covid-19 pandemic and its immediate aftermath. They all emerged in contexts of increasing xenophobia, racism, and distrust against people on the move, with governments across Europe aiming to create hostile environments for refugees and migrants (Jeffers and Musiyiwa 2023, 587). Often stretching beyond the confines of theatre institutions and architectures, the four projects confront audiences with conditions where people on the move and racialised citizens have been systemically excluded from spheres of appearance, representation, and knowledge production. Working across and against contemporary regimes of exclusion and punitive border control, these artists have developed performance spaces where historical and ongoing narratives of oppression, bordering, and colonial practices could be documented and critiqued. Responding to events in real time and in interaction, the four performances have intervened in and contributed to contemporary practices of transnational solidarity and border-critical activism.

2. Performing Borders, Performing Solidarities: Key Concepts and Debates

Theatre and critical border studies: an emerging field

Since the early 2000s, a growing strand of academic research has explored how theatre and performance art intersect with questions of migration, forced displacement, and border politics (Meerzon and Wilmer 2023, 2). Particularly over the last decade, works from across the critical humanities have started highlighting the potential of performance art to provide insights and interventions in political, social, and juridical bordering practices. Some crucial studies at this intersection include Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's *Performance and Cosmopolitics* (2009), Alison Jeffers' *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis* (2012), Yana Meerzon's *Performing Exile, Performing Self* (2012), Agnes Woolley's *Contemporary Asylum Narratives* (2014), Emma Cox's *Performing Noncitizenship* (2015), and S. E. Wilmer's *Performing Statelessness in Europe* (2018). A particular focus of this scholarship has been to highlight how representations of forced displacement are 'distinct from the traditional narratives of diasporic accommodation that have historically shaped discourses of migration,' given the indeterminate and legally precarious conditions produced by border regimes (Woolley 2014, 3).

More recently, several edited volumes and research series have provided extensive transnational and transhistorical case studies and decolonial frameworks in the field of theatre and border politics. Notable contributions include the 2020 collection *Refugee Imaginaries*, edited by Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley; the 2021 video series *Performance and Migration*, which involves conversations and lectures by Anne Ring Peterson, Paul Rae, and Emma Cox, among others; the 2023 anthology *Refugee Genres*, edited by

Mike Classon Frangos and Sheila Ghose; and the 2023 *Palgrave Handbook of Theatre and Migration*, edited by Yana Meerzon and S. E. Wilmer. Alongside several special issues and newly established research networks, these works have played a significant role in defining and expanding an emergent academic field, increasingly highlighting theatre landscapes and border contexts beyond the Anglophone world, where much of the earlier scholarship was based.[2]

Despite growing academic interest, however, this is still an under-researched area, with critical border studies relying predominantly on social sciences-based frameworks and methodologies. Drawing from wide-ranging areas such as migration and refugee studies, social anthropology, human geography, political science, and legal studies, this is an innately interdisciplinary field, yet humanities-based approaches remain an exception. This thesis responds to this gap, and specifically to what Yana Meerzon and S. E. Wilmer have recently diagnosed as 'a serious deficiency of academic work addressing the political, educational, and artistic roles that theatre and performance arts can play in resisting nationalist and xenophobic discourses and practices' (2023, 3).

Border studies' general lack of interest – until recently – in theatre is peculiar, given the form's long-established tradition of transgressing state borders, both in its creative approaches and its circulation practices. The history of theatre precedes the modern nation-state: its manifold practices of creating transnationally mobile forms lend themselves well to conceptualising

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[2] A significant part of academic works from the 2000s and 2010s focus on theatre and asylum contexts in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Given that theatre performances are often difficult to access (especially older productions that have not been released to the public as scripts or performance recordings), academic discussions often focus on productions that have already been discussed elsewhere, with certain cornerstone productions getting referenced repeatedly. These tend to be particularly successful productions, often with extensive media coverage and transnational scope, but originating predominantly from Europe, Australia, and the US. While there are different reasons to account for the relative prominence of these (predominantly Anglophone) plays, their discussion in academic literature has certainly added to establishing them as an emerging 'canon' of performances about forced migration – arguably rendering these plays better-known in academic circles than in broader theatre-going publics. Some well-known examples from the 2000s and 2010s are *The Bogus Woman* (UK), *Credible Witness* (UK), Peter Sellars' adaptation of *The Children of Herakles* (US), Adrian Jackson's *Pericles* (UK), *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (*Odyssées*) (France), *Something to Declare* (Australia), *CMI – A Certain Maritime Incident* (Australia), *Asylum Monologues* (UK), and more recently, *Queens of Syria* (Jordan, UK), Elfriede Jelinek's adaptation of *Die Schutzbefohlenen* (*Charges – The Suppliants*) (Germany), *The Situation* (Germany), *Illegale Helfer* (Austria), *Building the Wall* (US), *A Man of Good Hope* (South Africa), and, increasingly, *The Jungle* (UK), which is also the first case history of this thesis.

formations that do not take borders for granted, but that precede, suspend, and intervene in nation-state frameworks. This creative-political work of undoing has always been a core aim of critical border studies – to challenge the multilayered processes that naturalise borders and position state frameworks as self-evident. To make sense of 'Europe as borderland,' argues Étienne Balibar, it is necessary 'to "deconstruct" citizenship, to go back to the more general assumptions concerning the "spatiality" which is implicit in every territorial construction of citizenship as a collective "identity", a system of rights and duties, normative principles and capabilities' (2009, 190).

A crucial task of this deconstruction has involved developing theoretical frameworks and imageries that move away from the notion of borders as linear, taken-for-granted entities – what Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams describe as the 'Line in the Sand' metaphor (2012, 727–728). A longstanding 'thinking tool' in border studies, the line in this context represents the idea of 'the razor-edge of the nation-state where mutually recognised sovereignties meet and yet do not overlap' (Salter 2012, 736; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 728). Reinforcing a conception of nation-states as clearly defined 'territorial container-boxes', this imagery has never accurately captured how borders work (Gielis and van Houtum 2012, 797). Rather than fixed structures, contemporary bordering practices are 'manifold and in a constant state of becoming' (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 728). Operating across different spaces and temporalities, they function as complex regimes that reach beyond the physical spaces of border crossings, airports, checkpoints, and walls.

Europe's increasingly militarised bordering practices – referred to by some as 'Fortress Europe'[3] – rely on mutually reinforcing modes of prevention, deterrence, detainment, and diverse

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[3] Since the Cold War, and especially over the last decade, the term 'Fortress Europe' has become a widespread shorthand in anti-border solidarity movements and right-wing nationalist parties alike (the Austrian far-right FPÖ, for example, upholds 'Festung Europa' as an ideal that has not been reached yet) (Burgdorff 2022). This thesis avoids the expression, given its overdetermined usage and its earlier history as a propaganda term during World War II (Burgdorff 2022). Moreover, while emphasising the increasing militarisation of border governance, the imagery of

forms of external and internal exclusion. States have been enforcing their borders far beyond their official geographic territories and immediately visible architectures of control. 'Most maps,' notes Harsha Walia, 'do not conceptualize the shifting cartography of borders […] layered with drone surveillance, interception of migrant boats, security controls, and boots on the ground far beyond territorial limits' (2021, 4). Joseph Pugliese calls this the extraterritorialised 'pre-frontier' of European states, which turns environments such as the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert into militarised, deadly areas of control – signifying 'an imperially extended and amplified understanding of geopolitical space' (2013, 578).[4]

Beyond these literal hostile environments, European governments have been introducing policies to turn their territories into continuous borderscapes, with internalised modes of control, policing, and exclusion increasingly taking place beyond traditional spaces of state governance. 'Borders,' as Bridget Anderson, Nandita Sharma, and Cynthia Wright stress, 'surround [people] as they try to access paid labour, welfare benefits, health, labour protections, education, civil associations, and justice' (2009, 6). Practices of checking people's documents, monitoring their movements, and restricting their access to services are turned into 'a workplace ritual,' with teachers, social workers, nurses, landlords, and public servants cast as de facto 'border guards' (Walia 2021, 84; Phipps 2016).

Across Europe, governments have become increasingly explicit about their aims to enforce such wide-reaching practices of control and deterrence, targeting racialised citizens and

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a fortress still reinforces the idea of borders as clearly defined, physical structures of defence; it does not fully capture the ways in which borders can operate in spatially and temporally dispersed ways.

[4] The systemic criminalisation of Search and Rescue missions, note Ċetta Mainwaring and Daniela DeBono, is also enabled by a neocolonial imagination of maritime space – an imagination that oscillates between constructions of the Mediterranean as *mare nostrum*, 'our sea', and as *mare nullius*, 'nobody's sea' (2021, 1032). While *mare nostrum* suggests that 'states and the EU [have] reasserted their control over the Mediterranean,' *mare nullius* implies a space devoid of legal, political, and historical frameworks – a space for which European states have no responsibility (2021, 1033). Undoing these constructions, in which the Mediterranean is claimed as 'European space', has been a key concern in Black Mediterranean scholarship. Recalling Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Ida Danewid, Gabriele Proglio, Angelica Pesarini, and Camilla Hawthorne, among others, use this framework to 'historici[se] the Mediterranean as a *mare nero*,' highlighting the ongoing legacies of the Mediterranean slave trade in contemporary anti-Black racism and hegemonic white European ideological and legislative frames (Lombardi-Diop 2021, 3; Danewid et al. 2021, 11–12).

non-citizens alike. The UK government's so-called 'hostile environment' policies, for instance, have disproportionately affected people of colour, low-income workers, and homeless people, and are widely linked to fostering and legitimising racism and xenophobia across society (Liberty 2019, 7–8).[5] This dimension is often sidelined when borders and hostility to migration are discussed primarily along notions of integration, ethnicity, or culture, argues Anderson (2019, 8). Who is read as citizen/native/European and who as migrant/stranger/Other – '[w]ho sheds and who retains their migrancy' – in the national imagination is inherently entangled with racialised differentiations, frequently 'overriding legal status or other forms of belonging' (Anderson 2013; 2019, 8). But 'once migration is no longer at the border it becomes "race", and minority ethnic citizens are often already "migrantized"' (Anderson 2019, 8). This, Gracie Mae Bradley and Luke de Noronha summarise, 'is part of what borders do: they follow people around, excluding them in various ways at different times, thus producing the precarity and disposability that characterises the migrant condition. [...] [B]orders are everyday and everywhere' (2022, 5).

To address this ubiquity, researchers are increasingly analysing borders not only in terms of the migration policies of individual states, but also as global systems that produce and solidify oppression, racism, and coloniality. Writer and activist Harsha Walia, for instance, has put forward the concept of 'border imperialism' to capture how borders function 'as part of historic and contemporary imperial relations' (2021, 3). The border, Walia argues, 'is less about a politics of movement per se and is better understood as a key method of imperial state formation, hierarchical social ordering, labor control, and xenophobic nationalism' (2021, 1–2). This turn to longer histories of forced displacement and exploitation is a crucial task for contemporary critical border studies, since '[c]olonialism, genocide, slavery, and indentureship are not only

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[5] Since 2012, consecutive Conservative governments have been implementing hostile environment policies in the UK. Introduced by then-Home Secretary Theresa May and effected mainly by the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, these measures have formed part of an increasingly restrictive campaign to deter migration to the UK (Liberty 2019, 6). They have involved restrictions to services and far-reaching identity checks, data-sharing arrangements, and surveillance methods, embedded in public services and communities; as well as 'Go Home' billboard vans and adverts in minority ethnic newspapers and faith buildings (Liberty 2019, 7; Grierson 2018).

conveniently erased as continuities of violence in current invocations of a migration crisis, but are also the *very* conditions of possibility for the West's preciously guarded imperial sovereignty' (Walia 2021, 6; original emphasis).

The theatricality of borders: spectacles, masks, and double-appearances

Against this background, the world of theatre offers a constructive semantic field to conceptualise and dissect contemporary border regimes. There is a common association between theatre and pretence, artificiality, and untrustworthiness – 'fakery, falsehood, smoke and mirrors,' as Alison Jeffers notes (2012, 50). Theatricality typically implies properties such as 'pre-scripting, rehearsal, illusion, a self-conscious "acting", decorative elements and an organisation of appearances' (Nield 2006, 63–64). This has yielded a host of metaphors, analogies, and frameworks to intervene in the ostensible 'fact' of different modes of border governance – particularly questions of recognition, credibility, authenticity, and (hyper)visibility. There is a theatricality to borders, note Louise Amoore and Alexandra Hall, in the sense that they also function through forms of 'traditional display or show' – they render certain practices visible while concealing others: 'a political stage for the performance of control, a showy set of symbolic gestures' (2010, 303). This, however, is not meant to deny the real-world existence of border governance and its material, often deadly effects. Rather, borders are 'productive in the same way that theatre is productive,' note Amoore and Hall: they create 'a particular kind of space […] where identification becomes fraught' (2010, 303).

What appears on this stage, what is concealed behind the curtain? What characters are brought into existence, and how are their movements organised? For Nicholas De Genova, border spaces provide 'the exemplary theater for staging the spectacle of "the illegal alien" that

the law produces' (2002, 436). His concept of the 'Border Spectacle' illustrates how material practices of border enforcement are intertwined with discursive formations, images, and languages that continuously produce the 'illegality' of migration (2013, 1181):

> The scene (where border enforcement performatively activates the reification of migrant 'illegality' in an emphatic and grandiose gesture of exclusion) is [...] always accompanied by its shadowy, publicly unacknowledged or disavowed, obscene supplement: the large-scale recruitment of illegalized migrants as legally vulnerable, precarious, and thus tractable labour.
>
> (De Genova 2013, 1181)

While certain bordering mechanisms are rendered 'spectacularly visible' in media and political narratives, others are hidden from view, with the 'scene of exclusion' distracting from the 'obscene of inclusion' (De Genova 2013, 1181). By continuously emphasising 'the spectacle of walls,' states both conceal *and* guarantee the veritable inclusion of migrants through subjugated, illegalised labour (Walia 2021, 78; De Genova 2013, 1181). This is also another way of 'naturalising' the supposed illegality of migration, casting 'unsanctioned movement as an inherently illicit act' (Cox et al. 2020, 6).

The border creates a particular space, Sophie Nield suggests, where '"appearance" of a certain kind becomes possible; indeed, a space which is organized in such a way as to compel certain kinds of appearance' (2006, 64). Nield identifies some key similarities in how the encounter at the border and the theatrical encounter work. For her, both these spheres produce spaces where embodied identity and representational identity are at stake. In theatre, a performer is required 'to operate simultaneously as both what they are (the physical body of the performer) and also what they are representing themselves to be (their "role" within the performance)' (2006, 64). Borders, too, require this double-appearance, where people 'must simultaneously be present and be represented. The issue is [...] whether the person who is there *is* who they *represent* themselves to be, and is, in fact, the legal/juridical object that the legal/juridical mechanisms require them to be in order to assign the rights and freedoms that are being claimed' (2006, 65;

original emphasis). In the border space, the presence/absence of these two figures – the physically present person and the performed, jurisdictional subject category – is inherently intertwined: 'if the double exposure fails, if you are not able to represent yourself effectively, presence itself breaks down, and appearance fails. […] [F]ailure to broach the border causes people to disappear, both legally and performatively' (Nield 2006, 65). Appearing not only as a person, but also as the figure imagined in governing regimes of recognition, becomes a requirement for acting and claiming rights before the state, and for presence itself. 'As you move from one state to another,' Nield summarises, 'you "play" yourself, and hope you are convincing' (2006, 65).

While Nield writes on spaces of border enforcement such as crossings and checkpoints, the requirement to 'perform' a certain subject identity does not end there, but is enforced across other sociopolitical spaces, legal structures, and discursive formations. The bureaucratic categories of subjects created by border regimes – *citizens*, *refugees*, *asylum seekers*, *migrants*, *non-nationals*, *legal residents*, *illegal aliens*, *state authorities*, etc. – determine people's freedom and mobility to speak and act in the political sphere. Hannah Arendt, too, drew attention to the contingency of these jurisdictional identities that govern how a person is recognised in the public sphere. For her theories on action and speech, she also found useful analogies in dramatic traditions, particularly in Ancient Greek tragedy, suggesting that theatre represents 'the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art' (1998, 187–188). As an artform that 'comes fully to life only when it is enacted in the theatre,' drama, for Arendt, provides an ideal forum to stage the encounter between the individual and the collective, the specific and the universal – particularly in the interaction between actors and chorus (1998, 187).[6]

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[6] Frequently addressing themes of refuge, sanctuary, and supplication, Greek tragedies have also provided important reference points for theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, who draw on Ancient concepts and moral practices such as *xenia*, the obligation to offer hospitality (Wilmer 2018, 11–12).

Drawing on the etymology of 'person' – from the Greek 'persona', a mask that performers wore to be recognised as characters on stage in Ancient drama –, Arendt argues that citizenship, too, functions in this way: as a mask that allows its wearer to become visible and legible as a person in the legal and political field (Arendt 1963; Bilsky 2008; Stonebridge 2021, 28). The function of this mask is two-fold: it covers the face – i.e., conceals differences along ethnicity, gender, class, ability, etc. –, and it amplifies the voice – i.e., makes political participation possible (Bilsky 2008, 74). For Arendt, the mask of citizenship thus creates, if only nominally, the conditions for political equality and plurality (Bilsky 2008, 75). The 'right to have rights', she famously maintained, means very little outside the protections of formal citizenship (Arendt 1968, 296–97; Wilmer 2023, 68). Giorgio Agamben, too, highlights the paradox 'that precisely the figure that should have incarnated the rights of man *par excellence*, the refugee, constitutes instead the radical crisis of this concept,' with transnational refugee commissions and human rights legislations failing to address issues of mass displacement and statelessness with adequate legal and political frameworks (1995, 116).[7]

Yet the imagery of the mask also captures the instability of the rights offered by nominal citizenship and other forms of legal status. Masks can easily slip off: inequalities and exclusions persist far beyond the formal recognition of legal personhood, resulting in hierarchical formations of citizenship. Legal precarity, deportability, and systemic discrimination often resurface and persist over generations, as has become all too clear in miscarriages of justice such as the 2018 Windrush scandal.[8] Arendt's theatrical metaphor highlights the 'artificial dimension of

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[7] Agamben stresses that, as a figure who challenges the supposed unity of personhood and citizenship, the refugee represents 'a disquieting element' in the nation-state (1995, 117). Whenever refugees represent a mass phenomenon, rather than individual cases, states and international refugee commissions 'have proven, despite solemn evocations of the inalienable rights of man, to be absolutely incapable not only of resolving the problem but also simply of dealing with it adequately. In this way the entire question was transferred into the hands of the police and of humanitarian organizations' (1995, 115–116).

[8] During the 2018 Windrush scandal, hundreds of Commonwealth citizens were wrongly detained, deported, and denied legal rights by the UK Home Office. Named after the *HMT Empire Windrush* and the so-called 'Windrush

political equality enjoyed by citizens,' as Leora Bilsky notes: rights frameworks do not automatically guarantee political participation and belonging on equal ground, but are always contingent on others recognising them, and they need to be reaffirmed continuously (2008, 74).

Stages of recognition: bureaucratic performance and humanitarian spectacles

While everybody is, to different degrees, dependent on the recognition of others to act as a political subject, the pressures of performing 'personhood' in a convincing way are particularly relevant within regimes of asylum and refugee status determination. To be legally recognised as a refugee according to Article 1 of the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol, a person is required to prove to the state their 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' (UNHCR 1951, 1967).[9] While the right to asylum is enshrined in international law, the onus to prove one's fear of persecution still lies with the person seeking protection (Jeffers 2012, 34). Claiming asylum, Alison Jeffers highlights, means being placed under the constant suspicion of only 'acting the part'; people 'are assumed to be lying until they can prove otherwise' (2012, 18). Asylum regimes are also always mechanisms of exclusion, De Genova reminds us: the criteria 'tend to be so stringent, so completely predicated upon suspicion, that it is perfectly reasonable to contend that

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generation', the scandal primarily affected British people who had been living in the UK since before the 1973 Immigration Act (Walker 2022).

[9] The original 1951 Convention, written with post-World War II political refugees in mind, put strict geographical and temporal restrictions on who qualified as a refugee: it was limited to persons who were fleeing 'events occurring in Europe before 1 January 1951' (UNHCR 1951, 1967). While these restrictions were subsequently removed in the 1967 Protocol, the Geneva Convention still curtails many contemporary refugee claims. It tends to work with a narrow interpretation of persecution that centres on the individual, while precluding many forms of war displacement, postcolonial displacement, and climate displacement (Cox et al. 2020, 8–9). The UN framework has since been extended by other regional and transnational refugee conventions, subsidiary protection frameworks, and non-binding agreements, such as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, and the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which led to the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (Owen 2020, 2–3, 28–29).

what asylum regimes really produce is a mass of purportedly "bogus" asylum seekers' (2013, 1180–1181). This fundamental suspicion is also reflected in the terminologies of state-based refugee and migration policies across Europe, which increasingly delegitimise people's legal claims from the outset.[10] Nominally a mechanism of inclusion into the state, the way asylum is administered in Europe therefore also has the effect of criminalising the vast majority of global movement.

Against this background of criminalisation and distrust, formal recognition as a 'Convention refugee' (eligible according to the Geneva Convention and Protocol) requires presenting oneself as a 'conventional refugee' – adhering to certain socio-cultural expectations, scripts, and narrative-aesthetic conventions of what a refugee is supposed to act and look like (Jeffers 2012, 17). Jeffers has called this 'the bureaucratic performance of refugeeness': narrating and performing experiences in a way that is considered credible and coherent by the state agents processing the claim (Jeffers 2012, 6). Refugee status determination has barely changed since 1951, and compared to other forms of human rights legislation, as Jenni Millbank stresses, it depends on 'the most intensely narrative mode of legal adjudication' (2009, 2; Woolley 2017, 377). It involves the applicant's story being 'told in writing, orally re-told in full or in part, questioned, believed or disbelieved to varying degrees, and finally weighed against an assessment

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[10] One such example is the German legal label 'Fiktionsbescheinigung' ('fictional certificate'), a temporary document issued to refugees 'when it is not yet possible to decide on an application for a residence permit' (Service-Portal Berlin 2024). Linked to the concept of a legal fiction (i.e., a fact assumed by a court), the label also has pejorative connotations, as Corina Stan has observed: it 'stamps the existence of human persons by certifying them as "fiction" (with its connotations of pretence, of made-up stories)' (Stan 2018, 802; Gurnham 2023, 10). In a similar performative manoeuvre, as Justine Poon has argued, the Australian legal term 'unauthorised maritime arrival' dehumanises, delegitimises, and excises from the outset the legal claims of those arriving at the state's border: 'The legal subject that might be able to assert a claim under international law becomes an object whose only significance is its presence within the territory. It is the subject with political life that disappears and an object, a pure presence upon which the law acts, which emerges' (2018, 110–111). This is also the trend of current UK migration policies: proposed legislation, such as the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act and the 2023 Illegal Migration Bill, is increasingly undermining international frameworks of refugee protection, with the latter omitting the term 'refugee' altogether, as David Gurnham has noted: 'the IMB [the 2023 Illegal Migration Bill] refers only to "persons" (cl. 2), "certain persons" (cl. 1), and "migrants" (cl. 15–17). The "refugee" thus drops out of legal lexicon altogether […], effectively amounting to a denial of any state responsibility to hear the asylum claims of migrants reaching the UK by irregular means' (2023, 12).

of future risk based on available sources of information about the sending country' (Millbank 2009, 5–6).

Agnes Woolley calls this the 'asylum story': people are required to provide 'a credible account of their persecution and, where possible, […] documentary and often bodily evidence' (2017, 380). To be successful, this story is ideally coated in the language of asylum law, following 'its own rigid plotlines, producing an idealized refugee personhood rooted in the 1951 Convention' (Woolley 2017, 378). People 'must narrate themselves into a position of legitimacy,' as Woolley puts it, with the decision ultimately depending on the state representative's narrative interpretation – which often hinges on unreliable factors such as 'demeanour,' 'consistency,' and 'plausibility' (Woolley 2017, 380; Millbank 2009, 2). These supposedly 'objective' parameters are themselves shaped by subjective, culturally specific narrative conventions, presupposing a particular kind of personhood.[11] This means that, 'as a space in which historical narratives of oppression and injustice are heard,' the current international asylum system 'is deeply implicated in regimes of exclusion that operate through the regulation of narrative' (Woolley 2017, 386).[12]

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[11] Literary-cultural forms have always played a part in how the figure of the refugee and her claims before the state are imagined in legal frameworks. Joseph Slaughter argues that the history of human rights law is intertwined with the emergence of the Bildungsroman as a literary genre in the 18th century, each in turn shaping modern conceptions of the human individual – originally imagined as a white, bourgeois, male protagonist (2006, 2007). When modern human rights frameworks were drafted, the Bildungsroman offered 'the conceptual vocabulary, deep narrative grammar, and humanist social vision […] to imagine, normalize, and realize what the Universal Declaration [of Human Rights] and early theorists of the novel call "the free and full development of the human personality"' (Slaughter 2007, 4). Where the Bildungsroman follows the personal journey of a protagonist, the human rights narrative, too, projects a figure who travels from danger, war, and oppression towards safety, dignity, and rights fulfilment (2006). This narrative of development relies on 'mutually enabling fictions': one the one side, the individual as the bearer of dignity and rights, and on the other, the liberal state as the site where these rights will be recognised and realised (Slaughter 2006, 1407; Gurnham 2023, 2). However, '[i]f the human rights story is one of incorporation,' notes Stephen Clingman, 'then it is incorporation into a society which recognizes (certain) human subjects […]. But what of the state *founded* on the exclusion of some, for whom incorporation is not an option, at least not in their lifetimes? What is *their* narrative of human rights? And what literary forms might correspond to such a story, or allow us to see a story *not* foretold in the existing human rights script?' (2015, 368; original emphasis). David Gurnham also suggests that, in light of Europe's violent and punitive border regimes, the Bildungsroman framework – with its narrative of the individual protagonist's difficult personal journey of development, integration, and eventual rights fulfilment – is 'implausibly optimistic' (2023, 1).

[12] Given the ways in which the asylum interview polices and weaponizes autobiographical storytelling, Marina Warner reads it within a narrative tradition that reaches back to the early modern pardon tale: 'condemned criminals were permitted to write to the king in France to sue for grace. […] [O]nly the author of the most effective story would succeed in capturing the ruler's attention and receiving amnesty. The way the story was told weighed more

If the narrative conventions of bureaucratic performance are structured by the jurisdictional language of human rights legislation, its performative-aesthetic conventions are further governed by humanitarian imageries. Heath Cabot refers to 'the social aesthetics of eligibility': the images and appearances that determine 'what constitutes an "eligible" human life, […] delineating who or what is included in (or excluded from) the juridicopolitical realm' (2013, 453). In refugee recognition frameworks, this social aesthetics is closely linked to traditional humanitarian imageries of victimhood, silence, and passivity (Malkki 1996). Writing on the French context, Miriam Ticktin and Didier Fassin have analysed how asylum regimes increasingly restrict access to rights unless exceptional, ideally medically attested, bodily harm can be proven (Ticktin 2005, 367, Fassin 2005, 372). Drawing on Agamben's famous designation of 'bare life', they stress that fear of persecution and potential violence is often not enough to be granted protection in contemporary asylum regimes: visible, verifiable suffering – a threat to bodily integrity – becomes an implicit, sometimes explicit, requisite for recognition, with 'the biological truth inscribed on the body as the ultimate source of legitimacy' (Agamben 1995; 1998; Fassin 2001, 5).

This leads to a hierarchy of worth in which 'greater importance is ascribed to the suffering body than to the threatened body, and the right to life is being displaced from the political to the humanitarian arena' (Fassin 2001, 4). To allay underlying suspicions of being 'impostors' and 'bogus asylum seekers', forced migrants need to appear undeniably innocent, passive, and in visible need of protection – what Diana Tietjens Meyers calls a 'pathetic victim paradigm,' a continuous performance of scripts of vulnerability, suffering, and trauma (2016, 33). Relying on such a 'politics of pity', asylum is thus framed in terms of charity, rather than legal obligation, with refugees positioned as grateful beneficiaries and state actors as generous

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than the content; the more dramatic and the more heartfelt, the stronger the chances of success' (2017, 154). Unlike the early modern pardon tale, however, the asylum story must be told 'again and again and never deviate from the circumstances as given from the first moment. […] [A]n insurmountable border in itself: you must not change your story' (Warner 2017, 154).

providers (Arendt 1963; Wilson and Brown 2009, 8; Boltanski 1999, 13). Transposed into these humanitarian registers, recognition is based on ostensible benevolence, not normative justice, entitlement, and systematicity; it is, as Ticktin stresses, 'justice enacted case by case, based on emotions largely structured by circulating images, narratives, and histories' (2005, 359).

In the context of border governance, the representational therefore cannot be neatly separated from the social (Cox et al. 2020, 5). Rather, 'the work of representation and conceptualisation is also, and crucially, entangled in what it means to be a refugee' (Cox et al. 2020, 4). What constitutes 'ideal refugeehood' in the eyes of a state at any given moment, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh notes, changes with fluctuating media narratives that render certain border contexts, certain groups of forced migrants, and certain modes of humanitarian response hypervisible – often denoted as 'crises' in the Global North (2016, 457–458). Following the Long Summer of Migration, for instance, refugees from the Middle East, especially Syria, became centralised in Western media representations, political discourses, and civil society campaigns (2016, 457–458). This sudden hypervisibilisation, however, reflected 'not the "humanitarian crisis" in the Middle East but rather Europe's (self-)position(ing) as a space overwhelmed by the arrival of an estimated 1 million refugees in 2015' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016, 457–458). While forced migrants from Syria were briefly heralded as 'ideal refugees' in the West, including a temporary prioritisation and 'fast-tracking' of asylum claims, forced migrants from across the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia were rendered 'second-tier refugees', 'bad refugees', or even 'a-refugees', considered not worthy of humanitarian assistance (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016, 459). Representation therefore also entails '*repress*entation', Fiddian-Qasmiyeh argues, as most forced migration contexts across the Global South are concealed from public view in Europe (2016, 457–458). The 'dramatization' of certain refugee movements as 'crises' in the West, Fassin also contends, 'results far more from representations than from social facts; but then, one knows that in this matter, as in others, representations are social facts' (2005, 380).

How people on the move are typically imagined in the Global North has thus been defined by competing yet overlapping paradigms of representation and 'refugee imaginaries' (Cox et al. 2020). Especially since 2015, argue Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley, 'the humanitarian figure of the refugee as victim – embodied by the iconic but non-threatening image of Alan Kurdi […] – perpetually competes with the more threatening image of the refugee as (bogus) asylum seeker, as economic migrant, as tide or swarm or terrorist' (2020, 6). Only seemingly opposed, both these figurations 'radically limit the space for a refugee imaginary that is based in the experiences of actual people' (Cox et al. 2020, 6). Harsha Walia, too, stresses how pity and threat are often mutually reinforcing paradigms in dominant representations of the border: 'Media images of the drowning deaths of toddlers Alan Kurdi and Angie Valeria went viral to invoke shock and sympathy, yet the same media outlets depict the world's remaining seventy million refugees as swarms, floods, invaders. One refugee may summon pity, but large groups are painted as a threat' (Walia 2021, 2).

These oscillations play out regularly in Western media landscapes. While many European media representations of Syrian refugees during the summer of 2015 relied heavily on humanitarian registers, they quickly turned into narratives of suspicion after the November 2015 attacks in Paris, where one of the perpetrators reportedly entered Europe with a Syrian passport, and after the 2015–16 New Year's Eve assaults in Cologne, which led to widespread 'clash-of-civilisations' narratives and anti-Muslim racism (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). As Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez remarks, 'After the summer of migration in 2015, Europe turned to an autumn of racism' (2018, 24).

Given how quickly Europe's border regimes were reinstated, Fiorenza Picozza argues that many of the solidarity practices framed under 'Refugees Welcome' in 2015, such as German *Willkommenskultur* ('culture of welcome'), constituted a 'spectacle of solidarity' (2021, xvii). An inverted version of De Genova's 'border spectacle', this reversed visuality momentarily provided

'a "good border spectacle", […] which displayed the humanitarian inclusion of refugees, while it concealed their exclusion through illegalisation and deportation' (Picozza 2021, xviii). Intertwined with frameworks of charity, hospitality, and compassion, this spectacle offered an opportunity for some parts of Europe to momentarily present themselves as welcoming, cosmopolitan, and generous, even as border regimes were swiftly and dramatically being reinforced.

While these representations and solidarity practices helped put pressure on governments, they also distracted from what was happening 'off-stage'. For 'precisely in that spectacularised moment of solidarity and hospitality,' Picozza notes, 'we had to pay attention to the *invisible* developments of the border regime. Indeed, behind the scene of the *spectacle of solidarity*, […] both EU and local policies were developing at an extremely fast pace in unprecedented restrictive directions' (2021, xx; original emphasis). Already from September 2015, practices of border externalisation, containment, and deportation were reinstated, continued, and expanded, including reintroduced border controls across Europe, Germany's restrictive new legislations *Asylpaket I* and *II*, the 'hotspot approach' implemented in Greece and Italy, the shutdown of the Balkan route and Idomeni camp, the EU-Turkey deal, the EU-Afghanistan agreement, and Italy's bilateral agreement with Libya (Picozza 2021, xx–xxi).

While punitive border frameworks and the criminalisation of migration long precede the 2015 refugee movements, they have become drastically more expansive and violent since then, continuously eroding legal and political space where forced migrants can make human rights claims (Walia 2021, Gurnham 2023). Itamar Mann refers to this as 'the human rights encounter' – where rights claims arise 'not from inclusion in particular political communities' but from obligations and legal frameworks beyond state sovereignty (2016, 13). Increasingly defined by outsourced processing centres, third-country agreements, illegal practices of refoulement, and deterrence measures that prevent most migrants from ever reaching state borders, European border enforcement has been undermining and eliminating the 'place for a powerful party … and

a disempowered party seeking protection to meet each other' (Mann 2016, 174). This obstruction of political space also extends to frameworks of anti-border solidarity, with many governments actively criminalising rescue missions and curtailing basic civic freedoms such as the right to assembly and protest. Against this context, in which possibilities for human rights encounters are systemically being prevented, how may theatrical performance offer alternative ways to stage this encounter and to carve out a different political-creative space?

Bordering theatre: welcoming, witnessing, and wall-breaking on stage

During the height of the 2015–16 refugee movements to Europe, many theatre institutions, artists, initiatives, and productions explicitly positioned themselves in solidarity with people on the move. In the UK, for instance, the Young Vic Theatre coordinated the 2016–17 Horizons programme, and theatre companies LegalAlien Theatre, Maison Foo, and Phosphorous Theatre dedicated much of their work to questions of migration and forced displacement (Welton 2020, 242). 'At the temporal intersection of the so-called migrant "crisis" and the fallout from the Brexit referendum in 2016,' Emma Welton notes, 'there emerged a spate of new work exploring the theme [of forced migration], from individual performances to entire seasons curated within institutions' (2020, 230–231). In addition, the 'Theatres of Sanctuary' initiative has helped 'redefine a sense of what is possible in terms of a response to refugees in this historical moment' (Jeffers 2020, 124). Since emerging in 2014 from the 'Cities of Sanctuary' movement, Theatres of Sanctuary such as the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Young Vic Theatre, SBC Theatre Company, Ice&Fire, PsycheDelight, and Good Chance Theatre have introduced a range of creative activities to support and collaborate with forced migrants (Sanctuary in the Arts 2024). These have typically included free ticketing schemes, youth arts groups and performance workshops,

education events, and dedicated production schedules highlighting migration and border regimes (Jeffers 2020, 129). In Germany, likewise, theatre institutions played a significant role in putting pressure on the government to change its hard line on migration in August and September 2015, resulting in the momentary suspension of the Dublin Regulation (Wilmer 2018, 191–194). Alongside wider anti-border movements led by left-wing activists, artists, and volunteers, theatres such as the Gorki, the Schaubühne, the Grips, the Theater Bremen, the Theater an der Ruhr, and the Münchner Kammerspiele used their reach and cultural capital to advocate extensively in support of forced migrants (Wilmer 2018, 194–203).

Initiatives such as these can put 'political and ethical pressure on what it means to occupy and indeed to aestheticise public space' (Cox et al. 2020, 7–8). As states persistently refuse to accept their responsibilities towards forced migrants, theatrical solidarity movements have enacted alternative models of hospitality and sanctuary that 'work outside of, and even challenge, the statist politics of asylum' and the restrictive terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention (Jeffers 2020, 124). Performance contexts and their creative formats can offer, as Agnes Woolley has proposed, 'an alternative space for understanding the symbolic and social resonance of refugees and asylum seekers, a space that is more hospitable than the restrictive frameworks into which they are coerced in dominant discourses' (2014, 7). Part of this creative hospitality lies precisely in troubling political discourses and myths of hospitality towards people on the move, with many theatrical works attesting to Europe's 'increasingly inhospitable response to those seeking refuge' (Woolley 2014, 13).

Both as a mode of representation and as an institutional context, theatre has certain liberties to operate across or in opposition to inhospitable nation-state frameworks; however, the conditions of the alternative hospitality it may provide are never self-evident or straightforward. Many prevalent theatrical formats around 2015 still inadvertently reproduced representative dynamics where people's presence, recognition, and political participation in Europe – and on

European stages – was implicitly called into question. '[T]heatre made about, for, or with refugees,' Maurya Wickstrom summarises, is 'almost always about their "plight", almost always represent[s] itself as giving "voice to the voiceless", and advocate[s] for these "victims" through humanitarianism, human rights or development positions' (2012, 2). Competing refugee imaginaries and processes of hypervisibilisation were often continued and aggravated in post-2015 spaces of ostensible solidarity. In Germany, for instance, theatre maker Anis Hamdoun diagnoses a veritable 'Welcome Café Syndrome' in 2015 and 2016, as many theatres were recruiting forced migrants to perform in their 'urgent' and 'timely' productions:

> All the doors are opened, let's all have coffee together! Then we step back outside onto the street, we're energetic from the sugar and the adrenalin, but we're still unable to find employment – unless we're willing to work in theatre not as professional artists, but 'as refugees.' There were hundreds of productions with lay actors. To be from Syria was enough to be able to participate. With the tiny budgets of these productions, you would never be able to employ professional theatre practitioners.
>
> (Haakh, Hamdoun, and Herzberg 2019; my translation)

Hamdoun's critique highlights how gestures of welcome and ostensible 'inclusivity' were often coopted and commercialised in post-2015 institutional and promotional discourses, which still required artists to conform to dominant refugee imaginaries. Sara Ahmed has termed this 'non-performativity' (2006, 2012). Inverting Judith Butler's concept of performativity, where 'discourse produces the effects that it names,' Ahmed analyses contexts where 'to name is not to bring into effect' – where, for instance, institutions pledge their commitment to 'diversity', 'multiculturalism', and 'anti-racism' without following through in a more substantial way (Butler 1993, 2; 2018; Ahmed 2012, 113–114, 117).[13] Not only are such proclamations often inaccurate, but they indeed 'block action,' producing instead 'a kind of "marshmallow feeling," a feeling that we are doing enough, or doing well enough, or even that there is nothing left to do' (Ahmed

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[13] For instance, Ahmed analyses the language and 'tick box approach' used by diversity practitioners at British and Australian universities. For her, these are not examples of failed or, in J. L. Austin's terminology, 'unhappy' speech acts, where the required conditions for the performative are not in place (Austin 1976). Rather, non-performative speech acts *ensure* this failure: by proclaiming to 'have brought about the effects they name […] the names come to stand in for the effects' (Ahmed 2012, 117). In certain cases, 'naming can be a way of *not* bringing something into effect' (Ahmed 2012, 117; emphasis added).

2012, 117). Rather than introducing frameworks of sustained solidarity and collaboration on equal terms, many of the immediate theatrical responses after the Long Summer of Migration turned out to be short-lived, superficial, and conditional.

Theatre scholar Katrin Sieg, too, criticises how Germany, in the summer of 2015, 'basked in the international community's admiration of its "welcome culture"' – a discourse of hospitality that also inflected newly emerging performances (2016). She notes how '[w]elcoming refugees on stage harkens back to the days of the first guest-working recruitment contracts [in the 1950s and 1960s], when it was assumed that the useful, hardworking "guests" would eventually leave, but while there would lend themselves as foils to imagining a beneficent and tolerant German self' (Sieg 2016). This hierarchical host/guest relation is what Jacques Derrida has coined 'hostipitality', highlighting how hospitality inherently contains the threat of hostility (2000). In a 'place that accommodates' (a state, a city, an institution, a theatre, …), the terms of 'welcome' are still clearly defined by the one 'who is master in his house' (2000, 4). For Derrida, 'there can be no unconditional welcome, no unconditional passage through the door,' given this patronising relation toward 'the Other who has, at one time, been welcomed at the threshold' (2000, 4; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015, 109). 'Welcome' is therefore never simply a benign gesture: it is also a claiming of a place, hailing certain people as hosts/locals and others as guests/strangers, who are expected to conform to the terms set by the former – temporarily 'welcomed' on stage, for example, but not employed in directing or long-term decision-making positions.

Being positioned as a 'guest' also entails the implicit requirement to demonstrate gratitude, complaisance, and cultural assimilation – to reciprocate alleged generosity, for instance by ceaselessly 'sharing one's story' in front of a European citizen audience (Fassin 2012, 3–4). This dynamic also permeates some common formats of 'refugee theatre'. The juridico-political gaze, in which the credibility of refugee narratives needs to be proven again and again, re-emerges, for example, in some forms of documentary theatre. This has been a particularly

prevalent mode of theatrical engagement with border contexts in Europe, especially during the 2000s and 2010s.[14] While operating within the fictionality of the stage, productions typically incorporate documentary elements that are presented as 'factual evidence', such as photographs, video footage, verbatim testimonies, and court transcripts.

A seminal production in this genre is Sonja Linden and Christine Bacon's long-running play *Asylum Monologues* (2006), later developed into *Asylum Dialogues* (2008), which promises 'a first-hand account of the UK's asylum system in the words of people who have experienced it' (Ice&fire 2021). The production presents testimonies from asylum seekers and British citizens, delivered verbatim by professional actors in a minimalist setting.[15] This direct-address dramaturgy is intended to 'add a human, everyday dimension to large-scale historic events' (Sieg 2016). However, as Woolley has observed, this narrative organisation also implicitly mirrors the context of an asylum hearing, with audiences positioned as witnesses, encouraged to assess the credibility of the testimonies (2017, 384). Rather than questioning the validity of this political framework or drawing attention to 'the mediated processes through which forced migrants enter the public sphere,' *Asylum Monologues* seemingly accepts the notion that witnesses (audiences) are entitled to these accounts (Woolley 2014, 9). Relying on refugee testimonies that frequently centre experiences of trauma and violence, the performance is thus likewise 'parading an oppressed

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[14] Well-known examples of plays that use verbatim accounts include Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman* (2000), Ping Chong's *Children of War* (2002), Théâtre du Soleil's *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (2003), Sonja Linden's *I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda* (2003) and *Crocodile Seeking Refuge* (2005), Michael Gurr's *Something to Declare* (2003), Ros Horan's *Through the Wire* (2004), Banner Theatre's 'video ballads' *Wild Geese* (2004), and *They get free mobiles … don't they?* (2008).

[15] Launched in 2006 by UK-based theatre company Ice&Fire, this format is a common narrative approach in the company's back catalogue, which also involves verbatim interviews with people living in poverty, in homelessness, or under occupation, often in collaboration with organisations such as Actors for Human Rights and Amnesty International. Highly successful, *Asylum Monologues* and *Asylum Dialogues* are still being performed on request, as the scripts are regularly updated with contemporary testimonies and 'can be adapted for bespoke events which may have a particular focus (e.g. children in the asylum system, access to health care, etc)' (Ice&fire 2021). Michael Ruf, of Bühne für Menschenrechte (Stage for Human Rights), devised similar productions for the German stage, *Die Asyl-Monologe* and *Die Asyl-Dialoge*, which have also been performed widely since 2013 and 2015, respectively. As in the UK version, the testimonies are performed in a minimalist and unadorned setting, with the addition of an 'almost pathetic use of music' (Oberkrome 2018, 267). *Asylum Monologues* is also frequently used as part of events beyond the theatre, such as activist performances and academic conferences.

Other for recognition by a paternalistic [citizen] subject,' as Sieg argues (2016). As in politico-juridical spaces, forced migrants here figure as objects of suspicion, whose claims to rights, spaces, and resources need to be verified, scrutinised, and justified.

The underlying assumption, which is also reflected in *Asylum Monologues*' promotional discourses, is that 'add[ing] a human, everyday dimension' can supposedly mobilise theatregoers to develop greater empathy with forced migrants and even challenge legal frameworks (Sieg 2016).[16] This, however, is a dubious correlation. Psychologist Paul Bloom, who defines empathy as 'the act of coming to experience the world as you think someone else does,' argues that this is a limiting, biased, and shortsighted framework to address systemic injustices (2018, 16). Empathy's reliance on emotional registers tends to direct attention towards individuals, rather than structures of inequality – 'a spotlight focusing on certain people in the here and now,' which 'makes us care more about them, but […] leaves us […] blind as well to the suffering of those we do not or cannot empathize with' (2018, 9).

Many post-2015 solidarity practices (theatrical as well as activist) relied on such empathetic identifications, often using graphic depictions and tropes of victimhood, trauma, and suffering; for instance, several activist performances and artistic interventions referenced or even recreated the photograph of Alan Kurdi (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 161). These protest performances often invoked universalist group identifications, sometimes reinforcing labels that people were actively trying to shed – slogans such as 'We are all refugees' or 'We are all from somewhere'. As Suzana Milevska has observed, there is a logic of essentialism and semantic appropriation inherent in the collective pronoun: 'When a certain "we" is invoked, members of communities with different statuses and origins […] supposedly become, whether voluntarily or

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[16] For example, iceandfire uses the following review by a UK theatregoer in its promotion for *Asylum Monologues*: 'the chilling truth of the hidden and cruel inequality affecting asylum seekers in British society is laid bare, in front of you; in a safe comfortable space, I heard the truth of people's lived experience, the mental trauma, the physical trauma, the heart tearing decisions & and the scars this leaves behind. The only thing you want to do having heard their narratives is stand up & change the system' (Ice&fire 2021).

not, part of the community: a prime example of an infelicitous [speech] act' (2017). Accompanied by claims about 'humanising migrants', 'giving a voice to refugees', or 'adding a human face to the refugee crisis', etc., many of these discourses reproduced, rather than questioned, paternalistic politico-juridical and humanitarian constructions of what constitutes 'deserving' refugees. In their reliance on frames of suffering, loss, grief, and bodily vulnerability, notes Ida Danewid, these sentimental practices of pro-refugee activism often appealed to an abstract, rather than historical humanity (2017, 1674–1675). By turning 'questions of responsibility, guilt, restitution, repentance, and structural reform into matters of empathy, generosity, and hospitality,' these imageries also allowed 'the European subject to re-constitute itself as "ethical" and "good", innocent of its imperialist histories and present complicities' (2017, 1674). The result of such a 'disconnect[ing of] connected histories,' Danewid argues, 'is a colonial and patronising fantasy of the white man's burden […] which ultimately does little to challenge established interpretations that see Europe as the bastion of democracy, liberty, and universal rights' (2017, 1675).

A similar logic of substitution and abstract humanity underpins immersive theatre productions that aim to place audience members 'in the shoes of a refugee' – another common approach of staging forced migration.[17] By fictionally recreating border experiences, these performances ostensibly make audiences 'experience some of the physical and emotional discomfort that refugees may experience on their routes to safety,' for example by addressing theatregoers in different languages, treating them with disdain, or making them fill out immigration entry forms (Jeffers 2012, 61). Such strategies are intended to temporarily destabilise the conditions of hostipitality: audiences (who are assumed in this format as having no personal experiences of displacement) are being momentarily hailed as 'guests'. However, this does not automatically imply a similar process outside of the singular performance setting. With the

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[17] Productions using these 'step into the shoes of a refugee' and role-playing strategies include, for example, Urban Theatre Projects' *Asylum* (2001), Clare Bayley's *The Container* (2007), *Escape to Safety* (2003), and *Un Voyage pas comme les autres sur les Chemins de l'exil – An Unusual Journey* (1998) (Jeffers 2012, 61–63).

boundaries between citizen/refugee not fundamentally questioned, audiences are '*wrongly* hailed,' as Jeffers remarks: 'they know that they are not a refugee outside the frame of the performance' (2012, 66; original emphasis). Rather than questioning from a critical distance their own or their government's role in maintaining systems of injustice and border violence, audiences may end up more preoccupied with their own pain and discomfort during the performance (Coplan 2011, 9; Jeffers 2012, 60–61; Jones 2019, 267). The assumption that experiences of forced migration can be re-enacted by pretending to undergo them for a few hours fundamentally ignores the systemic and differential ways in which border regimes act on people. This is how empathy operates, Sara Ahmed argues: it 'sustains the very difference that it may seek to overcome' (2014, 30). Entangled with practices of voyeurism and consumption of the other, testimonial and immersive theatre approaches often risk such an appropriating of suffering – what Clare Hemmings describes as a 'cannibalization of the other masquerading as care' (2012, 152).

Recognising these limitations of empathic identification, theatre makers have increasingly turned to metatheatrical strategies to stage asylum and border contexts, adding to a growing strand of more 'playwriterly' texts (Sieg 2016).[18] Instead of mirroring the settings and terms of bureaucratic performance, these productions explicitly address the political-narrative conditions of such encounters. Through different metatheatrical strategies and devices, such as fourth-wall breaking, contrasting textualities, and intervening narrator/commentator figures, these plays are 'placing dramatic representation at the forefront of their engagement with asylum narratives' (Woolley 2014, 119). They often still work within the genre of documentary theatre but push against some of its underlying assumptions around 'factual evidence' and 'authenticity'. The multi-layered textualities in these productions explicitly tackle questions of subjectivity, narration, and claims to truth – thereby 'drawing attention to the iniquities of the asylum adjudication

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[18] Examples of productions asylum regimes that use metatheatrical and self-referential elements include Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman* (2000), Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Credible Witness* (2001), Adrian Jackson's *Pericles* adaptation (2003).

system which […] depends on the possibility of uncovering a historically accurate version of events' (Woolley 2014, 120). These performances aim to highlight the bias and subjectivity inherent in official storytelling and narratives endorsed with state power. Departing from the traditional docudrama approach, they stage refugee testimony as a narrative-performative genre that is itself shaped by mediation, juridical conventions, and political pressures – as well as by dominant cultural representations, including theatre.

This self-reflexive turn is reflected, for example, in Adrian Jackson's 2003 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Developed with Cardboard Citizens and the Royal Shakespeare Company, this walk-through performance combined the canonical Shakespeare text with verbatim accounts by forced migrants. In some parts, it adopted an immersive, 'step into the shoes of a refugee' format – upon entering, for example, audience members were ordered to fill out State of Evidence entry forms (Jeffers 2012, 61). To undercut the impulse towards uncritical sentimental identification, however, the production also involved narrator figures who frequently intervened and commented on the proceedings. For instance, a formally dressed figure would interrupt a series of testimonies, pronouncing that there was not enough time for stories 'too long, too complicated, too difficult to believe, too culturally specific, or too painful to listen to' – only to be replaced by a teacher figure 'educating' the audience on the presumably universal appeal of Shakespeare (Cox 2014, 17). With devices such as these, the production encouraged audiences to question the 'objectivity' of its various modes of representation and to reflect on their different statuses in dominant systems of knowledge (Cox 2014, 16).

Through self-referential, often playful and satirical elements, such meta-critiques can offer important interventions in hegemonic representative frameworks and visualities of suffering. Their frequent 'interruptions of happenings' follow an epic theatre tradition: spectators are not encouraged to identify with characters but are meant 'to be astonished at the circumstances under which they function,' with strategies of alienation exposing what 'has been too little noticed. It

may be called the filling in of the orchestra pit,' as Walter Benjamin describes the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht (2008, 150, 154). In the context of Europe's border spectacle, this too-little-noticed 'orchestra pit' represents practices of exclusion that have become normalised in other spaces – 'the multiple "repetitive acts" that write the very possibility of a securable state' (Amoore and Hall 2010, 301). Theatre's interruption, even if only momentary, can expose and make strange those border sequences that elsewhere have been relegated to background and are now 'entering our field of vision anew' (Amoore and Hall 2010, 301). Performance, Amoore and Hall maintain, can 'bring back into visibility those elements of security practice that had slipped below the visual register' (Amoore and Hall 2010, 313).

Theatre scholar Caroline Wake calls this 'reverse visibility' (2013, 119–120). Instead of feeding into the cycles of invisibility and hypervisibility of media discourses and political narratives, some plays attempt to make spectators 'think about the very terms and machinations of visibility itself. Why do asylum seekers disappear into detention centres, only to reappear as if by magic in time for the next election? Who orchestrates these appearances? Why aren't they as visible as the asylum seekers they detain?' (2013, 120). Theatre can be a sphere to 'shift the economy of visibility' and re-focus attention onto the reasons why governments and institutions cast migration as crisis in the first place – a turning of the gaze, as Walia has proposed, 'to the systems of power that create migrants yet criminalize migration' (Wake 2013, 119–120; Trnka 2016; Walia 2021, 2). This is also a way of redirecting scrutiny – from the figure of the refugee onto governments and corporations benefitting from border governance.

Writing on theatre productions about Australian asylum policies, particularly the so-called Pacific Solution, Wake traces a similar shift from primarily documentary to more hybrid, metatheatrical forms between the early 2000s and mid-2010s (2023).[19] This turn has also involved

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[19] Introduced in 2001 by the Howard government, the so-called Pacific Solution has extended Australia's previous policies of mandatory, potentially indefinite detention and enforced repatriation to also involve 'temporary protection, interdiction, excision, and offshore processing' (Wake 2023, 549–550). This was extended even further

a more ambivalent stance towards the efficacy of theatre to mobilise spectators to direct action and to influence policy beyond the performance space – to stage 'interventions', understood in theatre studies as 'the instrumentality or efficacy of practices, their disruptive capacity, or their cumulative potential to foment social change […] to make some sort of material impact' (Wake 2023, 558; Cox 2023, 573). Traditional docudrama, Wake observes, usually involves 'anti-theatrical aesthetics' but 'pro-theatrical politics' – performances suppress overt theatricality in favour of 'an austere aesthetic of authenticity' but trust in the potential of theatre to 'speak truth to power' (2023, 558–559). Many metatheatrical productions invert this principle: embracing 'pro-theatrical aesthetics', they conversely present 'anti-theatrical politics' – they openly address the mechanisms of the stage but distrust the efficacy of theatre to initiate political or material change (Wake 2023, 558). With border enforcement and anti-migration legislation advancing in unprecedented extents, artists seem increasingly wary of ambitious claims about 'the power of theatre' to create interventions – to 'come between' (the literal translation from the Latin 'inter' and 'venire') people on the move and violent state power (Cox 2023, 574). A growing strand of performances addresses these anxieties explicitly on stage, resulting in a type of self-conscious theatre that continuously 'reckons with its inherent impotence' (Wake 2023, 559).

