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Sofie de Smet

“It will always be Temporary”

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF COPING WITH COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE AND EXILE IN APPLIED THEATRE

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List of tables

Table of contents

Introduction

During the past decade, the wars, armed conflicts, and individual persecutions have continued to force people across the world to flee their countries and leave their families and communities behind in search of a safe haven. After arriving in a host society, refugees face the challenge of coping with these experiences of collective violence and persecution[1]. However, they often also face accumulative experiences of structural violence in the form of discrimination and social exclusion, as well as direct social hostility, as a result of a growing socio-political climate of polarization and xenophobia (De Cleen, Zienkowski, Smets, Dekie, & Vandevoordt, 2017; do Mar Castro Varela & Mecheril, 2016; Jackson, 2005; Rousseau, 2018). An extended body of research has documented the increased vulnerability of refugee communities, showing an increased prevalence of mental health problems caused by the long-term cumulation and interaction of social trauma, human rights violations and stressors in both home and host societies (Beiser, 2009; Beiser & Hou, 2016; Carswell, Blackburn, & Barker, 2011; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; Morgan, Melluish, & Welham, 2017). Hence, due to the precarious condition of refugees in resettlement, there is a need to develop contextually appropriate mental health and psychosocial care in hosting countries, not in the least as a means to fulfill the legal obligation to respect and protect the rights of refugees, based on the Refugee Convention of 1957 and the Protocol relating to the status of refugees of 1967 (UNCHR, 2010).

This interdisciplinary PhD in Psychology and Theatre Studies focuses on the provision of refugee trauma[2] care in the field of transcultural trauma psychology on the one hand and (applied) theatre studies on the other. With respect to the provision of trauma and psychosocial care for refugees in Western host

1 In this PhD we refer to the notion of collective violence as it is defined by the World Health Organization (2002) as "the instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group – whether this group is transitory or has a more permanent identity – against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives. Collective violence includes various forms as "wars, terrorism and other violent political conflicts that occur within or between states. State-perpetrated violence such as genocide, repression, disappearances, torture and other abuses of human rights."

2 In this PhD, we refer to the notion of trauma as a way to approach human experiences of extremes of violence in individuals' and communities' life-histories, which "break bodies and minds, leaving indelible marks even after healing and recovery" (Kirmayer, Lemelson, & Barad, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, in this PhD we engage with the notion of trauma beyond the dominant focus in trauma research on the diagnostic construct of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its psychosocial impact identified in three clusters of symptoms by the American Psychiatric Association.

societies, we observe that both the fields of mental health interventions and applied theatre interventions are dominated by similar practices. Both fields' practices are underpinned by an individualizing notion of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement, which is the topic of debate in analogous theoretical developments in both fields.

Within the broad range of the provision of refugee trauma care in Western societies, most therapeutic approaches adhere to verbal strategies for coping with traumatic experiences as a core reconstruction strategy (Hinton, Hofmann, Pollack, & Otto, 2009; Hinton, Safren, Pollack, & Tran, 2006; Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2010; Nickerson, Bryant, Silove, & Steel, 2011; Nose et al., 2017; Ruf et al., 2010). Here, trauma narration is emphasized as core healing mechanism in trauma recovery: the integration of traumatic memories through storytelling and its verbal articulation fascilitates the construction of meaning within a coherent account of traumatic life-experiences. The client is supported to narratively revisit traumatic events, with the aim to reconstruct a coherent life-story in which these traumatic life-events are meaningfully inscribed. This individualized focus on trauma narration as a core reconstruction strategy in posttrauma recovery and adaptation in exile in the majority of treatment models and psychosocial interventions constitutes part of a broader dominant emphasis in clinical trauma literature on the diagnostic construct of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the refugee's individual mental health status to understand the impact of collective violence and forced displacement in refugees' life histories (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006; McFarlane & Kaplan, 2012; Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2010; Schweitzer, Vromans, Ranke, & Griffin, 2014). This individualizing localization of the impact of collective violence and forced displacement by the dominant PTSD-language in clinical literature has been increasingly questioned by scholars, who stress the relational impact of collective violence and forced displacement by disrupting fundamental relational ties between human beings, families and entire communities (De Haene & Rober, 2016).

In applied theatre[3] as well, applied theatre interventions with refugee

3 In this PhD we engage with the notion of applied theatre as a discipline that raises questions on the meaning of the word "applied", the purposes and settings of theatre (Warstat, Heinicke, Kulu, Möbius, & Siouzouli, 2015): "to what or whom drama and theatre might be applied, and for what reasons, and whose values the application of theatre-making serves and represents" (Nicholson, 2005, p. 5). Applied theatre practices share the notion that "theatre has the potential to 'address something beyond the form itself'", which implies that applied theatre is "primarily concerned with developing new possibilities for everyday living rather than segregating theatre-going from other aspects of life." (Nicholson, 2005, p. 4). In doing so, the notion of applied theatre, as a "Rückkehr zur Normalität", reconnects with the historical development of theatre as a part of daily communication with intentional goals (Warstat et al., 2015, p. 16).

participants have greatly emphasized the construction of refugees' personal narratives as their core theatre practice[4]. The predominant goal of diverse practices of applied theatre in dealing with refugee trauma is to give refugee participants the opportunity to voice their autobiographical stories, verbally or symbolically, while at the same time sharing these stories with a wider audience. The expression of refugees' personal narratives is primarily understood as a vehicle of benefit and for agency, a mobilization of marginalized voices in society, and as a means to create individual empowerment.

This central role of trauma narration in the way refugees are supported in coping with trauma and exile, with a strong emphasis on disclosing individual past traumatic experiences in order to reconstruct a biographical account, has been a topic of critique in both scientific fields underpinning these practices of psychosocial interventions. Firstly, scholars in the field of transcultural psychology, psychiatry and cultural anthropology have argued for a broadening of the predominant individualized conceptualization of trauma narration as a mere autobiographic process towards a relational understanding of trauma narration. In this conceptual debate, the idea that one should disclose individual traumatic life-experiences verbally and directly in order to reconstruct a meaningful biographical account as a coping mechanism has been increasingly questioned. Here, scholars have been advocating the importance of a modulated form of trauma disclosure[5], which stresses the role of partial and indirect modes of trauma narration (Measham & Rousseau, 2010; Kevers, Rober, Rousseau, & De Haene, 2017; Lin, Suyemoto, & Kiang, 2009). Furthermore, a growing body of research has documented the multilayered meaning-making systems that underpin multiple modalities of trauma narration, mapping the complex relational interactions between personal, familial, social, cultural, and political dynamics involved in the process of trauma narration (Brough, Schweitzer, Shakespeare-Finch, Vromans, & King, 2013; Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016; Kirmayer, 2007) and therefore, acknowledging both verbal and non-verbal modes of expression as for example silencing

4 This is clearly the case in, for example, "verbatim theatre (performance of refugee or asylum seeker transcripts), testimonial theatre (refugees 'performing' their experiences on stage) or playback theatre (improvised interpretations of personal refugee stories)" (Balfour & Woodrow, 2013, p. 18).

5 The concept of modulated disclosure emphasizes the selective nature of disclosure delineating the role of particular and unique strategies regarding timing and modality of expression through which partial trauma disclosure in a regulated and sensitive sense may occur (Lin, Suyemoto, & Kiang, 2009; Measham & Rousseau, 2010;). Furthermore, modulate disclosure can also consist of indirect modes of trauma narration as refugees develop modes of expression that enable them to maintain safety and reconstruct their traumatic memories within a process of symbolic distancing in relationship to significant others (Dalgaard, 2015; De Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012; De Haene, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober, 2018; Kevers, Rober, Rousseau, & De Haene, 2017).

and corporeal responses in cultural communities' practices that operate protectively in dimming overwhelming experience (Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012; Kidron, 2010; Summerfield, 2005). For example, scholars have delineated how remaining silent on personal trauma histories may function as a strategy to protect the self and significant others (De Haene et al., 2012; Kevers, Rober, Rousseau, & De Haene, 2017) or the social cohesion within the cultural community (Derluyn, Vindevogel, & De Haene, 2013; Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012). In sum, these studies fundamentally address how the validity of storytelling is largely shaped by the willingness of open remembrance within the narrator's broader social fabric (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010b; Weine et al., 2006); hereby indicating the need to develop an understanding of trauma narration as located in the complex balancing of open remembrance and forgetfulness in both individual and community (Lemelson, Kirmayer, & Barad, 2007). These developments result in a move away from the dominant individualized understanding towards a more relational conception of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile. This relational approach broadens our view on the role of narration for the reparative process in autobiographical traumatic life histories: it emphasizes the role of the social, cultural, and political fabric in shaping both mode and meaning of narration. The narration of trauma does not arise in a social vacuum, but enters into a language with a wider social, cultural, and political meaning (Kirmayer, Lemelson, & Barad, 2007). Based on an understanding of how these recent studies counteract the dominant assumption of a clear relationship between trauma narration and refugees' coping with trauma and exile, scholars have put forward the notion of a more circular relationship between trauma narration and suffering (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010; Kirmayer, 2002): a notion that affirms how suffering invokes the imperative of narration in order to mobilize witnessing, while narration inherently reinforces suffering in revisiting experience beyond meaning. This ongoing circularity, that introduces the inevitable oscillation between the simultaneous push to witness and to forget on an individual and collective level in the process of trauma narration (Rousseau & Measham, 2007; De Haene et al., 2010), entails the protective function of silence and the role of the broader social and cultural fabric in shaping the meaning of narration.

Secondly, applied theatre scholars have pointed to the potential limitations of giving voice in the process of theatre participation. Applied theatre interventions may run the risk of reiterating refugees' victimhood and powerlessness within the encounter with host-society audiences, which are embedded within a wider socio-political context. Shifting away from an emphasis of benefit

on refugees' disclosing personal stories in applied theatre, scholars have increasingly raised awareness on the potential risks for refugee participants in, adjacent to lines of agency, reiterating the loss of power and agency in applied theatre while documenting the socio-political dynamics at play in the process of giving voice, both between refugee participants and audiences within the broader macro-context of a public encounter (Dennis, 2013; de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Erel, Reynolds, & Kaptani, 2017; Jeffers, 2008, 2013). In fact, applied theatre scholars have increasingly explored the potential of the variety of meaning in artistic expression and aesthetic representation of testimonies of collective violence and forced displacement (Cox, 2008; Tinius, 2017; Trezise & Wake, 2009). In doing so, they have been calling for a dynamic and critical exploration of the aesthetic representation of testimonies of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre practices with refugee participates in host societies beyond the representation of their personal narratives.

> *A rich aesthetic is one that, perhaps, plays with levels of meaning and interpretation, and can redefine an encounter with the other in a new and transforming ways, rather than reinforcing preconceived values. (…) This is not necessarily so much about knowledge of the other, or information about their situation… as it is about the ethical quality of the experience itself, about a certain kind of affect. (p. 19)*

Furthermore, applied theatre scholars have argued for the importance to broaden the theoretical reflection on aesthetic language and representation in applied theatre practices beyond the modes of representation and transmission in the performative encounter with an audience. Scrutinizing the aesthetic dimensions of an applied theatre process should entail all relational actions, inside and outside the rehearsal space, off and on stage (Warstat, Heinicke, Kulu, Möbius, & Siouzouli, 2015). In sum, these recent explorations in applied theatre provide inspirational research material that resonates with the critique formulated in the field of transcultural psychology.

This interdisciplinary PhD focuses on these debates within the fields of transcultural trauma psychology on the one hand and (applied) theatre studies on the other. The analogous theoretical developments in both fields raise fundamental questions on an individualizing notion of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile, which underpins the provision of refugee trauma care in both fields' practices. Our study aims to further current scholarly work in both transcultural trauma psychology and theatre studies by connecting their analogous critique and conceptual broadening by focusing

on an empirical analysis of the relational conception of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre. Hereto, we empirically explore the different modes of trauma narration in an applied theatre setting and the process of meaning-making underpinning these modes of trauma narration.

In the field of transcultural trauma psychology, research which incorporates modes of narration beyond narrative recall and which critically explores relational processes in modes of trauma narration is still in its infancy. Hence, there is a dire need for more extensive empirical studies that provide an in-depth process-analysis of the relational nature of trauma narration in refugees' coping and which scrutinize the diversity in the patterns of personal and relational meaning-making that underpin various modes of trauma narration. In this context, integrating the intrinsic artistic and relational dimensions of applied theatre offers a unique opportunity to map refugees' modulation of bearing witness to trauma beyond verbalization, and facilitates such an in-depth empirical exploration of the meanings and parameters of the process of trauma narration. Indeed, within applied theatre interventions, vehicles of art and play may assist refugees in the exploration of both direct and indirect modes of expressing trauma and exile, while at the same time employing techniques of symbolic distancing. Furthermore, the collective-based approach of applied theatre interventions gives us the opportunity to look into the relational dynamics at play in the process of narrating traumatic life-events and life in exile, within both the micro-context of the rehearsal space and the macro-context of the public arena[6].

This interdisciplinary study is also innovative also in the field of applied theatre. Whereas there are many studies on the representation of trauma in theatre, studying the dynamics of staging violence in the encounter with the audience (Duggan, 2012; Le Roy, Stalpaert, & Verdoodt, 2011; Pewny, 2003; Stalpaert, 2015b), there are hardly any studies which empirically explore the process of trauma narration in refugee participants' coping with trauma and exile in the entire creative process of applied theatre practices (both on and off stage, both micro- and macro-dramaturgy). Hence, we still lack an in-depth understanding of how trauma narratives and their aesthetic representation, both verbal and non-verbal, play a role in coping processes of refugee participants in applied theatre.

6 In this PhD we draw on the notions of micro- and macro-dramaturgy as delineated by the Flemish dramaturge Marianne Van Kerkhoven (1994b). She differentiated between the micro-dramaturgy, which is the dramaturgical work that takes place within the rehearsal space and the macro-dramaturgy, which is at play as soon as „a production comes alive through its interaction, through its audience, and through what is going on outside its own orbit".

Hence, this study aims to further our empirical understanding of the relational nature of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre with refugees, leading to the following research questions: How do refugees express traumatic experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre? How do refugees give meaning to these expressions of experiences of collective violence and forced displacement? Addressing these research questions, we aimed to contribute to the ongoing debate on the relational nature of trauma narration in both transcultural trauma psychology and applied theatre studies. Furthermore, by enhancing our understanding of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile, we aimed to advance the development of contextually appropriate mental health and psychosocial care for refugees in hosting countries. Our interdisciplinary critical exploration on the process of trauma narration in applied theatre pursued to give practical insights into how to mobilize restorative modes of trauma narration in relational contexts in coping processes for refugees, including applied theatre, psychosocial interventions and clinical encounters with refugees.

Aim and methods of dissertation

Scholars in the growing field of refugee research have stressed how researchers working with refugee communities are compelled by a primordially ethical imperative. They stipulated the need for a vigorous commitment to both scholarly rigor and relevance for policy. Furthermore, in recent years, scholars have also advocated mobilizing refugees' agency and empowerment in the act of research participation itself, with the aim to alleviate the risks of a possibly harmful reiterating of refugees' silencing and disempowerment (Ellis, Kia-Keating, Yusuf, Lincoln, & Nur, 2007; Halilovich, 2013; Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011; Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007). Collaborative research practices are increasingly put forward in this debate as a way to translate these ethical imperatives into a reciprocal and empowering research participation. In our aim to respond to these ethical imperatives in research with refugees, we developed, in a first preparatory stage, a participant observation study of an applied theatre project with refugees resettled in Germany (pilot study). A second phase consisted of a case study of a participatory applied theatre project with refugees resettled in Belgium (main case study) in collaborative partnership with a community center and a professional theatre director.

Collaborative refugee research

In a first preparatory stage, in winter 2016, we conducted a participatory observation study in collaboration with a Berlin-based participatory refugee

theatre group (*see* Chapter 3). In doing so, we aimed to improve our methodological strength, rigor, as well as our reflective ethical practice in light of our future main case study. Indeed, our observations and reflections on the findings of our pilot-study resulted in the development of an observational checklist to guide our observations during future research. Furthermore, it also resulted in several methodological adaptations in the research design of our main case study, such as for example the installation of reflecting ethical team meetings with two supervisors from the doctoral study's both disciplines (psychology and theatre studies), which furthered a self-reflexive practice in our study beyond our field note diaries (Tracy, 2010).

Our main case study, which formed the second phase of this PhD, consisted of an applied theatre intervention with nine Syrian refugees who had recently been resettled in Belgium. The project was initiated in 2017 in a collaborative partnership with a community center and a professional theatre director, who had continued his professional career as a theatre maker and actor after fleeing from the war in Iraq, and who had extensive experience with theatre-based community interventions.

In order to explore the way the participants employed various modes of expression in the process of coping with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre, we opted for an interpretive methodology. Firstly, an empirical exploration of creating meaning from trauma narration requires an in-depth process analysis of parameters of coping mechanisms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Secondly, locating this question in the specific population of refugees requires a design that addresses these parameters as culturally and socially mediated phenomena (O'Reilly, 2009). Hence, there is a need for a contextualizing approach which understands coping with collective violence and forced displacement as located within a concrete cultural praxis, and lived in participants' self-understanding.

Collaboration with the Syrian diaspora community

In our main case study, we decided to collaborate with the Syrian diaspora community in Belgium. At the time of our intervention, six years after March 2011, when the initial peaceful protests in the city of Daraa, which demanded freedom and democracy across Syrian ethno-religious groups, the Syrian conflict had become one of the most destructive wars of our modern times. It led to a worldwide refugee displacement crisis: over 5,6 million Syrians left the country, and more than 6 million were displaced internally in order to escape from collective violence and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2019). The large majority of the Syrian refugee community is confronted with tremendous challenges and poverty in provisional refugee camps at the borders of their

country, or in urban living environments in neighboring countries. This has led to a wide range of psychosocial and physical problems among Syrian refugees (Hassan, Ventevogel, Jefee-Bahloul, Barkil-Oteo, & Kirmayer, 2016; Smeekes, Verkuyten, Celebi, Acarturk, & Onkun, 2017; UNHCR, 2015; Wells, Steel, Abo-Hilal, Hassan, & Lawsin, 2016). Although only a small percentage of Syrian refugees has resettled within European borders, Syrians still formed the largest number of people granted refugee status in Belgium in 2016 (5436) and 2017 (3346) (CGRA, 2016, 2017).

The modern state of Syria, officially the Syrian Arab Republic, is home to an array of ethnic and religious communities rooted in Syria's long history. Hence, one of the aims of our study was to work with Syrian refugees from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. We acknowledge that this cultural diversity might hamper an extensive exploration of trauma coping mechanisms embedded within a specfic ethnic and religious praxis. Nevertheless, at the heart of the Syrian revolution, which was brutally and disproportionately suppressed by the regime, lies a sense of cross-sectarianism. Furthermore, scholars have pointed out the need to be aware of the ethno-religious diversity within Syria's history if one wants to understand and analyze the ongoing civil war in Syria (Rousseau, 2014; van Dam, 2017).

Furthermore, since the envisioned public performance of our applied theatre project implies a promise of political agency, change and efforts of advocacy, our decision to collaborate with the Syrian diaspora community was also grounded in an analysis of the current socio-political dynamics in the host country. Firstly, many authors have denoted how it was the financial, political and military support of foreign countries that gave rise to a destructive civil war among Syrians and a proxy war between members of the international community, at the expense of the Syrian population (Heydemann, 2013; van Dam, 2017). In doing so, both the Syrian regime and the international community have exacerbated the conflict by fuelling the uprising of violent religious extremism and ethno-religious sectarian polarization in the mosaic society of Syria and the Arab world. Hence, there is a collective responsibility and complicity of the international community (Al-Shami & Yassin-Kassab, 2016; Corstange & York, 2018; Droz-Vincent, 2014; Rousseau, 2014). Secondly, at the time of our study, a dominant mediatized narrative of a prodigious flood of refugees reaching Europe gave rise to a climate of polarization, anxiety and xenophobia (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016). In this respect, recent studies have shown the existence of a growing climate of polarisation, marked by an 'anti-Islamic clash of civilisations discourse' (De Cleen et al., 2017, p. 25) and increasingly vehement stigmatisation, exclusion and public hostility towards Muslim minorities, asylum seekers and refugees in a post 9/11 war-on-terror-climate (do

Mar Castro Varela & Mecheril, 2016). This growing tendency to regard refugees and asylum seekers as a homogeneous threat to the social and economic status quo erodes their social conditions and rights, and fosters the legitimization of violent acts, including subtle and structural discrimination.

Main case study "Temporary"

Our main case study, the applied theatre project *Tijdelijk* (translated as *Temporary*), was initiated in the autumn of 2017. Nine Syrian refugees, three women and five men, all between the age of 18 and 26, were involved. All had fled pre-displacement stressors of war or organized violence in Syria, had lived in Belgium between 1 and 5 years, and had been granted permanent resident status. Our sample represented the diversity of ethnic and religious backgrounds among the Syrian population by including Kurdish (N=1), Druze (N=1), Sunni (N=4) and Ismaili (N=3) participants. In order to maintain a safe space of expression for group interactions, a relatively advanced proficiency in Dutch was one of the inclusion criteria. Still, there was always a translator present at rehearsals in order to make sure that participants always had the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue whenever this was necessary.
The project consisted of eleven weekly collective theatre workshops of four hours in the community center, held from September to December 2017. The creative process developed around the overall narrative structure of a collective, imaginative transgression of an old world into a new, and eventually into an envisioned one. The old world symbolized the past, the new world the present, and the envisioned world the future. In this way, the overall collective narrative suggested a temporal continuity from the past to the present and into the future. This general narrative was made concrete through four different types of creative activities: creative movement and expression exercises, video-recorded interviews, the development and discussion of participants' creative writing material, and role-playing games and improvisational exercises (for an overview, see Chapter 2). As the premiere approached, the resulting collection of expressive verbal, choreographic, auditory and visual material and theatrical scenes was arranged into a continuum of scenes in which all participants were continuously present. The final result was the public performance *Temporary* (for in-depth description, see Chapter 4). It was staged during three consecutive evenings in a community center in Brussels, followed by three performances in the state theatre in Antwerp during the subsequent week.

Throughout the research process, multiple types of data were collected through participant observation during the rehearsals and public performances, and

by means of three consecutive, in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. During the workshops, we systematically took field notes guided by our observational checklist and participated in several workshop exercises. All rehearsals were videotaped and reviewed afterwards. The interviews were conducted in three stages during the course of the theatre project. The first in-depth semi-structured interview was carried out six weeks after the start of the project. A tape-assisted recall (TAR) procedure was used in order to facilitate the joint exploration of interpersonal processes (Elliott, 1986; Rober, 2005). In this interview, three or four selected video fragments of particular actions within the rehearsals were evaluated together with the participant. These fragments were selected based on significant verbal or non-verbal expressions in relation to experiences of organized violence and forced displacement during the course of the rehearsals. By watching these fragments together, participants were invited to reflect on their experiences within the project, including their interactions with others. The second interview was conducted one week after the final performance. It invited the participants to explore their experiences of the performances and their interactions within the group and with the audience. Five months after the end of the project, additional individual member reflections (Tracy, 2010) were conducted with all participants. Beyond a mere verification of our first analysis, these member reflections aimed to offer an opportunity to provide a deeper and richer analysis (Bloor, 2001), include participants' voices in a collaborative data analysis process, renegotiate informed consent, and give feedback on the entire research process.

A qualitative data analysis was conducted in different stages. It consisted of an in-depth within-case and cross-case analysis of all empirical material, which was derived from detailed field notes, interview transcripts, and poems written by the participants. In the first phase, we explored participants' individual accounts by means of a case-centered thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), which consisted of a close contextualized reading of both verbatim interview transcripts and transcribed member reflections. In a second phase, a cross-case inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used in order to grasp participants' experiences of coping processes and expression of personal testimonies in the project. After an intensive rereading of all data, a hierarchical coding structure with categories and subcategories was developed. All transcripts and written texts were stored, organized and coded using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 12. Initial codes were reviewed by rereading coded material in order to track relationships between codes, prominent overarching themes and subthemes relevant to our research questions using memo writing in Nvivo 12. The entire data analysis process was supervised by a second researcher, i.e. the supervisor in the field

of Psychology, who was not involved in collecting of the data. Each transcript and text from the participants was coded by both researchers, followed by a consensus coding in order to enhance an in-depth understanding of our findings by means of data crystallization (Tracy, 2010).

The structure of the dissertation

As this dissertation is a collection of scientific articles, the structure is somehow different than that of a monograph. However, a clear organic process and different disciplinary foci can be traced in the subsequent order of the chapters.

The first part of this PhD aims to further our empirical understanding of the role of trauma narration in refugees' coping with traumatic experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre. Therefore, in the first two chapters, we present an outline of the empirical findings from our main case study *Temporary*. In Chapter 1, we report on our exploration of the various ways in which refugees express experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre, as well as the way they gave meaning to these narratives throughout the theatre intervention. Our findings show an empirical variety of forms of trauma expression, which suggests that the process of trauma narration is an inherently dynamic one (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, 2019b). This dynamic nature is the result of a continuous, dialectic tension between the wish to forget and the urge to testify, within a continuous relational interaction and negotiation with multiple significant others. In Chapter 2, we continue contextualizing our findings on the processes of refugees' coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre by specifically exploring the role of diaspora community relations embedded in a broader socio-political dynamics in applied theatre. As an in-depth examination of within-group processes is still lacking in applied theatre research with refugees, these innovative findings may fill this gap by exploring how within-group interactions between community members in applied theatre may play a role in the way people cope with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement. Here, we discuss our innovative findings on the restorative dynamics at play in the relational interactions between the Syrian participants of our case study. These findings extensively document how community relationships offered restorative avenues for the participating Syrian refugees in the aftermath of a collective violence and forced displacement. Within-group interactions in our case study seemed to provide a temporary and relatively safe haven that enabled the reconstruction of pseudo-familial and community bonds. This haven could then offer the participants important tools to reinstall

a sense of personal continuity in disrupted life trajectories and communities, as well as hope for political and social change in the Syrian conflict (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, in press).

This interdisciplinary research setting has generated several particular methodological and ethical questions. This is reflected in four methodological reflections that complement the empirical findings of our empirical study delineated in the first two chapters. In these consecutive methodological reflections, we develop a more in-depth understanding of participation in applied theatre with refugees, and of dynamic research partnerships in mental health research with refugees.

The second part of the PhD provides methodological and conceptual reflections on the notion of participation of refugees in applied theatre in Western host countries. Here, we aim to further the debate in recent research on applied theatre that points at the limitations of theatre participation as some possible unforeseen counterproductive outcomes, as broader socio-political dynamics penetrate the performative shelter and obscure the intervention's genuine, beneficent intentions for participation. In order to do so, we analyze the role of the dramaturgical practices that shape participation at different levels in the micro- and macro-dramaturgy, zooming in on both our pilot study and our main case study. In Chapter 3, we integrate scholarly voices from the fields of applied theatre and refugee research and analyze the dramaturgy of our pilot study. Through this analysis, we reflect on how the participation of refugees in applied theatre entails opportunities for empowerment, agency, and giving voice, but also runs the risk of leading to disempowerment and silencing in the interconnected relations between participant, theatre maker, audience and the broader socio-political context in contemporary European host societies (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018). In Chapter 4, we reflect on the dramaturgy of the theatre-making process in our main case study. Here, we aim to further the understanding of participation and dramaturgy in participatory theatre with refugees by reflecting on the different potential dialogical art practices at play in relationship to the director. Therefore, we zoom in on the role of the director within applied theatre with refugees and examine how in our case study the director's pursued dialogue with the audience seemed to implicate a tension with the dialogical practice inside the creation process, and the dialogue and interaction between the director and the individual participants (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, in press).

In the methodological-ethical reflections of the third part of this PhD, we aim to foster our understanding of a reflective research practice with respect to relational power dynamics and to research relationships in the grow-

ing field of collaborative refugee research and qualitative health research. Hence, in Chapter 5, we will focus on the various relational contexts that shape refugees' research participation, and which have an influence on power dynamics in collaborative research. Here, we explore participants' research participation by means of an interpretive cross-case analysis of three psychosocial collaborative intervention studies, including our main case study. This analysis shows how research participation operates as a relational forum in which refugees continuously navigate and negotiate within and between multiple relational contexts. We argue that performing research participation, as a way of relating to a relational context, is both an interactive and a dynamic process (de Smet et al., 2019). In Chapter 6, we aim to contribute to a reflective research practice in refugee research by conducting an in-depth exploration of the nature of the research partnership in our case study (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, 2019a). By doing so, we aim to further the development of an enhanced contextual and dynamic intersubjective understanding of the research partnership and its impact on the growing importance of role boundaries in qualitative health research.

Finally, we conclude this PhD with a final integrative discussion, connecting our empirical findings on the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre with our methodological and conceptual reflections on applied theatre with refugees and collaborative refugee research. After delineating the limitations of our empirical study, we initiate a dialogue between the different chapters and articles and hence, we point to potential further research directions for future research on the understanding of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping in applied theatre practices. Furthermore, in this discussion we aim to extend our methodological analyses and raise further methodological questions on collaborative research with refugees on mental health and refugee trauma as a starting point for further reflection. In a last paragraph, we conclude with a final dialogue between research and practice and discuss the practical implications of our research findings and methodological reflections. In doing so, we formulate several suggestions for both applied theatre psychosocial interventions with refugee participants and clinical refugee trauma care.

PART 1

**Empirical findings from a case study “Temporary”:
An exploration of modes of coping with collective violence
and forced discplacement in applied theatre**

Chapter 1

Towards a relational understanding of trauma narration in applied theatre: A qualitative study of Syrian refugees' multiple modes of expressing histories of collective violence and forced displacement

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Under review with *Transcultural Psychiatry*

Abstract

During the past decade, there has been increasing attention for a relational understanding of the process of trauma narration for refugees. This approach sees narrating trauma as something that unfolds within a complex relational meaning-making process performed by refugees in dialogue with family, community, host community members and the public arena. This broadening of scope urges a reflection on how to mobilize reconstructive relational processes of narration in the context of psychosocial interventions and clinical encounters with refugees. In this article, we aim to contribute to our understanding of reconstructive modes of trauma narration in refugees' trauma recovery. Hereto, we study various modes of refugees' expressions of experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre, a growing mode of psychosocial intervention. In this article, we report on our findings with regard to an applied theatre intervention with Syrian refugees who were resettled in Belgium. We explore the multiple ways in which participants express experiences of trauma and exile and create meaning within their community and in dialogue with each other. In a final section, we discuss the possible implications of our findings for clinical practice, outlining some suggestions for clinicians to mobilize reparative modes of bearing witness to loss and suffering in refugee trauma care.

Introduction

During the past decade, there has been a growing interest in applied theatre practices as a particular mode of psychosocial intervention with refugees and asylum seekers (Balfour, 2013; Bundy, 2017; Cox & Wake, 2018; de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Jeffers, 2012; Maedza, 2017; Tinius, 2017). At the heart of applied theatre as psychosocial intervention lies an emphasis on a participatory approach to theatre-making, fostering an active dynamics of regaining agency (Jeffers, 2008; Nicholson, 2005) (Jeffers, 2008; Nicholson, 2005). It aims to provide spaces in which refugees can reclaim their voice, mobilize political empowerment, and counter dominant narratives (Balfour & Woodrow, 2013). Scholars have documented the socio-political dynamics at play in the process of giving voice, both between refugee participants and audiences within the broader macro-context of a public encounter (de Smet et al., 2018; Dennis, 2013; Erel, Reynolds, & Kaptani, 2017) and between participating community members in the micro-context of the rehearsal space (de Smet, Stalpaert, Rousseau, & De Haene, in press). Through these encounters, practitioners and participants increasingly explored the potential of artistic expression and aesthetic representation of testimonies of collective violence and forced displacement (Cox, 2008; Dennis, 2013; Jeffers, 2008; Trezise & Wake, 2009). Remarkably, these intrinsic relational, socio-political, and artistic dimensions of applied theatre as particular mode of psychosocial intervention for refugees reflect recent developments in our understanding of trauma narration in the fields of transcultural psychiatry and cultural anthropology. Scholars in these fields have argued for a broadening of the predominant individualized conceptualization of trauma narration as a mere autobiographic process. In this debate, the idea that one should disclose individual traumatic life-experiences verbally and directly in order to reconstruct a meaningful biographical account as a healing mechanism has been increasingly questioned. However, despite these criticisms, most psychosocial interventions for refugee trauma care are still built around a positive valuation of disclosing individualized past personal traumatic events (Hinton, Hofmann, Pollack, & Otto, 2009; Hinton, Safren, Pollack, & Tran, 2006; Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2010; Nickerson, Bryant, Silove, & Steel, 2011; Nose et al., 2017; Ruf et al., 2010). Yet, a large body of literature and empirical studies show the importance of a modulated nature of trauma disclosure and a variety of meaning-making systems that underpin the process of narration. Such an approach could move the process of narration beyond the individual and result in a move away from the dominant individualized understanding towards a more relational conception of the process of trauma narration in refugees' post-trauma recovery.

First of all, scholars have been increasingly advocating the concept of modulated disclosure. This approach, which emphasizes the selective nature of disclosure, delineates the role of particular and unique strategies regarding timing and modality of expression through which regulated and sensitive trauma disclosure may occur (Measham & Rousseau, 2010). Furthermore, within refugee families, modulate disclosure can also consist of indirect modes of trauma narration as refugees can develop modes of expression that enable them to maintain safety and reconstruct their traumatic memories within a process of symbolic distancing (Dalgaard, 2015; De Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012; De Haene, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober, 2018).

Secondly, a growing body of research has documented the multilayered meaning-making systems that underpin these multiple modalities of trauma narration, mapping the complex interactions between personal, familial, social, cultural, and political dynamics involved in narration (Brough, Schweitzer, Shakespeare-Finch, Vromans, & King, 2013; Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016; Kirmayer, 2007). For example, scholars have delineated how remaining silent on personal trauma histories may function as a strategy to protect the self and significant others, such as family members for example (De Haene et al., 2012; Kevers, Rober, Rousseau, & De Haene, 2017). Furthermore, some cultural communities may adhere to the silencing of traumatic pasts in order to protect social cohesion within the cultural community and focus on the future reconstruction of social life (Derluyn, Vindevogel, & De Haene, 2013; Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012). In this respect, several authors have also marked the importance of acknowledging how disclosing trauma narratives can act as a political testimony and as a impulse for social and political change within the public and socio-political space (Brough et al., 2013). Additionally, narration means different things in different cultures. For example, there are societies that value silence or active forgetfulness as reparative strategies in the aftermath of organized violence (Foxen, 2000; Kidron, 2010).

Based on both lines of empirical findings, there has been increasing attention for a relational understanding of the process of trauma narration. This approach sees narrating trauma as something that unfolds within a complex relational meaning-making process performed by refugees in dialogue with family, community, host community members and the public arena. This relational approach broadens our view on the role of narration in autobiographical traumatic life histories for the reparative process: it emphasizes the role of the social, cultural, and political fabric in shaping both the mode and meaning of narration. The expression of trauma does not arise in a social vacuum, but enters into a language with wider social, cultural, and political meaning.

This broadening of scope urges a reflection on how to mobilize relational processes of narration in the context of psychosocial interventions and clinical encounters with refugees. Hence, there is a need for a critical exploration of the potential integration of these relational processes in reconstructive modes of trauma narration in rehabilitation processes for refugees. In this article, we aim to address this need and contribute to our understanding of reconstructive modes of trauma narration in refugees' post-trauma recovery. For this reason, we sought to study various modes, both direct and indirect, of refugees' expressions of experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre in order to explore the patterns of personal and relational meaning-making that underpin these modes. In this article, we report on our findings with regard to an applied theatre intervention with Syrian refugees who were resettled in Belgium. We explored the various ways in which participants disclose trauma and create meaning within their community and in dialogue with each other. The intrinsic artistic and relational dimensions of this applied theatre intervention offer a unique opportunity to delve into the modulation of bearing witness to trauma. Vehicles of art and theatrical play may mobilize potential techniques of symbolic distancing in the form of both direct and indirect modes of expressing trauma within social encounters in the rehearsal space and the public arena. In the following pages, we first describe the conducted methods of data collection and analysis in our case study. Subsequently, we document how the participants in our case study expressed histories of collective violence and forced displacement. In doing so, we scrutinize the participants' meaning-making with regard to these multiple ways of accounting for trauma and exile throughout the intervention. Our aim in doing so was to further our understanding of trauma narration. In the final section of this article, we discuss the possible implications of our findings for clinical practice, outlining some suggestions for clinicians to mobilize reparative modes of bearing witness to loss and suffering in refugee trauma care.

Methodology

Case study "Tijdelijk/Temporary"

The present study is based on a case study of the participatory theatre project *Tijdelijk* (translated as *Temporary*) with Syrian refugees resettled in Belgium, and was initiated in collaboration with a Brussels-based community center and a professional theatre director. The latter had continued his professional career as theatre maker and actor after fleeing from the war in Iraq, and had extensive experience with theatre-based community interventions in, among others, European prisons, schools and refugee camps. The community center

and one intern, a Belgian student in Theatre Studies, supported the organization and preparation of the weakly workshops. Nine refugees (N=9), all between the age of 18 and 26, were involved in the project, all of whom had fled pre-displacement stressors of war or organized violence in Syria, had lived in Belgium between 1 and 5 years, and were granted permanent resident status. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling, in close cooperation with several youth initiatives, Syrian cultural institutions, cultural refugee institutions and initiatives, language centers for refugees and preparatory student programs at universities and colleges. Our sample represents the diversity of ethnic and religious backgrounds among the Syrian population by including Kurdish, Druze, Sunni and Ismaili participants.

In order to preserve a safe space of expression for group interactions, a good level of Dutch language skills was used as a criterion for inclusion. Rehearsals took place in the presence of a translator in order to ensure that participants always had the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue. During introductory individual meetings with prospective participants, the objectives and the course of the research process was clarified, and informed consent agreements were negotiated carefully (Hugman, Bartolomei, & Pittaway, 2011). The participants' right to withdraw was stressed repeatedly in several individual informal and formal process evaluations in the course of the study. The aim was to create a process of iterative negotiation of consent (Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2012).

The applied theatre project consisted of eleven weekly collective theatre workshops of four hours in the community center. The creative process developed around the overall narrative structure of a collective imaginative transgression of an old word into a new and envisioned one as the main structuring device. The old word symbolized the past, the new world the present, and the envisioned world the future. In this way, the overall collective narrative suggested a temporal continuity from the past to the present and the future. This narrative served as the overall structure of the theatre process, which was composed of four different types of creative activities: creative movement and expression exercises, video-recorded interviews, the development and discussion of participants' creative writing material, and role-playing games and improvisational exercises.

Firstly, the transgression of the old to the new world was reflected in a steadily increasing collection of words selected by the director, as they appeared and reappeared in the course of the rehearsals, including for example 'freedom', 'fear', 'memory', 'love', 'history', 'border', 'birth', 'route', 'sorrow', 'loss', 'winning', 'time'. Here, participants were invited to express these words bodily and non-verbally, reflecting on their meaning and associations. Further-

more, as a group, they were encouraged to develop a collective *tableau vivant*, interweaving all group members' bodily expressions into a unifying realm for each word. Secondly, the director asked each participant to reflect verbally on the meaning of some of the collected words in individually videotaped interviews. During the subsequent rehearsals, the director showed a montage of the videotaped interviews. Thirdly, throughout the rehearsal process, the director encouraged participants to write or bring texts, stories, poems, or other creative material inspired by the creative process. Some participants brought self-written written texts, others brought drawings or songs. All creative writing material was brought into the rehearsal space and presented by the writers to the entire group and the director. Last, through role-playing games and improvisation exercises, the participants were encouraged to enact the transformation of an old world into a new one, both on a personal level and as a group.

As the premiere approached, the collection of created expressive verbal, choreographic, auditory and visual material, and theatrical scenes were arranged into a continuum of scenes in which all the participants were continuously present. The result was the public performance *Temporary*. The performance was staged during three consecutive evenings in a community center in Brussels, followed by three performances in the state theatre in Antwerp during the following week. In this respect, it is important to note that the participants were able to shape and reshape the very form of their participation on stage within the public performance at all times, and were allowed to decide whether they wanted to perform or not up until one week before the premiere would take place. In the end, all participants decided to take part in the public performance.

Data collection

In order to pursue a contextualized and in-depth analysis of participants' meaning-making processes of expressing experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in the project, multiple types of data were collected through participant observation during the rehearsals and public performances and by means of three in-depth semi-structured interviews per participant conducted by the lead author of this contribution. Before the start of this study, ethical approval was granted by the ethical committees of both involved universities. Weekly team meetings with the research team were held to ensure rigorous supervision on ethical decisions that arose during the course of the project, with special attention to relational ethics in the dynamics between participants, director, and researcher (Vervliet, Rousseau, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2015).

Participant observation. During the workshops, the lead author systematically took field notes, guided by an observational checklist that was developed in a pilot-study (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018) and participated herself in several workshop exercises. All rehearsals were videotaped and reviewed by the first author. In this way, verbal, auditory, and corporeal interventions between participants and the director, group interactions, developed written material, stories, chorographical phrases, auditory material, and other non-verbal dynamics were registered.

Interviews. The interviews were conducted in three stages during the course of the theatre project. The first in-depth semi-structured interview was carried out six weeks after the start of the project, using a tape-assisted recall (TAR) procedure in order to facilitate the joint exploration of interpersonal processes (Elliott, 1986; Rober, 2005). In this interview, three or four selected video fragments of particular actions within the rehearsals were evaluated together with the participant. The video-fragments were selected based on significant participants' verbal or non-verbal expressions in relation to experiences of organized violence and forced displacement throughout the rehearsals. By watching the video-fragments together, participants were invited to reflect on their experiences within the project, including their interactions with other participants, the researcher, the director and the intern during the workshops. During the interview participants could always choose to stop the tape. The second interview was conducted one week after the final performance and invited the participants to explore their experiences of the performances and interactions within the group and with the audience. Five months after the end of the project, additional individual member reflections were conducted with all participants. Beyond a mere verification of our first analysis, these member reflections aimed to offer an opportunity to include participants' voices in the data analysis, to renegotiate informed consent, and to give feedback on the entire research process. All in-depth interviews lasted approximately two hours and were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and Dutch, with the support of a professional translator.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted in different stages and involved an in-depth within-case and cross-case participants' analysis of all empirical material derived from detailed field notes, interview transcripts, and poems written by the participants. In the first analytical phase, we explored participants' individual accounts by means of a case-centered thematic narrative analysis

(Riessman, 2008) through a close contextualized reading of both ad verbatim interview transcripts and transcribed member reflections. In a second phase, a cross-case inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used in order to capture the participants' experiences of coping processes and personal testimonies in the project. After an intensive rereading of all data material, a hierarchical coding structure with categories and subcategories was developed. All transcripts and written texts were stored, organized and coded by using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 12. Initial codes were reviewed, by rereading coded material in order to track relationships between codes, prominent overarching themes and subthemes relevant to our research questions by using memo writing in Nvivo 12. After enquiring in depth into relevant themes and subthemes, cross-case themes were gradually defined, reviewed and refined. The entire data analysis process was supervised by a second researcher, i.e. the last author of this article, who was not involved in collecting of the data, by closely reading and annotating the data in order to further enhance a complex and in-depth understanding of our findings by means of data crystallization (Tracy, 2010).

Findings: Multiple and multilayered modes of expression

In this section, we describe how the participants in our case study expressed their histories of collective violence and forced displacement. In order to do so, we identified four intersecting modalities of expression. Within each section, we first provide a description of one specific form of expression, followed by an elaboration of how participants constructed meaning around this particular observed way of accounting for trauma and exile throughout the theatre project.

Temporary forms of expression, confined in time and space

Participants used a variety of modes of expression marked by a defined nature, confined both in time and space by the structure of the theatre project. The expression of experiences of loss and suffering took place within multiple forms of structuring containers linked to the defined character of the public performances, various theatrical acts within the performance, the multiple consecutive rehearsals, and the project itself, with its clear beginning and end.

Firstly, a common topic in the research conversations with participants was the temporary character of the public performances itself, during which they expressed experiences of loss and suffering. Here, the social interactions with group and audience that followed the public performances seemed to foreshadow a structural end to a phase of expression. Another par-

ticipant explained that, for her, her tears, the tears of her colleagues and the tears of the audience members at the end of the performance in the last scene, symbolized the tipping point to end this phase of expression of her personal life history.

Participant 7:

> *There was a lot of grief. In the preparation, if I know that tomorrow I will again show those emotions and all that pain revives again. And at the end, after each performance, I'm in tears. Because I remember my life. But also because of what I saw. The pain of my friends, of my team. And also the interaction with the audience makes it a bit harder. And with those tears I can have peace, in order that I can return to my normal life. (…) I believe, the tears were actually a border between two phases. Of pain and of return to reality.*

Secondly, in addition to the borders induced by the performance, the defined character of distinct theatrical acts within the performance, for example performing texts fragments, songs, and movements, also seemed to provide a way of generating defined and structured forms of expression. For example, one participant elucidated how a certain song brought him into a state in which he was able to express a personal experience of loss. For him, the final words of the song, referring to smoke, designated a symbolic point through which he could return to reality.

