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

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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, 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

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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 (Pejic 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 using applied theatre in therapeutic supports for refugees and asylum seekers (de Smet, De Haene, Rousseau, & Stalpaert, 2018; Balfour, 2013; Bundy, 2017; Cox & Wake, 2018; Dennis, 2013; Gilbert & Nield, 2008; 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 socio-cultural, 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 decades 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 programs 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 ages 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 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.

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 (authors, 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 processes 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 (Hooghe, Neimeyer, & Rober, 2012; Rober, 2005; Elliott, 1986). 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 12 h 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 paarticipant 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 on-going 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 deliberatively 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]

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

[1] Quran, Surah 5 "The Table", verse 32.
[2] Quran, Surah 109 "The Disbelievers", verse 109.

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.

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