

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre:
The Syrian Condition

Deena Shazly Elshazly

Assistant Professor of English Literature

Department of Humanities

College of Language & Communication

Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport

Cairo

DeenaElshazly@outlook.com

Abstract

Globalization is a tendency towards the policy and practice of the melting pot, and it seriously aims at Arab cultures in the first place. The true practice of hybridity seems unattainable due to the hegemony of globalization. It is not hyperbolic to claim that the ongoing Syrian situation directly affects the incursion of globalization policies that dominated the world. The United States of America is the sole superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern socialist camp. A process of re-ordering the Middle East has been activated on the part of this new world superpower. Accordingly, this paper examines the possible continuity of local and national identity when Syrian refugees are asking asylum in European countries. This is to be done through the study of three performances that showed practices to sustain identity: "The Syrian Monologues" (2016), The REACT, Rotterdam Theatre 's project (2017), to integrate refugees in The Netherlands and "Refugees", a street theatre performance in Athens (2018).

Keywords: Refugee Theatre, Identity, Xeno-racism, Integration, Arendt's Space of Appearance

Introduction

In "We Refugees" (1943), Hannah Arendt decides that relatives, occupation and language distinguish home and add quotidian quality to life. It is losing connection with these properties of home that shapes refugees' suffering experience. Arendt's description of a refugee is still functional by the closure of the second decade of the twenty-first century. I. Sirkeci and J.H. Cohen identify the Syrian Refugee Crisis between 2011 and 2014 (384) as the worst since

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

Second World War. In this respect, this paper questions the sustainability of identity when integrating Syrian refugees in Western host countries. Integrating Syrian refugees in non-Western countries, especially in Arab ones, is not within the interest of this study as Syrian refugees are likely to face problems of narrower scope and nature when fleeing to Arab countries due to shared national, religious and linguistic ideologies. In an age governed by globalization, the risk of effacing refugees' cultural history stands out and that is why this paper suggests the necessity of methods and strategies of resistance and sustainability to be practised by refugees. These strategies will continuously re-connect them to the homeland – in its virtual sense. In contrast to hackneyed approaches to refugees; utilizing Arendt's explicatory discussion on statelessness, this paper aims at applying Arendt's theory of action as a method of both resistance and sustainability in the host country – or new 'homeland', if can be ever called.

The paper encompasses the analysis of the degree of integration on two levels: integration of the refugee in the new community and the integration of the spectator in three performances by ASHTAR, REACT and street theatre. ASHATR is a Palestinian theatre troupe that targets the presentation of identity problems and resistance in a globalized age. *The Syrian Monologues* (2016) is mainly inspired by the very successful *The Gaza Monologues* (2010). *The Syrian Monologues* is a collection of Syrian refugees' stories of suffering and endurance. ASHTAR's *The Syrian Monologues* is an initiative where "ASHTAR worked with 120 refugees of different ages, 22 of them wrote their personal monologues. Some of these monologues were presented in Amman on June 9th, 2015 at a special event organised by CARE Jordan for the World Refugee Day" (Ashtar Theatre). The piece was performed for the first time in 2015 as part of the Psychology Programme then performed by white British citizens in the Temple Church, London in 2016. *The Syrian Monologues* comprises integrating techniques as the play is acted by the real refugees telling their own stories which they had originally written. Refugee Engagement and integration Through Community Theatre (2016-2018) (REACT) is a threefold rehabilitation project (Acta, Rotterdam and Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo Danilo Dolci) which focuses on the experiences of refugees in a local asylum centre so as to enhance cultural acceptance on the part of the original citizens. The project ends in a three-man show as part of Rotterdams Wijktheater in the Netherlands. The piece was performed at Rotterdam's International Community Arts Festival in March 2017. It is one among three projects intrinsically connected to the well-

being of refugees in the host country. "Refugees", a street performance, depicts the ordeal of the refugee aiming at grabbing attention of pedestrians through body movements and silence. Drawing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis, these three contemporary performances reflect on tensions of the diaspora space featuring displacement as overarching.

Diaspora space (Jeffers 11) is that space where different and various national backgrounds interact or work together; which can be easily exemplified in the case of Syrian refugees in non-Arab countries. Such a space can easily generate opposition based on the conflicting philosophies of these different cultural groups building on different, or sometimes conflicting, ideologies. One point of study for this paper is to decide the validity of integration in host societies. The paper suggests that integration and hybridity prove as idealist treatment of refuge issue in most scenarios far from being empirical. Different cultural attitudes on both sides; the host country and the refugee, allows for the impossibility of cultural integration to be the more convenient scenario. The readiness of members in each cultural group to maintain their culture is the benchmark in this situation. Here, politics usually exercises its power leading to cultural assimilation as a more realistic scenario.

