9

‘Still Lives’: Syrian displacement and care in contemporary Beirut

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The title of this chapter, ‘Still Lives’, borrows the name of a series of photographs taken by a girl of about eight years old (who I will refer to as M) on the evening of 11 July 2015, in Lebanon’s capital Beirut. M’s first image shows a blurred photograph of a bunch of red roses. The stems are packed together in a plastic bucket, and each one is wrapped in cellophane protecting a full crimson bloom. The photograph is taken from above, so that each perfect nest of petals faces towards the camera, picturesque. In the background, on the tiled floor on which the bucket stands, are two pairs of feet. One larger, in black high heels, seems to belong to a woman walking past or dancing. The smaller feet, in flat pumps and stripy socks are M’s, at the bottom of the frame. The second image is a close-up of the roses, blurry again. The next is in better focus, just two of the perfect blooms filling the frame. In the following image, M seems to be holding the bucket stably between her knees, handling the camera more securely, the bunch of red flowers gorgeous in the centre of the frame. The series of photographs continues: an extended, conscientious study evocative of the floral painting tradition referenced by its title.

M’s photographs have been shown to me by the Lebanese community artist Dima el Mabsout.¹ They form part of a collection of images taken by Mabsout and a group of children (including M) in the Hamra area of west Beirut over six months in 2015. The photographs were produced as part of *Fleeing and Forgetting*, a project Mabsout devised in response to the post-2011 conflict in neighbouring Syria. *Fleeing and Forgetting* focused on the transformation of urban spaces in Beirut enacted by the presence of new populations who had come to Lebanon from Syria as refugees. In June 2015, Mabsout began to compile a collection of photographs – mostly taken on streets in Hamra, a mixed neighbourhood with a particularly high refugee presence – that resonated with her focus.² Supporting herself financially as a part-time waitress in a restaurant on Hamra Street, Mabsout formed a friendship with a group of Syrian children who sold flowers at night outside the restaurant. Using her camera phone while Mabsout was at work, the children contributed to a body of almost two hundred photographs,

including those in 'Still Lives' described above, which document their experiences in the nocturnal life of the neighbourhood.

In this chapter, I explore the photographs collected through *Fleeing and Forgetting* in order to think through the performances of care that subtended this project, and the broader questions that these pose about art and scholarship produced in relation to experiences of displacement. While a visual art analysis of the images may (generatively) celebrate their qualities as aesthetic objects, I adopt the perceptual coordinates offered by performance, which emphasise the actions and processes that have enabled and conditioned their production. A focus on performance thus attends to the social and aesthetic care that the images perform and depend upon. This propels my problematisation of a historical tendency in some performance theory to associate migration with liminality, and with transgressing the interdependency of living-as-usual. In this chapter, I argue that to perform scholarship 'care-fully' (Thompson, 2015: 438), by recognising the specificities and complexities of experiences of migration, must also allow the latter to challenge the dominant hermeneutic and ethical paradigms through which research encounters practice (and vice versa). As Judith Hamera has argued, for scholars to act 'response-ably' and make ourselves 'accountable to others' bodies we must support the 'vulnerability' of our ethical and methodological positions (2013: 306–7). The particular challenge presented by *Fleeing and Forgetting*, I will suggest, demands that we pay attention to stillness, reciprocity and care, which as the project demonstrates can be just as pertinent to experiences of displacement as upheaval and transformation.

