

“We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us”: On the Becoming Nomadic of the post-9/11 Spectator¹

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I am sitting in the audience of the Royal Court Theatre in London, a venue that prides itself for stirring up British playwriting since 1956, earlier than that if you don’t believe in the whole *Look Back in Anger* mythology.² The theatre is not full, I can spot many empty seats around me. People walk in, take off their coats, browse through their phones, talk to each other. I don’t realise when the house lights are dimmed, maybe they never are. There are four empty chairs on the stage. Four more people walk in, take off their coats, silence their phones. Instead of sitting down next to the rest of us, they walk up to the stage and take on the four empty seats. We will soon learn that they are a team of ‘Artist-Facilitators’ who are here to save us. Save us from what? From whom? Do we need saving?

- Your city is in ruins.
- We’re being honest about – we’re not trying to hide that. Your city is...

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² John Osborne’s realist play *Look Back in Anger* opened at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956. This has been considered in most accounts on the history of British drama as both a theatrical breakthrough in the middle of postwar Britain, and the starting point of the institution’s commitment with the production of new writing (Billington). For a counter reading of this see Rebellato 1999.

- A civilization. An old civilization is shattered.
- Eggs have been broken.
- Exactly. Exactly. Eggs have been broken. When I got off the plane, when I looked around, when I saw, I thought to myself: eggs have been broken here.
- I was met at the airport. We drove past a pile of rubble. I asked my driver: "What's that?" And he started to cry. He cried and he said that was the university. "That was our university. I taught in that university. For years – my students came and I encouraged them to do their very best. And now that is just brick and dust and crater." That man, that driver, he was broken, as that building was broken.
(Ravenhill 189)

In Robert de Niro *Taxi Driver* fashion, I want to ask them: "You talkin' to me?" Are they talking to me? To us? Whose city is in ruins?

I've been looking you up, I looked you up and – wow! – what a culture you used to have, what a culture, what an amazing culture you used to have. Before we had a culture, before we ... when we were sitting in mud huts in the rain, you were, you were – you had your own stories, beautiful huge really long epic stories, your alphabet, sculpting, dancing – you really – you had a culture here thousands of years ago. (191)

What is going on? I am sitting in this theatre in the middle of Sloane Square in Chelsea, London, yet these 'Artist-Facilitators' speak to me as if I were not here, as if I were in a shattered, non-western city. I look around me, most of the audience fits right into the definition of what would be an "imagined white liberal audience", the kind of audience that mostly fills the seats at the Royal Court, yet this is not how we are being defined.³ While most of us probably identify with the characters on stage – a painter, a writer, a dancer and an artist doing "sort of art performance installation sort of bonkers thing" (Ravenhill 192) – and their western, very likely white, guilt in front of the horrors of the 'war on terror', we are being addressed as survivors of this war, citizens of a shattered city in need of reparation. What is the effect of that? Am I somehow crossing a border? Or, better yet, is a border crossing me?

During the 1960s *Movimiento Chicana/o* (Chicana/o Movement), one of the common signs carried during demonstrations read: "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us" (Mezzadra and Neilson 6). Borders, in the 21st century "cross the lives of millions of men and women who are in the move, or, remaining sedentary, have borders cross them" (ibid.). Against the western fantasy of a borderless world, promised by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the (failed) project of globalization, in the early years of the 2000s we have witnessed how

³ See for example debbie tucker green's definition of the audiences at the Royal Court as predominantly white and liberal (Gardner; Abram 115), or Dan Rebellato's critique of the Court's productions being complicit with middle-class audiences (Rebellato, "Théâtre Des Boulevards").

precariousness, vulnerability and dispossession of human beings have been produced by acts of terror and militarized responses to it (the so-called ‘war on terror’), economic terror resulting from austerity policies, mass displacement of refugees, racialization of bodies and reinforcement of border controls. In this context, Gargi Bhattacharyya has affirmed that “the war on terror”, and I might include here the mediatization of the subsequent economic crises, Arab uprisings, Syrian war and refugee displacement – “includes a cultural project that seeks to create a consenting global audience” (2). Against this affirmation, I want to propose that theatre has the potential to open glitches and work in the interstices of this cultural project by engaging with audiences in spaces of proximity; as such it can become a space which offers a heightened environment for affective distribution in the context of the first decade of the 21st century. By becoming a sort of borderland, theatre can propose lines of flight that escape the aforementioned consenting global audience and engage a different kind of spectator, a spectator I will call *nomadic*, who can potentially transition between both sides of the border dividing the ‘us/them’ binary at the centre of the narratives behind the cultural project identified by Bhattacharyya.

