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Narrating Refugee Lives: Political Asylum in 21st century France

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**NARRATING REFUGEE LIVES: POLITICAL ASYLUM
IN 21ST CENTURY FRANCE**

by

SUSMITHA UDAYAN

MA French, MPhil French

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in French Studies

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Pulikkal Krishnan Udayan.

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Narrating Refugee Lives: Political Asylum in 21st century France

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines representations of refugees in legal and aesthetic texts. Using the notion of chronotope as a conceptual framework, it studies the use of time and space in various refugee narratives to argue that aesthetic texts about refugees foreground the concept of spatiality to materialize and historicize the refugee condition. These texts, I contend, provide a necessary counternarrative to the depersonalized, dehistoricized representations of refugees encountered in legal texts and media discourses. Comparative analysis of legal and literary texts shows that adventure-time, which dominates legal asylum narratives, contributes to produce coherent, linear, singularized legal asylum stories. Such a narration also serves as a screening test for host nations to grant refugee status only to those claimants who prove their victimhood and helplessness. Contemporary refugee narratives' emphasis on space visibilizes the social production of space and the invisible power relations lurking underneath socio-spatial inequalities which lead to forced displacement.

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Introduction

Asylum seekers and refugees represent transnationality in its most literal sense. The precarious, vulnerable condition of refugees reveals the erosion of the traditional politico-legal and religious categories that upheld universal human rights. In Hannah Arendt's brief 1943 essay, *We Refugees*, she proposes that the condition of being a refugee, which brings into serious question the assumption of rights, constitutes a new historical consciousness. Referring to the refugee as "the only imaginable figure of the people in our day" (Agamben 114), Giorgio Agamben calls for a reconstruction of current political philosophy beginning with the refugee figure. Extending Arendt's insight, Agamben considers the displaced refugee to be the central figure of our political history: the "one and only figure" that exposes most deeply the "original fiction" of sovereignty (117). A category deeply marked by the contradictions between universal human rights and the sovereign rights of nation-states, the refugee poses hard challenges to uninterrogated, normative categories such as 'citizen' and 'alien'.

When Francophone novels protagonize refugees and asylum seekers,¹ they address the ways in which forced displacement challenges singularized conceptions of identity such as gender and nationality. The increasing abundance of such narratives—from Togolese author Sènouvo Agbota Zinsou's early novel *Le Médicament* (2003) to contemporary

¹ Terms such as asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants are generally used synonymously. Though these terms all convey the idea of exile and displacement, in terms of legal status, there are crucial differences. An asylum seeker is a person who seeks safe haven in a different country due to persecution in their home country, but has not yet received any legal recognition or status. A migrant is an umbrella category used to designate a person who chooses to move from their home for any variety of reasons, but not necessarily because of a direct threat of persecution or death. A refugee is a person who has been granted legal status in a host country after fleeing his/her home country due to persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. For more details, see http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/definitions_of_refugee2c_asylum_seeker2c_idp2c_and_migrant.pdf

works such as Paola Pigani's *Venus d'Ailleurs* (2015), Olivier Adam's *À l'Abri de Rien* (2007), Kim Thuy's *Ru* (2009), and Velibor Colic's *Manuel d'Exil* (2016)—has not led to a plethora of radical conceptions of belonging and citizenship. Though attitudes have shifted over time, Francophone texts contending with migration treat the notion of citizenship with equal measures of celebration or agnosticism. These texts inevitably negotiate a particularly French notion of integration inherited from the French Revolution when “the new concept of universal human rights was constructed within the particularistic framework of the nation” (Silverman 27). The increasing visibility of refugee figures in contemporary literature corresponds directly to high levels of forced displacement caused by climate change, civil wars, and other disasters. Francophone authors who tackle refugeehood expose the heterogeneous, plural identities that wrestle under apparently homogeneous nationalist identities. Additionally, contemporary refugee fiction's narrative frames trouble hackneyed, depersonalizing stories about refugees by offering a composite view of forced displacement. These texts historicize our present because as Frederic Jameson writes, they are “socially symbolic acts” which are to be considered as aesthetic manifestations of social tensions.

As a literary figure, the refugee appears in various guises in genres such as immigrant literature, diasporic literature, trauma literature, women's writing, etc. Paradoxically, casting refugees alongside migrant characters has only served to amplify their voicelessness. The specificities of forced displacement – asylum seekers' journey across long distances under fraught conditions, their lives in transit centers, their fearful, prolonged wait for regularization, and the precariousness which surrounds their lives in the absence of regularizations – are seldom represented in literary texts. Instead, refugee stories

are narrated as migrants' stories where the narrative focuses mostly on general conditions associated with migration and the experience of adapting to a new environment. In the past decade, and especially in the last couple of years, literary markets have witnessed the appearance of more and more titles of narrative fiction that chronicle experiences of forced displacement.² The proliferating literary market for novels and *bandes dessinées* about forced displacement marks a space where concepts such as hospitality, borders, citizenship, and political identity can be debated.

Storytelling and seeking asylum are intimately related. Asylum seekers need to be captivating storytellers. Similar to *Arabian Nights*' Shahrazad, who evaded death with her endless stories, asylum seekers are obliged to represent their lives adeptly in credible yet compelling stories. However, as the subsequent chapters of the dissertation demonstrate, most refugee stories follow a standard narrative arc. The inseparable relationship between storytelling and the refugee condition makes it imperative that multiple stories of forced displacement coexist. As refugee fiction writers such as Viet Thanh Nguyen and Kim Thù have argued, unlike immigrants, "refugees are unwanted where they come from. They're unwanted where they go to" (Nguyen *thenation.com*). Nguyen insists: "While boundaries may blur under certain conditions, it is nonetheless important to mark a space for refugee literature, for stories that illustrate the plight of those for whom return is not an option."³ Studying stories of statelessness in legal, literary, and graphic forms offers important insights into the relationship between tellability⁴ and narrative form.

² Some of the recent titles include Delphine Coulin's *Une fille dans la jungle* (2017), Mbougar Sarr's *Silence du Choeur* (2016), and Joude Jassouma's *Je viens d'Alep. Itinéraire d'un réfugié ordinaire* (2017).

³ See <https://www.thenation.com/article/call-refugee-not-immigrant-viet-thanh-nguyen/> for the full interview.

⁴ Narratologist Raphaël Baroni defined Tellability as a notion that refers to "features that make a story worth telling, its "noteworthiness." Tellability is "dependent on the nature of specific incidents judged by

Literary scholars who study contemporary anglophone refugee fiction such as David Farrier and Agnes Woolley⁵ have posited that a “representation anxiety,” or “scandalous absence,” surrounds refugees and asylum seekers in popular culture. While there exists a large corpus of literature that represents the trajectories of migrants, particularly from previously colonized nations moving to the Global North in search of work or studies, narratives about those who are forced to leave behind their homes and seek protection in other countries remain scarce. The relative absence of refugees and asylum seekers in literary texts is mirrored in postcolonial critical studies on migration. Characterized by a celebratory approach to displacement and minoritarian agency, postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy have proposed conceptualizations such as arborescent belonging, a root-less/route-oriented approach, and several other polysemous and hybrid invocations as alternatives to characterize identities produced by displacement. Critical responses that valorize displacement as a counterforce to nationalism do not take into account asylum seekers’ need for recognition and sanctuary conferred by a territorial sovereign. The implicit dehistoricization of the refugee in statements such as “[r]efugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community” (Breckenridge et al. 6) is deeply problematic. Such positions equate immigrants and voluntary exiles with asylum seekers and ignore the hierarchy of privilege attached to different experiences of displacement.

The tension between universal human rights and territorial sovereignty contributes to the representational anxiety surrounding refugees. This tension is borne by the

storytellers to be significant or surprising and worthy of being reported in specific contexts, thus conferring a “point” on the story. (<https://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Tellability>)

⁵ See David Farrier’s *Postcolonial Asylum* and Agnes Woolley’s *Contemporary Refugee Narratives*.

problematic figure of the asylum seeker for whom territorial belonging is both the cause and the solution to forced displacement. Drawing attention to refugees' need for state protection, Daniel Warner explains that "the state is at the same time the root cause of refugee flows and the durable solution for refugees in exile" (261). Postmodern approaches which valorize displacement seldom take into account the experiences of those forcibly displaced. The liberatory or progressive aspect of migration mostly applies to those who are in charge of their movement. Critics of culturalist postcolonial studies such as Benita Parry argue that postcolonial critics who do not sustain "a sufficiently rigorous engagement with the material experiences of 'economically enforced dispersal'" refuse to take into account the fundamental role and function of identification (as deserving refugee status, or as undeserving) in improving asylum seekers' material circumstances (Farrier 3). The difficulty in accommodating the figure of the asylum seeker—who is both dependent on state sovereignty and, at the same time, a victim of national frontiers, explains to some extent the preponderance of universal human rights-based approaches when it comes to the question of asylum seekers and their protection in postcolonial theory.

Most contemporary discussions around refugees and the forcibly displaced is found under the category of human rights and universalism. While forcibly displaced people are protected by charters such as United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Geneva Convention, their access to protection is less certain and secure than that of the citizen who is protected by the nation-state. In their book *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, Kay Schaeffer and Sidonie Smith show the important link between narration and the lives of vulnerable displaced populations. Most refugee rights protection institutions use testimonial narratives to draw attention to the violation of basic human

rights. Personal narratives of suffering are used as disseminating material in order to seek recognition for individuals and for organizations who voice these concerns. Postcolonial studies critique the ethics of such recognition and the reader/witness positionality as relics or legacies of western humanism. Refugee life stories that are used to validate claims for protection belong to a specific Enlightenment archetype of selfhood.⁶

Postcolonialism's inadequate response to the material conditions of asylum and forced migration has meant that asylum studies have mostly been examined under the lens of universal human rights. However, this construction of refugee within the framework of "humanity" and as part of discourses of humanitarianism is not entirely without its own set of problems. Hyndman, Rajaram, and Malkki argue that by essentializing, and universalizing refugees' experiences, liberal humanist discourses and humanitarian campaigns "de-historicize, de-politicize, and de-personalize refugees" (Moe Suzuki 12). Representations of refugees are polarized between two fundamental and extreme positions. On the one hand, postcolonialists blur boundaries between migration and forced displacement. On the other, humanitarians essentialize refugees as deserving of empathy without factoring in the historical conditions that produce forced displacement. Locating this tension between extremes as the focus of investigation, my research points to the critical role played by contemporary narrative fiction in resisting essentializing paradigms surrounding those fleeing civil wars, climate change, gender persecution or other forces of oppression. This fiction unmask the historical continuities of injustices, violence, dispossession, and colonialism that produce forced displacement. It produces a situated

⁶ Arguing against the use of autobiography to prop up an essentialist notion of a Romantic selfhood, Linda Anderson writes: "according to this view, generated at the end of the eighteenth century but still current in the middle of the twentieth, each individual possesses a unified, unique selfhood which is also the expression of a universal human nature" (2010, 4).

account of forced displacement and offers important clues to representational strategies that operate together to create in-group/out-group identities such as refugee / citizen.

Methodology

In the following chapters, I examine refugee fictions by relying on a cognitivist-narratological approach that draws from concepts such as Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope", and Bakhtin scholar Bart Keunen's typology of plot-spaces. The concept of chronotope was extremely relevant for my study due to two reasons – on the one hand, to examine the dehistoricized representation of refugees, I needed to focus on the two fundamental narrative categories of space and time. Secondly, since chronotope functions as a cognitive device,⁷ using this lens makes it possible to identify the ways in which narrative participates in producing refugee stereotypes. In my reading of refugee narratives, I use chronotope as an evaluative tool to assess the openness of a text. Texts containing multiple chronotopes which co-exist without dominating one another, or heterochronotopic texts, exemplify the notion of a "work in movement" or "openness". I use the term "openness"⁸ as a relative value where texts are more or less open than another according to a sliding scale, with the absolute (and perhaps hypothetical) values of openness and closedness at either end. Open texts⁹ pull readers away from a predetermined path and require them "to fill up semantic gaps, to reduce or further complicate the multiple readings proposed, to choose [their] own preferred path of interpretation, to consider several of them at once" (Eco 276). The

⁷ See Keunen, Bart. "Bakhtin, Genre Formation, and the Cognitive Turn: Chronotopes as Memory Schemata." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.2 (2000): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1069>>

⁸ My use of the term "openness" draws from Umberto Eco's definition of the term in *Role of the Reader*: "a feature by which the reader – or listener or viewer, as the case may be – is offered several possibilities of interpretation that are encompassed in a cohesive narrative and aesthetic structure" (39).

⁹ Open texts, on the contrary, are "those texts that according to Barthes (1973) are able to produce the 'jouissance' of the unexhausted virtuality of their expressive plane . . . because they have planned to invite their Model Readers to reproduce their own processes of de- construction by a plurality of free interpretive choices" (40).

organization of a text and the cooperation it elicits from readers is extremely relevant in the context of asylum since asylum seekers depend on a status-based system where acknowledgment of them as “truly” deserving of protection hinges on witnessing, on the reader or listener’s acknowledgment that their stories are real. When there is such a large-scale rhetorical machine that spreads false propaganda about refugees as “terrorists” and “bogus migrants”, and this propaganda relies mostly on stories, it becomes more important to pay greater attention to the architecture of stories and the effects they produce on their audience.

Given the significance of spatiotemporal categories to this research, Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope constitutes a core conceptual analytical tool that I use in my readings. Chronotope has remained a complex term since Bakhtin originally used the term in his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”. The term encompasses multiple layers of meaning. At the most fundamental level, chronotope is an epistemological category that is central to cognition. Secondly, the term connotes the representation of such a cognition in the novel. This use of the term is more general and common. It is also what Bakhtin emphasized when he referred to chronotope as “the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel [...] the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied” (250). In the aforementioned essay, composed between 1937 and 1938, Bakhtin layered his use of the term with several additional nuances. On the one hand, the concept of chronotope as representation of time-space allowed him to establish demarcations between genres. Additionally, he introduced the term “chronotopic motifs” to refer to a “more localized rendering of time and space within the diegesis” (Flanagan 57). In a section titled “Concluding Remarks”, that Bakhtin added

to his original essay in 1973, he added a third layer of meaning, when he contended “out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)” (253). This additional remark which emphasizes the connection between chronotopes of a genre and real-world chronotopes that prevailed at that time, points to narrative form’s role as a method of knowledge.

In the context of this research, the various meanings of the term “chronotope” outlined in the paragraph above need to be considered. While discussing literary narratives, chronotope’s significance as a subset of local motifs within the text makes it possible to read texts as “x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 425-6). In *Venus d’Ailleurs*, for example, chronotopic analysis reveals the tension between two competing spaces that struggles to exist: the chronotope of global markets represented by Simona who works at Mistigriff, and that of erstwhile industrial era and factory spaces represented by Mirko, who makes graffiti in the now abandoned factory grounds of T.A.S.E.¹⁰ While discussing legal narratives, chronotopes’ meaning and relevance as a connecting bridge becomes relevant. The resurgence of adventure chronotopes and the use of adventure genre for purposes of testing at various points in history can be mapped to the spatio-temporal configurations of those times. This aspect of chronotope is critical to the discussion and analysis of legal asylum narratives. An important point was introduced to the concept of chronotope by contemporary Bakhtin scholar Liisa Steinby when she suggested that chronotopes should

¹⁰ The T.A.S.E. Factory is an old silk factory which was built in 1925 and is now listed as industrial heritage. Located in Lyon-Vaulx-en-Velin district, the factory is a part of urbanization project of the Carré de la Soie.

also be considered as “specific spatio-temporal form of a certain possibility of human action” (122). Using the example of salons in 19th century realist novels, she argued that “Social localities are not a neutral, passive background of action but on the contrary determine its chronotopic form. What a person can do is conditioned by the setting and the locality” (120). This idea of chronotope as possibilities of human action stands relevant in the discussion of refugee narratives such as *Alpha* where the Ivoirian Alpha has no choice but to undertake the arduous journey from Ivory Coast to Paris in eighteen months through clandestine routes, a journey that would take a matter of hours with a visa. This third nuance related to chronotope becomes relevant in the discussion of “paraspaces” I identify in the refugee novels. Just as the 19th century nineteenth-century French novels opened up in literature a “fundamentally new space (...) of parlors and salons” that not only visibilized the historical time but also served as a milieu which determines what can happen and how life is experienced, the “paraspaces”¹¹ of refugee novels, unearthed by a chronotopic analysis visibilize such spaces in our contemporary milieu and maps how such spaces determine how refugees experience life.

Chronotopic analysis of refugee narratives yields several makes it possible to argue that all refugee novels analyzed in this research adhere to the mimetic function of realist novels where the novelistic chronotopes stay faithful to actual historical or geographical realities to present models of the real world. Comparing chronotopes of legal narratives with those of literary texts shows that the former is a carrier of spatio-temporal characteristics of a modernity governed by temporality whereas in the latter, there is far more emphasis on the dynamics of space. Single-story paradigms surrounding refugees

¹¹ I borrow this term from Scott Bukatman’s analysis of science fiction. For a definition and discussion of this term see chapter 3.

result from narratives where a single time-space dominates. Monochronotopicity or flattening of time-space is a characteristic feature of dehistoricized and essentialized representations of refugees. Secondly, texts that contain multiple chronotopes interdependent or where one chronotope does not subsume the other is a characteristic of what I call “open texts”. The theses put forth by the storyworlds of such texts are intimately related to their form or, in other words, the co-presence of multiple chronotopes where no one time-space dominates or subsumes the other. Such storyworlds allow for a historicized perspective of forced displacement and refugeehood. Thirdly, polychronotopic texts give readers the possibility to move allow the reader to move between chronotopes and to map relationships between them – a function which, I contend, mirrors the witness function. Hence literary texts with open structure and multiple, covalent chronotopes (which co-exist) serve to historicize refugees and stimulate empathetic responses from readers. To sum up, a cognitively inflected narratological analysis of refugee narratives demonstrates how contemporary refugee narrative fiction disrupts or reinforces prevailing scripts surrounding refugees.

Overview

The dissertation is organized into two sections. In the first section, I analyze legal asylum stories produced by asylum seekers. To better situate the refugee determination processes, I have outlined at the start of this section France’s historical engagement with the notion of human rights. Touted as the birthplace of human rights, France has played a pivotal role in the shaping of discourses surrounding human rights and humanitarian approaches to displacement since medieval times. The French revolution and the declaration of human rights cemented this role concretely. However, the inhuman

treatment of refugees as shown by the forced eviction of Calais camps during winter betray the discrepancies between the ideals and their practice.¹² France's position vis-à-vis refugees can be better understood by looking at how it conceives the idea of nation. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon model of citizenship, which takes into account origins in terms of ethnicity also, the French state relies on a binary of citizen/étranger and any differences are subsumed through integration. Pegging of identity to individuals is played out most evidently in refugee status determination hearings. The legal testimony serves as a narrative tool in implementing this singularization of identity.

After briefly situating France's role in the history of human rights, this section takes a close look at contemporary asylum practice at French national courts of asylum. As I have argued in the earlier part of this introduction, the spatial aspect of asylum shifted to that of a status-based notion of protection in the twentieth century. Accordingly, asylum seekers are required to justify their reasons for fleeing their countries of origin and prove their credibility in order to secure refugee status. One of the key tools in the process of proving their credibility is the legal asylum narratives that they have to furnish as part of seeking refuge. I begin my discussion of asylum narratives with these legal stories. Constructed according to classical rules of narration such as adherence to verisimilitude, narration in first person singular voice, unity of action etc., these narratives exemplify a closed narrative structure. The narratological analysis of these legal stories shows how space-time configurations are used to produce a logic of singularization which robs refugees of their stories, their collective histories. Additionally, such a structure serves as a powerful tool to produce the very refugee figure that nation states seek to produce.

¹² See "<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/26/france-police-attacking-migrants-calais#>".

The second section of the dissertation examines literary fiction, *bandes dessinées*, and other aesthetic texts and their engagement with forced displacement, as well as the ways in which these texts configure spatio-temporal sequences to historicize the refugee figure. I discuss four refugee novels in this chapter—Togolose writer Zenouvo Agbota Zinsou's 2003 novel *Le Médicament*, Paola Pigani's 2016 novel *Venus d'Ailleurs*, Olivier Adam's 2015 novel *A l'Abri de Rien*, and Shumona Sinha's *Assommons les Pauvres!*. Zinsou's novel narrativizes the trajectories of several refugees who live in the Bayerrode transit center in Germany. The refugee transit center as a spatial locus serves as a meeting point where various colonial histories rub shoulders. It produces a larger context that shows how seeking asylum is at once the proverbial medicine and poison for those forcibly displaced. The romantic plot that Zinsou's treatment of the relationship between—his protagonists Justine, Jurgen, Clara, and Stefan clearly betrays a romantic emplotment of a cosmopolitanism that he offers as a panacea to the estrangement and alienation that result from borders and frontiers. Paola Pigani's *Venus d'Ailleurs* narrates the lives of a Kosovan brother sister—Mirko and Simona—who successfully gain refugee status in France, only to grow estranged from each other as their new lives in the host country provide the brother-sister duo with entirely differently sets of experiences. The novel succeeds at merging two rarely intersecting worlds by meshing together two chronotopes—the world of high fashion boutique stores where Simona works and that of the construction site where Mirko toils and the abandoned factory spaces of Lyon where he moonlights as a graffiti artist. While describing the face-off between these two worlds, Pigani succeeds in showing the various waves of migration that shaped the material conditions of living of those marginalized within the citizenry such as Alice, Thomas, and other graffiti artists and muralists who

belong to the lower ranks of social hierarchy. The inequalities that continue to exist within the seemingly homogeneous in-groups such as citizens and the tensions within unquestioned affiliation to the nation emerge in the complicated narration of Mirko and Alice's relationship. Despite the novel's success in bringing together two distinct chronotopes, it fails the test of equilibrium. As the novel draws to a conclusion, Mirko and his trajectory fade off the narrative and readers witness the celebration of a yet another new nation-state.

Rejecting Zinsou's romantic solution or Pigani's model of integration, novelists such as Olivier Adam and Shumona Sinha use an open narrative structure that refuses neat resolution to foreground the fragmentation that marks trajectories of refugee lives. Olivier Adam's 2015 novel *A l'Abri de Rien* tells the story of a French couple Marie, Stephan, and their two children. The cyclic rhythm and simplicity of Marie's life in the provincial town of Calais is ruptured by her sister Claire's death. The influx of refugees into this town after the closure of the Sangatte refugee camps intersects with the provincial chronotope of Marie's family life. Adam unveils each strand of the story and, as the novel progresses, the spatiotemporal configurations of Marie and the refugees, which seemed separate and distinct at the start of the narrative, edge closer. Adam's refugee narrative refuses to provide resolutions of narrative tensions nor does it adhere to the victim/perpetrator dichotomy. Instead, it makes space for the multiple narrative strands in an open structure that maps the experiences of refugees with those suffering from trauma or those displaced from within.

The fourth refugee novel discussed in this section, Shumona Sinha's *Assommons les Pauvres!* borrows heavily from the author's experience as an interpreter at the French Asylum office. Loosely constructed as a frame narrative, the author allegorizes the

postcolonials' fetish for the colonial master in the form of her ardent love for the French judge Lucia. Caught in the supposed neutral zone of interpretation, the translator-protagonist describes her impressions of the various asylum-seeker narrators she encounters in the tribunals. A first-person narrative voice that only provides access to the seemingly neutral position of the translator, however, yields a stunningly sharp subjective critique of asylum seekers and their adherence to the stock asylum narrative. Clearly belonging to the other side of the scale in terms of openness, the novels' various episodes narrated by the translator show readers the biases inherent to any system and invite readers to parse for themselves the various stakeholders in the decision-making process and choose their affiliations.

Chapter 4 turns to a different aesthetic form – *bandes dessinées* – where the literary and the visual coexist. Recent decades have witnessed a proliferation of graphic novels and *bandes dessinées* that describe the plight of those forcibly displaced.¹³ Refugee graphic novel has thrived because of its ability to combine the visual language of sequential art with the structured realism of the novel. While the subject of this chapter could be a separate book, considering the sheer number of refugee comics, I have chosen three texts as exemplifying comics' uniqueness in engaging with refugee experiences. Bessora and Barroux's *Alpha* (2016) describes in vivid detail the perilous journey of Alpha, an Ivoirian migrant who makes a frantic attempt to reunite his family by undertaking a perilous journey across 31,000 kilometres – from Abidjan to Paris. *Alpha* uses the spatiotemporal codes of the adventure chronotope to chronicle this migrant's odyssey, thereby historicizing the plight of countless migrants such as Alpha from erstwhile colonies such as Ivory Coast.

¹³ <https://scroll.in/article/902250/these-graphic-novels-and-comics-are-countering-the-depiction-of-refugees-as-people-who-dont-count>

Unlike *Alpha*, which relies on a documentary register, Jérôme Ruillier's *L'étrange* (2016) uses codes borrowed from parables and fables to describe the plight of displaced people. Narrative elements such as anonymized protagonist, anthropomorphized narrator-witnesses (crow, fish), peripheral narrators such as Bernard, Robert, Christine as well as the absence of geographical specificity create a composite text which uses its structured uncertainty to unsettle and perplex readers. Such a narrative technique confers on readers the role of a judge who hears competing and opposing perspectives of the case in question. In this text, polyphonic narration takes the place of the polychronotopcity identified in some of the earlier texts that were discussed. Such a polyphonic narration brings into dialogue together on the page fundamentally incommensurable perspectives. At the same time, the tension between these unmerged perspectives is never resolved. Rather, the texts and visuals combine to create a surface where various ideas compete and add density to the question of migration.

Analysis of legal, literary, and graphic narratives of asylum seekers and refugees shows that a majority of these texts adhere to realist conventions of representation. While the choice of this aesthetic mode clearly emerges from a motivation to represent the subject matter "truthfully", the realist mode for representations of forced displacement seems at times woefully inadequate. Literary refugee texts especially suffer from its excessive focus on the referential function and the relative inadequacy of imagining other possibilities. Highlighting fiction's role in expanding possible worlds, theorist Marie-Laure Ryan writes: "For the duration of our immersion in a work of fiction, the realm of possibilities is thus recentred around the sphere which the narrator presents as the actual world. This recentering pushes the reader into a new system of actuality and possibility" (22). While

some of the literary texts analyzed in this dissertation takes care to contextualize forced displacement with a meticulously orchestrated play of multiple chronotopes, they frequently fail to to expand possibilities or posit new conceptions of global citizenship.

Chapter 2: Legal Testimony: Emplotment and Narration

“Comment avez-vous échappé pendant deux ans à la police érythréenne ? Vous avez raconté lors de votre passage devant l’Ofpra que vous étiez, à ce moment-là, menacé de mort ?”, interroge un officier de justice.

–“Je travaillais comme ouvrier dans une exploitation agricole et donc les policiers ne m’ont pas trouvé”, répond Amam. Ses propos, en tigrigna, sont traduits en français.

–“Quelqu’un a-t-il écrit votre récit pour vous ? Il est écrit que vous étiez marchand de légumes”, relance sèchement l’officier de justice.¹⁴

[“How did you evade the Eritren police for two years? During the OFPRA interview, you mentioned that you received death threats during that period?”, asks the protection officer.

I was working as a laborer in a farm and so the police did not find me”, replies Aman.

His response in Tigrigna is translated into French.

“Someone scripted the story for you? It is written here that you were a vegetable vendor”, remarks the protection officer dryly.

The conversation quoted above is excerpted from a hearing at the French National Court of Asylum where protection officers investigate the veracity of asylum seekers’ testimony after OFPRA has rejected their requests for asylum. Assessing the credibility of asylum seekers’ life stories is an important step that moves them forward in the complex process of gaining refugee status. Media coverage about asylum stories¹⁵ that can be bought

¹⁴ This conversation is excerpted from an article that discusses how asylum narratives are scrutinized for veracity at the French national asylum court. See <http://www.slate.fr/story/117391/vendeurs-histoires-migrants>

¹⁵ See examples of such media stories under the following links:
https://www.liberation.fr/france/2018/05/14/asile-le-piege-des-dealers-d-histoires_1649999
<https://www.slate.fr/story/117391/vendeurs-histoires-migrants>
<https://fr.sputniknews.com/france/201605131024979616-migrants-france-asile-achat/>

for as little as 50 euros has contributed strongly to public perception of refugees as “bogus asylum seekers” or “faux réfugiés”. Alongside such news stories, there exists an equally significant narrative surrounding refugees, endorsed and circulated by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Médecins sans frontières (MSF). The refugee narratives disseminated by humanitarian organizations foreground their helplessness, especially using dramatic images of crying children, multitudes of people with arms outstretched, seeking help. Such images are calculated to evoke empathy and pity among public. Response to refugees is often polarized between cynicism and suspicion or pity and concern for their suffering. Considering how little of asylum seekers’ and refugees’ own personal stories and images are available in the public sphere in forms over which they exert control, I chose to examine legal dossiers, in the first section of this research. While legal asylum stories are purportedly testimonial life stories produced by asylum seekers with the help of translators, the obligation to comply strictly to the narrative conventions prescribed by legal frameworks makes it difficult for asylees to narrate their stories in their own voice. In the following sections of this chapter, after tracing a brief history of asylum, I examine some of the narrative codes and conventions that shape legal asylum stories.

Asylum: An Overview

Sanctuary and the practice of accepting strangers form a part of almost every major religious tradition. The term “asylum” is derived from *asylon* (“asylum”, from *asylos*, invulnerable), which represented an inviolable space within the polis, watched over by the divine order. *Asylon* was a powerful institution broadly respected across Greece and its

colonies, which by 300 BC extended to the Levant and to North Africa, including Egypt. Historians have identified that the practice of sanctuary was prevalent in Hebrew traditions. The Hebrews had designated six free cities in order to rescue manslayers from blood-revenge and in the Greek and Roman times there were sanctuaries that ante-dated the Christian ethic of compassion (Marfleet 443). Grecian and Roman Antiquity also mentions the practice of sanctuary at altars, temples, and sacred places for “insolvent debtors, for slaves who had fled from the severity of their masters, and murderers” (Rabben 32). The inviolability of space afforded by asylum was contained within the confines of sacred grounds such as temples, groves, and other places associated with the gods.

The right to such an inviolable space was what the 314 undocumented persons were claiming when they took refuge in the Saint-Bernard church in Paris in 1996. On 23rd August 1996, they were forcefully removed from the church by French police and armed forces. The protests of the undocumented, and the hostile manner in which it was dealt with by the French government, combined with the sustained media coverage contributed to the creation of a powerful impetus that shaped the *sans-papiers* movement in France. The undocumented persons’ move to occupy the church harkens back to the medieval practice of seeking sanctuary, a practice that continued to erode since the French Revolution.

