



MIGREAT!

Playing Forum-Theatre in the MiGreat! Project

Research Report

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Abstract

The MiGreat! project was an Erasmus+ programme that took place between October 2019 and March 2022. It involved four organisations: Giolli Coop (Italy), EFA London (the United Kingdom), Élan Interculturel (France), and Nyitott Kör/Open Circle (Hungary). The aim of this project was to contrast dominant narratives around migration by identifying counter narratives and, above all, producing alternative ones. This was based on the application of participatory approaches in which the four partner organisations have a long expertise, including Freirian popular education, Community Organising, Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre in Education, Applied Drama and Critical Incident method. The project included the realisation of three types of intellectual outputs: a handbook, four visual tools, and four Forum-Theatre scripts. This report focuses on the production of the Forum-Theatre scripts. Drawing on seven semi-structured interviews with referees from the four partner organisations, this report investigates some of the issues that emerged during the realisation of the Forum-Theatre scripts. Therefore, it considers both the process of construction (initial meetings and rehearsals), and the Forum-Theatre sessions, with a particular attention to the role of the Joker. The analysis led to the emergence of three relevant themes: the management of language differences, the promotion of participation from the audience, and the positive feedback received from the actors and actresses. Moreover, the report encourages further research on the impact of the Joker's gender on the various steps in the process, and the influence that Covid-19 pandemic had on this phase of the project. In sum, it is argued that various challenges emerged during the realisation of Forum-Theatres scripts, but several strategies were found to accommodate them. Critical thinking about these issues is crucial in order to render this type of projects helpful in discussing topics which are considerably relevant nowadays, such as migrations.

Keywords: Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum-Theatre, participatory methods, Joker, theatre, performance, migrations, "MiGreat!"

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
EFA London	English for Action London
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
Giolli Coop	Giolli Cooperativa Sociale
IO	Intellectual Output
TO	Theatre of the Oppressed

1. Introduction: The MiGreat! Project

“MiGreat! Changing the narrative of migration” (hereafter MiGreat!) was an Erasmus+ programme that aimed at questioning current narratives about migration and trying to find new, positive ones. Starting in October 2019 and reaching its conclusion in March 2022, MiGreat! saw the involvement of four educational organisations from four European countries: Giolli Coop (Italy), EFA London (the United Kingdom), Élan Interculturel (France), and Nyitott Kör/Open Circle (Hungary). These four partners acknowledged the spread of anti-immigration sentiments across Europe in recent years (Multiple authors 2021, p. 6). Thus, through this project, they tried to tackle dominant, negative narratives around migration, and proposed counter and alternative narratives (Multiple authors 2021, p. 6). The four educational organisations have a long history of work based on different, but interconnected, methodologies, including Freirian popular education, Community Organising, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre in Education, Applied Drama and Critical Incident method (Multiple authors 2021, p. 6). During those two and a half years, they worked with educators, language teachers, social workers, activists, and other professionals and people involved in the field of social work and migration, to spread knowledge and awareness about these methods and teaching how they can be used to contrast dominant, negative narratives and create new narratives (Multiple authors 2021, p. 6).

MiGreat! included various phases. The first part was based on the share of good practices among the four partners. This consisted in three training sessions that took place in London, Trento, and Budapest, as well as three webinars. This part involved around 80 practitioners – comprising “adult educators, theatre practitioners, activists, campaigners, community organisers, psychologists, and social and cultural workers”, many of whom from a migrant background (Multiple authors 2021, p. 6).

The other part was based on the dissemination of practices and methods to a wider audience through workshops, seminars, Forum-Theatre sessions and a conference (Multiple authors 2021, p. 6). During these events, the tools that were produced in these two years and a half were disseminated. To begin with, a handbook was produced by the four partners – which constituted the IO1. Here, a conceptual framework is provided about what is meant by “narrative”. Narratives are defined as “stories that circulate in societies” and that “emerge from shared social beliefs and also act to reinforce them, while guiding decisions and actions of individuals and groups” (Multiple authors 2021, p. 7). Narratives are “partial” in that they represent a particular perspective (Multiple authors 2021, p. 7). The handbook highlights that dominant narratives around migration are mostly negative, “dehumanising” or “essentialising” (Multiple authors 2021, p. 7). Conversely, counter and alternative narratives challenge dominant, negative

narratives and try to show the diversity of migration experiences. In particular, counter narratives question specific narratives and target supporters of extremist perspectives, whereas alternative narratives are realistic, factual, and inclusive depictions of those who are discriminated against, and they target the whole population (Multiple authors 2021, p. 7). Moreover, the handbook includes examples of these types of narratives in the four countries. Finally, it provides a practical guide including numerous participatory activities that the four partners tested with various professionals.

Subsequently, the IO2 was realised, which consisted of the production of visual tools through a participatory process, where the groups of participants actively contributed to the choices that were made concerning the themes, the medium, the audience. Each partner realised different products: Giolli Coop created a video which merged several clips showing various dominant narratives around migration, told and performed by people from a migrant background. EFA London created a short video telling the experiences of several people from a migrant background currently based in London, who underline the fundamental role that language learning has played in their life. Élan Interculturel created various posters, each highlighting various dominant narratives around migration, as well as counter and alternative narratives. Finally, Nyitott Kör/Open Circle realised several videos and a thinglink poster¹ telling the migration experiences of various people from a migrant background currently living in Budapest.

The third and last product of MiGreat!, the IO3, consisted in the construction and public performance by each of the four partners of a Forum-Theatre, which is the most famous technique used in Theatre of the Oppressed. The scripts were based on one or two scenes showing examples of one, or more, dominant narratives about migration (see Multiple authors 2022 for details about the four scripts). The audience was then invited to go on stage; people had the chance to play one of the characters acting in a different way from what they saw during the scene(s) that was presented. By doing so, they were given the opportunity to explore new narratives. Importantly, the aim of these Forum-Theatres was to investigate dominant narratives around migration and explore alternative narratives, rather than proposing solutions to the situations shown on stage. The four Forum-Theatres that were realised in the four countries are the focus of the present report. In particular, the analysis focuses on both the construction process of the theatre scripts, and on the role of the Joker – also called “Jolly” or “Curinga” (Boal 2021, p. 41) – in each Forum-Theatre session, including the challenges that they faced while acting in this role.

¹ A thinglink poster includes tags that, when clicked on, lead to webpages and other resources on the web.

These three phases of the project were strongly affected by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. Indeed, the restrictions that were imposed in all the four countries involved led to a change in several parts of the project, which mainly resulted in moving online various activities that were initially planned to take place in person. Among these there were notably a significant part of the process of construction of the IO2, and the three trainings. While it is not the aim of this report to examine in depth how the pandemic affected the entire project, some of these changes will be considered, as they also influenced the development of the IO3.

Before moving to the conceptual framework, it is important to highlight the relevance of MiGreat!. In fact, the four countries identified several differences between their experiences of migration, but also numerous similarities. Italy, the UK, France, and Hungary have different histories of emigration and immigration, as well as different political, social and cultural contexts (Multiple authors 2021, p. 8). Notwithstanding this, the four partners recognised that, especially in recent years, all four countries have witnessed an increase in racist and anti-immigration opinions and behaviours (Multiple authors 2021, p. 6). Especially since the Arab Spring in 2011 and the “refugee crisis” in 2015-2016, people from a migrant background have increasingly been considered a “threat” to European, as well as national, security, and they have been subject to a process of “othering” (Grove and Zwi 2006, pp. 1933-1934; Multiple authors 2021, pp. 8-16; O’Neill et al. 2019, p. 134). These processes have been facilitated both by public discourses, for example in mainstream media (O’Neill et al. 2019, p. 134), and by increasingly restrictive entry policies, especially for individuals seeking asylum in Europe (Fassin and Kobelinsky 2012). Further, this context has facilitated the spread of discriminations, as well as violence, towards people from a migrant background (Grove and Zwi 2006; O’Neill et al. 2019; Fassin and Kobelinsky 2012; Multiple authors 2021, pp. 8-16).