Conflict and Human Mobility

The fact that spatial re-positioning or mobility is one prime ability and right of human beings foregrounds migration as wholly dependent on conflict in the first place (Kunz, 1981, Jeffers, 2012; Sirkeci and Cohen 2016). Jeffers identifies choice, planning and return (18) as the criteria that set traveller and refugee apart; "[t]he traveller who moves for reasons of pleasure is usually destined to return, but those who are forced to travel have a much more ambivalent relationship with 'home', perhaps unwilling or unable to consider a return" (19). A refugee is deprived of the luxury of deciding to leave or not and to where; of preparation before departure and of deciding to return to the departure point. According to Jeffers, travelling is mandatory in the case of refugees. It is believed, then, that asking refuge is originally time-bound by which a special point in history manipulates the destinies of humans in massive numbers. People are forced to leave their homes for a compelling reason as in genocides, for instance, and usually this fleeing is not on an individual basis as this event detrimentally affects the nation. The situation is the opposite in the case of tourists or migrants. Economic migrants, as per Jeffers, are not compelled to leave. One more important point to add is the fact that they are welcomed at their home country at any time.

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

Instability or tension at the home country is identified as conflict. In "Syrian Crisis and Migration", migration is the consequence of "discomforts, difficulties, restrictions, clashes, and finally violence and wars at the country of origin. People only decide to move when they see that given conflict as a threat, an environment of insecurity, which is unmanageable" (Yazgan et al. 182). In this sense, economic migrants face some sort of homeland conflict due to a deficiency in resources or labour. Proponents of the conflict model

define conflict in a broad sense to cover a continuum of positions ranging from full cooperation where no conflict exists, to one where conflicts of interest exist even leading to violent conflicts where one can face wars, armed clashes and life threatening risks leading to fear of persecution. (Sirekci and Cohen 384)

Such interpretation of conflict proves too general that it includes those who move or migrate due to economic instability. In this manner, quotidian problems at the workplace can be a trigger of migration; gender inequality can be a trigger of migration; economic. Moreover, religious or political unrest can also be triggers of migration as well. The Syrian Crisis continuing since 2011 is the most recent example of Sirekci and Cohen's 2016 cultural conflict model. The writers propose that human mobility and migration flows are intrinsically related to levels of conflict. From another perspective, the conflict model handles migration as a variable according to individual endurance rather than being one distinct human practice defined by specific and standardized measurable criteria; which hinder sequential legislative work. Endurance of individuals and peoples differ from one country to the other or even one age to another. That is to say, an individual, or a people, in one country may go through a conflict and remain in their homeland whereas others cannot endure the very same conflict in another country, or even the same country. So, they may leave. Therefore, a clearer distinction comes in the work of Jeffers who conversely identifies asylum seekers and refugees, on the one hand, and economic migrants, on the other, as two independent categories. The 1951 Refugees Convention, the milestone in refugees' condition, defines the refugee as follows:

As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the

country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

(qtd. in Jeffers 19)

The "events that occurred before 1 January 1951" refers to Second World War and its consequences. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) decides that persecution of any kind is life-threatening, pushing or forcing a citizen to abandon his homeland. In contrast, the migrant has different reasons to leave – with the choice to return home at any time to enjoy his country's government protection as well as citizenship.

In the eighties of the past century, refugees were classified into three main groups: majority-identified refugees, events-alienated refugees and exiles (Kunz 42). Conflict again stands in the middle of this classification, but displacement appears as another factor in the refugees' experience. Kunz categories of refugees depend on the degree of social acceptance as contrasted to governmental acceptance. The majority-identified refugee is the citizen who leaves due to persecution, but he is accepted by the majority of citizens of the nation. He also reflects the general perspective of the majority of the population in the homeland who are also in opposition to the government. This kind of refugee is rejected only by the homeland government, and not the citizens. The events-alienated refugees are those who pass through racial or religious discrimination or persecution in the first place. Syrian refugees mostly fit here. In this case, the group is not usually backed up by the majority of the homeland population; "[w]hat is common among them is their knowledge that events have irrevocably alienated them from their fellow citizens of the past, and unlike the majority-identified refugees, they seldom entertain the hope, and only rarely the wish, to return to live among their former compatriots" (Kunz 43). The exiles are those individuals who adopt ideological considerations that are normally contrasting to the mainstream. They usually acknowledge themselves as society-alienated (rejected by society) or self-alienated (they avoid and reject their society). It is this group that can be ontologically mixed with voluntary migrants, according to Kunz.

Refugee Crisis and the Syrian Condition

The refugee crisis has been identified by the United Nations (UN) as the blemish of the twenty-first century; when refugees have been, for the first time, highlighted as one global problem. The Syrian refugee crisis has been acknowledged to be the world's worst refugee crisis since Second World War as

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

"[m]illions scattered, creating the largest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. More than 5.6 million Syrians have fled the country as refugees, and another 6.2 million people are displaced within Syria. Half of the people affected are children" (Huber et al.). The refugee remains captured in in-betweenness foregrounded by his loss of the citizen state. On being granted refuge, a refugee practically encounters what Jeffers termed "bureaucratic performances" (Jeffers 37) where they face a sort of institutionalized racism owing to the drastic growth in the number and flow of economic migrants. Jeffers recognizes a gap between the official definition of refugee as propagated by international law and its pragmatic and political aspect (16). The interest and well-being of refugees pass through discrimination and marginalization on a daily basis. Since the moment of fleeing home a refugee gets a threshold status that hinders the simplest details in their lives. For instance, the rights to daily morning shower and to intimate private space are violated in the camps and while being kept on waiting lists for camp-entry. Although international law protects and supports the refugees through temporary protection in camps, the very same law practises selection that may provide gaps for host countries keeping refugees in that liminal space.

