



universität  
wien

# MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Im/mobility in the context of migrant artists“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2024 / Vienna 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme code as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

UA 066 656

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium CREOLE  
Cultural Differences and Transnational Processes

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ayse Caglar



**“Im/mobility in the context of migrant artists“  
by Daria Tchapanova**



## **“Im/mobility in the context of migrant artists“ by Daria Tchapanova**

### Abstract (English Version)

Globalization has had an impact on all levels of social life. Artists and their artworks respond to the globalised world in their every day lives by tackling the boundaries and limits of national categories on various levels. They are moving across different sites, creating new cultural creations and contributing to multiple understandings of identities, interconnections, diversity and locality in respond to their living realities. Making art while being on the move is a normative for many artists, for established and emerging ones and art students alike. Their lives cannot be understood as within the boundaries of national categories, they are driven by different forms of mobility, their identities and creations are shaped by their experiences of moving across different countries, living in different cultures and speaking various languages.

The thesis takes a critical standpoint towards the concept of mobility and includes the criticism by nine interviewed artists how the concept of “mobility“, a synonym for free movement in neoliberal systems, falls short to capture their realities and the dynamics of their lives. “Im/mobility in the context of migrant artists“ highlights several topics to built a frame around im/mobility based on captured interviews with international artists based in Vienna: locality in relation to identity and self-identification; im/mobility in relation to nationality and belonging; (cultural) institutions and their role as meaning makers and brokers; collectivity and communities' art practices as a means to empowerment and equity.

## **“Im/Mobilität im Kontext von Künstler:innen mit Migrationshintergrund“**

**Von Daria Tchapanova**

Abstract (Deutsche Version)

Die Globalisierung hat sich auf alle Ebenen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens ausgewirkt. Künstler:innen und ihre Kunst sind Teil dieser globalisierten Welt und setzen sich auf verschiedenen Ebenen mit den Grenzen und Beschränkungen der nationalen Kategorien auseinander. Sie bewegen sich an verschiedenen Orten, schaffen neue kulturelle Werke und tragen zu einem vielfältigen Verständnis von Identitäten, Verbindungen, Vielfalt und Lokalität bei. Künstlerische Praxis, bedingt durch migrantische Prozesse, ist für viele Künstler:innen, sowohl für etablierte als auch für aufstrebende Künstler:innen und Kunststudent:innen, eine Selbstverständlichkeit. Ihr Leben kann nicht innerhalb der Grenzen nationaler Kategorien verstanden werden, da sie von verschiedenen Formen der Mobilität angetrieben werden. Ihre Identitäten und ihr Schaffen sind von ihren Erfahrungen, in verschiedenen Ländern und Kulturen zu leben und verschiedene Sprachen zu sprechen, geprägt.

Die Master Thesis nimmt einen kritischen Standpunkt gegenüber dem gegenwärtigen Konzept der Mobilität ein und bezieht die Kritik von neun teilnehmenden Künstler:innen ein, dass das Konzept der "Mobilität", ein Synonym für Freizügigkeit in neoliberalen Systemen, nicht ausreicht, um ihre Realitäten und die Dynamik ihres Lebens zu erfassen. "Im/Mobilität im Kontext von Künstler:innen mit Migrationshintergrund" beleuchtet verschiedene Themen, um einen Rahmen für Im/Mobilität zu schaffen, der auf Interviews mit internationalen KünstlerInnen in Wien basiert: Lokalität in Bezug auf Identität und Selbstidentifikation; Im/Mobilität in Bezug auf Nationalität und Zugehörigkeit; (kulturelle) Institutionen und ihre Rolle als Sinnstifter und Vermittler; kollektive und gemeinschaftliche Kunstpraktiken als Mittel zur Ermächtigung und Gerechtigkeit.

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## I. Introduction

*“My name is Marlène Southe. That is my artist's name. I was born in Austria, raised in Switzerland, and I grew up in England before I came back here (Vienna) and settled in my hometown. (...) I think that my most exciting place where I lived in was in London, quite different from a small town, somewhere in a valley in Switzerland. I was for the first time introduced to a range of cultures and people who, at first glance might seem like they look like me. But I find to see that there was quite a difference in sort of upbringings, backgrounds and I guess knowledge as well. It was perhaps one of my greatest experience that I ever encountered because that's where I was in able to fall in love with creative writing. That's also where I inherited the name Southe“ (Marlène Southe in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 22 February 2022).*

The lives of contemporary artists is driven by a nomadic lifestyle, and making art while being on a journey is a normative for many artists, for established and emerging ones and art students alike. Their lives are driven by different forms of mobility, their identities and creations are shaped by their experiences of moving across different countries, living in different cultures and speaking various languages. Marlène is one of the participants in my research on “barriers and exclusions of international artists in Vienna“. In her introduction she makes clear that being raised in different places with different cultures and languages was not necessarily her choice, but an important experience that inspired her to become an artist. Marlène was born on 2 January 2000 in Vienna and she is the only participant in the research who has this tie with the city. Her family roots are in the Democratic Republic of Kongo, her first language is French but usually she speaks English, especially in her art practice this is the most important way of expressing herself. Speaking German is a big challenge to Marlène because of the bad experiences she had in different schools in Vienna as a teenager. These situations limited her to appropriate access to higher education in Austria and they shaped her relation with the Austrian society. Although she calls the city of Vienna her “hometown“, her experiences have been characterized by different forms of discrimination, in particular facing racism or language barriers.

As mentioned before, Marlène was born on 2 January 2000 and she is the youngest participant in the research. She would probably identify with characteristics of the so-called “generation Z“, a generation strongly defined by racial diversity, non-heterosexual orientation and “acceptance of gender fluid identification“ (Seemiller & Grace 2018:29).

Mobility, a synonym for free movement, has had impact on the living conditions of people worldwide and for many people being born after 2000, moving across countries and cultures has become a normative. Like in Marlène's introduction, being raised and living in different regions is a given situation, not necessarily by choice but as a response to contemporary lifestyle in a globalized world. In our conversation Marlène highlighted her connection with the city of Vienna.

*“My connection to Austria is very short, yet important as well. I was born here, in January 2nd 2000, two days before the 21st century. (...) So, yeah, that was my introduction of coming on this earth here specifically in Austria. Well, even though I did not grow into the cultural, I didn't grow up specifically here in Vienna (...) I used to call that space my home. (...) I did not know at the time that to be considered a citizen of any nation, there was quite like a list of fulfilling to do. And at the time, and even now a bit, I did not fit in into the requirements that will, I guess, see myself as an actual Austrian or a traditional Austrian. I think I'm gonna leave it like that“ (Marlène Southe).*

What is the meaning of nationality and citizenship for contemporary artists and their creations?

For Marlène this would be a difficult question, the meaning of citizenship, her “coming on this earth“ and her experiences of growing up in different regions with her roots in DRC do not correspond to traditional belonging to nationality. Her identity shows a wide range of personal, social and cultural interconnections that form the basis for understanding her world and responding to it with art. In her emphasis on her birthplace, she describes her important connection to the city of Vienna, a feeling of belonging as well as a break in this connection due to her migratory experiences, her language skills and her cultural background. She chose South London as her favourite place. She describes it as a place that inspired her to think beyond national boundaries, to identify with people on the streets, to share the same language and to express herself through creative writing. She defines English as her first language, although she grew up mainly speaking French. Her artist name *Marlène Southe* is inspired by South London, the writing appears French and she underlined the importance of pronouncing and writing her artists name correctly.

Marlène's emphasis on the question of belonging and her challenges to create an understanding of national belonging, reflects the discourses in the national and transnational social fields. Glick-Schiller and Levitt argue about the reformulation of the

concept of society, because “the lives of increasing numbers of individuals can no longer be understood by looking only at what goes on within national boundaries“ (Glick-Schiller & Levitt 2004:1003). They emphasise that national and transnational interconnections should be looked in relation to the reality of each individual, in order to reflect on the simultaneous interconnectedness of all spaces. The transnational lens allows broader understanding of locality and identity within different spaces and their interconnectedness to be analyzed and reflected. The sovereignty of a nation state and its boundaries, an analytical perspective based on methodological nationalism in social processes, can no longer be taken for granted in the reality of individuals. Glick-Schiller and Çağlar (2011) outline that

*“the term “methodological nationalism” emphasizes the political implications of the container notion of society. (...) Because the nation-state is equated with society for methodological nationalists, the social fabric and the integrity of social institutions and the cultural norms that support them are seen as contained within state borders“ (2011:64).*

The transnational lens tackles the boundaries of a single nation-state and its container notion of society, it questions the concept of locality based on territory and allows broader discourses in the context of identity and meaning-making to take shape. Young artists like Marlène, who feel excluded from traditional national belonging, express themselves through alternative narratives of belonging. Through their art works these artists create meaningful contributions to the concept of society, they create new forms of collectivity through collaborative engagements and they reflect on their transnational interconnectedness and their multiple identities through art. Their imagination, based on experience through migration and beyond, creates and visualizes new fabrics of society that responds to living realities of artists on the move and their lifestyles. These works should not be looked at as single pieces, the transnational lens allows them to be framed in a broader context, to highlight their collectivity and their appearance in public spheres as well as to underline how the question of identification is central to feelings of exclusion in the context of the migrant artist.

## II. A way through ...

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### - Methodology

Globalization has had an impact on all levels of social life, artists and their artworks respond to the transnational social field in their every day lives by tackling the boundaries and limits of national categories on various levels. Artists are moving across different sites, creating new cultural creations and contributing to multiple understandings of identities, interconnections, diversity and locality in respond to their living realities. The research “barriers and exclusions of international artists in Vienna“ looks closer into the lives of twelve international artists living or temporary staying in Vienna through semi-structured interviews recorded on camera.

Before going deeper into the narratives of the participating artists, I would like to give inside into the context. In November 2021 I was selected as an artist for a six month fellowship by the organization *kültür gemma!* to collaborate with the Austrian UNESCO Commission in Vienna. The organization *kültür gemma!* is well known for its counter-hegemonic position in the cultural landscape of Vienna and their community building projects. For my research during the fellowship, I was looking for twelve international artists who would like to contribute their experiences on the topic “barriers and exclusions of international artists in Vienna“. Through an open call artist could become part of the project. The position of *kültür gemma!* was very supportive in reaching out to the artists and for the creation of a common ground. *kültür gemma!* is a project to promote migrant\*) artistic work. (...) *kültür gemma!* sees itself as a cultural networking platform. Its goal is to establish migrant positions in the predominantly white\*) cultural scene as a matter of course and to do justice to the plurality of the city in cultural life as well (<https://kueltuergemma.at/en/home/>). All participating artists are familiar with the activities of *kültür gemma!* and connect with the aim of the project. My support from *kültür gemma!* and the use of their platform and networks fostered a common political, social and cultural understanding between the participants and myself. These supportive structures allowed critical voices to be heard as well as to make meaning to counter hegemonic art movements and their practices. I identify myself as a visual artist and researcher with a migration background. Some artists raised questions about my position and my approach towards the topic. Before the recording, I met with each artist online to get to know each other and to create the focus for our recording. I realised how important this moment was

for the artists involved, to decide if and to which extent they want to share personal issues with me. I made all processes involved transparent, fair and respectful.

The aim of my research is to create a shared space, to bring twelve different positions together, to portray experiences of exclusion through different art positions, to analyze and contextualize personal narrations through the transnational lens and to contribute to the empowerment of artists, especially for those with migratory backgrounds. Inspired by the activities and network of *kültür gemma!* I am highlighting collaborative art practices of migrant artists to underline the importance of the topic as well as to show how collectivity represents means to empowerment.

As the context of art and migration is central to the research, the participating artists shared their experiences, feelings and knowledge on the topic. The focus on art and migration through personal narrations supports the arguments that the lives of artists can be seen as a lens into future transformations of societies due to their highly mobile lifestyle (Libbhardt 2015). Researches in the context of art and mobility are rare although artists and mobility has always been a major field in the art practice (Libbhardt 2015). To conduct research in this field can provide inside into new modes of production as well as contemporary approaches towards representation of migratory processes. It also shows the relevance to study artists biographies through qualitative methods in terms of broader social and economical transformations due to their entanglement of simultaneous processes and interconnections (Libbhardt 2015:60aa). Through personal narrations connected to experience and art creations by the participating artists these intertwined aspects become visible. Libbhardt (2015) critically states in reflecting on the highly mobile worlds artists are living in, that the terminology “creative class“ is used by institutional policies, in particular European cultural policies, to address artist in the creative industries as well as artists on the move. The taken-for-granted embedding of international artists in the industries, along with supportive structure of funding, ignores the realities of international artists who have no access to labor markets or funding. Some have been displaced due to social, political or economical reasons and/or they do not respond to traditional ways of belonging on the basis of territory and nationality. The framing of mobility and art through cultural policies embedded in national regulations leads to feelings of exclusion as central to the research. It presents one of the critical arguments throughout the text, mobility defines free movement for some, while restrictive movements and feelings of exclusion for others. The research takes a critical standpoint towards the concept of mobility and includes the criticism by the participating artists how the concept of

“mobility“, a synonym for free movement in neoliberal systems, falls short to capture their realities and the dynamics of their artistic lives.

The identification of artists on the basis of territory, typically embedded in methodological nationalism (Glick-Schiller & Levitt 2004, Ring-Peterson 2017), reproduces national categories that lead to feelings of exclusion or different forms of discrimination. Glick-Schiller and Levitt (2004) approach migration in the transnational social field by distinguishing between “ways of being“ and “ways of belonging“ in order to reflect the simultaneous entanglement of migrants in their daily activities, their social institutions, their daily interconnections and their social relations. Ring-Peterson (2017) underlines how transnational studies have created an important frame to look at contemporary art practices and she uses the analytical framing of *migratory aesthetics* to build up a broader understanding of how migrant artists shape the contemporary art discourses. In order to shape these discourses participation is essential, it brings the question of im/mobility and status forefront. The “so-called ‘biennial boom’ since the 1980s has gradually transformed the world map of exhibitions and enabled artists from all continents to circulate world wide“ (Ring-Peterson 2017:52). This opening of the art world, including the art markets and embracing the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion, defines mobility as an important mean to art production along with restrictions to mobility which I define as immobility. These restrictions are linked to bureaucratic processes that are always underpinned by national regulations. Cultural institutions, even when operating in the transnational field, are subjects to these national regulations and cannot circumvent these structures. They have to negotiate national regulations with the transnational reality of the artists to ensure the freedom of expression as well as the freedom of movement for each artist equally. The research focuses on personal experiences of exclusion connected to im/mobility because all participants identify as migrants, even Marlène who has a particular connection to the city of Vienna would not consider herself as Austrian. The im/mobility lens is used to explore how exclusions are constituted and experienced due to migratory experiences and how different motives contribute to these exclusions. It also brings various networks of institutional and non-institutional actors within their different power distributions in the context of migrant artists at play. In the narratives of the participating artist, and especially through their biographies, they make clear that their lives can no longer be understood as in relation to their countries of origin or where they are momentarily located. They underline their experiences of restricted movement based on their nationality and/or identity and highlight how their everyday lives are driven by immobility and discriminations instead of free movement or the freedom of expression.

They stress about the restrictive bureaucratic regulations imposed on them as well as about discriminative policies and the usage of particular terminologies. They underline that the selection of those artists who are able to move freely and those who are restricted to do so, can lead to unequal distribution of rights, restrictive accesses to art markets and limitation in participation which is embedded in the general debate on migration and art (Hildebrandt et al. 2019). They highlight that their living realities, their identities and their migratory experiences are often not respected in a national context. The argument by Ring-Peterson about the importance of *migratory aesthetics* is looked critically by some because they emphasise on the question: who are these migrant artists and who is able to built this up or even participate in these discourses? They make clear that participation is first of all a bureaucratic process, a question of citizenship and status, that each person needs to overcome individually in order to be able to participate in broader discourses. They address the im/mobility lens with a focus on accessibility and they stress about their identification based on nationality and citizenship, defining it as an insurmountable barrier to participation.

The context of the research is very broad and complex, and there are different ways to approach the topic. I have decided to invite twelve artists to contribute to the topic and to share their feelings and experiences in front of the camera. The visual research, as I call it, allows their stories to be presented as personalised narratives. The participating artists could choose the location of the recording and also the way they are portrayed eg., one participating artists chose a cooking situation as a performative act to express his narration. Some preferred to share their stories in their homes whereas others opted in for a location. The setting of the interview is meant to create a self-determined portrait of the interviewed artists, it provided space for self-expression and self-identification. The combination of video and sound, a form of visual storytelling, is a method often used in cultural researches because it enables multi-layered perception and reflection. It is often used to encourage empowerment, both on an individual and collective level. "Digital media has provided communities and individuals with the capacity to be creators and broadcasters of their own stories once again, now told powerfully through the medium of the moving image" (Chodony 2017:186). This very situation requires mutual understanding and respectful handling with the captured material. Through several months of research and video documentation, which broadened my perspective and knowledge on the topic, and studying the biographies of the artists, I understood that my focus on feelings of exclusion is linked to very personal and existential questions. Chodony argues

“methodologically, creating visual stories can be likened to practice-based research or learning where the experience of the journey is as valuable as the outcomes“ (2017:187). My journey with twelve artists happened to be the biggest challenge because their realities constantly change and while trying to make an argument about a particular situation, this situation has sometimes already shifted into a new reality. Practice-based research creates space for transformation and I looked at the research as a journey to underline that movement is a process in time and space. Through the complexity of their stories and their biographies, and the way they portray their identities, each artist has immersed me in their personal world and point of view. My practice while capturing their stories is about embarking on an uncertain journey, to build connections and bridges that can reveal a common ground. I agree that the process and experience of research is as valuable as the outcome because the im/mobility lens emphasises movement and transformation as a mutable process.

In my attempt to present all participating artists as a collective voice, I emphasise that artists' movements are essential to artistic practice in the past, present and future. Artists' movements are not limited to certain disciplines, the participating artists express themselves through different mediums of art and through various languages. The im/mobility lens along with feelings of exclusion creates a basis to think beyond disciplines. The artists express their feeling of exclusion as a reaction to social and political constellations in a particular place where they currently find themselves. As a starting point in our conversations we talked about the the city of Vienna, we used the city as a point of reference to thematize transnational connections. The artists also made clear that their identities are embedded in a broader context that goes beyond the city or the nation. They describe their identities and their art creations as likely to be seen in opposition to certain prevailing social norms not necessarily connected to a particular location but to politics of the location. Visualization or being visible is an essential mean in artistic practice and the artists made clear that the question of in/visibility is linked to their status at a particular location and how they are perceived at this place. The fact that they allowed me to capture them on camera within a particular context as described through my fellowship with *kültür gemma!* appeared to be important to the artists. Bringing the research into this paper is a different context, therefor I have decided to focus only on their narration without personalisation. The visual material created during the research is not part of this work. The artist in this text, nine out of twelve positions are included, are made anonymous and their names are changed respectfully. I have made this decision in consultation with the artists involved, because they pointed out that their realities are constantly changing and

the recording should be seen as a snapshot of their perceptions and feelings at a particular time within a particular context. By anonymising their identities, they give me the permission to use their personal narrations to support my arguments in a scientific context. This issue was not brought up in the beginning of my research and they allowed me to use the captured material for the creation of a short video, which I presented during a festival in Vienna in October 2022. This video was my first intensive examination of the collected material and shows my ambition to link the stories and the positions together. For this text, and as a second step of representing the research, I have decided to work only with their narrations without personification again with the ambition to bring their narratives together.

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### **- Building connections and framing the content**

The thesis highlights several topics to build a frame around im/mobility based on the captured interviews: locality in relation to identity and self-identification; im/mobility in relation to nationality and belonging; (cultural) institutions and their role as meaning makers and brokers; collectivity and communities' art practices as a means to empowerment and equity.

The first chapter presents two artist positions, both mid-career artists with long traveling experiences and knowledge of the art market, to address locality in relation to their understanding of identity. The interconnectedness between “ways of being“ and “ways of belonging“ is represented by their individual experiences, personal networks and is relative to the question of identity and locality. Their emphasis on “ways of belonging“ rather than on “ways of being“ shows that locality, when based on national territory, is opposed to realities of the transnational social field. One of the interviewed artists defines herself as settled in Vienna, the other artist is currently on the move, Vienna was a stopover to join a PhD program at the Academy of Fine Arts. In our conversation neither reflect on their current living situation as connected to mobility or locality, they speak about different forms of creating art in the context of migration, social and spatial belonging as well as about their feelings of exclusion. They address locality in relation to self-identification within different spaces. One of the artists introduces the expression “negotiation“ by saying: “You have to be in a dialog. ... to negotiate between yourself and others“ which underlines the constant flux these processes carry. This argument is supported by the other position with reference to questions of participation. She underlines restrictive processes embedded in

institutional structures and the importance of knowing local production in order to get familiar with certain processes that shape the meaning of one's actions at a particular location. She critically highlights the terminology "world music" to make meaning to the usage of terminologies by institutions and to address unequal power relations between the artist and the institution. Both artists bring in their broad experiences on art and migration and form the basis to understand locality not through territory but through negotiation as defined through "ways of belonging" by Glick-Schiller and Levitt (2004). They underline the simultaneous entanglement of local, national and global interconnections in their daily lives and underline the problematic nature of national categories in cultural production.

"The discussion of mobility and immobility reflects and shapes our understanding of time as well as space" (Nyíri 2010 in Glick-Schiller & Salazar 2013:196). This discussion reflects on political situations at a particular time, eg situations of war, financial or humanitarian crises and it brings global power dynamic and asymmetries upfront. National sovereignty, with the aim to preserve power to sovereign nation states, defines "mobility as dangerous and threatening, while immobility is seen as normal and necessary for political and personal security" (Glick-Schiller & Salazar 2013:184). The second chapter addresses im/mobility through the narration of three artists, they reflect on their movements on the basis of political conflicts, gender discrimination and/or bureaucratic processes in Austria. Their displacement from their so-called "country of origin" is connected to the question of safety and combines all narratives together. When living outside their so-called "country of origin", they find themselves often being trapped in a waiting position due to bureaucracies. Hage (2009) addresses waiting as an important state of being for many migrants due to their national identity, which is linked to a systematic discrimination based on values of citizenships. He poses the question 'who waits for whom' (2009:7) that refers to questions of power and class as well as underlines a global power asymmetry where one position is in charge over the other. Hage emphasises on politics of waiting to show how waiting is structured and organised through social systems and their politics to locality. These politics unfold their power in the everyday life of the interviewed artists, it regulates their everyday life and their timeframes of action through visa regimes. In the experience of the participating artists either in remaining in some kind of inactive position or in terms of visas that are about to expire. Tobias Kelly (2008) contextualizes that the question of returning to the so-called "country of origin" cannot be taken for granted for many migrants, even if this condition is given by national regulations as an option instead of waiting, it is not realistic for displaced individuals. Kelly argues "displacement is never

simply a physical movement across space, but also involves transformations in the political, social and economic practices through which people are related to place" (2008:26). He points out "mobility and flow exist alongside rootedness and territory, sometimes in the same spaces and amongst the same people" (Kelly 2008:26aa). Even if a person remains at the same place, this place might change politically, economically or/ and socially and the relation of a person to this place will transform. This transformation constantly redefines the place and its social relations.

In the narratives of the three selected artists the relation to the so-called "country of origin" is difficult because these places do not exist anymore, they are not safe or they are affected by political conflicts. Both, Hage (2009) and Kelly (2008), highlight important arguments in the context of restrictions to free movement which have been brought up by the interviewed artists. Kelly argues that the transformation of places creates "a situation where displacement and return, absence and presence, movement and confinement are entwined with one another" (Kelly 2008:26). Hage's emphasis on waiting looks closer into living realities of many migrants that have been displaced due to political, economical and/ or social reasons and find themselves in some kind of "inactive" position in a new location. This particular situation has been brought up in Ahmed's narrative. He is the only participant with a stateless status, where waiting is often part of everyday life. His waiting position in Austria remained many years before he was officially allowed to participate as an active member of the society. Ahmed is aware that this situation is not related to Vienna or Austria specifically, he would find himself in the same situation in any other place due to his "stateless status". Existing structural and social issues that lead to immobility are based on citizenship (Gündoğdu 2015). Citizenship is a key element in the definition of a nation state and its social, political and economical boundaries as well as an important mean in the context of im/mobility. In our conversation Ahmed often referred to human rights as an important framework and he argued that national rights always create obstacles where by the human rights framework should be supportive in his living situation. The protection of individuals by human rights, either on the move, settled or in transition, and the actual exercise of nations in accordance with the human rights framework, underlines the fact that states remained the "biggest guarantors and violators of human rights" (Gündoğdu 2015:8).