Nevertheless, migrants are often described by common public discourses independently of their migration status or experience (Yuval-Davis and Kaptani 2009, p. 57). Indeed, people from a migrant background are often treated as a homogenous group (Multiple authors 2021, pp. 8-16), despite the fact that migration is a highly diversified phenomenon. Migrants’ agency has often been denied, and they have been subjected to a process of disempowerment that finds its roots in European colonial history (Grove and Zwi 2006, 1933; Rozakou 2012; Multiple authors 2021, pp. 8-16). Despite this, the four partners acknowledged how several initiatives to identify counter and alternative narratives are present in the four countries. These come mainly from civil society organisations, but in some instances also from political and cultural institutions (Multiple authors 2021, pp. 8-16). In sum, it is in this context that MiGreat! found its rationale. Throughout the different phases, dominant narratives were investigated and questioned, and new narratives were explored in order to challenge negative stereotypes about people from a migrant

background. This report shows how this was done, including the challenges that arose, while constructing four Forum-Theatres.

This report argues that the main themes that emerged from the process of construction of the four Forum-Theatres are the management of language issues, the challenges in promoting participation from the audience during the Forum-Theatre sessions, and the positive feedback that was received from those who participated as actors and actresses. Moreover, this report points out that two areas that deserve further attention are the role played by the Joker's gender during the entire process of construction of the script, and the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had during this phase of the project. Hence, consideration of these aspects is encouraged for future projects.

The report is structured as follows. The next section outlines the method of Theatre of the Oppressed, drawing on its theories and techniques. Subsequently, an overview of the academic literature analysing the use of Theatre of the Oppressed in the context of migration is presented. After that, the methodology utilised to realise the present report is outlined. The main section presents and discusses the findings. Before concluding, some suggestions for future research and/or for future projects, based on the findings, are examined. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key points of the report, outlines some of its limitations, and encourages critical thinking about the themes that emerged from the analysis.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Theatre of the Oppressed: Theory and Techniques

The Theatre of the Oppressed (hereafter TO) draws on Paulo Freire's approach to education, best known for the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2018[1968]). Freire argued that education should lead to the liberation of those who are oppressed, through a process in which people "educate each other through the mediation of the world" (Freire 2005, p. 32). Indeed, he criticised what he termed a "banking" approach to education, where students are simply conceived as empty boxes that need to be filled by teachers (Multiple authors 2021, p. 23). This approach, he claimed, should be replaced by a humanising and dialogic type of education that promotes students' process of conscientisation of the oppression to which they are subject (Freire 1968; Schroeter 2013, p. 397; Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 115), as well as on the problematisation of reality (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 129). In this way, people should learn how to act in order to achieve their liberation from oppression. In sum, Freire promoted the use of critical

pedagogy to achieve critical consciousness (Freire 1968; Schroeter 2013, p. 397; Multiple authors 2021, pp. 22-24).

TO was conceived by Augusto Boal drawing on Freire's approach to education (Schroeter 2013, p. 397; Multiple authors 2021, p. 25). Developed in Brazil in the 1960s, TO was introduced as a tool which encourages and facilitates social change (Boal cited in Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 111). It was conceived as a form of political theatre that aims at conscientisation (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 115; Schroeter 2013, p. 397; Opfermann 2020, p. 141; Boal cited in Opfermann 2020, pp. 147-148), thereby leading to individual as well as collective empowerment (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 112). TO can thus be defined as "a set of techniques that helps people overcome oppression through acting, both in the sense of being an actor and being active" (Boal cited in Alshughry 2018, p. 171), in order to identify solutions to one's problems (Alshughry 2018, p. 174). In other words, Boal conceived theatre as an "exercise" that would prepare people for their liberation in their "real" life (Boal 2021, pp. 42-43; Horghagen and Josephsson 2010, p. 169). Through various TO techniques, people can directly experiment how to behave when facing oppression in their "real" life. Thereby, theatre could become "a rehearsal for revolution" (Boal cited in Schroeter 2013, pp. 397-398; Boal cited in Opfermann 2010, p. 141; Boal cited in Ranjan 2020, p. 5) or a "rehearsal for reality" (Boal cited in Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 7; Boal cited in Yuval-Davis and Kaptani 2009, p. 63). To sum up, oppression, power, and conflict are central concepts in TO (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, pp. 122-123).

TO includes a variety of techniques. Image-Theatre, for example, is based on the construction of various images using one's body. Normally, a person models their or another person's body according to the image that they want to construct, which can represent an idea or a thought about a given issue (Miramonti 2017, pp. 171-172; Boal 2011; Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 118; Boal 2002). More precisely, people utilise their body to illustrate a word or a concept immediately, without thinking about it and before activating their mind. This is based on the idea that image is a language on its own, complementary to words. It is polysemic, illuminating and real. Further, Invisible-Theatre, instead, consists of a show that takes place in a public space, without people being aware that what is happening is in reality a theatrical show. During the show, an oppressive situation is illustrated. To put it differently, the scene represents a power imbalance, where some people, or a social group, dominate others, limiting the latter's possibility to decide about their own life (Multiple authors 2021, p. 27). In other words, in an oppressive situation power is distributed unequally, and those who have more power try to achieve their goals violating the rights of the less powerful (Miramonti 2017, pp. 11-12). Yet, what characterises an oppression is the fact that it can still be "fought", and the oppressed still have the chance to "free themselves" (Boal 2021, p.

78). Those who are present get involved and act to intervene in this situation and try to solve it, but without being aware that in that moment they are, indeed, “spect-actors” (Boal 2021, p. 39; Boal 2011; Boal 2002; Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, pp. 117-118). Newspaper-Theatre aims at problematising the news as they are presented by mass media, especially newspapers and magazines; it includes eleven techniques which allow to uncover various contradictions, as well as omitted information, that readers might not perceive, and that contribute to shape the interpretation of the news (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 117; Boal 2011). Legislative-Theatre, instead, is based on the use of various TO techniques to produce laws that originate from the ideas and needs of the subjects of these laws. The final aim is to connect citizens’ needs with political institutions, promoting a democratic process (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 120).²

The most famous and widely used technique is, however, Forum-Theatre (Boal 2002; Boal 2011; Boal 2021). In Forum-Theatre, a story is performed, showing a negative, oppressive situation. Then, the audience is invited to intervene. Members of the public have the opportunity to play the role of various characters and try to find solutions to the situation that was shown, provided that they do not act as oppressors themselves (Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 9). In this way, spectators become “spect-actors”, who directly go on stage and act (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, pp. 118 and 126; Schroeter 2013, p. 397; Capobianco and Vittoria 2012; Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012; Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008, p. 5). A person called the “Joker” coordinates the audience’s participation (Boal 2021, pp. 39-41; Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, pp. 118-119; Schroeter 2013, p. 397; Miramonti 2017, pp. 13-14; Ranjan 2020; Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012). During Forum-Theatre, what the audience sees is a show that problematises a situation, challenging the public and asking questions. Hence, the aim of Forum-Theatre is to question reality, instead of providing answers (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, p. 123). This is based on a fundamental feature of TO, which is the idea that, if oppressed people want to achieve their liberation, they have to play an active role in the process of liberation. Only by doing so can they become empowered. In this way, TO underlines the difference between victims, who are subject to oppression but remain passive, and oppressed people, who instead have the opportunity to become active (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, pp. 123 and 125-126; Miramonti 2017, p. 12; Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 2). At the same time, TO blurs the distinction between performers and spectators, as well as between life and stage, which is typical of traditional theatre (Yuval-Davis and Kaptani 2009, p. 59; Opfermann 2020, p. 141).