I begin this chapter by introducing *Fleeing and Forgetting* and the conditions of its production. I then turn back to a lengthier exploration of 'Still Lives', the series of photographs described at the opening of the chapter. I mobilise the dialogues around performing care staged in this edited collection in order to suggest that, even as it evidences the conditions of precarity experienced by the child photographer M, 'Still Lives' requires and performs relational infrastructures of care that seek to work against this precarity. I use the term 'infrastructure' after AbdouMaliq Simone, whose attention to 'people as infrastructure' denotes intersubjective and complex 'combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices, [...] providing for and reproducing life in the city' (2004: 408). I trace a disciplinary history in which migration has been celebrated as a metaphor for transgression and examine the ways in which apprehending the images instead through an 'aesthetics of care' (Thompson, 2015) might defamiliarise these tropes. A 'care-full' approach, I suggest, would respond to the two-fold injunction of Thompson's argument: first, to notice the acts of care that performance practices depend on; and in doing so, to enact care in our hermeneutic responses as researchers. In the context of *Fleeing and Forgetting*, a 'care-full' approach recognises the children photographers as subjects, rather than objects, of representation; and as givers, as well as receivers, of aesthetic and intersubjective care. Finally, I turn to a second series of images from

the collection entitled 'Home', concluding that it indexes a complex, non-dichotomous relationship between 'home' and 'displacement', and reiterates the importance of attending to sustained, embodied and reciprocal care in addressing art making by or about displaced persons.

Postcards from Hamra

Over six months in 2015, I was regularly emailed 'postcards' by the Beirut community artist Dima el Mabsout, consisting of individual or grouped photographs, each accompanied by a date, title and short text written by her. I first began working with Mabsout when she successfully applied to be artist-in-residence at 'Beirut: Bodies in Public', a three-day programme of conference activities and performances in public spaces in Beirut that I co-convened in 2014 with Eliesh S. D., a performer and founder of the Lebanese NGO Organisation du Développement Durable (Organisation for Sustainable Development). These projects took place in conjunction with several years of my own research on performance practices in Lebanon. To reiterate Hamra's (2013) terms, my affective and critical 'vulnerability' to *Fleeing and Forgetting* partly owes to the duration of my engagement with the project and my proximity to Mabsout as my colleague and, increasingly, friend. Mabsout and I maintained close correspondence through emails, instant messages and video calls throughout *Fleeing and Forgetting*, and I returned to Beirut from London towards the end of the project. Mabsout's collection of postcards was exhibited in December 2015 at the community art venue Mansion in Zoukak el Blatt, Beirut, alongside a shared meal and public forum discussing questions relating to urban public space in the context of the recent large influx of people leaving Syria for Lebanon as refugees.

Lebanon still experiences the after-effects of its own 1975–90 civil war (in the form of high levels of inequality, extant sectarian hostility and irregular public services, among others) and at the time of writing hosts an estimated 1.5 million refugees from the current Syrian conflict, in addition to hundreds of thousands of others from around the region: one in three residents in Lebanon in 2015 was a refugee.³ In her texts and in our correspondence at the time, Mabsout expressed concern about how the images might be viewed, cautious both of the hostility to Syrian refugees prevalent in both Lebanese and international media, and, on the other hand, the reductive stereotype of the victim (which I will go on to discuss later in this chapter). Remarkable popular initiatives providing support to refugee populations in Lebanon have been counterposed by mediated images of refugees as burdensome and threatening additions to an already strained national infrastructure. Despite much active support for refugees, the Lebanese government has perpetuated a fear of the Syrian presence and its apparent risk for national security, blaming crime and public service breakdown (in

particular over waste management, which I discuss below) on the Syrian influx (Al-Saadi, 2014; see also Mroue, 2014; Chit and Nayel, 2016).

Mabsout's postcards, numbering over forty and comprising almost two hundred photographs in total, were displayed at Mansion in 2015 as A4 prints on long tables. The chronology of the postcards was sporadic, and the text so miniscule that the objects had to be brought close to the eyes to read, making it difficult for viewers to feel they could assume a panoramic perspective on the collection, or, by extension, ascertain generalised reflections on either Mabsout's experience or the children's. Mabsout's texts read as confessional and extemporaneous rather than explanatory, often a candid – and uncomfortable – reflection on the ethics of representation inherent to the project, and rarely a direct explication of what the images depicted. The 'postcard' form, juxtaposing text and images, gestured towards the constraints of the page space and the polyvalence opened up by this adjacency of visual and verbal modes, pointing to the unknown context, actions and affects that extended beyond the frame. Alongside the photographs, Mabsout's texts spoke from a deliberately personal and self-reflexive perspective. Rather than superseding the photographs in a dominant narrative mode, her writing pointed towards the incompleteness of both image and text, and the ultimately subjective nature of their respective interpretation.

