Strangers at Our Door: Syrian refugees' crisis in *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018)

Shaimaa AlDahshan

Deraya University, Egypt

Email: shimaa.magdy@deraya.edu.eg

Abstract

The global refugee crisis stimulates important debates about the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. Jessica Glause's *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018) exposes the experiences of some Syrian refugees and asylum seekers before and after their arrival in Germany in the wake of the Syrian Civil War (2011-2024). Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Strangers at Our Door* (2016) offer a critical investigation into the journeys of such refugees, underpinning their anguishes and assimilation. This paper attempts to find answers to the following questions: What is the role of theatre in countering securitization, stigmatization, and exclusionary policies toward refugees? How does the German theatre respond to the challenges of the Syrian exodus to Germany? Why are Bauman's terms such as "Precariat," "Vagabond," "Official Fear," and "Stigmatization," used as a lens to understand the situation of the Syrian refugees? Moreover, the paper investigates the theatrical technique of Verbatim Theatre used by Glause.

Keywords: Jessica Glause, *Liquid Modernity*, Miunikh–Damaskus, *Strangers at our Door*, Syria

1. Introduction

Since time immemorial, wars disrupted the lives of people, killing and maiming thousands from both sides. Consequently, people seek shelter and peace by immigrating to other countries. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, numerous wars displaced millions of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. The theatre was the first to document the crisis of refugees when King Lear launched a bitter diatribe against the storm after being stripped of his kingdom.

> KING LEAR. Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
> You cataracts and hurricanes, spout
> Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
> You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
> Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
> Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
> Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
>
> (Shakespeare, 2019, 3.2.1-4)

King Lear describes what every refugee, asylum seeker, evacuee, deserter, or fugitive feels when being overwhelmed and defeated by his people. Out of rage, feelings of betrayal, and

terrible disappointment, he calls upon the forces of nature to destroy the earth. In the twenty-first century, the dilemma of migration is further aggravated due to globalization and regional conflicts.

2. The Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War (2011) erupted concurrently with other Arab nations' revolutions in what is called the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s. It began in Tunisia in response to corruption and economic stagnation. From Tunisia, the protests initially spread to five other countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. The Syrian Civil War started as "a nonviolent movement that ultimately gave way to civil war" (Ziter, 2015, p. 1). Then the war escalated to include all Syrians, as Vulin indicated "It was a nation that rose up then. It was not Sunni Muslims against Alawites or Christians, it was the whole of Syria" (Vulin, 2016, p. 126).

The Syrian Civil War was part of a larger sectarian geopolitical conflict. It was a tangled web of regional conflicts "reflecting both a triangular geopolitical contest for dominance among Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey and the ancient bitter rivalry between the Sunni and Shiite factions of Islam" (Carpenter, 2013, p. 3). The war resulted in severe human suffering with a huge death toll and millions of displaced Syrians on the one hand and widespread destruction of infrastructure across Syria on the other. International involvement by Russia, the United States, and regional powers further complicated the conflict. The war also triggered a major refugee crisis, affecting neighboring countries and Europe.

As a result, Syrians began to flee the country by masses in what is known as The Syrian Refugee Crisis (2011-2024). It reached its peak in 2015, when "hundreds of thousands of refugees made their way through what was then known as the 'Balkan route', heading towards [Central Europe]" (Eriksen & Schober, 2017, p. 282). Moreover, Reid (2023) documented the approximate number of Syrian refugees who were forcibly displaced as "13.5 million," which was "more than half of the country's population." She continued to classify those 13.5 million into "6.8 million" as refugees and asylum-seekers who have fled the country, while the rest, "6.7 million people", remain in Syria "but are displaced from their homes. That means they're internally displaced." In addition, she identified asylum seekers as "people who've applied for refugee status, but have not yet been granted it" (Reid, 2023, What is the Syrian refugee crisis? section). This statistical overview underscores the increasing human toll of the conflict and the massive scale of displacement.

Among the European nations that received Syrian refugees, Germany emerged as a pivotal site. In 2015, the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel bravely suspended the Dublin Regulation which restricted the entry of refugees and asylum seekers to Germany. She adopted an open-border policy welcoming refugees from different countries, especially Syria. She "liberalized many highly restrictive asylum regulations . . . which set the stage for an unprecedented wave of new arrivals in 2015" (Mushaben, 2017, p. 95). Merkel delivered a speech where she launched the hosting policy of refugees declaring, "Wir schaff en das" which means in English "We'll manage this" referring that Germany is a strong country that absorbs refugees. However, this influx of Syrian refugees into Germany sparked intense political and

cultural debates. Merkel was criticized that "she has exacerbated a problem that will be for years, perhaps decades" (Oltermann, 2020, para. 6). This criticism indicates that her message encouraged more refugees to seek asylum in Germany which meant, for the critics, more crime and terrorism. But the truth is that "more than 10,000 people who arrived in Germany as refugees since 2015 have mastered the language sufficiently to enroll at a German university. More than half of those who came are in work and pay taxes" (Oltermann, 2020, para. 4). This proves that, unlike expectations, refugees are willing to assimilate as they mainly are in search of a stable life. While some lauded Germany's humanitarian response, others expressed concerns about integration and security. This polarized environment set the stage for *Miunikh– Damaskus: Stories of One City*, which sought to humanize the refugee experience amidst widespread misconceptions and fears.