The two other positions in this chapter, Gin and Nermin, highlight personal discriminations connected to their gender as a driving force for migration or displacement. Gin talked about being a transgender person in transition and emphasised that no country can be considered as safe. For Gin, any national context is driven by discrimination and

transphobia. Gin argues that local knowledge is essential to overcome discrimination or to have the ability to counteract these discriminations on a daily base. Gin outline that the more they are familiar with local regulations, the safer they are. Although Gin and Nermin “belong“ to one or more nation states, they do have citizenship(s), both emphasise on “ways of belonging“ through their transnational ties, their personal migratory experiences and their social lives. In Nermin’s narrative the bureaucratic process of renewing his visa is highlighted, because this situation was very vivid at the time of the recording. He shared his anger and frustration about governmental institutions and their ways of operating with migrants by underlining how governmental institutions implement discriminative structures in order make migrants feel unsettled, dependent and compliant. For Nermin this manner is connected to values of citizenships, the degradation process most migrants experience due to their backgrounds and the attitude of governmental institutions towards migrants. All three, Ahmed, Gin and Nermin, underline the importance of safety in any national context. They question governmental institutions and their ways of operating with migrants as well as they highlight that participation is important to be recognised as an active member of a society. Although they, in particular Ahmed, refer to the freedom movement as a basic right that should be protected by the human rights framework, they make clear that national regulations are more powerful in their daily lives than any other framework.

As the research took place in collaboration with the Austrian UNESCO Commission, in particular with the department *diversity of cultural expressions*, this allowed access and a closer look into an intergovernmental institution, its structures and policies. *Freedom of expression*, defined by the department *diversity of cultural expressions*, is one of the most important definition in the context of art, because it is intended to ensure equal treatment of artists all over the world. It carries a “universal“ claim similar like the human rights framework.

To create a broader understanding of the UNESCO, their policies and their implementations, the book “Reinventing Human Rights“ (2022) by Mark Goodale is used to unfold the role of the UNESCO in a historical and political context as well as to look closer into the current human rights framework. Goodale focuses on the reinvention of human rights as a necessary task in order to built human rights as “the most important global framework for justice-seeking at all levels“ (2022:3). One of the leading argument throughout his book is to unfold the historical entanglement between political economy and social injustice in a neoliberal world in the context of human rights. He situates the historical and current condition of the human right framework, where the role of the

UNESCO survey and their current field of actions can be analyzed, as a basic problem that creates the core aim for its reinvention. He addresses the sovereignty of the nation state in relation to the human rights framework, as also brought up by Ahmed, to underline how political economy, driven by national regulations and global capitalism is opposed to global justice. He situates the existing Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as “a continuation of Western imperialism” (Goodale 2022:10). This argument links the criticism, demands and claims by the interviewed artists to a broader context. Goodale’s historical lens provides a critical understanding of humanitarian institutional structures and their policies in neoliberal systems. He argues how general usage of policies that claim to be universal are problematic (Goodale 2022:4aa). He points out that “universality itself should be abandoned” (2022:7) and replaced with translocality, and translocality on the social level, structured by ethical principles, requires “thinking and feeling beyond the nation” (2022:17). His ambition to reinvent human rights underlines the transnational perspective on humanitarian frameworks and he emphasises on a decolonial view in order to liberate the existing human rights framework from Western imperialism. I argue that the same task is needed in the context of *freedom of expression*, it should be looked through the transnational lens and reconstructed, reframed and rearticulated, to ensure freedom of expression to everyone equally. Goodale’s arguments support different perspectives of the interviewed artists because they often highlight the distinction between Western and non-Western citizen as a driving force to their feelings of exclusion and immobility. Gin’s position, identifying as a transgender person, further supports Goodale’s argument that the category of “human” needs to be redefined and freed from its existing limitations.

The following chapter highlights questions of responsibility through the position of a cultural worker from Mexico temporarily working in Vienna. Juana, like Nermin, stressed about visa regulations, how they regulate her stay in Austria and limit her field of action. She underlines how given time frames remain the biggest obstacles for emerging cultural workers from the so-called Global South. Juana emphasises on the responsibility and importance of cultural institutions to create better working conditions to all people working in the cultural sector, and in particular for those coming from the so-called Global South. Like in the previous chapter, the question of safety is addressed by Juana when reflecting on her living and working situation in Mexico. Direct violence is a driving force for many migrants to relocate in another region, at the same time structural and cultural violence shapes the living situation of migrants in new locations. Throughout the interview, Juana stressed the responsibility of cultural institutions in Europe to ensure better living and

working conditions for migrant artist and cultural professionals as well as to include everyone in this process equally. For Juana “mobility“ is clearly connected to Europe, the Western world and its institutions. By underlining that “mobility“ belongs to Western institutions, she addresses relevant topics in current arts and culture debates. These debates are driven by demands of inclusive structures, decolonisation of institutions and “diversity“. Institutions of higher education and arts are responding to the neoliberal logic of giving access to people from different parts of the world (Çağlar 2022). Levitt writes “across the country (US) and the world, calls for greater equity in the halls of academia, museum galleries, and libraries are loud and clear. They demand more “diversity,” and “inclusion,” or that the university should be “globalized” or “decolonized.” (Levitt 2023). “Diversity“ cannot be seen as an *add-on* (Çağlar 2022) for the institution to be represented as contemporary and future-oriented, they should respond to ongoing social demands for more equity by artists, scholars and cultural workers. Levitt raises the question “Why, then, if everyone agrees that business as usual is no longer acceptable— and that a wider range of voices need to be heard—is progress so slow?“ (Levitt 2023)

Through the perspective of an emerging performance artist from Iran, who described her challenges to become an art student of an Austrian university, “the impediments of mobility“ (Çağlar 2022) become visible. Her journey has mainly been driven by border regimes and governmental regulations, in Iran as well as in Austria. It also presents the current material in her art practice. When looking closer at her study conditions in Austria, it becomes clear that visa regimes and monetary policies are the biggest obstacles for students whose status does not respond to privileges of the so-called Global North.

*“The global inequalities in freedom of movement continue to pose a substantial barrier to attain the objective of the mobility of students, scholars, and artists. Despite several calls and initiatives undertaken by institutions of various scale, the uneven landscape of mobility between regions and different parts of the world prevail. The asymmetries in visa regimes, especially between the Global South and the Global North, come to the fore as one of the main reasons behind the impediments of mobility“ (Çağlar 2022).*

The boundaries of the categories “Global North“ and “Global South“ are not clearly defined, but higher education systems and their regulations, in particular educational mobility programs, make clear that privilege to knowledge production reproduces inclusion/exclusion with regard to the identity and nationality of an individual. “It is important to address mobility barriers and asymmetries in connection to closures of knowledge

production“ (Çağlar 2019) in order to frame the entire picture of exclusion. Through the narration of the interviewed artist, barriers to knowledge production are linked to questions of responsibility. Her struggles to overcome and fulfil bureaucratic regulations, shows that institutions of higher education lack of possibilities to help their international students. “Mobility and diversity can neither be an “add-on” (Çağlar 2022), nor a matter of achieving compositional diversity, “instead, it is central to any attempt to act against the inequities of knowledge produced and reproduced in and through the institutions of education and arts“ (Çağlar 2022). The importance to restructure Western institutions and to address the question of accessibility, is linked to a “decentering attitude“ (Levitt 2023). Levitt’s approach to decentering is highlighted to think around alternative structures and their embedding. She uses the term “infrastructure“ to visualize how ideas, people and content can circulate. She argues that policies, in order to be useful, appropriate, or applicable need to decenter (Levitt 2023). The implementation of policies through fluid infrastructures allows ideas, people and content to travel between spaces and while circulating new ideas, contents and people constantly emerge and rebuilt the infrastructure. As stated by Levitt, the demand for “diversity“ and “inclusion“ is loud and clear but existing infrastructures are missing.

There are different ways to address (infra-)structures, the responsibility of institutions and to frame these discourses. It is important to be particular about an institution, their mission in society, their structures, possibilities and political position, because it is through this lens that their actions are perceived. I am using again the context of the research, the collaboration with the Austrian UNESCO Commission, to think around policies and their structural embedding. As in the previous chapter the definition of the *freedom of expression* is looked closer, this chapter focuses on a policy in the context of mobility. Border regimes, essential in the context of im/mobility, are embedded in the meaning of national belonging and citizenship, as already discussed through the context of locality and belonging. The example of a policy by the UNESCO, the so-called “preferential treatment“, shows a continuum of the process of differentiation and selection on the basis of territorial thinking and national belonging. The wording of this policy is looked critical to highlight the importance of articulation as well as to argue how the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion in the context of mobility and border regimes can be legitimized by such policies. Some artists in the research underlined that borders, their terminologies and their spaces of performances, can be negotiated and contested. By continuously engaging and visualising counter-hegemonic narratives, artists counteract the discriminative differentiation mechanism carried by borders. Artists highlight particular topics related to

their migratory experiences and it makes clear that their art practices and creations are not single pieces.

The last chapter reflects on four art practices by the participating artists to underline collectivity and collaborative engagements against discrimination. The border, as a physical, social and symbolic barrier, is presented through an image in the open call and the artists could respond to the image by recreating, reframing or resisting it. The image, along with a short text, refers to the dichotomy borders carry. The first example describes a work by a performance artist. She points out the importance of border control, how power is distributed in this situation and how much the body is involved in this process. She includes the visitor, as the performance was presented in an exhibition space, to underline the importance of shared experience in power relations as part of her work on borders. Artists when using the border topic to counteract its meaning reshape its materiality and create new connotations through shared experience. They interfere into given structures, involve their audiences and create visibility opposed to dominant narratives. These art practices are important means in processes of self-empowerment and recognition, and they should not be viewed as single events or single pieces, they often appear as collaborative engagements. In the second example the importance of “community projects” through the perspective of an interviewed artists is highlighted to underline their means to collective empowerment. In her introduction she makes clear that higher education systems allowed her to move across different countries but also shaped her feeling of exclusion. Counter-hegemonic art projects often contextualize border topics, they underline the connection between freedom of movement and art practice as a field of art that always existed. The interviewed artist emphasised on community projects as spaces of belonging, shared values and a common ground to resist discriminations. Her emphasis refers to the transnational social field as representative for artist on the move and their social lives. Counter-hegemonic art communities through collaborative actions and collective engagements shape the visibility and performances of hegemonic systems. The next example visualizes the imagination of a “new country”, a safe space for Kurdish Queer people in Vienna, as described by the artist. Through his imagination and the visual appearance of his project, he highlights the importance of recognition and empowerment as well as the community building aspect which is central to his project. His desire to built a safe space, without boundaries, national belonging and sexual harassment, speaks

about his multiple identities and his experiences. He addresses safety not only in relation to the world outside his community, but also within his community. Through his project he creates awareness of multiple ways of discrimination, about discriminations within communities as well as how these processes can be shaped through visibility. His narrative is brought into relation with another artistic position, both within the Kurdish community. This relation is meant to address transformation processes, to show how social, cultural and political circumstances lead to personal transformations and form the basis for new identification processes that shape new creations. Through their visual appearance the meaning of these works transcends to other people, it creates shared experience and underlines their collective approach. The last example is meant to visualize how these processes take shape in zine culture. One of the participating artists, mainly engaging in zine culture, makes meaning to a culture that is independent, self-organised and counter-hegemonic. I describe the zine culture as “the translocal medium of expression“, because its ways of producing and distributing, along with a structure that enables every person to participate, makes meaning and visualizes how decentering processes can take shape. The imagination of an infrastructure that enables ideas, cultures and people to travel and exchange freely is examined through this little paper works, the zines. They can easily cross borders and communicate with an environment free of governmental regulations. Zines usually carry a very personal character and these narrations form a dialog between the creator and their multiple audiences, no matter of locality.

The first chapter, looking at locality in relation to identity and self-identification, and the last chapter, highlighting collectivity and community art practices as a means to equity, speak to each other. The narratives sometimes overlap due to the focus of biographies and personal experiences. It is not possible to distinguish between the artists creations, their understanding of locality, their relations to institutions and their multiple identities. The structure of the text appears like a circle, the first chapter leads to the last chapter and the steps in-between focus on particular topics that have been brought up by the interviewed artists but are also relevant in other chapters. All topics are intertwined and the structure of this text reflects on these interconnections. In trying to built connections between the different narratives in the research, I tend to think linear. This linear mindset in analysing a problem and bringing some kind of solution limited my approach in writing this text. The

fact that twelve artists contributed to the research brought a very wide perspective into the topic. The challenge to bring them together is to make their narratives related to each other and to underline their collectivity. I am creating connections to support my arguments, at the same time I am using their narratives to create a deeper understanding of the topic and to built new arguments. It is a receptive process based on the exchange of experience and knowledge over a certain period of time. The structure of this text reflects my way to think about the incorporation and visualization of flowing circular pattern in the form of written words.

## 1. Locality in the transnational social field

The determination of locality shows “the debates in geography about the way in which territory is experienced” (Çağlar & Glick-Schiller 2011:62) and underlines the debate between methodological nationalism and transnational theory. The complexity to determine locality in the transnational social field is relative to processes of globalization mainly driven by disjunctures of global cultural flows (Appadurai 1996). In this sense, locality appears as a landscape, while the different flows become visible in the artist’s biography and their artwork. Theory around migration, in particular about the artist as a migrant worker (Ring-Peterson 2017), tackles the concept of locality, placement, production and meaning making in the contemporary art world. It appears inappropriate to reduce artists, their biographies, identities and creations within a place of origin which is typically embedded in methodological nationalism.

Globalization, along with artist mobility and the extension of the art market, has had a significant impact on the daily lives of artists and it has affected each person in one way or another. This cannot lead to the assumption that this impact is uniform, it rather shows the individual character of each story within different time frames. Some artists in my research have made their first migratory experiences in the 90s or earlier, others moved in early 2000 or within the past ten years. Their directions of movement, the different timeframes of migration and accessibility to mobility can only be looked at individually. The interweaving of different aspects at the same time shows the difficulty of determining locality because mobility and migration are driven by constant simultaneous flows and appear as individual paths at the same time. The migrant artist cannot be reduced to political structures like the distinction the so-called “Global South” or “Global North” and its presumed directions of movement because they are embedded in multi-sided locations within fluid pattern. Ring-Peterson (2017) addresses these dimensions of locality in the context of art to underline the argument how the transnational lens on locality creates an appropriate perspective to look at the lives of contemporary artists and their creations. Her approach to locality focuses on the art production, involving the creator, the presentation and distribution of the work as well as its reception. The approach in social studies, as mentioned by Glick-Schiller and Levitt (2004), opens the field of the transnational perspective by focusing on social relations to space and interactions in places. These dimensions allow a broader understanding of locality, a locality linked to identity and vice versa. This relational

character can be analyzed through individual actions as outlined through the perspective of the participating artist.

In the research the common ground for all narratives is the city of Vienna. All participating artists have gone through different paths before coming to Vienna, their motives are different, for some it happened by choice, for others it happened to be an opportunity. Their being in Vienna is connected to their previous transnational interconnections and networks, it widens their scale and has impact on the city. Their everyday actions shape the city as well as the city shapes their actions by providing opportunities. “These opportunities include variations in regulatory regimes, local infrastructures and possibilities for entrepreneurial activities, employment, education, housing, and entrance into local political and cultural life” (Çaglar & Glick-Schiller 2011:3). For artists the opportunities for labor is often linked to short term contracts, low payments and mobility programs, such as higher education institutions offers. The labor situation, also including studying programs, is driven by the visa regulation. In my research almost all participants have temporary living conditions and need to renew their visas according to their status. In the following section the city of Vienna is used as an analytical frame to look at the interconnectedness between the artists and the city.

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### **1.1. Migrant artists in the context of locality**

“Migrants respond to and contribute to each city’s historical and institutional legacies, even as they are part of the continuing reconstitution of global processes that are substantiated locally” (Çaglar & Glick-Schiller 2011:3aa)

When thinking around the local, regional and global interconnection of each participant in the research in relation to the concept of scaling and rescaling the city (Çaglar & Glick-Schiller 2011:5), they actively transform the city through their personal engagements and their art creations because they, even when feeling excluded, contribute to the social capital of the city.

Vienna, considered to be a Western City within the neoliberal logic, represents social wealth, particular attention to art and culture as well as labor and study opportunities. The artists in the research have chosen or happened to be in this city for one reason or another. The concept of scaling (Çaglar & Glick-Schiller 2011) looks closer into their social processes and their relation to space through the transnational lens, in particular in the

context of cities and the role of migrants. The interviewed artists have entered the city mainly through visa regulations, some had a refugees status in the beginning but at the time of the interviews no-one was considered as a refugee. Their visa regulations are directly linked to the labor market, they are perceived as temporary workers, as students or have already settled with a permanent permission to remain in Austria. In any case, their work as artists in making the city of Vienna competitive on the regional, national and global scale matters. Çaglar and Glick-Schiller (2011) introduce the expression “scale makers” to outline the role of migrants in neoliberal cities, their contribution to wealth, development, economic, political, social and cultural capital. They highlight the importance of scale makers as “active agents in the neoliberal transformation of cities” (2011:12) in order to underline their active role beyond neoliberal values. Through this conceptual frame, the cultural and social capital that international artists bring into a city becomes an important value. Vienna, like many other Western cities, takes part in the competition on the “diversity”, “global” and “contemporary” scale and its representation. Migrant artists are key figures in these discourses. Local institutions play an important role in making-meaning of global as well as local discourses, they create opportunities for cultural and social discourses to take shape and influence public opinion. The role of cultural institutions in the context of “diversity” is to create fair structures of accessibility, participation and visibility. I argue that institutions, particularly in higher education and arts, have the responsibility to address and highlight the cultural and social capital of migrant artists in order to tackle discriminative national regulations that are embedded in their structures. They play a key role as facilitators, because Western institutions can contribute to unequal structures by maintaining their historical or political heritage, or they have the opportunity to favour new dynamics led by artists, especially artists with migrant backgrounds.

“Since the 1990s, terms such as ‘global art’, ‘the global contemporary’ and ‘the global art world’ have become a staple of mainstream art discourses” (Ring-Peterson 2017:48). Ring-Peterson critically points out “there is no consensus regarding the use of the terms global art and world art, which thus seem to function as floating signifiers in today’s historiographical and curatorial discussions” (2017:49). She locates these discourses, in particular the usage of the terminology “world art” to the legacy of Western art heritage (2017:49) and she uses the terminologies “globalization-from-above” and “globalization-from-below”, defined by Stuart Hall, to create a wider picture on the global power asymmetries in the cultural sector. With “globalization-from-above” she describes the

maintenance of existing power structures, e.g. through institutions and markets, mainly embedded in Western art world (Ring-Peterson 2017:52). Opposed to that, “globalization-from-below“ takes centre stage in the discourse on contemporary art and migration“, it broadens the field of “migration, diaspora, exile, refugeedom, displacement, precarity, subalternity, cosmopolitanism, cultural translation, creolisation, cultural translations and migratory aesthetics“ (Ring Peterson 2017:53), topics that are essential to contemporary art production and are considered to strengthen the cultural capital of a city on a global scale.

The relation between “globalization-from-above“ and “globalization-from-below“ shows the interconnection between institutions and migrant artists. Central to her argument is the criticism towards the ongoing dominance of Western institutions in the so-called “global art world“ as well their Eurocentric perspective on art that limits migrants artists to be understood as scale makers or active participants in the city. She introduces the terminology “migratory aesthetics“, with the awareness that aesthetics itself is rooted in European culture, to define the importance of the role of the migrant artists as catalysts for cultural transformation and change. She highlights two pitfalls for the usage of “migratory aesthetics“.

*“On the one hand, there is the risk of overemphasising aesthetics and turning the representation of specific migrant experiences into a general, apolitical aesthetics of migration to be celebrated as an almost universalised multicultural or cosmopolitan ideal. On the other, neglect of the significance of the aesthetic dimensions of art and culture may lead to a situation where the migrant is denied any kind of agency and active participation in the cultural transformation of society, and it will, in any event, make it difficult to pinpoint what the contributions of the artists are“ (Ring-Peterson 2017:59).*

This scenario has been brought up by one participant in the research when reflecting on particular situations of musicians with institutions in Vienna, which is highlighted in the next section. Ring-Peterson points out the “multicultural or cosmopolitan ideal“ to underline how institutions, mainly located in the Western Hemisphere, embraced multiculturalism as a policy (Ring-Peterson 2017:76). She situates these terminologies as discriminative because they favour Western hegemonic culture production and separate Western from Non-Western actors in the field of culture.

*“According to some critics, institutional multiculturalism is a regulatory instrument appropriated and deployed by the West to continue to sustain its cultural hegemony.*

*It segregates white artists from non-white artists by categorising art by the latter as ,ethnic art'. As a result, the identity politics of institutional multiculturalism is blamed for being a severe obstacle to 'true' recognition of the individual artist because it perpetuates a hierarchy in which Western artists obtain recognition on the basis of their individual artistic merits, whereas non-Western artists are only recognised as representatives of the ethnic community and local culture to which they or their ancestors belong“ (Ring-Peterson 2017:76).*

In the relation between local institutions and migrant artists these pitfalls need to be considered. Looking at the city of Vienna through the pitfalls of “multiculturalism“ and/or “diversity“ policies is examined in the next section through an example. Migrant artists have become important actors in shaping the cultural capital of the city. Their relation with their city appears first hand local, the concept of scaling underlines how local phenomena unfold in similar ways in global processes and vice versa. Each city has its now history, ways of governance and political transformations and therefore needs to be examined individually. As I am not going into a deep description into the city of Vienna, I am highlighting the position and activities of the artists in the research to argue how they actively shape the city through their social engagements and their creations. I support the argument that they shape the city where they live or they are momentary located because they engage with institutions, collaborate with local communities and facilitate discourses on “diversity“. The question why there are not always visible and why they are restricted in the labor market - which is usually linked to questions of cultural capital - is connected to structural power asymmetries.

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## **1.2. Seyran**

Seyran is a mid-career artist, she defines herself as a Kurdish musician and political activist. In our conversation she mainly addressed the music sector in Vienna, because this is her field of actions. Seyran came to Vienna many years ago as a political refugee, she has settled in the city and looks at Vienna as her “hometown“. When speaking about exclusion of international artist in Vienna, she reflected on her long experiences with Austrian institutions, her background in Turkey and her engagement as a musician with local institutions. At some point she critically brought up the term “world music“ to point out the problem of the usage of so-called “universal“ terminologies by Western institutions and to make meaning to the embedding of “diversity“ policies in the music sector in Vienna.

*“Aber mit der Zeit ist eine Inhalt, dass man Worldmusic (nennt), also ein Diskriminationart geworden. Zum Beispiel, die die Menschen aus mittleren Osten kommen, die Musik machen, (das) ist World Music. Aber genau so wird World Musik, wenn man so nennen sollte, eine ganz traditionelle österreichisches Lied, auch ein World Music gesehen werden. Zum Beispiel wenn jemand aus dem Iran kommt, hier Jazz macht, wird das nicht als Jazz wahrgenommen. Oder Sie möchten das anders nennen. ... Warum soll man einfach einen Korb haben und was die Kurden machen, was die Perser machen, was die Afghanen machen, ist World Music in dieser Korb reinwerfen. Das ist schon ganz leicht“ (Seyran in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 18 February 2022).*

As stated before, the use of such terms like “world art“ or “world music“ relates to their Western legacy. When Seyran creates a parallel between traditional Austrian music and world music, she tackles the meaning and boundaries of what is defined as “world music“. The legitimate question why traditional Austrian music is not world music remains unanswered but it shows how meaning making is transported through articulation and its use by institutions. Seyran critically points out how terminologies lead to the creation of containers based on nationalities that favour discrimination and she addresses the responsibility of Western institutions and their role as meaning makers to address these discriminations. She examines how the production of specific containers creates the assumption about a particular culture eg. the Afghans, the Kurdish. The national classification is also linked to a degradation process, a value system in methodological nationalism. The term “world music“ is embedded within the ideal of “multiculturalism“, as critically outlined by Ring-Peterson, and Seyran underlines how this container leads to discrimination because it reproduces stereotypes.