Where testimonial and immersive performances tend to formulate claims to solidarity through humanitarian pity and empathy, these more self-oriented performances often turn to irony and detachment (Chouliaraki 2011, 364). As a primary mode of engagement, however, self-referentiality does not necessarily shift performance spaces in favour of more self-determined, pluralist frameworks. Dismissing sympathy and sentimentality can sometimes become a self-gratifying move – what Lilie Chouliaraki calls 'improper distance', a form of detached self-

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under the 2013 conservative Liberal-National coalition's 'Operation Sovereign Borders' (Wake 2023, 553). Rather than processing asylum claims on Australian mainland, state authorities systematically intercept boats and imprison people in offshore detention centres, such as Nauru and Manus Island, excised from Australian territory. For a critical-creative account of Australia's offshore processing regime, see e.g. Manus Prison Theory, developed by Behrouz Boochani and Omid Tofighian (2018; 2020).

awareness that replaces the 'common humanity' and 'universal' proximity projected in iconographies of suffering (2011, 364–368; James 2021). Increasingly common in 'post-humanitarian' communication and online activism, these self-referential textualities ultimately achieve only little towards shifting representations in favour of neglected perspectives; rather, 'they subordinate the voice of distant others to our own voice and so marginalize their cause in favour of our narcissistic self-communications' (Chouliaraki 2011, 368).

Calling out how representative regimes distribute narrative authority differently is not the same as guaranteeing this authority on equal grounds. Chouliaraki proposes 'agonistic solidarity' as a more pluralist, other-oriented paradigm that enables 'proper distance': a historically embedded, multi-media textuality 'that brings the voices of distant others in the same space-time as ours and allows them to be heard side by side with our stories' (2011, 376; Silverstone, 2006, 43–49). By enabling multiple positionalities and perspectives to coexist in the same time-space, agonistic migration narratives can unsettle hegemonic distinctions between citizen and migrant figures, notes Hans Lauge Hansen: instead, these textualities 'create new identity positions and alliances across the "us"–"them" divide' (2020, 547).

Undoing ostensibly neat separations – between 'our' and 'their' stories, between 'us' and 'distant others', between 'here' and 'there', between 'present' and 'past' – is what is ultimately at stake. The four theatre productions at the centre of the following chapters are thoroughly engaged in this work of undoing and reconnecting: their transnational creative practices aim to show how histories and narratives that are otherised, externalised, or relegated to the past in state-based representative regimes are intrinsically linked to 'us', 'here', and 'now'. These performances, too, reveal anxieties of representation, each navigating the tensions between universalism and particularity, proximity and distance, empathy and irony in different ways. While they diverge in their theatrical styles and political contexts, they are all attuned to how circulating

images, narratives, and regimes of representation have, throughout history, restricted people's safety, freedom, mobility, and political participation in Europe.

Given the histories of systematic violence and exclusion that they address, these artists frequently find themselves in a position of having to justify and defend theatre-making against common associations with frivolous entertainment and superficial self-staging. Some of the performances explicitly address this tension between Butler's performativity (naming and bringing into effect) and Ahmed's non-performativity (naming but not bringing into effect). How to intervene productively in harmful representations without producing a cosmopolitan 'marshmallow feeling' – another distracting 'spectacle of solidarity' for Europe (Ahmed 2012, 117; Picozza 2021, xvii)? If hegemonic frameworks tend to erase and disconnect connected border histories in service of a benevolent European self-imagining, how may theatre be a space to reestablish these connections (Danewid 2017, 1675)?

3. Transborder Theatre: Research Approach, Definitions, Argument Outline

Methodology

The aim of this thesis is not to provide a comprehensive overview of post-2015 transnational productions and activist practices across Europe, but to consider four key case histories during this time: *The Jungle* (2017/2018), *Phone Home* (2016), *Azimut Dekolonial* (2019), and *The Walk* (2021). While these projects move through diverse contexts within and beyond the continent, each of them is, to some extent, anchored in the United Kingdom, Germany, or Greece. Except for Cape Town-based Handspring Puppet Company (co-creators of *The Walk*), the theatre companies are based primarily in London (Good Chance Theatre, The Walk Productions, Upstart Theatre), Hamburg (Hajusom), Munich (Pathos Theater), and Athens (Highway Productions). Changing bordering and solidarity practices in the UK, Germany, and, to a lesser degree, Greece will therefore be central to my discussion. It is within and against these contexts that the performances primarily position themselves – from the systemic rights violations committed in refugee and migrant camps such as Calais and Moria, to Germany's so-called 'Willkommenskultur' and colonial memory debates, to the Brexit regulations, 'Stop the Boats' policies, and Illegal Migration Bill introduced by the UK government.

With anti-migration policies and far-right nationalist movements gaining traction, these contexts have all been central stages for Europe's changing hostile environments and transnational solidarities over the last years. Situated at the continent's geographical peripheries and centre, these are some of the key sites where Europe's 'boundary work,' its self-imaginations, and the construction of its strangers have been unfolding, frequently through alarmist registers of

crisis and exceptionality (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Apostolova 2015). Yet in these spaces exclusionary formations have also been challenged throughout. As Cox and colleagues note, '[t]he narrative in which the Global North claims the crisis as its own is an anxious narrative, in need of constant reassertion. This performance of territoriality creates gaps that, with skill and patience, might be expanded' (Cox et al. 2020, 7). Identifying and expanding these gaps, I argue, is a central aim of all the productions in this thesis. They consciously depart from the predominant humanitarian and 'refugee theatre' frames that emerged in response to the 2015 migrations, instead offering more extensive and historicised critiques of border governance and exclusionary formations in contemporary Europe.

The performances reflect a wide variety of theatrical approaches, institutional settings, and artistic formats. I deliberately chose case histories that involve various styles and methods of implicating transnational audiences – from immersive-naturalist theatre to more metatheatrical, Brechtian approaches, from montage aesthetics and walk-through archive installations to itinerant puppetry. All these companies draw on workshop-based theatre, often collaborating with NGOs, schools, and advocacy groups in the development of their productions. While important to their theatrical practice, this participatory arts work will not be the focus of this thesis, which is concerned with the more public-facing trajectories of the eventual productions. Of the four projects, *The Jungle* is the only one with a published script. For all case studies, I relied primarily on performance recordings and, in the case of *The Walk*, in-person visits to several live events in October 2021 and June 2022.[20] My close readings are also informed by materials that the companies shared about their creative process in blog posts, making-of documentaries, website

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[20] Early plans to also attend a live performance of *The Jungle* at St. Ann's Warehouse in spring 2020 were unfortunately prevented by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent hiatus of the production. However, Good Chance Theatre have given me online access to a performance recording from the 2019 run at St. Ann's Warehouse, which has been invaluable for my understanding of the production's immersive elements, its audience interactions, and the effects and organisation of its stage design. In addition, I attended the *FreeDome Festival* in Sheffield on 21 and 22 February 2020, a poetry and performance series organised by Good Chance Theatre, the affiliated Change the Word poetry collective, and Sheffield Theatres. This also allowed me to meet and speak to some of the artists and Good Chance team members involved in *The Jungle* and the company's wider projects.

information, photographs and videos from research trips, development meetings, set designs, and rehearsals. Where possible, I conducted Zoom interviews with members of the creative teams; I am particularly grateful to Tom Mansfield, co-director of *Phone Home*, and to David Lan, co-producer of *The Jungle* and *The Walk*, for sharing their time, insights, and perspectives.[21] In addition, my discussion draws on published interviews and post-performance Q&As with theatre makers, promotion materials, and reception discourses in news outlets, social media sites, and academic publications.

The extent of these reception discourses differed widely across the four case histories, linked to how long the productions ran, how widely they travelled, and in which institutions they were embedded. *The Jungle* and *The Walk* have featured very prominently in media and academic circles. Drawing on a wide network of established theatre institutions, high-profile endorsements, and connections with renowned artists across numerous countries, these performances have garnered a degree of cultural capital and global mobility that only few performances about forced displacement reach. Both co-produced by Good Chance Theatre, they have been recommissioned several times and are likely to be staged again. While different factors have played a role in their considerable success, their international trajectories also give some indication of how – and under what conditions – border-critical performance art may be 'mainstreamed' in the current political moment. *Phone Home* and *Azimut Dekolonial*, by contrast, have received only sporadic journalistic and academic attention. Devised for only a few performance events in independent venues, these were still extremely elaborate productions whose transnational conception and development took over a year. As they are no longer being

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[21] While I contacted the creative teams of all the projects, opportunities for interviews were limited, given the lockdown restrictions and limited availability of the theatre makers. Two extensive Zoom interviews are included here: one with Tom Mansfield, of *Phone Home*, on 20 November 2020; another with David Lan, of *The Jungle* and *The Walk*, on 11 November 2022. I am very grateful for these inside perspectives into the creative and production process. While these conversations are, of course, not representative of the projects in their entirety, they have provided insightful additional source materials for my close readings. This has been especially valuable in the case of *Phone Home*, which has received less public discussion than the other productions.

performed, it is also an objective of this thesis to provide an account of these relatively little-known yet innovative works.[22]

My close readings of these four case histories draw on and extend recent work in the critical humanities at the intersections of performance, borders, coloniality, memory, and solidarity. This interdisciplinary scholarship offers appropriately expansive lenses to contextualise these unruly, format-crossing productions. Rather than reproducing 'easy claims about the "humanising" qualities of art, literature and narrative,' my work aims to contribute to this growing field of research that has highlighted how 'artistic, social and legal work is cross-pollinating in response to changes in refugee history' (Cox et al. 2020, 3–4). While frameworks from performance studies, critical border studies, social anthropology, memory studies, and media studies have provided the theoretical scaffolding for my analysis, this thesis also affirms the critical-creative significance of the performances themselves. It aims to read these productions not just as objects of analysis. Rather, they are productive spaces that create knowledge, record and interpret specific moments in Europe's border history, and intervene in hegemonic (including academic) discourses – sometimes in collaboration with more established institutions of knowledge production, such as museums, archives, and universities. This study, therefore, regards these theatre makers and performers not just as commentators responding to political developments, but also as creative historians and active contributors to recent junctures in transnational solidarity. In my discussion, I pay particular attention to how narrative, dramaturgical, and stylistic choices have enabled different mobilities and articulations of solidarity within and around these performances – sometimes suspending, sometimes reproducing dominant border imaginaries. Where, and in what ways, do these performances direct the gaze of their transnational audiences?

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[22] While *Phone Home* and *Azimut Dekolonial* are unlikely to be staged again in the future, recordings of the performances may still be available from the companies on request.

Fig. 1: *The Jungle*, produced by Good Chance Theatre.
Credit: Marc Brenner 2018.

Fig. 2: *Phone Home*, produced by Upstart Theatre, Pathos Theater, and Highway Productions.
Credit: Phone Home 2016.

Fig. 3: *Azimut Dekolonial*, produced by Hajusom.
Credit: Michael Pfisterer 2019.

Fig. 4: *The Walk*, produced by Good Chance Theatre, Handspring Puppet Company, and The Walk Productions.
Credit: own image, taken in London on 23 October 2021.

Terminology

The four productions all involve artistic collaborations across national boundaries. Establishing transnational networks – defined by anthropologist Steven Vertovec as 'sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states'– is a focal point of the performances and the companies' wider creative practice (2009, 2). Rather than 'transnational', 'cross-border', 'migratory', or 'itinerant', however, my preferred term for these productions is 'transborder theatre'. These designations overlap and are often used interchangeably; the latter, however, best encapsulates the centrality of the border in all these theatre projects. Even as they rely on transnational exchange and creative links across nation-states, these performances are acutely aware of the restrictive realities of present border control. They originate from collaborations between artists who hold different legal statuses and residence permits. Bringing together diverse transnational trajectories and family histories of migration, these theatre makers are attuned, often on a highly personal level, to the ways in which borders act differently upon people. By enabling and participating in various forms of transnational mobility, their works deliberately address how governing border regimes prevent most people from partaking in these same mobilities; in some cases, productions have crossed borders that remained closed to the artists themselves.

The term 'transborder' is meant to indicate this simultaneous working *across* and *against* borders, taking inspiration from projects such as Ricardo Dominguez' *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, Christina Aushana's research on transborder art activism at the Mexico-US border, and Louise Amoore and Alexandra Hall's work on protest art that intervenes in landscapes of border security (Net Art Anthology, n.d.; Aushana 2012; Amoore and Hall 2010). Similar to those projects, the works discussed here participate in forms of transborder art activism, or 'artivism', in the sense that they imagine and create solidarities beyond existing border regimes. They interrupt the

naturalisation of the 'border spectacle' and consciously intervene in 'the theatrical rituals of border security' (De Genova 2013, 1181; Amoore and Hall 2010, 299). Their transnational approaches follow a deliberate purpose: to produce critical-creative spaces where understandings of historical and ongoing border violence can be documented, questioned, and expanded. At the same time, each of these performances is interested in sites where solidarity and bordering practices cannot be neatly separated into diametrically opposed spheres – instances where statements and actions, intended as expressions of solidarity, end up disguising or reproducing inequalities. As artworks that participate to different extents in commercial theatre circuits, these projects also raise questions around how art, protest, and solidarity can become commodified and coopted within neoliberal discourses.

The terminology used here is also an attempt to resist trends in Western theatre institutions to commodify instances of intensified border violence and 'crisis' into 'urgent', 'brave', and 'timely' productions 'about refugees' (Latif, Morey, and Yaqin 2019, 258; Haakh, Hamdoun, and Herzberg 2019). Developed across multiple theatrical styles, conventions, and institutional settings, the performances discussed here trouble such labels – implicitly in their creative approaches, and sometimes explicitly in accompanying materials and interviews. Just as they push against the reductive categories imposed by migration regimes, these theatre makers refuse to be contained within ostensible genres such as 'migrant theatre' or 'refugee theatre' – a form of performative labelling in which artistic work is positioned as Other and excluded from European and national theatre landscapes. Elsewhere, artists have also started to adapt and reclaim these terms as a form of conscious re-appropriation and self-labelling; a notable example is the postmigrant theatre scene that emerged in Berlin in the mid-to-late 2000s.[23]

These dynamics of 'categorical fetishism,' in Raia Apostolova's term, also resurface in all my case histories – the discursive-political processes that treat border categories 'as if they simply

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[23] For a more detailed discussion of German postmigrant theatre, see Chapter III on *Azimut Dekolonial*.

exist, out there, as empty vessels into which people can be placed in some neutral ordering process': 'good'/'bad' migrants, 'legals'/'illegals', 'asylum seekers'/'Gastarbeiter', 'refugees'/'migrants', etc. (Apostolova 2015; Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis 2018, 49). Against these persistent labelling practices, the performances aim to consciously blur and denaturalise the 'bifurcation between "voluntary" and "involuntary" migration' (Apostolova 2015). These tensions are especially relevant to my discussion of *The Jungle*, which has been enmeshed in shifting marketing discourses across the UK and the US (with Good Chance Theatre generally more inclined to embrace the 'refugee art' label for its work); and *Azimut Dekolonial*, whose creators have explicitly deconstructed the otherising labels and genre categorisations circulating in German and European theatre industries.

By gathering these performances under the umbrella of 'transborder theatre', I do not intend to simply replace one reductive label with another. Rather than a genre of its own, this framework intends to highlight a particular mode of theatre making. It recognises the bordering mechanisms against which these performances position themselves, while remaining open to the variety of experiences, themes, and styles expressed in these projects. Some, such as *The Jungle* and *The Walk*, were devised specifically as responses to Europe's present border regimes; others, such as *Azimut Dekolonial*, build on several decades of varied theatrical practice and transnational solidarity. The focus of my analysis necessarily involves a selective view of these works, bringing certain scenes and aspects to attention while neglecting others. The term '*trans*border' aims to capture that, while the border is a core concern in all my case histories and in the daily realities of many of these artists, the performances also address various themes *beyond* migration, displacement, and coloniality. Importantly, these productions refuse to be positioned as Europe's exception or its Other, as originating 'from somewhere else' or as existing 'at the margin'. By centring the continent's historical and ongoing practices of exclusion and its transnational solidarities, each of these performances is resolutely *about Europe*.

Implicating transnational audiences: re-historicising border contexts

As they navigate Europe's shifting borderscapes, the meanings and receptions of the four productions change throughout. As transnationally mobile artworks, they trace further journeys still, moving through various performance spaces and cities, but also through changing political landscapes and transitions in border governance. They therefore also need to navigate changing relations of proximity and distance between performance and audience: depending on when and where a performance is staged, spectators will have different ways of relating to its content and its specific political resonances. The conditions and formal decisions that allow these productions to circulate their representations of injustice require some scrutiny – particularly where plays are invested in creating certain affective responses among theatregoers. How, and to whose benefit, do narrative-aesthetic choices and emotional registers work in migrating productions – and how does their reception change in new performance contexts?

Writing on Magnet Theatre's *Every Year, Every Day, I Am Walking*, Emma Cox has analysed how this production mobilises tropes of refugee victimhood and refugee hope, with different implications for its transnational reception (2012). Devised in 2008, the play was a response to a wave of xenophobic violence, lootings, and attacks against refugees in South Africa, which left 62 dead and thousands injured (Cox 2012, 129; Oatway and Skuy 2021). Despite this immediate context, however, *Every Year* tends to prioritise 'impressionistic generality over historical specificity' in its narrative forms and set design; while partially set in Cape Town, its other geographic contexts are kept vague, offering instead 'an "every story" of African displacement,' as Cox observes (2012, 119, 126). This historical 'malleability' meant that the production lent itself easily to being circulated, not only among South Africa and directly implicated nations, but also among distant metropolitan audiences who were not directly affected by the contexts displayed, for instance in the UK (Cox 2012, 119–120, 126). Cox is suspicious of

who, exactly, 'is served (as well as who is implicated and mobilized) by a refugee narrative that London audiences could relegate to a generalized geopolitical imaginary: "far from here"' (2012, 120). She argues that the play's generic depictions risk 'reproducing, in London and elsewhere, a pan-African subjectivity inhering in a generalized combination of oppression, crisis and victimhood' (2012, 126). For her, the performance thus 'slot[s] all to easily into an international audience's generic moral imaginary […] of an Africa that is always and by definition in crisis and mourning' (2012, 126).

This is an important observation, also for the performances discussed in this thesis. How can productions about historically specific border violence, migration, and coloniality achieve mobility on a transnational theatre marketplace? How do these plays navigate the relation between proximity and distance, particularity and generalisation – and how do they avoid dehistoricising their subject matter from its specific contexts and actors? In the case that Cox describes, historically specific border violence is abstracted, especially once there is greater distance – geographical and/or temporal – from the original performance setting. This ends up feeding, once again, into depoliticised crisis imaginaries that represent refugees as eternally suffering victims – 'speechless emissaries' in 'a miserable "sea of humanity,"' in Liisa Malkki's famous observation (1996, 377). Luc Boltanksi has theorised this form of relating to injustice as 'distant suffering' (1999). He argues that, in an age of mass media and international image circulation, consuming and sharing depictions of geographically and temporally remote suffering gives 'everyone the opportunity to cultivate themselves through absorption in their own pity at the spectacle of someone else's suffering' (1999, xiv). By projecting injustices as detached from their audiences, imageries of supposedly generic, eternal victimhood can propagate 'an ideal identity for the spectator as a citizen of the world – literally a cosmo-politan,' as Lilie Chouliaraki notes (2006, 2). Here viewers are united 'in a community of virtue that discovers in its own fellow-feeling for distant others a narcissistic self-contentment' (Chouliaraki 2010, 113). This

dimension of self-cultivation is particularly relevant in the context of live theatre where, as Jeffers observes, the spectatorship moves from the domestic area of Boltanski's TV living room into a more civic arena – where the act of watching is itself being watched by others (2020, 136).

How are conditions of injustice represented, and who benefits from their representation? Where do invocations of solidarity end up disguising existing hierarchies and privileges? In theatrical representations that slip into universalist archetypes – refugees as wandering exiles or 'metaphors for rootlessness' rather than socially and politically situated subjects –, displacement becomes 'as much psychological as political (wherein anyone may conceivably be a "refugee")' (Woolley 2014, 4; Cox et al. 2020, 8–9). Writing in 1984, Edward Said warned against the dangers of universalising experiences of forced migration in arts and literature. In an age of mass displacement, he argues, 'exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism;' rather, it is 'unbearably historical; […] produced by human beings for other human beings' (2001, 174). To frame displacement in abstract terms, 'as beneficially humanistic,' Said maintains, 'is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as "good for us"' (2001, 174).

These are central ethical-political and aesthetic concerns for transborder performances that attempt to confront theatregoers with complex contexts of border governance, oppression, and inequality. The four case histories discussed in the following chapters all experiment with creative formats to at least partially bridge the gaps between seemingly remote border contexts. Unlike the historical 'malleability' identified by Cox, these performances are firmly rooted in specific political moments of border governance, placing their (primarily Western) participants, both spectators and performers, in more direct relationships with the conditions presented on stage. The artists largely enable the transnational circulation of their productions not by rendering them historically vague (although there are occasional exceptions), but by consciously retrieving

links between audiences and contexts that may seem geographically or temporally remote – connections that are often deliberately denied in other dominant discourses.

To denote such historically and spatially dispersed relations of violence, injustice, and inequality, literature and memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg uses the concept of implication (2019).[24] As a deliberately capacious umbrella category, implication exceeds the prevalent, emotionally charged trichotomy of victim, perpetrator, and bystander often used to describe relations of injustice (2019, 2). Instead of 'an ontological identity that freezes us forever in proximity to power and privilege,' implication presents a relational, changeable framework: 'a position that we occupy in particular, dynamic, and at times clashing structures and histories of power' (Rothberg 2019, 8). This framework does not deny the existence of victims and perpetrators in historical and ongoing injustices, nor the need for mourning and accountability, respectively (2019, 10). However, implication extends these clear-cut categories with other, more ambiguous subject positions. Centring on 'the latecomer to histories of perpetration' (2019, 14) – such as the descendant, the perpetuator, and the beneficiary of expulsion, colonisation, genocide, and other forms of violence –, implication introduces a vocabulary to address temporally and geographically remote histories and relations that are often unconscious, denied, or framed as concluded (2019, 11–13).

In the four transborder performances I analyse, various theatrical strategies are mobilised to expose different forms of political-historical implication between theatregoers and Europe's contemporary border regimes – yet in ways that largely eschew simplistic notions of guilt and innocence. The stance these performances take towards their audiences, for the most part, is not one of accusation or blame, but neither are spectators simply absolved from complicities: they are not automatically positioned as straightforward allies or collaborators in transnational solidarity. These plays hinge on a more ambiguous, changeable form of address. Spectators are asked to

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[24] In his 2019 work *The Implicated Subject*, Rothberg's case histories range from the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and South African apartheid to post-Holocaust Europe and contemporary Israel/Palestine.

consider themselves within complicated, occasionally conflicting subject positions and implications: expressing solidarity with people on the move, for instance, while also contributing – if they are tax-paying citizens – to the border regimes funded and perpetuated by their governments. To varying degrees, the productions invite their participants to recognise themselves as beneficiaries of or inadvertent contributors to border violence. Some of the theatre makers also explicitly extend this scrutiny to their own artistic formats and institutional contexts. As has been the case in many productions about border control, some of these performances are increasingly sceptical of the scope and adequacy of their theatrical interventions – which are, after all, also part of neoliberal and commercial structures in a wider cultural sector profiting off 'refugee storytelling'.

To stage these entanglements, the performances work with a blend of embodied-immersive strategies and metatextual elements that invite a more detached engagement. None of them presents an entirely self-contained, preconceived play, where audiences watch a narrative unfold on a designated stage. They all involve elements of interaction, with performers addressing spectators directly and occasionally turning them into active participants of the production. By paying attention to these moments, my readings aim to add more nuance to prevailing arguments in theatre and migration studies that align certain aesthetic-creative choices with political efficacy – for instance, immersive theatre as inherently depoliticising vs. metatheatre as automatically subversive. Rather than feeding into such binary oppositions and either dismiss or take for granted the critical significance of certain theatrical techniques, my analysis traces how the four performances move between different forms of address to deliberately interrupt comfortable, fixed positionalities. They show how immersion can sometimes work as an avenue into more critically detached forms of engagement – as a way of keeping audiences present and alert to what they are watching, for instance. These projects all mobilise the interactive, synchronous, and self-referential possibilities of live theatre in deliberate and sophisticated ways

to disrupt dominant perceptions about the geographical and temporal limits of political responsibility and solidarity.

Following the four case histories also reveals a growing dissatisfaction with traditional forms and contexts of the theatrical encounter, with artists deliberately transgressing and modifying the boundaries and architectures of their stages. By manipulating their performance spaces to reflect transnational, transhistorical connections, these theatre projects fictionally bring seemingly remote histories of injustice into the same time-space. While this reframing is temporary and limited to the performance context, it still offers creative avenues to confront transnational audiences with externalised border spaces and colonial histories. By troubling common assumptions about the borders of political space and community, these performances offer imaginative ways 'to reconceptualize the subjects of justice' beyond nation-state frameworks (Rothberg 2009, 21).

Chapter Outline

The first two case histories of this thesis both address Europe's Long Summer of Migration/Autumn of Racism, albeit from different angles. In the first chapter, Good Chance Theatre's immersive play *The Jungle* (2017/2018) explores the 2015–2016 Calais camp and Europe's responses to refugee movements during that time. Drawing on documentary materials and news images, the play highlights how fluctuating media discourses impacted the lives of people in the Calais camp – from the viral circulation of the Alan Kurdi photograph to xenophobic narratives following the November 2015 Paris attacks. By comparing the original 2017 script, the revised 2018 version, and staged productions in West End and US theatre houses, my analysis traces important shifts between the play's various iterations. Particularly in its

revised script, *The Jungle* entails nuanced dissections of the traditional humanitarian encounter, reflecting growing anxieties around reproducing empathy-based paradigms of 'help' in post-2015 transborder theatre. Some of these self-reflexive critiques, however, become muted in the performance event. With its primarily naturalistic style and its aim of recreating the Calais camp as an immersive 'experience' within high-end Western theatres, *The Jungle* is enmeshed in questions of commodification, consumption, and voyeurism. At the same time, its entanglements with established commercial institutions have enabled an unusual global mobility and longevity: long after Calais has disappeared from dominant Western media and political discourses, *The Jungle* is still confronting its audiences with this unresolved border context.

The commodification of solidarity is also a main concern in *Phone Home* (2016), discussed in the second chapter. Using dispersed, partly digitised stages in Greece, Germany, and the UK, this production interrogates and satirises how solidarities were communicated and coopted in Europe following the Long Summer of Migration. The performance turns to self-referential metatheatre, distancing strategies, and montage formats to stage a critique of self-congratulating 'post-humanitarianism' in Europe (Chouliaraki 2011). It's trinational, split-screen dramaturgy allows the performance to simultaneously stage specific, local contexts and draw out trans-European connections. Commenting on the same 2015–2016 representative juncture as *The Jungle*, *Phone Home* explores, among others, imageries of celebrity humanitarianism – a critique which in the play blends into a wider commentary on dominant victim/threat paradigms and xenophobic narratives of 'bogus asylum seekers'. By staging these only seemingly contradictory figurations as interlinked phenomena, both *The Jungle* and *Phone Home* criticise how people on the move were variously depicted as subjects of pity and suspicion within changing media and advocacy discourses in post-2015 Europe.

While these projects offer ambitious transborder interrogations of the 2015–2016 Calais camp and Europe's Long Summer of Migration, neither performance extends its gaze very far

beyond its specific political-historical moment. Both plays gesture towards longer and more structural inequalities, yet their respective theatrical spaces cannot quite contain the geographic-temporal expanse and the pluralist textualities that these productions aim to establish. Following the 2015–2016 migrations, calls for more historical depth and thorough decolonial critiques of border governance had become more pressing across activist, legal, academic, and particularly creative and theatrical spheres. The third and fourth chapters turn to two case histories that consciously shift the frame towards longer border histories, more expansive contexts, and more collaborative theatrical formats.

In the third chapter, Hajusom's production *Azimut Dekolonial* (2019) combines an immersive performance space with more fractured montage elements to explore colonial legacies in contemporary bordering practices. Based in Hamburg, its interactive walk-through installation creates a transnational archive of Germany and Europe's colonial histories, also reflecting a wider decolonial turn in anti-border solidarity discourses during that time. Intervening in dominant memory discourses, the production highlights how borders follow people across space and time, with many of the artists themselves being persistently otherised in a majority-white society. By establishing long-term collaborations for border-critical work beyond the immediate theatre context, Hajusom's creative practice aims to create sustained, multidirectional frameworks of transnational solidarity.

The fourth chapter, finally, explores the travelling puppetry festival *The Walk* (2021), performed over five months along refugee routes from Syria to the UK. By creating diverse street performances and assemblies around a giant puppet representation of a Syrian girl, this project presents a canvas on which Europe's diverging responses to people on the move are reflected in real time. As a performance that revisits a minor character from *The Jungle* – the girl Little Amal –, *The Walk* also offers a micro-history of some of the representative shifts in transborder theatre that this thesis traces overall: from traditional humanitarian frames towards more collaborative,

agonistic border-critical textualities. My analysis shows how Little Amal was developed from a relatively dehistoricised, empathy-based representation of a child into a more unmanageable, open-ended artwork that became extended further by assemblies of spectators and participating artists in each new performance site. With the puppet increasingly appearing in protest performances and spaces of anti-border activism, her gigantic presence works to mark an absence: the systemic exclusion of real refugee children from European space, and the unprecedented erosion of refugee rights frameworks in European border policies.

Working and collaborating across state borders, these four productions expose and defamiliarise Europe's historical and ongoing border regimes, signifying an important shift in emphasis: away from dehistoricising representations of the refugee/migrant as a figure of humanitarian pity or politico-juridical suspicion, towards more pluralist and historically embedded frameworks of theatrical solidarity. They all ask how the 'illegality' of unsanctioned movement has been produced in different representative frameworks, highlighting 'that refugees and asylum seekers do not fit neatly into conceptual domains that relate to migration' (Woolley 2014, 12, 14). Developing increasingly expansive, interconnected stages, these performances bring seemingly remote contexts of injustice into the present time-space and turn the critical gaze back onto Europe, its governments, and its institutions.

More recently, as I argue in the conclusion chapter, this turn is increasingly framed in an openly juridical register, with tribunal performances such as *Asyl Tribunal* (2022) putting European nation-states on trial for failing their international legal obligations. By involving transnational perspectives from artists, researchers, activists, and legal experts, Europe's new transborder stages have been imbuing solidarity practices with more historical, political, and legal specificity. During a time when politico-juridical spaces to enact human rights encounters are radically being eroded, these performances offer imaginative ways to reconceptualise contemporary languages of transnational solidarity.

I. *THE JUNGLE* (2017/2018)

STAGING CALAIS ON THE WEST END

1. Good Chance Theatre and the Calais Camp

This first case history centres around Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson's play *The Jungle* (2017/2018), which emerged in the context of the 2015–2016 Calais refugee and migrant camp. While various state-sanctioned, 'tolerated', and informal squats and encampments have routinely been built and abandoned in the vicinity of Calais since the 1980s, this informal camp existed from April 2015 to October 2016, before it was evicted and demolished by French state authorities (Agier et al. 2019, 8, 11). At its peak, around 10,000 people lived there, most of them planning to seek asylum in the UK (Agier et al. 2019, 2). Known unofficially as the 'Calais Jungle', the camp became infamous for its abject living conditions and inadequate water and sanitation services, with French state authorities barring international aid agencies (McGee and Pelham, 2018, 22, 26). This systematic indifference, note Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, and Surindar Dhesi, constituted an intentional politics of 'violent inaction' (2017, 1263). Both the French and the British state were aiming to immobilise the camp's residents and relied on circulating images of Calais as a tactic of deterring migration: '[T]his deliberate ignoring of a glaring humanitarian problem can be read as an agnopolitical expression of power: intentionally maintaining ignorance of a situation for political ends' (Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017, 1276).

For many, Calais came to symbolise a particular moment of European border violence and grassroots solidarity that emerged in the wake of the 2015 refugee movements. Joe Gill argues that the camp had 'become a symbol of the times we live in,' and Michel Agier and

colleagues call 'the Calais event' a 'metonym for European crisis … and solidarity' – a site that reflected wider ongoing tensions of '(in)hospitality, citizenship, cosmopolitanism, globalization, the status of foreigners and national public policies in the face of precarious mobility' (Gill 2018; Agier et al. 2019, 7, 9). Against the 'formal humanitarian void' produced by state authorities, several grassroots humanitarian initiatives formed in Calais, some of which emerged from pre-existing volunteering networks in the area (McGee and Pelham, 2018, 22). Numerous volunteers started settling in the camp, while many others paid one-off visits, contributing to a veritable 'humanitarian tourism' or 'voluntourism' (Agier et al. 2019, 102). Creative and journalistic initiatives also developed in and around the camp, creating an archive of photographic, literary, poetic, and artistic interpretations of Calais (Agier et al. 2019, 102).

Good Chance Theatre is the most prominent UK theatre company that emerged in this context. Founded in 2015 by British playwrights Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson, it began as a participatory theatre project. Working with a temporary theatre dome – a geodesic tent structure made of iron bars and tarpaulin –, the company was present in the Calais camp from September 2015 until the eviction of the southern part in February 2016. As a venue for creative expression, art workshops, performances, conversations, and debates, this dome provided an open meeting space for the camp's residents – 'a sort of townhall,' in Murphy's words (Good Chance 2015, 02.00–02.08).[25] Within the political liminal space of the camp, argue Alison Jeffers and Ambrose Musiyiwa, the theatre presented 'a symbolic liminal space, unsanctioned and unsupported by the state' – 'a convivial focal point in an extremely hostile environment' (2023, 589). While the dome's tent-like architecture was primarily a logistical choice (it provided a cheap, practical structure), its spherical shape and acoustic effects also aligned with the dome theatre's 'democratising' and 'equalising' ambitions (Jeffers and Musiyiwa 2023, 592). As one Good

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[25] Political engagement and efficacy play an important role in the self-conception of Good Chance Theatre, which promotes its work as 'theatre that "shakes hands with the world"' (Jays 2017, cited in Good Chance 2024a). As the company emphasises, the dome in Calais was envisioned as 'the civic and cultural centre of the camp and a powerful voice in the international conversation about the refugee and migrant crisis' (Good Chance 2018).

Chance Theatre member puts it, 'There is no sense of some people being in a corner and some people being separated out on a stage. […] [W]herever you are you can hear somebody all the way across the dome as if they are right next to you' (cited in Jeffers and Musiyiwa 2023, 592). As a space where '[y]ou don't have to be considered through the prism of being "a refugee",' the theatre was also intended as 'somewhere to go to get out of the Jungle,' in Robertson's words (Jeffers and Musiyiwa 2023, 592; Index on Censorship 2016, 2:45–2:50). Following its work in Calais, Good Chance Theatre expanded its scope to other cities in France, the UK, and the US, organising participatory performance projects and workshops. For these temporary events, the original dome structure (in addition to two smaller dome theatres) was reassembled in each new location.

Fig. 5: A performance outside the theatre dome established by Good Chance Theatre in the 2015–2016 Calais camp. Credit: Sarah Lee/*The Guardian* 2016.

Fig. 6: Inside the reconstructed Good Chance Theatre dome during a performance in Paris in 2018.
Credit: Raphaël Hilarion 2018.

Good Chance Theatre's flagship projects, however, are its large, internationally successful productions *The Jungle* (2017/2018) and *The Walk* (2021), with the upcoming performance *Kyoto* scheduled for June 2024. Unlike the company's earlier theatrical practice in Calais, this public-facing strand of work 'sits more comfortably within traditional structures' (Jeffers and Musiyawa 2023, 594). While Good Chance Theatre does not receive public subsidy, its work is enmeshed in a network of high-profile commissions, endorsements, donations, and partnerships. As a 'company-turned-charity' (Welton 2020, 231), it frequently collaborates with other theatres, foundations, brands, and celebrity ambassadors.[26] Compared to other art initiatives that emerged

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[26] Several prominent theatres and institutions have partnered with Good Chance Theatre, such the National Theatre, the Young Vic, Shakespeare's Globe, the Royal Court Theatre, the Southbank Centre, Théâtre du Soleil, La Comédie-Française, Théâtre de la Ville, and Handspring Puppet Company. Celebrity supporters in the British and French theatre scenes include Cate Blanchett, Ariane Mnouchkine, Michael Morpurgo, Ian Rickson, and Sir Tom Stoppard. Good Chance has also collaborated with NGOs, foundations, and charities such as Help

in Calais, Good Chance Theatre is extraordinarily well-connected within established Western cultural sectors, continuously expanding its scope with large, transnational projects and collaborations. The company has also helped initiate several ongoing creative fellowships, collectives, and networks, some of which involve artists and musicians who were living in the Calais camp, including the *Change the Word* poetry collective and La Troupe Collective.

Based on Murphy and Robertson's volunteering experiences in Calais, *The Jungle* was commissioned and co-produced by the National Theatre and the Young Vic. The play stages the encounters and relations between residents of the camp and a group of British citizens volunteering there, from its initial stages in March 2015 to the eviction of its southern half in February 2016. The performance traces the camp's tentative living arrangements and provisional infrastructures of restaurants, mosques, churches, and distinct neighbourhoods. Set mainly in an Afghan café, *The Jungle* also embeds its audiences in this context, frequently hailing them as restaurant guests and, by extension, as volunteers residing in the camp – a position that is complicated by the play's ambiguous, often unfavourable portrayal of volunteering. A departure from the typical 'imagine you're a refugee' immersive format, this framework stays more closely aligned with Murphy and Robertson's experiences in the camp, as well as the assumed perspectives of the play's primary audiences in UK and US theatres (in the Young Vic and Playhouse productions, they were explicitly addressed as British). While *The Jungle* does use occasional metatheatrical techniques, the production relies primarily on documentary and immersive-sensory strategies: it constructs an encompassing restaurant space in the theatre, where the stage resembles lined-up tables, television screens display newsreels, and audiences are served food. In this setting of catered hospitality, the performance interrogates questions of political hospitality/'hostipitality' towards people on the move (Derrida 2000).

Refugees/Choose Love, Safe Passage, Refugee Action, the Genesis Foundation, and Bloomberg Philanthropies. For a full list of partners and supporters, see: https://www.goodchance.org.uk/supporters.

This approach, in which audiences enter Calais as a theatrical 'experience', has proven highly successful. *The Jungle* has received an overwhelmingly positive reception and sold out repeated production runs. Although criticised by some for 'jumping on the bandwagon of publicity surrounding the Jungle,' the production has been met with almost exclusively favourable media reviews and high-profile endorsements (Vassiliades 2022, 522). After its original run at the Young Vic (2017–18), *The Jungle* was revised and transferred to larger West End and US theatres: London's Playhouse Theatre (2018), New York's St. Ann's Warehouse (2018–19), and San Francisco's Curran (2019). After a four-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the production returned for another US tour to St. Ann's and Washington, D.C.'s Shakespeare Theatre Company (2023), in addition to a series of rehearsed readings and translated adaptations in South Korea (2020), Sri Lanka (2023), and Istanbul (2023). By March 2024, over 150,000 theatregoers had seen *The Jungle*, and Good Chance Theatre had become a prominent platform in migration-related debates across Europe and the US (Good Chance 2024b). The company has received numerous theatre and advocacy awards, and its members regularly present at international conferences (Good Chance 2024b).[27]

Already in its original run, *The Jungle*'s production credentials involved some of the most influential names in Anglophone theatre, including directors Stephen Daldry and Justin Martin, set designer Miriam Buether, and producer David Lan. For the transfer to the Playhouse Theatre, mega-producer Sonia Friedman was involved, referred to as 'the most powerful figure in British theatre' when *The Jungle* premiered on the West End (Mason 2018).[28] In some spaces, *The Jungle* has become almost synonymous with these large-scale, profit-oriented production settings.

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[27] Good Chance Theatre has been awarded, among others, the 2016 Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award, the 2018 Genesis Prize, the 2018 South Bank Sky Arts Award for Theatre, the 2018 Broadway World UK Award, and the 2020 San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award (Good Chance 2024b).

[28] Featured in *Time Magazine*'s list of '100 Most Influential People of 2018' and named *Broadway Briefing*'s 'Show Person of the Year 2018' and 'Producer of the Year' at the 2019 *Stage Awards*, Sonia Friedman's other recent West End productions include *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Dreamgirls*, and *Oklahoma!* (Sonia Friedman Productions 2022).

Though justified in the context of a wider post-2015 'refugee cultural industry', some of these critiques have resulted in reductive views of *The Jungle* as an entirely state-sanctioned, appropriative, or apolitical production. Artist and researcher Lorna Vassiliades, for instance, recounts being asked in an interview for a writers' residency whether she 'would choose to produce *The Jungle* or small venue productions. The choice was described as a London West End play made by white writers and directors, or work written and made by refugees and asylum seekers' (2022, 522). Vassiliades notes how, to justify her favourable view of *The Jungle*, her response required careful framing: 'As a refugee *myself, and* as an artist whose work has been rejected, and who has been told that I come from a minority that isn't of any huge marketing value, I would still choose the major West End production' (2022, 522, original emphasis). Dismissing *The Jungle*, this account suggests, has become its own form of self-staging in the theatre world, implying a distancing from a certain conception of Western, commercial 'refugee theatre', while upholding an idealised image of small-venue productions as intrinsically subversive and radical.

Clearly the success of *The Jungle* within Western commercial theatre has been aided by its embeddedness in these structures throughout; the either/or dichotomy between mainstream and fringe theatre, however, infers implications about political and artistic significance that are not that clearcut. Vassiliades, who had herself initially avoided the play – 'What could two young, non-refugee, male playwrights possibly tell me about being a refugee?' –, still maintains that there is value in how the production creates a space for audiences to gather and perform to each other shared convictions and solidarities (2022, 522). Since the play's premiere in 2017, public spaces to enact pro-migration activist practices and the 'human rights encounter' have been systematically restricted and criminalised by punitive border governance (Mann 2016; Gurnham 2023). In this political context, *The Jungle*'s transfers into established Western theatre circuits have afforded it with a remarkably extensive and long-lasting transnational mobility, precisely in nation-states that

have introduced unprecedented levels of border violence and anti-refugee legislation over the last years – from Donald Trump's 'Muslim ban' and executive orders on border security in the US to the UK government's 'Stop the Boats' policies and Illegal Migration Bill. Circulating between theatres in these increasingly hostile environments, *The Jungle* is also carving out spaces for people to assemble and confirm to each other anti-border solidarities.

However, the translation of the 'Jungle' into *The Jungle* – from an outsourced border space defined by states' deliberate indifference to a blockbuster production circulating between commercial theatre landscapes – has happened under specific conditions. Analysing this case history, this chapter pays attention to the narrative, dramaturgical, and aesthetic choices that have enabled this transnational mobility. While *The Jungle* interrogates the terms under which people are included in or excluded from European nation-state structures, its history as a production also traces a story of how transborder narratives are transferred into national theatres and profit-making entertainment sectors. This is a performance that fictionally reintroduces an outsourced border space into the commercial centres of the nation-state – long after the destruction of the real Calais camp. The production's continued renewals and commercial success also shed some light into what forms of anti-border solidarity and critique are considered acceptable, relevant, and profitable within contemporary theatre marketplaces – what forms of 'refugee narratives' are 'welcomed' on established Western stages. What interpretation of Calais is being circulated, and how are audiences implicated in this border space?

If Good Chance Theatre's original dome offered a creative-imaginative space for those immobilised in the camp to momentarily 'get out of the Jungle,' *The Jungle* conversely promises a way for people to *get into* a recreation of the camp (in the 2019 St. Ann's Warehouse production, the stage design even involved the reconstructed theatre dome from Calais) (Index on Censorship 2016, 2:45–2:50). To give a better sense of this imagined camp space, the following two sections offer a close reading of *The Jungle*, drawing primarily on the revised script version

(developed for the 2018 West End transfer) and performance recordings from the 2019 St. Ann's Warehouse production.[29] I will show how the play presents sophisticated – albeit occasionally inconsistent – critiques of humanitarian practices, media narratives, and Britain's political-historical implications in the Calais camp. The final chapter section turns to an analysis of *The Jungle*'s set designs, promotion discourses, and transnational reception. I show how the production's mobility is predicated on an experiential and consumerist form of marketing that creates a tension with some of the self-conscious critiques of humanitarianism and border governance proposed in the play itself.

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[29] There are two official script versions of *The Jungle*, both published by Faber & Faber. The original script from the play's 2017 run at the Young Vic Theatre in London is still available on *Drama Online* (Murphy and Robertson 2017). The more widely available print version is from 2018 – the basis for *The Jungle*'s transfer to the Playhouse Theatre and subsequent production runs (Murphy and Robertson 2018). While I will occasionally refer to the original 2017 script, my analysis is primarily based on the 2018 version and two recordings from the 2019 production at St. Ann's Warehouse in New York (St. Ann's Warehouse 2019a; 2019b). Good Chance Theatre shared these recordings with me since, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the production was still on hiatus during my time of research (one recording was filmed with a single camera, the other with multiple cameras and edited as a performance film).

2. Refugee–Citizen Encounters in *The Jungle*

'The telling of this story': Safi and narrative framing

The Jungle tends to present its characters in three distinct groups: the script's character lineup lists twelve camp residents (from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Sudan, and Syria – although more appear throughout the play); five volunteers (who, in a deliberately homogenous demographic representation, are all white British citizens); and French state authorities (represented by the civil servant Henri, a police officer, and a group of anonymous *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* [CRS] officers) (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 9). British state authorities, meanwhile, remain conspicuously absent. This character structure broadly corresponds to 'the tripartition of "the refugees", "civil society" and the "state"' common in many depictions of 2015 'Refugees Welcome' grassroots movements (Picozza 2021, xxiv). This portrayal, notes Fiorenza Picozza, fails to acknowledge the role of non-citizens in solidarity practices and humanitarian assistance, instead reinforcing 'white saviour' imageries and dehistoricising discourses that produce forced migrants as permanently external to Europe (2021, xxiv). While misrepresentative of volunteering practices in Calais and elsewhere in Europe, *The Jungle* employs this reductive conception strategically to stage a political critique of humanitarian action, border governance, and neocolonial frameworks.

The play begins in medias res, with the chaotic eviction of the southern half of the Calais camp in February 2016: '*An emergency meeting of residents and volunteers inside a makeshift Afghan restaurant in the Jungle […]. The restaurant is restless and busy. […] Everything happens quickly in the Jungle, all at once, everyone on top of each other and always present*' (Murphy and Roberston 2018, 13). In quick succession, the first scene depicts camp residents and volunteers discussing an eviction notice and their failed attempts to sway the French courts; the news that Norullah, a fifteen-year-old

boy, died on the motorway trying to cross to the UK; the panicked dispersal of most people in the camp; and finally, the violent entrance of CRS officers '*in full riot gear*,' pepper-spraying those who refuse to leave (2018, 24).

Into this chaos steps Safi, a 35-year-old man from Aleppo and *The Jungle*'s narrator figure: 'Stop. Let's stop for a moment' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 25). The action is then rewound to several months earlier, when Mohammed, Salar, Ali, and Safi arrive in Calais: '[L]et's go back to the beginning. March 2015 is the date of birth' (2018, 26). In typical transborder-metatheatre style, Safi acts as both a character and a slightly removed commentator, mediating between theatregoers and camp context. As a master of ceremonies, he guides audiences through the action, alternately interrupts and advances the proceedings, and introduces signposts where the play does not follow the chronology of real events: 'You should take some time to think about this. […] Let's have an interval' (2018, 73). In a departure from *The Jungle*'s largely naturalistic docudrama style, Safi's recurring references to performance protocols remind audiences that they are watching a mediated story. While the play repeatedly refers to real-life events, legislation, and media discourses, it notably avoids verbatim testimony, as actor Ammar Haj Ahmad, who portrays Safi, highlighted in a recent interview: 'Out of respect to truth, we went away from saying it's a documentary' (Schama 2023). Foregrounding anxieties of (mis)representation and subjectivity, Safi introduces himself to the audience not as a supposedly neutral documentarian, but specifically as a literature scholar and storyteller: 'Former student of English Literature and Language in my home town, Aleppo. So I know a little bit about telling stories. Always start at the end' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 25). He alerts listeners to the limitations of narration, even anticipating potential criticism: 'I do not pretend we did not make mistakes. And many more will be made in the telling of this story, I am sure' (2018, 26).

Fig. 7: The storyteller: Safi, played by Ammar Haj Ahmad, in the 2018 Playhouse production of *The Jungle*. Credit: Tristram Kenton/*The Guardian* 2018.

Safi's interruptions and meta-comments frequently provide contextualisation on political developments and media narratives that impacted people's experiences in the Calais camp. Jeff Casey argues that the character is one of several distancing devices at work in the production, introducing opportunities 'to estrange the story, break the illusion of realism, engage our critical faculties, and foreground the historical and political contexts of the story' (2021, 362). In the immersive storytelling event that *The Jungle* constructs, however, Safi's role as a narrator becomes more multilayered: he is not primarily a disruptive figure – contrary to a Brechtian alienation effect, his asides to the audience also fulfil a distinctly embracing function. Although there are occasional exceptions, his relationship with theatregoers is fundamentally accommodating and generous, much like the chai and naan served in the stalls. Karie Miller's account of the Playhouse production highlights this inviting dimension: 'Through Safi's direct-address narration, interposed with representational scenes, we were welcomed into the story as both witnesses and friends. […] Murphy and Robertson translated what are often regarded as foreign events into

personal ones' (2019, 504). In addition to other immersive elements, Safi's storytelling positions theatregoers within the narrative and implicates them as listeners and participants, rather than pulling them out of the action into the perspective of more distanced observers.

While theatregoers generally receive a warm welcome in *The Jungle*'s restaurant space, the same cannot be said about the volunteers in the play. Subverting the hegemonic conditions of the citizen–refugee encounter, it is often the European citizens whose presence, narrative authority, behaviours, and motives in Calais are called into question and found wanting. Rather than 'How did refugees come here?', 'What did the journey involve?', etc., the play's central question is, 'Did volunteers who flocked to Calais do more harm than good?' (Ross 2017).

With each of the five British characters, *The Jungle* introduces a different impasse of humanitarian aid, already alluded to in their respective entrances in the camp. Beth, a young gap-year volunteer, enters with a phone displaying the photograph of Alan Kurdi. Through her, *The Jungle* interrogates problems of sentimental humanitarianism and liberal 'virtue-signalling' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 92). Sam arrives '*filming everything*' in the camp without asking for permission (2018, 42). Through him, the play addresses questions of voyeurism and surveillance. Paula '*enters with bags of donations*,' asking, 'Where's the UN? […] Save the Children? […] Fucking Red Cross?' (2018, 40). Through her, *The Jungle* provides exposition on legislative frameworks and the absence of aid organisations in Calais. Boxer enters '*playing his banjo and duetting "I Wanna Be Like You" from* The Jungle Book' (2018, 44). He is often drunk, sometimes endangering the camp residents. Through him, the play stages a critique of 'voluntourism' in Calais. Derek's entrance, by contrast, is a self-flagellating performance of white guilt: 'On behalf of my country, I am so sorry. […] We should be ashamed' (2018, 41). His carelessness is different from Boxer's: frequently speaking over the camp's residents, he envisions the emerging camp structures as '[a] thriving bubbling town […] Hope Town,' where he can find the 'community' he deems lost in austerity Britain (2018, 51, 45). Through Derek's euphoric exclamations and utopian fantasies, the

play criticises attempts by affluent Western citizens to frame forced migration as an 'opportunity' and basis for alternative social-political models – manifested in recent years, for example, in suggestions for a 'Refugee Nation' or 'Refugia' (Walia 2021, 15; University of Oxford 2022).[30]

The Jungle is careful not to present the residents' temporary landmarks, structures, and agreements as ideals to strive for, but rather as attempts to retrieve and maintain dignity and respect in a hostile environment (Bressler 2018, 81). Romanticised notions of the camp as a place of either harmonious conviviality or joint defiance against border enforcement are immediately qualified with pointed silences, ridicule, more conflictual scenes, time jumps, or marked tone changes, usually emphasised by Safi. Whenever *The Jungle* does indulge in moments of playfulness, celebration, and sentimentality, these scenes tend to end abruptly. For example, just before the end of the play, there is a moment of reprieve when the residents think they have prevented the camp's eviction. Unlike the characters, however, the audience already knows the outcome, which has been pre-empted in the first scene. The celebration lasts only briefly:

> *More and more people join in the music, it's beginning to completely*
> *overwhelm the meeting. […]*
> *Chants of Yayayayayayaya!*
> *Maz jumps up to reprise 'Glory, Glory Man United'. Norullah joins him.*
> *[…]*
> *Everyone enjoys this brief reprieve.*
> *Until it ends abruptly.*
> **Safi**　　　The southern half of the camp was evicted six weeks
> 　　　　　　later.
>
> (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 120)

Such elements of interruption and juxtaposition – already present in the play's original 2017 script – reappear continuously in the revised 2018 version, which is more wary of presenting an overly amicable relationship between residents and volunteers. For example, Boxer

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[30] 'Refugee Nation', proposed in 2015 by millionaire Jason Buzi, was envisioned as a new island nation to resettle all forced migrants globally, 'a country which any refugee, from anywhere in the world, can call home' (Walia 2021, 15). The ongoing 2015–2025 academic project 'Refugia', coordinated by the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, is framed as 'a confederal, transnational polity emerging from the connections built up by refugees, with the help of sympathizers […], governed by refugees and migrants themselves. […] [T]he whole would be greater than the sum of its parts' (University of Oxford 2022).

insists early on that the volunteers all have self-serving motivations for being in Calais, suggesting that 'Everyone here is running from something. We're all refugees. […] I'll gan first. Missus is a dragon. […] So that's why I'm here. Fleeing the authoritarian regime of my ex-wife' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 44–45). This leads to a 'game' in which the volunteers disclose their respective motives for leaving the UK: a loss of social connection, the prospect of student debt, etc. With each confession, Boxer and Norullah proclaim, 'Refugee!' (2018, 45–46). Playfully suspending the boundaries set up by the play's central refugee–citizen binary, the scene hints at the performative frameworks that govern decision-making in asylum regimes: a person is officially recognised as a 'refugee' only once it is proclaimed by the right state agents, under the right circumstances (Jeffers 2012, 31–34). Yet at the same time, the central discrepancy of the situation is obvious throughout. The scene also highlights the dehistoricising effects of humanist proclamations that 'everyone could be a refugee', which becomes clear once Boxer's game ends with Safi:

> **Boxer**   […] What about you, mate?
> **Safi**   Me?
> **Norullah**   The civil war in Syria.
> **Boxer**   Yeah, that'd do it. Refugee.
> *The volunteers are alone in the centre, the residents looking at them. There is*
> *a strange, brief moment. 'Us' and 'them'.*
>
>   (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 46)

In the 2017 script, this 'strange, brief moment' is quickly dispersed: '*Norullah breaks it by pulling Beth into a dance, which sparks off the whole restaurant*' (Murphy and Robertson 2017, 46). The 2018 version, by contrast, resists this easy resolution and allows for a more uncomfortable and ambiguous first encounter between residents and volunteers.[31]

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[31] For a more detailed analysis of Boxer's character and the role of satirical song in the play, see Welton (2020).

'A photograph of a boy': Beth and sentimentalist humanitarianism

Beth, the 18-year-old on a gap year, emerges as a primary character whose perspective audiences are invited to relate to. Portrayed more sympathetically than the other British volunteers, she goes through the most extensive personal development – progressing from a naïve, sentimentalist-humanitarian perspective towards a more comprehensive, historicised understanding of Calais and Europe's bordering mechanisms. Initially, Beth relates to the camp and its residents primarily through media images and an abstract, empathy-based register that underpinned many solidarity practices in the summer of 2015:

> *Beth enters, holding her phone, which displays the photograph of Alan Kurdi. […]*
> **Beth**   A photograph of a boy … A little boy in blue
>   shorts and a red top … Washed up on a beach …
> *She shows everyone the photo.*
>
> (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 37–38)

While volunteering practices in the real Calais camp started long before the wide-spread circulation of the Alan Kurdi photograph, in *The Jungle*'s narrative, it is the single galvanising force that 'spark[s] an outpouring of horror and sentiment in Europe' and 'brings a new kind of resident to the Jungle: the naive and well-meaning English volunteer' (Agier et al. 2019, 95; Gill 2018). Safi comments on the irony of these contrasting (im)mobilities: 'Then, in September, everything changed. […] Alan. Alan Kurdi. From Kobani in northern Syria. […] We spend months trying to get to UK. And in September, UK came here' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 37–38, 40).