The French revolution heralded a new era in the history of asylum. In the aftermath of 1789 revolution, asylum was scripted into the Constitution of 1793, also known as the Montagnard Convention, keeping in mind the persecution of freedom fighters who fought against tyrannical monarchies. Article 120 of the Convention clearly specifies: “tout homme persécuté, en raison de son action en faveur de la liberté, a droit d’asile sur les territoires de la République” [Any man persecuted in virtue of his actions in favour of

liberty may claim the right of asylum upon the territories of the Republic]. The key word in Article 120 of the 1793 Convention seems to be liberty. Considering the political climate of the period, with revolutionary uprisings against monarchies, France reiterated its commitment to the cause of liberty. Any foreigner that was fighting for freedom in another region was considered France's friend. So much so that the terms patriot and refugee were almost synonyms. Asylum took on the meaning of shared political affinities. The appearance of terms such as "peuple français" [French people] and "étrangers" [foreigners] and "patrie" [homeland] is significant for it reveals the shift in perception of space. The appearance of the notion of sovereignty tied to territoriality is evinced here. The loss of space within the polis without the grasp of sovereign power led to a situation that was completely under law's hegemony. The notion of sanctuary within the polis began to disappear. The practice of asylum underwent an important structural revision whereby instead of regulating spaces of refuge, it began to define the person and the movements of refuge.

International refugee law in its current form and the juridical construction of refugee status started after the First World War, with the issuance of Nansen Passports to Russian refugees. The proliferation of the term "refugee" occurred during a specifically mid-twentieth century context. In dealing with the aftermath of World War II and the hundreds of thousands of displaced Jews who did not wish to return to their "homelands," the victorious Western powers came together in 1950 to discuss and, eventually, define refugees and an international policy to protect and care for them. In 1951, after WWII, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created with the mandate to ensure the protection of refugees. The definition that materialized from the newly formed

UNHCR in 1951, later modified in 1967 to include non-European refugees, would set the global standard for determining who was a “refugee” and how governments should deal with refugees. The 1951 Refugee Convention ratified by 145 states and its 1967 Protocol constituted two foundational documents that established the modern definition of refugee. According to Article 1 of the Convention, a refugee is defined as any person who:

As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Several features immediately catch the attention of modern readers when the 1951 convention is juxtaposed with the earlier texts. While earlier texts such as the Theodosian Code offered accused criminals sanctuary within sacred precincts as an opportunity to redeem their place in society through intercession, prayer and penitentiary practices, the 1793 convention offered freedom fighters from other countries, shelter and protection from extradition. In the contemporary Refugee Convention, the notion of space and the principle of upholding freedom have disappeared. Another significant detail that emerges from a comparative reading of these texts is the absence of the right to seek asylum, which is explicitly mentioned in the other two texts. While the notion of ‘protection’ remains, the grounds of such a protection is predicated on “proof” that needs to be verified. The 1951 convention defines “who” can be termed a refugee, or in other words, the term refugee was

revised to that of a status and by making it a status-based title, the persons fleeing persecution bear the burden of proof to give a credible account of their persecution.

Legal asylum testimonies are governed by several narrative conventions. Examining the formal restrictions imposed on asylum seekers in telling their “true” stories visibilizes the work that narrative performs within asylum granting institutions of host nations in creating and reproducing refugee identities. Using samples of refugee testimony and notes from asylum seeker hearings that I collected in the Spring of 2017, I draw attention to the high level of narrative competence that asylum seekers are required to demonstrate in order to tell convincingly a specific narrative of becoming a refugee. Adhering to the formulaic narrative conventions of normative asylum story offers very little room for personalization. This chapter maps the rich intertextual dialogue between adventure novels of ordeal, on the one hand, and legal asylum narratives, on the other. It shows how an adherence to narrative conventions of legal asylum life story dehistoricizes and depersonalizes the refugee. Secondly, the chapter describes the ways in which normative asylum story and the convincing narration and performance of this story serves as a screening test for host nations to allow entry only to those asylees who prove themselves as abject victims devoid of any personal agency. Forswearing agency is the narrative condition for success in the asylum story.

French Refugee Status Determination Procedure

Before analyzing legal asylum narratives, in the following section, I briefly outline the French asylum adjudication system in order to situate the role and relevance of legal asylum stories. Two national institutions—*Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et des Apatrides* (OFPRA) and the *Cour Nationale du Droit d’Asile* (CNDA), formerly known

as the *Commission des Recours des Réfugiés* (CRR)—regulate asylum adjudication procedures in France. Applying for asylum involves establishing before asylum-granting institutions that one’s life is threatened.¹⁶ In order to prove their lives are under threat, asylum seekers need to fill out a sixteen-page asylum application form (Appendix B) that includes an autobiographical story that the institutions will verify for credibility and coherence. In sum, what will amount to a legal testimony constitutes the central piece of evidence in determining the outcome of such a request. Though the form seems simple in appearance, it constitutes the hardest challenge for most asylum seekers—a challenge that is made more complex by the fact that it needs to be prepared in French¹⁷ and completed quickly.¹⁸ The form (in fact, a 16-page booklet), requires several important pieces of information. The section asking the reasons for requesting asylum – “les motifs de la demande” – receives the closest scrutiny and is where the “story” gets written. Regarding this story, the protection officers who verify the dossiers prefer a “récit linéaire et chronologique” [linear and chronological story] – CIMADE¹⁹ calls this personalized and particularized narrative “le coeur de la demande d’asile” (page 11 of CIMADE’s report).²⁰ It is assumed and/or expected that the social workers who help asylum seekers prepare their

¹⁶ Appendix C contains a flowchart that delineates the process asylum seekers need to follow to apply for refugee status.

¹⁷ A ruling in 2004 mandated that the *récit de vie* should be prepared in French. This ruling obliged most asylum seekers to seek assistance for their dossiers via an intermediary such as an association, *bureau de traduction*, or sometimes more experienced ‘ex-asylum seekers’ from their own country who would help with the application and the redaction of the testimony.

¹⁸ the application is to be assembled within 21 days – which frustrates many social workers who are forced to understand, process, and prepare a *récit de vie* that will take into consideration the various nuances that would add credibility to the dossier.

¹⁹ La CIMADE, founded in 1939, is a French NGO that defends the dignity and rights of refugees and migrants, irrespective of their origins, political opinions or convictions. See <https://www.lacimade.org/> for more details.

²⁰ See CIMADE’s report “Voyage au centre de l’asile : Enquête sur la procédure de détermination d’asile ” <https://www.lacimade.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/VoyageAuCentreAsile2.pdf>

dossiers should know how to describe in detail the torture, psychological trauma and suffering that these asylum seekers have undergone in their countries of origin. Additionally, these details should be documented with as much precision as possible so that there are dates, places, and other verifiable circumstantial details that contribute substantially to the strength of the document. Even though it may seem that the story is a simple biographical report, this segment of the application would constitute a severe challenge even for the educated French citizen, if they were to seek asylum in another country. After the document is submitted, the asylum seekers await the oral interview where they will be asked to explain the details provided in their asylum application.

As the previous section indicates, asylum seekers' *récits de vie* bear an important role in the asylum adjudication process. Aid officers who help asylum seekers prepare their dossiers conduct several interviews in order to collect the biographical information required to complete the application. The interviewers use a chronological approach (based on the questions that are typically asked during OFPRA interviews) and make meticulous notes during the interview, especially with regard to dates, places, and events. They follow the narrative convention of a "récit linéaire et chronologique" privileged by French asylum granting institutions while preparing the *récits de vie*. As I mentioned in the introduction, a narratological approach to the analysis of *récits de vie* yields significant information regarding normative codes used for representing asylum seekers. The notion of chronotope—especially, its meaning as a textual motif, unifying space and time (for example, the chronotope of the threshold, the meeting etc)—serves as a useful tool in understanding how asylum life story narratives are organized.

After the interviews, aid workers begin the process of transposing the raw events of a life into the plotted representation in a narrative or in other words, when they transpose fabula into *sjuzhet*.²¹ In the transposition of fabula time to textual time several narrative choices are made. These choices follow the dimensions indicated²² by Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse*. While order (chronological) is retained without any disruption (in fact, it is adhered to meticulously — a choice that contributes to the construction of identity as a continuity), asylum narrative plays mostly with the duration — the narrative dwells longer on the events that led asylum seekers to flee their country. To return to Bakhtin’s idea of chronotope as a textual motif — these stories foreground what he referred to as “the chronotope of crisis and break in a life” (248). These narratives scrupulously detail the persecution that forced asylees to flee and seek refuge in host countries. Genette’s third element—frequency—comes into play here where using the narrative temporality of repetition; the asylum narrative returns multiple times to a single event or condenses multiple happenings of an event into a single instance of narration. Taken together, these three processes of temporal distortion—order, duration, and frequency—render the asylum seeker’s life into a continuous unified identity and contributes to the creation of what Bourdieu famously called the biographical illusion.

The process of “cadrage”—the configuring or formatting of the life story to comply with the legal definition of a refugee as defined by the Geneva Convention—performed by those who help asylum seekers prepare their testimony involves transforming the life story

²¹ Fabula refers to the chronological sequence of events in a narrative; *sjuzhet* is the re-presentation of those events (through narration, metaphor, camera angles, the re-ordering of the temporal sequence, and so on). The distinction is equivalent to that between story and discourse, and was used as a term by the Russian Formalists. See <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/terms/fabula.html>

²² Genette proposes the concepts of order, duration, and frequency as three primary ways of understanding the variety of temporal relations between “story time” and “narrative time” (or between fabula and *sjuzhet*)

into a story that by virtue of its coherence and consistency with the external and internal elements stands up as proof in court. Such a rhetorical reconstruction of the asylum seeker's life story only permits the presence of those elements that fall within the categories admissible within the asylum law. The amplification of the story by using several verifiable elements entails inclusion of plenty of sensory factors that are verifiable using OFPRA's research records and country-wise information dossiers. The loss entailed by the conversion of life story to legal story is best summarized by Jerome Bruner in *Making Stories*, who explains:

They work hard to make their law stories as unstorylike as possible, even anti-storylike: factual, logically self-evident, hostile to the fanciful, respectful to the ordinary, seemingly “untailored.” (...) Legal stories strive to make the world seem self-evident, a “continued story” that inherits a legitimated past (11).

Most of the volunteer workers with whom I spoke seemed to concur with Bruner's remarks about the anti-story nature of legal asylum testimony. They acknowledged the difficulty of accommodating subjective elements of asylum seekers' stories into their testimony. The solution was, they said, either to revert to stereotypical narratives or sometimes even to eliminate emotions entirely from the testimony. This deliberate omission of emotions was justified by the argument that it is more important to be factual and coherent. Observing and analyzing the process of asylum seekers' dossier preparation reveals that “mise-en-intrigue” [emplotment] constitutes the most crucial part of legal testimony. Researchers Belkis et al, highlighted the “unité biographique” [biographical unity] that is artificially imposed on the asylum seekers' life stories in order to foreground the persecution that led to their flight. Such a framing of life stories ensures that the only

possible identity that emerges is that of a threatened/persecuted person who demands the protection of the state. During the OFPRA interviews which follow the submission of asylum dossier, the asylum seekers' bodies and memories serve as a link²³ between the incidents they narrate and the moment of narration. The effectiveness of asylum seekers' narration is influenced by the extent to which the testimony has been modified to comply with the host country's narrative culture.

Chronotopes

The previous section described the process by which asylum lifestories are prepared by aid workers. In this section, I analyze the spatio-temporal configurations deployed these narratives to achieve the "biographical illusion" required by French normative asylum story. Three chronotopes can be identified in most of these stories. The first narrative chronotope is the "exterior real-life chronotope in which one's own or another's life is realized as (...) as an account of the self." Such a chronotope, Bakhtin wrote, is "constituted by the public square" (the agora)" (131).²⁴ In the contemporary context, the asylee-narrator is located in the court which folds in the space of the square and the entire state apparatus. It is in this space that the narrators give a public account of themselves to receive the civic stamp of legitimacy. Remarking on the utter exteriority of such a chronotope, Bakhtin wrote: "in such a biographized individual there was not nor could there be anything intimate or private, secret or personal, (...) nothing that could not be subject to public or state control and evaluation" (132). Asylum seekers posit themselves as such publicly whole individuals and narrate the carefully curated elements of their life in a chronological

²³ During asylum adjudication hearings, asylees are encouraged to rely on their psychical and body wounds as a witness to persecution.

²⁴ Bakhtin distinguishes between biographical time and autobiographical time in this section of the essay *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*.

sequence. Such a narration validates and performs into existence the idea of a biographized being. For example, even a cursory inspection of the life story segment of asylum applications shows that most of them state their name, place, and date of birth. The ensuing paragraphs extend the biographical sketch chronologically by outlining a summary of events that led up to the event(s) that forced them to flee. During the OFPRA interview as well as CNDA hearings, the sequence of questions adheres to the chronological examination of appellant's life.

The second narrative chronotope is the time-space of crisis – a series of or a single instance of persecution that fuses together the space and time of factors that led asylum seekers to flee. This time-space constitutes the most significant part of the asylum story and it is also the longest and most scrutinized section.²⁵ The time of crisis is expanded – either by returning to the event from multiple angles or by delineating all the details surrounding the crisis. Two temporalities govern this section – psychological time and adventure time. Some asylum stories narrate a series of events chronologically which test the narrators severely. Some other stories, on the other hand, expand the time of crisis by recalling in vivid detail the circumstances surrounding the traumatic incident(s) which led them to flee.

Bakhtin commented on the play between adventure time and subjective time in novels of ordeal, in the long essay “The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel).” In this essay, Bakhtin identified diverse subcategories of the novel based on “how the image of the main hero is

²⁵ It is useful, in this context to recall Gerard Genette's definition of narrative duration or speed as “the connections between the variable duration of these events or story sections and the pseudo narration (in fact, length of text) of their telling in the narrative” (35).

constructed”. Among the five categories, he called the second type the novel of ordeal. Defining it as the most widespread subcategory of the novel in European literature, Bakhtin conducted a diachronic survey of the novel of ordeal and enumerated a set of common features associated with this type that contribute to its significance. In terms of plot, Bakhtin underlined its quality of deviating from the norm: “the novel of ordeal always begins where a deviation from the normal social and biographical course of life begins, and it ends where life resumes its normal course” (14). As far as temporality goes, adventure time suffuses the novel of ordeal. Since the novel focuses on the deviations from the normal course of life, normal temporal categories are breached. The reworking of the temporal category is also marked by what Bakhtin called “psychological time”, which is characterized by subjective palpability and duration. Regarding the world depicted in the novel of ordeal, Bakhtin wrote that in novels of ordeal the surrounding world and the secondary characters are transformed into a mere background for the hero, into a decoration, a setting (...) lacking independence and historicity. In the novel of ordeal, the world is represented as an inert background against which the hero undergoes tests and trials. Spotlighting the central idea of testing [“testing for vocation, for genius, and for membership in the elect” (16)] which constitutes the organizing principle of this type of novel, Bakhtin highlighted the special quality of this novel to contain diverse ideological content alongside complexly psychological.

Several characteristic features of the novel of ordeal, described in the paragraph above, can be found in legal asylum life stories. Using two sample testimonies (Appendix A)— from an Albanian asylum seeker and a Sri Lankan respectively—I analyze how the narrative conventions of these testimonies map to those of the novel of ordeal.

In sample 1 (life story of F.G., an Albanian asylum seeker), the very first paragraph declares that his testimony will involve the retelling of a tragedy (“tragédie familiale”) that befell his family. He alludes to what one could call a hamartian mark of tragic destiny — the fact of being born guilty of something that one does not know. Stylistic devices such as similes and metaphors—“ma patrie que nos ennemis politiques ont transformée en tombeau [my country that our political enemies turned into a graveyard], “Comme une panthère noire me suit toujours le souvenir de tristes événements” [the memory of these sad events haunts me like a black panther]—contribute to the foreshadowing of tragedy. The plot structure clearly consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning is constituted by the asylum seeker’s current situation. He then provides a chronological narration of all the tragic events that befell his family and weaves it within the larger frame of the national history of the fight between communism and the Albanian government. Such a sequencing allows the testifier to make the case that only asylum could help break the tragic destiny of his family and thereby appeals to France — “le pays le plus démocratique de l’Europe” [the most democratic European country] —to save the family. The chronological stacking of tragic events contained within the testimony has been meticulously narrativized and emplotted in a manner that makes evident this family’s persecution for their political beliefs over many generations.

Sample 2 is the testimony of Elanchelvan Rajendram, a Sri Lankan asylum seeker who sought asylum in France in 2002. It starts with the chronotope of biography—a brief summary of Rajendram’s biographical details is delineated in three short paragraphs (a sixteen-year period spanning 1976 to 1992). The subsequent thirty-five paragraphs describe the various ways in which he was persecuted during the ten-year period from 1992

to 2002. In terms of the narrative's temporal features, the first sixteen years of his life are captured in five sentences and the rest of the narrative is given over entirely to adventure time where the applicant narrates the various events that led him to flee the country. The world depicted in the narrative is one where the asylum seeker undergoes various trials. Several towns in Sri Lanka as well as India, Saudi Arabia, and Moscow are mentioned in the testimony. The narrator enumerates his trials while passing through all of these places. His account does not contain any instance of aggression, fight, or resistance. Instead, experiences of torture in the LTTE camps, walking through the forest for several days, and traveling stuffed in the underside of a truck barely able to breathe for two and a half days are all described in detail. The timespace of crisis is sustained by the anisochronic treatment of time or, in other words, the difference between story time and discourse time whereby some parts of the event-story is summarized in the discourse, creating acceleration and density.

Adherence to chronology as well as the tripartite narrative structure of the testimony contributes to the biographical illusion.²⁶ Lifestories of Rajendram, F.G, and countless other asylum seekers show the limitations of normative asylum story structure. The potential of biographical narratives in producing knowledge and recognition of the lived experience of asylum gets shortchanged in the legal context. Projects such as "Participatory Biographies: Walking, Sensing, Belonging"²⁷ have shown the power of

²⁶ In an essay titled *The Biographical Illusion*, Bourdieu rejected the idea of a coherent and sequential life history. He argued that such a sequencing rests on "presuppositions" that imagine life to unfold "according to a chronological order which is also a logical order, with a beginning, an origin, (both in the sense of a starting point and of a principle, a *raison d'être*, a primal force), and a termination, which is also a goal" (298).

²⁷ This project elicited lived experiences of ten undocumented/asylum application refused women from different countries. Using storytelling and visual/photographic and walking methods, the project showed women's lives, experiences, and issues related to forced displacement.

narratives in providing access to experiences of loss, exile, gendered and political relations of power. Encouraging polyvocality and recognition of difference by acknowledging distinctiveness of narrative styles and cultures is absent in contemporary practices of asylum adjudication. In legal and most institutional frameworks, a “biographical illusion” is strictly adhered to in the name of verifiability, veracity, and coherence. French sociologists such as Michael Pollak and Nathalie Heinich challenge the deliberate and unquestioned assumption of continuity and coherence as distinctive features of life-stories: “tout se passe comme si cohérence et continuité étaient communément admises comme les signes distinctifs d'une identité assurée” (Heinich and Pollak 52). Asylum institutions’ insistence on narrative continuity and coherence serves to delegitimize asylees’ experiences and reinforces stereotypical images of them as “undesirable”, “bogus” or “illegal.”

The narrativization that produces such a biographical continuity is produced by a process of curation, wherein aid agency workers or others who help asylum seekers prepare their dossiers, bring together or eliminate factors that would make a succession of isolated incidents or events into a narratively coherent whole. The asylum life story that emerges at this end of this process of formatting privileges linearity, coherence, and verisimilitude — the hallmark monological features of a classical plot bound by centripetal forces.²⁸

Thus, legal institutions’ insistence for a specific type of narrative hinges on teleological rules of drama such as those posited by Aristotle. Legal conventions are

²⁸ As Mikhail Bakhtin already cautioned, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, with its emphasis on unity of action, serves as an ally of monological “centripetal” forces. In the essay “Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book”, Bakhtin summarizes his ideas on monologism, which forms a strong basis for all his theories: Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou). (...) Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons (292-293).

heavily influenced by literary traditions.²⁹ The legal testimony furnished by asylum seekers remains an important site where sovereign power employs specific chronotopes in the legitimation of authority. As Tom Conley writes in his foreword to Louis Marin's *Portrait of the King*, "in the arts of representation are found the real origins and organs of social control" (vi). Asylum seekers' legal narratives consist of a series of events strung together using a narrative sequence organized according to host societies' narrative conventions and commonsense understanding of spatiotemporal orders. These normative, prescriptive representational conventions are subsequently weaponized by judicial systems of host nations to police the movement of bodies across borders and constitute categories such as legal and illegal.

Novel of Ordeal and its impact on the legal asylum story

The previous section outlined the points of convergence between asylum life story and the novel of ordeal. In the following section, I discuss the ramifications and challenges involved in using this narrative model for asylum testimony. Tracing the socio-historical contexts in which adventure novels flourished, in the essay "From Novelistic Romance to Romantic Novel", Pieter Borghart and Koen de Temmerman identified two typologically similar circumstances which contribute to the rise and later revivals of the genre. According to them, proto-ethnic awareness and a growing unease with the political climate among the writing elite are two factors that contribute to the adventure chronotope. The novelistic protagonists of these novels embody moral and cultural qualities³⁰ which separate them

²⁹ Both Joseph Slaughter and Mark Antaki have shown that international human rights law and the nineteenth-century genre of the Bildungsroman "are mutually enabling fictions" because "each projects an image of the human personality that ratifies the other's vision of the ideal relations between individual and society" (Slaughter 1407).

³⁰ Expanding on conceptualization of Greek identity during Roman domination, Classics scholar Tim Whitmarsh lists *praiotes* (gentleness), *sophrosyne* (self-control), *epieikeia* (decency), *philanthropia* (benevolence), and *paideia* (education) as key qualities which played a role in Greek identity construction.

from non-Greek barbarian enemies and at the same time, they demonstrate a lack of actual power over the world they inhabit. In the adventure time-space, they are tossed all over the Mediterranean by divine forces or by pirates or by other enemies. These characteristics are central to the identity construction of the Greek elite under the Roman empire.

In the case of asylum seekers, the use of novel of ordeal's adventure timespace codes in their lifestories allows them to be seen as virtuous and non-threatening, in comparison with other illegal immigrants. In the competent narration of trials they underwent within the adventure time-space of their legal life-story, asylum seekers pass the final test—proving their credibility and gaining refugee status. In this sense, the third level of meaning of the term chronotope, as suggested by Bakhtin in his “Concluding Remarks” to the chronotope essay, where he contended that the representational elements of the text emerge “out of the actual chronotopes of our world.” Here, the cognitive aspect of the chronotope goes beyond that of narrative construction. Instead, it serves as a cognitive code that helps to evaluate the relationship between text and reader: how the world of the reader “creates the text” and how the text completes the dialogic circuit by feeding back into the world of the reader (Flanagan 105).

As I mentioned at the start of this section, at the OFPRA interviews, the written asylum testimony provided by asylum seekers has to be corroborated. It is during these interviews that one can assess the disadvantage and danger of legal asylum stories' emplotment. The narrative structure privileged by legal frameworks becomes the very hindering structure that serves to other. This is evidenced during the OFPRA interview where the asylum seeker must conform to the smallest detail that his narrative describes. Any variation from the narrative leads to a rejection of the case. During a Malian asylum

seeker's hearing at the CNDA (16 February 2017), for instance, when the asylum seeker's oral deposition showed variations from the written testimony, the judge was quick to point out the inconsistencies between the two testimonies. Such inconsistencies that arise as a natural consequence due to the 'formatting' of legal testimony are then used by the institutions to construct discourses around 'bogus asylum seekers' and the need to 'secure the borders' to protect 'our citizens' from the 'false refugees'. The testimonial economy of the legal system is put to use by the government for justifying its own protectionist rhetoric. The collective production of testimony before it reaches the court is curiously elided and the asylum seeker is singlehandedly expected to perform the precarity and vulnerability that his written testimony constitutes. The process by which written testimony is produced and oral testimony is scrutinized for veracity, consistency, and coherence in the interview performs three forms of violence on the asylum seekers. On the one hand, it forces them to perform an identity of a complete victim, an abject being. Secondly, it leads to a sense of alienation due to the gap between the culturally formatted testimony and their own story, the mutism caused by loss of one's own voice. Thirdly, the asylum granting institutions usurp the stories to construct dehumanizing myths about the refugees, thereby subverting a system to serve its own ends.

Much of the potential "realism" associated with the "refugee narrative," stems from the idea that the person begging for asylum has been an eyewitness to atrocity, both on his or her own person and on others. Yet, here too, the idea of a transparently communicable experience is suspect. In *Le Témoin Oculaire*, French sociologist René Dulong emphasized the point that being an eyewitness is a deliberate effect of language and that witnessing and testimony are intimately linked to language and narration. The written testimony of asylum

seekers focuses exclusively on foregrounding the persecution so as to help asylum seekers make the claim for protection. While such a 'mise-en-intrigue' or emplotment as Ricoeur defines it is understood as a biographical 'fiction' or 'biographical tale' or 'biographical justification' by the aid workers and other stakeholders involved in the production of testimony, this understanding is blurred when the testimony enters the courtroom. The testimony is then taken literally, and the interview is based entirely on verifying whether the asylum seeker is able to conform to (and confirm) the truth contained in the testimony. An excessive reliance on the asylum seekers' performance of their testimony during the hearings leads to a 'spectacle of suffering' or a regime of suspicion and radical skepticism that seems to suggest that, anyone having actually witnessed these forms of abuse and suffering should be able to communicate them clearly and coherently. During several hearings I attended at the CNDA, the scrutiny of verifiable information was paramount in the adjudicators' interrogation. A Coptic Christian who fled Egypt due to a death warrant was relentlessly questioned about the penal code categories of Egyptian law. A Malian asylum seeker who fled his town due to physical abuse and unceasing threats from marauders who were stealing his cattle and land was subject to several questions about the type of weapons used by his accosters. Documentary films such as *Les Arrivants* adequately capture the regime of suspicion that pervades asylum adjudication. While the Krishnamoorthy family from Sri Lanka narrated the events that led to their flight, the aid agent who transcribed their experience asked them to explain if the sound of explosion they heard during the attack was produced by a bomb or a grenade. Such questions are clearly intended to verify the truth of asylees' stories. Host nations' asylum institutions use the

rhetoric of verifiability and objective knowledge to mask the antagonism and suspicion they harbor toward asylum seekers.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, asylum seekers are forced to demonstrate a high level of narrative competence. Not only do they have to provide a persuasive, linear narrative that is orderly and sequential, they are also expected to display the right mix of vulnerability and resolve. In short, they have to embody the “ideal victim” who is disenfranchised but still holds enough agency to provide a competent narration and thereby achieve civic inscription and self-possession in the host country. Specific narrative constraints—excessive reliance on a coherent plot structure, insistence on first-person narration, removal of subjective, unverifiable elements—prescribed by the legal form of testimony, combined with proliferation of third-party witnesses, and a corroborative performance of the written testimony during the refugee status determination hearings have created a situation where the asylum seekers have less access to meaningful action. In the next section, I propose to examine the subject positions and trajectories that realist fiction creates and maintains for refugee figures.

Formatting asylum seekers’ stories into stock stories that comply with host societies’ narrative culture runs the risk of silencing narratives that are thick with specificities of time and space, which make it possible to situate and historicize forced displacement. Privileging a story arc that flattens out space and foregrounds linear time constitutes a form of faux re-selving and with it comes the danger of legitimizing misrepresentations and prejudices. In the introduction, I used the term polychronotopicity to define the coexistence of multiple chronotopes in a narrative. Applying the sliding-scale approach in performing a chronotopic analysis of legal asylum narratives, shows that these

narratives constellate at one end of the scale. The single prevailing chronotope here is that of adventure time-space. Chronological narration, a relatively unchanging immutable world, and the continuous focus on a single character—contribute to produce a two-dimensional, flattened figure of the asylum seeker—a dehistoricized, essentialized figure of the victim. The more convincingly and artfully an asylum seeker enacts and performs this abject victimhood, the greater the chances of gaining refugee status.

Chapter 3. Narrating the Refugee in Literary Fiction

In the previous section, I discussed legal asylum life-stories and the significance of the dominant adventure time-space that prevails in most of these stories. Built around classical literary codes that insist on strict adherence to linearity, coherence, and verisimilitude, the legal form is crafted to foreground the “individual” experience. Such a foregrounding works by normalizing uncontested binaries such as private/public, individual/collective. These binaries serve to dissimulate complicated colonial histories and separate the global landscape and its inseparable intimate connectivities. As Ann Stoler reminds us in her book *Duress*, “many of these conditions (urgent issues of our day) are intimately tied to imperial effects and shaped by the distribution of demands, priorities, containments, and coercions of imperial formations” (3). However, the links to imperial times are masked by strict narrative conventions such as first-person narration, linear temporality, and coherence which erase the collective history and experience of refugees and instead shore up the narrative of refugees as powerless, abject victims. Additionally, the legal form serves as a “narrative test” that screens asylum seekers’ potential to conform to the requirements of host countries’ definition of ideal citizen. A test that involves superior narrative skills and erasure of collective memories that historicize their communities of origin. In this chapter, I turn my attention to literary fiction of recent years that plot refugees, asylum seekers, and forced migrants. The purpose of considering contemporary literary fiction about refugees is two-fold: on the one hand, it allows for an analysis of representational strategies employed by writers to depict the refugee. Secondly, this section seeks to address the question of literary fiction’s capacity to recover occluded

and silenced histories that do not surface in the legal asylum stories as well as its potential to intersect with, critique, and transform contemporary ideas about asylum seekers.

Literary and cultural criticism does not fully distinguish asylum seeking and forced migration from other forms of migration. However, as the literary texts I analyze here reveal, the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers cannot be mapped directly to the experiences of other migrants. The arduous journey that asylum seekers undertake, as well as their shifting, transient legal roles, foreclose their capacity for asserting the kind of celebrated affirmative hybrid identity accessible to legitimate migrants.³¹ Postcolonial theory has been instrumental in reconceiving notions of identity to accommodate the breadth of historically and politically situated expressions of subjectivity in the context of migration. Contributing to an expanded notion of identity, Homi Bhabha, with his concept of “hybridity,” and Stuart Hall, with his articulation of “new ethnicities,” attempt to gather together understanding of selfhood as living through differences. However, other scholars such as Andrew Smith, Benita Parry and Ella Shohat have provided important correctives to certain postcolonial critics’ privileging of textuality. Andrew Smith criticized postcolonialists’ celebratory reading of displacement as “free-air-miles sentiment in postcolonial theory”³²(245) while Shohat called it out for its “potentially depoliticizing implications” (Shohat 99). For Parry, the absence of a sufficiently rigorous engagement with the material experiences of “economically enforced dispersal” (to which we may

³¹ Responses to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) showed the need for caution in adopting an optimistic, celebratory account of the “hybrid” transnational or cosmopolitan migration.

³² Critiquing the valorization of exile, Smith writes: “for most people in the modern world, migration is a terrifying option. Without the right circumstances of birth or bank account the majority of the world’s population remain intractably in place and very distant from the celebration of a newly mobile, hybrid order

reasonably add politically and environmentally enforced) is evidence of a debilitating insufficiency in much postcolonial enquiry. Benita Parry's criticism of Bhabha identifies refugees as a group requiring, though not receiving, less metaphorical treatment (Parry 70). Bhabha attempts to reconcile marginals or what he refers to as "18 or 19 million refugees who lead their unhomey lives in borrowed and barricaded dwellings" with his concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism" conceived of as a "a cosmopolitan community envisaged in a *marginality*" born of a "culture of community that has resulted from the transnational flows of cultures and peoples which have disaggregated (and disarticulated) that mechanism of the national imaginary" (42).