*“Das ist ein Markt und eine Industrie. Und leider nicht so gleichberechtigt. Oder Chancengleichheit, Gleichheit. Und man kann zum Beispiel so denken ... Du kommst in ein völlig fremdes Land und du sprichst die Sprache nicht, noch nicht. Du kannst dich nicht so gut äußern und die Musik, die du machst, (...) die Sprache, die du verwendest mit deiner Musik, ist anders. Da hast du viel wirklich Nachteile. (...) Und wenn du hier her kommst wegen deine politische Hintergrund kriegst du auch natürlich Interesse. Zum Beispiel wenn Afghanistangeschichte da ist, dann die Afghanen. Afghanische Musikerinnen vielleicht kriegen mehr Aufmerksamkeit oder die Frage mit Syrien ist sehr lebendig, dann sie kriegen mehr Aufmerksamkeit. Dann aber du kriegst Platz in viele Festivals und sobald du dich so einfach nennen*

*möchtest Aber mit der Zeit. Deine Geschichte kriegt mehr Aufmerksamkeit als deine Musik. (...) Und dann mit der Zeit kommt deine Geschichte vor. Was du gemacht hast, ist hinten. Was du musikalisch machst, das wird nicht gesehen“ (Seyran).*

Seyran underlines the pitfalls of “institutional multiculturalism“ and the “diversity industry“ by highlighting a process of inclusion/exclusion connected to politics of a particular location. In her early experiences with cultural institutions in Austria she faced discriminations and she highlighted a few scenarios in our conversation. For example, she was asked to sing in Turkish and to dress traditionally while performing, but she refused to do so. She further refers to another example, where she was payed less than another participant due to her background, but she agreed. These negotiation processes of migrant artists with institutions represent struggles in the context of participation and Seyran underlined the importance to pass through these processes. In her first years as a musician, she was not always able to overcome discriminations but over time she learned how to address certain inequalities. For many years she fought for her right to remain in Austria, now she is settled in Vienna and recognised as a musician and activist. Her attitude, based on experience and patience, has inspired other artists to go through similar processes. Emphasising again on the argument that migrant artists shape their city and vice versa, through Seyran’s words the importance of time that leads to transformation becomes tangible. When referring to artists with a national lens eg the “Afghan artist“, the “Kurdish artists“, Seyran pointed out how nationalities are used by local politicians, the media or institutions to favour the selection of artist for a certain period of time. But this time frame expires, once a new nationality is central to the public discourse. The national lens that lies behind this systematic discrimination does not favour the artists and their right to the freedom of expression, it is contrary to the definition of artistic freedom because it favours a selection based on the whims of governmental strategies. With the example of “world music“ Seyran highlighted how local politics influence art production and contribute to unequal processes of participation. She emphasised on the use of language because it is important to her artistic practice and her political activities. Growing up in Turkey, in particular the use of languages and its assimilation policy, has given Seyran a great sense of knowledge about structural discrimination.

*“Du musst von Anfang an lernen, wie du deine Identitäten. Ich sage Identitäten ganz bewusst, denn es gibt eine religiöse Identität und ethnische Identität. Alles einfach gut verstecken kannst. Du kannst das lernen als Kind. Das ist eine Art Lebensart“ (Seyran).*

This way of life is a constant process of negotiating one's identities and for Seyran it is visible in her art, as much as in her political activities. It also becomes apparent through her expression "sobald du dich so einfach nennen möchtest" (Seyran). She points out that artists need to be aware of the choices they have, how they can use them in their favour or get used by "others".

Nowadays Seyran speaks and sings in many different languages and she expresses her political attitude through her artistic work. As mentioned before, Seyran is settled in Vienna. She uses her language skills, she speaks around seven or eight languages, to negotiate herself with the cultural landscape of Vienna and beyond. Through her regular performances she tackles the meaning of "diversity" by avoiding the term. She argues that artists need to redefine these terminologies and their use through constant engagements and new art practices. Her settlement in Vienna gives her the opportunity to engage with a system at a particular place, it creates the possibility to have impact on a society and to be part of a process of transformation because her living situation is not shaped by limited timeframes of action. Seyran benefits from her settlement because she can travel to other locations without being worried about how or where to return to. The barriers she experienced before settling down are central to her art practice and her political activities. In her narrations she reflects on her knowledge and experiences of exclusion, negotiating one's identities within different locations, as an important strategy of surviving that shaped her attitude as an artist today.

The following section highlights the narrative of another artist. Marina, unlike Seyran, has not settled in Vienna. She lived a few years in Austria pursuing her PhD and has left the city in May 2023. She describes her living reality as in permanent transition and underlines the approach to locality and identity as in constant flux.

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### **1.3. Marina and ways of belonging**

Marina defines herself as an experimental filmmaker, visual artist and social researcher and in our conversation she highlighted her attitude towards spaces and belonging.

Through her wording, I realised that she had already dealt with topics, such as identity, nationality, belonging and spatiality, extensively. In the beginning of our conversation she shortly mentioned her migratory experiences and her current status. Marina was born in Russia, she migrated from Moscow to New York in 1995, which she describes as her first

big move. She then later moved to St. Petersburg, while being connected to previous locations and countries. At the time of the interview she pursued her PhD at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Marina differentiated between her migratory experiences and her ongoing status, she critically addressed the term “mobility“ by reflecting on its embedding in neoliberal systems. In the following statement, she describes her understanding of "spatiality" as a process of constant transformation.

*“So for me its more about how you navigate the spaces rather than you follow some kind of a concept. Or have to belong to something. Ask others if they want you to belong. Right? Its not a process of..., or its not a situation that is given. Or even national identity, its a process of working through and negotiating many questions and dilemmas happening. Right? Because even your nation state, Russia, is in constant flux. Do you want to belong or do you don't want to belong. But what are your options and do you have any options that you can navigate. (...) What does it mean to carry something called Russian ... on your history and culture. Right? It is not something you once decide. And I think as soon as you understand that everything is on the move and relational things become easier. I mean complex but also easier. You have to be in a dialog. ... to negotiate between yourself and others“ (Marina in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 16 February 2022).*

Marina describes the relation of people and places as relative to time and space. She underlines her simultaneous position in different locations and her awareness of her transnational ties which are also constantly shifting. She emphasises on the term “belonging“ as a process of negotiation between herself and others. Seyran did not emphasis on the term “belonging“ as much as Marina. Although both referred to the “negotiation of identities“, a concept linked to the transnational perspective, Marina underlines that national belonging is also a process, because political, social and economic factors are constantly shifting within nation states. They cannot be looked as static entities because they are embedded in global processes that unfold local and vice versa. Marina raises the question: Do you want to belong or do you don't want to belong? with the aim to create awareness around the transformative processes within particular territories and how they shape the relation of people to place.

Marina was raised in Moscow in the Soviet Union, and after the fall of the regime, she migrated to New York. Marina never mentioned being excluded in the Soviet society, but she underlined how the shift in political systems affected her life and her migratory experiences.

*“But then I moved to States in 95’ and Soviet Union collapsed in 91’. That was shocking. I mean, that was shocking. I was also thinking that you understand this, this mobility thing, the controversial or hidden, undercurrent meaning, when you actually move. You understand it through the experience I guess (...) you cannot learn about that in advance. You cannot set your mind about it in advance, you kind of understand things in experiencing and doing it or practicing it” (Marina).*

Marina makes meaning to important global political changes and how this changes affected her life. With the statement above she underlines her experiences in shifting identities within a particular historical context. She describes how her relation to a place is shaped by political, social, economical and cultural transformations and how these transformations form the basis for new negotiation processes, which again is a personal but at the same time global.

Her first big move, from Moscow to New York, can be analyzed in a broader discourse on global power dynamics in the 90s, but this had not been brought up by Marina in our conversation.

She underlines how her first migratory experience shaped her understanding of locality which she defines as relational to identity. In the late 90s she moved from New York to St.Petersburg, which she defines as her second big move. The fall of the Soviet Union has created a new Russian identity, Marina experienced this transformation by raising the question “do you want to belong or do you don’t want to belong“. As she stated, it is a process in constant flux between yourself and others. Marina points out that migration, also within a country, is a process and this process can change the personal perception to this entity. Marina reflects on “the idea of absence of home“, as a feeling driven by her movements and her experience of migration within different historical timeframes and political constellations.

*“ ... the idea of absence of home or the place where you belong becomes super problematic let’s say. You basically trying to build your belongings right. In a place where you are. Right. And trying to think what kind of a connections or what kind of bonding you have to develop, or you have to establish in order to make (...) you can feel home or you feel comfortable or you feel secured because we, I guess we all need to have a place where we can just relax and stop acting or behaving as well as where everything is under control. (...) And so for me, we were always moving because then after New York, I moved back to St.Petersburg to Russia, and then I*

*lived there and also migrated between the different parts of the city in St.Petersburg. And then I came to Vienna and soon, I guess I will be on the move again“ (Marina).*

Marina’s thinking around the importance of a place called “home“, as significant to a place where one feels comfortable and safe, is addressed by most of the interviewed artist. At the same time she describes her life as being constantly on the move. I am highlighting the definition of “ways of being“ and “ways of belonging“ by Glick-Schiller and Levitt (2003) because it is central to the understanding of the realities of the participants and their negotiation processes.

*“Ways of being refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with their actions. Social fields contain institutions, organizations, and experiences, within their various levels, that generate categories of identity that are ascribed to or chosen by individuals or groups. Individuals can be embedded in a social field but not identify with any label or cultural politics associated with that field. They have the potential to act or identify at a particular time because they live within the social field, but not all choose to do so. In contrast, ways of belonging refers to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group. These actions are not symbolic but concrete, visible actions that mark belonging such as wearing a Christian cross or Jewish star, flying a flag, or choosing a particular cuisine. Ways of belonging combine action and an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies“ (Glick-Schiller & Levitt 2003:1010).*

Marina emphasises on “ways of belonging“ rather than on “ways of being“ because she doesn’t define herself through national belonging or territory but rather as being constantly on the move. She describes her relation with her “country of origin“ as difficult and constantly shifting. Her experiences with the country where she is momentarily located are driven by feelings of exclusion.

Marina defines herself as a “queer-feminist activist“ with multiple identities and broad interdisciplinary interests, that allow her to move across disciplines, media, formats, and different political, social, and artistic worlds“ (Marina). Her emphasis on “ways of belonging“ reflects her attitude to “the kind of identity that action signifies“ (Glick-Schiller & Levitt 2003). She looks at her relation to Russia as problematic, at the same time she underlines how this relation shapes her movements, processes of participation and (self-) identification.

The interview with Marina took place on 16 February 2022. A few days later Russian's invasion of Ukraine took place and the beginning of the war in Ukraine has changed Marina's life inevitably. She doesn't support Russia's military actions in Ukraine and although she puts efforts in maintaining her personal and artistic relations with friends, family and colleagues in Russia, it appears to be very difficult. The situation of war has changed her living reality within a few days and she has to redefine herself due to the ongoing situation. Wars and political global shifts are essential in questions of displacement and confinement (Kelly 2008) as well as in questions of self-identification. The transformation of the Russian society is a process, as highlighted by Marina. She is aware that her Russian identity will affect her further movements and her position in the global context, as it already did in her previous movements. The outcome is unpredictable, but the fact that an individual has constantly "to negotiate between oneself and others" becomes visible and it underlines the relational character places and people carry. For Marina going back to Russia is not an option, staying in Vienna is about to expire due to her visa regulations and the new location is a question of opportunities. Marina has chosen Mexico as her new destination and left Vienna in May 2023.

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#### **1.4. Seyran & Marina in reflection**

In both narratives the artists, Seyran and Marina, refer to their childhood. They pointed out how growing up with certain historical and political conditions of their "countries of origin" became driving forces to their movements. Seyran was raised in Turkey, as a Kurdish woman she has experienced exclusion through systematical discrimination by governments and their officials, including violent manners. In our conversation she mentioned the assimilation politics in Turkey at the time she grew up and how these politics influenced her understanding of belonging and identity. This background has shaped Seyran's knowledge about structural discrimination and its impact on people's lives.

Marina responds to the complexity of multi-sided and multi-layered locations and she constantly negotiates herself in different spaces. Marina looks at her constant journeys as part of her way of life. Her emphasis of "ways of belonging" rather than on "ways of being" is essential in understanding her identity as well as her art practices. Both, Marina and Seyran, are detached to territory, their "identities and localities could be understood as

products of social relations rather than of fixed relationships to territory“ (Glick-Schiller & Salazar 2013:186).

Marina critically pointed out the use of the term “mobility“, because it implies certain positive connotations on people’s movements that are questionable. Seyran has entered Austria as a political refugee, her understanding of mobility was never connected to privileged movement, it was rather a situation of displacement that she had to experience. She mentioned that Austria was not her first choice, it happened to be an opportunity, which she accepted.

The positive connotations around the use of the term “mobility“ tend to ignore the fact that some people are forced to move or have no choice then to move. Marina raised the question: “who calls for mobility, who have a right to move or who has a means to move, or who participate in that?“ When thinking around this question, the legacy of the term “mobility“ implies a colonial context, a continuation of Western colonial structures where movement is a privilege. The binaries of inclusion and exclusion, in particular who is allowed to travel and who faces restrictions, should be looked in regard to this legacy of people’s movements. The use of the term “mobility“ ignores the very fact that people’s movement is neither free nor equal, it is connected to questions of identity.

At the end of our conversation Marina shortly mentioned the Covid-19 pandemic and raised concerns about restrictions on people’s movement during the pandemic.

*“This idea of closing borders for me, was shocking. Finding myself, locked up in Austria. That was like, what does that mean? I cannot go. I mean, all my fears of being locked in one country and then locked in a house and all this restrictions, don’t go there. You will be fined. Don’t go here. You will be fined“ (Marina).*

Marina pointed out that Mexico never closed its borders, they remained open during the pandemic because they just couldn’t afford it. She was moving between Austria and Mexico during the pandemic because she had access to. While talking about her travels between Mexico and Austria during the pandemic, she emphasised how mobility, in particular its mechanism of inclusion/exclusion, is connected to the economy of nation states, unfolding in border regimes and visa regulations. She underlined that the Covid-19 pandemic made global inequalities very visible, because it connected local/global economies and structures of nation states to the question of people movements. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted selectiveness, im/mobility as well as spatial and economic disparity in the context of people’s movements.

Some of the interviewed artists spoke about their struggles with visas and/or the social and economic inequalities that became visible during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the participants did not travel during this period, because the imposed traveling restrictions created more tension about their living reality in Austria and they did not have the economic means to travel. They underlined that their movements depend on their visas as well as their economic situations is regulated by their visas. Both aspects do not allow them to move freely.

## 2. Im/mobility

The following chapter looks closer into the living reality of three participants, Ahmed, Gin and Nermin in relation to their status. Ahmed and Gin question nationality and belonging as connected to their feelings of exclusion. The implication of a “host society“ and a “home society“, traditionally favoured by methodological nationalism, does not seem to be appropriate in their biographies. Ahmed and Gin grew up in nations that have significantly transformed, this transformation is/was mainly driven by situations of war and political conflicts, some ongoing. By questioning the meaning of a “home country“ they underline “migrant dynamics and sociabilities should be analyzed in relation to broader structural forces active on the localities with which migrants’ lives are entangled“ (Çağlar 2016:2). Their living situation and their biographies make clear that displacement is not a choice, it appears as a given situation due to the transformation of particular nations and the practice of citizenship which goes along with this transformation. Jungen (2019) argues that citizenship is not only a legal and bureaucratic tool of exclusion, it is comprised of cultural and social interaction (2019:191).

Although Ahmed, Gin and Nermin moved for different reasons, their migratory experiences are driven by political, social and economical conflicts in their “countries of origin“ and they have the quest for safety in common. Their identification on the basis of their “countries of origin“ shows the limitation of the current concept of “mobility“. The practice of citizenship and the current concept of mobility are intertwined and follow the same principle of exclusion. They do not take into account how the biography of an individual is shaped by social, political and legislative transformations but rather emphasis on the power of the nation state.

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### 2.1. Ahmed

Ahmed lives in Austria since 2015, he entered the country as an artist with a refugee status coming from the West Bank. Ahmed is the only participant in the research with a “stateless status“. His living situation in Austria is shaped by displacement, the quest for safety, belonging as well as artistic and personal development. In his first years in Austria he could establish meaningful social relations and he could develop as an artist by joining different art programs and collaborative projects. Ahmed is an actor and his favourite place of acting is the theatre. His life has changed significantly since December 2019, because

his residence permit was rejected, since then he has had to wait. Like everyone else, he started our conversation with a short introduction about himself

*“Ich komme aus Palästina. Ich bin in Arabien geboren, in Palästina aufgewachsen und meine Oma ist aus Ägypten und ich bin jetzt in Österreich seit sechseinhalb Jahren. Naja, ich kann auch sagen, ich weiß nicht woher komme ich, weil ich finde, ich gehöre zu keinen Ort oder kein Land oder keine Stadt. Ich bin einfach ein Mensch, aber muss man halt manchmal das erklären“* (Ahmed in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 19 February 2022).

For our recording Ahmed wanted to create a cooking situation and he invited me to his apartment. This setting appeared important for him because he defined cooking as a creative way to overcome the period of waiting. He uses to the expression “my lockdown“ to describe his waiting situation since December 2019.

*“Ich habe mein Kochen Hobby entwickelt, während meinem Lockdown. Ich hatte nicht so viel zu tun. Und hab mir gedacht, Kochen interessiert mich sowieso. Ich liebe kochen. By the way, ich bin Schauspieler und ich finde Kochen und Schauspiel oder Kunst sind eine Sache“* (Ahmed).

The combination of cooking and art is connected to creative practices on a daily base, a creation of something that is connected to pleasure, wellbeing, culture and hospitality. Sharing food within a broader art discourse presents also a form of resistance, an act of togetherness or collectivity, which is often used by artists in counter-hegemonic art projects. It brings everyday practice in relation to the governance of daily activities. Sharing the same table creates a space where socioeconomic disparities are likely to disappear for a certain moment. The table appears as a space where people have the same rights while sharing the same food.

Ahmed insisted that the interview should take place while he is cooking in his kitchen. He used this situation to underline that a common ground of understanding is needed to talk about feelings of exclusion. As mentioned before Ahmed’s living reality at the time of the recording was based on waiting without knowing how long this process will take. Ahmed came up with a positive mindset to overcome his position and he underlined the importance of hospitality. Hospitality is connected to the understanding of social life, behaviour and expectations, and it has different approaches in different cultures. It speaks about an attitude towards the “other“ and about the “self“, and Hage (2009) argues that waiting pervades an understanding of values in society. In a broader sense this can be

reflected on the attitude, capacity and ability of a society to welcome others, or to make them feel unwelcome.

Ahmed's living situation does not speak for a welcoming attitude of the society in which he lives, but he created a space for our conversation which was very welcoming. For Ahmed cooking and eating together speaks about his family background, values he grew up with, social and cultural manners that are important to him. It represents personal values connected to culture and he underlined the importance of hospitality, the ability to welcome people in a place that can be called "home". It also carries a sense of resistance, to resist his living reality and to turn waiting into something productive.

Hage posed the question 'who waits for whom' (2009:7) as directly linked to questions of power and class. In our conversation Ahmed emphasised the question of power and pointed out that the bureaucratic system in Austria constantly tries to take control over his personal timeframe where by his own actions may appear powerless.

*"Das ist keine Freiheit. Ich möchte das niemandem ... über dein Leben entscheiden muss oder soll und wie du nicht entscheiden kannst. Jemand hat eine Macht oder Kraft über dich. Oder mehr als dich. (...) Und vielleicht für einige Menschen macht Spaß, Menschen zu kontrollieren oder Menschen zu unterdrücken, weil ihre Egos einfach so? Keine Ahnung" (Ahmed).*

The question who waits for whom underlines a power asymmetry which shapes Ahmed's living reality at the time of the interview. As stated earlier, he carries a "stateless status". He is personally connected to a place, he grew up in the West Bank and his family is still there, but he is politically excluded in many locations due to his status. Glick-Schiller and Levitt raised the important question: "how to rethink society if we do not take national boundaries for granted?" (Glick-Schiller & Levitt 2004:1005). It is important to think around this question, especially when considering the global situation and the exclusion of millions of people due to their stateless status. Why are stateless people stigmatised?

This questions opens a wide field of historical, political and social developments. The human rights framework and the practice of citizenship, which will be discussed later, offers a perspective to look at circumstances of these discriminations.

Ahmed is aware that his "stateless status" does not come with privileges. He has decided to remain in Austria and he is constantly looking for possibilities to overcome the position of displacement. All his efforts to become part of the Austrian system, including the seemingly endless waiting processes, are less problematic than facing the daily problems of a "stateless person". Although we didn't talk much about violence, it does have impact

on his decisions to leave the West Bank. In Austria, he does not let the arbitrary bureaucratic ways of the authorities dissuade him from his desire for security, belonging and artistic development. Hage (2009), by referring to Crapanzano, highlights the expression “passive activity“ to underline that waiting, even when something appears to be out of control, should be looked in regard to the agency of a person. “Crapanzano nicely calls waiting a ,passive activity’, emphasising that it is something we do, though we can also easily see it as ‘active passivity’ for a slightly different but meaningful take on what is the same mode of being in the world (Hage 2009:7)

Sometimes, like in case of Ahmed, waiting is connected to a bigger decision, the decision to remain in a particular place. It is existential and waiting is only a step further in order to achieve his goals. Everyday practices by artists underline their resistant forms of making meaning to situations that are usually perceived as inactive. Ahmed’s cooking situation can be seen as a form of resistance and he pointed out how he links this practice to art with an emphasis on shared experience. Hage argues how situation of waiting can appear “big and small, grand and trivial“ (2009: 8). For Ahmed the situation is big, it is existential.

*“Like everything existential, it is hard to determine with precision, but we might want to convey the fact that for us humans, the very moment of becoming conscious of our existence comes with a question mark: ‘And?’ This is in the sense of ‘So here we are. And now what?’ ‘What’s next?’ This sends us on an endless search for the meaning of life but it also makes us wait for the moment where waiting ends“ (Hage 2009:8).*

In our conversation Ahmed often raised this “big“ questions, because his every day life is put on hold. Ahmed, while waiting, has no right to work, no right to earn money and no access to public social service, which also includes health care. According to Ahmed, in Austria only particular catholic institutions (diaconia) or NGOs like “doctors without borders“ provide people in this very precarious living situation with health service. Which immediately raises the question: How can people survive when they are excluded from basic social rights for an indefinite period of time?

As pointed out by Hage, like everything existential, it is hard to determine with precision and people find ways to manage their struggles. Ahmed uses the period, from December 2019 until recently to establish social and economic relations for a possible future, which also included his participation in the research. Ahmed describes his waiting position as mentioned by Hage as “the end to social chaos and a return to law and order“ (Hage 2009:9). I would rather describe it as a decent living situation, to have access to public social services, including health care, a salary and a self defined accommodation.

Although Ahmed mainly addresses bureaucratic processes, he also mentioned the difficulties to establish meaningful social relations, in particular we talked about love. Ahmed is married, but his marriage is on hold until his living situation changes. When looking at a marriage as a social institution, “anything that operates as a social institution, as an institution in which several subjects together construct shared meanings, construct shared practices, construct shared understandings that enable them to go on“ (Hage 2009:21), waiting can unfold its power in a negative sense. It creates a situation of hope and desire without the chance of realisation due to various reasons. Uncertainty can dominate shared spaces and it makes a common construct of togetherness difficult. This uncertainty is not easy to address and Ahmed mentioned that this issue is very important but also complicated. He puts effort in establishing personal long-lasting relationships but the uncertainty that dominates these relations is hard to overcome. He couldn't find the right words to express the entity of this uncertainty, but he emphasised on the importance to address such issues. In this context he also talked about his family in the West Bank.

*“Ich habe meine Familie seit sechseinhalb Jahren nicht gesehen und bald ist meine Schwester und dann mein Bruder Hochzeit. Und wenn sie sagen, kommst du und dann sag ich ja. Aber ich bin noch immer nicht sicher, ob ich das schaffe. Weil es halt nicht in mein Hand liegt“ (Ahmed).*

In the text “Returning to Palestine. Confinement and Displacement under Israeli Occupation“ (2008) by Tobias Kelly, the author underlines the importance to look at the transformation of places within their territories and how people, when being connected to this territories, experience social, political and economical transformation as relative to time and space. The personal identity is shaped by these transformations and vice versa.