Generally, refugee crisis is considered an outcome of host countries' undesirability to accommodate accretionary migration rates. In the case of Syrian refugees, UNHCR has announced that neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan Iraq, Egypt) hold the largest numbers of Syrian refugees in comparison to Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America which selectively provide refugee-friendly environment on a lesser scale:

An estimated 125,000 Syrians have received protection in the four [western] states by the end of 2014 compared to the 3.7 million registered Syrian refugees in the region, not to mention the Syrians awaiting registration and de facto Syrian refugees. The relatively small numbers offered protection by these four states is of even greater concern given that Germany and Sweden have admitted the largest number of Syrians aside from countries in the region. This paints a bleak picture for the level of protection provided to Syrian refugees by industrialized states outside the region. (Ostrand 272-73)

The number of refugees (and asylum seekers), from non-western countries, has sprawled in the 1990s. According to Jeffers, this happened due to three basic reasons: impoverishment in many parts of the world, globalization as facilitating

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

international travel, technology advancements together with the media-created images of the affluent northern lifestyle, and the change in the nature of war. It is reported that western countries are growing aware as to voluntary waves of migration due to economic conditions in the original homeland. It is believed that globalizing international policies of the market associated with the overwhelming control of capitalism and monopoly, among other factors, stand for impoverishment in developing countries (that contribute with the lion's share of economic migrants).

In 2015, European policies and press concern are still focused on "raising walls, strengthening borders, and futile categorisations of movers as 'refugees' or 'economic migrants'" (Yazgan et al. 181) – criticizing open-door policies adopted by Germany in the first place. The boom in asylum seekers and refugees since the late 90s has led to a shift in the European approach to the refugees' issue. It cannot be overlooked that the 1951 Refugee Convention was issued for the bereaved Europeans ensuing WWII in the first place. Jeffers shows that the international policy of host countries has developed an attitude of control rather than embracing humanitarian calls. Despite the fact that the UN 1951 Convention forbids *refoulement* (sending asylum seekers or refugees back to their original countries), Western countries with the prospect of being hosts have worked out a number of laws to reduce and control increasing flows of migrants and refugees. The 1991 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act are exemplary of international laws that violate refugees' right for non-*refoulement* enhancing the authority to detain illegal immigrants, (Jeffers 23). Even Canada, "with its reputation for a more liberal approach to immigration, has seen a tightening of regulations since the early 1990s" (23). The Hungarian government, in 2015, began a campaign to disseminate false or misleading information that relate terrorism, instability and anxiety to immigrants and called a national referendum, a year later, on the refugees' relocation in Europe, admitting that Muslim refugees "would not feel at home" (Mahrtdt 542). Slovenia shows a similar xenophobic approach towards refugees. Jeffers speaks of a mythical co-relation between security and migration, from countries that are "predominantly Muslim", that she termed securitization (27). The right for mobility becomes fettered by more restrictions that ban non-Europeans' freedom of global mobility and migration. In this respect, the 1951 Refugee Convention no longer holds an over-arching character.

The growth in the legislative body on the condition of the refugees contributes to the condition of "circular migration" where countries interchange

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

three classifications: origin, transit and destination (Crisp 3). Any country is vulnerable to be the departure point from whence a migrant comes; or a temporary point on the migrant's map; or the end of their journey. Theoretically empowered by many UN legislative acts, a refugee is similarly vulnerable – but to refoulement or deterrence at any point of their journey. Migrants – refugees included – re-create methods and strategies to evade the restrictions put by every host country culminating to the phenomenon of illegal migration which inflicts refugees with swirling dangers. In fact, the vast majority of refugees are caught in a vicious circle that fortifies stereotypical attitudes and framing practices. As identified by Jeffers in her informative study *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities* (2012), "[t]he increase in the volume of legislation has made it a necessity for refugees to use illegal means to enter most states, and this increases the level of suspicion and mistrust of refugees shown by the populations of many western nations" (24). Examples from the mid-1980s show that words as "floods" and "tidal" (28) were first used to describe the refugee condition. Jeffers states overtly that linguistic hostility is the milestone for the racist rendition of refugees. Media phrasing usually invent metaphors that through repetition become sticky and even inheritable across generations. Jeffers also confirms that several studies in 1997, 2004 and 2005 confirm that "[w]hile the attitude of the popular press towards race in general has softened in recent years..., the notable exception to this is seen in attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers. This reflects the move from racism predicated on biological difference to that based on cultural difference" (24).