Similar to Bhabha's notion of cosmopolitanism, another important concept that has influenced discussions of migration is that of diaspora. Critics such as Caren Kaplan, James Clifford, and Paul Gilroy have highlighted the social dynamics that undergird their conceptions of diaspora. However, the mobility and widespread displacement encompassed by the term diaspora does not quite capture the particularity of forced migration. For Gilroy, diaspora consciousness relies on a shared history whereby "the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration" offer an alternative to "sovereign territory" as the determining factor in subjectivity (124). Yet the act of seeking asylum predominantly rests on an individual basis on their particular circumstances of flight. Gilroy's definition of diaspora as a strategy of empowerment that disrupts the "power of territory to determine identity" does not square with the specific case of refugees because transnational affiliation and collective memorialization is hinged on the legitimating privileges granted by nation-states.

While it is true that refugees trouble the national imaginary, the extent to which refugee groups constitute a marginal, cosmopolitan community, remains debatable, especially considering that they continue to live in camps—a space that is primarily a signifier of isolation. Pitting globalization against the condition of statelessness, Simon Gikandi envisages the refugee as “the Other of the Cosmopolitan; rootless by compulsion, this figure is forced to develop an alternative narrative of global cultural flows” (26). These alternative narratives are precisely what is at stake in the cultural representations of asylum discussed here. These narratives envisage solidarities that navigate varying affiliations of culture, nation and globe while accounting for the potentially long-term condition of statelessness.

Representations of forced displacement in contemporary refugee novels complicate the overly simplified binary roles of victim or bogus immigrant ascribed to refugees. This chapter investigates literary texts’ capacity to historicize forced displacement and identify the codes they use to engage with the double-voiced nature of asylum. The four novels examined here—Agbota Zinsou’s *Le Médicament* (2003), Paola Pigani’s *Venus d’Ailleurs* (2017), Shumona Sinha’s *Assommons les Pauvres!* (2011), and Olivier Adam’s *A l’Abri de Rien* (2007)—share common ground in two ways: these novels are built on realist codes and they represent various aspects of forced migration and refugee life such as the journey, the border-crossing, arrival, living in transit centers, adaptation to new milieu after gaining refugee status. I have selected these four novels because they not only depict several important stages of the refugees’ trajectory, they also represent a good mix of various styles of narration—third-person omniscient, first-person, as well as different perspectives—the

child refugee, the asylum court translator/interpreter, male/female refugee, a citizen's perspective of a refugee.

How does contemporary refugee fiction make use of spatiotemporal configurations to represent the refugee condition? As John Cawelti puts it succinctly, "genre itself is the result of strategies of mimesis" (97). On the basis of strategies, he distinguished between genre typology based on the form of representation (lyric, epic, dramatic) and type of content, which avers is the conception of genre that forms the basis for the idea of popular genres. If one uses the latter idea of genre typology based on content spatiotemporal analysis of refugee fiction helps to identify the representational codes related to this genre. In the previous section, I discussed the similarities in the treatment of space and time in legal asylum stories and adventure novels of ordeal. While that section of the dissertation deals primarily with the category of time, which Bakhtin averred to be more important than space, I argue that several texts of refugee fiction analyzed in this chapter foreground spatial codes. As my analyses of the novels show, depictions of space are accorded a greater prominence and solidity in the text. In fact, texts such as *Assommons les Pauvres!* and *À l'Abri de Rien*, prioritize their spatial component, hypercharged "deep" spaces are given priority over the chronological imperatives. In both these novels, as Scott Bukatman says, "paraspace" operating "in parallel to the normal space of the diegesis" (157) serve an important function. The mapping of relationships between refugee spaces such as camps and detention centers—spaces which exist on the periphery of cityspaces—traces the dependencies which exist between them. Attention to space in these narratives offsets the temporal focus of legal asylum stories.

Applying Bakhtin's chronotopic approach to refugee fiction was useful, primarily, because it gave me the freedom to approach texts as collections of representational spaces, and to structure my thinking around exploring these spaces and their interactions with one another. The process of mapping the plotspace by identifying minor and dominant chronotopes of each text which I studied helped me test out the hypothesis with which I began the study—the idea that multiple chronotopes which co-exist without dominating one another or heterochronotopia, exemplify the notion of a “work in movement” or “openness”.³³ Novels are especially adept at producing “interdiscourses” by borrowing perspectives couched in various other discourses such as economy, religion, politics, and so on. By showing the various ways in which multiple timespaces interact and dialogue with each other, I argue that these texts do not merely reflect the world,³⁴ instead they produce and envision new worlds where the refugee is imagined differently. The oppositional, congruous, or supportive relationships between these chronotopes and the complex, power-inscribed dialogue between them produce storyworlds which contest refugee representations which portray them merely as victims or bogus asylum seekers.

The mapping of plot-spaces using the concept of chronotope was productive because I began to notice that in each of the novels that I analyze, there exists a “paraspace”³⁵ or “zone” which represents the inverse of the citizen's world, a zone where

³³ My use of the term “openness” draws from Umberto Eco's definition in *The Role of the Reader*: “a feature by which the reader – or listener or viewer, as the case may be – is offered several possibilities of interpretation that are ensconced in a cohesive narrative and aesthetic structure” (39).

³⁴ In the “Concluding Remarks” to the chronotope essay, Bakhtin contended that “out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text). [...] however forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, [...] they are nevertheless tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction” (254).

³⁵ Scott Bukatman defines paraspace, in the book *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* as space that “exists parallel to the normal space of the diegesis—a rhetorically heightened “other realm”” (157).

a large number of fragmentary timespaces coexist in an impossible space, “capable of accommodating so many incommensurable and mutually exclusive worlds” (McHale 44). All four novels analyzed in this chapter contain such paraspaces – for instance, in *à l’Abri de Rien* – the makeshift tent run by volunteers which provides food and medical care for refugees, in *Le Médicament* the transit center, in *Venus d’Ailleurs* the abandoned T.A.S.E silk factory in Lyon, in *Assommons les Pauvres!*, the asylum court located at the outskirts of Paris. The description of such spaces and the mapping of relationships within and outside this space plays an important role in “situating”, visibilizing, and spatializing the refugee. In the following sections, I will discuss the various strategies³⁶ used by authors of these novels to construct such paraspaces and the ways in which such spaces in these fictional narratives exemplify Henri Lefebvre’s argument that “places contain the traces of the historical events that have shaped them, and so the effacement of history is never complete” (Smethurst 15).

A l’Abri de Rien

In the narrative space of Olivier Adam’s *À l’Abri de Rien* multiple chronotopes intersect and coexist. The tension between these independent yet interrelated timespaces is not resolved by the author. Instead, they remain suspended and thus expand the play of meanings for readers who navigate them. Additionally, the relational dynamics between these chronotopes interact with readers’ prior knowledge to recreate and renew the text.

Winner of *Prix du roman populiste* and *le Prix du Roman France Télévisions*, *À l’Abri de Rien* is Olivier Adam’s sixth novel. Recipient of Prix Goncourt de la Nouvelle, Adam is a prolific writer who has written more than twenty novels. His novels depict

³⁶ McHale identified the following as strategies for constructing and deconstructing space in postmodern fiction: juxtaposition, interpolation, superimposition, and misattribution” (45).

middle-class protagonists grappling with identity crises, struggles of adaptation, and problems of the French banlieue. Since the publication of his first novel *Je vais bien, ne t'en fais pas*, Adam has garnered for himself the reputation of the chronicler of “invisible France.” Adam’s plotscapes are a far cry from the clichés that attract tourists to France. *À l’Abri de Rien* was inspired by the events related to the closure of Sangatte³⁷ by Nicolas Sarkozy, who shut down the operations of the Red Cross center at the camp and imprisoned citizens who hosted refugees. Reacting to this incident Adam commented: “C’était une aberration! Des gens mis hors la loi pour cause de générosité. Et ça risque de reproduire !” (9).³⁸ Adam’s commitment to use fiction to express his disapproval of the political stance toward refugees is clearly discernible in the novel.

Before I proceed to an analysis of some of the different chronotopes represented in *À l’Abri de Rien*, and the relationship between them, it is first necessary to briefly outline some of the problems I had in identifying and classifying the different chronotopes in the first place. One of the primary difficulties is the “fuzziness” that surrounds the term chronotope. As I mentioned in the introduction, on the one hand, the term is used to indicate the dominant genre-specific spatiotemporal form of a text such as adventure, idyll etc. and on the other hand, the term is also used to designate the local textual motifs that occur inside the text—chronotope of the road, chronotope of the threshold etc. Secondary chronotopes such as that of the road may themselves be associated with another genre such as the adventure; but their appearance in a different genre shows an oppositional or

³⁷ Sangatte is a migrant camp opened in 1999 by the Red Cross in Sangatte, a village about a mile from the Eurotunnel entrance to the UK.

³⁸ In an interview accorded to researcher Leïla Ennaili, Adam contended that “si un écrivain doit s’engager c’est d’abord dans et par ses livres” [if a writer must campaign, it is primarily through and by his books] (286).

contrapuntal relationship with the main chronotope. The secondary chronotopes may have a narratological function or a symbolic or ideological purpose with the theme of the novel. As Lynne Pearce astutely observed: “A chronotope may therefore be labelled differently according to the textual function under discussion at any one time” (Pearce 177). Keeping in mind the difficulties pertaining to the polyvalence of the term, my use of the term in the following section refers to the textual function such a space-time configuration plays in analyzing the representation of refugees in the given text.

At the level of textual motifs, two different space-times intersect in the narrative space of Olivier Adam’s *À l’Abri de Rien* – the chronotopes of provincial town and that of crisis. The novel braids together two seemingly disparate strands—on the one hand, the intimate life of a French couple and their two children, and on the other, the precarity and vulnerability of refugees wandering without shelter after the dismantling of Sangatte camps. The novel problematizes the key word “abri” within multiple contexts. Marie and Stephane, the French couple, live in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France and their two children — Lucas and Lise — also go to schools there. Stephane works as a school bus chauffeur. Marie used to work as a clerk at Monoprix. After having been fired from her job, Marie’s struggles with chronic depression since the random death of her sister in a road accident intensifies after being terminated from her job. Her growing sense of alienation causes her to gradually break away from her family to bond with a group of volunteers helping migrants in Calais. Marie’s depression, the spiraling police violence on the refugees, and the background of continuous rains contribute to evoke a pervasive mood of gloom and erosion.

The first chronotope I want to discuss is that related to the provincial life. From the beginning, Adam presents Marie as an alienated, troubled, and depressed mother and wife. Unlike other women of her neighborhood, Marie finds it difficult to accept and make peace with the repetition and cyclicity of her life in Calais. Marie's growing sense of alienation caused by her sister's abrupt death, and her sense of feeling drowned in the insignificance of life's banality, especially after losing her job, is conveyed through a stream of consciousness narration which shows her grappling with the beginning of such a banal existence. This narration foreshadows the crisis waiting to erupt into her life:

Comment ça a commencé ? Comme ça je suppose : moi, seule dans la cuisine, le nez collé à la fenêtre où il n'y a rien. Rien.

[How did this begin? Like this I suppose: me, alone in the kitchen, nose pressed against the window where there is nothing. Nothing.]

The words “alone”, “kitchen”, and “nothing” locate Marie spatially within the domestic realm, looking out into the outside world, and encountering emptiness. The word “rien”, repeated thrice in the very first paragraph of the novel, underscores the all-pervasive-uniformity and unremarkability of the millions who inhabit this space. Four successive adjectives in a fragmentary sentence—“indifférents , confinés, retranchés, autonomes” [indifferent, confined, cut off, standalone]—emphasize modern man's condition (11). While Marie rails against the sameness that drowns her out, she is surrounded by other women who appear to appreciate the cyclicity and repetitive pattern of their daily life: “c'est ça leur vie, attendre toute la journée le retour de leurs gamins ou de leur mari en accomplissant des taches pratiques et concrètes pour tuer le temps” [that is their life, wait

the whole day the return of their kids or their husband by getting their chores done to kill time] (12).

Just as readers begin to wonder at the reasons why Marie resists the repetitive life, the first-person narrator delves into her nostalgia for an earlier phase of her life where she recollects the happiness she found in living with her parents in an HLM “qui dominait le front de mer, au parking entre l’immeuble et le sable.” Marie reminisces fondly about how much she enjoyed living in that place: “on vivait là c’était pas grand-chose, mais on était heureux” (25). After leaving her kids at school, Marie stops at the site of her old home to relive nostalgically her experiences of childhood. While standing on the seashore reminiscing about her earlier life, Marie stumbles upon a scene of brutal police violence unleashed on the refugees:

J’ai fait quelques pas et je les ai vus, des types en uniforme et leur chiens lâchés, des armes luisantes à leurs ceintures, astiquées. Dans le crépitement des talkies ils hurlaient et s’agitaient, braquaient leurs lampes sur trois réfugiés hagards, serrés comme des gosses à l’intérieur (28).

[I walked a few steps and I saw them, men in uniform et their unleashed dogs, weapons glistening against their shiny belts. In the spluttering of their walkie-talkies, they were screaming and getting agitated, holding up their torches on three haggard refugees, squashed in like children.]

Marie’s escapade into her childhood comfort place is now marred by the memory of this violence. The idyllic, cyclical everyday time of the provincial chronotope gets knocked off course by this irruption of violence in the plot space. Marie is unable to make sense of what she witnessed, and she arrives late at the clubhouse where her son Lucas

waits for her. Perceiving Marie's malaise and disoriented look, Lucas warns Marie: "Je veux pas que ça recommence, maman" [I don't want that to happen again, Mom] (30). The ominousness and serious tone of Lucas' voice does not escape her. However, despite her son's endearing admission of how much he loves her, Marie is haunted by the flashing memories of the cops with German shepherds, the violence and the faces frozen in terror, while driving home in the rain. Marie's brief glimpse of a different time-space represented by the conflict chronotope and her inability to wipe the memory of that violence when she reenters the provincial life timespace—performing the role of a mother who goes to collect her children from school—pits the two time-spaces against each other. The narrative tension between these two chronotopes propels the story forward.

The slow pace of the provincial life chronotope is disrupted by the conflict chronotope which dredged up the violence that always hovers around the edges of scenic quietness. As readers process the invisibility and inaudibility of the violence that surrounds the idyllic scenes of domesticity encountered in the opening chapters, Adam introduces the chronotope of encounter—a chronotope that is instrumental in the narratological function of moving the plot forward by "accelerating or decelerating time" (Pearce 176). The encounter chronotope unfolds while Marie attempts to fix the flat tire in the pelting rain during her drive home with Lucas. The driver of a vehicle on the other side of the road catches her eye and just as he is about to slow down, he sees Lucas and speeds away without helping Marie. Struggling to fix the tire under the pelting rain and fighting against the sensation of being swallowed by the sea and the sand, Marie glimpses the shadow of a man walking toward her. While Lucas entreats her to lock the car, Marie realizes that the man wished to help them. From his clothes and his accent, she understands that he is a refugee.

After he fixes the car, Marie thanks him, shakes his hand, and asks him his name. After learning that his name is Jallal, she is overwhelmed by the uselessness of that information. She does not pay him or offer him anything as a token of appreciation. He walks away into the darkness and she returns home.

This encounter proves pivotal to the narrative. After this incident, Marie starts to frequent the area near the makeshift tent where the refugees gather together. It is inside this tent that she meets Isabelle, the caretaker who provides food, shelter, and medicine for the refugees. When Marie enters the makeshift tent the first time, Isabelle, the volunteer warns her: “Qu’est-ce que vous faites là ? C’est pas le spectacle ici. C’est pas un zoo, madame” [what are you doing here? There’s no show here. This is not a zoo, lady] (61). Correlating the refugee camp to a zoo draws attention to public and media’s spectacularization and prejudices which equate vulnerable persons such as refugees with non-humans and animals. The encounter chronotope leads Marie to the paraspace of the tent where she begins to “see” refugees, learn their names, and get to know them. Until then, Marie’s references to refugees consisted of collectivizing terms such as “types” [guys] or the third person plural “ils” [they] which depersonalizes them.

Marie’s daily visits to the makeshift tent leads to increased familiarity with the refugees, especially Jalal and Béchir. By entering the paraspace of the tent, Marie stumbles upon hidden worlds in her own hometown. She learns that Isabelle, the volunteer who runs the tent, shelters migrants in her home even though she risks getting arrested by the police. At an impromptu gathering at Isabelle’s house, Béchir “[E]nveloppé d’un drap blanc” (138) and “le visage recouvert d’un masque ... africain” [shrouded in a white sheet, face covered with an African mask] (138), performs a show that recreates a theatre scene from Iran.

With this performance, we learn that Bechir used to belong to a theatre group in Iran. Within the hidden space of Isabelle's home, Bechir is like a "un fantôme macabre" [a macabre ghost], an invisibilized refugee recreating fragments of his life and evoking the spectre³⁹ that haunts and borders our lives. Adam creates a proliferating series of storyworlds embedded within storyworlds – from a highway on Calais, to a makeshift tent, to a secluded countryside home, to a theatre scene in Iran.

The domestic scenes opening the novel quickly recede into more and more invisible spaces such as the hangar, the makeshift temporary habitations. As these places proliferate, in a parallel movement, Marie's home space shrinks. Unable to feel at home in her own house, she seeks solace in the nearby woods: "Les bois, c'était juste du noir avec le vent qui sifflait dans tous les sens, mais je n'avais pas peur [...] Je me suis enfoncée dans le bruissement des dernières feuilles, je me dirigeais en tâtonnant, mes doigts caressaient des troncs humides et couverts de mousse, mes pieds s'enfonçaient dans la terre boueuse" [It was all dark in the woods, with the wind whistling in all directions, but I was not afraid [...] I sank into the rustling of the recently fallen leaves, I felt my way forward, my fingers caressing moss-covered, humid trunks, my feet sinking into the mucky earth] (147-148). In the forest, Marie reminisces her childhood days, spent with her sister, completely abandoned to each moment. Marie's memories of happy times spent with her sister in the dark unfamiliar space of the forest problematizes binaries such as familiar/alien associated

³⁹ In the book *Les Spectres de Marx* (1993), Derrida defines the spectre as "On ne sait pas si c'est vivant ou si c'est mort." [One does not know if it is alive or dead] (26). Bechir, the Iranian refugee's enactment of the ghost confuses the audience due to this indeterminacy. Later in the book Derrida defines exorcism as "L'exorcisme consiste à répéter sur le mode de l'incantation que le mort est bien mort" [consisting of repeating incantatorily that the dead is well and truly dead] (84). Bechir's enactment of his life as a theatre artist in Iran seems like his attempt to revive a ghost from the past.

with city/forest. At multiple instances in the novel, Olivier Adam introduces episodes that defamiliarize familiar spaces and introduce an uncanny element to the familiar.

The concluding chapters of the novel introduce a new space into the narrative — that of the convalescence center where Marie is confined after her nervous breakdown. The paraspatial zone of the hospital, where the last scenes of the novel unfold, serves as reconciliatory space which holds the potential to heal the rupture produced by the opposing chronotopes of provincial town and crisis. The dialectic between these two oppositional chronotopes and the interaction between them through the plotspace evokes the dialectic of division described by Gaston Bachelard in his study of the poetics of space: “Outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility” (218). In *À l’Abri de Rien*, the void Marie feels in her inner space at the start of the novel and the clearly demarcated exterior spaces of her hometown begin to dissolve. The exact coordinates of “here” and “there”, “home” and “outside world” become blurry. Toward the end of the novel, Marie’s repeated forays into refugees’ spaces and her attempts to reconcile her personal life with that of the world inhabited by refugee characters such as Bechir and Jallal brings to the very border-line surface between the inside and outside, where “the center of “being-there” wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being” (Bachelard 218). As she begins to gain clarity and peace, the outer world becomes a fuzzy space where marginalized spaces seem to take over spaces she had mapped differently. The linear treatment of time which leads to a conventional denouement does not occur in *À l’Abri de Rien*. Instead, Adam’s narrative takes the reader through a journey of several spaces such that instead of a telos, the reader emerges with a topos, a deepening awareness

of space. Marginal spaces—the refugee makeshift camp, Isabelle’s home where she provides shelter to the homeless refugees, the temporary huts near the beach where refugees seek shelter—mapped by Adam disrupt the provincial chronotope of the novel. According to Scott Bukatman, such paraspatial zones are sites of ontological breakdown, where “the world has lost visibility, corporeality and comprehensibility” (164). The final scenes of *À l’Abri de Rien* represent an “axiomatic paraspace,” in which the “causative structures of narrative” are “entirely elided” (Bukatman 177).

By layering the narrative space with these chronotopes, Adam maps the traumatized life of a provincial town woman with that of the displaced refugee. The congruences between these seemingly divergent life trajectories produce resonances and highlight the importance of “situating”—providing a space for the nothingness that swamps not only refugees but also those marked by trauma such as Isabelle⁴⁰ and Marie. While Adam’s layering of these chronotopes serves to illuminate the trauma suffered by those forcibly displaced, it does precious little to historicize the refugee except to serve as a prop onto which the trauma of a middle-aged woman is expanded.

In Adam’s narrative, the various chronotopes I described, coexist as “independent centres of consciousness” (Pearce 175). Each reader parses the relationship between the unmerged, independent timespaces in their own fashion. The play of timespaces also sets the stage for working through “unspoken” trauma. What has remained “unspeakable” for Marie for several years is exposed and texturized through her dialogic encounters with Bechir, Jalal, and Isabelle. In turn, they perform the role of the Bakhtinian interlocutor,

⁴⁰ Isabelle is marked by the tragic death of her husband and young son in a road accident.

serving as the witnessing other, whose presence is indispensable for the past to be grounded into the present.

Le Médicament

Sénouvo Agboto Zinsou's novel *Le Médicament* portrays the trajectories of refugees and asylum seekers from various parts of the world who share the common space in the transit center at Bayerrode, Germany. The novel, which consists of forty-three chapters of unequal length, is narrated by Justine Togbévi, a refugee from Puta, capital of Dugan⁴¹, a fictitious country. Through Justine's narration, we meet the other inmates of the transit center in Bayerrode. In terms of spaces mentioned in the novel, while the primary focus is on the lives of the inmates residing in the transit center at Bayerrode, Germany, there are several flashbacks that yield details about the past lives of the inmates before their arrival in Germany. Their stories expand the novel's terrain to include places as diverse as Bamberg, Wurzburg, Hamburg, Malmoe, Gorée Island in Senegal, and Kigali, Rwanda.

Sénouvo Agbota Zinsou has produced several plays and novels that draw from his own exilic experiences in Germany. Forced to flee Togo in the wake of political conflict, Zinsou sought political asylum in Germany in the early nineties. Zinsou's novel which one offers an interesting counter example to the single-story paradigm and the representational anxiety around refugees that I discussed in the first chapter. The novel sets up a dialogue between two acute and seemingly irreconcilable positions: that of restriction conveyed by "homo sacer" and the transformative potential contained within the migrant figure. In this section, I discuss the chronotopes in the novel to probe how Zinsou defies reductionist

⁴¹ Dugan serves as fictitious stand-in for Togo, Zinsou's country of origin.

media tropes of refugees as passive, helpless, victims and recuperates a space for refugees' agency that is hewed by their experiences of displacement and disaffiliation.

I identified three competing chronotopes in the novel. The dominant one is that of the romantic love between Justine and Stefan. This chronotope organizes both the story and the narration. However, two other chronotopes—regeneration and degeneration—reinforce and partially challenge the dominant one. In the process, they allow the novel to explore issues about refugee resettlement that are seldom addressed. The dialogue of these three chronotopes produces a highly textured representation of refugees which, despite its facile resolution of many challenges, visibilizes the precarity of refugee lives even after securing refugee status.

Bayerrode transit center, where refugees reside temporarily before they are assigned a permanent residence, constitutes the most important space in the novel. It brings together a disparate group of people from various places of origin who are forced to live together for a temporary period of time. The transit center serves as a paraspace because it brings into view the “worldness” of world and offers opportunity for reflecting on world-making itself, especially refugee world-making. In terms of chronotopes, the chivalric romance chronotope structures and dominates the novel's plotspace. Beginning with Justine and Stefan's chance encounter on the road and the immediate spark of romance (an attraction that largely remains unexplained), much of what happens in the novel gets organized around “miraculous adventures.”⁴²

⁴² According to Bakhtin, what sets the chivalric romance apart from the Greek adventure novel is the quality of the adventure-time, which is imbued with the “tendency toward the miraculous” whereas in the Greek novel, “adventure-time was technically true-to-life within the limits of individual adventures” (154).

Le Médicament differs from the other novels discussed in this section on many levels. At the most fundamental level, the novel is much longer and has a much broader canvas with multiple protagonists. Secondly, the story itself unfolds within the transit center—a heterotopic space populated by those who share a common purpose, that of gaining legitimate status in the host country. Setting it up as the primary locus where the novel’s plot unfolds helps Zinsou create a heterotopic “other” space from where the interactions with/in the outside world can be explored. Unlike other novels, where marginal spaces of refugee habitation remain on the periphery of the plotspace, here they take center stage. Secondly, the large cast of characters in the novel makes the transit center space seem expansive and the outside world feel smaller in comparison. Zinsou uses several other strategies which flip the representational hierarchy. The title *Le Médicament*, for instance, draws from the Dugan people’s conceptualization of the asylum process as *atike* (medicine), and the asylum centers as *atike-kpame* (hospital). Zinsou uses the title as a deliberate play on the tension surrounding various perceptions of asylum: while Europeans consider asylum seekers as a scourge, a plague, and an epidemic, for the asylum seekers, the process of seeking asylum remains a step toward wellness, a necessary “*atike kadikadika*,” or bitter pill (16). In salutary acknowledgement of Derrida’s *pharmakon*, the classic signifier of ambivalence, the medicine indicated by the title tackles head-on public discourses where refugees are represented as a scourge and flood—to show that one man’s poison is another man’s cure.

The clever use of the extended metaphor of medicine allows Zinsou to draw attention to the various strategies that refugees, or as he calls them, “the sick from all over” [“*des malades des quatre coins du monde*”] adopt for their healing (17). The treatment or

medicine [“*medicament*”] may well take different forms for different people; the remedy or the cure that the asylum seeker seeks may exist in several forms and different people approach the medicine that works best for their condition and their temperament –“*chacun est venu prendre son medicament selon sa propre maladie*” [each of us came to take our medicine according to our own illness] (116). The diversity of cures and remedies are indicated by the polysemy of words such as “*pilules*”, “*potions*,” “*injections*,” and similar terms related to the lexical field of medicine (14). While discussing the remedies available for each refugee, Justine also refers to her fellow inmates’ dream of achieving respectability [“*respectabilité enfin*”] and asylum by meeting a man who proposes marriage (56). Despite the possibility of sexual exploitation due to the unequal power relationship between refugees and the citizens, many residents from the transit center still risk dating. According to Justine, if seeking asylum is one form of medicine, dating is yet another form of medicine that administers wellness: “*un médicament comme un autre. Avaler toutes les pilules, toutes les potions; se laisser administrer toutes les injections, on ne sait jamais laquelle sera la bonne. Et surtout, on ne sait pas de quelle cuiller, de quelle seringue useront ceux qui vous les administrent*” [a medicine like any other. Swallow all the pills, all the potions; allow yourself to be administered all the injections, one never knows which will work. And especially, one does not know which spoon, which syringe those who administer them will use] (14). However, for characters such as Miranda and Georges le Bel, who are sexually exploited by their German dating partners, this form of medicine turns lethal. The perverse sexual relationship between Miranda and the old man makes her sick (“*elle vomit, elle a mal au ventre*”); the use of words such as “*ingurgite*”, “*visqueux*”, and “*dégoûtant*” as qualifiers of the old man’s medicine plays with the medical vocabulary

to suggest the dangers of sexual exploitation that stalk refugee women (33). The use of medicine and treatment as an extended metaphor for asylum renders the legal asylum process as one option among a larger category of cures that are available to those who seek a remedy for their suffering. Additionally, the sexual slavery of Miranda and Georges le Bel exposes how those who claim to cure the illness end up cannibalizing those they claim to heal.

Unlike other refugee novels such as *A l'Abri de Rien* and *Assommons les Pauvres!* the dominant romantic chronotope of *Le Médicament* gives it a teleological structure. The connection between plot pattern of a fictional world and the world outside of literature was explained by Clark and Holquist as follows: “Since authors model whole worlds, they are ineluctably forced to employ the organizing categories of the worlds that they themselves inhabit” (278). *Le Médicament*'s romantic emplotment, as revealed by characters such as Justine and Stefan, Clara and Jürgen, Carlos and Mir, betrays Zinsou's philosophy of cosmopolitanism—a world where national borders are transcended by the unificatory power of romantic love. However, in the large canvas of *Le Médicament*'s protagonists, aventurier-professionnels such as Kwesi, rejected and policed across various national borders, commits suicide, an act which is characterized as adventure romance protagonist's action of last resort signifying loss of all hope.

After conducting a typology of a vast corpus of Western European literature, Bart Keunen, a contemporary Bakhtin scholar, argued that most of these narratives share a static tension arc, that is, a tension arc in which states of equilibrium alternate with states of

conflict. Keunen identified three possible teleological plot types⁴³—mission, regeneration, and degradation plots. The narrative movement in *Le Médicament* is one that is defined by a drive from conflict to equilibrium. The textual chronotope of meeting between Justine and Stefan makes it possible for Zinsou to plot the regeneration of a large cast of characters who reside at the Bayerrode transit center. The encounter between Stefan and Justine at the early part of the novel constitutes the difference or the “chance” event that alters the life course of Justine and several others. The random, fortuitous encounter on the road sets the way for an alternate course of events. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin wrote of individual motifs in the Greek romance:

[o]f special importance is the close link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the road ('the open road'), and of various types of meeting on the road. In the chronotope of the road, the unity of time and space markers is exhibited with exceptional precision and clarity (98).

Bakhtin also referred to the “collapse of social distances” produced by the accidental meetings on the road where “people who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet” and “the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another” (243). Justine and Stefan’s chance meeting produces a “snowballing” effect with actions gaining momentum as the protagonists drive across a space that is anything but empty.

Contending that “studying the alternation of equilibrium and conflict”, which is nothing but the development of time, helps to formulate a “a method of establishing genre

⁴³ His monologic plot-spaces/plot types are: (1) the mission plot: equilibrium → conflict → equilibrium (recurrence plot); (2) the regeneration plot: conflict → equilibrium (emergence plot); and (3) the degradation plot: equilibrium → conflict (tragic plot) (Keunen, *Tijd* 22–33, *Verhaal* 51–142).

categories,” Keunen offered a typology of plot-spaces produced by the variation in the interplay of repetition and difference as follows: “the representation of a fictional world in which the conflict is pressed between two images of equilibrium (a mission chronotope) will be distinguished from the regeneration chronotope (a representation in which the narrative ends in a state of equilibrium after a series of conflicts) and from the degradation chronotope (a tragic image in which the loss of equilibrium is the center of attention)” (Keunen 10). The definition of the regeneration chronotope best fits the plot structure of *Le Médicament*. The crucial meeting of Stefan and Justine, at the start of the novel, gives the initial impetus to a process of rehabilitation for a host of other characters. However, I do not attempt to fit the entire novel into the category of a single chronotope. Instead, as other scholars such as Lynne Pearce and Tamara Danicic have shown, a single text is constituted by a multiplicity of space-time relations or “a matrix of local chronotopes” (Danicic 312).