Fig. 8: Outpouring of sentiment: Beth, played by Rachel Redford, in the 2017 Young Vic production of *The Jungle*. Credit: David Sandison 2017.

Taken by Nilüfer Demir on a beach near Bodrum, Turkey, on 2 September 2015, the Alan Kurdi photograph spread across social media outlets within hours and briefly dominated global newspaper front pages (Saha 2021, 115). It was quickly called 'the kind of iconic image that will surely be republished for many years to come' and touted as having 'sparked a social movement to "welcome refugees" in Europe' (Greenslade 2015; Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 158). In the following weeks, the image prompted countless artist-activist reproductions.[32] Its iconicity and reproducibility, argue Anna Carastathis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi, 'hinged on the universal possibility of identifying with Alan Kurdi' – an identification that was often expressed in familial terms, for example in the #CouldBeMyChild hashtag trending at the time (2020, 161; Saha 2021, 115). As one caption in *The Guardian* read, 'Alan Kurdi was an individual who became

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[32] The photograph was reproduced, for instance, in songs, murals, commemorative coins, and rescue ships dedicated to Alan Kurdi. Some activists replicated or re-enacted the image by standing in as proxies for the boy: in September 2015, a group of thirty protesters, organised by Latifa Ahrar, lay face-down on a beach in Rabat, dressed in red t-shirts, blue shorts, and trainers; and artist Ai Weiwei, lying on a beach in Lesvos, recreated the photograph for *India Today* in February 2016 (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 161). Widely criticised, these visual strategies of replacement (artists and activists standing in for Alan Kurdi) made visible the logic of identification and assimilation that prevailed implicitly in many of the responses to the image.

a global icon; alone, facedown and faceless, he could have been anyone's son' (Baron 2016). The frame of the photograph excluded Alan's mother Rehanna, his brother Ghalib, and the other people who had drowned on that day (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 157).[33]

That Beth highlights Alan Kurdi's clothes – 'blue shorts and a red top' – is a telling detail. That the boy was 'dressed for the west,' some have argued, was one of the reasons why the photograph temporarily galvanised so many Europeans, when countless other images before and after it did not (Greenslade 2015). As Nadine El-Enany notes:

> Perhaps it was the innocence evoked by the body of a light-skinned child that enabled the temporary, fleeting awakening among white Europeans to a refugee movement that long-preceded the media spotlight on that photo. […] What of the refugees who do not evoke in the mind of the white European an image of their own offspring?
>
> (El-Enany 2015, 13–14)

Ida Danewid, too, highlights how many responses to the photograph appealed to a universal (rather than historically-situated) humanity (2017). Public performances of grief and lamentation, she argues, tend to conceal the political conditions and complicities that caused the death of *this* child – notably not 'anyone's child' (2017). Drawing on Gloria Wekker's framework of 'white innocence' and Lauren Berlant's work on national sentimentality, Danewid maintains that sentimental solidarities 'turn dead migrants into the conduit through which the European left redeems its *own* humanity and ethical salvation' – which begs the question of 'whose humanity is at stake and, indeed, for what purposes' (Wekker 2016; Berlant 2001; Danewid 2017, 1676).

In *The Jungle*, Beth insists that her performance of grief is justified: 'Cynical world. What sorry state have we got ourselves into if we can't honestly express our horror at what is happening? That you can't cry at the picture of a boy, dead on a beach, without some fucker telling you you're lying' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 92). The play does not exactly devalue or

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[33] A photograph that has been circulated widely, however, is that of Abdullah Kurdi, Alan's father, as he holds the body of his son during the funeral in Kobani (Barnard and Shoumali 2015; Allsopp 2017). Along with other images, Jennifer Allsopp has argued, this photograph has 'begun to weave a new narrative around what it means to be vulnerable, to be a man and to be a refugee,' as it 'depict[s] new masculinities of war that challenge the militarised assumptions' often projected onto men fleeing from warzones (2017).

dismiss the sincerity of Beth's empathic response to the image; it does, however, draw attention to the selectiveness of Europe's public grief and the systemic political disregard for the lives of most displaced children. The camp residents are acutely aware that children are killed at Europe's borders, long before one image goes viral. 15-year-old Norullah, as the audience already knows at this point, will himself eventually die trying to cross the UK border. Throughout the play, he insists that he is 'not bambino', and neither is he read as such within dominant imageries of 'this could be your child' lamentation: buried 'in the mud in Calais,' his death is not registered by cameras, news outlets, or global outpourings of grief (Murphy and Roberston 2018, 20, 38).[34]

The disconnect between Beth's speechless incredulity and the situation of the camp residents also comes through when she shows everyone the Alan Kurdi photograph, visibly in distress, and Safi and Norullah inquire about *her* wellbeing and make efforts to ensure *her* comfort:

> **Safi**   […] (*To Beth.*) Are you OK?
> **Beth**   I just … I saw this … and … I thought I should –
> **Safi**   Norullah!
> *Norullah goes to her, stuffs a fresh naan bread into her hands. […]*
> **Norullah** You are UK. You have good seat.
> **Beth**   I don't need –
> **Norullah** Sit. You queen. I am Norullah.
>
>   (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 38)

Norullah's pointedly excessive response undermines the sentimentalism of the moment. It ensures Beth's capacity to empathise does not take precedence over the experiences of the camp residents. Her abstract shock is contrasted against the tangible, everyday reality of the camp, with Norullah pulling her down onto a chair. One object is exchanged for another: Beth hands, previously holding the phone with the photograph, are now '*stuff[ed with] a fresh naan bread*' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 38). It is a symbolic encapsulation of two diverging imaginations

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[34] This is made even more explicit in the 2017 script, where Paula at one point directly addresses a camera, broadcasting her message onto TV screens in the theatre: 'Four hundred and fifty kids. Three hundred alone. […] Kids riding bikes through mud. Surviving winter in tents. […] Angel's corner. That's the muddy patch at the edge of a graveyard full of little wooden crosses' (Murphy and Robertson 2017, 23).

of Calais in tension in *The Jungle*: Beth, along with the other volunteers, moves from an uncomprehending outside perspective – filtered through fluctuating media depictions – into the immediate environment of the restaurant. Through her immersion in the camp and her encounters with the residents, she eventually reaches a more nuanced understanding of Calais.[35]

'Obviously a humanitarian crisis': Sam and adventure reporting

Questions around how images of suffering may be appropriated or weaponised within racialised regimes of exclusion come through even more strongly in *The Jungle*'s portrayal of Sam, the other 18-year-old volunteer. Like Beth, he first enters the stage holding a phone, which is swiftly removed from his hands – albeit for different reasons. Sam's device is attached to a selfie-stick, while he records an imagery and narration of Calais, intended for online circulation:

> *Sam enters, filming everything with his phone.*
> **Sam**   (*narrating*) I'm standing inside the Jungle refugee and
>   migrant camp in Calais, France. It's obviously a
>   humanitarian crisis. Less than an hour on the
>   Eurostar from St Pancras. […] Lots of fences, more

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[35] For a more satirical take on the shifting constructions of 'ideal refugeedom', hypervisibility, and sentimentalist-humanitarian frames in the Calais camp, see for example PSYCHEdelight's 2016 production *Borderline*, developed by Sophie Besse. In the play, one of the volunteers has brought her ukulele to the camp as she is 'more of a human-to-human kind of volunteer' (PSYCHEdelight 2022, 41:30–47:50). She spends her time in the camp 'looking for some Syrians,' exclusively, since she 'can really feel that they are the ones who need [her] the most': 'Syrians! Syrians! Syrians! Erm, hello? Erm, excuse me, are you from Syria? No? Ah. Syrians! Syrians!' (PSYCHEdelight 2022, 41:30–47:50). When she finally finds a camp resident from Syria, the play stages his entrance in royal fashion: he emerges on a balcony like a celebrity-king greeting his subjects, accompanied by fanfare, drumrolls, and flashlights, with the volunteer characters waving back fully enraptured, bowing, and cleaning the floor for 'the Syrian' to walk on. A later scene shows him again as he is sitting with a pained expression, begrudgingly listening to the ukulele player's jarred rendition of 'Everything's Gonna Be Alright'. Satirising misguided volunteer behaviours in Calais, the scene is also a commentary on how European concern for refugees tends to be selective, affect-driven, and transient. When PSYCHEdelight released a performance film of *Borderline* in 2022, it used this retrospective view on the 2015–2016 Calais camp to further highlight how humanitarian hierarchies fluctuate with each new 'crisis' circulating momentarily in the media – and with politically motivated decisions about which contexts of conflict constitute not 'crises' but 'safe countries'. In a language class in the play, two students quickly change their answers about their country of origin since 'Sudan no good! Syria, Syria!' (PSYCHEdelight 2022, 41:30–47:50). When two other students proudly announce that they 'are from Afghanistan,' expecting this to elicit an enthusiastic response from the volunteer characters, the language teacher is quick to rebuke them: 'Well, Afghanistan […] is a beautiful country, and it's safe – here in 2016! You know? Wait five years for your moment in the spotlight! Now sit back down' (PSYCHEdelight 2022, 41:30–47:50).

fences being built. Maybe five or six thousand tents, some makeshift shacks. One police officer standing on the bridge watching over the camp. […] I was expecting more authority. But there don't seem to be any checkpoints at all.

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 42)

Through Sam, *The Jungle* most explicitly addresses neocolonial structures in humanitarian aid. While he gradually reaches a more differentiated perspective, in his early scenes, his voyeuristic-ethnographic streak comes through especially strongly. In contrast to Safi, who highlights his credentials as subjective storyteller, Sam fashions himself as a disinterested documentarian of Calais. In his narration, the camp is reduced to a catalogue of stereotypical imageries: fences, tents, makeshift shacks, 'obviously a humanitarian crisis' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 42). Safi later provides more context on how such crisis imageries of Calais were circulated deliberately as a mode of deterrence: 'We're in burzakh, purgatory, waiting on the Judgement, in perfect view of the motorway, for everyone to see. A warning to the world. Don't come. Don't try' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 105). His remark highlights how the perpetuation of Calais as a site of precariousness and emergency – both its material existence as a place and its visual presence in media discourses – became part of deliberate border strategies.

Fig. 9: Bearing witness: Sam, played by Alex Lawther, in the 2017 Young Vic production of *The Jungle*.
Credit: Marc Brenner 2017.

Sam, however, is unaware of how his filming is contributing to these representative contexts. In his desire to document and expose what is 'obviously a humanitarian crisis,' he reflects what Heath Cabot has called 'crisis chasing' – 'a kind of salvage anthropology of the refugee crisis,' which perpetuates not only media discourses but also academic outlets (2019, 262). She identifies a larger paternalistic trend in scholarship in the Global North 'to study "refugee experiences," recount "refugee stories," or reproduce "refugee voices" […] framed as an urgent moral imperative' (2019, 267). Against a context where sites of border violence are systemically invisibilised and disavowed by state governments, attempts to document and recentre these spaces can present important representative counterpoints. Sam's selfie-stick-toting portrayal in *The Jungle*, by contrast, reflects a markedly appropriative and exploitative practice of image circulation, serving primarily his self-promotion as a 'brave' documentarian of the camp.

As journalist and researcher Ramzy Baroud notes, 'refugees are not subjects for a social media gallery' (2016). He criticises recurring instances

> where 'activists' – westerners, especially – seek […] a respite from their consumerism-driven, often uneventful world. They view their relationships with humanitarian crises as saviors, carrying the 'White Man's burden' wherever they go, yet always aware, if not proud, of their privilege and their sense of superiority. […] It is far easier to declare oneself an 'activist' and snap a thousand photos which parade victims of war in total isolation from one's own moral responsibility.

> (Baroud 2016)

Sam sees himself as 'doing something' simply by 'bearing witness' and 'documenting' violence and injustice (Slaughter 2014; Dawes 2007, 1, 7). He justifies his presence in Calais by arguing that '[i]t's terribly important to be able to see and understand different cultures. Bear witness' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 46). Boxer immediately mocks him and points out the privilege and transgression of Sam's position: 'Jesus, say no more! Put that silver spoon back in your mouth, Paddington Bear Witness! You'll have someone's eye out' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 46). In the 2017 script, Boxer's assessment of the newly arrived volunteers' reactions to Calais is even more pointed: 'Choose your adjective: shocking, shameful, appalling, galling, dirty, awful, but oh so inspiring!' (Murphy and Robertson 2017, 44). Following a long narrative tradition of 'heroic' humanitarian writer-protagonists – traced by Joseph Slaughter from *Don Quixote* over Jean-Henri Dunant to Nicholas Kristof –, Sam creates a (partly online) identity for himself as a white-knight figure 'who must venture into a world of wrongs *and* must tell humanitarian adventure stories of wrongs righted' (Slaughter 2014, 47; original emphasis).

His narrative power over the camp, however, is swiftly interrupted when he attempts to take a photo of Yasin, one of the camp's residents:

Sam   […] (*To Yasin.*) Oh, hello. Where are you from? Photo?
Yasin (*snatching Sam's phone*) No photos!
The phone is instantly traded, and traded again. Suddenly lots of people are involved.
Sam   I'm sorry. If I could just have my phone back, please. I'll delete it.

[…]
Safi   Norullah! (*Pashto.*) Give him his phone.
Norullah gives it to Sam.
Sam   Thank you.
Safi   Ask before you take someone's photo, OK?

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 42)

Sam initially lacks any awareness of just how severely he is encroaching on people's lives in the camp. Here photographs taken without consent present not only a violation of privacy, but also a potential piece of biometric identification that could diminish chances for asylum in the UK. Under the Dublin regulation, which requires that refugees claim asylum in the first EU country they enter, photographs can become weaponised to trace a person's locations. As Rob Pinney notes, 'Cameras are treated with utmost suspicion [in the Calais camp] […]. Many feel a sense of anger towards the way that some photographers and filmmakers have chosen to work, and especially over the "theft" of their image in the form of a photograph taken without permission' (2016). In the play, Yasin and Norullah quickly retaliate Sam's 'theft' by taking away his phone, and his narrative authority with it.

3. Narrative Authority and Decolonial Interjections in *The Jungle*

'Already they make us animals': Salar and the politics of naming

Debates around who should have the authority to narrate, define, and organise the camp space reemerge throughout *The Jungle*, also in the characters' numerous allusions to literature, music, culture, and history. While the play is presented as the memory and narration of a Syrian man, its references still frequently mark it out as written with the projected perspectives of primarily Anglophone audiences in mind (tellingly, Safi is specified as a '[f]ormer student of *English* Literature and Language,' much like Murphy and Robertson themselves [2018, 25; added emphasis; Thorpe 2016]). The restaurant in *The Jungle* may be called 'the Afghan Flag', but Britain is the nation flagged most consistently in the textual geography of *The Jungle*, with allusions to popular culture ranging from *Worzel Gummidge* over Kevin Keegan to *Monarch of the Glen* (Koch and Paasi, 2016). These cultural markers are frequently employed to infer information about the volunteers, such as their class backgrounds, political attitudes, and cultural-historical awareness within the camp context (Sam's social-economic distance from the camp, for instance, is reinforced in references to his Eton education, his Barbour jacket, etc.). At the same time, some of the meanings commonly attached to these markers change within the transnational camp context.[36] Enmeshed in questions of bordering, belonging, and authority, they become part of *The*

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[36] For example, Okot, a seventeen-year-old boy from Sudan, uses 'White Cliffs of Dover' as his ringtone. This song, popularised in 1942 by 'the Forces' Sweetheart' Vera Lynn, became famous as a rallying song during World War II. In 2009, it was reportedly the subject of a lawsuit filed by Lynn against the British National Party: to raise funds ahead of the European election, the far-right party had been selling a CD compilation that used the song as its title, advertised as '[a]n unforgettable trip down memory lane' for party sympathisers who 'like reminiscing about the second world war' (Bates 2009). While, on the surface, a peculiar choice of ringtone for a Sudanese teenager, this detail is associated with new meanings in *The Jungle*. As framed by Okot, the song's associations with changing histories of patriotism and both antifascist *and* fascist mobilising in Britain recede into the background. Instead, 'White Cliffs' is linked to a symbolic, iconised idea of the British border and a certain perspective on Britain – as a place that is just out of reach and invested with emotion and imagined as desirable by Okot: 'I have one dream only. To stand on white cliffs of Dover and see Jungle this big …' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 60). It is one of the instances where a cultural reference is explicitly addressed and recontextualised in the play. Okot later qualifies this

Jungle's wider interrogation into language, naming, and mapping practices as methods of marking out space and exerting symbolic and material power.

Fig. 10: Hostile host: Salar, played by Ben Turner, in the 2019 Curran production of *The Jungle*.
Credit: Little Fang 2019.

Salar, the owner of the Afghan restaurant, is an especially vocal opponent of the volunteers' attempts to occupy discursive and material space in the camp. As the central host figure through whom presence/absence on stage is structured in *The Jungle*, he fulfils a double-role similar to Safi, figuring as both a character and a slightly removed dramaturgist. More antagonistic towards the British volunteers than Safi, Salar questions the legitimacy of their

further in front of Norullah, suggesting that his sentimentalised relation to the 'White Cliffs' (the UK as a place of longing, his 'one dream only') is also in part an act he performs specifically for the British volunteers: 'I do not want UK. I want home. I want Sudan. But we cannot go back. […] Look at those cliffs, Norullah, look. They are so close' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 101).

presence in the restaurant and the camp, initially attempting to send them away: 'Now there is a problem. The British. […] What are they doing here? […] We tell them, go! You are not wanted' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 47–49). In his exchanges with Sam, he often refers to Britain's imperial legacies and ongoing role in Afghanistan, insisting that 'I know what British are like. They go to places they don't belong and tell people what to do' (2018, 50).

Along with Safi, Mohammed, Helene, and Ali, Salar repeatedly criticises and mocks the volunteers for the ignorant and neocolonial attitudes conveyed in some of their misplaced references and mistranslations. Sam at one point tries to introduce a new system of resource allocation and mapping in the camp, apparently oblivious to the already-existing place names and spatial organisations. When he explains to the residents that he has devised 'an algorithm' for distributing resources, they quickly call out his patronising perspective:

Sam	I've weighed it. It's like an algorithm.
Helene	Algorithm?
Sam	Sorry, it's an English word –
Safi	It's an Arabic word, actually.

The residents applaud this.

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 64)

Sam's suggestion to divide the camp into 'quadrants' – to replace the neighbourhoods that had previously developed along lines of national belonging – is quickly discarded:

Ali	Where is Kurdistan?
Sam	It isn't on there.
Ali	You don't recognise State of Kurdistan?
Sam	No. I mean, yes. I'm grouping it in this quadrant here with Iraq and Iran –
Ali	You're doing what?
Sam	Or not.
Ali	Do you know nothing of our history?!
	[…]
Sam	OK, everybody. Forget about the quadrants!

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 62–63)

In a dynamic that repeats itself at several points in the play, the volunteers' missteps are exposed through humour and ridicule. By inviting theatregoers to judge – and often laugh about – the characters' paternalistic attitudes, *The Jungle* generally aligns audience members as knowing co-critics, rather than direct addressees of these narrative interventions. At the same time, however, the volunteers' blind spots and mistakes indicate systemic inequalities in which theatregoers are implicated more directly themselves. Levelled at the Eton-educated Sam, Ali's accusatory question 'Do you have any idea of our history?!' also works to critique wider Western educational systems that have long failed to adequately acknowledge colonial histories. Later in the scene, Salar again calls out Sam's performance of 'white innocence' and historical amnesia, having to spell out to him the significance of Anglo-Afghan historical referent points (Wekker 2019):

Salar	One day I will tell you about my village in Afghanistan. You have destroyed it three times in the last two hundred years.
	[…]
Sam	I've never destroyed your village.
Salar	Your army has.
Sam	My army?
	[…]
Salar	1839. 1888. 2001.
Sam	What?
Salar	Karz. My village in Afghanistan. […] You know nothing of our struggle.

<div align="center">(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 65–66, 112)</div>

Through repeated interjections such as these, Salar reintroduces histories that, to Sam, seem remote and disconnected from both his personal experience and the present camp context. For Salar, by contrast, the Calais camp is a continuation of longer cycles of persecution, eviction, and forced migration, intrinsically connected to European interventionism and imperialism. When state authorities threaten and eventually destroy his restaurant along with the rest of the camp, Salar recognises this violent expulsion as a pattern that has been playing out not only in Calais (where new encampments are routinely demolished and deterred), but also in his own biography and over generations: 'I won't move. […] I have been moved, and moved, and moved,

and moved. […] I can't be moved again.' (Murphy and Roberston 2018, 115). When Sam tries to detach himself from this seemingly distant context of injustice – 'I've never destroyed your village.' –, Salar does not let him disavow responsibility quite so easily: 'Your army has.' (2018, 66). By confronting the volunteers – and theatregoers – with these repeating and ongoing histories of persecution, Salar also demands that they acknowledge their implication, as tax-paying British citizens, in the state structures and institutions they inhabit, benefit from, and contribute to (Rothberg 2019).

In exchanges such as these, the Calais camp is presented as a site where imperial pasts return, intersect, and continue. This also comes through when Derek first enters the camp and mishears the Pashto name 'Zhangal' ('Forest') for 'Jungle'. Safi starts to correct him, but Derek has already plunged into a recitation of Rudyard Kipling's poem 'The Law of the Wolves':

Safi	Zhangal. A Pashto word that means –
Derek	Jungle!
Safi	Not quite.
Derek	'Now this is the law of the Jungle, and the Law runneth forward and back, 'The strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.'
Mohammed	You must be very tired.

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 41)

Although Derek's viewpoint later changes, in this scene, he appears oblivious to the racist and dehumanising inferences of the name 'Jungle' and of citing the author of 'The White Man's Burden': to him, the Kipling poem merely illustrates the need for cooperation and community in the camp. Safi and Mohammed's reactions highlight this disjuncture, and later Salar more explicitly reiterates the term's connotations with colonial 'savage' discourses: 'Jungle? So already they make us animals' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 50). Defying the volunteers' ostensible authority over the camp, he and other residents keep using the name 'Zhangal'.

Despite this contextualisation, however, the name 'Jungle' catches on – both within the performance and in wider media discourses on the Calais camp. As Agier and colleagues note, the resignifying from 'Zhangal' to 'Jungle' further added to the politics of fear surrounding this 'unnameable place': the Westernisation of the camp's moniker 'designate[d] it from this point of view, French and European, as a negatively exotic and disturbing place, more distant than it [was] in reality, and less human' (2019, 2). The play itself uses '*The Jungle*' as its title (and not, for example, '*Zhangal*'). This works at least in part as a form of semantic reappropriation: as a title, the term 'connotes more than it denotes' – a cluster of meaning beyond its original usage, including Salar's critical reading of the name (Cole 2018). Yet even so, the racialised connotations persist, and *The Jungle* has itself further contributed to the prevalence of the moniker.

This is one of the instances where the play's investment in naturalist-documentary formats restricts its capacities to subvert the terms of its historical context – also indicating limitations of autocritiques formulated primarily through ironic and self-referential registers. *The Jungle* sometimes fails to extend its in-text scrutiny to its wider storytelling-restaurant space. Within the parameters of the play, characters such as Salar repeatedly interject and point to historical continuities and colonial legacies in the camp, yet *The Jungle* rarely moves beyond this 'indexical' decoloniality. As a production, it is not always receptive to the characters' narrative interventions, leaving little room to challenge in a more substantial way the neo-colonial structures that the camp residents criticise. As the 'host', Salar is ostensibly in charge of the restaurant and, by extension, the theatre stage, yet his authority is compromised: the true terms are still dictated by a Western-citizen perspective (just as Safi's role as narrator disguises the play's underlying Western-citizen narratorial voice and positionality).

There are other occasions where the play inadvertently reproduces the power structures it critiques. At several points, characters contest the differential authority afforded to Anglophone and non-Anglophone textualities in the camp: certain cultural-historical references are canonised

and presented as presumably universal signifiers (such as Derek's Kipling references), while others are deemed too culturally specific, requiring further explanation and justification (such as Salar's references to British involvement in Afghanistan). The play itself, however, is not always equally hospitable to these textualities. In contrast to the specificity and variety of Anglophone signifiers, references to other cultural products and linguistic varieties are often generic or entirely unspecified in the script: '*A song is sung in Arabic*' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 21), '*TVs blast out Bollywood movies as music from all nationalities collides into one*' (2018, 37), '*Translations throughout the room*' (2018, 50), '*People join in with their own prayers*' (2018, 81), '*[S]ongs from many cultures can be heard throughout the Jungle*' (2018, 95). Instead of a pluralist representation of different textualities on equal terms, these generalisations and omissions produce a discursive hierarchy in which non-Anglophone references are frequently otherised.

During the performance event, these gaps in the stage directions necessarily become voiced, enacted, and associated with more specific meanings. Some elements of generalisation persist, however. When characters translate English into Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, or Tigrinya, this often happens in close succession or simultaneously, resulting in a tangle of overlaid voices. Similar to how '*music from all nationalities collides into one*' in the script, the diversity of languages here '*collides into one*' on stage, creating a sense of 'surround sound' rather than distinct linguistic layers (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 37).

'You have heard this story before': Okot and choric testimonies

A similar tendency towards universalisation – a colliding of many into one – underpins multiple scenes where camp residents enact stories in chorus. *The Jungle* uses this narrative device at several

points to illustrate the recurrent, systemic dimensions of border violence; as Safi remarks, 'And you have heard this story before. A thousand times, I am sure' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 83). Much like Norullah's phone-snatching and Salar's interjections, these 'choric' scenes aim to shift the dynamics of narrative authority and redirect the critical gaze away from the camp residents and onto the British volunteers. For example, in an English language class organised by Beth, the students narrate and re-enact their attempts to reach the UK in a lorry, with everyone adding a line to complete the collective 'story': 'I cut the canvas with my knife –' 'I climb through the hole –', etc. (2018, 54). Beth's role at the beginning is to correct the English of her students, structure their narration, and advance the story with further questions: 'Tell me about the lorries!' 'Have you all done this?' 'What happens next?' etc. (2018, 52–53). The dynamics of the asylum interview are mirrored: a British citizen is asking forced migrants to answer questions about their journey to Europe and frame them in a concise, grammatically correct narrative. Beth is teaching not only a language class, but also a prep course for the narrative requirements of the 'asylum story' (Woolley 2017). However, while this collective script is rehearsed, the teacher–student dynamics are progressively reversed, with the students instructing Beth about the tactics they employ when they hide in lorries: 'Keep up, Beth!' 'I think Miss Beth has never try!' 'You should try, Miss Beth!' (2018, 55–56). Eventually Beth becomes the object of questioning, asked to understand and even enact her students' narratives by climbing into a box – the parameters that typically govern the narrative process have been momentarily suspended.

The choric voice effectively highlights the pressures placed on people in asylum regimes to frame diverging experiences as a concise, recognisable, and repeatable narrative – to 'share their story', with the narrative requirements in juridical, creative, and activist contexts stretching variably from testimonies of suffering to tales of resilience. However, this narrative-dramaturgic device itself risks universalising and otherising conflicting textualities into one generic 'story'. This comes through in an extended scene where Okot, a 17-year-old boy in Beth's class, decides

to share his experiences of fleeing war, genocide, and torture in Sudan – an intimate testimonial setting that later blends into a more encompassing choric narration. *The Jungle* largely insists on the right of the camp residents to withhold such narratives, against a representative context that frequently denies this right. This is the only instance where the play stages a traditional testimony, dovetailing closely with the performative requirements of asylum interviews.

Fig. 11: Reversing the gaze: Okot, played by John Pfumojena, in the 2018 St. Ann's Warehouse production of *The Jungle*.
Credit: Sara Krulwich/*The New York Times* 2018.

Standing under a spotlight, Okot's wounded and scarred body is exposed for everyone to see – providing visible proof of bodily harm, 'the ultimate source of legitimacy' (Fassin 2001, 5). His story is 'made recognisable' to Beth and the audience along traditional humanitarian imageries and asylum stories: he 'narrate[s] [himself] into a position of legitimacy' (Woolley 2017,

380). It is an ultimately futile endeavour. Even though Okot's testimony fulfils the rigid narrative-performative requirements associated with both human rights and humanitarian frameworks, these structures eventually fail to protect him: he is abused by French state authorities and never reaches the UK. Through his larger character arch, *The Jungle* also highlights inconsistencies and failures of humanitarian paradigms of recognition that require of people to repeatedly perform frames of vulnerability, suffering, and trauma.

In the testimony scene, the script and scene design also underscore the presence of those who listen, implicating both Beth and the audience in the power structures of Okot's narration. Like in the language class, rather than being subjected to the scrutiny of Beth's questions, Okot controls the terms of their encounter. Before he recounts his story, Beth has to prove to him her ability to listen:

Okot	A refugee dies many times.
Beth	I know.
Okot	You know?
Beth	I didn't mean that. I mean I can imagine.
A long pause.	
Okot	What do you know of me?

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 74–75)

Beth hesitantly tries to answer Okot's questions about himself, the war in Darfur, and the conditions refugees face in the Mediterranean: '*He is silent. She is forced to continue. She is uneasy*,' until eventually, Beth admits, 'I don't know' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 75).

Even though the scene's focus remains on Okot and Beth, the lightening and seating arrangement in the theatre also ensure that audience members are always visible to each other. Seated in close vicinity to the characters on stage, set designer Miriam Buether explains, 'the audience can't lean back and hide in the dark' – they are not just witnessing but participating in the scene (Zack 2019). In another departure from *The Jungle*'s predominantly embracing gestures towards its audiences, the immersive setup is used here to place the theatregoer in a less

favourable position than that of a knowing co-critic and ally. As listeners of Okot's testimony, the audience is implicated in the action in a more conflictual way – in what Casey calls 'ethotic recognition,' whereby a play 'attempts to heighten an audience's awareness of their relationality toward refugees' (2021, 351).

This slightly more uneasy position is also underlined by Safi, who occasionally takes a seat among theatregoers and provides additional context and translations, but also calls out the limits of mediating between these perspectives. In a departure from the 2017 script, the revised version of *The Jungle* has Okot – whose excellent English skills are highlighted at several points – switch to Arabic when he speaks about his mother. Unlike in other scenes, where translations overlap and collide, Arabic is employed here in a symbolically and politically significant way. Against a context in which people are expected to meet the linguistic requirements of politico-juridical settings, Okot's multilingual narration refuses to accommodate his listeners and instead creates a more fluid representation of spoken language and codeswitching. While Safi translates the Arabic passages for Beth and the audience, he also highlights gaps in understanding between Okot and his listeners that cannot be easily bridged or translated: 'She doesn't know. They don't know. […] Do you think we'd be here if they knew?' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 77). It is one of the few instances where Safi's addressing of the audience takes on a more confrontational tone: the otherwise embracing 'you' has turned into a more distanced 'they'. In this moment audiences are themselves implicated in Beth's position as a privileged listener and her inability and failure to understand Okot.

Yet these ambiguities and tensions fade into the background once the scene turns into a choric narration. Towards the end of Okot's testimony, several other camp residents join in, progressing in turns his account of crossing the Mediterranean:

> **Okot**   We go out to bigger boat.
> **Ali**   A fishing trawler. Fifteen metres long. Wooden.
>   Strong.

Yasin	But old.
Safi	[...] The zodiacs keep coming. This boat is for two hundred people.
Maz	Here there are seven hundred.
Hamid	Nine hundred.
Omid	Fifteen hundred.
Okot	People on top of people on top of people.
Felah	The heat is unbearable.

<div align="center">(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 80)</div>

Casey has analysed that this switch to a shared narration as a distancing effect that interrupts Okot's 'poetic, horrifying, and riveting' story (2021, 363). Rather than using the narrative 'to arouse intense pity,' he argues, the play here 'breaks the spell of narrative immersion and forces the audience to see it in a larger context. [...] We recognize that this is not only Okot's story but the story of hundreds of thousands or even millions of refugees' (2021, 363). Casey links this use of the choric voice to Ancient Greek drama, arguing that it 'creates a dialectical pendulation between the individual story and the collective experience. The personal is presented as political without losing the human individual' (2021, 363).

This may be true of 'the human individual' Okot; the other participants of this collective narration, however, can hardly be called individuated here. Of the many characters in the scene, Okot is still the figure who Beth and the audience are encouraged to care about the most – a singling-out that is later called out by Ali, the play's smuggler figure. When Beth tries to arrange a passage for Okot, Ali asks her,

Ali	Why him?
Beth	Do I need a reason?
Ali	There are many boys in the Jungle.

<div align="center">(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 103–104)</div>

Even though Beth does not openly acknowledge it, Okot is distinguished from these 'many boys' in a way that recalls her empathic identification with the Alan Kurdi photo: his closeness to her, his excellent English, his ability and willingness to communicate his experiences in a format that is largely recognisable to his listeners, etc. The other characters who partake in the shared

86

testimony, however, do not receive the same degree of individuation and attention. Throughout the play, only refugee characters are relegated to such a collective, anonymous narrative voice. Some, such as Felah, Maz, Hamid, and Omid, hardly ever appear in another capacity – a few of them do not even feature in the script's character list. Their role is primarily to echo, repeat, and multiply the same single narration. Rather than creating intersectional perspectives, agonistic textualities, or commentary akin to the Chorus in Greek theatre, the main task of these (already only vaguely drawn) characters is, again, to produce 'surround sound' on stage. The play employs them as generally interchangeable, token 'refugee' figures, without ever expanding on their specific biographies and contexts of displacement.[37]

There is one scene, however, where *The Jungle* embeds its choric voice in a more nuanced critique of differential representative regimes and solidarity practices, specifically responses to the November 2015 Paris attacks. Commenting on the reporting following the ISIS attacks, Safi stresses how persistent misrepresentations changed the political climate and affected European responses to people fleeing from Syria:

> **Safi**   […] It was also reported that a Syrian refugee
> passport was found with the body of one of the
> attackers. It was fake. But does it matter?
> In that moment, the refugee, terror, the Jungle and
> me, were bound together. […]
> The horror I escaped had found me.

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 83)

As in his earlier contextualisation of the Alan Kurdi photograph, Safi again highlights how developments and volunteering practices in Calais were conditioned by shifting media discourses: 'Alan Kurdi changed everything, and the night of the 13th of November changed

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[37] This tokenisation also comes through when comparing the 2017 and 2018 script versions. In the transition, the roles of 'refugee chorus' characters such as Yasin, Hamid, and Yohannes have been removed, changed, or shuffled, without this affecting the script in any substantial way – neither version features the specific biographies and contexts of displacement of these characters in a significant way. These slippages emerge, for example, when Yasin – specified in the 2018 character list as a young man from Iraq – refers to his hometown as 'Gaza City', not 'Basra' as in the 2017 version (it is now Hamid who says he is from 'Basra') (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 84; Murphy and Robertson 2017, 83).

everything again' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 83). Citing these two pivotal media events together, Safi indicates the entanglements between seemingly contrasting media constructions of refugees as humanitarian subjects (associated primarily with women and children) and undesirable threats (typically projected onto men). These figurations, notes Bishupal Limbu, 'have coagulated into a standard discursive mode that one finds routinely in journalistic writing and other news media' (2009, 268). It is frequently the same media outlets that perpetuate both these gendered and racialised stereotypes alongside each other – and profit from the clicks, virality, and sales figures these constructions generate (Walia 2021, 2).

Fig. 12: Praying for Paris: Boxer, played by Trevor Fox; Paula, played by Jo McInnes; Okot, played by John Pfumojena; Safi, played by Ammar Haj Ahmad; and Salar, played by Rachid Sabitri, in the 2018 St. Ann's Warehouse production of *The Jungle*.
Credit: Teddy Wolff 2018.

Following Safi's remarks, several camp residents distance themselves from the attacks and publicly solidarize themselves with Paris. While volunteers are also holding up signs in solidarity,

it is primarily the men of colour in the camp who bear the onus of condemning Islamist

terrorism and correcting false claims made by some Western newspapers and far-right politicians:

A vigil.
Signs reading #Pray4Paris are lifted.
A minute of silence ends.

Safi Thank you, everyone. I am writing an open letter,
     from all the citizens of the Jungle, condemning the
     attacks –
Boxer It's got nothing to do with you lot.
Safi   We know this –
     […]
Mohammed […] The pictures I see in the news, I recognise.
     It is Darfur. I know the pain. It is why I'm here.
Salar   It is the streets of Kabul.
Hamid Basra.
Ali   Halabja.
Yasin   Gaza City.
Safi   Aleppo.
Mohammed Today we are all Paris.

<div align="center">(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 83–84)</div>

This scene of camp residents collectively declaring 'we are all Paris' would have easily presented

another instance of universalisation in the script. Safi's contextualisation, however, highlights that

this solidarizing happens against the context of racist and Islamophobic media reporting that puts

pressure on refugees, particularly young men of colour, to condemn Islamist terrorism.

Positioning themselves in solidarity with Paris, Safi, Mohammed, Salar, Hamid, Ali, and Yasin

also distance themselves from the 'militarised masculinities' projected onto them within

antagonistic refugees-as-threats border imaginaries (Allsopp 2017). Unlike Boxer and the other

volunteers, the residents immediately understand that the Paris attacks further jeopardize their

rights claims within European border regimes. As Áine Josephine Tyrrell puts it, 'As the ultimate

outsiders of this society, they shall be punished […] and held accountable for the offenses

committed against white French citizens' (2020, 160). In the play, Salar makes more explicit how

the Paris attacks were instrumentalised as justifications for increased border governance, racial

profiling, and military interventions: 'France is in a state of emergency. The police have more

power. They closed the borders' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 86).

The scene also draws out how publicised, coordinated expressions of solidarity in the West tend to be selective, addressing victims of terrorism in Europe, but rarely elsewhere. In November 2015, this became apparent in the differential international responses to two other attacks which closely preceded the ones in Paris. Only hours before, on 12 November 2015, two suicide bombings in Beirut killed 43 people and injured at least 239. Committed in the immediate vicinity of Bourj el-Barajneh camp, which houses primarily Palestinians and Syrians, it was the most fatal bombing in Lebanon since the end of the civil war in 1990 (Graham 2015). As with the Paris attacks, ISIS claimed responsibility, yet the Beirut bombings received not nearly the same level of attention and outpouring of grief in the West. As Habib Battah remarks, 'while monuments across the world had been lit up with the French flag out,' the victims of the Beirut attacks a day earlier were omitted 'from the international stage of outrage,' with many Western news outlets instead 'dilut[ing] the massacres with qualifying adjectives that labelled the victims according to their geography and assumed political leadership' (2015). This reinforced a longstanding pattern whereby war, terror, and violence, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, are normalised and framed as ostensibly eternal crises. Against this context of differential reporting and selective solidarities, *The Jungle* momentarily recentres sites that are systemically side-lined in Western-centric media discourses and performances of collective grief. As the characters join the *#Pray4Paris* protests, they also name some of the gaps in these discourses: Darfur, Kabul, Basra, Halabja, Gaza City, Aleppo.

'All paid for by UK': Helene and the Calais camp as 'British' space

Beyond the choric scenes, other aspects of *The Jungle* draw out more explicitly how borders act differently upon people, especially exchanges involving Helene, a young Eritrean woman. Like

Salar, she presents an 'ungrateful refugee' figure, who refuses to perform the scripts of gratitude and docility expected of her in European border regimes (Nayeri 2017; 2019). Yet unlike the unified front suggested by the play's choric voice, the two characters often disagree, with Salar initially trying to restrict Helene's access to his restaurant:

Salar	Why is she in my restaurant?
Helene	She is called Helene.
Salar	You should be in the French centre. There are sleeping places for women there.
Safi	The centre only has a few places. It was full after a week.
Salar	Where is her husband?
Helene	I do not have husband.
Salar	Zhangal is no place for woman on her own.
Helene	And this is why I am here. Our voices should be heard at these meetings.

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 33)

More so than the men in Calais, Helene continuously has to reassert her right to participate in the camp's spaces and decision-making processes (a claiming of discursive-political space that also occurs on a meta-theatrical level: compared to the 2017 script, Helene's part has been significantly extended in the 2018 version). She becomes a spokesperson for other Eritrean women in Calais, emphasising the specific challenges, threats, and rights violations that they face: 'While you are talking, all Eritrean women are still in tents. A group of us have to sleep in the church because men tried to come in the night. Two of them are with child. The only protection we have is a whistle from Paula. We need strong wooden house with door and lock' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 66). In her interactions with Salar and the volunteers, Helene frequently underlines how intersecting forms of racialised and gendered violence condition her experiences in Europe.

Fig. 13: Ungrateful refugee: Helene, played by Nahel Tzegai, in the 2017 Young Vic production of *The Jungle*. Credit: David Sandison 2017.

Helene also keeps reminding the volunteers that her efforts to reach the UK are intrinsically linked to British colonial histories. Through her, as with Salar, *The Jungle* recentres the role of racism and imperial legacies in European border governance. Paula at one point tries to delegitimise Helene's presence in the camp – and in Western Europe –, suggesting that Helene made a 'choice to come this far,' rather than '[claiming] asylum in the first safe country you come to,' as stipulated in the Dublin regulation (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 91). Helene immediately rebukes her and calls out the border hierarchies and prejudices that the volunteers are implicitly replicating: 'Paula thinks I am economic migrant. […] I didn't choose my life, Paula. […] I didn't claim asylum in Italy, where I landed, because they treat refugee like animal. My cousin is in UK. I speak English. Everyone in Eritrea does, because UK used to run Eritrea!' (2018, 91). Having to continuously spell out to the volunteers how European racism and imperial histories have acted

upon her life, Helene understands refugee camps like Calais as 'postcolonial entities' (Davies and Isakjee 2019, 214). Along with Salar, she is acutely aware how 'race, othering and empire continue to underpin the logics of contemporary border politics' (Davies and Isakjee 2019, 214).

Following her encounters in Calais and her cousin's experiences of racism in the UK, Helene grows increasingly wary of European proclamations of goodwill and ignorance regarding the camp. As Salar maintains from the start, the Calais camp has never been simply a political oversight or exception:

Helene   I spoke with a woman who says people in UK don't
                    know what is happening here.
Salar   You believe this?
Helene   If they know, maybe the border will open.
Salar   They know.

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 48)

Here the references to 'knowing' and 'not knowing' about refugee contexts highlight not a fundamental gap in understanding (as in the testimony scene between Okot, Beth, and Safi), but a deliberate politics of ignorance maintained by European politicians and wider publics – 'an agnopolitical expression of power' (Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017, 1276). Helene and Salar both reject the idealised notions that some volunteers harbour about Europe as a space where human rights and freedom prevail. Through their remarks, the citizen/non-citizen relationship in the camp instead emerges as conflictual, riven, and conditioned by imperial histories.

Throughout *The Jungle*, the British characters – and theatre audiences – are confronted with the complicities of European structures in maintaining a politics of 'violent inaction' in Calais, including the human rights institutions that the volunteers hold in such high regard (Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017). When Okot is unlawfully detained, injured, stripped of his passport, and coerced to sign a document without a translator or lawyer, Beth screams at the French prison guard: 'This is not France! He's a seventeen-year-old boy! Look at him! This is not France! You've forced him to sign documents! […] There's a European Convention of the Rights

of the Child, don't you dare say this is France!' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 72–73). In an inversion of the residents' declaration of solidarity, 'we are all Paris,' Beth's assertion that '[t]his is not France' here works to express her indignation at the conditions in Calais (2018, 84, 72). Repeated by British characters at several points in the play, this pronouncement also fulfils another function: it symbolically rejects the camp from the idealised space that the volunteers imagine Europe to be – an envisioned 'bastion of democracy, liberty, and universal rights' (Danewid 2017, 1675). Claiming that the Calais camp 'is not France' works to discursively maintain the integrity of the fantasy, concealing the causal link between the two spaces. Since the Europe of the volunteers' imagination cannot accommodate the violence and rights violations committed in border spaces such as Calais, they maintain that, somewhere else, there must still exist a different version of Europe that is a space of dignity and equality – even as the camp manifests the crisis of this very idea.[38] Instead of a site actively produced, maintained, and funded by European political decision-making, the camp is framed as a space where political and juridical structures are not working properly, similar to pronunciations that 'Europe is better than this' – even against overwhelming historical and present-day evidence to the contrary.[39] Responsibility is thus externalised.

In the scene with the prison guard, Beth threatens to report Okot's case to 'Lawyers. Human rights lawyers. In Paris' – the 'real' France, where rights and justice supposedly prevail (Murphy and Robertson, 2018, 72). The prison guard eventually agrees to release Okot, yet in the same moment, the play casts doubt on whether the 'proper' legal structures that Beth alludes to

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[38] I am grateful to my PhD colleague Hari Reed, who first alerted me to this dimension of the 'This is not France' discursive strategy in the play. Hari generously shared and discussed with me insights from her doctoral research on creative representations of the Calais camp, which was an invaluable addition to my critical readings in this chapter (her 2021 thesis, which is under embargo until 2026, can be viewed at https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/11256/).

[39] For instance, in August 2015, François Heisbourg criticised the rise of far-right nationalism and the inadequate responses of EU institutions to mass displacement by announcing that 'Europe is better than this; so is France' (2015). Similarly, reporting on the conditions that refugees faced in the Opatovac transit camp in Croatia, Lydia Gall and Izza Leghtas wrote in October 2015 that 'as Europeans we felt ashamed […]. Surely Europe is better than this' (2015).

would make any difference. Later in the scene, she admits that she lied to the guard to secure Okot's release: 'I don't know anyone in Paris' (2018, 73). Her 'human rights lawyers' are a fiction. In a much more arbitrary and unreliable course of events, it is Beth's personal connection to Okot and her ability to convincingly pretend to be well-connected that manages to effect his release from unlawful imprisonment.

Helene, meanwhile, proposes an altogether different version of the notion that '[t]his is not France':

Helene	I thought the Jungle was France. But it's not. The fences, the barbed wire, the police beating children, it is all paid for by UK.
Beth	Hang on, what? Is that true?
Paula	Sixty million quid so far.

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 91)

While Beth's insistence that '[t]his is not France' is presented as a form of disavowal and naivete, Helene here forwards a different idea of the camp as 'not France', namely the camp as 'Britain': an externalised border space that belongs to the UK not only in terms of ethical or political responsibility, but in a thoroughly material sense. Expenses for coastal surveillance, drones, and shore patrols in northern France are formalised in a series of UK-French bilateral agreements, from the 1991 Sangatte Protocol and the 2003 Treaty of Le Touquet to several more recent deals struck since 2014 (Grierson 2021; DW 2020; Gower 2023, 1–2). The figure Paula references has in fact been steadily rising, long after the destruction of the Calais camp. Between 2014 and 2023, the UK's payments to France amounted to more than £232 million, in addition to further funding commitments of £476 million between 2023/24 and 2025/26 (Gower 2023, 1–3). These shared complicities also come through when Sam and the French civil servant Henri argue about who is responsible for the Calais camp:

Henri	They're not here because of my border, Sam. They're here because of yours. If we ripped up the Treaty of

	Le Touquet today, this Jungle would move to Dover tomorrow.
Sam	This would never happen in Britain.
Henri	Are you so sure about that?

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 95)

Eventually, Sam's and especially Beth's initial trust in the idea of Europe as a bastion of human rights is eroded significantly. Beth links the failures of European political-legal institutions to the term 'virtue signalling', coined by journalist James Bartholomew in 2015 (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 92; Bartholomew 2015). Bartholomew uses the phrase to refer to online practices and gestures of goodwill that, in his view, have little to no material effect: '[w]hen people share opinions or petitions or crowdfunders online, […] not actually doing anything' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 92). Beth takes this idea of empty posturing further, extending it to Western governments and institutions:

Beth	[…] I remember going on a school trip to Parliament. […] I remember being so fucking awestruck by this incredible place with all the laws we've ever made. […] But now I know, and I am so, so sorry. That's the virtue signal. Look at us. Look how much we care. These people have human rights! They do exist! Until they're standing at our door, screaming for help. The British government. The French government. The United Nations. The European fucking Union. Where the fuck are you?

(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 92)

Directing the accusation of 'non-performativity' away from the online practices of individuals, Beth's speech instead targets wider institutional frameworks whose commitments to equality and justice manifest in name only (Ahmed 2006; 2012). She refocuses scrutiny onto European governments who proclaim their commitment to international refugee law while maintaining brutal policies of detainment and exclusion that directly contradict these frameworks. Beth's eventual disillusionment with the established processes and institutions of human rights and refugee law recalls the central tension in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* (441 BC) – one of the most

frequently referenced and reinterpreted Greek tragedies in contemporary productions about forced migration.[40] Like the Ancient heroine, Beth calls out state-based legal-political practices as unethical and ends up enacting an overriding sense of justice: 'If the system won't save [Okot], fuck the system. Do it yourself' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 93). She contacts Ali, the play's 'smuggler' figure, and offers to pay for Okot's unsanctioned passage to the UK – which turns out to be in vain: Safi takes the spot instead, and Okot disappears after the camp's eviction.

Calais emerges in *The Jungle* as a space that has been variously claimed and disavowed by the British state as an extraterritorialised, neoimperial 'pre-frontier' (Pugliese 2013, 578). The oscillation between claiming space (for externalised border enforcement) and simultaneously abjecting it (from frameworks of legal-political and historical responsibility) recalls how maritime space has been constructed within contemporary border regimes. The Mediterranean, note Ċetta Mainwaring and Daniela DeBono, is typically imagined along two alternating neocolonial frameworks: *mare nostrum*, 'our sea', and *mare nullius*, 'nobody's sea' (2021, 1032). While *mare nostrum* suggests that 'states and the EU [have] reasserted their control over the Mediterranean,' *mare nullius* implies a space devoid of legal, political, and historical frameworks – a space for which European states have no responsibility (2021, 1033). *The Jungle* presents a similar double-imagination of the Calais camp: a '*nostrum*' space that is up for claiming (reflected, for instance, in the volunteers' failed attempts to assert dominance through naming and mapping practices) and a '*nullius*' space that is projected beyond the reach of European historical, political, and legal

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[40] In the Ancient play, Antigone defies the decree of the ruler Creon, who has declared her fallen brother Polynices a traitor and ordered him to be left on the battlefield without the holy rites. Antigone still performs a symbolic funeral for Polynices, is condemned to be buried alive, and is herself denied the holy rites. She eventually hangs herself, her sacrifice and suffering lamented by the Chorus, whereas Creon is cursed and condemned by the gods. The law of the state, represented by Creon, is contrasted against the 'natural' or 'spiritual' law represented by Antigone – an overriding sense of moral justice, linked in the play to the laws of the gods. These themes of ethical (un)tenability and disobedience against state structures have provided a common reference point for many contemporary productions that address tensions between different frameworks of justice. Recent productions of *Antigone*, in which the play is reimagined within contemporary refugee contexts, include *Antigone of Syria* (2014), directed by Omar Abu Saada and staged in Beirut, and Ubah Cristina Ali Farah's *Antigone Power* (2018), directed by Giuseppe Massa and staged in Palermo. Farah and Massa's retelling, for instance, evokes the conflict between the state's systemic criminalisation of unsanctioned movement and the duty to rescue enshrined in maritime law, with figures such as *Sea-Watch 3* captain Carola Rackete defying the Italian Minister of Home Affairs (IPCS 2019).

responsibility ('This is not France', 'This would never happen in Britain' [Murphy and Roberston 2018, 72, 95]).

Throughout the play, residents of the camp intervene in this neocolonial imagination, urging the volunteers – and theatre audiences – to regard Calais as a space intrinsically entangled with British and European history, responsibility, and self-imagination. While *The Jungle*'s modes of representation are sometimes inconsistent, moments of projected 'common humanity', celebration, and sentimentalism tend to be qualified through ambiguity and tension, creating a self-aware and judicious interrogation of European humanitarianism, sensationalist media spectacles, and hegemonic refugee representations. In the revised script version, the dialogue has shifted in favour of characters such as Helene and Salar, the play's most outspoken critics of borders as mechanisms of imperial control. Linking contemporary Calais to histories of British colonialism, they keep reminding the (at least initially) high-minded British volunteers that political exclusions and border spaces are not Europe's exception but have historically been its political and material condition. As a production, *The Jungle* also enacts this manoeuvre on a larger scale: staged in British theatres, it symbolically reintroduces the externalised border space back into the national imagination. Performed on established London stages (and later US theatres), the production is well-placed to implicate audiences in an ongoing border history that is frequently ignored or denied in hegemonic representations.

In this transition from page to stage, however, some of the play's most poignant critiques and nuanced reflections on mediation, authority, and implication have been moderated or counteracted. The forms of engagement produced by reading *The Jungle* as a script and 'experiencing' *The Jungle* as an immersive production pull in different directions. Its marketisation in various institutional contexts has followed an approach more akin to traditional documentary theatre, leaning strongly into the idea of the play as both a faithful replication of the real Calais camp and a unique theatrical experience. Narrative-dramaturgical interruptions that foreground

the racialised, neoimperialist, and gendered effects of borders are still present in the staged production. However, these moments of discomfort and disconnection between the camp's residents and volunteers – and, by extension, theatregoers – are toned down and concealed in different ways in the promotion and staging, resulting in a flattening of the play's tensions and autocritiques (another 'colliding of many into one'). The marketing discourses frequently invite forms of engaging with Calais that the script itself criticises in its most unsympathetic portrayals of volunteering: consumerist (Boxer), voyeuristic (Sam), and idealistic-utopian (Derek). In its promise to offer Calais as an immediate, all-encompassing 'experience' to primarily Western audiences, *The Jungle* risks becoming itself entangled in forms of voyeuristic place-consumption, image circulation, and liberal self-staging, both in its in-theatre spatial politics and its wider reception as a transnationally mobile production.

4. Circulating *The Jungle* between Western Theatres

'A little bit like being in the Jungle': set design and *Jungle*-fying the West End

Recalling the ambitious 'pro-theatrical politics' of traditional docudrama, Good Chance Theatre has linked *The Jungle*'s West End and US transfers to its company image as socially-engaged theatre that 'matters' and 'galvanises' audiences to further action (Wake 2023, 558; Murphy and Robertson 2018, back cover). As Joe Murphy commented on moving *The Jungle* from London's Young Vic to the Playhouse in 2018,

> We were really overwhelmed by people saying, 'This has to be seen by more people,' people coming out at the end and going, 'What can I do?' – feeling galvanised and inspired and activated by the play. […] This story should be […] in the heart of the West End, right in the middle of the conversation, because it *is* an important subject and conversation. It's of national importance, and the people in it, the performers, the singers, the dancers, should absolutely be here, telling this story.
>
> (WhatsOnStage 2018, 00.00–00.31)

Producer Sonia Friedman voiced a similar sentiment, arguing that *The Jungle* 'allows me just a bit more peace in my life, to sleep a little more, because I am putting my energy into something that really fucking matters' (Mason 2018). She, too, framed the West End transfer as a politically subversive move that exposed a wider Western public to refugee-related issues: 'We had this conversation about needing this story, this play, right now, to be the centre of the conversation, and not to be, as it were, on the fringes. […] Let's bring it into the West End, […] let's have it in the listings alongside *Dreamgirls* and *Lion King* and *Wicked*' (WhatsOnStage 2018, 01.19–01.45).