Glause's *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018) was produced by *The Munich Kammerspiele*. It offered a platform for Syrian refugees and asylum seekers to share their stories and confront stereotypes. The preparation process persisted three months before the show, from February to April 2018. The usual daily activities included two four-hour rehearsals in the morning and evening while afternoons were dedicated to German language classes for actors. The creative team behind this theatrical enterprise comprised "a director and her assistant, a dramaturg, a translator, a costume designer and her assistant, a music composer, a set designer, and five performers" (Totah & Khoury, 2018, p. 5). The performers included three Syrian males, a Syrian-Palestinian female, and a German actress from the *Münchner Kammerspiele Ensemble*. Only one of the four Syrian performers had refugee status; others had just arrived in Munich to work as actors.

3. Methodology

This paper examines Jessica Glause's *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018) through the theories of the Jewish-Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman as expounded in his works *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Strangers at Our Door* (2016). Bauman (1925-2017) was known for his critical analyses of contemporary society, culture, and globalization. He offered unique insights into the complexities of modernity and its effects on individuals and communities. Bauman (2000) coined the term "Liquid Modernity," to describe the fluid nature of modern life, where traditional structures and institutions become more transient and unstable. Bauman (2016) analysed the origins, contours, and impact of the present-day migration panic.

Bauman (2000) described the term as a state of constant change and uncertainty, where social structures, identities, and relationships are fluid and lack permanence. He explained, "these are reasons to consider 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in novel, many ways, *novel*, phase in the history of modernity" (p. 2). Unlike the solid modernity of the past, where life was more predictable and institutions were stable, "Liquid Modernity" is characterized by a lack of long-term commitments and a focus on individualism. He preferred the concept "Liquid Modernity" to "Postmodernity" as modern society had not transitioned to a completely new era but had entered a phase where the solid structures of the earlier solid modernity had become fluid. This fluidity is characterized by constant change, uncertainty, and the dismantling of stable institutions. To better illustrate the state of liquidity of society, Bauman explored five "new and improved solids" or concepts that

were the main reasons behind this fluidity: "emancipation," "individuality," "time/space," "work," and "community."

The first concept "emancipation" freed the individual ostensibly from the bonds of society, yet "what feels like freedom is not a freedom at all" as it left him/her with this freedom often comes with new forms of anxiety and uncertainty (Bauman, 2000, p. 17). Bauman casted doubt on the benefits which the freedoms can offer explaining that "it is likely to bring more misery than joy" because of "the expectation that each will be thrown to his own resources for the supply of his own wants" (p. 9). Thus, that freedom stimulated mental torments and agony of indecision, according to Bauman.

The second concept is "individuality" which granted the individual a sense of freedom, but it came with a price too. The individual's sense of identity became fragmented, as they were always under pressure to constantly adapt and present themselves in ways that reflect an ever-shifting context. In liquid societies, the freedom and identity of the individual have changed. Freedom is limited to "choose and to act" (p. 5) in shopping and consumption only. Individual's identity has changed from "a given into a task" (p. 31). This means that "the task or the identity of the individual is to follow the rapid changes of the market which always creates the next need by reinventing itself and pushing the individuals to constantly change his/her identity with the new trend" (Abdel Fattah, 2019, p. 32). It is no longer inherited, but it must be constantly adapted in response to the changing demands of society. This means that individuals are responsible "for performing the task and for the consequences" (Bauman, 2000, p. 31), which causes them anxieties because traditional structures dissolve, leaving individuals to navigate their paths alone.

Thirdly, in a liquid society, "work" and employment became increasingly rare and characterized by flexibility, short-term contracts, and a focus on adaptability. Work became detached from "the grand design of humankind's universally shared mission and no less grandiose design of a life-long vocation" (Bauman, 2000, p. 139). As everything changed, marriage, which once used to be a lifetime bond, became transient and short-term, as Bauman asserted, "Marriages 'till death us do part' are decidedly out of fashion and have become a rarity: no more do the partners expect to stay long in each other's company" (p. 147). This revealed the prevalent flexibility in liquid times.

Fourthly, Bauman (2000) explained the concept "time/space" in liquid modernity by describing some key features of contemporary urban areas. He asserted that those areas are fortress and fenced off giving an example of Heritage Park residence in Cape Town which is characterised by its "self-enclosure: high-voltage electric fencing, the electronic surveillance of access roads, barriers all along the way and heavily armed guards" (p. 91). That gated feature results in a fear of strangers as an increasing amount of people believe that they are "the victims of stalkers" (p. 93).