In this light, and borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Rosi Braidotti’s work on nomadism, together with approaches to borders that consider them as “creative spaces” (Anzaldúa 95), “heterogeneous universes” (Miano 47) and “productive sites” (Mezzadra and Neilson vii), I propose to explore the figuration of the ‘nomadic spectator’. In order to do that I will be looking at different aesthetic elements from three theatre plays performed in Britain between 2008 and 2015: Mark Ravenhill’s *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (2008), debbie tucker green’s *truth and reconciliation* (2011) and Cordelia Lynn’s *Lela & Co.* (2015). For this purpose, I will focus on moments or elements of their performance that contribute towards collapsing (sometimes momentarily) the divide – or border – between stage and auditorium. It is in these instances, I suggest, when the spectator is invited or pushed towards crossing the border, or the border crosses the spectator, and thus they can (though not necessarily do) become nomadic. With this, I not only want to discuss how theatre has responded to the post-9/11 terror narrative, but also start a conversation on the necessity to broaden the critical vocabulary for the analysis of text-based theatre and consider the conceptual problems we face when writing about or predicting spectators’ responses.⁴

Spectatorship as an object of study is fragile, ever-shifting, temporary and contingent, and its study renders visible the impossibility of containing it. Several questions emerge when we think about the spectator: Does the ideal spectator

⁴ See Aragay and Monforte’s edited issue of *JCDE* on theatre and spectatorship and Rodríguez, specially her chapter “Affect and the Holed Spectator: Ecology of Transfers” for recent appraisals on spectatorship that broaden the conversation on how to approach spectatorial responses.

exist? Do we think about the spectator in singular or plural terms? What methodologies are there to think the spectator? How can the researcher approach the study of spectatorship without generalising, or being purely speculative? How can we think spectatorship without homogenising the spectating bodies, and invisibilising experiences? How can we include gender, racial and class differences in thinking about the spectator? If we maintain the study of spectatorship in a context of critical theory, and away from more quantitative modes of analysis that might imply data collection by mode of after play surveys, etc., the position of the researcher is more complicated. The body of the researcher has to enter the equation, but the moment that happens, methodology is exposed as vulnerable. Writing on spectatorship from this position entails a being within that, as Tiffany Page suggests in her research on vulnerable writing in research, relocates the researcher into a space of vulnerability, one that highlights the possibilities of not-knowing and as such requires the acceptance of not-knowing as the result of the process of research, a sequence that might feel counterintuitive (Page 18). The figuration of the nomadic spectator, therefore, demands that the researcher also becomes nomadic in that she also inhabits an in-between space that might entail her to be manifestly present in her research and writing, accountable, embodied, and accepting of contradictions, and of the fact that “there is no possible conclusion, only more productive proliferations” (Braidotti 13).

Post-9/11 British Theatre

Mark Ravenhill's *Shoot/Get Treasure /Repeat* (2008), a collection of sixteen short plays, was first presented as *Ravenhill for Breakfast* (2007) in a series of morning stage readings at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and later on staged throughout different venues in London during the month of April 2008.⁵ The cycle is centred on the domestic repercussions of the ongoing ‘war on terror’ and the western urge to bring ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ to non-western countries. Throughout the different pieces, Ravenhill scrutinizes recent discourses revolving around the aftermath of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ in a kaleidoscopic presentation that constantly shifts perspective. Thus, from piece to piece, we witness how war affects the lives of middle-class western families, soldiers, artists, war survivors, refugees, international aid workers, gay couples, neighbours, etc. Both rooted in classical tradition and fiercely contemporary, and with each piece named after an existing epic – such as *Women of Troy*, *War and Peace* or *The Odyssey* – Ravenhill wrote the big picture through little fragments and different approaches to the same topic. In its April 2008 performance, the city of London served as a grand stage which hosted