Presented by Good Chance Theatre in similar terms as the 'democratising' and 'equalising' aspirations associated with its dome theatre in the Calais camp, *The Jungle*'s transfer from the 'fringes' to the 'centre' nevertheless favoured certain (primarily metropolitan, affluent) publics while excluding others (Jeffers and Musiyiwa 2023, 592). By West End standards, prices

were kept relatively cheap: 'Forty percent of tickets have been kept below £25 […] and some have been reserved for refugees and their families' (Gill 2018). However, as Emma Welton notes, 'the West End as a space and industry is one still predicated upon multiple foundations of material exclusion,' including its location within central London and its participation in gentrifying processes (2020, 234). '[T]he majority of tickets were still marketed between [£25 and £80], which presents a very real financial barrier to many' (Welton 2020, 234). The play's journey 'into the middle of the conversation' may have exposed it to a larger number of people, yet it did not automatically diversify its audiences or create a more pluralist theatre space.

To perform *The Jungle* 'alongside *Dreamgirls* and *Lion King* and *Wicked*' also meant entering into direct competition with these shows – and at least in part touting for the same audiences (WhatsOnStage 2018, 01.19–01.45). An integral part of selling *The Jungle* on the West End entailed symbolically and visually distancing it from this context: its implied out-of-place-ness and 'edginess' formed part of its appeal and its marketability. Welton has analysed how promotional and reception discourses framed the production as a rebellious, 'political' play entering the commercial landscapes of mainstream theatre: '*The Jungle* both cast itself and became cast as a misfit,' implied to present 'a risk' and 'a gamble' for its creators and producers (Welton 2020, 233; Mason 2018). As commentator Paul Mason noted ahead of *The Jungle*'s 2018 transfer, '[Sonia Friedman is] about to launch an edgy, politically committed play […] into the full commercial glare of a 20-week run in the West End. […] I can't recall any mainstream theatre producer attempting something so dissonant with theatreland's idea of what sells' (Mason, 2018). This framing, Welton notes, also reflected racist logics underpinning a wider cultural industry and policy context where diversity is commodified and marketed: it 'impl[ies] that productions centring non-white subjects could not have broad audience appeal' (2020, 234). While its subject matter and cast constellation were presented as 'diversifying' and 'subverting' the West End, *The Jungle* was, however, still written and produced by people already established in – and largely

representative of – an overwhelmingly white, affluent entertainment sector. Constructing the production in opposition to the inferred apoliticism of typical West End productions also served to present its transfer as a politically, rather than financially, motivated decision.

Yet this presumable dissonance with the West End is itself part of what *The Jungle* sells to its audiences: the experience of stepping out of the typical 'theatreland' environment, where shows are enjoyed from the comfort of plush seats, and of being instead immersed in the makeshift aesthetic of the Calais camp. Miriam Buether's elaborate set design 'removes you from the West End and places you inside the camp […] [in] the roughly thrown together Afghan cafe, assembled on a dirt floor' (Gill 2018). To create the set, the Playhouse was 'temporarily gutted […]. Where there was once ormolu and Edwardian chintz there are […] just plywood, sawdust and tarpaulin' (Mason 2018). A whole new stage was built on top of the stalls as a double floor, and wooden surfaces were layered over the theatre walls. To '*Jungle*-fy' this space-within-a-space, it was filled with layers of mulch, hardboard tables, rugs, pillows, flags, printed fabrics, written signs, graffiti, scrap metal, strings of light, tents, and (at St. Ann's Warehouse) the original Calais dome theatre. During the performance, the entire Playhouse auditorium lay hidden underneath theatregoers as they were seated on the wooden benches and pallets of the 'makeshift' café (which, as videos of the elaborate set construction show, was anything but makeshift).
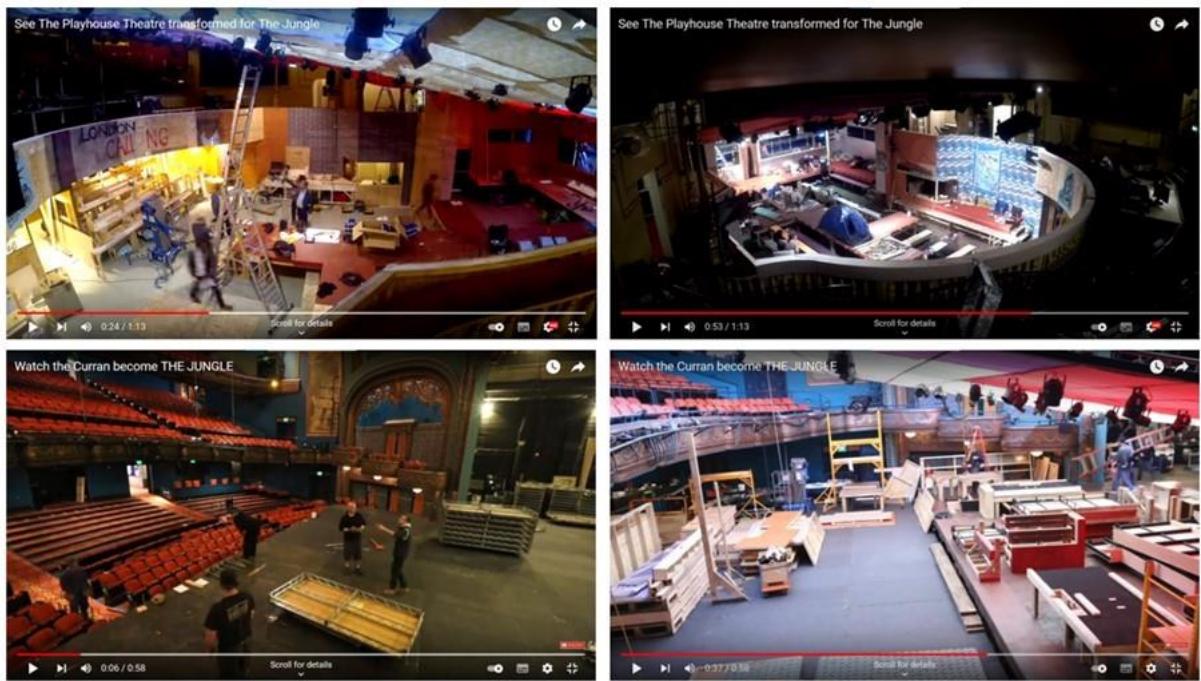
Fig. 14: *Jungle*-fying Theatreland: Screenshots from timelapse videos depicting the construction of *The Jungle* set designs in London's Playhouse (2018), above, and San Francisco's Curran (2019), below.
Credit: ATG Tickets 2018; San Francisco Curran 2019.

Contrary to the precarious camp context it references, however, this is a carefully curated environment. As Olivia Lamont Bishop notes, 'It is through their [Murphy and Robertson's] eyes that we walk these passageways and alleys, and they are the custodians of the stories, the builders of the construction and environment […], owing much more of their aesthetic to the West End than the original site' (2019, 106). In its online materials, the production occasionally highlights its theatricality and 'stagey-ness', with dedicated videos acknowledging and promoting the critically acclaimed stage design and momentarily allowing audiences to look behind the curtain (and underneath the floors).[41] During the performance event itself, however, *The Jungle* is careful to hide its 'double floors' and create an immersive environment, largely relying on the 'anti-theatrical aesthetics' of docudramatic tradition (Wake 2023, 558). As a show that 'conjures life inside a refugee camp,' as Alexandra Schwartz's review notes, *The Jungle* 'does not so much present its

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[41] For example, timelapse videos released by the Young Vic, the Playhouse, and the Curran depict how these respective theatre architectures were transformed into *The Jungle* set (Young Vic 2017; ATG Tickets 2018; San Francisco Curran 2019).

story as plunge us directly into it, to astonishing emotional effect' (2019). Audiences are immersed in the play as 'actors bake bread and play instruments, dance, run, fight, sing, weep, and pray' (Schwartz 2019). Creating such an encompassing experience was a conscious aim of the production, as executive producer David Lan notes:

> People who came to the show at the Young Vic, who had been in the Jungle at Calais, when they walked in, they were, 'Oh my God, this *is* what it felt like,' which is a pretty amazing thing to achieve. And so, the experience while there was a *little* bit like – of course, it was a show, rather than real life – but it was a *little* bit like getting people to understand what the experience of being in the Jungle was. So, when we decided to bring it here [to the Playhouse], we had to recreate the same thing. We had to deliver an experience at the same intense level as we had before.

(WhatsOnStage 2018, 01.45–02.20)

In this West-End staging of a border space, an inverted disguising is thus taking place. The border space that the nation-state outsourced and systematically disavowed is now symbolically reintroduced into the nation-state's commercial-cultural centre and made spectacularly visible as 'an experience at the same intense level'. It is now the West End space that is temporarily removed from sight, visually and symbolically abjected from the sphere of representation – similar to how the script implicitly justifies its narrative authority to speak about Calais by disguising the Western-citizen positionality of its narrators.

For some theatregoers, the way in which these disjunctive aesthetics (West End/Calais) were folded into one another created a jarring effect. Reflecting on her visit to the Playhouse, Lamont Bishop highlights 'the stark and uncomfortable contrast between the recreation of the camp with the West End awnings and plush foyer' (2019, 106). Tyrrell makes a similar observation about her visit at the San Francisco Curran, stepping from the theatre's opulent foyer – 'an oasis of calm and old-money elegance' – into the play's 'make-shift space of scrap metal and rough-hewn wood. The whiplash is considerable' (2020, 155).

While unsettling, this coexistence of spaces of bordering and recreation, layered into one another, is also telling: it exposes differential (in)hospitalities of border governance that are often

strategically obscured from view – 'the scene' conceals 'the obscene,' in De Genova's terms (2013). The contrast between the West End and the Calais camp could thus have been used to stage a larger political critique of how spheres of leisure and material-political exclusion manifest in the same space – a disjuncture that also frequently emerges in the employment practices of theatre institutions themselves.[42] Joseph Pugliese employs the Foucauldian concept of 'heterotopia' to account for 'violently disjunctive experiences of space' in sites where mobility and detainment intersect (Pugliese 2010, 106; Foucault 1986). Heterotopias, in Michel Foucault's sense, are spaces 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another' (1986, 25). The encounter between a highly mobile, cosmopolitan theatre world and a space of systemic exclusion and immobilisation in many ways exposes how borders are differentially produced in contemporary Europe – offering further opportunities for 'ethotic recognition' and autocritique in performance (Casey 2021, 351).

Certain elements in *The Jungle* do tap into this potential, such as theatregoers' visibility to each other during the play and Safi's recurring commentary – when volunteers start arriving in Calais, he points out the fundamental irony that 'We spend months trying to get to UK. And in September, UK came here' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 40). This is a tension that also plays out in *The Jungle*'s production history: in a reversal of the camp residents' desire in the play to leave Calais and enter the UK, the performance presents theatregoers an opportunity to momentarily (pretend to) leave the UK and enter Calais.

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[42] As is the case across entertainment, hospitality, and education sectors, institutions such as the National Theatre increasingly rely on precarious in-house workers on zero-hour and casual contracts, often exploiting people's insecure legal status and conditional work permits (Masso 2020; May et al. 2007). Especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, protesters and unions such as Equity and BECTU have been pushing for more stable agreements in the theatre and entertainment industry (Masso 2020).

However, *The Jungle*'s investment in offering its viewers a consumable, experiential encounter – 'a *little* bit like […] the experience of being in the Jungle' – interferes with the critical-creative potential entailed in staging this juxtaposition (WhatsOnStage 2018, 01:45–02:20). The production's immersive strategies, Welton argues, lead to a prioritisation of viewers' affective responses, rather than a more critically distanced scrutiny of state power and border governance: 'The political contradictions which the play names, and which the play stages by its very existence on the West End, become muted in favour of the audience members' individual emotionality and introspection' (2020, 237). In recreating the camp, *The Jungle* thus 'risks confecting an environment of dark tourism for the audience' (Welton 2020, 237). Lamont Bishop, too, has argued that the recreation in the play 'comes close to an exoticization: a social imaginary of the two westerners' [Murphy and Robertson's] cultural experience' (2019, 106).

'Join the residents': promotion and the camp as a space of consumption

This touristic dimension, in which the camp is figured as a space of leisure, consumption, and exoticism, also emerges in *The Jungle*'s marketisation discourses. Promoting the Playhouse production on its website, the National Theatre announced:

> Meet the hopeful, resilient residents of The Jungle – just across the Channel, right on our doorstep. […] Join the residents over fresh baked naan and sweet milky chai at the Afghan Café, and experience the intense, moving and uplifting encounters between refugees from many different countries and the volunteers who arrived from the UK.
>
> (National Theatre 2018)

By inviting audiences to momentarily inhabit the camp as a space of consumption and a 'unique experience', the marketing materials ultimately align viewers with volunteers in the play who also regard Calais as an opportunity for 'intense, moving and uplifting encounters' (National

Theatre 2018). Sam initially refers to the camp as 'Glastonbury. Without the toilets,' and Boxer spends most of his time consuming the drinks, food, and entertainment offered in the camp's emerging businesses, flouting 'the social decorum carefully established' by the others (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 43; Welton 2020, 240). Boxer's behaviour ultimately endangers camp residents when a fire breaks out: 'Children nearly died. […] Volunteers were drunk, fucked-up on fuck knows what. […] [Boxer] was asleep in [Salar's] restaurant while the fire was burning. Children were screaming and he was on the floor' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 85–86). The play emphasises this disjuncture throughout: the volunteers' perspective on the camp as a space of hospitality and momentary reprieve from their other responsibilities – a space that, crucially, they can leave at any moment – differs vastly from the residents' experience of Calais as a dangerous, potentially deadly space of immobilisation and protracted legal limbo. To make this point, Salar picks up Boxer's 'volunteers-as-refugees' theme from the beginning, reminding the volunteers of their responsibilities and their privileged mobility: 'We have trusted you with our lives. If you are here for opportunity, or holiday, or because this place is better than your home, leave. We do not want you. The last thing Zhangal needs is more refugees' (2018, 86). *The Jungle*'s set and marketisation, however, still recreate Calais alongside Boxer's initial perception of the camp as a 'show' and a 'holiday' – as a distinctly consumptive space that people are encouraged to enter and experience for a few hours.

Fig. 15: The camp as experience: Dancing in the 2018 Playhouse production of *The Jungle*.
Credit: Marc Brenner 2018.

A similar tension between script and experiential marketing emerges regarding the politics of 'gazing at Calais'. On stage, *The Jungle* introduces several elements to interrogate the politics of looking at, recording, and circulating images of displacement, especially in Sam's 'humanitarian adventure narration' of the camp. By addressing media spectacles such as the circulation of the Alan Kurdi photograph and the news narratives after the Paris attacks, the play foregrounds how people on the move are systematically subjected to fluctuating regimes of hypervisibility, surveillance, and invisibilisation. The promotion and theatre design, however, directly contradict this critique, as viewers are promised uninhibited access to the camp. Aspects of the performance context that might interfere with the immediacy of 'be[ing] transported into the world of the Calais camp' are presented in an almost apologetic manner: 'Due to the unique nature of this production […], we cannot guarantee you will see every actor at all times. This is a deliberate design feature which enhances your experience in The Jungle' (National Theatre, 2018).

This emphasis on promising enhanced experiences, Adam Alston notes, is a growing trend in immersive productions (2016). He argues that much like 'theme parks, themed

restaurants, experiential marketing, and so on, immersive theatre is preoccupied with the provision of stimulating and memorable experiences' (2016, 16). Within this 'experience machine', the theatregoer is figured as 'the neoliberal consumer [who] is increasingly offered personalised and experiential forms of consumption in an expanding "experience economy"' (2016, 16). As part of its personalised product, *The Jungle* invites theatregoers 'to choose from two unique experiences':

> [T]ake a seat in the bustling Afghan Café in the stalls, or watch from the traditional theatre seating of the 'Cliffs of Dover' in the Dress Circle, where the view overlooking the dynamic performance space is enhanced by accompanying video screens relaying 'live news broadcast'-style footage of some of the action.
>
> (National Theatre, 2018)

Both viewpoints of the play's 'theatrical geography,' Lamont Bishop remarks, 'aim to align the audience with a perspective of understanding,' either close to the action in 'the Afghan Café below' or peering down from the more distant 'United Kingdom' (2019, 108). This mirrors two perspectives on the camp that are also present in the play: the volunteers move from an external view of Calais, filtered through media narratives and circulated images, towards a more immediate understanding of the material-sensory world of the restaurant. The script contrasts and complicates both these positionalities: it is critical of the volunteers' attempts to relate to Calais through media images *as well as* their attempts to heedlessly immerse themselves in the realities of the camp residents. These critiques are however undermined in *The Jungle*'s marketisation, in which both the stalls' restaurant tables and the dress circle's television screens are presented as added layers to the immersive viewing experience: 'Wherever you sit, prepare to be transported into the world of the Calais camp, where a community forged from necessity shares its unimaginable stories of hope against all odds' (National Theatre 2018). In the stalls, this imaginative 'transportation' is aided by the consumption of food, in the dress circle by the consumption of news footage and broadcasts from the stage. While these positionalities are presented as 'unique,' they also dovetail closely with dominant frames of how many people in

Europe have related to residents of the Calais camp. The citizen/non-citizen encounter becomes once again conditional on the provision of products to earn and reciprocate ostensible 'hospitality' – delicious meals, riveting stories, and captivating media spectacles.
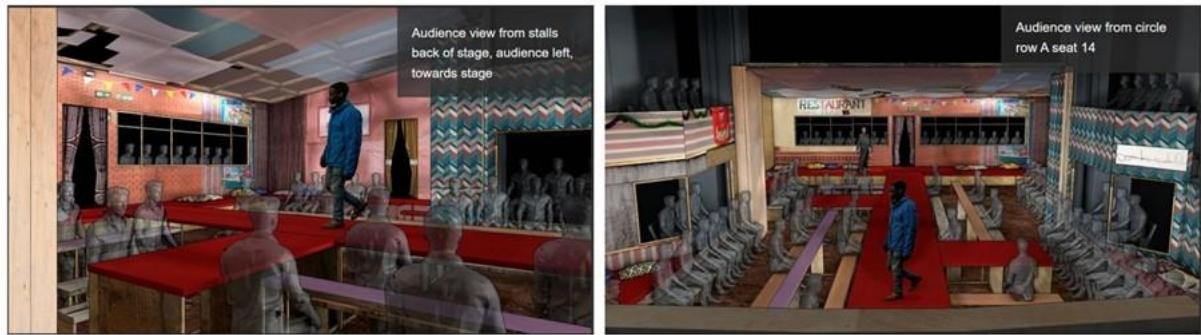
Fig. 16: 'Bustling Afghan Café' or 'Cliffs of Dover': 3D illustrations of audience views at the Playhouse Theatre. Credit: National Theatre 2018.

This feeds into a distinctly optimistic construction of the camp context. By meeting the camp's 'hopeful, resilient residents,' audiences are promised 'intense, moving and uplifting encounters' and a 'devastating, uplifting show [that] celebrates the human capacity to build something out of nothing' (National Theatre 2018; Murphy and Robertson 2018, back cover). Whereas the script is careful to moderate the volunteers' visions of the camp as a utopian space of potential and anti-austerity solidarity – Derek's idealistic proclamations of 'Hope Town' are always presented in an ironic register –, the play's marketisation is similarly invested in presenting the fictionalised Calais as an ultimately inspirational space for Western-citizen audiences. There is, as Emma Cox remarks, a 'robust international marketplace for "redemptive" stories of trauma' that mobilise tropes of 'refugee hope' and 'refugee resilience': theatre about forced displacement is frequently 'marketed and received by critics as "ultimately uplifting" or "inspirational"' for audiences (2012, 128). Within these discourses, 'the difficult emotional terrain of trauma is made comprehensible and *meaningful* to the extent that it generates hope in/for spectators' (2012, 128).

Against the script's attempts to present discomforting citizen/non-citizen encounters, here it is ultimately the theatregoers' comfort and optimistic outlook that is at stake.[43]

'A curious pride in being British': reception and *The Jungle* as spectacle

In line with its optimistic promotional narratives, Good Chance Theatre relies strongly on a discourse of theatre as a vehicle for social change and connection, positioning it as an artform than can supposedly create common languages where other forms fail. The company's work is promoted as theatre that 'shakes hands with the world,' that 'alter[s] hearts and minds,' that 'unite[s] communities, tell[s] stories of our shared humanity,' and that 'shatters stereotypes and inspires connection' (Good Chance 2023; 2024a). Performance art is presented as an almost mystical unifying force: 'We believe it's time for theatre and art to rediscover their ancient power to connect, tell our shared story and create new opportunities' (Smiley Charity Film Awards 2023). In *The Jungle*, this celebratory vision of theatre is questioned only once during a metatheatrical exchange between Salar and Mohammed, in which they refer to the role of the real Good Chance Theatre dome established in the Calais camp:

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[43] Within this context, the more tangible forms of action that *The Jungle* encourages in many ways channel audiences' reactions back into individualist frames of responsibility. After the end of the performance at the Playhouse Theatre, for example, audience members were sometimes given an exit flyer with the question 'What Can I Do?' on one side and several suggestions on the other, such as 'donating to the charity Help Refugees, donating goods, volunteering, hosting a refugee in your home or writing to your parliamentary representative' (Welton 2020, 241). These propositions, as Welton has observed, 'still situate meaningful change at the site of the individual – something which the play for two and half hours previously had seemed to critique in the representation of British volunteer characters' (2020, 241). Eliciting the affective responses of a single 'I' and foregrounding theatregoers' sensory and emotional experiences, the play's immersive strategies and post-show materials 'leave the burden of responsibility upon the individual spectator, deflecting – counterproductively – blame from the broader political establishment' (Welton 2020, 242). Welton argues that a politically more provocative 'What Can I Do?' flyer would have left the other side blank, for example (2020, 241).

Salar	I have heard there may be a theatre for entertainment.
Mohammed	All of these things are important.
Salar	Important for who?

<div align="center">(Murphy and Robertson 2018, 48)</div>

Apart from this brief interlude, the practices of Good Chance Theatre, and of theatre institutions more broadly, remain exempt from the play's critical gaze. The autocritique of 'virtue signalling' formulated by Beth does not go so far as to undermine the legitimacy of Western theatre as a medium to respond to and shape discourses of border violence in Calais altogether.

Echoing Good Chance Theatre's generally 'pro-theatrical politics', reception narratives sometimes present the act of watching and empathising with *The Jungle* as a form of anti-border solidarity in itself (Wake 2023). As reviewer Paul Mason remarks,

> Watching the audience laugh, gasp and, inevitably, cry, I wondered what Theresa May might make of it. […] [T]he cabinet will deliberate on migration, racism and asylum. But its members dare not, either publicly or in disguise, venture through the Asquith-era portals of the Playhouse. For there, they would be forced to confront the human costs of the orders their fountain pens sign off.

<div align="center">(Mason 2018)</div>

Visiting *The Jungle*'s immersive restaurant is aligned with bravely 'facing the facts': only few 'dare […] venture through the Asquith-era portals' and 'confront the human costs' and harsh realities presented there. Much like Sam's adventure reporting in the play, the act of watching a performance here becomes a way for audiences to 'bear witness' and perform *themselves* as a certain kind of person – as courageous, virtuous, and separate from 'Theresa May' and 'the cabinet'.

In *The Jungle*'s theatrical organisation, this self-staging happens not only against the outside, but also within the spatial politics of the theatre. This is a production that generally rewards proximity and immediacy: while the stalls and dress circle are both marketed as enhanced and unique, there is still an implicit hierarchy that positions those closest to the stage as *more* courageous, *more* tolerant, and *more* empathic. An (exaggerated) account of the performance by

Daniel McNeil, Yana Meerzon, and David Dean reflects how viewing *The Jungle* could create a sense of smug superiority between audience members:

> We are […] fully immersed in this performance of lives lived in this migrant community on the outskirts of Calais. We […] occasionally glare at those observing at a distance, watching what is happening before their eyes replicated on television screens in front of them. They, like us, are theatre-goers, but they sit in the balcony, beyond the cliffs of Dover; we are sitting on cushions, on benches. We are in the café. We are the café. We are migrants and refugees and volunteers. We were not assigned those roles […]. We chose them because the play has compelled us to do so, through our feelings, experiences, and imaginings. We have repositioned and reinvented ourselves in the bodies and experiences of others. We have embraced difference.

(McNeil, Meerzon, and Dean 2020, 10)

Not only does the seating in the stalls offer audiences a dubious sense of having temporarily 'repositioned and reinvented [them]selves in the bodies and experiences of others,' but it also affords them the self-affirming pleasure of 'glar[ing] at those observing at a distance' (McNeil, Meerzon, and Dean 2020, 10). In reality, the vast majority of the play's Western-citizen audiences are firmly situated on that figural balcony, beyond the cliffs of Dover. It may be hidden underneath layers of hardwood and mulch, but this recreated camp is still experienced from the comfortable setting of a high-end London theatre.

This risk of presenting viewers with an artificial sense of 'narcissistic self-contentment' and of 'hav[ing] embraced difference,' rather than a recognition of Western responsibilities and implications in Calais, becomes even more apparent in the transnational context (Chouliaraki 2010, 113; McNeil, Meerzon, and Dean 2020, 10). With *The Jungle*'s transfer to the US, its reception has become intertwined with different conceptions of national identity. Now a British export product, the performance has sometimes created an effect contrary to its own self-critical streak regarding 'national sentimentality' (Berlant 2001). For some British viewers who saw the play in New York, it became a marker of seemingly redeemed 'Britishness', especially against what they viewed as even more restrictive US border governance. Lorna Vassiliades, for instance, recounts seeing the performance at St Ann's Warehouse in New York, after two previous visits

to the Playhouse production in London: 'for a third time I would cry. Back out in Brooklyn's Dumbo, with Manhattan Bridge all lit up, I felt a curious pride in being British. Here was a British play challenging how politics has treated a humanitarian crisis, sold out in Trump's anti-migrant USA where migrants were demonised' (2022, 523). Against what she viewed as *even worse* US border politics, *The Jungle* for Vassiliades apparently reinforced a sense that 'This would never happen in Britain,' much like Sam's dubious proclamation in the play (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 95). The repeated discursive manoeuvres that the volunteers perform in *The Jungle* to disavow responsibility ('This is not France!') have become 'This is not Britain!' in this reception narrative. In a peculiar inversion, this play about UK border governance, complicity, and systemic inaction in Calais here works as a vehicle for the redemption of national identity for liberal Britain: a nation that produced *The Jungle*, rather than a nation that produced the Jungle.

Several high-profile political and cultural figures have reinforced this discourse, in which *The Jungle* figures as a marker of national pride, rather than a contestation of nation-state structures – a relatively uncontroversial shortcut for voicing pro-refugee sentiments in the same states that pursue increasingly violent bordering measures. A significant shift has thus happened in the translation from Calais, the externalised border space that existed in 2015 and 2016, to the 'Calais' that has been symbolically reincorporated and circulated between UK and US stages since 2017. Originally defined by the strategic absence of state structures – a 'metonym for European crisis' –, the space has been turned into a theatrical institution enmeshed in attachments and endorsements from public figures and establishments directly invested in discourses of British national identity, from the National Theatre to the Arts Council (Agier et al. 2019, 7). Against the critiques presented in the play, the production's transnational reception discourses have partly created a 'spectacle of solidarity' that distracts from the fact that most people who try to enter these same nation-states are violently excluded, intercepted, detained, or deterred long before ever reaching state borders (Picozza 2021).

For the creative team, this has created a need to consciously redirect focus onto the larger structures of border governance and the systematic exclusion of forced migrants worldwide. Some members of the ensemble have explicitly highlighted the contrast between *The Jungle*'s cosmopolitan mobility as a production and the conditions of exclusion and immobilisation that the play names and critiques. During the *The Jungle*'s first transfer to the US, one Syrian and two Iranian cast members were affected by Donald Trump's 'Muslim ban'; only after a joint transnational letter campaign, supported by public figures such as Bill de Blasio, Sadiq Khan, and Rowan Williams, were the performers granted a waiver from the travel ban (Paulson 2018). In the case of Ammar Haj Ahmad, the producers even managed to expedite his British citizenship, rather than taking the presumably more difficult avenue of persuading the US to admit the Syrian artist (Paulson 2018). For some commentators, enabling this selective, conditional mobility for three performers seemingly amounted to a symbolic resistance against Trumpism and a recuperation of national identity, recalling Vassiliades' newfound pride in 'Britishness' above. In a statement urging the American Embassy in London and the US State Department to consider the case of the artists, New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand argued that '[w]elcoming refugees is what the Statue of Liberty stands for and what our nation stands for, and this play is so important because it gives refugees a chance to bring their powerful experiences to the United States' (Paulson 2018). Once again, it fell to non-citizens themselves to provide perspective. Just as his character Safi offers contextualisation in *The Jungle*, Ammar Haj Ahmad commented in an interview on the singularity of this mobility: 'It's bizarre that we live at a time when you need all this work to get one person to another country […]. I also feel very privileged, because every day I'm here, I think about the millions of people who can't go from one place to another' (Paulson 2018).

In the play, Safi's final address to the audience also mirrors this refocussing on the continued border violence committed by Western states. *The Jungle* ends slightly removed from

the main action at an unspecified point in the future, implied to be the 'now' of the performance event. Safi, now based in Leicester, reflects on the events in Calais after his departure. As the only former resident confirmed to have reached the UK, he highlights that, following the eviction of the camp's southern half, 'One hundred and ninety-eight children went missing, including Okot, and no one saw them again. Norullah was hit by a lorry on the motorway and was buried, if you remember, in Angel's Corner, a muddy patch at the edge of a graveyard' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 120). Safi also uses his position of conditional mobility and visibility to highlight the circumstances of those who never reach UK state borders, even as he himself is stuck in bureaucratic limbo:

> **Safi** […] I sit here, day after day, in my temporary room in Leicester. I have been waiting to become a person again, an official refugee. […] And now you know. There are nearly a thousand refugees still living in Calais today. The police prevent any building. Any sign that things might grow again. Volunteers distribute what little they have. Their vans give out meals in car parks, roads, wherever they can.
>
> (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 120–121)

In the staged production, Safi's final remarks are followed by a video address, updated regularly, from a reporter, activist, or volunteer still working in Calais, who informs audiences about the current conditions there, implicating them more directly in this ongoing border space in the immediate moment (St. Ann's Warehouse 2019b; Neher 2023).

Over seven years after the destruction of the Calais camp, the political moment of 2015–2016 in Europe – and its interpretation in *The Jungle* – is still considered relevant and marketable by a Western theatre industry: following a four-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the production returned to US stages in spring 2023. But with every consecutive run, the events of Calais lie further in the past – a leap in time and geography that becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile with the industry prerequisite to provide topical urgency. The 2023 production has

therefore been described in promotion discourses, somewhat misleadingly, as an 'unprecedented theatrical event,' whose 'timing couldn't be more prescient […]. Our hearts are breaking for the families displaced in so many parts of our world, and this extraordinary piece of theatre asks us to empathise with their plight in a deeply visceral way' (Shakespeare Theatre Company 2022; DC Metro Theater Arts 2022). *The Jungle* is presented as theatre that is still urgent, timely, and prescient, even as the stages, actors, and scripts of global displacements have shifted. The continued transnational mobility of the play and 'its hopeful, resilient residents' seems guaranteed for as long as the production manages to bridge this gap: as long as it can sell tickets on the promise of generating 'deeply visceral' empathy from Calais within Western theatre circuits.

The 2023 production materials notably adapted earlier promises of offering a unique, immediate experience of the camp: '*The Jungle* invites audiences into a faithfully replicated Afghan restaurant, where endless cycles of survival and threat, failed social contracts, creative thought and action, compassion, and empathy unfold' (Rabinowitz 2023). While still rooted in affect and docudramatic frames of 'faithful replication', promotion discourses were now emphasising elements of 'intense remembrance' over 'unique experience' – echoing the 'endless cycles' of destruction and rebuilding that are still playing out in Calais itself (Rabinowitz 2023).

As European governments are prohibiting new camps from forming in Calais, *The Jungle* keeps staging the Calais camp, even as state authorities project a false sense of closure onto the site. While this border context has largely disappeared from dominant media discourses in the UK and US contexts where *The Jungle* has been performed, it remains a life-threatening reality for people trying to cross the Channel, with many sleeping rough and facing constant brutality and harassment (Care4Calais 2024). Their situation is further aggravated by the French police, which enforces regular expulsions under its 'zero fixation point' policy, as well as the UK's Illegal Migration Bill and planned Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda, which involves the outsourcing of asylum procedures to the African country (Bertouille Cessac

2022). While the physical architecture of the camp was destroyed and replaced by 'fields of yellow rape' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 120), the fictionalised architecture of *The Jungle* keeps being incorporated into and layered onto theatre spaces across the UK and the US. Its mobility as a production is conditional and selective, predicated on the shifting demands and stipulations of a commercial theatre industry; yet despite these reservations, *The Jungle* also enables Calais to return and remain in established Western spaces and discourses – just as the real Calais is still unfinished and keeps haunting European border politics.

II. *PHONE HOME* (2016)

DISPERSING BORDER HISTORIES ACROSS EUROPE

1. Highway Productions, Upstart, Pathos Theater, and the Long Summer of Migration

From *The Jungle*'s expansive trajectory across firmly established, commercial performance settings, this chapter turns to a much smaller production: *Phone Home* (2016), a collaboration between three independent companies in Greece, the UK, and Germany – Highway Productions in Athens, Upstart Theatre in London, and Pathos Theater in Munich. Developed across 2015 and 2016, this performance project addressed the same historical juncture in Europe as Murphy and Robertson's play, yet from a different creative-political angle. Where *The Jungle* formulated its critique of border governance by zooming in on the Calais camp – presented as a 'metonym for European crisis … and solidarity' that keeps implicating audiences across the West –, the creators of *Phone Home* worked with a more abstract, collage-like approach (Agier et al. 2019, 7). They, too, aimed to implicate transnational audiences in seemingly remote border histories, but compared to *The Jungle*'s clearly demarcated setting, timeline, and plot structure, *Phone Home* was a more experimental, deliberately disjointed performance. Both in its development and its on-stage execution, it presented a distinctly riven, at times conflictual theatrical project that was less accommodating towards its audiences than *The Jungle* – and more sceptical about the capacities of theatre to intervene in border regimes.

Performed ten times between 21 and 30 October 2016, *Phone Home* took place on three stages simultaneously: Sfendoni Theater in Athens, Shoreditch Town Hall in London, and

Schwere Reiter in Munich (Upstart 2016a; 2016b; 2016c). In each city, theatre audiences experienced an in-person performance directly on stage, as well as parts of the other two performances virtually, which were broadcast live onto screens and linked via on-stage phone calls and video conferencing.[44] Commenting on this multi-branched dramaturgy, Tom Mansfield, the play's co-director for Upstart Theatre in London, notes that 'There isn't a canonical *Phone Home*, there's three different *Phone Homes*' (pers. comm., 20 November 2020).[45] While theatre audiences attended one of these three versions, they were simultaneously part of a wider, transnationally dispersed *Phone Home* audience and performance event.

Fig. 17: Trinational staging: The *Phone Home* stage in Shoreditch Town Hall, with screens depicting livestreams from Sfendoni Theater in Athens (left), the London stage itself (centre), and Schwere Reiter in Munich (right). Credit: Robert McElroy 2016.

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[44] The creators of *Phone Home* have given me access to three performance recordings, one from each stage: Athens (Upstart 2016a), London (Upstart 2016b), and Munich (Upstart 2016c). While I will refer to all three settings throughout this chapter, my analysis is primarily based on the recording of the London performance and audience Q&A, filmed on 22 October 2016 (Upstart 2016b).

[45] Tom Mansfield, *Phone Home*'s co-director in London, kindly agreed to share insights into the artistic process and political-creative considerations that went into the production. Our conversation took place via Zoom on 20 November 2020.

Funded by the EU's 'Creative Europe' programme, the conceptual work for the trinational collaboration had already begun in mid-2013, initially envisioned as a project about broader themes of 'moving homes, moving to another country and communicating with those left behind' (Phone Home 2016). The primary creative vision for the play changed, however, as the Syrian civil war escalated and Greece, Germany, and the UK all became significant sites in the refugee routes, solidarity practices, and rapid re-enforcements of European border governance in 2015 and 2016. The focus of *Phone Home* became more specific: the interconnected performance format turned into a theatrical exploration of 'the true stories of people who – willingly or not – left their home to create a new one,' with a particular spotlight on the roles that media and social networks played in Europe's Long Summer of Migration and public responses to forced displacements (Mansfield 2017, 3; Sommer 2016). Incorporating video calls into the performance enabled the theatre teams to reflect on how these communicative structures have shaped contemporary experiences of migration, as Yannis Kalavrianos, the play's co-director in Athens, emphasises: 'We wanted to use this form of communication in the stories, precisely because they are stories of people who have left their home and who communicate with their home' (Upstart 2016a, 2:00:00–2:21:00; translation by Daria Luise Stumkat).

While rooted in the three cities, *Phone Home* pulls together multiple geographic contexts and histories. The play's fragmentary structure consists of loosely connected scenes, developed from narratives, images, and materials that the creators collected during the production's research and writing period in 2015 and 2016. The performance draws on news clippings, reports, photographs, and events where European bordering and solidarity practices were negotiated and performed in public, often highly mediatised ways. The three theatre teams also co-hosted several performance workshops ahead of the production, collaborating with organisations and charities such as Fairbeats, Action for Refugees in Lewisham, Freedom from Torture, Station Athens, and Faros. These events were aimed primarily at people who had recently come to Athens, London,

and Munich as refugees, but they were also open to long-term residents. Experiences and stories shared in the workshops also became part of the performance's creative development, as did the theatre makers' own biographies and family histories of migration and displacement. The aim was 'to compile a mosaic of voices, images, and situations that address how we deal with forced displacement and migration and how we depend on each other internationally,' in the words of Michael Sommer, *Phone Home*'s co-director in Munich (2016; my translation). The play's kaleidoscopic format became a way to stage these interdependences without denying the singularities of different European contexts.

Like *The Jungle*, however, *Phone Home* is not a traditional testimonial docudrama performance. Its source materials are always presented in defamiliarized and fragmented formats, with the production drawing heavily on metatheatrical strategies. Its self-referential streak is much more pronounced than in Murphy and Robertson's play: this is a performance that highlights its own multimedia textualities and theatricality throughout. During *Phone Home*'s development and staging, the theatre teams were notably transparent about their creative process, sharing not only livestreams and recordings of the performances, but also a making-of documentary, regular blog posts on a dedicated trilingual website, and a user's guide, aimed primarily at theatre practitioners interested in telepresence (Kenyon 2017; Phone Home 2016; Mansfield 2017).

While the three strands of *Phone Home* use different narrative fragments, languages, aesthetics, and theatrical styles, the general visual organisation is the same in each theatre space: facing the stage, audience members are looking at a group of four or five performers, as well as screens behind the stage that variably display images, video footage, or live feeds from the other theatres – virtual windows into each performance. Each of *Phone Home*'s three iterations follows the same order of scenes, so that certain parts can be performed in a joint format between Athens, London, and Munich. Five of the play's fifteen scenes are staged in this way, with the

performers of all three companies interacting both online and live on stage in multiple languages (referred to as 'connected scenes' in the following). Three other scenes are performed by one of the companies, but broadcast onto the screens on all three stages, including subtitles and translations into the respective languages. The remaining seven scenes are realised and performed individually by each company in their respective primary language; during these parts of the play, theatre audiences do not know what is happening in the other two performances ('individual scenes').[46]

Not all aspects and textualities of *Phone Home* are thus immediately available to theatregoers. Such an omniscient view is reserved for virtual audiences: each performance is also broadcast live online for viewers at home, who can choose which theatre stage they want to follow at any given point during the evening – or, in theory, even use several streaming devices to watch the entire production simultaneously across all three locations. This is a marked departure from *The Jungle*'s immersive setup, which rewards physical presence in the theatre space and proximity to the stage, with the sensory elements framed as an integral aspect of the performance experience. *Phone Home*, by contrast, tends to keep its audiences at a distance, both in its inclination towards fragmentary storytelling and in its wider theatrical setup, with the transnational, livestreamed format already anticipating diverse groups of viewers engaging with different versions of the play – including a virtual audience experiencing the performance entirely from outside of a theatre space (a distanced, streamable setup that would become a far more common mode of theatre viewing and creative interaction during the Covid-19 lockdowns four years later).

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[46] A chronological list of the fifteen *Phone Home* scenes, with the titles used in the London performance (Upstart 2016b): 1. 'Do It Like Charlize – Part 1' (connected); 2. 'Help' (individual); 3. 'Long Distance' (connected); 4. 'Every Time You Leave It's Like a Breakup' (broadcast); 5. 'Calling Center' (individual); 6. 'Leaving Home' (individual); 7. 'Memories of Leaving / Hatred' (individual); 8. 'Trafficker' (individual); 9. 'Tips and Tricks for Leaving Europe' (individual); 10. 'Officer' (broadcast); 11. 'Emergency Call' (connected); 12. 'Swimmer' (broadcast); 13. 'Referendum' (connected); 14. 'Do It Like Charlize – Part 2' (connected); 15. 'I Left' (individual).

This partly embodied, partly digitised dramaturgy offered a versatile plane to explore the multiple ways in which borders work across mediatised spaces. As Mansfield notes, the play's transnationally dispersed geography created a broader stage on which to address 'the [migration] of refugees into Europe, the way we relate to migrants within the EU and from outside it, the varying attitudes of the people, politicians and media in each of our three countries' (2015a). Throughout 2015 and 2016, *Phone Home*'s main geographical nodes had become prominent stages where these questions were being negotiated in real time. The theatrical collaboration linked three contexts with changing relationships to each other, to the EU, and to Europe, particularly in the aftermath of the Greek debt crisis, the Brexit referendum, and increasing politics of austerity across the continent. As Sommer notes,

> What happens in our city [Munich] largely depends on what happens elsewhere, and maybe the 'refugee crisis' was what made us really experience the degree of globalisation that determines our lives. So if we tell stories of people leaving their homes to come to […] Europe, we must tell them in an interconnected way.
>
> (2017, 6)

As the continent swiftly reinstated and expanded its bordering practices in late 2015 and 2016, the extended research and writing timeline of *Phone Home* allowed the theatre makers to respond to events as they were still unfolding. For the creative team, Europe's re-bordering also reasserted the creative-political significance of collaborating transnationally, particularly as all three countries were, and still are, facing a surge in populist-nationalist and far-right movements and policies (Mansfield, pers. comm., 20 November 2020). In Greece, the neo-fascist movement Golden Dawn (Chrysí Avgí) had been rising to prominence since the 2009 government-debt crisis and had become the third most popular party in parliament in the January 2015 election (Trilling 2020). In the UK, the Home Office's hostile environment policies had been intersecting with the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the Brexit referendum (Liberty 2019). In Germany, the Islamophobic extremist movement Pegida had been organising demonstrations since 2014, and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) was about to become the country's

strongest opposition party, for the first time represented in federal parliament by 2017 (Clarke 2017). Across all these states, refugees and migrants were facing increasing hostility and state-sanctioned violence, with Europe swiftly expanding its border policies, including pushbacks and mass deportations from Greece to Turkey from March 2016 (Chouliaraki 2017, 84; Gillespie et al. 2016).

These contexts of growing xenophobia and hostility towards people on the move put pressure on *Phone Home*'s transnational approach: initially envisioned as a more generic engagement with questions of home and belonging, its creative method had now become an exercise in pluralism and agonistic transborder solidarity. Trying to capture the central creative-political purpose that ties the show's sometimes clashing performance strands together, Mansfield suggests that 'if this is anything at all, this is a show against othering' (Kenyon 2017, 40:44–41:11). While *Phone Home*'s theatrical space highlights the desire and creative aim to establish sustained transnational connections – between people, histories, narratives, border contexts –, the performance simultaneously stages the difficulties and occasional impossibilities of this endeavour. In contrast to *The Jungle*'s encompassing theatre space and marketisation (which tend to mute the play's tensions and conflicting textualities, pulling theatregoers and characters into a unified, hopeful restaurant community), *Phone Home*'s fragmentary format consciously reaffirms and foregrounds moments of incoherence and disjuncture. Rather than 'colliding many into one', it insists on the singularity and specificity of its dispersed contexts and textualities – as well as the positionalities of artists and audience members. On occasion, the play is markedly inhospitable towards performers and theatregoers alike, implicating and immersing them in uncomfortable subject positions that depart from benevolent European self-imaginations.

In the following sections, I show how *Phone Home*'s synchronised split-screen dramaturgy and its multi-perspectival, often self-referential approach can work towards the aim of creating 'a

show against othering'. I will first outline the three companies' collaborative method of making transborder theatre, before turning to close readings of three key scenes in *Phone Home*: 'Help', which was performed by each company individually, and the connected scenes 'Do It Like Charlize' and 'Referendum'. As fictionalised responses to real events and news stories, these scenes address volunteering practices and theatrical responses during the 2015 'Refugees Welcome' movements; the 2016 Cinema for Peace Gala (a Berlin charity event centred around activist performance pieces by artist Ai Weiwei); and a referendum held in 2016 in the Swiss village of Oberwil-Lieli (where residents voted against accepting ten refugees under Switzerland's newly imposed quota system). As recounted by *Phone Home*, these specific events are successively transformed into more encompassing, transnational explorations of othering processes in Europe. Along with the companies' wider creative approach, the three scenes reveal the artists' aims of establishing and maintaining transnational solidarities, but also their frustrations and disillusionment with theatre (and activist performance more broadly) as a medium to adequately respond to border violence. *Phone Home*'s interrogation of Europe's hostile environments repeatedly highlights how spaces of ostensible hospitality, including theatre, can reproduce exclusionary border formations.

2. Possibilities and Limits of Theatrical Solidarities in *Phone Home*

'A dialectical method': transborder theatre making in post-2015 Europe

Throughout the research process, the writing phase, and the rehearsal period, the creators and performers of *Phone Home* worked collaboratively across Athens, London, and Munich. Face-to-face meetings between all the participants were limited to a few dedicated weekends in their respective cities; most interactions between the companies took place virtually – a way of applying the largely digitised performance format already in the creative process.[47] In each theatre group, two main writers and dramaturgs were responsible for transforming the diverse fragments from the workshops and research phase into a script: Yannis Kalavrianos and Eri Kyrgia (Athens), Tom Mansfield and Zodwa Nyoni (London), Michael Sommer and Nora Schüssler (Munich). These parts were then further workshopped into a joint transnational script between all the companies. For Mansfield, this form of working across national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries was a way to 'create work that celebrates our uniqueness as British, German and Greek theatre makers, and at the same time brings us together across those boundaries. […] We'll tell our own stories, alongside others telling their stories. And all be richer for it' (2015b). This striving towards artistic-aesthetic forms that could reflect multiplicity and transnationalism had become all the more pressing in the context of the UK government's hostile environment policies and decision to leave the EU, as Mansfield stresses: 'It feels even more important that as artists, but more importantly as citizens, we're able to work together across borders' (pers. comm., 20 November 2020).

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[47] For a detailed outline of how *Phone Home* was devised, including the technological infrastructures that shaped and frequently complicated the collaborative process, see Tom Mansfield (2017) and Sarah Beck (2018).

Fig. 18: Workshopping: Developing *Phone Home*'s multimedia collage.
Credit: Phone Home 2016.

Putting this pluralist, agonistic vision into practice was not always a smooth process, however. The companies frequently had differing opinions on how to frame and present the materials, particularly in how they explored questions of forced displacement and bordering. Transnational collaboration is sometimes presented as a border-defying approach in and of itself, whose intrinsic aesthetic-political value is presented as self-evident. Yet for the creators of this production, it became essential to reconsider and re-evaluate the political and creative purposes of their joint endeavour throughout – particularly as the political conditions of their transnational project changed in the wake of the 2015–16 refugee movements, increased border enforcements, and the Brexit referendum.

While artistic and ethical-political discussions often had to be sidelined during the virtual meetings, the rare face-to-face encounters between the teams provided better opportunities to

debate and work through creative tensions (Beck 2018, 66).[48] For instance, during a plenary session in Athens (the first joint meeting after the Brexit referendum), there was some disagreement about whether to change the show's original scripts to reflect the Brexit referendum. Yannis Kalavrianos, of Highway Productions, categorically opposed such a rewriting, arguing that 'It's a great issue that happened during the procedure, but we're not going to have this story about Brexit' (Kenyon 2017, 34:04–37:00). Angelika Fink, of Pathos Theater, however insisted that the referendum needed to be reflected in the performance: 'We have to! […] Why can real-life talks not be a part of the project?' (Kenyon 2017, 34:04-37:00). Their disagreement caused the team members to review more extensively the shared purposes of their collaboration:

Geli Kalampaka	Why not use this opportunity that we have here to be physically present to have a common starting point […]? We do agree that there is some common ground.
Angelika Fink	I understand, but what is the point? We could have three theatre plays in three cities and not be connected.
James Blakey	Something to be gained from telling stories together in the context of a show about Europe.

<div align="right">(Kenyon 2017, 34:04–36:15)</div>

This continuous work of finding compromises and of reasserting 'some common ground' and shared belief in the value of transnational storytelling became crucial in this frequently diverging collaboration (in Kalavrianos and Fink's case, the companies ultimately addressed the Brexit issue differently in their respective versions of *Phone Home*, with the individual scenes affording each team a certain degree of creative autonomy). The *Phone Home* creators have referred to this as a 'dialectical' approach to theatre making, which opened up diverse

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[48] As Sarah Beck outlines in her analysis of the production, *Phone Home*'s reliance on telepresence and digital technology often had the paradoxical effect of hindering, rather than facilitating, the collaborative process and rigorous debate about ethical and story-related questions (2018, 66). Meetings and rehearsals on Skype frequently contained technical problems, such as lags in the internet connection and sound difficulties (some of which were repurposed to create certain effects in the production). The general lack of face-to-face contact and joint time – including, crucially, 'informal' time outside the rehearsal room – further complicated the collaboration and often led to misunderstandings and miscommunications between the theatre companies, which then had to be addressed in the face-to-face meetings (Beck 2018, 66–67).

perspectives during the creative process as ideas were proposed, challenged, and developed into something new: 'A dialectical method […]. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. A way of thinking that doesn't hold on to entrenched positions, but instead sees the merit in a competing argument, bringing together alternative possibilities and allowing something new to be born' (Mansfield 2016). To some degree, disagreement was thus explicitly welcomed as a catalyst for creativity and an integral part of *Phone Home*'s aim of democratising the creative process.

Recalling the way in which Good Chance Theatre has framed its work in the Calais dome, the *Phone Home* creators, too, have aligned their collaborative, workshop-based approach with the objective of pluralising the writing and theatre-making process. Their theatrical community, however, is a markedly fragmented one. It corresponds to open-ended models of political community, as suggested by Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, and Robert J. C. Young: a 'community without unity' that is heterogenous, conflictual, and unfinished, always 'coming' and 'being constructed for the future' (Nancy 1991; Agamben 2009; Young 2016, 18–19). Rather than framing their transnational project in terms of a harmonious artistic community coming together in the face of increasing political division and nationalism, the *Phone Home* artists chose to foreground their own divisions and conflicting positionalities, and to repurpose them creatively.

'If we make that tension stronger…?': *Phone Home*'s transnational collage format

It became a conscious creative strategy of *Phone Home* to highlight certain incoherences instead of smoothing them out: 'all these little things that we're disconnecting about, that everyone is arguing about […] what happens if we make that tension between the three sets stronger?' (Kenyon 2017, 45:13–45:25). The play's dispersed split-screen stage, which variously shifts between connected and individual scenes, provided the ideal medium to reflect both the

commonalities and tensions between the three theatre companies and their respective political-creative contexts. The disjointed sections of *Phone Home* allowed each company to shape their version of the play along their own creative preferences, which was also reflected in the different technical setups and stage designs in each theatre.

The Athens performance was the least self-referential of the three, with the Highway Productions team using a naturalistic style as their primary mode of representation and an elaborate stage design with many props (Beck 2018, 68). For the virtual stream, it relied mostly on a single laptop and a steady camera to capture the entire stage in Sfendoni Theater. The London performance in Shoreditch Town Hall, by contrast, was considerably more self-referential, blending naturalist and epic traditions (Beck 2018, 68). It involved a minimalist stage yet elaborate technical setup with multiple hand-held cameras, phones, and laptops, which added more layers to Upstart's frequent metatheatrical interventions. Moving around the stage, the performers often addressed the screens directly and commented on the performance as it was unfolding. The Munich team also used multiple camera perspectives and relied even more strongly on a Brechtian approach of alienation. As part of its numerous distancing strategies, Pathos Theater substituted some of its on-stage furniture in Freie Reiter theatre for cardboard cut-outs and frequently introduced abstract elements and visual counterpoints (both within its own staging and against the other performances).
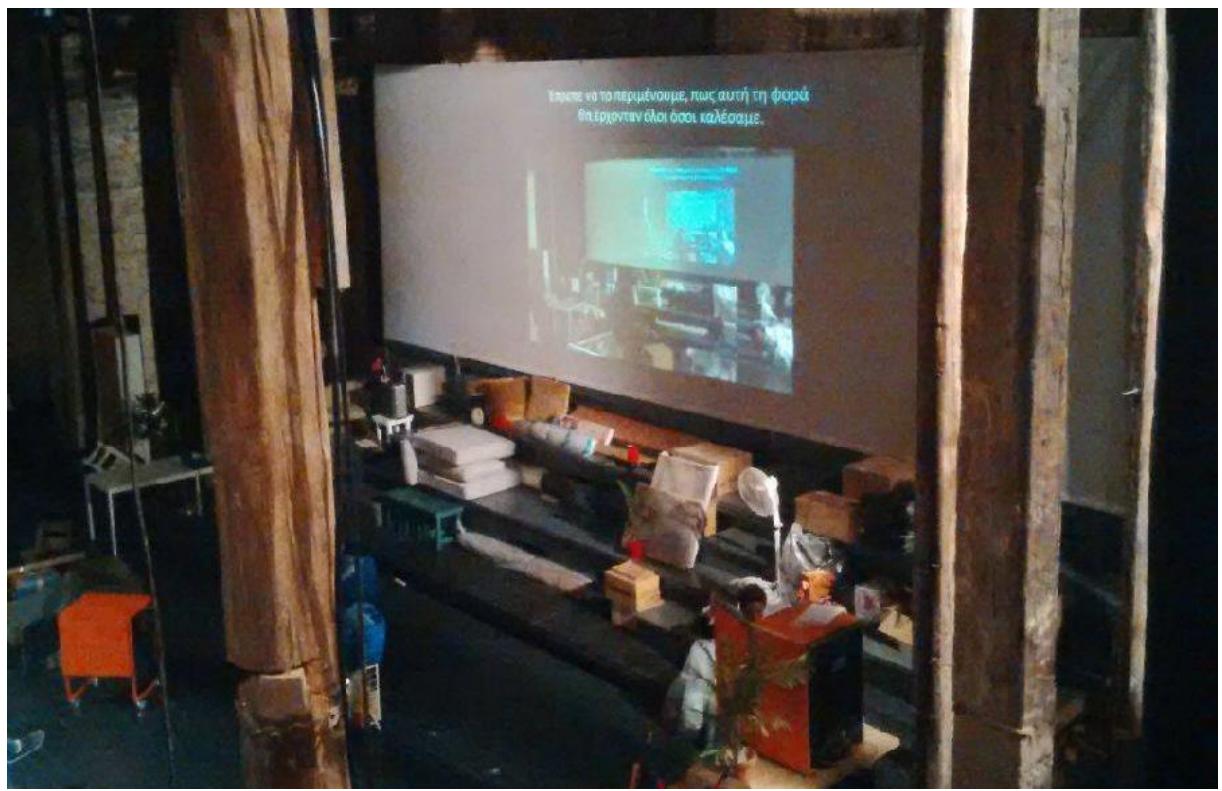
Fig. 19: *Phone Home*'s Athens stage setup for the Highways Productions performance in Sfendoni Theater.
Credit: Phone Home 2016.