In the collection, the children frequently photographed themselves, each other and their flowers, sometimes in long series of images (such as 'Still Lives') that show them playing with the camera during Mabsout's shifts at work in the restaurant. The images also attest to the positive affects of their time together, and to the care that Mabsout and her co-workers attempted to provide for the children, frequently (as is shown in the postcards) appropriating food and bottles of water from the restaurant for them, sketching portraits together, intervening during incidents of aggression they faced on the street or accompanying them when they crossed the city at night. Revolving around the children's night-time labour selling flowers, however, the postcards are frequently also reminders of the violence they face. The postcards make numerous references to physical harassment of the children by local shopkeepers and from within their own families, fights between some of the children over food and the exhaustion they experience selling flowers at night, often falling asleep on the pavement or stairs outside the restaurant.

The context of Mabsout's concurrent activity – the other kinds of paid labour and political action that formed the social world in which *Fleeing and Forgetting* was realised and exhibited – also manifested timely concerns regarding institutional accountability and infrastructural, relational care. Alongside *Fleeing and Forgetting* and her hospitality work in the restaurant, Mabsout was involved in designing and building a playground with children living in refugee camps in the Beqaa Valley, with the non-profit group CatalyticAction.⁴ As she related in our correspondence, she was also participating in and documenting protests that took place in response to a breakdown in public waste management. In July 2015, residents living close to the

Na'ameh landfill site south of Beirut successfully brought the closure of the (supposedly temporary) site due to public health and environmental hazards. Without an alternative landfill option, however, rubbish collected on the streets of Lebanon's most populated zones, Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Demonstrations took place in late July and early August contesting corrupt government relationships with the private waste-management company Sukleen and the political stalemates that had precipitated the crisis (Anon, 2016). Demanding an end to government corruption and to the dilapidation of public services, these demonstrations emphasised the importance of accountable state institutions and the necessity of infrastructural maintenance to social and environmental well-being. They also enlisted a large degree of social coordination across identitarian and interest groups, emphasising the concerted, cooperative nature of the particular political action that was efficacious at this time.⁵ Mabsout incorporated documentation of the demonstrations into the collection of postcards, and the demonstrations would also have been in the forefront of the minds of many of the visitors to the exhibition and forum. Contemporaneous events thus inflected the artwork with the significance of maintaining communal and accountable infrastructures of service and support.

Concurrently, Mabsout was also facilitating an ongoing project called *The Naked Wagon* (originally developed in 2013), which uses a bare wooden cart pulled by bicycles as a peripatetic platform to stage creative events in public spaces. She used the Wagon, for example, to hold a memorial for Fares – a child who also sold flowers in Hamra – who returned to Syria and, as she writes in a postcard entitled 'Nightingale', was killed by an American missile. Fares was known in Hamra for reciting a poem about a *bulbul*, or nightingale. The images in 'Nightingale' show the Wagon strewn with red roses, and children placing candles on the wooden boards. In the text accompanying the image, Mabsout writes that over a hundred people attended this street-side memorial to Fares at short notice, bringing flowers, candles and personal offerings. 'The roses were then collected and sent to Fares by sea' (Mabsout, 2015a). Postcards such as this – and the broader social and artistic context in which *Fleeing and Forgetting* took place – stage actions and affects of intersubjective care. They attest, then, both to precarity, disenfranchisement and violence at multiple levels, and also to efforts to counteract this through activist and artistic performances of sustained, communal caregiving.