*“For many Palestinians, the ad hoc interventions of the region's states have meant that their presence in any place is always contingent, yet they also face severe restrictions on moving elsewhere. This has produced a situation where displacement and return, absence and presence, movement and confinement are entwined with one another“ (Kelly 2008:26).*

He addresses Ahmed's situation by underlining the political changes and transformations that the region is going through. For many people moving away from the West Bank is obligatory, at the same time it is connected to personal opportunity, national as well as international restrictions on people's movements. Ahmed's travelling experiences started during his drama studies in Ramallah. He traveled every year between 2011 and 2014 to different cities in Europe, mostly cities in the German-speaking world because his study

program was supported by a German foundation. He had the opportunity to improve his language skills, he first expressed himself in English and later learned German. His travelling experiences had awakened his desire to work and live in the German-speaking world, along with the experience of developing one's artistic practice and work. Vienna happened to be a possibility when he had the opportunity to leave the West Bank in 2015. People leaving their region or their "countries of origin" in the means of safety find themselves again looking for security in their new destinations. Kelly underlines how the exclusion of people in the means of survival presents mobility as a "scarce resource" (Kelly 2008:27) and represents inequality among people who are forced to leave their place. Kelly underlines that people's movement is always regulated through bureaucratic and administrative processes within a national context, which can also lead to displacement within a national territory, as it is the case for Ahmed. So the question of remaining in the region or the question of return when living abroad can carry the same problem and disadvantage as mobility may create. Displacement cannot be seen as only in relation to territory, displacement is a personal, political and social process relative to places, that unfolds differently in the experiences of each person. When looking at Ahmed's situation, returning to live in the West Bank, is not mentioned. Although he is in regular contact with his relatives and friends by phone, he is aware that over time this place has transformed. This transformation, based on a long and difficult political conflict, is not coming to an end soon. In the meantime his living reality in Austria has opened new perspectives to look at his future. This new perspective drives his ambition to overcome discriminative practices by governments with the aim to remain in Austria. The ongoing war in Gaza affects Ahmed's living reality in Austria inevitably. He faces challenges, discriminations and stigmatisation which are again changing his living situation and expand his feelings of exclusion no matter of locality. He has left his friends and family in the West Bank many years ago, but he is still attached to the daily struggles related to the place and its people. The entanglement between movement, displacement and confinement represents no fixture based on territory, either here or there the same questions and problems occur. The war in Gaza, its historical and political backgrounds have an impact on the global community and influence people regardless of location.

In the conversation with another participant Gin, aka Animal Bro, the political and social transformation of a particular place is also linked to displacement no matter of locality. The motives and circumstances for Gin are different to the situation of Ahmed, but for both return is not an option and they search for personal and artistic development abroad.

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## 2.2. Gin

Gin is a visual artist, a writer and a transgender person. Gin uses the pro-noms they/them. They grew up in former Yugoslavia and experienced the war in the 90s. Gin moved to Vienna just before the pandemic, at the end 2019. In the beginning of our conversation Gin shortly introduced themselves.

*“I was born in Belgrade in 1982. So, when I was a kid war in former Yugoslavia started and it was very bloody and lasted long. Once everything was over, everything that has been and all the values that I've been brought up, were like non existing anymore. So that not only there was a lot of violence and there were very bad economical changes. Many people had to leave this area, but also this cultural shift was so traumatic because values of the society have changed. So it's sort of place ... the place where I'm coming from is nonexistent anymore.”* (Gin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 6 March 2022).

Gin makes meaning to Kelly's argument about displacement in relation to the transformation of places through personal experience. Gin defines their birthplace without connecting it to nationality, but to time. This form of self-description places one's own history in the context of political and/or historical events. Gin carries a Serbian citizenship, but it is not necessarily connected to the question of belonging. Far more important seems to be the question of gender, but this cannot be excluded from the boundaries and meaning of citizenship. As mentioned by Gin, war in former Yugoslavia has led to a social reconstruction of the region along with processes of social inclusion/exclusion and new practices of citizenship. This transformation of a society, with consideration new national categories that emerged from the war, can be driving forces for migration. The question "do you want to belong or not" is imposed by a new society and their new value system. Dealing with this question is not a choice, but an unavoidable fact when considering that it was raised by a situation of war. In my conversation with Gin, the question of moving away from Serbia was mentioned as a given situation, as important and not to be questioned. Gin's first big move took place when the war in former Yugoslavia was over and the new social order had taken its course. "In my late twenties I moved to Australia. It wasn't my choice, but it was an opportunity that at that time looked good" (Gin). Gin didn't mention much about the impact of violence they experienced on personal level due to their gender and/or as a motive to move away from Serbia, but Gin underlined the fact that their movement is not a free choice. Kelly (2008) argues that class, race and

gender are important reasons for people's movements. "Transnational movements of capital and military power have forced many people to move in order to find work or security, yet the same people also face serious problems when they attempt to cross borders" (Kelly 2008:38).

The problem of migrating to Australia was not necessarily a topic in our first conversation, although Gin mentioned some difficulties and highlighted that this was their first experience in migration and it was rough. They mentioned that they hold two citizenships, a Serbian and an Australian. Their migration to Austria can be seen as the second big move. I asked Gin "How does it feel to be back in Europe?"

*"It's strange first, impressions were like... this is very, very familiar, but in the same time not. Because I haven't been to Europe very long time, like for a decade, basically I visited once. And so it was very, very unusual experience because I'm not the same person... with very, very different perspective. But this is much more familiar of course. And the variety, the diversity that Vienna especially provides is something that I can totally live with. It's sort of a thing that makes me feel comfortable. And also that there are always this constant cultural exchanges..." (Gin).*

Gin underlined their personal transformation, the shift of perspective connected to movements and how these movements shaped their identity. The familiarity with Vienna is linked to previous experiences in Europe, but Gin emphasises on the personal transformation that becomes more tangible to oneself through similarities in the environment.

As mentioned before, Gin is a transgender person. The personal transformation process, the transition from female to male, requires a safe space in order to take place. The question of safety can be looked closer through legal frameworks within a country and how legal frameworks are implemented in a society. Gin did not mention an explicit explanation for moving to Vienna beside feelings of familiarity, but they mentioned that Serbia was not an option. This can be connected to the complexity of moving back to a place that they have already left for a reason, like in the case of Ahmed, returning may carry the same problem as mobility creates.

*"What can I say about migration? There are so many things to say ... people are usually forced to move so that's not good. But it seems that once we are not attached to this identity that we have when we live in one place, it also liberates us from some conditions. Because in a sense ... say we have a very supportive community or we*

*live in a country where we're born in, everything is fine. We are supported, but in a way also it can be shifting, because often a society doesn't allow us to expand or be free. It can be restrictive as well. So once we don't have this, we are liberated. We don't have some kind of support, but we also are liberated from some expectations“ (Gin).*

Gin's emphasis on liberation through movement can be linked to the personal developments many migrants experience when living abroad. There are different reasons why people have to return or decide to continue their journeys, in either way the personal transformation process relocates an individual within a new location. For Gin the leading motive for migration is connected to their transition from female to male through gender-affirming surgery which Gin defines as a form of liberation. Transgender rights are embedded within national rights as already stated. It is important to look at these regulations within national regulations in order to engage with discriminations as well as to do something against these discriminations.

I am using data provided by the research of "Public opinion of Transgender Right in Serbia (2021)" by Winston Luhur, Ivana Krstic and Ari Shaw as a lens into Serbian society. Gin is critical towards the embedding of transgender rights within national regulations and they stress that no nation is safe for transgender people.

The authors of the research refer to the report "Global Attitudes Toward Transgender People" by Ipsos (2017), which involves 27 countries as an approach to build an analytical frame around transgender rights globally. The global report was published January 2018 with the aim to create better understanding and protection for transgender people globally (Ipsos). The authors focus on social aspect by measuring attitudes, public opinions and relations within particular national contexts. They make comparisons with other countries in order to present measurable values analytically on the basis of these comparisons. This embedding appears problematic, because it can reproduce generalisation about stereotypes, hierarchies and assumptions. The aim of the report is to analyze data and "to provide new information on attitudes towards transgender people and their rights and status in Serbian society" (2021:1). The report underlines different aspects and in particular legislative changes. It further highlights the adaptation of the first comprehensive anti-discrimination law in Serbia in March 2019, that explicitly mentions sexual orientation and gender identity, in order to underline the presence of stronger values of equality in Serbian society. Nevertheless different forms of violence are a major topic of concern due to

*“numerous challenges in the application of the laws, such as lack of information in terms of access to rights, inconsistent practice by state authorities, misinformation provided by health professionals, or lack of processes in health institutions that affirm one’s gender identity. Transgender people also face stigma, prejudice and discrimination, violence, hate speech, and hate crimes. Under the Criminal Code, violence based on gender identity constitutes aggravating circumstances“ (2021:1).*

Structural and direct violence against transgender identities is happening along with prejudice and discriminations on a daily base, as also critically mentioned by Gin. Stigmatisation of transgender people shows the ambivalences of the theoretical framework of laws in relation to their actual practice. Gin spoke about their experiences in Serbian society by emphasising on local knowledge. They critically pointed out that any national reports lead to general assumptions of a particular nation, which can appear different in the experience of an individual. For Gin living in Serbia as a transgender person, although considered to be dangerous, was manageable. They spoke about the knowledge of social codes, values, wordings and attitudes in difficult situations and their ability to react in such situations in order to avoid or to overcome discriminations on a daily base. At a new location, this knowledge must be acquired and it takes time. For Gin the problem is not first hand the implementations of laws in any society, the problems appears with the ability to decode social norms in a new society. The timeframe of knowledge production is always important because it drives feelings of exclusion and experiences of discrimination.

The Serbian report further points out a generation difference, where “participants ages 16 to 34 were significantly less likely than those ages 50 to 64 to agree to supportive statements toward transgender persons“ (2021:11). This leads to an assumption that a future trend of a younger generation in Serbia favours traditional gender identities and roles. This traditional roles can be looked through questions of marriage and parental rights. In Serbia, according to Serbian law, same sex marriage is prohibited. Laws that regulate the social life of people and in particular of transgender people through legislative regulations are important to be addressed not only in relation to self-identification, but also in regard to shared spaces and values among people. Gin is married, they entered Austria on a “family member visa“, and the couple wants to continue their journey together. According to the Austrian law ([österreich.gv.at](https://www.oe-gov.at)) same sex marriage or partnership is legal since 1 January 2019. The application of the law is connected to a “country of origin“, the nationality of the partners, including cross-border partnerships, and their passports or multiple citizenships ([österreich.gv.at](https://www.oe-gov.at)). Although this law gives the couple the opportunity

to remain married, they have to go through a process of (self-) identification based on the regulations of Austrian authorities. The practice of citizenship becomes visible in the application process, because the legal inclusion does not consider social exclusion that drives feelings of stigmatisation.

Gin stressed about the limitation of national frameworks because it is disconnected to their living realities, a central critical point addressed by many counter-hegemonic art communities in their discourses. Queer and transgender artists are leading positions in these discourses, they address social exclusion in relation to the reality of a person and they make meaning to the questions of identification as connected to “ways of belonging“. Gin, when talking about Vienna, points out that diversity is visible in public spaces in the city. Their way of perceiving the city speaks about their previous experience in Australia and also about expectations about the current location. This perspective is very personal, it cannot lead to any general assumption about Austria, Australia or Serbia, but through visibility in public spaces a possible attitude of the society can create expectations for migrants. In our first conversation Gin was very optimistic about Vienna, over time their perception of the city changed as they were able to develop a deeper understanding of society and social exclusion became noticeable.

Visibility in public spaces speaks about active communities in the city and it drives possibilities to find like-minded people and to counteract discriminations and stigmatisation. Gin’s optimistic emphasis on visibility and diversity in Vienna is a way to look at the city as a space that tackles boundaries and creates possibilities to participate in discourses of change through art.

Schiappa (2022) points out that the transgender movement has a long history, but “the visibility and salience of transgender issues has increased dramatically in the 21st century (Billard 2019, 165)“ (2022:1). He situated the actual debate on visibility relative to the definition of sex and gender. He mentions two opposed ways of looking at gender and sex which are politicized, the “*biological determinists*“ argue that biological sex determines one’s gender, and the *autonomous nominalists* who define gender/sex through “self-identification“ and independent of biology (Schiappa 2022:2). Schiappa’s two ways of looking at sex/gender, although presented as binaries, addresses important topics in the context of in/visibility of transgender people because the gender debate is driven by question of recognition in public spaces. Gin underlines that these debates are very vivid in their communities, they look at visibility in public space as an aspect to define to which extend a society creates spaces for particular social values. They see transgender rights

as a global issue because it speaks about the reformulation of the human body on the global scale, not through singular national entities. They argue that the reformulation of the concept of society cannot happen within a limited territory, the ambition is much bigger. The question, which country is “safer“ and which country is more “transphobic“, does not seem to be an appropriate question. This way of looking at transgender rights conceals the actual ambition of transgender people to self-identify with sex and gender according to their personal understanding and to provide a framework of rights for everyone no matter of locality. Gin stresses that any national context presents pros and cons for transgender people on the move, but this also shifts the actual transgender agenda into comparison of nation states instead of claiming the reformulation of the human body, which is the central approach.

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### **2.3. Ahmed & Gin in reflection**

Ahmed and Gin are in very different positions. Their stories carry strong personal narratives and should be looked at individually. By bringing them together, bureaucratic difficulties through national frameworks become visible along with the quest for safety and the search for personal development. Glick-Schiller & N.B. Salazar argue that “the study of mobility can obliterate the understanding that movement and interconnection are fundamental to the human condition - past, present and future“ (2013:186).

Ahmed and Gin are conscious travellers, they have made decisions to move from one place to the other, although for different reasons, they look at movement as a fundamental right. Especially in the statement by Gin, the liberating process involved in the context of mobility and migration outlines the possibility for personal development. The direction of movement is not necessarily a free choice, it is connected to opportunities that open up while considering personal questions and experiences. In the case of Ahmed, it is connected to his studies that created his path. Gin didn't talk about their opportunities and choices of traveling in our first conversation. Later Gin told me that Australia was the only option they got in terms of visa at that time. When they moved to Australia, European countries of their choice did not allow them to enter with a working permit or would not give them a legal status. So their choice of moving back to Europe is connected to the first travel when they were rejected. Austria can be looked at as another opportunity and living in a German speaking country with limited language skills can be challenging. It can be connected to the statement by Seyran, migrants sometimes don't consider how language

skills can lead to disadvantages in a new society. It appears relevant once people have to deal with local issues and especially with bureaucratic regulations. This was mentioned by Gin because the gender-affirming surgery involves many legal, medical and psychological processes.

Gin and Ahmed emphasised on their priorities in life as driving forces to remain in Austria. For Gin the personal transformation process is prior to any national context, although language skills and knowledge of social values in a new location are important and sometimes challenging, the legal framework for transgender people in Austria provides possibilities for Gin to develop. For Ahmed the priority to overcome his permanent situation of displacement due to his stateless status is a driving force to remain in Austria. Although he was put in a waiting position for many years, he was constantly looking for possibilities to perform, even without payment, and to build new social relations. Finally, after three years of waiting in November 2022 Ahmed received a legal status in Austria. It is called "Bleiberecht", the right to remain in the country for one year. He was able to find a job, an apartment and generally to have a decent living situation. In November 2023 the process of renewing his visa started again.

Gin and Ahmed pointed out the importance of time relative to power. For Ahmed, at the time of our first conversation, this was linked to his waiting position and his feeling of not being able to determine time by himself which he expresses as a feeling of powerlessness. Gin reflected on the historical conditions that led to the transformation of their "country of origin" and how this transformation impacted their further movements. This very broad perspective on time, a historical lens to look at social transformations within a particular national context, can also be linked to the situation of Ahmed. His living reality is currently changing due to the ongoing war in Gaza and the entire region, the outcome is unpredictable. Gin and Ahmed question the idea of a "country of origin", for them political and social transformation of particular regions, in particular through situations of war, have shaped or are currently shaping their relation to place. These transformations have impact on their identities and they underline how political conflicts form the relation of people to place. Both underline that the idea of a "country of origin", a place that is called "home" does not exist in their realities, it drives feelings of exclusion no matter of locality because they identify beyond national categories.

Displacement has to be framed as a process in which the negotiation of social, cultural and political circumstances must be constantly redefined. All artists in the research question national belonging and the legal structures that are embedded in. In the next

section, through the narration of one participant the problem and feelings that drive exclusion are expressed very emotional. It makes visible how much bureaucratic processes affect the daily situation of a person and how it shapes the relation to the place.

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## 2.4. Overcoming visa barriers

My conversation with Nermin, another participating artist in the research, was shaped by his anger with Austrian governmental institutions because at the time of the recording he had to renew his visa. And like all other artists, Nermin first introduced himself.

*“I usually make photographic works about my identities, because I am an immigrant, I am Kurdish, I am queer person and I am person of colour. And I usually work with these issues and make my identities more visible. And in my artistic work, I am creating a space for my identity or for other people like me“ (Nermin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 4 March 2022).*

His self description speaks about his approach to art related to his identities. He underlines the importance to work collectively, to built alliances through artistic practice and to create visibility through photography. He also emphasises on space, the creation of spaces where discriminations on the basis of identities are non existent. An explicit example of his work is presented in the last chapter. At the time of the recording his anger with the magistrate's department for migration and citizenship (in short MA35) was very dominant. He was stressed when arriving for the interview, so I asked him what had happened?

*N: That's a hard question. So I have to apply to my resident permit in Austria next week, but there are a lot of stress and this stress is just traumatizing me because I have to make a lot of documents ready for them. And, you know the MA35, they are like a kind of really racist institute in Austria because we all know of people's story from them. So I'm really dealing with this documents right now and I have to work full time. (...) It takes my energy, it takes my time, it takes my mind. It's really a hard process for immigrant artists to deal with this issue or every immigrant in this country, because you always have to be strong.*

*D: It affects your creativity and your art as well.*

*N: Sure. Because I don't feel in power of myself. I cannot do anything because this stress affects me so much and everything depends on it because your life depends on it. You are here, you are working, you are living and this is everything*

*about your life. It's a big issue for your life. And of course, I mean if you cannot have this resident permit, then you have to go back to Turkey where you came from or whatever. (Nermin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 4 March 2022)*

Our conversation took place on 4 March 2022 and Nermin was not feeling very comfortable. Although it is not the first time going through this process, he is based in Vienna since 2017, every time he has to renew his visa, he raises existential questions. For Nermin it is always connected to the question of living or leaving Austria, it affects his feelings to the city as he defines it as a love/hate relationship.

*“And after five years, sometimes when I'm outside, when I'm traveling somewhere, I feel like I used to live here and it's becoming home because I have a life here. So because I have friends here and I have a lot of connection here. And this is what makes you feel home because you are creating a life here and you are starting to feel safe in your community, in your circle. That's why I love to walk in this city. Actually I love the city. I quite love the city. I would say, I think the city is beautiful, but the problem is the people. I will love more the city than the people. I mean Vienna is nice. It is looking fancy somehow and maybe a quite white city as well, because you know, it's Vienna, but I love the feeling walking on the streets in the city. And I love to see that some arts are happening in the streets or where you go to, when you go to somewhere else, you can see something about art, you know, and this makes you feel, I would say more beautiful or nice“ (Nermin).*

Through these expressions his connection to the city and its people becomes visible along with a feeling of uncertainty. Nermin several times pointed out that he wants to remain in Vienna, but it does not depend on him but rather on what others will decide for him. We met again a few month after our first conversation and Nermin still worried about his permit because it had not been renewed by then. Six months had passed and still no feedback. Gin experienced a similar situation, although with different living conditions, they also did not get any feedback on their visa application within six month. Gin contacted a lawyer privately who got in touch with the MA35 by sending an official letter. Within a few days they got a visa renewal and Gin shared their experience with Nermin. Nermin became a member of “Austria for beginners“, a “Vienna-based non-profit organization which fosters integration by making the Austrian legal system understandable and accessible for expats and their families“ (<https://www.austria4beginners.at/>), in order to have access to legal consultation. Within a few weeks after “Austria for beginners“ wrote an official letter to MA35, Nermin got his visa renewal.

By researching the visa regulations in Austria through the stories of the participating artists certain situations overlap. The visa application process, in particular the renewal process, requires maximum six month. Within this timeframe, and with respect that each living situation is different, the communication with the magistrate's department for migration and citizenship (MA35) is inaccessible. People have to spend hours in telephone waiting loops to get in touch with a person working for the MA35. And when they finally reach someone, the conversation cannot take place in English and the person at the other line cannot give any useful information on individual cases. This process continues until the end of the sixth month, after the person either gets a response, or nothing happens. In the case of Gin and Nermin, nothing happened and they had to take legal steps. For Ahmed, the situation is even more complicated due to his stateless status and I could not find an organization explicitly helping stateless people to overcome visa regulations.

During my research on visa regulations, it became clear that the wording is difficult to understand, it needs to be decoded and access to information is fraught with obstacles. Thinking again with Hage and how power relations are embedded in processes of waiting, time appears as a structural barrier in bureaucratic process and it differentiates individuals on the basis of their citizenships.

Hage (2009) uses the expressions "waiting for" and "waiting on" to describe social relations embedded in time. "The present is merely a 'waiting room', disembedded from what may have brought us to this place and what will take us out of this place. There, we merely wait for the waiting to end" (Hage 2009:53aa).

The artists in the research address waiting with reference to uncertainty. They are not in control of any given timeframe, their daily lives and their social relations are subject to miscommunication, no access to proper information and the whims of others. The present appears for some as a waiting room or is shaped by major global events that individuals have no control over. In the case of Nermin, his living situation connected to the uncertainty of staying or leaving Austria shapes his attitude towards the Austrian society and the city where he lives. Social relations which unfold in these situations are hard to determine, they are emotional, very personal and constantly shifting. Bureaucratic processes shape these emotions and the fact that individuals, like in the case of Nermin or Gin, need legal steps to overcome these processes should be looked as discriminative. The NGO "Austria for Beginners" responds to the increasing demand of international artists and cultural workers to provide information in order to overcome these bureaucratic processes. It underlines the highly mobile lifestyles of artists and cultural workers, the difficulties to deal with national regulations as well as how barriers and exclusions are

embedded in national structures to make information inaccessible and misleading. In this sense, waiting is one of the biggest structural obstacles for migrant artists created by national policies, their practice of citizenship and the maintenance through institutions.

Citizenship regulates movement and participation, claiming rights when being on the move is an important mean to participation. Marina pointed out that she is concerned about her Russian passport. For her, the “Russian status“ does not come with privilege, it rather shows how political conflicts have big impact on her live and how she is perceived in societies. Marina has chosen Mexico as her next destination, she never outlined her decision as being politically motivated, she rather connected it to possibilities and personal relations that are important to her. Marina holds a US citizenship next to her Russian citizenship. When traveling she chooses which citizenship is more useful in terms of her movements. Gin also holds two citizenships, a Serbian and an Australian. Similar to Marina’ situation, Gin chooses which nationality is to be used to create a better situation for themselves while living in Austria. Gin underlines that having two citizenships can be beneficial for the holder but at the same time authorities can also make choices when a person holds two citizenships. It appears like a game of choice in the process of visa application or renewal. Both, Marina and Gin, do not identify with their citizenships, but rather make a clear distinction between privileged wealthy states and other nations. Seyran pointed out that she never associated her Turkish citizenship to privilege. As previously mentioned, Seyran detached her identity from her citizenship and nationality while still living in Turkey. The awareness of power structures related to the concept of citizenship and its boundaries is addressed by all artists in the research in one way or another. At the end of our conversation Nermin made an emotional statement about power relations based on citizenships and what “mobility“ stands for.

*“It shows the power of white people. It shows our power of passport. It shows power of white colonialism. It shows everything. And these countries that are destroyed by the white people. And when people tried to come here and they're dealing with this racism, even across the border, even when you are living in here, you are still dealing with this racism because it's everywhere“ (Nermin).*

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## 2.5. Human rights or the right to have a right

Citizenship is a key element in the definition of a nation state and its social, political and economical boundaries. Furthermore, it is essential in the means of mobility. “There is no doubt that the new intensity of struggles over citizenship is associated with global movements and flows of capital, labour and people. (...) What is important is not only that citizenship is a legal status but that it also involves practices of making citizens – social, political, cultural and symbolic“ (Isin 2008:16aa). Ahmed spoke about his situation of waiting and his feeling of being excluded from the society by questioning the expression “illegal“.