Fig. 20: *Phone Home*'s London stage setup for the Upstart performance in Shoreditch Town Hall.
Credit: Robert McElroy 2016.
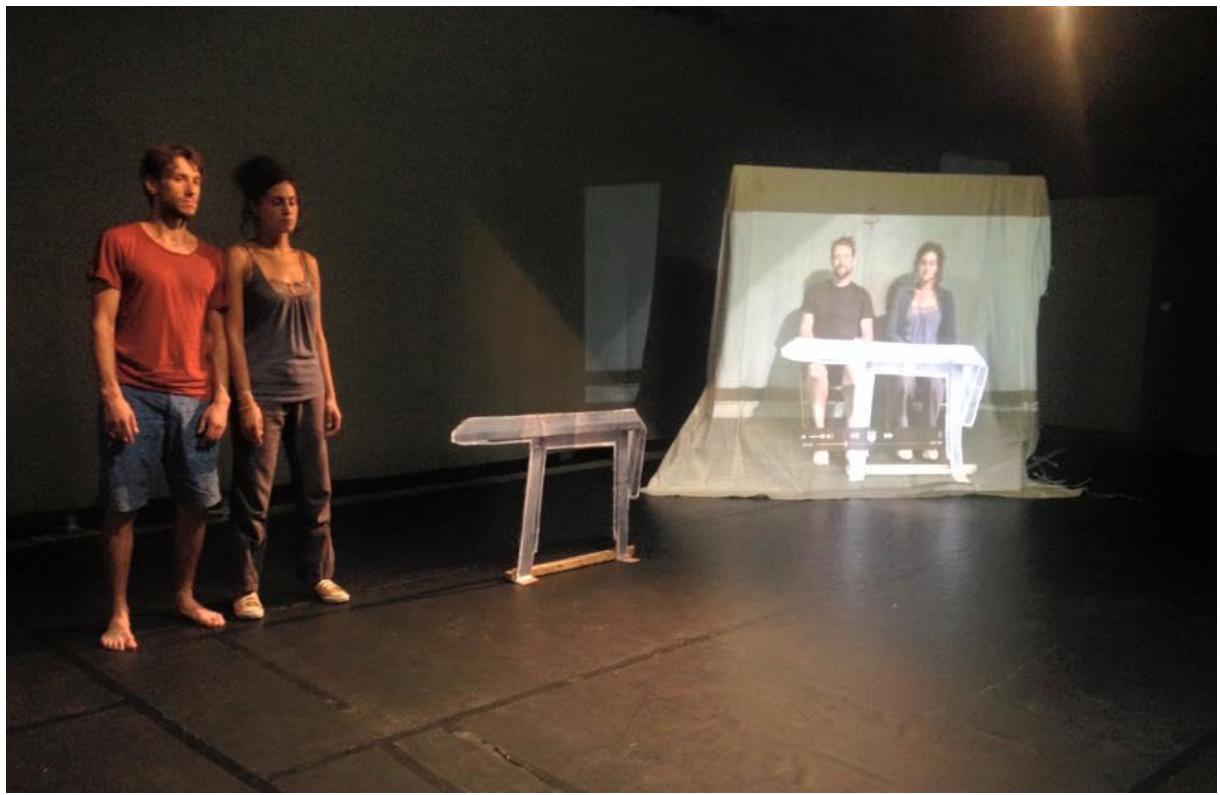
Fig. 21: *Phone Home*'s Munich stage setup for the Pathos Theater performance in Schwere Reiter.
Credit: Phone Home 2016.

By allowing space for various creative approaches and theatre traditions, *Phone Home*'s

process of co-creation also became a way to recognise and reflect the different politico-historical

and media contexts in Athens, London, and Munich. In the individual scenes, the three teams

still reacted to the same theme and scene heading, such as 'Help', 'Leaving Home', or 'Trafficker',

but they presented their own interpretation from within their specific geographic, political, and

linguistic context. Each team also had primary creative supervision over some of the connected

scenes; whenever there were creative disagreements during the subsequent interpretation, the

other companies ultimately had to respect the intentions of the scene's originators (Beck 2018,

70). From a creative perspective, these were the most difficult parts to develop and stage,

requiring an elaborate narrative, dramaturgical, and technological setup. Yet they also offered a

more sophisticated plane to address transnational questions of bordering. With each stage

momentarily extended to also involve the other two locations, virtually stretching across the continent, *Phone Home* could gather its three performance strands – each with its distinct aesthetic character and politico-historical focus – and put them in conversation with each other.

To link the three-fold transnational stage, *Phone Home* worked with multiple cameras, screens, microphones, tablets, loop pedals, smartphones, and video conferencing software. As with the play's conflicting styles and textualities, however, its various technologies were used to establish not only connections, but also disjuncture and distortion. For the artists, the technological setup posed numerous challenges, including frequent disturbances during online rehearsals due to echoes, delays, noise interferences, and bad connections (Kenyon 2017). How to repurpose these obstructions in support of the play's larger creative and political aims became an important question during the creative process. Any interfering sound was also a potential asset for the production, as Rochi Rampal, of Upstart Theatre, points out: 'How do we harness it for our benefit in the show?' (Upstart 2016b, 2:26:48–2:33:46).

In the play, the various screens and speakers added further phonic and visual layers to the already multi-layered, multilingual performance. This also enabled *Phone Home* to create a recurring distancing effect across the transnational stage: contrasting, for example, the naturalistic dialogue in one theatre (usually the Greek stage) with jarring sound effects broadcast from another stage; or simultaneously displaying diverging acting styles across the three performance livestreams; or creating visual juxtapositions by having some performers actively 'manipulate' the cameras and film the stage from unusual angles (especially in the Munich performance) (Mansfield, pers. comm., 20 November 2020). In typical metatheatre tradition, the split-screen dramaturgy thus allowed *Phone Home* to create continuous counterpoints to undercut, juxtapose, and cast doubt on its own textualities – also offering an additional plane to defamiliarize bordering mechanisms.

These meta layers became particularly significant for the play's reflections on media narratives, humanitarian discourses, and the legal-bureaucratic language of border enforcement – but also for scenes involving first-person testimonies, interviews, and family biographies. Its various technical devices enabled *Phone Home* to highlight gaps between texts and performers throughout, along with other strategies of alienation and abstraction. At one point, for instance, an Upstart performer relays a woman's first-person account of moving from Zimbabwe to the UK in 1992, including the racism she encountered there. Rather than simply reciting this narrative, however, the performer reads it out from index cards, clearly marking it out as someone else's experience (the scene was written by Zodwa Nyoni) (Upstart 2016b, 49:35–53:48). Aiming to re-establish this distance between themselves and the materials throughout, the Upstart artists also changed the role assignments briefly before each new show. This was one of *Phone Home*'s guiding principles that all three theatre companies, despite their different aesthetic approaches, agreed upon: 'We are not pretending to be refugees, we can't know what that experience is' (Mansfield, cited in Beck 2018, 71). While several of the artists involved in the project shared personal or family histories of forced migration, it was still important for the creators to not impose any universalist frames onto the specific contexts and narratives of displacement that the play addresses.

'How can I help?': inadequacies of theatrical solidarities

More so than in *The Jungle* (which only once explicitly mentions the theatre space and its role within border contexts), *Phone Home* highlights its own theatricality throughout the performance. Anxieties around the inadequacies of certain performances of solidarity – in theatrical but also activist contexts more broadly – come through strongly in an early scene in *Phone Home*, entitled

'Help'. Performed individually by the three companies, it addresses theatrical responses and volunteering practices in Germany, the UK, and Greece during the 2015 'Refugees Welcome' movements. The diverging interpretations of the scene in Munich, London, and Athens offer three ambiguous and self-critical reflections on what constitutes 'helpful' theatrical activism, also revealing nuances in how transborder solidarities were performed and discussed differently across Europe in 2015.

The Munich version of 'Help' is the most sardonic interpretation of the three, framed in a characteristically satirical and metatheatrical style. Unlike the other two performances, the Pathos Theater actors refer to their on-stage personas by their real first names. Without collapsing the gap between text and performer, the staging blurs the distinctions between fictionalised performance and real experience, aiming to establish political-ethical links and implications between the two positionalities. One of the performers, Angelika, recounts to the audience a scene that she once witnessed outside a refugee accommodation behind Munich's Schwere Reiter theatre (where the *Phone Home* performance is taking place). Inviting her fellow performer Melda to participate in the narration, Angelika instructs her to play the part of 'a very, very involved Munich resident, I mean *really*. […] You enter the area in a completely distraught state. You ask, "Where are the refugees? I have to do something!"' (Upstart 2016c, 22:30–22:60; my translation). Another actor, Simon, is recruited to play 'a young African' (Upstart 2016c, 22:50–23:10; my translation). Following Angelika's stage directions and adding her own improvisations, Melda embraces Simon amid enthusiastic cries of 'Welcome, welcome!', unloads large stuffed toys into his arms, and showers him with greetings in German: 'You are so very welcome, I saw it all on TV, it is really terrible what is happening in this day and age, I brought some clothes, you are so very welcome here in Germany!' (Upstart 2016c, 23:10–23:50; my translation). In response, she receives a pointed 'Danke?' from Simon (Upstart 2016c, 23:45–23:55; my translation). Angelika, the 'director' of this scene-within-the-scene, now addresses the *Phone Home* theatre audience again

to comment on the episode. She recounts how, in her understanding, this situation had eventually become reversed, with the young man acting as the person who helped the overly eager volunteer.

Delivered in these meta voices and mise-en-abyme format, the purposefully exaggerated scene encourages audiences to view the volunteer's behaviour, at least in part, as a form of self-staging. She extends a form of 'helping' that primarily serves her own sentimental needs to be perceived as a 'very, very involved' citizen, a cosmopolitan who is aware of 'what is happening in this day and age' – ironically, however, she is supremely unaware of the perspective of the other person. With her gigantic stuffed toys, she seems to picture only unaccompanied children and young families as recipients of her 'help', and she never stops to listen if, or in what form, her supposed 'generosity' is welcomed. There are parallels here to the critiques of misguided humanitarian responses and white saviourism expressed in *The Jungle*. The Munich version of 'Help', too, draws out how certain widely circulated images of people on the move – e.g., train stations full of young families, the 'good border spectacle' of German 'Willkommenskultur' – led to preconceptions about people's demographics and projected needs, while excluding many others (Picozza 2021, xviii). In its caricature of a singularly unhelpful, self-absorbed volunteer, Pathos Theater's scene foregrounds this selectiveness and offers a less self-congratulating narrative of 'Willkommenskultur'.

While the Munich scene also implicates theatrical responses in its critique of self-staging – alluded to in the blurred boundaries between performers and on-stage personas –, the London interpretation of 'Help' makes this point more emphatically. Upstart's more explicitly self-referential version of the scene foregrounds the (often futile) desire of European citizens, specifically those participating in theatre, to respond to mass displacement and border violence. As if reading out the results of a group brainstorming session, a performer flips through file cards with answers to the question, 'How can I help?'. The partly sincere, partly ironic suggestions

range from the material to the discursive, from the academic-theoretical to the humorous-absurd, and highlight metatheatrical anxieties throughout:

> I can make a piece of theatre with a scene about all the ways I can help. […] I can write a letter to my MP, asking them to legalise asylum applications from abroad. […] I can stop referring to them as 'refugees' and maybe start referring to them as 'evacuees'. […] I can clone Rupert Murdoch and use the clone to force media accountability across the board. […] I can admit my country's mistakes in chopping up a part of the world for our own financial, strategic gain. I can listen to what people need, not what I think people should need.
>
> (Upstart 2016b, 18:22–23:15)

For Upstart members Tom Mansfield and Rochi Rampal, the aim was to recognise varied solidarity practices, but also acknowledge a 'collective sense of the inadequacy of any response' (Upstart 2016b, 2:04:37–2:05:13). Their reservations about the practicality of activist (particularly theatrical) responses highlight a fundamental impasse of distant spectatorship. In Mansfield's words, 'Here we are, in London, and we are a thousand miles away from the beaches at the Greek islands, and we are in some ways really powerless' (Upstart 2016b, 1:59:40–2:00:55).

In Athens, meanwhile, where these beaches are not 'a thousand miles away,' 'Help' unfolds differently. As interpreted by Highway Productions, the scene opens with a cheerful choreographed sequence, where the performers evoke the sense of a circus show as they clap, chant, do cartwheels, and use the multiple props on the cluttered stage for ball games, playfights, and masquerading. Following this interlude, one of the characters, Anti, thanks another, Daphne, for putting on the successful show, which is revealed to be a circus performance for children in a refugee camp. They arrange a further show, take a selfie, shake hands, and part ways (Upstart 2016a, 23:00–29:00; translation by Daria Luise Stumkat). The rest of the scene is taken up by a succession of text fragments, projected onto the background screen: present-day and historical quotes that express anti-refugee sentiment and xenophobic violence in Greece and elsewhere. This catalogue of racism, Islamophobia, and antisemitism includes prejudices expressed by

individuals and far-right groups, as well as references to state-perpetrated violence, such as the Chamouria genocide and expulsion of primarily Muslim Cham Albanians in 1944 and 1945 (Upstart 2016a, 23:00–29:00; translation by Daria Luise Stumkat).

Framed by these quotes, the significance of Daphne and Anti's show goes beyond purely escapist entertainment. Taking place within and against the context of racist state policies and systemic xenophobic violence, their continuous efforts to arrange circus games for children living in the camp are presented as part of wider anti-racist work. While the London and Munich interpretations of 'Help' voice impasses and inadequacies of transborder theatre and distant spectatorship, the Greek version of the scene exposes a similar disconnect but also paints a more open-ended picture of arts-based solidarity. Daphne and Anti's circus show cannot resolve the violence children experience at Europe's borders, yet it is still part of wider efforts to counter the xenophobic discourses and racist bordering mechanisms that surround and condition it.

Along with its 'pro-theatrical aesthetics', *Phone Home* thus presents an ambiguous picture of the role of theatre as a form of anti-border solidarity (Wake 2023). While the Athens strand tends to present a more affirming vision, the performance generally leans towards 'anti-theatrical politics', in line with many transborder metatheatre productions (Wake 2023). Though optimistic about the democratic potential of *making* a performance in a transnational workshop context – which involves more sustained forms of engagement, interaction, and debate across longer time periods –, the project's creators are more sceptical of the power of *watching* a performance (as a singular event, limited to a few hours) to initiate any long-term anti-border solidarities. Compared to Good Chance Theatre's hopeful visions of theatre 'that shakes hands with the world', *Phone Home* is less confident in the artform's capacities to build connections, mobilise theatregoers to further action, or intervene in political frameworks (Good Chance 2024a). As Mansfield remarks, 'I believe [that theatre can make a difference], but I also think it's inherently self-serving bullshit. […] I think we need to be more self-aware about the limitations of theatre as a form' (pers.

comm., 20 November 2020). Highlighting these limitations, while still reaffirming the desire towards sustained solidarity and tangible action, was a conscious aim of *Phone Home*: 'there is a culture of congratulation around helping that can feel really negative and self-seeking – and can, often in the same breath, be the only thing that any of us can do. […] Are we, on stage, are we, as a society, doing enough?' (Upstart 2016b, 1:56:40–2:06:52). Frequently pushing against this 'culture of congratulation', the play is careful to dispel comforting ideas of theatre as a self-evident force for political change. Instead, it asks audiences and artists alike to continuously reconsider their positionalities as participants in a performance event, but also as citizens in Europe, who are directly implicated in the continent's border regimes.

This self-referential approach differs considerably from the community of 'hopeful, resilient residents' created in *The Jungle*. That production's shared immediacy and sensory-immersive restaurant elements (shaking hands, sharing chai) are aimed at bridging differences between viewers and characters – which can lead, so the implication, to more enduring forms of solidarity beyond the performance context. *Phone Home*, by contrast, tends to establish a more divided space, leaning into its fragmentary, dissensual format. With audiences geographically scattered across three countries and an additional virtual plane, there is from the start a caveat to any sense of unified community potentially established in the theatre. Continuously gesturing back towards itself and its audiences, *Phone Home* pursues a more transient form of transnational collaboration that needs to be reasserted throughout.

3. Celebrity Humanitarianism in *Phone Home*

'Like they're fetishizing being a refugee': Ai Weiwei and the Cinema for Peace gala

Questions around the limits of theatrical solidarities come across even more strongly in *Phone Home*'s two-part scene 'Do It Like Charlize'. Performed jointly by the three companies, the two elaborate sequences frame the production and take up roughly a fifth of the overall performance time. The scene, which was initiated by the Athens team, is a response to post-2015 celebrity and social media humanitarian practices in Europe, presented in a predominantly satirical and (particularly on the London stage) self-referential register. It is the part where *Phone Home* most overtly implicates artists and theatre audiences within its on-stage critique, which lead to different receptions in Athens, London, and Munich.

When the scene starts, it first appears to be set in a refugee camp. 'We're short on blankets,' a performer on the London stage announces in a panicked voice, 'We need at least 250 blankets by tomorrow, what are we going to do? […] We have tons of people coming, we've got to be ready! […] Each one of them needs a blanket, okay, it's urgent!' (Upstart 2016b, 08:00–08:30). Convening via a video conference, other performers agree to call Doctors Without Borders and gather spare blankets from Munich and Athens. Soon, however, it is revealed that this is not a camp context at all: these people are the organisers of the trinational 'Golden Gala', an extravagant charity event meant 'to raise money,' 'to help those less fortunate than ourselves,' and to increase awareness for 'the refugees' (Upstart 2016b, 1:32:22–1:32:27, 09:45–09:50). The emergency blankets are for the attending guests, a group of anonymous, generic celebrities, who are meant to wear them during the gala's central photo-op.

What first comes across as a fictional charity gala is eventually revealed to be a reference to a real event in February 2016: the Cinema for Peace gala at the International Film Festival in

Berlin, held annually since 2002. The scene in *Phone Home* recalls a photo-op organised by artist Ai Weiwei, who served as the honorary president of the festival's jury in 2016. In a publicity stunt intended as a gesture of solidarity with refugees, Ai invited gala guests in Berlin's Konzerthaus to pose in golden thermal blankets, which resulted in a series of widely circulated selfies and photographs (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 133). One of the most prominent images from the event shows the entire concert hall as an indistinguishable mass of golden blankets and phone cameras. Another one depicts artist Pyotr Verzilov taking a selfie with *Pussy Riots* member Nadya Tolokonnikova and actor Charlize Theron – the namesake of the *Phone Home* scene – as they smile into the phone camera. In the 'Golden Gala' of the performance, these original selfies are later projected onto the screens in each theatre, alongside other images, social media feeds, and videos of celebrity ambassadors.

Fig. 22: Photograph of guests posing with thermal blankets at the 2016 Cinema for Peace gala.
Credit: Ai Weiwei 2016.

Fig. 23: Photograph of Pyotr Verzilov, Nadya Tolokonnikowa, and Charlize Theron taking a selfie at the 2016 Cinema for Peace gala.
Credit: Gisela Schober/*Getty Images* 2016.

The images were widely criticised as 'misguided,' 'offensive,' 'tasteless,' 'tacky,' and 'crass' (Perlson 2016). Tim Renner, Berlin's secretary for cultural affairs at the time, commented that 'even though it is presented as an act of solidarity, there is something clearly obscene about the organisers asking the guests of Cinema for Peace to don emergency blankets for a group photo' (2016; my translation). Despite criticisms, Ai stood by the installation, reiterating his intention to 'defend the dignity' of refugees (Barnes 2016). What most commentators took issue with, however, was not the sincerity of the artist, the organisers, or even the attendees (some of whom, such as Ai and Tolokonnikova, have personal experiences of persecution and longstanding commitments in transnational activism). Rather, it was the presentation of the photo-op and its 'mistaken impression of vanity and callousness,' as Emma Graham-Harrison notes: 'The juxtaposition of smiles and the metallic shimmer made the crowd look facile, and an event meant

to demonstrate solidarity came across more like a vain, empty publicity stunt' (Graham-Harrison and Finch 2016).

At this point, Ai had been using selfies in art and activist projects for some time, frequently also circulating them on his Instagram page. His 2016 collage project *Iphone Wallpaper*, for instance, chronicles over 12,030 images taken on Lesbos, including selfies with people who had recently arrived on the island as refugees (Choy 2016). Such 'solidarity selfies' are a common genre of celebrity humanitarianism (Chouliaraki 2017, 87). Especially around 2015 and 2016, many public figures shared images and videos showing themselves interact with people in refugee camps, for instance. Prominent examples include actors Jude Law, Angelina Jolie, and Ewan McGregor, as well as political and religious leaders, such as former German chancellor Angela Merkel, former Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras, and Pope Francis. By typically setting a public figure side-by-side with a non-famous person, the composition of these images implies an exchange of symbolic capital and brand value, as Lilie Chouliaraki notes: 'the selfie capitalizes on the figure of the migrant so as to stage the celebrity as a "true" brand of benevolent activism, while it reciprocally transfers the symbolic value of celebrity onto the migrants, endowing them with a potential for recognizability' (2017, 88). Much like *Phone Home*'s 'very, very involved Munich resident' in the scene 'Help', the celebrity in these images is thus able to momentarily cast themselves as a cosmopolitan, socially conscious activist (Upstart 2016c, 22:30–22:60; Chouliaraki 2017, 88).

In the Cinema for Peace photo-op, Ai took this celebrification one step further: here the gala attendees became the only subjects visible in the frame. In contrast to other solidarity selfies, 'there is no co-presence to mobilize celebrity–migrant value transfers. The migrant is now absent' (Chouliaraki 2017, 89). Instead, the golden blankets were meant to invoke the absent person: in the visual logic of these images, '[t]he celebrity, bearing the blanket as an acting prop, stands for

the migrant' (Chouliaraki 2017, 89).[49] A similar logic of substitution was also at the core of Ai's *Safe Passage* installation, the twin piece to accompany the photo-op. While the inside of the Berlin Konzerthaus appeared in radiant gold, its outside was momentarily transformed, too: its columns had been covered in 14,000 discarded life jackets, donated by the mayor of Lesbos, Spyros Galinos. Each life jacket was meant to 'represen[t] a single refugee,' with '[t]he sheer abundance of jackets [...] highlight[ing] the countless lives changed by the crisis' (Azzarello 2016). The installation was often used as a contrast to highlight the perceived shallowness of the celebrity photo-op inside the Konzerthaus; culture secretary Renner, for instance, called it a 'not exactly subtle but effective and justified' illustration of the scale of mass displacement (2016; my translation).

What both these pieces of art activism have in common, however, is that they visually replace their referents entirely – as did Ai's widely circulated replication of the Alan Kurdi photograph.[50] Where the blanket photo-op aims to momentarily recast wealthy celebrities as people who have experienced dangerous border crossings, the lifejacket installation foregoes the person entirely. By 2016, this type of proxy-representation had become a prominent feature in many activist performances and art projects: certain – often highly compromised – objects of survival (emergency blankets, life jackets, rubber dinghies, buoys …) had been transformed into 'a mobile signifier for people on the move, and specifically for refugees arriving in Europe'

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[49] This visual displacement of people on the move concerns not only the visual structure of the individual selfie but extends to wider media contexts where these images are shared and circulated. In her analysis of 'the theater of the selfie,' Lilie Chouliaraki argues that the ways in which 'selfies of celebrities-as-migrants' are circulated in mainstream news networks works 'both as a stage for affective engagements and as a site of power relationships that produces hierarchical classifications of humanity' (2017, 81). As a prominent genre of activist performance, the selfie 'contributes to orientalist agendas that "other" migrants and refugees; it does so by coupling the geopolitical bordering of migrants stuck in the outskirts of Europe [...] with practices of "symbolic bordering" that appropriate, marginalize, or displace their digital testimonies in Western news media' (Chouliaraki 2017, 78).

[50] Alongside numerous other replications and re-enactments of the image, where activists stood in as proxies for Alan Kurdi, Ai Weiwei recreated the photograph for *India Today* in February 2016, lying on a beach in Lesvos (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 161).

(Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 85).[51] As works of art activism, these objects were invested with a new cosmopolitan visibility and mobility. While on Lesbos, lifejackets had been discarded in a landfill – a 'lifejacket graveyard' hidden from touristic centres –, they were now 'bravely scaling monuments, […] staging occupations in front of parliaments, [….] sharing the limelight with socially conscious celebrities' (Vehkasalo, n.d.; Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 85–86).[52] Similar to how *The Jungle*, as a production, can travel freely across Western states, while its performers and characters cannot, Ai's life jackets and blankets omit the systemic immobilisation that they reference: with the *Safe Passage* installation having travelled to several other European and US cities since 2016, these objects 'end up doing things that [their original] wearers cannot[:] [c]ross borders, gain recognition' (Asmelash 2020; Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 85).

Though intended as a gesture of solidarity, however, this proxy trope is itself indicative of, and further reinforces, forms of political depersonalisation and homogenisation: a form of commodity fetishism in which 'subjects appear as objects, and objects as subjects' (Marx 1976; Benjamin 2008; Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 73). As Anna Carastathis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi remind us, 'If an object can come to represent a subject—and, indeed, act as its proxy—it is because that subject has, already, been objectified' (2020, 91). The label 'refugee', they note, 'is itself an ossified category' that dehumanises and abjects people, 'a process involving thingification, force, and the constitution of sociolegal, bureaucratic, humanitarian, military, and documentary gazes' (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 78). That a group of celebrities could so easily fashion themselves as 'refugees' by putting on golden blankets was possible only because of

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[51] Guaranteeing survival, however, is not always the primary purpose for the producers and distributors of these ostensible survival objects: 'people were arriving in Lesvos wearing "fake life jackets" (an untold many wearing these jackets never arrived at their destination). […] [F]illed with absorbent foam and other substances that would negate its basic function as a flotation device, the fake life jacket was and is sold in coastal points of departure in Turkey in the wake of the spectacle of the refugee crisis.' (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 84)

[52] Life jackets have been repurposed in protest art on public monuments, such as Ai's, but also in various upcycled consumer products. The company *Makers Unite* in the Netherlands, for example, turned five thousand discarded life jackets into a 'Life-Vest Collection' of tote bags, laptop sleeves, wine coolers and – perhaps most tellingly – travel pouches (Makers Unite 2022).

these wider processes of dehumanisation. The commodity fetishism of the blankets is intrinsically linked to the 'categorical fetishism' of border governance, which frames people on the move as populations to be 'managed' – 'a commodity, traded between states,' as Filippo Grandi, the current United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, once put it (Apostolova 2015; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Grandi 2017).

By visually removing the actual person from the frame, the blanket selfies and lifejacket installations stripped away political-historical and material hierarchies, instead projecting a universal humanity along humanitarian forms of identification. Such forms of celebrity humanitarianism therefore expose 'a scandalous contradiction,' as Chouliaraki notes: they gloss over extreme disparities in political-material privilege and conceal ongoing Western complicities in maintaining global structures of injustice (2012, 4). Ai's interventions, Jerome Phelps observes, 'neutralis[e] political crisis into a (passing) crisis of feeling: even at a celebrity art gala you can don an emergency blanket and feel good about yourself. Hard political questions, of your country's leaders or yourself, not required' (2018, 19). Uniting everyone within a 'sentimental feeling culture,' the charity gala created a space that 'at once confirm[ed] the unity of society, regardless of its structural disparities, while also authenticating the morality and goodness of those benefitting from the disparities in question' (Sharma 2017, 3; Berlant 2001).

Ai's photo-op thus employed precisely the kind of proxy-representation and universalism that *Phone Home* explicitly rejected in its theatrical practice: 'pretending to be refugees' and 'to know what that experience is' (Mansfield, cited in Beck 2018, 71). As Rochi Rampal, of Upstart Theatre, notes about the gala event, 'elements about how that happened made some of us feel uneasy […] – demonstrating some sort of affinity with the golden blankets' (Upstart 2016b, 2:01:16–2:01:36). During a Q&A after the London performance of *Phone Home*, one audience member reiterated this:

> When I saw the image of Charlize Theron wearing the golden blanket, sitting at this gala dinner with champagne and celebrities, […,] it just made me feel really ill because it's like they're fetishizing being a refugee somehow. It felt like almost mockery, and they were there looking really radiant. […] Why is *that* the thing you're doing to raise money?

<div align="right">(Upstart 2016b, 2:07:18–2:07:43)</div>

In its satirical rendition of the event, *Phone Home* deliberately exaggerates this jarring juxtaposition and fetishisation even further. Employing the various distancing possibilities of its transnational stage, the play pushes against the gala's projected universalism, highlighting throughout the scene the disparity between the extraordinary cosmopolitan mobility and wealth of the charity event and the contexts of exclusion and bordering that the gala is meant to address and represent.

'All together!': satirising celebrity humanitarianism

In its parody gala, *Phone Home* blocks the original photo-op's implied association of the blankets as 'a mobile signifier for people on the move' (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020, 85). As the two-part scene unfolds in the play, the blankets are successively turned into a signifier for celebrity humanitarianism instead. From the start, 'Do It Like Charlize' emphasises the ostensibly universal message that the gala organisers project onto the blankets:

London	When should we wear the blankets? I was thinking, from the beginning.
Munich	Yeah, the blankets carry a very powerful message.
Athens	They show solidarity! […]
London	Yes. And if we wear them as well, then I think it'll be a very resonant message that we could find ourselves in these same poor people's condition.

<div align="right">(Upstart 2016b, 16:30–16:55)</div>

Convening between London, Munich, and Athens, the teams disagree about gala menus and seating arrangements, but are unanimously in favour of the emergency blankets and their 'powerful message'. Contrasted with the organisers' petty arguments over champagne and

celebrity gossip, however, it is made abundantly clear that they are, in fact, highly unlikely to ever find themselves 'in these same poor people's condition'. The two-part structure of the scene, too, helps to emphasise this disjuncture. Once the preparations for the event have unfolded in 'Part 1' of 'Do It Like Charlize', *Phone Home* momentarily leaves its Golden Gala organisers and turns to its other scenes, many of which address Europe's differential regimes of exclusion more explicitly. By the time the play revisits the gala in 'Part 2' of 'Do It Like Charlize', towards the end of the performance, the organisers' visions of unity and togetherness ring even more hollow, contrasted against the multiple scenes of bordering that have preceded them.

'Part 2' is where the gala reception properly commences. Accompanied by dramatic awards music, fanfare, and colourful light effects, the organisers in each city enter the stage as if walking on a red carpet, smiling and winking at the cameras and the audience. The golden blankets have now been refashioned into shape-shifting props and malleable fashion items: elaborate turbans, hairbands, and sashes. As if posing on a runway, the gala organisers are donning elegant evening gowns and suits, with the blankets wrapped around them – mimicking the guests at the real Cinema for Peace gala.

Fig. 24: The gala scene on the Athens stage, played by Kostas Silvestros, Christina Maxouri, Alexia Beziki, Yorgos Glastras, and Stefi Poulopoulou.
Credit: Creative Europe 2016.

Like circus directors, they exuberantly welcome everyone to the 'Golden Gala', waving champagne glasses and addressing both their in-theatre audiences and *Phone Home*'s wider transnational audience:

Athens	Three countries, three venues in live connection, 27 non-governmental organisations, 130 volunteers, and hundreds of guests – with one common goal!
London	To raise money! To help those less fortunate than ourselves! [...]
Athens	All together, [for] Refugee Day! [...]
Munich	We are having the biggest charity gala ever held in Europe!

<div align="center">(Upstart 2016b, 1:32:05–1:36:37)</div>

After these increasingly jubilant exclamations, all the performers raise their hands to the screens to applaud each other across the virtual connection – enthusiastically in London and Athens, more hesitantly and pointedly in Munich (creating yet another distancing counterpoint). 'It is essential that we stay united in these difficult times for Europe,' proclaims one of the gala organisers in Athens; 'now that the refugee crisis is knocking at our doors, no-one must be indifferent,' adds a London organiser, emphasising each word with grave earnestness (Upstart 2016b, 1:33:38–1:34:22). As the scene progresses, the performers' smiles become more exaggerated, vacant, and prolonged, adding an increasingly grotesque element to the proceedings.

With their proud claims of presenting 'the biggest charity gala ever held in Europe,' bringing together '27 non-governmental organisations, 130 volunteers, and hundreds of guests,' the gala speeches also reflect how 'post-humanitarian' practices intersect with competitive market and advertising logics (Upstart 2016b, 1:32:05–1:36:37; Chouliaraki 2010). As Jeff Crisp notes, aid agency communications are increasingly 'dominated by fund-raising, marketing, branding, [...] social media and show-business activities,' with organisations such as UNHCR relying on 'the

methods of slick commercial advertising' (2022).[53] In these communicative structures, complex conditions of displacement are often reduced to hashtags and soundbites, leaning into 'the "ecstatic communication" of show business, wherein suffering turns into fleeting spectacle without moral content' (Chouliaraki 2012, 4). With celebrity ambassadors embodying 'the illusion of a single person fighting against structures of injustice,' the people whose interests these communications claim to advocate for are frequently silenced, side-lined, or turned into branding opportunities (Chouliaraki 2012, 4). Analysing promotional photographs used by aid agencies, for instance, Crisp has observed how the compositional structure of these images tends to place brand names, not people, in the centre of the frame; the actual subjects 'are used as a prop for aid agency logos,' wearing merch t-shirts, holding relief items, or standing in front of infrastructures displaying the brand logo (2019). As with the proxy logic of Ai's photo-op, people and their specific contexts are displaced from the frame.

This is further emphasised in *Phone Home* once the Golden Gala culminates in a short video screening, recalling the film festival of the real Cinema for Peace gala. Introducing the clip, the organisers invite audience to watch 'all these wonderful people that set an example that humanity is not lost!' (Upstart 2016b, 1:34:10–1:34:22). What follows is a montage of the original gala selfies and other examples of celebrity humanitarianism, underlaid with melodramatic music. Several Western public figures flicker across the screens as they visit refugee camps, take selfies, pose on rubber dinghies and at littered beaches, carry supply boxes, and wear emergency

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[53] While this is a wider trend in the communicative strategies of many relief agencies, in Crisp's estimation, 'UNHCR appears to have embraced the marketing-based and "soft advocacy" approach more enthusiastically and wholeheartedly than many other humanitarian organizations' (2022). A migration researcher and former UNHCR staff member himself, Crisp has written on how increasingly large logos on refugee tents and other relief items – often justified by humanitarian agencies as a method of improving the security – have also come under increasing criticism for creating the opposite effect and putting people at risk (Crisp 2020, Gharib 2018). While providing a certain degree of accountability, exceedingly dominant humanitarian logos are often experienced as demeaning, serving primarily the agencies' own brand visibility to donor audiences (Gharib 2018). This form of product placement is also a way of occupying public space and entrenching the international presence of aid organisations and governmental agencies, as W. Gyude Moore notes regarding humanitarian branding in Liberia during the Ebola epidemic: 'A big, blue EU sign with the yellow stars that says, "This maintenance was paid for by the EU and the U.K. government" — and a small Liberian flag in the corner. […] Why don't we paint the asphalt road with your country's flag, too?' (Gharib 2018).

blankets, lifejackets, and agency ambassador t-shirts. The footage is accompanied by pointedly vacuous hashtags, such as #art_helps, #philanthropy, #care, #i_am_you, #stay_united, and #humanitarians (Upstart 2016b, 1:34:22–1:35:57). Reworked into this film-within-the-play, these documentary materials are presented with an additional layer of mediation, similar to the scene-within-the-scene staging of the Munich version of 'Help'. Emphasising the aura of cinema stardom and showbiz, *Phone Home* frames these activist practices even more explicitly as self-serving performances of celebrity branding and humanitarian adventure storytelling (Slaughter 2014).

'Quite uncomfortable … a bit guilty': transborder performance as charity gala?

Rather than merely commenting on the Cinema for Peace gala from a detached perspective, however, *Phone Home* then turns the gaze back onto itself, transforming 'Do It Like Charlize' from a broadly satirical into a characteristically metatheatrical scene. As the organisers address the guests of the charity event, the space of the gala starts to overlap more and more with the space of the performance itself, until it has been fully transposed into the theatre setting. This shift into the immediate time-space is underlined in the emphatic exclamations of the gala organisers, who encourage everyone to partake in their hashtag activism on social media:

Athens	We are in Sfendoni Theatre!
London	We are at Shoreditch Town Hall!
Munich	We are in Pathos München at Schwere Reiter! […]
Athens	And now, go on and wear your blankets and post your selfies on our Facebook page!
London	Use the following hashtags: #nooneisillegal, #aid, #humanity, #itstartswithyou, #refugeecrisis, #prayforrefugees, #careforrefugees, #prayforrefugeechildren, #iamrefugee, #phonehomeeu, #goldengala!

(Upstart 2016b, 1:32:05–1:33:40)

As one of the organisers on the London stage finishes her list of generic hashtags with the final two references, '#phonehomeeu, #goldengala,' she turns directly towards the audience, then towards the camera, smiling and pointing a finger gun: 'We would like to thank our sponsors, our volunteers, our guests and – you! Our audience, who are watching on television screens across Europe and through livestreaming all around the world' (Upstart 2016b, 1:33:38–1:34:00).

Fig. 25: '… and you!': Screenshot (Upstart 2016b, 1:33:38) of a London gala organiser, played by Nadi Kemp-Sayfi, pointing at the camera during 'Do It Like Charlize'.
Credit: Upstart 2016.

What so far has been presented as a critique of glamorous celebrity humanitarianism has now turned into something more. Throughout the scene, the gala organisers have successively resituated themselves and the performance context, from a geographically distant event in the past, to the immediate reality of the theatre space: we are not at the Berlin Cinema for Peace gala in February 2016 anymore, 'We are in Sfendoni Theatre! We are at Shoreditch Town Hall! We are

in Pathos München at Schwere Reiter!' (Upstart 2016b, 1:32:40–1:33:00). The 'Golden Gala' has spread to the theatre audiences and viewers watching at home, with performers pointing and speaking to them from the stage and via the camera connection. Using both the immediacy and the multimedia setup of its performance space, *Phone Home* now implicates its participants – artists and audiences – more directly in the scene. They are turned from 'impartial spectators' into more involved contributors of the charity event (Choulariaki 2017). Applauding themselves and the theatre audiences between sips of champagne, the gala organisers end the transnational Skype connection in another self-referential gesture:

Munich   We can help! We mustn't forget that.
Athens   Everyone does his best!
London   Theatre shows, concerts, exhibitions, documentaries!

(Upstart 2016b, 1:35:57–1:36:37)

It is almost as if the scene has sprung a trap on its audiences: lulled into a sense of superiority by the broadly satirical, ridiculing register, they are now compelled to consider whether this moral high ground is truly warranted. Where the scene has previously encouraged them to direct their critical gaze towards the behaviours of celebrities, they are now invited to view their own actions with a similar scrutiny, momentarily compelled to see themselves as not-so-different from the gala guests. Clapping at each other and at the audience members, the performers are also asking: what separates our actions – making theatre and attending shows about forced migration – from the humanitarian branding of Charlize Theron? How is buying a ticket to a theatre show different from donning a golden blanket at a gala show? Is watching *Phone Home* ultimately just another opportunity to 'Do It Like Charlize'?

Phone Home's three performance strands offer diverging answers to these questions. The extent to which the play lingers on this self-referential moment varies considerably between the three locations, also resulting in different audience responses. In the final moments of 'Do It Like Charlize', the performances are no longer connected transnationally, instead choosing divergent

routes to move on from this moment. On both the Munich and Athens stage, the tension is dispelled relatively quickly, with the performers dispersing and moving on to the final part of the play. On the London stage, however, 'Do It Like Charlize' is extended slightly longer, culminating in one and a half minutes of frantic applause directed at the audience, with the actors clapping and smiling in an increasingly distorted way. Pulling their audiences even more firmly into the scene, the performers distribute golden blankets among theatregoers. Given how *Phone Home* has led audiences through the scene, these props no longer represent a compromised shortcut to a refugee perspective ('that we could find ourselves in these same poor people's condition' [Upstart 2016b, 16:30–16:55]). The play has undercut this dubious association and turned the items into signifiers of self-congratulating posturing instead. Enmeshed in the golden blankets, theatregoers are meant to momentarily consider themselves within the discomforting position of highly privileged gala attendees.

One London viewer commented during the post-show Q&A that the scene made them feel 'quite uncomfortable' and 'a bit guilty': 'If you're looking at us as an audience, and you're clapping until you can't anymore … It's sort of saying, you know, "Well done, you're not doing enough." That's how it felt. […] But, fair enough, I mean, we're *not* doing enough, you know' (Upstart 2016b, 1:56:40–2:02:44). Other audience members were considerably more uneasy with how 'Do It Like Charlize' unfolded, as Mansfield points out:

> A lot of people [in the UK] *hated* the gala scenes, absolutely hated them. […] Seeing a scene in which, basically, *they're* being satirised, or people with their social attitudes are being satirised, was quite problematic for quite a lot of our audience. Some people said that they really liked the whole show but that they wouldn't tell other people to go and see it because of that scene. Really intense. Meanwhile in Greece, they just think it's hysterically funny. Because, of course, if you're in Greece, every other day, some celebs are coming over to hug a refugee on Lesbos.
>
> (pers. comm., 20 November 2020)

While alienating the audience was not an explicit intention of the London performance, the theatre makers consciously 'wanted to create an uncomfortable moment' (Upstart 2016b,

1:56:40–2:06:52). In Mansfield's words, 'If we were making a piece of theatre about the subject that we're making it about, and we sent everyone out into the night feeling like everything was okay, and that we were all doing the right thing, then we wouldn't be doing our jobs properly' (Upstart 2016b, 1:56:40–2:06:52). For the Upstart team, 'Do It Like Charlize' became a way of complicating and 'satirising our own belief in theatre's power to make a difference,' similar to the scene 'Help' (Mansfield, pers. comm., 20 November 2020). The company's more confrontational approach to the scene foregrounds how theatre, too, can be implicated in the universalising logics of sentimental humanitarianism, where 'the generosity and tender-heartedness of the West unites donors in a community of virtue that discovers in its own fellow-feeling for distant others a narcissistic self-contentment' (Chouliaraki 2010, 113). Aiming to prevent such easy fellow-feelings, *Phone Home* continuously tears holes into the theatrical community it creates, reconfiguring its boundaries throughout – a marked contrast to *The Jungle*'s much more coherent, hopeful restaurant community. When *Phone Home* ropes its audience members into the performance reality, it is not to share naan and chai, but to wrap them in golden blankets and shower them with sarcastic applause. Moving back and forth across its multiple stages, the play presents a markedly conflictual form of theatrical implication.

4. European Villagers and Strangers in *Phone Home*

'This "we", that's not me': Oberwil-Lieli's 2016 referendum

Implicating transnational audiences in uncomfortable positionalities is also an aim of the collective scene 'Referendum'. Here *Phone Home* most explicitly places its central theme, 'home', under scrutiny, along the guiding questions, 'What does it mean to feel at home, what does it mean to be European, and what is it like to have to flee your home in order to make a new one?' (Moses 2016). Theatre of migration, Emma Cox notes, often 'coalesces around notions of *home*. […] [It] is simultaneously a location, an idea […] and a material and affective practice […]. When local populations encounter migrants, certain convictions are triggered about who may be allowed to enact a "homely" relationship with place' (2014, 77; original emphasis). In 'Referendum', *Phone Home* stages the exclusionary dynamics that produce the borders of 'home' in the context of the 2015–2016 refugee movements to Europe.

The scene traces the story of a group of 'villagers' who collectively decide to prevent 'eight strangers' from joining their community. Based on a real news story from Switzerland, 'Referendum' is performed in the style of a twisted fairy tale that, much like the Golden Gala, transcends its original context and becomes representative of wider European responses to recent refugee movements. Where 'Do It Like Charlize' centres on symbolic bordering and othering practices that displace the narratives and positionalities of people on the move from European representative planes (substituting them for blankets), 'Referendum' more explicitly draws out how these mechanisms are intrinsically linked to geopolitical bordering practices that displace people on the move from political and material space in Europe (Chouliaraki 2017, 78).

In 2016, the Swiss village of Oberwil-Lieli, in the Canton of Aargau, became an international news story. Its mayor Andreas Glarner, of the far-right Swiss People's Party (SVP),

had announced in the previous year that the municipality would refuse to accommodate ten refugees – a number that had been determined by the government's nation-wide allocation policy and quota system (in some news outlets, this number was misreported as eight, which is presumably why the *Phone Home* scene refers to 'eight strangers'). Switzerland has long had stakes in the EU's policies of border governance and deterrence. While not a member state, the country is still part of the Schengen agreement and has participated in the EU's refugee resettlement programmes since 2015 (SEM 2022). It has also been contributing financially to FRONTEX since 2011 – 24 million Swiss francs per year in 2021, a sum which will be increased to 61 million francs by 2027 (Peter 2022). Known for his racist and Islamophobic campaign slogans, Glarner has long been a vocal proponent of more restrictive border governance in Switzerland, arguing in 2015 that resisting the government's refugee allocation policy amounted to a 'civil duty' for Swiss citizens (Jirát 2016; The Local 2016). Instead of allocating ten people, Oberwil-Lieli would pay a fine of 290,000 Swiss francs to the canton, already calculated into the budget plan for the following year (Yeung 2016; The Local 2016).

Situated in the highly affluent environs of Zurich, Oberwil-Lieli is one of the richest places in Europe, counting more than 300 millionaires among its 2,200 residents (Yeung 2016). It is 'among the most low-tax municipalities of the Canton of Aargau,' as the official municipal website highlights, adding, 'Let us hope that the traditions and peculiarities of the place, as well as its rural character, will defy change and thus be preserved for future generations' (Oberwil-Lieli n. d.; my translation). Events in 2015 and 2016 revealed just how determined the governing SVP administration and some of Oberwil-Lieli's residents were to preserve the community's 'traditions and peculiarities' and 'its rural character', with supporters of Glarner's policies offering donations to contribute to the fine of 290,000 Swiss francs (Rey 2015). To further prevent the canton government from potentially turning several vacant buildings into refugee accommodations, Glarner's office pre-emptively acquired them and had them demolished (ARD

2015b). As the mayor stated in an interview at the time, 'We were concerned that the canton government would want to force asylum seekers on us as they were keeping an eye on every vacant building. We figured, better demolish them and play it safe' (ARD 2015b; my translation).

The case of Oberwil-Lieli presented a stark contrast at a time when European news stories often highlighted examples of rural communities that had initiated alternative models of accommodation, sanctuary, and transnational solidarity. From Domenico Lucano, the former mayor of Riace, Italy, to the more recent example of László Helmeczi, the mayor of Záhony, Hungary, some municipal governments had actively opposed state policies of exclusion. Against exceedingly hostile nation-state border practices, they had offered housing and support networks to people seeking asylum, in certain cases deliberately inviting new residents, with the aim of rejuvenating community life and revitalising local economies in the face of rural exodus. Against these practices, Glarner's approach in Oberwil-Lieli presented a drastically different vision of municipal politics: one that involved actively destroying local infrastructures to prevent new forms of communal living and transnational solidarities.

Not all residents accepted the increasingly established narrative of Oberwil-Lieli as a community that was collectively hostile towards people on the move. Some of them founded the alliance 'Für ein solidarisches Oberwil-Lieli' ('For an Oberwil-Lieli of Solidarity'), organising demonstrations and campaigning with other solidarity groups across Switzerland. Student Johanna Gündel, one of the alliance's members, remarked at the time, 'I was outraged about the municipal mayor's statements, claiming that we, as a community, didn't want to receive any refugees' (ARD 2015a; my translation). Dominique Lang, another member, noted how '[p]eople started to recognise the place as "xenophobic Oberwil-Lieli". And in every interview, that municipal president [Glarner] was saying "we". And this "we", that's not me. Each time it shocked me anew' (ARD 2015a; my translation). Rejecting these invocations of a unified community, several residents explicitly distanced themselves from the all-encompassing narrative

about Oberwil-Lieli painted by the municipal government and several news outlets (Milevska 2017).

Their practices of dissent and protest reflected how the supposedly coherent community projected in the SVP's nationalist-populist and securitising discourses was working against the pluralist realities of intercommunal living. As Young notes, 'the nationalist fantasy of how a nation should work' is fundamentally at odds with the lived reality of community: '[t]he imagined community of the nation has historically been a destroyer of actual communities, of the historically achieved modes of intercommunal living' (2016, 22). Positioning themselves against the destructive policies pursued by the SVP – which also manifested in the actual demolition of village infrastructures –, some Oberwil-Lieli residents insisted on the heterogeneity of their municipality, also reflecting how 'community has its own resistance to itself built in, […] a conflictual poetics of dissent' (Young 2016, 20). As Jacques Rancière outlines in his conception of 'dissensus', authority figures and institutions may try to impose a holistic and self-contained conception of community, yet its members, as well as those excluded from these boundaries, will push against this narrative, forever moulding and extending it (2010).

In the case of Oberwil-Lieli, these processes of dissent were negotiated not only in public protests, but also via more institutionalised forums of debate and political participation. As is customary in the Swiss direct-democratic system, the matter was put up for a referendum, a legally regulated assembly common in most municipalities. Despite the campaigns organised by the newly-formed 'Solidarity' alliance, the referendum held in May 2016 still resulted in a 52–48 majority in favour of Glarner's position – an outcome that was subsequently challenged again (Jirát 2016; Yeung 2016; The Local 2016).

'Happily together … *mostly*': undermining harmonious community

As staged by *Phone Home*, this episode from a Swiss village becomes a parable for wider bordering processes in Europe. Rather than using a documentary or journalistic register, the play narrates the events of Oberwil-Lieli in the style of a fairy tale – yet one that, in characteristic *Phone Home* style, simultaneously undermines itself, with the connected trinational stage providing counter-images, phonic juxtapositions, and diverging body languages throughout. The scene's discordant, transnational staging reflects the contradictory dimensions of the original Oberwil-Lieli context while also dispersing political-historical implications for the referendum across Europe.

Originally devised by Upstart, the scene owes its fairytale elements to theatre workshops that the company had previously co-organised with young people at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, in collaboration with the Journey MCC Church and the Birmingham LGBT Centre (Moses 2016). The idea for the narrative genre grew out of the parables and folklore storytelling traditions that participants had shared during the workshops (Mansfield, pers. comm., 20 November 2020). Marina Warner has worked extensively on the significance of such forms of transnational storytelling, myth, and folklore, especially as a way of extending and countering the restrictive narrative genres imposed by state-based regimes of recognition (2017, 154–155). Writing on her long-term workshop project *Stories in Transit*, devised since 2016 across Palermo and several UK cities alongside storytellers, activists, lawyers, and social scientists, Warner stresses how border histories have always been represented across varied forms and narrative traditions (2017). Exceeding the autobiographical-testimonial frames typically demanded by asylum regimes, these genres include 'tall tales, proverbs, jokes, riddles, satire, romances, tales of wonder and magic, fairy tales, animal fables, and, above all perhaps, those supremely unlikely stories, myths' (Warner 2017, 155). These imaginative forms are themselves mobile and changeable, creating 'travelling tale[s]' that 'continu[e] to shape-shift […] into many new forms'

throughout history and across different geographies (2017, 151). As popular expressions of ancient legends, fairy tales have often formed the 'connective tissue between a mythological past and the present realities' – 'travell[ing] across cultural borders, […] passed on from generation to generation, ever-changing, renewed with each re-telling' (Warner 2014, xvi; 2018).

The workshop participants and creators of *Phone Home*, too, participated in such practices of creative 'shapeshifting', transposing narrative genres into new transnational contexts and forms. For the scene 'Referendum', the artists wanted to include the folklore traditions shared in the Birmingham workshops and develop them further: 'Let's make something a little bit like that, but let's make it sinister. […] Folk tales aren't always inherently sinister, but often there is a sinister background to them' (Mansfield, pers. comm., 20 November 2020). The act of storytelling became itself a central motif in *Phone Home*'s theatrical response to the notably sinister border history of Oberwil-Lieli, with 'Referendum' centring on the discursive processes with which communities narrate themselves – and delineate their outsiders. Here, too, fairytale tropes came to work as 'connective tissue' between seemingly distant realities: as mobilised by *Phone Home*, these narrative traditions became a way to reestablish transnational connections between Oberwil-Lieli and a wider European context, against dominant media framings that often disavowed these links in favour of a more benevolent self-narration.

Fig. 26: Narrating a European village: The 'Referendum' scene on the London stage, played by Simon Carroll-Jones, Nadi Kemp-Sayfi, Rochi Rampal, and Ramzi DeHani.
Credit: Robert McElroy 2016.

The main narration in 'Referendum' takes place on the London stage and is kept purposefully vague and generic. A background screen displays panorama footage from an alpine village, and the soundscape involves cowbells, birdsong, and yodelling, indicating a stereotypical, rural Swiss setting – the exact location and timeframe, however, are never specified. The scene title, too, reflects this abstraction: called simply 'Referendum', it does not delineate a precise geographic context (arguably more so than Oberwil-Lieli, the Brexit referendum provided an obvious association for viewers during the performance time in October 2016).

There are no named characters in the scene, only abstract 'villagers'. This omission is a marked departure from how events in Oberwil-Lieli had typically been framed, with many media accounts preoccupied with two main protagonists of the story. This was a tale that told itself well, as Jirát remarks: 'The media loved the story that Oberwil-Lieli had been offering them [...]: here

was the [far-right] hardliner and political professional Andreas Glarner – there the young student Johanna Gündel, appealing to humanity. It was entirely clear where the sympathies lay' (2016). *Phone Home* consciously avoids this simplistic villain–hero structure and the neat distribution of sympathies in its staging. 'Referendum' presents a more complicated scene that highlights shared complicities in political decision-making, as well as incoherences in the stories contemporary Europe tells about itself.

Four performers represent the community of villagers on the London stage. Huddled up close together, they recount in English the dynamics of their village life and their civic processes. Taking turns with each new sentence, they fill in the story as if reciting a well-rehearsed script, including refrains and exaggerated voices for different villagers:

Villager 1	Once upon a time, somewhere in Europe, there was a village.
Villager 2	A beautiful place of peace and prosperity, where everybody lived happily together …
Villager 3	… *mostly*.

<div align="center">(Upstart 2016b, 1:23:20–1:23:50)</div>

The villagers' shared, anonymous narration recalls the choric voice employed at several points in *The Jungle*; here, however, any implied unity is compromised and collapsed from the start. The village community may wish to project a seemingly unified front, but much like the sinister undercurrent of many fairy tales, it is only superficially so – a 'beautiful place of peace and prosperity' only for certain groups of people. Iterations of the qualifying '… *mostly*' above are repeated throughout the scene, along with other elements that continuously complicate any coherent narration of community the villagers may try to establish. The different participants of their shared narration continuously contradict and undermine each other, qualifying and undercutting any absolutist claims (to narrative authority, to space, to political determination in Europe …). As in other scenes, *Phone Home*'s fragmentary, multi-voiced dramaturgy lends itself

well to staging these recurring interruptions, presenting instead a more pluralist, fractured vision of European community.

Significantly, this village is not confined to one single place. Linked via the transnational screen connection, the performers on the Athens stage also complement and undercut the storytelling by providing commentary in the form of a satirical sound backdrop – a contemporary version of the Ancient Greek Chorus. As the London performers recount how 'the villagers would all get together for a debate and then vote on what should be done,' their narration of an ostensibly fair and equal democratic process is repeatedly interspersed with skewed alpine music, cartoonish sound effects, and occasional curses in Greek (Upstart 2016b, 1:23:40–1:23:50). Adding to the sarcastic tone of the London narration, the repeated interjections from the Athens stage provide a reminder to not take the villagers' claims at face value when they suggest that 'after the vote, we would all shake hands and agree to do what had been decided' (Upstart 2016b, 1:24:03–1:24:10).