A gallery of flowers

The interrelated dynamics of precarity and care evidenced by the postcards are acutely exposed in the series of images described at the start of this chapter, 'Still Lives'. In the accompanying text, Mabsout writes: '[K] and his sister took my phone and were busy photographing and filming for hours until the battery died. I am looking through the documents and there are

tons of material I have yet to post. But here is a gallery of flowers his sister took' (2015b). Mabsout's title, 'Still Lives', and her description of the series of photographs as a 'gallery' are thrown into relief by the evidence that the photographs were not taken in stillness. While the term 'gallery' indicates that Mabsout conceives of M's photographs as artistic works, the images have evidently not been produced in the traditional, meditative space usually associated with visual art production or display. The first blurred and off-centre images are indicative of an authorial body in motion, and the two pairs of feet in the frame evocative of a passing opportunity, resting the bucket on the floor before moving on through a space of walking or dancing. The other meaning of 'Still Lives' suggests a broader paradox of transition. M and her brother K are still lives – still alive – but they have survived conflict, forced migration and now the labour of selling flowers at night on the streets of Hamra. This labour is profoundly dehumanising, because the children's very existence *as* lives is ignored by many of the people they try to engage. Selling the roses (for 2,000 Lebanese lira, or £1 each) is possibly their family's only source of income, and it means that they do not attend school in the daytime. Stillness, then, additionally evokes the impasse that forced migration has brought about in their lives. M's evident pleasure in the beauty of the roses, and the aesthetic care that is manifest in her growing dexterity as a photographer, are poignant reminders that the flowers are also the objects of her labour. The time she takes to photograph them adds to the hours in which she has to sell them before she is allowed to return home. Mabsout's title, then, alludes to M's vulnerability, but also to her demonstration of skill and joy in the production of beauty, and her capacity to enact care as well as to receive it.

Attending to M's own performance of aesthetic care is not intended to suggest a straightforward conflation of art making with social empowerment, nor to erase her severe disenfranchisement through over-emphasising the pleasure and skill the photographs manifest. Yet I would suggest it is also worth forgoing the impulse to reduce her experience to victimhood and abject helplessness. Refugee populations – and particularly children – are associated with a heightened visibility as the objects, and rarely the subjects, of image making, yet the photographs collected in *Fleeing and Forgetting* trouble this norm. They index a range of performances, including manifestations of grief and anger by the children, but also of joy and the strong, reciprocal bonds of friendship they formed with Mabsout and her peers. Certain postcards in the collection include reams of 'selfies', sometimes comprising as many as forty images taken consecutively, in which the photographers joke around and pull silly faces, trying to make each other and Mabsout laugh when they return the camera phone to her after work.

The children's humour and skill as performers goes some way towards challenging the lack of self-representation prevalent in depictions of refugee populations, and especially of those departing Syria and the region since 2011. As Katty Alhayek has noted of recent media images of Syrian women, 'In this dominant media representation, Syrian refugee women are robbed

of their agency and are constricted to a representation of a single faceless victim/woman' (2015: 1). This 'invisiblise[s] their complex and various stories of struggling for freedom, suffering from violence and war, and resisting inequality and injustice' (Alhayek, 2015: 2). As Alison Jeffers has similarly claimed, audiences of refugee performances are often 'better prepared to accept an image of depressed passivity' because 'the alternative is to portray refugees as [...] angry, as active agents of change' (2012: 139). Though the postcards do at times show anger in the children, there is also agency in their performances of humour, affection and care. I suggest, then, that resistance and subversion are not the only means by which agency might be expressed. Recognising the varied conditions within which people can manifest ethical or political action points towards the social value of interdependence.⁶ The children's photographs are funny, tender and increasingly confident, and through them, they present themselves as agents of self-representation and as givers (not just receivers) of care.

New conversations bringing together performance and care enact a helpful intervention in approaching 'Still Lives' in light of these concerns. In advocating for an 'aesthetics of care', James Thompson (2015) traces a critical framework in which the work that sustains art making is not concealed by the culminating product, nor seen as subsidiary to it, but rather is an integral and constituent component – and must equally be in its analysis. In this, I read a double imperative to at once recognise the caring practices that enable and constitute aesthetic production, and, in so doing, to enact care in our own work as scholars or critics, allowing the specific practices and subjects we engage with to challenge dominant hermeneutic priorities.

