Performing metaphors into a physical space

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ABSTRACT

Negative portrayals of migrants shown by media not only neglect reporting the impact of migration on communities. They are also transformed into outsiders and different to Europeans, subjects and objects of fear, experiencing the fear of being rejected, and inspiring fear in the resident populations. While discussing the link between media logic, theatrical performance and moral imaginary, the paper will shed light on how the theatrical metaphor of cosmopolitan solidarity is challenged by the physical proximity of the 'other'. It specifically analyzes how Cantieri Meticci – a theater company based and active in Bologna (Italy) involving asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and Italian citizens – use participatory theatre to resist, rework, or disrupt the mainstream logic of the border spectacle while also promoting social coexistence between citizens and newcomers. As such, the analysis of their artistic practices and social interventions provides an insight into other methods of being political subjects 'before and beyond the law'.

1. ABSOLUTE STRANGERS

Although Europe became a land of immigration in the 1960s, European nations and public opinion as well as governments have failed to translate the change of their status from 'emigration lands' to 'immigration countries'. This is particularly true for Italy, which has experienced a shift from being predominantly a country of emigration to one of the most important immigration countries in Europe.

While immigrants are thus becoming an increasingly important part of Italian society in terms of numbers, and although several researches have started recognising the potential benefits of immigrants for the Italian economy and for the labour market (Solari, 2016), they are still neither wanted nor welcomed by society, as can be seen in the country's strict immigration and deportation laws (Ambrosini, 2013).

Often, the representation strategies and discursive practices enacted by Italian military authorities, national politicians, and local media have been depicting the Mediterranean Sea as the setting of a perpetual emergency (Calhoun, 2010; Vaughan, 2015; Musarò, 2017), and migrants and asylum seekers[2] crossing borders as a significant problem to be managed in terms of a wider social, cultural and political 'crisis'. These 'crisis' representations exaggerate existing migration-related issues and accentuate public anxiety about migration and asylum-seeking in Europe, feeding back to a vicious circle of further anti-migration media coverage and xenophobic political rhetoric (Pastore *et al.*, 2006; de Haas, 2007; Musarò and Parmiggiani, 2014). While coverage of 'the crisis' is characterised by significant diversity, overall, new arrivals were seen as outsiders and different to Europeans: either as vulnerable outsiders or as dangerous outsiders (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2018).

In both cases, newcomers are represented without any historical or political framework, while the issue of irregular migration flows is construed as a tragic game of fate. As protagonists of a crisis who come from nowhere, migrants are depicted simultaneously as subjects who are forced to put themselves in danger – departing on unsafe boats – and as subjects at risk (of death and trafficking) who need to be saved.

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[2] Although there is a crucial legal difference between 'migrant' and 'refugee', it is worth noting that in the media these terms are often used interchangeably, depending on the period and its public sentiment (according to Google Trends data, throughout 2015, searches for 'refugee' remained slightly higher than 'migrant' spiking in early September, around the time the distressing photos of Aylan Kurdi were released). *Available at*: http://www.newsweek.com/refugee-vs-migrants-whats-right-term-use-371222 [Last accessed 10 March 2018].

Depicting the newcomers as threats to security (Bigo, 2002; Mezzadra 2013) or merely vulnerable subjects (Tazzioli, 2015; Albahari 2015; Andersson, 2014)[3], and not as agents of their own destiny, with education and employment experiences and skills, the 'spectacle of the border' adopts different languages to speak to different audiences. As Albahari (2015) argues: like the different light refractions of the same kaleidoscope, the national spectacle of policing and border control is also the cosmopolitan spectacle of rescue and salvation.

The sensationalist and stereotyped images of migrants and refugees shown by media on a daily basis, not only neglect reporting the impact of migration on communities, and correctly informing audiences on the rights migrants are due under international, regional and national law. They also no longer depict 'extra-communitarian residents' as just any foreigners in a simple legal sense, but as 'absolute strangers' or 'aliens' (Balibar, 2004). They are transformed into subjects and objects of fear, experiencing the fear of being rejected and eliminated, and inspiring fear in the resident populations. Thus, legitimizing states in investing in the control of borders more than ever before, while fear is often used to obscure questions of political responsibility (Cuttitta, 2014; De Genova, 2013).

If migrants and asylum seekers are framed either as vulnerable victims or as dangerous outsiders, how can we challenge the opposition between us (citizens) and them (non-citizens)? How can we recognize 'them' as legitimate subjects who are able to negotiate participation in cross-cultural public dialogue on their own terms? In what ways can refugees and migrants speak up in order to challenge these narratives of security and pity? What 'architectures of listening' (MacNamara, 2016) can we establish whereby refugees' voices can come to matter?