From another perspective, a body of anticipatory studies and articles concentrates on the pressure on infrastructure and human resources in host countries. Articles like "Impact of the Syrian Refugees Crisis on Land Use and Transboundary Freshwater Resources" (2016), "The Economic Impact of Syrian Refugees on Host Countries: Quasi-experimental evidence from Turkey" (2016), and "The Impact of Refugee crises on Host Labor Markets: the Case of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Turkey" (2015) are good examples. In this respect, Liz Fekete discusses how host countries have developed xeno-racist approaches towards refugees and migrants in general; describing xeno-racism to correspond to feelings of hatred, fear and rejection on the part of original citizens towards foreigners that generate discriminatory and culturally oppressive practices. Fekete believes that xeno-racism reflects the West's infatuation with their achieving civilization and economic system for which it demonstrated considerable concern as threatened by communism in the past century (23). In a

similar tone, A. Sivanandan, the emeritus director of the Institute of Race Relations, elucidates that poverty is the benchmark of discrimination in the twenty-first century; "once, 'they' demonised the Blacks to justify slavery. Then they demonised the 'coloureds' to justify colonialism. Today, they demonise asylum seekers to justify the ways of globalism" (2). The fact that migration is fundamentally linked to economic reasons continuously feeds xeno-racism. Migrants, as thus, are considered a burden and a threat to original citizens in the host country which becomes responsible for migrants and refugees subsidies and housing upon accepting them within its borders. The aforementioned articles, for instance, endorse considerable statistics on refugees' sharing the labor market with the original citizens leading to higher unemployment rates among original citizens. It is suggested that xeno-racism immensely contributes to negative renditions of refugees.

In terms of cultural practices, refugees are demanded to drop their sense of belonging or attachment to their past lives and rather demonstrate an eagerness to assimilate to not disturb the original cultural texture of the host country. Theoretically, acculturation (the activity where more than one culture meet) occurs in four ways: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization (Bowskill et al. 5). Integration is an optimal outcome of "cultural contact" (4) where different cultures generate a dialogic space towards diversity. On the other side, assimilation is an outcome of cultural maintenance (4) where each group maintains the continuity of its ethnic legacy. Separation and marginalization are points of no cultural interchange but a condition that deepens otherness and victimization discourses. In practical terms, refugees, particularly, are mostly facing a process of assimilation where the dominant group maintains its culture. Hannah Arendt criticized refugees' tendency to save no effort in joining the mainstream by adopting behaviours and practices of dominant groups.

Hannah Arendt's theory of Action

Refugees are essentially the group that may best benefit from political theatre revival which has widely flourished by the turn of the millennium. The growing body of Refugee theatre avails a space that may help in juxtaposing the Arendtian description of refugees that reads: "[t]hey are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion" (qtd. in Mahrtdt 539). The intention here becomes clear to illustrate the possibility of reversing such juxtaposition once revisiting Arendt's theory of action. It is time for refugees to seize the

opportunity provided in order to subjugate victimization discourses that often work on dripping pity. Even on real grounds, "offering more blankets and tents here and there will only soothe the upset of the giver but will not alleviate the much deeper issues countries like Syria are facing" (Yazgan et al. 183). Obviously, giving a hand reflects sharing responsibility and conforms to the concept of global citizenship which drops off considerations of political (nationality), racial or religious affiliations for the sake of benevolence; which agrees with the thesis that global and local interests are not oppositional. At the same time, giving a hand still stabilizes objectification of the refugees as round-the-clock passive recipients. In fact, this viewpoint finds resonance the concept of "marketing of trauma" (Edmondson 468) where interest lies in the spectatorial gaze. Edmondson believes that bringing calamities of any bereaved to the forefront has a similar effect to the commodity-customer relationship where a process of selling follows marketing. In a relevant context, Marvin Carlson expressed that refugee theatre is not politically functional in the United States of America (USA) due to separatist ideologies. Henceforth, a common ground has to be established between refugees – their theatrical presentation in this case – on the one hand and the audience, on the other hand, that happens to be mostly of the original citizens in the host country.

It is believed that Arendt's theory of action can be utilized as a resistance method towards globalizing discourses that aim at assimilating the refugees. Empathy on the part of an audience to the suffering and calamity of refugees proves insufficient, for "[w]hat we need now is the collective courage to follow through with concrete action on words that will otherwise ring empty" (Yazgan et al. 184). Arendt's entwinement of speech and action is believed to construct a sound system that can be adopted by refugees in building up a counterbalance of powers.

Arendt discusses that speech and action are two aspects that mark human beings as distinct. Only humans have access to speech that is totally different from any other system of communication, as in sign language, for instance. She explains that speech in human beings is pertinent to the ability to act. Arendt even states that "with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 176). To act, for Arendt, is to take the initiative – as based on the original Latin meaning to set something into motion. In this respect, human action is considered as the actualization of being or existence and speech, respectively, is the actualization of plurality. It is noticed that Arendt's chapter on action is inspired by an

epigraph from Danté which classifies action as one main source of man's delight because action is primarily a realization or demonstration of the agent's (doer) self. Arendt proposes that separating action from speech reverses the validity of action itself since the agent is no longer realized for the actor, "the doer of deeds is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words" (*The Human Condition* 179). So, speech constructs the agent's self, action and distinctive qualities. Speech and action, as discussed by Arendt, display the common characteristic of being revelatory. Both reveal personal qualities and entity. At the same time, both require a public sphere to be realized and efficient.