Performance is a helpful analytic focaliser since it encourages us to look beyond two-dimensional images such as those presented in 'Still Lives' and towards the actions and material conditions that enable (and are in turn shaped by) them. The images collected in *Fleeing and Forgetting*, in this sense, index much broader infrastructures through which care is performed. These were present in the context in which the photographs were taken, but also in their presentation and curation, and in their analysis in this chapter. Participating in a chain of performances that affect one another mutually, such moments of creation and display all have the capacity to manifest care. I agree with Thompson when he argues that writing about performance practices makes scholars powerful storytellers, with a consequent ethical responsibility to perform care ourselves in our research and writing (2004: 150–1). Taking the visual analysis of the postcards therefore as the starting (not ending) point of the discussion, I seek to adopt what Shannon Jackson refers to as the 'disciplinary perceptual habit' (2011: 4) of performance to attend to process and labour, the material and social infrastructures that make possible the creation of aesthetic works. As she argues, 'Performance's historical place as a cross-disciplinary, time-based, group art form also means that it requires a degree of systemic coordination, a brand of stage management that must think deliberately but also speculatively about what it means to sustain human collaboration spatially and temporally' (Jackson,

2011: 14). Though the relationships formed between Mabsout and the children were challenging to maintain and at times disrupted, it is crucial to attend to this sustained and systemic effort that underpins images of and by the children in this project and that can also be read as speculating a greater degree of self-representation available to the subjects of the photographs.

As M's photographs of the roses in 'Still Lives' make evident, aesthetic production and the labour and maintenance of the body are bound together inextricably; indeed, this is signalled by the title of the postcard and the very moment at which the photographs themselves were taken. During such moments both M and Mabsout were performing other kinds of paid work (hospitality and flower-selling), a confluence of labour and art making that is mirrored in their practices and joined through mutual relations of care. In Thompson's terms, this attests to the visibility of the artwork's 'preparation' in the moment of its 'exhibition', which can thus 'demonstrate and model a form of mutual regard' (2015: 438). The postcards' many references to labour (both to Mabsout's and to the children selling flowers), to shared meals syphoned from the restaurant and to embodied protection and the de-escalation of street violence, emphasise this enmeshing of aesthetic practice with the survival and care of the body and its material needs.

With Jackson, Thompson has argued that "supporting infrastructures" are not the hidden mechanism of creative endeavours but a valued component of the aesthetics' (2015: 438).⁷ This underscores the creative quality of infrastructural support and caring labour, emphasising that the substrates and conditions of possibility for the aesthetic are not given, but themselves imaginatively (and often collaboratively) made and effortfully maintained. The 'mutual regard' elicited here encourages us to encounter the children as subjects and as art makers who enact, as well as receive, creative care. Performance is helpful, then, in naming a 'doing' that enfolds and enmeshes the work of creative, sustaining and caring practices, challenging the relegation of these to separate spheres (such as the aesthetic, the activist, the social or the domestic), and emphasising that care is often reciprocally practised by multiple subjects in art-making processes.

Uncoupling migration and freedom

In the case of *Fleeing and Forgetting*, then, mobilising Thompson's 'aesthetics of care' helps to recognise the children photographers as subjects of self-representation, whose agency is interwoven within broader relational infrastructures of aesthetic and intersubjective care. In the particular context of art making by and about refugee populations, this stands to challenge not only dominant representations of refugees as victims (as suggested with Alhayek and Jeffers above), but also to problematise critical narratives in which migration and displacement have been employed as metaphors that celebrate rupture and transformation. As Sara Ahmed notes in her book *Strange Encounters* (2000), which interrogates the discursive