Finally, Bauman (2000) described liquid community as a nostalgic ideal in a world of instability, offering a sense of belonging and security amidst constant change. However, he highlighted the tension between freedom and security, as communities often demanded conformity at the expense of individuality. In liquid modernity, communities became fluid and voluntary, with transient affiliations reflecting the impermanence of modern life. He warned

that while communities may provide comfort, they can also create exclusionary "boundaries dividing 'us' from 'them'" (p. 176). Ultimately, community is no longer a given but a task, requiring active effort to build and sustain in a fragmented, ever-changing society.

Moving to Bauman (2016), the author of the paper uses terms such as "Precariat," "Vagabond," "Official Fear," and "Stigmatization" as grammar to analyze the play. Owing to insecure environments and the twentieth-century rapid challenges, the "Precariat" emerges as a new sociological concept to describe those who are always negotiating unpredictable situations; they are defied "by the quicksands on which they are forced to move" (p. 21). It is a social class of insecure and alienated people due to the socioeconomic fluid conditions and the growth of precarious work. They are worried about their status and are "afraid of losing their cherished and enviable achievements, possessions, and social standing" (p. 12). They constitute a class facing economic insecurity and instability.

Meanwhile, the term "Vagabond" refers to individuals who find themselves in a state of uncertainty within contemporary society. It is one segment of the broader social class, the Precariat. Refugees constitute the major proportion of the "Vagabond". They are, in Bauman's (1996) words, the ultimate "Vagabonds," "the waste of the world which has dedicated itself to tourist services" (p. 14). He explains how the consumer society is stratified according to the degree of mobility into two main classes: the first world inhabited by "Tourists" and the underclass for "Vagabonds". The first-world inhabitants are like global tourists; they can move faster and freer. Their freedom is constitutive of their power to control others and vice versa. Freedom of choice is their "flesh and blood" (p. 14). On the contrary, the underclass inhabits the second world and is perceived as a threat to social order by an increasingly fearful public that lives under perpetual economic insecurities and, therefore, marginalized, criminalized (especially violent ones), and even imprisoned. The term "Vagabond" underscores the challenges faced by individuals who struggle to find a sense of place and belonging in a rapidly changing and unpredictable world, where traditional sources of stability and identity are eroded. Bauman utilizes it to describe the predicament of migrants and refugees in the context of global migration and the refugee crisis. Migrants and refugees are often seen as "Vagabonds" by those who viewed them as outsiders or strangers, and they face various challenges in their search for safety, stability, and a sense of belonging.

Political powers have capitalized on the existing fear in society and redirected it towards new targets, such as migrants and refugees. Bauman discusses how this "Official Fear" was manufactured and manipulated, often through media narratives and political discourse to create a sense of insecurity and imminent threat, leading to increased support for strict border controls and immigration restrictions. According to Bauman, "Official Fear" perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, scapegoating, and hostility towards outsiders, particularly migrants and refugees. Bauman also discussed the rise of populist leaders (i.e., Strongman) who exploit the fears and anxieties of the "Precariat" to gain power and support.

"Stigmatization" refers to the social process by which individuals are excluded and labeled as undesirable, dangerous, or inferior. Bauman (2016) asserted that refugees and migrants are frequently stigmatized by their new host societies through fear-driven narratives that associate them with threats to security, culture, or economic stability (pp. 26-27). Bauman connects this

to the broader dynamics of liquid modernity, where insecurity leads people to look for scapegoats. Refugees become the others who are blamed for society's anxieties.

4. Introduction to the play's analysis

Jessica Glause is a German theatre director and playwright who loves to stage documentary plays, using real refugees and asylum seekers in her production. In her plays, *Noah* (2016), *Moses* (2017), and *Eva und Adam* (2019), Glause "mixed young performers from Munich (*some migrants, some not*) with recently arrived refugees, originating from countries such as Afghanistan and Syria" (Roesner, 2023, p. 118). In *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018), she collaborated with Syrian refugees as part of the *Post-Heimat* initiative, exploring themes of home, belonging, and identity in the context of migration.

The cast of *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* included three Syrian males (Majd Feddah, Kamel Najmeh, and Kinan Hmeidan), a Syrian-Palestinian female (May Hares), alongside a German actress from the *Münchner Kammerspiele Ensemble* (Maja Beckmann). Maja acted as a translator who facilitated communication while adding her commentary. Each performer brought their unique perspective and experiences to the stage, enriching the narrative with authenticity and depth. The four Syrians witnessed the atrocity of the Syrian Civil War. They held theatre degrees from the High Institute of Dramatic Arts Damascus in Syria. Only one of the four Syrian performers had refugee status; others had just arrived in Munich to work as actors. By blending their personal stories with theatrical expression, the performers portray a multifaceted collage of the refugee experience, challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy.