⁵ The joined venture of putting together the cycle of plays was taken on by Plaines Plough (who also produced the initial version at the Fringe Festival) The Gate Theatre, The National Theatre, Out of Joint, BBC3 Radio and The Royal Court. One of the fragments, *Yesterday and Incident Occurred*, was substantially adapted for BBC 3 Radio.

a multi-situated performance of the cycle of plays, renamed *Shoot/Get Treasure /Repeat* following video-game jargon. The sixteen twenty-minute reflections on the global 'war on terror' were now staged in different venues. Directed and performed by different people, each production used a variety of staging strategies which transformed the city into the setting of a postmodern video-game in which spectators became active participants in a quest for meaning that became almost a treasure hunt (Laera 3).

debbie tucker green's 2011 play *truth and reconciliation* draws our attention to a number of unresolved conflicts from our recent past. Throughout its fragmented structure, readers and spectators become witnesses to the unhealed wounds of South Africa, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Bosnia Herzegovina and Northern Ireland, from the point of view of the survivors and their confrontation with some of the perpetrators. Inspired by the rationale behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in post-Apartheid South Africa, tucker green questions to what extent are both truth and reconciliation possible by presenting the preliminaries for these encounters between victim and tormentor and highlighting the expectations, fear, numbness and repulsion each of the parts feels. While we wait for these encounters, tucker green takes us through numerous conflicts where the border is, or has been, fundamental, and places us in the uncomfortable position of bearing witness to the suffering of our distant (or not so distant) neighbours, resulting in a "challenge of globalisation [that] is also a challenge to redefine ethical behaviour and the limits of responsibility" (Riedelsheimer and Stöckl 113).

Cordelia Lynn's *Lela & Co.* (2015) opened at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs and presents the life story of Lela, a woman living in an unknown country at war with its neighbour over the border. During the performance, we learn that she is married (presumably after being bought) to a man from over the border, taken to the neighbouring country and abused physically and psychologically. She will be forced into prostitution so that her husband can earn a living and ultimately transformed into a business enterprise, hence the title, 'Lela & Co.', until she finally manages to escape and return home, only to be forced to silence her experience so as not to shame her family.

In all three plays, borders are present as artificial and problematic elements, whether they are explicitly referred to or just hinted at. As Lela herself expresses:

In the woods they have laid down lines that dictate the borders of a country, and these lines bear little significance to the demands and formations of the land, and to the demands and formation of a people, and are, to my mind, spurious to say the least. (Lynn 45)

As pointed out by de Waal in her study of British *Theatre on Terror*, a lot of the plays her work engages with "trace the trajectory of border-crossing subjectivities" (256), and similarly do the plays I engage with here. In Ravenhill, we find constant examples of the boundary between 'us' and 'them' in the manifold references to us as "the good people" (7), "our civilisation, a world of good people" (9),

or “the normal men and normal women” (69); and them as “you are opposite” (11), “you are not a person” (12), “the evil” and “the rotten egg” (76). These boundaries are coupled with a desire for gated communities and walls to prevent the spread of terror, as in the short play *Fear and Misery* where a married couple discusses the possibility of moving into one of those gated communities:

Harry: I want us – you, me, Alex – to build a wall against... Somehow the world out there got full of... Somehow there’s nothing but hate out there. Aggression. Somehow the streets got filled with addicts who need to steal to get so high they can kill who then come down and want to attack and steal your... THE WORLD IS ATTACKING US, THE TERROR IS EATING US UP AND YOU... WE NEED GATES. WE NEED TO, TO, TO ... DRAW UP THE DRAWBRIDGE AND CLOSE THE GATES AND SECURITY, SECURITY, SECURITY, SECURITY. (48)

tucker green is not as explicit as Ravenhill, yet the places she sets her stories in are populated by walls and boundaries. As Wendy Brown states, “Postapartheid South Africa features a complex internal maze of walls and checkpoints and maintains a controversial electrified security barrier on its Zimbabwe border” (8), the “Peace Lines” separate Catholic and Protestant areas in Northern Ireland (80) and the Dayton Agreement has not prevented ethnic segregation in Bosnia (Borger). Together with this, the play also engages in the construction of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ division, built around the victims and perpetrators. In the case of *Lela e’ Co.*, the play manifestly and explicitly engages with the border, as well as with border crossing, in a way that it almost becomes a character in the story. There are constant references to it as in “I come from over the border” (13), “me all alone over the border” (17), or “coming from over the border, after all, as he does” (20). The fate of Lela is tied to a man who comes from across the border, and her experiences of border crossing will carry the story forward and will allow for her development as a character, as she herself expresses:

I have walked a hundred miles, I told you so to begin with, did I not? I have come to know something of bodies, and of the body of the land. I know its shifting, and its aesthetic caprices, and its unbelievable indifference to the soft pads of a human being’s feet, its indifference to the centuries of linelaying and border-mapping. I have come to know something of a lot of things. (46)

While it is clear that all three plays thematise to a greater or lesser extent both the border and the experiences of bodies with it, how do they relate to it in terms of aesthetics? What is the role of the spectator in it? How can we conceive of the nomadic spectator in the context of these plays? In the following sections I will sketch the figuration of the nomadic spectator and I will look at different moments in the plays that contribute towards his becoming nomadic. In order to do that, this article builds upon the work of Ariane de Waal (2017) and Clare Finburgh (2017), both of which introduce the perspective of the audience in their analysis

of post-9/11 drama, a perspective that was generally lacking in most of the monographs published before.

Borders, Nomads, and Audience

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 set in motion the myth that, with its collapse, Europe's last frontier was gone. Fast-forward to the 21st century and the borderless West is nothing but an almost pornographic fantasy of white, affluent, privilege. Not only did the 2016 Brexit vote hijack the trope of the free movement of people, European borders have been on a process of reconfiguration since as early as the 1990s (Dalakoglou 180), setting the basis for the construction of a fortress trying to push out all those who could tamper with the fantasy of Europe, and underlining that borderless and free movement were not for everybody. In the last twenty years, the EU, the US and dozens of other countries have built walls in their borders to prevent the movement of people, the number growing from fifteen to almost seventy (Jones 16). As Jones reminds us, "the reality is that EU borders were not removed in the 1990, but simply moved to different locations" (17). To top that, securitisation has become one of the most lucrative businesses in the last few years, as the numbers shown by Amnesty International suggest – between 2007 and 2013, the EU has spent €2bn on fences, surveillance systems and land and sea patrols (Trilling). However, intense securitisation does not prevent neither border crossing, nor violence, and it certainly does nothing to prevent the inequality sustaining the border regime. As Reece Jones states, "the existence of the border itself produces the violence that surrounds it. The border creates the economic and jurisdictional discontinuities that have come to be seen as its hallmarks, providing an impetus for the movement of people, goods, drugs, weapons and money across it," this hardening of borders through new security practices is, according to him, "the source of violence, not a response to it" (5); "the wall of security is in fact a wall of insecurity" (Minh-ha 3).

The paradox of the incessant emergence of walls alongside the globalising project has been identified by theorist and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha, who states that:

In the shift from ancient territorial power to modern biopower, virtual boundlessness in globalization is widely praised as the overcoming of frontiers. The globe is evoked in terms of both a closely knit village, and a new, dishomogeneous metropolis. Yet, the talk on the world of political page is all about closing down, curtailing movements, reinforcing borders, building new fences, installing more checkpoints, fortifying security zones, setting up gated communities, and worse, sealing an entire nation into restricted areas. (1)

The tension identified by Minh-ha belongs to what Rosi Braidotti, following Deleuze and Guattari, has called "the schizoid political economy of our time" (6). Our current global climate, Braidotti sustains, entails a "mobilization of

differences and [a] deterritorialization of social identity; it simultaneously challenges the hegemony of nation-states and their claim to exclusive citizenship", and it creates world cities in which commodities have more mobility than humans (5). To quote from Braidotti again, "[t]he contrast between an ideology of free mobility and the reality of disposable others brings out the schizophrenic character of advanced capitalism" (7). A schizophrenia that, I want to suggest, grew exponentially after the events of 9/11, contributing towards the climate from which borders are fearlessly re-emerging against the globalizing project.