Participant 8:

> *Yes, when I'm singing the song, for me it is such a situation that I go back in a state of unconsciousness and if the song is finished, I go back to myself.*

Furthermore, the rehearsals also seemed to generate defined and distinct weekly-based frameworks of expression. For example, one participant indicated that, in a group exercise during the first rehearsal, she clearly expressed the loss of her family and her feelings of grief in exile towards the other participants. She emphasized that she had decided to talk about the difficulties in her personal life during the very first rehearsal, and that this would be a one-time event, bound to the context of the first rehearsal. In the aftermath of this moment of disclosure, she urged the wish not to talk about her loss and sadness throughout the further course of the theatre project.

Participant 5:

> *I sensed at that moment that I needed it. I told really everything and everybody listened to me. They also gave me advice and I loved it. Everybody could tell, tell his story, and I really liked listening to the other stories as well. I felt that at that moment I needed it. (…) But I wanted to say that I, I told you, I don't like to complain. So I told my problem once. After that, I do not want to talk about it again.*

Thirdly, the theatre project in its entirety seemed to be seen as a temporary step bound to a particular time and space within the participant's life. In the member reflections five months after the public performances, this temporarily bounded phase of expressing personal memories of the past throughout the project stood in stark contrast with participants' current engagement with those memories. One participant explained she restored her memories in a safe place in the aftermath of the project.

Participant 7:

> *There are many memories, of course in my sub-consciousness, in my brain. But during Temporary those (memories) came back. I gave them the permission to come back, in that temporary space, but now, not anymore, of course. I restored them at the same place and forgot them.*

In the same vein, seven participants decided to write a text during the course of the project. What is remarkable about these texts is that several participants referred to it as a particular moment in their life history, strongly connected to their participation in the theatre project. They were described as documents that referred to a specific time and place in their lives and which should, above all, remain there.

Participant 1:

> *I received requests to perform the text in other ceremonies or parties or to write something else. (…) But, I only want this text for our performance. It is only for Temporary.*

Researcher:

> *Only for Temporary.*

Participant 1:

> *What I mean is, I wrote it for Temporary and it will always be Temporary.*

Personal relief and control. Expressing experiences of loss and suffering within defined containers seemed to bring forth a sense of personal relief and at the same time draw strict boundaries in the reactivation of feelings of distress and pain linked to the traumatic content. Participants revealed that, though painful, expressing personal memories in the project resulted in a sense of personal relief, since it may have enabled a discharge of the pain, anger and stress that were enclosed in their inner world. For example, one of the participants wrote a poem, which referred to his personal life trajectory when he was forced to leave Syria. In the research conversation, we watched a video fragment of the rehearsal when he had recited his poem for the first time in the presence of the other group members. In the research conversation, we explored together how expressing his unspeakable pain in his poem brought about a certain sense of relief during the rehearsals.

Participant 1:

> *I was nervous at that moment because I don't want to expose my weaknesses to anybody. At that moment I was exposing myself, exposing my weak sides. After I told it, I was calm and relieved that I told it. A lot of things that I said are the result of my own experiences in life.*

Another participant explained that, at each performance, she waited to listen to a particular text of a participant to weep for the loss of her family and country during that definite moment of recitation.

Participant 5:

> *At the end, there is a text of (another participant's name) and every time I await this text with joy to listen to. (…) I waited for that moment to be sad, that I do not have to be strong all the time.*

It seemed that the realization that the moment of expression was temporary could install a sense of personal relief for the participants. It could result in a sense of regaining control by allowing them to reactivate strong inner emotions and suffering during the remembrance of painful memories and avoid emotional flooding. In this respect, we need to be extra concerned about the role of the research conversations: in what sense could they have counteracted this sense of control when the researcher invited participants to re-examine particular moments of. In this way, the researcher acquired control over the reactivation of painful memories in determining the temporary container of trauma narration. For example, one participant indicated that watching a fragment in which he expressed personal experiences of his life in Syria triggered

feelings of grief and sadness during the research conversation. He expressed his wish to stop watching the video-fragment together.

Participant 1:

> *The positive thing when I see this, is that I'm happy that I told it. I didn't keep it inside of me, because keeping something inside is not good. So in general I'm happy that I told it. But now, when I'm hearing myself, then everything returns to me, because it is a sad story and I remember it as well. It is off course in me, it is not that I don't know it, but I told it and then it recalls memories, or bad … sorrow actually.*

Furthermore, it should be noted that the public performances took place during three consecutive evenings in Brussels, followed by three consecutive evenings in Antwerp. In the research conversations, participants expressed their awareness of the consecutive confrontation with grief and pain during these moments of expression. Arguably, the structure of these repeated performances may have mitigated a sense of control in the temporary reactivation of suffering during expression. In this respect, it is important to point out that, in the aftermath of the research project, theatre houses inquired about the possibility of performing the play again. As the participants were confronted with the question of whether to continue their participation in future public performances, one participant delineated the importance of the temporary character of his participation, including the content of his text.

Participant 3:

> *That text is finished. That project is finished. The theatre is finished. We have to think about the next step and I think I have taken the next step within my life.*

In a sense, this participant may have regained control by choosing not to participate in the rerun of the public performance in the future, and by determining, by and for himself, the time and space of his form of expressing experiences of collective violence and forced displacement.

Caring for future and family. In exploring the temporary dimension of expressing traumatic experiences of life in Syria and exile during the course of the theatre project, participants voiced how discovering a bounded form of expression was related to their ongoing ambition of shaping a meaningful future in resettlement in Belgium. The temporary container of the theatre project allowed them to express traumatic life histories, which they experienced

as impossible in their daily reality, in which they were oriented towards a prosperous future in the host society.

Participant 6:

> *It is impossible for every human to keep on living in fear, in sorrow, in such a black situation. Everybody has to search for a future. Otherwise you just delete your future. Concerning me, I can't keep on struggling with my memories about Syria, about the war in Syria, I have to rebuild my future, I have to keep my life in mind. But in the performance, it was a different context. It was temporary and I'm allowed to go back to Syria for a short while. It was temporary (laughs).*

Researcher:

> *It was temporary?*

Participant 6:

> *Yes, 'cause we can't always stay with fear, with friends. We also have our own life and we have to move on, go forward, and build our future of course. Both of those don't work. (…) Yes that is why, after the performance, I understood why our project is called Temporary.*

Furthermore, the outlook of a prosperous future in Belgium seemed to provide participants with a pathway to repeatedly legitimize having left Syria, family, and community members behind, which is usually marked by strong feelings of guilt and grief. Indeed, participants showed an emotional ambivalence towards their safe lives in Belgium, separated from their family and friends. This ambivalence was induced by an ongoing tension between, on the one hand, the necessity of escaping death or persecution and protecting family members, and on the other hand feelings of guilt and pain invoked by ambiguously prolonged family separation, given the lack of a perspective of a peaceful Syria. One of the participants compared her refugee predicament with a double-edged sword, oscillating between positive and negative perspectives. She described how the negative side of the sword would always chase her, while, at the same time, she would never be able to let it go. In this respect, the ability to express traumatic life experiences of collective violence in Syria within a temporary container seemed to have functioned as a vehicle to deal with these issues: it allowed them to respond to the strong and continuously lingering moral imperative to remember family and community members left behind in Syria, while at the same time safeguarding their future and the idea that the sacrifices associated with a diasporic life have not been in vain. Telling one's story offered personal avenues of taking care of family and community ties after being pervasively ruptured by forced displacement. Within these de-

fined forms of expression, both in time and space, it became possible to hold on not only to family, but also to the future.

Participant 6:

> *We all try, of course, to forget and to avoid those painful memories, but Temporary has a function within our life here. As Syrians we cannot forget that we have family as well, that we have family members, friends, who are still living in oppression, who still suffer the consequences of war. (…) We all try to forget, we try to neglect, but Temporary has given us the chance to re-experience those images, those memories, painful memories as well. That just means that you even if you want to forget, you just can't. There will be moments when you will make a connection to those memories, those difficult ones. And like this, you should not forget and you should not forget your family members, your relatives, your friends back there, who still suffer from oppression.*

Symbolic forms of expression

Participant 8:

> *I go back to things that are actually unclear in order to express them. So the others think it is just a song, but it actually means something else. There is a meaning behind it.*

As this quote of one of the participants illustrates, it seems that participants actively turned to symbolic vehicles for indirect communication in order to express personal experiences. Indeed, we identified that, in a variety of ways, participants were able to account for trauma and loss in a symbolic form. In our research conversations, we observed how such an indirect mode of expression might operate protectively by dimming overwhelming experience and regulating emotional distress during the recounting of personal stories, while at the same time keeping a safe distance from personal life histories. Secondly, this symbolic distancing may have enabled the exploration of a mode of expression that ensured cultural continuity. Furthermore, we also observed how symbolic modalities gave participants hope that they would be able to transmit their suffering to the listening host society.

Protection and alleviation. The symbolic distancing mechanisms present in the theatre project seemed to offer participants a sense of protection from reactivating pervasive feelings of distress and pain. For example, participants expressed how art in the form of theatre or poetry could alleviate

the pain in the process of expression, when a harmful and harsh reality was suddenly accompanied by the softness of a sense of beauty. In this way traumatic experiences could be expressed, since their painful colors were softened with a brush of beauty.

Participant 1:

> *it is hard to describe, it is an innermost sense, I can't really describe it, but I see beauty. It feels … it is at the same time the feeling of grief, but also something beautiful. (…) It is a mixed- feeling. It is a mixture of pain and beauty actually. When I heard the song, and it is getting dark, the participants take the cloves with the words. It refers to our experience, when I had to leave my country, when I had to take things and leave. That is pain and beauty.*

Additionally, during the performance, several scenes took place in complete silence. One of these scenes was structured around the silent embodiment of certain words, including 'freedom', 'revolution', 'love', 'road', 'time' and 'goodbye'. Participants described how, during this scene, they transmitted experiences from their lives in Syria and their journey to Belgium. In a further joint exploration of the meaning of this silence, one participant referred to the power of silence in relationship to the vivid memory of the beauty of Damascus and Syria to reinforce that beauty, hereby quoting the Syrian poet Nizar Tawfiq Qabbani: "If I stood in front of your beauty silent, silence in the presence of beauty is beauty".

Two participants also indicated that they found protection of emotional deregulation, distress, and intrusive recollections of traumatic memories by refusing to play theatrical roles in the rehearsals and the performance. They indicated that, here, they had chosen to play another role within that scene, which through certain gestures and acts reminded them strongly of past experiences. By carefully adjusting and negotiating their roles within the group, they were able to remain at an even further symbolic, and therefore safer, distance of particular traumatic memories and content. In this way, they were able to perform within that particular scene and express their personal experiences of collective violence and individual persecution. For example, one scene in the performance was developed during the rehearsals as a result of a role-playing game. During the game, participants were asked to pose as a king or a ruler of the new world. Whoever took the king's crown, became the king. Every participant could improvise a particular action he or she would use to exercise power upon the others if he or she were to be king. The participants compelled each other to sing, dance, or laugh, but also to

obey and abuse power. One participant decided not to play the character of the dictatorial king, as the role resonated strongly with the oppressive rule and his personal experiences of political arrest and imprisonment in Syria. Another participant explained that he refused to play the role of protector in times of danger, as it reminded him strongly of himself protecting the children of his village during bombardments. In order to protect himself of being emotionally overwhelmed, he decided to play the role of the children.

Participant 4:

> *There was a scene of danger. What happens if there is danger. There was a discussion about me playing the role of (other participant's name), but I did not dare to take that role. Why? I would just keep on crying until the end of the performance.*

Furthermore, this indirect mode of expression seemed to have offered a vehicle for symbolic restoration and change during the moment of expressing traumatic experiences. One participant explained how, during a scene in the performance, he expressed the Syrian demonstrations for freedom by holding pieces of white fabric bearing the words 'revolution' and 'freedom'. In contrast to his original memory, he indicated that, here in this performance, he could revolt once again in the struggle for freedom and human rights within a safe space.

Participant 4:

> *That is just, that is also a special feeling. Freedom and revolution have something personal with my soul. We revolted. We fought for revolution. So here as well, when I do it, that is beautiful. And when I'm lifting the word freedom or revolution here (in the performance), than I'm relieved because I'm safe and nobody can hurt me. (…) Because in Syria, when we participated in demonstrations, we were of course beaten by the police and sometimes stabbed. But here, it is a beautiful memory, even if I can just imagine it.*

Cultural continuity. In our study, symbolic pathways of expression also played an important role in weaving a sense of cultural continuity. For example, one participant turned to a text written by an Arab philosopher. He indicated that reciting that text during a rehearsal offered him the possibility to express certain personal stories and memories without explicitly disclosing them. He explained that the words of the writer supported him during the expression to control his urge to share these stories, as he could continuously drew upon the text and another men's words "as if he speaks with my tong."

Participant 8:

> *When I would go into depth and would tell more about myself, it would be possible that the image of me is affected. And that is something I want to prevent. (…) I didn't want that others would see or perceive me differently by giving own examples. I do not want to that the image of me will become affected. And I did that by choosing not to tell to others about my own examples.*

The participant pointed out that he felt emotionally relieved after expressing his stories in an indirect way. In doing so, he was able to safeguard his adherence to his cultural role as a leader in his family and community. After all, he explained, a leader is expected to not share his feelings and emotions with other members of the community.

Participant 8:

> *So every leader in the world should not talk about things, particularly not about his feelings in order for him to be perceived, for him to still be perceived as a leader. That is important.*

Symbolic communication may have also helped participants to appropriate culturally specific containers as cultural metaphors and symbols. In the participants' written texts and poems, certain symbols, such as jasmine and the olive tree for example, reoccurred regularly. In one of these texts, a participant expressed his experiences of the war and bombardments in his hometown in Syria, ending his text with a hopeful message.

> *And (I also hope) that out of my buried (planted) heart once an olive tree will flourish in the first spring wherein also the jasmine will flourish. The jasmine will yield wheat, whereof my mother will bake bread and feed her hungry children.*

During a research conversation, the participant explained how the symbols of jasmine and the olive tree could unify the Syrian people in times of political and geographical fragmentation and collective violence within the Syrian community.

Participant 6:

> *There are few things that unites us, Dabke and the jasmine and olive tree. There is nothing else. There are many differences: there is war, there is lots of misery, but those three things will always stay. Those will stay the same.*

Arguably, participants' active engagement with cultural symbols during the process of expression may have operated as a vehicle of cultural continuity, with a soothing role for pain and loss in the moment of expression. Cultural symbols seemed to play a role in the reconstruction of a culturally coherent and cohesive universe and in the reaffirmation of personal and collective identity. In this way, it may have provided a relief-inducing contrast to the experiences of social disruption and disconnection. For example, a participant explained how jasmine would remind all Syrians of the peaceful streets in Damascus, and how it could be a symbol for peace within their community. To ease the pain of being separated from Syria, the participant narrated how he daydreamed daily of returning to a peaceful Syria by sitting next to a small jasmine tree on his balcony at home. The fragrance of jasmine generated a calming, hopeful atmosphere.

Participant 6:

> *There is a strong connection between jasmine and peace. Jasmine refers to Damascus and Damascus reflects lots of tranquility and especially the old streets. If you arrive, you just feel a peaceful, quite feeling. And also the jasmine tree produces a very good, strong smell, which helps to relax. That is just special. And that smell refers to Damascus (laughs). It is always like that. There is a connection between, if I smell the jasmine, than all, I start to fantasize about Damascus, that I'm there of in my village. Yes, so every time I see or smell the jasmine, it makes a connection, between my head and there (laughs), not just me, but all Syrian people.*

Furthermore, this indirect way of communication may have also provided a possibility sharing personal experiences regardless of the participants' current political orientation or history of political activity within the polarized Syrian conflict. Indeed, some participants explicitly pointed to the importance of remaining silent on the political dynamics and positions within the group. In this way, participants were able to avoid a reiteration of the Syrian community's fragmentation and remain committed to the cohesion of the group and to collective collaboration. Furthermore, participants' engagement with an indirect, humoristic way of expressing may have also played a role in conveying politically induced messages to both other group members and to the audience in times of social stigmatization as an technique of distancing within a constrained political environment in Syria.

Participant 2:

> *Once I was present at a performance at a theatre. The actor assaulted somebody, a corrupt member of the government. And he was critical of him, but of course with humor. He could do it and dare to do it with humor. Without humor, with a direct message, he would go into jail or be killed. Like that, I just realized, that is the right way to discuss things. Even hard things you can discuss with humor.*

Transmission of suffering to host community members. In the exploration of the way participants created meaning through the symbolic expression of personal traumatic experiences, the hope to be understood by the host society became a recurrent topic in the research conversations.

Participant 6:

> *I felt that I was showing my life and how it was to the public. I was showing what is happening in Syria. (…) They were not just ordinary movements. I had the feeling that the audience could understand many movements, although it was not easy to understand them. In my head, I had the feeling that the audience could understand me, so I was living in my own world.*

Participants seemed to be convinced that, by expressing their experiences of atrocities symbolically, they would be able to communicate them to others who do not share the same traumatic history of forced displacement.

> *Love is when the smuggler likes you so much that he puts you on the sea when the waves are not that high.*

As this excerpt of a participant's poem indicates, participants turned to the symbolic power of humor. Here, they mentioned how expressing the trauma story encapsulated with humor in the theatre project would provide an alternative to the dominant media coverage and circulating war images of Syria. They hoped it would induce a more responsive listening from the side of audience members from the host society. In this respect, a participant delineated how humor offers a pathway to convey a message and ensure interaction with the listener, since it unites people on the basis of a shared humanity.

Participant 2:

> *Comedy is the most important way to come to the heart of a person. With comedy we can convey things. With humor, for example, with jokes, you can convey a message. But you're also sure that there will be interaction*

> *of the receiver, that the receiver can remember this message and do something with it. So that is the difference.*

As this quote indicates, participants seem to turn to symbolic expression to create a universal vehicle for the transmission of suffering and to allowing encounters based on a common ground and shared language for every possible listener. In search for such a universality, one of the participants drew on heroes, gods and goddesses of the Greek mythology and other Western cultural symbols, such as the Mona Lisa, to convey her story of suffering. By building on Western cultural symbols of the host society, she wanted to make herself and her story understood.

Participant 7:

> *And to address the public in a language that he understands. And also, with the symbols, that he understands, particularly if I want to talk about my case, about my pain, about my problems. I can't for example mention the Abbasids, an Arabic culture in antiquity, because they don't know them. So I have to talk with words they know. If I for example want to address the people of Latin America about the nation, about our country, I should talk about Che Guevara. And here too, with the Europeans, I should talk about Mona Lisa as a symbol of beauty.*

Furthermore, these cultural symbols supported her in her quest to connect Belgian society with her culture by drawing attention to the shared human and universal values underlying cultural symbols. In this respect, participants emphasized that the aim of this hope for understanding of their suffering was not to simply convey a specific, intact story, but rather to construct a common ground where human suffering and values meet.

Participant 1:

> *We don't want to create a defined framework, cause we want to provide space for the audience to collaborate, to complement this painting. In this way, they will have an understanding of the words' meaning depending on their emotions and perhaps have a deeper understanding than what we want to convey.*

Public forms of expression

The third mode of expression in our case study is related to the public character of expressing experiences of collective violence and forced displacement. In the research project, the space for disclosing personal histories of collec-

tive violence took place against the backdrop of a future public performance. Indeed, the theatre performance opened up a public arena for expression in the presence of witnesses. In this way, the audience member as future witness was continuously present in the rehearsal space as a silent listener. Hence, the public arena seemingly played an important role for participants to enter into a dialogue with both members of their home community (both in exile and in Syria) and the host society. As we explored the meaning of such a dialogue with both addressees, it seemed that participants' testimonies could provide ways to reestablish social ties and connectedness.

Reconnection and recovery with Syrian society. Firstly, we observed that by expressing themselves in a public platform, participants seemed to be able to meet to a moral obligation towards the home community, which resulted in a renewed interweaving of their personal lives in exile with those of the people who endured or are still enduring violence and injustice in Syria. For example, one participant aimed to explicitly testify about the death of the civilian victims in his hometown Raqqa in Syria through a correct use of Arabic language in order to redress their martyrdom. He indicated how the Western media predominantly focused on Raqqa as a stronghold of Islamic terrorism, hence disregarding the suffering of Raqqa's civil population. Furthermore, in the Islamic religion, people and civilians, who are unintentionally killed by man-made atrocity, such as many people in Raqqa, receive God's grace as martyrs, and immediate access to heaven. In his text, the participant aimed to redress the incorrect use of the linguistic notion of 'civilian victims' used by the Western media by explicitly calling and honor his fellow citizens of Raqqa as 'shuhada' in the presence of public witnesses.

Participant 4:

> *People who die in Raqqa are not just normal people who died according to my religion. That is a special name. If he dies or gets killed, for God, he is still alive but in heaven. It is complex. I do not have the right name in Dutch. But is is shuhada. It is very beautiful to say. For example, if I would become shahid, that is really beautiful. Cause than you go straight to heaven, you won't go to … For God they are still alive, not for us, but for God there are alive, you go straight to heaven.*

Secondly, participants' expression of personal experiences in the public format allowed them to potentially reconnect with the Syrian community by playing an active role in offering social support to members of the diaspora. Participants actively engaged with their own suffering to create a transitional

space for other community members in exile to feel heard and consoled. In this way, participants were able to discover a personal strength to reforge social bounds and transform their own traumatic experiences. For example, one participant explained how, with his poem, he felt as if he were expressing the stories of many other Syrians. Parallel to his personal sense of relief that was the result of the expression of an internal reality, he indicated how that same expression could also bring relief to other Syrians who witness his words.

Participant 1:

> *Because I tell parts of my own experiences with my own tongue. I have all experienced it and they too have experienced the same kind of stories. And they will surely be relieved if they would hear it.*

In a follow-up interview after the public performances, we reflected once again on this ability to ease the pain of other Syrians as witnesses in the audience.

Participant 1:

> *I'm glad to be able to do that. If I can contribute to ease the pain of others, that is a good act of me. So I'm glad to do that, and that is a human side, and I'm glad to do that.*

The presence of the other participants during the rehearsals might have contributed to participants' exploration of the future responses of Syrian community members within a relative safe space.

Participant 1:

> *I have definitely thought about it. When I finished, the group was very happy. They came to me and told me how beautiful it was, bravo, and that it really touched and affected them. I was happy that I could touch them and now I'm waiting how it will be during the premiere. I invited many people and they heard that I will read poems but they don't know what. Lots of people will hear it and I know for sure that it will calm them, because we all come from the same damaged country.*

Mobilizing moral and political witnesses in society. Against the backdrop of a growing socio-political climate of polarization, xenophobia and stigmatization of refugees in European countries of resettlement, including Belgium (da Silva Rebelo, Fernández, & Achotegui, 2018; De Cleen, Zienkowski, Smets, Dekie, & Vandevoordt, 2017; do Mar Castro Varela & Mecheril, 2016), testifying of personal experiences of atrocity in a public arena attended by

host community members seemed to serve as a pathway to connect with the host society, in a variety of ways. Firstly, being confronted with stigmatization and hostility in the host country, several participants attributed an important political role to expressing their histories of collective violence in the presence of the audience as witnesses. This could, so they thought, contribute to the remobilization of empathy for the human suffering of Syrian refugees and change the dominant representation of Syrian refugees. Hence, by disclosing stories of suffering and loss, participants could act as agents of social and political change for their community and improve the future coexistence of Syrian refugees and Belgians in the host society.

Participant 1:

> *I told you I'm optimistic because then I can show emotions and that is particularly for the people. Not for all the Belgians, but for the Belgians that don't want the refugees. I just want them to show what the situation in our country is like and why we are here. I wanted to show how we feel inside, because we are here. I want to make a connection between the refugee and the society here.*

Secondly, participants stressed how expression offered them the opportunity to counter dominant stereotypes of refugees as economic fortune hunters, which disregard the cultural richness and history of Syria. Furthermore, in addition to these personal stories being a vehicle for adjusting the dominant de-humanizing representation of refugees in the social nexus, participants also emphasized the meaning of expression as way to challenge the dominant unilateral narrative of the Syrian conflict in the resettlement country and the international community. Indeed, some participants mentioned how the public performance created the opportunity to disclose those stories of Syrian history of oppression and repressive dictatorship that have been silenced by the media. In doing so, they wanted to tackle the dominant language of the media, which focuses too exclusively on the recent upspring of Islamic terrorism.

Participant 6:

> *That is why, they have to, somebody who can show everything to the people what is happening in Syria. That it is not just IS, there is a dictatorship, there are people, who live in poverty and people who are injured, people who kill, people who live without hands, without body parts. There is an air force that bombs people and houses and … But the people just pay attention to the politics, but they don't look at the people.*

Another participant stressed the importance of recalling painful memories of oppression and violence during his school years in Syria under the authoritarian rule of the Ba'th regime. Although he articulated a strong wish to forget these memories, he emphasized the importance of witnessing these events in the public performance in order to expand the current debate on radicalization in Syria and in the Arab world.

Participant 3:

> *Yes, that is unbelievable. That is why, radicalization. Some people are born as radicals, very bad people, many reasons, but it is also very important to focus on the dictatorship. How do people become radicals? Really, that is very important!*

Additionally, voicing these personal accounts of oppression and war, installed a certain hope for political change in current Syrian situation, since for some participants it was a means to emphasize the complicity of the international community.

Participant 6:

> *We want to tell the truth and we want to say as well: the mistakes by the Syrian government are ignored by the world and the Europeans, or the world is complicit.*

In this way, expressing personal stories of atrocity and oppressive rule in Syria might rebuild a connection with the wider international community in the aftermath of extensive organized violence before the eyes of that same community, which had played an ambiguous role throughout the course of the Syrian conflict, and left behind an intricate network of political opponents and a confused civil society. One participant explained how, during the scene of the king, the audience became a witness.

Participant 4:

> *For me the public was a synonym for the world. The world watches what is happening in Syria. And the people are discussing with the president on his deeds. (…) The public is actually the world. And the group members were the people. But the president, unfortunately, was not present, Baschar al-Assad. Unfortunately he was not there.*

Finally, in conversation with the participants, the experience of an emotional communication with the host society audience members seemingly re-estab-

lished a sense of universal human connectedness. For example, one participant pointed out how witnessing the tears of the audience members who witnessed her story alleviated her pain in the moment of expression. Becoming a witness of emotional transmission also appeared to create a moment in which a core of interpersonal trust could be regained after experiences of man-made atrocity. As such, it could form a point of departure to reach for mutual understanding and trust in the resettlement country.

Participant 7:

> *It is beautiful to see how the audience, with a different culture, has returned to its human source. And they shared that with you, that suffering. That helps us to make our suffering a bit less. (…) It confirms what I believe, that humanity still exists, that there are still people with a good heart, people, who can give a hand to others and help one another, help to establish or even to accept in their country.*

However, at the same time our analysis also brought to light a critical awareness on behalf of the participants with respect to the ephemeral character of that interaction during the public performance. Participants shared their thoughts with the researcher about how witnesses could easily forget this mutual experience at the public platform. In this respect, it is remarkable how the video recordings of the performance turned into a vehicle for participants to immortalize their public testimonies in the project, therefore partially overcoming their transience. Moreover, the video recordings of the performances seemed to offer participants a pathway to show family and community members in Syria their continuous engagement for the Syrian cause, the Syrian community, and family values in their lives in exile.

Participant 7:

> *The audience that watched the play will definitely forget it after a while. But concerning us, for example these recordings are very important. If we could send these video-recordings to our friends and family in Syria, then they know, this is also important for them. Than they will know, there are still people who defend our cause somewhere, who spread our message in the world.*

Furthermore, this critical awareness may have protected participants from feelings of disappointment and disillusion against the backdrop of the chronic nature of the Syrian conflict and the ongoing confrontation with structural violence and social injustice in Belgium. In the member reflection with one par-

ticipant, it became clear that his initial hope for social and political change in Belgium, which was a key theme in the first two research conversations, was petered out in light of current incisive experiences of structural violence in Belgium. The participant explained how, in the end, his struggle for change only served a personal matter:

Participant 1:

> *Temporary just means a struggle for myself. (…) I struggle, I do, in me, an inner revolution. But not with the people, with the audience. It was alone. Inside. In me. I do a kind of struggle because I'm Syrian. A kind of struggle, but not one to share with the audience. Not to receive some results from the audience. It is only in my heart. Inside.*

The participant compared his initial struggle and hope for political change by means of his testimony in the theatre project with the Syrian revolutionary experience. Months after the theatre project, his testimony may answer to a moral obligation towards the Syrian community to continue the struggle of the revolution in exile. At the same time, the theatre project allowed him to combine his personal struggle with the collective project for the entire Syrian community. By emphasizing his political commitment towards the Syrian case, it may enhance connection with his home country against the backdrop of increasing feelings of disconnection from the host community.

Participant 1:

> *Like the Syrian revolution. We revolted but some people did not accept it. And some did. So… We did that. The mission. But … We will not wait for results. We did it for ourselves. That is it. The same. (…) We expect of course that there will be positive things, that is also a mission. We took action, but we are not sure if there will be change. But we have to do it.*

This same participant was reluctant to participate in the rerun of the public performances. Arguably, his wish to avoid further testimonies in public performances was also a way to protect himself by avoiding being confronted once more with the unwillingness of host community members to listen to his pain, which was reflected in the continuation of structural violence in his life.

Collective embedded forms of expression

Finally, we observed how participants gave expression to their stories of loss and suffering in a collective context. In this respect, personal stories seemingly became embedded within the larger collective and socio-political narrative

of the Syrian community in the format of a collective voice and a collective body in the moment of expression, as participants were being constantly surrounded by the continuous bodily presence of other Syrians in the rehearsals and the performances. Indeed, in addition to fragments of individual texts that were played via the participants' audio-recorded voices, the performance's structure was characterized by collective movements and collective theatrical exercises. The collectively created expressive theatrical and choreographic material was arranged into a continuum of scenes, during which all the participants were continuously present on stage.

In this final section, we will zoom in on how participants gave meaning to such a collective embedding of the communication of personal experiences. We argued that it may have served as an important vehicle for participants to receive social support, restore a sense of collective unity of Syria shattered by war and collective violence, and initiate social change.

Social support. Against the backdrop of an increasing polarization within the Syrian community, a common topic in the interviews was how the project had offered them a collective platform to reconnect with the Syrian community in the host country. Participants emphasized how their lives in Belgium were hampered by disconnection from the Syrian community, feelings of loneliness, and social isolation.

In the research conversations, participants' reflections on the creation of meaning in the form of shared expression of traumatic experiences constantly alternated between individual and collective utterances emphasizing the larger social and Syrian context and revolution in which their life trajectory as a Syrian community member was embedded. As such, this form of expression might reflect the intrinsic collective character of organized violence, war, and socio-political forces that elicit personal experiences of human rights violations, which underpin refugees' and entire communities' predicaments and their stories of trauma and hope in post-trauma reconstruction Brough, Schweitzer, Shakespeare-Finch, Vromans, & King, 2013; Kirmayer, 2002). In a collective container of expression, participants could continuously blend their personal story with a macro socio-political story. As such, participants incorporated their personal stories in a comprehensive collective, which may counterbalance the experience of social isolation associated with individual suffering and loss. The sense of social support of other group members seemed to make the expression of personal stories of loss and suffering more bearable during performances or rehearsals. The continuous presence of group members offered a sense of support, as the collective environment enabled suffering to be shared. These dynamics became increasingly apparent within

the research conversations, as the individualized interview context seemed to efface the mechanisms of a collective supporting circle, as we reflected on the process of expression within the performance in relationship to the individualized here-and-now of the research conversation.

Participant 9:

> *At that moment there was another atmosphere, another dynamic in the group, that made those feelings less painful. It is not like now. At that moment I received the support of the others, of the other team members. That made the situation less painful. (…) In general, if you share your pain with others, it is more easy to deal with it. Alone is very hard. At that moment I felt supported by my colleagues in the performance, so I … there were painful moments off course, but they pass by very fast and then I return to another dynamic, another atmosphere. Not like now. (…). During the performance we share the grief. We realize that we all experienced difficult moments, so there is something in common for all of us. That makes is less hard.*

In addition to receiving support from other group members, the fact that their expressions were embedded in a collective paved the way for participants to enhance the provision of social support within the group. For example: one participant accounted how hearing other people's stories became a personal impetus to turn the downward spiral of collective loss and shared experiences of grief, which touched upon personal cores of sadness, into an upwards spiral of actively supporting other group members. In this way, personal experiences could remain uncovered, which meant that she would be able to preserve her expected cultural and familial practices. Furthermore, a reactivation of personal distress and emotional deregulation could be circumvented by means of this reversal, which in turn could strengthen a sense of personal control in within-group interaction.

Participant 5:

> *Inside, it is a bit painful to hear that the other participants share the same pain, share the same grief. But I try to be strong, I try to make a strong impression. I try to comfort them. I try to show myself in my strengths, for my colleagues, for my friends. And I try to make them feel a bit positive. That is what I did. A concrete example, if someone says: "I miss my family, my parents, I'm planning to just go back." I try to make myself strong and approach the things in a positive way: "Your parents are happy that you are here, so you have to be happy for them, for their joy that would be gone when you return."*

Restoring unity and initiating political change. Expressing personal stories of atrocity and loss in the format of a collective voice and a collective body also seemed to evoke comforting feelings of a restored Syrian unity and the rebuilding of their fragmented community. Firstly, the collective, embedded form of expression was experienced as a symbolic container of a united Syria of the past. During one particular scene, participants presented a keychain of words via bodily and verbal expression in complete silence. It turns into a series of collective *tableaux vivants*, during which the participants very slowly transform one word or one *tableau* into the other, from one emotion or memory to the other, from the past to the future. One participant explains how he uses each particular word to return to a particular memory of Syria, sensing the understanding of the audience.

Participant 6:

> *I feel that I show to the public what my life was, that I show what is happening there in Syria (…) that the public sees what is in my head.*

He further explained that, while silently moving through these harmonious collective movements during which he expressed fragments of his life story, he literally felt as if he was merging with the other participants into one body. This one body reminded him of the past unity of the Syrian nation before the beginning of the civil war.

Participant 6:

> *What does this one body mean to me? It refers to Syria in the past, when we were there. The people were one. They agreed. There was love. There was help, people helping each other. These are actually characteristics of Syria. So it was a representation of how the Syrian community used to be.*

Furthermore, the collective embedding of expression seemed to have paved the way for a reconstruction of collective strength to initiate political change through a shared collective history of violence, oppression and suffering. During the king-scene, which recalled personal and collective experiences of violence and oppression toward the Syrian people, one participant explicitly refused to wear the king's crown, took it, and threw it away during an improvisational exercise. This improvisation went on to become a crucial part of the scene: the audience witnesses a chain of absurdly and hilariously dominant rulers, kings and queens, as the performers alternately seize power by deceivingly taking away the crown, until one of the performers refuses to become the

group's successor. In the research conversations, participants expressed how they were able to rediscover collective agency as the participant initiated this change within the theatrical play that recalled personal and collective experiences of collective violence and oppression. The symbolic political change seemed to install a glimmer of hope for the future, as well as a sense of empowerment that was the result of a regained collective control and unity.

Participant 4:

> *(other participant's name) told with his gesture: enough! Enough of the war! Enough of the crimes! We want to live as one people. We just want freedom. And my reaction was not planned. It was not written down in a script. I improvised. You saw me, walking towards (other participant's name) and I clapped on his shoulder. I found it fantastic. (…) With that gesture, throwing away the crown, the amount of freedom increased. What did he do? He just showed that freedom exists and it is easy to reach it.*

Discussion

In this article we examined how Syrian refugees accounted for personal experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in a participatory applied theatre project. Our study showed an empirical variety of modes of expression, which we outlined in four intersecting modes: temporary, symbolic, public, and collective embedded forms of expression. Furthermore, within each mode we found that participants attached multilayered meanings. These included both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of creating meaning, within a specific format of expression, as a way of accounting for traumatic life histories. The variety of the identified forms of expression suggests that participants' engagement with the process of trauma narration is an inherently dynamic one. First of all, the dynamic character of participants' construction of trauma narratives seemed to emerge from a continuous dialectic engagement in a negotiation between the wish to forget and the urge to testify throughout their participation in the project. Indeed, these very same oscillation between avoiding and disclosing traumatic events, and the continuous ambivalence experienced by refugees with regard to disclosing traumatic experiences, has been increasingly acknowledged in recent research on trauma recovery, which moves beyond the dominant strictly restorative function of narrative reconstruction (Rousseau & Measham, 2007; Slobodin, Ghane, & De Jong, 2018). In our case, the artistic and contained performative dimensions of applied theatre seemed to have provided a means to modulate a temporary safe balance in this persisting ambivalence between expressing and withholding experiences

of collective violence and forced displacement. As a result they were able to mobilize reconstructive modes of trauma narration. Secondly, within this continuous dialectic tension, we observed how participants blended the personal and relational dimensions of making sense of their disclosing of traumatic life experiences in the project. In our case study, participants seem to be aware of their own personal needs in their search for protection from emotional deregulation in the moment of expression. At the same time, participants' expression of traumatic experience emerged from a continuous relational interaction and negotiation with multiple significant others, both present and silent listeners, during the rehearsals as well as during the public performances. This group of others included other participants, the director, the home and diasporic community, and the host and broader society. Consistent with other recent research on the communication of grief (Hooghe, Neimeyer, & Rober, 2012) and trauma in refugee communities (De Haene et al., 2012), the dialectic and relational nature of the process of trauma reconstruction urges us to move beyond a mere individualized understanding of the process of trauma narration, and towards a more relational one. In our case study, we observed how these relational processes of meaning-making brought about substantial impetuses for reconstruction in the process of narration. The presence of witnesses in the moment of narration seemed to install restorative and supportive traces, with holding suffering and thereby, introducing sparks of social and political change. These profound, political acts of disclosing traumatic experiences occurred in interaction with other group members, fellow sufferers from the home and diasporic community, as well as with the audience, acting as political and moral witnesses from the host and international communities. Yet, it is still vital to acknowledge the implicit power disparities and coercive dimensions that can disclose or silence narratives within relational encounters including within the research relationship. Hence, it is necessary to recognize the precarious nature of these relational vehicles of reconstruction within disrupted community ties and a broader socio-political climate of distrust and stigmatization.

With regard to clinical practice, our findings suggest the importance of mobilizing symbolic and artistic modalities of narration in modulating safe distances to traumatic content. Such a process of modulation through symbolic and creative expression may allow the therapist to make room for a dynamic dialogue, embracing both the space for narration as well as for silence and as-yet untold stories (De Haene et al., 2018; Quinlan, Khawaja, & Griffin, 2016; Rober, 2002; Rousseau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2003; C. Rousseau, Singh, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004). Furthermore, the profoundly aesthetic dimension of symbolic language in our case study gives

rise to a reflection on how the clinician can engage with art within the clinical space, not only to address, and reflect on, human suffering from a safe distance from traumatic experience, but also to transform human suffering into beauty (Dieterich-Hartwell & Koch, 2017). Beyond the referential, the performative aspects of symbolic language and the creation of beauty may allow alleviating feelings of meaninglessness in the aftermath of man-made atrocity, while at the same time offering a potential novel, overarching meaning based on a transformed reality and a shared experience of beauty as a potential vehicle to transmit suffering in a transcultural clinical setting. Furthermore, our findings also emphasize the reconstructive role of the presence of witnesses in different modalities of public acts of testifying. In this sense, clinicians may be encouraged to explore multiple pathways to mobilize witnesses in clinical encounters and embed the clinical space into a broader public and socio-political context (Huttunen, 2014; Stepakoff et al., 2011). For example, such a mobilization of witnesses of the home community could lead to the creation of group- and community-based interventions with refugee communities (Drozdek, Kamperman, Bolwerk, Tol, & Kleber, 2012; Weine, 2011). However, it is still vital for therapists in community-based interventions to remain attentive to personal or heterogeneous ethnoreligious sub-groups' needs and the potentially hurtful role of collective meaning-making ways of reconstruction. Furthermore, clinicians may enlarge the audience within the clinical space by including outsider-witness conversations (White, 2007) with representatives of both the home community, and representatives of the host country, for example by engaging with voices of cultural brokers. Yet, enlarging the clinical space to become a public one requires the clinician's responsibility to carefully peruse the potential risks of reactivating traumatic suffering or reiterating relational harm in order to be able to safeguard a safe space of narration. As a response, we turn once again to the reconstructive nature of symbolic reality, in which the clinician can engage with multiple symbolic pathways to bring voices and stories into the clinical space, or to transmit voices and stories to an audience outside the clinical space, opening doors towards the mitigation of isolation and social suffering in the aftermath of man-made atrocity.

Chapter 2

The role of within-group interactions: A qualitative analysis of coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre with Syrian refugees

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Abstract

Around the world, armed conflicts force people to leave their homes, families, and communities in search of protection from collective violence, and seek to regain a meaningful perspective on their lives within the borders of their Western host societies. As the dynamics of organized violence and forced displacement continue to impact and disrupt relationships in refugee communities, scholars in the field of refugee trauma care have increasingly argued for the need to understand spaces that are able to restore safety, meaning, and connectedness in the process of post-trauma reconstruction within those disrupted communities. This is reflected in the growing interest in community-based psychosocial interventions. In this article, we focus on applied theatre interventions with refugee communities. In doing so, we aim to understand the restorative role of within-group interactions in applied theatre. We performed a case study of a community-based applied theatre project with Syrian refugees who were recently resettled in Belgium. The qualitative analysis that was the result of this case study allows us to develop an understanding of the various processes of coping with trauma and exile that are at play in within-group interactions between Syrian community members in applied theatre, against a background of authoritarian rule, collective violence, and forced displacement.

Introduction

Around the world, armed conflicts force people to leave their homes, families, and communities in search of protection from collective violence, and seek to regain a meaningful perspective on their lives within the borders of their Western host societies. These dynamics of war and collective violence have a disruptive effect on the ties within the refugee community. Traces of organized violence and human rights violations imbue various parts of the social environment with a profound lack of security and trust. Furthermore, in the aftermath of forced displacement, refugee communities also have to cope with traumatic experiences of man-made violence, the loss of family and community relationships, and the complexity of the process of regaining a sense of social connectedness and belonging within a diasporic community and an unknown, at times uncertain and untrusting, Western resettlement country (Cleveland, Rousseau, & Guzder, 2014). Host countries often attribute homogeneous identities to refugee communities based on nationality. However inner tensions within refugee communities do not always disappear when in exile. Hence, relations within the refugee community play a dual role: there are a source of both social support and fear and polarization.

This pervasive impact of the dynamics of collective violence and forced displacement on community ties has increasingly urged scholars in the field of refugee trauma care to try to understand spaces that are able to restore safety, meaning, and connectedness in the process of coping with trauma and exile within those disrupted communities (Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016; Slobodin, Ghane, & De Jong, 2018). Here, the increased interest in the dynamics of community ties in refugees' coping with trauma and exile post-trauma reconstruction in trauma care research culminated in a growing body of empirical studies on the relational mechanisms and strengths of community-orientated psychosocial trauma interventions in the development of family or group-based interventions (Drozdek, Kamperman, Bolwerk, Tol, & Kleber, 2012; Pejic, Alvarado, Hess, & Groark, 2017; Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 2013; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014; Van Ee, 2018; Weine et al., 2008). In a community-orientated framework meant to enhance refugees' psychosocial well-being and social integration, the social environment, including the family and the larger community, is crucial in understanding, and coping with, trauma, forced migration and integration. In addition to creating bridges and structures that support community and social cohesion within fragmented families and communities, community-based practices of rehabilitation may also form another means of strengthening existing cultural coping strategies and practices, while still harnessing and rekindling cultural community resources and resilience (Pe-

jic et al., 2017; Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 2013; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). Furthermore, collective interventions could also offer a pathway to surpass the obstacles for refugees to connect with host countries' mental health services, while at the same time targeting everyday problems and acculturative stress in post-resettlement situations by negotiating cultural values and enhancing mutual understanding, respect and collaboration (Renner & Peltzer, 2008; Weine et al., 2008).

Within a variety of community programs there has been a growing interest in applied theatre interventions with refugees and asylum seekers (Balfour, 2013; Bundy, 2017; Cox & Wake, 2018; Dennis, 2013; Gilbert & Nield, 2008; de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Jeffers, 2008, 2012; Maedza, 2017; Tinius, 2016). At the heart of the values of applied theatre practices lies an emphasis on an involved, participatory and engaged approach to theatre, which aims to foster agency and empowerment (Jeffers, 2008; Nicholson, 2005). Given the increased awareness of how community ties may offer spaces to deal with loss, collective violence and diaspora, it is remarkable that there has not been much scholarly attention for the restorative dynamics of within-group processes in applied theatre (Bundy, 2017). Indeed, applied theatre research has predominantly focused on the expression of refugees' personal narratives as a potential vehicle for post-trauma reconstruction, usually meant to mobilize marginalized voices in society and promote participants' individual empowerment (Balfour & Woodrow, 2013). However, an in-depth examination of within-group processes is still lacking. Hence, in this paper, we aim to fill this gap by exploring how within-group interactions between community members in applied theatre may play a role in the way people cope with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement.