The play is non-linearly structured, interweaving three scenes to explore the experiences of the characters. The scenes are set in the past in Syria, the present in Germany, and the uncertain future of the refugee characters.

The first scene captures the lives of the characters right before and during the Syrian Civil War. It details how their everyday lives seemed, the abrupt disruption caused by the conflict, and the harrowing experiences that forced them to flee. Through vivid descriptions and personal anecdotes, this scene reveals the profound loss and trauma endured by the refugees, providing crucial context for their current struggles. The second scene is set in Germany, examining the lives of refugees' attempts to adapt to their host country, revealing the problems of assimilation and multiculturalism. It examines the bureaucratic challenges they face and the social and cultural alienation they often experience. This timeline emphasizes the immediate hurdles of seeking asylum, the precariousness of their situation, and their attempts to rebuild their lives amidst uncertainty. The third scene is the bleak future of the refugees, exposing their dreams and fears, which are overshadowed by the precariousness of their legal status and the trauma of their past experiences. It also underscores the absence of a secure and stable future, highlighting the psychological toll of living in limbo and the fear of deportation or continued displacement. Most of their wishes are simply normal human rights.

By interweaving these three timelines, the stories poignantly illustrate the comprehensive impact of displacement on refugees, emphasizing how their past continues to influence their present and how the uncertainty of their future shapes their current existence. This structure

not only humanizes the refugee experience but also underscores the enduring consequences of conflict and displacement.

5. Critical discussion

The "Precariat" face social and economic instability. Majd gives a soliloquy personifying the conditions of refugees as part of the "Precariat." He delivers it after getting excited by the song "From home to the home office. From home office to the bed" (Glause, 2018, 31:20-33:00). The song indicates the fast rate of life in Munich and all similar capitalist cities. Majd launches his diatribe:

> MAJD. I want my human right *(Sic)*! No, I want OUR human right *(Sic)*. And I don't have a *(Sic)* time, but I prepare this speech. I don't own my time anymore. . . . I don't want to be a German machine. . . . I don't want to work all the time. I don't want Espresso to go. I want to have a coffee at home, listen to my music and look out the window in a normal way. My time is capitalized!
>
> <div align="right">(Glause, 2018, 33:33-35:00)</div>

He exposes the effect of capitalism on individuals and the dark side of the Precariat life of having to work all the time. His normal dreams are extremely reduced to normal human rights. He is not dreaming of having a big business or being an influential politician. His dreams, however, are the simple dreams of any person: to have a peaceful life.

Majd portrays the lens of the "Precariat" in the play and depicts the anguish of refugees as being part of the Precariat. By "our time is capitalized," he is not only depicting his individual crisis but rather a collective one for all Syrian refugees. The ultimate aim of capitalism is exposed as an inverse relation, getting people to work longer hours for lower wages. Longer work hours serve as a diverting distraction for them so that they cannot think about their miserable conditions. Kinan agrees with Majd repeating in German, "from home to the home office, from home office to work" (35:49-35:50). They are full on making a modest living and don't have any chance to diagnose or find any solutions to their dilemmas.

All four Syrian performers embody Bauman's the "Precariat" as they lack access to essential public services and social benefits and face discrimination and marginalization due to their precarious status. They are denied a sense of home and stable presence. Their memories and dream episodes lament a stable home back there in Syria. Moreover, their distinct experiences shape their perspectives and goals. They are often in search of better life conditions but face difficulties in achieving them.

The "Vagabond" represents individuals who are perpetually on the move, not by choice but due to exclusion from stable social structures. Unlike the "Tourist," who moves freely and enjoys mobility as a privilege, the "Vagabond" is forced to wander due to economic instability, displacement, or political marginalization. They are often refugees, migrants, or precarious workers who lack security and belonging. Their movement is not an adventure but a struggle for survival, reflecting the inequalities of modernity.

Bauman's terms of "Tourists" versus "Vagabonds" can be traced in the performance through the experience of May. She personifies the constant mobility of refugees being a Palestinian-Syrian born with a refugee status. Her memory episode as a gymnast with a diplomatic passport to travel freely echoes the state of a "Tourist." Unfortunately, she lost that state after being badly injured. Now, she turns into a "Vagabond" after losing her passport which was her way

to move freely as a "Tourist," not restrictedly like a "Vagabond." She laments losing it and getting back to the state of Bauman's "Vagabond" as a refugee.