On the Munich stage, meanwhile, the performers are silently consuming a lavish banquet. Filming each other with a hand-held camera, they are constantly manipulating and distorting the camera angles, zooming in and out of people's plates, faces, and mouths as they devour the food. A visual juxtaposition for 'Referendum', this decadent meal will, in the following scene, be revealed as the opulent gala dinner of 'Do It Like Charlize'. Projected onto the screen to accompany the villagers' narration in 'Referendum', this unsettling imagery of greedy consumption frames and contextualises this 'beautiful place of peace and prosperity'. Right from the start, the boundaries of the supposedly idyllic, self-contained village are thus undermined. The transnational montage staging of the scene links it to wider, more complex realities, dispersing the community both narratively and in a more concrete way: performed across *Phone Home*'s split-location stage, the village *is* located 'somewhere in Europe', with its components virtually linked via the screens, but physically spread across three countries.

Tensions, contradictions, and layers of double-meaning, already present in the scene's multi-voiced storytelling, soundscapes, and visual presentation, are further enhanced on an embodied level. Throughout 'Referendum', the performers' body languages and exaggerated facial expressions present a juxtaposition to the villagers' story. Like in the Golden Gala scene, the grotesque expressions and encroaching gestures convey a sense of increasing unease and unwanted intrusion, with the performers grimacing, touching each other, and ceaselessly removing each other's hands. Devised by movement director Jennifer Jackson, these mannerisms emerged from rehearsal warm-up games, where the performers would experiment with different forms of reactive touch, delineating and moving into each other's personal space. Commenting on the creative development of the scene, Tom Mansfield notes how the initial iteration

> was very 'clean', sort of 'children's TV presenter'. […] Then we started to add a thing where [the villagers] all had a hidden objective of being the person at the front whenever they're speaking. […] We always wanted to undermine what they're saying. […] That moment was all about things undercutting it.
>
> (pers. comm., 20 November 2020)

The villagers may try to establish themselves as a unified collective based on shared democratic principles and rights – 'we, the villagers' –, yet their movements betray a more riven reality: they are constantly pushing against each another, reflecting hierarchies and conflicting interests that run through their community politics and sphere of appearance. Much like the real residents of Oberwil-Lieli, who refused to be included in the all-encompassing 'we' presented by Glarner's SVP government, the villagers in the scene form a more unstable, open-ended community. Recalling *Phone Home*'s own conflictual, multi-voiced theatrical community, the villagers reflect how community may be understood, as Young suggests, by moving 'away from the vertical synchrony of metaphor, from sharing and substitutability, to the horizontal prospectiveness of metonymy, of *clinamen*, a relation of leaning or contiguity and therefore also of contingency, a narrative always in process or an unfinished becoming' (2016, 19). In the play, with the villagers' bodies not so much supporting as intruding on one another, their gathering on

stage represents, quite literally, 'a relation of leaning or contiguity'. Even as they continuously try to demarcate their community boundaries against the outside, they can never quite form any unified entity.

'A dark spot of Switzerland': reframing Oberwil-Lieli as a European narrative

By transposing its village onto a European plane – 'a village somewhere in Europe' – *Phone Home* turns Oberwil-Lieli into a narrative that is indicative of wider processes of bordering underpinning Europe's imagined democratic community. Writing in 2010, Étienne Balibar contended that Europe's 'new borders' and their continuous relocation, particularly under the Schengen Agreement, had produced 'a European *apartheid*, a reverse side of the emerging European community of citizens' (2010, 319). Through processes of European integration, he argues, 'some foreigners (the "fellow Europeans"), in terms of rights and social status, have become *less than foreigners*, they are in fact no longer exactly strangers, which is not to say that they feel no difference' (Balibar 2010, 319; original emphasis). At the same time, however, 'other foreigners, the "extra-communitarians", and especially the immigrant workers and refugees from the South, are now […] *more than foreigners*, they are *the absolute aliens* subject to institutional and cultural racism' (Balibar 2010, 319; original emphasis). By the time *Phone Home* was performed, and even more so today, these simultaneous internal and external exclusions of the 'European community of citizens' had become markedly more pronounced, reinforced by rising nationalist and neofascist movements and more restrictive border policies across Europe.

'Referendum' stages this 'reverse side of the emerging European community', drawing out how the villagers' supposed idyll and openness towards some 'fellow-Europeans' is compromised and predicated on the systemic exclusion of 'extra-communitarians'. The villagers

pride themselves on their participative democratic procedures and their ostensible tolerance towards 'strangers'. Yet when 'the government – *far away*' announces that they would need 'to take strangers into [their] village,' straight away, they reveal that there are clearly limits and certain expectations attached to their alleged hospitality (Upstart 2016b, 1:24:00–1:24:30).

Villager 3	Now, this village was used to strangers. Many had come before.
Villager 2	But these eight strangers were different.
Villager 4	These eight strangers weren't *planning* to come to *this* village.
Villager 3	They didn't know anything about *this* village.
Villager 1	And this village didn't know anything about them.

<div align="center">(Upstart 2016b, 1:24:12–1:24:48)</div>

Defining someone as a stranger, Sara Ahmed remarks, is not simply a failure of recognition, but already a form of recognition in itself: 'Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognised as not belonging*, as being out of place' (2000, 21; original emphasis). The recognition of certain people as *not belonging* and *out of place* is produced both in multicultural discourse – 'welcoming the stranger as the *origin of difference*' (Ahmed 2000, 4; original emphasis) – and in xenophobic discourse, where the figure of the stranger 'comes then to embody that which must be expelled from the purified space of the community, the purified life of the good citizen […]' (Ahmed 2000, 22). In the 'purified space' of *Phone Home*'s village community, the 'eight strangers' are successively imagined with ever greater degrees of suspicion and hostility, alongside dominant racialised border categories.

Some of the villagers initially appeal to a humanitarian tradition and invoke, with exaggerated pathos, 'a duty […] to help people less fortunate than ourselves,' recalling the exclamations of the Golden Gala organisers (Upstart 2016b, 1:24:50–1:25:00). Other villagers insist to wait 'until the paperwork comes through and we know whether they're the right kind of strangers' (Upstart 2016b, 1:29:25–1:29:35). Calls for solidarity are quickly drowned out by ethno-

nationalist and populist rhetoric, similar to the claims of Oberwil-Lieli's SVP mayor Glarner that

it was a 'civil duty' of Swiss citizens to oppose the government's refugee allocation policies:

> **Villager 4** But what about our duties to *our* families, to *each*
> *other*?
> **Villager 1** Where will these people live?
> **Villager 2** Who even are they?
> **Villager 3** Are they *really* refugees, or are they only here to take
> our jobs?
> **Villager 2** We have worked hard to make this village great.
> What if they take it away from us?
>
> (Upstart 2016b, 1:25:00–1:25:25)

The villagers directly echo the justifications of real Oberwil-Lieli residents, one of whom argued

in an interview, 'We have worked hard all our lives and have a lovely village […] we do not want

it spoiled' (Yeung 2016). Glarner, too, justified his policies in Oberwil-Lieli by arguing that the

municipality was not 'told if the 10 [people] were from Syria or if they are economic migrants,'

and that 'the refugees from Syria […] are better served by being helped in the camps nearer their

home' (Yeung 2016).

While the specific Oberwil-Lieli context is still present in the dialogue, *Phone Home*

deliberately places the residents' statements within a wider European context. Similar to *The*

Jungle, the scene draws out how mutually reinforcing media figurations constructed refugees as

victims/threats in the wake of the 2015–2016 forced migrations. One villager, 'a doctor, who had

not long ago been treating sunburnt and dehydrated children on a stony beach somewhere at the

edge of the continent,' still votes against the accommodation of refugees once he considers 'the

increase in taxes that might have come from supporting a *swarm* of *strangers*' (Upstart 2016b,

1:28:16–1:28:40). Another villager echoes wide-spread Islamophobic media narratives following

the 2015/2016 New Year's Eve in Cologne and what Sara R. Farris has referred to as

'femonationalist' media narratives, where feminist themes became 'exploit[ed] and co-opt[ed] […]

by anti-Islam and xenophobic campaigns' (Farris 2017). Initially inclined to support the

accommodation of the 'strangers', the villager changes her vote after picturing 'her sixteen-year-old daughter outside Cologne railway station on New Year's Eve, surrounded by men from a different culture who didn't share the respect for women we have taught our men so well here in Europe' (Upstart 2016b, 1:27:53–1:28:08). Delivered by the performers in exaggerated tones and pointedly intrusive body languages, these claims to humanitarian traditions and European 'respect for women' are undercut throughout, particularly by how the villagers themselves ceaselessly encroach on each other's personal space.

As with the Gala scene's sarcastic applause, 'Referendum' deliberately interrupts attempts at benevolent self-imagining in Europe. This is a dimension that was often neglected in the national and international news stories about Oberwil-Lieli, which tended to frame the SVP's municipal politics as an exception, both in Switzerland and in Europe. As Daniel Hechler suggested at the time in the German news programme *ARD Morgenmagazin*, 'Views that would be considered right-wing extremist elsewhere are socially acceptable here. […] Oberwil-Lieli: ultimately a dark spot of Switzerland that wants nothing to do with the country's humanitarian tradition' (ARD 2015b; my translation).

Several reports, especially in Germany, relied on this 'dark spot' narration, sometimes drawing on folklore tropes. Introducing the story to *ARD* viewers, Hechler noted sardonically, '2,200 residents. Switzerland from its chocolatey side. Idyllic landscapes, low taxes, high density in millionaires. All is still right with the world here' (ARD 2015b; my translation). Jan Jirát, meanwhile, referred to 'the disenchantment of the village king' in his account of how Glarner's political influence and authority had momentarily been challenged (2016; my translation). Here too, fairytale registers are mobilised, yet in a way that is markedly different from *Phone Home*'s twisted parable. In these journalistic accounts, the mock-folkloristic elements work to highlight not so much Oberwil-Lieli's trans-European resonance as its supposed exceptionality: the village is framed as a remote place, locked in a distant past and detached from wider transnational

realities – an anomaly both within Switzerland and wider Europe. Much like *The Jungle*'s volunteers like to think that Calais is 'not France', the fairytale tropes here work to construct Oberwil-Lieli and Glarner's SVP as 'not Europe'. A form of detachment that also reinforces a dubious sense of superiority: we may have our own 'dark spots', but look – *over there*, it is even worse.

Yet the narrative in which Glarner's SVP is written off as a deviation, confined to an isolated village, downplays the extent to which xenophobic and neofascist ideologies reach across Europe. Currently the largest party in the Swiss National Council (occupying 53 of 200 seats), the SVP has been characterised as 'one of the most powerful far-right political parties in Western Europe' (Doerr 2017, 4–5). It has played a significant role in the recent surge and reconfiguration of the European far right – what some commentators refer to as Europe's 'new racism', characterised by sophisticated, increasingly subtle rhetorical strategies, coded language, and widely disseminated media campaigns shared among transnational far-right networks (Doerr 2017, 4–5; Wodak 2013, 25; Richardson and Colombo 2014, 538). The SVP's appeal to nationalist and neofascist movements beyond Switzerland has also been facilitated by the country's multilingualism. The party's national poster and media campaigns, originally designed for German-, French-, and Italian-speaking sympathisers in Switzerland, frequently reach multilingual audiences and far-right parties across Europe, such as Germany's Die Heimat (formerly the National Democratic Party) and the Italian Lega Nord (Doerr 2017, 5–7). Contrary to the singularity implied in some media narratives about Oberwil-Lieli, the SVP's reach is clearly not confined to village boundaries.

This comes across strongly in *Phone Home*'s transnational narration. Here the fairytale elements no longer work to lock Oberwil-Lieli in a remote past and different moral-political space; on the contrary, they form the 'connective tissue' between this specific context and the wider border histories that condition it (Warner 2014). The village is reframed as a microcosm

that reflects ongoing European tendencies. An extraordinarily wealthy community, locked in debates over accommodating 'eight strangers', instead opts to pay a large fine from the community budget, happily sends the 'strangers' on to the next village, and pre-emptively destroys the conditions and infrastructures that might enable transnational solidarities. This story, *Phone Home* suggests, is not an outlier, but a reflection. Here is a continent with ample resources, conditioned on ongoing structures of exploitation, that nonetheless enacts crisis discourses over accepting a marginal percentage of the people displaced globally. *Phone Home*'s village community is representative of a longer, ongoing history where the granting of asylum is no longer framed as a legal obligation enshrined in international law, but as a debatable extra-task that states can opt out of, as long as they are willing to pay. When, towards the end of 'Referendum', the villagers discover that '[i]t actually works out cheaper to cover the cost of the fine than to support the strangers here,' they are 'shocked' and 'overjoyed' (Upstart 2016b, 1:28:58–1:29:40):

Villager 3	It is the best deal ever! Everybody wins!
Villager 4	The government gets the money that they can use to house the strangers in *another* village!
Villager 2	The other village get to feel good about themselves for supporting the strangers!
Villager 1	And the strangers get somewhere they can call home!

(Upstart 2016b, 1:29:12–1:30:00)

As with Europe's ever-growing web of migration deals, bilateral agreements, and funding commitments to border enforcement, responsibility is outsourced entirely: the presence of those constructed as 'strangers' is prevented, long before they ever set foot in the 'village'.

In its sinister tale, as in the Golden Gala, *Phone Home* presents a narrative of Europe as a fairy tale gone wrong. The play does not allow its audiences to simply detach themselves from these border histories. In its transnational staging, it is no longer solely far-right village mayors and super-rich celebrities who are accountable for the violent exclusion of refugees from European (material, political, representative ...) space. Instead, questions of implication are

transposed onto a more collective, transnationally dispersed arena, in which comforting notions of a benevolent European self are continuously undermined. Dispelling easy resolutions and refusing to 'sen[d] everyone out into the night feeling like everything was okay,' *Phone Home* presents a distinctly open-ended, unresolved vision of theatrical community and solidarity (Upstart 2016b, 1:56:40–2:06:52). Here transborder performance emerges an ongoing project that is never self-evident or exempt from bordering mechanisms, but that requires continuous work and re-negotiation.

III. *AZIMUT DEKOLONIAL* (2019)

DECOLONISING GERMANY'S BORDER REGIMES

1. Hajusom and a Decolonial Turn in Transborder Theatre

While formally and tonally very different, both *The Jungle* and *Phone Home* address the fallout from Europe's responses – and its failures to respond adequately – to refugee movements since 2015. Charting Europe's various hostile environments (with *The Jungle* following a mainly naturalistic and *Phone Home* a more abstract, experimental approach), both these plays centre on the multiple forms of violence that contemporary border regimes inflict on people on the move. At the same time, these performances present critiques of corrupted models of cosmopolitanism and sentimental humanitarianism that resurfaced in that same moment. From the unthinking actions of voluntourists in Calais to the self-staging antics of celebrity gala guests, these plays focus on how contemporary models of humanitarian 'helping' have failed to adequately address, and in some cases helped to reproduce, the border violence perpetrated by European states. In both these plays, there are efforts to deconstruct presentist 'crisis' discourses and self-congratulating narratives of Europe as a space of ever-greater liberty, equality, and human rights.

The performances discussed in the following two chapters, *Azimut Dekolonial* (2019) and *The Walk* (2021), still speak to the moment of 2015–16 to some degree, yet they originate from a considerably changed political-historical place. Several years into the Trump presidency, the Brexit process, and the far-reaching exacerbation of European border governance, these performances reflect a shift towards more extensive border-critical approaches and explicitly decolonial transnational solidarities – both in creative-activist and in academic-legal spheres. In

some regards, *The Jungle* and *Phone Home* already anticipated this move, drawing attention, for instance, to white-saviour imageries in humanitarian aid and continuities between imperial histories and the logic of contemporary borders. Yet they historicise these frameworks only to a point, with both plays focussing primarily on the immediate context of Europe's 2015–2016 bordering practices and 'Refugees Welcome' solidarities.

The 2019 production *Azimut Dekolonial – ein Archiv performt* ('*Azimut Decolonial – an archive performs*'), the case history of this chapter, deliberately draws on longer timelines, more expansive transnational contexts, and explicitly decolonial and antiracist frameworks in its interrogation of contemporary border governance. Developed by Hajusom, a Hamburg-based theatre ensemble and longstanding centre for transnational arts, this performance was created as an intervention in colonial archives, art practices, and historiographies, while also troubling border categories that have shaped post-2015 migration politics in Germany and wider Europe. Originally designed as an interactive walk-through installation, *Azimut Dekolonial* was performed five times at Hamburg's Kampnagel theatre in late March 2019 and subsequently presented, in an adapted format, as a guest performance at the *After Europe* festival in Berlin's Sophiensæle theatre in October 2019. In both these iterations, audiences were presented with a montage-style performance, involving a wide range of archival materials, testimonies, video footage, sculpture, and dance choreographies, which explored different aspects of Germany's colonial past and ongoing present, racism and Eurocentrism in histories of knowledge production, and neo-imperial structures in contemporary trade relations and supply chains. To compose this multilingual performance archive, Hajusom worked in close collaboration with Hamburg's MARKK (Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt, formerly the Museum of Ethnology).

Border-crossing and transnational collaboration were essential parts of how *Azimut Dekolonial* was developed. Its network of co-creators reached far beyond Hamburg, with the

production aiming to simultaneously retrace and subvert historical routes of colonial expeditions and ethnographic collecting. Its title, derived from the Arabic '*as-sumūt*', for 'paths', reflected the multiple trails, journeys, and colonial histories traced throughout the production (Sophiensæle 2019). Several Hajusom members travelled to their families' countries of origin (including Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Chile) and returned with personal and collective narratives of colonial oppression and resistance. In addition, the performers collaborated with Tongan-Australian artist Latai Taumoepeau, Cameroonian theatre maker Martin Ambara, and the research group AK Hamburg Postkolonial to devise decolonial performance concepts for the show.

Fig. 27: Some of the archival materials used in *Azimut Dekolonial* in Hamburg's Kampnagel theatre.
Credit: Michael Pfisterer 2019.

More so than *The Jungle* and *Phone Home*, *Azimut Dekolonial* deconstructs the ways in which contemporary border regimes are intertwined with longer histories and structures of imperial control and exploitation. Its turn to the past is driven by a keen concern for the immediate present: an understanding that colonial histories and contemporary systems of border governance and 'migration management' exist on the same continuum. Speaking about the production in a

short making-of documentary, performer and long-standing Hajusom member Farzad Fadai notes,

> There's this term 'economic migrant' ['Wirtschaftsflüchtling', lit. 'economic refugee'], and everybody is asking, 'Oh, but why do so many people come here, of all places? We aren't doing so well either!' But nobody is asking the question: How did all this start? Why is it that people are forced, for economic reasons but also persecution and other reasons, to run away from their home? And we also need to be clear about the economic reasons for [migration from] colonial states – which they aren't any more, but only in a formal sense, since most [former colonial powers] still make profits in these old colonial states. […] This is breaking it down and putting it very simply: where you take something away, something goes missing. And if something goes missing, people just have to leave and take it back from where it 'went'.
>
> (Menneking 2019a, 19:50–20:59; my translation[54])

In its turn towards longer histories of migration control, bordering, and colonial conquest, *Azimut Dekolonial* moves beyond calls for 'open borders', aiming instead to trouble the legitimacy of European border regimes in a more fundamental way. By the time the performance opened in Hamburg in the spring of 2019, political conditions in Germany had changed considerably since the Long Summer of Migration. The country's 'September fairy tale', as some commentators referred to the temporary suspension of the Dublin Agreement and widespread grassroots solidarities in 2015, had quickly given way to a rapid re-bordering of the continent (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 127). As Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez notes, Germany's widely lauded 'welcome culture' was markedly selective and short-lived, at least on the level of state policy: Europe swiftly 'turned to an autumn of racism,' exacerbated further by Islamophobic media narratives in the aftermath of the November 2015 Paris attacks and the 2015/16 New Year's Eve attacks in Cologne (2018, 24). By 2017, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) had secured representation in 14 of Germany's 16 state parliaments and had won 94 seats in the

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[54] Original quote in German (Menneking 2019a, 19:50–20:59): „Es gibt ja auch diesen Namen ‚Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge' oder sonst was, und alle wundern sich: ‚Oah, warum kommen so viele grade hier zu uns? Uns geht's doch auch nicht gut!' Aber niemand stellt sich die Frage: Wie hat das Ganze angefangen? Oder wieso bewegt es Menschen, auch aus wirtschaftlichen Gründen, aber auch aus Verfolgung und sonst was, von der Heimat abzuhauen? Und wir müssen uns das vor Augen führen, dass die wirtschaftlichen Gründe für die Kolonialstaaten, die es ja eigentlich nicht mehr sind, aber offiziell nur nicht mehr sind, weil die meisten machen ihre Gewinne immer noch in diesen alten Kolonieländern. Und das muss sich ja, wie gesagt, da, wo man was nimmt, fehlt etwas. Und dann, wenn da was fehlt, müssen die Menschen einfach weg und sich das da wiederholen – das ist jetzt nur runtergebrochen und vereinfacht –, wo es hingegangen ist."

federal election, entering the Bundestag for the first time as the third largest party. Against this context, Hajusom's performance asks audiences to question the validity of European border categories and migration policies, structured around hierarchies of supposed deservingness and illegality. Instead, theatregoers are encouraged to refocus on histories of colonialism and racial capitalism that are concealed and disavowed in hegemonic regimes of politico-juridical recognition.

In a context where the 'border spectacle' continuously dehistoricises and naturalises the supposed illegality of unsanctioned movement, *Azimut Dekolonial* presents a theatrical experiment in reconnecting histories that have been severed in state-based structures of recognition, representation, and memory (De Genova 2013; Cox et al. 2020; Danewid 2017). In the following sections, I will first outline the wider legal-political and creative-activist decolonial interventions within and alongside which *Azimut Dekolonial* was situated as a production. I will show how Hajusom's long-term creative practice has allowed the ensemble to establish and reaffirm transnational solidarities within Germany's restrictive border and memory regimes, with some of the artists' concerns overlapping with a wider turn to 'postmigrant' frames and 'multidirectional memory' in German theatre (Rothberg 2009; 2022). The last two chapter sections will focus in more detail on the performance *Azimut Dekolonial*.[55] My close readings centre on the artists' transnational research journeys and the versatile theatrical space they created in the production – a 'living archive' where multiple border histories converged, morphed, and entered into dialogue (Kampnagel 2019). In its open-ended approach that transcends traditional theatre spaces, *Azimut Dekolonial* signals ongoing shifts in transborder performance towards markedly more pluralist, agonistic, and expansive forms of solidarity and creative collaboration.

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[55] Since *Azimut Dekolonial* was performed in March 2019, before the start of my research, I was unfortunately not able to visit the original Kampnagel performance installation in person (Hajusom 2019a). My analysis is based on a recording of the adapted stage version (performed at the *After Europe* festival in Berlin's Sophiensæle theatre in October 2019), which Hajusom kindly shared with me (Hajusom 2019b). In addition, I draw on photographs, videos, making-of documentaries, and media reports of the original performance installation.

2. Decolonial Interventions in Theatre and Migration Studies

'Not a natural gap': reconnecting colonial histories in legal and migration studies

Not only on transborder theatre stages have calls for a refocussing on colonial legacies become more urgent. While historians, legal scholars, writers, artists, and activists were already drawing attention to colonial legacies in border governance prior to the Long Summer of Migration, the 'unprecedented and spectacularised debordering and re-bordering of Europe' (Picozza 2021, x) throughout 2015 and 2016 galvanised these critiques in new ways. Deconstructing Europe's perceived 'refugee crisis', border-critical activists and scholars have been reworking traditional humanitarian discourses of helping/suffering into more historicised frameworks of transborder solidarity, migrant justice, and antifascist resistance.

In critical legal and political theory, this has involved re-examining the right of states to exclude people on the move, especially in cases where migration patterns correspond with former colonial ties. In recent years, several crucial interventions in migration studies and legal theory have foregrounded how colonial legacies continue to impact contemporary structures of asylum (e.g., Mayblin 2017; Picozza 2021), migration policy and governance (e.g., Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; El-Enany 2020; Walia 2021; Lemberg-Pedersen et al. 2022), human rights frameworks and international refugee law (e.g., Maldonado-Torres 2017; Achiume 2019; Krause 2021), as well as the academic institutions and research disciplines that theorise migration and forced displacement (e.g., Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020; Mayblin and Turner 2021).

Much of this critical work has focussed on how the legal, political, and economic frameworks that govern contemporary mobilities and forced displacements require and perpetuate a form of wilful historical amnesia. Writing on the 2015 refugee movements, postcolonial sociologist Gurminder K. Bhambra observes: 'Just as Western countries (their media

and many politicians) fail to connect the geo-politics of war and displacement to their own foreign policies, so they fail to see that the gap in living standards between Europe and other countries is not a natural gap' (2015). Outlining this 'politics of selective memory,' Bhambra notes how '[f]ollowing [formal] decolonisation, European states have purified their histories as national histories and imagined their political communities as composed of "kith and kin"' (2017, 404). This retreat into state-based frameworks of political community has allowed former colonial powers to distance themselves from responsibilities for the ongoing legacies of colonialism: they 'refus[e] to share obligations to those who were previously dominated within their broader imperial political communities. The latter are now represented as "different", neither sharing values nor the particularities that make up the different national cultures' (Bhambra 2017, 404).

Human rights scholar Marie-Bénédicte Dembour calls this 'postcolonial dereliction': 'the entrenched European reluctance to think in terms of postcolonial responsibilities' (2015, 65). Even as migration patterns to Europe closely followed colonial connections in the decades after formal independence (with people migrating from former colonies to respective former colonial states), in the public conscience, officially, and legally, 'there was no sense in Europe that something was owed to these new migrants because of the colonial past' (2015, 65). This dereliction, as Dembour argues, 'did not arise from nowhere, but from the leftovers of ideology which saw nothing wrong in colonising other people, described as primitives, and thinking that the economic and political benefits which were drawn from this were rewards for the "burdens of empire"' (2015, 65). Conflict scientist Achankeng Fonkem also highlights the ongoing effects of this postcolonial dereliction when he maintains that 'the "refugee and migrant crisis" was and is an extension and a consequence of the legacies of European colonisation and a flawed decolonisation process' (2020, 53). Arguing against presentist explanations for the post-2015 refugee movements, he stresses the need to recentre colonial histories and neo-imperial relations

that have conditioned recent displacements: 'people fleeing to Europe and other destinations from war-torn and poverty-ridden home countries in Africa and the Middle East escape from a situation also created for them, their families, and their home countries by colonial legacies in postcolonial states and the nature of the decolonisation process' (Fonkem 2020, 53).

These links, however, are barely reflected in the conventions, legal bills, and treaties that structure the international refugee regime today. This, as many critical migration and legal scholars have stressed, is not an accidental oversight, but a purposeful omission and erasure. Researchers such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2017), E. Tendayi Achiume (2019), and Ulrike Krause (2021) have traced how the deliberate disregarding of colonial relations – what Krause calls a 'colonial-ignorant' perspective (2021, 599) – came to define the legal cornerstones of the contemporary refugee regime, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. As Krause highlights:

> From the outset, the composition of states discussing the draft convention and invited to the conference [held in Geneva in July 1951 to finalise the document] was critical: colonised territories were excluded, being represented instead by colonisers, and thus silenced. At the conference, colonial and imperial states largely dominated debates […] [and] insisted on the focus on Europe—which the adopted version reflects.
>
> (Krause 2021, 601)

In the following years, this 'colonial-ignorant' bias 'complicated protection for refugees outside of Europe, and especially those escaping decolonisation struggles' (Krause 2021, 601). The 1967 Protocol rectified some of this; crucially, it removed the Convention's geographic and time limits, extending the refugee definition beyond post-WWII refugees from Europe. However, the Convention's trajectory still has 'lasting effects for today's global refugee regime,' with many decolonised states adopting other, regional agreements (Krause 2021, 601).[56]

In more recent years, critical legal theorists have therefore been calling for a fundamental redefinition of governing doctrines to account for colonial histories and the lasting effects of de-

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[56] Beyond the UN framework, regional and transnational refugee conventions, subsidiary protection frameworks, and non-binding agreements include the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, and the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which led to the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (Owen 2020, 2–3, 28–29).

facto 'neocolonial empire' – contending that the Global North and Global South are still intrinsically connected within unequal political community, even as colonial-imperial ties have nominally been outlawed and severed (Achiume 2019). E. Tendayi Achiume, the former UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, argues that the 'political stranger exceptionalism' underlying international law must be fundamentally reconceptualised (2019). Under governing sovereignty doctrines, non-nationals are framed, by default, as political strangers who states may exclude, unless they are deemed 'worthy of discretionary exemption' – for example, if they can prove their well-founded fear of persecution under the 1951 Refugee Convention and Protocol (Achiume 2019, 1515). Achiume insists, however, that people who migrate in response to 'political subordination rooted in colonial and neocolonial structures' also 'have compelling claims to national admission and inclusion' – based on their status as political insiders, not strangers, who are historically bound to Northern nation-states 'that today unethically insist on a right to exclude them' (2019, 1510, 1520). Achiume also stresses that neocolonial structures do not work bilaterally, but multilaterally: the ethical obligations that result from neocolonial interconnection are not 'confined to the formal, original authors of colonialism and the specific [...] peoples those colonizers officially incorporated (for the purposes of exploitation) into their empires' (2019, 1561). Rather, neocolonial empire is produced and maintained 'as a joint enterprise' in the Global North, to the benefit of Northern states as a collective (2019, 1561).

Critical legal theorist Nadine El-Enany, too, calls for a different understanding of contemporary immigration law – not as a 'seemingly harsh but fair mode' that categorises people on an axis of supposed deservingness, but as a mechanism to keep colonial wealth in the West (2020, 5). Often reproduced in the language of humanitarianism, the categories and frameworks of immigration law, in El-Enany's analysis, serve as a 'veneer' that allows states in the West to conceal their colonial histories and present themselves as generous host states, seemingly with no

part in the historical and contemporary causes of displacement (2020, 134). Writing on the British context, El-Enany argues that a discourse of 'compassionate cases' and 'unexpected arrivals', underpinned by the structures of international refugee law, 'provides a convenient path for Britain to frame itself as a generous host state' (2020, 133). It allows the state to 'shed the association between its colonial history and the migration of its former subjects' (2020, 133). By linking the right to entry and abode in Britain to citizenship, legislation such the 1971 Immigration Act and the 1981 British Nationality Act materially and symbolically 'severed a notionally white, geographically distinct Britain from the remainder of its colonies and Commonwealth' (2020, 4). This effectively put the resources, wealth, and infrastructures gained via colonisation 'out of reach for the vast majority of people racialised through colonial processes,' even as most of them 'had geographical or ancestral histories of British colonialism' (2020, 4–5). At the same time, border governance works as a 'prop used to teach white British citizens that what Britain plundered from its colonies is theirs and theirs alone' (2020, 5). Regimes of legal status determination, El-Enany contends, also 'serve to legitimise the claim that colonial wealth, as it manifests in Britain, belongs behind its borders, only to be accessed with permission' (2020, 7–8).

By the time *Azimut Dekolonial* was performed in Hamburg's Kampnagel theatre in March 2019, many of the conversations around Europe's obligations towards people on the move had markedly shifted. Beyond the spheres of critical legal theory, this call for a different conceptualisation of political space and political community – one that considers the continuing effects of colonial histories – had also become more urgent in creative-activist circles. Tracing contemporary European border control within longer histories of imperial conquest and racial capitalism, migration researchers and activists such as Harsha Walia and Ida Danewid have been arguing for more historicised and antiracist approaches to articulate transborder solidarities. Liberal, empathy-oriented models of refugee solidarity, Walia notes, rely on 'a superficial

antiracism' that frequently fails to address how borders have historically worked as mechanisms of exploitation and racial state governance, perpetuating unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South (2021, 13):

> Liberal antiracist analysis, obsessed with superficial representation and flag-waving, purposefully fails to interrogate the material structures upending racism. Instead, we are offered the shallow politics of humanitarianism, such as 'Welcome refugees,' or liberal multiculturalism proclaiming 'We are all from somewhere,' or commodifying platitudes such as 'Immigrants build our economy.'
>
> (Walia 2021, 13)

In Germany, border-critical, anti-racist, and transnational theatre initiatives have been significant spaces where decolonial interventions in nation-state frameworks have been articulated in recent years. Theatre makers, performers, writers, and artists, particularly activist-artists of colour, have been persistently highlighting German colonial histories on stage, as well as the colonial structures underpinning certain German theatre institutions (Sharifi and Skwirblies 2022, 12). Deconstructing and working against racist discourses and colonial legacies, these creative spaces and grassroots arts practices have in many regards been performing a turn that major academic institutions in Germany are still catching up with. Taking stock of contemporary German theatre landscapes in their 2022 collection *Theaterwissenschaft postkolonial/dekolonial* ('Theatre Studies Postcolonial/Decolonial'), theatre researchers Azadeh Sharifi and Lisa Skwirblies note how, despite the multifaceted decolonial interventions happening on German stages, academic-theoretical spheres have 'remained conspicuously quiet and supposedly "neutral"' (2022, 12; my translation). Unlike in Anglophone universities, where dedicated postcolonial research centres and long-term projects are more common, German academic institutions still tend to marginalise decolonial approaches as a niche subject within the discipline of theatre studies – frequently diametrically opposed to students' increasing interests in colonial histories, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and critical whiteness studies (2022, 12–13). Against this persistent 'postcolonial dereliction' in academic institutions, many theatre and

performance initiatives in Germany – including Hajusom – have been developing inventive spaces where the critical and the creative have come together to formulate decolonial frameworks (Dembour 2015).

'A wild multilingualism and a spirit of solidarity': Hajusom's transborder practice

Efforts to reject a presentist discourse of 'refugee crisis' in favour of more long-term, far-reaching anti-border solidarities have defined not only the performance *Azimut Dekolonial*, but the larger trajectory of Hajusom as an ensemble. Unlike the theatre projects and collaborations discussed in this thesis so far, which were developed in response to more recent events, the history of Hajusom stretches back several decades. Initiated in 1999 by theatre makers Dorothea Reinicke and Ella Huck in a suburb of Hamburg, in a primary care facility for unaccompanied young refugees (Hohe Liedt), the project started out as a three-month theatre workshop. This origin story is still reflected in the ensemble's name 'Hajusom', an acronym based on the names of its first three participants: Hatice, Jussef, and Omid (Huck and Reinicke 2014, 8; Huck et al. 2022, 265). For its contemporary performers, as Hajusom member Katalina Götz notes, this name serves not only as a connection to the history of the ensemble, but also as 'a reminder for whom I am standing on stage' (Huck et al. 2022, 266; my translation).

Since the first workshop-based production (the eponymous *Hajusom 1–4*, which was created with the performers' own texts, choreographies, videos, and music), Hajusom has become an established centre for transnational arts, with a constantly evolving team of young performers and artists (in the 2022 ensemble, the youngest performer was 9 years old, the oldest 36) (Huck et al. 2022, 265–267). To date, Hajusom has developed 27 productions, most of them in transnational collaboration with other artists and performance projects (Huck et al. 2022, 266;

Hajusom 2024). The ensemble's work, as co-founder Ella Huck notes, has always had a strong transnational scope, defined by 'a mix of artistic research, the political struggle for asylum, dealing with and overcoming strong conflicts – paired with a wild multilingualism and a spirit of solidarity' (Huck et al. 2022, 266; my translation). The centre, which also organises public performance workshops and research events, presents itself 'as an artistic response in the field of European migration policy and as a contribution to decolonising discourses and practices' (Hajusom 2023). As part of its aim to establish long-term solidarities among its performers, Hajusom follows a concept of 'transgenerational' community and continuity: along the principle 'Each One Teach One,' ensemble members with several years of experience are encouraged to lead performance projects and assist newcomers as translators and mentors (Hajusom 2023).

In sustaining long-term collaborations and slower timelines (Hajusom's productions generally take one to two years to develop), the ensemble members are also responding to, and aiming to work around, restrictions and requirements imposed by the German state. While Hajusom is a long-established centre with its own creative rhythms, the ensemble's extended timeframes also result from having to adjust to the temporality of status requirements and residence permits: 'Notwithstanding our high professional standards,' as Huck and Götz note, 'our performers are only ever able to rehearse in their spare time; many of them rely on having a decent, steady income (an apprenticeship or employment contract) not only to get by but to be able to stay in Germany at all' (Huck et al. 2022, 269; my translation). Many of Hajusom's performers are highly aware, often on a personal level, of the politically produced contradictions that make it difficult – sometimes impossible – to participate in cultural life in Germany while also leading a secure existence (Huck et al. 2022, 269). This, too, has been a continuous reality from the very start: of the three original Hajusom members, only Omid was able to remain in Hamburg – Jussef was denied papers and had to flee further to the Benelux states, and Hatice was deported even before the first Hajusom production was put on stage (Hajusom 2014).

As much as Hajusom's work is predicated on border-crossing journeys and transnational collaborations, the ensemble's artistic practice is also exceedingly restricted by immobilisation and policing, with the state curtailing the freedom of movement of many Hajusom members. Several artists in the ensemble are affected by the restrictions imposed by *Residenzpflicht* ('mandatory residence') or are for other reasons not allowed to travel abroad (Huck et al. 2022, 266). A legal requirement unique to Germany, *Residenzpflicht* stipulates that people who are in the asylum process or who have been granted a 'tolerated stay permit' (*Duldung*, i.e., a temporary suspension of deportation) must live within certain boundaries defined by the local foreign office (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2022). They cannot choose their place of residence, and they may not leave even for a short time unless they obtain permission from the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), Germany's federal agency for migration and refugees (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2022). Supporting each other against these restrictions, too, has become a central element of Hajusom's 'spirit of solidarity' and political positioning, as co-founder Dorothea Reinicke notes: 'those who have it easier, in terms of their documents, […] support and fight for those who struggle, again and again, against stupid borders, also internal borders in this country, in regard to their documents, in regard to being recognised, in every regard' (Huck et al. 2014, 142–143; my translation).
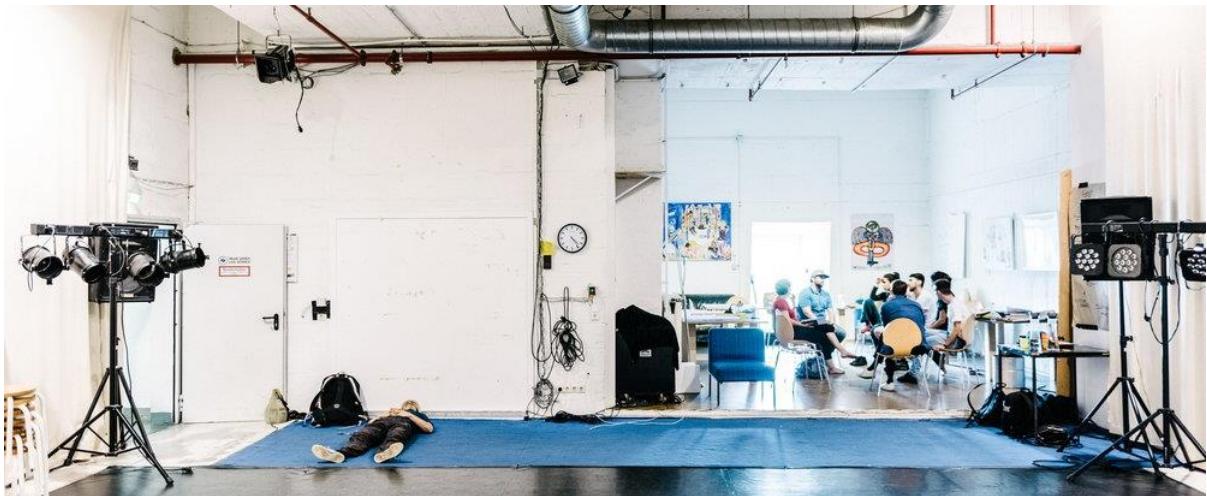
Fig. 28: Hajusom artists at Kampnagel theatre in Hamburg.
Credit: Philip Morris n.d.

Finding new ways of working transnationally – in spite of, and against, the restrictions and policing measures imposed by the German state – has been a continuous effort in Hajusom's creative practice and political work. While not all members are able to travel freely themselves, the ensemble has over the years established a far-reaching transnational artistic network. Instead of travelling themselves, the Hajusom performers frequently invite internationally connected artists and experts to come to Hamburg, with recent collaborations involving, for example, Malian puppet artist Yaya Coulibaly and musician Patrick Kabré, who runs the Burkina Faso-based eco-art project Atelier Silmandé (Huck et al. 2022, 266). Creating art not as a self-contained company, but as a continuously evolving 'transnational cosmos', has allowed Hajusom to still work across and against borders, despite the multiple ways in which migration regimes restrict their artistic practice (Huck et al. 2014).

'We do not want to be paraded': Hajusom and the postmigrant turn

Beyond these very tangible ways in which the ensemble's work has been intertwined with European border governance, Hajusom is also acutely aware of the discursive and symbolic bordering practices that characterise the contemporary German theatre landscape and dominant reception discourses. With the ensemble comprised almost exclusively of artists of colour, many of them newly arrived in Germany, Hajusom's members continuously come up against being defined – or misrepresented entirely – as 'refugees' or 'migrants' first, and artists second (Huck et al. 2022, 271). Regardless of the ensemble's long-term roots in Hamburg, its artists are still confronted with dominant theatre discourses that frame them, implicitly and often explicitly, as 'European Others' (El-Tayeb 2011). Since its beginnings, as co-director Ella Huck and performer Katalina Götz note,

Hajusom's work has been not only artistic, but also political, because our existence is political. We do not want to be paraded as 'model migrants', and we refuse to be defined by rigid categories. We are migrants, some of us have experienced forms of forced displacement, and we make art – we are professional artists. […] Hajusom does not make amateur theatre, and we are not amateurs: we have many years of experience creating art.

(Huck et al. 2022, 268; my translation)

Despite having created award-winning productions for over two decades, the ensemble's artistic work is frequently framed in terms of 'community theatre' or 'social work' – with reviewers emphasising Hajusom's 'refugee theatre workshop' beginnings while disregarding how the centre has developed in the quarter century since (Huck et al. 2022, 271). Running down a list of theatre reviews from 2011 to 2019, performer Nebou N'Diaye highlights how many commentators consistently misrepresent Hajusom's productions in reductive, often patronising terms, as 'refugee theatre' or 'migrant theatre': critics have referred to the performers, for instance, as 'the Hajusom refugees,' with one writer commenting that 'refugees are treated like real artists here,' and another noting, 'They are kings for one night, these 22 young refugees from all across the world, who are otherwise queuing up in front of the registration office for the extension of their residence permits' (Huck et al. 2022, 269–270; my translation).

N'Diaye herself has in the past been misrepresented as a 'migrant' hailing 'from Burkina Faso': 'I have roots in both Germany and Burkina Faso, I was born and raised in Hamburg, and my first language is clearly German, yet this apparently did not fit into the narrative of "migrant theatre" that [the journalist] wanted to establish […], the narrative of Hajusom as a successful social project for refugees and migrants who make quite good theatre' (Huck et al. 2022, 270; my translation). Rather than being recognised as professional performers (some of whom happen to have diverse histories and experiences of migration), the Hajusom ensemble members are framed as 'refugees' and 'migrants' who happen to make art, as if by accident (Huck et al. 2022, 270). As N'Diaye observes, 'We cannot shake the feeling that, to be taken seriously as performers and as an art ensemble, we would need to Europeanise ourselves – conform to the aesthetics, forms,

and traditions of European theatre. Otherwise, we are seen as refugees or migrants who, by the generosity of a few progressive artistic directors, have been allowed on stage and have been given a voice' (Huck et al. 2022, 272; my translation). The Hajusom artists constantly need to reassert the aesthetic-creative significance of their work, against dominant reception discourses that frame their productions in primarily educational-political terms, directed towards a form of 'interventionist thinking' that is 'preoccupied with helping refugees' (Cox 2023, 583).

The racialised and exclusionary labelling that the Hajusom performers experience aligns with criticisms voiced by many artists of colour currently working in Germany. Since the late 2000s, many theatre makers have been reckoning with similar otherising attributions under the banner of the 'postmigrant'. A wide-reaching artistic, political, and academic turn, the postmigrant movement has foregrounded the perspectives of Germans who are migrantised (as second or third-generation migrants) and thus routinely encounter racism and exclusion in a majority-white society (Langhoff 2011). By now a quickly expanding research field and epistemic turn (key figures include Naika Foroutan, Kijan Espahangizi, Erol Yıldız, and Marc Hill), the postmigrant movement originated in the Berlin theatre scene of the mid-2000s. It was popularised by young theatre makers around Shermin Langhoff, then the director of the independent theatre Ballhaus Naunynstraße. From 2008 on, Langhoff designated her work as 'postmigrant', a reaction to her productions being persistently labelled – much like Hajusom's work – as 'migrant theatre' and structurally excluded from what was seen as 'German theatre' (Petersen, Schramm and Wiegand 2019, 3).

Speaking in 2011, Langhoff noted that on German stages, the figure of the migrant was (and still is) often used to ventriloquise and reinforce hegemonic views of the 'majority' society, rather than breaking with dominant perceptions of otherness (Langhoff 2011). Postmigrant theatre, by contrast, became an important practice for artists who 'refused to be labelled "migrants" or "immigrants" and reduced to mere objects of national "integration" politics'

(Petersen, Schramm and Wiegand 2019, 3). The 'post' in 'postmigrant' is thus not intended to signal that society has in any way moved 'past' racist formations and otherising discourses. Rather, comparable to postcolonial frameworks, a postmigrant analytical perspective regards migration as an ongoing process, involving long-term social, political, and legislative transformations – with postmigrant frameworks seeking to break with distinctions such as migrant/non-migrant and migration/sedantism (Hall 1996; Foroutan 2018, 15; Hill and Yıldız 2018, 7). For many artists, the term has worked as a productive form of appropriation: a self-labelling gesture and a 'discursive tool to voice a cultural critique and political protest' (Petersen, Schramm and Wiegand 2019, 3–4).

In the German theatre landscape, the postmigrant movement has also initiated some institutional changes, especially after Langhoff became the artistic director of the state-funded Maxim Gorki Theatre in 2013 and transformed the majority-white ensemble into a postmigrant company (Petersen, Schramm and Wiegand 2019, 4; Wilmer 2018, 7). From the beginning of her artistic directorship, Langhoff has oriented the production schedule towards multilingual transborder productions (Gorki 2021).[57] Since November 2016, in addition to the Gorki main ensemble, up to seven professional artists from Syria, Afghanistan, and Palestine have been working as part of the Exile Ensemble (Gorki 2021).[58] Several other companies and ensembles have been at the forefront of this recent turn in German theatre, including Collective Ma'louba,

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[57] Examples include *Verrücktes Blut* (*Mad Blood*) by Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje; *Common Ground*, *The Situation*, *Third Generation – Next Generation*, and *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*), all devised by Yael Ronen and various ensembles; *Skelett eines Elefanten in der Wüste* (*Skeleton of an Elephant in the Desert*) by Ayham Majid Agha; *Futureland* by Lola Arias; and *Berlin, Oranienplatz* by Hakan Savaş Mican.

[58] While Langhoff's work and the wider postmigrant movement have been important driving forces in working against longstanding stereotypes and exclusionary formations in German theatre, the Gorki's image as a postmigrant theatre has also created a new dynamic whereby it has now become the seemingly sole address for artists who want to create transborder theatre. Theatre maker Anis Hamdoun, for instance, recounts how, 'When I speak to a theatre house [about artistic opportunities], they often tell me, you can always try the Gorki. Why would I go to the Gorki? It doesn't make sense. […] They tell me, go there, that's where all the Turks, Arabs, Palestinians, Israelis go' (Haakh, Hamdoun, and Herzberg 2019; my translation).

boat people project, Open Border Ensemble, and kainkollektiv, some of which have also created networks and collaborations among each other.

However, despite the important border-critical work happening on (certain) stages, deep-seated institutional and structural biases persist across German theatre scenes. As theatre researchers S. E. Wilmer and Azadeh Sharifi note, there is often 'a missing link' between institutions and 'racialized minorities who are still seen as non-Europeans' (2016). On stage, this has frequently resulted in racist and colonial stereotypes, also reflecting the extent to which colonial legacies are still being disregarded or denied. As Wilmer and Sharifi stress, 'the effects of the postcolonial present have been downplayed by media, politics and the society, generally. Many cultural institutions are, in this sense, missing the insight and expertise into what could have been the connection to the current situation for refugees' (2016).

In the post-2015 context, the ostensible 'welcome culture' of many theatre institutions rarely went so far as to place artists in decision-making positions, directing roles, or more long-term employment. Instead, many productions expected theatre makers to conform to the role of providing 'illustrative materials' to 'educate' Western audiences about conditions of forced displacement: 'these kinds of projects target white audiences but not the racialized groups, or an audience that lives in a diverse society' (Wilmer and Sharifi 2016). Artists who work in transborder theatre scenes have long been insisting that there cannot be any lasting changes in representation without structural shifts in theatre institutions. This is also something Langhoff already criticised over a decade ago. To her, the main challenge in theatre had never been primarily about 'including fifteen "disadvantaged people" in an ensemble,' or about 'presenting presumably "authentic conflicts" of a so-called "migrant class" to educated middle-class audiences' (Langhoff 2011; my translation). Rather, the aim had always been to create new discourses on an equal footing that would lead to lasting changes in perspectives and participative

opportunities, so that categories such as 'postmigrant' would eventually become superfluous (Langhoff 2011; my translation).

While many of Hajusom's concerns overlap with the representative and institutional shifts demanded by the postmigrant movement, the ensemble does not define itself as 'postmigrant' per se. Just as the Hajusom artists frequently disagree with the labels that theatre critics attach to their performances, they have also never been entirely content with the terminologies suggested by academic authorities, including 'postmigrant' or the earlier term 'postdramatic' (Huck et al. 2022, 274). The ensemble has in the past relied on certain self-definitions to refer to their approaches, such as 'transdisciplinary', 'transnational', 'intersectional', and 'antiracist'; however, these terms are also only ever approximations and cannot capture the entirety of Hajusom's creative-political approach, nor the relationships and solidarities it realises in its artistic practice (Huck et al. 2022, 274–275). Similar to *Phone Home*'s insistence that the terms of transnational collaboration need to be redefined throughout, Hajusom presents a distinctly open-ended form of creative solidarity and theatrical practice. As Dorothea Reinicke notes, the ensemble continuously tries to move beyond any overly restrictive categorisations, also when revising texts for its website and external publications: 'There is a pronounced longing for more poetry, greater imagery, entirely new terms and attributes. How to deal with these (im)possibilities of capturing Hajusom in words?' (Huck et al. 2022, 274; my translation). For Reinicke, the ensemble's name also performs some of this striving towards new attributes: 'like a word from an unknown language for a new space, a place that asserts itself, even against all dystopian perceptions of this world, a "real" utopian place that its participants have been developing, criticising, and creating anew for almost 25 years' (Huck et al. 2022, 274; my translation).

'Coming to terms': Hajusom and Germany's memory regimes

For several years, especially since the development of *Azimut Dekolonial*, decolonisation has been a crucial guiding principle for Hajusom. As Reinicke notes: understood, in Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova's terms, as a process of 'learning to unlearn,' decolonisation presents 'a historically derived mandate for all members of the Hajusom cosmos' (Huck et al. 2022, 276; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2012; my translation). This recentring of colonial histories is a particularly significant intervention, given how calls for decolonisation – in migration policy, but also in school curricula, university departments, and collective memory practices – have long been marginalised and ignored in Germany.

The side-lining of the country's colonial past in public spaces and institutions has been closely intertwined with the centrality of the Holocaust in state-supported memory practices. While Germany's NS history has become the central focus of its dominant memory regime and state-sponsored practices of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ('coming to terms with the past'), other histories of extreme violence have not been addressed to the same extent – significantly, the 1904–08 genocide committed by German colonial troops against the Herero and Nama in Southwest Africa (today's Namibia), widely considered the first genocide of the 20th century (Pergher et al. 2013). Nor does the dominant memory regime in Germany adequately reflect atrocities committed by the German colonial empire in today's Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Ghana, the Micronesian islands, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Togo (Pergher et al. 2013). Emphasising Germany's longer histories of genocide and colonial rule, so the argument goes, would diminish and relativise the significance and 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust in public memory regimes (Rothberg 2009, 3). In this logic, collective memory is framed in competitive terms, with different histories struggling for recognition in public space as a seemingly scarce resource (Rothberg 2009, 3). In the most extreme version of this position, any

attempt at transhistorical comparison is dismissed as inherently 'antisemitic' and as paving the way for Holocaust denial.

When *Azimut Dekolonial* was performed in 2019, these debates were just starting to garner new momentum, in the course of what has become known as 'Historikerstreit 2.0' or 'the German catechism', a nickname coined by genocide historian Dirk Moses to denote the increasingly dogmatic debates around German memory regimes (2021a).[59] As Moses points out, 'German elites do in fact use the Holocaust to blend out other historical crimes' (2021a). While it is today widely accepted in Germany that the country bears 'a special obligation to Jews because of the Holocaust,' most commentators generally '[neglect] to mention such obligations to Namibians' (Moses 2021a). It was only in 2004 that the German government officially recognised and apologised for the Herero and Nama genocide, and it took until 2021 for longstanding calls for reparations to be addressed in some form: following negotiations with the Namibian government since 2015, Germany agreed in May 2021 to pay the country €1.1 billion for existing aid programmes over the next 30 years – although the statement at the time called this 'a gesture of reconciliation', tacitly avoiding the language of legally binding reparations and compensations (Oltermann 2021). Moses contends, 'No wonder these descendants of victims of the German state, whose capacities for development were smashed by genocidal colonial warfare, experience German memory culture as racist: it posits a hierarchy of suffering, degrees of humanity, and an embarrassing lack of critical self-awareness' (2021a). Naita Hishoono, the director of the Namibia Institute for Democracy, makes a similar point. Speaking at the GIGA Institute for African Studies in Hamburg, she argues, 'Namibians are very aware of colonialism because we see the architecture [in Namibia reflecting German street names, shops, and colonial-era buildings], we see the economic impact, we see and live it every day. But in Germany, you would completely forget that Germany had colonies' (Pelz 2021).

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[59] For a concise summary of the debates around 'Historikerstreit 2.0', see Rothberg (2022).

Colonial violence still remains conspicuously absent in Germany's dominant memory regime, even though historians working with transnational and postcolonial approaches have been interrogating the connections between the Holocaust and colonialism for many decades. Hannah Arendt, who regarded the Nazi system of totalitarian rule as entirely new, still traced its roots back to longer imperial histories in her 1951 work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Pergher et al. 2013, 40; Arendt 1968). In 1955, writer and politician Aimé Césaire famously argued that what distinguishes Hitler and Hitlerism, in the eyes of Europeans, from preceding genocides and forms of extreme violence 'is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that [Hitler] applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the [labourers] of India, and the [Black people] of Africa' (Césaire 2000, 36; original emphasis).

Despite these early interrogations into the transhistorical continuities between the Holocaust and colonial systems of subjugation and annihilation, these links were then largely neglected in both research and state-sponsored memory regimes throughout the rest of the 20th century (Pergher et al. 2013, 40). Relational and transnational approaches have, however, received renewed scholarly attention since the 2000s. A significant milestone in the field was the 2003 'Genocide and Colonialism' conference in Sydney, organised by Dirk Moses and attended, among others, by transnational memory scholars Michael Rothberg and Jürgen Zimmerer (Moses 2021a). Jürgen Zimmerer, whose work also interrogates the colonial history of Hajusom's hometown Hamburg, is one of the proponents of what has come to be known as the 'continuity thesis' (as opposed to 'uniqueness theory') of Holocaust history. In his 2011 work *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz?* (*From Windhoek to Auschwitz?*, published in English in 2024), Zimmerer draws out continuities between the Nazi genocide and Germany's genocide against the Herero and Nama (2011). Michael Rothberg, too, has worked on transnational interconnections between memory practices that centre the Holocaust, colonialism, and slavery, exploring the topic in detail in his

books *Multidirectional Memory* (2009) and *The Implicated Subject* (2019). Dirk Moses' work *The Problems of Genocide* (2021b), meanwhile, asks how 'talk of genocide functions ideologically to detract attention from systematic violence against civilians perpetrated by governments, including Western ones' (2021, 1).