co-constitution of the figure of the (migrant) 'stranger' in dialectical opposition to the (localised) 'epistemic community': 'Migration is employed as a metaphor within contemporary critical theory for movement and dislocation, and the crossing of borders and boundaries. Such a generalization of the meaning of migration allows it to be celebrated as a transgressive and liberating departure from living-as-usual' (2000: 80). As such, migration (and with it the exemplary 'figure' of the migrant) become tropes denoting a certain type of sociopolitical radicality that prioritises social disruption over social cooperation. Misleadingly, such tropes come to stand in for the lived diversity of migratory experiences: for Ahmed, 'this act of granting the migrant the status as a figure (of speech) erases and conceals the historical determination of experiences of migration' (2000: 81). Extrapolating from lived displacements to metaphors suggesting the movements of ideas and theories can be productive, though as Caren Kaplan has similarly argued, such 'affiliation is political, however, and cannot simply be assumed through [...] the deployment of generalized metaphors' (1996: 105). Such metaphors risk effacing concrete, historical disparities in the conditions faced by migrants and refugees, as well as disparities between places in the world that they depart from and arrive.

In performance studies, Ahmed's diagnostic has special relevance given the historical tendency of the field to celebrate experiences of liminality and transgression. In an example of what Jon McKenzie has called the 'liminal norm', the efficacy of both the focus and the method of performance studies has been defined by 'a mode of activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic "in-between-ness" allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed' (2001: 50). Many years after McKenzie's observation, liminality continues to be enlisted in the (paradoxically normative) valorisation of both performance practice and its study as subversive, interstitial activities. Liminality relies on pervasively spatial metaphors, as deployed by Arnold van Gennep (1977) and then Victor Turner to describe a 'gap between ordered worlds [in which] almost anything may happen' (Turner, 1985: 13). Foundational narratives of performance studies, such as those authored by the theorist-practitioner Richard Schechner, have also visualised the field's liminal constitution through exceptionalist metaphors of mobility; for example, by comparing performance studies to a sidewinder rattlesnake characterised by indirection, disorientation and dissimulation 'as it sidewinds its way across the deserts of academia' (Schechner, 1998: 358).⁸ These metaphors imagine performance as evincing exceptional change through movement and social rupture. Correspondingly, stillness and social interdependence come to be pejoratively associated with stasis, normativity and unfreedom.

The disciplinary history of these paradigms, denoting conditions of institutional privilege in a North Atlantic context, are limited in what they are able to make legible about actual migratory experiences. As Ahmed has suggested: 'The naming of theory as nomadic can be understood in terms of the violence of translation, a form of translation that allows the theory

to name itself as a subversion of conventions', yet 'what is at stake here is a certain kind of Western subject, the subject of and in theory, as a subject who is *free to move*' (2000: 83, emphasis added). In measuring freedom according to the mobility of an individual, heroic and privileged subject, we risk overlooking the unfreedoms that many experience through migration, as well as different forms of agency that may, for example, be constituted through stillness or continuity, rather than mobility and liminality. As Jackson has suggested, in much avant-garde art and performance, freedom has been 'increasingly equated with systemic *independence*' (2011: 28, original emphasis). Yet performance, she suggests, 'both activates and depends upon a relational system' and thus recognises that 'to avow the supporting acts that sustain and are sustained by social actors is to avow the relational systems on which any conception of freedom rests' (Jackson, 2011: 30, 36). My reading of *Fleeing and Forgetting* insists on the recognition of reciprocal performances of care as crucial and life-sustaining in certain conditions of displacement. In this sense, the perceptual 'habit' of performance is helpful in rethinking the correspondence of mobility and freedom, and pointing instead towards the systemic, 'care-full' interdependencies through which agency, well-being or joy can be founded in art practices.

'Home'

One of the final postcards in the *Fleeing and Forgetting* collection points towards the intervention that attention to performances of care might make in recognising the diverse ways in which subjective agency can be expressed by displaced persons. I conclude this chapter with an exploration of this postcard, suggesting that it encourages us to complicate oppositions between mobility and stillness, and so too the ethical valences that each of these concepts denote. Noticing the performances of care indexed by the postcard conversely foregrounds the varied experiences that art making by or about displaced persons might articulate.