May does not belong here or there, so she is "either refused entry or rounded up and chased away" (Bauman, 2000, p. 92). Her state as a "Vagabond" refugee confines her mobility and makes her subject to investigations for hours at airports. However, she explains that her state is upgraded when she arrives in Europe; she becomes "a Palestinian-Syrian-European refugee" (Glause, 2018, 49:02-49:10). That upgraded state ironically means that she gets stuck in signing papers because "when you have the privilege of being a double refugee, the paperwork is twice as much" (49:20-49:25). She refers to the long process and multiple documents to be finished to get the formal status of a refugee. At this moment, she is singing a song in English:

> MAY. Paperwork! Paper now is everything. Here and there and everywhere. Your life depends on it, piece of shitty paper. Paper! You're not the decision maker. Who is the decision maker? A piece of a sh** paper. A piece of a sh** paper. Your identity is a number on that piece. It can be sharp like a knife and can cut through your life deeper and deeper.
>
> (Glause, 2018, 49:30-50:17)

May chooses to sing a song instead of delivering a tirade or portraying a tragic image because music provides a more subtle yet profound way of expressing emotions and experiences. Singing allows her to communicate loss, resilience, and nostalgia in a way that resonates deeply with both the performers and the audience. Instead of directly confronting the tragedy of displacement with heavy dialogue, her song becomes a symbol of endurance and continuity, reflecting her ability to hold onto pieces of her identity despite being uprooted. Additionally, in the context of *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018), singing serves as a universal language, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers while offering a moment of shared emotional connection.

Her song reveals the exhausting long process of finishing asylum documents that she has to experience. Refugees cannot take decisions for themselves to move freely. Instead, they have to go through a long journey of waiting for documents to be processed. May concludes her memory episode by declaring that she is a normal human being who should enjoy all the rights of normal human beings. As a refugee, she experienced enough loss of home and beloved people. She does not need any more losses or restrictions of her mobility for being an asylum seeker, as she asserts, "Just because I don't have nationality, doesn't mean I don't have an identity. I am here; I am a human being. I am not a number on the f*** paper" (Glause, 2018, 51:55-52:08). For her, "the question of asylum has always been a question of existence" (51:38-51:40). She is frustrated of the losses that she has been through, home, beloved people, and prosperous future. Her use of expletives adds a sense of raw authenticity to her performance, capturing the frustration, anger, and defiance that often accompany experiences of displacement and loss. Additionally, expletives function as a form of emotional release, allowing May to voice her pain and disillusionment in a way that is direct and unapologetic.

Bauman (2002) attributes the spread of refugee camps to globalization which produces more nowherevilles "through which the new globe-trotting elite moves" (p. 343). He compares refugee camps to "the gated communities of the discriminating rich and the ghettos of the discriminated poor" (p. 344). This confirms that refugees living in camps adapt to their attempts of daily survival amidst an environment charged with violence and despair. Kinan personifies

what Bauman (2016) describes as "the policy of mutual separation and keeping one's distance, building walls instead of bridges" (p. 14). In his memory episode as a monologue, he complains about how differently and fearfully he is perceived and treated after people know he was a Syrian. He narrates,

> KINAN. When people ask me where are you from, I used to say 'Don't panic. I'm from Syria,' because I can see the faces how change when I say this word Syria, change the whole situation, you know. I'm labelled in ten seconds.
>
> (Glause, 2018, 54:20-54:40)

Kinan symbolizes Bauman's concept of the indigenous "Official Fear" from refugees. "Official Fear" denotes how political powers have capitalized on the existing fear in society and redirected it towards new targets, such as migrants and refugees. That "Official Fear" is manufactured and manipulated through media narratives and political discourse in order to create a sense of insecurity and imminent threat, leading to increased support for strict border controls and immigration restrictions. Political leaders (the Strongmen, in Bauman's words) exploit that cosmic fear to gain power and support from the indigenous people.

Being one of "perhaps the most rapidly swelling of all the categories of world population" (Bauman, 2002, p. 343), Kinan, as a refugee, has to negotiate his identity in order to fit in the new home and avoid such labeling. For him, the solution is to be cosmopolitan not belonging to a specific land, as he confirms: "I just want to be cosmopolitan! So, when you ask me, where are you from, I will say, I am from nowhere" because I don't believe in border or countries" (Glause, 2018, 54:46-54:55). Thus, any boundaries that lead to his classification are undermined by him.

In addition, Kinan's song describes his state of being lost in space and social status. He is fed up with the constant movement that he has to bear,

> KINAN. My feet hurt me, where I no longer handle the shaky grounds beneath. I forgot where I belong going down roads that are unknown. . . . In dreams I'm getting lost in a maze of signs. I see faces without eyes and a silent mouth that cries.
>
> (Glause, 2018, 55:30-56:50)

Even, his dreams reflect his state of loss. He is in a desperate search for stability and unbiased recognition, which are normal dreams for normal human beings, "I'm longing to see the open city, open space where I can choose all and all" (57:35-57:45).

As a refugee, Kinan derives his social characteristics and composes his identity according to other people's actions. He depends on "the *sediments of other people's actions*" (Bauman, 2002, p. 343). Unfortunately, those actions stigmatize and deny him any social acceptance as well as forcibly alienate him from the group he may have aspired to join. Refugees are effectively excluded and compelled to acknowledge and accept the community's verdict of their imperfections and inferiority, further exacerbating the offense and injury inflicted upon them. Like any human being, Kinan's motives transcend survival and breadline. He needs to be recognized as a normal human being, that is why he decides to belong to nowhere.