I will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the artistic and social work of Cantieri Meticci, a theater company based and active in Bologna (Italy) and involving professional and non-professional actors from over 15 countries[4]. Working in the intersection between aesthetics and activism, since 2012 Cantieri Meticci has been organizing large-scale theater projects that involve asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and Italian citizens, and which culminate in huge artistic events open to the local community. Running drama workshops in schools, community locations, mosques, and reception centers, Cantieri Meticci uses artistic tools to stimulate a public debate on the ongoing relations between newcomers and the hosting countries. Thanks to collaboration with several not-for-profit organizations and public institutions at local and international levels, its activities are widely visible and have the power

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3 As such, the current focus on both the securitarian and the humanitarian sides of the phenomenon supports a more complex logic of risk and benevolence, of threat and vulnerability, allowing for a military-humanitarian response.

4 See URL: http://www.cantierimeticci.it/ [Last accessed 10 March 2018].

to reach citizens and inspire a large-scale debate on the issues of migration and intercultural dialogue in Europe. Through a participatory methodology, Cantieri Meticci aims at improving the artistic and cultural education of local societies. It also aims at sustaining a community of professional actors/activists whose performances shed light on topics such as border control, human rights, solidarity, and citizenship.

Drawing on the work of this theatre group, this essay adopts a 'maximalist definition of participation' (Carpentier, 2017), and focuses on the notion of 'social performance'[5], in order to explore how Cantieri Meticci's theatrical performances and their participatory workshops face the mainstream narrative that associate migration governance with border control or humanitarian aid. Exploring their artistic practices, the article investigates how they work on imagination to create alternative spaces that are able to challenge dominant representations and hegemonic discourses, making the notions of 'border' and 'citizenship' active sites of resistance and struggle (Rovisco, 2014).

The essay opens with a short overview of a theoretical model based on the notion of theatricality as a productive metaphor to understand the workings of moral experience in modern societies (Habermas, 1989; Calhoun, 1992; Fraser and other, 2014)[6]. Then, assuming that theater is capable of both humanizing and desensitizing its publics (Chouliaraki, 2012), the article goes on to explore how the theatrical metaphor of cosmopolitan solidarity is challenged by the physical proximity of the 'other'.

It specifically analyzes how Cantieri Meticci use participatory theatre to resist, rework, or disrupt the lines between possible and 'impossible citizens' (Vora, 2013; Papadopolous, Vassilis, 2013)[7], while fostering inclusion through new communicative spaces and alternative social relations.

2. PERFORMING SOLIDARITY

Drawing on performance and theatre studies, Alexander shows how the rituals of early societies have been replaced by ritual-like performances that remain pivotal to mobilizing people's beliefs and attachments: among others, theatre (Goffman, 1967; Turner, 1982). Ever since the tragic plays of classical Athens, which exposed citizens to spectacles of suffering with

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[5] The notion of social performance appears productive in regard to reconsidering traditional dualities like structure and agency, as well as for putting different notions into dialogue. For an analysis of social action as performance see: Schatzki et al. (2001) and Alexander (2011).

[6] The metaphor of theater has been adopted by several authors to describe the public sphere in modern societies.

[7] This concept refers to people who are formally excluded from citizenship but are capable of creating other forms of belonging through relationships with local communities.

the aim of cultivating virtuous modes of being in the polis, theater has been considered a pedagogic institution.

Today, the theatrical model has the same potential to articulate discourses of solidarity that come to legitimize the moral imperative to act on vulnerable others, what Taylor calls the 'modern social imaginaries', or 'the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectation' (Taylor, 2002). Social imaginaries, then, are both factual and normative in that, their 'images, stories and legends' not only tell a story but also propose a moral 'lesson' about the meaning of that story that is shared by large groups of people. Diffused across society, imaginaries are also embedded in and carried through people's lived experiences, in their constructed environments and practices of 'everyday life' (de Certeau, 1984).

Following Taylor, Chouliaraki (2012) draws upon Smith's theory of 'sympathetic identification'(Smith, 2000), and on Arendt's metaphor of the public realm as an agonistic 'space of appearance' (Arendt, 1993) where different performances of vulnerability are played out - to highlight the importance of theatre in the moral experience of modernity[8]. Taking as a departure point the classical conception of Greek tragedy as dramatic action seeking to evoke 'pity and fear' amongst those who watch the vulnerable others, Chouliaraki argues that it is precisely our imaginative capacity to feel, think, and act for distant others, while observing ourselves as actors in their suffering (the possibility of seeing and being seen) that ultimately defines how we relate to distant others. The theatrical performance mobilizes the faculty of imagination by distancing the spectator from the spectacle of the vulnerable other through the objective space of the stage (or any other framing device) whilst, at the same time, enabling proximity between the two through narrative and visual resources that invite our empathetic judgement towards the spectacle (Chouliaraki, 2012, p. 22).