Despite these important academic explorations of Germany's entangled memory regimes and histories of extreme violence, there remains a fundamental gap between the country's dominant memory practices and its inhabitants, particularly younger generations. In 'Germany's "postmigrant" present,' Rothberg notes, 'an ever-more diverse population confronts a powerfully univocal memory culture,' one that has reached its limits in the current moment (2022, 1318). In Rothberg's analysis, '[t]he productive "self-doubt" that characterized German memory culture in its earlier stages [in the 1980s] has given way to a creeping dogmatism,' where the relational, transhistorical memory practices of an increasingly diverse population are policed and often silenced (2022, 1318). As Moses puts it, 'Redeeming the *Zivilisationsbruch* has empowered [the dominant memory regime in Germany] to proclaim a new civilizing mission that sees the problem of migrants' "imported antisemitism" as solvable with Holocaust education rather than identifying racism of all kinds with the conflation of the German *Volk* and political citizenship' (2021). Journalist and author Mohamed Amjahin calls this Germany's 'Erinnerungsüberlegenheit' ('memory superiority'), which dictates the terms of how newly arrived people should engage with Germany's Holocaust history, often with little regard for their own experiences and histories of extreme violence (Amjahin 2021).

Political scientist and writer Max Czollek makes a related argument in his 2023 publication *Versöhnungstheater* ('theatre of reconciliation') – a contemporary revisiting of the idea of a 'theatre of memory,' introduced by sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann in 1996 to describe how, in Germany and Austria, commemorative practices have often been instrumentalised by state representatives to construct redemptive post-WWII national narratives. Czollek argues that

this is still a fundamental misconception underlying the dominant memory regime in contemporary Germany. He stresses that public performances of Holocaust commemoration (such as politicians' speeches on commemorative days) frequently become discursively equated with reconciliation (Seibel 2023). Rather than facilitating a reckoning with ongoing forms of racist violence, dominant German memory practices, in Czollek's analysis, eventually serve to lock histories of extreme violence in the past and to showcase to the world the image of a redeemed nation (Seibel 2023). (In other words, yet another iteration of 'Europe is better than this', a discursive distancing manoeuvre that also resonates with the critiques in *The Jungle* and *Phone Home*.)

In framing his critique through the metaphor of a 'theatre of reconciliation', Czollek – and Bodemann before him – aims to denote a form of insincerity and superficiality in dominant memory practices. Notwithstanding the validity of these criticisms, the choice of metaphor is incongruous in this case, given the extent to which theatres have been spaces where many of these dynamics have been negotiated, challenged, and reconfigured in Germany in recent years.[60] As Rothberg highlights, 'German society already possesses more relational practices of memory that have the potential to transform the German model of coming to terms with the past in productive ways' (2022, 1318). While state-sanctioned memory practices may not reflect the diverse histories and experiences of the country's inhabitants, many people living in Germany today have been exploring alternative, multidirectional approaches to collective memory in grassroots activist practices, writing, arts, and theatre initiatives.

Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz refer to these practices as Germany's 'migrant archives of Holocaust remembrance': diverse creative explorations and approaches that have been

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[60] In a similar vein, activist practices that are perceived as superficial and ultimately meaningless are frequently labelled 'performative' in media and online discourses. This directly contradicts how the term has been used and popularised by Judith Butler, and J. L. Austin before them, to denote 'discourse that produces the effects that it names' (Butler 1993, 2; Austin 1976). The connotations of superficiality, conversely, are aligned more closely with Sara Ahmed's concept of 'non-performativity', where Butler's concept is inversed (2006; 2012).

'contesting the orthodoxies of the dominant memory regime, not in order to relativize the Holocaust or the demands it continues to make on Germans—and on all of us—but rather to experiment with new ways of remembering and taking responsibility for multiple forms of political violence' (Rothberg and Yildiz 2011; Rothberg 2022, 1318). In these creative performances, acts of 'memory citizenship' can emerge – understood here not as the civic practices of formally recognised citizens but, along with political theorist Engin Isin, as '*deeds* that take place regardless of formal citizenship status and beyond the bounds of normative practice' (Rothberg and Yildiz 2011, 34, original emphasis; Isin 2008). Beyond legal status regimes, acts of memory citizenship 'model new ways of being-in-common that complicate established understandings of what constitutes […] forms of belonging' (Rothberg and Yildiz 2011, 34). Theatre projects – including postmigrant approaches and, significantly, the work of Hajusom – have long played a key role in staging these alternative, subversive acts of memory citizenship in contemporary Germany.

3. The Immersive Montage Techniques of *Azimut Dekolonial*

'A decolonial trail': walking through the performance space

Performed by Hajusom in 2019, *Azimut Dekolonial* reflected and participated in these decolonial shifts in German memory politics and transnational solidarities. As a production, it consciously reintroduced transnational, transhistorical connections that had often been concealed, wilfully ignored, and severed in post-2015 debates on migration and states' obligations towards people on the move – in Germany as well as in wider Europe. 'Some histories are enchained,' remarks one of the performers early on, 'nobody is supposed to know what happened – or what would be unjust and what would be just. Nobody is supposed to utter it. And once they finally emerge, they trail more and more histories – for there simply isn't only one single, finished history. There are many, many unheard histories' (Hajusom 2019b, 11:37–12:10; my translation[61]).

In *Azimut Dekolonial*, some of these 'unheard histories' are retrieved, in an effort to reframe the political-historical space that is contemporary 'Europe'. The performance rejects the 'erroneous historical understanding that separates states and colonies' and instead insists that 'Europe's posited others have always been very much part of Europe's broader imperial histories and its neo-imperial present' (Bhambra 2015). Not the 1951 Geneva Convention, but the 1885 General Act of the Berlin Conference is the central text that is referred to throughout *Azimut Dekolonial*. This approach of staging transnational solidarity is markedly different from the widespread 'welcoming refugees on stage' performances in the immediate wake of the 2015 migrations: what was previously framed predominantly as a humanitarian encounter between

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[61] Original text in German (Hajusom 2019b, 11:37–12:10): „Einige Geschichten sind gefesselt. Keiner soll wissen, was passiert ist – oder was unrecht und was gerecht wäre. Keiner soll es aussprechen. Und wenn sie endlich rauskommen, dann ziehen sie noch mehr, mehr Geschichten hinterher – weil es einfach nicht nur eine abgeschlossene Geschichte gibt. Es gibt viele, viele ungehörte Geschichten."

privileged European 'hosts' and disenfranchised refugee 'guests' is now historicised as a postcolonial re-encounter between contemporary Europe and its histories of imperial conquest.

To stage this geographical and temporal expansion of what is considered European space – which includes recentring the continent's ongoing entanglements in its colonial legacies and neo-imperial trade relations –, *Azimut Dekolonial* also strives against, and aims to reshape, its physical theatre space. The show's original run at Kampnagel Hamburg was designed as an interactive walk-through installation, which merged an immersive space-within-a-space (similar to *The Jungle*) with dispersed montage techniques (similar to *Phone Home*).[62] The stage design relied on a large, maze-like structure of scaffolding and canvas that the creators built within the theatre. Each section of this construction of tunnels, stairways, pillars, pits, and small rooms housed a group of performers who enacted a different scene of the show, with every corner revealing a new part of *Azimut Dekolonial*. The performance programme describes the installation as 'a decolonial trail', where 'Hajusom navigates deep into the past of its young performers, who explore colonialism in the world, in themselves, and in their histories […] a living archive of story booths, mini-performances, video installations, and sculpture' (Kampnagel 2019).

Created by Michael Böhler and Markus Lohmann – who refer to the elaborate structure as 'the beast […] a giant shell that, parasite-like, occupies the room' –, the stage design was capacious enough to allow up to 150 audience members at a time to explore the performance (Menneking 2019a, 10:22–10:50; my translation).[63] Theatregoers could move through this installation with a relatively large degree of agency, choosing themselves how to make their way

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[62] Even though certain aesthetic choices echo across the performances, these links are not direct references. *The Jungle*, *Phone Home*, and *Azimut Dekolonial* were all developed independently from each other. The creators may well have been aware of previously performed works, and some of their historical reference points overlap, but at no time do these productions explicitly reference each other (the only exception will be the fourth case study on *The Walk*, which works as a deliberate extension and revisiting of *The Jungle*, both co-created by Good Chance Theatre).

[63] Set designer Markus Lohmann puts the material structure into numbers: it involved 300 metres of scaffolding pipes, 300 scaffolding clamps, 1,000 square metres of grey stretch fabric, 2 tons of clay, around 1 cubic metre of wood, 1,000 litres of liquid chocolate, as well as additional construction wood, screws, nails, tulle, molton, etc. (Menneking 2019a, 10:48–11:15).

through the trail of artworks, installations, and performance pieces. As the programme information notes, audiences decided how long to linger in each place and with each scene, 'climbing aboard and sailing along at will' in their interactions with *Azimut Dekolonial*'s performance archive (Hajusom 2019c; my translation). They were invited to be theatre*goers* in a literal sense: walking from story booth to story booth, they explored and extended the performance through their own movements and interactions, sometimes in direct dialogue with the performers.

Fig. 29: 'The beast': Michael Böhler and Markus Lohmann's elaborate archive structure in Kampnagel theatre. Credit: Michael Pfisterer 2019.

There are parallels here with the immersive setting created in *The Jungle* – unlike that play's camp-restaurant, however, this space-within-a-space was not meant to evoke a distinct geographical place. It denoted a more abstract, composite site: an interactive archive that took different shapes as the performance progressed. Here, geographically remote sites and moments in history existed simultaneously and in close proximity, more akin to *Phone Home*'s networked

montage dramaturgy. By inviting theatregoers to step into this many-storied structure and discover its hidden rooms and twisted alleyways, the installation lent itself well to the staging of decolonial memory practices and the retrieving of 'enchained histories' (Hajusom 2019b). Its creative approach recalls longer postcolonial artistic and literary traditions: writing on uncanny elements in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for instance, Michèle Roberts suggests that '[t]he psychoanalytical idea of the return of the repressed can be applied to reminders of imperialist histories leaping up and demanding to be remembered and addressed. British history becomes a house haunted by what it has tried to forget' (2021, 33). This metaphor, where hidden attic rooms and secret storeys (and stories) expose repressed colonial pasts, resonates with the theatre space of *Azimut Dekolonial*. Like a theatricalization of the 'haunted house' of German history, here, too, the sprawling alleyways and story booths worked to confront and implicate audiences in repressed colonial pasts and ongoing presents, 'leaping up and demanding to be remembered and addressed'.

Devised as 'thematic spaces,' the story booths reflected the performers' own contributions and research journeys. These included a wide range of histories and locations. For example, Hajusom member Inoussa Dabré travelled to Burkina Faso to conduct oral history interviews with witnesses of the colonial era (Menneking 2019b). Katalina Götz retraced the routes of Spanish colonisers and the forced migrations of indigenous Mapuche in Chile (Menneking 2019b). Nebou N'Diaye spoke with relatives in Ouagadougou about how the French state remains present in Burkina Faso's administrative and political institutions (Menneking 2019b). Dennis Robert Ebhodaghe conducted interviews with family members and researchers in Warri to learn more about British missionaries, the colonial histories of corporal punishment in schools, and the struggles for independence in Nigeria (Menneking 2019b). These diverse interviews, narratives, and histories all became part of the installation – reflecting, too, how these

seemingly remote contexts and family histories shape the performers' own experiences in contemporary Hamburg.

As is the case in all of Hajusom's productions, the ensemble members' perspectives, experiences, and interests formed the starting point of *Azimut Dekolonial*, with the performance providing a kaleidoscopic space to explore the specific histories and transnational interconnections that have shaped the artists' own experiences and realities. Throughout Hajusom's history, this montage style has proven a dynamic method to accommodate the ensemble's pluralistic, multi-perspectival 'cosmos' approach with its diverse aesthetics and creative visions (Huck et al. 2014, 132; Huck et al. 2022, 274). For *Azimut Dekolonial*, this meant that the performance was divided into different phases: much like in the partly-divided, partly-combined dramaturgy of *Phone Home*, the Hajusom artists alternated between their separate 'story booth' scenes and several collective scenes and choreographies – performed four times in a loop throughout the evening (Menneking 2019a, 09:43–10:05).

Fig. 30: The 'living archive' of *Azimut Dekolonial*.
Credit: Michael Pfisterer 2019.

In a subsequent iteration of the show, entitled *Azimut Dekolonial/Remix* (2019), the walk-through format was adapted into a more contained stage production. As part of the *After Europe* festival, curated by cultural anthropologist Julian Warner and held in Berlin's Sophiensæle theatre in October 2019, Hajusom developed the installation into a moveable performance that could be transplanted out of Kampnagel theatre. Audiences were presented with an assortment of scenes from the original performance, watching now from the more removed stance of an auditorium – with elements of canvas and scaffolding at the back of the stage still suggesting the previously encompassing archive structure, albeit in a more compressed form. This arrangement, in which there was a greater distance between stage and audience, was also interrupted repeatedly however, with performers addressing the audience directly throughout the show. Occasionally, they would leave the stage altogether to enter into more informal conversations with various sections of the auditorium.

The format of distinct-yet-connected story booths was still noticeable in this adapted version, with the majority of the cast remaining present and visible throughout the show – watching from the side of the stage as each scene was presented by a different group of performers. The production involved only little dialogue between the ensemble members, relying primarily on direct-address narration. There were, however, other forms of interaction and collective storytelling, such as shared dance choreographies, scenes where performers took turns in delivering their lines to the audience, and moments where they extended and responded to each other's performances through different interjections, sounds, chants, and movements (Hajusom 2019b).

Fig. 31: The adapted stage production *Azimut Dekolonial/Remix* at Sophiensæle, Berlin.
Credit: Dorothea Touch 2019.

'Multidirectional memory': shaping the archive

The centrality of these multidirectional movements and paths in the show – the artists' research journeys, the theatregoers' trails through the performance – is also reflected in the title. As the programme information clarifies,

> The term AZIMUT – from Arabic السموت, as-sumūt, is a term from astronomy and means, among other things, "the paths". Following the traces of colonialism, the young performers of the transnational ensemble Hajusom travelled to their countries of origin, bringing back stories and transforming their memories into choreography and song. The multilingual performance […] reflects the intensity of the individual experiences, allowing the audience to be immersed in experienced and narrative memories, personal and collective histories. Do we all see the same stars?

> (Sophiensæle 2019)

In developing the conceptual frameworks for the production, Hajusom collaborated, among others, with Tongan-Australian artist Latai Taumeopeau, who introduced the Tongan cultural concept of *tā-vā* as a focal perspective in the performance. A cyclical, non-linear concept of how time and space are perceived, *tā-vā* is based on the idea that, moving through the world, 'we face our past, and we back into the future, which is the unknown,' as Taumeopeau describes it: 'what we know is what we face, and that helps us navigate, in the present, the unknown which is in the future' (Menneking 2019a, 13:30–14:11). In *Azimut Dekolonial*, this notion of 'backing into the future, rather than facing the future' became a central concept to capture how historical regimes of oppression and coloniality are still at work in present-day structures of inequality (Menneking 2019a, 14:11–14:17).

The format of a 'living archive' lends itself well to an engagement with historical memory that is pluralistic, interactive, and relational: in this 'lived multidirectionality', in Rothberg's term, the colonial past and the postcolonial present are not framed as separated, sealed-off time-spaces, but as intertwined spheres that inform each other (Rothberg 2022). The staging of *Azimut Dekolonial* presents theatregoers with seemingly distant contexts and materials, places these texts in new relations, and reconnects them to the present. In this sense, the installation works as a theatrical expression of Rothberg's concept of 'multidirectional memory': a fluid, intertextual approach that considers collective memory 'as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing' (2009, 3). As Rothberg highlights,

> Far from being situated—either physically or discursively—in any single institution or site, the archive of multidirectional memory is irreducibly transversal; it cuts across genres, national contexts, periods, and cultural traditions. Because dominant ways of thinking (such as competitive memory) have refused to acknowledge the multidirectional flows of influence and articulation that collective memory activates, the comparative critic must first constitute the archive by forging links between dispersed documents.

> (Rothberg 2009, 18)

Stepping into this role of comparative archivist-critics, the Hajusom performers developed a genre-crossing, transnational archive of their own, exposing in the process how these perspectives and transhistorical connections are being disavowed in hegemonic regimes of representation, memory, and recognition. In *Azimut Dekolonial*, performers and theatregoers alike are encouraged to 'forg[e] links between dispersed documents' by tracing diverse journeys – during transnational research trips ahead of the performance, in the case of the ensemble members, and during the walk-through installation itself, in the case of theatregoers. While the archival materials stem from a variety of contexts and sites, they are momentarily brought together within a physical space – albeit a fluid and volatile one – that can be explored, extended, and adjusted. The active mode used in the subtitle of the performance also registers this: *Ein Archiv performt* (*An Archive Performs*). It is the archive itself, which in this case involves performers and theatregoers, that is positioned as the central character in *Azimut Dekolonial* – and as such, it morphs and changes throughout the performance.

Fig. 32: Part of the archive: performers and theatregoers in *Azimut Dekolonial*.
Credit: Michael Pfisterer 2019.

Although the materials and narratives have already been curated beforehand, theatregoers are still positioned as active co-creators of this interactive performance piece: along with the artists, they are implicated as participants, rather than detached observers, of this morphing archive. At the same time, *Azimut Dekolonial* explicitly highlights that, historically and in the present moment, diverse actors have held vastly different perspectives and positions in the narratives and histories of injustice presented in the installation. Within this encompassing setting, there is not merely one singular mode of viewing. While audiences may follow similar routes through the archive's thematic spaces, the ways in which they relate to the materials will differ greatly – 'Do we all see the same stars?' asks the performance programme (Sophiensæle 2019). Its invitation to become part of the archive is intertwined with an understanding that looking at histories of colonialism and violence always implicates spectators in diverging ways. Moving into the installation's multiple alleyways of scaffolding and canvas, they also enter into a distinct ethical-political relationship with the images, documents, materials, and narratives presented there (Azoulay 2008; Cole, 2018).

4. Deconstructing the Colonial Archive in *Azimut Dekolonial*

'Many, many unheard histories': retrieving colonial memory

Its blend of immersive space-making techniques and multi-perspectival montage aesthetics allows *Azimut Dekolonial* to establish a sophisticated combination of embodied-affective and critically removed relations between performance and audience. Border histories are explored through immersive techniques (by moving through the archive and interacting with its material structure) as well as through more detached and metatheatrical approaches (by listening and relating to diverging archival materials and narratives). These shifting forms of engagement are already introduced early on, when the artists prepare theatregoers for what lies ahead. Arman Marzak extends a blessing to the audience that is rooted in an old Afghan ceremony: 'You're supposed to use flour, but this is not possible here because of the sensitive stage equipment. So instead, I'll use a handful of herbs today' (Hajusom 2019b, 08:20–10:25; my translation). Throwing the herbs lightly over his head, he concludes, 'That's how you chase away the evil spirits. And you'll be protected for this evening' (Hajusom 2019b, 08:20–10:25; my translation). Nebou N'Diaye adds, 'Especially those who see and understand, with eyes like our own, the images that we will recreate and reproduce tonight: this protection is meant for you' (Hajusom 2019b, 08:20–10:25; my translation).[64]

Similar to *The Jungle*'s sensory-immersive elements, theatregoers are invited in and brought together by a shared sensory experience, manifested in Arman's herbs. *Azimut Dekolonial*, too, uses these elements here to set up a form of theatrical hospitality, yet one that is framed explicitly

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[64] Original text in German (Hajusom 2019b, 08:20–10:25): Arman Marzak: „Eigentlich benutzt man Mehl. Aber das ist hier nicht möglich, wegen den empfindlichen Geräten. Deshalb benutze ich heute eine Hand voll Kräuter. […] Und damit verscheucht man die schlechten Geister. Und Sie erhalten damit einen Schutz für diesen Abend." Nebou N'Diaye: „Besonders diejenigen, die die Bilder, die wir heute Abend rekreieren und reproduzieren werden, mit Augen wie unseren sehen und verstehen: Euch gilt dieser Schutz."

as an ethical-political relationship. It involves different positionalities and viewpoints: 'those who see and understand, with eyes like our own.' Nebou's addition registers that people will be differently affected by *Azimut Dekolonial*'s materials, depending on their own experiences and histories. What, for now, is only hinted at in abstract terms – 'evil spirits' – will be defined in more precise political-historical terms as the performance unfolds. From the beginning, the framing recognises that theatregoers who have been directly targeted by ongoing colonial-racist violence throughout their lives will require Arman's symbolic protection more than others in their interaction with this archive.

In its multi-perspectival approach, *Azimut Dekolonial* explores how historiography and memory are always selective processes: 'There simply isn't only one single, finished history,' as the performers stress early on, 'There are many, many unheard histories' (Hajusom 2019b, 11:37–12:10; my translation). Highlighting the mediation – and deliberate erasure – of colonial histories in contemporary Germany, the installation is also an interrogation into the role of Western institutions of knowledge production in this erasure. The performance draws out how historical archives, museums, universities, and art spaces have, throughout history, worked as mechanisms to produce, codify, and justify imperial epistemologies, including the framing of colonial history as 'finished' and 'lying in the past'. In *Azimut Dekolonial*'s various story booths and thematic spaces, the performers explore several such sites where ongoing structures of coloniality have been deliberately marginalised, silenced, or ignored altogether.

Within their dynamic, open-ended approach to archive, the traditional aesthetics and formats of (colonial) archival institutions are mimicked, defamiliarised, and occasionally mocked. 'Archive One, please,' requests a performer early on (Hajusom 2019b, 17:14–17:18; my translation). Immediately, the lights are dimmed, and, as if viewed through a slide projector, images appear on the fractured canvas walls of the performance space: black-and-white archival photos depicting different landscapes and village scenes, seemingly collected during colonial

expeditions. Two performers kneel before the projection and mimic digging movements, as if unearthing some hidden treasures buried in the theatre's floor, before they eventually collapse, exhausted, in front of the images projected onto the walls.

Rather than taking these archival documents at face value, *Azimut Dekolonial* historicises them by highlighting the contexts of imperial conquest under which these materials were obtained in the first place. While the photographs are layered on top of each other on the canvas wall, the performers scatter around and enter into conversations with theatregoers. The clicking sound of the slide projector, with its suggestion of obsolete technologies and schoolmasterly formats of knowledge presentation, is successively replaced by the performers' multiple voices – its authority over the past disrupted by those speaking in the present moment, like unruly students disturbing the smooth proceedings of a history lesson. Their approach to the archive is a decidedly defiant one, tracing avenues that are, in the terms proposed by literature scholar and cultural historian Saidiya Hartman, 'wayward', 'riotous', and 'troublesome' (2021).

Fig. 33: Watching *Azimut Dekolonial*'s archival slide show (screenshot from Menneking 2019a, 08:11). Credit: Mathis Menneking 2019.

Hajusom's performance archive expresses a fundamental frustration with the limits and prejudices of historical archives, conditioned by colonial forms of knowledge production. As Hartman has put it: 'History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence, and archive,' yet these limits are compromised: 'Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor' (Okeowo 2020; Hartman 2021, xv). Considering the violence that has conditioned this archive, Hartman argues, 'Are we going to be consigned forever to tell the same kinds of stories? Given the violence and power that has engendered this limit, why should [we] be faithful to that limit?' (Okeowo 2020).

Artists, writers, and creative memory scholars have long been contesting the fiction according to which the historical archive presents a neutral, objective, apolitical space where documents and records are stored, preserved, and put away. Photography theorist and curator Ariella Azoulay notes, 'If there is any sense in working with the common definition of the archive as a composite of "putting away" and "sheltering," it is not as a predicate of how the archive works by itself, but rather of how the imperial gesture is performed' (2019, 187). She suggests that unlearning this definition of the archive means 'disengaging from the position of the explorer–historian, and instead engaging in a present continuous mode with those considered "past"' (2019, 188). *Azimut Dekolonial* – along with other theatre initiatives that have recentred Germany's colonial histories in recent years – presents a creative space to perform this conceptual move from past tense (colonialism as a period locked in the past) to present continuous mode (ongoing systems of coloniality and acts of resistance), from *archive-as-fixed* to *archive-as-fluid*.

As the performance unfolds, it makes the underlying conditions of violence in historiography and knowledge production more explicit, highlighting how today's knowledge

about histories of colonialism and slavery is based largely on the documents and materials written and gathered by the oppressors and profiteers of colonial violence (Hartman 2008). Projected against *Azimut Dekolonial*'s canvas walls, images depict maps of Africa, deeds, and trade ledgers from Germany's colonial era. 'In Chapter 1, Article 6, of the Berlin Conference, it is stated,' a performer reads out, "'… aim at instructing the natives and bringing home to them the blessings of civilization'" (Hajusom 2019b, 20:50–21:11; my translation[65]). The citation from the 1885 General Act of the Berlin Conference is immediately followed by the sound of a whip. The performer then switches to Yoruba, before translating his lines into English and German: 'It means, "Run away from Oyinbo, rennen weg von den Weißen, so ist mein Vater" [run away from the white people, as did my father]' (Hajusom 2019b, 21:20–21:31). He keeps repeating these lines in Yoruba as a chant, interjected with repeated whip sounds, and eventually the other performers join in his song.

In this juxtaposition of the language of colonialism with the language of the colonised, *Azimut Dekolonial*'s interaction with the archive also asks: How much, and what type of information, *can* be learnt from historical records about 'what it was like for the people who were enslaved?' (Hajusom 2019b, 11:14–11:18; my translation[66]). What can this colonial archive, complied from slavers' manifests, trade ledgers, logbooks, looted artworks in galleries, and human remains in museum depots, truly express about the experiences of the people whose narratives were violently excluded from the archive (Hartman 2008)? In the original Kampnagel installation, performer Inoussa Dabré insists, 'I want to stay awake. If someone asked, "What was it like back then? What about the slaves? How was the colonial era?" I wouldn't be able to

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[65] Original text in German, citing the 1885 General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa (Hajusom 2019b, 20:50–21:11): 'In Kapitel 1, Artikel 6 der Berliner Konferenz steht es: "… die Eingeborenen [sind] zu unterrichten und ihnen die Vortheile der Civilisation verständlich und werth zu machen."'

[66] Original text in German (Hajusom 2019b, 11:14–11:18): „Wie war es mit den Menschen, die versklavt worden sind?"

explain anything because I don't know' (Menneking 2019a, 01:02–01:27; my translation[67]). Reflecting this fundamental impasse, his story booth in the archive structure is situated in a deep, chimney-like pit.

Fig. 34: Performer Inoussa Dabré in his story booth in the Kampnagel walk-through installation (screenshot from Menneking 2019a, 01:10).
Credit: Mathis Menneking 2019.

In its efforts to uncover 'enchained histories' of coloniality, *Azimut Dekolonial* tries to find ways to '[retrieve] what remains dormant […] without committing further violence in [the] own act of narration' (Hartman 2008, 2). During the performance, the testimonies of colonial violence that the ensemble members collected during their research journeys are not simply repeated, but simultaneously subverted. For example, when Dennis Robert Ebhodaghe relates what he learnt during his research about the intertwined histories of Catholic colonial missions and corporal punishment in Nigeria, he does so in a style that is closer to epic distancing than documentary

[67] Original text in German (Menneking 2019a, 01:02–01:27): „Ich möchte wach bleiben. Wenn einer fragt: ‚Wie war es früher? Wie war es mit den Sklaven? Wie war die Kolonialzeit?' – ich könnte gar nichts erklären, weil ich es nicht weiß."

realism. In his performance, he first cites (in English) excerpts from his interviews with Warri-based historians, interjected by follow-up questions and expressions of incredulity from his co-performers in the wings (Hajusom 2019b, 12:10–14:33). He then translates the passages into German, before listing and enacting, in a highly stylised delivery, some of the historical punishments he learnt about in his interviews. With each new command – 'kneel down, hands up,' 'touch your toes,' 'angle ninety,' 'frog jump' – he carefully enacts the movements and holds the position for over ten seconds (Hajusom 2019b, 14:33–16:08). When he moves on to more extreme forms of violence, he no longer enacts them, but only lists them, his delivery deliberately suspended and distorted (Hajusom 2019b, 16:08–16:57). In these uncomfortably extended pauses and interruptions, there also lies an attempt to prevent a voyeuristic appropriation of these narratives: to record these accounts, but not to reproduce or fetishise the violence that they describe.

'Historical actors': extending the archive and moving beyond the theatre

Hajusom's performers refuse, with Hartman, to remain faithful to the limits dictated by colonial archives. They practice experimental history: their 'living archive' presents creative strategies 'for disordering and transgressing the protocols of the [colonial] archive and the authority of its statements' (Hartman 2008). Throughout the evening, different documentary materials, images, video footage, and records are projected onto the canvas walls of the all-encompassing archival structure – not onto a screen or onto the flat walls of Kampnagel, but onto the markedly uneven, contorted surface of this space-within-a-space. Making backdrop visible and explicit in this way is a perceptive aesthetic–political choice: this archive, just as any archive, is not a supposedly neutral, objective, blank surface but an evolving structure that distorts and fractures images in

certain ways. It changes according to how people use it – which alleyways they choose to explore, and how they themselves extend it through their presence and their histories.

Fig. 35: Extending the archive.
Credit: Arnold Morascher 2019.

As if responding to Achille Mbembe's contention that '[c]olonialism rhymes with monolingualism' (2016, 36), here, the performers write directly onto the canvas walls in various languages and scripts throughout the show, the monolingual and coherent story of the colonial archive deliberately disrupted through these transnational, multilingual writings that inscribe themselves onto this ongoing process in unpredictable ways. This engagement with the archive reaffirms the open, dynamic, and unfinished nature of historical documents and images – what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer describe as 'liquid time' in their work on school photographs during the Holocaust (2019). This approach regards images as open-ended works that keep developing, even after they have been 'fixed' in the dark room, in the process of being looked at,

circulated, rearranged, and interpreted (Hirsch and Spitzer 2019). *Azimut Dekolonial*, too, aims to undo the supposed fixity of its archival materials and recreate the moment of potentiality that manifests in the dark room, when the camera film has not been developed and determined been yet (Hirsch and Spitzer 2019). In this performance space, the ensemble members become 'historical actors' in a double sense, performing theatre and claiming a role as co-authors of an alternative collective archive, one that purposefully recentres their own perspectives and experiences with colonial legacies and racism in contemporary Germany (Hartman 2021, xv).

The multiple transnational perspectives and collaborative approaches of Hajusom's performance archive are an opportunity to move from 'university' towards 'pluriversity,' as Achille Mbembe has proposed: 'a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity […] via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions' (2016, 37). In its pluralist approach, *Azimut Dekolonial* exposes and pushes against ongoing biases and positionalities in the alleged universalism of Western science, art, and knowledge production – epistemic coloniality, summarised by Mbembe as 'the endless production of theories that are based on European traditions. These are produced nearly always by Europeans or Euro-American men who are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality; they involve a particular anthropological knowledge, which is a process of knowing about Others – but a process that never fully acknowledges these Others as thinking and knowledge-producing subjects' (Mbembe 2016, 36).

Fig. 36: Performers Nebou N'Diaye and Katalina Götz in the 'White Cube' scene.
Credit: Dorothea Tuch 2019.

The systemic failures and refusals to 'fully acknowledge these Others' are made particularly explicit and visible in *Azimut Dekolonial*'s 'White Cube' story booth. Using a sheet of canvas, Nebou N'Diaye and Katalina Götz create a white, empty space – a room with blank walls, reminiscent of museums and art galleries. It is a space that claims to be neutral, objective, and universal despite being anything but. Standing in the middle of this White Cube, they read out quotes from books, academic works, and letters that were integral in the invention, legitimisation, and reinforcing of racial categories and hierarchies – works of anthropology, philosophy, and Western Enlightenment, which continue to shape academic disciplines and methodologies. Using coloured jelly, the performers write onto the canvas and ask: Who speaks here? Whose knowledge is this? Why should the West decide what counts as justice and human

rights, given its material and political foundation on colonialism, slavery, and subjugation, and its continued participation in global regimes of exploitation?

In the case of *Azimut Dekolonial*, the reconfiguration of the historical archive took place not only within the walls of Kampnagel. To assemble and study the various research materials, historical documents, and archival images ahead of the performance, Hajusom also worked closely with Hamburg's MARKK (Museum at the Rothenbaum – Cultures and Arts of the World). Formerly known as Hamburg's Museum of Ethnology, the MARKK has for several years 'been in an active process of examining its own colonial past and has initiated a comprehensive process of repositioning,' which has involved discussions over restitutions, exchanges of digitised materials, the circulation of objects, and long-term projects with the collections' contexts of origin (MARKK 2023). Prior to the collaboration with Hajusom, in 2014 and 2015, the MARKK had already participated in a joint project with the research centre 'Hamburg's (post-)colonial legacy' at the University of Hamburg, led by Jürgen Zimmerer. This project, entitled 'Colonialism and Museum', involved three research seminars exploring the colonial histories of the museum and its collections, which were then presented in a virtual exhibition.[68]

Hajusom's collaboration with the MARKK involved a different form of decolonial intervention – one that momentarily took over the museum's architectures, exhibition rooms, and archive spaces in February 2019. During a two-day conference, the performers worked with Cameroonian theatre maker Martin Ambara and staged various artistic interventions within the museum space, also sharing behind-the-scenes impressions of their creative approaches and presenting some of the research materials that informed their work on *Azimut Dekolonial* (which would premiere in the following month). As Dorothea Reinicke notes, this collaboration with the

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[68] The virtual exhibition on the 'Museum and Colonialism' research project is available here: https://artsandculture.google.com/story/colonial-background-the-museum-of-ethnology-hamburg-museum-of-ethnology-hamburg/_QXRWkBQpqlsLw?hl=en.

MARKK fit into Hajusom's wider aim 'of dismantling the separation between artistic practice and art theory, including academic discourses, and of identifying intersections between these fields and finding new formats of networking and collaborating, also with academic institutions' (Huck et al. 2022, 276; my translation). The creative collaboration with the MARKK presented an opportunity for the ensemble to apply decolonial frameworks in concrete, embodied terms. During this event, Reinicke argues, the 'imperial architecture of this colonial temple of ethnology' was successfully contested (Huck et al. 2022, 277; my translation). By staging diverse performative interventions and taking over rooms in different parts of the building, the performers deliberately introduced the perspectives of those who had, in the past, been degraded to exhibition objects in these same rooms, and who were now presenting a 'living counterforce' within the museum's architecture (Huck et al. 2022, 277).

Fig. 37: Theatre maker Martin Ambara, atop the ladder, in the MARKK museum archive.
Credit: Arnold Morascher 2019.

In these collaborations and creative encounters with other institutions and spheres of knowledge production, *Azimut Dekolonial*, and Hajusom's work more generally, deliberately aims to transcend the physical architecture of the theatre space. This is a central concern that also links the performance to *The Jungle* and *Phone Home*: permeating all these productions is the sense that their traditional performance spaces cannot quite contain the creative interventions that these transborder plays aim to stage. They experiment with different artistic formats to – at least fictionally – shift and suspend the borders of their respective theatres: temporarily concealing the architecture with elaborate set designs, momentarily extending the performance space through virtual camera connections, etc. In *Azimut Dekolonial*, there is an even more insistent move beyond the theatre, as an institutional context, with the creators explicitly aiming to undermine rigid distinctions between spheres of artistic practice and academic exchange. This striving towards more expansive, dispersed spaces of engagement, interaction, and theatrical solidary is also central to *The Walk*, the final case history discussed in the following chapter – a project that entirely leaves behind the confines of theatre's traditional architectures.

IV. *THE WALK* (2021)

CROSSING BORDERS WITH LITTLE AMAL

1. The Walk Productions, Handspring, Good Chance, and the Global Pandemic

This final chapter turns to a performance project that reflects and reacts to the changed realities of a Europe still caught in the Covid-19 pandemic: the large-scale transnational puppetry festival *The Walk*. Realised in different locations across the continent from July to November 2021, this collaborative street theatre project entailed over 140 associated performance events and assemblies, some meticulously planned, others more spontaneous. Co-organised by The Walk Productions, Good Chance Theatre, and Handspring Puppet Company, *The Walk* followed the character of Little Amal, a 3.5-metre-tall puppet operated by a team of puppeteers. As the narrative centrepiece of this continent-spanning travelling street performance, the giant girl was embedded in a deliberately simple framing story: Amal represents a nine-year-old Syrian girl in search of her mother. She is walking from Gaziantep, near the Syrian-Turkish border, to Manchester in the UK, and along the way, she encounters diverse creative and activist responses. These events – framed by the organisers as 'Events of Welcome' – were organised in collaboration with local cultural partners, schools, NGOs, public figures, municipal partners, and assemblies of spectators (The Walk 2023).[69]

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[69] A full list of associated events (including Little Amal's performances beyond *The Walk*) is detailed on the project website at https://www.walkwithamal.org/past-events/.

Fig. 38: The puppet Little Amal, designed by Handspring Puppet Company and operated by a team of puppeteers, during an event near Calais, 17 October 2021.
Credit: Elliott Verdier/*The New York Times* 2021.

Conceived prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, this interactive, predominantly outdoor performance format turned out to be prescient. During a time when theatre houses across the continent were still dealing with the repercussions of extended lockdowns, rescheduled or cancelled seasons, and prolonged closures, *The Walk* was a way to take theatre outside of its established architectures. In each site, spectators could follow a new section of Amal's journey. Walking in assembly and interacting with the puppet, they became themselves participants in this 'huge play set on an 8,000-kilometre stage,' adding to 'the rich tapestry of Amal's experiences on her epic odyssey,' as artistic director Amir Nizar Zuabi has referred to the project (2021, 04:26–05:24). While most 'Events of Welcome' involved an element of shared walking and a performance event of some form, the scale and character of these gatherings differed widely.

Some entailed collaborations with prolific institutions and public figures, often resulting in elaborate, highly mediatised events; others took place in more communal settings, involving local schools and activist groups.

This variety also became apparent during the Amal performances that I attended in person in London, Erdington, and Birmingham city centre in October 2021 and June 2022. The London performances, carried out across several busy, central locations on 23 October 2021, involved spectacular choreographies and partnerships with established cultural institutions. Throughout the day, Amal was serenaded in front of the Globe Theatre; encountered Joey, the famous Handspring puppet from the 2007 National Theatre production *War Horse*; and danced with performers at Somerset House. Her appearances drew large, partly spontaneous crowds that were extended further by unsuspecting passers-by and tourists. These events were also documented by an accompanying camera team and resulted in extensive media coverage.[70] By contrast, the event on Erdington High Street, in a suburb of Birmingham, had a distinctly communal character. Staged on 28 October 2021, Amal's performance involved local school children preparing friendship bracelets and poems for Little Amal.[71]

For the organisers, turning towards an itinerant, border-crossing, and collective form of street performance became a way to stage contemporary border politics and solidarities beyond more established theatrical formats. Six years after the Long Summer of Migration, *The Walk* was

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[70] *The Walk*'s performance events in London on 23 October 2021 were entitled 'What Country, Friends, is This?' (Shakespeare's Globe), 'Welcome Wishes' (Southbank Centre), 'I Am My Own Way Home' (National Theatre), and 'All Under the Same Moon' (Somerset House). The event programme information can be accessed here: https://www.walkwithamal.org/events/what-country-friends-is-this/;
https://www.walkwithamal.org/events/welcome-wishes;
https://www.walkwithamal.org/events/i-am-my-own-way-home/;
https://www.walkwithamal.org/events/all-under-the-same-moon/.

[71] The Erdington performance on 28 October 2021 was entitled 'Kaleidoscope'. The event programme is available here: https://www.walkwithamal.org/events/kaleidoscope/.
On 23 June 2022, I was able to attend another Amal performance, this time in the Birmingham city centre, on Victoria Square and Centenary Square. By this point, *The Walk* had already been concluded, but the puppet was briefly resurrected for a series of UK-based performances as part of World Refugee Week. Like the Erdington event, this was a relatively small-scale, community-based performance. Entitled 'Where is my family photo?', it had local families, friends, and community groups pose for portraits with the puppet. The event programme can be accessed here: https://walkwithamal.org/uk-2022/.

meant to reflect a changed political moment that script- and stage-based forms of performance had been struggling to accommodate already before the pandemic. For Zuabi and his team, mass displacements since 2015 had created a need for 'a new model of theatre. Maybe we need to take our theatre out of the theatres and into the streets, the streets where these people were walking' (Zuabi 2021, 01:17–02:00). Amal's five-month journey across the continent was intended to mirror real refugee routes, particularly the 'eastern route' that people have been forced to follow since the height of the Syrian displacement crisis (Walia 2021, 113). Anchored alongside politically and symbolically significant sites and border spaces across Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and the UK, *The Walk*'s itinerary was an attempt to reflect refugee movements and social-political responses in Europe – albeit in a distinctly fictionalised form.

Fig. 39: Itinerary of *The Walk* (2021) from Gaziantep, Turkey, to Manchester, UK.
Credit: Good Chance Theatre 2021.

As a piece of transnational performance art, Amal was able to circumvent borders that remained closed and often lethal to people on move, even more so in the 2021 pandemic context. In stark contrast to the arduous journeys undertaken by most migrants, the puppet's largely unobstructed path across Europe took place on an imaginary plane. As co-producer David Lan has stressed, 'We see Amal as a work of theatre. […] It's just a play on a very big stage. […] The one end of it was the Syrian–Turkish border, and the other end of it was Manchester' (pers. comm., 11 November 2022).[72] Far from a realistic depiction of the conditions faced by displaced children, the aim of *The Walk* was to signify this disjuncture: an oversized, unignorable puppet representation of a girl, who walks across the continent to draw attention to how real children are systemically excluded and immobilised in Europe's border regimes.

Amal was however not entirely detached from existing regimes of exclusion. Various nation-state-based insider/outsider dynamics, host/guest frameworks, and spectacles of inclusion/exclusion were still at work in *The Walk*, both in its conception and in how people reacted to the project (De Genova 2013, Picozza 2021). Performed in real time, across real space, and against real borders, this large puppet also functioned as a canvas onto which diverse, sometimes hostile responses to refugees were projected. Unsurprisingly, not all spectators were willing to participate in 'Events of Welcome' for Little Amal. By using a large, visually peculiar puppet to stage these encounters, *The Walk* created an imagery that both represented and defamiliarised Europe's contemporary responses to refugee children: from people gathering in public spaces to partake in gestures of 'welcome' to some protesters throwing stones at the puppet; from celebrities hugging Amal in highly mediatised events to municipal governments banning the project from entering their constituencies. Tracing these responses, this chapter explores what *The Walk* reveals about bordering practices in post-pandemic Europe – and where the project's more subversive potentials may be situated.

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[72] My conversation with David Lan took place via Zoom on 11 November 2022.

Amal's trajectory as a character also indicates how the political-aesthetic stakes shifted in transborder theatre in the years between the Long Summer of Migration and the Covid-19 pandemic. A multifaceted and sophisticated performance festival in its own right, *The Walk* is also an endeavour in creative revision and adaptation. Co-produced by Good Chance Theatre, the project has direct links to the first case history of this thesis, *The Jungle*. It is in Murphy and Robertson's 2017/2018 play where Little Amal has her first appearance as a character. There she still holds a very minor part: as a mostly silent and unobtrusive girl in the 2015–16 Calais camp, the Little Amal of *The Jungle* bears only a passing resemblance with her larger-than-life puppet successor. By revisiting and adapting this character – from a mostly side-lined figure confined to a fixed script into a constantly evolving, collaborative performance event –, *The Walk* in many ways encapsulates a wider turn in transborder performance and activism. The creative development of Little Amal reflects how certain post-2015 humanitarian paradigms had, by 2021, been reworked into different solidarity frameworks: formats that explicitly aim to accommodate more expansive contexts, more historical depth, and more collective approaches.

2. Walking out of *The Jungle*: Amal's journey from humanitarian child to giant puppet

'Utterly epic in execution': Little Amal and Joey at the National Theatre

Of the six *The Walk* events that I visited in person, Amal's journey along the South Bank in central London, performed on Saturday, 23 October 2021, stood out in its scope and spectacular imagery. Throughout the day, the puppeteers were following a particularly busy schedule, performing at several iconic sites across central London. Earlier, Amal had already appeared at St. Paul's Cathedral, where she had been greeted with words of welcome by the dean, David Ison. Then, outside the Globe Theatre, the *Twelfth Night* company had delivered a performance of 'The Strangers' Case' for the puppet.[73] Now moving across the crowded walkway from Gabriel's Wharf to the Southbank Centre, Amal was accompanied by a large procession of spectators, from visitors who had showed up specifically for the event to unsuspecting sightseers and passers-by. As with many other large-scale performances during *The Walk*, Amal was deliberately placed within the high visibility associated with major tourist attractions and established cultural institutions, her gigantic frame nearly impossible to ignore. Like a celebrity, she was followed by a dedicated film crew, media representatives, and a team of security guards, who were pushing people firmly to the side to clear the puppet's path along the riverbank.[74] Occasionally, Amal

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[73] Now a popular passage to mark World Refugee Day, 'The Strangers' Case' originally appears in *Sir Thomas More*, an Elizabethan play attributed to Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle (considered to be heavily revised by Thomas Heywood, Thomas Dekker, and William Shakespeare). Delivered in the play as a speech by Thomas More, 'The Strangers' Case' addresses London rioters during the 1517 'Evil May Day' xenophobic uprising, where local apprentices attacked and looted migrant workers from the continent, especially Flanders. Trying in vain to dispel the riot, More, then the under-sheriff of London, decries the crowd's 'mountainish inhumanity' and denounces England as 'a nation of such barbarous temper, / That, breaking out in hideous violence, / Would not afford you an abode on earth' (Shakespeare's Globe 2018).

[74] As intended by the organisers (David Lan, pers. comm., 11 November 2022), Amal's day in London received extensive media coverage. For instance, David Levene's photographs of the series of puppetry events would later

stopped to explore details in her surroundings and to greet people – waving, touching children's outreached hands –, before moving swiftly onwards.

The remarkable skills of the Handspring performers were evident throughout. Moving Amal during performance required a team of three to four puppeteers – one at each arm, one inside her torso on stilts, and sometimes one at her back.[75] Manipulating Amal into movement was extremely physically demanding for the puppeteers and required exceptional coordination, strength, and endurance: this 'little girl' was so difficult to manoeuvre that she could only move for one hour at a time (Levene 2021). So lifelike were Amal's movements and expressions that the puppeteers almost faded into the background. Taking her large, determined steps, the puppet appeared to be leading the performers along with her, instead of being directed by them.[76]

As the puppet made her way through the crowds, she evoked reactions of surprise, delight, and occasional annoyance from those whose routes had been disrupted. Most spectators readily waved back and shook her outreached hand, shouting greetings, well-wishes, and encouragements: 'Oh no, she's afraid of the train! Don't be afraid, Amal!' A complete lack of reaction was a marked exception. It was, as *The Guardian* noted in an editorial, almost impossible not to acknowledge the puppet: 'As a piece of theatre Little Amal is an extraordinary thing:

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appear in an extensive photo essay in *The Guardian* (Levene 2021) and a companion book to *The Walk*, entitled *The Long Walk with Little Amal* (The Walk Productions, Good Chance Theatre, and Handspring Puppet Company 2021).

[75] Handspring dramaturge and theatre researcher Jane Taylor has written extensively on how the puppet constitutes a 'multiple figure' in performance, occupying a liminal space as an artwork – 'neither wholly *performers* nor simply part of the *set* [and] *costumes*' (Taylor 2009a, 11). The dynamics of puppetry resist simple categorising: what a puppet 'is' changes in different contexts and is inherently unstable, as puppets adopt and move between different subject positions, depending on the context they are in. For Taylor, this opens up an array of existential questions: 'What are the limits of the human; […] what is it that makes us believe in the puppet while we are conscious of the puppeteer; what kind of life inhabits the puppet?' (2009b, 19). 'The puppet's work,' as Handspring executive producer Basil Jones notes, 'is to strive towards life. […] Every second on stage is a second in which the puppet could die' (2009, 254). This 'death,' however, is equally provisional as the 'dead' puppet can always be brought back to life. Taylor notes how, in order to engage with the puppet as an artwork, spectators implicitly engage in what she calls the 'as-if' contract of puppetry: 'Via a transaction of affect between these sites, we are allowed to engage with the object *as if* it were generating a universe of expressive and intellectual complexity' (2008, 53).

[76] *The Walk*'s ten puppeteers had specific performance styles – as they rotated positions, each event was matched to certain puppeteers' style (Levine 2021). As Puppetry Director Enrico Dau Yang Wey notes, 'Before each event, we discuss Amal's situation, where she is coming from, where she is headed in relationship to the offerings from the local organisation' (Abrams 2023, 20).

incredibly simple, almost naive in conception, and yet utterly epic in execution. Hers (somehow it is impossible to say "its") has been a tremendous, and deeply touching, journey' (The Guardian 2021). Most spectators intuitively moved along with Amal; when she hesitated or stopped, the crowd also stopped – a continuous back-and-forth, in which the puppet implicitly mobilised others to be mobile with her. Those lingering in her path, capturing her through their phone screens, were firmly ushered to the side to make room for her sweeping steps. The puppeteers thus held in their hands not just the motions of Amal, but implicitly of an entire assembly, who copied and multiplied her movements, creating a disruption in the urban rhythms of the South Bank.

The main event unfolded in front of the National Theatre. Here Amal met another famous puppet operated by a team of Handspring puppeteers: Joey, the horse from Nick Stafford's acclaimed 2007 production *War Horse*, 'perhaps the most famous giant puppet in the world' (Levene 2021).[77] The two figures – the 'little girl' towering over the true-to-life sized horse – were manipulated into intricate movements and highly emotive expressions by the puppeteers, with Joey neighing and rearing up, to the delight of the crowd. After their joyous encounter, Amal moved on, striding towards the Golden Jubilee Bridge with characteristic purpose. Later in the day, she would reappear outside the National Theatre for another event, where singer Juliana Yazbeck and a community choir would sing and perform the piece 'I Am My Own Way Home' from Jim Fortune's musical adaptation of Shakespeare's *Pericles*.

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[77] Based on Michael Morpurgo's 1982 novel and adapted in 2011 into a film by Steven Spielberg, Nick Stafford's 2007 production *War Horse* at the National Theatre became a great success, performed in 11 countries over the following years. Set during World War I, the play traces the story of Albert, a young farm boy in Devon, and his horse Joey, who is sold to the Cavalry and brought to France. A collaboration with Handspring Puppet Company, *War Horse* became renowned for its life-sized horse puppets, manipulated by puppeteers to gallop and charge on stage.

Fig. 40: A meeting of giants: Joey and Little Amal in front of the National Theatre in London, 23 October 2021. Credit: David Levene/*The Guardian* 2021.

Not quite the last leg of Amal's journey (more performances were scheduled across England and at the Glasgow climate summit), the puppet's appearance at the National Theatre still presented a moment of coming full circle. Amal's encounter with Joey bridged several decades of Handspring's history of puppet making and performing, bringing together two of the company's most well-known works that had helped solidify its international acclaim. For many South Bank spectators, the sheer magnitude, spectacular visuality, and collective experience of this meeting (at a time when new Covid-19 lockdowns were still an ever-present possibility) may well have dominated their impressions of the event – particularly if they happened onto the scene without prior knowledge of the performances. Yet Amal and Joey also evoked stories beyond this fleeting appearance, carrying with them larger narratives of war, forced migration, and European bordering. Violently expelled from their respective homes, they confronted London audiences

with histories of World War I (Joey) and the Syrian war (Amal). In different ways, these two characters represented political failures of European nation-states, and specifically the British state – now meeting, significantly, in front of the National Theatre, an institution that has long expressed aims to create spaces where the 'state of the nation' is put under scrutiny (National Theatre 2023).[78]

'School': Amal's depiction as humanitarian child in *The Jungle*

For Amal, the *War Horse* and 'I Am My Own Way Home' events also represented another kind of homecoming: she was returning to the institution that co-produced and commissioned *The Jungle*, in which she took her first steps as a character in 2017. If it was not for her name, however, this giant figure could hardly be traced back to her prototype character. In Murphy and Robertson's play, particularly in the script, Amal is depicted as the paradigmatic humanitarian child: innocent, unthreatening, fragile, and well-behaved. A Syrian girl stranded alone in Calais, she is still a few years younger than in her 2021 iteration as a puppet (six instead of nine). Throughout the play, she is usually holding the hand of a volunteer or drawing quietly on a sheet of paper at the edge of the stage. Except for one word, '[s]chool', she has no lines of dialogue, and not even this she utters independently – it is merely an echo of an earlier statement made by the volunteer Boxer (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 23). Amal's representation in the play is

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[78] The National Theatre's self-identity 'as the home of incisive, state-of-the-nation new writing' in Britain dates back to the period when Richard Eyre served as the institution's third Artistic Director (1988–1997) (National Theatre 2023). Famous for productions such as David Hare's 'state of the nation' trilogy (*Racing Demon* about the Church of England, *Murmuring Judges* about the UK legal system, and *The Absence of War* about British politics), Eyre's tenure came to represent the idea 'that the theatre could and should act as a public forum on occasions: a place to address and contemplate the big issues of the day' (National Theatre 2023). This principle has more recently been reiterated by the National Theatre's current Artistic Director, Rufus Norris. Appointed in 2015, he has reasserted the idea 'that theatre is the centre of debate for what's going on in the nation,' with his directorship involving the productions *My Country; a work in progress* (about the EU referendum), *Small Island* (about the Windrush generation), and *Grenfell: in the words of survivors* (about the Grenfell Tower fire) (National Theatre 2023).

deliberately generic and inconspicuous: as the youngest character, she is supposed to encapsulate 'the hundreds of unaccompanied minors in the Calais camp' – an estimated 1,300 by October 2016, when the camp was destroyed (The Walk 2023; Meera 2021). A composite figure rather than a fully-fledged character in her own right, the Little Amal of *The Jungle* fulfils a primarily tokenistic role, standing in for all the 'lone children of the camp' (Meera 2021).

The play's depiction of this assumed catch-all character is closely aligned with how child refugees tended to be imagined and constructed in Europe in activist and media discourses on the Calais camp. Following a long tradition of humanitarian and advocacy discourses, many appeals at the time relied heavily on 'the iconic figure of the child, the embodiment of […] innocent vulnerability' (McLaughlin 2018, 1758). Cast as eternally small and accommodating figures, refugee children are frequently reduced to 'the paradigmatic suffering subject […] innocent and pure recipients of care and compassion' (Riga, Langer, and Dakessian 2020, 712). Intended to support the prioritisation of children in frameworks of protection, these 'child first, migrant second' representations can also have a markedly dehistoricising effect. As literature and migration scholar Carly McLaughlin has analysed, 'in the context of the criminalisation of undocumented migrants, childhood is no longer a stable category which guarantees protection, but is subject to scrutiny and suspicion' (2018, 1757). Instead of ensuring systemic access to rights and protection, the persistent association of displaced children with silent victimhood also works as a mechanism of exclusion. The humanitarian child, McLaughlin shows, simultaneously demarcates her mirror figure, the 'unchildlike child', who is suspected to be a 'bogus child refugee' – too old, too troublesome, too strange, etc. – and seen as undeserving of protection (McLaughlin 2018, 1757; Brown 2011; Aitken 2001).