Consequently, Bauman's concepts of the "Precariat," "Vagabond," "Official Fear," and "Sigmatization" intersect to reveal how identity, exclusion, and power operate in liquid modern societies. The refugees embody the "Precariat," living in constant insecurity without stability or recognition, while their forced displacement casts them as "Vagabonds," uprooted not by

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choice but by necessity. At the same time, they become objects of "Official Fear," as states and institutions frame them as potential threats to justify surveillance, control, and exclusion. This fear is reinforced through "Stigmatization," which fixes them in the role of the "outsider" and denies them full membership in the host community. Collectively, these interwoven mechanisms dramatize the contradictions of "Liquid Modernity," wherein identities are increasingly fluid yet experienced as precarious, and where state power perpetuates its authority through the systematic marginalization of vulnerable populations.

6. Technique

The title *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* is a pastiche of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, a historical novel published in 1859. It is set in London and Paris, exploring the conditions that led up to the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. While Dickens' title represents the divergence, Glause's reflects the convergence. The title merges rather than separates two cities, Damascus and Munich, through shared stories of displacement, memory, and identity. In so doing, Glause gives a glimmer of hope to the refugees and a vindication for humanity.

Glause created a myriad of theatrical techniques in her play, driving the audience to think and engage positively with performers. These techniques reflect the fragmented, dislocated, and emotionally charged experiences of Syrian refugees. The mise en scène incorporates minimalist staging to create an environment of instability and transition. Multilingualism and translation play central roles, not only bridging cultural gaps but also foregrounding communication barriers. The use of verbatim theatre techniques, where performers draw from their own lived experiences, adds authenticity. Additionally, the non-linear narrative and dream sequences deepen the sense of disorientation, memory, and longing that shape the refugee journey.

Staged in the open air, in a makeshift theatre in Munich, the play breaks the traditional Aristotelian Theatre (the proscenium stage). Thus, it is a site-specific theatre that is designed as an unusual place which grants the performance "an unsuspected power, and places the audience at an entirely different relationship to the text, the place, and the purpose for being there" (Pavis, 1998, pp. 337-8). The stage is minimalist yet symbolic, evoking a liminal space between two worlds. A caravan is placed on stage, serving both as a literal object and a metaphor for mobility, temporality, and marginality. The projector screen on stage often displays visual material, connecting the present space to memories and dreams. This choice of setting resists realism in favor of abstraction, placing the characters in a timeless, placeless zone that mirrors their suspended status.

The minimally equipped stage is reminiscent of Jerzy Grotowski's (2002) concept of Poor Theatre, which was centered on the idea of poverty, but as a conscious removal of theatrical luxuries. He believed that theatre "can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, 'live' communion" (Grotowski, 2002, p. 19). He placed the full emphasis on the actor's craft and the direct connection between performer and audience. In the play, a DJ set is placed on the right of the stage and a translation machine on the left. The DJ device, used by Kinan, serves not

only as a musical instrument but also as a communication tool, giving him a degree of agency and connection to the audience. In the middle, there are three microphones on a stick. Moreover, the light system employs movable spotlights scattered on the floor of the stage and fixed spotlights on the ceiling. There are no curtains; the fourth wall is removed, and the stage is ready. This stripped-down environment reflects the precarity and rootlessness of the refugees' lives: nothing is stable, permanent, or guaranteed.

Costumes are a major scenographic element as they help the performer to be engaged in the scenography. Carriger (2018) highlights the role of costumes stating that "a performer in costume can transform an ordinary public space into a performance space simply by entering it, even before beginning to perform. That is, costume functions as portable scenography, the mise-en-scène inextricable from the body of the performer herself" (Carriger, 2018, pp. 43-4). In the play, the costumes play a subtle yet powerful role in highlighting themes of identity, displacement, and the intersection of cultures. All five performers appear in the same polychromatic outfit throughout the performance. They wear simple, everyday clothing consisting of pants and sweatshirts rather than traditional or theatrical attire, which aligns with the poor theatre and the verbatim nature of the performance. This choice emphasizes their lived experiences rather than fictional characters, enhancing authenticity. The uniformity and simplicity of the costumes allow for fluid transitions between different roles and memories, reinforcing the idea of fragmented identities and shared refugee experiences. Unlike the simple mise en scene which used few props and plain machines on stage, costumes are very colorful and bright. However, they do not present facts about the performers. As a spectator, you cannot differentiate if the performers are Arabs or German from their costumes.