The presence of others provides what Arendt calls the space of appearance that sets the agent's self into being. Arendt's space of appearance "comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized" (*The Human Condition* 199). The space of appearance deals with human beings in their raw human condition, highlights their distinctions and emphasizes their plurality. Conversely, non-primordial affiliations as nation, race or politics classify humans in fake or fabricated distinctions that either demolish or highlight diversity as uniqueness. Speech and action generate power only in the presence of others as "[t]his revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are with others and neither for nor against them — that is, in sheer human togetherness" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 180). Isolation stops one's ability to act and to be free. Human togetherness is not realized by just the assembly of people, but is realized when those people foreground no political or social belongings save for their being human. In this condition, human beings are open to their fellow humans as both distinct and equal. Arendt expresses that human togetherness is violated when people are divided into for and against with the simultaneity of internal tensions (due to conflicting interests) that violate the validity of action. War is Arendt's example of the loss of togetherness. In this respect, cultural contact is believed to be an example of human togetherness and integration is then a means of human togetherness. Otherness, here, is perceived in the light of distinction rather than in the light of adversary and stigmatization; again working towards global citizenship.

Arendt extensively mentions that a narrative – as a structure – is intrinsically linked to power annexation. Human togetherness is sustained through the story as a frame or means because it secures a number of fellow men

who are ready to listen and respond to others. She explicates that speech empowers the speaker who publically addresses a group of people and helps the individual in turning into an agent who takes responsibility. The hero, for Arendt, is a word that originally entails exposure of the self and courage, which is frequently mentioned with the hero, means the "willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own... courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 186). In a story, the hero occupies utmost interest and attention as the story manifests his uniqueness at every turn and ensures his being and self through his speech and action – or diction and plot. Power becomes the outcome when Arendt interweaves speech and action in the public realm. She believes that structures based on human togetherness maintain some irresistible power that can never be defeated. This means that power is the product of speech and action in the presence of others. Arendt's conclusion is that force is the alternative to power. Force is born in the absence of human togetherness. Force is that manner which one man or one country exercises against others with violence as its aftermath. Therefore, power and force form a dichotomy of existence. It is deduced that a man with force has essentially missed or violated the opportunity to access the space of appearance that is based on the combination of speech and action.

The dialectic of power and force applies, by analogy, to the condition of post-millennial refugees whose role is to exploit their given space of appearance. Host countries manipulate their taking up the responsibility towards the refugee crisis. On the other hand, the refugees are expected to reverse the process of marketing their traumas and to engender their own space of appearance to show their distinctness. Not only do silence and the yearn to be accepted in host countries incapacitate power on the part of refugees for the sake of the monopoly of force, but also generate violence exemplified in practices of racism, xeno-racism and discrimination. Therefore, it is highly recommended that refugees should present themselves employing the story as their functional unit for survival or resistance.

Refugee Theatre

A range of theatre projects are interested in foregrounding, investigating and showing the condition of the refugee. In one of his informative lectures, Marvin Carlson explicates that theatrical reflections of the American stage on refugees reverberate either stereotypical or idealist perspectives. In host

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

countries, which happen to be mostly European, refugees usually face racist and miniature experiences where cultural and political pre-conceptions prevail. Theatre projects, as such, fail to feature – even if with good intentions – refugees. On the other hand, in best cases, they are deeply presented as victimized or taken as "illustrative material" (Sharifi and Wilmer). The condition of the refugee in the new home country is actually bewildering since they face a condition of institutional racism; for they are often referred to as non-European. In most theatre projects, there is a gap between stage representation and the outcome of the show in practical life. The clash between normative notions of the refugee and national identity generate institutional and behavioural racism due to the unacceptance of the refugee in the new society and culture. In the first place, the point in refugee theatre is its attempt to remove the boundaries between the refugee and the citizen; a process that unfortunately widens the gap between the exclusionist and inclusion outlooks.

The 1980s marked the onset of Refugees Studies Centre (RSC) which summoned a wide variety of material that is mostly not publically available. It is remarkable that the twenty-first century signals a change in the reality of refugees. In the past refugees typically geographically departed their countries not beyond the near borders of their country whereas the contemporary refugee encounters a journey of calamities and dangers that range from being tracked by police to drowning or being shot down by neighbouring border forces. It is noteworthy to hint that refugee theatre is originally a public platform. It started in the first place within communities of refugees and asylum seekers, taking their stories of suffering and pain as significant subject matter. In this respect, the story stands out as "practical, embodied and popular way of knowing" (Jeffers 12). Such way of knowing culminates in fostering anxiety and instability in communities with refugees – on both sides: refugees and the original citizens themselves.

Post-millennial theatre increasingly reflects a condition of universality that is embedded in adopting international human affairs. Such devotion verifies for the concept of global citizenship that foregrounds taking responsibility as the direct way towards action. Global citizenship can be considered a counterpart to the Arendtian compassion; a symptom of humaneness. It is not a coincidence that political theatre has been revived by the turn of the twenty-first century which had occurred consequentially to political events of long-term results – as in 9/11 Attacks (2001), War on Iraq (2003) and War in Afghanistan (2001-) – that dominated the onset of the third millennium.