This framework also determines Amal's representation in *The Jungle*. Corresponding closely to sentimentalist-humanitarian depictions of refugee girlhood, her portrayal reinforces the idea of children 'as the most vulnerable section of a displaced population whose experience is

dominated by trauma and whose needs are self-evident' (Hart 2014, 383). At no point does the script allow space for Amal to articulate her own experiences, memories, or points of view. Instead, her silent, timid presence is often used as a pretext for other characters to provide exposition on the political and legislative frameworks that govern the experiences of child refugees in Europe. The volunteer Paula, for example, comments on the absence of NGOs such as Save the Children in the Calais camp and on legal entitlements for family reunification under the Dublin III system (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 52).[79] While these frameworks are contextualised and interrogated critically at several points in the play, Amal herself is reduced to a spectral presence in the process.

Fig. 41: Humanitarian child: Little Amal with the volunteer Paula in the 2018 Playhouse production of *The Jungle*. Credit: Tristram Kenton/*The Guardian* 2018.

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[79] The character of Paula is likely based on Liz Clegg, a now well-known activist who founded the Women and Children's Centre in the Calais camp. Clegg features prominently, for instance, in Thomas Laurance's 2023 feature documentary about British volunteers in Calais, *On Our Doorstep*.

For example, Paula at one point reiterates her reasons why children such as Amal should deserve special protection before other refugees: 'If we can't even win the argument about unaccompanied kids like her, we don't stand a chance with [adults who cannot prove their fear of persecution]. […] But the kids are different. She doesn't have the capacity to choose any of this' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 90–91). Yet neither does the script allow Amal the capacity to voice, react, or respond to 'any of this' – instead, Paula is the one who holds the narrative authority. It is one of the moments where hegemonic regimes of representation are inadvertently reproduced in the play, even as they are being critiqued. Amal works as a blank character to outline humanitarian and legal frameworks and to establish the advocacy positions of the volunteers she is attached to. Much like the child subjects of traditional humanitarian appeals, the Amal of *The Jungle* also fulfils a role of 'satisfy[ing] the needs – including, importantly, the sentimental needs – of white people' (Cole 2012).[80]

However, even in *The Jungle*, the character already suggests a more ambivalent, open-ended iteration – if not in the script itself, then at least during the performance event. On stage, Amal reclaims some of the agency that she is denied in the script, if only in a limited sense: interpreted by young performers, she inhabits a playfulness and rebelliousness that pushes against scripts of docile refugee childhood. Recounting a 2019 performance of *The Jungle* at the Curran in San Francisco, theatre researcher and director Suhaila Meera observes how Amal

> leap[ed] up and strut[ted] – hips swaying – to the opposite end of the stage, as if on a catwalk. […] She clapped her hands and laughed, even at dramaturgically inappropriate moments. Her body language appeared to be worlds apart from that of a girl who had grown up in a refugee camp, yet there was something deeply stirring and unsettling about her presence on stage.

> (Meera 2021)

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[80] The character is played by an alternating cast of child actors whose families, in co-director Justin Martin's phrasing, 'had some experience with or connection to the refugee conversation' (cited in Meera 2021). Among others, Aliya Ali, Alyssa Denise D'Souza, Lara Alpay, and Erin Rushidi have so far portrayed the character. As Meera observes, 'In contrast to the adult ensemble's naturalistic acting, Amal is ambiguously performed' (2021). To maintain more realistic reactions on stage, the young actors were given deliberately little rehearsal time and only few performing notes (Meera 2021).

This 'inappropriateness' suggests a more dynamic, multilayered portrayal beyond typical humanitarian frames – an incongruity that reflects the inherent 'unmanageability' of childhood, against dominant representative regimes 'within which the otherness and peculiarity of children are rendered safe and manageable' (Aitken 2001, 119). This dimension would become markedly more pronounced a few years later, when Amal made her grand re-entrance as a puppet.

'Not conforming to expectations': the unmanageability of puppets

By the time Amal re-emerged as the centrepiece of *The Walk* in 2021, her character had undergone significant revisions, with the creators consciously adjusting her representation to a changed political moment. Working with the slogan 'Don't forget about us', the performance festival intended to subvert how people on the move, and particularly displaced children, were increasingly being sidelined and erased in post-pandemic media discourses and legal-political frameworks in Europe (The Walk 2023). The new iteration of Amal, as Murphy and Robertson have pointed out, was also meant to rectify the character's earlier depiction in *The Jungle*: 'This time, however, the girl was different. […] We had hope that she had more to say than the one word ('school') […]. We had hope that she could provide some sort of tonic or inspiration for those searching for refuge and those who welcome' (Murphy and Robertson 2021, 67). The name 'Little Amal' – used sincerely in *The Jungle* and, incidentally, corresponding to the part's size in the script – now took on an ironic quality.[81] Revisiting the National Theatre in purposeful, striding

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[81] The puppet's name has been a point of contention. Amal means 'hope' in Arabic, yet the Arabic spelling in *The Walk*'s official merchandise materials has raised some criticism. Instead of using the common Arabic spelling of the name, أمل (pronounced (ʔamal)), 'Amal' is written as آمال (pronounced (ʔāmāl), with longer vowels). In Arabic, this is the plural form of the noun 'hope' and not commonly used as a personal name. Some have interpreted the spelling on the merchandise as an error in judgement on the organisers' part – at best, a direct transliteration of how the name 'Amal' is written and pronounced in English, at worst a careless mistranslation indicative of underlying Eurocentric biases in *The Walk* ('the whitest response ever possible to a refugee crisis,' as the Twitter account

steps, the character had been transformed, through the artistry of the Handspring puppet designers and performers, into a figure who was no longer little at all but towered over her surroundings wherever she appeared.

Fig. 42: Little Amal as a puppet, meeting actor Jude Law in Folkestone, Kent, in October 2021.
Credit: Gareth Fuller/*PA Images* 2021.

Abdulisms argued [2021]). This may well be the case; however, that the marketing materials have remained unchanged throughout the past two years suggests that the unusual spelling is deliberate – particularly given that several decision-making positions in The Walk Productions are held by Arabic native speakers. Whether intentional or not, the pluralised name effectively captures what distinguishes *The Walk* as a theatrical project – a performance that reflects diverse solidarities and bordering practices, with Amal constituting a 'multiple figure'.

In visual terms, *The Walk* inverted the hierarchy of the humanitarian encounter presented in *The Jungle*, most prominently through the sheer size and peculiar design of Amal. Standing 3.5 meters tall, the puppet undermined traditional post-2015 frames of refugee childhood as eternally fragile and accommodating. In *The Jungle*, Amal's movements around the stage are largely determined by the volunteers holding her hand; Boxer at one point even '*sweeps her up into his arms*' and carries her off-stage (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 23). As a giant, unignorable puppet, by contrast, Amal now appeared as the one guiding the people by her side, drawing large crowds wherever she went.

Through the format of the puppet, it became possible for *The Walk* to simultaneously reflect and defamiliarise Europe's diverse responses to children in displacement. The festival did not depart entirely from humanitarian handholding: from well-known artists and celebrities to political and religious representatives, Amal still met numerous public figures on her journey across Europe, echoing the imageries of traditional advocacy campaigns. Unlike, for instance, *Phone Home*'s acerbic take on celebrity humanitarianism, *The Walk* rarely resorted to the register of parody. Rather, it aimed to deliberately harness the visibility and media coverage that these events entailed, as co-producer David Lan remarks:

> When she meets people who are of political authority, or of political power, […] those are very important moments […]. The important thing is that [they] should be *seen* to be greeting her. […] When the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral [in London] stood on the stairs with thousands of people around and said, with a mic, talking to the cameras, […] "London is a very big city. There is room for many, many, many people to be welcomed in our city, many, many, many refugees to be welcomed in our city," that is one of the things that we're trying to achieve.
>
> (David Lan, pers. comm., 11 November 2022)

Like the traditional humanitarian encounters that they echoed, these 'Events of Welcome' were embedded in questions of self-staging and host–guest dynamics, in many ways disguising underlying political-economic power imbalances (who is assumed to hold the power to welcome,

who is constructed as a stranger, etc.).[82] However, this was also an entirely different visual hierarchy that undermined familiar frames. The gigantic size and visual peculiarity of Amal removed these scenes several steps in representation (and several metres in height) from the typical depiction of the sentimentalist-humanitarian encounter. It was now Amal who controlled the visual terms of these encounters. Not quite a reversal of power structures, this was still a marked departure from her earlier depiction. As in the child actors' ungovernability, there was an underlying playfulness to these scenes of public figures pretending to be interacting with a giant puppet – also opening up a space for these gestures of welcome to be perceived, at least partially, as strange and incongruous. Against and alongside tropes of refugee childhood, *The Walk* created its own distinct visuality – one that became itself increasingly recognisable and iconic as the performance project gained international renown and wide-spread media coverage.[83]

Fig. 43: Amal outside St. Paul's Cathedral.
Credit: Hollie Adams/*Getty Images* 2021.

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[82] Even though some of the event outlines and narrative setups for *The Walk* explicitly framed Amal as a stranger in Europe, these constructions sometimes became inverted during the performance event itself, with spectators actively rejecting the preconceived narrative frame. See e.g. Janet Banfield, who traces this dynamic in her account of the 'Amal Meets Alice' performance in Oxford (2022).

[83] In May 2023, Little Amal was represented twice among the first ten results when entering the term 'refugee girl' in a Google image search in the UK. While this is likely to change once the Little Amal performances become less frequent, it is still an indication of just how well-covered this project has been, and of how the figure of the 'refugee girl' is currently imagined and represented in dominant imageries in the West.

Amal's oversized presence also defied dominant associations between puppets and notions of passivity and dependence. Novelist and P.E.N. International president Burhan Sönmez alludes to this connotation when he draws a parallel between Amal and the way in which 'good migrants' are imagined in Europe's border regimes (2021). In a piece on *The Walk*'s performances in Turkey, he notes, 'A refugee should not get ill, be very hungry, read too much, talk too much, not look too much. If she is like a puppet, she will be safe, as Little Amal is safe' (2021, 27). However, in most puppet performances, and certainly in Handspring's specific art of puppetry, notions of docility and agreeableness are also continuously undermined. The metaphor of the dependent, well-behaved, unobtrusive puppet does not hold when applied to the giant, commanding figure of Amal. In her encounters with politicians and actors, she was never just an isolated figure waiting to be accepted by those whom she met, but always projected a sense of mischief and subversiveness.

Handspring's particular design also reinforced this. Amal's exaggerated facial features, especially her enlarged eyes, could easily have led to a cutefication of the character, foregrounding naïveté and infantility. Yet this was not the case here. While highly emotive, her features were also perceived as 'strange,' 'creepy,' 'uncanny,' and 'scary' by some spectators and online commentators (Good Chance Theatre 2020).[84] As Claudia Orenstein remarks about Amal's features,

> Perhaps the honest details of a young girl's face, blown up to scale and translated into puppetry, might not echo the more carefully designed "cute" versions we are used to seeing in crafted and animated commercial figures. But like her self-locomoting structure, her face—alert, innocent, and somewhat care-worn—reflects the greater meaning of her performed travels. Not conforming to expectations of a charming doll-like figure signals that she is not here solely to be admired; she makes us think twice about her presence and what it signifies.

(Orenstein 2023, 13–14)

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[84] For example, underneath a YouTube video about the making of the puppet, user *Jetstream Jack* remarked, 'This is Wicker Man levels of creepy,' commentator *Sushmitha Chowdhury* noted, 'This look scary,' and the account *zxy atiywariii* referred to 'an Uncanny Valley look' (Good Chance Theatre 2020).

This form of visual defamiliarization is a creative strategy often used deliberately in puppetry. Writing on Peter Schumann's famous *Bread and Puppet Theater*, for example, Ingrid Schaffner notes that puppets are inherently 'insurrectionists' that defy social conventions and purposefully refuse to be 'fluffy, lovely, or digestible' – 'the puppet that fails to rebel […] may as well be a person' (Schumann 1999, 56; Schaffner 2008, 33). In her visual design, Amal, too, refused to be entirely 'digestible.' As a puppet, she represented a fundamental strangeness and out-of-place-ness: she was, quite literally, 'unchildlike' and partly resisted representative regimes of manageable refugee childhood (Aitken 2001, 119). While Amal's journey as an individual girl still recalled familiar frames of what Europe currently imagines as a paradigmatic refugee child, she simultaneously pushed against these imageries through both her size and visual strangeness. As a puppet she no longer represented a humanitarian subject. She now demanded rights frameworks that were robust enough to also, and especially, guarantee the protection of those who are not visibly vulnerable, fragile, and 'digestible' to European nation-states.

3. *The Walk* as Evolving Transborder Tapestry

'A feel-good symbol': *The Walk* as distracting parade?

Amal's transnational mobility as a performance project stood in stark contrast to the systematic immobilisation of refugees within European border mechanisms. While *The Walk* was performed in real European space and time, it simultaneously operated on an idealised, fictional plane – one in which a Syrian girl could move relatively freely across the continent. Many mechanisms of border governance were suspended for Amal, who had a particular freedom of mobility in public space. 'The route we're taking is a route which refugees have taken but we stay in hotels, we have passports,' as David Lan stresses (Gentleman 2021). Some commentators have suggested that this premise fundamentally misrepresents the realities of people on the move, instead presenting an opportunity for Europe to cast itself as tolerant and welcoming – yet another 'spectacle of solidarity' (Picozza 2021). The festival's spectacular 'Events of Welcome' have been criticised for trivialising the brutal conditions that most people on the move, and children in particular, are subjected to in post-2021 Europe.

Several commentators have argued that the Amal performances 'invisiblize and depoliticize the issue' (Amira Benali, 2 April 2023, comment on Abdelnour 2023), dismissing them as 'performative liberal bullshit' (Polly Pallister-Wilkins, 2 April 2023, comment on Abdelnour 2023). The account Abdulisms calls it 'the whitest response ever possible to a refugee crisis,' arguing that Amal 'isn't for refugees, or Arabs or anyone other than white people and their conscience quite frankly. They might come out and welcome your dumb puppet. But wash up with salt in your clothes and a twang in your tongue and they might just break your legs' (Abdulisms 2021). Commenting on Amal's performance in Camden in April 2023 (in one of her many subsequent appearances after *The Walk* itself had ended), education researcher Carlos

Azevedo highlights the large numbers of unaccompanied children who had disappeared from Home Office-run hotels earlier in the year. He contends that 'the fetishisation of #LittleAmal is also a distraction from the more than 200 *real* child refugees who have gone missing from government-approved accommodation in the UK […] Our empathy should go to #AsylumSeekers and #refugees, not to a puppet' (Azevedo 2023). Similarly, conflict researcher Samer Abdelnour argues that the puppet 'is a feel-good symbol celebrated by privileged people and a distraction from the weapons industries and wars that create refugees and the racist policies that actively drown refugees and migrants every day […]. [I]t isn't even performative solidarity, [it's] just performance' (2023).

Particularly in its initial conception, *The Walk* arguably reinforced this interpretation. Amal's joint walks with people across Europe were framed as jubilant parades, with promotion discourses relying heavily on a joyful language of welcome, togetherness, and celebration. As artistic director Amir Nizar Zuabi stressed, '*The Walk* is not a walk of misery. This is a walk of pride. We want […] to talk about the potential [refugees] bring, about the cultural riches they come from and to honour their experience' (2021, 04:54–05:21). Similar to how Good Chance Theatre's promotional discourses highlighted *The Jungle*'s 'hopeful, resilient residents' and their 'capacity to build something out of nothing,' *The Walk* was described by its organisers as 'a celebration of shared humanity and hope' (Murphy and Robertson 2018, back cover; Zuabi 2021, 04:54–05:21).

Lan, who conceived the concept for *The Walk* after having worked on *The Jungle*, recounts the early considerations around the project: 'At the beginning, I was very clear that it was not a campaign. […] We wanted to do this in such a way that *anybody* could walk behind Amal, could support Amal – left-wing, right-wing, anybody' (David Lan, pers. comm., 11 November 2022). In this original vision, Amal still shared her predecessor's abstract universalism and agreeableness: imbued with the impossible task of '[r]epresenting all displaced children', she was framed as an

exceedingly generic figure who 'anybody could walk behind' (The Walk 2023). Transposed from a humanitarian to a celebratory register, this still supposed an underlying consensus: the singular figure of the child, able to garner solidarity with people on the move across the continent. Intended as a counter-representation to challenge dominant perceptions of refugees as victims or threats, the universalist approach of celebrating 'shared humanity' would soon become more qualified, however, as *The Walk* developed into a more nuanced and ambiguous artwork in its eventual execution (Zuabi 2021, 04:54–05:21).

It soon became clear that this harmonious vision for Amal was untenable. Whatever the project's narrative intentions, these became lost to events and assemblies unfolding around Amal. As Lan acknowledges, 'I changed my mind quite a lot in the course of it, and I think different things now to what I thought [in the early stages of conceiving the project]. […] We try always to see it from the perspective of not any child but *that* particular child – *that* particular child, who has accumulated now a lot of experience' (David Lan, pers. comm., 11 November 2022).

A specific representation of forced displacement was being circulated here – and not one that automatically reflected the diverse, complex challenges most people on the move were facing in Europe, let alone beyond. Significantly, the 'humanitarian child' Amal had been the character chosen to step out of *The Jungle* – rather than, for example, Salar, the outspoken Afghan restaurant owner. This, too, reflected bordering regimes as they currently manifest in Europe, the organisation of public space, and the types of refugee narratives that are readily available for public consumption. Here was a young, light-skinned Syrian girl, who was travelling without family members, and who was repeatedly associated with 'the potential' she brought to the countries she entered (Zuabi 2021, 04:26–05:24). The vast majority of forced migrants were excluded from the supposedly universal frame. As Nadine El-Enany notes, 'What of the bearded male refugee? What of the woman in the hijab or burka? What of their dark-skinned children?' (2016, 14). That Amal could move relatively freely across Europe (though not always), with many

politicians and public figures happily attaching themselves to her, was also a reflection of a carefully chosen and curated representation of forced displacement.

By 2021, the idea of the 'unifying refugee child' had become even further removed from the ongoing realities of European border governance. Instead of an imagined child figure uniting 'left-wing, right-wing, anybody' in support of refugees, precisely the opposite had been happening: on a policy and rhetoric level, parties across Europe had become increasingly united in their efforts to prevent, detain, and deport those trying to move across the continent – overtly eroding international legal principles such as non-refoulement and the duty to aid people in distress at sea (Trilling 2021). In the UK, the 2016 Dubs Amendment, intended to provide safe passage and support for 3,000 unaccompanied children, had been halted already in 2017, with only 480 children relocated to the UK (Rosen and Crafter 2018, 67). For many refugee children, the Covid-19 pandemic had created even more precarious conditions, including increased poverty, food insecurity, and disruptions to social support networks (UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM 2021, 6).[85] Asylum procedures and family reunifications had been delayed across Europe, state services and support structures for caregivers suspended, and children's access to healthcare, legal aid, and education services impeded (UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM 2021, 6).

As *The Walk* progressed, the realities of European border governance also started to infringe onto the fictional plane where Amal's journey was taking place. Diverse bordering mechanisms were reflected back onto the puppet at several points, rendering her transnational mobility much more fractured and volatile. This became evident especially during the early stages of *The Walk*. Both in the street and online, Amal was frequently met with hostile, xenophobic,

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[85] Conditions were even worse for people living in refugee camps. Writing on the situation in the Greek camps in spring 2020, Kenny Cupers notes how the state's newly imposed measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 disproportionately targeted people in camps, who were immobilised under catastrophic health conditions (2020). Even before the outbreak of the pandemic, EU-funded facilities on the Greek islands – most notoriously, Moria camp on Lesbos – had effectively been used as prisons where people were kept in protracted limbo, often under life-threatening conditions (Cupers 2020). The severe restrictions of movement, chronic malnutrition, disastrous hygienic conditions, and constant threats of violence in these spaces became only aggravated during the pandemic, with camps presenting 'death traps […] European policies of deliberate neglect with lethal consequences' (Cupers 2020).

and Islamophobic reactions, forced to divert her route, and banned from entering certain spaces (Allen 2023). For example, in Larissa, Greece, protesters threw fruit, eggs, and stones at the puppet (Marshall, Gall, and Povoledo 2021). Further violence was threatened ahead of a performance in Athens, causing Amal to relocate to the city's rooftops. In Meteora, a local council voted to ban the project from entering the Orthodox monasteries, citing the risk of contracting Covid-19 in large crowds, but also reservations about 'bringing a Muslim element to Meteora,' even though Amal's religion had at the time not been specified (Gentleman 2021). As Yolanda Markopoulou, *The Walk*'s producer in Greece, noted, 'it was interesting to see how they felt threatened, even by a puppet representation of a nine-year-old girl. […] There was a parallel in what happened in Greece to what happens to actual refugees – there are always people who welcome them and people who do not' (Gentleman 2021).

This also became apparent at another significant site of Amal's story: a scheduled performance in Calais had to be moved to Bray-Dunes, following objections raised by mayor Natacha Bouchart (Gentleman 2021). That Amal was welcomed in spectacular fashion outside the National Theatre, but not in Calais, presents a telling parallel with *The Jungle*'s trajectory as a production: while the play's fictional version of Calais is staged across Western theatres, any new settlements in the real Calais are routinely evicted and destroyed.

'A duty unfulfilled': marking an absence

Amal's walk across Europe came to signify these contexts, deliberately highlighting the disjuncture between the puppet's spectacular mobility and the systemic immobilisation and exclusion of most refugee children. Her oversized presence marked an absence: the real refugee children that European governments were systematically and violently preventing from reaching

state borders and claiming their rights. As David Gurnham has observed, the puppet's epic 'reappearance' was performed just as refugees and migrants were being violently 'disappeared' (2023, 14). Her journey took place during a time when the UK government heavily reaffirmed its 'desire to be rid of refugees traveling by the irregular route that Amal herself followed' (2023, 14). The Home Office was paving the way towards drastic legislation changes, aiming to prevent and eradicate the presence of actual migrants from UK territory and legislative frameworks (Gurnham 2023). While Amal was walking to Manchester, the Nationality and Borders Act was passing through parliament (royal assent by April 2022) and plans for the Rwanda removals policy were underway (Gurnham 2023, 13). In the drafted Illegal Migration Bill, the term 'refugee' had been erased entirely: 'While the language of NABA at least acknowledges that the people targeted for punitive treatment are refugees, the IMB refers only to "persons" (cl. 2), "certain persons" (cl. 1), and "migrants" (cl. 15–17). The "refugee" thus drops out of legal lexicon altogether' (Gurnham 2023, 12).

Against efforts of the UK and other European governments to effect refugees' disappearance from the nation-state and from legal frameworks, *The Walk* became a way to mark this border context. Gurnham has analysed the puppet as a ghost-like figure who comes back to haunt Europe – much like the colonial histories in *Azimut Dekolonial*'s 'haunted house' (Gurnham 2023). He suggests that the ghost story offers a productive framework to conceptualise the human rights encounter as it is currently enacted, and systematically prevented, in Europe. In Gurnham's framework, the figure of the ghost does more than evoke suspicion and signify an absence: the ghost also 'appears, and that appearance is traditionally associated with a demand for justice in the form of redress or reparation for past hurts and wrongs, but which ordinary justice procedures seem incapable of providing' (2023, 2–3, 9). In this sense, Amal's ghost-like presence also represents, for Gurnhahm, the refugee's claims towards the nation-state, and significantly, the reluctance of the state to address these claims (2023, 15).

Fig. 44: Protesting against the UK's Nationality and Borders Bill outside the British Parliament, 7 December 2021. Credit: *Imageplotter/Alamy Stock Photo* 2021.

Amal's gigantic presence across Europe, just as governments were taking unprecedented steps to effect the excision and erasure of refugees from state territories and legal frameworks, offered a way of making the demands of refugees and migrants visible. Against states' efforts to exclude and remove people from European space and legislation, Amal's events were deliberately performed in public space, on the streets, on a gigantic scale, rather than hidden away in a theatre. In a departure from her original, universalist conception, she was increasingly placed in spaces of anti-border protest and activism – joining and extending assemblies where rights claims were being formulated. In December 2021, as British MPs were debating the proposed Nationality and Borders Bill, Amal joined protests outside Parliament, standing alongside Tulip Siddiq and Jeremy Corbyn during their speeches and holding a banner with other protesters that read, 'Solidarity Knows No Borders'. In Belgium, assisted by her puppeteers, Amal held up signs

demanding 'JUSTICE FOR MAWDA' in English and Arabic, in response to the killing of two-year-old Mawda Shawri by a Belgian police officer in 2018. At the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Amal stood with Samoan activist Brianna Fruean during her speech at the Advancing Gender Equality in Climate Action event. The puppet delivered an open letter calling for emission cuts and raised a large banner together with several other delegates and participants: '1.8 MILLION PEOPLE SAY: SAVE OUR FUTURE NOW.'

Fig. 45: Amal during the 'Advancing Gender Equality in Climate Action' panel at COP26 in Glasgow, with Samoan climate activist Brianna Freuan, on 1 November 2021.
Credit: *The Scotsman* 2021.

Fig. 46: Amal joining delegates and participants at COP26.
Credit: *The Scotsman* 2021.

It is in these collective, interactive terms that Amal could 'speak' in *The Walk*, in a way that was markedly different from *The Jungle*. In such joint pronunciations of solidarity, Amal's narrative was linked to larger, transnational struggles for recognition and claims to rights. Although silent on the surface, Amal still amplified conversations that might otherwise not be heard as clearly in the same public forums. During a time when displaced children were (and are) systemically excluded from spheres of appearance in Europe, Amal and the public assemblies surrounding her created a unique form of representation and interaction in public space. In assembly with others, the puppet's presence marked 'a reminder of a moral [and legal] duty unfulfilled' (Gurnham 2023, 19). Amal – who explicitly demanded to be looked at – offered ways of representing the rights claims of children, even as these rights were being denied and continuously eroded by punitive border control.

'What Amal may want': interactive, multi-textual tapestries

Similarly to how *The Jungle* fictionally reintroduced its ongoing border space into the nation-state, the gigantic figure of Amal came to implicate spectators across Europe in an unfolding border history. Whereas the former play recreated a specific time-space, *The Walk* was more encompassing and open-ended. As it progressed as a project, new contexts, histories, and perspectives were constantly added to the sprawling 'tapestry of Amal's experiences' (Zuabi 2021, 04:26–05:24). The giant travelling puppet, onto whom both bordering practices and solidarities were projected in real time, provided a versatile format to reflect how borders, too, are mobile and act on people in intersecting ways.

Amal was gradually developed into a more well-defined character with specific memories, experiences, and an evolving history. With each new performance event, her perspective was contextualised further. Creating her history became a collective endeavour, with artists and collaborators constantly adding to her evolving frames of reference through narratives, speeches, songs, poetry, and dance. These collective performances placed *The Walk* within multiple creative fields, histories, and larger political conversations. They extended Amal's story in creative ways, sometimes addressing themes that were less prominent in the 'cosier' Acts of Welcome. For example, for the 'Night Vision' performance at the Teatro India in Rome, Syrian artist Tammam Azzam created an installation depicting war-torn Syria, a dreamscape where 'Amal's lost homeland is alive in her thoughts. Memories of war rise to the surface and when she wakes visions of home appear' (The Walk 2023). Through such performances, Amal's history became more layered, diverse, and expansive.

Fig. 47: Little Amal during *The Walk*'s first performance event in Gaziantep, Turkey.
Credit: Good Chance Theatre 2021.

Adding to this particularity and historical depth in her piece 'Justice for Little Amal', writer and journalist Samar Yazbek relates *The Walk*'s performances near the Syrian-Turkish border to her own memories of attempting the crossing, along with girls like Amal, in August 2013 (2021, 9–12). While media coverage of Amal's journey across Europe often left little space to address the reasons for Amal's presence in these places, Yazbek stresses these historical-political conditions: 'The news agencies and big newspapers might cover the Little Amal story, but what Amal may want, and here I am saying what I believe as a Syrian like her, is that the world should know why she was forced to leave her country' (2021, 13). She highlights that

> Little Amal travels around with her sad face because a popular movement arose in her country to demand legal and constitutional reforms, such as the repeal of emergency law and the release of political prisoners. [...] She wants to explain to the world that in Syria she was deprived of the most basic rights of children – shelter, housing, food and drink [...][,] education [...]. I don't want her to be a transitory, ephemeral moment – a moment that trivialises the humanitarian urge. This happens when we sympathise with children but forget the source of their suffering.
>
> (Yazbek 2021, 12–13)

Yazbek's piece is from the companion book *The Long Walk with Little Amal*, published jointly by The Walk Productions, Good Chance Theatre, and Handspring Puppet Company in 2021.[86] This project, too, became a way to add further historical depth, localised context, and transnational perspectives to Little Amal's history. A collection of poetic, journalistic, and photographic entries, each of the book's contributions focuses on a different location of Amal's itinerary. The pieces were written by authors, researchers, and activists who work directly in these contexts and in many cases have personal experiences of forced displacement. As part of a wider multimedia archive in which the organisers documented *The Walk*, this book worked to further contextualise the original performance events.[87] Many entries presented a critical counterbalance to the distracting 'feel-good' spectacle that some commentators had identified in Amal's fleeting appearances alongside Europe's cultural and political elites. Often drawing on their own experiences as activists and border crossers, the authors here deliberately recentred the violent conditions that people on the move face in the states that *The Walk* traversed.

Many of the entries stressed the central disjuncture exposed by *The Walk*: on the one side, the systemic, violent immobilisation of people on the move and the multiple forms of border governance that prevent them from entering Europe in the first place; on the other, the specific mobility that Amal represents – which, while enacted in the real world, is still a largely imagined, theatrical mobility. For instance, in his piece on *The Walk*'s performances in Turkey, Burhan Sönmez highlights the oppression and xenophobic violence that Kurdish families and migrant workers face in many parts of Turkey (2021, 25). Outlining several attacks and border killings committed in the months ahead of Amal's performances, Sönmez stresses that '[e]ight hundred

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[86] All royalties from the book sales were used to support various charitable activities and funds associated with the three production companies, most notably the Amal Fund, created by The Walk Productions in association with Choose Love to support grassroots educational projects (The Walk 2023).

[87] The events were also covered on *The Walk*'s official website and social media channels (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube), in the form of photographs, edited video clips, short texts, and links to related materials. Plans to turn the project into a documentary film (a dedicated camera team accompanied the 2021 performances) have so far not been realised.

migrants died trying to cross the Mediterranean in the first half of 2021 alone. The exact number cannot be known. […] Now Little Amal is trying to cross the waters that they could not cross' (2021, 28).

In the wider network of texts, artworks, and performances that *The Walk* initiated, this work of contextualising and historicising was continuously expanded, also after the official end of the performance festival. Since 2021, Little Amal has reappeared in several other events, initiatives, and transnational activist contexts, including performances in Ukraine and Poland in May 2022, the US in autumn 2022 and again in autumn 2023, Mexico in November 2023, and Australia in March 2024. The open-ended format has allowed this project to react to shifting border histories and solidarities as they are unfolding, with the story of Little Amal continuously expanding and transforming.

Much like Hajusom's momentary performance intervention in Hamburg's MARKK, this ongoing puppetry project reflects how recent transborder productions have increasingly been striving towards more outgoing and interactive formats that transcend traditional theatre spaces. Rather than trying to convince more people to enter their theatre houses, many artists are doubtful whether these spaces are the right locations for the transborder interventions they are aiming to stage – a scepticism that already predates the Covid-19 pandemic. Many theatre makers working on transborder performances are increasingly wary of the multiple gatekeeping mechanisms and exclusionary politics that govern who is able and willing to participate in the cultural institutions where these productions are being staged.

This is a tension that has resurfaced in all the case histories of this thesis. Hajusom's transnational artistic practice is constantly being undermined by restrictive state governance, making it difficult or even impossible for some ensemble members to participate in cultural life in Hamburg. The *Phone Home* creators, meanwhile, are conscious that their critique of celebrity humanitarianism is itself being staged 'in a rather nice building in East London,' as co-director

Tom Mansfield puts it: '[H]ow much *is* that achieving?' (Upstart 2016b, 2:14:04–2:14:11). *The Jungle* is even more closely entangled with the exclusionary world of commercial institutions and high-end theatre districts. As Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson suggest, 'some people, lots of people, do not want to come into our theatres, and many have good reason. Theatres are clean, vast, opulently designed, expensive and intimidating. […] If theatre is to remain relevant in our social and political lives, perhaps it has to take its first steps outside its buildings' (Murphy and Robertson 2021, 69).

Good Chance, Highway Productions, Upstart, Pathos Theater, and Hajusom have all explored collaborative approaches and theatrical formats that can accommodate this outward gaze. Within their various performance contexts, they have showcased different ways to momentarily connect, implicate, and transcend various European spaces and border histories. *The Walk*, finally, performed this impulse in a more embodied, material way. On a continent-spanning scale, it was an experiment in what could happen 'if theatre were not to root itself so firmly in its historic buildings' (Murphy and Robertson 2021, 69).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I have traced how transborder theatre can trouble frameworks where responsibility is externalised into a distant geographic or temporal space. *The Jungle*, *Phone Home*, *Azimut Dekolonial*, and *The Walk* all interrupt narratives in which injustices and border violence are committed 'over there, not here,' or 'back then, not today.' While they acknowledge the histories of specific contexts, these performances undermine the fundamental idea that 'it isn't happening here.' Working with hybrid theatrical techniques, they use their transnational stages to show how 'here' and 'there' are intrinsically connected. In their efforts to reestablish political-historical implications and responsibilities for Europe's border regimes, these projects confront audiences with conditions that are intentionally overlooked, made invisible, and excised from dominant political discourses, media narratives, memory regimes, and migration policies. The four performances are linked in a creative-political aim that marks them out as not only transnational, but distinctly 'transborder': a shared concern for developing theatrical forms to expose border practices, call them into question, and momentarily transgress them.

In *The Jungle*, the British volunteers must come to terms with the notion that the human rights abuses of the Calais camp are not simply Europe's exception – 'This is not France,' as their incredulous refrain goes in the beginning (Murphy and Robertson 2018, 72). Rather than as a sign of political negligence and oversight, they come to view Calais – much like Moria and other camps in Europe – as the consequence of a deliberate politics of 'violent inaction' (Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017; Gordon and Larsen 2021). Beyond the script level, *The Jungle* also reestablishes this wilfully neglected connection in dramaturgical terms, recreating its interpretation of the camp right in the centre of London and other Western cities – and doing so repeatedly, for several years after the real camp's destruction, always including updated video

messages from volunteers working in present-day Calais. While new camps and settlements are routinely destroyed and kept hidden from public view, *The Jungle*'s repeated recreation, in plain sight, acknowledges Calais as an ongoing and unresolved border space that still implicates audiences in the UK and across the West.

Phone Home involves similar manoeuvres of bringing externalised border spaces back into the immediate time-space. In its trinational staging, the play's critical gaze reaches beyond selfie-snapping celebrities in charity galas and far-right xenophobes in remote Swiss villages. Many news reports framed the 2016 Oberwil-Lieli referendum as an exceptional occurrence, unique to a super-rich, closed-off community; in *Phone Home*'s parable-style narration, however, it becomes a transnationally dispersed village 'somewhere in Europe,' a place whose residents engage in the same victim-threat dichotomies that have dominated discourses on refugees across Europe (Upstart 2016b). With its synchronised screen-stages, *Phone Home* distributes responsibility for the referendum across the continent, and it also holds up a mirror: *Look again – this is happening here, too.* This self-referential gesture is carried out even more explicitly in the all-encompassing celebrity gala scene, where performers and audience members are themselves included in the play's critique of self-congratulating posturing. At the same time, *Phone Home*'s intertextual montage aesthetic ensures that its original historical referents remain present in the staging: performers refer to news reports and statistics, the screens display photographs and social media posts, etc. Both *Phone Home* and *The Jungle* draw attention to how certain border spaces, events, and solidarity practices following the Long Summer of Migration (2015–2016 Calais, the 2016 Cinema for Peace Gala, etc.) became mediatised and turned into humanitarian spectacles, while others have been kept from the public eye (such as present-day Calais).

Azimut Dekolonial, too, dissects and intervenes in the mediated processes of the border spectacle, casting its scope wider in both space and time. In its interactive walk-through installation, performers and theatregoers alike become implicated in Europe's ongoing colonial

histories as they navigate the encompassing archive structure in Kampnagel theatre. Throughout, the production highlights diverging perspectives and forms of engaging with its images, narratives, and materials, presenting an interpretation of archive that is open-ended, unfixed, and changeable. *Azimut Dekolonial* also deliberately moves into other spaces of critical encounter and knowledge production, presenting a fluid performance format that aims to create sustained transnational collaborations and decolonial work.

In *The Walk*, finally, Little Amal returns to haunt Europe as an oversized puppet, drawing attention to ongoing border contexts wherever she appears. From her unobtrusive and passive predecessor in *The Jungle*, she has been transformed into a continuously evolving and distinctly unmanageable artwork. Embedded in diverse bordering practices and solidarities, she is imbued with more historical depth in each new performance event. Against a context in which people on the move are systemically being prevented from appearing in and moving across Europe, Amal's giant presence highlights the violent exclusion of most forced migrants from European space and legislative frameworks.

All four projects reflect a sense that conventional theatre architectures are inadequate containers for these particular creative-political interventions. To meaningfully speak to the conditions of Europe's border regimes, artists are increasingly moving beyond theatre's traditional spaces and institutions, towards more expansive formats and collaborative approaches. In each of these projects, a significant part of the research and creative work informing the performances relies on transnational collaboration and interaction. These efforts towards more encompassing, border-crossing frameworks also carry over to the productions themselves, finding their ways into the set designs and aesthetic forms. To stage their critiques of European border governance, these plays showcase diverse creative approaches to undermine, relocate, and transgress the physical boundaries of their various stages: collapsing expansive border histories into their theatres (Calais in microform, colonial history as walk-through archive, etc.) or

conversely spilling over the borders of their performance spaces and magnifying the frame (connecting geographically dispersed stages, moving onto the street, etc.).

Having turned their respective theatre spaces into more fractured, multi-layered, and sprawling stages, the performances find various techniques to implicate audiences in historical and ongoing systems of bordering and exclusion, often blending embodied-immersive and more distanced and fragmented approaches. Where audiences are initially immersed in a convivial restaurant setting, for instance, they are subsequently confronted with their political-historical distance from the experiences depicted on stage. Elsewhere, productions push against the impulse towards smugly detached, ironic spectatorship by immersing the audience right back into the performance space and the critiques that they stage.

Within each production, the modes of interacting with spectators often vary from scene to scene and between different performance contexts. Rather than hailing their (primarily liberal, Western-citizen) audiences exclusively as pro-migration activists and anti-racist allies, the performances invite them to momentarily consider themselves within more complex and discomforting subject positions: as well-meaning but naïve and unprepared volunteers (*The Jungle*); as privileged, out-of-touch gala guests (*Phone Home*); as beneficiaries of colonial wealth accrued in the West (*Azimut Decolonial*); and as citizens implicated in the anti-migration policies of their elected governments (*The Walk*, as well as the other performances). Ultimately, however, none of these projects aim to directly accuse audience members as individuals. Rather, they confront theatregoers with ways in which the institutions and state structures that they inhabit, and often benefit from, are also part of global systems of injustice, oppression, and coloniality. In their various itineraries across Europe and the US, the performances also demonstrate the unpredictability and unmanageability of audience reactions. Responses to these productions often diverged in different performance contexts, sometimes in tension with the creators' original intentions. As performances happening in real time and engaging with events as they are

unfolding, these plays are morphing and evolving throughout, continuously including new contexts and perspectives as they develop further.

These interactive, mobile formats have reacted to the restrictions of punitive border control and pandemic lockdowns by creating stages that do not close in on themselves; instead, they are outgoing and unfinished, drawing out existing links and establishing new connections between contexts that may seem geographically and temporally remote. Kaleidoscopic montage approaches allow these performances to stage European bordering practices and solidarities from multiple viewpoints: already present in *The Jungle*'s 'bustling Afghan Café' (National Theatre 2018) and *Phone Home*'s 'mosaic of voices, images, and situations' (Sommer 2016; my translation), they are embraced even more deliberately in *Azimut Dekolonial*'s 'transnational cosmos' (Huck and Reinicke 2014; my translation) and *The Walk*'s 'rich tapestry' (Zuabi 2021, 4:22–4:54). These collaborative stages are also attempts to create spaces which are accommodating to different positionalities and perspectives on Europe. They open up room to perform agonistic solidarities and to establish representational spaces beyond the victim-threat dichotomies of dominant humanitarian, media, and political discourses on migration and forced displacement.

The multi-perspectival, sustained theatrical work of these companies is also a form of resisting presentist 'crisis' narratives in Europe since the Long Summer of Migration. Instead of reproducing regimes where the presence and recognition of people on the move and racialised citizens are called into question, these plays recentre the systemic bordering practices pursued by European states. Not the figure of the refugee/migrant, but the state itself becomes the object of inquiry, its self-evidence momentarily suspended. Significantly, in the case of Hajusom, Good Chance Theatre, The Walk Productions, and Handspring Puppet Company, this refocussing happens repeatedly, over several production runs and multiple years of theatrical practice.

Across Europe, the stages of transborder theatre are also increasingly involving people who work outside of the traditional spaces of theatre – human rights experts, lawyers and legal

scholars, historians, archivists, museum curators, and educators. This has already been the case in the productions discussed here, especially *Azimut Dekolonial* and *The Walk* – and it has become an even more deliberate aim in more recent border-critical productions. Moving forward, what might Europe's new transborder stages look like?

As a final scene to extend the performance histories traced so far, the following section turns to another form of theatrical response that has become increasingly common in recent years: tribunal performances in which European nation-states and governments are symbolically put on trial. As in the case histories traced throughout this thesis, these performances reflect efforts to redirect the spotlight – and the gaze of suspicion – back onto the state; however, they perform this turn in a more explicitly accusatory, juridical register.

Recent tribunal performances, such as Shahrazad' *Tribunal 12* (2012), Karen Therese's *Tribunal* (2016), and Arian Moayed's *The Courtroom* (2022), have staged theatrical court proceedings, often using verbatim transcripts from asylum processes and migration policies. Since accountability is not ensured in other spaces and mechanisms of the judicial system, these plays have offered public forums to hear and record injustices, present evidence, and enable debates around justice. Although they operate without juridical authority, tribunal performances have played an important role, as Jamie H. Trnka argues, 'in developing legal concepts and vocabularies of rights claims internationally' (2016). Often, these plays demonstrate the limitations of codified legal frameworks and human rights regimes when it comes to offering practical solutions in contexts of forced migration. At the same time, however, theatrical tribunals also tend to show how existing legislation, conventions, and legal institutions can provide at least partial safeguards against the efforts of Western governments to enforce punitive border mechanisms. By enlisting legal experts, human rights lawyers, and migration historians, and by drawing on extensive archives of court hearings and precedents, many of these performances aim

to develop more multilayered, historically and legally embedded registers for articulating border-critical solidarity practices.

One such performance was *Asyl Tribunal – Klage gegen die Republik* (*Asylum Tribunal – The Case against the Republic*), directed by Alireza Daryanavard and developed by Theaterkollektiv Hybrid and WERK X-Petersplatz, a theatre collective in Austria. Staged in June 2022 as a five-day public show trial in Vienna, the performance involved theatre makers, human rights and asylum experts, lawyers, activists, artists, and researchers. As contributors in this staged trial, they collectively explored what might happen if the European Commission sued the state of Austria for neglecting its international legal obligations towards those seeking asylum. Like *The Walk*, this was a free outdoor performance, and like *Phone Home*, it was also livestreamed and made available as a recording online, with live translations into Arabic and Dari/Farsi. Viewers could tune in or stop by in person, take a seat or sit down directly on the cobblestones of the square, and thus become part of the spectatorship in this public courtroom.[88]

The tribunal took place, significantly, between two monuments on Judenplatz, a square that used to be the centre of Vienna's Jewish community and is now a key memory space of the city. Behind the Bench, rising over the jury, was the 'nameless library', the Austrian Holocaust Memorial devised by Simon Wiesenthal and Rachel Whiteread in the late 1990s (the walls of the memorial resemble a library filled with books turned inwards). On the opposite side of the square, presiding over the openair courtroom, was the monument to German dramatist and Enlightenment thinker Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Created by Siegfried Charoux in the early 1930s, the original statue had soon been removed by the National Socialists and melted down for weaponry (the current monument is a replica, created by Charoux in the 1960s). It was no coincidence that the *Asyl Tribunal* theatre makers and human rights experts chose this site in 2022 to bring the Austrian state to court for its past and present injustices: this symbolic trial was

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[88] As of January 2024, the performance recordings are still available online and can be accessed here: https://www.okto.tv/de/sendung/asyltribunal.

framed, quite literally, by longer histories of racism, persecution, bordering, and genocide, as well as antifascist resistance and ideas of emancipation – all interlinking in urban space and implicating performers and audiences in the present moment.

Fig. 48: Day 3 of *Asylum Tribunal* on Vienna's Judenplatz: the jury, played by Victoria Kremer, Amani Abuzahra, Ines Rössl, Noomi Anyanwu, and Ingrid Porzner, underneath the Holocaust Memorial.
Credit: Bettina Frenzel 2022.

Fig. 49: The open courtroom of *Asylum Tribunal*, with Siegfried Charoux's Lessing monument in the back.
Credit: Bettina Frenzel 2022.

On five consecutive evenings, the all-female courtroom presided over Judenplatz ('if only our courts really looked like this in terms of composition of judges,' noted Karin Svadlenak-Gomez in a review [2022]). Scrutinising a recent statement made by Austrian chancellor Karl Nehammer, 'Ein Rechtsstaat muss ein Rechtsstaat bleiben' ('The rule of law must remain the rule of law'), the theatre makers posed the question to what degree the right to asylum could indeed still be guaranteed in Austria. Fictitious government spokespeople, human rights advocates, and witnesses all made their case. They drew on historical accounts of refugee movements to and from Europe, UNHCR reports and legal documents such as the Geneva Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights, and reports of recent events in European and Austrian border politics. These included the closing of the so-called Western Balkan route, the tightening of family reunification and visa regulations, accounts of illegal pushbacks, the refusal to evacuate refugees from Afghanistan, and the highly mediatised deportation of 12-year-old Tina to Georgia in January 2021 (a case that led to widespread protests and has since been declared unlawful by the Austrian Constitutional Court).

Questions around Austria's historical obligations, made present in the memoryscapes on Judenplatz, were repeatedly foregrounded to frame the performance and its debates on the role and legitimacy of legal frameworks. 'What role does the rule of law play in this performance,' asked theatre maker and human rights activist Mahsa Ghafari in an open post-performance discussion, 'if we also consider the role it has played historically – […] that people under National Socialist rule also referred to the rule of law in order to justify and advocate injustices?' (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 17:20–17:50; my translation[89]). An echo of Katalina Götz and Nebou N'Diaye's theatrical intervention in the 'White Cube' scene of *Azimut Dekolonial*: why should Western states

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[89] Original wording in German: „Welche Rolle spielt der Rechtsstaat in diesem Stück, wenn wir auch bedenken, welche Rolle der Rechtsstaat historisch gespielt hat – [...] dass im Nationalsozialismus Menschen sich auch auf den Rechtsstaat bezogen haben, um Ungerechtigkeiten zu rechtfertigen und zu argumentieren?" (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 17:20–17:50).

decide what counts as justice and human rights, given their material and political foundation in histories of genocide, conquest, and exploitation?

Ultimately, despite the law's entanglements with state power, *Asyl Tribunal* reaffirmed its significance as 'a discursive space that still works differently, has its own logic, and thus makes it possible to also break things up again' (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 19:00–19:10; my translation[90]). On the fifth day of *Asyl Tribunal*, the verdict was announced that the Republic of Austria had indeed 'violated its obligations under Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights to guarantee the right to asylum in accordance with the Geneva Refugee Convention' (Asyl Tribunal 2022a, 36:22–36:36; my translation[91]). It was a central aim of the performance to reassert this potential of legal frameworks as instruments to criticise governing border policy, as Ines Rössl noted, drawing on her expertise as both a legal scholar and a performer:

> Sometimes people pretend that those who criticise prevailing migration and asylum policies can invoke only justice. As if all this was simply a classic *Antigone* situation – *Antigone*, that ancient [Sophocles] play, where Antigone stands up to the ruler and insists, against the law, on burying her brother, and she invokes a natural law, i.e. a form of overriding justice. [...] Yes, that is also an important argument, but we also have legal arguments to criticise, again and again, asylum policy and legal practice in asylum matters. And it is necessary to insist on this because the law is also a powerful and recognised discourse – like a residue of potent arguments.

> (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 20:20–21:16; my translation[92])

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[90] Original wording in German: „ein Diskursraum, der doch anders funktioniert, eine eigene Logik hat, und damit auch immer wieder Dinge ermöglicht aufzubrechen" (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 19:00–19:10).

[91] Original wording in German: „Die Republik Österreich hat gegen ihre Verpflichtungen aus Artikel 18 der Grundrechtecharta, das Recht auf Asyl nach Maßgabe der Genfer Flüchtlingskonvention zu gewährleisten, verstoßen" (Asyl Tribunal 2022a, 36:22–36:36).

[92] Original wording in German: „... weil manchmal so getan wird, als würden jene Leute, die die herrschende Migrations- und Asylpolitik kritisieren, sich einfach nur auf Gerechtigkeit berufen können. Also so, als wär das alles so eine Situation wie diese klassische *Antigone*-Situation – *Antigone*, dieses alte Stck, wo Antigone sich gegen den Herrscher stellt und sagt, sie möchte ihren Bruder begraben, gegen das Gesetz, und sie beruft sich auf ein Naturgesetz, also auf eine Form von übergeordneter Gerechtigkeit. [...] Ja, auch das ist ein wichtiges Argument, aber wir haben auch juristische Argumente, immer wieder, um die Asylpolitik und auch die Rechtspraxis im Asylbereich zu kritisieren, und das ist auch notwendig, darauf zu pochen, weil das Recht eben auch ein machtvoller, anerkannter Diskurs ist, so was wie ein Residuum von Argumenten, die auch eine Kraft haben" (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 20:10–21:16).

This is a markedly different way of engaging with legal frameworks than, for example, in *The Jungle*. The volunteer Beth, too, evoked *Antigone* in her story arc: at the end of the play, she is utterly disillusioned with existing human rights frameworks, gestures helplessly and furiously at the ineffectiveness of UN bodies, and ends up enacting her own sense of overriding justice. In the process, the Calais camp is positioned as a space that legal frameworks cannot reach. 'We accuse', by contrast, proposes another theatrical mode of staging the human rights encounter. Rather than rejecting legal frameworks altogether, *Asyl Tribunal* stages the intricacies, and failures, of existing juridical procedures. The performance attempts to make legal processes more accessible to a non-expert public, while at the same time using these frameworks to explicitly indict the state. Similar to how Little Amal appeared outside of the UK parliament to put a spotlight on the legal machinations mobilised in the Nationality and Borders Act and the Illegal Migration Bill, *Asyl Tribunal* aims to imbue solidarity practices with more legal and historical specificity.[93]

None of the legal regulations in *Asyl Tribunal* were fictional, as Ronald Frühwirth stressed, a well-known expert in Austrian asylum law who was involved in developing the performance (Asyl Tribunal 2022b). A former lawyer, he had decided in 2019 to close his firm after more than fourteen years of representing people in difficult asylum cases. In an announcement that caused some public uproar in Austria at the time, Frühwirth explained that he no longer wished to be part of a judicial system that was inconsistent, deficient, and systemically failed to acknowledge people's fundamental rights (Müller 2019; AIDA/ECRE 2023). Specifically, he accused the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum and the Supreme Administrative Court of hindering him from providing adequate representation and counselling for his clients, arguing that the

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[93] The project was also linked to an open petition to the European Commission, 'Wir klagen an: Schluss mit der Straffreiheit für Österreichs unmenschliche Asylpolitik!' ('We accuse: Stop the impunity in Austria's inhumane asylum policy!'), which gained over 3.800 signatures. The petition, which remains open as of January 2024, can be accessed here: https://mein.aufstehn.at/petitions/wir-klagen-an-schluss-mit-der-straffreiheit-fur-osterreichs-unmenschliche-asylpolitik?source=wa&bucket=wai.

Court's 'jurisdiction does not follow the rule of law anymore but can only [be] understood as "doing politics"' (AIDA/ECRE 2023). His experiences and frustrations with the juridical system also informed his work with *Asyl Tribunal*. He was the one who wrote the final verdict for the performance, stressing that

> Based on European law, as it stands at this moment, a trial could proceed in exactly the same way, and a verdict could look exactly the same. So, we can see that there is potential here to initiate change, and this is what we also wanted to show with this performance. […] How easily the law can be corrupted by politics, and how much courageous courts are needed.
>
> (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 16:30–16:50; 27:35–27:42; my translation[94])

In anticipation, but also in recognition, of such 'courageous courts' that oppose Europe's governing asylum regimes, Frühwirth also highlighted the significance of the symbolic courtroom on Judenplatz: 'It felt great to hear this verdict being pronounced today. To write it did, too. But I am not really a theatre person, and this was my first time experiencing a text that I wrote come to life on stage like that. […] Finding a way to stay true to asylum law without carrying out this work right at the frontlines, in front of the courts' (2022b, 32:33–34:00; my translation[95]).

Even though it operated without juridical authority, the open courtroom on Judenplatz became a way to demarcate a space where justice could symbolically be reaffirmed in assembly. *Asyl Tribunal* presented a multi-layered sphere for the law to reflect back on itself, also incorporating textualities that are rarely recognised in standard legal procedures. Asylum regimes fundamentally restrict the narrative genres through which border experiences may be communicated, as Marina Warner has highlighted (2017). The staged trial in Vienna was markedly

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[94] Original wording in German: „Anhand des europäischen Rechts, so wie es im Moment sich darstellt, könnte ein Prozess genau so ablaufen, könnte ein Urteil auch genau so aussehen. Also man sieht, da ist Potenzial, um irgendwie Veränderung anzustoßen, und das wollten wir mit dem Stück auch ein bisschen aufzeigen. […] Wie korrumpiert Recht halt auch durch Politik ist, und wie sehr es mutige Gerichte braucht." (Asyl Tribunal 2022b, 16:30–16:50; 27:35–27:42).

[95] Original wording in German: „Das Urteil heute verkündet zu hören, hat sich großartig angefühlt. Es zu schreiben, auch, aber ich bin ja kein Theatermensch und hab sozusagen erstmals die Erfahrung gemacht, wie es ist, wenn ein Text, den man schreibt, dann nachher irgendwie lebendig wird auf der Bühne. [...] Insgesamt einen Weg zu finden, dem Asylrecht treu zu bleiben, ohne diese Arbeit ganz vorne an den Linien vor Gericht weiterzubetreiben, das ist ein schöner Weg, der sich ergeben hat" (2022b, 32:33–34:00).

more accommodating towards diverse forms of narrative, including journalism, creative texts, memoryscapes, architectures, and historical accounts. *Asyl Tribunal* also explicitly foregrounded the role that theatre can play as a space to enact and reaffirm solidarities within Europe's increasingly hostile environments.

This is a common thread that runs through all the performances I have traced throughout this thesis. While these projects are often rightfully suspicious of the limitations of theatrical solidarities, they still fundamentally reaffirm the significance of creating spaces of exchange, critical reflection, and assembly – even more so during a time when spheres to enact such solidarities and human rights encounters are systemically eroded across Europe. Governments across the continent are aiming to erase the presence of people on the move and migrantised citizens from European space – in detention centres and externalised processing regimes, by introducing deterrence measures and policy changes that contradict international legal doctrines, by neglecting histories of migration and coloniality in official memory regimes. Transborder theatre productions, along with other spaces of border-critical activism, have insisted on staging this deliberate politics of erasure and on making it spectacularly visible, calling it out again and again. In their evolving creative trajectories, these performances offer innovative formats to transform contemporary languages of transnational solidarity.

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