² Further readings on TO techniques: Boal 2002; Boal 2011; Mazzini and Talamonti 2011; Miramonti, 2017; Boal 2021.

In Forum-Theatre, the Joker can be defined as “a person acting as an intermediary between the audience and the play” (Schroeter 2013, p. 397), and they play a key role. First, the Joker explains to the audience “the rules of the game” and guides the audience during some warming-up exercises (Boal 2021, p. 41). After the first performance of the show, the Joker asks the audience if they agree with the way in which the oppressed protagonist behaved. Since the audience is likely to say “no”, the Joker then explains to the audience that the show will be performed again and they can intervene, shouting “Stop!”, as soon as they see something that they would do differently. In this way, they can go on stage and try to find new solutions (Boal 2021, pp. 41-43), as well as experimenting with different strategies. While coordinating the Forum-Theatre, the Joker does not judge the comments and proposals by the audience; rather, they invite the audience to reflect upon the solutions that are proposed and try to question them (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, pp. 118-9; Miramonti 2017, pp. 13-14 and 195-203). For instance, the Joker can ask questions such as: “Did this solution work or not?”, “Was progress made?” (Day 2002, p. 22); in this way, they foster discussion and participation by the audience (Day 2002, p. 22; Multiple authors 2022 pp. 9-10; Boal 2002). Thus, the Joker acts as a “co-researcher” (Multiple authors 2021, p. 25). Although the Joker has to ensure that the solutions proposed by the audience are realistic, it is ultimately spectators who assess whether solutions are adequate or not (Day 2002, p. 22; Boal 2002, pp. 260-262). To put it differently, the Joker encourages people to act, to intervene, to apply their knowledge and skills, without establishing what are the best solutions (Boal 2021, p. 43; Miramonti 2017, pp. 13-14 and 195-203; Boal 2002, pp. 260-262; Multiple authors 2022 pp. 9-10). Forum-Theatre, as well as TO more generally, have been applied in several contexts that concerned the field of migrations. Yet, the literature examining these projects is limited. This topic is deepened in the next paragraph.

2.2 Previous Projects Applying TO to Migrations

TO, and specifically Forum-Theatre, have been used in several projects and activities dealing with the migration theme and that were objects of analysis in social scientific research (see for example McGregor and Ragab 2016, p. 12). Yet, research in this field is still scarce, and concerns mainly (although not exclusively) English-speaking countries. This scarcity of research on this topic shows the urgency to deepen knowledge on how projects such as “MiGreat!” can impact on the field of discrimination and racism.

Several scholars have shown the key role that TO can play when working with people from a migrant background. For example, TO gives these people the opportunity to share and give visibility to their experiences (Horghagen and Josephsson 2010, p. 172). Studying a project that took place in the UK

which applied TO to work with refugees, Ranjan (2020, p. 5) points out how TO workshops constituted a break for refugees from their difficult everyday experiences. In another context, TO activities allowed women from a migrant background to share their experiences and express their needs and wish for change (Erel and Reynolds 2014). Theatre allows participants to point out the oppression by society and governments to which they are subject (Yuval-Davis and Kaptani 2009, p. 69), and to do so through the development of solidarity and the use of humour that unites them (Yuval-Davis and Kaptani 2009, p. 70). Moreover, TO allows to put in contact people from a migrant background with natives, underlining that integration needs to come from both sides (Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 15; McGregor and Ragab 2016, p. 7). In this way, TO contributes to allow people from a migrant background to enact their citizenship and work on their empowerment, which is something that they are often prevented from doing in other contexts (Erel and Reynolds 2014, p. 110; Yuval-Davis and Kaptani 2009, p. 70; Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 11). Indeed, research has underlined that, by participating specifically in Forum-Theatre, they become active subjects who stop oppression. This leads to an important change from the role of victim – as they are often considered (Varvin cited in Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 12) – to subjects with agency (Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 12). This is highly relevant given that Boal himself stated that by actively participating in the process of changing society can people become citizens (Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 15). Through this active involvement, TO plays a crucial role in helping people reflect upon oppression, by putting themselves “in other people’s shoes” and trying out different strategies that they can apply in real-life situations (Day 2002).

Nevertheless, several studies have underlined how projects applying TO in the field of migration can also include some critical issues. For instance, when working with people who might have different mother tongues, there might be problems in communication due to language barriers (Opfermann 2020, p. 140). Relatedly, a lack of trust, due to the difficulties in enhancing dialogue, might limit the success of this type of activities (Opfermann 2020, p. 140). This can be problematic, given that several theatrical activities, including those which are part of TO, are based on verbal communication (Opfermann 2020, p. 144). Moreover, scholars have pointed out that moral reflection and follow-up activities are necessary in order to increase the relevance of TO activities, particularly in educational contexts (Day 2002). Additionally, Ranjan (2020) has shown how a project based in the UK using TO to work with refugees risked reproducing neo-colonial relations. Indeed, the author highlights how important it is to take into account refugees’ needs and the ethical aspects of working with them, in order to really facilitate their empowerment and leave space to their agency (Ranjan 2020).

Nonetheless, the literature on projects utilising participatory and/or theatrical activities to talk about migration is scarce. Apart from a project that took place in Greece and applied Theatre in Education, TO, and other methods to train teachers on themes related to human rights and refugees (Choleva et al. 2021), and the studies previously mentioned, to date research has not explored how these methods can help tackle issues related to migration narratives. Hence, drawing on these issues, this report will investigate several aspects related to the construction and public performance of four Forum-Theatres in the four countries involved in the MiGreat! project, with a special focus on the role of the Joker. Before doing this, the methodology that was utilised is outlined in the next section.

3. Methodology

This report focuses on the four Forum-Theatres that were realised in the four partner organisations. Importantly, the report is not based on a comparison among them. Indeed, the four scripts were not studied in the same way. In the case of Italy, I followed and supported the construction of the scene from the beginning until the public performance. This was part of the internship I did at Giolli Coop as part of my master's course in Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento. Conversely, as far as the other three countries are concerned, I only read their scripts and looked at internal materials (pictures and videos) that were produced during the processes of construction of the scenes. Unfortunately, it was not possible to observe the construction processes, since they started to take place before the work on this report, as well as my internship, started. Yet, in order to learn more about the phases that led to the realisation of the four Forum-Theatres, seven interviews were conducted with the professionals working in the four organisations and coordinating or taking part in the construction of the theatrical works. Specifically, interviews were conducted with two members from Giolli Coop, two members from EFA London, one member from Élan Interculturel, and two members from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle. Among these, there are the four persons who acted as Jokers during the Forum-Theatres, and three persons who worked mainly as supporters, co-organisers or performers.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that they included open-ended questions, so that interviewees were left with the opportunity to expand and deepen as much as they wished the telling of their experiences during this phase of the project. The interview with one of the professionals from Giolli Coop was conducted in person, whereas the other six interviews were conducted online through Google Meet or Zoom. The interviews were conducted in English, with the exception of the two interviews to the

two professionals from Giolli Coop, that were conducted in Italian. The quotations from these two interviews were translated from Italian into English by me, doing my best to not alter the meaning.

The seven interviews lasted between one hour and forty-five minutes and almost four hours. They were entirely transcribed, coded and analysed through thematic analysis which led to the emergence of three themes. These are examined in the next section.