We conducted a case study of a participatory theatre project with Syrian refugees who were recently resettled in Belgium. The project was initiated in partnership with a community center and a professional theatre director in the autumn of 2017. We explored how refugee participants cope with life histories of collective violence and forced displacement throughout the theatre project. Furthermore, we tried to understand various forms of expression of personal experiences of collective violence and forced displacement, as well as the way participants gave meaning to these accounts for trauma and exile throughout the intervention.

In this article, we report on one specific part of our findings on participants' lived experiences of coping processes with trauma and exile in this theatre project by focusing on within-group interactions in order to explore the role of community relations in the way people deal with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre practices. In

order to understand these within-group interactions in their context, we first provide an outline of the Syrian historical and socio-political context and of current socio-political tendencies in the European multi-ethnic societies in which our case study takes place. Of course, such a brief overview can never grasp the inherent complexity of Syria's history and current state. Hence this outline merely tries to provide insight into how the within-group interactions in our case study are located within the broader sociocultural, political, and historical realm. In the second part of this paper, we first delineate our case study by providing an in-depth description of the creative process, and then outline our data collection methods. In our subsequent analysis we explore how within-group interactions in our case study may have offered restorative avenues for the participating Syrian refugees to cope with experiences of collective violence and a life in exile.

The Syrian 'mosaic' society: From revolution against authoritarian rule to a civil war

The modern state of Syria, officially the Syrian Arab Republic, is home to an array of ethnic and religious groups. Although there is no consensus on the exact proportionate composition of the Syrian population due to the absence of demographic data collection, scholars estimate that 75 percent of Syria's population is Sunni, followed by other Muslim minorities, including Alawites, Ismailis, Twelver Shi'a (11%), Christian (10%) and Druze (3%) (UNHCR, 2015). Furthermore, Syria is also populated by a Kurdish ethnic minority (approximately 10%), followed by Turkmen, Assyrians, Circassians and Armenians. In addition to this ethno-religious diversity rooted in Syria's long history, the country was already hosting a myriad of refugees and asylum-seekers, among others from Palestine and Iraq, before its current state of war. Although there is indeed a sense of cross-sectarianism, which lies at the heart of the Syrian revolution, scholars have pointed to the need to be aware of this ethno-religious diversity within Syria's history if one wants to understand and analyze the inherent complexity of the ongoing civil war in Syria from an outsider's perspective (Rousseau, 2014; van Dam, 2017).

Against the backdrop of a wave of revolutionary demonstrations in the Arab world in 2011, known as the Arab Spring, a series of peaceful marches and demonstrations took place in March 2011 in the city of Daraa in the South of Syria following the detention and abuse of 15 young school children, who had painted anti-regime graffiti on their school walls. These initial small-scale and peaceful marches in Daraa went on to become the symbolic birthplace of a Syrian wave of protest movements throughout the entire nation. After dec-

ades of authoritarian and repressive rule of the Ba'th regime (Group, 2018), these protests breached a culture of collective fear and paranoia supported by security and intelligence services *Mukhabarat* (Lesch, 2012). However, these revolutionary demonstrations were brutally and disproportionately suppressed by President Bashar al-Asad's regime, followed by violent and militarized confrontations between the regime and the opposition. Combined with the financial, political, and military support of foreign countries, these dynamics gave rise to a destructive civil war among Syrians and a proxy war between members of the international community at the expense of the Syrian population (Heydemann, 2013; van Dam, 2017). In this respect, many have argued that the Syrian regime and the international community have exacerbated the conflict by fuelling the uprising of violent religious extremism and ethno-religious sectarian polarization in the mosaic society of Syria and the Arab world (Al-Shami & Yassin-Kassab, 2016; Corstange & York, 2018; Droz-Vincent, 2014; Rousseau, 2014).

Seven years after the initial peaceful protests demanding freedom and democracy across Syrian ethno-religious groups, the Syrian conflict became one of the most destructive wars of modern times. It lead to a worldwide refugee displacement crisis. Over 5,6 million Syrians left the country, and more than 6 million were displaced internally in order to escape from collective violence and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2019). The large majority of the Syrian refugee community are confronted with tremendous challenges and poverty in provisional refugee camps at the borders of their country or in urban living environments in neighboring countries. This resulted in a wide range of psychosocial and physical problems among Syrian refugees (Hassan, Ventevogel, Jefee-Bahloul, Barkil-Oteo, & Kirmayer, 2016; Smeekes, Verkuyten, Celebi, Acarturk, & Onkun, 2017; UNHCR, 2015; Wells, Steel, Abo-Hilal, Hassan, & Lawsin, 2016). Although only a small minority of Syrian refugees has resettled within European borders, Syrians still formed the largest number of people granted refugee status in Belgium in 2016 (5436) and 2017 (3346) (CGRA, 2016, 2017). All of this gave rise to a mediatized narrative of a prodigious flood of refugees reaching Europe, which amplified a climate of polarization, anxiety and xenophobia in Europe (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016). Indeed, scholars have underscored how the recent European refugee crisis is transforming from a 'crisis' lived by refugees into a crisis 'caused' by refugees and lived by their host society members (De Cleen et al 2017, 34). There is a growing tendency to regard refugees and asylum seekers as a homogeneous threat to the social and economic status quo, which may foster the legitimization of violent acts, including subtle and structural discrimination, against the other in public discourse.

Methodology

Case study "Tijdelijk/Temporary"

The present study is based on a case study of the participatory theatre project *Tijdelijk* (translated as *Temporary*) with Syrian refugees resettled in Belgium, and was initiated in collaboration with a Brussels-based community center and a professional theatre director. The latter had continued his professional career as theatre maker and actor after fleeing from the war in Iraq, and had extensive experience with theatre-based community interventions in, among others, European prisons, schools and refugee camps. The community center and one intern, a Belgian student in Theatre Studies, supported the organization and preparation of the weakly workshops. Nine refugees (N=9), all between the age of 18 and 26, were involved in the project, all of whom had fled pre-displacement stressors of war or organized violence in Syria, had lived in Belgium between 1 and 5 years, and were granted permanent resident status. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling, in close cooperation with several youth initiatives, Syrian cultural institutions, cultural refugee institutions and initiatives, language centers for refugees and preparatory student programs at universities and colleges. Our sample represents the diversity of ethnic and religious backgrounds among the Syrian population by including Kurdish, Druze, Sunni and Ismaili participants.

In order to preserve a safe space of expression for group interactions, a good level of Dutch language skills was used as a criterion for inclusion. Rehearsals took place in the presence of a translator in order to ensure that participants always had the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue. During introductory individual meetings with prospective participants, the objectives and the course of the research process was clarified, and informed consent agreements were negotiated carefully (Hugman, Bartolomei, & Pittaway, 2011). The participants' right to withdraw was stressed repeatedly in several individual informal and formal process evaluations in the course of the study. The aim was to create a process of iterative negotiation of consent (Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2012).

The creative process: towards the new world

The theatre project consisted of eleven weekly collective theatre workshops of four hours in the community center. The creative process developed around the overall narrative structure of a collective imaginative transgression of an old world into a new and envisioned one as the main structuring device. This was delineated by the director at the start of the project. The old world symbolized the past, the new world the present, and the envisioned world the fu-

ture. In this way, the overall collective narrative suggested a temporal continuity from the past to the present and the future. This narrative served as the overall structure of the theatre process, which was composed of four different types of creative activities: creative movement and expression exercises, video-recorded interviews, the development and discussion of participants' creative writing material, and role-playing games and improvisational exercises.

Creating collective tableaux vivants. The transgression of the old to the new world was reflected in a steadily increasing collection of words selected by the director, as they appeared and reappeared in the course of the rehearsals. At the end of the creative process the following twenty-five words were selected.

Freedom
Fear
Happy
Flight
Memory
Embrace
Dead
Love
Farewell
History
Border
Time
Lost
Gain
Loss
Animals
Birth
Life
Sleep
Shock
Scream
Sorrow
Revolution
Danger
Selfie

Here, participants were invited to express these words bodily and non-verbally while reflecting on their meaning and associations. During the exercise, participants could verbally elaborate on their bodily expression within the group. Furthermore, as a group, they were encouraged to develop a collective *tableau vivant*, interweaving all group members' bodily expressions into a unifying realm for each word. In this exercise, which combined the possibility for mere nonverbal as well as verbal means of expression, participants could witness each other's bodily expressions of significant words associated with the past, present, and future. Steadily, the growing chain of words was translated into in a series of *tableaux vivants*, during which the participants very slowly transformed one word or one *tableau* into the other, from one emotion or memory to the other, from the past to the future.

Reflecting on video interviews. Second, the director asked each participant to reflect verbally on the meaning of some of the collected words in individually videotaped interviews. The responses of the participants varied from long silences and single words to long monologues including personal life trajectories and more general statements and opinions about the meaning of these words. During the subsequent rehearsals, the director showed a montage of the videotaped interviews, in which the chain of words was represented by verbal accounts of the participants. While watching these edited videos, participants could see themselves and each other while reflecting on potential differences and opposing opinions on the meaning of words such as 'freedom', 'flight', 'fear', 'happiness', 'memory', 'love' and 'history'.

Creating and sharing personal material. Thirdly, throughout the rehearsal process, the director encouraged participants to write or bring texts, stories, poems, or other creative material inspired by the creative process. This creative input, which established a connection between the rehearsals and the personal work and daily life of the participants, took place on a continuous basis throughout the rehearsal process. Some participants brought written texts, others brought drawings or songs. Seven participants decided to write texts themselves, which resulted into six prose texts and five poems. All creative writing material was brought into the rehearsal space and presented by the writers to the entire group and the director. Afterwards, all texts were translated into Dutch and were, in the following rehearsals, recited simultaneously in Arabic and Dutch. For example: one participant's poem, entitled 'Achilles', referred to heroes, gods, and goddesses of the Greek mythology and other Western cultural symbols.

> *Mother, you are greater than Thetis, mother of Achilles*
> *who made for him an impenetrable shield*
> *to protect his strong body.*
> *You made shields to protect my soul*
> *from love, passion, madness, and the acceptance of the other.*
> *Mother, you are greater than Thetis*
> *and therefore*
> *I will be stronger than Achilles.*
> (excerpt of 'Achilles')

Another participant wrote a prosaic dialogue between several fictive Syrian asylum seekers in a Belgian asylum center. In the course of this dialogue, he integrated his own voice while referring to the exercise of the collection of words in the rehearsal process.

> *Osama interrupts Mohammed, and asks me: "And you, what are you writing about? I say: "I participate in a theatre play with some refugees, but the organization and the audience are Belgian. I'm writing a text on some of the words that are central in the play.*
> *Osama: "Oh, which words?" I: "Love"*
> *Ilyas replies: "Love is when the smuggler likes you so much that he puts you on the sea when the waves are not that high".*
> (excerpt of 'Those who are recently defeated')

Envisioning a new world. Finally, through role-playing games and improvisation exercises, the participants were encouraged to enact the transformation of an old world into a new one, both on a personal level and as a group. For example, during one improvisation exercise, participants were asked to enact a gathering for a last supper before leaving to the new world. During another exercise, they were asked to pose as a king or a ruler of the new world. The participants could verbally generate ideas and values on how they as a king would imagine a new world. During a follow-up exercise, every participant could improvise a particular action he or she would use to exercise power upon the others if he or she were to be king. Whoever takes the king's crown, becomes the king. The participants compelled each other to sing, to dance, or laugh, but also to obey and abuse power. This exercise was aimed towards personal reflection on subtle forms of violence present in daily interactions, exercised by every individual against the backdrop of a polarizing social climate.

Temporary. As the premiere approached, the collection of created expressive verbal, choreographic, auditory and visual material, and theatrical scenes were arranged into a continuum of scenes in which all the participants were continuously present. The result was the public performance *Temporary*, of which every theatrical scene and every text was developed by the participants during the creative process. The performance was staged during three consecutive evenings in a community center in Brussels, followed by three performances in the state theatre in Antwerp during the following week. In this respect, it is important to note that the participants were able to shape and reshape the very form of their participation on stage within the public performance at all times, and were allowed to decide whether they wanted to perform or not up until one week before the premiere would take place. In the end, all participants decided to take part in the public performance.

Data collection

In order to perform a contextualized and in-depth process analysis of participants' coping processes and expression of personal narratives during this project, several types of data were collected through participant observation during the rehearsals and public performances and by means of three in-depth semi-structured interviews per participant. Both the participant observation and the interviews were conducted by the first author of this contribution. Before the start of this study, the ethical committees of two involved universities granted ethical approval. Weekly team meetings with the research team were held to ensure rigorous supervision on ethical decisions that arose during the course of the project, with special attention to relational ethics in the dynamics between participants, director, and researcher (Vervliet, Rousseau, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2015).

Participant observation. During the workshops, the lead author systematically took field notes, guided by an observational checklist that was developed in a pilot-study (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018), and participated herself in several workshop exercises. All rehearsals were videotaped and reviewed by the first author. In this way, verbal, auditory, and corporeal interventions between participants and the director, group interactions, developed written material, stories, chorographical phrases, auditory material, and other non-verbal dynamics were registered.

Interviews. The interviews were conducted in three stages during the course of the theatre project. The first in-depth semi-structured interview was carried out six weeks after the start of the project, using a tape-assisted recall

(TAR) procedure in order to facilitate the joint exploration of interpersonal processes (Elliott, 1986; Rober, 2005). In this interview, three or four selected video fragments of particular actions within the rehearsals were evaluated together with the participant. By watching the video-fragments together, participants were invited to reflect on their experiences within the project, including their interactions with other participants, the researcher, the director and the intern during the workshops. The second interview was conducted one week after the final performance and invited the participants to explore their experiences of the performances and interactions within the group and with the audience. Five months after the end of the project, additional individual member reflections were conducted with all participants. Beyond a mere verification of our first analysis, the aim of these member reflections aimed to offer an opportunity to include participants' voices in the data analysis, to renegotiate informed consent, and to give feedback on the entire research process. All in-depth interviews lasted approximately two hours and were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and Dutch, with the support of a professional translator.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted in different stages and involved an in-depth within-case and cross-case analysis of all empirical material derived from detailed field notes, interview transcripts, and poems written by the participants. In the first phase, we explored participants' individual accounts by means of a case-centered thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) through a close contextualized reading of both ad verbatim interview transcripts and transcribed member reflections. In a second phase, a cross-case inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used in order to grasp participants' experiences of coping processes and expression of personal testimonies in the project. After an intensive rereading of all data material, a hierarchical coding structure with categories and subcategories was developed. All transcripts and written texts were stored, organized and coded by using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 12. Initial codes were reviewed by rereading coded material in order to track relationships between codes, prominent overarching themes and subthemes relevant to our research questions using memo writing in Nvivo 12.

Throughout our data analysis, our thematic analysis increasingly indicated the overarching importance of various coping processes at play in the interaction between the participants within the project. Consequently, we decided to further scrutinize these within-group interactions by zooming in on relevant codes and sub-codes, for example codes related to how participants

made sense of coping processes in relation to the group as a whole, and with respect to coping processes in relation to specific other participants. Furthermore, we more closely examined codes that addressed participants' collective meaning-making as a group or as a community, in relation to mechanisms of reconstruction. After enquiring into relevant themes and subthemes, cross-case themes relating to within-group interactions were gradually defined, reviewed and refined. In the context of this papers' interest in exploring restorative dynamics in community relations in applied theatre interventions, we report in our next paragraph on this particular part of our findings.

The entire data analysis process was supervised by a second researcher, i.e. the last author of this article, who was not involved in collecting of the data, by closely reading and annotating the data in order to further enhance a complex and in-depth understanding of our findings by means of data crystallization (Tracy, 2010).

Findings

In this section, we present our thematic analysis on the possible role of within-group interactions in the process of post-trauma reconstruction in our case study. Firstly, we describe how participants' interactions with each other throughout the project turned the group into a relatively safe haven where participants could reestablish a sense of belonging after the loss of family and community that resulted from a life in exile. Within this temporary holding environment that enabled the reconstruction of pseudo-familial and community bonds, we identified three dimensions of coping with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement. Firstly, within this temporary safe haven of the group, participants seemed to be able to restore a sense of personal continuity in exile in the aftermath of forced displacement. Secondly, through an experience of connectedness among group members, participants could rediscover a glimpse of hope for social and political change after experiences of collective violence within Syria's particular history and current state of war. Finally, interacting with other group members in a safe environment may have enabled participants to reshape cultural belonging and transcend Syria's cultural fragmentation in a variety of ways in the aftermath of trauma and displacement.

The group as a temporary safe haven in the context of a fragmented social environment

Participant 4:

> *My existence doesn't mean only my body and my appearance. My family, my friends and my surroundings form my existence. So, now, that I'm here, all those things are absent. But I'm standing here as a body of course, but all those other parts that shape my existence are not here. (…) I feel that I exist when I'm surrounded by my family, my friends, people for whom I'm important, valuable. Here in Belgium I don't have any network, I don't have friends or more, it is very hard to make friends.*

In this interview excerpt, one participant testifies how forced displacement gave rise to a radical rupture in his social ties with family, friends, and community members, which heavily impacts his life as a refugee in Belgium. Indeed, all participants indicated that being forcibly displaced and living in exile in Belgium, separated from family, community members and their homeland Syria, resulted in strong feelings of loss of belonging. One of the participants described the life in exile in Belgium as the life of a newborn.

Participant 1:

> *If you flee, you leave behind your family. You leave behind your friends and the people who have put their marks on your life. You have to start over somewhere else. It is like being born anew.*

It is important to note that restoring social cohesion between Syrians and being part of their own community in Belgium seemed to be complicated in day-to-day interactions. Participants identified a certain urge for many Syrians resettled in Belgium to successfully establish a social homogeneous network with the local Belgian community in order to expedite the integration process. One participant explicitly raised this issue in a self-written prose text, which was performed during the rehearsals, by outlining the fictive life histories of several Syrian refugees in exile.

> *"In Turkey we are more Turkish than the Turks.*
> *If a Turk works 12h a day, we work 15 h.*
> *And if a Turk prays 5 times a day, we pray 7 times.*
> *In Greece we arrive in the morning as a refugee at the coast in a rubber dinghies / And in the evening we return to the coast as a tourist.*
> *In Belgium Iyad convinced his teacher of the integration course that he is more Belgian than the Belgian."*

This focus on a rapid integration in Belgian society seemed to hamper the reconstruction of social ties and social support structures between newly arrived Syrian community members in the host country.

Participant 2:

> *The social life here is totally something else than our life in Syria. We need people, on one way or another. We rely on each other. And here, it is difficult cause we are not allowed to do that. You cannot do that. … Nobody has the experience to restart in a new country and for all the Syrians that I know, they have the same idea: "No, I just want to have contact with Belgian people, to learn the language faster, to force myself."*

Through our explorations of the dynamics underlying this altering of social networks and frequent distancing from the Syrian diaspora community, it seemed that participants attributed this to, among others, the increased social pressure that characterizes the life in the host country, and their own obligation to adhere to regulations of the Belgian social system in order to grasp the opportunities for education and employment they need in order to rebuild their lives. Furthermore, participants accounted that the social pressure to integrate successfully in Belgian society is reinforced by an increasing responsibility to take financially care of parents and family members in Syria, who often lack access to basic human needs as food and health in war-torn areas.

Participant 7:

> *Now, that pressure of life here goes hand in hand with the problems in Syria. Our contact, still, with Syria, makes our life very difficult. My mother has for example taught for 30 years and now has a pension of 35 euros. Just by thinking about this, I have problems. How can you study here, how can you try to make your dreams come true and look into the future? I main, the past grasps us, still follows us constantly, and hampers our life. … What is even worse is actually the feeling of powerlessness. Now, your parents need you. As long as the situation is difficult, you have to support them, at least financially. You can't be there. But financially you can't either. That is hard.*

The strong aspiration for a successful integration in exile seemed to be vital to be able to answer to the moral obligation and responsibility towards family and community members left behind in Syria. Adhering to the reconstruction of a successful future perspective in a safe Western country seemed to be an important source of meaning that can help them to make sense of the experience of forced displacement and separation from their parents and home country.

Participant 1:

> *I left my country in a moment it was revolting. I had to be there, but there were other things that had priority. I don't think that I didn't do my duty by fleeing. For me, there were more reasons to flee. I didn't do it for myself. It was more for my family. For the future, for my future, and the future of Syria. I also want to help Syria in the future with the reconstruction of a new Syria when the war is over.*

At the same time, the strong commitment to fulfill this successful future perspective could also exacerbate feelings of distress and induce feelings of failure anxiety.

Participant 5:

> *I lost everything. I miss my family. I came here to study. So I am very afraid that I will not be able to study here the same subject that I wanted to study in Syria. I do not have many friends here. I have some, but I am always busy studying.*

Furthermore, a participant explained that the deliberative avoidance of developing a social network and social support structures within the Syrian community is the result of the predominantly negative image of Syria and Syrian society in the host country. This image seemingly blocked some potential pathways for reconstructing a positive Syrian identity in diaspora. He indicated that Syrians arriving in Belgium tend to eschew their Syrian identity through a dynamics of social distancing and 'belgianization' of cultural practices, since being associated with the stigmatized notion of the 'Syrian refugee' seemed to be a cause of feelings of shame and discomfort.

Participant 3:

> *If you are not proud of your country or your culture, than you don't want to show it and you want to run away from it. That is a problem. … If you are not proud of yourself, you won't make it. And in Syria, there is a problem between us. When people talk about us as Syrians, we have to know ourselves: No, we are not Syrians anymore. Every person has its country and its house now here. People shouldn't talk about refugees as like a society.*

The participant formulated his wish to tackle these dynamics of social isolation and the deliberate loss of the Syrian identity within the Syrian diaspora by stimulating a sense of pride and human dignity in the word 'refugee':

Participant 3:

> *I mean that we should always stay loyal to the word 'refugee'. Not because we will always flee, but because we will always stay refugees. And we have to get a good feeling towards the word. We are like that and we will always stay a refugee from Syria. We should not try to become Belgian, we will not become Belgian. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't love the culture and respect it. No, if I'm here with you, I'm here with my story. I will not repeat what you do. Otherwise, I will become a mirror and mirrors do not have a heart.*

Against the backdrop of these dynamics at play in a post-resettlement process of acculturation, taking part actively in a collective engagement with other Syrians during the rehearsals seemed to have led to a circumvention of this disconnection between Syrian community members in exile, and to the re-installment of a sense of belonging for the participants.

Participant 2:

> *For example, (others participant's name), he intended to never have contact anymore with Syrian people, but he had to do it and for him it was like "No, it is important to have contact with Syrian people from my family or group". And for (other participant's name), it was the same. … So, according to me, projects that bring Syrian people together, and also projects that bring Syrian and Belgian people together are both important. Very important. And you did both, so thank you.*

Indeed, all participants pointed out to the pivotal importance of their membership of the group and of their interactions with other group members. By establishing friendships and social relationships during the rehearsals, it seemingly offered them the opportunity to reestablish social ties with the Syrian community in the host. Participants often described the group as a kind of new family in the resettlement country.

Participant 1:

> *We became like a family. We came together and we're leaving together.*

Participants indicated that the group, like a family, created a supportive and loving environment, with vehicles of taking care for others and being taken care of that reinforced feelings of belonging.

Participant 3:

> *For everyone, the most beautiful thing what we saw in the project, was being together. We miss each other. Some of us are maybe embarrassed to say it, but believe me, everyone wants to come so badly and say to each other: "I missed you", "I did not see you an entire week and I missed you".*

This temporary shelter may have generated, from the side of the participants, feelings of reliance and mutual interdependence, which stand in contrast with their lives in exile, which are marked by social isolation and exclusion. At the same time, we were also able to witness the coexistence of joy and fear in participants' experiences of belonging. After all, there is always the danger of potential, reiterating loss.

Participant 5:

> *I am a very honest person and sometimes my honesty can hurt people. But at a certain point, I started to depend on the group. I love this group and I did not want to leave or lose them. That is why I have also adapted a bit. My honest character could perhaps hurt the others, not on purpose, I just do it spontaneously, but I have adapted a bit to the norms of the group.*

Interacting within the group may have offered participants the opportunity to discover and rediscover, each at his or her own pace and sometimes at a safe distance, interpersonal trust and reliability in a temporary safe haven.

Participant 4:

> *There is a unique dynamic within the group. There is respect; there is acceptance of the other. Perhaps you have noticed that I do not want to become too much involved in the activities together as going to the restaurant. Out of fear that I will have stronger longings towards the group and that they will leave me. A bit of separation anxiety, those feelings I have.*

It should be noted that participants also referred to the importance of the ethnic diversity of the group, as it contained various ethno-religious backgrounds, including both Syrian and Belgian members (i.e. the researcher and the intern). As such, the group's temporary shelter provided pathways to reestablish a sense of belonging to both the Syrian community, and to the resettlement society. Within this temporary safe environment that enabled the reconstruction of pseudo-familial and community bonds, we identified the following three dimensions of coping processes with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement.

A sense of personal continuity in exile

By engaging with this temporary haven, participants seem to be able to construct a sense of continuity, since the activities in the group allowed them, at certain moments, to rediscover their past and recover parts of the rupture in their lives that was caused by forced displacement. One of the participants described how belonging to a group with people from his home country created unprecedented moments of transcending the discontinuity that was installed between his life in Syria and in Belgium, where he felt cut off from his original network and environment. Referring to this discontinuity as 'number one', his Syrian self, and 'number two', his self in exile, he pointed out that belonging to the group facilitated ways to rediscover his 'number one'. This sense of personal continuity formed an impetus to pick up his old passion for creative writing and find trust in the ability to be emotionally attuned with himself and others. In reflecting on his experience of the creative writing exercise he performed, he emphasized the importance of the group:

Participant 3:

> *It is actually not the content or the text as such, but the cooperation, the belonging to this group. This group has made me think about myself. So it made me remember a bit my past when I was in Syria. It made me think of (participant's name), the Syrian. (…) I still have the ability to have an emotional impact on my environment, but I don't have confidence anymore in my capacity. So this text, in this group, they have, my trust came back. So it is not self-confidence, it is just trust in my feelings.*

Another participant described his life's uprootedness as having his body here in Belgium, but his soul still stuck in Syria, since the people who define and confirm him as a social being are still in Syria. He explained that, when he felt surrounded and supported by the presence of other group members during the collective movement exercises in the rehearsals, there were some precious moments during which he rediscovered the presence of his soul.

Researcher:

> *She was here?*

Participant 4:

> *Yes. Me and my soul, my heart.*

Researcher:

> *was here.*

Participant 4:

> *Yes totally (laughs). That is really true. If my soul is not here, than I don't feel so much beauty, it was fantastic!*

Furthermore, it seemed that witnessing other participants' actions may have strengthened a sense of overcoming the discontinuity shared in all participants' life histories. For example, one participant indicated how seeing other participants' competency in writing, cooperating, and playing throughout the theatre rehearsals showed her that it was possible to overcome the challenges that are the result of a ruptured life, and continue personal growth.

Participant 7:

> *Why was that beautiful, according to me, why was that fantastic? Because we, Syrians, we lost a certain part of time. Normally, in our development, we have to go to university and learn something, but in that period we have war, we just missed it. During the rehearsals we just realized, nothing is actually lost, they can really make it.*

A sense of hope for political and social change

By the time the project started, between 109.000 - 500.000 people had been killed, tens of thousands were still missing, and hundredths of thousand had been injured in the protracted Syrian conflict, which was characterized by regular outbursts of extreme violence in certain areas of the country followed by hardened intransigence of the parties involved (UNHCR, 2017). The Syrian civil war had entered its seventh year, leaving the country socially divided in a pro- and an anti-regime camp. Syrians were displaced without a glimpse of hope of ever returning to a peaceful and united home country. At the backdrop of these ongoing macro-political dynamics that shattered the Syrian community, the within-group interactions in this project's temporary safe haven seem to have opened avenues that could help individuals overcome these macro-level dynamics.

Participant 8:

> *In our society is it pretty evident that people hurt each other with words. But in this project, it was totally different. I have tried to, that we should stay positive, talk positive about the others and don't hurt each other with words. That is something I have tried to avoid as much as possible.*

Two participants symbolically described the feeling of togetherness and connection among group members as the experience of being one body. Here, they seem to portray an 'esprit de corps' in its true etymological sense.

Participant 4:

> *I got the feeling that we are one body. And that person is playing with different fingers. That's how I felt it: that we are connected to each other. We can understand each other without talking or without eye contact. Just with feelings.*

While exploring the meaning of this experience of one body, it became clear that, for participants, the group resembled the past unity of the Syrian nation before the beginning of the civil war:

Participant 6:

> *What does this one body mean to me? It refers to Syria in the past, when we were there. The people were one. They agreed. There was love. There was help, people helping each other. These are actually characteristics of Syria. So it was a representation of how the Syrian community used to be.*

The group seemed to embody, in the most literal sense, social and political change and the ability to transcend ethno-religious difference by means of collective expressive movement exercises, transforming *tableaux vivants*, and, symbolically, in their successful collaboration towards the end result of the project.

Participant 3:

> *So that was cooperation and that was really beautiful, cause that is what we need in our country. Working together. Now we have a shattered country. Nobody will help us. We have to help ourselves. And that is for me, responsibility for the future. So I have the feeling, we can, this is more than theatre, and perhaps it becomes something else. This was a small test of theatre, but for me that resembles that we can work together, for something more as theatre, for example to build up our country, for our family, for … yes (smiles).*

One participant described how collectively collaborating as Syrians within the theatre project served for him as a way to rewrite Syria's history in the present and criticize the dominant adherence to Syria's and Arabia's glorious historical past as a pathway to unify the Syrian community.

Participant 1:

> *We want to build something now. Something great, something good. In that way, in the future, we can become history, we will be remembered as good history builders (laughs).*

It became apparent that the experience of group harmony, solidarity and collective strength by means of collective exercises and collaborating towards a joined public performance may have offered participants a glimpse of hope for the future. Within the inner social arena of the rehearsal space, participants seemed to witness a careful transcendence of the dynamics of national division and reinforced sectarianism.

Participant 4:

> *It just means that it is open, that there is still hope, that there are also Syrians that want to agree, that want to look for that cohesion in their community.*

Researcher:

> *Can you help me to understand what that hope means for you?*

Participant 4:

> *The hope that all Syrians come together, agree, become one voice. Than, they can join against the bad guys, than the war can come to an end, than you can make our country better, just like the Europeans. Before, they were divided, but afterwards they agreed and became a stronger country.*

Reshaping cultural belonging

We witnessed that, to varying degrees and often at a prudent pace, participants actively took part in the establishment of the group as a connected cultural community that could embrace Syria's religious, political and cultural mosaic and overcome the community's geographical and political fragmentation. In this sense, interacting with other group member in the project may have enabled participants to reshape cultural belonging within the group through various ways. In this final paragraph, we document through five vignettes, how participants engaged in constructing a shelter and how they, as a group, tried to move beyond social isolation and cultural fragmentation and took cautious steps towards negotiating and restoring cultural, religious and human values in the aftermath of Syria's history of collective violence and forced displacement.

Transcending fragmentation through rooting in a shared cultural history: The jasmine and olive tree. One of the participants explained that, in the current times of conflict, internal division and displacement, there are still some cultural symbols and practices anchored in Syria's history that will unite the Syrian people: Dabke, the olive tree, and jasmine.

Participant 6:

> *So there is little what unites us, including Dabke and the jasmine tree and the olive tree and or the rest nothing. There are many, many differences, there is a war, there is lots of misery, but those three things will stay forever. Those will stay the same.*

The participant clarified that, although Dabke exists in a wide variety of forms in the Arab world, Syrians, in spite of their regional backgrounds or political differences, will always dance the same Dabke:

Participant 6:

> *Image, if there are two soldiers fighting at different sides, one at the side of the Syrian army and the other one at the side of the opposition. If there isn't a battle off course at that moment, and there is music of Dabke, than they will dance together. Yes, the Dabke is the same in whole Syria, in all the provinces, they dance the same Dabke. For example in Damascus or Aleppo, it is not a different kind of Dabke, it is all the same, in entire Syria.*

In fact, dancing Dabke turned into a reoccurring collective activity during rehearsal breaks, and marked the end of each rehearsal, inducing the rehearsal space with joy, laughter and a symbolical closure of the day. Participants described it as an important social bounding activity, as well as a vehicle to jointly cope with stress during the hours before the performances. In the same vein, jasmine, a cultural symbol of peace and a peaceful Damascus (it refers to the jasmine trees and blossoms that fill the streets of Damascus), seemed to elicit a feeling in the entire Syrian community that united them in the memory of Syria and its cultural history.

Participant 6:

> *Always when we look at jasmine, than we all remember Syria and Damascus (…). There is a strong connection between jasmine and peace. Jasmine refers to Damascus and Damascus radiates calmness and especially the old streets. If you enter the city, than you just feel peaceful, a calm feeling, and also that jasmine tree gives a very good, a very strong smell that helps you to relax. It is just special. And that smell refers to Damascus.*

Remarkably, several participants turned to jasmine as a symbol in their written prose and poems. In this particular case, the participant indicated that this was not a surprise for him: he knew beforehand that other participants would refer to jasmine and olive trees in their texts. He explained that he also delibe-

ratively chose to include the symbol of jasmine in his text, which he performed during the rehearsal towards the others.

Participant 6:

> *I know beforehand, if I will use jasmine in my text, the receivers, the Syrian, the participants, will get the same feeling as I have. Just like the plant hashish, so they get the same feeling.*

Apparently, for this participant, the symbol of jasmine could function as a vehicle to actively re-forge the bonds within the group, as if it was to reconnect all Syrians. The olive tree as well, as a universal symbol of peace and life shared by all religions, offered him a way to continuously address the other participants in their shared humanity. For him, a focus on universal human dimensions was the only way in which to overcome the current division within the Syrian population.

Participant 6:

> *That is actually the only way. That we talk about human nature, not about the differences. Like this, we can bring together the Syrian people, particularly in a country where there is war for seven, eight years.*

Mobilizing a dialogue across religious difference: A response in prose. With the bringing nuance to the characterization of Islam within the group, another participant decided to write a piece of prose as a reply to a text with elements referring to religion that was written and performed by one of the other participants during the rehearsals.

> *Afterwards he whispered to himself: "didn't I lost enough already?" He remembered the first word that came upon his holy book: "Read …" He discovered that religion encouraged him to wish for his brother that was he wishes for himself, to keep his promises, to obey his parents and to be good for his neighbor. His religion incites him to stand up for himself and his rights, and to not kill.* She taught him: "whoever saves one life - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely." [1]. She taught him to have respect for another man's faith. "To you your religion and to me mine." [2]

1 Quran, Surah 5 "The Table", verse 32.

2 Quran, Surah 109 "The Disbelievers", verse 109.

In a particular part of his text, quoted above, he included some verses of the Quran in order to convey a message of mutual respect towards each other's religion. He clarified that, although he respects other group members' opinion on religion, the project and performance should be able to include and embody both perspectives.

Participant 4:

> *I wrote part of the Quran (cites verses in Arabic). That means 'you have religion and I have religion'. That means 'I will respect you and you should respect me as well'. (…) So one of the texts was on religion and I've written a critic on that text. I would like that both texts are performed in the performance or none of them.*

One could say that, through the use of this text, he actively facilitated the existence of multiple and contradictory meanings and promoted mutual understanding and religious tolerance in the group. As such, he was able to introduce a sparkle of change in the social environment of the group, symbolically representing tolerance between two arduously conflicting worlds in the current host country and in the Syrian conflict.

Embodied transformation of cultural stigma: Body revolution. One participant tentatively addressed the dynamics of cultural stigmatization in the Syrian community by breaking the taboo on homosexuality within the group. In an improvisation exercise during one of the rehearsals, one in which only male participants were present, the director invited the participants to playfully perform their arrival into the new world. The audience would represent the new world while the participants were encouraged to convince the audience of their significance and strength. The exercise resulted into an endless repeating catwalk of men being cheered by the audience, represented by the researcher and the intern, and by each other. During this exercise, one of the participants seemed to bring up homosexuality, wordless, merely by using his body and gestures. The participant continued to represent homosexuality in a less hesitating way, followed by other group members improvising other gestures and movements. Although homosexuality did not become a topic of group discussion after the exercise, non-verbal group interactions, moments of stillness and gentle laughter seemed to infuse the rehearsal space with a sense of acceptance. In the research conversations, the participant indicated that, although he did not yet dare to write about homosexuality in his prose, speaking with his body may have been a first important step towards raising this theme within the community.

Participant 3:

> *I have to become a bit stronger to dare that.*

Researcher:

Here you talked about it, not with words, but…

Participant 3:

> *With my body*

Researcher:

> *In a strong manner*

Participant 3:

> *I find it beautiful, I find it very good and I hope that I can raise this in a text. Perhaps with your help, the help of all of you, the good people that support our case, we can talk about those themes and defend them.*

Addressing the role of culture in political oppression: 'Fuck Zenobia'. Throughout the rehearsals, several participants took a stance towards Syria's historical past by including Syrian cultural symbols such as Zenobia. These symbols supported them to deal with the daily struggle of Syrians' lives in exile while envisioning hope for the future and negotiating cultural values in the Syrian diaspora community. For example, one participant embedded her life story in a historical transition between the past of a united and flourishing Arab world and an envisioned return to that past in the future. For this participant, a collective narrative stressing the cultural wealth of Syria's and pan-Arabia's history, helped her understand her present and gave her hope for the future. Throughout the project, she actively engaged in finding support for this collective narrative within the group, with the aim of altering the dominant negative self-image within the Arab community in exile. Therefore, instead of writing a text as the others, she decided to sing a famous Arabic song about the Arab homeland as a symbol for a united Arab world.

Participant 9:

> *In our Arabic countries, we cannot achieve anything. We cannot rebuild a future. We are in a kind self-fulfilling prophecy. For me it is important to recall these Arabs through the use of this song, that we are able to achieve, that we at least should keep hope. (…) I will be happy if I could change the opinion or the image of Arabs, that there is no hope.*

However, throughout the project, she was also confronted with other group members who did not share her attachment to Syria's history as a means of constructing hope and installing change in Syria. In fact, some participants explicitly distanced themselves from a positive valuation of Syria's collective

history. They expressed this by withdrawing verbally during the individually videotaped interviews, or symbolically in movement exercises when they were invited to express the word 'history'. One participant explicitly uttered his critique on the adherence to the nation's historical past by swearing, in his written text, in a strong Syrian dialect, about predominant Syrian historical symbols and figures such as Ugarit, a historical important prosperous trade city in Syria founded around 3000, and Zenobia, the illustrious queen of Palmyra.

> *Fuck Zenobia, if a small girl has to suffer from cold in her tent. Fuck Ugarit, the first alphabet ever, if Abu Khalid, a man of 67 years old has to sit irritated in the station of Ghent because he can't write 'Brussels' in Dutch and therefore can't buy a train ticket to go back to his home in Schaerbeek.*

He explained how cultural symbols, including Zenobia and the Arab standard language, were and are still used by dictatorial rule, to blind the Syrian people for, and impede them from, revolting against actual injustice and inhumanity. By writing and performing a piece of prose within the group, the participant seem to encourage a discerning reflection and negotiation of past cultural symbols in the light of Syria's current crisis and its citizens, rather than an uncritical perpetuation of the adherence to Syria's glorious past.

Living vulnerability as part of integration trajectories: Behind the theatre curtain. As a way of counterbalancing the focus on resilience and adaptation to adversity that is dominant in the Syrian diaspora, one participant wanted other group members to exhibit their vulnerability towards each other. By advocating vulnerability in his written prose, the participant aimed to pave the way for other participants to reconnect with each other and transcend the dynamics of social isolation that is at play in day-to-day interactions between Syrians with a strong focus on successful integration.

Participant 3:

> *I would just like to say to the people, I find it hard. I don't feel at home. I would like to say that to the people in order for them to feel at home here one day. But just acting, to stay acting, that is hard, acting before the OCMW, acting before life, acting on the street, acting with your clothes, acting with, etc. Just stay who you are. Work on your weaknesses in order to become strong. Go now, and stay yourself. Because, it is not good for this country, and not good for you to act. (…). The group tries to show to each other that we are strong or that is good or I can speak Dutch very well, I can eat Belgian food, I can … I don't agree with this, at all.*

Indeed, for many participants, the future public performances created a vehicle to mobilize a sense of belonging to the Belgian host society. For the participants, the envisioned relational interaction with Belgian community members during the public performances functioned as a way to express their social integration and act as full members of Belgian society. Participating in a successful public performance in the host society seemed to offer them pathways to foster a more positive public perception of Syrian refugees. In this respect, the participant outlined the importance of the moments behind the theatre curtains in the aftermath of the end of the performance, when the participants wept in silence and hugged each other at the backdrop of the audience's fading applause.

Participant 3:

> *At that very moment, I understood that we need each other. Not merely, I need them or they need me, really, we need each other. (…). We always try to show each other that everything is fine with us. But behind the curtain there was a moment where we are, we look like ourselves, we look like our weakness, because either ways, we have a lot of problems, but always, we try to show other people that everything is fine.*

The question remains how the theatre project may have reinstalled a focus on Syrian refugees' resilience within the host society by creating a public platform showing successfully integrated Syrians on a public stage in Belgium. In doing so, it was walking a fine line between agency and the reiteration of powerlessness. Furthermore, it urges applied theatre scholars to reflect critically on the complexity of staging vulnerability as "re-enactments of victimhood" (Jeffers, 2008, p. 217) while integrating the voices of refugees themselves within this debate.

Discussion

In our study we examined the restorative role of group interactions in an applied theatre project with Syrian refugees. More particularly, we focused on the role these interactions can play in the aftermath of a long history of authoritarian rule, human rights violations, civil war, and forced displacement. It became clear how the group provided a temporary and relatively safe haven, which offered important tools to reinstall a sense of personal continuity in disrupted life trajectories and communities, and hope for political and social change in the Syrian conflict and its history of collective violence. Finally, we observed how the interactions within the group's shelter enabled participants

to reshape cultural belonging in the aftermath of collective violence and cultural fragmentation. In this regard, it is important to note that participants' reshaping of cultural belonging was repeatedly the result of single participants' initiatives. Participants' agency in the group's development of mutual trust, solidarity and collective strengths may have created a source of individual empowerment within the project.

What is also remarkable is that the reconstruction of cultural belonging within the group unfolded predominantly in a symbolical communicative manner through the body, cultural symbols, music, and prose, as illustrated above in our vignettes above. One could say that the symbolic expression in the applied theatre project seemed to create relatively protected ways of negotiating cultural belonging for the sake of the group's cohesion in times of political polarization in the Syrian diaspora society. By having offered non-verbal, symbolic and embodied pathways for restoration in within-group interactions, the creative-based modality of applied theatre may also have served a more adequate appropriation of a culturally sensitive practice for the Syrian participants. Furthermore, the relatively limited resurgence of within-group conflicts and the preservation of the cohesion of the group, despite within-group ethnic and religious differences, may be also due to the fact that tackling stereotypes and stigmatization surrounding refugees in the host country quickly became a common challenge and objective of the group as a whole. However, it also became apparent that within the relative safe shelter of the group, explicit political narratives remained tacit.

Participant 4:

> *What made our cohesion fast, is the fact that we, we also have something in common. That is, we are all opponents of the regime, but despite this, we don't talk about politics with each other. Why? Each of us has its own opinion on the opposition. And that is my tip for you, for the future, for example if you would found another group to do another project, than, there has to be an agreement: don't talk about politics with each other.*

Such silencing mechanisms in within-group interactions may have been at the expense of participants' personal or particular ethno-religious group-based needs towards reconstruction of meaning in the aftermath of man-made violence. We could note that the research conversations, literally and symbolically outside the rehearsal space, through their reflective perspective on a joined experience may have offered a space within the project to introduce an avenue towards a more individual reconstruction of meaning in a co-constructed dialogue with the researcher, as representative of the host community and as an

outsider. In this respect, we should also acknowledge that the theatre project was limited in duration. Future research on longer-term interventions with refugees could further investigate the role of symbolic communication pathways within group interactions in relation to the group's needs and development and how it could foster the awareness of the other beyond the risk for further polarization. It might also be interesting to raise questions on vehicles of restoration in culturally heterogeneous refugee groups or same-sex refugee groups, which could guide further research on applied theatre interventions. While we recognize that the findings of this study are embedded within the Syrian context, with the observed findings we intend to contribute to a further understanding of how within-group dynamics affect pathways of restoration in group-based and creative psychosocial programs with refugees from different countries of origin and cultural backgrounds. After all, at the heart of symbolic ways of expression lies not merely an Achilles' shield of distance towards intricate and constrained subjects, but also a bridge towards underlying universal values and a shared humanity fostering the acceptance of the other, moral complexity, and the restoration of human trust.

PART 2

Methodological reflections in understanding participation in dramaturgical practices in applied theatre with refugees

Chapter 3

"Behind every stone awaits an Alexander": Unraveling the limits of participation within micro- and macro-dramaturgy of participatory refugee theatre

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Abstract

In this article, we question the unilateral discourse of benefit of participation in participatory refugee theatre in the context of a growing socio-political climate of polarization and stigmatization of refugees in European countries of resettlement. By integrating critical voices from the fields of applied theatre and refugee research, we analyze the micro- and macro-dramaturgy of a Berlin-based participatory refugee theatre project. Through this analysis, we explore how refugees' participation entails opportunities for empowerment, agency, and giving voice, but also risks disempowerment and silencing in the interconnected relations between participant, theatre maker, audience and the broader socio-political context.