The postcard – comprising three photographs and a short text – is entitled 'Home' and dated 4 September 2015. It contains a 'selfie' photograph taken by Mabsout: she appears in the foreground in her apartment in Hamra, with K and M in the background, who are looking at the camera phone and laughing, in the middle of a meal. There is another photograph of K showing a large painting he has created of what seems to be the inside of a house, with open, multicoloured windows and a framed portrait showing three or perhaps four faces hanging on the wall. The final photograph included in 'Home' shows two buckets of roses, one bigger and one smaller, put aside on a bench in Mabsout's apartment. The only accompanying text reads: 'That night I invited [K] and [M] home for the first time' (Mabsout, 2015c).

Like many of the postcards, 'Home' leaves space for – indeed, draws attention to – what it does not disclose. The postcard does not express how long K and M were at Mabsout's home, nor what they did except eat and

paint together, nor whether this first time inaugurated her apartment as a more consistent space of their relationship that continued beyond the temporal scope of *Fleeing and Forgetting*. Beyond the references to a shared meal and K's painting, it is difficult to gauge the degree to which this experience extends or supports any broader well-being on the part of the children, and I do not seek – and indeed am unable – to draw generalised conclusions about the wider effects that Mabsout's project and the friendships it generated may have had on the children's lives. Despite the support system maintained by a wider group of Mabsout's peers and collaborators, who have responded to the needs of Syrian refugees and the repercussions of their entrance into Lebanon, this postcard is perhaps disconcerting in expressing an unboundaried provision of care for the children: for implying both their needs (for food, rest and creative play) and the personal demands placed on Mabsout in responding to them, both material and affective. Given the professionalisation of practitioners in the fields of 'applied' and 'community' arts and in a humanitarian context, the photographs are perhaps also troubling for the blurring of roles and spaces they index. This postcard insists on the private and intimate sphere of the home as a space of care and social action, and the affective intricacies and attachments this manifests. As Thompson has argued, however, 'intimate care [...] can be connected to an affective solidarity and felt sense of justice, and ultimately might be foundational to the ethics and aesthetics of a theatre and arts practice that seeks to engage with communities' (2015: 432). 'Home' refuses to 'bifurcate a world of public justice and private care' (Thompson, 2015: 432), an intervention that can be both disorientating and hopeful.

The postcard itself seems to allude both to the importance of home as an enduring site of rest, food and creativity, and to its precarity, particularly in the final photograph. The two buckets have been put aside temporarily (for the moment they are 'still') but they are a reminder of the children's labour, which must be carried out to permit their time eating and painting at Mabsout's apartment, and that will also eventually separate them from her. A nostalgic image of home might metaphorise and figure it oppositely to mobility or transgression, either with positive or pejorative connotations. This postcard, however, suggests that 'home' is expressed as a specific material, spatial and affective relation. Instead of positioning private care and public justice oppositely, or figuring home dichotomously to mobility, the postcard suggests that displacement can occasion complex but not necessarily devoid or divorced relationships to the idea of home and the care associated with it. A migratory 'figure' that is 'premised on universality in the very loss of home' (Ahmed, 2000: 79) would perpetuate the reductive theorisations of migration described above. Yet in this postcard, home is both profoundly precarious and passionately supported by migratory *and* 'local' individuals, suggesting that the home can be one possible site for realising interdependence and reciprocity supported by mutual and effortful care.

In my exploration of *Fleeing and Forgetting*, I have aimed to both recognise and mobilise performances of care. These joint aims respond to what I see

as the double imperative operating within Thompson's articulation of an 'aesthetics of care'. The first of these works towards avowing the systems of support and interdependency that can underlie expressions of agency within social settings, suggesting that agency and freedom cannot be disentangled from the material and intersubjective conditions in which they are expressed. Agency, then, is bound up with performances of care, manifest, for example, in the aesthetic care shown by M in 'Still Lives' or the material and affective care demonstrated by Mabsout in 'Home' and other postcards. Second, mobilising care in critical scholarship asks us to work 'response-ably' (Hamera, 2013) to the specificities of contexts, artworks and experiences, and allow these to interrogate the dominant paradigms that shape our hermeneutic work.