In the context of this article, 9/11 has to be understood as triggering a narrative of terror and fear which interfered in the relationship between bodies and social spaces, regulating which bodies are allowed to move freely, and which are not allowed to do so, as well as racializing both spaces and bodies. However, in these global and spatial economies of fear, as Sara Ahmed has defined them, not everybody is racialized and read through this same narrative. Ahmed concludes that a distinct category has emerged after 9/11, "the fearsome", the "could be terrorist", a category that sticks to certain bodies and not others (75). In a similar exercise, the border is a concept that can also be said to stick to certain bodies and no others.⁶ While after 9/11 mobility of the bodies of subjects in the West is defended and encouraged – as Ahmed reminds us "the most immediate instruction made to subjects and citizens in the West was "to go about your daily business", "to travel", "to spend or consume" (73) – the bodies who were/are not identified as belonging in the West carry with them the image of the border they have violently, illegally and wrongly crossed, thus contributing to the aforementioned climate, or economies, of fear. It is in these economies of fear and in this schizophrenia, Braidotti suggests, where the figuration of the nomad is more useful as a tool to think through the contemporary, and enact an intervention in the social imaginary (14).

The early deleuzian sketches on nomadism appear in an essay on Friedrich's Nietzsche's capacity to distort philosophical hegemony (Deleuze 252). In Groot Nibbelink's words, "[r]eading Nietzsche produces affects, according to Deleuze, a sensation, an intensity, a getting aware of something that eludes description, or analysis, or interpretation; something that escapes the code" (22), the nomad appears as well as something that escapes the code. Can theatre produce the same effect? And are there specific aesthetics that manage to do that? The figuration of the nomad has hardly been used to think about theatre, and on the few occasions when this has happened, it has been in relation to wandering, devised or immersive performances, or plays identified as postdramatic theatre, rather than

⁶ I am grateful to Praveen Sewgobind for pointing me in the direction of thinking together the concepts of the border and Ahmed's stickiness, and discussing its relevance through his own experiences of border crossing. See his text "Racist Normalcies for Crossing Borders in Europe" for an appraisal of these experiences (2016).

in relation to text-based or dramatic theatre. That is, plays in which the spectators, movement was literal.⁷ Still, following Deleuze, I want to claim that

the nomad is not necessarily someone who moves around: some journeys take place in the same place, they're journeys in intensity, and even historically speaking, nomads don't move around like migrants. On the contrary, nomads are motionless, and the nomadic adventure begins when they seek to stay in the same place by escaping the codes. (259–60)

Groot Nibbelink, whose thesis engages with the notion of nomadic theatre – note the difference between her proposal (theatre) and mine (spectator) – makes a case to separate the concept of nomadism from physical movement, by alluding to Deleuze and Guattari's own words ("it is false to define the nomad by movement" (Deleuze and Guattari 420) and relating it to deterritorialization (Groot Nibbelink 17). Some of the examples she provides have to do with staging theatre in urban spaces, or in plays such as those performed by Rimini Protokoll in which there is no opposition between stage and audience. Her focus, in short, has to do with plays that "collapse the distinction between stage and auditorium" (18). However, it is relevant to note that the plays she chooses for her study are all participatory or interactive performances, which usually tend to include physical movement, while the plays I propose to look at belong to what she would define, following Hans-Thies Lehman, as dramatic theatre, plays taking place in conventional set-ups. In this sense, the nomadism I will be making reference to has more to do with the movement of intensities and the affection of the interacting bodies in the theatrical space, than with the literal physical movement of these bodies, as well as with the disruption of cultural codes. Without leaving Deleuze and Guattari, I will align with the affirmation that "[a]ffects are becomings" (256), thus, the becoming nomadic of the title will have to do with "affective happenings" (Colman 13) rather than with wandering performances.

Against the artificial drawing of borders and the enforced division of identities they entail, Léonora Miano and Gloria Anzaldúa propose a subversion of the border in which this becomes more than a liminal, a creative space, a space of multiplicity, what Miano calls "a heterogeneous universe" (47), or what Anzaldúa drafts as a queer space, as for her, the border is inhabited by those who "go through the confines of the "normal" (25). The border, the boundary, needs to be considered beyond the image of the wall, and be approached not as a space of division, but as a space of relationality, a perspective shared by Mezzadra and Neilson, Minh-ha, as well as Judith Butler, who states that:

⁷ For work centred on the exploration of the nomadic in relation to devised and immersive performance see: Keefe, John 2015: "The Spectator, the New, and a Disruptive Creative Participation" in *Media Transformations*. Vol 11, 50-72; Groot Nibbelink, Liesbeth. 2015: *Nomadic Theatre: Staging Movement and Mobility in Contemporary Performance*. Utrecht University Repository.