*“Aber was bedeutet illegal? Das ist verrückt. Illegal? Das ist die Erde. Das gehört uns allen. Wir müssen alle da leben. Wir müssen alle da arbeiten dürfen. Und ich verstehe nicht, was bedeutet illegal? Weil ich kein Stück Papier habe, das mich legal macht. Das ist lächerlich“ (Ahmed).*

Ahmed raises awareness about the division between citizen and migrant. A citizen is endowed with rights and responsibilities, from which migrants or non-citizens are excluded. The mechanism of inclusion/exclusion in the context of mobility is directly related to personhood, further the question are you a citizen of the “Global South“ or the “Global North“ appears as another layer of exclusion. By trying to dismantle these categories, they appear as a superior set of rules that regulate the entire framework of mobility.

Several times Ahmed referred to the human rights framework, in particular for stateless people to be able to claim rights in national contexts. I am looking at Gündogdu’s approach (2015) to human rights, an analytical framework based on Hannah Arendt’s critical approach to human rights, to contextualize Ahmed’s question. Gündogdu underlines the timeframe, after World War II, that was significant to the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). “At the time, the declaration was mainly aspirational, as it aimed to raise awareness of human rights without providing any institutional mechanisms of enforcement.“(Gündogdu 2015:7) Gündogdu gives a short overview of the development of the UDHR by focusing on Arendt’s criticism to include all members of society, in particular stateless people. To be noted that Hannah Arendt was considered as “stateless“ at the time of the implementation of the declaration and her criticism reflected her position at a particular time within particular global configurations. Gündogdu shows that the transformation of human rights from a “state-centric international

law“ to a “matters of international concern” is an important step to increase its power from local to global to so-called “universal“. “Human rights concerns started to occupy a prominent place in the agendas of non-governmental organizations“ and its institutions (Gündogdu 2015:7). The institutionalization of human rights along with necessary law improvements led to a set of transformations, in particular the rights for asylum seekers and refugees to stand before the courts and make rights claims that were formally associated only with citizenship. Although this improvement was necessary, it also created new categories to exclusion. Arendt’s criticism was based at the very beginning of the declaration, she argued that it presented itself with a “lack to reality“. I argue that the core of her thoughts are evident in the lives of many migrants, stateless people, refugees and asylum seekers until today.

*“She (Arendt) used the term “stateless” to refer to not only those who formally lost their nationality but also those who could no longer benefit from their citizenship rights: refugees, asylum seekers, economic immigrants, even naturalized citizens who faced the threat of denaturalization in times of emergency“ (Gündogdu 2015:2).*

The expansion from “stateless“ people to all people on the move shows the current “lack to reality“ and underlines the argument that states remained the “biggest guarantors and violators of human rights“ (Gündogdu 2015:8). Similar to Gündogdu (2015), Goodale (2022) gives great importance to the historical conjuncture that lead to the implementation of the UHRD in 1947. He highlights particular discourses that were central to the distinction between theory and practice, where Arendt’s critical approach can also be situated. Goodale highlights the power relations, political as well as economical conditions that were key factors to the conjuncture. He also points to the importance of the UNESCO Human Rights survey, critical views on the declaration, but it was never adequately reflected (Goodale 2022:19aa). Important criticism towards the declaration was brought up by various scholars worldwide to show how the framework of human rights even at the time of their implementation were already connected to political and economical inequalities and how the UDHR reflected global power discourses, in particular “a continuation of Western imperialism“ (Goodale 2022:10). “The critical problem for any reformulated account of human rights is that despite the many variations, nationalism, at its core, relies on a hard and fast ideology of difference“ (2022:12). By pointing out the relationship between state sovereignty and the international human rights framework, Goodale makes the difference between theory and practice visible. He underlines how state sovereignty is connected to political economy, driven by global capitalism and

opposed to global justice. He argues, with reference to Samuel Moyn, “the greatest threat in the world today is the explosion of global economic inequality, a threat for which conventional human rights provides only weak and ultimately insufficient answers“ (2022:12).

Gündogdu’s approach to human rights is analytical, whereby Goodale builds his arguments on the reinvention of human rights empirical. The historical entanglement between political economy and social injustice is one of the leading argument throughout his book “the reinvention of human rights“ (2022). He situates the historical and current condition of human rights, a framework of inclusion and exclusion, as a basic problem that creates the core aim for its reinvention. He argues “human rights as the most important global framework for justice-seeking at all levels“ (Goodale 2022:3). In order to make the framework appropriate in the means of justice, it should be deconstructed from its national, political, cultural and economical structures. The UDHR claims to be universal, but this cannot be justifies when looking closely at its structure through arguments by Goodale. He critically states “universality itself should be abandoned“ (2022:7) and replaced with translocality, and translocality on the social level, structures by ethical principles, requires “thinking and feeling beyond the nation. (2022:17). “...as a logic of translocal collective action, a reinvented human rights must be developed in such a way that it remains noncolonial at its very core (2022:95). He underlines the decolonial view in order to liberate human rights from Western imperialism and examines the question of cultural diversity with reference to the role of the UNESCO.

Throughout my research, the search for a "justice-seeking framework" that would enable international artists to claim rights at the national level was raised by some participants. In the age of globalization where people constantly travel for different reasons, forced or by choice, locality needs to be addressed multi-sided. I agree with Goodale, although it seems to be a very ambitious task, that the human rights framework should be liberated from its national, economical and cultural boundaries in order to be relevant in the means of justice. Ahmed, while waiting, wanted his voice to be heard and to be recognised against his political status of being “right-less“ and he referred to human rights. He wants his actions to be recognised, to have a right to participate in society and to be recognised as an active member. Although the human rights framework gives him the possibility to claim rights on the international level, the Austrian government holds control over his daily activities. In the chapter on waiting this very situation becomes visible because it shows processes of negotiation between oneself and others as well as that time or given timeframes are structural obstacles that lead to feelings of exclusion.

Goodale's ethnographic approach visualizes the problem of theory and practice. "The existing international human rights system is built on and through nation-states, its genetic makeup is both institutionalist and bureaucratic. What this means is that the underlying moral or normative bases of human rights become completely obscured and even transformed in practice" (2022:43). He points out three major problems as related to questions of sovereignty. "State human rights bureaucracies organize and manage human rights implementation and reporting at the subnational and national levels" (2022:43) and their bureaucracies are often presented as opposites to the UN's human rights agencies. The international human right framework, where states hold priority in all matters, converts into "another logic of state governance, one, moreover, that is most often utterly marginal in relation to others" (2022:44). The second problem presents the "state-centric" structure of the existing human rights system. States are responsible for the wellbeing of their "citizens" as well as for violence against their population. The "structural conflict of interest" (Goodale 2022) between national interest and international systems addresses directly the question of sovereignty. According to international law, state sovereignty must be independent in order to govern its population within a particular territory. The fact that states cannot be seen as equally powerful allows power imbalances and violence to be legitimized, contradictory through the enforcement of human rights. The third problem in practice shows that the state-centricity embedded in the UHRD is structured through "the whims of internal state politics" (2022:44).

*"The human rights of people within the existing international system are fundamentally limited by the often-violent caprices of national politics and the domestic histories of discrimination that national politics can embody" (2022:45).*

All these problems are interconnected and intertwined, one structure leads to another set of problems, and at its core the national lens that governs the UDHR. Goodale's approach to translocality tackles the question of sovereignty as a means to reinvent human rights. Any discrimination against a human being cannot be legitimized through national structures and/or political whims. It can neither be justified within a particular territory nor outside the territory, because at its core it is not territorial and non colonial.

*"In making the argument that human rights universalism must be replaced by human rights pluralism as the foundation for a reinvented human rights, it is important to be quite clear about the ways in which cultural difference has been politicized, manipulated, and wielded as a weapon of exclusion and violence" (Goodale 2022:116).*

Goodale emphasises that “pluralism“ is created by a framework that is dynamic, emergent, and ecumenical (2022:119). By replacing universalism with pluralism and embedding the framework of human rights in the transnational social field, the reinvention of human rights should respond to questions of belonging not based on difference, such as national, class, racial, religious, and so on, but rather on social interconnections which are the principles of translocality (2022:8). The translocality lens tackles existing power relations and structures of national, international and supranational governance as already stated.

*“reinvented human rights represents a different way of belonging, a different logic through which cultural difference becomes a generative resource for creatively responding to problems that are also translocal. Instead of the grand synthesis of universal human rights, human rights pluralism points to a much more diffused framework of alliance and attachment, one that is dynamic, emergent, and ecumenical.”* (2022:119)

Goodale argues that cultural difference is embedded in the framework of the UHRD. The claim to be “a universal right“ is again attached to the historical conditions that led to its implementation. Goodale critically writes about these conditions and points out that “universal/universality“ was already at that time connected to questions of geopolitical power and exclusion (Goodale 2022:104aa). In this context, he addresses the UNESCO human rights survey several times and points out authors who critically engaged with the framework but their ideas, criticisms and perspectives were not considered. They often addresses the colonial legacy, geopolitical power constellations, meaning making through institutions and the actual practice of the declaration. As their words remained unheard, the UHRD was defined by those in power through their wording, their understanding of culture and history. The fact that the UHRD remained colonial and national at its core created the path for the UHRD to develop. The claim to be “universal“ occupies a dominant sphere in public discourses because it legitimizes cultural difference through cultural hierarchies. “Pluralism“ for Goodale, as opposed to the idea of cultural difference in “universalism“, should unfold new ways of belonging.

*“I envision a reinvented human rights to propose a new way of belonging, one that does not merely replace one un-lived abstraction with another, for example, the idea that pluralism can only constitute the basis for social and political community if it is structured by something like a Rawlsian “overlapping consensus.” Instead, human rights should become a well-traveled relational bridge, one that is built with materials that cannot be specified a priori. Rather, in mediating the fraught passage between*

*existing differences and the call to collective action beyond these differences, human rights should provide the means through which our “pluriversal” realities are given both emancipatory and unifying form” (Goodale 2022:103).*

It appears difficult to imagine a “well-traveled relational bridge“, but the fact that the existing frame is not functional due to its static character becomes clear as well as that new structures should respond to “ways of belonging“ opposed to cultural difference in “universalism“.

The UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, addresses cultural difference as one of their main tasks in their agenda. Goodale points out the implementation of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UDCD) in 2001, but he also underlines that it played almost no role in the relation between international or national law (2022:109). The UDCD added another layer of meaning into a given structure without changing the pillars. By pointing out the role of the UNESCO, Goodale visualizes their field of action until today. In short, I describe the UNESCO as a powerful position to represent particular international cultural values without the power to create change in the means of global justice. The organization is embedded in national structures, they are under the authority of single nation states and also funded by the governments where they are situated. Their possibility to promote global values in the context of education, science and culture responds to their embedding. Their actions, as mainly being policy makers, also underlines how theory and practice coexist because their efforts to justice often remain unheard and unseen. The UNESCO, in particular the department for *diversity of cultural expression*, has implemented policies that are presented as justice-seeking and carry a “universal“ character. Their definition on “artists freedom“ states

*“Artistic freedom is the freedom to imagine, create and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of governmental censorship, political interference or the pressures of non-state actors. It includes the right of all citizens to have access to these works and is essential for the wellbeing of societies“ (UNESCO).*

The UNESCO underlines that the “artistic freedom can only be guaranteed if production, distribution and participation are freely possible - this also includes the social and economic protection of art and cultural actors“ (UNESCO). How can their broad definition on artistic freedom address artists equally?

When relating the definition of artistic freedom to arguments by Goodale, it follows similar principles like the UHRD and its limitations. The UNESCO is an intergovernmental

organization, they work on the international level, but they are subordinate to national law. The definition is embedded in these structures, it claims to be “universal” and at the same time it speaks of a perspective on locality based on nationality. In this context the term “citizen” can be reflected through arguments by Arendt, because it does not reflect on the realities of citizens “who no longer benefit from their citizenship rights” (Gündogdu 2015:2). Artists, who are forced to leave a place or move by choice often experience a process of degradation when moving from one place to another. This process is directly linked to their personhood as well as to their citizenship rights or stateless status. It further underlines the global economic inequality that is embedded in practices of citizenship, where production, distribution and participation is driven by economic means. The definition of artistic freedom and its “universal” claim does not reflect on the transnational realities of artists on the move and their multiple ways of belonging as well as it does not adequately respond to their challenges while being on the move. The highly mobile lifestyle of artists, in globalization driven by the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion, requires “thinking and feeling beyond the nation” (Goodale 2022:17). An intergovernmental organization, due to the structural embedding, cannot provide these requirements. Artists with migratory background cannot participate in the meaning-making of policies, because bureaucratic processes involved in policy making does not allow their voices to have impact. The expression to “distribute cultural expression free of political interference” can possibly mean that artists can raise critical statements through their creations, also when not being in line with their governments, and share their standpoints openly. In reality, these voices often remain unheard because the economic and political relations of states regulate in/visibility of critical voices. The distribution of creations, a possible way to have impact on public discourses, must be free of national belonging, territorial thinking and economical asymmetries in order to allow cultural expression to circulate free of political interference and as a means to the freedom of expression. One possible way forward is to free the definition of “artistic freedom” from its embedding in an intergovernmental organization, so that artistic freedom can be led by artists and not by institutions and their bureaucracy. Goodale raises the question how “human” is defined in the UHRD. If human rights are meant to involve “all members of the human family” (2022:7), who is the subject of this family? He critically states “yet as it turned out, the “human” in human rights proved to be as, or more, problematic in practice than the category of rights. Normatively, in one form or another, turns out to be universal, but humans are not; indeed, quite the contrary” (2022:123). He outlines his approach to think around “the subject of the human family” through his ethnographic research.

I am thinking with Gin and the perspective on transgender identities. As mentioned earlier, Schiappa (2022) points out two ways of looking at gender and sex, the “biological determinists” and the “autonomous nominalists”. The distinction of these two “categories of human beings” and the discourses, driven by politicised power relations, underlines first of all the importance of the debate about the definition of “human”. Further it shows how these debates are driven by political processes, which frame the question of the human being along with questions of national belonging and cultural difference. As often stated by Gin, transgender identities and the quest for safety cannot be framed through national belonging and/or the understanding of cultural difference. At the heart of the “human category” debate, which Goodale identifies as a core problem of the human rights framework, the national and colonial view on gender present the actual threat for transgender people. The reason why queer and transgender artists are leading the counter-hegemonic discourses is connected to their questions, concerns and discriminations they face in everyday life and the ways they approach these problems. They raise existential concerns connected to the question “who is the subject of the human family”, to underline the limitations of any framework that addresses human beings.

Goodale emphasis on the reinvention of human rights is a highly ambitious task and I argue that the same task is needed in the context of artistic freedom. When addressing the question “who is subject to the artistic family” to the definition of artistic freedom, the same problems and limitations occur like in the human rights framework. As written, the reality of contemporary artists is based on their movements, their multiple interconnections and multiple identities. Any definition that is meant to address the “artist family” - with this expression I am including all members of the cultural world - must respond to their transnational embedding. I agree with Goodale that global frameworks in the means of justice are important, and artistic freedom at its core is very important. It is essential for artists as well as the wellbeing of societies. The definition of artistic freedom cannot be looked as unnecessary nor its aim should be underestimated. I argue, inspired by Goodale, that the structural embedding of the definition needs to be deconstructed from its national, political, economical and cultural limitations in order to include all members of the “artist family”. Goodale starts his book with a reference to the well known artist Ai Weiwei and his criticism towards the current concept of humanity, in particular Ai Weiwei saying that “we don’t really love life enough” (2022:1). Ai Weiwei is one of the leading artists in the contemporary arts, he addresses the connection between human rights and the freedom of expression through his work and his activism constantly. Ai Weiwei is a well-represented

and respected person in public discourses, his voice is important as representative for many artists whose voices remain unheard because through his visibility and his publicity he creates awareness. His political and artistic activities are intertwined, and his living situation - living in exile most of his life - shows that the connection between im/mobility and arts has always been a major field in art practice. Goodale, by using Ai Weiwei's quote as an entrance to his book, shows a connection between the human rights framework and the arts. I am highlighting this aspect because it supports my argument that the lives of artists can lead to progressive change in the means of equity and justice. In this sense participation is essential, not only through well-represented and respected artists, but by all artists.

### 3. Addressing responsibilities

My conversation with Juana, another participant in the research, was led by her emphasis on responsibility. Our conversation took place 26 February 2022 in Vienna and Juana introduced herself as a cultural worker from Mexico, at that time with a temporarily working permit/visa in Austria. She dedicated her position as a cultural worker to the creation of awareness about global inequalities and asymmetries, as well as raising questions of responsibility. From her perspective Western institutions have the responsibility to create fair structures and to ensure participation equally. When she started talking I noticed her fine way of expressing herself in English. So I asked her where it comes from and she talked about her background, growing up at the border region between Mexico and the US, on the Mexican side.

*“I would say people try to learn English, but in the Northern border, there’s obviously a stronger cultural pressure to learn English and to learn it well. And so was my case. I grew up in the border region and that (...) people were told you need to learn English very well for the future“* (Juana in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 26 February 2022).

Juana underlined the importance of mobility in her career and her responsibility as a cultural worker to address this topic from the institutional side.

*“And for me it’s a very big topic. It’s a very delicate one. I feel, as somebody specialised on culture from a more organizational side, I do feel responsibility to engage with it more and to touch upon something that hurts, but that needs to be addressed and be done something about it“* (Juana)

I felt as if Juana distinguishes between her personal life and her career when talking about mobility. The conversation with other participating artists was personal right from the beginning, Juana first presented herself very professional and shared more personal comments later on. Her endeavour to take responsibility as a cultural practitioner is to create fair institutional structures for everyone in the cultural sector, but she also mentioned how challenging this is due to the given timeframe for her work in Austria. Different to all other participants, she stayed in Vienna with a working permit based on a specific timeframe for a selected work position. For her the given timeframe cannot be objected, it is a situation she has to deal with. She had to leave Austria in summer 2022 and she now lives back in Mexico. At some point she brought up an interesting expression

to define her temporal working situation, she described it as “the anxiety of the uncertainty”.

*“So you are already possibly getting involved with other projects and those projects are jeopardized by there's a temporality to, until when you can stay in a place. So you are living with the anxiety of how do I address this with a person or something that I can, I'm not allowed to stay here anymore. An anxiety that you have to live with and you cannot make plans. And you're always in a more risky position than a cultural worker that perhaps does not need a residence permit to do the job that you can also do. And that's very tough also because it doesn't matter how prepared you are...” (Juana).*

These circumstances are challenging for Juana, although she wanted to extend her stay but the bureaucratic obstacles seem to be insurmountable and Juana raised her disappointment towards such living and working conditions. She pointed out that this situation does not allow her to raise awareness about responsibility or accessibility, because these processes require time. She emphasised on the importance of mobility in the cultural sector while she constantly faces barriers to work or live abroad. For Juana, cultural workers from countries outside the Western world are needed because their position is important in the decentring process of Western institutions. She further advocates that artists must be involved in the making of cultural policies, the relation of artists and cultural institutions must respond to mutual understanding not as opposed to each other. Her challenges to make meaning to her endeavour as a cultural workers is driven by “the anxiety of the uncertainty”. At the end of our conversation Juana pointed out her shift in perspective due to her experience in Europe.

*“I think I've learned in Europe to try to be more for flexible with myself because sometimes I'm like ... in this paper, it says this, this, this. So I do it 1, 2, 3, and then I'm like, but nobody is doing it, not even other Mexicans. And I'm like, why am I following this rules? I should just go for what I want. But yeah, that's a bit my personality and my fear ... that's also a very border thing. And it's that in the border region, the American side has so much rules for the Mexican side that you become paranoid about rules...” (Juana).*

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### 3.1. Who calls for mobility?

Debates around mobility are mainly addressed by Western institutions, as critically stated before by Marina with the question “who calls for mobility, who have a right to move or who has a means to move, or who participate in that”. The “call for mobility” traditionally belongs to wealthy nations and their institutions, mainly in the Western world. It becomes visible in higher education systems and cultural institutions and their policies. These institutions are embedded in structures of national regulations that do not provide equal distribution of rights. The relation between non-Western artists and Western institutions, a discourse that has been ongoing since the 1990s, is being questioned by various artists, scholars, publishers and cultural professionals. It requires a shift in power as well as a transnational perspective on locality.

Juana, while working in Vienna, addressed questions of centralised power and responsibility through her position. She underlined her background, her experiences of growing up at the border region between Mexico and the U.S., she named the importance of language skills and also she highlighted the question, from which side one looks at the border. Depending on this, certain power relations become visible.

*“When I first applied for the residents permit in the Netherlands, I was so afraid of everything, because my experience was visa for the U.S., for Mexican is way more complicated. I had already been to Europe and I knew things were way more flexible or more human, compared to the US, but I was still with that fear. (...) Also it's something that my mom is very much like that when we cross the border by car, which is a very normal thing for a person in that region, (...) my mom always being very nervous in the line with the car. Like “okay, now nobody talk, okay, put your seatbelt on because in Mexico, nobody puts their seatbelt on, but my mom was always like, okay, now everybody don't talk, put your seatbelt on lower the windows.” Like a lot of things. And then we get through and my father was always very nervous and they both don't know English very well. (...) That's something I remember. And so that was my mind, always about borders and visas, I was like, things are like this. And then I learned like, no, it depends where you are at and who you are with and the context. But, I think that's where I got my fear of these sort of things. But then now I'm realizing as I'm older, I'm like, I can do this maybe a bit more different” (Juana).*

The feeling of fear, although mentioned very personal by Juana, is experienced by many people at borders because borders “still perform a “world-configuring function“ (Mezzadra & Nielson 2013:4). People become subject to shifting and unpredictable pattern of mobility and overlapping, appearing and disappearing as well as sometimes crystallising in the form of threatening walls that break up and render political spaces that were one formally unified“ (Mezzadra & Nielson 2013:6). Juana’s phrase “the anxiety of the uncertainty“ addresses borders not only as physical spaces, as lines of division, but mainly through their social function, the classification of people based on their national identity. Juana speaks about her fear connected to crossing borders, because she experienced this moments as unpredictable and discriminating. Mezzadra and Nielson (2013) stress, with reference to Étienne Balibar, that “borders are always *overdetermined*, meaning that “no political border is ever the mere boundary between two states” but is always “sanctioned, reduplicated and relativized by other geopolitical divisions” (79). “Without the *world-configuring function* they perform,” Balibar writes, “there would be no borders—or no lasting borders” (79)“ (2013:4)

When looking at the border as a place where belonging is performed, the arrangement of this performance highlights global hierarchies and (self-)identification within these hierarchies. Juana’s experiences of crossing borders do not speak about a privileged position, it is connected to fear and a process of degradation. When looking specifically at the U.S./Mexican border or the Mediterranean Sea, these are dangerous paths. Once people manage to cross these paths, they face degradation and discrimination which is embedded in the performance of border regimes and their social function beyond the physical space. The social function transcends to spaces far away from the actual line of division and localizing the border only through geographical aspects does not address its entire function. Juana, growing up in a region where this division is very powerful on a daily base, reflects on its social function when sharing stories of her childhood. She connects her personal experiences with her awareness about the importance of mobility as well as with her ambition as a cultural worker. She differentiates between Mexico and Europe by saying

*“I think in Mexico, it (mobility) is not even addressed, it's not even a topic in the cultural sector and since the cultural sector is way more, I would dare use the word violent. I mean, I know working in the cultural sector, in most of parts of the world is difficult. And there's a lot of pre courageousness and commitments that you have to*

*do. I would say that in my experience, in my region in Mexico or the two places that I worked in Mexico, it was a very harsh experience“ (Juana).*

As Juana points out, mobility is not even addressed in Mexico. The term “mobility“ does not imply a universal usage. It is connected to its colonial legacy and it belongs to a particular tradition of people’s movement. It becomes visible through existing border regimes and its social, political and economic function. The impact of globalization, mobility as an important mean, and the colonial structures of people’s movements should be looked relational to each other. For Juana, moving away from Mexico was connected to the possibility to further her studies - she studied in the Netherlands before coming to Vienna - as well as to avoid violence in her working sector and to experience directions of movement different to the traditional migration processes between Mexico and the U.S.. Mezzadra and Nielson (2013) argue “the image of the border as a wall, or as a device that serves first and foremost to *exclude*, as widespread as it has been in recent critical studies, is misleading in the end. Isolating a single function of the border does not allow us to grasp the flexibility of this institution“ (2013:7). They further argue that inclusion and exclusion should not be looked as opposites, it rather appears as a continuum (2013:7). A person might be able to pass the border control and enter a country, but systematic control beyond the actual border takes place through visa regimes. They regulate time or given timeframes of individuals on the basis of national differentiation, which presents the core of the institution along with its systematic mechanism of inclusion/exclusion. People who have passed different borders and experienced different stories at these locations, as also mentioned by Juana, understand the structural embedding of borders and underline its power beyond the actual space of division. Juana’s traveling experiences have shaped her knowledge of cultural production and created awareness about questions of responsibility. She highlights the importance of mobility in the cultural sector because she experienced cultural exchange and collective knowledge production as very valuable. She underlines that the implementation of fair structures by Western institutions is important in order to make the usage of the term “mobility“ appropriate to the “freedom of movement“ and to liberate it from its historical colonial contextualisation. She states that people engaged in arts and culture always travelled, to look at this connection as separate entities is related to the current concept of “mobility“ and its limitations.