While explaining the typology of chronotopes, Keunen explained that the hero or heroine of the mission narrative will use his or her sacred ethos to subdue her surroundings, whereas the everyday hero or heroine of the regeneration chronotopes will adapt to these surroundings. The adaptive ability of the hero or heroine plays an important role in their moral virtue. As Keunen wrote, it is the hero’s or heroine’s capacity to “come home” despite everything that explains how they are able to prevail. The protagonists of *Le Médicament* show their adaptivity and cunning during numerous instances. They rely on several unique and temporary practices and behaviors that help them survive their daily reality. Consider, for example, the tactical use of language in the novel. It contains a considerable number of references in German, English, and Vewo⁵ within the forty-three

chapters.⁴⁴ Most characters in the novel use code-switching or mixing of languages as a strategic tool. For example, when referring to the used clothes they are forced to buy from charity organizations such as the Red Cross or Caritas, they use the term “zovidzi” or “lampions rouge”:

En fait, “lampions rouges” est d’abord une façon détournée de designer la croix rouge, car ceux qui s’y rendent pour chercher des vêtements voudraient cacher ce fait aux autres, par honte et pour jouir de la vanité de dire après qu’ils les ont achetés ou qu’ils les ont emportés depuis le pays et cachés au fond de leur valise. (7)

[In fact, “lampions rouges” is first of all a convoluted way of indicating the red cross, because those who go there looking for clothes, fact they would like to hide from others, because of shame and to enjoy the vanity of saying that they bought it or that they brought it from the country and it was tucked into the bottom of their suitcase.]

In sum, Justine acknowledges that “lampion rouges” is a clever way to refer to the Red Cross so that those who shop from such places can hide their shame and pretend to enjoy a sense of vanity by claiming to have either bought it or discovered it in the bottom of the suitcases they brought from home.

Clara, Justine, and other refugee characters resist the essentializing homology mapped between languages and national identity and reserve their right to pick and choose the kind of connection between language and identity they wish. Consider, for example, Justine’s self-reflexive comment at the annual music festival at Bayerrode:

⁴⁴ Critics such as Janos Riesz have studied the linguistic diversity that marks the novel. Riesz, in particular, has drawn attention to the way the use of German serves to delimit the social environment of the asylum seekers.

– Ça fait plus prestigieux d’être française que duganaise ou rwandaise : le vin français, la cuisine française, la mode française, la langue française... Français se vend bien, en tout cas, mieux que Duganais ou Rwandais.

– Eh bien alors, nous aussi, nous nous vendons bien partout où nous pouvons parler le français. (41-42)

[It’s more prestigious to be French than Duganese or Rwandan: French wine, French cuisine, French fashion, French language... French sells well, anyway better than Duganese or Rwandan.

-well, then, we too, we sell ourselves well wherever we can speak French]

Clara and Justine recognize the potential in the use of dominant languages like French to navigate problematic situations defined by asymmetrical power relations. In addition to deploying their French language skills in situations that accrue them capital, Clara and Justine use their skills of bargain shopping and acquired knowledge of French fashion as tactics against a hostile environment; they constantly manipulate events to win a temporary advantage over the dominant powerful. In this sense they follow Michel de Certeau’s claim that consumption should not be characterized as a purely passive reception, but rather as the “secondary production”⁶ of the consumer, a production that remains “clandestine,” “tireless,” and “quasi-invisible” (31). Several instances in the novel – buying a TV, strategically chatting up the owner of the discount clothing store to get a better price, buying a mirror so that they can groom themselves better – reveal the important if minor forms of agency the refugee inmates show as they navigate adverse circumstances. They turn the situations into means of advancing. Clara, Justine, and other refugees’ “tactical” approaches to life foreground constant inventiveness and continuous vigilance to any

opportunity that will help rebuild their lives. With these vignettes, Zinsou's narrator testifies to the resiliency of refugees. Such witnessing expands upon the prevalent notions around refugees so that they are not seen merely as powerless victims lacking in agency but also as artists, survivors, and bricoleurs of life.

Several episodes such as those discussed in the previous paragraphs offer instances of regeneration chronotopes whose principal objective is either escaping or "manipulating" the threatening situations. As Vladimir Propp explained in his morphology of characters: a victim—hero/heroine—is not a character who is charged with a task, but one who must give himself or herself a task because of his or her own situation—the goal being to escape the initial situation (104). This self-given task of rebuilding their lives characterizes all the protagonists of the *Le Medicament*. They fight against effacement and liminality not merely through appropriating the colonial masters' culture but also by consuming their products and speaking in their language. In sum, they wage political protests and claim their "right to have rights" (Arendt "Origins" 296). Moments of solidarity are shared not merely between the inmates of camps, but also between the citizens and non-citizens. Several instances in the novel demonstrate the extent to which the protagonists manage to invent or appropriate forms of political subjectivity that disrupt the socio-political order of the camp. In the early sections of the novel, Zinsou describes Justine's "bataille contre le désordre et la saleté" [the battle against disorder and dirt] using "l'arme de l'exemple" [the weapon of example] (23). She teams up with other inmates from Dugan and they claim their rights to a clean space through their own subversive forms of protest. Seemingly "natural" affiliations also come up for scrutiny in the novel. While attempting to recruit other Duganese refugees in her mission to clean the transit center, Justine is rebuffed by

Enuglo, who is considered a traitor among the residents of the transit center because he cooperated with German police officers in the arrest of a fellow inmate. Enuglo critiques ideas such as African solidarity and its importance especially outside Africa.

-- Quelle solidarité ? dit Enuglo, comme déchaîné, tu crois que si on lance une pierre maintenant, un Africain risquerait sa tête pour sauver la tienne sous prétexte de solidarité ? Quelle solidarité? Ce ne sont pas les Africains qui se sont cotisés pour m'acheter un billet d'avion. Ah, non! Chacun sait comment il est venu et pourquoi il est venu. Chacun est venu prendre son "médicament" selon sa propre maladie. (116)

[What solidarity? said Enuglo, violently, you think if we throw a stone now, an African would risk himself to save you for the sake of solidarity? What solidarity? It was not Africans who contributed to buy me a plane ticket. Oh, no! Each one of us knows how we came and why we came. Each of us came to take our medicine according to our own illness.]

The idea that each refugee needs to find a cure for their own specific situation (conveyed using the metaphor of illness and treatment) serves to underline the heterogeneity within the supposed homogeneity implied by terms such as refugees. This passage also serves to highlight the dialogical tension that is inherent to most narratives of migration. As Alan DeSantis points out in his essay on the exiles, the dialogical tension that marks migrant narratives finds its most eloquent expression in the metaphors that "place the individual in between centripetal/centrifugal forces, unable to find solace in one stable position" (DeSantis 6). Consider, for example, the metaphor that Enuglo uses to deride the call for African solidarity: "Nous sommes à un marché où chacun apporte sa merchandise et

cherche à la vendre. Alors ne me demande pas de laisser la mienne de côté et d'aller vendre celle des autres pour leur compte" [We are at a market where each brings his/her merchandise and tries to sell it. So don't ask me to leave mine aside and go sell others' on their behalf] (116).

Enuglo, who counters the call for solidarity with his right to sell his own merchandise in the market of capitalism, reminds Justine (in the same conversation) of the qualities of the Duganese and the commonality they share due to their shared origins: "Le Duganais est correct, poli, sérieux..." [Duganese is correct, polite, serious...] (117). The irony of Enuglo arguing for his right to be a free agent while drawing on shared traits of nationality reveals the contradicting forces pervasive in exilic discourse.

Legitimacy through marriage: White men as saviors

While one can argue that Zinsou captures the resilience and adaptability of the refugee protagonists through multiple chronotopes of disequilibrium, it has to be borne in mind that the timespace of the road where Stefan meets Justine proves to be the pivotal moment of the narrative, a meeting whose impact cascades into the trajectories of several other characters in the novel. The romantic love between Justine and Stefan constitutes an important narrative strand of *Le Médicament*. Despite the creative resistance and resilience of the transit centers' inmates, the resolution of their situation—which entails gaining legitimate status—is made possible primarily by marriage—in the case of Justine to Stefan, Clara to Jurgen, Carlos to Tasia. Stefan and Jurgen are the white male helpers who promise Clara and Justine support. The choice of these characters is deliberate and raises questions about their resiliency and creativity, especially when contrasted with the trajectory of Kwesi, whose story seems to fit the category of the degradation chronotope. In the typology

established by Bart Keunen, he defines the degradation chronotope as follows: “a degradation chronotope ends with the exclusion of the hero or heroine from his or her home world. [...] Of the circle of departure-adventure-return, only the part of “departure” is left in this chronotope” (91). The portrayal of Jurgen and Stefan and their willingness to help Clara and Justine evokes Makau Mutua’s SVS metaphor. In the essay “Savages, Victims, and Saviors”, Mutua wrote about the savages-victim-savior construction that riddles every human rights movement. In this tripartite construction, the state is represented as the “classic savage”, while the second dimension “victim” depicts “a human being whose dignity and worth have been violated by the savage, and the savior or the redeemer is the angel who protects vindicates, civilizes, restrains, and safeguards” (201-204). In *Le Médicament*, the regeneration at the end of the narrative is largely due to the help and support provided these two white males.

Kwesi, a Ghanaian-Sudanese, whom Justine refers to amiably as “aventurier-professionnel” [professional adventurer], was first a Ghanaian immigrant in Nigeria, hoping to escape the economic crisis (111). After he was part of the first lot of foreigners sent out of Nigeria, he tried his luck in the Ivory Coast; he tried to make plans to go to the United States, whilst living on nothing in Senegal, and was then involved in a series of European journeys to Sweden, Switzerland, and to England. Involved in the business of second-hand motor vehicles and spare parts, this dynamic “aventurier-professionnel” business school graduate ends up in Germany after a series of clandestine journeys. For Kwesi, it is impossible to affirm his multiple identities within the limited definitions of identity used by national institutions involved in the process of determining refugee status. His suicide, however, at the end of the novel serves as a signifier for the irreconcilability

of multiplicity in a world that privileges origins and roots. Kwesi, who was haunted by the injustices perpetrated on the slaves pushed through the door of no return at Gorée Island⁴⁵ to the slave markets across the Atlantic, struggles to regain his equilibrium after his arrest and brutal assault by the police for traversing the borders without documents. While visiting Gorée with Doris, his girlfriend, Kwesi provokes her into a dispute regarding the meaninglessness of maintaining law and order in the face of material proof of slave fortresses. The horrible inequality that riddled the world in terms of mobility where a select few could emigrate according to their will while others were forced into slavery remains an irreconcilable cruelty. Kwesi's engagement with questions of mobility and freedom and his failed pursuit of a hybrid identity culminates in his suicide—a *dénouement* that underscores the Hobson's choice that societal frameworks foist upon refugees. The author's decision to end the life of the most non-conformist character—the non-citizen⁷ who grapples the most with questions of mobility and freedom and who struggles to negotiate a hybrid identity—suggests the impossibility of representing an identity that is caught in crisis between many worlds.

Kwesi's suicide at the end of the novel (suggesting his departure from the community's values) and Justine's oracle-like premonition about his fate evoke the codes of a religious-moral universe where the hero who refuses to acquiesce will receive punishment. On the one hand, Zinsou secures redemption for characters such as Justine, Clara, Carlos, and Dorothee by developing the romantic emplotment. However, other sections of the novel where characters such as Kwesi are driven to suicide challenge the

⁴⁵ Gorée Island, located in Senegal, is considered as the largest slave-trading centre on the African coast. In 1978, it was declared as a world heritage site by United Nations. The house of slaves and its Door of No Return was believed to be one of the final exit points for many slaves. That's where I met your professor!

very possibility of such facile happy endings. Using the transit center as a background allows Zinsou to depict a miniature, unseen world that exists on the periphery of a city. However, as the inmates of the transit center cross the threshold that separates them from citizens, the complex, thorny question of integration and building a new life is resolved simplistically through a romantic storyline that achieves the positive goal of social reconciliation and world citizenship.

The heterotopic space of the refugee transit center represents a site where notions of self and identity are negotiated for Justine, Clara, Carlos and all the other characters of *Le Médicament*. The backdrop of the transit center makes it possible to explore the social production of space or in other words, how space is “given meaning and definition by the regular activities and social relationships that unfold in it and the cultural rules governing them” (Peteet 93). Unlike the ready-made labels and categories of refugee organizations that operate on monolithic discourses of identity, the refugee transit center of Bayerrode reconstitutes the dynamics between relationships, cultures and languages. This reworking of identities that Zinsou depicts evokes Stuart Hall’s conception of cultural identity as “a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being” (225). The unexpected encounters at the transit center changes the characters of *Le Médicament*. These encounters alleviate the burden that defined them as the only bearers of their individual histories. The migratory journeys and lives in transit centers constitute permeable spaces allowing for an interstitial identity constantly traveling between previous spaces, which allows for the creation of an indefinite number of identities. *Le Médicament* complicates refugee identities and offers a powerful testimony of de Certeauian subversive practices and forms of infra-political resistance that constitute everyday life of refugees.

Venus d'Ailleurs

The contrast that marks the trajectory of Kwesi and the other protagonists of *Le Médicament* is amplified in Paola Pigani's novel *Venus d'ailleurs* (2015). Published amidst the refugee crisis in Europe, *Venus d'ailleurs* interweaves the trajectories of Mirko and Simona, an Albanian brother-sister duo from Kosovo, fleeing persecution from Serbs. The novel charts their experiences in the host country, meticulously describing their evolution from asylum seekers to refugees, a legitimacy which enables them to build a new life in France, the host country. While Simona integrates into French society by painstakingly learning the French language and embodying French identity, Mirko struggles with his traumatic past. Increasingly taunted by the host society with ethnic slurs, Mirko grows alienated, estranged even from Simona. He feels a tenuous sense of belonging amidst a group of graffiti artists, and begins a relationship with Agathe Ridosky, an artist. Mirko survives an instance of brutal violence on the streets of Lyon where he is tortured and abused for his Otherness. The novel closes with Mirko's return to Kosovo.

If *Le Médicament* grappled with the in-between phase of refugee lives and *À l'Abri de Rien* captures how the presence of refugees intersects with the lives of residents in host societies, in *Venus d'Ailleurs* the question of refugee integration comes under the crosshairs. From the outset, *Venus d'ailleurs* maps two chronicles of the refugee condition. In the first of these, language, imagination, and performativity join seamlessly to tell the narrative of the refugees' seemingly 'successful' integration into a host society. The other is constituted by trauma that eludes language, spaces that immure, and interminable struggles to defy the engulfing violence of the racist gaze. The spacetime of Mirko and Simona begin to drift apart after their entry to France. While Simona gets swept up into the

responsibilities of mastering the new language and securing socioeconomic status Mirko remains trapped in the construction field and struggles to build a new life.

In my discussion of the depiction of refugee figures, I focus on two important chronotopes that intersect in the diegesis. As soon as Mirko and Simona secure refugee status, Simona is assigned to work at a women's store and Mirko begins work at a construction site. The spatial coordinates of where they find themselves in the host country separate the siblings forever. Pigani's placement of her protagonists in two starkly contrasting spaces and its ramifications for the plot serves as a through line that visibilizes the role of gender and class in refugee integration into host societies. While Simona learns the language and seems to move ahead in her career, Mirko struggles with language and finds himself trapped in an alienating world, alone with his thoughts. Despite having entered the country together, later, their trajectories diverge completely – Simona gains visibility, recognition, and moves more into the center, whereas Mirko is made invisible and pushed to the periphery. He begins to haunt abandoned factory spaces, looking to inscribe his experiences, register his presence, in a way that is non-linguistic, and thus very different from Simona's approach.

Indeed, language is a prime factor in Simona's "integration". Narrating, as Bamberg rightly notes, "has established itself as a privileged site for identity analysis – a new territory for inquiry" (133). Language, narrative, and identity are therefore closely interconnected. Simona establishes the ability to self-narrate by assiduously learning French from the day Aldo, the people smuggler, leaves her and Mirko in front of the administrative offices at Le Puy-en-Velay. She uses every new word, every new phrase in her daily language: "Elle apprend vite, saisit les nuances des expressions qu'elle fait

répéter, quelle que soit la personne.” [she learns fast, seizing the nuances of expressions that she makes them repeat, regardless of whom she is speaking to] (Pigani 41). She learnt the words needed to narrate her story and to organize it into neat categories of the present and the past; she relies on her linguistic skill to provide “les éléments concrets [the concrete elements] required to prepare a convincing asylum application (86). While Simona makes steady progress in integrating to the host society using her linguistic capital, Mirko struggles to understand French and consequently, experiences an increasing sense of isolation. He has no stories to tell: “Mirko, lui, n’a rien à chanter, rien à raconter. Il préfère regarder les autres, deviner leurs histoires, leur vie à reconstruire entre silence intérieur et vacarme du chantier.” [Mirko, he has no songs to sing, nothing to narrate. He preferred to watch others, imagining their stories, reconstituting their life between the inner silence and the din of the construction site] (Pigani 10). He has no words to narrate himself even if he wanted to because all the words he has learnt since his arrival in France belong to the realm of construction and manual labor:

Tous les mots qu’il a appris depuis qu’il est en France sont pris dans le béton: les consignes, les mises en garde, les banches, l’auge, le mortier, le taf, magnez-vous les gars!, c’est l’heure, on se tire...les mots du boire et du manger lui sont venus de la rue. Trop peu pour dire la solitude de l’homme qui marche, empli de la mélancolie [All the words he has learnt since arriving in France have something to do with concrete: instructions, warnings, panels, trough, mortar, work-to-do, hurry up, guys!, it’s time, let’s get out ... words of food and drink, he learnt from the street. Too little to narrate of the solitude of the man who walks, filled with melancholy.] (24)

Mirko's silence and lack of acculturation seems to be tied to his work environment, where he is surrounded by other undocumented immigrants living under harsh conditions. The gendered lines along which the novel distributes socioeconomic factors that contribute to exclusion and acculturation (or lack thereof) is problematic and deserves a closer look.

While Mirko fails to acquire the adequate linguistic capital that will facilitate his integration to the host country, the novel positions Simona in a wholesale discount clothing store where the fashion labels, clientele, and exposure to the spoken language seem to work as a catalyzer that sets her on a fast track to becoming a 'successful' refugee, well integrated in the host society. The notion of language as cultural capital, as wealth, is an important factor in understanding Simona's integration into the host country. Unlike Mirko who works on a construction site amidst other undocumented workers who do not speak French, Simona works in Mistigriff which is a discount store frequented mostly by women. As Simona remarks at the early part of the novel, she likes to believe that she "works in the international": "Elle travaille dans l'international. C'est ce qu'elle dit avec malice quand on lui pose la question [She works in the international sector. That's what she says maliciously when asked about her work] (27). Simona's growing ease with the language helps her pun on her condition as a displaced refugee and spin that as a skill that adds to her competence. Her exposure to English words and the various styles and trends enable her to expand her world even while staying within the realm of the domestic (women's clothing store). Like Zola's protagonist Denise Bardu, from the novel *Au Bonheur des Dames*, who sheds her provincial manners and transforms into an elegant woman, Simona's work in the clothing store helps her to expand her world and model herself around those she observes. Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus together provide a

useful conceptual framework for understanding how the knowledge and experiences of refugees' past lives becomes negated or validated in a new and different social space (1977). Simona, for example, constructs a cosmopolitan habitus for herself through her workplace and the French language. In Bourdieu's framework, the various forms of capital – cultural, social, symbolic and economic – are resources which individuals can draw upon to secure advantage in particular fields. Crucially, in order for the various forms of capital to have value they have to exist in a field in which they are recognized and can be employed. Only when cultural and social capital has been recognized as legitimate can it be converted into symbolic capital which brings with it symbolic power. For Simona, she is able to perform French identity successfully through the French language, as well as by dressing and styling herself as French women do. In a telling commentary of Simona's greater potential at integration into French society thanks to the fungibility and ease of conversion between the various forms of capital she possesses, Ousman, the black guard at the store where Simona works remarks to her: "tu seras française dans quinze ans et moi français dans cent cinquante ans [You will be French in fifteen years, and me in a hundred and fifty years]" (68).

While refugee women like Simona accrue social capital – toward the end of the novel, Simona achieves her dream of becoming a storekeeper at Monoprix des Cordeliers, despite warnings by her French colleagues at Mistigriff that it was an unrealizable ambition – the situation of refugee men reveals a deep malaise. Various studies (Takeda; Watkins, Razee, & Richters) have shown that during resettlement male refugees have to contend with downward mobility. Additionally, they are forced to confront the hostility and indifference with which they are greeted in the host society. In Mirko's case, his identity

as a Kosovar is very quickly assimilated into that of people from the east: “Plus de six cents des Balkans ...des gens de l’Est. Globalisés ainsi, les primo-arrivants, les demandeurs, les requérants de là-bas. Kosovars, Albanais, Serbes, Macédoniens, Roms. De la même engeance, semblait-il [More than six hundred Balkan people ... people from the East. A noun that served to generalize early asylum seekers from there. Kosovans, Albanians, Serbs, Macedonians, Roms. All from the same tribe, it seemed]” (18). Mirko also has to reckon with insults such as: “Sale Rom” or “Ces types à moitié sauvage qui feraient mieux de retourner d’où ils viennent [these savage men who would be better off going back where they come from]” (104). Remarks such as these point to the prevailing narratives about violent masculinities that are severely racialized and bestialized. In Elizabeth Olivius’s meticulous analysis of discourse on men, masculinities and gender equality in the field of humanitarian aid to refugees, she identifies three main representations of refugee men:

First, refugee men are represented as perpetrators of violence and discrimination against refugee women. [...] Second, refugee men are represented as gatekeepers who, as power holders and decision makers in their families and communities, can both obstruct and enable change towards gender equality. [...] Third, refugee men are represented as emasculated troublemakers. (57)

The third category describes Mirko’s status in France. Wherever he goes, he is acknowledged merely as a Roma: “Mirko a beau s’habiller simplement, ne porter ni bijoux, ni moustache, il ressemble à un Tsigane de Roumanie. Il n’est pas près de se fondre parmi les Lyonnais [Mirko can dress simply, not wear jewelry, nor a mustache, but he still resembles a Tsigan from Romania. He was not going to blend in with the Lyonnais]” (48). Considered as rootless vagabonds, Roms as they are referred to in France, are generally

stereotyped as thieves or criminals. The prevalent yet questionable use of botanical metaphors such as roots normalize the relationship between people and places so that identity is considered as a ‘root essence ... of the cultural, and of the national, soil from which it is thought to draw its nature and its sustenance (Malkki 27). Associations such as this have led groups such as the Roma to be perceived as inferior due to their vagrancy and so-called rootlessness. In addition to the trauma caused by the persecution they suffered under the Serbs, Kosovan refugees such as Mirko are obliged to bear the stigma of rootlessness associated with the Roma.

In a Bourdieusian sense, Mirko is unable to inhabit a well-fitted habitus. Daily interactions and the experience of living in a familiar environment are unavailable to Mirko. According to Ghassan Hage, the feeling of community is crucial for feeling at home: “a space where one recognizes people as one’s own and where one feels recognized by them as such [...] a space where one possesses maximal communicative power” (3). Mirko lost or rather left behind two fingers in Kosovo: “Les deux doigts qui manquent, ils sont restés dans mon pays [My two missing fingers remained in my country]” (11). This loss serves as a constant reminder of a lack of wholeness: “Je suis un homme à moitié, je crois [I am half a man, I think]” (75). The lack, the perceived loss of wholeness in the corporeal sense can be read as a metaphor of Mirko’s marginality in French society. Deterritorialisation, and the consequent loss of social acceptance and recognition, combine to produce feelings of isolation and exclusion among refugee men such as Mirko.

For Mirko, his inability to articulate the trauma that he suffered while fleeing Kosovo constitutes perhaps the greater tragedy than the downward mobility and the loss of social status caused by resettlement. Unlike Simona who grows more distant from her

earlier life in Kosovo: “elle oubliait d’être triste [...] Mangeait sa rage, ses regrets” [she forgot to be sad (...) Ate her rage, her regrets] (Pigani 33), Mirko is haunted by persistent memories of his family’s persecution. Even while working on the construction site, he is constantly haunted by, “des images qui tournent dans la tête. (...) et au loin, sa guerre à lui [images churning in his head (...) and far away, his own war]” (12). Art is Mirko’s only respite in the face of antagonism and exclusion from the host society. Confronted with the incapacity to frame his thoughts in the host society’s language and communicate to others, Mirko turns to graffiti. Creating graffiti in abandoned spaces, forging a language to express his inner fury provides Mirko an opportunity to connect with himself: “Tracer un signe humain sur une surface blessée, un dessin, une fureur. Là aussi, il existe comme il a existé à Mitrovica. Partout où il a cru vivre, où il a cru mourir, Mirko a laissé des signes, des traces” [To mark a ruined surface with a human sign, a drawing, a fury. Here too, he continued to exist like he was in Mitrovica. Wherever he thought he lived or died, Mirko left signs, traces] (60).

The space where Mirko produces his graffiti, the places he hangs out with the few friends he has made in the host country are the abandoned spaces such as the T.A.S.E silk factory. Mirko moves from making simple, basic tags (writing his name in his own unique style) to creating a piece (a scene or well-known characters with some sort of slogan) towards the end of the novel. Mirko chooses to write *au sang d’un ventre*, a verse from the poetry of René Leynaud, the *resistant* who was shot dead by the Gestapo, on the walls of the military prison of Montluc. Soon after, he is brutally attacked and abused by four people near the SNCF station in Lyon. Pigani’s use of graffiti as Mirko’s preferred mode of expression invites a closer look. Graffiti has traditionally been considered as an anti-

capitalist movement that provides minorities and the marginalized with a space and a platform to express their identities. According to Ricardo Campos, an artist's dedication to graffiti may be considered as "a form of an identity and performative game where the imagination plays an important role" (156). Furthermore, Campos contends that "illegal graffiti envelops its practitioners in a certain spirit of adventure, characterized by the pleasure of transgression, risk and adrenaline-seeking" (157). Illicitness contributes to the affective value of graffiti. Violating the codes, boundaries, and limits imposed by the authorities and making one's own space, and thereby de-territorializing the territory constitutes the core of the graffiti writer's work. This is also the reason why graffiti is considered as an auto-poietic practice. For Mirko, graffiti serves as his voice, his unique form of expression. His resistance to the suffering and injustices he perceives around him surfaces in his tags. When a construction worker falls to his death, Mirko marks the spot by drawing a tiny blue bird on the sidewalk and the wall nearby. Even while tracing his resistance on the ground, Mirko wonders, "que peut signifier un oiseau peint par terre, à même le sol et sur un mur, au niveau où les chiens lèvent la patte pour pisser?" [what good is a bird painted on the floor, on the ground and the wall, at the same level where a dog lifts its leg to pee?] (Pigani 138).

Despite the seeming futility of his art, Mirko finds solace in Cendrar's verse, "je suis translucide [I am translucent]" (142), that he repeats to himself almost like a mantra. Similar to the poet's goal (in Cendrar's poem), Mirko's artistic aspiration is "to be the space where the light crosses over" (Noland 142). Throughout the narrative, for Mirko, "c'est dans ses gestes perdus de graffeur qu'il existe encore [It's in the lost gestures of a graffiti artist that he still exists]" (Pigani 28). When he visits Agathe's art exhibition, he

remembers his graffiti friends in Kosovo and how they filled the walls with, “calligraphies sauvages” (72) as an expression of their rebellion to the regime. This reference offers an important insight into the graffiti subculture, which offered him and his peers a free space to explore and forge a sense of their own independence. The notion of subculture offers a crucial entry-point into understanding Mirko’s experience in France. In his incisive study, Ken Gelder defined subcultures as “groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do, and where they do it” (1). In France, it is amidst fellow graffiti artists (“graffeurs et muralists”) that Mirko seeks and finds a community, amongst those, “qui ont envie d’ancrer leur regard quelque part [who wish to fix their gaze somewhere]” (Pigani 64). Mirko feels alive only when he “laisse une marque sur ces choses qui tombent. Si je peux laisser une trace, la couleur” [I can live if I leave a mark on these things which fall. If I can leave a trace, a color] (109). When Mirko and Agathe visit the banlieues of Lyon where the erstwhile factory of TASE was located, she shares her family’s immigration history with Mirko. Her grandfather, a Polish immigrant who belonged to the first wave of immigrants, had killed himself after being expelled from the factory just two years before his retirement. Identifying her own fresco from her teenage years, Agathe tells Mirko that those who made these frescoes, “n’ont plus que ça pour vivre, pour se dire la vérité” [only have this to live, to tell themselves their truth] (130). Struggles over territory, place, and space (often characterized as core issues among subcultures) or in other words, a shared sense of liminality defines Mirko’s relationship with Agathe, Thomas, and other artists. The shared experience of estrangement, of not being home, forges a bond among them and allows the beginning of a sense of community. The omniscient narration hints at

that possibility: “cette fille, cette ville pourraient lui donner les deux doigts de clarté qui lui manquent, les battements d’une présence nouvelle.” [this girl, this city could give him the two missing fingers of clarity that he lacks, the flutter of a new presence] (157). However, the violence unleashed on him by the host society forces Mirko to decide to leave France and return to Kosovo. When Mirko visits Pierre to announce this decision, Pierre gives him the book of atlas. As Mirko leaves Pierre’s store, the thought of coming back crosses his mind: “Revenir (...) Ce mot restera un caillou dans son estomac [To return (...) this word will remain a stone in his stomach]” (170). Pigani alludes here to the impossibility of returning home because childhood homes no longer exist as they once did. But Pierre’s book of atlas serves as a magical object that portends the journeys to come. Even if Mirko goes back to Kosovo, the experience of exile has altered him. His home in Kosovo can never be recovered. Mirko’s return to Kosovo at the end of the novel might be construed as his failure to remake a home in France. However, if as bell hooks wrote, home is “that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference” (148), then Mirko succeeds in making a home in France perhaps even more so than his sister does. Pierre’s gift, the book of atlas given to him, “pour les voyages à venir,” [voyages yet to come] (170) serves as a cipher, a talismanic object that will stand in for home wherever he goes. *Venus d’ailleurs* plots different time-spaces for its protagonists. If one uses Keunen’s chronotopic framework, it can be said that the novel contains both regeneration and degradation chronotopes. Similar to Justine and Clara, Simona is able to adapt to her surroundings and use her intelligence and persistence to produce a turnabout in her situation. This success is made possible by the space (fashion discount store) and the time (global marketplace of

21st century) that the plot assigns to her. Mirko, on the other hand, is severed from a world where he had friends and family to an economically inferior, linguistically alienating world of migrant construction workers. The only friends he makes are others who are similarly marginalized. The novel's attribution of the 'successful' refugee role to the female protagonist who masters the French language and skillfully embodies French identity seems like a facile solution to complex issues surrounding hospitality and inclusion. Mirko's trajectory remains unclear and invisible suggesting perhaps that fiction itself fails to situate the refugee figure who struggles to integrate to the host society. While the novel deconstructs naturalized notions of home and belonging and thereby leads us to reckon with the constructedness of identities, its resolution of refugee protagonists' complex quest for home along gendered lines indicates an eagerness to achieve authenticity by evading some of the enduring, and hard to resolve realities of real-world refugees.