Identity is not thinkable without the permeable border, just as identity is not thinkable without the possibility of relinquishing a boundary. [...] the boundary is a function of the relation, a brokering of difference, a negotiation in which I am bound to you in my separatedness. (52–53)

This reading of the border, I propose, highlights the many contradictions and complexities that identity navigation present, and allows the border to be transformed from a purely disciplinary element, to an in-between space of possibilities and creation, in that, focusing on the border instead of on what lies at either side of it, allows us to imagine a world beyond binaries, and enhances or sets the grounds for more tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction. This in-between space of becoming-multiple is, according to Braidotti, the space inhabited by the nomad. What happens when we think the figuration of the nomad together with the spectator?

Already pointed out by Jacques Rancière, the spectator embodies a paradox by which she is needed in order for a performance to be considered as such, yet “being a spectator is a bad thing [because] viewing is the opposite of knowing” and “the opposite of acting” (2), yet Rancière challenges the implied equivalence between viewing and listening on the one hand and ignorance and passivity on the other on the basis of the equality of intelligence of all individuals. This understanding of the spectator as always already emancipated can be read alongside the aforementioned description of the nomad, by which the nomad does not necessarily need to move, but rather, question the cultural codes by acknowledging the discourses that shape them. The nomadic subject as defined by Braidotti entails the possibility of renderings of alternative subjectivities which move beyond dualisms and inhabit a space from which to articulate critical thought, as she highlights that “[n]omadism is about critical relocation, it is about becoming situated, speaking from somewhere specific and hence well aware of and accountable for particular locations” (15). The nomadic spectator would then be a critically relocated spectator, one that is provided with the tools to potentially enact a discursive intervention.

The Nomadic Spectator at Play

What are these tools that allow the spectator to potentially enact a discursive intervention during a theatre performance? In the final section of this article, I want to explore this idea by referring to particular moments in the plays which contribute to the collapse of the border between us and them, between the spectators and the auditorium, moments which transform the theatrical space into a liminal space, an in-between, a borderland. In order to do so, I will focus on three different aspects: borders crossing spectators through verbal address, sharing of objects and sharing of food.

The first example I want to focus on is from some of the plays in the cycle *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat: Women of Troy, Yesterday an Incident Occurred* and *Birth of a Nation*. While all through the cycle there seems to be a constant presence of borders, I wish to centre this part of the analysis on these fragments, in which, through verbal address, the actors contribute towards the collapse of the border between stage and auditorium by directly addressing the audience, or, to refer back to the Chicana/o perception of border crossing with which this paper started, borders cross the spectators. In their address, the actors will refer to the members of the audience as potential suicide bombers, possible witnesses of suspicious behaviour or survivors of war, while they reinforce the divide ‘us’ versus ‘them’.

Women of Troy presents us with a group of women (as many as the play’s director chooses) who constantly refer to themselves as “the good people” and who are struggling to understand why their city is under terrorist threat if they abide by a strict moral code and ethical choices such as the consumption of “ethical food” and “healthy breakfasts” (8), while at the same time they construct the audience as a racialized fearsome, or as “could be terrorists”, to borrow from Ahmed again. As exemplified in the following fragment, by directly addressing members of the audience, the actresses on stage will utter the lines:

You are not a person. I don’t see you as a person. I’ve never seen you as a person. You’re a bomb. I look at you. And all I see is a bomb. I see you there now and I see you and I hear you ticking away and I feel frightened and angry and disgusted. That’s why I feel. (12)

Something similar happens in *Yesterday an Incident Occurred*, although this time, spectators will be placed on the same side of the normal/other divide as the actors, and in this case, they will be asked to denounce and brand with an iron those who present a menace to democracy: “It’s up to you. Do you love democracy? Or do you hate democracy? Which is it going to be? Contact your representative now. Just text the words BRAND THEM now”(73).