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

The stereotypical portrayal of refugees inhibits their capacity to freedom and action in the Arendtian sense because they appear as an object rather than an agent. It is believed that adopting storytelling and refugees acting themselves on stage enhances the validity of refugee theatres and assists in putting refugee theatres objective of integration into effect. It is high time that refugee theatre provides that space of appearance through distancing itself from political and governmental regulations and constitutions. Too optimistic as it may seem, this proves that cultural integration is utopian in the first place.

The bereaved commonly share the opinion that their lives are never the same as before the disaster they had undergone. People who experience loss at any rate agree that life is no longer "narratable" (Jackson 102). Nearly all refugees are aghast and/or silent when asked to tell their flight stories (immigration) or describe their last moments of surviving fleeing; a fact which emphasizes that being expelled from one's homeland proves to be degrading and tormenting. In the case of refugees "[n]ot only is there a loss of the social context in which stories are told; the very unities of space, time and character on which narrative coherence depends are broken" (102) due to the loss of dignity that constitutes a metaphorical value in an individual's life. Being deprived the right to a return; the refugee loses the directness of life-as-a-journey. This fact supports the idea that integration, for refugees, is not a functional condition. Different stories of refugees infer that silence becomes the routine or the regular response to their calamity. Apparently, refugees are imprisoned in their moments of flight where they are disconnected from their social, political and psychological environments that constitute their memorabilia. This condition disturbs the natural flow of time in their lives, so the future is in circular – rather than sequential – relationship with their past which illustrates why "refugee stories typically juxtapose nightmarish recollections of flight and nostalgic image of Paradise lost" as Jackson says (103).

"The Syrian Monologues", REACT, "Refugees" – and Arendt

The first performance is produced by Ashtar, a Palestinian theatre group that is internationally renowned. Ashtar belongs to forum theatre embracing the aesthetic role of theatre in relation to society and aims at giving voice to the voiceless. The theatre often discusses Arab identity in the aftermath of important contemporary events in the Arab world. The "Monologues" series (Gaza then Syrian) reflect the solitary situation of individuals in trauma. The performance employs techniques of theatre of Witness and is produced through mechanisms

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

of devising theatre. The crew starts a workshop with real Syrian refugees encouraging them to open up and share their stories of the Syrian war, where they received guidance to write down their own stories that later formed the script for the performance.

The performance depends on storytelling and direct address. Refugees tell the stories they wrote to the present audience, with specific details concerning the speakers' voice tones, body language and the refugees' feelings about the moment. *The Syrian Monologues* employs authentic stories to involve the spectator as witness to the refugees' ordeal. The participant refugees provide intense stories from different cities in Syria at the time of war; working as accounts to turn spectators into witnesses. In a story from Edleb, the account shows an inhibition of the return when the hero's cousin asks him never to come back as well as a rupture in the familial bond when his sister denies him brotherhood. Remarkably, both the cousin and the sister wanted to save the storyteller from the aggravated surroundings conditions of the neighbourhood under attack. These two examples refer to the struggle on the part of the refugee who is deprived of the right to return and even to remember his past for the sake of survival. Another story from Daraa tells of Home as a conceptual metaphor of security and peace in the world. It also tells of the inhibition of the refugee at all times, since the storyteller confirms that his wife's regular questions in the host country remind him of the security forces interrogations in Syria.

Throughout the stories, the tellers mostly employ the present tense in narration except for specific incidents that are usually linked to the undesirable (as episodes of smuggling and fleeing). One stunning story tells of a three-year-old son who is able to manipulate the checkpoints from El Mussefra to Damascus. His mother recollects how he shouts once for the State Army and Freedom Army. It is believed that this story particularly emphasizes the in-betweenness as a lifelong status of the refugee with consequences of duality, polarity and other moral issues. The stage, here, is of minimal facilities except for a podium with a microphone and a large screen. Needless to say, both devices mark an attempt at stepping out to the world, to be seen and listened to, in addition to the hope of re-connection.

The second piece is a short theatrical presentation, 15 minutes, approximately, which belongs to REACT project. In this performance, three Syrians are acting themselves in a highly optimistic atmosphere of involvement. The REACT asylum centre provides a haven to the concerned refugees. In other words, the centre secures a refugee-friendly environment that again employs the

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

mechanics of devising theatre in production. Following the community theatre footsteps, the performance rests on accentuating the degree of interaction between the actors, mostly non-professional, and the audience, who are intended to reflect diverse cultural backgrounds. The show utilizes features of devising, allowing the refugees to write down and enact their own real stories with professional writers and directors giving a hand. Narratives, role-play and improvisation are increasingly employed to alleviate grief and disappointment on the part of the refugees as well as to engage the spectators in a real-life-like dialogue on the stage. Save for a black curtain at the background, the stage is minimal. This is not to distract the audience from the lighting thread which the three men co-operate to make use of after playing it as a rope. While one of the three men directly addresses the audience about Syria, the other two start using the lighting thread to magically draw a map of Syria on the ground with on-going grooming so to reflect the exact borders of the country – calling it their country. They are joined by the speaker and they try to re-locate themselves on certain spots on the imaginary Syria map that actually correspond to their hometowns' locations.