Theatre can be considered the first ground where language provokes an imagination to make, evoke, and penetrate materiality. Whilst contemporary theatrical spectacles take different forms and shapes, including the adoption of a wide range of mediated practices, from newspapers to the web, what has remained important through time is the power of theatre to imaginatively engage us with someone else's position. Imagination is not only the human faculty that bridges the gap between inner subject and outer world, actors on stage and audiences, 'the capacity to see in a thing what it is not' (Castoriadis, 1987) — as Castoriadis puts it; but it is also the key component of the new global order, and a constitutive feature of

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[8] As Chouliaraki (2012: 216) argues: 'Inherent in this conception of the theatre, from Aristotle to Smith and d'Alembert, or from Arendt to Nussbaum and Rancière, is the idea of performance not simply as entertaining spectacle but also as a site of moral education'.

modern subjectivity within and across state boundaries (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Silverstone, 2007).

Providing an understanding of what is possible, 'right' and desirable, as well as what is impossible and cannot or should not be attempted or aspired to, imagination extends communities of solidarity beyond the nation and encompasses the world[9]. Inviting participants to imagine the humanity of themselves and of others, theatrical performances can be considered to be normative resources for ethical thinking. As a crucial communicative structure of our culture that functions as a form of moral education, the humanitarian dramaturgical consciousness becomes, in this account, paramount in the formation of cosmopolitan dispositions. Incorporating into its self-description a series of distinct altruistic claims, images and stories of distant sufferers contribute to maintain the self-definition of Western liberal democracies both as political regimes of national welfare and as ethico-political projects of trans-national solidarity in the name of 'common humanity'[10].

Nevertheless, we must be conscious that today we are witnessing a 'self-oriented' morality, which still invites care for distant others but increasingly relies on minor self-gratifications and ephemeral pleasures as our motivation for taking action to alleviate the suffering of these distant others. We are becoming, in the worlds of Chouliaraki (2012), 'ironic spectators'. Next to a dominant 'ethics of irony', anchored on self-reflexive instant gratification, the ambivalence of a theatrical model that simultaneously offers both moral education and narcissistic pleasure[11] is evident in the European reaction to the alarming daily spectacle of 'migration crisis'. Rather than cultivating the ethico-political dispositions of the polis, the shocking images of asylum seekers risking their lives to flee war or poverty, displayed daily in the media, become commodifying spectacles of distant suffering, and also create alarm when the 'distant others' become closer (Chouliaraki, 2006). What this criticism suggests is that migrants and asylum-seekers ultimately challenge the European self-description as a proud place with a history of cosmopolitan solidarity and respect for human rights (Musarò, 2015). As soon as these mediatized 'poor victims' — who we are invited to 'adopt' and 'save' when they are far away — decide to move and to try to reach our countries, they become turn into a threat that poses risks for European populations' wellbeing and lifestyle. The previously supposed victims change status and become dangerous, unwanted, and criminalized (Musarò, 2013).

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[9] Chouliaraki (2012: 22) defines it as 'our capacity to see the world from other people's standpoints as well as our capacity to imagine how we might act on these others' predicament'.

[10] 'Humanitarian action is quintessentially cosmopolitan – Calhoun (2009: 73) states - as it represents an effort to relieve the suffering of strangers'.

[11] As Boltanski (1999: 21) argues, this ambivalence that offers both 'a way of looking which can be characterized as disinterested or altruistic, one which is oriented outwards and wishes to see suffering ended, and one which is, selfishly, wholly taken up with the internal states aroused by the spectacle of suffering: fascination, interest, excitement, pleasure, etc.' goes back to the diatribe between Plato's anti-theatricalism and Aristotle's defense of tragedy.

This contradiction between our compassionate attitude at a distance and our fear towards the physical proximity of the 'other' invites us to reflect on the collapse of the theatrical metaphor of cosmopolitan solidarity. By enabling us to imagine ourselves as compassionate citizens who have both the capacity to save migrants' 'bare lives' (Agamben, 1998) in the high sea, and to defend our countries from the invasion of the aliens, the humanitarian theatricality represented by the media, with their anti-migrant stereotypes, results in undermining rather than intensifying solidarity.

Besides the media logic, this is the mechanism of differentiation that borders and border security practices reproduce. As van Houtum *et al.* (2005) have recently shown, the normative value reflected in the word and phenomenology of the b-order is just the naturalised construct of a dominant narrative, which need to manage and control mobility and difference, by reducing their complexity to the binary logic of inside/outside, security/danger, self/other. However, as several authors argue, borders are not simply fixed and objective lines of definition. They are instead complex and unstable processes of differentiation, where multiple actors continuously negotiate meanings and space.

How is it possible to move beyond this binary order? How is it possible to dis-bordering this hostility towards refugees and migrants promoted by media? How can we reconceptualize theatricality as a potential and unique moral force able to construct bridges, rather than borders, between citizens and non-citizens at imaginary levels? In the next section.

I focus on Cantieri Meticci in order to explore how their work breaks into the borderline and introduce interruptions and alterations within it, opening up a space of otherwise. I will show how they transform the theatrical metaphor of cosmopolitan solidarity into a physical space where citizens and non-citizens can interact and perform both commonality and diversity, perceiving themselves as part of the same symbolic universe.