Introduction

Participatory theatre projects can give birth to collectives or micro-communities that attempt to strengthen "democracy by reinvigorating its associational and participatory aspects" (Fleishman, 2016, p. 205). Defined as an ongoing process with shared ownership, involvement in a collaborative ensemble may offer participants the chance to "participate artistically and socially in the practice of freedom" (Neelands, 2007, p. 316). A participatory ethos in theatre might bring about unique opportunities in terms of agency, empowerment and the possibility of expressing lived experiences. However, recent research on applied theatre also points at some possible unforeseen counterproductive outcomes of participatory theatre projects, as broader socio-political dynamics penetrate the performative shelter and obscure the project's genuine, beneficent intentions for participation (Thompson, 2009).

In this article, we discuss the current socio-political contexts in which refugees' participation in applied theatre practices in European multi-ethnic societies take place. In both 2015 and 2016, a record number of 1,3 million people tried to restore a meaningful future within the borders of European societies (Eurostat 2017). Although some authors have emphasized that these numbers should be seen in a historical and global perspective (Goddeeris, 2016), the numbers give rise to a mediatized narrative of a prodigious flood of refugees reaching Europe. The media in their turn, are feeding a general "fear of cultural, religious, and ethnic difference in the midst of increasing anxiety and precarity for many in Europe" (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016, p. 12). In addition to this, recent studies show the existence of a growing climate of polarization marked by an "anti-Islamic clash of civilizations discourse" (De Cleen et al., 2017, p. 25) and increasingly vehement stigmatization, exclusion and public hostility towards Muslim minorities, asylum seekers and refugees within a post 9/11 war-on-terror-climate (do Mar Castro Varela & Mecheril, 2016). We focus on how this socio-political climate acts upon the opportunities of refugee theatre within the dynamics of participation. While participation potentially reinstates equality and non-hierarchical forms of collaboration, we question the unilateral discourse of the benefit of participation in participatory refugee theatre in European countries of resettlement. Refugees' participation creates opportunities for empowerment, agency, and giving voice, but there is also a risk of disempowerment and silencing. First, in mobilizing agency, voice and power, participation touches on precisely upon those dimensions that are incisively shattered in the aftermath of collective violence and forced displacement (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010b). The life of refugees is permeated with the loss of agency, voice, and power as a result of organized violence

and lawlessness in their home countries on the one hand, and structural violence in the form of discrimination, social exclusion and isolation in resettlement countries. Therefore, participatory refugee theatre shows a particularly important, continuous concern for the possible harmful reiterating aspects of the loss of agency and of being silenced and disempowered. However, mobilizing refugees' agency, voice and power also involves a particular risk with regard to the status of refugees as an inherently vulnerable one. The refugee's legal protection is legitimized by the loss of power, agency and voice. Kirmayer (2013) signals the paradox of that vulnerability in the extent that any trace of refugees' capacities, strengths and actions diverge from this category that is based on the refugees' passivity, disempowerment and victimhood. Hence, such traces undermine its very legitimacy and could be met with suspicion by the host country. Furthermore, this paradox of vulnerability is becoming more relevant in the current context, in which there has been a remarkable reconfiguration of the hierarchy of compassion: more than the refugee, it is actually the Western state itself which is in need of protection, against the threatening Other (Kronick & Rousseau, 2015). In Europe, the recent European refugee crisis is seen as "a crisis *caused* by refugees rather than *lived* by refugees" (De Cleen et al., 2017, p. 34), showing a growing tendency to see refugees and asylum seekers as a threat to the social and economic status quo.

In order to unravel the opportunities and risks of participatory refugee theatre, this contribution deals with the multiple interconnected relationships between participant, theatre maker, audience and the broader socio-political context. As Bala (2012) outlines, "participation in theatre and performance can be theorized not only in terms of who is on stage and is allowed to be the agent of artistic exchange, but also in terms of the encounter between seer and seen" (p. 245). We aim to connect the issues surround refugee theatre to the wider debate within theatre studies on the notion of participation in performance, in which "it can no longer be taken for granted that its dramaturgical strategies carry specific political meanings or social imperatives" (Harpin & Nicholson, 2017, p. 3). The writings of the Flemish dramaturge Marianne van Kerkhoven are an interesting point of departure for our analysis of such strategies. Van Kerkhoven (1994b) expresses the need to differentiate between micro-dramaturgy of a theatre production on the one hand, and macro- dramaturgy on the other. Micro-dramaturgy entails a dramaturgical work that takes place within the inner circle of a particular production's rehearsal space. However, this inner rehearsal circle is connected with surrounding circles through the interaction with people, communities and structures. A so-called macro-dramaturgy describes the theatre's social function: "around the production lies the theatre and around the theatre lies the city and around the city, as far as we can see,

lies the whole world and even the sky and all its stars". Van Kerkhoven (1994b) stresses that both dramaturgies imply a dialogical continuum. The micro communicates with the macro and vice versa: "the walls that link all these circles together are made of skin, they have pores, they breathe. This is sometimes forgotten." Her emphasis on this dialogue resonates with voices in applied theatre that criticize the assumption that there is an empty or safe space in which theatrical work operates: "bare, yes, open, yes, but never empty. It is always the site of physical, social, and psychic forces in society" (Thiong'o, 1997, p. 13). The permeability of micro- and macro-dramaturgy calls for an increased awareness when anchoring the process of applied theatre in the social realm. Hence, an in-depth analysis of the social realm is needed in order to identify opportunities and risks of refugees' participation within micro- and macro-dramaturgy of participatory refugee theatre.

In this article, we take up this question through an analysis of a case study of participatory refugee theatre and its intersections with broader social dynamics related to the European refugee crisis. In an in-depth analysis of a participatory refugee theatre project based in Berlin, we aim to document and explain thoroughly how this participatory refugee theatre project gave rise to unforeseen and counterproductive outcomes and risks. Moving from a micro-perspective towards a macro-perspective and back, this article's structure mirrors the dialogue between the micro- and macro-dramaturgy of this participatory refugee theatre project.

Case study: A participatory refugee theatre project in Berlin

In 2016, the first author of this article embarked on a fieldwork study with the participatory refugee theatre group called Refugee Club Impulse (RCI). She conducted a four-month participatory observation, focusing on the creative process of the public performance project *Carnival Al-Ladji'in*. She observed all workshops, rehearsals and team meetings, particularly the development of Hakawati-stories by nine refugees, which would result in a public performance later that year. The refugees participating in this theatre project fled from countries around the world (such as Syria, Iraq and Algeria) and were resettled in Germany. A few months after the public performance, six participants agreed to an in-depth interview with the researcher. The semi-structured interviews invited the participants to reflect on their lived experiences during the creative process, the development of their and other participants' Hakawati-story, and their experience of the public performance.

The starting point of the creative process was the Hakawati, a traditional pre-colonial Arabic cultural form of expression on the threshold of oblivion. The Hakawati itself is a traditional wandering storyteller in the Arab world – a tradition that goes back to the eleventh century – who performs well-known traditional stories in public places. During his performance, the Hakawati encourages the surrounding public to engage actively with the topical messages. As such, he promotes awareness and critical thinking by the social community (Pannewick, 2000). However, the few remaining Hakawatis have been on the threshold of oblivion since the 1970's, even though they have been revitalized on the postcolonial Arabic stage as a dramatic figure (Pannewick, 1999, 2010). Arabian dramatists have been using the figure of the Hakawati as a way of distancing themselves from colonial European-Aristotelian text-based theatre and hence establishing a new 'authentic' genre of modern Arabic theatre. Furthermore, by reviving this traditional element, modern Arabic theatre was able to revitalize elements from collective memory and reinforce a cultural identity after a period of colonization and cultural repression (Pannewick, 1999). Hence, RCI's choice for the figure of the Hakawati is clearly in line with these postcolonial ideas and corresponds to the emerging call to move beyond colonial pitfalls and hierarchic aesthetics in applied theatre (Heinicke, 2017). As a group, they are careful not to impose a European-Aristotelian text-based theatre format on the participants. Since their creation in 2013, it has always been RCI's aim to give asylum seekers a voice of their own.

RCI: History and mission

In 2013, a collaboration of social workers and artists initiated a five-month pilot program called *Impulse* in an initial reception center for asylum seekers in Berlin. The social cultural program included theatre, dance, music and art workshops. During the perilous trajectory of seeking asylum, the project aimed to generate impulses to improve the living conditions in the center. Following the pilot program, the participating refugees and the organizing team decided to continue their theatrical work, and founded Refugee Club Impulse (RCI), a self-organized theatre club by refugees that came together on a weekly basis and was supported by a local youth theatre. The club's manifesto mentions the crucial issue of voice as their slogan reads: "nobody gives us a voice. We take it!". This fierce message refers to the quotidian violence of "non-recognition" (Kirmayer, 2013, p. viii) towards refugees, as their voices are being relegated to a marginalized social position. The topics addressed in RCI's theatre work are adapted, changed and re-worked on a continuous basis. Since RCI declares itself an open space, participants are free to move in and out of the theatre space and in and out of the theatre production. RCI's work ethos

is characterized by a self-organized structure of refugees and non-refugees aiming towards an equal distribution of tasks, responsibilities and authority. Their participatory ethos aims to promote equality and collaboration within a democratic artistic process. Before the rehearsals start, a coordinating team meeting open to every member takes place. During these meetings, members discuss themes and topics brought up during the rehearsal process, creating avenues of power and redistribution of control. The club is proud to inaugurate an empowering democratic political practice, in the sense that the participants are engaged as full persons, who have rights and the possibility to take part in an ongoing negotiation.

After an extensive tour in Germany from 2014 to 2016 with their first evening-length performance (*Letters Home*), RCI embarked on a collaboration with several other Berlin theatres within the structure of the refugee rights alliance *My Right is Your Right*. They issued a joint call for a carnivalesque pageant through the streets of the German capital. The parade was entitled *Carnival Al-Lajiìn,* and was to take place on 20 March 2016, the day before the International day against racism. By adopting the format of a carnival, the procession aimed to deconstruct the conventional and unequal distinctions used in the distribution of precarity and rights of citizenship. The artistic demonstration called on four main rights: freedom of movement, the right to work, the right to education and the right to live in dignity. The carnival parade counted eight floats, each of them corresponding to an artistic or cultural organization, among others several Berlin state theatres, youth associations and refugee activist groups. The assembly gathered a group of 5000 participants and covered a distance of five kilometers in the heart of the capital, encountering multiple politically charged sites on their way. For example, the pageant started at the Platz der Luftbrücke, a historical square that forms the entrance to the former Tempelhof International Airport, which had, since 2015, been transformed into Germany's largest refugee camp, accommodating approximately 13.000 asylum seekers. The monumental airport building formed an immobile part of the opening performance's backdrop. After the 'borders' written on an enormous fabric were shred into pieces and destroyed by the audience, the carnival started its authorized route throughout the city.

After walking for two hours, the crowd around the first carnival float, which was RCI's, was asked to make way for three improvised platforms that were scattered on the street. Several musicians with drums and tambourines and other actors of the theatre group supported the nine Hakawatis in order to gather the public around each platform. Each improvised platform swiftly transformed into a stage for three Hakawatis. The Hakawatis consecutively performed their story, while other Hakawatis provided simultaneous transla-

tions into a variety of languages (German, Arabic, English and French). Each story was followed by a joint sing-along, which mirrored the tradition of Arada[1] in the Arab world.

Participation within micro-dramaturgy: The Hakawati

Besides the club's commitment towards an empowering participatory approach on the organizational level, participation within the micro-dramaturgy provided multiple opportunities for agency and giving voice. Although by means of the unique micro-dramaturgical structure the participant could become an active "agent of artistic exchange" (Bala, 2012, p. 245), the opportunities for agency and giving voice proved to be very fragile.

The dramatic figure of the Hakawati. The mobilization of participants' lines of agency gave rise to the autonomous refashioning of the Hakawati during group discussions and improvisational play. Within that refashioning, participants could reconnect to and actively reassert a culturally specific heritage. They were encouraged to discuss, identify and question the cultural tradition of the Hakawati within the group. The rehearsals provided a space for collective remembrance and discussion of the Hakawati's historical role in Arabic society, and offered participants the possibility to explore what the role of a contemporary Hakawati in Europe could be. Questions were raised on the topical messages and protagonists of a contemporary Hakawati's story and on whether a contemporary Hakawati could be a woman. The rehearsals' structure alternated between group discussions and improvisational exercises that focused more on bodily re-enactments of the traditional Hakawati, inducing a subtle interplay between verbal and more embodied remembrance of cultural repertoire. The improvisational play revealed, during the course of the creative process a "rearrangement of the terms of participation" (Bala, 2017, p. 283) as the participants moved, to the director's surprise, beyond the strict role of the Hakawati as a narrator. The participants oscillated between the narrating Hakawati and the multiple protagonists of the story: at times they embodied the storyteller, at times the protagonists of their story, and at times their real selves. All those embodiments were continuously intertwined, which led the director into a state of ambiguity and "not knowing" (Jeffers, 2012, p.

1 Arada is a traditional Arabic music group consisting of 20 to 50 men, who sing and perform swordplay during a myriad of celebrations, usually at the occasion of a wedding, the inauguration of a new store or business, or a pilgrim's return from Mecca. They celebrate, congratulate, and welcome the groom, the storeowner or the returning pilgrim, while triggering the curiosity of bystanders and passers-by in order to gather and entertain a crowd.

157). This confusion was followed by a joint discussion during which the lines of the creative play were collaboratively rearranged. In this way, the improvisational play offered a space for the participants to actively remodel the Hakawati and alternate between different identities. Apart from this, the Hakawati marked a strong connection with a local and culturally specific tradition on the threshold of oblivion. Working with the dramatic figure may have enabled the participants to keep the Hakawati tradition from disappearing in times marked by radical loss and uncertainty about their home countries' future. In this respect, one participant wrote a story about a Kabyle woman upon the arrival of the French colonists in Algeria. The participant performed a Hakawati and at the same time told the story he had been told by another Hakawati, introducing a transgenerational element that reinforced the historical element of the Hakawati:

> *My grandfather was a Hakawati.*
> *Everyday he would tell me a story.*
> *One day, in the cold of the winter, in the evening,*
> *He told me a story I remember until today.*
> *It was the story of a girl called Amèle.*[2]

At the end of the story the participant interrelated the story of Amèle, a woman who resisted the colonial forces and repression in her country, with a personal statement. He therefore played an ambiguous role, situated between the narrating Hakawati and the participant's self:

> *And in this way, she tried to create a generation that resists and is full of hope, because the name Amèle means 'hope' in Arab. And in this way, she succeeded in stopping the blood to flow like rivers. She succeeded in creating a generation that still waits for an explanation for the boat of culture. Thus, I am a part of the generation that Amèle created. I am still waiting for an answer for the war crime. And I say: everything comes and goes except the evil that leaves his traces.*[3]

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2 Mon grand-père était un Hakawati. Chaque jour il m'a raconté une histoire. Une fois dans le froid de l'hiver, pendant le soir, il m'a raconté une histoire que je me rappelle jusqu'à maintenant. C'était l'histoire d'une fille qui s'appelle Amèle. Translation by first author.

3 Et comme ça, elle a essayé de créer une génération qui résiste et qui est pleine d'espoir car le nom Amèle veut dire l'espoir en Arabe. Comme ça, elle a réussi à arrêter le sang qui coule comme des rivières et à créer une génération qui attend encore une explicitation pour le bateau de la culture. Donc, moi je suis une partie de cette généra-

The story of the Hakawati. the creative development of the Hakawati-stories by the refugees indicates an important dynamic of participation that might allow the participants' voices to be heard. The development of the stories was stimulated by an array of alternating creative writing assignments and reflection exercises. Throughout the rehearsal process, the flexibility of the artistic container formed by the Hakawati became increasingly apparent. Precisely this malleability of a creative structure has been identified as a core dimension of devising a holding container to structure personal experiences (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). The diversity of the Hakawati stories might give us an indication of the participatory process of the project and hence, give visibility to the fragile engagement of autonomous voice. The stories' diversity mirrors the dynamics of participation for the refugees and their ability to autonomously negotiate social positioning in dialogical encounters within the group and with the broader audience, while finding a balance between individual and collective stories. Here, the Hakawati-story could offer them the possibility to engage with fictional elements beyond autobiographical veracities and play with alternative visions in dialogical encounters. It could enable the participants to critically engage with an often mediatized, unilateral image of the refugee. In the act of social positioning, the participants could become active "interpreters of their own experiences, and not simply […] reporters of events" (Cox, 2008, p. 198) and "creative agents capable of playfully negotiating their political subjectivities" (Tinius, 2016, p. 21). One of the participants explained how writing a story offered a way to distance herself from a clearly autobiographic story.

> *I was really bored of telling my story, cause of all the media, and every day I had to tell it five times. So I was like really pissed off. I don't want to hear my story anymore. So I got, okay, I don't want to say anything about my story anymore. And I was not ready to say it yet. Then I wrote this story, and I said: "okay I'm not ready yet. I will say this story; it's easier for me."*

Furthermore, some participants decided to connect their personal experiences to historical and collective dynamics, reinforced by the artistic container of the Hakawati as an element of cultural heritage. This mirrors the ongoing complex negotiation of individual and collective responses of meaning-making in refugees' narratives in the wake of collective violence and forced displace-

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tion qu'Amèle a créée et attend encore une explication pour le crime de la guerre qui dit : 'tout passe et repasse sauf le mal qui laisse des traces'. Translation by first author.

ment (Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016) and the inherent "tensions between the collective project and the personal realities of exile" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 254). For example, a participant wrote about the mission of a Cupid born in Anatolia, to make the impossible love story between a Kurdish man and an Arab woman possible.

> *He takes his last arrow, his precious arrow, on which is written "the arrow of solidarity". He says: "I will shoot this arrow through the heart of all of us!"* So, the arrow of solidarity hits the heart of Tristan, Isolde and the heart of Cupid.
> And peace covers the world.

In short, with the backdrop of the flexible artistic container of the Hakawati, participating refugees gained access to a creative writing playground that allowed their agency and voices to emerge within the interplay of different meanings and stories. The participatory microcosm of the project facilitated a permeable membrane that allowed participants to let social and political forces enter into the micro of the rehearsal space and vice versa. Indeed, during the rehearsal process, the awareness that the project took place within the complex matrix of social and political forces was continuously reaffirmed by a collective engagement towards a wider social movement. *Carnival Al-Ladji'in* aimed to transform broader social and political structures in Germany and connect to a wider global movement of anti-racism. Yet, precisely this political engagement might have installed a predominant tendency within the micro-dramaturgical playground to embed stories in a broader socio-political context. Nevertheless, the diversity of the stories seemed to reveal that the participatory rehearsal process respected the participants' decisions to maintain a certain distance between themselves and collective or political reconstructions of meaning. For example, one of the participants decided to withdraw from the politically charged playground and instead make a universal appeal to the dream of every child to become a star. In doing so, he pleaded for a universal call for patience. Although the story was first confronted with subtle ironic remarks of other participants, further group interactions with regard to the story were characterized by silence. In this shared silence, a space of acceptance could evolve around what is left unsaid.

Other than moments of silence within the group interactions on the stories, the participants also gave extensive feedback on each other's work, ranging from artistic and theatrical to more thematic suggestions. Hence, they became in some ways (active) directors of each other, which further created lines of agency within the rehearsal process. In the creative process, all par-

ticipants were engaged in "the distributive agency of dramaturgical labor", inaugurating "an openness towards co-emergence and co-creation", providing "new opportunities and possibilities of relating, of a *co-creative* kind of relating" (Stalpaert, 2015, pp. 104, 106).

The Hakawati's fragile voice. Although the above-mentioned unique micro-dramaturgical structure provided opportunities for agency and giving voice, these proved to be very fragile. Firstly, their fragility became apparent in the reiterating dimensions of powerlessness and voicelessness within the mobilization of culturally specific idioms. For example, some participants accepted the suggestions of the guiding director or the researcher to include certain dramatic figures or elements, which were derived from a more Western tradition, without even knowing the figures. These suggestions were raised in liaison with more culturally specific figures or elements that were familiar for the majority of people in the rehearsal space, but would be unfamiliar to the audience in the host country in the performative encounter. Indeed, the plural voices invoked in refugee narratives are mostly absent, and "even when they can be conjured, they are liable to speak a foreign idiom, unfamiliar to the audience in a new land" (Kirmayer, 2007, p. 369). It may reveal that some aspects were not renegotiated in a power-balanced space of discussion. In this respect, despite the ways of power redistribution within the rehearsal process, implicit "micro-points of power" or "microphysics" (Foucault qtd in Dona 2007) in the relationship between the director, the researcher and the participants remained present, counterbalancing the fragile means of empowerment. Hence, it seems vital to recognize the inevitable power dynamics and fragile sites that come to the fore in projects such as this. These micro-points of power might render a redistribution of power impossible in some cases, as "social relations are inherently political and inevitably based on power differences" (Wilson, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2018, p. 193).

Secondly, in the aftermath of the public performance, the mobilization of autonomous voices evoked other participants' subtle feelings of voicelessness linked to a disrupted social life in exile. One of the participants questioned, for example, the benefit of expressing a story that invokes voices from their home country.

> *He's telling about the Kurds and the Arabs. He told the story in Germany. Why? It does not help us. Our country is far from here. If he tells his story in Syria, that would help, the Kurds and the Arabs, everybody there. But we, we are here, in Germany.*

This feedback of one of the participants reveals the spectator's inability to listen and witness, as the addressed listener is part of a community that was disrupted in the aftermath of forced dislocation. The participant here utters the need for a mobilized voice to be heard within his broader social community, which nevertheless is limited due to the dislocation of that same community. Here, it seems that the expression of the story by one of the participants fuelled another participant's feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness, and might have exacerbated his experience of disconnectedness. It could be that the chronic nature of the conflict within the story hindered the artistic expression to be, in short term, "a tool for personal transformation" (Rousseau et al., 2014, p. 8). It is arguable, that both the chronic and growing nature of the climate of polarization in European resettlement countries might prevent applied theatre projects from becoming a tool for personal agency as it could exacerbate the loss of mastery in a context of chronic social difficulties.

Participation within macro-dramaturgy: Carnival Al-Ladji'in

> *Why is the city so dark?*
> *Is it because of us?*
> *Or did the world try to do this?*
> *Is this really happening?*
> (Excerpt out of a Hakawati-story entitled "The Dark City")

To illuminate the transformative dynamics of participation within the macro-dramaturgy of the project, we reflect on the subversive potential of the carnival's performative dimensions in the light of Butler's (2015) performative theory of assembly and Bakhtin's theory of the carnival. Butler suggests that in the act of a public bodily assembling on the street, one embodies the political demands one aspires. Through appearing, moving and existing within a public space, the subject enacts the freedoms it demands. Indeed, the predicament of the refugee is inherently linked to "limits of social recognizability" (Butler, 2015, p. 153) experienced by social exclusion and isolation in refugee camps. The carnival's call to participate was directed particularly towards refugees living in refugee camps throughout the city: "Come out! Be heard and be seen. Welcome to the culture of Carnival Al-Ladji'in." One of the primordial demands of the *Carnival Al Ladji'in* was human equality, which was enacted in the project's carnivalesque approach inspired by Bakhtin. Questioning disparities of power in society is an intrinsic component of carnivalesque rituals, as they aim to invert established power dynamics by means of grotesque and humorous strategies. Furthermore, the patterns of participation in *Carnival Al-Ladji'in* re-

veal how "the materialities of the landscape, place, objects and performance are not just props or backdrop to the dramatic action, but integral to it, casting an assertive presence" (Harpin & Nicholson, 2017, p. 6). Indeed, the carnival took place on certain specific public spaces in the heart of the politically charged urban landscape of Berlin. Walking throughout the city might "speak" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 99) of solidarity and resistance to the current political discourse. Likewise, the footsteps of the participating crowd can exhibit "a minor performative disruption enacted by a kind of motion that is at once a movement in that double sense, bodily and political" (Butler, 2015, pp. 138-139). Indeed, in such "pedestrian speech acts" (de Smet, Breyne, & Stalpaert, 2015, p. 234) the body's full participation is stimulated, activating the spectator's "response-ability" (Lehmann, 2006), resulting in a political significance beyond the performance. In this respect, it is important to note that the organizational board of the carnival explicitly wanted to stimulate the encounter of human bodies beyond borders, institutions, political parties and nations. The call for participation stressed that it was vital not to promote any institution or political party, nor to bring any logos or national flags. Rather, people should come as humans with human solidarity for refugees.

Despite the opportunities the transformative participatory modes of *Carnival Al-Ladji'in* provided, the risk of this engagement became dramatically apparent after the carnival. Indeed, theatre has been identified as a potentially dangerous activity, described as playing with fire (Schechner in Fleishman, 2016). Such playfulness with fire, at the heart of theatre, occurs on a personal level when one playfully explores the unknown, but might also involve an inadvertently play with fire on a social level while "disrupting the given situation, the social order, and proposing a new way of speaking and acting and of being together" (Fleishman, 2016, p. 200). And this "risk is run precisely by those bodies on the street" (Butler, 2015, p.92).

Bakhtin located a paramount focus of the carnivalesque in the blurred distinction between actor and spectator, since "the grotesque body cannot be a spectator to events, it can only be a participant" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 444). It is important to be aware of the complex discourse of power intertwined in such a participatory approach of turning spectators into performers. Its focus on the interactivity between performer and spectator might indeed generate a heightened awareness by the spectator, but can also be imposed on the spectator and result in "deteriorating into a new reactionary or dominating power" (Stalpaert, 2009, p. 81). A participatory interactive approach can "dislodge established values, knock dominant viewing strategies off their pedestal and dismantle the paradigm of classical dramatic aesthetics" (Stalpaert, 2009, p. 79) and in doing so, generate a feeling of being forcibly overpowered

on the side of (some) spectators. These negative emotions "can even snowball into disconnectedness and aggression" (Stalpaert, 2009, p. 79). Indeed, Butler's cause for concern with respect to public assemblies is the violence directed against bodies on the street and their powerlessness to counter the "hegemonic control over which images travel and which images do not" in the media (Butler, 2015, p. 93). The value of the spectator's willingness to listen and witness is inherently linked to disparities of power and asymmetric social relations within the broader social context (Hamel, 2013; Dennis, 2013). Hence, the challenge of participatory refugee theatre is not merely to give a voice to refugees, but more particularly "to persuade people to listen" (McCreery in Gallagher, 2016). The growing political climate in European countries, including the ongoing polarization in Germany (Zick, Küpper, & Krause, 2017) may undermine the audience's willingness to listen and urge it to gravitate towards reactivating hegemonic discourses of power.

In our case study, public media became the vehicle of such dynamics. The media directed its attention to the presence of Palestinian organizations and political activists at the carnival. Numerous voices in the media, including international online platforms and online local newspaper articles, represented the carnival as an anti-Semitic demonstration. In this way, the media coverage overshadowed the carnival's call for unity by appropriating the carnival's intended space against racism into a space of racism. The media was silent on the claims, testimonies and messages throughout the carnival with respect to the refugee's predicament, and hence turned away from the refugees' own stories. During the interviews, many participants bore witness of how the media's appropriation invoked their sense of power disparity within the social space, reactivating feelings of powerlessness. When asked how the participant had perceived the media attention, a participant tellingly answered as follows:

> *Like everything that refugees do, they just turn it into everything they want. Cause we, we don't really have a back or someone to fight for us. That's why I want to study human rights, because I want to be the back for all the refugees.*

The representation of refugees as potential vectors of terrorism in the dominant press coverage was experienced as unfair and reiterated the lack of trust and human connectedness they had already been experiencing. Participants recounted how the representation by the media elicited strong emotions of pain and of 'there is nothing I can do'.

> *They say: "No, come down". Really, to us, not saying directly, but what they do, like saying: "Come down. Come, come down. What are you doing? What are you doing? You are nothing". Really, they say to us, we are terrorist. No, I'm not a terrorist. I'm an artist. I do art. […] I want to do theatre, because I want to say my message. But the media says we are terrorists and we are, I am a really bad person. I cannot do anything. After that, I get down. They broke me.*

During our conversations with the participants, we witnessed the harmful aspects of the refugees' participation once the project had left the rehearsal space and entered the city, which is embedded in an increasing political macro-context of stigmatization. That "Re-entry des Sozialen" (Warstat et al., 2017, p. 14) abruptly undermined the project's aspirations that were created in the micro- and macro-dramaturgy. It became clear that the fragile lines of participation were met with uncontrollable and unexpected failure after entering the city. It brings to mind a story, told by a participant, about Alexander the Great upon his arrival in Baluchistan. Alexander the Great, known for his triumphs and victories, was, surprisingly enough, not able to conquer Baluchistan on the first day. He then wrote a letter to his mother, explaining his defeat: Alexander had seen, behind every stone, another Alexander. Behind every stone awaited an Alexander, someone like him.

One very surprising Alexander in the Berlin participatory refugee theatre was the negative focus of the media on the club itself. After the carnival's condemnation of anti-Semitism in the days after the event, negative media coverage continued, be it with a focus on the theatre group itself, as the main organizer of the carnival. Zooming in on past political engagements of single members of the club, the accusations by the media of anti-Semitism now shifted from the carnival as an event to the entire theatre group as an institution. The club was accused of indoctrinating refugees with terroristic and anti-Semitic ideologies and, moreover, of reinforcing their already existing anti-Semitist feelings. Given the limited opportunity for the club to respond, media representations immediately gave rise to considerable consequences on multiple levels: partnerships and collaborations were cancelled, jobs were lost and funding initiatives were put on hold. In the attempts to put forward a counter-narrative, the club and its members were faced with several limitations.

Firstly, the loss of support from previous partners in the field and the media was conducive to the public silencing of the club's counter-narrative and the invalidation of their engagement against any form of racism – including anti-Semitism – in their theatrical work. This loss seemed to reinforce the club's members' strong feelings of distrust and betrayal (Wilmer, 2016), which

was in contrast with the carnival's original aspirations. In this respect, it again aggravated the refugees' feelings of disconnectedness. One of the participants articulated how the loss of support had a severe impact on him:

> *For me, it was horrible, that suddenly the entire world was against us. The entire world. And actually, that is typical. Cause it is just business, only its own. Everyone only thinks of himself. (…). They all appreciated us, and then, suddenly, all at once (silence). You are right, they said, but there is nothing we can do.*

Secondly, the individual capacity to advocate and defend the club was hindered by refugees' precarious position and vulnerability linked to their status as refugees. As some of the refugees still faced uncertainty regarding their status of residency, publically defending the club was met with great fear as it might have a negative influence on their asylum procedure. Thirdly, some refugees expressed their concern for being publically associated with terrorist organizations. Such a political association increased their fear of endangering the lives of family members and friends left behind in their conflict-ridden home countries, since terrorist organizations are actively involved in ongoing conflicts. Furthermore, in the attempt to elucidate solidarity with Palestinian refugees in a counter-narrative, the Palestinian narrative as a narrative that was independent and inherently different from anti-Semitic discourse seemed to be disregarded, as any form of critique on the contemporary policies of the state Israel was not tolerated in developing a counter-narrative.

In short, the opportunities for giving voice, agency and empowerment for the participants within the participatory theatre project were confronted with limitations associated with a specific socio-political climate. Indeed, within the broader social fabric, the expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian case during the public performance of the carnival in the streets of Berlin seem to have invoked a circular process of splitting and projection. In a context of polarization, such transmission of expressions of solidarity within the social space invoked a rigid splitting between positions of solidarity and positions of anger. Refugee participants' public expressions showed the intersection of anger and solidarity in referring to historical injustice towards Palestinians as a means of transmitting and mobilizing social solidarity. However, this ambivalence was met with a response of splitting from the spectators in which anger became merely exclusively associated with a violent other, hereby serving to maintain a representation of the benevolent self. Within the social sphere, the perceived aggression was projected on refugees as anti-Semitic and terrorists, confirming and exacerbating the existing stereotypes of Muslims as violent others.

For the refugees involved in the project, these circular processes of splitting and projecting negative representations within the public space resulted in an experience of loss: a loss of voice, agency and empowerment. Power disparities that prevail in the broader sociocultural context and at the same time mark the avenues of resistance in the participatory micro encounter penetrated the inner circle of the theatre group. In this respect, it seems vital to remain sensitive to the dialogue between the two dramaturgies. Therefore, in our last section, we focus on the relational dynamics within a fragile permeable inner circle by zooming in on how the group became a microcosm of a broader social reality**.**

The city enters the club

"We are a family". The participants often referred to the club as their 'family'. Indeed, the need for social support for young refugees can be high, as many of them lack opportunities of identification with caregivers due to drastic changes in the composition of their family and the disruption of their community (Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, & Moreau, 2001). In order to overcome drastic transitions in the background of forced displacement, a strong family group has been identified as a protective function for refugees (Wilson & Drozdek, 2004). In all interviews, there were elements of a strong sense of solidarity with each other and each other's stories. Some participants articulated how the group and listening to each other's stories provided a counterweight to the experiences of discrimination and sexism they faced on a daily base. Cupid's arrow of solidarity had hit its target among the participants. One of them explained how his story, which focuses on the age-old conflict between Kurdish and Arabic people, was met with positive understanding within the group:

> *They immediately understood and were with me. For this story, we do not need any discussion, because we all know about it. We don't need to talk about it, because it is so old, and we know about it. We, we passed it. We passed it a long time ago. (…) It does not exist in our group.*

The example illustrates how the club functioned as a holding environment in the backdrop of a climate in which discrimination prevails. However, after entering the city, the relativity of this safety became increasingly apparent, as feelings of fear and mistrust entered surreptitiously within the group level. In view of their voice's deformation in the media and the subsequent silencing of any counter-narrative, some members felt increasingly compelled to distance themselves from any association with the club. Other members felt forced to follow the choice of the majority of the group, or of the ones that occupied

positions of authority and power given the club's predicament. It is vital to remain attentive to how these choices were made by each individual in a context of limited individual and communal decision power, both within the group and in the surrounding socio-political context. However, this did not prevent feelings of betrayal towards other participants of the club from arising, which in turn were met with mistrust and anger. Eventually, these feelings of betrayal, mistrust and anger caused the club to break up, and put an end to their theatrical activity. In this respect, the club could not, despite its first attempts to counter the silencing, "escape that which penetrates the pores" (Van Kerkhoven, 1994b).

The club's break-up elicited strong feelings of pain, betrayal and loss. One participant shared how this break-up caused an open wound that would take a long time to recover from. He, therefore, expressed the wish to avoid any further contact with other group members, as it would remind him of a painful past. Man-made suffering and a pervasive lack of safety now permeated the inner space of the theatre, once a safe space for recovery. The broader social dynamics of splitting and projection encroached upon the relational interactions within the group.

Discussion

In the analysis of our case study, we have observed how a participatory ethos in the interlinked micro- and macro-dramaturgy entails both hopeful opportunities and desolate risks. Indeed, in order to understand the marginalization of the club, the participants increasingly called the willingness of the broader societal context to allow a refugee theatre group to be self-organized into question. This process of meaning-making mirrors the ongoing dialogue between micro- and macro-dramaturgy, as the micro struggles to communicate with the macro and the outer circles. The self-organized participatory micro-dramaturgical structure of the club is in stark contrast with the category of the refugee as vulnerable and disempowered, which is dominant on the macro-level. When exploring the limits of participation in micro- and macro- dramaturgy, it is, therefore, important to acknowledge which supremacy of interest is present within the notion of participation. Hence, it is equally important to remain critical towards modes of participation that might reinforce the status quo or reinstate disparities of power.

In the context of the political climate in European countries, it is vital to continuously reflect on how participatory refugee theatre might put people at risk, in both micro- and macro-dramaturgy. In this respect, drawing on de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic determined by the

postulation or the absence of power respectively, Thompson (2009) indicated that it is politically and ethically necessary for applied theatre in controversial socio-political contexts to make use of tactical rather than strategical performance practices. Strategical performance practices aim to change the macro-environment by means of performative interventions, but if one does not have the power to act strategically, it is better to resort to tactical resistance. Given the deeply constrained political climate, one might consider extending this argument to applied theatre with refugees in Europe. However, as de Certeau acknowledges, tactical resistance inherently runs the risk of further stabilizing existing power structures. If we want to extend Thompson's argument to European multi-ethnic societies, our first concern should be the need for reflection on the abilities and willingness of refugees to participate in a joint decision on either strategical or tactical applied theatre practices. Our second concern is that deciding for refugees or reflecting on refugees' capacity to decide whether to engage in strategical or tactical performance practices may further aggravate refugees' voices. After all, this would amount to speaking on behalf of refugees. In addition, as we critically examined in this article, micro-dramaturgy is inevitably surrounded by the macro-political, and cannot "escape that which penetrates the pores". A tactical performance practice might presuppose an impermeableness of micro-dramaturgy's circle as a utopian safe space. The assumption that the inner circle's wall is made of impenetrable material may ignore the potentially disempowering dynamics within micro-dramaturgy. As such, theatre makers in Europe are always part of a broader socio-political system, and hence are inevitably a representative of a host society, complicit with human rights violations within that system (Rousseau & Kirmayer, 2010). A performance space is indeed never empty, and never empty from complicity as well. However, precisely in times of polarization and fear, it seems primordial not to underestimate human community and solidarity in order to let reflexivity and not fear prevail in applied theatre practices. A plea for a reflective ethical space might encourage further solidarity within the research and applied theatre community. After all, a shared performance space is not empty, as it is also related to time (Thiong'o, 1997): to the past, but also to the future. Therefore, we conclude that, in the context of a growing political climate of polarization in Europe, participatory refugee theatre requires a thoughtful critical reflection on the beneficial discourse on participation and the inevitable intertwining of micro-and macro-dramaturgical approaches. The steps towards empowerment, agency and giving voice through participation implies the responsibility of the researcher, dramaturge, theatre maker and practitioner to remain aware of harmful aspects of those steps throughout a potentially beautiful, but precarious dance.

Chapter 4

Exploring dramaturgy in participatory refugee theatre as a dialogical practice: Dialogical tensions in a T/temporary relational playground

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Abstract

In this essay, we shed light on the creative process of the participatory theatre project *Temporary* by listening to its director and the nine participants. Using the written traces of conversations that took place inside and outside the rehearsal space, we reflect on how the director's approach in *Temporary* aspired to a kind of dialogical practice in relationship with the audience and with the participants. We elaborate on these different dialogical practices at play and, by zooming in on the role of the director within this theatre project, we examine how the pursued dialogue with the audience seemed to implicate a tension with the dialogical practice inside the creation process, and the dialogue and interaction between the director and the individual participants. In this paper we aim to scrutinize this tension in *Temporary* with the use of concrete examples and interview fragments, and reflect on the role of other potential, active but silent dialogues that may have impacted both dialogical art practices, namely inner dialogues and interactions with personal lives histories of collective violence and forced displacement.

Introduction

As part of an interdisciplinary research project in the field of theatre studies and transcultural psychology on the role of trauma narratives in participatory refugee theatre, we initiated the theatre project *Tijdelijk* (translated as *Temporary*) in partnership with theatre director Mokhallad Rasem, a Brussels-based community center, and nine Syrian refugees, in Autumn 2017. Although only a small minority of Syrian refugees worldwide is resettled within European borders, the Syrian community constitutes the largest country of origin for recognition of refugee status in Belgium in 2016 and 2017 (CGRA, 2016, 2017). In *Temporary*, the nine participants and the director collaborated towards a public performance work throughout weakly rehearsals that took place at the heart of the Belgian capital.

In participatory refugee theatre, refugees are actively involved in creating and performing a theatre play (Jeffers, 2012). This means participation is central in each step of the creation process are central, including inventive acts of organic, unformalized, unsolicited acts of participation (Bala, 2017, 2018). At the same time, research on participatory refugee theatre has recently examined how this type of theatre may entail both emancipatory actions as well as simultaneous risk of a reiteration of disempowerment when coming up against the limits of participation (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Enria, 2015). In this essay, we shed light on the creative process of the participatory theatre project *Temporary* by listening to its director and the nine participants. Using the written traces of conversations that took place inside and outside the rehearsal space, we reflect on how the director's approach in *Temporary* aspired to a kind of "dialogical art practice" (Cools, 2015) in relationship with the audience and with the participants. A dialogical art practice has been articulated in theoretical reflections on art practices and dramaturgy on different levels, including both dialogues outside and inside the creation process.

Firstly, this dialogical art practice, inspired by the work on dialogism of linguists Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov, evolves through processes of exchange and conversation and "shifts its focus from the productive to the receptive side of the creative cycle" (Cools, 2015, p. 120) as the artist strives towards an active dialogue with the audience with the aim of producing a productive polyphonic conversation, without persuading other pre-existing ideas, in order for new thoughts to emerge.

> *Thus, all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing more than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in whatever form it may be actualized). And the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his or her own idea in someone else's mind.* (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69)

Secondly, such a dialogical practice is also formulated as taking place within the creation process, between director and participant, and between participant and participant, who all take part in a continuous conversation in the process of creating.

In that way, approaching dramaturgy as a dialogical practice between directors and participants ties in with the recent reconceptualization of dramaturgy as, beyond a mere practice from action to performance, a mode of working and action that entails a "social and political kind of work *in practice*" (Georgelou, Protopapa, & Theodoridou, 2017, p. 20). It is important to acknowledge that the sound of these dialogical practices, both inside and outside the creation process, is not without dissonances of moments of disagreements, misperceptions, conflict, and violence. In *Temporary* we observed various tensions within dialogical practices both in and outside the creation process, between participants, between participant and audience, between director and participant, between director and audience. In this paper's focus we aim to zoom in on a particular tension that may have evolved between two dialogical practices in and outside the creation process in relation to the role of director in *Temporary*. Intriguingly, we took note that the pursued dialogue between director and audience seemed to have implications for the dialogue and interaction between the director and the individual participants. In this paper we aim to scrutinize this tension in *Temporary* with the use of concrete examples and interview fragments, and reflect on the role of other potential, active but silent dialogues that may have impacted both dialogical art practices, namely inner dialogue and interaction with personal lives history of collective violence and forced displacement. Before proceeding with our reflections on the different dialogical practices at play in this particular participatory refugee theatre project, we first outline the development of the creation process of *Temporary*, followed by an in-depth description of the performance.

A T/temporary common playground

The participatory theatre project *Temporary* took place in 2017 in the framework of an interdisciplinary research project that explores trauma coping processes for refugees in theatre practices. Nine Syrian refugees, between age 18 and 26, participated in the applied theatre project. They had all fled pre-displacement stressors of war and organized violence in Syria, had lived in Belgium between 1 year and 5 years, and were granted permanent resident status. Throughout the entire project the lead author of this contribution conducted participant observation during the rehearsals and public performances as well as two in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. One year after the start of the project, the same author conducted an interview with Rasem to reflect further on the entire research collaboration and the theatre project before the start of the performance's rerun in different cities in Belgium.

As the project's director, Rasem led the weekly rehearsals, which resulted in six public performances staged in Brussels and Antwerp in December 2017. Rasem studied theatre at the Bagdad Conservatory and Bagdad University while creating his first performances. A European tour with his performance *Sorry, Sir, I didn't mean it* in 2005 suddenly inaugurated radical change in Rasem's life course. Against the backdrop of an increasingly protracted conflict and organized violence in his home country Iraq, he applied for asylum in Belgium at the end of the tour. After a long waiting period in an asylum center in a small village in Belgium, Rasem continued making theatre with Belgian organizations often in international collaborations, such as the Antwerp city theatre Het Toneelhuis, where he is artist in residence since 2013. He gained extensive experience with theatre projects in prisons, schools, and refugee camps, among other places. In *Temporary* Rasem structured the rehearsals around the overall theme of a collective imaginative transgression of an unknown old world into an unknown new world. This recurrent theme shaped the direction of the performance throughout group discussions, role-playing games, improvisational exercises, video-recorded interviews, and movement exercises. The structuring frame of an imaginative transgression was further conceptualized by the use of an ever-increasing collection of words as they appeared and reappeared within group discussions. In this way, throughout the process, verbal language became more and more condensed into single isolated words that stimulated bodily and silent expression.

Freedom
Fear
Happy
Flight
Memory
Embrace
Dead
Love
Farewell
History
Border
Time
Loss
Gain
Loss
Animals
Birth
Life
Sleep
Shock
Scream
Sorrow
Revolution
Danger
Selfie

The participants were invited to give bodily and verbal expression to these words and reflect upon its meaning in non-verbal collective movement exercises, in group discussions and in individual video-taped interviews with the director. Inspired by these key words and encouraged by the director, seven participants decided to write texts, which were brought into the rehearsal space, performed, translated, and discussed within the group. All theatrical scenes and text material in the public performance were developed from those improvisational and movement exercises by the participants during the rehearsals. Besides, participants were able to shape and reshape the very form of their participation on stage within the public performance at all times, and were allowed to decide whether they wanted to perform on stage or not up until one week before the premiere would take place. In the end, all participants decided to take part in the performance. As the premiere approached, the collection of created expressive verbal, choreographic, auditory and visual

material and theatrical scenes were arranged into a continuum of scenes during which all the participants were continuously present on stage.