The third performance entitled "Refugees" is a 15-minute-piece of street theatre depicting the suffering of the refugees upon leaving their homeland. The performance employs body movements in the first place to convey loss of connection among citizens of the world. "Refugees" is an allegory of Syria's division where a European (Greek) female actor stands and speaks in the name of Syria. Different from the other two performances, "Refugees" reflects an apocalyptic outlook that shames global inaction. The fact that this street piece happens to be the most recent of them jeopardizes global involvement with the refugee crisis and renders it unfunctional. In other words, it highlights that refugees do not need only more camps and blankets and host countries, by analogy, are mostly marketing traumas. The performance is multilingual: Arabic, English and Greek. It is remarkable that Syria speaks to the world, the public, neither in Arabic nor in English but in Greek; which signals international lack of communication. At the same time, as Syria addresses the public in Greek, on Greek streets, marks raising awareness as to the responsibility of the host countries. The performance conveys refugees' sense of loss and imprisonment in their past. Alison Jeffers identifies refugees' activity outside the realm of passivity and silence (14) such as anti-deportation demonstrations and different acts of self-harm (lip-sewing on hunger strikes) as "impossible activism" because refugees defy official or mainstream renditions of

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

stereotypical silence, invisibility and victimization. An affinity to this impossible activism is believed to exist in "Refugees". Performers' activity grabs attention generally attributed to a parade or a demonstration where the pedestrians turn into witnesses in a circle around the performers taking photos with their cellular phones. In "Refugees", there is no microphone thus engaging the pedestrians into a narrower circle of space. They have to approach in order to listen clearly. The stage is an open space that minimizes the space between the audience and the actors. It is notable that the characters mimetically play their roles; that prevents the distortion of the illusive boundary between the real and the imaginary. In other words, the split between the fictional character and the real actor foregrounds the story framework of the piece; thus allowing for the creation of Arendt's public appearance that engenders power and recognition.

When refugees tell their stories – and enact them – they acquire speech in the Arendtian sense and are agents of action rather than marketing the trauma. Arendt confirms that:

the real story in which we are engaged as long as we live has no visible or invisible maker because it is not made. The only 'somebody' it reveals is its hero, and it is the only medium in which the originally intangible manifestation of a uniquely distinct 'who' can become tangible *expost facto* through action and speech.

(The Human Condition 186)

Silence is the predictable response to the unnarratable catastrophic event in the life of refugees. Refugees overcome that unnarratable aspect, turning their calamity into a spoken story of their flight. Since action is essentially characterized by being unpredictable, speaking violates the predictable response on the part of refugees embossing an initiative towards action. Speech is considered the prime means of continuity on the part of refugees since it, on the one hand, bridges chronological disruption due to losing connection with their time and their place (as they conceive of them in their homeland) and renews connection to their past (family, relatives, neighbourhood and memorabilia), on the other. In the case of Syrian refugees, death is too pertinent to their experiences during flight. Jackson even proposes that the general condition of refugees resembles death as silence is the outcome of both conditions and ensures that it takes considerable time to have them speak "let alone [telling]stories, though all mourning involves an attempt to recapture the power of stories" (107). Arendt believes that recollection and remembrance are gifts that challenge perishability. In conclusion, Arendt states that they preserve facts

and keep them alive for generations to come in a kind of "organized remembrance" to use Arendt's expression (198).

Conclusion

The refugee is a label that classifies an individual in a near-permanent condition of in-betweenness that results in distortion of the concept of life itself as it disrupts linear progression. Refugees are largely fettered in their past lives and feelings. Theatre plays a role pivotal to the liberation of refugees as it widens the space offered to them, expands the horizons of original citizens in the host community and supports cultural contact. What is expected from theatre is perplexing as refugee theatre has to keep the fine line – at all times – between empowering the refugees through telling stories and being trapped into victimization and otherness. In spite of being helpful here, strategies of the Theatre of Witness have to be economically utilized because re-telling the trauma simply repeats it. The concept of global citizenship collides with the activities of the legislators in the host countries, who are usually European. The refugee is required to belong to the World, yet he is depleted due to the spatial dimension of his existence. It is noteworthy that re-visiting Arendt has drawn attention to the necessity of re-defining (Arab) identity in conformity with the rise of global citizenship. Remembrance is one effective strategy of the continuity of communal identity. In addition, enacting means of reversing the loss of the refugee to statelessness and (assimilative) integrative patterns is highly recommended through the involvement of political, jurisdictional and societal institutions.