3. CANTIERI METICCI: THEATER AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Whilst the physical proximity of the 'other' often provokes the collapse of the theatrical metaphor of cosmopolitan solidarity, Cantieri Meticci adopts the material stage of the theater to re-build a sense of community and moral commitment. Giving voice to the 'voiceless' newcomers, commonly portrayed in our media, as well as in the streets of our cities, as victims or threats, the participatory theater of Cantieri Meticci challenges people's opinions and makes them think beyond the daily-reiterated stereotypes.

Following theater experiments of the 1960s with several forms of public involvement[12], Cantieri Meticci aims at reducing the separation between spectator and actor, through a re-articulation of theater as a text-based art, to an open, playful and social event. Influenced by the work of the theater and film director Peter Brook and of the educator and theorist Paulo Freire (1992), as well as by the revolutionary priest Don Lorenzo Milani, Cantieri Meticci uses theater as means of promoting social and political change. The creation of workshops and performances is largely based on the idea of dialogue and interaction between the audience and performer. Engaging workshops' participants and fellow spectators in conversation as part of the play, the audience becomes active, i.e. 'spectactors'[13] as they explore, show, analyze, and transform the reality in which they are living.

From this perspective, Cantieri Meticci focuses on theater as a simple and accessible tool for self-expression that can be quickly learnt by newcomers. Participatory theater is intended as a pragmatic method of promoting cooperation between citizens and newcomers: it is full of potential as a creative aid in the process of integration, and it can contribute to the development of new ethics and a sense of solidarity within communities — by moving participants beyond the tension between cosmos and polis, global and local, worldly and parochial angles of vision. As the director of the company, Pietro Floridia, argues, the main aim of the project is: to establish a sustainable, international, community-based theater and social development program, based upon the principles of El Sistema: a music education program founded in 1975 by Abreu[14].

Adopting the motto 'Social Action for Music', in 1975 Venezuelan musician and activist José Antonio Abreu created a free classical music project to help poor Venezuelan kids learn to play a musical instrument and be part of an orchestra. Promoting human opportunity and development for impoverished children, it has created over 400 music centers and fostered 700,000 young musicians. As Abreu stated: Music has to be recognized as an agent of social development, in the highest sense because it transmits the highest values — solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion. And it has the ability to unite an entire community, and to express sublime feelings (Tunstall, 2012).

Inspired by Abreu's work, Floridia's theatrical project seeks to engage people in schools, refugee centers, soup kitchens, dormitories, mosques, churches, and community centers,

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[12] Bertholt Brecht has been a precursor to the theory and practice of participatory theater and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* brought this innovative principle a step further. See: Boal (1979).

[13] This is a term created by Augusto Boal to describe the dual role of those involved in the process as both spectators and actors, as they both observe and create dramatic meaning and action in any performance.

[14] Interview with Pietro Floridia conducted in February 2016. The case study is based on ethnographic research, analysis of documents, participant observation in workshops and performances, and interviews during the period April 2014 - June 2016. All the quotations have been translated from Italian by the author.

through a cooperative and inspirational approach aimed to strengthen communities and nurture a new generation of creative, engaged, and responsible citizens. According to his perspective, Cantieri Meticci's work can be defined as a 'political public art project that fosters participation in the polis and aims to transform the social imaginary and the very way to shape the city'[15].

How does the urban space change and how does it shape our relation with public life if we are foreigners? How does it influence our relations with newcomers when we are well-rooted citizens? How do our relations with the local community influence our relation and reactions to newcomers?

By focusing on what has been defined as 'hybridization strategies' for central and suburban areas, Floridia aims at experimenting with new contaminations between institutional theater and public spaces, while also experiencing new models of relation between citizens and newcomers. Thus, one of the ongoing projects – Ascolto il tuo cuore, città. Esplorazioni artistiche di una città che cambia ('I listen to your heart, city'. Artistic explorations of a changing city)[16] – offers several artistic explorations of the different Bologna neighborhoods and also includes a final party on June 20, 2016 (World Day of the Refugee) with ethnic food, music and dances in the park of Villa Aldini, a historical building on Bologna's hills that is actually hosting over 90 asylum seekers. Inviting the inhabitants to explore the city from the point of view of 'new citizens', the project intends to discuss possibilities of changes and solutions in public spaces in order to make it more open for dialogue and coexistence between citizens and newcomers.

These artistic explorations are parts of the wider project Periferie Meticce ('Hybrid Suburbs')[17], which seeks to ensure a real, inclusive participation in considering the community places and new ideas of intercultural coexistence. To rethink community and city space in the light of migrant stories, the project aims to create a 'new agora': a space for reflection on how organization of living space in the city influences our way of living, our perception of others, and our participation in public debate. As the director affirms: we strongly feel that the notion of agora, and the sense of community and human solidarity is being lost in our city societies — we lack safe spaces for a common reflection where the voice of everyone could be heard and we lack the ability to discuss, reflect and take into consideration voices of those who live

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[15] *Floridia*, Interview.

[16] The project is funded by the Municipality of Bologna and the Valdese Church.