4. Analysis: The Challenges of Building and Conducting Forum-Theatre about Migration Narratives

This section discusses the three main themes that have emerged from the analysis. These are the management of language issues during rehearsals and during Forum-Theatre sessions, the participation from the audience during Forum-Theatre sessions, and the feedback from actors and actresses after the entire process.³

4.1 Managing Language Issues

Verbal communication is central in TO, as well as the use of a shared language (Opfermann 2020, pp. 143-144). In all four countries, language differences were discussed by Jokers and facilitators of the activities since the beginning of the construction of the four scripts. In Italy, the entire process (from construction to public performance) took place in Italian; in France, it took place in French, but sometimes English was also used (in order to facilitate the course of the activities); in the UK, it took place in English, but sometimes Spanish was utilised (because it was the mother tongue of numerous participants); in Hungary, the most used language was Hungarian, but the scene included some sentences in Persian (because of the main character of the scene), and in the public performances also English was utilised. Language differences constituted one of the initial difficulties that were encountered during the recruitment process. For instance, in Italy, language was “an ingredient for the choice” of participants (Interview with the Joker from Giolli Coop), meaning that several participants who were not confident with Italian language and/or with English language were not involved due to the difficulties in translating. Moreover, in France some people might have been discouraged from participating because of the difficulties with the French

³ In this report, the expressions “Forum-Theatre sessions” and “public performances” refer to any event during which the scenes were played in front of an audience, in contrast to rehearsals. In some countries these events involved an external audience, in others they included other people from the same organisation. In some countries there was just one such event, in others there were more. However, these differences are mentioned only when relevant for the purposes of the analysis. Otherwise, they are not considered.

language (Interview with the Joker from Élan Interculturel). The challenge posed by language skills became evident during the Forum-Theatre session, for example in the Italian case, as the following quotation highlights.

So, well, uhm for me we didn't have uh comprehension problems in the sense that, maybe not every single word but, repeating the thing more times etcetera, for me people during... they un-understood and moreover uh we did-like, the meeting before, the multiplier event, where there were many foreign people, it also allowed us to understand who didn't understand [...] It's obvious that, in every context, when we feel for any kind of thing, lack-lacking a-a characteristic that other people have, we tend not to intervene. [...] (Interview with the coordinator of the MiGreat! project, from Giolli Coop)

The interviewee here underlines how some issues might have emerged during the Forum-Theatre session. On one side, there might not have been huge difficulties, since the scene was repeated several times (as part of a Forum-Theatre). Moreover, in Italy a multiplier event was held before the Forum-Theatre, where the audience gathered to watch the videos from the IO2. In this instance, the organisers were able to acknowledge who the non-native Italian speakers were. On the other side, the interviewee recognises that in any context where someone feels that they “lack” some skills that the majority of the other people possess, they tend not to intervene. In Italy, indeed, the audience to the Forum-Theatre session included a significant percentage of people from a migrant background who are not native Italian speakers (around 30%, as stated by the Joker from Giolli Coop and the coordinator of the Migreat! Project, from Giolli Coop, during interviews). Although some people from a migrant background actively intervened, also entering the scene, several people might have been hindered from participating. This was caused both by the fact that the Forum-Theatre session was held in Italian, and by the fact that there were time constraints (Interview with the Joker from Giolli Coop). As such, these factors partly limited the goal of “dialogic exchange” as theorised by Boal and Freire (Opfermann 2020, pp. 140-141). However, in the other three countries, strategies were found to accommodate spectators' linguistic needs. For example, in Hungary, some parts of the performance were prepared to be held either in Hungarian or in English (with some parts in Farsi⁴), as the following quote underlined.

Uhm... there was a part before-before we began with the whole play uh with... [the Joker] asked the-the audience that... “How much English do you speak?” So, uh about the language, English language, okay, “if you speak very well stay here, and if you don't speak at all, then stay here” and there was an activity like this. (Interview with an actress from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle)

⁴ Although one interviewee from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle uses the term “Persian”, whereas the other utilises the word “Farsi”, they refer to the same language, spoken in Iran.

The interviewee explains in this quotation that, during the Forum-Theatre session, the Joker asked the audience whether they spoke English or not, so that the audience could move to different areas of the room depending on the language they spoke. The actresses would then play the scene either in Hungarian or in English, “depending on the audience”, or the Joker would translate in one of the two languages for the other participants (Interview with the Joker from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle). In France, instead, participants from the audience helped each other when translation was necessary, as pointed out in the following quote.

[...] if someone doesn't know how to say something or has some difficulty, but normally the group would help uhm ins-inside of it, like automatically, it was natural, so... and as we all uh... everyone in... almost everyone in the room had an accent, so it would be really like, welcoming and safe place. (Interview with the Joker from Élan Interculturel)

The quote above explains that in France, members of the group that worked on the scripts would help each other with translation if something was not clear, and this came “automatically” and it was “natural”. Moreover, the interviewee underlines that every participant had a particular accent, since they came from different countries, including French-speaking countries. Therefore, the group managed to create a “welcoming and safe place” where people would feel comfortable asking for help with the language.⁵ A similar situation took place in the UK, where theatre became an opportunity to practise with the English language. In fact, due to the goals of EFA London, which are based on facilitating English-language learning for ESOL students, and to the fact that the script was based on the issue of language learning (a theme that was chosen by the group of participants), Forum-Theatre was considered an opportunity to improve their language skills, as explained in the quotation below.

Maybe-maybe-maybe participating. I don't-I don't think it stopped people going, because they were ESOL students, and they were going to see other ESOL students, I think it would have been... they would have felt like it was a learning experience. Uhm uh may-I mean, maybe some people thought they wouldn't understand, so why go? But usually, I don't-I don't think so particularly. I think there would have been other barriers stopping people going, more to do with, like, geography and work and looking after children and things like that, I don't think the language would have been the most important barrier. In terms of pa-par-participating on the day yeah maybe, maybe people struggled a little bit with the instructions of the Jolly, uhm but not too much [...] (Interview with one of the writers of the MiGreat! project, from EFA London)

⁵ In France, the two scripts were created during a two-day workshop, in which participants produced the two scenes and performed them without external spectators. The fact of carrying out activities together (including de-mechanisation and story-telling activities), contributed to the creation of a relationship among participants that allowed them to feel comfortable with each other. Although a similar situation occurred in the UK, it was not the case in Italy and Hungary, where the Forum-Theatre sessions took place in front of an external audience.

In the quote above, the interviewee states that language issues might have discouraged some people participating while they were at the Forum-Theatre session, but it might not have prevented people from going to see it. In fact, given that in London the session was prepared by ESOL students and the people invited were almost all ESOL students, they considered it a “learning experience”. Although the interviewee recognises that some people might have not attended the session, or some might not have participated actively, due to difficulties in understanding the language, this might not have occurred for numerous people. Moreover, as he keeps explaining, other reasons might have impeded participants to go to the session (geography, work, childcare) more than language barriers. Overall, neither the Joker did perceive that there were relevant language barriers, also thanks to the fact that students helped each other during the session (Interview with the Joker from EFA London).

In sum, this section has shown that during the construction of the IO3 some language issues occurred. To some extent, language differences impacted on both the recruitment of actors and actresses and on participation during the four Forum-Theatre sessions. These challenges were tackled either by the way in which the scenes were constructed, such as in Hungary, or by the collaboration by participants who tried to help each other with comprehension, such as in the UK and in France. In the Italian case, during rehearsals all participants were native Italian speakers, whereas during the Forum-Theatre session several participants with other mother tongues were present. Although several of them managed to participate, the interviewees have acknowledged that others might have been discouraged from participating because of language issues. Nevertheless, in all four countries participation was active during the Forum-Theatre sessions, and this was mainly because of the crucial role played by the Jokers. These aspects are analysed in the next paragraph.