Assommons les Pauvres!

Indian origin writer Shumona Sinha's short, lyrical novel *Assommons les Pauvres!* paints a complex, unsympathetic portrait of asylum seekers. Published in September 2011 to critical acclaim, the novel's title is borrowed from Baudelaire's prose-poem from the collection *Petits poèmes en prose*. Narrated by an unnamed female protagonist, who works as a translator-interpreter at a refugee status determination agency located in Paris, the text delineates her growing sense of alienation, the compassion fatigue, and the consequent act of violence that shocks her and leads her to question her unraveling. The biographical indices are evident from the beginning. The author has mined from her experiences as a translator at OFPRA and even though she takes care to not reveal any direct links, the geographical location, and the physical description of her workspace leave no doubts that

this is a work of autofiction. Indeed, on the novel's day of publication, Sinha was fired from her job and OFPRA released a statement condemning the author for not having informed the agency that she was writing a book.

Sinha started out in the literary field as a poet. Her collection of poems *Tout est chemins* was critically acclaimed. Her first work of fiction, *Fenêtre sur les abîmes*, published in 2008 grappled with the marital dissatisfaction between a woman of Indian origin and her French husband. After *Assommons les Pauvres!*, the author published a third novel *L'Apatride*, which tackles the theme of migrancy along gendered lines. Sinha's prose fiction is characterized by a high poetic charge. Her lyrical texts have less to do with describing the material situations and more to do with capturing the subjective world and the phenomenological relations to our environment. As the titles of the twenty-eight chapters that constitute *Assommons les Pauvres!* reveal, the author is interested in evoking a mood and fleshing out her scenes through unexpected details that make readers less interested in the outcome than in inhabiting a certain world she paints.

Before discussing the novel and its unique representation of the predicament of asylum seekers, the provocative title and the epigraph deserve a closer study. Written in 1864, Baudelaire's prose-poem *Assommons les Pauvres!* was considered unpublishable by the *Revue Nationale et Etrangère* and was only included posthumously in *Les Petits poèmes en prose* in 1867. Baudelaire's poem deals with his attack of a beggar. The poet, after spending nearly two weeks with books: "des livres où il est traité de l'art de rendre les peuples heureux, sages, et riches" [which deal with the art of making nations happy, wise, and rich] went outside for a drink "dans un état d'esprit avoisinant le vertige ou la stupidité" [in a state of mind bordering on vertigo or idiocy] (137). On his way to the tavern,

he encounters a beggar, who he pummels to the ground. The beggar, in turn, beats the poet even more thoroughly, thereby proving himself an equal. The poet has just tested out the theory that that to make a man equal you must provoke him beyond endurance. Jonathan Culler succinctly summarized Baudelaire's provocative poem when he wrote that it: "suggests that an account of justice which seeks to evade the model of rule and its application, by evoking proximity and involvement, may find itself violently applying rules and assimilating the unexpectedness of the Other's reaction as an expectation of its own theory" (1235-1236). Sinha's use of the title for her novel plays on Baudelaire's association of violence and justice. The successful female immigrant performing an act of violence on the struggling male asylum seeker adds a gendered perspective to the already double-edged title. At multiple instances in the novel, the reader is left to wonder if the title serves a provocative taunt not merely to the asylum seekers from the narrator's country, but also to the entire cohort of asylum seekers from everywhere. By this, they would prove themselves equal to the high standards of the poet and the host country.

The novel's epigraph is taken from Pascal Quignard's *La Barque silencieuse*: "Aux oreilles d'un Grec ancien le mot grec de liberté (eleutheris) définissait la possibilité d'aller où on veut (...)" [To Ancient Greeks, the Greek word for freedom (eleutheris) defined the possibility to go where one wishes]. At first glance, the epigraph seems to refer directly to asylum seekers and the importance of unfettered mobility and autonomy to cross borders. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that interpreter-narrator's desire for freedom to cross borders—borders of sexuality, gender, and territory—is also encapsulated by the epigraph.

Two competing chronotopes vie for dominance in *Assommons les Pauvres!*. On the one hand, the narrator's passionate lesbian (and impossible) love for Lucia, a love that serves as a stand-in for her (equally) impossible desire to possess the colonial master's whiteness. This romantic spatiotemporal sequence plays on the edges of the other chronotope, that of the public square and the courtroom where asylum seekers bare their lives for adjudicators to decide on their worthiness for refugee status. The oppositional play between these two chronotopes is heightened by the carnivalesque mockery introduced to the diegesis through the narrator whose "level-headed, cheery, and clever wit" channels the rogue figure. In Bakhtin's conceptual framework, the rogue figure can be understood to function in accordance with his description of the carnival text that "overcomes all oppressive social norms" by giving voice to folk truth through "grotesque realism."

Sinha's protagonist, an interpreter who works at a refugee status determination center (a protagonist in whose guise she performs) permits her to make a broader social commentary on the asylum process and the host country. This critique is all the more powerful in that the reader will be aware that Sinha worked as a translator/interpreter in OFPRA and that there therefore exists a permeable relation between author and character.⁴⁶ Indeed, to consider Sinha's interpreter character as the rogue figure is to recognize Sinha herself as having played the rogue figure by "externalizing things" – by using her role as an interpreter at OFPRA. This role and the book she wrote from that experience allowed her to bring to the public realm the realities of the closed juridical world of refugee status determination. It also prompts the audience to identify who exactly is the target of these

⁴⁶ As Bakhtin noted in the FTC essay, readers "make use of autobiographical and biographical material, to study the appropriate era in which the author lived and worked (...) creating an artistic and historical image of the author that may be truthful and profound (...) which can help the listener or reader more correctly and profoundly to understand the work of the given author" (257).

characters' carnivalesque subversions. More radically still, it may lead those readers to wonder whether they now also constitute an object of that critique.

In E.A. Williams' essay "Bakhtin and Borat: The Rogue, the Clown, and the Fool in Carnival Film," she commented that,

in carnival texts, rogues target the very persons and ideologies of an official culture that the author selects as their target. For example, a rogue and his audience will understand the ways in which his trickery targets both his fellow characters and his audience, as it is this trickery that results in the mockery of the same mainstream ideology to which both the characters and audience subscribe.

Following this logic, the interpreter protagonist of *Assommons les Pauvres!* shuttles between apathy, suspicion, hostility, and pity to the asylum seekers and at some point in the novel one starts to question if the mockery and hostility that the interpreter shows to the asylum seekers is a self-referential way to shock the readers into questioning their own attitudes.

As Bakhtin's discussions of carnival culture and literature make clear, the problem of determining the subject of subversive laughter is commonly asked in relation to carnival texts. The difficulties readers can have in determining who bears responsibility for carnival subversions may be illuminated in part by examining such carnival texts as *Assommons les Pauvres!* in accordance with Bakhtin's theorization of what he called "carnival character masks." These masks—the rogue, the clown, and the fool—can be plotted on a spectrum of naïveté based on whether or not they in fact express the genuine view of the author. Because carnival texts such as *Assommons les Pauvres!* push the boundaries of what may be acceptably ridiculed in mainstream culture, readers may have difficulty recognizing that

carnival texts often ask us to question our own values and ideologies. Accustomed to authors who are prepared to bear responsibility for whatever offensive behavior they perform, readers may respond to carnival texts by critiquing the characters rather than by considering whether they themselves, and mainstream culture at large, should bear any responsibility for the absurdities or contradictions that such a carnival performance serves to reveal. In what follows, I review some of the ways that each mask is used in the novel to achieve its critical objectives. I conclude with brief observations about how analyzing the use of carnival character masks in texts like *Assommons les Pauvres!* leads to more fruitful and nuanced discussions of the significance of both carnival and satirical cultural commentary.

Sinha's interpreter protagonist meets all three characteristics of the rogue figure⁴⁷ that Bakhtin delineated. She is the "voice" of the asylum seekers at the court, and as such serves as a bridge – for the court personnel and the asylum seekers in the novel and vis-à-vis the readers, she serves the function of the insider-outsider or as Bakhtin put it, "their entire function consists in externalizing things" (160). Quite like the mask of the fool that aids the novelist to portray the "mode of existence of a man who is in life, but not of it" and links that with the chronotope of the public square, Sinha's interpreter similarly is both in and not in the sphere of the asylum seekers. A migrant herself, her secure position and her ability to use her mother tongue in the service of the host country to separate the true

⁴⁷ In the sixth section of the essay *FTC*, Bakhtin identified three prominent types or figures that he considered as characteristic of folkloric literature of the Middle Ages – the rogue, the clown, and the fool. In his discussion of these figures, he delineated three important characteristics of these figures: first, their "vital connection" with the public square, second, their metaphorical significance and finally, their existence as a reflection of some other's mode of being. Taking into consideration Bakhtin's characterization of the rogue figure, as well as Sinha's role in *OFBRA* as an interpreter, one can understand that she is "somehow embedded in the novel". This author-image helps the reader understand the work of the given author more correctly and profoundly.

and false asylum claimant casts her in a third space in the chronotope of the courtroom. Unlike the taunts of the clown and the simpleminded incomprehension of the fool, the rogue's weapon is cheerful deceit.

The first-person narrator whose voice opens the novel describes herself as “lasse et accablée” [weary and weighed down] and expresses wonder at how within the span of a day she went from the interrogation rooms to the damp room of the police station. The nameless narrator expresses dismay that the country to which she had fled to escape the misery of her home offered her the job of an interpreter and that she is now surrounded with the very misery she sought to escape:

... [T]out s'embrouillait et se confondait dans ma tête qui avait su, depuis longtemps, effacer le souvenir de la misère. Les récits se ressemblaient aux récits. Aucune différence. Sauf quelques détails, de date et de nom, d'accent et de cicatrice. C'était comme si une seule et unique histoire était racontée par des centaines d'hommes, et la mythologie était devenue la vérité. Un seul conte et de multiples crimes : viols, assassinats, agressions, persécutions politiques et religieuses.

[Everything was muddling up and getting mixed in my head, which had known, since a long time, erased the memory of misery. The stories resembled each other. No difference. Except a few details in terms of date, name, accent and wound. It was as if a single, unique story was narrated by hundreds of men, and mythology had become truth. A single tale and multiple crimes: rape, murders, violence, religious and political persecutions.]

The similar patterns that undergird most asylum seekers' stories alludes to the dialectic between "universal" and "particular". It also raises questions about the very meaning and possibility of what constitutes a "true" story. Despite her growing cynicism and apathy toward the plight of asylum seekers, she admits that misery and environmental catastrophe can't be mentioned as these reasons don't justify political asylum. She realizes that everyone is merely playing a role. Thus, she remarks ironically: "Il leur fallait donc cacher, oublier, désapprendre la vérité et en inventer une nouvelle." (11) [So they needed to hide, forget, unlearn the truth and invent a new truth]. The self-reflective narrator's voice underscores that she is aware that everyone here is simply playing a role. Indeed, this may be where Bakhtin's rogue function reaches full circle.

The humorous note Sinha imparts to her description of the asylum seekers' presentation of themselves at the tribunal – characterizing them variously as "Robin des bois" [Robin Hood], "rustam" [dark horse], "adam-byapari" [human smuggler], "femme glycine" [glycerine woman] – is laced with contempt and irony. Despite the potential cruelty of the humor, she succeeds in activating these stereotypes in a way that prods the readers to confront their own preconceived notions of those considered "vulnerable" populations. The ironic humor which characterizes the narration is particularly evident in the chapter titled "L'homme qui avait chez lui un goyavier", where the narrator recounts the interview with an asylum seeker. She describes him as a person with "les yeux ronds et ahuris en permanence" [round eyes with a permanent expression of shock], a simpleton ("simple d'esprit"). Evoking the register of the circus, she says that much like "un garçon de village que le cirque ambulante avait trouvé assez godiche pour s'en moquer et le donner en spectacle" [a village boy who the traveling circus had found awkward enough to ridicule

and put on as a show] (31). The interrogation at the trial was tantamount to walking the tightrope for this asylum seeker. While describing his reasons for fleeing the country, he stumbles through the explanation to claim that his Hindu friend who was dating a Muslim girl was killed by the girl's family and that the dead body of his friend was hung at the guava tree of his yard. The experience, he claimed, was so traumatizing that he decided to flee. In response to his story, the protection officer responded with the question: "Pourquoi il n' y avait pas de goyavier chez l'autre?" [Wasn't there any guava tree at his own house?] (35). Despite the cruel deliberate mockery directed toward the hapless asylum seeker, the protection officer's question triggers a burst of uncontrollable laughter for the narrator. In multiple instances throughout the novel, Sinha uses laughter as a weapon and the narration leaves the reader in a quandary whether to laugh or be indignant. Sinha's strategic use of humor and irony serves as a trigger for a deeper examination of readers' own unconscious biases. The strategic use of humor makes its target ambivalent. In that ambivalent space, Sinha tricks the readers into considering the asylum seekers' sans the tired tropes of pity, compassion, and misery that usually frame refugee discourse.

In a subsequent chapter titled "Je vais vous dire la verité," [I am going to tell you the truth] readers are presented with the interview of an asylum seeker who gets lost in the maze of questions – "dans un bhul-bhulaia,⁴⁸ labyrinth mogul" [in a bhul-bhulaia, a Mughal maze] (66) The narrator describes the deceptive series of questions that are posed to asylum seekers to trick them. At the end of the interview, despite the asylum seeker's claim that he has told the whole truth, one understands that "truth", within the asylum context, is a

⁴⁸ "Bhul-bhulaiya," an urdu word which means "maze" or "labyrinth" refers to a set of interconnected passages that is designed to confuse minds. It is an architectural feature of the Mughal Empire.

double-edged sword, that the supplicants are asked to reveal all, only to have it bounce back on them:

C'était la routine. Je le savais. L'homme ne savait pas. On amenait ces gens-là à dire la vérité pour en fin de compte ne rien en faire. C'était un cul-de-sac. On les délaissait au pied du mur, au fond de l'impasse, où des centaines et des milliers comme celui-ci avec leurs récits s'entassaient, stagnaient, puaien, devenaient mousse parmi la mousse, grignotés par les larves de l'oubli. (75)

[It was routine. I knew it. The man did not know it. We led these people to tell the truth in order to not do anything about it finally. It was a dead end. We abandoned them at the foot of the wall, at the bottom of the impasse, where hundreds and thousands like them with their stories were heaped up, stagnating, rotting becoming moss amidst moss, nibbled by the larvae of oblivion]

The passage cited above describes the cruel apathy with which asylum seekers' painful experiences are received. The narrator demonstrates the rigorous, methodical way in which the very system that is supposed to protect has been used to trick the asylum seeker into getting caught and fall through the cracks. Examining the adjudication practices of developed nations which pose as saviors and upholders of human rights, show that they only pay lip service to these measures. Consequently, even the narrator's fervent admiration for Lucia, the protection officer, who symbolizes the ideal starts to disenchant the narrator. She begins to see Lucia as lacking in mystery—"elle perdait de son mystère et devenait quelconque" [she lost her mystery and became ordinary]—and by extension, France, the supposed haven of human rights as "dépourvue du pouvoir magique" [devoid of magical power] (75).

The final altercation/incident in the metro between Sinha's protagonist and the male asylum seeker represents a clash of desires – a clash along the lines of gender, class, and roles. The interpreter is a young educated woman pursuing her dreams in a foreign land while the asylum seeker is a poor immigrant who does not speak the language nor understand the culture of the country where he seeks protection. The narrator reveals her predicament when she says:

Je ne sais plus comment ne pas défendre les hommes de mon ancien sous-continent. Ma cuirasse s'effrite. Mon masque de soldat neutre tombe. J'écoute leurs récits, les yeux embués. Larmes de détresse et de honte. Leurs mensonges me font rougir. Je tente pourtant de repérer les allées et les sorties de secours entre leurs mots. Si seulement dans le fouillis, dans le fatras des phrases, comme dans les racines entrelacées, entremêlées des arbres riverains, je pouvais trancher et tracer un chemin salvateur. (101)

[I no longer know how not to defend the men from my former subcontinent. My armor disintegrates. My impartial soldier's mask crumbles. I listen to their stories, misty eyed. Tears of distress and of shame. Their lies make me blush. Nevertheless, I try to locate the trails and emergency exits between their words. If only, through the confusion, the jumble of sentences, as through the interlaced, intertwined roots of riverside trees, I could carve out and trace a saving path.]

On the one hand, she has to render the life story and misery of her compatriots comprehensible. At the same time, she is all too aware of the language, culture, history, and political climate of her own country. Walking the tightrope between her desire to help the poor as well as maintain her integrity by staying compliant with the French laws of

refugee determination becomes an arduous task for the young protagonist. The unnamed interpreter resists translating fabricated stories and cringes in shame when her fellow countrymen debase themselves before the French authorities. Her loyalty is torn between her country of origin and her adopted country. However, what clearly triggers this act of violence is the disrespect that the asylum seekers show her by criticizing her work:

Ils avaient droit de critiquer mon travail puisqu'aucune femme digne de ce nom ne travaille. Aucune femme qu'ils reconnaissaient de près ou de loin comme une voisine du village ne descendait aussi bas pour s'exposer au monde, s'obliger à gagner sa vie toute seule, comme s'il n'y avait plus d'hommes sur la terre ! Et de surcroît n'osait les interroger eux, les hommes ! Dans le bon vieux temps, ... ils auraient donné une taloche à la femme qui leur aurait parlé la tête haute, voix élevée, aurait fouiné dans leurs secrets, prétendu les mettre face à leurs propos erronés, contradictoires. Ce qui était absurde, c'était qu'une femme les interroge et qu'eux, les hommes, lui répondent. C'est à ce moment-là que j'aurais pu fracasser un crâne. (26-27)

[They had the right to criticize my work because no woman worthy of the name works. No woman they knew from near or far, like a village neighbor, sank so low as to expose herself to the world, to bring herself to earn her living on her own, as if there were no men left on Earth! And what is more, to dare to interrogate them, men! In the good old days . . . they would have given a clout to the woman who would have dared speak to them head high, voice raised, rummaging through their secrets, and purport to show them their errors, their contradictions. The absurd thing

was that a woman was cross-examining them, and they, the men, were answering her. It was at this moment that I could have smashed someone's skull.]

When Sinha's protagonist breaks a bottle of wine on the asylum seeker's head inside the metro, the suppressed, chronic rage that she continuously hid behind the mockery and laughter comes to the fore. Her consequent attack on the poor asylum seeker in the metro is the externalization of her own contradictions:

[Pour] quelle raison j'avais agressé un malheureux immigré, demandeur d'asile politique [?]. . . [Comment] atteindre la vérité secrète cachée au fond de moi. Il ne s'agissait plus d'une agression de hasard en place publique. Il s'apprêtait à révéler un labyrinthe tortueux de pensées, une source boueuse de haine, la rage qui avait soudain jailli pour qu'une femme de couleur s'en prenne à un homme de couleur, qu'elle tente de lui fracasser le crâne. (18-19)

[Why had I attacked a poor immigrant, an asylum seeker [?] [How] may I find out the secret truth which lies hidden deep inside of me. This was not a haphazard aggression on a public stage. He was about to reveal to me a snaking maze of thoughts, a murky spring of hatred, the rage which had suddenly gushed out and led a woman of color to lash out at a man of color, to smash his skull.]

Her violent "act" demonstrates her inner conflict: a conscious desire for freedom from her immigrant status (represented by her desire for Lucia, the enlightened, idealized French woman) and an unconscious identification with her compatriots, an affiliation that seems to have at its source the sense of belonging to a "community of color", as the previous citation seems to suggest. Such an affiliation, the narrator fears, will blur her autonomous status and thus, she commits the act of violence. As Robert Kroetsch says, the

“promise of [the] carnivalesque is a promise of renewal by destruction” (118). While the narrator remains content to play the rogue and expose the official culture to subversive laughter, at one point she resorts to violence (an act arguably excluded from the carnival) and at that moment, seeks a renewal of the system that she exposes from both sides.

Bakhtin does not mention violence in his extended work on carnival and *Menippea*.⁴⁹ Sinha’s decision to open and close the narrative with the analysis of the act of violence and the description of that violence suggests that when carnival laughter is exhausted, subversion by violence is the other possibility. Such an option, though, brings death to dialogue. The clever plot structure -- beginning with the narrator reflecting on the motivations that produced her act of violence, which then segues into the helplessness, indifference, laughter, and cruelty that finally produces the act of violence – (when seen as a whole) both justifies that violence as well as shows its futility.

Bakhtin’s essay “Art and Answerability” helps situate Shumona Sinha’s use of the interpreter as a rogue figure and author-image. In this essay, which can be read as Bakhtin’s response to Viktor Shklovsky’s early Formalist essay “Art as Device”, Bakhtin argued against the art-life boundary which eliminated any discussion of “content” that was deemed too subjective for analysis. According to Bakhtin, “Art and life are not one, but they must become united in me, in the unity of my responsibility” (*Art and Answerability* 6). Accordingly, Bakhtin’s vision of the author’s responsibility involved “an interaction between the aesthetic and the ethical spheres” (Morson and Emerson 72). *Assommons les*

⁴⁹ In fact, while discussing the role of laughter in the middle ages, Bakhtin completely dismissed the role of violence: “It was understood that fear never lurks behind laughter (which does not build stakes) and that hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask. Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian. [...] Seriousness was therefore elementally distrusted, while trust was placed in festive laughter.” (*Rabelais and his World* 95)

Pauvres! is a good example of the aesthetic tussle between form and content. In *Assommons les Pauvres!* two poles interact – the first pole constituted by the novel’s protagonists (the interpreter and the asylum seekers) who react “realistically” to events within the novel, these characters do not know that they are fictions, and so their acts are open-ended acts that bear real ethical significance; the second pole constituted by the author (Sinha) who creates the characters within a finalized aesthetic whole. Were the protagonists to merely play the author or serve as her mouthpiece, they would become mere stylized versions of the author causing the novel to lean heavily on the “formal” side. Instead, Sinha’s text avoids coopting the voices of interlocutors by affording structures and/or conditions for their voices to be heard. Sinha does not synthesize or resolve the resultant tensions. Instead, the wholeness or consummation rests on the readers.⁵⁰ Sinha’s clever use of the translator protagonist and the carnivalesque plot where the authority is destabilized from all corners “liberates content from its real-world contexts (...) so that it become open to contemplation” (Morson and Emerson 81). The text serves as a surface where utterances of the various entities enter into dialogue and coexist in productive tension.

⁵⁰ Writing about the complicated and vexed relationship between form and the content in the essay “The Problem of Content”, Bakhtin averred that the purpose of form is to “free content of responsibility before a future event The word, the utterance, ceases to wait and to desire something of the real beyond its borders (61-62).

Chapter 4: Documentary Bandes Dessinées: Bearing Witness to the Refugee Condition

“Maybe vulgar, semiliterate, unsubtle comic books are an appropriate form for speaking the unspeakable.” – Art Spiegelman

The previous chapter discussed four novels that depicted several salient moments of forced displacement. The chronotopic analysis of these narratives excavated the role of paraspace “in parallel to the normal space of the diegesis” (Bukatman 157), where time and space progress differently. The relationship between the individual and the community, as well as between the community and the landscape are problematized by the juxtaposition of paraspaces alongside places that are familiar.

In this chapter, I discuss *bandes dessinées* that engage with the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. Most of the texts that I discuss in this section unmask a crucial part of the immigrant/asylum seeker trajectory that rarely gets seen or discussed (except in new media, where the coverage falls mostly under the rubric of humanitarian crises)—to wit, the perilous journey that most of them undertake and the experiences of xenophobia and hostility they encounter in the host country. I use the word ‘unmask’ specifically because given the visual nature of the medium and its productive tension between text and image, these texts serve as tableaux that reveal what Foucault called “heterotopias of deviance” – institutions and spaces (border zones, detention centers, refugee camps) established to maintain control, where the supposed guardians of law and order misuse their power to commit actual assaults on people who are not in charge of their own lives. The graphic narratives explored in this section play with color, drawing styles, panels, and gutters, to make visible the material conditions of asylum seekers, and the masked spatial constructions that make it possible for this vulnerable population to be exploited. This

chapter looks at the formal features such as narrative techniques – the use of multiple narrators to create polyphony, for example – as well as the chronotopes that comic texts deploy for representing the refugee condition.

The testimonial function that *bandes dessinées* perform by adopting a documentary mode of address constitutes a secondary prong of focus in this section. Comics scholars such as Jeff Adams, Benjamin Woo, and Nina Mickwitz have considered the relationship between documentary and comics at some length. While Jeff Adams' *Documentary Graphic Novels and Social Realism* (2008) situates documentary graphic novels with the historical and political tradition of critical and social realism, Woo contrasts comics journalism and documentary based on “an ideal-typical distinction between the reporting of facts and the communication of experience” (Woo 167). Mickwitz (*Documentary Comics*) also argues for the notion of documentary comics by expanding on the visual, narrative, and discursive representation of the real as a significant link between documentary and certain comics. My focus here will be on the nature of witnessing that the documentary comics I have chosen perform. I am particularly interested in identifying the relationship between a text's openness as defined by Umberto Eco and its capacity to bear witness. The corpus of comics analyzed here seems to suggest that the symbiotic relationship between the verbal and the visual elements of comics as well as the myriad connections between their spatio-topical units (the balloon, the panel, the strip, and the page) are productive of a dialogical space. Once again, Bakhtinian concepts such as the chronotope, polyphony, unfinalizability are ideally suited to the discussion of *bandes dessinées* texts and their witness function. Further, the dialogic interaction that is ever-

present on the page in these comics presents a sharp contrast to the monologic legal testimony of asylum seekers.

***Bandes Dessinées* and Immigration**

Comics have proven to be an integral medium for narrating immigrants' experiences. The sheer volume of comics that narrativize the trajectory of immigrants in Europe as well as the success of expositions such as *Bande Dessinée et Immigration 1913-2013*, organized by *Musée de l'histoire de l'Immigration* in Paris attest to the centrality of this genre in bearing witness to immigrant experiences. *Bandes dessinées* as a genre and immigration as a social phenomenon have an imbricated history. The enmeshing of comics and immigration is not entirely surprising given that comics emerged as a popular cultural product precisely on the grounds of its strength in accommodating voices that are normally not heard in the mainstream. As Charles Hatfield explains in the landmark study *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, underground artists of the 1980s addressed topics such as creators' lives and outlooks and thereby invented formats and themes which influenced future *bandes dessinées* texts and their themes. Autobiographical comics and reportage comics owe their genesis to the underground comix revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s.

The tremendous success of autobiographical comics by Spiegelman, Satrapi, and Eisner as well as reportage comics by Joe Sacco and Emmanuel Guibert paved the way for the development of increasingly experimental graphic and narrative explorations. Distancing itself from the coherent, super-imposing "I" of the autobiographical pact, autofiction *bandes dessinées* texts such as Cyril Pedrosa's *Portugal*, Aurélia Aurita's *Je ne verrai pas Okinawa*, and Alessandro Toto's *Terre d'Accueil*, combine codes of fantasy and

autobiographical elements to create stories which accommodate all the fragmented selves of the author-artist. Comics grammar, with its fusion of the verbal and visual, lends itself perfectly to the co-presence of the disparate and diverse elements within the self, especially associated with extremely destabilizing and fragmenting experiences such as migration.

The growth and popularity of *bandes dessinées* can be mapped alongside large migration movements of the second half of the 20th century – especially from Europe to the United States. Several well-known comic artists such as George McManus, Bilal, Hugo Pratt, Uderzo and Goscinny, and more recently Zeina Abirached and Clément Baloup, have produced comics that depict migrants' experiences. Highlighting the unique role that comics play in representing the migrant condition, the editors of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*'s special issue on comics wrote:

Reading a comic involves crossing boundaries by the thousand. The movement from each panel to the next is a border crossing that weaves the narrative in each step. At every turn readers must consider their next moves and bridge the gap between the panels. The transitional movement used here is about reconciling violence and reconstructing brokenness; postcolonial narrative art seeks to redefine and recreate identity out of a violent and often obliterated past. Thus, in their very make up, the comics form mimics the thematic concerns of postcolonialism. (Knowles et al. 381-382)

While constructing meaning between panels as one reads may help readers experience how migrants “bricole” their lives together and derive meaning, scholars have also pointed out that the visual accompaniment such as masks, puppets, or visual scrolls forms an intrinsic part of the storytelling traditions of most migrants. This could also explain why “illustrated

texts” such as BD prove to be a good fit to narrate experiences of leaving one home to make another home in another land.

In addition to autobiographical comics, memoir and autofiction comics, the category of reportage comics has produced a prodigious number of volumes in the past decade. Exhibitions such as the Centre Pompidou’s “BD Reporters” attest to the growth and artistic impact of this category. Perhaps no other journalist has influenced the growth and scope of this medium as much as Joe Sacco whose works such as *Palestine*, *Reportages*, and *Safe Area Gorazde* have found their way into the “essential books” classification of Angoulême. As Hescher has pointed out correctly, in addition to sharing the rhetorical devices of graphic novels, reportage comics possess the distinguishing feature of “claim to factuality/authenticity.” Spearheaded by the work of artists such as Joe Sacco and Alain Guibert, documentary comics aim to produce memories and testimonies of others, without coloring them with the artists’ own understanding. These nonfiction comics serve as documentary and/or as forms of witnessing that combine history, art, and perspective in interesting ways to literally “document.” They present evidence within sequential frames that the readers can take apart, put back together, aggregate and synthesize to generate their own understanding of the history. In this sense, nonfiction comics contested the prevailing conception that only the written medium could be used for histories and historiographies while underscoring the fragmentary nature of the refugee narrative.

Theoretical Frameworks

Early comic artists such as Töpffer considered the word and the image as “two equal components of comics”. Extant debates pertaining to a definition of comics can be

broadly understood as divided into three positions, one which sees the combination of word and image as a defining feature (Harvey 9), the other privileging sequence as an essential element (McCloud 9) and a third group represented by contemporary comic theorists such as Thierry Groensteen who contend that “narration passes first and principally (save for exceptions) by way of the images” (11). He highlighted the importance of the reader’s role in creating meaning while reading comics. Comics (according to Groensteen) offer the reader a story full of holes and these gaps in understanding require reconstruction on the part of the reader. Federico Fellini attributed this to be the reason behind the fascination for comics: “Comics, more than film, benefits from the collaboration of the readers: one tells them a story that they tell themselves; with their particular rhythm and imagination, in moving forward and backward” (Fellini). The implication of readers in construing and reconstructing the narrative plays a significant role in the witness function of comics.

In *Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud emphasized readers’ participation in construing comic texts by arguing that comics is “a medium where the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator” (65), and that when reading comics, we must actively make sense of the interplay between visible and invisible elements on the page, and in this way, achieve closure as we interpret the message that is conveyed (63). Several other scholars have drawn attention to the specificity and power of the drawn line of comics. Hillary Chute, in *Disaster Drawn*, speaks of “the force, or force field, of the mark and line to impart information both external to the maker and also personal to the maker. The distilled register of the cartoon and the drawn line creates an enveloping, idiosyncratic world of expression that can be powerful for witness” (Chute 168). The lines and marks of the comic serve as material witness to the conditions represented in these

texts and as individual meaning makers, we (readers) join the community of witnesses while reading these texts. As the texts analyzed in this section show, the maps or building or even the faces of people serve as material witness to the conditions they speak of.