In our conversation she further pointed out that she never had issues about her position as a cultural worker at her work place in Vienna, she experienced a very welcoming attitude and friendly relations with her colleagues. Her challenges occur with her visa that defined her timeframe of action on arrival and, thus, limit the scope of her action. As argued by

Mezzadra and Nielson (2013), inclusion and exclusion are a continuum, mobility represents the access to free movement for some, for others an impediment to move freely. Visa regimes regulate people's movements, people from those countries with "long-standing economic and political" (Levitt 2023) ties can easily circulate, whereas people from countries that face "long-standing economic and political" exploitation remain immobile. This unequal distribution of access and rights is linked to global "unequal relations of economic and geopolitical power" (Levitt 2023) and they drive the current framework of mobility.

Juana underlined that her working situation with her colleagues was very welcoming and mutual. Nevertheless she was not able to overcome the bureaucratic regulations and continue her work in Vienna, although she wanted to do so. The institution she worked for cannot offer her alternative working structures for her to remain in Vienna. Juana made clear that European cultural centres matter and that they have to take responsibility for equity on a global level. She emphasised on the importance to allow people from the Global South to shape these centres or to built new centres. Juana's "call for mobility" differs to the "traditional call for mobility" due to her position and her experience, I define it as a "decentering attitude" (Levitt 2023).

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### 3.2. Shirin

In conversation with a young performer from Iran, Shirin, barriers to knowledge production within an educational programme in Vienna show the difficulties an individual faces when willing to study at an Austrian University. Shirin defines herself as a performing artist with a background in drama studies, she has lived in Vienna since 2019 and studies at the University of Applied Arts. She mentioned that her current status "Residence Permit – Student" was not valid at the time of our recording, it took place on 3 March 2022, and therefor she called herself "illegal". It should be emphasised that the "Residence Permit – Student" is a legal form within educational mobility programmes and it carries different provisions than other residence titles. I asked Shirin about her motivation to study abroad.

*“Als ich im Iran war, war ich auch beschäftigt mit dem Grenze Thema, die Probleme von Grenzen, weil als Künstlerin... wollte ich immer mit Internationale Künstlerinnen in unterschiedlichen Ländern arbeiten aber leider mit diesen Grenze Probleme. Es geht nicht, weil ich habe iranischen Pass. Als ich im Iran war, konnte ich auch nicht mit meinem Pass reisen. Es gibt keine Möglichkeit zu reisen. Ich muss immer das*

*Visum beantragen. Und manchmal habe ich die negative Antwort bekommen. Immer diese Rejections. Und als Künstlerin hatte ich keinen Free Space“ (Shirin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 3 March 2022).*

With this statement Shirin addressed the border issues and visa regimes as major obstacles to achieve her desire to work as an artist with/in international context. Her statement shows her awareness that the art market requires contemporary artists to be mobile in order to participate in global art discourses. For Shirin being a holder of an Iranian passport is equated with no benefit from her citizenship rights, she rather connects it to barriers and exclusions through borders and visa regimes.

When looking at the regulations of "Residence Permit – Student“ in Austria, the platform “OeAD - Agency for Education and Internationalisation“ provides a good overview of the regulations and the complex bureaucratic process involved. In short, it involves a permission of the “home country“ to leave, a successful application at a “host university“ abroad, a health insurance and a relatively high amount of money to cover daily expenses. Each step is fraught with difficulties and an individual has no certainty that the process will be successful. Nevertheless for individuals being part of an educational mobility programme, such as universities offer, is more likely to be successful than other programs eg. international artist-in-residence programs. After Shirin successfully passed her application at the University in Vienna, she waited two years for permission from the Iranian authorities to travel to Austria and begin her studies. She further reflects on her current situation in Austria, as she continues to struggle with bureaucratic regulation regarding her stay and her studies.

*“Jetzt wohne ich auch für zwei Jahre in Wien, aber noch habe ich diese Probleme. Zum Beispiel jetzt aktuell. Ich sitze hier ganz illegal, weil ich habe kein Visum. Ich habe vor sieben Monaten beantragt und sie geben mir keine Antwort, keine Rückmeldung und Sie sagen bitte ein bisschen Geduld immer. Wir müssen als Ausländer Geduld sein“ (Shirin).*

Time again appears as a structural barrier and an exercise of power and Shirin raised her disappointment about these practices. She further pointed out the importance of money which is evident in all process involved. For the renewal process of her visa she has to prove her financial means to cover her living costs (Students under 24 years of age: EUR 613.16/month) as well as a valid health insurance, a so-called “health insurance covering all risks“. Both regulations are associated with high financial costs, in particular the living

costs need to have a proof of the origin of the funds. The regulations for health insurance are explained precisely at the OeAD platform and it makes clear how difficult and costly this task appears to be. As a student, she is allowed to work up to 20 hours per week, which requires a work permit, for which another application procedure is necessary. Unlike ordinary working permits, this permit will be granted without labour market check (<https://oead.at/en>). While Shirin is waiting, as she calls herself “illegal“, she is officially not allowed to work in Austria. These regulations make visible how complicated the entire process is and highlights the importance of economic means. “Unequal relations of economic and geopolitical power“ (Levitt 2023) unfold in visa regulations and their policies. These unequal relations are embedded in structures of higher education systems that individuals like Shirin have to overcome through personal economic means. Shirin reflected on her financial situation and her difficulties to achieve these standards in order to continue her studies. She mentioned that her colleagues at her university are not aware of the financial requirements “third-country nationals“ need to prove, because these inequalities often remain unspoken. For Shirin the economic factors embedded in visa regulations present one of the leading “impediments of mobility“ (Çağlar 2022). She points out that it should be addressed and made visible, because the knowledge about such issues is important to create a common ground of understanding and shared spaces for resistance.

*“Once we frame the questions of diversity and the mobility of students and scholars in terms of the inequities and closures of knowledge production, it becomes clear that the lion’s share of efforts and administrative and advisory support initiatives targeted to dismantle the policies of institutions that undergird the inequities and mobility impediments is primarily the responsibility of the higher education or cultural institutions in the Global North“ (Çağlar 2022)*

Similar like Juana, Çağlar situates the responsibility to implement fair structures to institutions in the Global North. They have to change their political, economical and/or social regulations to access to knowledge production in the means of equity in order to tackle barriers international students face. It cannot be the task of individuals to overcome all institutional barriers through years of economic, political and social in/visible struggles while institutions highlight “mobility“ as a means to “diversity“ and “equity“.

Shirin as a performance artist expresses herself through her body. The border topics drives her performative practices and she passionately spoke about her collaborations with others like-minded artists. She underlined that she has to create art that resonates and

reflects her body and the border topic is likely to be the most important one. I asked Shirin if she would like to work on another topic and she responded

*“Ich würde wirklich gerne mit anderen Themen arbeiten. Keine Ahnung. Ich würde aber gerne an einem Hamlet Stück arbeiten. Aber ich kann nicht, weil ich glaube, in meiner Kunstpraxis bringe ich nur meine persönlichen Erfahrungen auf der Bühne mit. Ich kann nicht ohne meine Bedenken arbeiten. Und jetzt? Ich bin immer beschäftigt mit diesem Thema, mit diesem Grenzen Thema. Weil mein ganzes Leben ist irgendwie mit diesem Thema verbunden und ich kann nicht einfach weglassen, ich kann nicht ein Teil von meinem Körper, mein Hirn weglassen. Es ist wie ein Teil von meinem Körper geworden. Wenn ich mich jetzt um das Visum kümmere und ich habe keinen fixen Plan oder keinen fixen Platz hier. Wie kann ich zum Beispiel über Hamlet nachdenken? Ich kann nicht. Und ich muss immer, immer, immer mit diesem Thema arbeiten. Weil in meiner Kunstpraxis wurde ich gerne mit meinen persönlichen Erfahrungen und mit meinen persönlichen Gedanken arbeiten. Und jetzt? Ich bin immer beschäftigt mit diesem Thema. So. Meine Identität ist eine Zusammenfassung von diesem Grenze Probleme“ (Shirin).*

I agree that there is no way to create an artwork that does not reflect on the experience and reality of its creator. For Shirin “freedom“ or “mobility“ are abstract terms because her reality is driven by national regulations and economic obligations. She responded to the question: What means mobility? by saying

*“Mobility? Ehrlich zu sagen ... Ich meine, ich kenne das Wort, ich verstehe es, aber es gibt keine richtige Bedeutung für mich, weil es funktioniert für mich nicht. Ich kann nicht mobil sein, ich kann nicht wirklich reisen. Und wenn ich über meinen Freiheit nachfrage, Sie geben die Antwort: “nur bitte ein bisschen Geduld“ (Shirin).*

Thinking through the situation of Juana and Shirin, the institution where they work or study cannot provide help to overcome their visa regulations, they appear like a superior and overarching set of rules impossible to be changed. Shirin is allowed to extend her stay until she has completed her studies, taking into account any difficulties that may arise during that period. Her confrontation with border regimes is a challenge as long as she is part of the educational mobility program. Çağlar argues

*“the goal of ensuring mobility and diversity can neither be an “add-on”, nor a matter of achieving compositional diversity. Instead, it is central to any attempt to act against the inequities of knowledge produced and reproduced in and through the institutions*

*of education and arts. We need to acknowledge that mobility and diversity of artists and scholars are the sine qua non of institutions of education and arts“ (2022).*

Shirin and Juana underline that mobility is one of the most important aspects of contemporary art production. They understand that mobility and knowledge production is intertwined and function as an entity. Borders, to be understood as institutions, regulate inclusion/exclusion to mobility as well as to knowledge production.

Juana pointed out the importance of sustainable networks as essential for her career. For her these networks require a stable living situation and lasting interpersonal relationships. In Europe she dedicates her work to question inequalities embedded in institutional structures as well as to address responsibility in order to allow diverse voices to be heard in these places. My conversation with Shirin was driven by the border topic. Everything she reflected on, her daily life, her studies, her performances and her engagement with like-minded colleagues are subject to borders, and how they lead to her feelings of exclusion. Mezzadra and Nielson (2013), by underlining the important connection between borders and labor in global and postcolonial capitalism, make meaning to the barriers and obstacles cultural worker or students from the so-called “Global South“ have to deal with. The expansion of the border, from a particular location that marks a line of division to a symbolical constructed social division, is important in sense-making of borders regimes. The ability to develop economically and to build independent social and economic networks is a big barrier for all participating artists. It underlines another layer of differentiation embedded in “mobility“ to favour the selection of people on the basis of nationality.

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### **3.3. Decentering**

Thinking with Juana and her approach towards Western institutions speaks of a “decentering attitude“ (Levitt 2023) as stated before. Levitt addressed meaning making in the context of “decentering“ through *the inequality pipeline*, an institutional supply chain in the classroom of universities, museums and libraries which allows or doesn’t allow those from the peripheries or semi-peripheries to enter the traditional centre of knowledge production (Levitt 2023). Levitt argues that the story of cultural globalization has shifted away from being one of just a few centres and peripheries to one of multiple centres and multiple peripheries, their margins are as meaningful as their multiple centres. She further states that it is not only about the reformulation of these centres of power, “it is to configure

different kinds of infrastructures and connections that let a broader set of people and ideas in“ (2023).

*“Decentering goes beyond this (reformulation). It is, at the least, a transformational project or, in some cases, a total starting from scratch. It recognizes with clear eyes that the capitalist and political world order relies on the marginalization and impoverishment of poor countries to sustain the lifestyle of wealthier ones. It questions the fundamental tenants of modernity, patriarchy, and racial capitalism that accept inequality and environmental degradation as necessary evils“* (Levitt 2023).

Decentering addresses equality through the transnational lens by embracing constant flows and multiple “ways of belonging“ as well as challenging the traditional centers of power, to highlight the importance of “inclusion“ and “diversity“ on various institutional levels. Decentering emphasises on the creation of an infrastructure, which allows people and ideas to circulate across different spaces. Levitt, with reference to Larkin (2013), refers to “infrastructures as the platforms, passageways, containers, and gates that enable people, knowledge, power, and ideas to circulate“ (Levitt 2023). They are “material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space. They are the physical networks through which goods, ideas, waste, power, people, and finance are trafficked (Larkin 2013:327). Importantly Levitt addresses the “decentering attitude“ (Levitt 2023) not only through institutions but also through individuals, to think around their structural embedding and their environments. Juana reflects on her embedding by pointing out her background as well as how power is distributed in her situation in Austria. Juana says that the individual perspective on the world matters because this perspective creates the ground for future transformation processes that can contribute to change as means to equity as also highlighted by Levitt.

*“... we cannot stop at simply adding more diverse content to the theoretical canon. In addition to decentering our ideas, we also have to decenter ourselves as individuals, the institutions where we work, and the infrastructures through which ideas and culture travel. To create more inclusive and equitable conversations, we have to not only radically change the structures within which they take place but to also change the moral and ethical principles that guide them“* (Levitt 2023).

Principles that guide structures become visible through their expression and the use of terminologies. When looking at “mobility“ through a “decentering attitude“, “mobility“ should be replaced with a term significant for movement that allows circulations of divers ideas, objects and people with different backgrounds to flow between multiple centres and

multiple peripheries. The replacement of traditional centres of power with an infrastructure that consists of fluid pattern can dismantle the national hierarchy along with its moral and ethical principles that lies behind the current concept of “mobility“. Infrastructure is significant for the ability to move, the term, as defined by Levitt, is used to imagine fluid pattern opposed to fixed structures. Levitt emphasis on self responsibility addresses the person behind these structures, their moral and ethical principles and the choices individuals have in either maintaining fixed structures or contributing to social, political and/or cultural transformation.

Juana’s experience with her colleagues at her workplace in Vienna speaks about shared values in the cultural sector. Relevant centres of cultural and intellectual power recognise the importance to bring in more “inclusion“ and “diversity“ into their systems, they “have become cherished values and found their place in the “metrics” of performance and excellence“ (Çağlar 2022) in institutions of higher education, arts and culture and other spheres of cultural knowledge production. As stressed by Levitt, it is not about the reformulation of these centres, it is about an infrastructure that allows ideas and people to circulate. All participating artists made clear, in order to overcome the process of differentiation and the “impediments of mobility“ (Çağlar 2022), an alternative infrastructure is needed.

*“Despite several calls and initiatives undertaken by institutions of various scale, the uneven landscape of mobility between regions and different parts of the world prevail. The asymmetries in visa regimes, especially between the Global South and the Global North, come to the fore as one of the main reasons behind the impediments of mobility“ (Çağlar 2022).*

Çağlar, by highlighting visa regimes as the main reason behind “the impediments of mobility“, underlines the global asymmetries in access to mobility based on citizenship. Shirin’s situation, the bureaucratic process she has to go through to become and remain a student at a Western university, shows that access and participation for people from countries outside the Western world is fraught with many obstacles. Visa regimes are leading principles of “*the inequality pipeline*“ and drive the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion in the context of mobility. As Shirin is managing to overcome these processes, they become the core of her artistic practice.

Additional to “*the inequality pipeline*“, Çağlar addresses mobility, its barriers and asymmetries in connection to *closures of knowledge production* (Çağlar 2019; 2023). It shows the importance of language and translation as knowledge production often counts

as “theory”. Articulation, wordings and expressions, and in particular their presentation as canons, produces values of cultures that transcends to different regions and can never be seen as free of power relations. Their embedding within a particular power grid shows how power is distributed through language and meaning-making. Using the term “mobility” as a canon for free movement, underlines its meaning as colonial and national. The fact that artists and cultural workers from regions outside the “Western world” can’t make meaning to the term and/or face barriers to shape the meaning, underlines how the gates are closed for a particular group of people whereby kept open for others. This selection does not become visible through the term itself, it refers to its legacy, its usage and its implementations through institutions. Çağlar, in addressing the “closure of knowledge production” through the usage of terminologies in institutional context, makes meaning to the process of selection and translation. With reference to Chibnik, she points out “in-group vocabulary and writing styles” (Çağlar 2019:214) remains inaccessible for many readers, because these vocabularies and styles are typically embedded and created in higher education systems, cultural institutions of power and international policy makers in the Global North. Seyran, when referring to the “world music”, criticized how particular expressions and terminologies are used in the context of “cultural diversity” by Austrian institutions. These expressions and terminologies overshadow structural problems, influence the “freedom of expression” of each individual and turn into synonyms for legitimized discrimination. Seyran stated that institutions have the responsibility, as highlighted also by Juana, to address such issue, and in particular, to address them through a critical standpoint by allowing artists, who are traditionally excluded from these discourses, to participate. Institutions have a historical, political and cultural legacy that they must respond to, by doing so they also have to be self-critical, create access on the basis of equity and respond to current demands of international artists.

Most of the participants in the research did not address the problem of “in-group vocabulary and writing styles”, because they emphasised on their artistic language as their way of communicating with their environments. Their ways to express themselves through art is highlighted in the next chapter. With the emphasis on art and collectivity, their creations and their collective engagements can be seen as an approach to create new forms of communication. Visualized through art, their works can contribute to the creation of new platforms that are able to circulate. In the research and through the collaboration with the UNESCO, the problem of “in-group vocabulary and writing styles” through policies become more evident. I am looking closer into a policy in the context of “mobility”, the way

this policy is articulated and how the institution approaches the problem of differentiation and the selection of people.

The UNESCO, within its different domains, highlights mobility as one of the leading topics in their cultural policy. The UNESCO Global Report 2022, in particular the chapter “Re-imagining mobility for artists and cultural professionals”, explicitly points out how visa policies remain one of the biggest issues for artist to travel (2022:153). The report underlines bureaucratic issues that lead to exclusion or barriers to mobility embedded in national regulations.

The role of the UNESCO in the context of mobility and cultural production is defined as policy maker and facilitator. I differentiate between institutions (eg. theatres) or international platforms (eg. biennales) because their engagement in art is different. The role of the UNESCO as policy makers is mainly structural, to build conceptual frameworks for artists and institutions and to be able to implement their policies in order to respond to demands of the cultural sector for more equity. *The UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expression* explicitly points out the unequal distribution of rights, access and participation of mobility in the global context. Their approach towards transformation and against the imbalance between Global North and Global South is expressed in Article 16, the so-called *preferential treatment* (Article 16 - Preferential Treatment of Convention).

*“The Convention therefore requires countries of the Global North to establish relief measures and preferential treatment policies for cultural goods and services from countries of the Global South in order to allow a balanced exchange”* (<https://www.unesco.at/en/culture/diversity-of-cultural-expressions/the-unesco-convention>).

This article seeks preferential treatment for artists, cultural professionals and practitioners, as well as cultural goods and services from so-called “developing countries” (UNESCO). The organization is always anxious about being publicly reminded of this article, as it has not been implemented since its inception in 2005. I argue that the article is far away from its implementation, now and in a possible future. This assumption should not question a fundamental search for the freedom of movement or global equity, but I am critical of the usage of locality and the wording. In particular the expressions “relief measures and preferential treatment” doesn’t appear appropriate because it speaks of power dynamics as a given situation that cannot be contested. I observed that the term “preferential” recently appears in public discourses eg. in mass media representation being used in national contexts along with questions of sovereignty. I asked some participating artists if

they want to be treated preferentially, the answer was no. It evokes feelings of aid or support and they never asked for charity. They stand up for fair structures.

By relating the UNESCO Report (2022) to the Transgender Report, both use a national lens as a base for their analysis. This form of addressing social exclusion or barriers to mobility tend to recreate national hierarchies, stereotypes and values that are preexisting. Cultural inequalities are legitimized by those power relations, because they are part of a system that tend to expend the legacy of colonialism and imperialism through its maintenance. A more appropriate way to address social exclusion or barriers to mobility is by highlighting the problem of the national lens embedded in locality. In the UNESCO report inequality of people's movements is connected to accessibility and economic values driven by national factors, it basically underlines that countries with "long-standing economic and political ties" (Levitt 2023) can easily travel whereas others have to remain immobile. This understanding of locality, referring to geopolitical relations of power as a given situation, favours the expression "relief measures and preferential treatment" because it is related and associated with the economy of a nation. In this sense this expression leads to the assumption that people due to their nationality lack of power whereas others hold it. Decentering these policies requires different wording in order "to disrupt the inequality pipeline" (Levitt 2023). In the decentering process cultural policies are meant to circulate, they "belong to – and are embedded within – particular social and cultural worlds or 'domains of meaning' (Shore & Wright 2011:1). These "domains of meaning", expressed through wording and terminologies, are "organising principles" (Shore & Wright 2011:2) that structure social relations. Thinking beyond national space configurations in the cultural sector is important because 'domains of meaning' are embedded in the transnational social field. The structure of the UNESCO report appears to be linear, it analyzes a problem, the visa application process for people from the Global South, and presents policies, preferential treatment for people from the Global South, as solutions for change. This cannot be understood as a shifting process, because this way of addressing change does not lead an infrastructure that enables circulation in the means of decentering, it rather presents solution for the maintenance of given structures. Decentering, as mentioned before, goes beyond the reformulation or improvement of existing centres. Policies, or rules for social relations that constantly travel, should be defined through their practice. To engage with a policy first of all requires to feel addressed by its meaning through its wording. In the reality of the participating artists policies, that govern the relation between themselves and the state, are inaccessible, difficult in understanding or are being perceived as discriminatory. Decentering policies

addresses meaning making as a process, a reciprocal way of exchanging knowledge, ideas and culture. It gives power to each individual equally and uses terminologies significant for those who are addressed. It is not about reformulating existing structural problems, giving preferences to one or the other, it is a different approach to locality by rebuilding existing linear structure into fluid pattern. It requires equal participation as a leading principle in the meaning making of policies.

Policies that do not address its recipients are likely to remain unheard. A possible way forward, to disrupt the power relations that are embedded in policies, is through different expressions that are created by artists and cultural workers in collaboration with policy makers. From my point of view, the UNESCO in the domain of mobility and cultural exchange, should be guided by artists and cultural professionals, not by governments. The structural embedding of the institution does not give space to divers voices of artists, their structures simply don't allow a change of articulation because they have to be in line with their governments.

Once an infrastructure is created, that allows diverse languages, articulations and expressions to be included and shape the "domain of meaning", the context of cultural production automatically changes. New "in-group vocabulary and writing styles" will emerge and their transmission, bringing one content into another society, requires reciprocal cultural processes, not national. To imagine an infrastructure that creates space for all these processes to happen, is a productive way to think around transformation. In my view it could possibly show the connection of movement and arts as a continuum, as it always existed. The embedding of art and movement in the neoliberal context, the term "mobility" as significant, recreates the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion and doesn't put in the foreground that this connection always existed and was shaped by artists.

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### **3.4. Thinking around transformation**

It is important to acknowledge Juana's and Shirin's engagement to travel to Europe and to deal with European borders and barriers. Their openness and participation in the research, like all other participants, highlighted important topics in the context of exclusion. Juana, when thinking around the working conditions in the cultural sector in Mexico, uses carefully the term "violent". In her distinction between Mexico and Europe, she addresses violence as an important issue that drives mobility. Like for Ahmed, Gin, Nermin, Marina, Shirin and Seyran safe environments are essential for cultural production and personal development.

Juana's perspective on Europe speaks about her belief that Europe is more peaceful than places in the so-called Global South. Different scales of violence, from acting out direct violence to the implementation of structural violence and the maintenance of cultural violence have impact on the decisions and opportunities individuals approach in their journeys. Direct violence and/or violent political conflicts are the leading aspect to mobility as means of surviving. It becomes visible in the stories of Ahmed and Gin, but also through the situation of Marina and many others. Looking at Western Europe as a "more peaceful" place tend to underestimate the impact of violence which is embedded in institutional structures in Europe and other Western societies. The infrastructure, in the means of Levitt, is missing as well as any alternative regulation to overcome visa barriers does not exist. Terminologies and expression that hide the actual problem of exclusion and discrimination are maintained by institutions and legitimized through policies and/or public discourses. A "decentering attitude" towards fair structures raises awareness about existing limitations and addresses responsibility through the institution and the individual.