4.2 Promoting Participation from the Audience

In the four countries, participation from the audience was generally active, although some challenges appeared. Indeed, at the beginning the audience struggled to participate, for example in Italy, or some groups of spectators were reluctant to contribute to the session, as in Hungary. In all countries, the Jokers tried to identify various strategies in order to foster spectators’ participation. For instance, in France, one of the main ways through which the Joker from Élan Interculturel encouraged participation was asking questions, as she explains in the following quotation.

Uh...I would ask some basic questions at the beginning, so it'd be easy for the audience to answer, and little by little, we would uhm uhm immerse among more complex discussions and uh the fact of ideas that would come and their

replacements... that would little by little uh construct some-some complex conversations. [...] (Interview with the Joker from Élan Interculturel)

Here, the interviewee states that she started the discussion by asking “basic questions”, in order not to create difficulties in answering, and then she began coordinating “more complex discussions”, with the emergence of various ideas from the audience and ways to tackle them in order to give rise to more “complex conversations”. Asking questions is central to the Joker’s role (Day 2002, p. 22; Miramonti 2017, pp. 197-201; Multiple authors 2022 pp. 9-10; Mazzini, President of Giolli Coop, cited in “MiGREAT! Changing the narrative of migration” (no date)). However, in Forum-Theatre, talking is not sufficient. Indeed, active participation also includes physically performing, replacing one of the characters. In order to move towards this direction and activate spectators, Jokers coordinated some physical and warming-up activities, or de-mechanisation (Miramonti 2017, p. 196), similarly to the case analysed by Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand (2012, pp. 5-6), as the quotation below highlights.

[...] because of the game, because it had been quite physical, everybody had been running around uhm that-there were enough students, I think we had maybe five or six that-that were ready to-to get up on stage and intervene. Uhm so yeah, it didn't feel difficult to... uhm to manage contributions [...] (Interview with the Joker from EFA London)

Here, the interviewee mentions a game that she made the audience play at the beginning of the session. Being a “physical” activity where people were “running around”, several students who were there as spectators managed to intervene. Playing this game facilitated participation and helped to activate people and create an atmosphere in which they would feel more relaxed to interact. These challenges were encountered also during the Forum-Theatre session in Trento where, after the first time that the scene was performed, participation was quite low, and silence prevailed. Also in the Italian case, asking questions and physical activation were the two main ways through which the Joker promoted participation, as explained below.

So uh how did I facilitate? Asking many questions, listening to all possible answers. At the beginning I feared... as it often happens, that activation would not start and that people would expect that something would have had to happen elsewhere whereas it had to happen there and also through them. [...] [N]ormally minds have to be activated and also bodies a bit. [...] the warming-up of the audience is important and so I created a climate of lightness uh a bit of dynamic and... and I asked many questions. The Joker’s role is above all that of collecting, collecting and re-introducing, but not losing any-any stimulus that comes from the audience, so a widespread attention to anyone who even looks up a bit. (Interview with the Joker from Giolli Coop)

The quotation above shows that the Joker decided to ask “many questions”, as well as to listen “to all possible answers”. This occurred throughout the session. As the Joker here explains, at the beginning

she feared that activation from the audience would not have started, and that people would have waited for something to happen elsewhere. The Joker underlines that something had to happen *there*, and that they would have had the responsibility to do so. These lines remark the main feature of Forum-Theatre (but this could also be applied to the rationale of TO more generally) – namely the fact that spectators are invited to actively participate, and not simply looking at what occurs on the stage while remaining passive. Moreover, the Joker points out that “minds”, as well as “bodies”, need to be activated. For this reason, during the Forum-Theatre session in Italy, she coordinated a warm-up activity in order to create an atmosphere of lightness and a dynamic approach (this was a coordination activity where everybody moved their arms in different ways while being seated). In fact, scholars have demonstrated how important movement and physical activities are in Forum-Theatre (as well as in other TO techniques), since they contribute to increase awareness of one’s body, as well as to create a comfortable and trustworthy environment (Schroeter 2013, p. 402). Subsequently, she asked numerous questions. Additionally, the interviewee explains that the Joker’s role is that of collecting and reintroducing the stimuli that come from the audience, being careful to any signal of response, including physical signals. Thus, this quotation underlines how the body is important for the audience’s participation, both in order to encourage people to activate and intervene, and because spectators can manifest their reactions in an embodied way. Despite these strategies that the Joker utilised to foster spectators’ participation as spect-actors, in some cases people were reluctant to actively intervene, as highlighted in the next quote.

[...] And... whereas at the beginning, then the issue attenuated, a person from the audience who uhm I don’t know for which necessity of her hmm I-I would say uh personal necessity no? of her character or an existential necessity, she did-she felt the need to uh judge and to point to the right uhm way, for the salvation (*smiles*), I don’t know how to say this in another way. But the comment is-was: “But it’s clear, it’s like this!”. At “It’s clear, it’s like this”, the Joker’s first reaction is to answer: “It’s clear that it’s not only like this” or “If it’s like this, come and show it to us”. This person never got up, she never intervened, I didn’t manage. For me it’s a bit of a small failure, for sure. (Interview with the Joker from Giolli Coop)

In this quote, the Joker comments on the presence of a spectator who made various comments regarding what was happening on the scene, but who never entered the scene as an actress. In fact, the spectator was often judging the behaviour of the different characters, claiming that it was “clear” what the solution was. Yet, as the interviewee points out, the Joker has the responsibility to problematise any intervention, underlining that things are not so crystal-clear when an oppression occurs.⁶ Further, if spectators deem a solution to be self-evident, they are welcome to go on stage and show the rest of the audience how the

⁶ This applies especially to the script that was produced in Italy, given that the scene was complex, as it included numerous characters and various axes of oppression.

character that they replace should behave. Nonetheless, this spectator “never got up” and never intervened to go on stage. The Joker adds that she experienced this as a “failure”, because she did not manage to push this spectator to go on stage. Deepening the factors that might have hindered active participation by several spectators is encouraged, also considering that the Joker underlined during the session – recalling a Forum-Theatre that was part of another project – the importance to enter the scene and act, which “means not only *to perform*, but *to take action*” (Jackson cited in Day 2002, p. 31, italics in original; Multiple authors 2022 pp. 9-10; Mazzini, President of Giolli Coop, cited in “MiGREAT! Changing the narrative of migration” (no date)). Conversely, in the UK active participation allowed spectators to acknowledge the difference between just verbalising possible solutions, and acting in order to try them out in practice, as shown below.

I think one of the first interventions was actually somebody saying, “Well, actually like, the... it was the customer that was being rude. And uhm if the customer was just more polite than they would get served”. And then we said, “okay, brilliant, you know, come come up and show us”. Uhm and they tried and got the same response, and it basically.... uhm it showed the-the audience that it wasn't enough to be polite, it wasn't enough to...uhm... yeah, to-to be patient, and this and that, because ultimately, it was a-it was a situation of discrimination. So uhm... yeah, so then, that-that student said, “Well, I have to change my mind. It's not-it's not the customer, that's the problem, it's uhm... it's the pharmacist”. (Interview with the Joker from EFA London)

The interviewee here clearly highlights the difference between acting and just talking. To put it differently, the distinction between just being a spectator and become a spect-actor becomes clear (Mazzini and Talamonti 2011, pp. 118 and 126; Schroeter 2013, p. 397; Capobianco and Vittoria 2012; Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012; Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008, p. 5). Indeed, during the Forum-Theatre session in London, a spectator challenged the fact that the protagonist was oppressed. They argued instead that the protagonist (the customer in the pharmacy) had to be more polite. The Joker, at that point, took advantage of this comment to push the spectator to enter the scene and act, replacing the customer. (Un)surprisingly, the situation did not change! The Joker states that this episode showed the rest of the audience that what was happening in the scene was not simply a problem of scarce politeness. Rather, it was a case of “discrimination”. As such, the student who made that comment realised that the problem was not the customer, but the pharmacist, who acted in an oppressive way. At the same time, they understood how crucial the embodied experience in Forum-Theatre is, and in theatre more generally (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008, p. 3; Multiple authors 2021, p. 26). In other words, putting oneself “in other people’s shoes” is fundamental to try to change society (Day 2002; Boal cited in Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, p. 15).