[17] As part of this broad project, Cantieri Meticci has renovated an old industrial building and transformed it into an artistic academy and co-working area - named *Eufemia. Spazio Meticcio* – which hosts several workshops and live performances. It is funded by Coop Alleanza 3.0 and several private and public sponsors.

in the margins of our cities, but who would like to be considered in the discussion - migrants, refugees, asylum seekers[18].

The focus on 'hybridization' — as the proper method to invite Italian citizens in migrant contexts (as happens when workshops are held in mosques and refugee centers) and, conversely, non-citizens in Italian contexts (as when the workshops bring refugees to public libraries, schools, and universities) — is conceived as a method of giving voice to migrants and refugees living in local contexts, while also promoting tolerance, intercultural dialogue, and peaceful coexistence between the city's cohabitants. Moving beyond the metaphorical dimension, theater becomes a physical multicultural space and a social process that not only promotes 'conviviality'[19], but it also gives birth to deep interpersonal relationships of cooperation on the basis of the same passion (theater, music kitchen, tailoring, poetry, computer, reading club, dance).

Furthermore, with the aim of creating several hybrid theater companies ('one per neighborhood' is their slogan) that can spread the knowledge of their native cultures in the field of drama, Cantieri Meticci has created educational incubators — named I MET[20] — that promote access for both refugees and vulnerable young citizens to high-level artistic and academic training. Linking theory and practice, this pioneering project — that calls to mind the educational and empowering work of the barefoot movement[21] — proposes a progressive pedagogy based on new methods of co-teaching by artists and scholars (such as sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists) that transcends traditionally separated disciplines and are in constant dialogue with the ongoing issues of the contexts in which participants are trained. Focusing on their intimate knowledge of neighborhoods and urban histories, Cantieri Meticci aims to incubate a cohort of 'artistic and cultural migrant leaders' capable of enhancing knowledge of native countries, while creating bridges with local cultures.

Intended as 'a simple form of political education', to adopt the words of the assistant director, Karen Boselli, this pedagogy is fundamental for developing stronger relationships between participants and territory:

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[18] *Floridia*, Interview.

[19] As Gilroy (2004) refers to the processes of cohabitation and interaction, which have made the ordinary features of social life in postcolonial urban areas multicultural.

[20] *I MET* is an acronym for *Educazione Teatrale Meticcia* ('Hybrid Theatrical Education') where the 'I' refers to the personal involvement of participants. It was developed in partnership with local institutions and the University of Bologna.

[21] The program was founded by Bunker Roy in 1972 [accessed 15 April 2016]: http://www.barefootcollege.org/. A similar experience has also been developed in Mumbai by ONG Pukar: http://pukar.org.in/ [Last accessed 10 March 2018]

I believe theatrical activities must leave the confines of the theater building itself. We aim to develop techniques of listening to territories, techniques of transforming the stories we hear into performances or installations of public art. In each workshop, we try to elaborate different ways of artistically restoring these stories to sites where they were collected. Installations and performances in squares, in terraces, on the roofs of houses and on the steps. Parades of bicycles through the streets. Performances in gardens and shops. In every phase of our artistic process we try to involve those using these public spaces[22].

4. HYBRIDIZATION AND BELONGING

As in the previously described projects, throughout the work of Cantieri Meticci participants, wherever they are from, learn to recognize the territory of the neighborhood as the subject of their own interventions and something they should nurture. Concurrently, the neighborhood recognizes the group of participants as belonging to its territory. This participatory process not only contributes to re-shaping the daily practices of cohabitation in the same urban space, but it also helps to mediate between citizens and newcomers, while promoting a new definition of politics, public spaces, and practices of citizenship.

However, the activities at the local level represent only one aspect of Cantieri Meticci's broad projectuality. As several migrant solidarity groups and transnational networks of activists, this multicultural theater group based in Bologna engages in transnational projects, inscribing its workshops and artistic performances within a larger reflection on the role of borders globally, and emphasizing their relationship with other global dynamics of domination and exploitation. Alongside projects at a local level, Cantieri Meticci also organize activities on the themes of intercultural dialogue, solidarity, and citizenship in different countries, often combining local activities and international collaborations with artists and academics from all over Europe. These activities include: Alone we stand, a project developed in partnership with Teatro dell'Argine and Oxfam Italia, and performed by Al-Harah Theater in Palestina[23]; Migrating Theatre, a multicultural workshop lasting ten days and featuring 40 amateur actors from 15 countries in which they create an interactive performance entitled The End of the Titanic, which symbolizes a journey across the contemporary world undermined by economic

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[22] Interview with Karen Boselli conducted in April 2015.

[23] *Alone we stand*, Al-Harah Theater, 2014. Al-Harah Theater is a cultural form of resistance to oppression that provides expression to the everyday struggle of Palestinian people, a vehicle for young people to share their humanity, and a means for these people to announce the world in which they want to live. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsEAaOqd2j4 [Last accessed 10 March 2018].

crisis and social unrest[24]; and The City Ghettos of Today, an initiative involving 24 partner organizations and aimed at combining artistic creation with sociological research concerning the memory and the present-day reality of migrant communities in seven European cities[25].