Selection and scope of primary resources

The decision to involve a group of primary texts, rather than limiting the research to one or two examples, has been taken in order to illustrate the diverse range of comics that potentially could be thought of as documentary. The representation of the real world in comics encompasses diverse approaches. Some portray historical events as narrated and brought to life by a cast of fictional characters. Author/illustrator duo Bessora and Barroux have produced this kind of work in the album *Alpha Abidjan-Gare du Nord*. Christophe Dabitch has similarly charted multiple realities of immigration in the album *Immigrants*. Without inserting himself into the reproduced testimony, the writer worked with various artists to visually represent eyewitness testimony using his/her preferred medium (e.g. watercolor, charcoal, India ink) and graphic style. Calling attention to the plight of undocumented immigrants leading clandestine lives, Alfred and David Chauvel's *Paroles Sans Papiers*, produced by Delcourt (2007) portrays the hardships and exploitation faced by those whose asylum claims have been rejected. Both these albums, although grounded in actual experiences, make use of composite protagonists and plotlines in order to construct their narratives. Further removed from potential comparisons with historical or documentary drama, Jérôme Ruillier's *L'Étrange* (2016) flirts with the textual codes of allegory and fable to represent the universalized refugee condition with his anonymized protagonist. In the last section of this chapter, I discuss extracts from testimonial *bandes*

dessinées such as Chauvel's *Paroles Sans Papiers* and Christophe Dabitch's *Immigrants* that engage specifically with women refugees.

Alpha

The product of a collaborative effort between the illustrator Barroux and the fiction writer Bessora, *Alpha Abidjan-Gare du Nord* delineates the journey of Alpha Coulibaly, a cabinetmaker, who leaves Ivory Coast in the hope of reuniting with his wife, Patience and his son, Badian. Patience and Badian left Abidjan for Paris in the hope of finding work with Alpha's sister-in-law who owns a salon near Gare du Nord. Narrating the genesis of the work, Barroux revealed that Alpha is based on an African refugee whom he met at his workplace in Paris. Using the format of a *journal intime*, the *bande dessinée* depicts Alpha's perilous journey across 10,400 kilometers, four countries, by bus, dinghy, lada niva,⁵¹ and on foot. Published in 2014, *Alpha* won several awards (English PEN Award, the Prix Médecins Sans Frontières 2015) and was endorsed by Amnesty International, the International Edinburgh Book Festival and the Institut Français Royaume Uni. It has been translated into English, Spanish, and Italian. Barroux uses a style that is reminiscent of a personal diary with artwork created in cheap felt-tip pen and wash to give the impression that Alpha himself might have created it as a record of his journey. The first-person narration and direct speech contribute to a sense of interiority and intimacy.

Alpha's documentary register or mode of address invites the reader to decode and make sense of what is narrated as representations of real historical persons, events and experiences. In the case of *Alpha*, this register is constructed significantly by, to use the

⁵¹ The Lada 4x4, formerly called the Lada Niva (Russian: Лада Нива; Niva (нива) is the Russian word for "cornfield"), is an off-road vehicle designed and produced by the Russian (former Soviet) manufacturer AvtoVAZ specifically for the rural market, although models made for urban use are sold. (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lada_Niva)

terminology of Gérard Genette (1991), para-textual elements such as appended editor's descriptions, quotes from reviews on the back cover and a substantial foreword by Michael Morpurgo. In terms of the narrative situation, the author uses an autodiegetic narrator, a distinction made by Genette (1980), to characterize a narrator who is also the protagonist of the narrative. In his book, *Comics and Narration*, Groensteen introduces the term "actorialized narrators" (first-person narration by a character involved in the story and represented in graphic form) and mentions the increasing presence of such narrators in contemporary comics, especially those comics that belong to the autobiographical or reportage genres. As readers we learn everything from the point of view of Alpha whose narration has internal focalization, which means that we have access only to his thoughts and perceptions, his range of knowledge. In terms of ocularization—a term that Ann Miller uses to represent the visual perspective of a character within the diegesis—all the images (with a few exceptions, to which I will return) show Alpha's perspective, thereby contributing to the subjective mode.

The cover of the album shows a man, presumably Alpha, with a clothsack slung over his shoulder. The red (of Alpha's T-shirt) and flecks of yellow in the clothing of those who arrive at the airport stand out against the bleak background of the sketch. The inkwash effect, which draws attention to the textures, alludes to the porousness associated with memory and the risks of representation entailed in any work involving memory. The departicularized faces and the minimalist effect produced by the mostly two-toned visual scheme serve to amplify the devastating normalcy and precarity of immigrant lives. According to Spiegelman, with a minimal visual system, the reader cannot "take comfort,"

that “it ain’t you.” The de-specification, in other words, opens out to greater readerly identification (Chute 55).

The rough lines that Barroux uses for his illustrations evoke a sense of drawings made while on the run, with characters’ monochrome faces, their noses shaded black, their thin, incomplete bodies and their ill-fitting, ragged clothes. The absence of dialogues and the diegetic narration add to the documentary effect of the comics. Unlike conventional comics, there are no speech bubbles. Instead, at the bottom of each panel, readers share Alpha’s thoughts—a technique that simulates the voice-over narration of documentaries. Each page is mostly composed of two panels (*cases*) with text that runs into three or four lines beneath each panel. Each *case* is either square or rectangular, with uneven frames that add to the impression of hand-drawn separations as one finds in a personal diary. Another feature that contributes to the diary-like effect is the one-to-one ratio of drawing to print size – one sees the mark at the same size at which it was drawn (Chute 190). Throughout the album, the absence of phylactère or speech bubbles suggests the real voicelessness of disempowered immigrants. The text in the BD comes in the form of *récitatif*, a term borrowed from music (*recitativo*) to refer to text found at the edges (top, bottom or side) of a frame. Explaining the use of *récitatif* in his book *Comics in French*, Laurence Grove wrote: “the use of the *récitatif* provides the bande dessinée with a narrator’s voice and in so doing introduces many of the ambiguities of textual narrative discourse” (32).

The panel that gives biographical information about Alpha is riddled with inconsistencies. The author follows up every affirmative sentence with a negative statement (Fig 1). The succinct sentences structures serve to highlight the antithetical aspects of Alpha’s life, as well as underscore the inadequacies of conventional biographies

produced for institutional purposes. In subsequent panels too, there is a constant play of oppositions – “le jour du départ, je suis heureux comme pour une naissance, mais je suis aussi endeuillé, comme si quelqu’un était mort. Ce quelqu’un c’est moi. Je meurs de quitter mon pays, mais je renais de marcher vers un nouveau destin. Retrouver ma femme et mon fils” [On departure day, I’m as happy as I would be at a birth, but I’m also grieving as if somebody had died. That somebody is me. It kills me to abandon my country like this, but I’m being reborn by walking towards a new destiny. Finding my wife and son].



Figure 1

This oppositional voice amplifies as we discover more details about Alpha’s journey. As elements of the journey take on more and more definition, there is a growing sense of a failed adventure. The album *Alpha* bears an oblique and ironized resemblance to Bakhtin’s description of the chronotope of the Greek adventure novel, which he further defines as “the adventure novel of the ordeal” and this is notably true of *Alpha*. At the same

time, the historical context which frames the album reverses or problematizes several features of the Greek adventure novel. For instance, the neutral and ahistorical characteristics of the adventure novel are steeped with socio-historical significance in *Alpha*. Typically, in the Greek adventure novel a pair of lovers is separated, then reunited by a bizarre set of coincidences, only to lose each other again. In *Alpha*, Alpha is separated from his wife Patience and Badian. Their separation is caused by socio-economic factors (here, poverty and lack of employment in Ivory Coast). Unlike Bakhtin's example of Achille Tatiou's novel *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Alpha and Patience are not reunited. While delineating the characteristic features of the adventure novel of ordeal, Bakhtin wrote that the characters in the Greek adventure typically undergo:

(...) a storm at sea, a shipwreck, a miraculous rescue, an attack by pirates, captivity and prison [...] wars, battles, being sold into slavery, presumed deaths, disguising one's identity, recognition and failures of recognition, presumed betrayals [...] prophetic dreams [...] descriptions [...] of [...] a very broad and varied geographical background [...] the habits and customs of the population. (88)

While this list refers to the 'abstract' events of the adventure novel, a lot of these features are relevant for Alpha. Human smugglers peddling illusory ideas of safe havens in foreign lands take the place of pirates, presumed deaths of Patience and Badian, Tarik's (the passeur) betrayal, descriptions of varied lands that Alpha crosses during his journey. Writing on the transhistorical feature of chronotopes, notable Bakhtin scholar Michel Holquist drew attention to the addendum Bakhtin provided to the original essay where he provided a long list of recurring patterns. In this regard, commenting on the seeming

antinomy of the adventure chronotope characterizing works separated by centuries, Holquist advised a “bifocal” treatment of chronotope – its use as a lens for close-up work and its ability to serve as an optic for seeing at a distance (113).

When discussing time in the Greek adventure novel, Bakhtin argues that its events constitute “a pure digression from the normal course of life” and “normal biography” (90). This is entirely true of *Alpha*, although once more the Greek novel’s neutrality is transformed by specific historical meaning. Unlike the adventure novel, in *Alpha* the events undergone by the protagonists certainly do leave a “trace” or in spatial terms, what is beyond the terrible threshold that a European country border constitutes. Like the Greek hero, Alpha also undergoes “a most improbable number of adventures,” and linear chronological time as he narrates his experiences often disappears under the weight of specific instances or durations. As Bakhtin puts it, adventure time, which is “highly intensified but undifferentiated”, “is not measured off in the novel and does not add up; it is simply days, nights, hours, moments clocked in a technical sense within the limits of each separate adventure” (90). In *Alpha*, the months that Alpha spends in Gao and the experience of waiting – waiting for a smuggler to guide one across the border, waiting for ‘regularization’, waiting for court hearings – is captured in terms of the depth of the experience and not merely in terms of the actual time. So, for instance, though the pirogue journey is probably only a couple of nights, entire panels are devoted to it. Alpha narrates his journey with strict compliance to chronology. But the way in which panels dwell on certain aspects of the journey longer than others render those experiences more vivid and the subjective experience of migrants can be better experienced as a result. BD’s unique

capacity to give temporal priority of different moments a spatial representation in the frame adds details and conveys the depth of Alpha's experiences on the road.

In addition to Alpha's thoughts and observations, the text in the r  citatif also introduces readers to people that Alpha meets on his journey. Early in the narrative, his visit to the French consulate for a visa (Figure 2) is met with rejection.

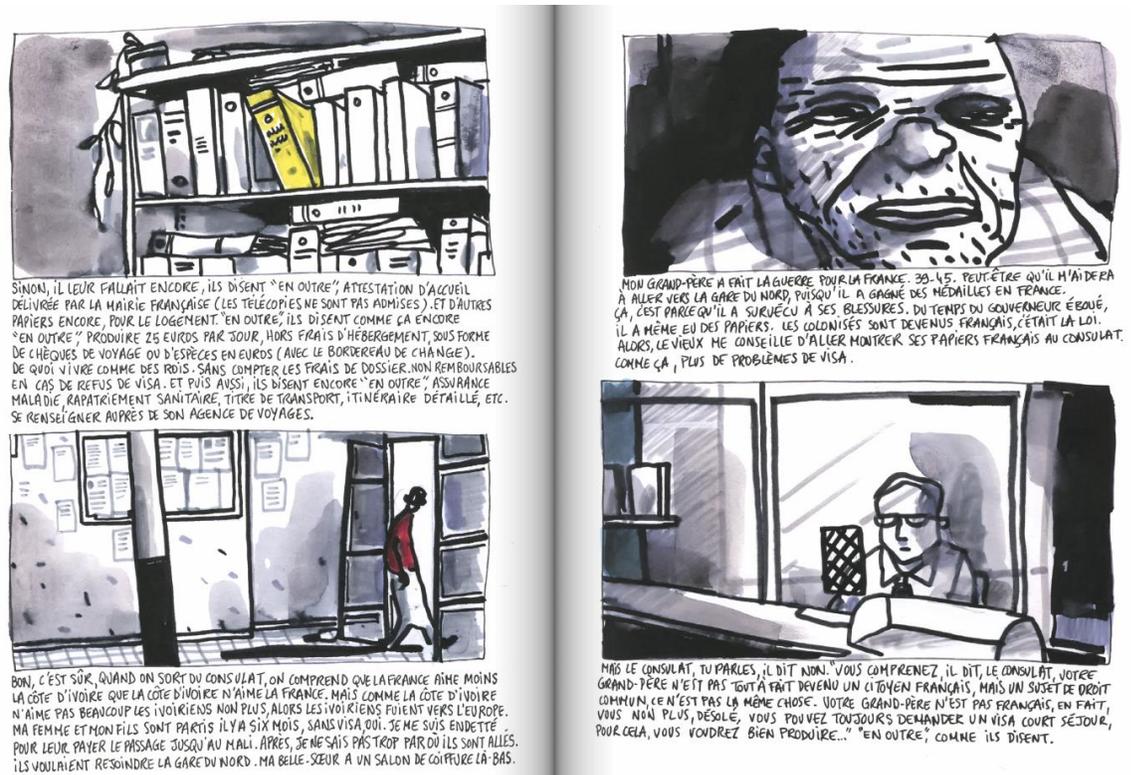


Figure 2

Within the space of four panels, we are made to understand the inexorable demands made on the visa applicants in Ivory Coast. Realizing that these requirements serve to discourage Ivoirians from traveling to France, Alpha decides to seek his grandfather's help. The subsequent panel transitions to the wrinkled face of Alpha's grandfather who fought for the French army during WWII and received an honorary citizenship for his contribution. The versatility of the comic medium in bringing together on the same page

the colonial legacy and the postcolonial condition defined by antipathy and disdain from erstwhile colonial masters shines through in these four panels. In *Comics and Narration*, under the section “Present-Tense Images in a Past-Tense Narrative,” Thierry Groensteen draws attention to the specificity of comics where,

at the moment when our attention is focused on one panel, the preceding ones have not yet disappeared (they remain available, retrievable at any time), but, above all, we already have sight of the following panels, and we can see that the future is already there. If the future that pulls our reading towards it is already present, then the present inevitably tends to slip back towards a past to which, in fact, it already belongs. The idea that successive presents can coexist is paradoxical: unlike the past, the present cannot be cumulative. (87)

Put another way, pulling into narrative time a past event and infusing it with the present-time of narration fuses the past with the present and gives us a paradoxical series of “successive presents” that coexist. The past is not merely relegated to the past, but it is coded here into the present narrative time. The transition between panels that show Alpha’s visit to the consulate and the one where his grandfather’s service to the French army during the second world war, pulls the past into the present in a material sense, forcing us, readers, to reckon with the colonial entailments that haunt the present. When Alpha takes his grandfather’s papers to the consulate he is sent back with a crushing sense of defeat and pointlessness. As he exits the consulate, he meets Valtis, a passeur who is described as ‘taximan pêcheur barman’ who waits near the consulate during its closing hours to swoop down on the rejected visa applicants. He poses himself as a humanitarian who is there to

help ‘mes frères à rejoindre l’Europe pour nourrir les parents restés sur place’ (Bessora-Barroux 11). He demands Alpha’s boutique-studio in exchange for help with the journey. To emphasize the perilousness of Alpha’s journey, the two panel per page layout transitions to a single panel in the following page. This vertical panel shows a rifle wielding cop patrolling the borders. Both in terms of the panel transition as well as the figure of the cop, which dominates three quarters of the panel, the dangerous journey that illegal immigrants undertake to save themselves and their families from death by poverty is foregrounded.

As Alpha embarks on his journey, he encounters several people – a young boy who runs away from school to join the group of illegal migrants attempting to cross to Spain, Antoine, who dreams of joining Spain’s football team, an old man and his daughter seeking treatment in Spain, Eugène, the unemployed sociologist, Tarik, the people smuggler, Abebi, the young woman from Lagos who falls into prostitution and finally dies from a stillbirth and a diseased body, Augustin, who comes into Alpha’s care by his elder sister. The accumulation of several immigrants’ experiences, framed and narrated from Alpha’s perspective, add density and help create the suffocated feeling of suffering that infuses the lives of those fleeing poverty and adversity in their home countries.

In an earlier vertical panel that shows an American tourist in Mali (figure 3), the text comments upon the disparities that exist between tourists from the first world and the poor who seek to immigrate:

À Abidjan, à Bamako, à Gao, on voit des touristes. Des Américains, des Français, des gens contents qui font le tour de l’Afrique à vélo. Qu’est-ce qu’on leur a demandé à eux? [...] Nous, on nous demande. On met des

barrières, paf, paf, paf, des barbelés, pif, paf, pof, des chiens renifleurs de clandestins, pouf, pouf, pouf, des miradors (36).

You see tourists in Abidjan, Bamako and Gao. Americans, French, happy people touring around Africa on bicycles. And what have we asked of them? [...] Us, plenty is asked of us. They put up barriers, bang, bang, bang, barbed wire, bang, bang, bang, sniffer dogs trained to find illegal migrants, sniff, sniff, sniff, and watchtowers.



Figure 3

In this vignette, Barroux and Bessora draw attention to the inequality of power that continues to affect postcolonial cultures. The clever inclusion of a fragment of photo in the illustration and its disruption of the homogenizing codes of the panel recreates self-referentially BD's power, as a polyvalent medium, to break codes. Such disruptive practices are not merely aesthetic but work (at the level of form and content, if one were to hold on to such categories for the purpose of analysis) to plait together the codes of the 'real' and the fictive. Additionally, the heterogeneity of representative elements interrogates the homogenizing 'single' stories that one mostly encounters about immigrants and refugees. For subordinated groups in society, there are often obvious restrictions on the repertoires of identities that are available to them and the stories they are permitted to tell (Schwalbe 2009). *Alpha* succeeds in drawing attention to these disparities by assuming and then subverting the role performed by colonial travel journals and travel writing codes of imperial times. Alpha returns the gaze of imperial visitors and his thoughts about the scenes he encounters on the road serve as social commentary.

Unlike most *bandes dessinées*, the verbal and visual elements work in unison or in other words, there is a high degree of conformity between the text and the image. Several *bandes dessinées* scholars stress the importance of the avoidance of redundancy. Baetens and Lefèvre, for instance, argued that a general principle of narrative economy demands that the text should not repeat information already given visually, but should complement it (20). In *Alpha*, however, we see what we read and at the temporal level, we see before we read, and the structure of focalization matches the narrative voice. The high degree of convergence between the verbal and the visual provides a documentary quality to the album

and adds to its truth-value effect. The conformity between the text and images serve to underscore the strict testimonial codes under which refugees speak.

After Abebi dies, Alpha travels by pirogue to Spain. The last vignette of the album shows Alpha reaching the shores of Spain. However, beyond this point, the narrative voice cuts from first person to third person in the epilogue. The visual-verbal correspondence that contributed to the truth-value effect diminishes in this section. The visuals disappear and from the third person narration readers learn that Alpha was not able to find his wife and son and that after a few months of wandering, he was repatriated to his country. This transition can be read as a self-reflexive allusion to Alpha's loss of ability to narrate his own story, suggestive of the trauma of being the 'other' in an alienating society as well as emblematic of the condition of all asylum seekers whose ability to narrate is taken over by others – volunteers who work in aid agencies, or government organizations that pronounce the verdict on the course of their lives.

Alpha projects the testimonial documentary voice and narrates the experience of immigration to France and materializes the conditions that illegal immigrants overcome in making their journey. Barroux and Bessora give readers an overwhelming compilation of testimonial voiced framed by Alpha's perspective. Despite the absence of action-laden double pages, or fighting scenes with the border police, the multitude of voices and the accumulation of fellow travelers' experiences amplify the testimonial voice by layering various testimonies, similar to the way Joe Sacco accumulates testimonial voices in Palestinian narratives. The epilogue in third person narrates (without images) what happened to Alpha and Antoine. And this too is emblematic of the fate of the asylum

seekers whose fate and whose capacity for narration are tightly controlled by other persons when they enter foreign borders.

The reworked adventure chronotope in *Alpha* is significant for several reasons. The expected features and elements of the adventure novel are either muted or reworked and thereby unlike the Greek adventure novel of the ordeal, the immigrants enact a failed adventure story. It is the absence of certain key chronotopic elements and in some cases, their merging and refashioning, that make visible the material conditions contribute to the refugees in *Alpha*'s failure. In other words, the chronotope functions precisely because it draws on already established temporal-spatial codes that are deliberately muted and the perceived lacunae forces readers to reckon with the material conditions that produce the failure of migrant adventures.

Bakhtin scholars such as Tara Collington have rightly pointed out that chronotopes encompass “the preprogramming of the reader’s reception of the text” (230). Such a preprogramming works to Alpha’s advantage. While Barroux and Bessora assign to their album a mimetic quality of the very type that Paul Ricoeur has criticized, in which fiction is seen as a replica of reality (Ricoeur 123–124), the realism in *Alpha* must be conceptualized in a different framework due to the spatiotemporal dynamics it sets up. Instead of conceiving fiction merely as reference back to something that is or has been, the adventure chronotope makes it possible to “refer in a ‘productive’ way to reality as intimated by the fiction” (Ricoeur 126).

Alpha underscores the tragic futility of most migrant adventures. Unlike the heroes of Greek adventure novels who undergo a transformation, in the case of Alpha, he reverts to his original situation. His wife and child are still missing. He has also lost his livelihood

since he no longer has his shop. The idea of crisis and rebirth developed in the adventure novels of ordeal is absent in *Alpha*. The use of spatiotemporal codes of Greek adventure novels of ordeal serves to emphasize the failure of asylum seekers' and migrants' adventures.

L'étrange

Unlike *Alpha*, a *bande dessinée* text where the prevailing register is that of documentary, Jérôme Ruillier's graphic novel *L'Etrange*, published in 2016 by l'Agrume, combines narrative elements of allegory and fable to witness the migrant condition. Dreams of rescuing his family from poverty and providing them a better life propel Ruillier's unnamed protagonist to undertake a perilous journey to an unnamed country as an illegal immigrant. The title, *L'étrange*, becomes the appellation by which Ruillier's protagonist is referred—a word that typifies rather than specifies, a word that seeks to shun and ward off, instead of drawing close and risk understanding. The anonymization of the protagonist as well as the relative vagueness concerning the countries involved – both the one he flees and the one to which he escapes – give the album a fable-like universality. The individuals in the drawings do not represent a particular protagonist one knows by name, but instead act as stand-ins for the ubiquitous “everyman.” Such a positioning of characters as everyone and no one in particular also serves to draw attention to the objectification of the subject within the institutions of the state (Cortsen and LaCour 142).

Before discussing the panels in detail, I wish to dwell on the title of the album. What is striking here is that *étrange* (like *unheimlich*), which one uses as an adjective to indicate a quality or characterizing feature, is employed here as a noun, a name. As a noun, CNTRL defines *étrange* as the “caractère étrange de quelque chose; ce qui présente un

caractère étrange” [strange nature of something ; that which presents a strange character]. It is this “strangeness” that engulfs Ruillier’s protagonist to the extent that he is subsumed by it and the quality overtakes his whole being. It is also interesting that the author does not call his protagonist ‘l’étranger’ – stranger. In this, he sharply distinguishes between *étrange* and the existential, abstracted condition hinted at by Camus’ *L’Étranger*. The ungainly appellation “the strange” is surely intended to show the typification of refugee population in media as well as political discourses. Depersonalizing frames of refugees as abject strangers are routinely used in the media to create a discourse of threat. At the morphological level, “étrange” creates a kind of syntactic suspension that creates a continuity between the inability of a grammar to capture the refugee condition as well as the actual state in which the refugee resides as “in suspension.” Interestingly, in the pages that open the album (one could consider this as a prologue where we see the protagonist preparing to leave) the protagonist, who is visually represented as a lumbering anthropomorphized bear-figure, is surrounded by other animal-person figures. The heterogeneity of those living in a supposedly unified territory such as a nation is foregrounded in this early section, where each panel shows a multitude of anthropomorphized characters – birds, dog, crocodiles as well as seemingly mythic beings such as a figure with numerous arms. The narration in this section (which along with the concluding one are the only chapters where the protagonist is the narrator) makes no reference to the difference between the inhabitants of the quartier. However, the impossibility of the protagonist’s living condition is visually conveyed in a page length panel that shows him hemmed in amidst various beings against a small patch of red background (Figure 4). This feeling of containment is underscored by the *récitatif* where

the protagonist narrator announces, in his native tongue depicted as unconventional symbology: “malheureusement, c’était devenu presque impossible” [unfortunately, it had become almost impossible] (6).

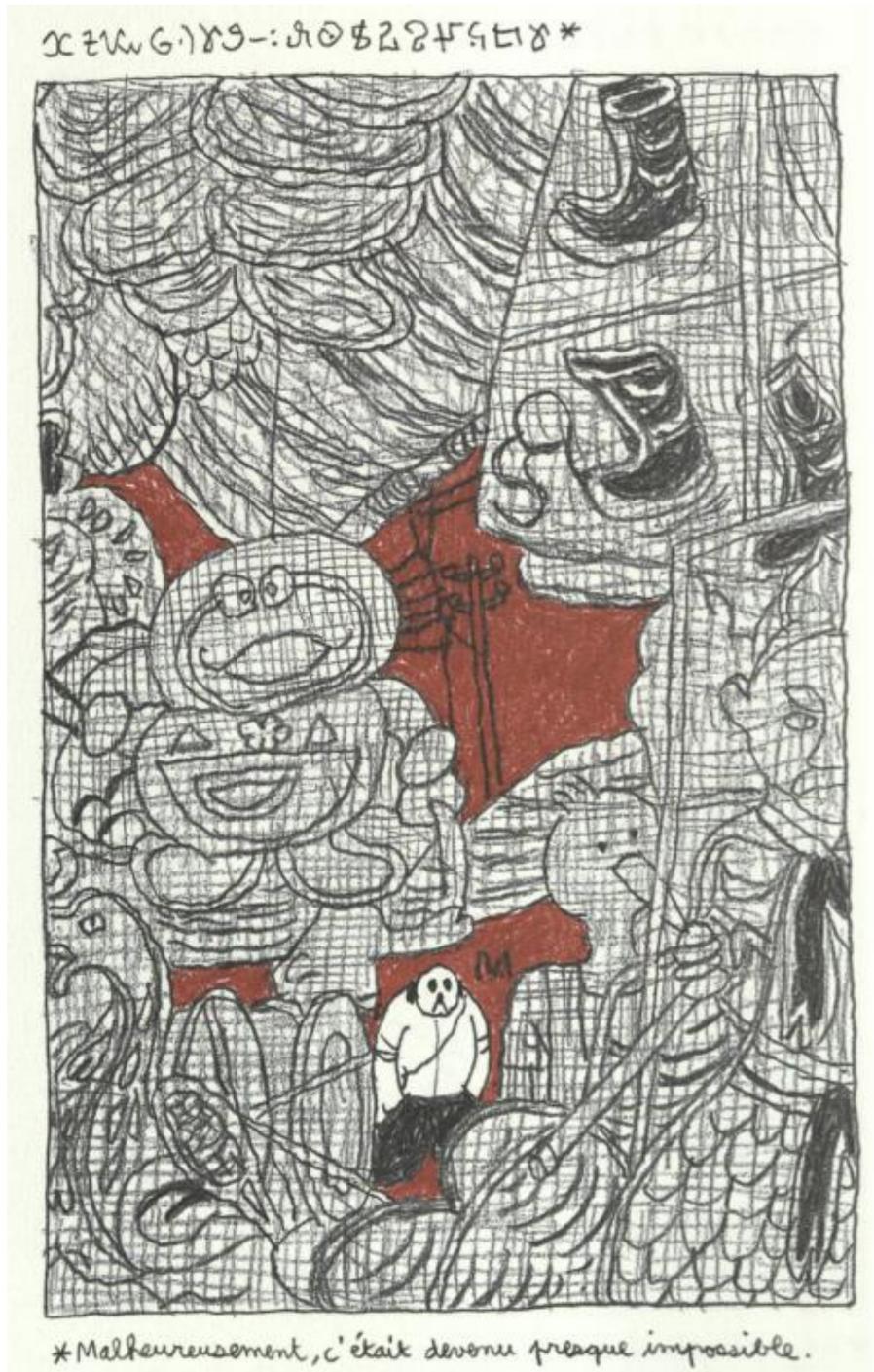


Figure 4

The influence of Spiegelman's *Maus* is unmistakable in Rullier's text. Just as Spiegelman famously employed anthropomorphism – Jews as mice and Nazis as cats – to bear witness to the horrors of the holocaust, Ruillier gives the illegal immigrant figure the form of a bear. Ruillier has played with animal characters in previous albums such as *Le Cœur-Enclume* (2009), which dealt with his daughter's struggle with Down's syndrome, and *Les Mohamed* (2011), a maghrebi story of immigration adapted from Yamina Benguigui's *Mémoires d'immigrés* (1997). The choice of rendering his subject in the form of animals offers an accessible way to recast the extremely sensitive and problematic nature of refugee representation. The animal metaphor of the album foregrounds its non-transparency and at the same time, it draws readers' attention to the ultimate inauthenticity of representation itself. Additionally, the animal metaphor renders the album both abstract and precise, universal and particular at the same time. Anthropomorphism is employed as a lens to examine human interactions in our world. In a reversal from Spiegelman's technique where he represented different nationalities as different animal species, Ruillier uses different animals to show fellow citizens – perhaps as tacit acknowledgment of the inherent diversity and uniqueness of humans.

From the outset, *L'étrange*, distinguishes itself as testimony despite its articulation using the codes of the animal comics genre. Traditionally, animal figures were deployed in two genres—beast fables and “funny animal” genres. The continuous toggling between two registers—the human and the animal—is at the source of the readerly pleasure associated with animal comics. In *L'étrange*, certain narrative segments deploy animal figures as witnesses and the compassion they extend to the protagonist adds an ironic counterpoint to the positionality of other human witnesses who treat the stranger with

indifference or at times with suspicion and cruelty. For example, the protagonist's search for food from the trash and his escape to the "jungle" is witnessed by the crow (figure 5) who asks ironically whether the group of 'étranges', given that they live in 'the jungle', truly belong to human kind. The layering of bewilderment—on the one hand, the crow's confusion over étrange's affinity with humans and on the other hand, the uncanniness produced by the crow expressing such a thought—troubles binary oppositions between humans and animals. The use of the bird as an empathetic witness (figure 6) who lets the protagonist eat from the trash serves to amplify the lack of decency and kindness that we show to fellow human beings. Surveying mankind dispassionately, the crow and the fish in *L'étrange* raise troubling questions concerning responsibility.