The language of the performance meets Yana Meerzon's (2020) perspective being "a partly translated multilingual dialogue" (p. 76). The language employed in the performance shifts between Arabic, English, and German. Arabic is the mother tongue of the four Syrian performers, while German is the mother tongue of the fifth performer, the director, and the audience. English is the common language. The diversity of language on stage mirrors transnationalism generally in Europe and particularly in Germany.

Glause (2018) utilizes multiple techniques for translation and interpretation. There is the translation machine that shows a written translation of some parts of the performance. Also, Maja is responsible for the simultaneous interpretation from German into English or vice versa. Translation and interpretation make the performance easy to comprehend. Meerzon (2020) explained the function of translation in the migration theatre stating that "migration enhances the political visibility of theatrical multilingualism. . . . Accordingly, the translation practices of multilingualism imply responsibility and hospitality" (p. 75). In this way, translation becomes a tool for bridging the gap between a migrant performer and German audience. Pavis (1998) explained that translation for the stage does not merely include transforming a theatrical text from a language to another. It comprises two notions, "first, in theatre, translation is determined also by the actors' bodies and the spectators' ears; second, one linguistic text is not merely translated into another - situations of enunciation and cultures which are heterogeneous and separated by space and time are made to communicate" (Pavis, 1998, p. 419). Glause (2018) took into consideration that her performance should communicate its messages clearly;

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that is why she utilized many translation techniques.

The Documentary theatre is an heir to historical drama as it depends on authentic sources. Pavis (1998) explained that for composing documentary theatre, playwrights "never create *ex nihilo* but always use sources (myths, historical events), any dramatic composition carries an element of the documentary" (p. 110). Many of Glause's works utilize documentary theatre to raise minority issues, especially refugees. She believes that her works should mirror the realities of the world, so she considers it irresponsible to overlook the refugee crisis. For her, talking with refugees enabled her to listen to their tribulations and gave her the role "acting as both an artist and a counselor" (Barone, 2018, para. 11).

In composing *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018), Glause depended mainly on improvisation and the real-life events of the performers which enriches the performance and makes it robust for the audience. Improvisation allows for a personal engagement with the material giving a chance to the performers to tell their stories themselves. She utilized improvisation during rehearsals to help performers recall and share personal narratives which were then shaped into the performance. This flexibility enabled performers to express not only the content of their memories but also their emotions. In this sense, improvisation provided authenticity enabling the audience to apprehend the refugees' trauma.

The play is Verbatim being based on the testimonies of the actors. Verbatim Theatre, as first coined by Derek Paget (1987), uses "tape-recorded material from the 'real-life' originals of the characters and events to which they give dramatic shape" (p. 317). In her book (2021), Summerskill asserts the aesthetic side of Verbatim Theatre which "faithfully represent the words of the narrators while also trying to attain artistic goals" (p. 174). Jessica Glause's creative process of making the material for the play met Paget's and Summerskill's explanations. It was based on the verbatim technique taking the following steps. Initially, she prompted the performers to recall personal memories. Then, she picked the stories that accord with the storyline and mixed common experiences from their daily lives to establish connections. Finally, she arranged one-on-one sessions for style assertion. The themes explored included aspects of the city, memories, dreams, and personal perceptions during transitions between spaces (Totah and Khoury, 2018, p. 7). This approach made the performers more open and safer to speak up their stories in the rehearsals which supported building up the stories of the performance.

Summerskill (2021) introduces multiple Verbatim theatrical devices that allow utilizing the oral testimony of actors on stage. First, she presents "direct address" as one style of monologue where characters "speak out to the audience rather than to a fellow actor/ character" (p. 180). This style acknowledges the presence of the audience while they are watching the performance. In *Miunikh–Damaskus*, the actors sometimes speak directly to the audience to create direct engagement by breaking the barrier between them and the audience. In addition, it provides the audience with insights into the actors' thoughts to guide the audience's understanding of the plot, themes, or emotional tone of the performance.

May, for example, tells her harsh story of losing the diplomatic passport due to a severe injury. Now, she is a "narrator-now-actor" speaking out directly to the audience which is more effective than characters speaking to each other on stage. The result is that the audience now

engage more deeply with her story, and they can feel what she feels. Here, the direct address style creates a rapport between the actor and the audience. In addition, Majd delivers his soliloquy to the audience although he is surrounded by his mates. He depicts his anguish as a Syrian refugee in Germany who has to work all day to earn the simplest living. He tells the audience directly that his dreams are so simple, just to relax and have coffee at night after work. Instead, he has to fall asleep so that he can wake up early and run in the confusing maze of work all day. Delivering his soliloquy directly to the audience enhances the sense of urgency about living in an endless circle of work.