To sum up, this section has outlined some of the challenges that the Jokers had to face to facilitate participation from the audience. Asking questions and coordinating physical activation were key to creating an environment in which people would feel encouraged to start interacting and intervene. At the same time, the importance to act, meaning to “take action” by stepping into the scene, replacing characters and trying out different strategies, were crucial to examine oppression and realise the difference that acting, rather than talking, makes.

4.3 Realising Something “Meaningful”: Feedback from Actors/Actresses

The interviewees underline that, after the completion of the production of the four IO3, including the processes of construction and the Forum-Theatre sessions, participants (as actors and actresses) in the four countries expressed positive feedback about the experience. Here it is important to note that these comments come from the point of view of the Jokers and their colleagues, not directly from participants. In Italy, actors and actresses were perceived as satisfied by the Joker, as the quote below suggests.

And-and the... this role is difficult, because you have to do it maieutically, like you have to do it by making things come out in the best way, ordering them, not losing pieces but not bringing something that is not there, so. So I don't know if they expected this, but this happened. So the level of satisfaction, this in relation to the expectation, I say everything very high, [...] for me in this third step, that is the one with the audience, their expectations were overcome. They didn't-they didn't expect for me to find... to be so capable of activating other people in turn. (Interview with the Joker from Giolli Coop)

The quote above points out how being a Joker is a difficult role, because it is based on the attempt to collect what comes from participants and ordering it, but without adding or imposing things that did not emerge from them. The fact that this happened, increased satisfaction among the group of participants in Italy. This satisfaction intensified even more after the Forum-Theatre session, where the audience was present. In particular, actors and actresses were enthusiastic about their capacity to activate other people – spectators who engaged in participation. This sense of satisfaction was shared also by participants in the UK, where this experience was deemed as an opportunity to learn new skills while talking about migrations, as pointed out in the following quotation.

[...] So for me, that's a good choice uhm with Forum-Theatre, which means that uh people's expectations uh... they are met, because they at least had the opportunity to practice some-some different things that they could do in a similar situation. So I think-I don't think-I-I think they would probably be satisfied that their expectations of Forum-Theatre were met. It was fun, they learnt some new skills-tools, they learnt some new language, and they understood an issue better. (Interview with one of the writers of the MiGreat! project, from EFA London)

The interviewee here argues that, through Forum-Theatre, participants' expectations were met, since they had the opportunity to try various ways of dealing with a situation such as those represented in the scene. Furthermore, participants had fun, they learnt several tools, improved their English and reflected upon the topic of migration, in order to understand it better. The experience helped ESOL students to acquire new skills in terms of language and awareness about oppression in the context of migration, similarly to the studies by Erel and Reynolds (2014) and by Horghagen and Josephsson (2010). Thus, Forum-Theatre constituted a creative way to discuss a topic that was highly relevant for participants, as in the case of other artistic projects dealing with migration (McGregor and Ragab 2016, pp. 7-8). Likely, participants in France experienced something new through Forum-Theatre, as explained by the next quotation.

Uh I think they had uh expectations of uh playing theatre, uh they were really uhm... uh motivated to do some exercises with the body, with the voice and, and just have uh... have a good time, and also to have a safe place to talk about migration. [...] [T]hey were really... proud (*smiles*). (Interview with the Joker from Élan Interculturel)

The Joker here claims that participants expected to play theatre, but were also keen on doing some physical and vocal exercises. Thus, the embodied component of a theatrical experience was important for them. Further, participants desired to “have a good time” and to find “a safe place to talk about migration”. Therefore, the opportunity to discuss issues related to migration, which they experienced (Interview with the Joker from Élan Interculturel), was central in participants' feeling of satisfaction at the end of the process (Erel and Reynolds 2014; Horghagen and Josephsson 2010). Additionally, participants perceived the experience of Forum-Theatre as meaningful, as the quote below suggests.

Uh I think uhm my expectations, uh what we reached, what-what we reached was more than my-my expectations, yeah, really (*laughs*). Yes, I can... maybe for all of us, I don't know, I don't uh I don't want to speak in the... for them, but I think it was more, yeah, more than I thought, okay, I said, okay, we will make something, but it was really, I can say, professional, and it was... meaningful, I-I-I saw that... it's-what we do uh... was important, and it has eff-effect on people, and that's because I think the group was very important, that we've worked with. (Interview with an actress from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle)

The interviewee here happily explains that her expectations were overcome after the end of the IO3. In fact, the result was very “professional” and “meaningful”, and this went beyond her initial expectations. She realises that what she and her colleagues produced was “important” to the extent that it had an “effect” on people. In order to achieve this, she argues that the group of actresses was crucial, highlighting the importance of collaboration among colleagues when working on a performance (Becker 1982; Horghagen and Josephsson 2010, p. 169). A positive feedback was given also by the Joker in Nyitott

Kör/Open Circle, who agrees with her colleague about the deep meaning that the IO3 has had, as she states in the following quote.

So, the expectations were not really high, just to meet in person, and have some nice process, where we can be... where we can be creative, and we can construct together something meaningful. And I think this was met, because my colleagues liked this activity, liked this performance, you can constantly improve it. Every audience, every group that we meet is different. So, it's not getting boring. [...] [W]ith this performance, it's-I think it's okay, we are not like exhausted, because it's liberating in some way. (Interview with the Joker from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle)

The Joker here highlights that expectations were not really high, also because Nyitott Kör/Open Circle started producing the IO3 when the pandemic was still impacting on their work due to various restrictions. Therefore, participants wished mainly to meet in person and express their creativity. This expectation was met, given that actresses were happy with the activities that they carried out and with the performance that they prepared. She recognises that there is always room for improvement, as also the audience influences a performance, and this is not specific only to Forum-Theatre, as it happens generally in the performative arts (Becker 1982, pp. 301-302). This fact prevented the experience from becoming boring; actresses were not tired of it, and, instead, the performance was perceived as “liberating”, after a period of severe restrictions.

In short, after the end of the process of construction of the IO3 and the Forum-Theatre sessions, actors and actresses were satisfied. The experience allowed them to engage other people with what they were showing, while having an embodied experience that contributed to their improvement of various skills, including, in some cases, language skills, and discussing a topic that was central to all of them, that of migration. At the end, they perceived to have realised something “meaningful” and “liberating” that increased their satisfaction about the process. Yet, other challenges emerged, but were not always given much attention during this phase of the MiGreat! project. These constitute interesting points of reflection, and they are discussed in the next section.