Figure 5



Figure 6

While *Alpha* deployed paratextual elements such as Michael Morpugo's foreword to situate the text within the contemporary situation, in *L'étrange*, Ruiller makes extensive use of excerpts from speeches of politicians such as Sarkozy, Marine Le Pen and Manuel Vallis. These excerpts serve as an epigraph to each section and their words frame the perspectives that are included in those sections. The crossing of these excerpts at crucial points in the diegesis fleshes out the perspective provided by various narrators by providing the effect of contrast or as filling out the positionality of the witness by adding complementary information. Consider, for instance, the famous citation of Sarkozy that opens the first section, after the prologue: "Je suis un libéral, au sens où je crois à la liberté. Et je suis un humaniste, dans le sens où je pense qu'on ne fait pas n'importe quoi avec l'homme, qui n'est pas une marchandise comme les autres" [I am a liberal, in the sense that I believe in liberty. And I am a humanist, in the sense that we do not do whatever with a human, who is not a merchandise like others] (21). This excerpt from Sarkozy's speech in Saint-Etienne, on 9 November 2006, augments the irony that the stranger is treated precisely as "merchandise" [merchandise] as the bird witness shows in the narration that follows the epigraph.

As another example of the album's use of excerpts from political speeches consider the following excerpt from Sarkozy's 2009 speech, which appears midway through the album: "Et c'est pour eux aussi, cette majorité silencieuse qui n'a pas les moyens de se mettre en grève, qui n'a pas les moyens de manifester, ou qui a la volonté de privilégier son travail, c'est aussi à eux que je dois penser et pour eux que je dois agir" [And it is for them too, this silent majority which does not have the means to go on strike, which does not have the means to demonstrate, or which has the will to make work their first choice, I must also think of them and act for them] (65). Here, Sarkozy reclaims the "majorité silencieuse", first used by Gaullists to refer to those who were not at the barricades in May 1968. After placing this excerpt, Ruillier introduces narrators such as the neighbor, the perspective of Kader, another illegal immigrant and the boss. With these polyvalent perspectives, the author invites the readers to judge for themselves who is the 'majorité silencieuse'.

In addition to the use of excerpts from political speeches, Ruillier uses multiple narrators/witnesses⁵² (crow, passerby, fish, neighbors etc.) to tell the story of the nameless illegal immigrant. The polyphonic narration energizes the narrative movement and the different narratorial perspectives layer our understanding of the protagonist. Such a narrative technique positions the reader in the role of a judge, who hears competing and opposing perspectives about the case in question. This idea of the polyphonic refers back to Bakhtin who proposed this very principle, defining it as "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (40). Without ever defining it as such, Bakhtin

⁵² Ruillier seems to have taken inspiration from Wajdi Mouawad's novel *Anima* (2012) where the writer narrates the murder of a pregnant woman from the perspective of several animals—dog, wildcat, spider, beetle.

proposes that a polyphonic work can be understood as one “in which several consciousnesses meet as equals and engage in a dialogue that is in principle unfinalizable” (Morson and Emerson 238-239). In *L'étrange*, readers encounter the nameless protagonist's experiences in the new country from the perspective of several characters – the crow, the fish, the patriarch, women such as Catherine, Christine, and Susie, neighbors. Each of these witnesses brings his or her own lens to the situation of immigrants in France. Additionally, as already noted, Ruillier also weaves in excerpts from the speeches of Sarkozy, Manuel Vallis and Marine Le Pen in the narrative.

Each narrator is given four to five panels and offers the readers a partial view of the protagonist as they view him. But considering the fragmentary nature of these vignettes, it falls to the readers to perform an assemblage of the various perspectives. This piecing together makes us perform the role of witnessing vicariously since each perspective remains incomplete and ‘unfinalizable’. The album thus underscores an ethics of reading by encouraging us to track the movement of the text and following its traces.

Ruillier's polyphonic witnessing stands in contrast to the monologic asylum seekers testimony one commonly encounters. It accounts for the web of social relationships in which witnesses and testimony have historically been implicated (Frisch 14). Additionally, what polyphony makes possible in *L'étrange* is that fundamentally incommensurable or divergent perspectives are brought together on the page to set up an authentic dialogue “about values and meaning”. At the same time these ‘unmerged’ perspectives are not gathered together or unified to provide a resolution of their tension. In fact, it is by visually and spatially separating them by using discrete narrators that Ruillier shows the plurality of perspectives. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin wrote about “voice-ideas”

which can be described as a unity of idea and personality that represents a person's integral point of view on the world. This term gains further clarity when it is contrasted with "separate thoughts" which can be abstracted and subsumed within a single consciousness. *L'étrange* works by not subsuming each narrator's voice ideas into a unified strand and resolving the heterogeneous elements into a homogenized whole. Instead, it works as a surface where various voice-ideas emerge and add density and texture to the question of migration.

The dialogic nature of a work is made possible by polyphony: "[the] polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through [...] dialogue penetrates within, into every word of the novel, making it double-voiced, into every gesture" (Bakhtin *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 40). As we have seen to this point, the comic form is an exceptionally dialogic genre. Considering that the hero is a 'particular point of view on the world and on oneself, the comic form visualizes 'how the world appears to the hero' and 'how the hero appears to himself'. A triangulated picture of the *étrange* can be built up by the reader from the narration of other characters as well as from the character's own perspective. The *récitatif* in the panel where the protagonist is observed by "un passant" [passerby] shows that, as readers, we perceive not merely how immigrants appear to citizens but also the immigrant's self-conscious attempts to go unnoticed.

The album's cryptic cover that shows *L'étrange* on a red roof (with a crow observing him from the opposite corner) seems perplexing. We understand the significance of the roof in the section where Kader, the illegal immigrant, narrates his experience working on construction sites. The workers without papers are shuffled onto the construction sites' roofs during an inspection. As Kader remarks ironically: "je ne sais pas

pourquoi mais les toits des bâtiments ne sont jamais vérifiés” (75). [I don’t know why, but they never seem to check the roof] Throughout the album, Ruillier deploys codes that have to be pieced together, thereby encouraging reader participation and foregrounding the fluidity and multiple relations that are possible within the comics medium. Indeed, Manuel De Landa’s theory of assemblage which he explains was “meant to apply to a wide variety of wholes constructed from heterogeneous parts” (3) and “the parts of an assemblage do not form a seamless whole” (4) serves as a useful analytical lens to understand the way comics components work on their own as well as in relation to other elements. In comics as assemblage, I consider all components on their own as well as determined by their relation to other elements. If we consider the entire album of *L’étrange* as assemblage, and focus on the code of color scheme (for instance, the way in which the color codes of each segment connects with identically colored segments), it will reveal differences and similarities in the positionalities of witnesses. My focus here is therefore not so much the structural analysis of how these panels work as a ‘whole’ and as ‘parts’ but more the witness role elicited from readers from the interplay between parts and the whole.

By using multiple narrators, Ruillier succeeds in presenting various reactions to *L’étrange*, the immigrant character. What is perhaps most striking about this polyphonic narration is that it allows us (readers) to imagine many different relations to otherness, ranging from objectification and abjection to compassion. Since the album toggles between action and testimony, it invites an analytic perspective. As readers, we are put into the position of an analyst or a judge, silently listening to the witnesses, understanding as much about them as about the protagonist. *L’étrange* functions like a mirror in which we see these witnesses. Additionally, the layering of action and testimony enables us to see to

what extent *L'étrange* appears distorted in their mirror. Here, I wish to specify that I do not claim that we, as readers, see the real protagonist but that we see several 'étranges' through the eyes of various narrators in an endless yet productive refraction—productive in the sense that Ruillier uses the technique of accumulation of perspectives to raise questions about witnessing itself.

A formalistic analysis of *L'étrange* in fact offers several indications as to what constitutes ethical witnessing. The testimonial function performed by the open comic form that this album privileges reflects Emmanuel Levinas' definition of the ethical as an encounter with "the face of the Other", 199), a radically transcendent, Platonic form-like face that is at once comprehensible and incomprehensible, that resists finality of interpretations. Narrative strategies such as proliferation of perspectives and the use of animal figures as witnesses draw on the tension between the universal and the particular to defamiliarize trite discourses about "invading migrants." Ruillier's work suggests an alternative practice of framing explicitly aimed at acknowledging the particularity of the other, at giving face through drawing—making (assembling) a picture as opposed to "taking" it.

Testimonial Bandes Dessinées: Bearing Witness to Persecution of Refugee Women

UNHCR's annual Global Trends Report⁵³ shows that women and girls make up around 50 per cent of any refugee, internally displaced, or stateless population. Despite being a significant cohort, lack of accurate disaggregated gender statistics makes it difficult to track the condition of women refugees and asylum seekers. According to feminist

⁵³ According to the 2017 Global Trends report published by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), nearly half of all refugees were women or girls and about half were children – a higher proportion than is seen in the world population. See <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/> for more details.

scholars, the absence of accurate statistics in turn “reflect an inherent gender blindness in research on these issues – [since] the figure of the refugee is often seen as male, and the particular types of persecution which force women to become migrants are ignored” (Freedman 158). The condition of women asylum seekers is further erased by media and human rights discourses which circulate notions about “cultural” practices⁵⁴ of certain societies. These “practices” are used to construct a public–private division of spheres, which undermines the gender neutrality of refugee law. Such distinctions between public and private forms of persecution are responsible, to some extent, for the notion that states of the Global North have the burden of protecting the “idealized” victim women of the global south in the manner specifically and extensively theorized by, among others, Gayatri Spivak in her famous essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” At the same time, the demarcation of a private sphere delegitimizes the asylum appeals made by women of the Global South that are based on domestic or sexual violence while privileging appeals based on putatively purely political, or “public,” claims.⁵⁵ For example, the French body that adjudicates asylum appeals by refugees and stateless people, the *Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides* (OFPRA), considers both female genital mutilation and forced marriage “cultural practices” for which a woman may receive subsidiary protection but not the conventional refugee status accorded to victims of “political” persecution. Debates over

⁵⁴ Female genital mutilation, and forced marriage are examples of such “cultural” practices, which OFPRA, (French asylum adjudicating body) considers as “non-political” which means that women who claim refugee status on these grounds would only receive subsidiary protection and not conventional refugee status.

⁵⁵ For example, in a recent decision, the British Court of Appeal rejected an asylum claim from a Sierra Leonean woman who feared forced genital mutilation if she were returned to her country. One of the judges argued that the practice of female genital mutilation was clearly accepted by the majority of the population of Sierra Leone and was not in those circumstances discriminatory (Refugee Women’s Resource Project 2005 cited in Jane Freedman’s essay “Feminization of Asylum Migration from Africa” in the book *African Migrations*). In Germany, for example, women have been refused asylum on the grounds of rape during times of ethnic conflict, because “widespread rape by hostile militia has been dismissed as the common fate of women caught in a war zone and not recognized as persecution” (Ankenbrand 48). The adjudicator at the appeal hearing of one of the women claimed that as far as he understood the law, “being beaten up by your husband is not a ground for asylum however deplorable it might be” (Crawley 319).

cultural relativism and what constitutes “persecution” produce a polarization of the world into categories of “refugee producers” and “refugee acceptors” (Macklin 226). Testimonial *bandes dessinées* such as *Paroles Sans Papiers* and *Immigrants* bear witness to the persecution of women asylum seekers by destabilizing these facile categories. Some of the stories presented in these texts make visible the danger of using the public – private division and the increased exposure of women to violence due to the absence of clearly defined forms of protection.

The album *Paroles Sans Papiers*, published by Alfred and David Chauvel in 2007, is an anthology of testimonies from those who live in precarious conditions – illegal immigrants as well as asylum seekers whose appeals for protection were refused by OFPRA and CNDA. In this collective work, which involved the collaboration of nine artists, each story narrates an individual’s migratory experience. Each migrant’s path is different, and this uniqueness is emphasized by the choice of a different artist to visually represent the reproduced testimony. The album is as visually heterogeneous as it is narratively diverse. While *Paroles Sans Papiers* focuses exclusively on rejected asylum seekers and the undocumented, Christophe Dabitch’s *Immigrants*, discusses the different waves of France’s immigration history. The testimony of immigrants from each wave is interspersed with essays on women migrants, colonialism and immigration, and stereotypes based on immigration.

Not unlike the cinema of social concern, albums such as *Immigrants* and *Paroles Sans Papiers* use an explicit documentary register and mode of address, with the aim of exposing institutional failings, making visible the social subject, and giving voice to those “denied access to the means of producing their own image” (Ruby 51). What is at stake

here is representation, the relations of power constituted by visibility and practices of looking; “who is authorized to look at whom with what effects” (Pollock 4), and the related questions of who speaks, who they speak for, and to whom such speech is addressed (Ruby 51). In *Paroles Sans Papiers* the reality effect is enhanced by the inclusion of a dossier that includes several documentary pieces – black and white images of refugee camps, a timeline of clandestine migration, the socio-economic factors that undergird migration, and several other references both to media texts as well as documents from NGOs such as CIMADE.⁵⁶ The presence of this dossier serves as a constant reminder to the reader that the testimonies that he/she reads maybe anonymized, but they draw upon the lived experiences of migrants. Additionally, the section titled “compléments biographiques” which follows the last testimony, gives biographical details about the persons whose stories inspired the album. Of the nine testimonies presented, five are from women – three from the African continent and two from Chechnya.

Paroles Sans Papiers tackles the seeming impossibility of voicing the specificity of torture undergone by women and their subsequent trauma. The protection of privacy accorded to victims of sexual violence, while it serves to protect these vulnerable persons, comes with the danger of silencing and invisibilizing these atrocities. Additionally, when we factor in the censorship-infused culture that we currently live under, one can understand that in the name of privacy and disclaimers of disturbing content, issues that require action and awareness may be pushed out of public discourse. In such a context, the comics texts I discuss here undertake what Chute terms “the risk of representation” (4). It is fitting to use the term “risk” considering that these texts navigate the tight balance between

⁵⁶ CIMADE, acronym for Comité Inter-Mouvements Auprès Des Évacués [Committee to Coordinate Activities for the Displaced] is a Paris based NGO that provides assistance to asylum seekers and refugees.

banalization of violence or worse still, voyeuristic impropriety and the dominant tropes of unspeakability or unrepresentability of trauma. Such considerations have produced an equally troubling effect – that of making these issues disappear from public discourse and thereby pushing them beyond the space of representation and consequently out of our minds. Dabitch’s and Chauvel’s testimonial texts attempt to materialize a difficult history and additionally, they draw upon the affective response that images trigger.

NGOs such as RAJFIRE⁵⁷ and Centre Primo Levi⁵⁸ have drawn attention to the specific problems encountered by female asylum seekers and cautioned against the overreliance on paradigms that pit cultures against each other in the discourse over gendered persecution of women asylum seekers. These conceptualizations are called out for the falsehoods they are in the testimonies in the album *Paroles Sans Papiers*. Through depiction of domestic and sexual violence, the testimonies of Martine in “Une Femme sur la Route” [A Woman on the Road] and of Rosalie in “Prostitution Sans Papiers” engage readers in questioning claims about how the protection and oppression of refugee women align with the Global North and the Global South.

Feminist scholars Claude Lesselier and Jane Freedman highlighted the “restrictive conditions” that confront women migrants and asylum seekers in France. They argue that such conditions force women “into a situation of illegality and precarity (...) making them particularly vulnerable to violence and sexual harassment” (Lesselier and Freedman 51). The fate of the asylum seekers after their asylum requests are denied rarely surface in public discourses. Rosalie’s testimony in the anthology constitutes a rare glimpse into the material

⁵⁷ RAJFIRE (Réseau pour l’autonomie des femmes immigrées et réfugiée) is a feminist NGO that works exclusively on issues pertaining to gender and violence.

⁵⁸ An NGO that works specifically with asylum seekers who have been subjugated to torture and other forms of violence.

conditions of life of such asylum seekers who live out the rest of their lives in clandestinity to evade deportation. Going beyond a cathartic or didactic value, these texts “materialize” history. My reading of these testimonial texts focuses on their formal features and how they urge readers to bear witness, to pause, reflect, and piece together the disparate, oppositional elements that lead to migration. Shining a torchlight on what she refers to as “the silences of history and within families and the silences that mediate relations between individuals and states that shape and guide many of our cultural configurations,” Anne Cubilié stressed the importance of performative witnessing “that challenge traditional structures of knowing, of power, of community, and of violence” (xi). This aspect of performative witnessing and the way in which trauma can be represented ethically and productively is what I focus on in my reading of women asylum seekers’ testimonies.

The first testimony “*Une Femme sur la Route*” (“A Woman on the Road”) rendered by the artist Lorenzo Mattotti, is that of Martine F. (Fig 7), a Congolese woman, who was forced to flee Congo after the murder of her parents. Direct address and the absence of extra-diegetic information, in the form of voiceover narration allows readers an illusion of unmediated access to the protagonist Martine. The thick, irregular lines and a messy style help to underline the aggression of the content. The strict adherence to the victim’s perspective creates a space where her voice can be heard, which in turn validates her specific experiences and subjectivity. The use of black and white panels, the darkened faces, and the bestialized representations of Martine’s aggressors combine to highlight the cruelty and humiliation suffered by migrants on the road. Additionally, the minimalism of each panel amplifies the narrative bite of the complicated traumatic events they depict. The narration also matches the minimalist visual representation – the violence is hinted at by

short fragments such as these: “on vous fait n’importe quoi, surtout si tu es une fille, il y a des viols”. [they do whatever they want with you, especially if you are a girl, there are rapes].



Figure 7

[My name is Martine and I am Congolese]

“A Woman on the Road” opens with a nearly black panel (the only white space being that of Martine’s eyes) containing a small inset with the words “Je m’appelle Martine and je suis congolaise” [My name is Martine and I am Congolese]. The emphasis on the eyes in the first panel convey the point of a subject who looks. It also communicates that the female subject is an object of looking. The eyes, as Hillary Chute elegantly phrases it, suggest “a creator of looking and sight” (2). The ocular emphasis on the first panel transitions, in the second panel, to a broad view of Martine’s spatial location – the Tétouan forest in Morocco. The third panel extending across the page gives a panoramic view of the perilous space Martine was sent to – a no-man’s land and its transitory nature conveyed by makeshift tents, broken fences, and fluid lines suggesting movement. The large panel size signals the importance of Martine’s precarity in terms of the spatial topos. The horror

and violence associated with this space increases as one moves across the panels. Following the opening sequence, smaller panels foreground violence by presenting perilous slopes where blackened bodies crouch with hands crossed over the head to shield against beatings by cops. A single panel features the sexual violence perpetrated on Martine in this no-man's land of the border (figure 8). Averted gazes of Martine's companions, the bestialized representation of Martine's rapist, her humiliation and helplessness conveyed in the sharp, jagged lines of her body communicates trauma. Martine's companions turned away faces stand as a reminder that violence to women and women's bodies become the site through which conflicting ethnic and national categories are constructed and reinforced. At the same time, the panel's graphic depiction of Martine's suffering demands that readers engage with the material on the page without turning away their gaze.



Figure 8 [They raped me, they did whatever they wanted and then they showed us the way to go toward Oujda]

The story of Martine renders visible through the comics form the heterotopias of deviance in border zones. *Bandes dessinées* testimonials invite us to engage in witnessing—"not through the overidentification of guilt and voyeuristic pleasures of horror but through a conscious performative stance of witnessing" (Cubilié 141). Violent sexual

acts perpetrated on women such as Martine lead them to fall off the grid, or envisaged in another way, fall into the grid of another kind of surveillance that is always ongoing despite its near invisibility to those of us who are not reckoning with these systems in our lives. Martine's testimony surfaces acts of violence constitutive of the way that power operates in the border regimes as well as within security regimes that protect nation-states. As Anthony Wilden argues, acts of sexual violence against women need to be read as "structural relationships of power, domination, and privilege between men and women in society. Violence against women is central to maintaining those political relations at home, at work and in all public spheres" (Wilden 37). The panel's linkage of rape with the rapist's promise of showing refugees their route ties sexual violence against women to delineation of national borders.

While "Une Femme sur la Route" showed the dangers that dot the path of women crossing borders, *Prostitution Sans Papiers* narrates the testimony of Rosalie Masimba, a Congolese woman, who seeks asylum in France with her brother. This graphic narrative shows how Rosalie Masimba is first duped by visa agents and then turns to prostitution to save herself. From the very first panel, the reader is struck by the dissonance between the visual and verbal elements of each vignette. The tension between the stances of the reciter (responsible for the recitative or voice-over narration) and the monstrator⁵⁹ (responsible for what is shown in the panel) opens up the interpretive space for readers. For example, in the first panel, the reciter performs what Groensteen calls management function⁶⁰ (Fig 9): "Je m'appelle Rosalie Mamba, j'ai 18 ans et je suis congolaise" [my name is Rosalie

⁵⁹ Groensteen uses the term "monstrator" to "designate the instance responsible for the *rendering into drawn form* of the story" (86).

⁶⁰ In *System of Comics* (156).

Mamba, I am 18 and I am Congolese]. However, the monstrator’s representation shows a travel bag with some clothes, a hairbrush, and a couple of stubbed out cigarette butts. The reader sees Rosalie in the third panel, head resting on her arms, with an expression of suffering. The reciter’s intervention gives us the information that helps us understand what is unfolding in the scene – “ ils (les policiers) m’ont obligée à dire des mensonges parce que j’étais coincée et ils avaient mis des couteaux sur moi ” [they (the cops) forced me to tell lies because I was cornered and they had placed knives on me]. When the reader returns to the previous panels with this information, visual referents – the bag, the bedside clock, the photo of Rosalie’s brother – emerge as material witnesses to the rape of Rosalie. Characteristic of the traumatic memory of women who have suffered rape, who remember the detail of an object or things they focused on during the time of violence, the objects in the first two panels recreate the scene of sexual violence. Such a recreation of a scene by the power of suggestion lead the readers to enact the scene all on their own. The imaginative power and the slow reading required to parse the various elements and understand the narrative extracts from the reader an ethical positioning such as the one already mentioned above.



Figure 9[My name is Rosalie Masimba, I am 18 years old and I am Congolese. I was at home, at Kinshasa, and one day, cops came to arrest me claiming that my brother

was trafficking in arms. They forced me to tell lies because I was cornered and they had even placed knives on me]

In the subsequent panel, Rosalie’s rape is announced with parsimony. While the text in the *récitaif* – “Les policiers m’ont violée” [the cops raped me] – announces what was done to her, the visual element represents the effect – the shame that Rosalie carries suggested by her covering her face (figure 10). The text in the subsequent panel – “et jusqu’à aujourd’hui je me sens mal” [and up to today I still feel the pain] – conveys by metonymy the torture that Rosalie was subjected to. The sharp objects represented in that panel (figure 11) serve as stand-in for the inexpressibility of Rosalie’s trauma. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry⁶¹ identified the use of visible referent as an aspect of language that can make pain representable. The artist Pierre Place uses spikes and other deadly and pointed object as visible referents for the experience of torture that Rosalie carries with her.



Figure 10 [and till today, I still hurt there]

⁶¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 281, 292. Scarry writes: “A material or verbal artifact is not an alive, sentient, percipient creature, and thus can neither itself experience discomfort or recognize discomfort in others. But though it cannot be sentiently aware of pain, it is in the essential fact of itself the objectification of that awareness; itself incapable of the act of perceiving, its design, its structure, is the structure of a perception” (289).



Figure 11 [and till today, I feel pain there]

The subsequent series of panels amplifies the tension between visual and verbal narration to show the cruel irony of the situation where Rosalie's plea for money to buy food falls on deaf ears. The women she meets force her to fall back on the only physical resource that remains – her body. The dissonance between the text and the visual, and a stream-of-consciousness style narration leads to a deliberate blurring of boundaries between the reciter and the monistrator, and a degree of tension between the two voices. Such a narrative strategy – the use of free indirect style and indecisive visuals – evokes what trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra calls the middle voice. As LaCapra explains,

free indirect style is itself a hybridized, internally dialogized form that may involve undecidability of voice. In it, the narrator interacts with objects of narration in various ways involving degrees or modulations of irony and empathy, distance and proximity—at the limit in liable, undecidable fashion. Undecidability takes the free indirect style to its limits in a kind of discursive return of the repressed middle voice. (196-197)

“Prostitution Sans Papiers” establishes a high degree of indecisiveness of voice by these means. One panel depicts Rosalie’s psychic fragmentation through her crouched fetal position on the floor, while the silhouette of a man with a weapon stands in the shadow of a half open door. The fears that haunt Rosalie and her psychic splintering are vividly represented in the final panels of the graphic narrative where there is a mixing of persons from France and Congo, Rosalie’s past and present. As readers, one is not completely sure whether the events in the pages show Rosalie’s perception (what she sees or imagines) or narrative action (how a viewer would see her experience of events). This middle or “in-between voice of undecidability and the unavailability of radical ambivalence of clear-cut positions” (20) contributes to what LaCapra calls “an ethos of uncertainty” (197). Narrative uncertainty produced by introduction of elements of fuzziness – dissonance between the text and the image – works as a strategy to draw attention to aspects that require further consideration by the reader, forcing them to stop, comb through the narrative elements, and piece them together for narrative comprehension. The artist imposes some degree of reading time on the readers; the co-presence of adjacent panels as Hillary Chute observed, makes certain that the “discursive recursivity” is built into the very “narrative scaffolding” of the comic (8).

While the album *Paroles Sans Papiers* depicted the travails of those who fall into the grey zone of “illegitimacy” after their asylum applications are rejected, Christophe Dabitch’s *Immigrants* (2010), a collected volume, offers a close look at the various waves of immigration that shaped France. The artists and historians whose work punctuates the pages of this comic-book album insist on reading immigration as an accretionary process that contributes to the growth and progress of a nation. In the album’s opening pages,

author and former journalist Christophe Dabitch cites a 1990 demographic study in which 40% of the French population were determined to be of foreign origin (Dabitch et al. 2). Given these statistics, the album's contributors seek to demystify the immigrant experience. The author and the illustrators deploy a wide range of visual strategies that allow readers to visualize the multiple realities of immigration. Dabitch, the writer who recorded the stories told in *Immigrants*, does not insert himself into the reproduced testimony. Instead, he selected a different artist for each account who was asked to visually represent eyewitness testimony using his/her preferred medium (e.g. watercolor, charcoal, India ink) and graphic style.

The visual component of each story serves to create a subjective perspective and to communicate the unspeakable. At times, images abandon the realist register and this shift underscores the storyteller's fear and the unimaginable physical and emotional pain. One striking example is the first narrative sequence about a woman, identified only as 'Hélène'. Hélène's husband, who worked in the diamond industry, was also a member of an opposition party in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Once the government discovered his wealth and political affiliation, both he and his wife became political and economic targets. The reversal of Hélène's fortunes is indicated by the abrupt change of color palette. While the single panel that opened her story was suffused with colors of golden yellow and beige, in the subsequent panel, on the next page, violent colors such as purple, red, and dark green dominate. Through the bold use of color, crosshatching, and other techniques, the reader understands Hélène's incarceration in the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital city, Kinshasa where she was held for two weeks, raped and tortured. Most vignettes that represent Hélène's life are drawn with a high degree of realism. However, in panels

that represent interrogation scenes, the artist Benjamin Flao depicts military personnel who interrogate her as human bodies with the heads of vicious dogs (figure 12). By deploying anthropomorphic figures – men who are half-humans, half-dogs with long, sharp teeth -- Flao effectively depicts H el ene’s intense feelings of terror as well as the inhumanity of her captors. The narrator’s husband is later drawn ambushed in a tree, again hounded by government ‘dogs’. Here, the artist establishes a predator–prey dynamic between the Congolese government and its citizens.



Figure 12 [where is this money from? You are against the regime and the president!]

The brutality of gangrape and the extreme violence perpetrated on H el ene is starkly represented by a panel that dominates the page.



Figure 13 [translation of panel in the note below⁶²]

The recitative arranged vertically serves as phallic figures of men who caused the brutal scene of violence unfolding in front of our eyes. The ink wash effect on this panel suggests men's feet. The cruel indifference of the standing men to the bleeding prostrate woman whose death might pose them a difficult problem (a detail, the reader understands from the speech bubble) amplifies the horror of the scene. The subsequent panels darken and readers see the supine figure of Héléne surrounded by a proliferation of speech bubbles. The accumulation of voices produces a certain disorientation forcing the reader to slow down and take in the various positionalities around Héléne. Flao chooses to situate the

⁶² They made me lay face down at the back of a jeep. They took me far, near a mountain. There was a river below and unfinished houses. They started to torture me. To massacre me there, they did all that they had to, whatever they wanted to. They beat me everywhere with their rifles, they even broke my intestine. Now I have a serious problem with the vertebral column and the intestine. They did all that they had to do and when they noticed that I was bleeding, he said to the others ["we need to stop"] because he had already done what he had to do and the others also, they had beers, condoms, cigarettes. They had everything. When they saw that I was bleeding a lot, that blood was flowing like water, they said they need to stop and take her to the hospital [If she dies, it will be another problem"].

characters off-screen, making them invisible. The speech bubble stands as the appendage of these invisible characters and serves as a symbolic space – a coded sign – more than as the receptacle of verbal contents. In this instance, the speech bubble, as Groensteen says, “is its own particular signified” (77).

The subsequent panels delineate H  l  ne obtaining forged documents and illegally immigrating to France. Even though H  l  ne wants to use her own authentic passport, the pursuit and torture of her father and her husband show the fragility of her situation. Given the danger to her life if she is recognized at the airport, she is forced to flee her country using a fake passport. After her departure, H  l  ne learns of her father’s death and eventually loses contact with her husband, demonstrating the extent to which political turmoil fragmented her family. H  l  ne’s case is unmistakably one of political asylum. *Immigrants* leaves no doubt that the rape of H  l  ne is an act of political violence through sexual means and that H  l  ne’s (domestic) status as daughter and wife make her a political sexual target. The depiction calls into question fastidious interpretations of Geneva Conventions that grant states the right to exercise sovereignty by granting or denying asylum solely on the basis of requests for refuge from (public) political persecution.

Reading texts such as “Une Femme sur la Route,” “Prostitution Sans Papiers,” and “H  l  ne” not only evokes empathy and motivation to help, but it involves “understanding the structures of injustice” (Kaplan 23). All three texts depict how sexual violence is instrumental to the production of illegal immigrants or refugees; they reveal the ways in which power structures collude to produce situations of extreme violence. Scholars such as Rikke Platz Cortsen and Erin Lacour have drawn our attention to comics’ ability to

position itself as a “Thirdspace”⁶³ that enables conceptualizing spaces beyond modernist binaries. Considering the spatial site of comics as “Thirdspace” is particularly rich for the analysis of these texts in that they offer a space that exposes the falsehood behind binaries such as cultures of persecution vs. protection, legal and illegal, a feminist Global North and a victimizing Global South. With the clever use of color, a varied repertoire of visual styles, and the assembling of spatio-temporal elements, these texts respond to Foucault’s call to criticize institutions “in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them” (Foucault 171). The testimonial *bandes dessinées* discussed in this essay show instances of institutional policing as well as infiltrations into private spaces by those who enact the policing force. Martine is stymied by a band of men who have taken it upon themselves to police the borders by menacing and persecuting women. Rosalie is systematically victimized and pushed over the brink when institutions for protecting refugees fail to acknowledge her as such. Hélène is tracked down by the government and brutalized. Collectively, these texts unmask how discourses of power operate and how separation of spaces as public or private, and the categorization of violence as domestic contribute to weakening of women’s asylum applications.

