

Collective Ma'louba (founded 2017)

How and why were you founded, and what is the group's status now that it is connected to the PostHeimat network?

The project was initiated by Rolf C. Hemke and Sven Schlötcke of Theater an der Ruhr in Mülheim an der Ruhr in late 2016. The goal was to give artists in exile a new place to live and work. Initially, the group's core consisted of the director Omar Abusaada, the author Mohammad Al Attar, the stage and costume designer Bissane Al Charif and the producer and dramaturge Immanuel Bartz. The trio of Abusaada, Al Attar and Al Charif left the project before its first production to realise an IPHIGENIE production at Volksbühne Berlin with its then-new artistic director, Chris Dercon. Working on the theatre production YOUR LOVE IS FIRE for Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen at the beginning of 2017, the actress Amal Omran, the author Mudar Alhaggi and the director Rafat Alzakout joined the project and gave it its name COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA (Ma'louba translates to upside down). Today, the core collective includes Amal Omran, Mudar Alhaggi, Immanuel Bartz and Omar Mohamad, who is in charge of public relations and developing an audience network. The group has been in residence at Theater an der Ruhr for the past five years. The artistic directors of Theater an der Ruhr decided not to prolong the residence beyond the year 2021. In 2022, COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA became an independent artistic group without the support of a theatre institution in Germany.

The first meeting of groups which would shape the PostHeimat network in May 2018 came about because of the initiative of the independent artistic group RUHRORTER and the Munich Kammerspiele. COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA and four other groups were invited to the first meeting in Munich, the first Encounter (#1). And it became evident that if the network wanted to continue, it would need a long-term financial base. With its application for renewed three-year funding, COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA included the PostHeimat network in its application form and its artistic productions in 2019, 2020, and 2021. The application was granted by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes and the Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen and for the groups, individual members and associates of the network two Encounters (Encounter #2 - Encounter #7) per year for three years could be realised.

How do you describe the aims of your group – Some groups started years ago, have there been changes in their aim?

In its theatre productions, COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA questions the political and social condition of the Arab world against the background of recent rebellions and penetrates the taboos of Arab and European society. Further artistic projects of thematic relevance, such as installations, exhibitions, concerts and workshops, accompany the theatre productions. They are shown in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, and abroad, thus creating transnational meeting places.

How do you describe your strategies, priorities and work aesthetics?

An external priority of the project over the past five years has been to be very successful artistically in a very short time to justify the extensive funding over five years. An essential internal priority of the project over the past five years has been to build mutual trust, form a group and its ways of working, and find its own artistic core.

What are the biggest challenges to your group?

Sustainability: In 2016, the Federal Cultural Foundation funded three flagship projects at three German theatre institutions, which was certainly also a cultural policy reaction to the ongoing wave of refugees. The Exil Ensemble is at the Maxim Gorki Theatre, the Open Border Ensemble is at the Kammerspiele in Munich, and the Collective Ma'louba is at the Theater an der Ruhr.

From the point of view of the sustainability of the projects, the Maxim Gorki Theater has created the best perspective for its group and taken over parts of the group into its ensemble. The Open Border Ensemble ceased to exist at the end of Matthias Lilienthal's directorship. The Collective Ma'louba will lose its artistic home at the Theater an der Ruhr at the end of 2021 and face an unknown future. In the project-related funding logic of cultural institutions, the focus changes every few years. Today, it's artists in exile; tomorrow, digital projects that come about because of a pandemic; the day after tomorrow, projects dealing with climate change. This makes it impossible to work from a perspective and in a long-term manner.

Time: Projects connected with the themes of flight and migration require a lot of time and space because they occur in unknown and unfamiliar contexts, languages and environments. In addition to artistic decisions, artists living in exile must make extensive and sometimes serious personal decisions. The question of exile, when and if it will end and how and where one's life will take place is a very central.

Mudar Alhaggi: "I don't think we create a new audience. Since I've been working in Germany, I've been constantly trying to understand better the audience as well as the theatre in general. It's not an easy task, but I like the challenge. In the end, we may realize that the whole thing is not about a new audience but a new kind of theatre."

Amal Omran: "We must not underestimate how deep the shock waves triggered by European culture are for some of the people who had to flee. Through the theatre, they can access this culture; at the same time, it represents an opening of society to the migrant part of the population. Theatre is always a secular public sphere that does not wall itself off but, on the contrary, attempts to make society transparent. The fact that taboos are breached in the context of the theatre or that things are talked about that are censored in the Arabic world is a major challenge."

Immanuel Bartz: "The theatre creates friction, which in turn triggers transformation. The aesthetic mirror held up to patriarchal power structures and the associated ways of expression engender immense dynamism and a great need for discussion within a heterogeneous audience. Equality between men and women is a huge topic because the hierarchical relationships between the sexes have not been overcome in the West either. The *#MeToo* discussions and even a glance at theatre structures, which men in many areas still dominate, provide ample evidence for it. Theatre and life – and indeed living together – constitute an indissoluble unity in this respect."

Omar Mohamad: "For the people who attend our events, it makes a huge difference whether Arabic-speaking projects exist or not. When you are in exile, culture – and the theatre – assume a profoundly relevant social function. Public attention has increasingly shifted away from the theatre due to the new media and social networks – and because it has become more apolitical. But in these contexts, it again takes on an essential and indispensable role, meaning no other medium can replace that. And that means a lifelong meaning and role. We now have audiences who engage with the art form of theatre because it is an art that generates a public sphere that is inextricably associated with conversation and communication: audiences for whom theatre have become a vital factor in their individual lives."