I am thinking with Seyran's emphasis on the usage of language in music production to imagine possible changes. Music transcends to the recipient on various levels, through the performance and the body of the musician, through instruments and the usage of language as well as through shared space of experience. In this sense language and communication has to be understood through its broad appearance. Seyran, when emphasising on language barriers as part of an exclusive process to cultural production, pointed out how national categories are created and maintained through particular container, eg. "world music". As lives of many international musicians are embedded in the transnational social field, they first need to learn in which national container they fit in and how their language, their style of communication, is classified. Artists from regions outside the Western world often find themselves in the category of "world music", which locates their language and music within geopolitical power constellations. For example Seyran stated that a Kurdish musician is only recognised in the Western world when the person participated in "world music" festivals in Western countries. Levitt introduces the expression "scale-shifting" (Levitt 2023) to underline the importance of power acquisition, cultural as well as economical, and as a means for content to circulate. Seyran stated that power acquisition is a process based on experience and it requires time. She argues that it is important for international musicians to go through the process of "shifting up", even if it implies the container of "world music", because over time these musicians can shape cultural discourses due to their participation and visibility. Music, unlike literature or theory,

is not necessarily translated. It carries multiple ways of perception which can be inspiring to think around fluid patterns. Words, phrases and the actual performance of the musician passes to recipients in various ways. It is not possible to determine this experience precisely, it requires openness and mutual understanding that shapes the space and the dialog between the musician and its audience. Seyran further stated that it is important how power relations are framed and created within spaces of appearance. She critically pointed out the example of Austrian folk music, its relation to world music and the domains of meaning which are created by these categories. Imagining the “domains of meaning“ in “world music“ is defined through traditional instruments, variety of languages including dialects and their transformation in different societies, the “world music“ container would transform. Although I do not think that we need new containers, it is an exercise to think how power balances can shift by little structural changes. The Kurdish musician is perceived equally to the Austrian musician because they fit into the same container, they are payed equally and represent the same position in global music production. Participation appears to be an equal process, both musicians are placed within the same “domains of meaning“, their expressions, their languages and their music form the basis of a new culture that can be developed free of national power relations. The question, what kind of structures and terminologies are needed, should be decided by the artists in collaboration with the institution in order to expand boundaries and to allow more people to join in. It is a mutual process where circulation and flow is a guiding principle.

Imagining the art, its different mediums of visualization, its boundless forms of communication and different spaces of appearance, as a driving force for the imagination of new infrastructures is an inspiring way forward. In the next chapter examples of art practices by the participating artists are highlighted. They are not curated, they happen to be part of our conversation and I have chosen them as examples to visualize the ways they express themselves. The artists enjoyed sharing these stories by emphasising the content and purpose of their works. The moment of shared experience and collaborative empowerment was brought up by some artists and made visible that alternative culture and counter-hegemonic movements are very important for artists on the move.



Image: "is it a connection or is it a border? ©Daria Tchapanova 2022

## 4. Collectivity & community art practices

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### 4.1. Re-imagining lines

As a starting point of the research I created the image above with the aim to address the ambivalences embedded around "im/mobility in the context of migrant artists". "Is it a connection or is it a border?" speaks to the artists, how they perceive feelings of exclusion through im/mobility as well as how they counter-act these feelings. The image is accompanied by a short text to give insight into the aim of the research and to underline its context. It was published through different platforms in form of an open call to which artists could respond.

Lines in the context of borders represent markers of division. They visualize the meaning of borders and also include the knowledge about global power constellations.

*"Lines, in fact, are not just the innocent representation on maps and on the ground that nation-states traditionally associate with borders. On the contrary, they are active instruments of powerful reduction, which transforms the complexity of border*

*practices into a supposedly objective mark of separation*“ (Giudice & Giubilaro 2015:81).

Lines create binary orders. With the sentence, “is it a connection or is it a border“ I am addressing the recipient, artists that would like to share their stories on the topic. It also raises the question: How do you read the image?

The visible aspect of the hands holding the line is meant to underline the fact that borders are constructed by humans. They are not fixed lines naturally existing, but man made as principles of differentiation. Borders are “an instrument of dichotomisation“ (Giudice & Giubilaro 2015), they produce *us* and *them*. Their representation through mass media becomes powerful in maintaining the hegemonic meaning of dichotomisation and even transcending it further into a taken-for-granted public opinion. The binaries, the substantial character of the line, underlines differentiation of humans on the basis of nationality. Characteristics of borders and their meanings appear in mass media narrations as fixed social constellations difficult to be contested.

*“in the dominant representation borders generally stand for lines demarcated in space. In this perspective, lines become tool and image of violent reduction and seeming pacification, a clear power strategy developed by the nation-state to define and manage its space“* (Giudice & Giubilaro 2015:81).

Artistic installations along border sides and actual interventions at site “can unsettle the scopical regime of borders and make room for alternative narratives, practices and imaginaries“ (Moze & Spiegel 2022:8). In contributing to the creation of these counter-hegemonic border narratives, artists take a central stage in the representation of borders and their meaning. Many artists address and/or install art works at borders in order to challenge the dominant narrative and to transform it. These art works unfold their power when they transform the line, the materiality of the border, from a marker of state power into a symbolic canvas of resistance (Moze & Spiegel 2022:8). The visibility of borders is deeply implicated in shaping hegemonic border narratives as well as in creating counter-hegemonic narratives (Moze & Spiegel 2022). Artists recreating border narratives through imagery form new narratives around their meaning. On the contrary, mass media and its visual representation of migrants at border sides reproduce stereotypes and clichés in line with hegemonic border narratives. The projection of fear, insecurity and public threat is constructed to favour a selection along borders as well as rendering in/visibility in order to maintain existing structures. Migrant artists often reflect on these structures through their art works based on their experiences, not necessarily in direct respond to mass media

representation. Their works show a different approach to materiality, to the question of fear and security and to the representation of human beings at border sides. Köhn (2016) argues that to fully understand the entanglement of visual representations with political processes, it is important to analyze the discursive content of these depictions as well as those very acts of visualization that render migrants visible (2016:30). “Visibility and invisibility have to be understood first of all as political modes of existence“ (2016:30). Köhn, by highlighting the position of Hannah Arendt, argues “visibility is the basic condition for political participation and the prerequisite for the emergence of a public sphere. Visibility, for Arendt, first of all constitutes our ‘common world’ (1958:52), the world we intersubjectively share with our fellow human beings. She describes the sphere of politics as a ‘space of appearance“ (2016:33). This “space of appearance“ is used by artists to portray their understanding of migration as often connected to their personal experience. In the hegemonic narration borders appear as static lines which cannot be contested and their meaning is carried out by mass media representations that influences the public opinion. It becomes even more powerful through performative acts eg repetition and gestures that are shown constantly with a particular framing. In this kind of visual representation a person cannot escape its dichotomy. Etienne Balibar underlines the importance of the imagination in the context of borders (Giudice & Giubilaro 2015). I am adding that the imagination of a person is shaped by their experiences, by what they are able to imagine, by what they actually see and how they could transform this picture. Personal experience expands the power of imagination. The hegemonic narrative of borders and its linear representation supports the idea of fixity. In counteracting the idea of fixed lines or static entities, the imagination from the actual line of division to transnational spaces can possibly lead to a new social construction. Giudice and Giubilaro (2015) critically state “representing borders as static and naturalised categories, besides reinforcing the essentialism of identity and issues of belonging, keeps them out of time and consequently beyond change thus producing an illusion of stability and permanence“ (2015:82).

Thinking again with the image “is it a connection or is it a border“, as I am holding the line and my hands are visible, I am rather raising the question: are there alternative ways to read this image? Accompanied by the open question, the image is meant to be reconstructed in the eyes of the reader. The image, along with the supporting text, addresses artists who are familiar with the topic and who have experience. In their art practices they address the border through their experiences, they reimagine the line of division through alternative visualization, they address like-minded people and create

spaces for collective resistance. In the following section four art practices presented illustrate creative ways to engage with border regimes and to think beyond binaries by the participating artists.

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## 4.2. Shared experience & counter-hegemonic art practices

*“Personal narratives are quintessential to who we are, because they are the stories that we tell. They may be personal in nature or reflections of culture, community, and social context, but ultimately they “create memory, meaning, and identity” and are “powerful resources for personal and social change” (Rappaport, 1998, p. 225 in Chonody 2017).*

Shirin shared some of her performances passionately. She emphasises on her personal experience in order to address the topic and she shared thoughts about her performances on border control. She described it as a performative act, acted out by the border police as means of “security“ and for the maintenance of a system of inclusion/exclusion. Shirin emphasised on this moment though shared experience by stimulating a border control situation.

*“Wir haben den Eingang blockiert und die Publikum mussten vor dem Eingang, einen Fingerabdruck auf unseren Gesicht hinterlassen. Und die Idee war eine Simulation von dieser Situation, die Grenzkontrolle. Wenn die Leute in Europa oder in den europäischen Ländern reinkommen möchten, sie müssen diese Fingerabdrücke machen. Und das ist wirklich wichtige Phase und Situation, weil das ist immer so, diese Kontrollen, die sie checken, ob du vorher einen Fingerabdruck gemacht hast oder nicht. Und wenn es geht nicht bei Ihnen und wenn Sie wollen nicht, sie können dich einfach zurückschicken oder sie können auch akzeptieren. (...) Und das finde ich wichtig. Und wir haben diese Idee als eine Metapher genommen. Und wir haben einfach den Eingang blockiert und die Reaktionen von Publikum war wirklich interessant, weil sie wollten nicht wirklich auf unserem Gesicht einen Fingerabdruck hinterlassen. Aber das ist so!“ (Shirin)*

Shirin addressed the importance of this moment as much as the experience that this situation carries from her personal point of view. She uses the fingerprint as a significant symbol and gesture of identification. “Border security practices are inscribed ritually. Every gesture is rigidly codified and it is repeated without variations at each crossing“ (Giudice &

Giubilaro 2015:85). Shirin draws attention to this repetitive act, a process of segregation that this very moment produces. She presented it as a moment of arbitrariness, the selection of people based on imagined categories depending on the whims of others. In Shirin's narration crossing the border appears as a moment of powerlessness that is simulated as an act between herself and the "powerful" others. She says that people were not pleased to put their fingerprints on her face, this act can be perceived as encroaching and mediates feelings not appreciated by those who are to carry them out in the exhibition space. The act of passing the border also creates the path for self-identification and the perception of an individual within a particular territory, for migrants the act is often perceived as degrading. Shirin emphasised that through her regular performances on the subject of borders, she wants to show how important the body is in these processes. "Contemporary artists often create works which actively involve the observer and consequently increase the emotional participation" (Giudice & Giubilaro 2015:87). This participation creates shared experiences where existing narratives can be questioned through the experience of the body.

*"Borders are thought up and instituted to differentiate, filter and control bodies. Sometimes, though, these forms of control can become instruments of death and an unrecognised body at the border a corpse outside of it, and these bodies usually sink into invisibility, hidden behind a barrier of blindness and disinterest. Borders differentiate bodies, in a way that can no longer be ignored"* (Giudice & Giubilaro 2015:87).

The act of crossing a border is often linked to violence. It is a dangerous path, for many migrants it is a matter of life and death. The representation of these situations as means of "security" is inappropriate, because it hides the violence that these situations carry. The "blindness", the hidden aspect of legitimized violence, is embedded in the dominant narrative of borders. "Violence is not an accidental feature of the border, but its unavoidable product" (Giudice & Giubilaro 2015:84) and it becomes visible and tangible through people's experience. Shirin's performance thematises violence and gives visitors to the exhibition space a sense of power. Through her position she represent a person marked by difference and she exposes these power relations by putting responsibility to the visitors of the exhibition. She further stressed that is important to cross the border safely. In order to avoid the control mechanism, people are looking for places of "invisibility". Shirin referred to toilets in trains as place of safety. Although I do not agree that toilets in trains are safe places, I support the meaning of Shirin's words that people

are scared when crossing borders and they are looking for places to make themselves invisible in order to avoid violence. In/visibility is always linked to the context and represents power relations. The need for security and protection for people crossing borders as well as the fear of violence that these moments carry, are significant for many person who has had bad experience in crossing borders. Juana, when sharing her experiences of regularly crossing the U.S. Mexican border with her family, also pointed out the fear and insecurity these moments carry for her. She also highlighted how her parents have taught her a certain behaviour when facing border control. She reflected on these moments and how they have shaped her behaviour until today.

Participation is a relevant topic in contemporary art production, it addresses the audience as well as like-minded communities. Some artists in the research reflected on community projects in relation to questions of belonging, community building processes, safety and spaces of healing and empowerment. The way in which these community projects unfold cannot be limited, the list of common grounds is endless because it emerges from every day experiences. What combines all narratives in the research is to look at counter-hegemonic communities as spaces of belonging.

In conversation with another participant, Ziba, she especially underlined the importance of a global community for artists on the move. Ziba is a freelance performer and choreographer, since 2019 a PhD student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Ziba is originally from Iran, and since the age of 15 she is constantly part of educational mobility programs that enabled her to built a broad understanding of people's movement along with the dis/advantages of mobility. Her international journey started at an early age and I was interested to know what made her travel the world.

*“I've been moving around so much, it has been kind of based on educational institutions. So I moved to Hong Kong to go to high school. I moved to the US to attend college and then stayed for my Masters. And then I moved to Vienna for PhD, even though I also wanted to move to Vienna because of Vienna. But most of the impulses of moving to a location has been not because of the location itself, but because of the institution that I was going to attend and study at”* (Ziba in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 26 March 2022).

Ziba talked about the impact of institutional mobility programs in her journey. He journey first hand does not speak about displacement, but rather highlights the opportunities through educational mobility programs that were available to her. Ziba underlines that

these accessibilities are very meaningful, they shaped her personal development and the way she looks at the world. She also mentioned that she always traveled on her own and therefore she was always looking for a supportive communities. Her experience with immigration and borders was not a concern in her first travels, it became more present when she moved to the U.S. to attend college.

*“The term mobility came more to the forefront during the Trump era, just because I was living in the US during his presidency and I was directly affected by his travel or Muslim ban. And it was only when I was comparing this experience to lack thereof juxtapose with the people who were not experiencing the same constraints. I realised that there is a certain, freedom of movement that is given to a certain group of people and a lack thereof to another group of people“ (Ziba).*

By pointing out the Trump era in the U.S., Ziba shows how a political situation at a particular time directly affected her living situation. Thinking again with Juana and her statement that the term mobility is embedded in the Western world, the U.S. and the way they structure im/mobility does have significant impact on the structure of international movement and its regulations.

Trump’s exclusion of Muslim people and other migrants in the U.S. made the “impediments of mobility“ even more discriminative and visible. Ziba, as holder of an Iranian passport, described how the “Muslim travel ban“ impacted her social, educational and artistic life and how this experience became life changing.

*“So the Trump era was really harsh ... on the seven countries were under of the travel ban and many, many different other people and groups from LGBTQ, to women to pretty much anyone who had any values for humanity was somewhat suffering under Trump's presidency. And specifically, when was it ...? Yeah, 2018, just a year before I graduated from my master’s program, I came to Europe to renew my visa. And in case you don't know, you cannot renew your student visa within the US. You have to leave the country. And in the case of being an Iranian, I cannot do it in Iran because we haven't had a US embassy since the revolution in 1979. So I always have to travel to a third country. And in this case, I travel to Sweden where I have some family members and it was in this American embassy in Stockholm that they kind of gave me a notice that we cannot process your visa at the moment. And we have to send it to, I believe, FBI for a complete background check to basically, vet me as a terrorist to make sure that I have no alignment with any terrorist organizations, which is the result of Trump's travel ban. This whole process was*

*something that he established as a means to really slow down. And also I think psychologically damage the presence of many immigrants in the US“ (Ziba).*

Ziba continued sharing stories of extraordinary journeys she had to go through in order to finish her educational program in the U.S.. She highlighted these experiences because they changed her perception of mobility, in particular the unequal distribution of access and rights created by political whims. She pointed out that the Trump era should not be looked as a singular phenomenon, she nicely commented

*“I think that there's still a chance of another Trump. There are also many Trumps growing in this world. If you take Trump as a kind of icon of many different ideologies, and we shouldn't forget, we shouldn't think that it's over and it's never gonna happen again. If anything, I think this time proved that a lot of the values and rights that we fight for, they're never permanent. Even if we achieve them, they're always fleeting. They're always changing. And that generation through generation, community through community, we have to keep these values alive and keep them standing“ (Ziba).*

I interpret Ziba's attitude and words as coming from a person that has a great knowledge of the contemporary world we live in. Her movements since an early age are part of a her transnational lifestyle. She experienced a process of othering during her last years in the U.S., different to her previous experiences, that presented her in a disadvantaged position along with the identity of a victim, as critically pointed out by Ziba. She commented on victimhood by saying “I still think that there's a sentiment of resistance that even if these identities are given to us or forced upon us, then there's a sense of resistance“. When talking about victimhood and resistance, she referred to an art project called “onboard hers“, a collaborative project that she became part of during her last period in the U.S..

*“And it was in this community that I felt with every workshop with every moment of being together, I felt more and more empowered and kind of found my own ground of what is right and is my value and how I should respect myself. Because a lot of these moments, of basically denying human values, it's sometimes you internalize that and you even unconsciously may start to accept some of these notions. And it was in this community that there was a strong presence of resistance to accepting these notions“ (Ziba).*

Ziba highlights that through collaborative engagement artists and like-minded people create space of belonging that are very meaningful to overcome feelings of discrimination.

Having lived away from her family most of her life, like-minded people and places of belonging are very important to Ziba. She often underlines collaborative art projects as spaces for shared values, collectivity and empowerment, which can be mind shifting as described by Ziba.

*“I think it requires a sense of valuing yourself even in face of a system devaluing you. And I was very lucky to also be in a certain community that uplifted me. And I think that’s something that is very important to remember that as we move individually from one location to another, through one border to another, that we shouldn’t look at this experience as a solo journey. We should also think of it in collective terms that we are never alone in these ways of moving and that there, that we have to actually search for our collective communal understanding of what it means to be othered, what it means to be excluded and to make sure that we have this support system that is constantly singing another song in your ear, even though you are faced with a scream in a way“ (Ziba).*

Ziba makes clear that her lifestyle is not unique by underlining that there are many people experiencing othering and exclusion in connection to “mobility“. She further raises awareness that the global community is huge and she sees herself as part of this global community.

In my conversation with Nermin, he brought up the border topic not only in relation to his current living situation as outlined earlier, but also as relevant in the context of community work and self-identification. He shared a collaborative art project that he could realise during a festival in Vienna in 2020. In this project he didn’t emphasise on citizenship, nor on the control mechanism around border regimes. He invented a country called “Queerdistan“ which is linked to his identity as well as to his desire for safety.

*“My last project was Queerdistan. Queerdistan is about Kurdish queer people in Austria about how they experienced the racism in daily life here, how they affected because of pandemic, mental issues, economical crisis and identity visibility. (...) It is a space because I have to feel safe and I have to create a space for myself and for my community because I had to know that I’m okay with my community and I feel safe. This is my safe space. And I need to feel that because it so important for all of us, because safe space, a word is really so important because it affects everything. Everything depends on it. I’m creating spaces because I need to feel safe“ (Nermin).*

Nermin invented a new space through his imagination and instead of denying any national context, he used the container of the nation-state to redefine it through different synonyms. He emphasised “Queerdistan“ is an imagination and that through art these spaces can come to existence even if only for a short period of time. Nermin identifies as being a member of the Kurdish community as well as identifying with the Queer community in Austria and elsewhere. He underlines that both communities need safe spaces as combined in his project “Queerdistan“.

*“... because as a Kurdish person who was born and raised in Turkey, I had to feel, I have to deal with anti Kurdish racism in Turkey, all my life. So in the bureaucracy, in the society everywhere I go, everywhere is like kind of really racists against the Kurdish people. They banned our language. ...the young generation of Kurdish people in Turkey, we even don't know our mother language. So that's why we have actually no rise in Turkey. It's difficult because I speak my mother language more worse than my Turkish. My Turkish is better. And that's a big problem because your mother language is your basic right to have. And that why is really hard for me as a Kurdish queer person to live in Turkey and deal with racism. And I felt I don't want to do it anymore. I don't wanna live here and I just move out from Turkey. (...)  
Sometimes I really miss being at home, but I think it's better to live abroad. Yeah. That's why I decide to move from Turkey. And because we are belonging to Kurdish community and we are Queer and we have homophobia in our community as well. We have transphobia, we have violence in our community as well. That's why we even feel more lonely in even our community because homophobia is such a big issue of this world says why we as Queer Kurdish people have to show it ourselves to our community as well. And it's hard being a Kurdish Queer in the society. That's why I made it this project because I also wanted to educate Kurdish community as well. And also Austrian society, to show them like we are here and you have to see that we have this problems as well“ (Nermin).*

Nermin addresses important issues in the context of belonging and discrimination for both, the Kurdish community and the Queer community. He speaks about his experience in Turkey, growing up as a Kurdish person without being able to maintain his culture. Like Seyran, he emphasised the importance of language as an important cultural asset, and Nermin said that he has lost his mother tongue. Seyran and Nermin grew up in different periods in Turkey and they are not from the same region. Nermin was raised in Istanbul and around Istanbul in the early 90s, and he made clear that he has lost particular cultural

roots while growing up in urban environment. He is also aware that Kurdish people, especially the generation before him, had better knowledge of their culture. He was very pleased to hear that Seyran is part of the project, although he doesn't know her in person, he knows her music and respects her political activities. Seyran pointed out the impact of assimilation politics at the time she lived in Turkey. In Nermin's case, these assimilation politics appear as already established into a take-for-granted discrimination. Nermin doesn't point out different forms of discrimination against Kurdish people in Turkey, he rather addresses a feeling of displacement and disconnectedness that he was born into. Seyran, when introducing herself, talked about the importance of language by sharing a story of her childhood. Her introduction became meaningful through the words of Nermin because she described moments that shaped her identity through particular cultural roots and she reflected on the time and space where she established these roots.

*“Ich bin in einer kurdischen Familie geboren und lange Zeit dachte ich, dass ich eine Türkin bin. Ich wurde so erzogen. Aber als ich für mein Studium Kurdistan, wo ich geboren bin, verlassen habe damals. Ich habe es auch nicht Kurdistan genannt. In dieser Stadt, dieser neuen Stadt in Edirne musste ich studieren und da gab es keinen Platz, wo ich einfach übernachten konnte. Unterkunft hatte ich nicht und deswegen musste ich für Studentenheim jemanden fragen. Ich bin zum Sekretariat gegangen und habe ich gesagt, ich brauche einen Platz. Der Beamte war sehr, sehr freundlich und er wollte mir helfen. Nun wollte er meine Identität sehen. Einen Ausweis. Als ich das gezeigt habe, seine Haltung sich total geändert und er ist anders geworden. Mein Geburtsort hat er gesehen und total war er ein anderer Mensch. Ich habe damals nicht verstanden. Und dann hat er mir gesagt. Schau in meine Augen, siehst du so ein Licht in meinen Augen, dass ich einer Terroristin Platz gebe? Das war der Moment, wo ich wusste, dass ich anders bin. Meine Geschichte hat so angefangen. Und dann habe ich mir überlegt, warum er so reagiert hat. Wer bin ich? Woher komme ich? Warum bin ich eine Terroristin? Da habe ich meine Identität mit dieser schlechte Erinnerung sozusagen entdeckt. Und Musik hat in meinem Leben immer eine Bedeutung gehabt. Als kleines Kind, wir haben immer türkisch gesungen in der Familie. Und die Sprache, die wir mit uns Eltern gesprochen haben, war eine andere Sprache und in der Schule haben wir Unterricht mit einer anderen Sprache bekommen. Als wir gefragt haben, warum diese Sprachen anders sind. Unser Eltern haben uns nichts gesagt. Sie haben gesagt: Das ist unsere Sprache. Und ich habe mit der Zeit recherchiert, ob auf dieser Erde eine Sprache, die unsere Sprache heisst gibts. Aber nirgendwo habe ich so was gefunden.*

*Entweder Englisch, Französisch, Deutsch, aber gibt es keine unsere Sprache? Was ist das? Das war immer eine Frage. Aber die Antworten als Kind habe ich leider nicht bekommen“ (Seyran).*

Although it appears like an anecdote, this narration can be meaningful in the understanding of self-identification and recognition. Seyran also mentioned that she was maybe the last generation of the Kurdish population in Turkey that had the possibility to speak the Kurdish language. “Wir sind vielleicht die Letzte. Meine Generation ist die letzte Generation, die meine Muttersprache sprechen. Wenn wir keine Dokumente haben, das schriftlich nicht irgendwie dokumentieren, dann wird eine Sprache verloren gehen“ (Seyran). This particular situation has shaped Seyran’s ambition to become a musician, to keep the language alive and to sing in her native language. She expresses her rootedness through her music, and also she feels free to combine different languages and music styles when performing on stage. Throughout the conversation she highlighted her love for languages but avoiding the term “diversity“ as mentioned earlier.