References

- Andrikopoulou, Niki. "Refugees." *The Living Theatre*, 2018.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDEx3EBAHx4
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed., U of Chicago P, 1998.
- . "We Refugees." *The Jewish Writings: Hannah Arendt*. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, eds. Shoken Books, 2007.
- Bowskill, Matt et al. "The Rhetoric of Acculturation: When Integration Means Assimilation." *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2007, pp. 793-813.
- Carlson, Marvin. "Contemporary Arabic Diasporic Plays in Europe and the United States". Helwan U. 12 Sept 2018.
- Crisp, Jeff. "Globalization, Poverty and Mobility: An Introduction to the

(Im)possibilities of Integration in Ashtar, REACT and Street Theatre: the Syrian Condition

- Developmental Dimensions of International Migration." UNHCR, 2008.
- Edmondson, Laura. "Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda". *Theatre Journal*, vol. 57, no. 3, Oct. 2005, pp 451-474.
www.jstor.org/stable/25069673
- Fekete, Liz. "The Emergence of Xeno-racism." *Race & Class*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2001, pp 23-40.
- Jeffers, Alison. *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Huber, Chris et al. "Syrian Refugee Crisis." *World Vision*, June 2019.
www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts
- Kunz, Egon F.. "Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory." *The International Migration Review*, vol. 15, no. 1/2, 1981, pp 42-51. JSTOR.
www.jstor.org/stable/2545323
- Mahrtdt, Helgard. "Rethinking our Refugee Crisis with Hannah Arendt." *Estudos Ibero-Americanos*, vol. 43, no. 3, Sept.-Dec. 2017, pp 535-547.
- Ostrand, Nicole. "The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Comparison of Responses by Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States." *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2015, pp 255-279.
- REACT: Rotterdam. Rotterdam Wijktheatre, 2017.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PtmvM5CnVE
- Rudmin, Floyd W.. "Critical History of the Acculturation Psychology of Assimilation, Separation, Integration, and Marginalization." *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2003, pp 3-37.
- Sharifi, Azadeh and S. E. Wilmer. "Reflections on Theatre and Statelessness." *The IATC Journal*, vol. 14, Dec. 2016.
<http://www.critical-stages.org/14/reflections-on-theatre-and-statelessness/>
- Sirkeci, I. & J. H. Cohen. "Cultures of Migration and Conflict in Contemporary Human Mobility in Turkey." *European Review*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2016, pp 381-396.
doi:10.1017/S1062798716000119
- Sivanandan, A. "Poverty is the New Black". *Race & Class*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2001, pp 1-5. *The Syrian Monologue*. Ashtar Theatre, 2016.
louisville.edu/theatrearts/images-1/The_Syria_Monologues_script.pdf.
- Yazgan, Pinar et al.. Editorial. "Syrian Crisis and Migration." *Migration Letters*, vol. 12, no. 3, Sept. 2015, pp 181-192.

صور غير / محتملة من الدمج في مسرح عشتار ومشروع
ري أكت ومسرح الشارع: الحالة السورية

د. دينا شاذلي الشاذلي

قسم الإنسانيات بكلية اللغة والإعلام

الأكاديمية العربية للعلوم والتكنولوجيا والنقل البحري

مصر

DeenaElshazly@outlook.com

المستخلص:

يعد منحى العولمة تجاه سياسة "القدر الصاهر" من أخطر ما يحوم بالثقافات العالمية بوجه عام – وإن كان أخطر تربصا بالثقافات العربية خاصة – كما أثقل انتصار العولمة سياسيا كاهل التنوع الثقافي حتى كادت مهمة الهجين الثقافي، وكذا وجوده تبدو أفلاطونية إلى حد بعيد. وليس من المبالغة في شئ الزعم أن الوضع السوري الحالي ما هو إلا نتيجة تفاقم سياسات العولمة وتوغلها بعد أن سادت العالم بتولي الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية زمام الأمور كقوة أحادية، خلّت لها الساحة العالمية إثر تفكك الاتحاد السوفيتي وانتهيار معسكر الاشتراكية الشرقية، لنقوم بتفعيل سياسات الفوضى الخلاقة وخلق شرق أوسط جديد. وعليه تدرس هذه الورقة البحثية إمكانية استمرارية الهوية المحلية والقومية عند اللاجئ السوري الذي تشتتت تواجده بأرض عربية وأوروبية وذلك بالتعرض إلى نصوص/عروض مسرحية (عربية/أوروبية/مشتركة) أظهرت ممارسات أداء الهوية؛ من خلال "المنولوجات السورية" لمسرح عشتار ومشروع مسرح روتردام ري أكت لدمج اللاجئين بألمانيا وعرض المسرح الحي بأثينا (مسرح الشارع). وهنا يجدر الإشارة إلى أن البحث سيتعرض لفكرة الدمج بمستوييه المادي والاستعاري؛ من حيث دراسة الدمج ثقافيا – واقع اللاجئ الاجتماعي – وكذا تقنيا بدراسة أساليب دمج المتفرج في النص / العرض وهو ما يتصل باتجاهات المسرح الأوروبي في سنوات ما بعد الألفية.

الكلمات الدالة: العولمة ، الأداء والهوية، دراسات اللاجئين، الدمج الثقافي، اللاحالة، المتفرج المدمج