A temporary performance

As the audience enters the performance space in *Temporary*, the performers' presence fills the stage, each of them carrying a collection of shredded pieces of white fabric. Once the light fades, excerpts of the participants' written texts and poems, which were recorded in Arabic and Dutch, are played, directing the audience's attention to a multiplicity of parallel multi-linguistic auditory and visual signs. While listening to the self-written poetry, the audience members witness the performers, picking up their clothes and gathering behind a beautifully laid table decorated with white fabric and a wide variety of fruits. Simultaneously, fragments of individual interviews mixed with images of moving clouds can be seen, projected on a spacious white canvas at the back of the stage. As the words disappear and the background music becomes louder, the performers move very slowly towards each other in front of the table before they start an endless collective journey towards the audience. They are supported by projected images of a pathway through the forest. Once they have arrived in the spotlights, in front of a king's crown lying on the floor, the audience notices that the performers' faces have been painted in vivid colors. Suddenly, one performer slowly unfolds one shredded piece of fabric and presents it to the audience. It reads "Welcome". This is the start of a chain of words. On shredded pieces of white fabric, the performers present big, hand-written words in different languages including Arabic, Dutch, French, and English. The large volume of cut fabric functions as meaning-shifting performative objects within the performance, varying from pieces of luggage to meaning-denotations explicitly shown word for word to the audience members. The music fades and an endless silence fills the performance space. The performers continue to silently present words, one after the other, with footsteps and coughs as the only auditory signs. A series of *tableaux vivants*, during which the performers slowly move from one *tableau* into the other, from one emotion to the other extreme and back, breaks the silence for the first time: the performers start faintly whisper certain Arabic words. A sudden interruption of the chain of silent words occurs when one of the performers secretly picks up the crown. From this moment onwards, the audience witnesses a chain of absurdly and hilariously dominant Arabic-speaking rulers, kings and queens, as the performers alternately seize power by deceivingly taking away the crown until one of the performers refuses to become the group's successor. This critical juncture confronts the performers and the audience with the increasing absurdity of power abuse. Fragments of texts written on large pieces of shredded

white fabric convey a harsh reality: “Love is when the smuggler likes you so much that he puts you on the sea when the waves are not that high”. The scene results in a final rejection of the crown followed by a joint return to the table. Sequences of poetry are replayed, converging into the voice of Lebanese singer Fairuz, supported by dissonant chords, while the performers are preparing for another departure towards another new unknown world.

Dialogical practices inside and outside the creation process

> *The outwardly, actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech; the dimensions of this island are determined by the particular situations of the utterance and its audience.* (Volosinov, 1973, p. 96)

Throughout the dialogical practice that the director aimed to generate with the audience members in *Temporary,* he adhered to a particular format in the representation and expression or, in Bakhtinian terms, ‘utterance’ of the participants’ experiences of loss and suffering within that dialogue. As a director, Rasem emphasizes the importance to adhere to a specific kind of theatrical representation, one that shelters the audience in favor of personal interpretation. In this way, he gives audience members the freedom to witness refugees’ experiences of loss and suffering according to each person’s particular character and history. The creation of beauty – or aestheticization – through the exploration of experiences of collective violence and forced displacement enables movements of interpretation for each individual audience member. For Rasem, this is the affective force of sharing experiences of war and displacement in art, which might reinforce an actively responsive understanding from the audience members. An aesthetic language could protect those who express and those who bear witness in the process of expressing experiences of atrocity and social suffering, as well as the connection between them.

> *In Temporary we have a kind of representation of what has happened, without texts, but with the use of the body and the use of images. When you see the tableaux vivants of the performance, they seem portraits of people who experienced terrible events. But how do you present that to an audience while still creating space for the audience to interpret? That is a very important question for me. As an audience member watching the performance, you are looking at a beautiful painting. However, if you explored the beauty of the painting more deeply, you would perhaps discover a painful color. You would discover certain horrifying thoughts in that same painting. The performance is like a very beautiful flower. But as an audience member, you might wonder, what are the roots of this flower? As*

> *a director I started working with the roots, but I will not present the roots. I present something that can communicate with the audience. I will present a flower. But I find it very important that the audience can go back and forth from the flower to the roots, as a continuous back and forth analysis. Perhaps, it is an analysis that the audience member cannot make at the very moment of watching. But if one wants to explore, one will discover.*

Besides, throughout what he calls an active dialogue with the audience members, Rasem aims to move beyond stigmatized notions of refugees in his frame of representation. In his perspective, the purpose of participants' expressions is to dismiss stereotypical notions of the refugee in order to develop an interaction based on a shared humanity. Rasem eschews the dominant testimonial culture, which is mainly focused on refugees' singular stories of loss and suffering. As such, Rasem's words fit into a wider debate in participatory refugee theatre in Western countries of resettlement that questions the focus on the telling of personal stories in theatre encounters (Balfour & Woodrow, 2013; Cox, 2012; Jeffers, 2008; Wake, 2013a), while examining dimensions of agency in refugees' refashioning and remolding of aesthetic and theatrical language throughout participation (Cox, 2008; Tinius, 2016).

> *The people on stage do not want to be presented as a cliché, they want to be presented as human beings, people like you and me, and not as solely framed by their situation, as refugees. How can we stage them as beautiful people as well? That was a recurring question for me. I always look at the human being when I create something. At the same time, I am looking for a way to present this authenticity to the audience by exploring a certain form. For me, that form always entails that we see who we are, as human beings, as me, as you. That is always the starting point. Be on stage, you, not a different character. There are other things we talk about and the audience should not assume they can only talk about loss; they can also talk about other things. They can dance, play, jump, and laugh. That is exactly what I wanted to achieve in this performance. I did not want them to get on stage with lots of grief. Thousands of people have these stories, all the people that came here, they have these stories, but what do you want to express with these stories? Do you want to say: "This is what happened to me", or "This is my story", or "People who fled their country can only tell stories".*

At the same time, Rasem delineates how in the creation process he aimed at creating a dialogue between him and the participants.

> *During the first meeting, I could read certain questions in the eyes of the performers: "What will we do? How are we going to play? Which texts are we going to perform? Which role will I play?" They were waiting to receive something from me and I waited to receive something from them. They were expecting a classical theatre text. During the process, people got to know each other. Their background, their mentality, their rhythm, their imagination, their power, everything revolved around them. Everything. And I watched and observed. I left everything open. I could have made a script today and given it to them, but it is not about the script that has to be performed. It is about them, a unique meeting place that becomes a common playground to understand each other and tell stories to one another.*

Through an active engagement during the rehearsals, the director stimulated the participants to shape their own aesthetic language, focusing on embodied and poetic practices. In this way, Rasem explained that each individual participant took active part in creating the *flower*, presented to the audience in *Temporary*.

> *In Temporary, the people are the roots of the performance. They create meaning at each very moment. They form the rhythm and paint the color of the flower. For me, the entire group forms the roots of the performance.*

Here, it seemed that the dialogical practice within the creation process took place against the backdrop of a future dialogical practice in the public performances. The audience member as a future witness and conversation partner continuously entered the rehearsal space as a silent listener that impacted the dialogue between director and participants. The focus on creating beauty or a *flower* as a structuring container to represent experiences of loss and violence in a dialogical practice with the audience might have mitigated the dramaturgical listening in interaction with the participants. The format of representation aimed at by the director may at times have limited the space to remain present to practice a continuous open dialogue within the creation process on the theatrical representation of experiences of collective violence and forced displacement. In what follows, we outline by means of concrete examples how the dialogical practice in the creation process became an area of tension where both dialogical practices met. The director's dramaturgical format of representation, through its malleable creative structure, seemed to bore the vital potential to protect and support participants while at the same time running the risk of silencing them throughout that dialogue.

First, it should be noted that the sense of beauty and its indirect gaze by symbolization provided some participants with vital ways for protecting themselves against emotional deregulation and distress, and to alleviate pain through expressing personal stories of loss and suffering. Furthermore, symbolic pathways of expression may enabled the exploration of a mode of expression for ensuring cultural continuity and transcultural transmission in the process of giving expression to experiences of loss and trauma in relationship to both the own as the host society community (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, 2019b). However, we observed how the exclusion of the representation of the harsh reality of Syria through an aestheticized language may have in some ways silenced the urge of some participants to explicitly disclose stories of suffering and loss. Indeed, being confronted with a growing climate of xenophobia and polarization in Western countries, including the resettlement country, several participants attributed an important political role to remembering histories of collective violence in the presence of the audience as witnesses. This remembering could contribute to the remobilization of empathy for the human suffering that Syrian refugees faced and bring about change in the dominant representation of Syrian refugees. Besides the role of recalling experiences of collective violence as a vehicle for adjusting the dominant de-humanizing representation of refugees in society, participants emphasized the meaning of recollection as a political act to challenge the dominant unilateral narrative of the Syrian conflict in the resettlement country and the international community. Indeed, some participants expressed how the public performance could create the opportunity to disclose those stories of Syrian history of oppression and repressive dictatorship that have been silenced in the media, while at the same time addressing the prevalent media images and official master-narratives that focus on the recent upspring of ISIS and Islamic terrorism. Furthermore, voicing these personal accounts of oppression and war in presence of the audience members as representatives of the host society, provided some participants with a certain hope for a change in the current situation in Syria, as it offered means for denouncing the complicity of the international community and re-humanizing the representation of the conflict.

Second, in the dialogical practice with the audience the notion of refugee was explicitly avoided by focusing on a shared humanity. One participant indicated, however, how he particularly wished to counter the dominant attitude within the Syrian refugee community to ‘act’ as if there is no pain and dismiss their identities as refugees. Therefore, he aimed to reinforce a sense of proud and human dignity for the word ‘refugee’ and advocate for vulnerability within the Syrian community by disclosing stories of daily hardship and mundane stressors within the life in exile for Syrian refugees. Paradoxically,

refugees' vulnerability forms a rationale behind legal legitimation, while at the same time causing suspect in its absence in the host country (Kirmayer, 2013). In *Temporary*, the very legitimacy of refugees' vulnerability in dialogue with the audience became a source of tension between participant and director. Within this particular tension it becomes apparent how director and participant might have had different pursued addressees in mind in their dialogical practice with the audience members. Indeed, throughout the creative process, some participants envisioned the silent listener as one belonging to their own Arabic community and refugee community, rather than the host society. This tension calls for a critical reflection on the complexity of staging vulnerability and the "re-enactments of victimhood" in refugee theatre (Jeffers, 2008, p. 217) while integrating the voices of refugees themselves within this debate. Overall, however, the question remains whether *Temporary* may have reinstalled the focus on Syrians' resilience in the host society and the Syrian community, by creating a public platform showing successfully integrated Syrians on a public stage in Belgium.

Last, the container of beauty that was important in the dialogue with the audience, for some participants seemed to resonate with the language used by the Syrian (political) elite. An aesthetic language might not be understandable for all present audience members, including the refugee community. In this way, conforming to the format of theatrical representation of loss and suffering in *Temporary* for some participants seemed to induce feelings of ambivalence and disloyalty towards the cause of the Syrian revolution and the Syrian people. For the participants, the pursued format of representation therefore may have constituted a certain continuation of the oppression of the weakest in the society by a political and intellectual elite. For example, one participant explained that he disliked the stretched series of *tableaux vivants* in the performance as he feared of losing track of the connection with the man in the street. He indicated the importance of him speaking a language that continues to address his people, the men and women in the street, as revolution in the past and the future will always arise from the street.

In sum, it seemed that in *Temporary* an open dialogical practice between director and participants was not entirely compatible with a responsive understanding in interaction with the audience through the aspired format of representation of loss and suffering. In *Temporary* the aesthetic language or *flower* that formed the structural base for an active dialogue with the audience seemed to have been perceived as a vehicle of power dynamics within the relationship between director and participant and the group's 'microphysics' of power (Dona, 2007). The very experience of the director's control in determin-

ing the creative format was by some participants experienced as intrusive, and resonated with experiences of oppression and authoritarian rule in the home country. By contrast, another participant explicitly delineated the importance of the director to take up such a hierarchical position with the purpose to safeguard the unity and equality within the group. He underlined that his experiences with other participants, who attempted to acquire a sense of control throughout the creative project, reminded him of previous experiences of corruption and sectarian discrimination in Syria. The director's ambivalent role and position of power thus demonstrated the fine and fragile line in securing unity and the exercise of power, while directing a theatre project with people whose life histories are marked by experiences of organized violence and discrimination. Indeed, applied theatre scholars have increasingly encouraged theatre makers to acknowledge hierarchical pitfalls and power dynamics when dealing with aesthetic languages, as well as to deconstruct power tendencies in the creation process, funding models and evaluation of applied theatre projects (Enria, 2015; Hamel, 2013; Heinicke, 2017). However, it could be noted that this tension, in which power dynamics became more present, might have been affected by another inner dialogue: a continuous dialogue that the director has with his own personal history of collective violence and forced displacement. Here, we would like to denote how the aesthetic language of representation adhered to in *Temporary* seems to resonate with the director's life as an artist.

> *Not every production is about the war, but the power, the energy, the atmosphere, the images of war stay with you – they inhabit your body, your mind and your thoughts. How can I turn all that into art, how can I portray all those elements like a painting, like a dance? How can I portray those terrible things? That's how I started making theatre.* (Toneelhuis, 2019)

Beyond being a mere format of representation in the dialogical interaction with the audience, the creation of beauty and an aesthetic language might mirror how the director personally interacts with his personal life story of loss and forced displacement. The language of art and beauty became an important vehicle for support in director's life, and a pathway to express experiences of the war – perhaps it was also a way to reinstall a sense of continuity in a ruptured artistic life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we elaborated on the different dialogical practices at play in the participatory theatre project *Temporary*. By zooming in on the role of the director within this theatre project, we examined how the pursued dialogue with the audience implicated a tension with the dialogical practice inside the creation process, and in the interaction between the director and the participants. We pointed to the concern of considering the director's personal engagement with a history of forced migration. However, it is important to highlight that such a tension equally unfolded within the dialogical practices between the participants themselves. In that way, the internal group dialogue has been equally affected by the continuous participants' inner dialogues with their personal histories of collective violence in a fragmented and polarized Syrian community shattered by trauma. A dialogical practice amidst the plurality of potentially discontinuous inner voices within the rehearsal space as a dramaturgical practice "that is already a politicized activity" (Georgelou et al., 2017, p. 21) did not elude the macro socio-political dynamics at play in the protracted current Syrian conflict, the Arab world and the Western host society. Furthermore, it was colored by the participants' personal histories of traumatic experiences of atrocity and man-made violence. In this respect, it seemed that the development of dialogical practices within the creation process, between the director and the participants, and among the participants, were not without a vital risk in reiterating acts of violation resulting in a further polarization and breaches of trust between participants in line with macro-political dynamics. However, we observed that the rehearsal space may have provided a relative safe space, where the participants could carefully and collectively explore and hold this tension and dissensus between them. Here, they could negotiate as "diplomatic bodies" (Protopapa, 2013; Stalpaert, 2015a) via a symbolical communicative manner through the use of the body, cultural symbols, music, and prose while working towards a collective performance (de Smet, Stalpaert, Rousseau, & De Haene, in press). In this respect, it is arguable that the tension within the participant-director-dialogue may have become more discernable due to the director's position of power within the creation process, but also because of the protective strength of distancing mechanisms at play in the symbolic way participants could dialogue in the creative workshops that the director facilitated. As Cools (2017) describes in his work as a dramaturge in conversation with choreographers, a practice of correspondence (written letters) or ekphrasis (a work of art in response to another work of art) throughout a dialogical practice could initiate a distance in time and hence, "a delay in the dialogue" in favour of freedom of interpretation, use, and reaction at the side of the ad-

dressee (Cools, 2017, p. 106). For example, in *Temporary* several participants wrote poetry and prose that were at times written in reply to the other group members' texts. Reciting these texts to each other in the workshops, with a distance to the adversarial content and a distance in time in reply, may have created moments of transcending the tension within their dialogical practice.

In addition to the dialogical practices described above, there remains another dialogical practice, one that evolves around the role of the involved researcher, who initiated formal and informal research conversations in and outside the rehearsal space with both the individual participants and the director. The resemblance with the role of a dramaturge in artistic practices is striking here. Indeed, the role of a dramaturge has been described as a witness and moderator in a dialogical practice with the participants and the director: "A good moderator keeps his own voice and opinion out of the discussion. But you do support and reinforce the voice in the discussion that you feel is most relevant in contributing to a solution in which everyone can eventually recognize themselves" (Cools, 2015, p. 122). The similarity between researchers and dramaturges in the observation of creation processes in Belgium and other European countries has recently been proposed in the field of theatre studies, more specifically with the notion of a "researcher-as-dramaturge" or "dramaturge-researcher" (Karreman, 2017; Lievens, Persyn, de Smet, & van Baarle, 2018; Stalpaert, 2017). In *Temporary* we became the witness of tensions that arose between different dialogues inside and outside the creation process. This essay as a written trace of those tensions intends to be a continuation of such a dialogical practice as a dramaturge-researcher, as witness and as moderator. After all, engaging in a dialogical practice as a dramaturge entails "to participate in the affective (mine)field he or she must by necessity tread on, daily, inside the studio and outside, alone and along with everyone else" (Lepecki, 2010, p. 71). Indeed, throughout the prevailing focus on the social and political strength of productive and responsive polyphonic dialogues as dramaturgical practices we tend to forget how easily these encounters may turn into an emotional, social, and political minefield with a cacophony of voices that may harm, confuse, and violate. And holding those may also hold the promise of restoration in the aftermath of violence.

PART 3

Methodological-ethical reflections on collaborative research partnerships in mental health research with refugees

Chapter 5

A contextualized perspective on research participation in collaborative refugee research: A multi-site exploration of power dynamics in psychosocial intervention studies

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Abstract

An increasing body of literature emphasizes the role of refugees' social context. Social conditions both at home and in the host society have an impact on pathways to the redistribution of power and the mobilization of agency in collaborative research. Our aim is to develop a contextualized understanding of research participation for refugees in collaborative research in order to further enhance insights in the potential strengths and pitfalls in mitigating imbalances of power and mobilizing autonomy. Therefore, we closely study the various relational contexts that shape refugees' research participation and that may have an influence on power dynamics in collaborative research. In the present study, we explore participants' research participation by means of an interpretive cross-case analysis of three psychosocial intervention studies sharing a collaborative approach with refugee participants, refugee families, refugee communities, and professional partners at different stages in the research process. We identify the developed collaborative strategies in our three case studies and provide an outline of the ways refugees mobilize research participation through these identified collaborative strategies, from within the relational contexts of the family, community and institutional actors. This analysis shows how research participation operates as a relational forum in which refugees continuously navigate and negotiate within and between multiple relational contexts. We argue that performing research participation, as a way of relating to a relational context, is both an interactive and a dynamic process. For research practice, our analysis addresses the importance of an in-depth understanding of participants' relational contexts to foster both a reflective research practice and trustful research relationships.

Introduction

During the past decade, the sustained presence of war, armed conflict, and individual persecution has continued to force people across the world to flee their countries and leave their families and communities behind in search of a safe haven. After arriving in resettlement, refugees are urged to cope with past experiences of organized violence and persecution. However, they often face accumulative experiences of structural violence in the form of discrimination and social exclusion, as well as direct social hostility in the context of a growing socio-political climate of polarization and xenophobia (De Cleen, Zienkowski, Smets, Dekie, & Vandevoordt, 2017; do Mar Castro Varela & Mecheril, 2016; Jackson, 2005; Rousseau, 2018). An extended body of research has documented the increased vulnerability of refugee communities, which show a heightened prevalence of mental health problems, caused by the long-term accumulation of trauma, human rights violations, and stressors in both home and host societies (Beiser, 2009; Beiser & Hou, 2016; Carswell, Blackburn, & Barker, 2011; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; Morgan, Melluish, & Welham, 2017). Hence, given the precarious and vulnerable situation of refugees in resettlement, scholars in the growing field of refugee research have stressed how researchers in research practice with refugee communities are compelled by a primordially ethical imperative. They stipulated the need for researchers' vigorous commitment to both scholarly rigor and relevance for policy. Researchers should aim to provide an in-depth understanding of refugees' needs and enhance their predicaments. In addition, in recent years, scholars have advocated mobilizing refugees' agency and empowerment in the act of research participation itself, with the aim to alleviate the risks of a possibly harmful reiterating of refugees' silencing and disempowerment (Ellis, Kia-Keating, Yusuf, Lincoln, & Nur, 2007; Halilovich, 2013; Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011; Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007). In this way, research practice is supposed to go through a shift from the fundamental starting point of 'do no harm' (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Rousseau & Kirmayer, 2010; Zion, Briskman, & Loff, 2010) to a "triple imperative": an obligation to rigor, relevance for policy, and to the promotion of autonomy in participants (Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2012, p. 84). In responding to this "triple imperative", researchers are encouraged to address and subvert power relations between researchers and research participants. Collaborative research practices are increasingly put forward in this debate as a way to translate these ethical imperatives into a reciprocal and empowering situation. This can happen to a greater or a lesser degree, at various stages in the research process, including design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination (Johnson, Ali, & Shipp, 2009; Kirmayer, 2013). Yet, in addition to this growing attention for agency and

empowerment in collaborative refugee research, an increasing body of literature and empirical studies also emphasize the limits of collaborative research practices, given that the power imbalances that are present in various domains of the participants' social context cannot be completely ruled out from collaborative research practices (Brabeck, Lykes, Sibley, & Kene, 2015; Dona, 2007; Vaughn, Jacquez, Lindquist-Grantz, Parsons, & Melink, 2017).

Firstly, scholarly work has pointed out how refugees' actual social condition in the host society may constrain their empowerment. For example, there is a potential contrast between the long-term research objectives for social change set by researchers and institutional bodies and participants' actual day-to-day struggles and precarious social position. This contrast is sometimes reflected in the latter's aspiration to deal with their daily struggles by means of research participation (Brabeck et al., 2015). Furthermore, empirical studies have shown the importance of the current socio-political context and its processes of stigmatization of, and hostility towards, refugees, which have the potential to diminish opportunities for mobilizing agency and disempower and silence participants (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Hamel, 2013). In this respect, the importance of the researcher's role as a representative of the host society and its institutional bodies has been increasingly emphasized in research practice (Kevers, Rober, & De Haene, 2018; Vervliet, Rousseau, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2015). Rousseau and Kirmayer (2010) have stressed that researchers will always remain part of their broader socio-political system, and, hence, are inevitably in some ways complicit with human rights violations within that system.

Secondly, scholars have documented how the fact that participants are part of a particular cultural community can have an effect on their participation in research, and their attitude toward the latter's aspiration to provide voice and autonomy. Researchers' good intentions towards community participation in research practice may bump against limits which are the result of power hierarchies in refugee communities. For example, power imbalances between minority and majority groups within a community might impede the participation of certain community members (Makhoul, Nakkash, Harpham, & Qutteina, 2014). Furthermore, deciding to participate in research may be the result of reluctant acceptance based on salient cultural traditions or culturally specific gender, familial or social roles within the community (Johnson et al., 2009). In this respect, while collaborating with community members as research collaborators may have its fundamental strengths (Riggs et al., 2015), authors have also problematized the social position of certain community leaders and gatekeepers, powerful members within the community, who might obstruct genuine informed consent or empowerment of research participants (Johnson et al., 2009; Obijiofor, Colic-Peisker, & Hebbani, 2018).

Finally, in the particular context of refugee research, research collaboration which mobilizes trust and reciprocity between researchers and participants touches precisely on those relational dimensions that are incisively shattered by collective violence, forced displacement and life in exile (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010b; Mekki-Berrada, Rousseau, & Bertot, 2001). Traces of organized violence and human rights violations imbue various parts of the social environment, resulting in a profound lack of security, relational trust, and human connection (Ajdukovic, 2004). Furthermore, in the aftermath of forced displacement, regaining trust, social connectedness, and human connection is hampered further by an increasingly distrustful social climate in Western resettlement countries, a marginalized social status, and a lack of social participation (Cleveland, Rousseau, & Guzder, 2014). All of these factors color refugees' experiences institutional bodies in the host country, the most important of which is the refugee determination process (Rousseau & Foxen, 2010). Hence, moving beyond the focus on research benefit and empowerment, scholars have increasingly pointed out the potential harmful and disempowering aspects of research practices as they can also reiterate the breaking of social bonds and reinforce distrust (De Haene et al., 2010b; Mekki-Berrada et al., 2001; Vervliet et al., 2015). Furthermore, an all-too-narrow focus on research participation's benefits and efforts might divert attention from the potential harmful aspects in research partnerships (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005), and runs the risk of installing a dichotomous opposition between "good" and "bad" research practices.

The present study

The studies mentioned above emphasize the importance of the participant's social context, with social conditions in both home and host societies having an impact on the possibility of power redistribution and the mobilization of agency in collaborative research. Hence, we aim to take this into account by developing a more contextualized understanding of research participation of refugees in collaborative research. We argue that this contextualized approach may enhance insight into the potential strengths and pitfalls of mobilizing autonomy and mitigating power imbalances in collaborative research. In order to develop this contextualized perspective, we scrutinize the various relational contexts that shape refugees' research participation and that may act on the power dynamics of collaborative research practices. Hence, in the present study, we explore participants' research participation in collaborative research through an interpretive cross-case analysis of three psychosocial intervention studies employing a collaborative approach with refugee participants, refugee families, refugee communities and professional partners at different stages in

the research process. We identify the collaborative strategies of our three case studies and reflect on the ways participants mobilize research participation through these identified collaborative strategies from within the relational context of the family, community and institutional actors (Falicov, 2007).

In the following pages, we first delineate our three case studies and review the particular participatory strategies at different stages in the research process. Then, we unpack the relational contexts of the family, community and institutional actors that have an impact on the participatory processes in our case studies. In a final section of the article, we discuss the implications of our reflections on participants' relational contexts and research participation for collaborative research practice, and we formulate several suggestions for researchers to mobilize agency and empowerment from a contextual perspective.

Collaborative partnerships in three psychosocial intervention studies

In order to analyze the ways in which participants' relational contexts shape research participation, we conducted a cross-case analysis of three psychosocial intervention studies with refugee participants, all of which primarily used a collaborative approach. In the first phase, each research team outlined the various collaborative partnerships that were mobilized in the intervention study according to four loci of collaborative partnerships: refugee participants, refugee families, refugee communities, and professional partners. Table 1 provides an overview of the various participatory strategies within each particular locus of partnership. Each of these strategies was meant to mobilize agency in our case studies within a particular phase of the research process. Secondly, each research team collected and structured all data from their respective dataset, based on the levels of relational contexts in which participants were embedded: the family system, the community, and the broader institutional system. This collection of fieldwork stories consisted of in-depth description of fieldwork observations, excerpts of researchers' fieldwork diaries, interview transcripts, and the creative material developed by the participants themselves. Meetings with all involved researchers were organized with the aim of developing a joint contextualizing reading of the collected data. In a second phase, after collecting and structuring relevant cases in accordance with each particular relational context, two researchers independently conducted a cross-case inductive thematic analysis within each relational level in order to grasp how participants adapt their research participation in light of these relational contexts. After enquiring into relevant themes and sub-

themes, cross-case themes relating to research participation were gradually defined, reviewed and refined by means of several feedback loops in which all researchers were involved.

Case Study 1

Our first case study consists of a participatory applied theatre intervention with Syrian youngsters from different ethnic and religious backgrounds who were resettled in Belgium (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, in press). The intervention was initiated in partnership with a community center and a professional theatre director in the autumn of 2017. We explored how refugee participants (N=9) cope with life histories of collective violence and forced displacement, and how they expressed these personal life histories throughout the intervention. The intervention consisted of eleven weekly collective theatre workshops in a community center, and eventually resulted in the public performance *'Temporary'*, of which all texts and theatrical scenes were developed by the participants themselves during the creative process. Several types of data were collected through participant observation during the rehearsals and public performances, by means of three in-depth semi-structured interviews per participant, including tape-assisted recall (TAR) (Elliott, 1986) and individual member check procedures.

Case Study 2

Our second case study concerns a local two-year running pilot study on the implementation of collaborative mental health care (Rousseau, Measham, & Nadeau, 2013) for refugee children and their families (N=15) in Belgian primary and secondary schools (Deruddere, Jans, Versteden & De Haene, 2018). The steering committee of the pilot-study was composed of various partners from different sectors, including urban policy services, the university's center of expertise in language and education, the local center for pupil guidance, and a research and clinical team of the Clinical Centre PraxisP of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences from the University of Leuven. Throughout the pilot-study, the research team evaluated the intervention on a continuous base by including monitoring procedures and piloting client feedback scales (Rober, 2017). In this pilot study, a multidisciplinary outreach team, which consisted of a consultant in language and educational support, a consultant in social participation, and a trauma counselor of the university's clinical team, provided support for school actors when concerns about pupils arose. When psychosocial support was deemed necessary, a collaborative network was initiated at school. This network was an active partnership between the refugee family, school professionals, representatives of cultural communities and rele-

vant service providers. At regular intervals, network meetings were organized at the school to exchange information and discuss intervention strategies with respect to the pupil concerned. In this way, psychosocial support took shape within the primary care context of the school, in the form of an ongoing dialogue between all partners, aimed at shared decision-making and responsibility with respect to the pupil's needs. In doing so, collaborative care models aim to acknowledge both the client's understanding of his own predicament and his capability to find appropriate solutions (Kates et al., 2011; Nadeau, Rousseau & Measham, 2014; Rousseau et al., 2013).

Case Study 3

The third case study consists of a classroom-based creative arts intervention study with refugee children and adolescents in Belgian schools (Rousseau et al., 2014). The study team collaborated with refugee youth, parents and school partners. The participants were repeatedly invited in focus groups, and a stakeholders committee of refugee youngsters was composed. Adolescents in the stakeholders committee (N=4) were invited to share their thoughts and input on the design of the study as well as on the intervention. The aim of this engagement with the voices of adolescents, as a primary target group of the school-based intervention, was to increase our understanding of their lived experiences, and subsequently to be able to tailor the intervention and study design to their realities and needs (McBride, 2016). Furthermore, the research team deliberately chose to enter into dialogue with parents (N=16). This decision reflects a strong belief in the importance of parental involvement in children' schooling trajectories and mental health (Brandt et al., 2014; McDaniel, Schiele, Taylor, Haak, & Weist, 2014), and a wish to hear refugee parents' voices on the myriad of ways in which they engage with children's education and well-being in school (Bergset, 2017; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). This makes it possible to focus on contextual resources for adolescent well-being and resilience, in contrast to the more individualized or a problem-focused orientation that is prevalent in society (Walsh, 2016).

Table 1 *Collaborative Partnerships and Participatory Strategies*

Research phase	Refugee participant	Refugee family	Refugee community	Institution
Case Study 1				
Design			Collaboration with theatre director in the set-up of intervention study	Collaboration with theatre director in the set-up of intervention study Collaboration with community centre in the set-up of intervention study
Recruitment	Iterative informed consent		Collaboration with refugee organizations for recruitment	Collaboration with theatre director in the set-up of intervention study Collaboration with community centre in the set-up of intervention study
Implementation	Participatory theatre and public performances		Collaboration with theatre director in developing participatory theatre project Collaboration with translators as cultural brokers during research interviews	Collaboration with professional translators in research interviews
Data analysis	Member check procedure		Member check procedure with theatre director	Member check procedure with theatre director
Dissemination	Book publication on theatre project		Collaboration with theatre director on book publication on theatre project	

Research phase	Refugee participant	Refugee family	Refugee community	Institution
Case Study 2				
Design			Collaboration with cultural community in researching the role of cultural brokers	Collaboration with local municipality to implement collaborative mental health care model within policy Collaboration with schools to implement collaborative mental health care
Recruitment	Iterative informed consent	Iterative informed consent		Collaboration with school actors to set up collaborative care model
Implementation	Collaboration in collaborative care model	Collaboration in collaborative care model	Collaboration with cultural brokers in collaborative care model	Collaboration with school partners in collaborative care model Collaboration with social workers in collaborative care model Collaboration with professional translators in collaborative care model Collaboration with linguistics as partners in collobartive care model
Data analysis	Monitoring during pilot-study	Monitoring during pilot-study		
Dissemination	Live-session with refugee participants during public workshop	Live-session with refugee families during public workshop	Live-session with cultural brokers during public workshop on the role of cultural brokers in collaborative care	Collaboration with schools in the organisation and implementation of public workshops for professionals

Research phase	Refugee participant	Refugee family	Refugee community	Institution
Case Study 3				
Design			Stakeholders committees with refugee youth	Stakeholders committees with policy makers Focusgroups with teachers
Recruitment	Iterative informed consent	Iterative informed consent		
Implementation		Focus groups with parents of participants		Collaboration with school partners Focus groups with teachers
Data analysis				
Dissemination				

Note: at the time of this study, further collaborative strategies for dissemination are being prepared for Case Study 1 and Case Study 2

Unpacking the relational dynamics of participation in collaborative research

In what follows, we will delineate according these three levels of relational context the various ways in which participants performed research participation as a means of mobilizing a variety of meaning.

Participation in relation to the family system

Across the three case studies, participants regarded their participation in research relationships as closely intertwined with their position in their family system.

Mobilizing research participation to counter the disruption of family bonds. Forced displacement poses radical changes to refugees' family units, as it separates entire families and communities during and after the flight to a safe haven (Shapiro & Montgomery, in press; Walter & Bala, 2004). At the same time, family can play a key role in transforming experiences of adversity, and provide pathways to anchor emotions and identities (De Haene & Rousseau, in press). In a context of ongoing separation, participants may mobilize participation as a means to transform this pervasive disruption of family bonds. In Case Study 2 for example, a father testified of his experience of personal failure to protect his children from human traffickers. In the aftermath of this experience, he articulated his strong wish to do his utmost best to take care of his children. He indicated how participating in the network meetings was one of the ways in which he tried to meet this aspiration.

Furthermore, we observed that participants actively tried to use research participation to alleviate the pain and grief surrounding family members who were left behind in the home country during extended family separation. For example, in Case Study 1, we observed that participating in a Belgian research project functioned as a pathway to demonstrate (to participants' parents) a successful integration in the host society. Such a testimony could validate parents' decision to have sent their children to Western countries of resettlement. In this particular case, it is remarkable how video recordings of the theatre rehearsals allowed participants to ascertain their parents that they were doing well, and to foster the mitigation of pain and grief.

> *I sent it to my parents. And they were very, very happy. And my father showed it to other people, to his friends: 'Look, (participant's name) is happy in Belgium!' (laughs).*

> *Yes, it is also clear as well, your parents, your family, as they see that you are mentally well, but also that you are normally healthy and that you are happy as well, then the farewell becomes a bit softer.*

During follow-up, the research team decided to publish all creative material in a bilingual book meant for the general public. In response to this publication, one participant articulated the importance of this book for her: she could give it to her mother, and, in doing so, she was able to show that she continued to embody her mother's and family's values in exile.

> *This means a lot for me. This means showing support to my mother. This means showing that I follow her values and norms. That I still take care of my country and my family.*

Research participation as a space to claim parental authority in resettlement. Forced displacement brings about radical changes within refugees' family units, transforming familial roles (Weine et al., 2004). In the host country, parents are often no longer able to take the parental role they used to exert in their country of origin. This could be the result of language barriers, loss of status, or traumatization, which may give rise to potential role reversals between parents and children (Almqvist & Broberg, 2003; De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010a; Puig, 2002; Sim, Fazel, Bowes, & Gardner, 2018). In this respect, we identified how parents used participation as a means to actively take up a parental role in the host society and mobilize their expertise in the child's education and parenting strategies. For example, after a network meeting from Case Study 2, a mother expressed to the researcher how her perspective as a parent could complement school actors' perspectives, in order to jointly try to enhance the child's well-being.

> *We cannot change everything at once. But if we try our best and keep on talking to each other at school, they as school actors and we as parents, then I believe everything will be all right.*

Similarly, in the focus groups with parents in Case Study 3, parents repeatedly voiced the responsibility they felt for their children's mental health. During these focus group discussions, several parents greatly emphasized their interest in the study results of their particular child, as they hoped this would allow them to gain a deeper understanding of its well-being. In addition to this, parents also underlined the importance of an ongoing dialogue with school actors on the upbringing and well-being of their children.

> *For me it is important that the school pays a lot of attention to the feelings of the children. It is an important partner for parents in the education, of course, so they should pay attention to the interaction between the children or their feelings. If they notice something, they have to communicate this to the parents. Ongoing communication between parents and the school is important.*

It was remarkable to note how parents who in the experience of school actors were usually 'difficult to reach', used the help of the interpreters to seize the opportunity to have their voice heard within the school. They were able to engage in a conversation about their hopes with respect to child education in relationship with school actors. In one focus group, a father affirmed that school actors are good partners to cooperate with on the matter of their children's well-being.

> *It is very interesting, of course, such a conversation with the school, the collaboration with the school. The school is a good partner to look for solutions on how children can come to school with a better feeling. Our children like to go to school, of course, but in our countries, these kind of projects do not exist. There is no collaboration with the school on this matter.*

Creating a sense of familial and cultural continuity through research participation. Throughout their life histories, refugees face personal, familial, and collective ruptures. In this respect, several studies have documented the protective role of familial or cultural histories and narratives in dealing with repeated experiences of loss and separation, and their ability to transform discontinuity into continuity (Kevers, Rober, & De Haene, 2017; Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004). In our case studies, participants seemed to grasp the avenues of participation as a means of conveying family and cultural values and continue to fulfill their roles as family members in their home country. For example one of the participants in Case Study 1 clearly aimed to foster a respectful dialogue within the group. During group discussions, he often took the lead and moderated discussion between group members. In a reflection on his position in the group during the research conversations, he explained that he considered it his task as an oldest son to propagate respect and calmness in the group. In doing so, he continued to play an exemplary role for others in social interactions, as was expected by his family.

> *So first, I am the oldest son in my family. Yes, so since I was little, I always had the feeling or my family gave me the feeling that I am actually a leader. So yes, that I am the leader for myself, and that I should not make any mistakes. (…). First, listen to the others, listen carefully and then afterwards, respond and do not make any problems. Yes, so, I would like to be in a place, where everything runs perfectly and I am without problems.*

In Case Study 3, some parents also used the focus groups as a means to emphasize the norms and values they considered important enough to transmit to their children by means of their parenting trajectories. One mother said:

> *In the beginning I was a bit skeptical about the project. […] There are many things transmitted to children, way too early for some of their age. And then, as a mother, it is your task to protect your child a bit. […] I thought about sexuality, for example, so I was thinking: perhaps your colleagues will start talking about a man marrying a man, or something like that. […] That is not normal for me, for our family. I wanted to be assured that the project would not be focused on that issue.*

By conveying her norms on sexuality to the other parents and researchers, and by formulating respect for these norms as a precondition for her and her child's participation, this mother clearly adapted her participation to protect central family values.

Participation in relation to diasporic, home and host communities

In multiple ways, research participation reflected participants' embeddedness in three different communities, their home community, the diasporic community and the host community. The position of participants within these different communities influenced and actively shaped their research participation.

Research participation as an opportunity for participants to voice moral obligation towards their home country. Seemingly, participants actively gave voice to the home community as a way to respond to a strong and continuously lingering moral imperative to remember family and community members who were left behind in their home country. For example, several parents in Case Study 2 bore witness to their personal suffering, as well as to the suffering and injustice inflicted upon their community in their home country.

> *One moment, when I (the trauma counsellor) referred to the suffering linked to past experiences in their lives, a mother corrected me and firmly said: "It is not only the war and the fire of the past! It is still going on! Our people are suffering, our children are dying!"*

Also in Case Study 1, participants said that they wanted to actively engage in the public performances in order to transmit the story of the Syrian people and their daily suffering under a dictatorship to the Belgian audience. In doing so, they aimed to represent the predicament of all Syrian people, throughout their participation in the public performances.

> *That is why, they have to, somebody who can show everything to the people what is happening in Syria. That it is not just IS, there is a dictatorship, there are people, who live in poverty and people who are injured, people who kill, people who live without hands, without body parts. There is an air force that bombs people and houses and … But the people just pay attention to the politics, but they don't look at the people.*

Research participation as a means to mobilizing compassion and empathy for vulnerable community members. We have observed how participation became a forum to express the voices of the most vulnerable community members in exile. By doing so, participants could express their solidarity with vulnerable community members who fail to meet the idealized image of the successfully integrated refugee. For example, when talking about how reception classes are mainly aimed at learning the language of the host society, and about how hard it is to master Dutch when your mother tongue is Arabic or Somali, one of the adolescents in the youth stakeholders committee in Case Study 3 suddenly interrupted the others. He firmly stated that they and the researchers should not forget that learning a new language is so much more difficult for adults. In accordance with his remark, participants in Case Study 1 aimed to mobilize the voices of those Syrian refugees who found it difficult to integrate into the host society, but at the same time remained under the radar of this specific research. One participant explicitly integrated these voices in the public performance by including an older man who had lost his daughter on the way to Belgium in his creative text, which was written for the host society audience in order to foster understanding of his predicament.

> *Say to the audience that Abu Ahmed cannot forget his daughter. If he could forget her for a moment, then he would try to become a good European citizen.*

> *But until then, you could perhaps accept us as witnesses of a country that is on fire. Accept us as you bear in mind the wars that you have experienced. Accept us as the weakest in a hard society. And if you do not accept us, then accept our children as witnesses of the mistakes we made as we have left our country. A country wherein injustice rules.*

Research participation as a vehicle for social support. Upon arrival in resettlement, refugees often face social isolation and loss of social support structures. However, in a collectivistic culture, social networks can mobilize support in times of adversity (Mooren & Bala, in press). Throughout the collaborative practices in our case studies, participants adopted research participation as a means to provide social support for other community members, to reconnect with cultural social support structures such as extended family networks. For example, in response to a question on whether their children had told them about the creative project at home, a parent from one of the focus groups of Case Study 3 initiated a conversation about her concerns regarding her son's isolated computer behavior. Several other parents reacted, sharing opinions and advice based on their own similar or different experiences, which therefore made the focus group an occasion for social support within the community of immigrant parents.

Parent 1:

> *That project is actually also a bit for the parents, right.*
> *To share experiences.*

Parent 2:

> *We are not the only ones with these problems, right, others also struggle with it.*

Parent 3:

> *Yes, we came here to hear about the project, but eventually, we are here sharing experiences.*

Similarly, after voicing personal hardship, the adolescents in Case Study 3 spontaneously started to support each other. They complimented each other, and shared accounts of things they experienced as helpful when navigating their lives in Belgium.

> *You should be so proud, you seem so smart and speak such good Dutch! How did you do that?"; "It a lot easier to learn Dutch, when you make Belgian friends. Try and focus on that!"; "Do sports, it's a great way to get your mind of difficult things, and it can help you to make new friends";*

> *"Whatever happens, you should always believe in yourself, N.. As long as you believe in yourself, everything will be alright.*

In Case Study 2, a family agreed to participate in a workshop with the aim of disseminating research findings on the provision of care for refugees in the framework of the therapeutic education of family therapists. In discussing their potential participation, the mother explained to her son how participating in such a workshop could improve the quality of care for all refugees living in exile. In doing so, the family used the workshop as a source of social support for other community members.

> *There are people that don't know how it is to be a refugee like us. And it is important that people like us can be helped. That's why we need to tell those people how it is and how it was to be from Syria and to come to Belgium and how difficult it is to live in a new country.*

Mobilizing research participation to counteract stereotypes in the host community. In a variety of ways, participants seized the opportunity of research participation to tackle dominant stereotyped images of refugees that have increasingly taken root in the host community, influencing day-to-day interactions between refugees and host community members. For example, in Case Study 2, a father continued to stress his ongoing efforts to find a job in the host country, referring to the loss of his occupation in his home country. By stressing his continuous yet unsuccessful search, he wished to tackle the stereotypical image of refugees on the side of teachers and other partners in the meeting, who tend to see refugees as people who supposedly do nothing more than benefit from the social security system in the host country. In the same vein, in Case Study 1, several participants attributed an important role to the public performances as a means of changing the dominant representation of Syrian refugees. Participants expressed how it could offer them an opportunity to counterbalance dominant stereotypes of refugees as economic fortune hunters and potential threats to society. For example, one of the participants ridiculed the Western fear for beards, and in this way tackled the dominant, unilateral narrative of the Syrian conflict, which focuses on the recent upspring of Islamic terrorism and stereotypical images of Arab men. In doing so, he confronted, and actively engaged with, the audience in the public performance in an ironical way, by using one specific one-liner, written on a shredded piece of fabric: "I have a beard". Another example is an adolescent in our stakeholders committee, who also scrutinized his host society's perceptions of Middle Eastern men, by asking the researcher how she deemed it possible that people in

the streets looked at him as if he was about to attack them and their country, while he himself had just fled a country where terrorist attacks happened on a daily basis. He wondered out loud, and therefore questioned, how people could fear him as a terrorist while fear of terrorism once overshadowed every single day of his life.

Negotiating categories of belonging in exile in research participation. In diaspora, refugees often face discrimination and stigmatization as a direct result of their refugee status or their membership of certain cultural groups. Furthermore, host countries often attribute homogeneous identities to refugee communities and disregard inner tensions and inequalities within refugee communities, which do not always disappear when in exile. In this respect, we observed that participants used their participation to plea for more social equality. For example, before the formal start of one of the focus group discussions that took place during Case Study 3, one mother expressed disagreement with the research team's understanding of migration and its perceived labeling of participating parents as people with a migration background. She questioned her being a suitable participant for the focus group, since she did not saw herself and her child (migrants of the second and third generation respectively) as migrants. She also shared her opinion on the research design, and proposed a different selection of research participants (i.e. only include children who had arrived in the host country very recently; or include children without experiences of migration in the extended family). In the same vein, a participant in Case Study 1 criticized the researcher's understanding of the Syrian community, particularly the position of the Kurdish minority, as the researcher explicitly probed into meaning-making in relation to the his Kurdish background. As a response, the participant indicated how he experienced these questions as hurtful and discriminatory. He stressed that he wanted to be acknowledged as a Syrian participant just as much as any other participant.