5. Suggestions for Future Developments

5.1 The Role of the Joker's Gender

In all the four countries, the Jokers were women. The impact that the Joker's gender might play during the construction of a Forum-Theatre, as well as during a Forum-Theatre session, is still under-researched. In fact, to date the literature has not focused on how being a female, or a male, coordinating the

participants and/or the audience can influence the relationships with actors/actresses and spectators.⁷ In interviews, the role that being a female might have played in the process has been recognised, mainly in positive terms, as the following quotation reveals.

the Joker's role is a very uh easy role-like it's a very central role, very central, everything depends on the Joker at a certain point and that this be a woman with only two-with two complicit women and... in this positive climate, it can only improve the situation, because the Joker... because at a certain point everything depends on the Joker and I believe I have a component, if we really want to trivialise, a masculine component that is quite accentuated, that is the one that is a bit more practical uh or sometimes deaf to hmm emotional nuances and... I have it and-and surely it's the one that works for me during the twenty minutes before going on stage, like I have to abandon everything that concerns care, the... no? [...] (Interview with the Joker from Giolli Coop)

In the quote above, the interviewee explains that the Joker plays a vital role. The fact that, in Italy, the Joker was a woman, and that there were other two women helping her with the construction of the scene, improved the situation. According to the interviewee, this female component was to some extent balanced out by a more “masculine component” that she has. This is conceptualised as more “practical” and more “deaf to emotional nuances”, which is necessary before entering the stage. During this moment, the interviewee states that she had to abandon the dimension of “care” in order to facilitate the start of the performance. These lines reveal that the Joker in Italy reflected upon the role that her gender might have played in the construction of the IO3. Yet, she suggests a binary vision of gender, stereotypically associated with practicality and rationality, in the case of masculinity, and attention to care, in the case of femininity, according to what are considered appropriate behaviours (see for example Connell 2011, pp. 35-36). This idea is developed by the Joker in the next quote.

Well I have to say no uh not my gender, but a-a capacity that however I saw and found also in Jokers not of my gender and... to uhm mix, how can I say, depth and also a bit sympathy, but in the etymological sense of the term to-to manage to feel together with people. I don't believe that this is a quality that is specific to my gender. Maybe it can have a part of major seduction, such-such an important role as I described it, when it is worn by a woman, but I say this now and I might change my mind in five minutes, looking at a male Joker capable of being as magnetic [...] (Interview with the Joker from Giolli Coop)

Here the interviewee argues that her gender might not have influenced her relationship with the audience during the Forum-Theatre session. Nevertheless, her capacity to mix “depth” and “sympathy”, defined as the skill to “feel together with people”, might have had an effect. The Joker clarifies that this might not be

⁷ However, a feminist approach to TO has been developed (see for example Ma(g)dalena International Network 2022).

specific to her gender, but suggests that being a woman might include a greater form of “seduction”. In sum, the interviewee points out that being a female Joker might impact positively on the relationship with the audience, and explains this through references to the capacity to seduce that she considers as probably more typical of women than men.

Another way in which the role of the Joker’s gender is explained by interviewees is through a connection with their professional sector. In the UK, in fact, the Joker remarked that the sector which EFA London is part of is highly feminised, and this might have had an impact on the Joker’s positioning, as explained below.

[...] possibly yeah, because I think ESOL is a very uh feminised sector, uhm the majority of ESOL teachers are women. [...] Uhm so perhaps there is an element uh... where... yeah, that work is kind of seen maybe more as women's work. Uhm... also, like, conversely, in community language classes, the vast majority of students are also women. [...] Uhm so yeah, I guess... I guess there is an element where... yeah, where my gender might play a role. Specifically, in terms of the relationships with the students and how the forum was constructed, I'm not-I'm not sure I could put my finger on it (*laughs*). [But I didn't experience any difficulties because of my gender in relation to participants or to spectators] I guess because the vast majority of the audience were-were also women. (Interview with the Joker from EFA London)

In the quotation above, the interviewee underlines that the ESOL sector is significantly feminised, given that the majority of teachers are women. Hence, people might already expect the role of facilitator to be carried out by a woman. Moreover, students are also mainly women. Therefore, the Joker points out that her gender might have affected the relationship with the students who participated in the IO3, even if she is not sure about how this could have happened. Further, she specifies that her gender did not cause her any difficulties, because the audience was composed mainly by women. In other words, being a woman together with many other women might have been experienced by the Joker as a positive aspect. This might be interpreted as related to a feeling of safety and comfort due to being with people of the same gender. Yet, it is not clear from the Joker’s point of view. In general, interviews revealed limited awareness about the effect that the Joker’s gender might have played on the entire process of construction of the IO3, as summarised in the following quote.

I think this is a really difficult question. I don't know. Hmm so we are all women, we communicate very well in the team. I think it's-it's true that we communicate better because we are all women. (Interview with the Joker from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle)

The quotation above underlines that the issue of the role of the Joker’s gender is “difficult” for the interviewee. Indeed, she does not know how it might have influenced the relationship with participants. Also in this case, the Joker specifies that the team who worked on the Forum-Theatre in Hungary was

composed exclusively by women. Precisely because of this factor, they communicated “very well”, even “better” (than if they were not all women). Nonetheless, the interviewee is not sure about why this was the case. Further, she thinks that her gender influenced her relationship with the audience, but she does not know how (Interview with the Joker from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle).

In sum, this section highlights that interviewees are a bit hesitant in recognising the role that their gender played during the construction and public performance of the four scenes, and unsure about what effect this had. Notwithstanding this, the quotations included here reveal that, according to the Jokers, their gender did play a role, mainly based on their (stereotypical) vision of gender. Being a woman was definitely recognised by the Jokers as relevant for the development of the process. Although gender issues have been widely discussed, problematised, and tackled through TO techniques, and a feminist approach to TO has developed (see for example Ma(g)dalena International Network 2022), research investigating the influence of the Joker’s gender is scant. Thus, more research is encouraged to deepen knowledge about the impact that the Joker’s gender can have on the realisation of a Forum-Theatre.

During the interviews, some other issues regarding gender in TO emerged (for example, the gender of the members of the groups, the ways in which actresses felt to be perceived by the audience because of their gender, the challenges in interpreting a character that has a different gender identity than the one of the actor/actress, etc.). Therefore, this shows the relevance of the role that gender plays in participatory and creative methods, including TO. This further shows how crucial it is to deepen knowledge on this area when practising and/or analysing TO.

5.2 The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

As mentioned in the Introduction, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 had a significant impact on the entire MiGreat! project. This concerns also the phase that was dedicated to the IO3. The pandemic influenced, above all, the management of the spaces where the rehearsals and/or the public performances took place, as revealed by the following quote.

The reality is that we had to dovetail availability, the cost, and the fact that we were in a Covid period [for the spaces]. [...] [A] place that did not have limitations due to Covid, so that was big enough, because a part of the activities [...] and... there are still some limitations given the number of persons etcetera, so it had to be a big place. [...] I have to say that the Covid issue made a big difference in choosing which the rooms were. (Interview with the coordinator of the MiGreat! project, from Giolli Coop)

This quotation highlights that restrictions due to Covid – together with availability and costs – led facilitators in Italy to choose certain spaces where to hold rehearsals and the Forum-Theatre session,

while excluding others. The rooms had to be large enough in order to welcome a given number of people. This was the main factor in choosing where to hold the various events not only in Italy, but also in France and Hungary (Interviews with the Jokers from Élan Interculturel and Nyitott Kör/Open Circle). Moreover, the pandemic gave rise to a high level of instability, given that rules for quarantine were still in place in many countries between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, as well as requirements to possess a vaccine certificate. Unfortunately, these factors prevented some people, including some from a migrant background, from participating – although there were also other reasons for their absence (Interviews with the coordinator of the MiGreat! project, from Giolli Coop, and with an actress from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle).

In the UK, initial meetings were held online. Although this constituted a possibility to start working on the IO3, it rendered the process more challenging, as the next quotation shows.