Going back to Nermin, the process of self-identification through cultural roots is not very vivid. He is aware that the loss of his mother tongue is due to the assimilation politics and the ongoing oppression of the Kurdish population in Turkey. He grew up in an urban environment, where different social, economical and political processes have shaped his personality and culture. His relation to his “country of origin“ is different from that of Seyran because through time the place, the Turkish State, has transformed. This transformation shapes the relation of people to space as well as it underlines that there is no fixity around spaces, as earlier mentioned through arguments by Tobias Kelly (2008). Both, Nermin and Seyran, have decided to leave Turkey for safety reasons and to become artists. Their identities and their art creations are connected to their experiences of displacement and through their medium of art they express their feelings and create new spaces of belonging. For Nermin being a Queer person is very important and it is driven by feelings of discrimination that he experiences in Turkey as well as in Austria. He underlines “Queerdistan“ is a community project mainly addressing Kurdish Queer people in Vienna to visualize discrimination within the community and he explicitly talked about homophobia and transphobia within the Kurdish community in Vienna. He expresses the need to address these issues and to widen the perspective of a largely heterosexual community towards more diversity. With the creation of an open space he is inviting like-minded people to join in, to address common needs and to express feelings through collective actions.

*“Yes, I wish we had a nation called Queerdistan and older queer people could live there freely. I mean, no pressure, no homophobia, no transphobia, no racism, nothing and live free. It was my dream. And its why I called it Queerdistan because also it's coming from my queer identity. Queerdistan is coming distant from Kurdistan. So it's a, a dream of me, an imagination of a free, free, free nation for the Kurdish queer people living there without any phobia. And that's my biggest dream in this world. So I know it's not possible to make it, of course, but it's just a dream, some sweet dream. And I can, I just made it and I used my artist identity to just create a small world in this project that was really important for me“ (Nermin).*

Although Nermin identifies with being a Kurdish person, he also points out “Queerdistan“ does not represent Kurdistan. He underlines that his space goes beyond the idea of a nation based on ethnicity. Artists like Nermin, as also mentioned by Gin, talk about the need and importance for communal spaces not only in terms of spaces of belonging, but also as spaces that can replace personal social relations. For queer or transgender people, especially coming from more conservative societies, the problems that arise within their families due to their identification can leads to exclusion and rejection. In our first conversations these sensitive issues were not brought up, it was only later when we continued talking on feelings of exclusion and the importance of communities of belonging, the family issue came to the fore. Nermin and Gin have difficult relations with their families, both are rejected due to their identification. They didn't want to talk about it in front of the camera as this issue is too personal. Even within their communities or when working on community projects, the family issue is silenced. Gin keeps silent about their marriage because this situation provokes discriminative questions within the transgender community and beyond. Nermin when pointing out that there is homophobia and transphobia in the Kurdish community in Vienna addresses discriminations based on experience. In this sense, “Queerdistan“ represents Nermin's desire to create a space free of any phobia. He calls it a nation, but without traditional national values. And he also emphasised that the whole world should be “Queerdistan“ because this place has no borders.

In Nermin's narrative the sexual issue is important because it shaped his feeling of exclusion and displacement no matter of locality. He stresses the need for safety, for himself and his community, the Kurdish Queer people as he calls it. He passionately reflects on the project as a dream that could take shape in form of an art project and the festival enabled his work to be seen by a larger group of people and to address like-minded people. He highlighted the collective shared experience and emphasised on the visibility of “Queerdistan“.

*“We can make ourselves more visible. We can do a lot of things as a community, but we have to also build this community. We have to work also on this issue, to build as a community. So let's see. I'm hoping for that, I hope it will be one day. I don't know”* (Nermin).

Nermin underlines the collective experience created through the project as well as to strengthen the community through photographs. Chonody (2017) argues “at the heart of artistic efforts in practice is empowerment—an approach that seeks to elevate the voices of those with whom we work” (2017:2). Nermin, in building a community through his art practice, puts effort to create shared meaning through his photographs. At the same time he emphasised on a collective authorship, an aspect that is typically embedded in community projects in contemporary art productions.

*“Community building through art is one avenue for meeting goals whether it is engaging residents to assess and create opportunities for change through creative enterprises and outlets, increasing public awareness about social issues, influencing key stakeholders by visually representing community assets and concerns, or developing space within the community for creative expression. Change at the local level can help further build capacity and social capital”* (Chonody 2017:2).

Nermin's photographic works visualize the social capital of his project beyond the actual appearance of the project. Through his photographs he can highlight the meaning and frame the context in a way that the collective empowerment becomes stronger. Photography is a common medium in community activism to create images and visualize narratives as well as “to implement the interests and strengths of the individual in their work together” (Chonody 2017:9). Photographs shape the meaning of art projects through the way the context is framed and presented. It is the people within the community, or the people who are connected to the context, who can create these images and present them as a collective endeavour. One's own involvement is important because through this perspective empowerment takes place. Photography can be understood as a tool to highlight “how individuals can feel empowered through the incorporation of photography in practice and research, including therapeutic benefits associated with the photographic process” (Chonody 2017:9). Social rejection, displacement, feelings of loneliness and the search for belonging is often connected to traumatic experiences over a long period of time. Chodony (2017) underlines the benefit of photographs by arguing that “it can facilitate an exploration of self-representation and reconstruction of personal narratives, which in turn may enhance self-esteem” (2017:12). She argues that photography is a

means to greater development of personal empowerment and involvement in social advocacy and policy reform. “The use of photography in practice can yield intrapersonal benefits as well as social change” (Chonody 2017:18). Nermin by documenting his project shaped the meaning of his work beyond the actual space of appearance. His photographs are not only documents in time and space, they are the actual material that transcends the purpose and meaning of his work from an imagination into a material body.

Thinking beyond any binaries shaped my conversation with Gin, as already stated through their critical view on reports based on national categories. Our conversation was driven by their passion for the zine culture. Zines are the shortcut term of “magazine” and address independent creators and audiences. “Zines are founded in grassroots activism and DIY culture. They have historically been a medium of self-expression for marginalized voices” (Gin).

*D: You inspired me by saying that zines are one of the things that are actually this typical cross border artworks. Can you tell me a little bit about it?*

*G: I had sort of totally this spontaneous introduction into zine culture that I always knew existed because I was like a punk kid. I was always in DIY and this alternative culture and everything. And it really started for me when I was in Australia and I sort of needed somehow to communicate my environment. (...) I think I'm an artist because of this need to communicate some ideas, but with visual art really didn't work. And I had to find another way. (...) So I started making zines first visual, and then I started writing. This was very inspiring as well because, the whole zine culture works in a way that their places online, for example, you can get in touch with people exchange zines via post. We send each other zines. So even like if, I was at some point a very isolated situation in Australia, culturally and socially isolated, but I always could find these people all around the world that I can exchange my ideas with. That was very stimulating and also a very organic way. You can write about whatever you want. It's usually personal and you sort of encouraged to be very personal about it, to say these personal things. And this is something that I never actually before in my life have had opportunity to really think who I am, what I want to say. So for that, I think sometimes I was like, we need some very difficult situations maybe to find, to find ourselves. I think I firmly believe in that for me, it was always these difficult experiences that actually brought a progress” (Gin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, 6 March 2022).*

Gin brought some zines they have created to show their works. The appearance of their works, small simple self made paper works, carry a very personal character. The topics of their works are connected to personal experiences, everyday life situations, historical engagements with particular communities and the need to express oneself. The medium itself speaks about traveling, with its pocket-sized format, addressing political and social topics translated into personal narratives. Gin's zines mainly appear as drawn or written stories. As explained by Gin, for creative people zines are a way of communicating with the environment. This environment is not limited to a territory, zines easily cross borders and the zine culture has established new ways, infrastructures and platforms to share and exchange zines worldwide. The community is unlimited, every person - no matter of skills or background - is able to produce a zine. Zine production is often supported by workshops, where like-minded people share their skills and knowledge on the creation to support those in the community that need assistance in content creation and in the printing process. Zine culture continuously widens its scope and produce new communities no matter of locality. Zine-making is a DIY culture, they are self produced as limited editions to underline their anti-capitalist mode of production. As stated by Gin, zines have always been a medium for alternative cultures and marginalized groups. Zines are predominantly written in English, which also goes back to their origin, but the way they use language has no "in-group vocabulary or/and writing styles". They basically produce culture through passion and experience and allow every person to be part of this process. The zine community is growing on the international, national and any other territorial level, and makes zines the translocal medium of interdisciplinary storytelling. They tell stories that are simple and passionate, sometimes touching very personal issues but reflecting on global discourses. Zine culture creates communities beyond any social, political or economical classification, they are interdisciplinary and the community is expanding. The idea of equity, participation, equal production and distribution becomes very alive in zine culture. Zines express themselves through themselves. They don't need translation or particular knowledge to be able to read them. Gin express themselves this way

*"The visual way, it's very different we communicate some very deep things, some emotions, some symbols they're very strong, very powerful, but if we want to be direct about who we are about our identity, we have to say it and it has to be word. And I actually discovered through this, that I had to say things, this words are actually very powerful. And then I had to sort of change the way I communicate or find another way to communicate because people that I was communicating with didn't understand this visual language. (...) So I have to be more direct. I have to really*

*choose these words to communicate these things about myself. So with visual stuff, I express some very deep things like, I'm maybe very emotional, very intuitive, but with writing is more how we give shape to our thoughts that can also be very complex. So it's a new field and some people maybe don't react to visual, but would react to the word" (Gin).*

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### **4.3. In reflection**

Bringing together all four positions together is meant to create a broad understanding of collective art engagement as means to empowerment. The artists approach their creations through their identities, underlined by their migratory experiences, their creations enables new infrastructures to be imagined and to emerge.

The image "is it a connection or is it a border" visualizes a line stretched between my hands. It leaves space for the reader to recreate, reframe or/and reimagine its meaning. The social construction of border lines, as it is outlined in the first part of this chapter, shows how loaded these lines are. Dominant narratives of migration, typically represented in mass media, have created a public opinion about border regimes and their representation which is difficult to be contested. Through the daily mode of production mass media constantly adds new connotation to these lines along with new forms of legitimized violence. The way in which mass media portrays migrants and border regimes needs to be decoded and this process requires historical, social, political and economical knowledge along with an understanding of rendering in/visibility and reflecting on the impact of technical improvements. These mass media representations are not directly reflected by the artists, but they are aware how these representations drive public discourses. Their emphasis on visibility and shared experience shows new ways of presenting migrants and it creates new participatory platforms for like-minded people. The border, as explored through Shirin and Ziba, is taken up directly in relation to artistic practice and collaborative engagement. Shirin addressed the border topic through her performance by highlighting a moment of dichotomisation. Her involvement of the visitor, to make the person being part of the performance, creates a moment of shared experience which is important in the process of meaning making. Ziba emphasised on global art communities and their power to resist discriminatory structures. Through her collaboration in a project, as a reaction to the U.S. border policies at a particular time, she makes meaning to the importance of self-identification and resistance as a collective process.

Nermin's narrative shows that discriminations within communities also need to be addressed. His desire for safety does not become visible through the work itself, it is the meaning that he transcends through his words and photographs that shape the imagination of "Queerdistan".

Through the narrations of Nermin and Seyran, the transformation of places, cultures, communities and individual developments becomes visible. They respond to these transformations through their biographies and their different approach in art. Nermin neither addresses the binaries contained within the image "is it a connection or is it a border", nor does he speak about borders, but broadens the context through his imagination of a new place with different moral and ethical principles. He transforms the line of division by erasing its dichotomy and reframing the content through his personal perspective and experience. Gin's engagement with zine culture speaks of a medium that I describe as "the translocal medium of expression". It has nothing to do with the image of the open call, any national context or border connotation is replaced by a culture that has established independent production, distribution and self-expression. The zine culture, historically embedded in counter-hegemonic movements, allows transformative processes to become tangible. In establishing alternative platforms and new infrastructures in the transnational social field, zines have created a culture that is constantly transforming. Participation is unlimited, everybody can create zines, and their independent mode of production allows new ways of distribution to emerge. The zine culture is contributing to the imagination of alternative social, political and cultural interactions. They transcend to locations far away from the creator and create exchange of knowledge not on the basis of canons, but on the basis of personal and/or collective imagination. The platform or infrastructure that enables zines to circulate is created and maintained by like-minded people, the distinction between centres and margins is blurred. Zine events mainly take place at self-organised venues or online, they are organised by independent organizations and self-publishers. The zine culture is an example of how existing boundaries of production, meaning making and distribution, can be transformed through alternative "spaces of appearance". Institutions of higher education and culture are not central to the interest of zine producers, because zines historically emerge from different positions of power, nevertheless the incorporation of such institutions is neither restricted nor limited. Every actor in the field of zine creation, presentation and distribution takes an equal position to allow exchange and mutual understanding to take place and continuously expands the boundaries of zine culture and its fluid patterns.

## 5. Conclusion

Migration is a process, just like the creation of art. Bringing them together in the context of “barriers and exclusion of international artists in Vienna“ highlights restrictions to free movement and barriers to freedom of expression. Ethnic and/or national background, and socio-economic aspects of status lead to inequality. The im/mobility lens illustrates these inequalities in relation to the living realities of the participating artists with the focus on their migratory experiences. Each participant in the research, their biographies, their travelling experiences and their daily lives can only be looked at individually. They show that feeling excluded is a response to structural barriers and limited access to participation. Topics such as recognition, self-identification, responsibility and collectivity as means to empowerment were brought up by the participants to underline their resilience through art. The visa issue, as also stated by Çağlar, is the biggest barrier to mobility or artistic movement. In my collaboration with the Austrian UNESCO Commission, this topic came even more to the forefront because the UNESCO addresses “mobility“ through their policies and they showed great interest when I proposed my focus on artistic movement. Relating the experiences of the participants to the policies of the UNESCO shows the ambivalences embedded in the term “mobility“. It defines free movement for a particular group of people but restrictions to free movement for others. This selection of people on the basis of their status reveals structural inequalities that are deeply rooted in Western institutions.

In the beginning of my research there have been disagreements within the organization *kültür gemma!* as to whether a collaboration with UNESCO is possible from their position. These disagreements have raised awareness as to whether an intergovernmental organization is able to address the needs of migrant artists or not. The participating artists could share any narrative or opinion openly, and as my fellowship run under the title “the freedom of expression“ I had no reason to think of any limitation in expression or articulation. The problem occurred when their comments eg. defining “mobility“ a neoliberal term or calling the MA35 a racist institute, were about to be presented on the UNESCO website. My first video did not respond to the narrative of the UNESCO, so it could not be published. We agreed in using only quotes by the artists to present their voices on the UNESCO website, but this situation led to a set of discussions because my selection of quotes again did not respond to their wording. This dilemma continued for a few months until we agreed on something. This situation opened questions and concerns,

it made me place the research in a broader context and it made clear that representing voices of criticism, in particular when these voices address governmental issues through an intergovernmental platform, contextualizes the problem of in/visibility. In/visibility is an important structural barrier in the lives of the interviewed artists. The dilemma of the research, my negotiation process with the UNESCO, is the dilemma the artists face daily when dealing with national regulations and/or institutional policies.

The artists recognise the importance of policies in order to address their issues, but the way policies are implemented and articulated has no impact on their lives or they feel excluded from their meaning. The UNESCO policies, even if they are “well-intentioned“, are embedded in a structure that is inaccessible and exclusive for many migrant artists because they cannot be part in the meaning-making process. My critical point towards the UNESCO, through a closer look into the definition of “freedom of expression“ and article 16 “the preferential treatment“, is to question the structural embedding of the institution and in particular their approach to locality. A different approach to locality, the determination of locality through the transnational perspective, offers a ways to think beyond binaries and national categories. The transnational perspective emphasises that processes of self-identification must be approached through “ways of belonging“, it implies an equal participation in the meaning-making process to create a path for all further actions. Similar like Juana, my working situation with people working in the institution was welcoming and respectful. Our differences became evident in the negotiation about visibility and wording. From my experience at the Austrian UNESCO Commission, employees have no personal connection to the significance of existential barriers in the context of exclusion and their approach to the topic is purely theoretical. As earlier stated by Levitt in the context of “decentering“, personal affectedness has impact on the decision and approaches one makes, because this perspective guides moral and ethical principles. *Kültür gemma!* managed to build a bridge and create the possibility for a collaboration with the UNESCO, which I looked at as the first step to a decentering process. My ambition in building a bridge between artist’s movements and the freedom of expression as well as presenting it through the UNESCO website could not be achieved. It made clear that existential issues, which are central to the “decentering attitude“, require critical engagement with current frameworks in order to allow further processes to take place. If this situation is not a given, the process might end up with no consensus. Juana’s position as a cultural worker to address institutional responsibility and to put effort to shape future processes of institutions is an important contribution to the research because she makes clear that fair “mobility“ structures are needed and must be approached by people working

in Western institutions. Similar to my work with UNESCO, certain issues and restrictions are important to be questioned but difficult to change because they challenge the foundation of Western societies. I agree with Juana, time is an important aspect that enables change to take place. Working within limited timeframes and short-term contacts does not allow significant impact to take shape. That was my situation during the research, Juana's working conditions in Vienna and generally the setting for artists on the move.

People's movements is a basic condition of life and has always been a major field in the arts and culture. The artists in the research consider their movements and their experiences of migration as a given situation, as a basis for self-identification and as a source of creativity which has a long tradition in art and culture. In the chapter "Locality" and in the chapter "Collectivity & collective art practices" topics and narratives overlap and/or speak to each other. In both chapters, the biographical connection between the artists and their creations show the interconnectedness of art and migration. The artists express themselves through their medium of art, with their language and their wordings. In doing so they respond to the societies where they are momentarily located and at the same time they create transnational interconnections. The structure of the thesis should not be regarded as linear, it is not built up from the first chapter to the fourth chapter, it is rather an attempt to underline the interconnectedness through a circular structure in which simultaneous processes and overlapping moments can be presented. Starting with how attempting to determine "locality" shows a basic mis/understanding that drives all further processes. In the chapter on "Im/mobility", which also focuses on the question of locality, the biographies of different artists show that their status on paper is the leading obstacle to participation, recognition and visibility. Some artists in the research were forced to leave their so-called "countries of origin", others moved for personal or economical reasons, in either way their migratory experiences are linked to their identities and how these identities are categorised in a national and socio-economic context. They address discrimination against their gender, race and/or class as driving forces to migration, at the same time these discriminations are the leading aspects in feeling excluded when finding themselves in a new location. It makes clear that artists who have been displaced or had to leave their "countries of origin", find themselves struggling with similar problems abroad as also highlighted by Kelly (2008). Political, social and economic practices which relate people to places cannot be framed through territory because territories transform over time and this transformation shapes people's relation to place. Visas regulate movement and confinement, their politics of differentiation expand the selection of people on the basis of

their status beyond borders. For those who can move freely, time is not an insurmountable obstacle, while for those who cannot move freely, timeframes are set by authorities and regulate all social processes.

The artists addressed restrictions of visa regulations, eg. in access to higher education systems in Western institutions and/or access to labor markets, but also in relation to rights, in particular human rights. By emphasising the human rights framework in relation to stateless people, particularly through Ahmed's position, and by building a bridge to the position of transgender people as outlined by Gin, the question "Who is part of the human family in human rights?" is an important question to be raised. Inspired by Goodale's approach to reinventing human rights, he emphasises the relationship between international and national rights through the problem of state sovereignty embedded in the current human rights framework. States favour a selection of people, they can decide who is allowed to enter a territory, who is allowed to stay and/or who is sent into uncertainty. Although human rights should be a superior set of rules to protect people no matter of locality, the practice of the current human rights framework shows that authorities can circumvent international regulations to exclude migrants without violating human rights provisions. This paradoxical situation shows that, as Goodale argues, the economic relations of nation states are the driving forces for inclusion/exclusion and states are the "biggest guarantors and violators of human rights" (Gündogdu 2015:8). Their relations with "the others" are based on economic ties not on means of justice.

Goodale's approach, "in proposing a reinvented human rights as a logic of translocal collective action that depends on the formation of alliances beyond categories of difference", lies in the creation of an alternative grounding along with an alternative conceptual and moral framework (2022:107). This ground, as also addressed by Levitt through an infrastructure that allows ideas, people and content to circulate, is based on movement and determination of locality as "a logic of translocal collective actions" (Goodale 2022:107). As long as there is no alternative grounding, as proposed by Levitt, visa regimes of Western countries along with their social and economical obligations are structural barriers that are impossible to overcome for migrant artists. The current concept of "mobility" is part of the *inequality pipeline* (Levitt 2023) that represents a continuum of Western colonial practices and it is one of the leading pillars of inequality in all levels of society. Dismantling the legacy of colonial structures through alternative forms of storytelling and visualization, as well as producing knowledge on the basis of equity as opposed to closure of knowledge production (Çağlar 2019) is necessary in order to break *the inequality pipeline*. The current concept of "mobility" perpetuates structural

discrimination and overshadows these barriers with “well-intentioned” policies that lead to the legitimization of social discrimination.

The interviewed artists presented themselves through their biographies, their creations and their daily challenges. In their art practice connected to feelings of exclusion, they address discriminations to show that inequality and injustice is part of a system that differentiates humans that no longer can be accepted. It is important to find creative ways to overcome structural barriers and to shape social inclusion through visibility. With the example of zine culture, the imagination of something that can emerge from the limitations of existent structures becomes tangible and it also visualizes how the distinction between theory and practice can merge. The simplicity of zines transforms complex theoretical questions into simple realisations, its democratic principles and its ways of distribution can be inspiring to imagine an infrastructure that is built on movement and shaped by creative processes.

The artists in the research raise existential concerns, their collaborations, engagements and struggles as well as their feelings of exclusion are not just experiences, they create the basis for their existence. Social inclusion as a principle counters binary thinking by creating a multiple three-dimensional grid that allows all interconnectedness and creative processes to flow. Artists contribute to the imagination of this multiple three-dimensional grid through their expressions, wordings and creations. They shape meaning-making through visibility to inspire new paths to emerge from current limitations which is also central to arguments by Goodale. Instead of thinking around new policies, the core of the existent ones can be used to be reimaged, reframed and rephrased to address current needs. Artistic work emerges from life and every generation has to find ways to overcome its own struggles. Mobility in the globalized world is driven by the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion and represents a contradiction between national and transnational realities. Marlène’s situation, the youngest participant in the research, shows that this situation is part of her identity as the search for belonging have always characterised her process of self-identification. These processes form the way she looks at the world and how she communicates with her environment. Thinking around social inclusion and diversity through feelings of exclusion highlights current limitations and barriers to participation. A more productive way to address social inclusion and diversity, to frame the context of art and migration for the next generation as a continuum, is to allow artist to create, participate and distribute art free of any binary thinking and economic values. Freedom of expression should be guided by diverse cultural expressions and their multiple appearances instead of

geopolitical power constellations. "The anxiety of the uncertainty" will not be linked to the identity of a person and to feelings of exclusion but to the process of creating art. A blank sheet of paper is a hurdle for some, but for artists it is an important moment to embark on a new journey. The outcome may be uncertain, but the process of learning through experience and visualising the uncertainty through art is an important source for shaping the next generations of artists. Art can do much more than just respond to the limitations of today's society, and to unfold its power it requires time, space and freedom.

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### Conversations & Image

- Ahmed in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 19 February 2022, recorded on camera.
- Gin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 6 March 2022, recorded on camera.
- Juana in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 26 February 2022, recorded on camera.

- Marina in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 16 February 2022, recorded on camera.
- Marlène Southe in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 22 February 2022, recorded on camera.
- Nermin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 4 March 2022, recorded on camera.
- Seyran in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 18 February 2022, recorded on camera.
- Shirin in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 3 March 2022, recorded on camera.
- Ziba in conversation with Daria Tchapanova, Vienna, 26 March 2022, recorded on camera.

Image: "Is it a connection or is it a border?" by Daria Tchapanova, 2022.