Participation in relation to institutional actors

Finally, participants adopted the forum of participation in the research relationships in light of their position within broader institutional structures. We identified four orientations in the way participants related to institutional actors and bodies through research participation.

Research participation as a means to initiate change in social position. We identified that participants appealed to the researcher or professional partners in the research with the aim of actively changing their current

social position. Indeed, researchers and professional partners were acknowledged as people with a potentially powerful position in both the intervention study and broader society (Chase, 2010; Vervliet et al., 2015). In Case Study 2 for example, parents actively tried to engage partners as powerful members of society to support them in improving their current life conditions, which they found difficult due the challenges resulting from discrimination in the host society.

> *My family is currently in danger of having no housing soon and you want to talk at school. I do not have time to talk at school. I have to look for a house. If I have found a house, then I'm willing to talk at school. I'm happy to listen if you can help me to find a house.*

Furthermore, in Case Study 1, after having watched another performance of the theatre director together, some participants expressed their disagreement with the image of the Arabic community that was conveyed in this performance. They expressed their concerns on the research and appealed to the researcher to use her position of power in relationship to the director to tackle this issue and give voice to their concern. The aim of the research team was to encourage the participants to make this disagreement a topic of joint group discussion in the rehearsals. In this way, we wanted to reinforce the participants' agency in addressing these differences in relationship to the director, with the aim of shifting imbalances of power between both researchers and participants and between the director and participants. During the following group discussion, one participant addressed the director's dominant position in the creative process, and expressed his need to be more involved in understanding the goal of every creative exercise in light of the final performance. In the research interview, the participant indicated that, after this discussion, the director became engaged in a more explanatory and egalitarian way.

Protecting social relationships through research participation. We observed that participants attributed a position of power to the institutional partners in the intervention study, and employed this position to protect social relationships among research participants and professional partners. For example, in Case Study 1, it was stressed that it was necessary for the director to be in a powerful position in order for the group to retain unity and equality. The participant underlined that his experiences with other participants, who attempted to acquire power within the intervention, reminded him of previous experiences of corruption and sectarian discrimination. Furthermore, participants also were quite ambivalent about the position of power of the director:

on the one hand, they felt the need to raise some questions and issues regarding the matter; but on the other hand, they also wanted to protect the successful collaboration and relationship between the director and the researcher.

> *We know that the director plays an important role in the performance in general. And we were also a bit worried about your role. We did not want to create a conflict because of us between you and the director. But at a certain point we were actually in a dilemma. Shouldn't we talk to (researcher's name)? Maybe there will be problems or conflicts between the director and (researcher's name)? Or should we just remain silent and continue?*

Research participation as a forum to testify of structural violence. Throughout different kinds of collaborative partnerships and participatory strategies, we observed how participants negotiated the forum of participation to testify of experiences of structural violence related to institutional partners in the research practice. For example, in Case Study 2, parents often made use of the platform of participation to testify of experiences of social injustice and discrimination they had faced in interacting with institutional and bureaucratic bodies. In doing so, they often addressed the professional partners that were present as representatives of these institutions by using the plural form of the institution they embodied, for example by referring to "you schools" or "you Belgian employers". During the informed consent procedure with one of the future participants in Case Study 1, the researcher handed over a written informed consent agreement. After extensively discussing and going through the agreement, the participant agreed to participate in the project, but not before making an ironic remark about the formal way of research informed consent procedures in the host country.

> *There are people that give papers and there are people that receive papers.*

In addition, he indicated that he would store the paper on top of all the other papers he had received from an array of Belgian governmental institutions. Hence, the paper as a symbol of violence became a topic of subject in the informed consent meeting, as the researcher tried to scrutinize the meaning of these words in respect to his research participation. In the subsequent discussion, the participant expressed his eagerness to participate in the project, but asked the researcher if he could introduce this issue of papers as a subject in the public performance by playing a character who continuously carries a pile of papers around on stage.

Research participation as a space to transform experiences of structural violence. Research participation also became a vehicle to transform previous experiences of structural violence in the host society. For example, in the focus group discussions of Case Study 3, parents shared the difficulties they had experienced in building a true partnership with the school, since their ability to express themselves and find recourse in the school were constrained by a language barrier.

> *I would like to talk [about how my child is doing] but I have communication problems. I cannot express myself. I would like to pose many, many questions, about the children's feelings and problems, but I cannot phrase them.*

Here, participation in research may have allowed them to explicitly address these experiences of structural violence and voice their hopes and concerns related to the partnership with school actors. Furthermore, in Case Study 2, a father indicated that he was present at the meeting because the school had invited him, and since, in the host country, it is socially expected to be present at appointments.

> *A father – whose recently deceased mother-in-law is being repatriated at that moment – is present at a planned network meeting at school. When I ask him what has made him decide to come to school on a special day as this, he replies: "I didn't want to be impolite." As I try to further explore his motives he only repeats: "I have been invited, so I am here."*

Despite the various instigations by the professional partners to convince the father he was not obligated to stay, he firmly made the choice to remain at the meeting. By doing so, he was able to restore a sense of agency and show his engagement as a valuable partner in a mutual partnership, in contrast to his experiences with various other institutional actors in the host society.

Finally, in Case Study 1, a participant criticized the informed consent procedure in the member check procedure. He expressed the need to integrate the professional partner in the informed consent procedure in order to offer participants the opportunity to make a decision with regard to research collaboration based on two agreements: one with the researcher, and one with the professional partner. In this way, the participant adopted the member check procedure as a means to address the experience of structural violence within the research project itself. By listening and validating our violent acts as researchers, the member check procedure may have offered a platform of transformation and restoration in the aftermath of experiences of structural violence from powerful institutions.

Discussion

In this article, we aimed to present a more contextualized understanding of research participation of refugees in collaborative research practices. We identified three different levels of relational contexts shaping refugees' research participation: family, community and institutional actors. We explored, through an interpretive analysis of three psychosocial intervention studies that share a collaborative approach with refugee participants, refugee families, refugee communities, and professional partners, how participants performed their participation in collaborative research in light of these relationships. Our cross-case analysis indicated how participants mobilized various meanings, from within the different relational contexts of family, community and institutional system. Research collaboration became a relational forum in which different forms of belonging were shaped, and which participants could continuously navigate and negotiate in, from and between multiple relational contexts. Hence, we argue that the adaptation of research participation, as a multiplicity of ways to relate to multiple relational contexts, is both an interactive and a dynamic process.

Firstly, we observed how, at times, participants mobilized research participation as a means to continue and sometimes change their position in this specific context. Indeed, throughout the three levels, participants adapted research participation in accordance with the way they positioned themselves on a particular relational level. However, other aspirations within the three social spheres made visible their aim to renegotiate that position towards change. Secondly, it became clear that the way participants related to multiple relational contexts at the same time interactively shaped their understanding of research participation. In this sense, participants' embeddedness in multiple relational contexts could also give rise to discrepancies, shaped by conflicting aspirations. Participants' belonging to a community and their aspiration to give voice to the home community may contrast with the aim to protect social relationships in research partnerships. Finally, throughout the research process, the dynamic character of mobilization in research participation is reflected in how participants shifted from one relational context to another in the way they shaped their research participation. Initially, participants may have hesitated to call institutional partners into question. However, during the course of the study, they started to explicitly raise matters of structural violence in relation to institutional actors. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that the time span and the intensity of research participation varied across our case studies, from only a couple of hours in focus groups to much longer and more extensive engagements, with potentially important repercussions in the de-

velopment of research relationships, and with fuzzy boundaries within the research relationship in collaborative research (Mayan & Daum, 2016). Although our cross-case analysis generated a contextualized understanding of research participation as a dynamic and interactive process, future studies may further explore the particular role of the development of the research relationship as a possibly new relational context in the way research participation is performed, and validate our understanding of research participation shaped by multiple relational contexts by means of member checks procedures.

Specifically with regard to research practice, our findings suggest the importance of an in-depth understanding of participants' relational contexts which have an impact on the development of collaborative research participation. Considering such a perspective throughout the different stages of the research cycle could lead to a more thorough understanding of research collaboration, which in turn could result in important methodological considerations and/or adaptions.

Firstly, with respect to research participation in relation to the family: working with individuals, our findings suggest that is important to bear in mind family relationships and participants' position within their family. It also urges researchers to be aware of, and critically reflect on, cultural and familial values and tradition beyond the power dynamics of cultural practices. These values and traditions can also be ways of enhancing familial and cultural continuity in disrupted life courses. Secondly, at the level of the community, we observed how participants' belonging to a particular cultural community influenced research participation from several orientations. As a result, it becomes important for researchers to take participants' understanding of belonging into account. In research practice, research teams often define cultural communities to which participants belong. However, it is vital to acknowledge how implicit imbalances of power can enter into collaborative approaches between researcher and participant when the researcher stipulates participants' relational contexts. Additionally, a biased perspective on participants' belonging may hamper an in-depth understanding of their research participation. Hence, a reciprocal and trustful research relationship might fail to develop. It became clear how, by using generalizing concepts such as 'refugees', or national, ethnic, and religious categories in research practices, researchers necessarily inflict implicit acts of violence on participants, disregard the heterogeneity of communities, and affirm existing stereotypes. Thirdly, at the institutional level, participants may have expectations and requests vis-à-vis the researcher or other professional partners, who are perceived as powerful members of society. This could result in some particular ethical ambiguities. By under-

standing these appeals as acts of agency (Vervliet et al., 2015), a contextualized perspective on research participation may offer the possibility to highlight participants' strengths and responsibilities in the light of other relationships. Consequently, these strengths and acts of agency could be further reinforced by facilitating a pathway towards further actions, which could be taken by the participant himself or by means of a collaborative approach. In this way, researchers and professional partners avoid assuming full responsibility, and therefore create a power imbalance. In this way, potentially harmful dichotomies within collaborative partnerships between 'good' researchers and 'bad' professional partners or vice versa could also be prevented, which in turn could be a way to model moral complexity in human relationships within the research partnership. Such an embodied experience could, for refugees as well as for members of the host society, counter the current dynamics of social polarization between 'us' and 'them', and a reiteration of distrust in the aftermath of traumatization.

In the field of refugee research, scholars have emphasized the role of a reflective research practice in order to remain utterly cautious with regard to power dynamics in collaborative partnerships and the institutional level at play in research participation. Here, the researcher is urged to be continuously alert for ethically important moments (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) and recognize the importance of self-examination during the research encounter (Bailey & Williams, 2018; Block et al., 2012; Zion et al., 2010). We argue that remaining attentive to the dynamic and interactive process of research participation from a contextualized perspective may further enhance a continuous ethically reflective stance from the side of the researcher throughout the entire research process. Furthermore, a daily practice or 'everyday ethics' in research processes can create a pathway to articulate and negotiate ethical challenges and dilemmas by means of a dialogic research practice between researchers and participants. In this sense, the researcher becomes, more than just a moral agent, guided by ethical principles: she becomes a participant embedded in a mutual dialogue (Banks et al., 2013; Guillemin & Heggen, 2009). We argue that the integration of a contextualized perspective on research participation as a topic of negotiation and discussion between participants and researchers may further broaden such a dialogical research practice. Aside from addressing power imbalances within the research relationship, it could offer participants a way to navigate within and between relational contexts during research participation. In this way, participating in research could become a forum to anchor experiences of regaining agency and meaning into narratives of the self. However, in this regard, it is important to realize that these narrative accounts are dialogical constructions, co-constructed by the presence of the

researcher (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Kevers, Rober, & De Haene, 2018). A safe dialogue between researcher and participant is also a communicative act and can become a means for participants to co-construct meaning, but also communicate suffering and harm within the research relationship. Bearing this in mind, a contextualized perspective on the dynamic and interactive process of research participation may provide researchers with helpful directions to listen carefully, and transform harm within a collaborative research practice.

Chapter 6

"I look at you and see you looking at me": Role boundaries in a dynamic research relationship in qualitative health research with refugees

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Abstract

In institutional ethical and deontological guidelines, there is a prevailing, static understanding of the research partnership, with a clear boundary between researcher and participant. In this article, we argue that such a static understanding may run the risk of impeding the development of an enhanced contextual and dynamic intersubjective understanding of the research partnership and its impact on the growing importance of role boundaries in qualitative research. Drawing from a refugee health study on trauma and forced migration, we explore the different ways in which participants and the researcher engaged with the researcher's multiple positions and role boundaries. In doing so, we aim to contribute to a reflective research practice by providing tools to recognize signs of potential harm and offer potential vehicles of reconstruction and agency within the intersubjective space of a dynamic research relationship, within a continuous, shared renegotiation process of role boundaries.

Introduction

At the heart of qualitative research lies an encounter between participant and researcher. The researcher immerses himself into the participant's social world and this intimate encounter gives rise to the development of a research relationship. Given the inherently intersubjective nature of qualitative research, a myriad of scholars have pointed to the inherent limitations of institutional ethical and deontological frameworks to guide qualitative health researchers in the ethical tensions they face during day-to-day relational interactions with participants in the field (Connor, Copland, & Owen, 2018; D'Souza, Guzder, Hickling, & Groleau, 2018; Hewitt, 2007; Kendall & Halliday, 2014). Here, in the application of fundamental ethical principles, several authors addressed the importance of a contextual and culturally sensitive understanding of these institutionalized principles, an understanding which takes into account the challenges of a continuous evolving, indeterminate research course, situated in a social context (Hewitt, 2007; Ruiz-Casares, 2014). Given the limitations of ethical codes in tackling the ever-changing co-creation of knowledge in qualitative research, scholars have acknowledged the importance of a reflective research practice in the everyday ethics of qualitative research in order to sustain ethical research relationships as the research process unfolds (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Etherington, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). In delineating the ethical dynamics within such a reflective research practice in qualitative health research, scholars have increasingly pointed to the rise of ethical dilemmas due to the blurring of role boundaries. These dilemmas are a consequence of evolving research relationships as the distinction between formal research relations and other, more informal relations, gradually becomes more blurred (Banks et al., 2013; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2006; Mayan & Daum, 2016; Wilson, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2018). The potential risks and moral dilemmas in the face of role boundary issues within a multiplicity of roles have been discussed on various levels. One typical example is the shift from a researcher-participant relationship with strict boundaries towards a form of friendship or a therapeutic relation (Ellis, 2007; Johnson & Clarke, 2003). In this respect, researchers have pointed to the potentially harmful aspects of research participation for both the participant (Morrison, Gregory, & Thibodeau, 2012) and the researcher (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2008; Kiyimba & O'Reilly, 2016; Woodby, Williams, Wittich, & Burgio, 2011). However, in the institutional ethical and deontological guidelines surrounding this debate, there is a prevailing, static understanding of the research partnership, with a clear boundary between researcher and participant. We argue that such a static understanding may run the risk of impeding the development of an

enhanced contextual and dynamic understanding of the research partnership in qualitative research. We argue that moving beyond a static understanding may help identify potential elements of harm and boundary issues in qualitative research practice. Hence, it might further the ongoing debate on the impact of the dynamic nature of intersubjective research partnerships on the multiple roles and role boundaries between researcher and participant. In doing so, we aim to contribute to an understanding of reflective research practice in order to deal with ethical ambiguities and moral dilemmas, and to skillfully negotiate role boundaries which may arise in emerging research relationships.

In this article, we aim to discuss these ethical questions and issues by means of an empirical focus on a refugee health study on trauma and forced migration. Our in-depth exploration of both the harmful and beneficial dynamics in research partnerships, with a particular focus on role boundaries, also resonates with the emerging consensus on the ethical obligation of research practices with refugee communities to mobilize agency and empowerment in a beneficial process of research participation (Ellis, Kia-Keating, Yusuf, Lincoln, & Nur, 2007; Halilovich, 2013; Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011; Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007). However, as said, scholars have also increasingly pointed to the potentially harmful and disempowering aspects of research practice as they can also reiterate the breaking of social bonds and reinforce distrust in the research relationship (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010b; Mekki-Berrada, Rousseau, & Bertot, 2001; Vervliet, Rousseau, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2015). Collaborative research practices with the creation of reciprocal research partnerships as a central aim, are increasingly put forward as a way to translate these ethical imperatives into reciprocal and empowering practices. The aim of this article is to contribute to this understanding of the dynamics of role boundaries in evolving research partnerships, and to provide a response to current ethical developments in qualitative health research on refugee trauma and forced migration.

Drawing from our case study on trauma recovery in an applied theatre intervention with Syrian refugees resettled in Belgium, we scrutinize the intersubjective dynamics of the encounter between researcher and participant. We will pay particular attention to the role of the researcher's multiple and evolving positions. By exploring the different ways in which participants and the researcher engaged with the researcher's multiple positions throughout the entire research process, we aim to strengthen our understanding of role boundaries in qualitative research encounters. By doing so, we also aim to increase the researcher's vigilance during a reflective research practice by helping him recognize both signs of potential harm and potential vehicles of recon-

struction and agency within the intersubjective space of a dynamic research relationship. Hence, we will reflect on the lived experiences of both the participants and the researcher. We explore how participants engaged with the researcher's multiple positions in the entire research process of our case study. Furthermore, drawing from our fieldwork experience, we also pay attention to the researcher's experience of the development of multiple relational positions with participants during the process of boundary management. In our final section, we offer some suggestions that can guide a reflective research practice in qualitative health research by positioning a continuous, shared renegotiation process of role boundaries in qualitative health research as a dynamic, internal, and external dialogue.

Case Study

Our case study consists of an applied theatre intervention with Syrian refugees who were recently resettled in Belgium. In the framework of an interdisciplinary research project, a collaborative partnership with a community center and a professional theatre director was initiated in the autumn of 2017. The aim of this case study was to explore how refugee participants coped with life histories of collective violence and forced displacement throughout the theatre project. We also tried to understand various forms of expression of personal experiences of collective violence and forced displacement, as well as the way participants gave meaning to these accounts of trauma and exile during the course of the intervention.

In the applied theatre project *Tijdelijk* (translated as *Temporary*), the researcher collaborated with nine Syrian refugees. The project took place in collaboration with a Brussels-based community center and a professional theatre director. Nine Syrian refugees, all between the age of 18 and 26, were involved. All had fled pre-displacement stressors of war or organized violence in Syria, had lived in Belgium between 1 and 5 years, and had been granted permanent resident status. The participants were recruited by means of snowball sampling, in close cooperation with several youth initiatives, Syrian cultural institutions, cultural refugee institutions, and initiatives, language centers for refugees and preparatory student programs at universities and colleges. In order to maintain a safe space of expression for group interactions, a relatively advanced proficiency in Dutch was one of the inclusion criteria. Still, there was always a translator present at rehearsals in order to make sure that participants always had the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue whenever this was necessary. During introductory individual meetings with prospective participants, the objectives and the course of the research

process was clarified, and informed consent agreements were negotiated carefully. The participants' right to withdraw (Hugman, Bartolomei, & Pittaway, 2011) was stressed repeatedly in several individual informal and formal process evaluations during the course of the study. The general aim was to create a process of iterative negotiation of consent (Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2012).

The project consisted of eleven weekly collective theatre workshops of four hours in the community center. Throughout the research process, team meetings with the research team were held on a regularly base to ensure supervision on ethical decisions that might arise in the course of the project, with special attention to relational ethics in the dynamics between participants, director, and researcher (Vervliet et al., 2015).

The creative process developed around the overall narrative structure of a collective imaginative transgression of an old world into a new, and eventually into an envisioned one. The old world symbolized the past, the new world the present, and the envisioned world the future. In this way, the overall collective narrative suggested temporal continuity from the past to the present and into the future. This general narrative was made concrete through four different types of creative activities: creative movement and expression exercises, video-recorded interviews, the development and discussion of participants' creative writing material, and role-playing games and improvisational exercises (Table 2). As the premiere approached, the resulting collection expressive verbal, choreographic, auditory and visual material, and theatrical scenes were arranged into a continuum of scenes in which all participants were continuously present. The final result was the public performance *Temporary*. It was staged during three consecutive evenings in a community center in Brussels, followed by three performances in the state theatre in Antwerp during the subsequent week.

Table 2 *The Creative Process*

Exercise	Description	Performance
Creative movement expression	This recurring exercise developed a steadily increasing collection of words associated with past, present, and future selected by the director, as they appeared in the course of the rehearsals. Participants were invited to express these words bodily reflecting on their meaning and associations. During the exercise, participants could verbally elaborate on their bodily expression within the group. As a group, they were encouraged to develop a collective tableau vivant, interweaving all group members' bodily expressions into a unifying realm for each word. Steadily, the growing chain of words was translated into in a series of 25 tableaux vivants, during which the participants very slowly transformed one word or one tableau into the other, from one emotion or memory to the other, from the past to the future.	The series of 25 collective tableaux vivants constitute an integral part of the performance. The 25 words are expressed in complete silence in the performance: fear, happy, flight, memory, embrace, dead, love, farewell, history, border, time, lost, gain, loss, animals, birth, life, sleep, shock, scream, sorrow, revolution, danger and selfie.
Personal interviews	The director asked each participant to reflect on the meaning of some of the collected words in individually videotaped interviews. During the subsequent rehearsals, the director showed a montage of the interviews, in which the chain of words was represented by verbal accounts of the participants. Watching these edited videos, participants could see themselves and each other and reflect on potential differences and opposing opinions on the meaning of the words.	Some selected videomaterial of the individual interviews provide the visual backdrop at the beginning and the end of the performance.
Creative writing	The director encouraged participants to write or bring texts, stories, poems, or other creative material inspired by the creative process. This creative input, which established a connection between the rehearsals and the personal work and daily life of the participants, took place on a continuous basis throughout the rehearsal process. Some participants brought written texts, others brought songs. Seven participants decided to write texts themselves, which resulted into six prose texts and five poems. All creative writing material was brought into the rehearsal space and presented by the writers to the entire group. All texts were translated into Dutch and were, in the following rehearsals, recited simultaneously in Arabic and Dutch.	Excerpts of the creative writing material were audio-recorded in Arabic by the participants and in Dutch by the researcher. These audio-recordings were replayed at the beginning and at end of the performance.
Role-playing games and improvisation	The participants were encouraged to enact the transformation of an old world into a new one in role-playing games and improvisational exercises. For example, participants were asked to enact a gathering for a last supper before leaving to the new world. During another exercise, they were asked to pose as a king of the new world. The participants could verbally generate ideas and values on how they as a king would imagine a new world. During a follow-up exercise, every participant could improvise a particular action he or she would use to exercise power upon the others if he or she were to be king. Whoever takes the king's crown, becomes the king. The participants compelled each other to sing, to dance, or laugh, but also to obey and abuse power.	The improvisation of the last supper provided the opening scene of the performane. The exercise of the king provided an integral scene in the performance: a chain of absurdly dominant kings and queens, as the performers alternately seize power by deceivingly taking away the crown, until one of the performers refuses to become the group's successor.

Data collection and analysis

Throughout the research process, multiple types of data were collected through participant observation during the rehearsals and public performances, and by means of three in-depth semi-structured interviews per participant. During the workshops, the lead author systematically took field notes guided by an observational checklist developed in a pilot study (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018). She also participated herself in several workshop exercises. All rehearsals were videotaped and reviewed by the first author. In this way, verbal, auditory, and corporeal interventions between participants and the director, group interactions, developed written material, stories, chorographical phrases, auditory material, and other non-verbal dynamics were registered. The interviews were conducted in three stages during the course of the theatre project. The first in-depth semi-structured interview was carried out six weeks after the start of the project. A tape-assisted recall (TAR) procedure was used in order to facilitate the joint exploration of interpersonal processes (Elliott, 1986; Rober, 2005). In this interview, three or four selected video fragments of particular actions within the rehearsals were evaluated together with the participant. These fragments were selected based on significant participants' verbal or non-verbal expressions in relation to experiences of organized violence and forced displacement during the course of the rehearsals. By watching the video-fragments together, participants were invited to reflect on their experiences within the project, including their interactions with other participants, the researcher, the director and the intern. During the interview, participants always had the option to stop the tape. The second interview was conducted one week after the final performance. It invited the participants to explore their experiences of the performances and interactions within the group and with the audience. Five months after the end of the project, additional individual member reflections were conducted with all participants. Beyond a mere verification of our first analysis, these member reflections aimed to offer an opportunity to include participants' voices in the data analysis, to renegotiate informed consent, and to give feedback on the entire research process. All in-depth interviews took approximately two hours and were audio recorded with the participants' permission. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and Dutch, with the support of a professional translator.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted in different stages, and consisted of an in-depth within-case and cross-case analysis of all empirical material derived from detailed field notes, interview transcripts, and participants' poems. In the first phase, we explored participants' individual accounts by means of a case-centered thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) through a close contextualized reading of both verbatim interview and mem-

ber reflection transcripts. In a second phase, a cross-case inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed in order to grasp participants' experiences of coping processes and their expression of personal testimonies in the project. After an intensive rereading of all data material, a hierarchical coding structure was developed. All transcripts and written texts were stored, organized and coded with the help of qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 12. Our thematic analysis indicated the role of the researcher in the process of coping with traumatic experiences and also participants' reiterating harmful experiences in the research process, on which they reflected in the here-and-now of the research conversations, in dialogue with the researcher. We decided to further scrutinize this by focusing on relevant codes and sub-codes. Examples include codes related to how, during the rehearsals, participants experienced suffering in relation to the researcher, the director, the audience, and in the here-and-now of the interview context. Furthermore, we closely examined codes that addressed how participants coped with harmful experiences of the past in interaction with the researcher, among others by performing meta-reflections in the here-and-now of the research conversations. In order to do so, we conducted, an additional dialogic narrative analysis of the interview material in which we examined how these harmful experiences were told in interaction with the researcher. In this context, we paid particular attention to silence, non-verbal utterances, and hesitations. Furthermore, in the context of this article's reflection on the researcher's multiple positions and ethical ambiguities, we closely examined and analyzed all of the researcher's field notes, and memo-notes as well as the written reports of the ethical team meetings and moments of supervision. The wider research team consisted of two supervisors in the study's both disciplines of psychology and theatre studies. During the course of the project, reflecting team meetings with a focus on ethics took place on a regular base, alternating between one-on-one disciplinary and joint interdisciplinary meetings. In these meetings, which were installed after experiences of role confusion in our pilot study (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018) ethically important moments and ambiguities that arose during the weekly rehearsals were discussed. Furthermore, during the process of conducting research conversations, there were regular exchanges between the first author and one of the supervisors, i.e. the last author of this article. In this process, the researcher discussed the preparation of the research conversations with her supervisor. Additionally, in the aftermath of the research conversations, both researchers jointly evaluated the conduct of the interview, often including a reflection on the researcher's experiences. Furthermore, the supervisor was also involved in the process of data analysis by closely reading and annotating the data. Each transcript and text from the

participants was coded by both researchers, followed by a consensus coding in order to enhance an in-depth understanding of our findings by means of data crystallization (Tracy, 2010).

The researcher's multiple positions in a temporary research partnership

In order to unpack the inter-subjective dynamics of the evolving research partnership in our case study, we will first provide an outline the researcher's multiple positions. The researcher indeed seemed to develop a multiplicity of positions in the relational partnership with participants, which blurred the static notion of the role of the researcher in the research process. In scrutinizing the evolvement of these positions as a researcher, a clinician, a temporary family member and a friend, we describe several case vignettes from our case study.

An interdisciplinary researcher: The researcher-as-dramaturge

Our interdisciplinary research project is situated in between psychology and theatre studies. Since the researcher has an academic background in both fields, the transcendence of disciplinary boundaries became a recurrent topic of discussion during interdisciplinary research team meetings, where possible risks of legitimized methodological strategies in both fields in designing our case study were discussed. In some ways, this ongoing negotiation also gave rise to feelings of insecurity and discomfort in a by times challenging search of a shared understanding (Trussell, Paterson, Hebblethwaite, Xing, & Evans, 2017). Evolving towards research synergy, our final interdisciplinary research design and data collection methods entailed both collective and individual research procedures; individual research conversations were combined with a weekly participatory observation process within a collective encounter shared by all participants and the director.

A witness by looking. In the collective encounter of the rehearsal space, we observed the creative process unfold. In developing the author's role as an interdisciplinary researcher conducting participant observation within a shared collective rehearsal space in collaboration with a professional director, the notion of a "researcher-as-dramaturge" (Karreman, 2017; Stalpaert, 2017) became a vital concept to connect both disciplines and methodological frameworks. The notion of "researcher-as-dramaturge" has recently been put forward in the field of theatre studies as a means to emphasize the similarity between researchers and dramaturges in the observation of creative processes. Mirroring the notion of the participant observation, dramaturgy has been conceptualized as "the passion of looking" (Van Kerkhoven, 1994a).

> *The active process of the eye; the dramaturge as first spectator. He should be that slightly bashful friend who cautiously, weighing his words, expresses what he has seen and what traces it has left; he is the 'outsider's eye' that wants to look 'purely' but at the same time has enough knowledge of what goes on the inside to be both moved by and involved in what happens there.*

Beyond being the first witness in the process of looking, the researcher-as-dramaturge also functions as a moderator in the dialogue between the participants and the director: "A good moderator keeps his own voice and opinion out of the discussion. But you do support and reinforce the voice in the discussion that you feel is most relevant in contributing to a solution in which everyone can eventually recognize themselves" (Cools, 2015, p. 122). Indeed, in our case study, the researcher became a witness and a moderator of tensions that arose between the participants and the director, facilitating a dialogue between them throughout the artistic creation (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, in press). For us, this role of the dramaturge resonated with the position of a researcher in refugee research, since the latter also pursues to reinforce participants' agency through research participation. For example, after jointly having seen a different performance from the theatre director, some participants expressed their disagreement with the image of the Arabic community that was conveyed there. They expressed their concerns about the research project, and appealed to the researcher to use her position of power in relationship to the director to face this issue and voice their concern. After having discussed this request in the ethical team meetings, we decided that the researcher should encourage the participants to make this disagreement a topic of joint group discussion in the rehearsals. In doing so, we tried to reinforce participants' agency in addressing differences and tensions with the director. Our aim was to transform the imbalance of power between researcher and participant, and between director and participant. During the subsequent group discussion, one participant addressed the director's dominant position in the creative process and expressed a need to be more involved in understanding the goal of every creative exercise in light of the final performance. In the research conversation, the participant indicated that, after this discussion, the director became engaged in a more explanatory and egalitarian way.

A witness by listening. The individual research conversations with single participants were aimed towards an in-depth understanding of participants' meaning making processes throughout the creative process. We invited

participants to reflect on the social interactions and encounters, and listened to their narratives. During these conversations, which could last several hours, the participant and the researcher reflected on shared experiences and intensive social interactions within the collective encounter. We discussed broader topics, themes, and emotions as well as particular issues related to questions, hesitations, and emotions at play in the collective encounter. In this way, it became clear that the research conversations offered a platform for participants and researchers to engage with themes that were, at times deliberatively, left unsaid or not addressed in the collective encounter. For participants, these research conversations created a connection between participant and researcher, based on shared embodied experiences, emotions, and human values. In doing so, the research conversation became an opportunity to have somebody to talk with who had shared the experiences of joy and difficulty that had taken place during the course of the creation process.

> *I am always happy when I talk to you, because it is always an opportunity to talk about human values, which are often not visible in this Belgian life as well as in Arabic society.*

A clinician: "You must be a *BV*"

Scholars in the field of qualitative research have increasingly highlighted the similarities and convergences between recent developments in the aims and objectives of qualitative in-depth research interviews on the one hand, and therapeutic encounters on the other (Bondi, 2013; De Haene, 2010; Dickson-Swift et al., 2006; Rossetto, 2014). In our case study, this convergence may have been further exacerbated by the researcher's active position as a clinician in clinical work. Indeed, in addition to the researcher's engagement in the research process, she was still involved in clinical work on trauma care for refugee families and communities in the Faculty's clinical center during the course of the research project. This was the result of the conviction that the knowledge we gain from our work as a clinician and as a researcher can be mutually enriching.

This ongoing clinical activity became a recurring topic of discussion in research conversations. Participants would call upon the researcher's experience in clinical work, ask her to provide information on clinical services in the host country for close friends and relatives, and discuss the dynamics of stigma within the Syrian community regarding mental health services. Furthermore, it became clear that this clinical engagement was a topic of discussion among participants. While we often stressed that our engagement in the research process as a researcher was distinct from our work as a clinician at the university's

clinical center, participants regularly referred to the researcher's clinical expertise in the research conversations, by delineating her way of listening and by making ironical remarks. For example, one participant mentioned in a humoristic way that the researcher must be a *BV* (i.e. *Bekende Vlaming* translated as *Famous Fleming*) in the university's city, where the clinical center is located, because she must be known by all refugees in town.

A T/temporary family member: "I look at you and see you looking at me"

The researcher and the participants shared a considerable time together in the rehearsal space while working collectively on the creation of a performative work. In the research conversations, participants often described how the theatre group became somewhat of a new family in the resettlement country. By establishing friendships and social relationships during the course of the rehearsals, it seemed to offer them an opportunity to reestablish social ties with the Syrian community in the host county.

> *We became like a family. We came together and we're leaving together.*

Participants indicated that, like a family, the group created a supportive and loving environment, in which people would take care of each other, which resulted in reinvigorated feelings of belonging. While defining this group, participants explicitly referred to the other participants and to the researcher, the director, and the intern. Indeed, the collective encounter seemed to have installed a kind of semi-family system in exile, which included all participants, the professional director, and the researcher and intern. As such, the group's temporary shelter provided a pathway to reestablish a sense of belonging, to the Syrian community through the presence of other group members (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, in press), and to the resettlement society through the presence of the researcher and intern. Furthermore, by the end of the project (during the public performances) this relational shelter seemed to have become an anchor for confidence and trust, connecting group members on and off stage. For example, participants expressed the need to know the exact location of the researcher in the audience before the start of the performance. One participant explained how, during the public performances, the researcher and the intern represented his mother and the director his father. During moments of insecurity and failure during the performance, he would look to the direction of the researcher to find her gaze, while during moments of success; the director's gaze provided him with a sense of pride.

> *When I get the feeling to give up, I look at you and I see you looking at me and I regain confidence in myself.*

A friend in the host society: "I want you to meet somebody"
Social media platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp became vital to provide participants with information and to organize the rehearsal process. However, in doing so, they also gave rise to an increasing feeling of connectedness and mutual awareness of the researcher's and participants' personal lives during the course of the research. In addition to this virtual social connectedness, professional colleagues, friends, and extended family members of both the researcher and the participants attended the public performances as the end result of the creative process. After the public performances, this resulted in a myriad of personal encounters between the researcher and the participants' friends and vice versa, in which the researcher represented her position as a daughter, a friend and a colleague in the host society.

Intersubjective dynamics at play throughout shifting multiple positions

In this paragraph, we zoom in on our reflections on the intersubjective dynamics at play in the researcher's multiple positions during the course of the unfolding research partnership. By means of three different dimensions, we explore how participants and the researcher engaged actively and with flexibility with the evolving multiplicity of positions. We will particularly focus on how participants and the researcher renegotiated boundaries, which entailed, for both partners, elements of harm, benefit and agency.

Mitigating isolation through modulated disclosure in different positions
The researcher's multiple positions, which developed throughout the course of the research process, seemed to have offered participants the possibility to carefully initiate moments to modulatedly disclose life-experiences of collective violence and forced displacement. By means of participants' active engagement with the researcher's multiple positions, the sense of isolation that is associated with carrying these stories could be mitigated.

Symbolic and temporary modes of modulated trauma disclosure.
In the individual research encounters, which took place outside the rehearsal space, the researcher and the participant reflected on joint experiences, including the development of creative material and symbolic expressions in the rehearsal space. Throughout the rehearsal process, the director encouraged

participants to write or bring texts, stories, poems, or other creative material inspired by the creative process. Seven participants decided to write texts themselves. The result was a collection of six prose texts and five poems. Throughout our individual research conversations, it became clear how this collectively shared, symbolic material could function as a point of departure for participants to share fragments of personal stories and experiences of suffering that were encapsulated in these symbolic stories. Arguably, this shared symbolic material supported the researcher in the exploration of personal experiences of collective violence and forced displacement from a safe distance through a balanced movement between indirect and direct communication. However, for one participant, even the mere physical presence of the written text material printed seemed to be too intrusive. At the same time, certain words and metaphors described in the creative material created anchor points to start from and return to in the transmission of personal stories during the research conversations. Here, it became clear that, for some participants, the exploration of symbolic material led to feelings of satisfaction and relief.

> *Yes, for example, I choose that song and I tried, there was a meaning behind it, behind that song and you explicitly asked for the meaning behind that song. And yes, I told it to you. And that I'm glad you asked so.*

In this respect, it is important to notice that, within this process of modulated trauma disclosure, there was still room for unsaid and unspeakable pain. For example, one participant briefly indicated during the research conversations that some particular characters in his prose text referred to a personal, painful experience.

Participant:

> *So, you can notice, in the beginning it (the text) was funny for everybody, they laugh with each other, but when I finished with the text, everybody wanted to cry. And you can realize how difficult it is to convey two contrasting emotions. How can we do this? If you are honest.*

Researcher:

> *How?*

Participant:

> *If you are honest.*

Researcher:

> *Than, you can convey something.*

Participant:

> *That is my answer.*

Researcher:

| *And after your texts, indeed, many were (participant interrupts)*

Participant:

| *Moved*

Researcher:

| *Moved, yes.*
| *And how was that for you, to see everybody moved with your text?*

Participant:

| *It is hard, it is just hard (emotional)*

Silence

Researcher:

| *It was hard?*

Participant:

| *It is hard because the last fragment in my text, is something that I experienced myself.*

In the text, he omitted his own role in the event as a witness. Without directly recounting the traumatic event, the shared knowledge of the participants' poem and what happened to the characters in the final paragraph of the poem allowed the participant to indirectly convey this traumatic experience of extreme powerlessness and unresolvable moral dilemma. The researcher's double role as a witness, by looking in the rehearsals and by listening in the research conversations, created a kind of 'fault lines', pieces of a puzzle that could be part of a greater meaning and totality. During this moment of communication, the participant briefly showed strong emotions of grief, abruptly followed by a sudden change of topic, which seemed to confuse the translator. We understood this abrupt change and confusion in the research conversation as a way of balancing and regulating his emotional distance to the traumatic content. Since we experienced the moment of recalling the event as too intrusive and potentially traumatizing, we briefly invited the participant to reflect on this moment of sharing, in the rehearsal space protected by the characters in his texts, as well as in the here-and-now of the research conversation.

| *Yes, I was happy and I am once again happy at this very moment. Because telling this … (participant exhales strongly). I do not know if you understood my words, as I myself did not understood them as I was writing them.*

Mitigating the isolation of bearing witness from multiple positions. The setup of our data collection methods with individual research conversations gave rise to a series of repetitive, isolated moments of the researcher bearing witness to participants' personal stories of loss and suffering within a collective space. Considering the various reasons participants had to remain silent on their personal life histories within the group (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, 2019b), the shared personal experiences in the research conversations generated isolated moments of transmission between the researcher and the participant in the presence of others in the rehearsal space. Indeed, many of these stories were left unsaid within the collective rehearsal space. In the aftermath of the rehearsals, the researcher was often confronted with feelings of loneliness while witnessing these stories, mirroring the observed isolation of participants' inability to tell these stories to the wider community. Indeed, by shifting between the position of an interdisciplinary researcher in individual and collective encounters and that of a temporary family member, the isolated position as a witness who is observing pain can become painful for the listener as well.

For example, the incident mentioned above, in which a participant communicated his pain without directly recounting the traumatic event that had led to it, the implicit shared knowledge of a participants' poem and the events described in the poem allowed the participant to indirectly transmit his traumatic experience. During and after this particular research conversation, the researcher felt overwhelmed by the unspeakable pain of extreme powerlessness and moral dilemma, which was transmitted by the participant, who briefly referred to his poem and the particular fragment of the poem in which one of the characters dies. Afterwards, during the discussion of the verbatim transcripts with the supervisor, we reflected together on the silence and the abrupt change and confusion in this research conversation as the participant referred to his poem. We read the participant's poem and the paragraph in which the characters that referred to his personal experience were present. Our reading again mirrored the confusion that was present in the research conversation: when we reread the poem, we shared our incomprehension and pain of witnessing this silenced story. Several days after this meeting, the supervisor told the researcher that the participant's story had been on her mind frequently. The researcher felt relieved and supported in her pain as an isolated witness of this story of unresolvable moral dilemma at the backdrop of a breakdown of meaning. In a sense, the supervisor became another witness, a witness by reading, and could therefore decrease the isolation of the researcher. In its turn, this mitigation mirrored the experience of the participant in uplifting his isolation by indirectly transmitting his story to the researcher. In this

respect, it is remarkable that our fieldwork diary, which was written directly after the research conversations, remained remarkably silent on this indirect transmission of suffering. By reflecting on what has been said and after a detailed discussion with the supervisor, the researcher realized that she might have been avoiding this pain in the same way as the participant. Both were reinforced by the strong urge to forget.

Furthermore, in the vast majority of research conversations, the researcher collaborated with the same professional translator. Quite often, the translator and the researcher spent some time together in the aftermath of the interview in order to clarify and discuss cultural specific containers and roles. However, these shared moments together also gave rise to unique, silent moments of sharing the pain of bearing witness after difficult research conversations. In this sense, it is important to mention that the researcher collaborated with the same translator in her clinical work. Several days later, after a clinical encounter, the translator told the researcher that he was very moved by a certain research conversation, and that he had been thinking a lot about the themes that were brought up in the interview. In addition to these moments during which the isolation of bearing witness was transcended by means of second (reading and translating) witnesses, it is important to note that both the supervisor and professional translator also attended the public performances. Again, their presence in the performance gave rise to moments of shared emotions in the act of bearing witness, by looking to both the said and the unsaid.

Renegotiating a singular position for open narration. At the end of the final research conversations and member check procedures, two participants explicitly requested a conversation with the researcher to talk about certain lived experiences from the past which they experienced as difficult to forget, and which were a cause of turmoil in their daily lives. Since we had shared various moments of bearing witness to the suffering of participants in silent embodied and symbolic ways, these requests immediately appealed to an understanding of the unsaid and unspeakable pain that was encapsulated within the symbolic, and which was shared between the participant and the researcher and between the researcher and the supervisor. After this request, the researcher found herself in the midst of conflicting ethical imperatives and multiple roles as a researcher, a friend and a clinician. In a joint reflection, the researcher and the supervisor discussed these different identities that seemed to be at play within this ethical dilemma. We acknowledged that a clear therapeutic trajectory could not be fulfilled, and discussed the possibilities of referring the participants to a colleague clinician. However, it seemed as though

that the participant did not call upon the researcher as a clinician, but rather in her role as an extended family member which had been listening to, and witnessing, fragments and pieces of these personal stories, to help them continue the reestablishment of threads of meaning within these fragments.

Creating a sense of human reciprocity through protective embodied transmission

The researcher's embodied shifts between multiple positions during the course of the research process also seemed to help participants rebuild a sense of belonging through intersubjective bodily interactions. Additionally, we observed how these embodied encounters could invoke a reciprocal sense of human vulnerability in the research partnership, while at the same time, in some ways, protecting the researcher's personal boundaries.

Silent embodied transmission in collective encounters. The rehearsals became an important intersubjective space in which participants and researcher shared embodied experiences by means of verbal and non-verbal theatrical and movement exercises. As the research conversations accompanied the rehearsal process, the personalization of symbolic material, including poems and bodily expressions, created unique, intersubjective and embodied encounters in which suffering was transmitted between the researcher and the participants. All creative writing material was brought into the rehearsal space and presented by the writers to the entire group and the director. Furthermore, all texts were translated into Dutch and were, in the following rehearsals, recited simultaneously in Arabic by the participant and in Dutch by the researcher. When we reflected on the creative writing exercise in the research conversations this intersubjective encounter in the rehearsal space seemed to have provided an opportunity for participants to witness their expressions and stories being welcomed by the researcher as a representative of the host society, against the backdrop of a future public performance and encounter with the host society.

> *When you were reading the text, there were many emotions in your voice, in Dutch. That is very important for us. (…). We sensed that, when you were reading the text, it became clear that you understood something; you interacted a bit with the text. That was important for us to understand that our text has an effect.*

In this way, the researcher may have played a role in the shared rehearsal space as the first spectator of the public performance. Moreover, the emo-

tions in the researcher's voice when reading participants' symbolic vehicles of trauma may have shifted the participants' sense of dis-belonging towards a possibility of social connectedness as members of a new society, while at the same time still affirming the legitimacy of a certain hope for transmission on the public platform of expression. In the same vein, the researcher was present as a witness by looking during the public performances.