These conjoined goals are particularly pertinent, I suggest, when writing about art made by or about displaced persons. While scholars in the field of performance studies have deployed metaphors of mobility to privilege liminality and transgression, an 'aesthetics of care' problematises such tropes. It points instead towards how displaced persons often give and receive systemic and sustainable care, and towards the ways in which political action can take place not only through social transgression or resistance, but also through social coordination and interdependence. Performing care, then, entails attending to the resolutely embodied and radically differentiated possibilities of movement and refuge available to subjects, and the ways in which these might be 'care-fully' addressed in art practices and scholarship.

Notes

- 1 The names of the children in this chapter have been removed to protect their anonymity. While no strategy of anonymisation is ideal, and this one risks de-personalising the individuals concerned, the most appropriate strategy for protecting their identity has been taken here in consultation with Mabsout.
- 2 There are eighteen officially recognised religious sects in Lebanon, and most areas of Beirut are predominantly associated with particular sectarian, ethnic or political groups. With a mix of residential and commercial use, two prominent universities and an established scene of cafés, bars and restaurants, Hamra is distinctively diverse in its class, ethnic and sectarian make up (see Khalaf and Kongstad, 1973; Seidman, 2012).
- 3 Terms such as 'migrant' and 'refugee' are not neutral and have important ideological valences as well as legal definitions. I describe the children concerned as refugees since, in having been forced to leave Syria due to violent conflict, they fall into the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR's definition, even if they have not been personally registered as such. For insightful analyses of the performative and theatrical constitutions of the category of 'refugee', see Nield (2006), Jeffers (2012), Wake (2013a) and Yoxall (2018). I use the term 'displacement' in this chapter to signal an affective experience as well as the geographic one suggested by migration (cf. Kaplan, 1996). At the time of writing, there are 259,849 Syrian refugees in Beirut registered with the UNHCR and 986,942 registered in Lebanon, approximately half of whom are children (UNHCR, 2018a; UNHCR, 2018b). However, registration with the UNHCR was suspended as per

instructions from the Government of Lebanon on 6 May 2015 (at which point the number registered reached over a million), so this data does not include unregistered individuals, estimated to raise the total number to 1.5 million (Human Rights Watch, 2017). On the Lebanese government's response, see el Mufti (2014).

- 4 The Beqaa region has received more UNHCR-registered refugees from the Syrian conflict than any other area of Lebanon (at the time of writing, 35.9 per cent as opposed to 26.3 per cent in Beirut), and there are currently over 350,00 Syrian refugees living there (UNHRC, 2018c).
- 5 The protest movement brought together demonstrators from multiple sectarian and class backgrounds and built on existing networks of activists in Lebanon: it thus wove into itself a diversity of interests and concerns including those around public space, environmental sustainability, police brutality and feminist movements (Abu-Rish, 2015; Mikdashi, 2015).
- 6 This argument builds on the work of Saba Mahmood, who in *Politics of Piety* asks: 'Does the category of resistance impose a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power – a teleology that makes it hard for us to see and understand forms of being and action that are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of subversion and reinscription of norms?' (2005: 9; cf. el Zein, 2017).
- 7 This claim echoes the insistence of some Marxist feminists on social reproduction as a terrain of unwaged labour that is invisible, and yet foundational, to the workings of capitalism (see Federici, 2012; and cf. Jackson, 2011: 75–103).
- 8 For Caren Kaplan, 'Euro-American recourse to the metaphors of desert and nomad can never be innocent or separable from the dominant orientalist tropes in circulation throughout modernity' (1996: 66). As Ella Shohat (1991) has similarly shown, visualisations of heroic mobility through deserted terra incognita (such as Schechner's) are often historically constituted through imperial fantasies of conquest.