Which performances did you organise as part of PostHeimat?

Since the beginning of the network, we created two projects within the context of PostHeimat:

REINE FORMSACHE (2019),

In the play, REINE FORMSACHE, two Syrian theatre actors have lived in Europe for a few years. They share a room and a story as time goes by. What do we do now, and what are we going to represent? Can we continue acting? They take advantage of their presence on stage and include the audience in their space – the play unfolds and starts with the question WHAT IF. It premiered in November 2019 and was presented at Maxim Gorki Theatre as part of Encounter #4 in March 2020.

OVERDOSE. The Unfinished Show of Pain and Joy (2021),

A vast stage inhabited by a group of people: A writer, a composer, a painter and a narrator. They all serve the oracle in the centre of the room. Three travellers arrive on the scene. All are occupied with their concerns. All are coming from their very personal experience of isolation. Will the oracle be able to help them? Will it provide answers to their questions? And will it show them who they really are? Seven performers, three languages, and some pains and joys – boat people project, Collective Ma'louba and kainkollektiv created a theatre journey of voiceless singers, torn actors and non-performers. The project was developed over 12 months in collaboration between the three collectives of which two are part of PostHeimat and a diverse group of theater makers from Syria and Germany.

COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA (gegründet 2017)

Wie und warum habt Ihr Euch gegründet und wie steht es heute um die Anbindung der Gruppe an das PostHeimat-Netzwerk?

Das Projekt wurde Ende 2016 von Rolf C. Hemke und Sven Schlötker vom Theater an der Ruhr in Mülheim initiiert. Ziel war es, Künstler*innen im Exil einen neuen Ort zum Leben und Arbeiten zu geben. Der Kern der Gruppe bestand zunächst aus dem Regisseur Omar Abusaada, dem Autor Mohammad Al Attar, der Bühnen- und Kostümbildnerin Bissane Al Charif und dem Produzenten und Dramaturgen Immanuel Bartz. Das Trio Abusaada, Al Attar und Al Charif verließ das Projekt noch vor der ersten Produktion, um eine IPHIGENIE-Produktion an der Volksbühne Berlin unter dem damals neuen Intendanten Chris Dercon zu realisieren. Während der Arbeit an der Theaterproduktion YOUR LOVE IS FIRE für die Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen stießen Anfang 2017 die Schauspielerinnen Amal Omran, der Autor Mudar Alhaggi und der Regisseur Rafat Alzakout zu dem Projekt und gaben ihm den Namen COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA (Ma'louba bedeutet übersetzt „auf dem Kopf stehend“). Zum Kernkollektiv gehören heute Amal Omran, Mudar Alhaggi, Immanuel Bartz und Omar Mohamad, der sich um die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und den Aufbau eines Publikumsnetzwerks kümmert. Seit fünf Jahren ist die Gruppe am Theater an der Ruhr zu Gast. Die künstlerische Leitung des Theaters an der Ruhr hat beschlossen, die Residenz nicht über das Jahr 2021 hinaus zu verlängern. Mit dem Jahr 2022 wird COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA eine unabhängige Künstler*innengruppe ohne die Unterstützung einer Theaterinstitution in Deutschland werden.

Das erste Treffen von Gruppen, die das PostHeimat-Netzwerk formen sollten, kam im Mai 2018 auf Initiative der freien Künstler*innengruppe RUHRORTER und der Münchner Kammerspiele zustande. COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA wurde zusammen mit vier anderen Gruppen zum ersten Treffen in München eingeladen, das der erste Encounter (#1) war. Und es wurde klar, dass das Netzwerk, wenn es weiter-

machen will, eine langfristige finanzielle Basis braucht. Mit dem Antrag auf eine erneute dreijährige Förderung hat COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA das Netzwerk PostHeimat neben seinen künstlerischen Produktionen in den Jahren 2019, 2020 und 2021 in den Antrag aufgenommen. Der Antrag wurde von der Kulturstiftung des Bundes und dem Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen bewilligt und für die Gruppen, Einzelmitglieder und Partner*innen des Netzwerks konnten zwei Encounter (Encounter #2 -Encounter #7) pro Jahr für drei Jahre realisiert werden.

Wie beschreibt Ihr die Ziele Eurer Gruppe – Einige Gruppen haben vor Jahren begonnen, hat sich Euer Ziel verändert?

In seinen Theaterproduktionen hinterfragt COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA vor dem Hintergrund der jüngsten gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen die politische und soziale Verfasstheit der arabischen und europäischen Welt. Weitere künstlerische Projekte von thematischer Relevanz, wie Installationen, Konzerte, Lesungen und Workshops, begleiten die Produktionen. Diese werden in Nordrhein-Westfalen, Deutschland und dem Ausland gezeigt und stiften transnationale Begegnungsräume.

Wie beschreibt Ihr Eure Strategien, Prioritäten und Arbeitsästhetik?

Eine externe Priorität des Projekts in den letzten fünf Jahren bestand darin, in sehr kurzer Zeit künstlerisch sehr erfolgreich zu sein, um die umfangreiche Finanzierung über fünf Jahre zu rechtfertigen. Eine interne wesentliche Priorität des Projekts in den letzten fünf Jahren war es, gegenseitiges Vertrauen aufzubauen, eine Gruppe und ihre Arbeitsweise zu formen und den eigenen künstlerischen Kern der Gruppe zu finden.