> *He told us that Sofie cried. Sofie cried, out of joy. And your tears were a signal for us to relax. (…) Your support, your confidence as well. We sensed that. Even without talking. We sensed that. You just look at us and we sense that you trust us. And that you trust us to turn the performance into a success.*

Towards reciprocal human vulnerability within boundaries. The researcher's shifts between positions also seemed to give rise to moments when a reciprocal sense of human vulnerability came to the fore. For example, the intense period of rehearsing and performing on consecutive evenings led to minor conflicts between the researcher, the intern, and the director with respect to organizational issues. This resulted in a discussion between the researcher and the director, after which the researcher, in tears, left the group for a short break, trying not to publically express her emotions in the presence of the participants. In what followed, participants started calling and texting the researcher, showing their concern and care for her well-being. Here, for the first time in the research process, the researcher's expression of her emotions might have opened a space for a reversal of vulnerability between participant and researcher. The researcher changed from an observant of suffering and vulnerability in her position as an interdisciplinary researcher into someone who expressed her own vulnerability and emotions in her position as a temporary family member. After her return in the theatre, one of the participants explicitly expressed how, for her, this incident represented an important moment of change and intimacy between the researcher and the participants.

> *Now, Sofie, we have seen that you are one of us.*

Following this, we could argue how vulnerability, as a potential dimension of reciprocity within the research partnership between participant and researcher, is often disregarded. In our case study, the denial of the researcher's personal vulnerability did not avoid the infliction of harm. On the contrary, one participant indicated that he found it difficult that the researcher did not share personal information and emotions, as he had done throughout the re-

search project. In doing so, he explicitized an imbalance of vulnerability in the research partnership which reflected subtle imbalances of power that were at play in a supposedly reciprocal relationship. Indeed, the multiple positions of the researcher in the research process lead to diverging engagements with respect to personal disclosure and vulnerability. It seemed that, throughout her embodied shifting of positions, the researcher was able to initiate a sense of reciprocal human vulnerability, while at the same time preserving the necessary personal boundaries required to continue her role as researcher in the research project.

Changing the ongoing dynamics of harm in addressing distinct positions

During the course of the research project, it became clear that research participation did not protect the participants from experiences of harm and violence. However, the researcher's multiple positions seemed to offer pathways to reinstall elements of relational safety and initiate change in experiences of an ongoing collective dynamics of harm and violence throughout the research process, since participants and researchers could address or speak from particular positions. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that, regardless of her particular position, the researcher would in some degrees always be a representative of the host community.

Exploring structural violence from a safe distance by means of the other. A recurrent topic in the research conversations was the subtle but painful experiences of voyeurism and instrumentalization in public performances in relationship to the host society's spectators as the unknown other.

> *For some people it was like a show, a real show.*

In our case study, the researcher was literally and symbolically part of this Belgian audience by actively looking at human suffering during the public performance, as well as in the research practice itself. For the participants, the research conversations could function as a vehicle to make sense of these experiences of stereotyping and voyeurism by the other, in dialogue with the researcher who was able to switch back and forth between the position of an othering researcher, a witness by looking, and a close friend in the host society to talk to about difficult subjects and painful emotions.

> *It made me a bit suspicious. Perhaps people came to watch us because they are just curious to see a refugee. And that is why I discussed it with you.*

It could be argued that we discussed the inherent dynamics of instrumentalization and voyeurism within unequal power relationships, including our own research relationship, from a safe distance, by reflecting on the position of the other as the unknown audience member. However, in this case, we were also able to speak from our position as an active witness, and listen to the inevitable harm we had caused, as a representative of the host society representative and as a voyeuristic researcher. Although we are aware that this dialogue would never lead to an altogether disappearance of instrumentalization from our position as a researcher on human suffering, it may have held the promise of offering a space of reconstruction, humanization, and mutual understanding in relationship to the unknown members of the host society.

> *In the end I just realized that it is a bit normal, that there is such a position in the audience.*

Furthermore, we observed how humor and sarcasm seemed to have functioned as another important way to express these experiences of structural violence and instrumentalization from a safe distance.

> *Once I was present at a performance at a theatre. The actor assaulted somebody, a corrupt member of the government. And he was critical of him, but of course with humor. He could do it and dare to do it with humor. Without humor, with a direct message, he would go into jail or be killed. Like that, I just realized, that is the right way to discuss things. Even hard things you can discuss with humor.*

As this quote illustrates, humor can play a pivotal role in disturbing power imbalances from a safe distance in a constrained socio-political context. In the same vein, humor and sarcasm can also play a positive role in questioning prevailing power dynamics in qualitative research (Hewer, Smith, & Fergie, 2019). Indeed, humor seemed to bring a kind of inverted balance of power to our research conversations. For example, one of the participants refused to have a translator present during his research conversations. However, for the last member check reflection, the researcher stressed that the presence of a translator was absolutely necessary. While discussing the importance of the translator, the researcher indicated that a translator might help her understand the participant's experiences. The participant reacted ironically that, she would never understand it, even with a translator. Similarly, during the research conversations, participants confronted the researcher via humoristic,

sarcastic comments and remarks with the limitations of her understanding in the context of an artificial interview. Here, we argue, the introduction of humor and playfulness mobilized an inversion of roles and re-negotiation of power positions, which may have supported significant vehicles of empowerment within a dynamic research partnership.

> *Okay, it is very simple, it is not that hard, but your Dutch is just not that good today (laughs).*

At the same time, this indirect, humoristic way of communication, which induced the research conversations with laughter, may have also provided a possibility to share painful experiences of inevitable instrumentalization, held by both the participant and researcher. This form of communication could, in some ways, humanize her violent and harmful acts of instrumentalizating human suffering. However, when the researcher switched to a more explicit dialogue on instrumentalization and power hierarchies, participants divided her as a person into the different positions she took, as a result of which the strict role of the researcher became the other.

> *I found it interesting, I found it good of course that I took part in this project in the framework of a PhD that thematizes the refugee. And I want to say: I never had the feeling that Sofie engages with us, engages with me, as a refugee. Not at all. That is your study that researches that: "who is the refugee, which feelings does he have".*

One could say that this distancing mechanism may have offered the participant a way to protect both the self and the researcher and their multiple relationships. In this respect, it is important for researchers to be wary and critical of the precarious balance between the relational dynamics of protection and power. The interactive construction between the participant and the researcher may result in a strict division of the latter's different roles. By doing so, the participant might want to protect the researcher, her power dynamics and multiple positions by presenting narratives which the researcher might wish to hear.

Protecting a shared collective identity. While we identified the reconstructive role of within-group dynamics in coping with trauma and exile (de Smet, Rousseau, Stalpaert, & De Haene, in press), we also observed how the collective rehearsal space was not devoid of macro-political forces and interethnic, religious, collective tensions. Of course, the project took place

against a background of a history of colonization, oppressive rule and ongoing violence in the Middle East, including the home country of the participants, the director, and the researcher. These tensions induced the collective environment with fragile elements of safety and within-group cohesion. Participants seemed to communicate experiences of harm and unsafety in the collective encounter to the researcher by foregrounding her static role as a researcher, irrespective of her other positions. In doing so, the participants arguably protected her other position, that of a temporary family member of the collective group. By focusing solely on the role of the researcher in the research conversation, the painful fragility and fault lines within our temporary family structure could, in some ways, be silenced. By doing so, the participant protected the shared collective identity of the group. For example, participants seemed to delineate the researcher's future research practice and address the broader research community as they expressed harmful experiences in the research partnership.

> *I had unclear feelings, should I discuss it with you or not. But I told it in the interest of your research as well. In that way, you can learn things in the future. It was a bit painful for me. But I kept it for myself. But, I want to share it with you now.*

As participants expressed how this awareness from the side of the researcher could protect future refugee participants in research projects, participants took care of other, potentially more vulnerable community members by communicating these experiences of harm in the research project. For example, in the context of a TAR-procedure in the research conversations, one participant expressed his critique on this research method. Here, it became apparent that, even in the rehearsal space, feelings of instrumentalization and voyeurism could not be avoided.

> *What I find particularly hard is the camera. It is not the engagement with you or the director or our roles, but the camera that observes us, always.*

In a sense, the camera continued to ostentatiously represent our position as a voyeuristic researcher in the collective encounter. In this dialogue, the participant stressed that, by criticizing the research method, he hoped to have an influence on other research practices and theatre interventions with refugees. This critique became a point of departure to explore the dimensions of violence and harm caused by the researcher by using video recordings of the rehearsals. In this respect, we aimed to validate the importance of indicating

vehicles of harm in the here-and-now of the research conversations in order to offer possibilities for reparation and prevent of further harm by increasing the sensibility of the research for the particular precarious dynamics at play in the research process. Indeed, it seemed that the TAR-procedure induced, in addition to feelings of instrumentalization, also feelings of unsafety for the participant. It could jeopardize the precarious within-group cohesion among Syrian participants in the aftermath of collective violence as participants could observe each other in the video-fragments. Similarly, another participant shared how the composition of text fragments within the performance caused harm. After listening to his objectives and suggestions for future research practices, we explored, from our strict role as a researcher, how this experience from the side of the participant induced feelings of inequality in the group, and touched upon experiences of sectarianism and dictatorship in the participant's home country.

Mourning the failure of holding on to all positions simultaneously. Although we were striving towards equality and reciprocity in our participatory research method (Brydon-Miller, 2009), we were still faced with harm we inflicted and the feelings of instrumentalization we induced, which are an inevitable result of research on human suffering. In one of our last research conversations for example, one participant expressed, in a very cynical way, his ambivalent feelings about the researcher's role in the research process. In fact, these remarks bordered on anger. As we reflected on his expectations of the researcher's role, the participant started laughing.

> *Yes, yes. (laughs). You, you did nothing! (laughs). Yes (silence). Of course.*

After this cynical way of expressing harm in the research project, we explored what the participant's meant by the phrase 'doing nothing'. In this dialogue, it became clear that, for the participant, 'doing nothing' referred to the relational interaction between the researcher and the director, since he himself and other participants' experienced feelings of unsafety and harm within the rehearsal space in interaction with the powerful role of the director. This reminded him of past experiences of inequality and oppressive rule. The participant seemingly called upon the researcher's responsibility and failure to 'do everything' use live up to her position as a researcher and ensure safety in the research process, to which he had given consent. In the aftermath of this research conversation, our fieldwork diary shows a multitude of questions, in which we tried to make sense of the meaning of 'doing nothing'. First questions in the diary seemed to reflect initial feelings of anger and disappointment in

response to this criticism. Here, our inner dialogue in the fieldwork diary shifted in accordance with the multiple positions we were taking, expressing anger and disappointment as a friend, family member, and clinician. However, towards the end of the diary, our voices started doubting about which of the multiple positions was addressed exactly, together with an increased awareness of a sense of privilege, power, and complicity, as broader socio-political dynamics started to penetrate the research encounter.

> *Could there be a way towards reconstruction by him giving voice to this anger in the research conversation? Now I wonder, did I really listen to him?*

Arguably, the term 'doing nothing' referred in some ways to the ongoing structural violence and inequality which was experienced vehemently by the participant at the time of the research conversation. In previous research conversations, the participant in question had already expressed the wish to participate in the public performances in order to tackle stereotypes in the host society. Now, however, he firmly stated that he wished to disregard his previous intention to bring change. He said that the research project was a vehicle to continue the Syrian revolution, for himself, internally.

> *Temporary just means a struggle for myself. (…) I struggle, I do, in me, an inner revolution. But not with the people, with the audience. It was alone. Inside. In me. I do a kind of struggle because I'm Syrian. A kind of struggle, but not one to share with the audience. Not to receive some results from the audience. It is only in my heart. Inside.*

Arguably, facing a continuation of structural inequality and violence in day-to-day interactions which mirrored the current situation in Syria, confronted the participant with the limited amount of actual change in the host country, which is what he initially envisioned when he started to participate in the research project. Indeed, we were forced to admit that we had in fact done nothing to bring about concrete change in his actual, precarious social position. We could argue that, through his participation in the theatre project, we have given him the possibility to express himself and have his voice heard in a time of growing stigmatization and polarization. However, this experience of having a voice may have in fact exacerbated feelings of hopelessness, due to the chronically precarious social situation in which the participant still found himself after the research project was finished (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Rousseau et al., 2014). The same participant was also reluc-

tant to participate in the rerun of the public performances. Quite possibly, his wish to avoid further testimonies in public performances may also have been a way to protect himself: in this way, he could avoid being confronted once more with the unwillingness of members of the host community to listen to his pain, and with the 'doing nothing' of the instrumentalizing researcher, which was emblematic for the continuation of structural violence in his life.

Afterwards, the researcher shared her experiences with her supervisor. The conversation in which this exchange took place started with a discussion on the research question and a follow-up on previous research conversations. Eventually the researcher shared the difficulties she experienced in the interview after having been accused of having done nothing. In her attempt to pinpoint what it was that made this experience so difficult, the researcher struggled to make sense of her words and remained silent. This silence initiated another silence at the side of the supervisor, followed by a validation of the meaning of silence. The supervisor then shared her own confrontation in research practice with participants' feelings of instrumentalization of human suffering. It became clear that, during these silences and after reflecting on them, we could share a sense of mourning about the impossibility of holding on to all our positions simultaneously to their fullest, value-driven intrinsic potential. As we shift from one position to another, we inevitably cannot uphold being a non-complicit and benevolent friend and family member and an inevitable voyeuristic researcher of human suffering at the same time.

Shifting language of positioning. While we cannot fulfill all positions at the same time, we observed that the researcher can initiate significant shifts in language and poetics according to the position she takes. We argue that this flexibility may have the potential to create restorative elements of relational trust and enhance an understanding of human moral complexity within a micro-research encounter. We reflected on how we could initiate elements of change in ongoing experiences of structural violence in the host-society by changing the dominant language in the research conversations. For example, by expressing his anger and the researcher's 'doing nothing' in the research conversation and by repeatedly formulating his dissatisfaction with the informed consent procedure in the member check procedure, the participant's language predominantly portrayed a poetics of administrative injustice and violence. He expressed the need to integrate the director in the informed consent procedure in order to offer participants the opportunity to make a decision on research collaboration based on an agreement with both the researcher and the professional partner. We tried to acknowledge this administrative violence by listening, validating, and holding our violent acts as researchers.

Recognizing the violence we inflicted and the harm we caused may have counterbalanced the dominant politics of non-recognition of violence and the illusion of purity which is present in other experiences of structural violence in interaction with institutional bodies. At the same time, we might have generated a different kind of language that reflected our personal position as a friend and temporary family member. We shifted to a more relational and subtle embodied language within our position as a friend by repeatedly expressing and emphasizing our regret and personal failure as a temporary family member. Arguably, such a shift of language may, as a counterbalance to the depersonalized language of administration, have the power to initiate a spark of change in the ongoing continuation of structural violence. As a researcher, a representative of the host society and a friend, we might have the political responsibility for the violence inflicted upon participants. By making the underlying ethical conflicts and ambiguities in the multiple positions of the researcher explicit and by introducing a sense of complexity in the multiple roles we represent, the intersubjective space between participant and researcher could become a performative micro-social platform to model moral complexity.

Discussion

In this article, we unpacked the researcher's multiple positions in the research relationship in our case study. Our aim was to further our understanding of the impact of interpersonal mobilization processes on role boundaries in an evolving qualitative field research partnership. We observed how both participants and researcher actively engaged with the researcher's multiple positions, and how elements of harm, restoration and agency were invoked for both participants and researchers. Furthermore, our analysis highlights the importance of taking the particular research setting and context into account and ponders over its impact on the inherent reciprocal and interpersonal mobilization processes between participant and researcher. In doing so, it stresses the importance of moving beyond the decontextualized and static understanding of the research partnership that is dominant in ethical and deontological guidelines, and to identify which dimensions of the research partnership need to be renegotiated time and time again in order to protect both participants and researchers.

In this light, and in line with recent scholarly voices in community-based collaborative research (Banks et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2018), we suggest to focus on the importance of a continuous renegotiation process with regard to the participant's and researcher's positioning in a continuous, unfolding research relationship. Such a continuous renegotiation during the

course of the research process allows us to remain alert for the continuous development of the research partnership. Hence it might strengthen the everyday ethical conduct (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) in which researchers remain attentive for ethically important moments, relational processes of power and positioning, and potentially harmful aspects in the research partnership. Throughout this a dialogic research practice between researchers and participants, the researcher becomes, not just a morally static agent guided by ethical principles, but a dynamic participant embedded in a mutual, ongoing dialogue (Guillemin & Heggen, 2009). In short, we argue that the renegotiation of role boundaries in qualitative health research partnerships is an 1) inherently dynamic, 2) internal and 3) external dialogue.

Firstly, the renegotiation process of role boundaries is a dynamic dialogue since the research partnership constantly evolves during the course of the research process. Within this dynamic micro-encounter, we also observed how the researcher can actively initiate micro-dynamic shifts in language, which may restore intersubjective relational trust. Furthermore, in addition to the micro-dynamics of the relationship between researcher and participant, we argue that the renegotiation process is also continuously colored by the macro-dynamics of the socio-political context that surrounds the research practice. In a context of macro socio-political shifts in Western host societies, where refugees' protection statuses shift from "being at risk towards being a risk" for society and the increasing eroding of human rights (Rousseau, 2019), there is a need in refugee health research to constantly adapt the renegotiation process to the evolving socio-political contexts in which research processes are embedded.

Secondly, we argue that the renegotiation of boundaries is also a self-reflective, internal dialogue. This self-reflective inner dialogue should include a close recording and rereading of fieldwork experiences in diaries and notes. In this respect, we observed how the researcher's supervision played an important role in increasing the researcher's reflexivity and awareness of emotional transmission and the ethical ambiguities of role confusion in the research partnership. In addition, we argue to broaden the self-reflective inner dialogue across research projects and across learning processes with regard to role confusion in "inter-project dimensions of research" (Huisman, 2008, p. 394). Indeed, we observed how our pilot study generated important self-reflective insights into the risks of role confusion, and had a significant impact on our final research design.

Thirdly, we understand participants' active contextual mobilization of the researcher's multiple positions and their boundaries as potential vehicles of agency within a dynamic research relationship. A reflective response to

these mobilization processes from the side of the researcher, based on an increased, flexible awareness of the various positions at play within the research partnerships might further a reflective research practice. This could result in a more explicit conversation on the underlying conflicts and ambiguities of the research partnership between researcher and participant. In this respect, we observed in our case study how the research partnership became a space for a "practice of joint reflectivity" (D'Souza et al., 2018, p. 35) and shared renegotiation of positions. Indeed, moving beyond the dominant focus on an individually practiced reflexivity from the side of the researcher to a collective co-created process shared between researchers and participants (D'Souza et al., 2019), it became clear how the awareness of a multiplicity of positions is part of a shared understanding between researchers and participants. Renegotiating and discussing these positions might offer a pathway to mitigate the harm caused by inevitable feelings of instrumentalization in research on human suffering, and entails vital elements of participant's agency in the research partnership, including the renegotiation of positions in the aftermath of the research project. In this respect, it is quite remarkable scholarly work focuses on the idea of 'leaving the field' primarily from the perspective of the researcher (Mayan & Daum, 2016; Morrison et al., 2012). Moving beyond a unilateral perspective, we argue that a broadening focus on the participant leaving the field may contribute to a redistribution of power and agency. Indeed, we observed how participants actively initiated the negotiation of positions during the development of the performative work's rerun, as some participants decided to engage further in the research project, but expressed their wish to end the engagement as a member of the theatre group. In the same vein, research benefit and personal transformation in the research partnership have been studied primarily with respect to participant's research participation (Legerski & Bunnell, 2010). Yet, in line with feminist scholarly voices in the field of qualitative research (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006, 2008), extending the notion of research benefits and risks from the participant to the researcher may entail a further deepening of our understanding of role boundaries in the intersubjective encounter of a dynamic research partnership with refugees. The participant is not the only one who participates in the research. The researcher does so as well, and both the participant and the researcher can be harmed and transformed.

When writing this reflection, we received a message of one of the participants with a picture of a flourishing jasmine tree on his balcony. This instantly brought us back to the research project. In the research conversation, that same participant had explained to us how jasmine would remind all Syrians of

the peaceful streets in Damascus, and how it could be a symbol for peace within their community. To ease the pain of being separated from Syria, he told us how he daydreamed daily of returning to a peaceful Syria by sitting next to the small jasmine tree on his balcony at home. The fragrance of jasmine generated a calming, hopeful atmosphere.

> *It is always like that. There is a connection between, if I smell the jasmine, than all, I start to fantasize about Damascus, that I'm there of in my village. Yes, so every time I see or smell the jasmine, it makes a connection, between my head and there (laughs), not just me, but all Syrian people.*

After this joint reflection, the jasmine became a strong, shared symbol of symbolic transmission of both loss and suffering as well as of the hope shared between participants and the researcher throughout the research project. In the message that we received more than one year after the end of the project, the participant said the following:

> *Every time I see the jasmine, I remember Temporary.*

The jasmine simultaneously symbolized both pain and joy in the memory of Damascus. Now, it also captured the harm and benefit of the shared memory of our research partnership, conveying both the harm and joy of a temporary shared space and an ongoing dialogical and symbolic renegotiation.

Integrative Discussion

In this integrative discussion, we aim to connect our empirical findings on the dynamics of coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre to our methodological reflections. Hereto, we will first summarize our main research findings on modes of coping with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in the applied theatre setting of our main case study *Temporary*, an applied theatre intervention with Syrian refugees resettled in Belgium.[1] Secondly, building on the inherent limitations of our study's design, we point to potential further directions for future research on the understanding of the process of trauma narration in trauma coping in applied theatre. A third part of this integrative discussion outlines and continues the methodological framework that underpinned the reflections presented in Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively. This third part stresses the importance of the interdisciplinary focus of this research. Finally, this discussion is concluded by a final dialogue between research and practice, in which we discuss the practical implications of our research findings and methodological reflections, and formulate several suggestions for both applied theatre psychosocial interventions with refugee participants and clinical refugee trauma care.

Main empirical findings on the relational nature of trauma narration in coping with a life history of collective violence and forced displacement in an applied theatre setting

The aim of this PhD was to further our empirical understanding of the relational nature of trauma narration in coping with traumatic experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre with refugees. Our literature review on the process of trauma narration in transcultural psychiatry and cultural anthropology indicated an increasing attention for a relational understanding of the process of trauma narration as a large body of literature and empirical studies show the importance of a modulated nature of trauma narration and a variety of meaning-making systems that underpin the process of trauma narration (*see* Introduction and Chapter 1). This points to a broadening of the predominant individualized conceptualization of trauma narration as a mere autobiographic verbalized process. The relational perspective conceptualizes narrating trauma as a complex process that unfolds in dialogue with family, community, host community members and the public arena. It

1 This integrated reflection on the research results largely corresponds to Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this doctoral study.

emphasizes the role of social, cultural, and political meanings in shaping both the mode, process and outcome of trauma narration (Brough, Schweitzer, Shakespeare-Finch, Vromans, & King, 2013; Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016; Kirmayer, 2007). In doing so, it points at the reconstructive role of modes of narration beyond words and acknowledges silencing and non-verbal responses in individual and communities' practices of coping with experiences of collective violence and forced discplacement (Derluyn, Vindevogel, & De Haene, 2013; Foxen, 2000; Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012; Kidron, 2010). Analogously, in the field of theatre studies, applied theatre scholars have questioned the predominant individualized focus on the expression of refugees' personal narratives in applied theatre as a vehicle of benefit and for agency. Here, increasingly scholars have critically explored the relational dynamics at play in interaction with host societies in the performative encounter with an audience (Dennis, 2013; de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Erel, Reynolds, & Kaptani, 2017; Jeffers, 2008, 2013) as well as delineated the importance to broaden the theoretical reflection on aesthetic language and representation in applied theatre practices beyond the modes of representation and transmission in the relational encounter with an audience, but to scrutinize all relational actions, inside and outside the rehearsal space, off and on stage (Warstat, Heinicke, Kulu, Möbius, & Siouzouli, 2015).

This interdisciplinary PhD focused on these analogous theoretical developments in both fields, which raise fundamental questions on an individualizing notion of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile. With the aim to further current scholarly work in both transcultural trauma psychology and theatre studies by connecting their analogous critique and conceptual broadening, we focused in this study on an in-depth empirical analysis of the relational nature of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre. Hence, to further our empirical understanding of the relational nature of trauma narration in applied theatre, we empirically analyzed the various ways in which refugees express experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre. The research questions underpinning this study were: How do refugees express experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre and give meaning to these modes of expression? We conducted a case study of a participatory theatre project with Syrian refugees who were recently resettled in Belgium. We tried to understand their various forms of expressing personal experiences of collective violence and forced displacement, as well as the way they gave meaning to these narratives throughout the intervention.

In line with recent research on trauma narration (Kevers, Rober, Rousseau, & De Haene, 2017), our findings show an empirical variety of modes of expressing life histories of traumatic experiences, which suggests that the process of trauma narration is an inherently dynamic one. This dynamic nature is the result of a continuous, dialectic tension between the wish to forget and the urge to testify (De Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012; Rober & Rosenblatt, 2017), within a continuous relational interaction and negotiation with multiple significant others (Dalgaard, 2015; De Haene, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober, 2018; Rousseau & Measham, 2007; Slobodin, Ghane, & De Jong, 2018). Our analysis has further extended our empirical understanding of the relational nature of trauma narration in applied theatre by the variety of forms of expression that we identified in our empirical study and the personal and interpersonal meaning-making processes that underlined these variety of modes of expression of life-histories of collective violence and forced displacement. Here, we observed the role of diasporic community and host society witnesses in participants' making sense of trauma narration in the entire creative process of applied theatre. Furthermore, our findings also innovatively pointed to the potential coping mechanisms at play in within-group diasporic community relations in applied theatre interventions. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss our two main findings on 1) the multiple modes and meanings of trauma narration in applied theatre with refugees and 2) the role of diasporic within-group interactions in coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre with refugees.

Multiple modes and meanings of expressing histories of collective violence and forced displacement in a relational context

Our empirical study indicated different modes in which Syrian refugees accounted for personal experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in an applied theatre project. In our analysis, we identified four intersecting modes of expression: temporary, symbolic, public, and collectively embedded expression. Furthermore, we also found that participants attached multiple meanings to each mode. These included both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of creating meaning, within a specific format of expression, as a way of accounting for traumatic life histories. The variety of these forms of expression and meanings suggests that participants' engagement with the process of trauma narration is an inherently dynamic one.

Firstly, the dynamic character of participants' construction of trauma narratives seemed to emerge from a continuous, dialectic negotiation between the wish to forget and the urge to testify (De Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012; De Haene, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober,

2018). We observed how creative symbolic modes and contained performative modes of expression in applied theatre seemed to have provided a means to modulate a temporary safe balance in this persisting ambivalence. Indeed, the symbolic modes of narration seemed to offer participants a sense of protection from reactivating pervasive feelings of distress and pain in the process of expression, while keeping a symbolic safe distance from personal life histories. In addition, this symbolic distancing may have also enabled the exploration of a mode of expression that ensured cultural continuity in this dialectic negotiation between forgetting and remembering. Furthermore, expressing experiences of loss and suffering within defined containers, as for example the defined character of the public performances and the various theatrical acts within the performance, seemed also to bring forth a sense of personal relief and at the same time draw strict boundaries in the reactivation of feelings of distress and pain linked to the traumatic content and therefore, to uphold a temporary balance in the oscillation between avoiding and disclosing traumatic events.

Secondly, in line with other recent research on the communication of grief (Hooghe, Neimeyer, & Rober, 2012) and trauma in refugee communities (De Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012), within this dialectic tension, we observed how participants blended personal and relational dimensions of making sense of their expression of traumatic life experiences in applied theatre. We documented how participants seemed to be aware of their own personal needs in their search for protection from emotional dysregulation in the moment of expression. For example, it seemed that the realization that the moment of expression was temporary could install a sense of personal relief for the participants. It could result in a sense of regaining control by allowing them to reactivate strong inner emotions and suffering during the remembrance of painful memories and avoid emotional flooding. Furthermore, participants' expression of traumatic experience emerged from a continuous relational interaction with multiple significant others, both present and silent listeners, during the rehearsals as well as during the public performances. This group of others included other participants, the director, and members of home and diasporic communities, as well as the host and broader society. Our findings have further extended earlier empirical research on relational processes of meaning-making by foregrounding the role of the diasporic community and the host society witnesses in participants' making sense of the process of trauma narration in applied theatre. We observed how these relational processes of meaning-making resulted in potential reconstruction processes in the process of narration. Participants' accounts indicated how the presence of witnesses in the moment of narration seemed to install re-

storative and supportive traces in for example reestablishing social ties and connectedness with home and host society and holding suffering together, inhibit suffering, and thereby introduce sparks of social and political change. These profound, political acts of expressing traumatic experiences occurred in interaction with other group members, fellow sufferers from the home and diaspora community, with whom participants could reconstruct a sense of connectedness and collective strength to initiate political change, as well as with the host society audience members, who could be mobilized as political and moral witnesses from the host and international communities in the process of trauma narration.

The role of within-group interactions in coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre

Our analysis exploratively indicates the restorative role of within-group interactions in applied theatre in the way people cope with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement. The study's findings extensively document how community relationships offered restorative avenues for the participating Syrian refugees in the aftermath of a long history of authoritarian rule, human rights violations, civil war, and forced displacement. Within-group interactions in applied theatre seemed to provide a temporary and relatively safe haven where participants could reestablish a sense of belonging after the loss of family and community that resulted from a life in exile. This haven could then offer the participants important tools to reinstall a sense of personal continuity in disrupted life trajectories and communities, as well as hope for political and social change in the Syrian conflict. Furthermore, interactions within the shelter of the group enabled participants to reshape cultural belonging in the aftermath of collective violence and cultural fragmentation. Here, participants could actively take part in the establishment of the group as a connected cultural community that could embrace Syria's religious, political and cultural mosaic and overcome the community's geographical and political fragmentation. This reshaping of cultural belonging was often the result of single participants' initiatives. Hence, it suggests that participants' engagement in the group's development of mutual trust, solidarity and collective strengths may contain also an important source of individual empowerment within applied theatre. All in all, these findings emphasize the importance of locating the restoration of safety, meaning, and connectedness in the process of coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre within the ties of the refugee community, since collective violence and forced displacement have a pervasive disruptive effect on these ties.

Limitations of our study

We acknowledge that our case study's design has several limitations. Hence, in the following section, we raise several critical questions which address these limitations.

Firstly, our applied theatre intervention was limited in time. This limitation, which was due to financial and organizational constraints, prevented us from integrating a more longitudinal and developmental perspective on the process of trauma narration in applied theatre. While conducting member reflections and organizing the public performance rerun generated some longitudinal insights into participants' individual meaning-making of the process of trauma narration, collective processes within the group in the process of trauma narration were discontinued after the public performances. Our study emphasizes the restorative role of group interactions in the aftermath of a long history of authoritarian rule, human rights violations, civil war, and forced displacement. Yet, the limited time frame of our case study prevents us from thoroughly considering the role of the group development in the process of trauma reconstruction in applied theatre.

Secondly, we acknowledge several limitations with regard to our main case study's sample, which limits the generalizability and cultural validity of our research results. Our research findings cannot be generalized to all Syrians living in diaspora in Western countries of resettlement. As our case study focused on the process of trauma narration for young refugees between the age of 18 and 26, our research findings are embedded within a particular age group and developmental stage, which plays a role precise nature of the lived experiences of the process of forced displacement. In addition, we argue that our inclusion criteria may have impacted the participants' overall educational level in our case study. Requiring a relatively advanced proficiency in Dutch, which needed to be acquired within a limited time frame of resettlement, may have led to a high educational level within our sample. However, in this respect, it is important to stress how some participants explicitly reflected on the privileged status related to their age and educational level within the diaspora community. As a result, research participation became a forum for them to express and witness their stories and that of others: the stories of the most vulnerable community members living in exile (see Chapter 5). Here, we acknowledge that our research design did not consider the voices of other community members, such as family members left behind in Syria or those community members who witnessed the participants' stories in the public performances.

Furthermore, we also did not incorporate the voices of the host society audience members in the process of bearing witness of experiences of trauma and exile in applied theatre.

Furthermore, our case study's sample contained both male (N= 6) and female (N=3) participants. In the recruitment phase we particularly aimed towards an equal participation of male and female participants in the theatre project. As the project would result in a public performance and encounter with the host society, we aimed to avoid a reassertion of the dominant negative image of male dominance in refugee communities arriving in Western host societies with means of a representation of both male and female Syrian refugees in our sample. However, we acknowledge that in our cross-case analysis we did not account for gender differences, which may underlie variations in modes of expressing histories of collective violence and forced displacement in a mixed-gender relational context of a Syrian diaspora community and in relationship to the host society in a public encounter. Indeed, research in cultural anthropology has foregrounded how gender may impact the process of bearing witness to experiences of collective violence and trauma (Abel & Richters, 2009; Tankink & Richters, 2007), also in public encounters as for example in truth and reconciliation commissions (Ross, 2001; 2003) and theatre performances (Breyne & de Smet, 2017). For example in our case study, while all male participants wrote a text, we observed how two female participants decided not to write a prose text in the creative process and opted for other modes of expression as for example music and dance. Besides, a female participant indicated how she aimed to counter the dominant negative position of Arabic women in Islamic religion and tradition in the host society. Here it is also important to take into account how participants' age may intersect with gender in determining the role of gender in the process of trauma narration within the group and the group's process. Therefore, we argue that a future follow-up analysis, which focuses in particular on the meaning of gender, may provide a more in-depth understanding of the role of gender in the relational process of trauma narration and how gender plays a role in determining the mode and meaning of trauma narration in applied theatre.

While our sample represents the diversity of ethnic and religious backgrounds among the Syrian population by including Kurdish, Druze, Sunni and Ismaili participants, we recognize the complexity of delineating the Syrian community at the backdrop of a history of interethnic and ongoing political conflict in the home country. Neither homogenizing nor heterogenizing terminology used in this study can ever fully capture the inherent complexity of the cultural, political, and social dimensions at play in the ethno-religious diverse Syrian diasporic community. We could say that the Syrian diaspora commu-

nity is continuously evolving, since community members continuously have to position themselves in relation to current developments in the ongoing conflict. Furthermore, although we took into account the cultural dimensions of meaning-making in our research procedures, we observed how the participants' cultural ethnicity is a particular precarious dimension, linked to a history of sectarianism and experiences of collective violence. This particular socio-political context installed a profound ethical complexity in the scrutinization of participants' ethnic cultural-specific dimensions of meaning-making. At times, the heterogenizing terminology of our research conversations was experienced as hurtful and discriminatory (see Chapter 5). In this respect, we acknowledge that the data of our case study was collected in a continuous co-construction in relationship to other Syrian participants from diverse ethnic, religious, and political background, an Iraqi director, and a Belgian researcher, both in individual and in collective research procedures, which in their turn were embedded in a wider, dynamic socio-political context. Nevertheless, the ethnic, religious and political diversity of our sample may have generated some preliminary insights into vehicles of restoration with respect to trauma and exile in applied theatre with culturally heterogeneous refugee groups from different countries of origin and cultural backgrounds.

Finally, in our research design, we aimed towards an in-depth, contextualized understanding of participants' lived experiences of the process of trauma narration in applied theatre by means of data crystallization (Tracy, 2010). In order to do so, we collected multiple types of data, including participant observation and several in-depth interviews, followed by consensus coding in the data-analysis process. Here, we acknowledge the absence of other research methods that could have further triangulated the data. These methods could have included collective research procedures, for example focus groups with the group, or standardized individual measures to evaluate the applied theatre intervention and assess the impact of the restorative dynamics we identified. However, in this respect, it is important to mention that the small sample size of our case study is inherently linked to the practical organization of an applied theatre intervention with public performances and the development of a safe creative process.

Furthermore, while we were striving towards a participatory approach at different stages in the research design (for overview, see Chapter 5), we recognize that we only validated the understanding of the process of coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre by individual member reflections based on our first, within-case analysis of the data. We acknowledge that, in this respect, our collaborative research approach did not include a collective, group-based understanding of the cross-case analysis of our data.

In accordance with the aforementioned limitations of our study, our research results call a more extensive, in-depth understanding of the process of trauma narration and modes of coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre. In the next paragraph, we outline more elaborate research questions which could be developed by means of three future research directions based on the main conclusions of our research.

Future research questions

Understanding the role of evolving within-group relationships in shaping the process of trauma narration in applied theatre

Our main findings documented how participants' used different direct and indirect modes of trauma narration. Furthermore, we observed how participants gave meaning to these different modes of trauma narration in relationship to their personal needs for protection from emotional dysregulation and in relational interaction with significant others. Indeed, the process of participants expressing experiences of collective violence and forced displacement resulted from a continuous relational interaction and negotiation with multiple significant others, both present and silent listeners, during the rehearsals as well as during the public performances (see Chapter 1). This group of others included, among others, the other Syrian participants in the micro-encounter of the rehearsal space. On a broader level, by developing a temporary safe emotional environment, our findings illuminated the central role of the within-group relationships in coping with trauma and exile (see Chapter 2). By further integrating these findings delineated in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, this continuous and relational negotiation in the process of trauma narration raises the question how participants' lived experiences of the evolving within-group dynamics as diasporic community relationships may play a role in the way they shape their modes of trauma narration, and its meaning-making process in applied theatre. Although the limited time frame of our case study and the lack of collective research procedures such as focus groups inhibited an in-depth exploration of the group's development, our analysis provides some exploratory indications of the potential impact of the evolving role of within-group community bonds on the process of trauma narration in applied theatre, stressing a more temporal landscape of within-group interactions and trauma narration. Here, we preliminary identify three potential pathways of the interaction between evolving within-group bonds and the process of trauma narration in applied theatre.

Firstly, we argue that within-group dynamics may play a role in inhibiting the open verbal narration of traumatic experiences that would impair diasporic community relationships and within-group cohesion. Indeed, recent research indicates that cultural communities may adhere to silencing trau-

matic pasts in the aftermath of collective violence in order to protect social cohesion within the cultural community, maintain a collective identity, and focus on the future reconstruction of social life (Derluyn, Vindevogel, & De Haene, 2013; Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012; Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustinos, & Somasundaram, 2015). In our case study, we observed how a sense of belonging to a community offered participants a strong sense of hope for social and political change for the future of the Syrian community. At the same time, explicit political narratives remained tacit within the relatively safe shelter of the group. Silencing particular narratives, which included traumatic experiences of collective violence that deviate from a unified political unity, might have protected this sense of hope, which was an important avenue to restore a future, hopeful perspective in exile for the participants. In doing so, participants were able to avoid a reiteration of the Syrian community's fragmentation and remain committed to the cohesion of the group and to collective collaboration.

Secondly, we observed how, within the development of the diasporic community, relationships between participants could reshape cultural belonging in exile within the group. In the evolving and safe collective shelter of the group, participants tried to move beyond social isolation and cultural fragmentation, and took cautious steps towards negotiating and restoring cultural, religious and human values in the aftermath of Syria's history of collective violence and forced displacement. We argue that this careful and often symbolic negotiation within diasporic community relationships may play a role in further shaping participants' modes of trauma narration, since it has an impact on the dynamic development of the group. For example, we observed how participants critically questioned cultural stigmas and roles within the group by for example advocating for exhibiting vulnerability in contrast to the focus on resilience to adversity in exile in the Syrian community. This ongoing process of cultural negotiation may interact with participants' adherence to cultural roles within the group. As we observed how cultural roles as for example the cultural role of the leader in the community, shape their modes of trauma narration, shifting and renegotiating positions towards these cultural roles in the safe shelter of the groups may color participants' engagement with their cultural roles during the process of trauma narration.

Furthermore, we observed how participants actively mobilized cultural symbols. Participants' active engagement with these symbols during the process of expression seems to have operated as a vehicle of cultural continuity, with a personal, soothing role for the individual's pain and loss in the moment of expression. In line with other studies that delineated the protective role of cultural tradition and identifications in coping with trauma and exile

(Achilli, 2015; Mekki-Berrada & Rousseau, 2011; Ramsden & Ridge, 2013), cultural symbols seemed to play a role in the reconstruction of a culturally coherent and cohesive universe and in the reaffirmation of collective identity. In this way, it may have provided a relief-inducing contrast to experiences of social disruption and disconnection. At the same time, we also observed how cultural symbols were mobilized in relational processes of meaning-making of trauma narration in relationship to other group members to reshape cultural belonging in within-group relationships. Taking into account the role cultural symbols and collective identifications can play in family and community interactions in coping with trauma and exile (Kevers, Rober, & De Haene, 2017; Lewis, 2010; Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004), cultural symbols could function as a vehicle to cope with loss and social disruption in our case study, uniting the community by means of a shared cultural history. However, at the same time, these cultural symbols can also become a source of disunity and conflict, as some participants critically mobilized cultural symbols to address the role of culture in political oppression and as a source of discrimination in the host society. These different ways in which cultural symbols are mobilized in a process of relational meaning-making can shape participants' further engagement with cultural symbols as a mode of symbolic expression of experiences of collective violence and forced migration.

Beyond these explorative indications of the potential role of dynamic within—group community relationships on the process of trauma narration in applied theatre, it is important to acknowledge how these relationships within the dynamic micro-encounter of the rehearsal space are embedded in a macro socio-political context, including actual outbursts of violence in an ongoing conflict. Indeed, macro socio-political dynamics have the potential to continuously change broader diasporic community relationships, enter the permeable, safe rehearsal space, and impact within-group dynamics. As we observed in our pilot-study, this could result in within-group conflict and the development of relational unsafety and distrust (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018).

In sum, our research findings suggest a potential interaction between evolving within-group community bonds and the process of trauma narration in applied theatre. Hence, further long-term research in applied theatre practices with refugees is needed in order to advance an in-depth understanding to address the following research questions: how do evolving within-group community relationships impact the participants' expressions of traumatic experiences in applied theatre? How do participants give meaning to these evolving modes of expression in relationship to other group members?

Understanding how interactions between the refugee and host community encounter shape trauma narration and reconstruction in applied theatre

Our findings exploratively indicate the host community also plays an important role in the relational meaning-making process in interaction with significant others. The relational negotiation with the host society raises similar questions, namely in which ways the participants' lived experiences of the relational interactions with the host society community may further shape their mode of trauma narration and the way they create meaning of these modes. The limited time frame of our case study and its lack of consideration of voices from the host society prevent us from thoroughly addressing the role of the interactions with host society members in a dynamic process of trauma narration and reconstruction in applied theatre. Nevertheless, our findings still indicate that there is indeed an interaction between these inter-subjective encounters and trauma narration in applied theatre.

At the side of the participants, we observed how, in the course of the interactions with host society members, the experience of an emotional transmission to audience members from the host society seemingly may play a role in re-establishing a sense of human connectedness, as well as a sense of belonging and social positioning within the host society (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, in the interactions with the host societies, the participants could in their political act of expressing traumatic experiences on stage mobilize political witnesses in the host community to bring about political change and counter dominant political narratives in the host and international community. Becoming a witness of emotional transmission from the side of the spectator also appeared to create a moment for the participants in which a core of interpersonal trust could be regained after experiences of man-made atrocity. Furthermore, throughout these emotional interactions, we observed how some participants regained a sense of dignity and self-confidence in their new social positioning in the host society. However, participants also indicated that, within the intersubjective encounter with host society members, there were also feelings of instrumentalization and voyeurism (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 5), which reinstalled feelings of disconnectedness and disbelonging. As participants aimed to initiate a dialogue by testifying of personal experiences of atrocity in a public arena in order to create empathy for the human suffering of Syrian refugees and to change the dominant representation of the Syrian political conflict and the image of Syrian refugees in the host society, these diverging experiences of the intersubjective encounter with host societies could further impact refugees' mode of narration. Indeed, our research findings showed how participants adhered to symbolic forms of expressing their experiences of collective violence and life in exile by mobilizing humor and Western

cultural symbols, with the hope that this would help them convey their experiences and connect with witnessing members from the host society in the public performance in socio-political times of stigmatization and polarization. We argue that the lived experience of the intersubjective encounter with the host society may play a role in participants' further engagement or disengagement with these symbolic and public forms of expression in the aftermath of such intersubjective encounters. Indeed, although the design of our applied theatre intervention was limited in time and only featured one moment of intersubjective encounters with the host society at the end of the project, the rerun of the performance and the member reflections may have generated some preliminary insights into the interactions between the encounter with the host society and the mode of expression employed by participants. For example, we observed how one participant decided to disengage from the public forms of expression in the performance rerun. Here, one could argue that the participant moved from a symbolic and public mode of expression towards silence. In this respect, it is remarkable that he also shifted from a predominantly relational and political meaning-making process to a more individual trajectory with respect to the meaning of trauma narration. While our collected research data do not allow a more in-depth exploration of these shifts in modes of trauma narration, questions related to the interaction between refugees and host society encounters and trauma narration in applied theatre remain.