According to Margherita Laera, throughout the performance of the cycle of plays we are presented with a “fearful opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’, the familiar and the unfamiliar, which establishes an atmosphere of reciprocal suspicion that permeates people’s bodies, expropriating them of their own words and influencing their psychological functions” (6). This opposition is, however, dismantled in the performance of *Birth of a Nation*, the example with which this article started, where a group of ‘Artist Facilitators’ try to heal the wounds of a war-torn community through a series of workshops. In this play, as well as in *Women of Troy*, spectators are forced to embody both parts of the divide, ‘us’ and ‘them’, by being addressed as ‘them’ (potential terrorists or survivors of war) while retaining consciousness that they are there as ‘us’ (an imagined liberal, possibly white, audience). In these instances, I suggest, we witness how the border crosses the spectators, resituating them in a new territory, namely the borderland in which we can witness a potential coming together of those at either side. In this new borderland

or in-between space spectators are invited to enact an intervention on the discourse of fear.

The second aspect I want to look at is the sharing of objects, this time in relation to *truth and reconciliation* where I will focus on the chairs. In the original Royal Court performance, spectators were invited to sit in the same wooden chairs as the actors, the chairs being in fact the only element in the scenography. I want to suggest that by placing the spectators alongside the actors, sharing in the same chairs (the same material), the setting enabled the nomadic-becoming of the spectator, as well as the movement of emotions from body to body, and from object to object. I refer here to what Ahmed defines as “[the] rippling effect of emotions; they move sideways (through sticky associations between signs, figures and objects)” (45). I contend that the use of the chairs reinforced the possibilities of collapsing the border that separates spectators and actors, and that sitting beside the characters pushed the spectators to enter the liminal space the nomad inhabits. The separation between stage and auditorium was blurred as the spectators resided in, or crossed the space of the play without being fully invited to participate, in that sense the chairs became the spectators’ space of in-between-ness.

References to the chairs are constantly made during the performance. As spectators, we witness dialogues between the different characters waiting for the encounter between victim and perpetrator where they constantly discuss where or when to sit and where sitting becomes almost a political statement. Thus we hear a South African grandmother complain that “I do not need to sit here on these harsh seats alone” (5), or a northern Irish woman making sure their companions know she is only sitting because she is tired, but that should not be read as a relinquishing of power or agency:

WOMAN: You can sit here and watch me all you like. I’m only sitting cos I’m sick of standing if I knew I’d be standing for hours I would’ve worn different shoes – worn better shoes – flats – d’you have a light? (62)

Together with this, several lines in the play seem to speak directly to the audience, in an invitation to sit, as in “come and sit and share the harshness” (4), or ‘we should sit. Side by side. In... solidarity. Or something’ (7). Quoting Mireia Aragay, then, we can see how tucker green “places spectators in radically uncomfortable, ethically undecidable zones of ambivalence” (16), allowing them the possibility to respond, which I want to suggest is heightened by the contact with the object, the chair.

Finally, a third element I propose to look at is the sharing (or lack thereof) of food, which will be analysed in relation to two specific performances of *Twilight of the Gods* (belonging to *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat*) and Cordelia Lynn’s *Lela e3 Co*. The consumption of food in a theatre play contributes towards the creation of a shared memory and the establishment of horizontal relations between performers and audience. The relationships between food and performance have been widely

explored by the Catalan collective *nyamnyam* in a series of open events and culinary performances.⁸ Particularly relevant to the argument made here is the performance *Extraños mares arden* (Strange seas on fire) by Barcelona based Chilean theatre maker Txalo Toloza and Basque dancer Laida Azcona. The piece, a documentary on the capitalist relations within the Chilean state explained through the industrial development of the Atacama Desert, was presented in two forms: a traditional staging where the performers built the scenography (an approximate reproduction of the materiality of the desert) and a culinary version called *El Asado* (The Barbecue).

The culinary version consisted of a gathering of people around a table who were served Chilean food while Toloza passed around family pictures and explained the story of the Atacama Desert through his own family history. Amongst the food and drink shared, Toloza gave the audience popular Chilean drinks such as Pisco Sour, and less widespread dishes such as *chayuyo* ceviche, a ceviche made with an alga from the Atacama Desert he had his father smuggle from back home (transforming the consumption of the algae by the European spectators once again in an experience of border crossing). While the content of the two pieces was the same, the experience, as well as the memory of it cannot be compared. The *Asado* version implied situating audience and creators around the same table, in a horizontal relation, and the affective charge of the stories Toloza shared were attached to the food we ate. Yet, while the story he told was deeply political and troublesome, the setting – an open-aired round table in a secluded square, on one of those warm autumn days – as well as the relaxed rhythm of the piece – Toloza starts the piece by reminding everybody that there is a high presence of anarchy in *asados*, and that we are free to talk to each other, move around, and act as in any dinner party or barbecue we've been to – engulfs the whole experience in a positive atmosphere that prevails in the memory of the spectator (at least in mine, as well as in that of my companions) every time the play is evoked. However, this is not the case in any of the plays I propose to discuss. While in Toloza's performance food sharing created a clash between the festive atmosphere of the play and the deeply political nature of the story, in which the lunch becomes almost an unfaithful activity, and where spectators experience the play against itself, both in Ravenhill and in Lynn's performances food sharing (or the refusal) becomes in and of itself the troublesome activity, and food emerges as the carrier of political meaning.