[...] it was-it was really challenging, I mean, my students were not connecting from a laptop, they were connecting from their mobile phones, uhm so it-it-it makes it difficult. Uhm... so... yeah, I-I was quite relieved when we were able to... to pick up again uhm in the autumn face to face. [...] (Interview with the Joker from EFA London)

As the interviewee explains here, having online meetings was “challenging”. For instance, participants connected from their mobile phones, which made interaction more problematic than when connecting from a laptop. Therefore, when restrictions were loosened, the Joker states that she felt “relieved”, so that she could finally meet participants “face to face”. However, in December, the Omicron wave hit London quite harshly. Due to this, some participants might have been prevented from attending meetings. Yet, the public event managed to take place, even if probably with less people than it might have been without the pandemic (Interview with one of the writers of the MiGreat! project, from EFA London). A similar experience occurred in France, where Élan Interculturel decided not to hold a performance inviting spectators who are not part of the organisation (although this was due also to other reasons). Covid affected this decision, as pointed out in the next quote.

Ah, so it was really uh about... for example, about the performance, if there-there wasn't Covid, maybe we would think about the performance, but it didn't cross our minds. Uh well, only for that, because at this point, we did everything-everything in-in real life, so we could do a real workshop, and... and everything. (Interview with the Joker from Élan Interculturel)

The interviewee states that if there was not the pandemic, perhaps her colleagues and her would have considered holding a public performance. Although in France the workshops that led to the construction of the scripts were held in person, recruiting an external audience was challenging also (but not only)

because of the pandemic. In Hungary, the pandemic affected actresses' mental wellbeing, as the next quote highlights.

my opinion is that it was a very difficult period, uh because Covid lasted for one and a half or two years already, when we started with rehearsals [...] we had to do online performances, and that wasn't enjoyable for the actors. So, it was stressful. [...] So, it was really... everybody was stressed out and wanted to actually (*laughs*) do real theatre again (*laughs*). (Interview with the Joker from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle)

The quotation above underlines that Covid led to a “very difficult period”. During the first months, rehearsals were held online, but actresses did not experience this positively, and were stressed about it. In fact, they wanted to do “real” theatre again. This underlines the fact that doing theatre online, which is a performative art that usually takes place in a physical space in front of a physical audience, constituted a challenge for the actresses, similarly to what was experienced by other groups and companies during the pandemic (see for example Timplalexí 2020). Moreover, the pandemic prevented some participants from attending the meetings in Hungary, and it imposed limitations on the number of spectators. However, when restrictions were released, the situation slightly improved (Interview with an actress from Nyitott Kör/Open Circle).

To sum up, this section has highlighted some of the consequences that Covid-19 pandemic had on the production of the IO3. The pandemic affected the choice of the spaces in which to hold the meetings. Furthermore, it limited the participation of actors and actresses as well as spectators, in Italy, France and Hungary. Moreover, when online meetings were held, there were difficulties in interacting with one another in the UK. Further, this situation caused stress on performers in Hungary. Overall, the pandemic created a considerable level of instability and uncertainty. This opens up numerous questions regarding the possibilities to do theatre online, and the adaptation of participatory methods to the virtual space (Mazzini, President of Giolli Coop, cited in “MiGREAT! Changing the narrative of migration” (no date); Timplalexí 2020). These issues deserve further thinking and research.

6. Conclusions

This report has examined several issues that emerged during the production of the IO3, as part of the MiGreat! project, with a specific consideration of the role of the Joker. The IO3 consisted of the construction of one or two Forum-Theatre script(s) in each of the four partner organisations: Giolli Coop, EFA London, Élan Interculturel and Nyitott Kör/Open Circle. Subsequently, one or more Forum-Theatre session(s) took place in each of the four countries involved. The analysis was based on seven semi-

structured interviews that were conducted with one or two professionals in each organisation. These included the four Jokers and three colleagues who took part in the IO3 in different ways (mainly as supporters, co-organisers or performers). The analysis has led to the identification of three relevant themes.

First, language differences were present in all countries, due to the participation of people with different mother tongues, during rehearsals and/or during the public performances. On one hand, these created several challenges, similarly to the study by Opfermann (2020). Here, participation by people who did not feel confident in the language that the majority of the group spoke was sometimes hindered. On the other hand, strategies were found to accommodate language differences, leading to a smooth running of the process, such as in Hungary, France, and the UK.

Second, the Jokers played a key role in promoting active participation from the audience during the Forum-Theatre sessions, especially asking numerous questions and soliciting physical activation at the beginning of the sessions, as in Italy, France and the UK. These are important when coordinating a Forum-Theatre session (Day 2002, p. 22; Miramonti 2017, pp. 196-201; Multiple authors 2022 pp. 9-10; Mazzini, President of Giolli Coop, cited in "MiGREAT! Changing the narrative of migration" (no date); Songe-Møller and Bjerkestrand 2012, pp. 5-6). Yet, some spectators were reluctant to actively intervene, and the Jokers did not always manage to make them enter the scene, as in Italy. At the same time, however, in the UK a spectator actively intervened and realised the difference between simply talking about what would be the best solution to an oppression and acting directly to change that situation. Hence, the core idea of Forum-Theatre, which is the importance of directly taking action (Jackson cited in Day 2002, p. 31; Multiple authors 2022 pp. 9-10; Mazzini, President of Giolli Coop, cited in "MiGREAT! Changing the narrative of migration" (no date)), emerged from the interviews.

Third, feedback from actors and actresses (as explained by interviewees) was highly positive. The IO3 was experienced as an opportunity to activate other people, learn new tools, discuss a topic that was relevant for participants, namely migration, and finally realising something meaningful (Erel and Reynolds 2014; Horghagen and Josephsson 2010; McGregor and Ragab 2016). This applies to all four countries.

From the interviews, two areas which deserve further attention emerged. The Joker's gender, and the impact that it has on the relationship with actors and actresses on one side, and on the audience on the other side, needs to be further explored. In fact, some of the interviewees acknowledged that the fact of being female Jokers might have affected their experience. Yet, they were not sure about how this could have occurred. Additionally, the fact that the entire MiGreat! project took place during the Covid-19 pandemic definitely had an effect also on the IO3. The interviewees pointed out how it impacted on the

choice of the places where to hold the various meetings (rehearsals and performances) and the involvement of several participants, as in Italy, France and Hungary. Further, connecting remotely was sometimes challenging, as in the UK, and caused stress on performers, as in Hungary. In sum, consideration of the role played by the Joker's gender, and of the impact of the pandemic, including the experience of carrying out participatory activities online, is strongly encouraged.

Before concluding, some limitations of this report need to be considered. Firstly, I was not able to follow the MiGreat! project from the beginning, since it was not compatible with my academic commitments. Thus, I am more aware of what was done during the last six months of the project than of the previous two years, during which the four organisations already started to think about the IO3, for example through the training sessions, which indeed I was not able to follow. Second, I followed directly the process of construction of the IO3 in Italy, but not in the other three countries. Therefore, what I learnt from the process of construction of the IO3 in the UK, France and Hungary is based on what I was told during interviews and on the internal materials I consulted, without being there during the process. Thirdly, this report is a synthesis of the most relevant themes that emerged during the interviews. With more time and resources, further details on these themes might emerge, and other relevant aspects might arise, which might deserve further investigation.

In conclusion, this report has analysed various aspects that emerged from the production of four Forum-Theatres as part of the MiGreat! project. It is important to critically reflect upon these issues, in line with Freire and Boal's attention to the problematisation of reality (Freire 1968; Mazzini and Talamonti 2011; Boal 2011; Boal 2021). This could be relevant in order to overcome any challenges and realise projects that help to express people's agency in relation to several issues, including migration.

7. References

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