With respect to these interactive patterns between refugee participants and host society members in trauma narration in applied theatre, our study lacks the perspective of the host society. Indeed, our study design and methods did not include the lived experiences from the side of host society witnesses in the process of trauma narration and its different modes of expression in applied theatre. With respect to enhancing a mutual understanding on these interactive patterns, further research could also focus on the role of host society witnesses in the process of trauma narration in applied theatre and scrutinize how different modes of trauma expression play a role in intersubjective encounters from the side of the listener. In this respect, we can recall the etymological definition of the audience as audiens, i.e. the role of listener. Here, an interdisciplinary approach could integrate scholarly voices in the field of theatre studies on processes of spectatorship and spectatorial witnessing in theatre (Bala, 2012; Rancière, 2009; Stalpaert, 2009; Wake, 2013b) and voices in the field of psychology on the process of trauma transmission, including the dynamics of avoidance and vicarious traumatization, and the cathartic process in healing practices (Kirmayer, 2004). Here, Bala (2012) mentions how the theatricality of a performative event can make the spectator actively self-aware of her own

spectatorship. Theatre scholars have referred to such a position of meta-spectatorship in witnessing testimonies of trauma as becoming a tertiary witness (Rokem, 2002; Wake, 2013b) and how such conscious acts of witnessing have the potential to bring forth reflection and reaction on the broader political role, positioning, and responsibility of the spectator. This notion of meta-spectatorship could be integrated with what Kirmayer (2004) has called an optimal "aesthetic distance" in the cathartic process, in which "the audience or participant becomes emotionally involved in the drama but with parallel awareness of being an observer" (p. 456). Such a parallel awareness of being an observer may hold the potential to safeguard the inherent political dimension at play in expressing experiences of collective violence and forced displacement as a way to mobilize political and moral witnesses in applied theatre. Overall, it is however vital to take into account how the intersubjective encounter between refugees and host society community members is embedded in a broader socio-political arena as expression acts as a profound political act of testimony in a public arena. Recent critical considerations in applied theatre have stressed the importance of framing the value of the spectator's willingness to listen and witness as being inherently linked to power disparities and asymmetric social and political relations within the broader social context (Dennis, 2013; Hamel, 2013). As we observed in our pilot study, broader socio-political dynamics could have an impact on the willingness of the host society to witness the political dimensions of expression in a public encounter (see Chapter 3). In current times of increasing polarization in Western host societies, where refugees undergo status shifts "from being at risk to being a risk" (Rousseau, 2019), contentious issues arise on how applied theatre practices can create safe communal spaces of expressing, and bearing witness of, experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in the host society as a space for human connectedness and of resistance, protest and political change in the aftermath of experiences of violence and forced displacement.

In sum, further research on the dynamics of this intersubjective encounter may result in an in-depth understanding of the role of interactions between refugee participants and host community members in shaping modes of trauma narration in applied theatre and may offer more in-depth insights into the restorative dynamics of the interaction with the host society in applied theatre interventions. Hence, it might contribute to the development of applied theatre interventions as our findings call for a further critical exploration of how to mobilize restorative relational processes of narration in the context of applied theatre interventions in the intersubjective encounter between refugees and host society community members. This could protect both those who express

and those who bear witness in the process of narration, as well as the human connection and the mobilization of a political dialogue between them.

Methodological reflections on an interdisciplinary case study with refugees

As our interdisciplinary research is situated between the disciplinary fields of psychology and (applied) theatre studies, our research design and data collection methods comprised the disciplinary research procedures and methodological strategies from both disciplines. This includes both individual and collective research procedures, and individual in-depth qualitative research interviews besides the weekly-based participatory observation within a collective encounter. This interdisciplinary research setting has generated several particular methodological and ethical questions, as amply mirrored by this dissertations' methodological-deontological reflections that complement the empirical findings of our case study in Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively. In these methodological reflections, we develop a more in-depth understanding of participation in applied theatre with refugees, and of dynamic research partnerships in mental health research with refugees. In this paragraph, we aim to extend these methodological analyses and raise further methodological questions. In doing so, we build on the methodological-ethical dialogue between the two disciplinary fields in which our research is situated. In a first paragraph, we draw upon our reflections on the notion of participation in applied theatre with refugees as delineated in Chapter 3 and further question the unilateral discourse of benefit of participation. After this reflection, we further build upon our reflections on collaborative research practices with refugees on mental health and refugee trauma (see Chapter 4, 5 and 6) as a starting point for further reflection. Drawing upon our reflections on a contextual understanding of research participation in collaborative research (see Chapter 5), we first focus on the broadening of this approach, from a focus on research participants to a focus on research partners. Lastly, based on our research findings and our methodological reflections on collaborative research, we explore the potential value of integrating art-based research methods in refugee trauma research.

Towards a more reciprocal understanding of benefit of participation in applied theatre with refugees

As said, our study design and methods lacked the voices of the host society witnesses and their lived experiences of the process of trauma narration in applied theatre. We acknowledge that this lack in our study's formulation of re-

search questions and the individual research procedures focused on the lived experience of the participants may have led to a unilateral discourse of benefit of participation in applied theatre with refugees (see Chapter 3), focusing on the people on stage being given a voice. This focus raises questions on our understanding of the benefit of participation in applied theatre. In fact, it has the potential to shift the recipient of benefits from 'on stage to off stage', from participant to the host society audience member, and back. Indeed, during our research conversations, participants would at times reverse the benefit of participation in applied theatre, and focuses on the benefit for the audience members from the host society. For example, in informed consent procedures, one participant delineated that he would participate in the theatre project to examine, not how 'we' could help refugees and give them voice, but how refugees could help the host society. He wanted to do this by, among others, presenting themes and embodied knowledge in public performances which the host society might have lost throughout history, or by questioning the dynamics of fear for the other. We argue that considering a more reciprocal understanding of benefit of participation in applied theatre may further initiate a redistribution of power in applied theatre practices. Hence, we express the need to address both benefit and risk on the side of participants as well as that of host society audience members and, as well as on a communal level, particularly in times of a broader social dynamic of anxiety, xenophobia and polarization.

Broadening a contextual understanding of participation in collaborative research for research partners

In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, we aimed to develop a contextualized understanding of research participation for refugees in collaborative research in order to further insights into the potential strengths and pitfalls of mitigating power imbalances and mobilizing autonomy. We analyzed the various relational contexts that shape refugees' research participation and which may act upon the power dynamics of collaborative research. We acknowledge that, in this analysis, we did not include an in-depth investigation of the relational context of the research partners that took part in our collaborative research project. Employing a more contextualized understanding of research participation with respect to our professional research partners may illuminate the role of their social contexts, which in turn may have an impact on research collaboration and intersubjective encounters with participants. Such a contextualized understanding of research collaboration could result in an ethically reflective research practice in refugee research in day-to-day interactions in the field. Indeed, in our exploration of the potential relational dynamics at play in the dramaturgical process with regard to the position of the director (see Chapter

4), our findings may shed light on the latter's relationship to the diaspora community, home community and host society institutions, including the theatre house. These factors could have played a role in the director's performance of research collaboration. However, since we did not collect more in-depth data on the lived experiences of our professional partner, a more in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of our research. However, we acknowledge the fact that, in the setup of our case study, we have in some ways disregarded the ethnic, cultural, and historical dynamics at play in the different home communities of our professional partner and participants. This disregard may have been embedded within our biased perspective on participants and professional partners' belonging to a homogeneous community, and could have reiterated existing stereotypes in our research partnerships, both with respect to participants and with professional partners. This decontextualization may have hampered an in-depth understanding of research participation and collaboration and the development of a reciprocal and trustful research relationship with both participants and research partners. Furthermore, in our case study, it seems important to take the unique interdisciplinary setting into account in the light of a contextualized dynamic understanding of the research relationship. This may have created multiple roles for the professional partners in the same way as it did for the researcher (see Chapter 6).

The value of art-based research methods in refugee trauma research

In recent years, scholars have pointed out the strengths of art-based methods in qualitative research at different stages of the research process, for example in informed consent procedures (Ruiz-Casares & Thompson, 2016), data collection methods (Enria, 2015; Godden, 2017), and dissemination (Rossiter et al., 2008; Rossiter et al., 2008). Given the increasing amount of studies that implement these innovative techniques, scholars have not remained silent on the ethical implications and challenges that go beyond institutional guidelines (Bugos et al., 2014; Gubrium, Hill, & Flicker, 2014; Roger, 2017). In this debate, there is an increasing interest in implementing art-based research methods in mental health research, for example by using photovoice, body mapping, autophotography and digital storytelling (D'Souza, 2019; De Vecchi, Kenny, Dickson-Swift, & Kidd, 2016; Glaw, Inder, Kable, & Hazelton, 2017; Han & Oliffe, 2016; Quaglietti, 2018). In this respect, scholars have shown how art-based research methods can support the collaborative character of qualitative research and enhance the richness and rigor of the collected data by creating a reciprocal dialogue which encompasses multiple forms of knowing, including explicit, tacit, and embodied knowing (De Vecchi, Kenny, Dickson-Swift, & Kidd, 2017; Vacchelli, 2018). We argue that our findings, collected in the art-based and

community-based modality of applied theatre, contributes to this debate by furthering our understanding of the potential strengths of art-based research methods in qualitative health research focused on refugee trauma research. Our main research findings on the process of trauma narration in applied theatre may shed an innovative light on the potential value of integrating art-based research methods in health research on refugee trauma and forced migration. By outlining these extended reflections, we first explore the potential implications of our findings for individual research procedures with refugee participants with a particular focus on the research partnership. Secondly, we raise several questions on the extent to which our research findings indicate how art-based research methods could also install methodological strengths in collective research procedures and group-settings with refugee communities. Finally, based on our findings, we consider how art-based research methods can contribute to the development of beneficial forms of dissemination processes in refugee trauma research.

Firstly, in individually research procedures scholars have emphasized the risk of reinstalling a coercive dimension by inviting refugees to narrate life experiences to a host society researcher in in-depth research conversations subject to power relations (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010b). Beyond the researcher validating silence, we argue that art-based methods in the process of narration could offer refugee participants the opportunity to mobilize verbal and non-verbal modes of narration which they experience as protective and supportive. In our case study, we observed how symbolic creative material, such as poems and prose, which participants decided to bring to the rehearsal space, seemed to have functioned as a point of departure for participants to decide to share fragments of personal stories and experiences of forced migration and trauma, encapsulated within these symbolic stories. Indeed, we observed how jointly reflecting on this symbolic material initiated pathways to modulated disclosure of life-experiences of collective violence and forced displacement (Measham & Rousseau, 2010) in the research conversations (see Chapter 6). We argue that this shared symbolic material could support the researcher and the participant in formal research conversations in a joint exploration of experiences of collective violence and forced displacement from a safe distance in a balance between indirect and direct communication. Beyond the dynamics of power redistribution and agency in the participant's choice for particular symbolic material that can be brought to the research interviews (Glaw et al., 2017), this reflection on symbolic material, prior to the research interview, may allow the participant to stipulate beforehand pathways for protection for emotional dysregulation in preparation of a research

interview. Indeed, our main findings on the process of trauma narration in applied theatre (see Chapter 1) show that symbolic modes of expression can operate protectively by dimming overwhelming experience and regulating emotional distress during the recounting of personal stories, while at the same time keeping a safe distance from personal life histories (Rousseau & Measham, 2007). This supportive character of symbolic modes, regulating distance to traumatic content, emotional distress and pain in the process of narration, can be facilitated further in research conversations, in which the researcher engages with symbolic material the participant brings to the interview, including essays, pictures, and stories, for example in photo elicitation (Sitvast, Abma, & Widdershoven, 2010). This might allow the participant to regain control and autonomous choice during the process of narration, in two ways: by choosing one or more specific artworks prior to the research conversation, as well as during the research conversation, by providing a narrative structure and emotional safety.

Furthermore, in line with recent research that emphasized the potential strength of art-based methods for enhancing culturally responsive research in developing culturally sensitive research procedures (D'Souza, 2019; Hammond et al., 2018), our case study showed how symbolic pathways of expression also played an important role in weaving a sense of cultural continuity into the process of trauma narration (see Chapter 1). Indeed, symbolic communication might have helped participants to appropriate culturally specific containers as cultural metaphors and symbols. These could play a soothing role and form a relief-inducing holding of pain and loss as they embodied a coherent and cohesive universe. Furthermore, we also observed how participants could use symbolic pathways of narration to adhere to their cultural roles in the moment of trauma expression. For example, they would hide their emotions and remain silent on traumatic experiences, through which they could respond to a moral obligation towards family and members of their cultural community. In sum, these findings may also point to the opportunities of art-based methods in developing a culturally sensitive research practice on trauma research with refugees, because refugees can mobilize culturally sensitive modes of expression in research participation (Rousseau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2003).

Finally, scholars have also stressed how art-based research methods may enhance the rigor and richness of the data. The fact that participant and researcher reflect together on artistic material implies both a process of collection and analysis and member checking in a reciprocal dialogue (Glaw et al., 2017). Furthermore, it may support the co-constructing of fragments of meaning (Balmer, Griffiths, & Dunn, 2015), which can be particularly supportive in

the research conversation, during which participants could reframe traumatic experiences (De Haene et al., 2010). Based on our research findings, we could say that there is another advantage to be found in this shared and intimate process of reflection within the participant-researcher relationship: it can help convey traumatic suffering to the researcher at a safe distance from traumatic content, which could reinstall a sense of belonging from the side of the participant. Indeed, we observed how participants associated hope with symbolic modalities in order to convey their suffering to the listeners while at the same time not overwhelming them. An emotional transmission of this kind took place in the public performances and during the micro-encounters of the research conversation in our case study. Here, we observed how the researcher's emotional response to participants' symbolic vehicles of trauma communication seemed to have transformed their sense of disconnection into the possibility of social connectedness as members of a new society (see Chapter 6).

In addition to the aforementioned strengths of the implementation of art-based research methods in individual research procedures in refugee trauma research in relationship to the researcher, we investigate to what extent our research findings in the art- and community-based modality of applied theatre also point to further methodological strengths of integrating art-based methods in the implementation of collective research procedures with refugee communities as for example in focus groups. Such a reflection may further insights into the dynamics at play in art-based research methods in collective encounters (De Vecchi et al., 2016; Lambert, 2013) with a particular focus on refugee communities. Since, as we have seen, participants' relational embeddedness in the home and diasporic community has an important influence on their research participation (see Chapter 5), a further reflection on how this relational embeddedness impacts collective research procedures with community members in refugee trauma research is in order. Indeed, upon arrival in resettlement, refugees often face social isolation and a loss of social support structures. However, in collectivistic cultures, the social network provides an important vehicle to mobilize support in times of adversity (Mooren & Bala, in press). In this respect, we observed how participants adopted research participation as a means to provide social support for other members of the diasporic community, reconnecting with cultural social support structures as extended family networks. Hence, the question arises how collective research procedures on trauma research can create safe collective encounters for trauma narration in order to at the same time support the development of potentially important social support structures at play in research participation. Against the backdrop of such a contextualized understanding of research

participation (see Chapter 5), we observed in our case study how symbolic and collectively embedded modes of expression created potential tools for personal protection, agency, and political change through a supportive, relational interaction with other community members (see Chapter 1 and 2). We argue that these findings may illuminate the potential strengths of integrating art-based research methods in collective research procedures to provide a safe environment of expression in research participation. For example, we observed how particular symbolic modes of expression could support participants in the process of trauma narration in relationship to others by allowing them to omit information about their political orientation in times of ongoing conflict in the home community. These findings seem to be in line with voices in research on art-based research methods in group settings that emphasize the strengths of art-based methods in creating a safe environment of disclosure (Lambert, 2013). In addition, in our case study, the relational interaction in the process of narration with other community members could offer a sense of social support, which seemed to make the expression of personal stories of loss and suffering more bearable. Integrating art-based methods in collective research procedures in trauma research with refugees could also provide the opportunity for participants to engage in a relatively safe negotiation of cultural practices and themes. Indeed, our findings also showed how, through symbolic and embodied modalities such as songs, cultural symbols, bodily interaction and theatrical play, participants could enter into a relatively safe reshaping of cultural belonging in the Syrian diaspora, even with potentially conflicting ideas lingering in the background. In doing so, the mobilization of symbolic communication, could form a source of individual empowerment and agency and mobilize solidarity, trust and collective strength (see Chapter 2). Last, we also observed how the embodied encounter with others working towards a collective art work seemed to invoke comforting feelings of a restored Syrian unity and a sense of rebuilding their fragmented community by means of collective strength. The question arises whether integrating such a collective art-based exercise in collective research procedures could pave the way for a symbolic reconstruction for other refugee communities which are fragmented as a result of forced displacement and collective violence. Here, researchers could explore various forms of collectively embodied art-based works. One example is the making of a joint collage (Vacchelli, 2018).

Finally, our main findings may prompt some reflections on the use of art-based methods in the dissemination process. In our case study, we decided to publish all creative material in a bilingual book meant for the general public. In doing so, we aimed to transcend the ephemeral character of the public performanc-

es and the research project and reach a broader audience. In addition to giving voice to the participants' stories in a public arena by publishing the book, it might also have valued the temporary character of the process of trauma narration in the theatre project. Indeed, we observed that expressing experiences of loss and suffering within defined containers seemed to evoke a sense of personal relief. However, this relief is confined within strict boundaries in which feelings of distress and pain could be reactivated and linked to the traumatic content. At the same time, telling one's story also offered personal avenues for taking care of family and community ties after these had been pervasively ruptured by forced displacement. We can, also wonder whether our book, as a form of dissemination, also adhered to such a defined form of expression in time and space. The book keeps containing the participants' expressions and therefore, extends the dialogue with potential future witnesses. It does this however without requesting the further active engagement of the participants to express their stories. Hence, participants could hold on not only to family, but also to the future. In revealing this potentially supportive but confined form of dissemination adhering to a temporary, a symbolic and a public form of expression, our research findings invite a reflection on other forms of dissemination that support the temporary character of trauma expression.

Implications for practice

In the following paragraph we delineate the practical implications of our research findings. Mirroring the interdisciplinary scope of our research, we first zoom in on the implications of our results for the development of applied theatre interventions, followed by a discussion on the implications of our results for clinical practice.

Community-based applied theatre interventions

In this part, we discuss the possible implications of our findings on the process of trauma narration and restorative within-group interactions for applied theatre. We formulate some suggestions for practitioners and policy makers to mobilize restorative dynamics and supportive structures in coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre interventions with refugee communities in Western host countries. Firstly, we will focus on the development of the creation process. Secondly, we will outline the implications of our findings with regard to target groups and group compositions in applied theatre interventions with refugee communities. Thirdly, we suggest exploring the role of the host society in the applied theatre encounter, in both macro- and micro-dramaturgy. Finally, we aim to address some structural questions on issues of sustainability and

cultural diversity in applied theatre practice in order to create a supportive structure for applied theatre interventions with refugee communities at an institutional and policy level.

Firstly, our research findings highlight the importance of a participatory rehearsal space in which participants can autonomously and equally mobilize various modes of expression of experiences of collective violence and forced migration, including modes other than personal verbalization. Other than a predetermined static dramaturgical structure, a flexible creative container can encourage participants' exploration of an embodied, intersubjective, and dynamic process of making theatre, which includes both narrative and non-narrative modes of expression. In doing so, the participatory rehearsal space might also prove to be a creative container for individuals and the relational interaction in the group, in which the dynamic process of trauma narration and the continuous dialectic engagement of the negotiation between the wish to forget and the urge to testify can be fostered. Furthermore, these symbolic modes of communication that go beyond verbalization can provide a safe negotiation space for within-group interactions to reinstall unity, hope and political change within the community. Other than the various symbolic modes of expression that can be facilitated by employing play, body and art, it seems that creating contained performative dimensions in the rehearsal space is another way to modulate a temporary safe balance within the participants' persisting ambivalence between expressing and withholding experiences of collective violence and forced displacement. We observed this in the single and contained character of exercises and rehearsals. These findings might help practitioners create pathways for symbolic closure after exercises and rehearsals, and provide a structuring, informative framework of each exercise and rehearsal to the participants. Furthermore, our findings seem to argue for the intertwining of person-centered and collective exercises in applied theatre interventions. Indeed, we observed how the embodied collective character of some theatre exercises contributed to the realization of political unity and reconstruction of a fragmented collective world. At the same time, person-centered exercises seemed to enable participants to embed more personal experiences in a collective rehearsal space from a safe distance. Such a dynamic dramaturgical structure reflects the notion of the unique development of a "dramaturgy of the landscape" during each particular process of making (Fleishman, 2014, p. 22), in contrast with a unilateral focus on a predetermined dramaturgy or artistic methodology. Fleishman describes the landscape as a collaboratively evolving unit to be discovered through processes of continuous negotiation and engagement of participants, directors and dramaturges. At the same

time, our findings do not advocate a total absence of power dynamics in such a participatory dramaturgical process. In this respect, the director, who may, to a certain degree, hold a position of power during the creative process, is marked by ambivalence and challenges. Indeed, since refugees' life histories are marked by experiences of power abuse and loss of power in the aftermath of organized and man-made violence as well as in current times of discrimination, we observed a fragile line between securing the unity of the group and reiterating feelings of oppression. Hence, it seems important to move beyond a dichotomous understanding of the director's position of power in applied theatre practices with refugee communities. Such a critical perspective may foster an ethical reflective practice from the side of the director, and also a reflection on how the rehearsal space is inevitably permeated with a broader socio-political dynamic. Indeed, the assumption that the rehearsal space is a utopian and egalitarian safe space may ignore the potentially disempowering dynamics within the relational interaction between the director and the participants, and between the participants themselves. Hence, it seems vital for directors and practitioners to continuously renegotiate a participatory dramaturgical practice during the creative process with refugee communities in applied theatre. In this way, they would acknowledge the inherent socio-political dimension of intersubjective encounters.

Secondly, our main findings underline restorative and supportive traces in the presence of witnesses during the moment of disclosure in applied theatre, which can inhibit suffering and create sparks of social and political change. Furthermore, we also identified important reconstructive tools in within-group interactions between community members. These findings urge practitioners to carefully reflect on the mobilization of these witnesses, including home and diaspora community members as well as members from the host society, in the composition of the group and in the conceptualization of a public format. As we observed the role played by community relationships in within-group interactions in the aftermath of a long history of authoritarian rule, human rights violations, civil war, and forced displacement, it seems vital for applied theatre to take the present community relationships in the diaspora into account in the composition of groups in applied theatre. Indeed, because host countries often attribute a homogeneous identity to refugee communities (often based solely on nationality), inner tensions within refugee communities in exile may enter into the performance space and have an impact on within-group dynamics. It is important to acknowledge that relations within the refugee community play a double role: they can be a source of both social support and fear and polarization. Recognizing the precarious nature of these relational vehi-

cles of reconstruction within disrupted community ties may further enhance critical awareness in developing group projects and avoid potential failure due to group conflict. In fact, one could actually make the argument that a reiteration of inner tensions in applied theatre project may further exacerbate social polarization and disruption in community ties outside the rehearsal space in the social realm. In the same vein, it seems vital to reflect carefully on the role of the host society in applied theatre. The presence of the host society witness may initiate a potentially reconstructive, but also precarious dialogue, particularly in times of a broader socio-political climate of distrust and stigmatization. Indeed, the mobilization of witnesses in our case study in the public arena seemed to have played an important role in stimulating participants to enter into a dialogue and connect with the host society. By mobilizing host society witnesses, participants could act as agents of social and political change for their community and meet their moral obligation towards the home community. Yet, this mobilization of the host society requires a careful reflection and negotiation on the potential risks of reiterating feelings of voicelessness and disempowerment. Hence, there is a need for a dynamic and flexible conceptualization of witnesses in applied theatre interventions, which can become a topic of joint negotiation. Here, we argue that the representation of the host society within the applied theatre team may form an important vehicle for refugee participants to enter into a dialogue and to give meaning to the, in some ways inevitable, reiterating feelings of instrumentalization and voyeurism associated with host community witnesses in the public arena (*see* Chapter 6). In this respect, one could argue that, in times of increasing polarization and stigmatization, applied theatre projects with both refugees and non-refugees could facilitate further restorative pathways to cope with the ongoing dynamics of post-flight discrimination and stigmatization.

Finally, our research findings may invite us to reflect on some structural questions with regard the institutional organization of applied theatre interventions with refugee communities. The first issue concerns the importance of cultural diversity within collaborative teams working with refugees in applied theatre projects. Although we acknowledge the potential problems of focusing homogeneously on the Arabic diaspora community, in some ways the collaborative work between an Iraqi director and a Belgian researcher may have facilitated the continuous representation of two worlds. In the terms of our case study *Temporary*, “the old world and the new world”, the homeland and the new land, were represented simultaneously in the rehearsal space. Mirroring transcultural clinical practices (Rousseau & Bagilishya, 2003), this diverse representation may stimulate participants to negotiate different me-

anings, modes of expression, and coping mechanisms within a relatively safe rehearsal space. Furthermore, in a diverse team, the partners could model the complexity of adhering to multiple roles, as we observed in the role of the researcher representing a researcher, a friend, and the host society (see Chapter 6). Indeed, the representation of the host society within the creative team may offer an opportunity to articulate the dynamics of instrumentalization, discrimination and voyeurism in relationship with host community members within a relatively safe encounter. In doing so, we may also avoid further harm caused by neglecting the broader-social dynamics at play in the social realm, or by exacerbating polarization in the aftermath of participants' feelings of voicelessness and disempowerment.

Our main research findings may also contribute to a critical perspective on the sustainability of applied theatre projects with refugees. In the process of trauma narration in applied theatre, temporary modes of expression seemed to have a supportive value for participants (see Chapter 1). This temporary mode of expression was also reflected in the delineated time frame of the theatre project. While our theatre project was indeed limited in time, this specific finding may blur an all-too-narrow focus on the benefits of striving towards long-term applied theatre projects with refugee communities. Here, it seems important to facilitate the autonomous choice of the participant to engage in temporary formats of expression and participation, as for example in the development of consecutive applied theatre projects within a structurally embedded organization.

Clinical implications for trauma care with refugees

Our findings on the different modes and meanings of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile document a variety of dynamic modes of expression, and emphasize the dialectic and relational nature of the process of trauma reconstruction. The supportive artistic and contained performative dimensions of applied theatre, which provided a means to modulate a temporary safe balance in the continuous negotiation between the wish to forget and the urge to testify, call to address the role of symbolic and artistic modalities of narration in clinical practice of transcultural trauma care. Such a process of modulation through symbolic and creative expression may allow the therapist to make room for a dynamic dialogue, embracing both the space for narration as well as that of silence and as-yet untold stories (De Haene, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober, 2018; Quinlan, Khawaja, & Griffin, 2016; Rober, 2002; Rousseau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2003; Rousseau, Singh, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004). Furthermore, the profoundly aesthetic dimension of symbolic language in our case study leads to a reflection on how the clinician

can engage with art within the clinical space, not only to address and reflect on human suffering from a safe distance, but also to transform human suffering into beauty (Dieterich-Hartwell & Koch, 2017). Aside from the referential, the performative aspects of symbolic language and the creation of beauty may alleviate feelings of meaninglessness and offer a potential new and overarching meaning, based on a transformed reality and a shared experience of beauty as a potential vehicle to transmit suffering in a transcultural clinical setting.

Furthermore, in our case study, we observed how in the relational process of trauma narration, the presence of witnesses during the moment of disclosure seemed to install restorative and supportive traces. In this sense, clinicians may be encouraged to explore multiple pathways to mobilize witnesses in clinical encounters and embed the clinical space into a broader public and socio-political context (Huttunen, 2014; Stepakoff et al., 2011). Here, we turn once again to the reconstructive nature of symbolic reality. The clinician can engage with multiple symbolic pathways to bring voices and stories into the clinical space, or to transmit voices and stories to an audience outside that space. In doing so, this could open doors towards the mitigation of isolation and social suffering in the aftermath of man-made atrocity. Furthermore, clinicians may also transform such a symbolic audience within the clinical space into a real audience by including outsider-witness conversations (White, 2007) with representatives of both the home community and the host country, for example by engaging with cultural brokers. However, enlarging the clinical space into a public one requires the clinician's responsibility to carefully peruse the potential risks of reactivating traumatic suffering or reiterating relational harm in order to be able to safeguard a safe space of narration.

A further step in this mobilization of witnesses of the home community could lead to the creation of group- and community-based interventions with refugee communities. Indeed, in recent years, there is an increasing interest in setting up community-based treatment modalities which locates refugees' post-trauma reconstruction within community relationships in a diasporic context. This is particularly important given the fact that collective violence explicitly targets and disrupts community ties (Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 2013). However, there are almost no evidence-based studies on community-based treatment modalities for supporting refugees' post-trauma reconstruction (Drozdek, Kamperman, Bolwerk, Tol, & Kleber, 2012; Mooren & Bala, in press; Van Ee, 2018; Weine, 2011). In this dissertation, we observed how the collective encounter offered supportive, collectively embedded forms of expression in which suffering could be shared and jointly hold, while at the same time offering a glimpse of hope for a future of collective restoration (see Chapter 1). Beyond the supportive role of the collective format in the process

of trauma narration, our findings also addressed some additional restorative dimensions of community members' interaction in a relatively safe creative encounter, i.e. facilitating the restoration of personal continuity in fragmented life histories, initiating a sense of hope for social and political change, and creating a platform to renegotiate cultural belonging in lives in diaspora (see Chapter 2). These findings call to address how group therapeutic work or community-based interventions with refugee communities can involve supporting community members in creating a safe holding environment.

The facilitation of symbolic and embodied pathways of communication, including for example texts, drawings, music and the body, is a key factor in nourishing the safety of the collective encounter. In addition to this, it is also vital for therapists in community-based interventions to remain attentive to the personal or heterogeneous of ethno-religious sub-groups and the potentially hurtful role of reconstruction based on collective meaning-making. In this respect, the integration of feedback and evaluation sessions during group therapeutic and community-based interventions may further the development of a relatively safe relational space of narration, and support clients in their process of trauma reconstruction. Such an integration is in line with recent research on the inclusion of monitoring procedures and client feedback scales in systemic therapy (Rober, 2017). As monitoring procedures shed a light on supportive and harmful interactions in the clinical encounter, we could argue that applying these procedures to community-based interventions with refugee communities may benefit from the integration of art-based evaluation methods (D'Souza, 2019). The integration of symbolic and creative participatory methods in the evaluation and monitoring of sessions may facilitate a safe relational negotiation among community members, which is attentive of the cultural and socio-political context of the community members in the development of monitoring procedures. Furthermore, adhering to an art-based approach in monitoring procedures with the clinician might also foster a safe space for modulated disclosure, mirroring our research design and the development of the research partnership.

Our final reflection on the mobilization of witnesses invites us to navigate back from the enlarged clinical encounter with witnesses towards the inherent micro-cosmos of the act of bearing witness from the position of the therapist. The clinician as a representative of the host society may, similar to the role of the audience, invoke the client's hope of transmitting stories of suffering and loss to act as agents of social and political change for their community. In those micro-acts of embodied emotional transmission in relational processes between clients and clinicians, there may be an opportunity to regain a core of interpersonal trust after experiences of man-made atrocity, and create

a sense of belonging to the new society (Rober & De Haene, 2014; De Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012). In this respect, we may raise the question to what extent the mobilization of symbolic modes of expression, including art, poetry, prose as well as humor and playfulness, may enhance such an emotional transmission in this relational encounter and offer a protective dynamics for both client and clinician. Indeed, the protective safe distance for the client may also install mechanisms of supportive distancing at the side of the clinician, and protect the latter from being emotionally overwhelmed, which could otherwise lead to potential harmful avoidance reactions or vicarious traumatization in the therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, as this supportive relational process of emotional transmission between the client and therapist as a representative of the host society demonstrates, it is important to acknowledge that the walls of the therapeutic room, like those of the rehearsal room, are permeable and in some ways always in dialogue with broader society (De Haene, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober, 2018; Rousseau & Measham, 2007). Hence, beyond reinstalling safety and the restorative role of embodied emotional transmission, the client-therapist relationship may also hold the potential for the clinician to take political responsibility for violence inflicted upon participants in the host country, in a way which is analogous to our reflections on the research relationship (see Chapter 6). In this sense, the client and the clinician could engage in a joint process of meaning-making and negotiation to make sense of those harmful acts, and thus create a space for humanization and mutual understanding in relationship to the unknown host society. However, here the need arises to acknowledge the potentially harmful acts of inherently representing a position of power, biased interpretations, and failure to protect clients from a sense of instrumentalization of suffering (Rousseau, Nadeau, & Measham, 2008). After all, even clinicians are in some ways 'doing nothing' by remaining complicit with human rights violations within the broader socio-political system.

Finally, mirroring the supportive role of the temporary defined character of testimonies of experiences of collective violence, we may ask ourselves in which ways the clinician, in the act of bearing witness in the clinical space, can modulate temporary acts of testimonies. The clinician could draw boundaries, in time and space, inside the therapeutic space by demarcating moments of expression, followed by a meta-reflective dialogue on the act of expression. Similar to the theatrical space, micro-ceremonial closures can support the contained format of the client's expressive act in consecutive sessions, for example by means of symbols that represent the clinical session. In this respect, the temporary mode of expression also invites us to reflect on the temporary and enclosed nature of the therapeutic relationship itself. While

the duration of therapeutic trajectories may diverse widely, the therapeutic relationship is inherently marked by a defined nature, confined both in space and in time. Initiating symbolic closing ceremonies at the end of therapeutic trajectories, for example by using letters or outsider-witnesses conversations, may enhance a joint co-construction of a framework of expression, defined as a temporary step bound to a particular time and space within the client's life. In doing so, the therapeutic space will always remain a temporary space. Clients may express, voice, disclose, play or write in a temporary relationship in this space, which will always be temporary.

English summary

This interdisciplinary PhD in Psychology and Art Studies focuses on the provision of refugee trauma care in the field of transcultural trauma psychology on the one hand and (applied) theatre studies on the other. With respect to the provision of trauma and psychosocial care for refugees in Western host societies, both the fields of mental health interventions and applied theatre interventions are dominated by similar practices. Both fields' practices are underpinned by an individualizing notion of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with experiences of collective violence and forced displacement, which is the topic of debate in analogous theoretical developments in both fields.

Firstly, scholars in the field of transcultural psychology, psychiatry and cultural anthropology have argued for a broadening of the predominant individualized conceptualization of trauma narration as a mere autobiographic process towards a relational understanding of trauma narration. In this conceptual debate, the idea that one should disclose individual traumatic life-experiences verbally and directly in order to reconstruct a meaningful biographical account as a coping mechanism has been increasingly questioned. Here, scholars have been advocating the importance of a modulated form of trauma disclosure, which stresses the role of partial and indirect modes of trauma narration. Furthermore, a growing body of research has documented the multilayered meaning-making systems that underpin multiple modalities of trauma narration, mapping the complex relational interactions between personal, familial, social, cultural, and political dynamics involved in the process of trauma narration and therefore, acknowledging both verbal and non-verbal modes of expression. Secondly, applied theatre scholars have pointed to the potential limitations of giving voice in the process of theatre participation. Shifting away from an emphasis of benefit on refugees' disclosing personal stories in applied theatre, scholars have increasingly raised awareness on the potential risks for refugee participants in reiterating the loss of power and agency in applied theatre while documenting the socio-political dynamics at play in the process of giving voice, both between refugee participants and audiences within the broader macro-context of a public encounter.

This interdisciplinary PhD focuses on these debates. The analogous theoretical developments raise fundamental questions on an individualizing notion of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile. Our study aims to further current scholarly work in both transcultural trauma psychology and theatre studies by connecting their analogous critique and con-

ceptual broadening and by focusing on an empirical analysis of the relational conception of the process of trauma narration in refugees' coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre. Hereto, we empirically explore the different modes of trauma narration in an applied theatre setting and the process of meaning-making underpinning these modes of trauma narration.

The first part of this PhD aims to further our empirical understanding of the role of trauma narration in refugees' coping with traumatic experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre. In the first two chapters, we present an outline of the empirical findings from our main case study *Temporary*, an applied theatre intervention with nine Syrian refugees who had recently been resettled in Belgium. In Chapter 1, we report on our exploration of the various ways in which refugees express experiences of collective violence and forced displacement in applied theatre, as well as the way they gave meaning to these narratives throughout the theatre intervention. In Chapter 2, we continue contextualizing our findings on the processes of refugees' coping with trauma and exile in applied theatre by specifically exploring the role of diaspora community relations embedded in a broader socio-political dynamics in applied theatre.

This interdisciplinary research setting has generated several particular methodological and ethical questions. This is reflected in four methodological reflections that complement the empirical findings of our empirical study.

The second part of the PhD provides methodological and conceptual reflections on the notion of participation of refugees in applied theatre in Western host countries. In order to do so, we analyze the role of the dramaturgical practices that shape participation at different levels in applied theatre. In Chapter 3, we analyze the dramaturgy of our preparatory pilot study. Through this analysis, we reflect on how the participation of refugees in applied theatre entails opportunities for empowerment, agency, and giving voice, but also runs the risk of leading to disempowerment and silencing in the interconnected relations between participant, theatre maker, audience and the broader socio-political context in contemporary European host societies. In Chapter 4, we reflect on the dramaturgy of the theatre-making process in our main case study. Here, we aim to further the understanding of participation and dramaturgy in participatory theatre with refugees by reflecting on the different potential dialogical art practices at play in relationship to the director.

In the methodological-ethical reflections of the third part of this PhD, we aim to foster our understanding of a reflective research practice with respect to relational power dynamics and to research relationships in the grow-

ing field of collaborative refugee research and qualitative health research. In Chapter 5, we focus on the various relational contexts that shape refugees' research participation, and which have an influence on power dynamics in collaborative research. In Chapter 6, we aim to contribute to a reflective research practice in refugee research by conducting an in-depth exploration of the nature of the research partnership in our main case study. By doing so, we aim to further the development of an enhanced contextual and dynamic intersubjective understanding of the research partnership and its impact on the growing importance of role boundaries in qualitative health research.

Finally, we conclude this PhD with an integrative discussion. After delineating the limitations of our empirical study, we initiate a dialogue between the different chapters and point to potential further research directions for future research. Furthermore, in this discussion we aim to extend our methodological analyses and raise further methodological questions. In a last paragraph, we conclude with a final dialogue between research and practice and discuss the practical implications of our research findings and methodological reflections. In doing so, we formulate several suggestions for both applied theatre psychosocial interventions with refugee participants and clinical refugee trauma care.

Dutch summary

Dit interdisciplinaire doctoraatsonderzoek in de Psychologie en de Kunstwetenschappen vestigt zijn aandacht op de vormgeving van traumazorg aan vluchtelingen, enerzijds in transculturele traumapsychologie en anderzijds in (toegepaste) theaterwetenschappen. Hierbij observeren we dat beide disciplinaire domeinen - psychosociale interventies in de geestelijke gezondheidszorg en in toegepaste theaterpraktijken - worden gedomineerd door gelijkaardige praktijken. Ten grondslag aan beide praktijkvormen ligt een geïndividualiseerd perspectief op het proces van het vertellen van traumata als een vehikel voor vluchtelingen om met hun ervaringen van collectief geweld en gedwongen migratie om te gaan. Het is net dat perspectief dat een onderwerp van debat is in beide disciplines.

Ten eerste pleit recent onderzoek in transculturele psychologie, psychiatrie en culturele antropologie voor het conceptueel verbreden van het dominante geïndividualiseerde begrip van het vertellen van traumata, louter als een autobiografisch proces, naar een relationeel begrip. In dat conceptuele debat stelt men het verbaal en exact reconstrueren van individuele traumatische levensgebeurtenissen in een autobiografisch verhaal als centraal copingmechanisme voor vluchtelingen in vraag. Hierbij wijzen auteurs op het belang van een gemoduleerde wijze waarop traumatische gebeurtenissen verteld kunnen worden, met inbegrip van indirecte en gedeeltelijke wijzen van het vertellen van traumatische ervaringen. Daarnaast heeft onderzoek ook de meerlagigheid van betekenissystemen gedocumenteerd die onderliggend is aan de verschillende wijzen waarop mensen traumatische ervaringen uitdrukken. Die meerlagigheid wijst op de complexe relationele interacties tussen persoonlijke, familiale, sociale, culturele en politieke dimensies in het proces van het vertellen. Daarnaast maakt ze ook ruimte voor verbale en non-verbale wijzen van het uitdrukken van trauma.

Ten tweede, theaterwetenschappers hebben in toenemende mate de grenzen om een stem te geven aan vluchtelingen in het proces van toegepast theater aangekaart. Ze nemen daarbij afstand van een eenzijdige positieve benadering van het vertellen van persoonlijke levensverhalen voor vluchtelingen in toegepast theater. Zo beogen theaterwetenschappers in toenemende mate de bewustwording voor de potentiele risico's voor het vertellen van trauma-verhalen in toegepast theater te stimuleren. Hierbij houdt men rekening met de sociale en politieke dimensies die inherent aanwezig in het proces van vertellen, zowel in relatie met de andere deelnemers alsook in relatie tot het publiek en de bredere maatschappelijke context.

Dit interdisciplinaire onderzoek zoomt in op die analoge debatten. De parallelle theoretische ontwikkelingen stellen fundamentele vragen bij een geïndividualiseerde kijk op het vertellen van trauma in het omgaan met ervaringen van collectief geweld en gedwongen migratie. Deze studie beoogt het huidige onderzoekswerk, zowel in transculturele trauma psychologie als in theaterwetenschappen, te verruimen door hun analoge punten van kritiek en conceptuele verbreding te verbinden. Van daaruit beoogt deze studie een empirische analyse uit te voeren van de relationele conceptualisatie van het proces van het vertellen van trauma in het omgaan met trauma en het leven in exil in toegepast theater. Daarvoor staat een empirische exploratie van de verschillende wijzen van het vertellen van trauma in een toegepaste theatersetting en het proces van betekenisgeving onderliggend aan deze wijzen van vertellen centraal.

Het eerste deel van deze dissertatie draagt bij tot een beter empirisch begrip van de rol van het vertellen van trauma in het omgaan met traumatische ervaringen van collectief geweld en gedwongen migratie in toegepast theater. In de eerste twee hoofdstukken rapporteren we de empirische bevindingen van onze hoofdcasus *Tijdelijk* (een toegepast theaterproject met negen Syrische vluchtelingen in België). In hoofdstuk 1 rapporteren we over onze exploratie van de verschillende manieren waarop de deelnemers hun ervaringen van collectief geweld en gedwongen migratie uitdrukken alsook de betekenis die ze geven aan die verhalen doorheen het theaterproject. In hoofdstuk 2 bouwen we verder onze bevindingen omtrent copingmechanismen in toegepast theater uit door in het bijzonder de herstellende rol van diasporische gemeenschapsrelaties en hun positie binnen bredere sociaalpolitieke dynamieken in toegepast theater te exploreren.

De interdisciplinaire aanpak van deze studie genereert verschillende specifieke methodologische en ethische vragen. Dat is weerspiegeld in de vier methodologische reflecties en hoofdstukken die het empirische luik van de dissertatie aanvullen.

Het tweede luik van de dissertatie biedt methodologische en conceptuele reflecties over de notie van participatie van vluchtelingen in toegepast theater in westerse gastsamenlevingen. Hiervoor analyseren we de rol van dramaturgische praktijken die participatie vormgeven op verschillende niveaus in toegepast theater. In hoofdstuk 3 nemen we de dramaturgie van onze voorbereidende pilootstudie onder de loep. Via die analyse bekijken we op welke manier participatie van vluchtelingen in toegepast theater in hedendaagse

Europese gastsamenlevingen zowel kansen voor emancipatie en agency herbergt, alsook het risico loopt machteloosheid te versterken. Hierbij kijken we naar de met elkaar verbonden relaties tussen deelnemers, theatermakers, het publiek en de bredere sociaalpolitieke context. In hoofdstuk vier onderzoeken we de dramaturgie van het creatieproces in onze hoofdcasus. Met als doel het begrip van participatie en dramaturgie in theaterpraktijken met vluchtelingen te versterken, zoomen we in op de verschillende mogelijke dialogische kunstpraktijken die ontstaan in relatie tot de regisseur.

In de methodologische en ethische reflecties van het derde luik van de dissertatie beogen we een beter begrip van een reflectieve onderzoekspraktijk. Zo'n reflectieve praktijk houdt rekening met machtsrelaties en de aard van onderzoeksrelaties, in de groeiende wetenschap van collaboratief onderzoek met vluchtelingen en kwalitatief gezondheidsonderzoek. In hoofdstuk 5 zoomen we in op de verschillende relationele contexten die de onderzoeksparticipatie van vluchtelingen vormgeven en een impact hebben op de machtsrelaties in collaboratief onderzoek. In hoofdstuk 6 beogen we een bijdrage te leveren aan een beter begrip van een reflectieve onderzoekspraktijk in vluchtelingenonderzoek. Daarvoor exploreren we de aard van de onderzoeksrelatie in onze hoofdcasus. Op die manier beogen we bij te dragen tot de ontwikkeling van een contextueel en dynamisch intersubjectief begrip van de onderzoeksrelatie. Bovendien denken we na over de impact van dergelijk begrip op het conceptualiseren van grenzen en onderzoeksrollen in kwalitatief gezondsheidsonderzoek.

Tot slot, besluiten we deze dissertatie met een integratieve discussie. Nadat we de beperkingen van onze empirische studie hebben uiteengezet, initiëren we een dialoog tussen de verschillende hoofdstukken en wijzen we op mogelijke lijnen voor vervolgonderzoek. Daarnaast reiken we ook verdere methodologische reflecties aan. In een laatste paragraaf concluderen we met een laatste dialoog tussen onderzoek en praktijk en bediscussiëren we de implicaties van onze onderzoeksbevindingen en methodologische reflecties. Dit doen we voor toegepaste theaterpraktijken alsook voor klinische traumazorg voor vluchtelingen.

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