At the heart of this project was a desire to explore the role that 'ghettos' play in shaping the identity of Europeans and how they affect individual and collective reactions to — and experiences with — difference. This broad issue contains the related question of how individuals construct an image of 'the self' through their encounters with 'the other', or how encounters with difference contribute to creating 'auto-stereotypes'. With the aim of making migrants and refugees the main protagonists of cultural scenes in the involved European cities, while also creating a bridge with European citizens, The City Ghettos of Today entailed a series of workshops open to local communities. In each of the seven European cities, each workshop concluded with an art installation and a public debate on the project's themes.

By briefly exploring how the project has been developed during the residency in Bologna, the tight relationship between the physical and symbolic dimensions of this participatory theater becomes clear. The topics to be explored, the spaces chosen for the workshops, and the collective process of creating the final performance, are all key factors that highlight the power of theater both as a space of physical proximity where different people can experience conviviality, and as a metaphor for an alternative society in which differences (of cultural backgrounds, personal histories, needs, aspirations, etc.) improve and expand the final result.

The two-week residency in Bologna focused on various forms of 'camps' for migrants and refugees located in Italy, Europe, and Africa. Seeking to realize a theatrical journey within and across borders, the residency began with a one-day theoretical workshop focused on exploring the camp as government technology in the domain of migration control (Sigona, 2015; Campesi, 2015). Furthermore, a series of in-depth interviews with asylum seekers have been conducted. To gain relevant insights regarding their personal perspectives of the contemporary 'ghettos', the participants discussed their experiences in several contexts: an Afghan camp in Patras, a refugee camp on the border of Sierra Leone, a prison in Libya, and a

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[24] The project was conducted in April 2013 in Warsaw and in May 2014 in Paris with the financial support of the European Commission. The final report is available at: http://strefawolnoslowa.pl/projekty/migrating-theater/?lang=en A short video of the final performance is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIroKM2BAhI [Last accessed 10 March 2018].

[25] Funded with support of the European Commission, the project was conducted in Paris, Helsinki, Bologna, Milan, Berlin, Warsaw, and Antwerp, in 2014. Thanks to the diverse social, cultural, historical contexts of these cities, each residency explored and presented a different interpretation of the term 'ghetto' that was specific to the city in question.

center for identification and expulsion (C.I.E.)[26] in Bologna. The methodological hypothesis was to listen to those who had lived in such contexts and, through the reflections and analysis of anthropologists, sociologists, and political geographers in dialogue with artists, to deconstruct those structures into constituent elements — with particular attention to categories 'similar' to those of narratology (e.g. characters that act, typical dynamics, types of conflicts, structures of life experiences, and objects). During the second week, under the researchers and artists' supervision, the keywords that emerged in such categories were used as stimulation for art workshops. Held in Italian, with English and French translation, the workshops involved almost 100 participants and embraced practices of writing, video, theater, illustration, and dance.

It is worth noting that these multicultural artistic workshops, as well as the final performance, were held in the prestigious setting of Cortile del Pozzo, the courtyard of the Town Hall of Bologna. Every day, from 30 June until 5 July 2014, from 6 to 8 p.m., this centrally located public space was transformed into a forge of common artistic practices, a multimedia installation, an open market for story-trading, a large atelier for contributing to theater, dance, writing, and video-making workshops. By introducing this diversity of human beings and social practices, the artistic project transformed this institutional location in what Mouffe (2007) defines as an 'agonistic public space': a plural battleground where different perspectives and multiple discursive surfaces are confronted. According to Mouffe, this artistic activism can be seen as a counter-hegemonic intervention whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to subvert the dominant hegemony, and to contribute to the construction of new subjectivities. Furthermore, the political dimension of such intervention can be acknowledged by recognizing the key role played by Cantieri Meticci in contributing to the democratic processes of the respectful representation of citizenry within public spaces[27].

At the end of the workshops, the final performance, which involved approximately fifty 'actors' from fourteen different countries, was titled The Island is Full of Noises, which is a verse from Shakespeare's The Tempest. To enable a reflection upon the encounters of different cultures, the participants worked at the intersection between The Tempest's plots and characters and the concepts that have previously emerged, such as ghettos, colonization, stigma, and violent language. The creative output has been elaborated through different languages, creating scenes, texts, choreographies, and videos that merged into the final performance. Why this stylistic choice?

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[26] Since July 2014 the C.I.E. has been converted into a reception center that gives first aid and hospitality to 300 asylum seekers before transferring them to other reception centers in northern Italy.

[27] Carpentier (2011) highlights the importance attributed to participation and self-representation in contributing to the processes of respectful representation.

Viewed through the Shakespearean lens — the artistic director argues — the 'camp' or the 'ghetto' signaled a form of isolation whilst simultaneously emphasizing a richness of possible voices and interpretive keys[28].