A second variation of monologues as a Verbatim technique is to allow characters to share their stories with each other on stage. In this style, the narrator tells their experience to be "witnessed by another character or characters on stage, rather than being told directly out to the audience" (Summerskill, 2021, p. 181). This practice can be explicitly traced in multiple scenes of the performance. Most of the memory episodes start with performers talking to each other and ends with them talking to the audience. A third theatrical device as a Verbatim technique is "secondary dialogues" which refers to rendering monologues into dialogues. In other words, the playwright generates dialogues from the interviews that they conducted with the actors in the process of creating the play (Summerskill, 2021, p. 182). This happened when Jessica Glause interviewed the performers and used their recorded interviews as the raw material for the performance.

In *Miunikh–Damaskus*, theatrical forms become a crucial way for staging the dynamics of "Liquid Modernity." The play's fragmented and nonlinear narrative, shifting abruptly between the memories of Damascus, the bureaucratic processes of asylum in Germany, and the lived present of displacement, embodies the refugees' fractured temporalities and the impossibility of constructing a coherent life under conditions of precarity. This disjointed structure mirrors Bauman's assertion that in "Liquid Modernity," identity is unstable and continually renegotiated. Similarly, the integration of multimedia projection, including documentary footage, immigration documents, and news broadcasts, situates personal narratives within a scope of "Official Fear" and surveillance, dramatizing how refugees' subjectivities are mediated, stigmatized, and disciplined by external powers. The use of improvisation, particularly in sequences where actors narrate or re-enact their own experiences, destabilizes the boundary between performer and role, thereby underscoring the fluid, contingent nature of identity and belonging. By weaving these techniques together, the play does not only represent but formally enacts the instability, fragmentation, and insecurity that Bauman identifies as defining features of liquid modern existence.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper examines *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* (2018) through the lens of Zygmunt Bauman's sociological concepts articulated in his *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Strangers at Our Door* (2016). It explores concepts of "Precariat," "Vagabond," "Official Fear," and "Stigmatization" as traced in the play. The analysis shows how the play serves not only as a storytelling performance but also as a socio-political comment on the lived experiences of refugees. The findings indicate that the play highlights the fragmented, precarious identities of Syrian performers navigating new lives in Germany, while

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simultaneously resisting dehumanization and stigma. The research findings are outlined in the upcoming paragraphs.

The play is a powerful medium of connection and confrontation. It offers performers a platform to tell their stories and reclaim agency. It confronts the "Strongmen" who propagated "Official Fear." Moreover, by staging personal improvised narratives of real Syrian and German characters, the play achieves authenticity that deeply affects the German audience, as the play went viral and received rave reviews. The blending of Syrian memories and German public spaces created a dialogue where cultural boundaries were blurred and empathy became possible.

Bauman's theories proved to be accurate frameworks for understanding the realities of migration in the contemporary era. The play confirmed Bauman's insight that modern refugees are caught in a liquid world of instability, constantly forced to adapt without ever achieving security. Scenes like Majd's monologue about the commodification of time and May's song about paperwork vividly illustrated the social precariousness that Bauman described. In addition, a vital ground between Bauman and the German theatre of migration is that both criticize the exclusion and instability of refugees highlighting how liquid modernity erodes communal ties and turns displaced people into dehumanized strangers. The German specificity lies in Merkel's 2015 open-door policy, which created a surge of solidarity and a denouncement of official fear.

The Syrian exodus, particularly in 2015, both confirmed and challenged Bauman's premises. It confirmed the vulnerability of modern refugees being politically scapegoated, and it also showed, through plays like *Miunikh–Damaskus*, the power of storytelling to resist dehumanization and offer a space for integration. In addition, the technique of the verbatim and site-specific theatre broke the old proscenium stage of Aristotle, driving the audience to think rather than empathize with the characters.

The paper does not merely replicate existing literature on the theatre of migration but extends it by relating Bauman's sociological thought to theatrical analysis. It bridges critical theory and performance studies, showing how abstract sociological terms can be made tangible through performative techniques and lived refugee narratives. Bauman's theories are indispensable in this analysis as they illuminate the shifting conditions of identity and "Official Fear" in the era of global fluidity. His concepts offer a sharp lens through which the audience can decode the hardships faced by refugees in the twenty-first century.

The German theatre dynamically responded to the Syrian refugee crisis offering a critical space to represent displacement and integration. Several theatre makers employed documentary and verbatim theatre techniques to offer refugees a chance to narrate their stories on their own terms. Productions like *Miunikh–Damaskus: Stories of One City* and initiatives like *Post-Heimat* engaged refugees not just as subjects, but as collaborators and performers. That is why German theatre acts as a cultural mediator. As the global climate moves towards rising nationalism and endless refugee crisis, migration theatre emerges as a poignant too not only for documenting the lived experiences of refugees, but also for confronting the audience with a counter narrative that provokes empathy and resists dehumanization. This way, it invites the society to reimagine its relationship with the "strangers at our door."

For researchers, a promising area of study would be to investigate how digital platforms and transnational collaborations can expand the reach and impact of migration theatre. Additionally, comparative analyses of refugee representations in theatre across different cultures could yield rich insights into how performance responds to and shapes public awareness.

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