In the original performance of Ravenhill's cycle of plays at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the short plays were performed daily at the Traverse Theatre during breakfast time. With the ticket, spectators were given a cup of tea/coffee and a breakfast roll, which will become central in *Twilight of the Gods*, where an aid worker, Jane, and a former academic and refugee, Susan, will fight over the same:

⁸ See their website for more information: <http://www.nyamnyam.net/>

the breakfast roll and the cup of coffee. During the duration of the scene, we witness how Susan tries to get Jane to feed her coffee and bread, while she narrates her descent from a reputable academic to, as she defines herself “a bony bitch grabbling at food” (162). The refugee’s hunger and desperation will impact strongly on an audience holding the character’s objects of desire, as they will be placed in an ethical conundrum as witnesses savouring the breakfast causing the conflict while listening to lines such as “Susan, I can still withhold your breakfast if I find you uncooperative” (163). The deprivation of food Susan is faced with, coupled with the fact that the audience is holding that very same food challenges the notion of a horizontal relation presented above, a challenge that invites the spectator to be resituated. We are no longer sharing a table as in Toloza’s play, instead here we become withholders of nourishment, as we are invited to reflect upon our own role in the manifold refugee crises, and on our political engagement or lack thereof.

In *Lela e Co.*, a cotton candy machine was used on stage. While the character of Lela narrated the horrors suffered at the hands of the different men in her life, the actor playing the roles of all those men made several sticks of candyfloss, given to both Lela and to different members of the audience. The sweet smell engulfed the small space of the theatre upstairs and lingered for the duration of the performance (most of which was in the dark). Yet, due to the play’s harshness, the cotton candy became suddenly linked to the horrors being narrated by Lela. It became a symbol of the patriarchal oppression and terror that Lela had endured disguised as love. At the end of the play, as spectators exit the auditorium, they were all given a small bag with cotton candy to take with them. Sara Ahmed’s notion of sticky associations becomes more material than ever, as the sugar of the cotton candy sticks to our fingers long after the performance, and its link to a happy childhood are subverted as the sweetness is now associated with hardship, patriarchal violence and fear. In this case, the spectators are not only placed in the situation of becoming nomadic, but they take the play’s affects with them in the form of messy, sticky, cotton candy.

In the setting and performance of all three plays, spectators are invited to enact interventions in the cultural codes upon which the texts are built. As already pointed out by the title “Becoming Nomadic”, I do not wish to suggest an effective or definitive ethico-political transformation of the audience in contact with the discussed plays, but rather, the grounding for the conditions of destabilizing, and/or moving towards the possibility of change that can help us question the discourses supporting the drawing of borders and erection of walls, or to borrow one last time from the deleuzian vocabulary, the possibility of opening up lines of flight.

I exit the Royal Court theatre upstairs. The narrow flock of stairs that will bring me down seem to go on forever, as I descend with a bag of sticky cotton candy tucked between my fingers. My stomach turns at the thought of eating it, I

cannot get the sweet smell away from my body, I reek of this sticky sweetness that is now forever linked to the story of Lela, and I remember her words:

Lela. My name is Lela, and this is my own story, this is what happened to me, I have to ask would they even would they hear because we have a way, a very way, a very human way of not hearing and not seeing, no not even seeing... (Lynn 48)

For a couple of hours though, I've been forced to hear, I've been forced to see. As have those sitting alongside myself. What we do with what we've seen and heard is up to us now, it is our own responsibility. For a couple of hours, we've been given the tools to resituate ourselves. Now it is up to us to act on it.



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