Adopting Shakespeare's drama as a starting point for artistic exploration represents a method of making the real stories collected by participants more abstract and convincing. The characters of Caliban and Prospero, the island where The Tempest is set, Prospero's teaching of language to Caliban, and Caliban's rebellion, are all key examples of 'forms', 'vessels' or 'labeled boxes' that the director needs, as a first step, to process the materials obtained in the interviews. In so doing, the performance became a cultural practice that reworked available background representations in new scripts, which were then performed by social actors in specific spatial and temporal settings and in front of an audience. Assuming that the metaphoric function of the theater is based on essentially one of make-believe or mimesis, this process contributes to the creation of a bridge between particular conditions and something more universal. As such, it becomes possible to transform reality into poetry and, as a consequence, to increase the probability of emotionally and morally engaging spectators. As Alexander highlights, before paintings, cameras, and other media technologies, drama required a plausibility that needed to be conveyed by the actors' ability to make the audience 'believe in' their speech, movements, thoughts, and feelings. The plausibility of this *mise-en-scene* is based on the connection between the impression made by the actors and the preconceptions of the auditors, who perceive the performance as authentic and real (Alexander, 2011).

Concurrently, rewriting a classic (as many actors did with the character of Caliban) allows participants on the stage to transport the story to other contexts, because the classic drama functions on a more abstract level. Speaking of a creature of fiction that belongs to the world of classic art consents actors to become more critical and reflexive than when an artistic process departs directly from their own stories. As Yunus, one of the actors, affirmed: we are freer to judge Caliban in both light and shadow, but also freer to express from behind his mask our own darkest sides and secrets, if so desired, without feeling that naked-ness or exposure of talking about ourselves directly or even about others who exist[29].

The process of developing the manuscript and dramatizing it represents a useful practice for reflecting on alternatives to something perceived as unchanging and fixed. It means exercising the freedom to find those windows of creativity in a fixed text, with opportunities to express

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[28] *Floridia*, Interview.

[29] Interview with Yunus conducted in February 2015.

disagreement with its established history and the ability to emphasize those aspects that in the official version remain in the shadows[30].

It implements themes such as playfulness and storytelling, which help migrants and refugees to develop social relations and habitual patterns to manage these relations, while also encouraging them to take more control over their own lives (Sissel and Staffan, 2010). Trapped in the 'permanent temporary' process of waiting — while living on charity — within reception centers often perceived as 'prisons', by telling stories and dramatizing them on the stage, asylum seekers and refugees are enabled to express some of their life experiences, including despair. The same act of listening to each other's stories encourages participants to release their own voices.

To sum up, this extremely personal approach of creative training and artistic inclusion can be viewed as a tactic to express a reality that is very different from that written in theories or books, or in media analysis.

As de Certeau (1984) argued, in this case the interventions of the artists are tactical, not strategic: by insinuating themselves into the field of other, they interrupt and chip away at the logic of the border opening alternative visions and possibilities.

Through the performative force of imagination, the artists claim a space that is at the same time intimate and political. As Giudice and Giubilaro (2014) have shown analysing artists whose works re-imagine the border, 'crossing the borders is a question of the capability of an artist to present her/his own experience so that it is readable also to people with a completely different experience.'

Working on imagination and creating alternative spaces, the artists of Cantieri Meticci challenge dominant representations and hegemonic discourse, making the border a site of resistance and struggle. As Edward Said points out: Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also

about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings. While supporting participants to enrich the local society with their narratives and cultural knowledge, Cantieri Meticci offers to those whose existence is conceived as locked and without choices, the tools to create an alternative reality that stands in opposition to that of their daily lives: a more inclusive world, or just a momentary escape.

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30 Also, the performance The sinking of the Titanic is based on the poem The end of Titanic by H.M. Enzensberger, and Gli Acrobati is a show based on a tale with the same title by Nathan Englander. The former is an allusive play that presents the Cuban revolution as a break within the capitalistic system, while the latter tells of a daring attempt by a Jewish village to save would-be-acrobats during World War II.

5. FOR A DIFFERENT IDEA OF BELONGING AND CITIZENSHIP

This article examined how Cantieri Meticci uses participatory theater to challenge the lines between possible and 'impossible citizens', while also re-building a sense of commonality and solidarity. In order to study the role of theater in promoting social coexistence between citizens and newcomers, the article explores both the ambivalence of the theatrical metaphor of cosmopolitan solidarity, and how this metaphoric dimension risks collapse as a result of the physical proximity of the 'other'.

I pointed out how media's role in crafting national perceptions of migrants and refugees contributes to feeding a public discourse that undermines solidarity rather than encouraging it. Reproducing the asymmetry between the structure of pity and the structure of the theater, on one hand this constellation of images and discursive formations risks the turning of suffering into a pure spectacle that 'supplies migrant "illegality" with the semblance of an objective fact' (De Genova, 2011); but, on the other hand, it socializes the public to a minimalist version of humanitarian solidarity, here intended as the pure obligation of saving human life. From this perspective, the link between humanitarianism and the migration management regime reveals the asymmetry of power between the comfort of spectators in their living rooms and the vulnerability of sufferers on the screen. Mirroring the articulation of European migration policies, this 'compassionate repression' (Fassin, 2007) reflects the tension between inequality and solidarity, between a relation of domination and a relation of assistance.

As I have shown, conceived as a highly collaborative endeavor, Cantieri Meticci's theater invites newcomers to become involved in creative processes through which they can experience and unfold their resources. Giving them an opportunity to perform by building on their experiences and wishes for their life in a new country, theater becomes a meeting place where the participants learn how to behave within a group, respect other cultural values, trust others, deal with physical proximity, and release their own voices (Sissel and Staffan, 2010: 173).

As a proper structure that enables empathy and judgment with the strangers, for migrants and refuges theater becomes a stage for visual representations of themselves, of their dreams and fear, of their stories and aspirations. The theatrical performance, especially when it inserts 'their' voices within Western stories, such as the classical dramas, guarantees to participants a high degree of identification, allowing them to share a social imaginary that promotes a common identity without repressing difference. As such, cultivating interactions and social relations among 'strangers' (to each other), theater becomes a physical and symbolic platform

for building a sense of belonging that is strong enough that each of the participants is committed to collective public life and solidarities (Calhoun, 2016).

Concurrently, the purpose of this participatory theater is not solely therapeutic. The participants are not viewed as needing therapy, but rather as people with resources and experience who are able to contribute something unique to local territory. They present themselves as citizens with dreams and hopes for a future, while constructing new realities with new possibilities to integrate into local society. In light of this analysis, I would suggest that this participatory technique serves as a framework for the development of a different idea of belonging and citizenship. Whilst at a larger, national level, or in large institutional settings, the degree of citizenship that migrants and asylum seekers experience or feel is minimal, this can be altered when examining a local situation where senses of citizenship and belonging operate in alternative ways. If we assume that citizenship is in part created through social practice, and includes our interactions with those around us, then this 'loose interactions' period can encourage a feeling of inclusion, community, and belonging amongst the participants.

The experience of Cantieri Meticci shows that, in order to stand in solidarity with migrants who enter Europe each day, we must consider politics beyond the formal framework of citizenship, traditionally intended as a legal status that is based upon exclusion, and upon lines that divide[31]. The performances challenge this division, articulating demands in an inspirational affirmation of the political contributions of non-citizens to the discussions that shape their lives, and that re-imagine our society, and its politics. Although most of the refugees who participate in the Cantieri Meticci's workshops experience marginalization in their day-to-day lives, this theatrical platform provides an opportunity for them to practice being part of a community, and to feel a sense of belonging to somewhere: to be a citizen of Cantieri Meticci and to feel 'in place'. Bringing refugees into being as political agents rather than framing them as political 'abjects' (Nyers, 2003) in need of discipline or aid, Cantieri

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[31] Focusing on how 'theatre develops alongside the emergence of publics of potentially empowered citizens', Alexander defines citizenship as 'the legal capacity for skeptical viewership, the right to criticize and choose among performances, and the right to form one's own performances in response' (Alexander, *Performance and Power*, p. 87). From this perspective, one of the most effective examples of this rethinking of political agency is Isin E. and Nielson G. M. (2008) *Acts of Citizenship*, London: Zed Books.

Meticci courageously exploits the performative power of theater to intervene into political debates concerning who counts as a citizen of modern Europe[32].

Providing an insight into other methods of becoming political subjects 'before and beyond the law', the theater company unveils not only how the formal concept of citizenship does not respond to the multicultural context of contemporary European societies, but also to what extent migration legislation resembles a 'magic mirror' that reflects not only relations between the citizens and 'others', but also constructions of national subjectivity.

Although this does not change anything regarding their citizenship at a legal level, the work on hybridization highlights the importance of belonging to territory beyond traditional concepts such as *ius solis* or *ius sanguinis*. Focusing on the idea of neighborhood as physical space, and of community as emotional and symbolic belonging, Cantieri Meticci emphasizes the role of newcomers as new citizens through their social practices: this is the 'gift of the theatre' (Nicholson, 2005).

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[32] An innovative approach that has been rewarded by the same EU, considering that Cantieri Meticci's philosophy and metodologhy is at the base of *Atlas of Transitions. New Geographies for a Cross-Cultural Europe*: one of the 15 "large-scale projects" chosen by the 2017 Creative Europe programme. *Atlas of Transitions is* a three-year international project (2017-2020) promoted by theatres, contemporary arts centres, cultural organisations and Universities from 7 European countries: Italy, Albania, Belgium, Poland, France, Greece and Sweden. Through the use of various artistic practices, it looks into the potentiality arising from contemporary migratory phenomena and works towards finding new ways of perceiving public spaces and cohabitation between European citizens and newcomers. Using a range of means, the project opens the path to promoting interchanging geographies involving a dialogue with *the other*, based on reciprocity and interaction. See: www.atlasoftransitions.eu [Last accessed 10 March 2018]

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