The testimonies of all three women in comic form portray a political view of reality as experienced by themselves or their subjects. These narratives question the ideological absolutes prevalent in the cultural context of the work and they reveal the deprivation and suffering caused by disregard or manipulation of laws and social responsibilities. If we

⁶³ Edward Soja used this term and defined it as: “Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history”p?.

accept Brecht's test for realist practice and ask if the work of art disrupts or supports the "prevailing view of things as the view of those in power" (Adams 76), we can agree that all three texts work by opposing the "prevailing" view. The realism of these texts is announced by the specific gendered position the text adopts, through the exposure of social structures that normalize discrimination, and through the analysis of spatial constructions that produce catastrophic social consequences.

In the testimonial *bandes dessinées*, the interplay between what women asylum seekers endure and how comic readers witness their persecution reveals the arbitrariness of the Global North's bright border line between domestic/sexual violence and public/political violence. While it is supposed that international laws and refugee conventions such as Geneva Convention offer protection on a gender-neutral basis, procedures for granting protection, defined along gendered practices, do not recognize domestic or sexual violence as adequate grounds for seeking asylum. Refugee law has been mostly interpreted in relation to the idea of political and public persecution, implicitly understood in relation to male asylum seekers. Consequently, measures to provide assistance to those suffering from gender-related persecution remains arbitrary. It is left to the discretionary powers of each judge to recognize the validity of claims made by women seeking refuge on the basis of sexual or domestic violence. Absence of clear institutional frameworks that provide protection to women create situations where those fleeing violence are forced to rely on people smugglers who force them into prostitution in order to repay their "debts". Testimonies of Martine, Hélène, and Rosalie offer insight into factors that produce sexual violence and prostitution. The impact of their testimonies is constituted, to a large extent, by the open structure that is made possible by the *bande*

dessinée. The open structure of comics involves the reader in what Mila Bongco terms a narrative politics where “discourse becomes a series of views” situating the reader as a spectator in participative readings (58). These texts succeed in allowing the reader to “see” the woman asylum seeker as well as bear witness to what she witnessed. As I mentioned earlier, these testimonial *bandes dessinées* texts deploy what Dominic LaCapra calls the “middle voice” whose “modulations of proximity and distance, empathy and irony with respect to different objects of identification” (30) combine to communicate trauma while retaining the distinction between victims and reader-witnesses. Interpretation of these texts seldom progresses along linear modes. Instead, the reader is led to dwell on the panels, identify recurring motifs, and achieve “closure”⁶⁴ by combining the textual elements autonomously. The fluid page architecture, the dissonance between the verbal and the visual narratives, as well as the weaving together of presence and absence into the narrative structure enable comics texts to perform the empowering political and aesthetic task of bearing witness to the precarious lives of asylum seekers.

⁶⁴ Scott McCloud introduces the term “closure” in the book *Understanding Comics*, and defines it as the “phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (63).

Conclusion

Discussions of legal, literary, and graphic narratives in the previous chapters examined how various narrative forms produce, represent, and historicize lives of those forcibly displaced. Analyzing these texts from a spatiotemporal perspective exposed some of the primary differences in the treatment of asylum seekers under various discourses. The discussion of asylum history traced the shift from spatial protection to that of a status-based protection where the burden of proving their legitimacy for refugee status rests on the asylum seekers themselves. Life-story narratives produced for this purpose, while purporting to be a detailed story that explains reasons for flight, follow a strict pattern. This narrative structure insists on adherence to chronological order and the first-person. Normative asylum story's insistence on these features produces a temporality where adventure-time dominates. Such a structure serves as nation-states' rhetorical device to produce the refugee figure that fits the definition of an ideal citizen. When asylum seekers ventriloquize linear narratives plotted for them by aid agents or translators, their own stories of strength and resilience are silenced. Willingly participating in constructing a false sense of self by borrowing others' stories makes further alienates and victimizes those the system is supposed to help.

Indeed, the blurring of lines between truth and fiction is justified by several people who work in the business of asylum dossier preparation as a necessary evil. As post-doctoral scholar Giacomo Mantovan highlighted in his article on Sri Lankan asylum seekers: "Resorting to borrowing other people's stories is a tactic because claimants play on the Other's ground, with the Other's rules, and aim to defeat a bureaucratic procedure, based on unequal relations between exiles and decision makers, which tends to exclude

them.” In other words, according to Mantovan, there is a degree of agency (and expediency) on the part of asylum seeker who invents or dramatizes his or her story as this is the only leverage the weak have in the face of the national bureaucratic order’s power. This, in a sense, follows a broader defense of the practice of using a conventional story arc and using others’ stories to build convincing legal asylum narratives. According to this logic, the increasingly restrictive application of the Geneva Convention, complex bureaucratic procedures for seeking asylum, and the general attitude of suspicion toward asylum seekers necessitate the need to fabricate stories.

Having noted this, there appears also to be some pushback on this development as an inevitability of the process. For example, contrasting the flattened narrative arc of legal asylum stories, where temporality is foregrounded, with contemporary refugee fiction and graphic novels yielded important insights and shows that there is not universal acceptance of the current situation. Competing narratives cultures and different forms of storytelling that are not allowed room in asylum courts gain what many believe is a fundamentally necessary visibility here. These texts recuperate important spatial components cauterized from legal stories. More specifically, cultural narratives of asylum situate asylum seekers in the social spaces around them, instead of treating them as singularized entities moving from one place to the other. The spatiotemporal analysis of aesthetic texts emphasized the role of paraspaces and the significance of multiple chronotopes in making visible historic conditions that produce refugees. Exploring the various time-spaces in these texts reveals that unlike the Bildungsroman’s principle of a consistent (and positively teleological) development in time, these narratives emphasize drifting through space. With the exception of *Le Médicament* noteworthy teleology, these novels use opposing chronotopes—

timespace of adventure and idyll in *À l'Abri de Rien*, for instance—to contrast refugee protagonists' movements at the margins of society with the regulated movement of bodies within the space of sovereign nation-states.

An examination of the chronotopic motifs at work in each text provides vital clues to the nature of time-space animating these texts. The dominant chronotopes of most of these texts emphasize the spatial element via paraspaces which exhibit different temporalities than the worlds with which they contrast. These “extended worlds” encourage readers to look outside or around the narrative dimension of the text, towards the text's production of space. All the texts studied, at least to some extent, chart the path through change and disruption. Whether crossing a threshold or passing through a moment of crisis, all involve a change between two states. For example, a change of state is fundamental to Olivier Adam's *À l'Abri de Rien*, where the transition in Marie's state of depression represented by her encounters with refugees such as Jalal, Bechir, and volunteers such as Isabelle creates a layered diegesis. In the novel's final chapter, readers apprehend Marie's confinement at the hospital. However, Adam succeeds in representing the hospital as another paraspace where the state between wellness and deterioration becomes less clear. There is no promise for Marie's recovery. Instead, the reader is led to question the very possibility of a “cure” represented by spaces such as hospitals, or any shelter whatsoever. In the process, it is the institutional assumption of temporally and spatially delineated (narrative) conditions that are unmoored in the process. As such, in *À l'Abri de Rien*, and as the title itself indicates, the plot does not offer any resolution. Instead, readers are offered an expansive view of overlooked spaces and their slow, cumulative effect on those who inhabit them. These changes necessarily take place in time, but they

usually also emphasize a drastic reconfiguration of space, both in terms of how the characters inhabit it diagetically and in the reader's perception of it.

Borrowing Darko Suvin's "estrangement" criteria⁶⁵, chronotopes of refugee fiction are often doubly estranged: they present a chronotope that is removed from the experiences of readers; and then introduce further changes and mutations to such chronotopes by introducing the perspectives of refugees.⁶⁶ The intersection of two timespaces—the global world of fashion and retail and the construction worker's world, reminiscent of industrialization era—makes it possible for readers to understand the unevenness and inequality in the experiences of refugees of different genders and social classes. The chronotopic contrast serves to underscore the complexity of refugee resettlement process. Mirko bears the weight of the experiences he has undergone. He is unable to shake off painful memories of his flight and consequently, he is unable to "integrate" in his host country, France. Simona's experiences of resettlement in France diverge from that of her brother Mirko. The text does not offer any explanation as to the relative absence of trauma in Simona, who shared the same experiences of forced displacement as Mirko. The text seems to suggest that her success in adapting to the host country derives from her ability to master the host society's culture and language. The contrasting timespaces of the refugee

⁶⁵ In the essay *Estrangement and Cognition*, Suvin argued for an understanding of Science Fiction as the literature of cognitive estrangement.

⁶⁶ For example, in *Venus d'Ailleurs*, Mirko's traumatic experience of fleeing war-torn Kosovo is amplified by the birth of his nephew Marush during such disconcerting circumstances:

"—Le petit sort, tombe dans la rivière avec sa corde à sang. C'est moi qui prends le bébé comme le poisson dans l'eau froide." [The baby comes out, falls into the river with his umbilical cord. It is me who picks up the baby like fish in cold water.]

The extraordinarily lyrical narration of the tragic events that transpired while Mirko fled his home country creates an oppositional effect, which defamiliarizes stock representations of forced displacement. Building on Russian Formalist Viktor Shklyovsky's discussion of "attitude of estragement" Bertolt Brecht defined this attitude as: "A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar." The lyrical, aestheticized narration of a baby's birth into a river while parents were fleeing war succeeds in defamiliarizing familiar experiences.

protagonists in *Venus d'Ailleurs* succeed in complicating overly simplified conceptions of “successful” refugee resettlement processes.

In *Assommons les Pauvres!* the banlieue space of the asylum court is the arena where the marginal asylum seekers’ experiences are unpacked. Blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, the author-interpreter chronicles asylum appeals of several unnamed protagonists. Several strategies are employed to represent refugees’ predicament. Sinha uses the courtroom as the setting, drawing attention to the way in which this space shapes the narration.⁶⁷ The narrator-interpreter’s ambivalent position, especially as a female from a third world country, assisting the asylum adjudication process of a country with which she has no formal affiliation complicates questions of origin and legitimacy. Sinha’s interpreter can justify her allegiance to the corrupt system she honors only by creating a romantic, impossible love for the female judge, Lucia, whom she describes as “inaccessible, un rêve inachevé, un désir endormi” [inaccessible, an unfinished dream, a slumbering desire] (36). Lucia represents, for the postcolonial interpreter, the impossible perfection associated with the colonial master. The thirdspace that the interpreter occupies in the court – the space between the asylum seeker and the judge – becomes the problematized space of affiliation that Sinha probes and critiques. When the novel begins, the aforementioned thirdspace of the translator has been disrupted and the interpreter finds herself in the role of the accused, in a cubicle, facing the interrogation of K, a Kafkaesque white male interrogator. Sinha calls into question seemingly natural roles and affiliations

⁶⁷ In the essay “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel”, Bakhtin emphasized the role of the public square in shaping the “exterior real-life chronotope”. According to him, the square constituted the entire state apparatus, with all its official organs” and it was in this concrete chronotope that “the laying bare and examination of a citizen’s whole life was accomplished, and received its public and civic stamp of approval” (132).

using the postcolonial interpreter, her impossible interracial love for the judge, and the very idea of neutrality in adjudication. The chronotopic reversal—from defendant (of legal asylum) to accused (of criminal behavior)—serves to not only problematize notions of legality but also highlight the production of what constitutes “criminality”.

Reflexivity associated with refugee texts of displacement is intimately related to the creation and exploration of paraspaces. As a space contained within or functioning in parallel to the primary diegesis of the text, many paraspatial zones are encountered in refugee fiction, under the guises of different chronotopic motifs. In each case, these paraspaces and the alternative type of spatiality and temporality they represent threaten the world that borders these spaces. Many of the chronotopes of refugee texts are concerned primarily with space, rather than time. Bakhtin stated that time is “the dominant principle” in the novelistic chronotope, but this does not imply that this preference for chronology is a universal feature of texts. Indeed, the example of refugee texts suggests that this is not the case. The chronotopes of refugee novels prioritize space; space appears as the primary driver of the diegesis, and interactions and movements through space make visible topology and geography instead of focusing only on the telos.

The *bandes dessinées* texts that I discussed in Chapter 4 use the potential afforded by the word-image combination to produce and maintain a flow of possible meanings to refugee lives represented these texts. As my close reading of these graphic novels demonstrated, several techniques—employment of unusual layouts and transitions, the use of color, dissonance between visual and verbal elements, polyphonic narration, anthropomorphized characters—combine to make these texts more open. Open texts recruit readers to perform the witness function by affording them the space to make

connections between various elements on the page. Texts that engage with women refugees defamiliarize stereotyped stories of sexual abuse, while making space for “new seeing” of reality instead of mere “recognizing” or “acknowledging” (Shklovsky). Similarly, in *Alpha*, the long arduous journeys undertaken by asylum seekers stops being a trope and instead using panels that extend and accelerate the lived experience of time, readers assimilate the subjective, lived experience of asylum seekers. *L'étrange* problematizes knowing by including perspectives of several witnesses, including animals and birds, who describe how they perceive the unnamed protagonist. As each section progresses, readers feel the discomfort of the anonymized hero around whom a plethora of gazes converge. The profusion of perspectives, as the album draws to a close, challenges the very notion of witnessing.

In order to explain the nuanced role played by aesthetic texts in representing refugee condition, I will discuss briefly a participatory art project that I stumbled upon while researching literary, and graphic asylum narratives. “Crossing Maps” is an aesthetic project that stemmed out of the desire to represent refugee narratives in a radically different way. It is a participatory project that emerged from the collaboration of twelve asylum seekers, two researchers in the field of geography and four artists who challenged themselves to map refugee routes creatively. Explaining the project’s genesis, researchers Sarah Mekdjian and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary explicitly state that their decision to use cartography for telling refugee stories emerged from the desire “to bypass the classical narrative form and above all avoid replicating an “interrogation” that lead asylum seekers to present themselves as mere victims.”⁶⁸ The maps were produced in an

⁶⁸ See <https://visionscarto.net/crossing-maps> for more details about this project.

atmosphere of conviviality. The researchers did not question the asylum seekers about their reasons for seeking refuge. Instead they offered them food and drink and art materials. They invited the asylum seekers to share their individual and collective experiences of crossing borders and of displacement. First, they developed a legend (see Figure 14) that they could all use for their maps. Using this new “language”, they cartographed their memories. While some participants used materials such as clay for their maps, others expressed their memories and their experiences by drawing on white tablecloths and embroidering them.

While storytelling with maps has been discussed by several scholars, it is only very recently that the question has been reversed. Can maps tell stories? Researchers such as Denis Cosgrove and Veronica della Dora, who studied *Los Angeles Times* artist Charles Owens’ dramatic color maps of the World War II, answer affirmatively to this question. I explore the storytelling potential of maps using one of the maps that was produced by an anonymous asylum seeker who participated in this project.

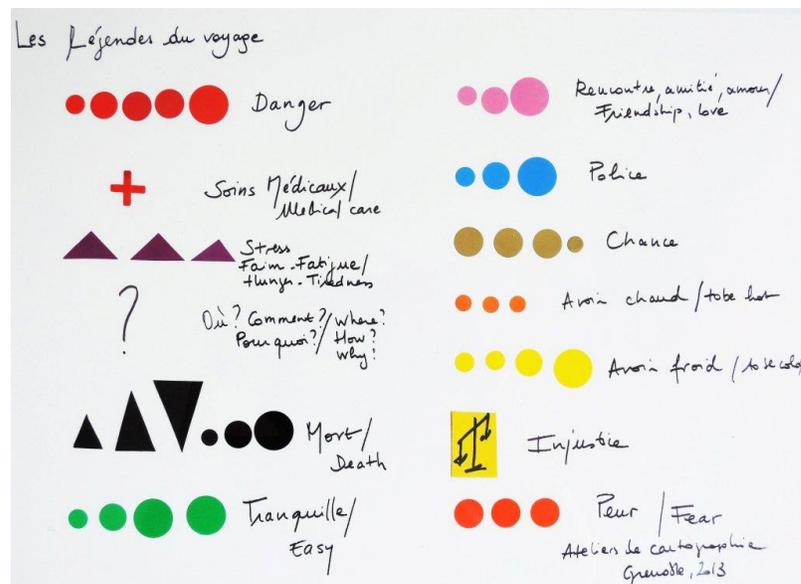


Figure 14. [Source: <https://visionscarto.net/crossing-maps/>]



Figure 15.

[Source: <http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/a-la-une/carte-a-la-une/carte-a-la-une-les-frontieres-vues-du-sol-et-du-ciel>]

The first thing that strikes the viewer about the map is that while it shares the vertical perspective of a conventional map, the absence of scale and the non-adherence to graphic conventions of cartographic practices. The bird's eye perspective offered by the map indicates the sheer scale of S.H's journey in one frame. The representation of mountains between Iran and Afghanistan disrupts the vertical perspective to introduce the perspective of a traveler and her/his lived experience. As the geographer Margaret Wicken Pearce remarks, "Traveling is not a linear sensation but a sense of enclosure by a moving

landscape” (25). A closer look at the map reveals other details such as a car, trucks, a barge, and a pedestrian – a profusion of details that represents the landscape from the perspective of a person walking on the terrain. The cognitive confusion produced by the blending of horizontal and vertical perspectives manages to capture the mobility of borders from the asylum seekers’ perspective while simultaneously retaining the idea of national, immobile conception of borders.

Some of the texts discussed in this dissertation succeed in capturing what S conveys with his map. Much like the blending of vertical and horizontal perspectives in S.H’s map, migrants grapple with two articulations of space – that of spatially constituted citizens from a country of origin, a paradigm reinforced by arbitrarily drawn borders and singularizing identity documents such as passports. The other articulation of space steps away from dyads such as citizen/migrant and instead, charts experiences in terms of meandering through space, the embodied, lived experiences of movement where nonlinear journeys ripple out in multiple directions. The spatiality lost in legal asylum story is recuperated in aesthetic texts. Cultural narratives of asylum disrupt the conception of space as “a universal, absolute and neutral container in which objects are ‘placed’ and events occur” (Mansvelt 56). Instead, these narratives show how spaces are socially produced. Critiquing essentialized, dehistoricized representations of refugee, these texts uncover the relations of power that produce and shape socio-spatial inequalities that trigger forced displacement.

The representative sample of legal, literary, and graphic novel texts that served as the corpus of this study also intervenes in the debates on realism and its representational limits and possibilities. While the limits of realist refugee novels illustrate the limitations of a genre whose development is intimately related to “the rise of nation-ness” (Anderson

334), the proliferation of refugee graphic novels attests to the dogged persistence of realism and its new formations. The vitality of refugee graphic novels draws comparisons to underground comics of 1960s which violated conventions of the Comic Code by saying things that “couldn’t be said” and showing things that “couldn’t be shown” and thereby raised the political consciousness of that period. The flourishing market for refugee graphic novels attests to the medium’s power to resist the silencing and invisibilizing strategies practiced by refugee status determination procedures of western nations.

Appendix A

Sample 1 Elanchelvan Rajendram, Sri Lankan Asylum seeker

La demande d'asile de à l'OFPRA (06.08.2002)

Je m'appelle Elanchelvan RAJENDRAM et je suis né le 29 août 1976 à MANIPPAY au Sri-Lanka. Je suis de nationalité sri-lankaise et d'appartenance tamoule.

Avec ma famille, nous résidions dans le village ILAVALAY dans la région de Jaffna jusqu'en 1992. Mon père travaillait dans une usine de confection de tissus et ma mère s'occupait de mes trois frères, mes deux sœurs et moi.

J'ai effectué mes études primaires et une partie de mes études secondaires au village avant que nous soyons obligé de fuir les bombardements.

Le 5 juillet 1992, l'armée sri-lankaise a attaqué notre village et l'a sévèrement bombardé. Nous avons fui jusqu'au village de UDIVIL où nous sommes restés environ un an, avant devoir à nouveau fuir, suite à de nouveaux bombardements, vers la ville de THIRNALVELI, toujours dans la région de Jaffna.

Le 10 août 1995, durant la période où nous habitons à Thirnalveli, un de mes frères, Ilankumaran (né en 1979) a rejoint le mouvement des Tigres. Ce jour-là, il n'était pas rentré à la maison. Mes parents sont allés le chercher et ils ont appris que ce même jour s'était tenu un meeting des Tigres (propagande tenue par des membres des Tigres dans les écoles). Comme d'autres jeunes, mon frère avait ainsi rejoint la guérilla. Par la suite, nous n'avons plus jamais eu le moindre contact avec lui.

Le 30 octobre 1995, les Tigres ont sillonné les rues de la ville avec des porte-voix pour prévenir la population qu'elle devait quitter la région de Jaffna car l'armée sri-lankaise allait arriver.

Notre famille est donc partie à MIRISIVIL, une ville sous le contrôle du LTTE. Nous y sommes restés seulement un mois car nous avons peur de pouvoir être persécuté par l'armée sri-lankaise en raison de l'engagement de mon frère dans le mouvement des Tigres. Nous avons préféré nous installer dans une autre zone contrôlée par le LTTE, dans le village de MAKULAM. Mais les conditions de subsistance dans ce village en pleine forêt étaient extrêmes, le manque de nourriture et de médicaments, le manque d'hygiène, l'impossibilité d'aller à l'école... Tous les membres de ma famille sont tombés malades. En outre, les Tigres venaient régulièrement à notre domicile pour y exercer des pressions afin que d'autres membres de notre famille rejoignent leurs rangs. Mais nous avons toujours résisté et refusé.

En raison des ces pressions constantes et des difficultés de vie, nous voulions retourner dans la région de Jaffna. Mais pour sortir de la région sous le contrôle des Tigres, il fallait qu'ils nous délivrent un laissez-passer et ils refusaient de nous le donner.

C'est pourquoi, nous avons été contraints de partir, discrètement, en nous cachant des contrôles. Nous avons pris une barque jusqu'à la petite ville de MANNAR où nous sommes arrivés le 18 décembre 1996. Nous résidions chez mon cousin, Santhirakumaran ULAKANATHAN, qui travaillait comme comptable dans un bureau. Nous nous sommes déclarés aux autorités gouvernementales contrôlant Mannar. Mais ils ne voulaient pas nous donner une autorisation permanente en nous disant qu'il nous fallait retourner à Jaffna dont nous sommes originaires.

C'est ainsi que nous sommes retournés dans la région de Jaffna en date du 5 janvier 1997. Il ne nous fut pas possible de retourner dans notre village de Ilavalaï qui était totalement détruit. Nous sommes allés vivre à THIRNAVELI, le temps de reconstruire notre maison de Ilavalaï. Au mois d'avril 1997, nous avons pu retourner chez nous. A ce moment là, ma sœur était institutrice en primaire et moi, je devais finir de préparer mon baccalauréat à Jaffna. Mon père n'a plus retrouvé une activité professionnelle, il cultivait notre jardin. En association avec un ami, mon frère aîné Isaichelvan a ouvert un magasin d'alimentation à Jaffna. Il devait se rendre tous les matins à son travail en parcourant les dix kilomètres qui nous séparaient de la ville en mobylette.

Le matin du 5 juillet 1997, alors qu'il se rendait au travail avec son ami, des combats ont éclaté entre les Tigres et l'armée sri-lankaise à la périphérie de la ville. Ils ont été pris en étau dans ces combats et ils ont été tués tous les deux.

Le corps de mon frère a été transporté à l'hôpital par des militaires. Lorsque mes parents s'y sont rendus, les militaires ont voulu leur faire avouer que mon frère travaillait pour les Tigres. Bien que mes parents leur ont expliqué qu'il se rendait juste à son travail, ils n'ont rien voulu entendre. Pour récupérer son corps et pouvoir l'enterrer, ils ont été obligés de déclarer que mon frère aîné appartenait aux Tigres.

A ce moment là, j'avais terminé mes études secondaires et obtenu mon baccalauréat. Je travaillais dans le jardin avec mon père et je donnais quelques cours aux enfants du village.

Le 31 août 1998, une bombe posée par des Tigres a provoqué l'explosion d'un bus. Deux militaires, deux policiers et un civil ont péri dans cet attentat. Beaucoup de passagers de ce bus venaient de notre village, en particulier le chauffeur. Un des militaires qui fut tué était le responsable chargé du contrôle de notre village.

Suite de cet acte de terrorisme, les soldats se sont mis à effectuer des contrôles partout, dans les villages, dans les maisons. Ils entraient partout, frappaient les hommes en leur ordonnant de leur dire qui avait fait cela.

Ils sont arrivés chez nous. Un prisonnier des Tigres les accompagnait et ils lui demandaient des renseignements sur les familles. Il leur a déclaré qu'un de mes frères appartenait au LTTE. Ils se sont alors mis à nous battre, mon père et moi. Puis ils nous ont bandé les yeux et fait monter dans une jeep. Nous avons été conduits dans un centre militaire du gouvernement, je ne sais précisément où. Mon père et moi avons alors été séparés et interrogés chacun de son côté. Pendant toute notre détention, je n'ai eu aucune nouvelle de lui.

En présence d'un traducteur tamoul (un Tigre fait prisonnier qui avait appris le cinghalais), ils m'ont interrogé et battu pour me faire dire où se trouvait mon frère. Mais je n'en savais rien, nous n'avions pas de nouvelles de lui, je ne pouvais de toute façon rien leur apprendre.

J'ai été torturé, attaché par les pieds, la tête en bas, au-dessus d'un feu allumé dont je recevais la fumée dans les yeux. Ils m'ont mis un sac rempli de gaz sur la tête jusqu'à ce que je sois au bord de l'asphyxie. Ils m'ont donné des coups de couteau dans les jambes et ont versé de l'eau salée sur les plaies.

Je suis resté là-bas durant 20 jours. J'étais toujours enfermé seul dans une pièce, là même où ils me torturaient. Ils me donnaient de la nourriture et parfois ils me forçaient à manger, me libérant une main tandis que l'autre restait attachée avec les pieds.

Un jour, le prisonnier tamoul est venu et a traduit que les militaires allaient m'emmener chercher mon frère : nous devions sortir ensemble dans la rue et je devais crier en appelant mon frère dès qu'il se présenterait. J'avais très peur, je savais qu'ils utilisaient cette

méthode pour me faire sortir et m'abattre dans la rue d'un coup de revolver. Ils pouvaient plus difficilement m'assassiner à l'intérieur sans raison, mais dehors, il leur était facile de faire passer cette mort pour un acte des Tigres. J'ai refusé. Alors, ils m'ont frappé sur la tête avec un coup de crosse, la plaie saignait, puis je ne sais plus rien, j'ai perdu connaissance.

Quand j'ai repris conscience, il n'y avait plus de soldats, j'étais seul. Environ un quart d'heures plus tard, ils sont revenus. Ils ne m'ont pas soigné mais bien au contraire, ils m'ont à nouveau frappé. Quelques jours plus tard, j'ai quand même reçu quelques soins.

Dans les villages sri-lankais de tamouls, il y a des responsables de village dont la fonction est de régler les problèmes de tous les habitants. Celui de mon village, Ponnar RASENTHIRAN, avait appris ma situation, il savait où j'étais détenu. Après ma libération, j'ai su qu'il était venu plusieurs fois accompagné du Directeur de l'école, Sellathuraï SUPRAMANIJAM, pour voir les militaires dans le but d'obtenir ma libération.

Finalement, le 20 septembre 1998, ils ont accepté de me laisser partir à condition que je vienne signer deux fois par mois. Mon père a été relâché au même moment, à condition qu'il vienne signer une fois par mois. Nous sommes rentrés tous les deux à la maison.

En 1999, j'ai commencé un stage de comptabilité à THINALVELI. Je continuais à aller signer deux fois par mois chez les militaires de PANDEETHERU. Quand je me présentais, il arrivait souvent qu'ils me menacent ou même me battent pour que je leur dise où se trouvait mon frère.

A la fin de l'année 1999, une attaque des Tigres contre plusieurs centres militaires de la région rendait les militaires particulièrement nerveux. En représailles, ils maltrahaient davantage leurs prisonniers et certains furent même tués. C'est pourquoi, j'étais de plus en

plus terrifié de devoir me présenter pour signer et je ne suis plus retourné (mon père, quant à lui, avait obtenu l'autorisation de ne plus se présenter en raison de son âge). J'avais peur de rester chez moi dans l'attente que les soldats viennent me chercher. Il fallait fuir quelque part.

J'avais un ami, Pirakalathan VISUBAMITHIRAR, qui travaillait pour le parti EDPS, un parti politique tamoul collaborant avec le gouvernement sri-lankais. Je lui ai confié mes problèmes et il m'a répondu que je pouvais obtenir leur aide. Ils ont accepté de me cacher dans les locaux de leur Parti à MANNIPAY. J'ai donc vécu là-bas, je les aidais un peu dans la confection de leurs journaux et brochures. Parallèlement, j'effectuais mon stage de comptabilité à Thirnalveli.

A la fin de l'année 2000, lorsque les Tigres ont appris que je résidais au local du parti du EDPS et que je travaillais pour eux, ils se sont présentés chez mes parents pour exiger que j'arrête cette collaboration. Ils ont demandé à mes parents de me transmettre un rendez-vous fixé au village de MALLAKAM. Sur les conseils de mon ami Pirakalathan, je n'y suis pas allé.

Peu de temps plus tard, deux hommes en civil qui avaient l'air d'étudiants, m'ont attendu devant le local du parti. Ils m'ont demandé pourquoi je n'étais pas venu au rendez-vous qu'ils m'avaient donné. J'ai prétexté un mal de tête et ils m'ont alors redonné un nouveau rendez-vous le jour même, en m'ordonnant de venir cette fois-ci. J'ai obtempéré et ils sont partis. Je n'y suis pas allé, j'avais trop peur des représailles. Désormais, j'avais peur de circuler pour me rendre sur le lieu de mon stage et j'ai donc dû arrêter ma formation (ce qui faisait deux ans d'études au lieu de quatre).

Je vivais toujours dans le local du EDPS dont je ne sortais quasiment jamais. J'aidais le parti dans la rédaction de son journal.

Le 15 décembre 2001, il devait y avoir les élections du Parlement du Sri-Lanka. Durant la campagne électorale, des manifestations et des meetings ont été organisés par le parti EDPS. J'ai participé à ces actions dans différentes villes dont la dernière, MANTHILLAI. Nous avons pris un bus pour nous y rendre et sur le chemin du retour, ce bus a été l'objet de tirs. Nous ne savions pas qui étaient les auteurs des tirs mais il y a eu des morts et des blessés. Un de mes amis est mort là. D'autres bus du EDPS revenant d'autres villages ont subi des attentats semblables.

Mes parents étaient très inquiets et à mon retour de Manthillai, ils sont venus me voir au local. Ils m'ont appris qu'ils avaient reçu une lettre les informant du décès de mon frère qui avait eu lieu le 14 novembre 1999. Les Tigres avaient brûlé le corps. Ce sont les parents d'un autre jeune homme décédé qui les avaient prévenus, deux ans après son décès, le temps de trouver notre adresse. Ma mère m'a dit qu'elle avait déjà perdu deux fils et qu'elle ne voulait pas me perdre aussi. Elle m'a dit que si je restais au bureau du EDPS, le même sort m'attendait. Elle voulait que je parte. Elle a parlé au Directeur du Parti pour lui demander son aide pour organiser ma fuite.

Le 5 novembre 2001, je suis allé clandestinement dans le bateau d'un pêcheur jusqu'à NEDUNTHINU, une ville sous le contrôle du EDPS. Le Parti a payé et organisé le voyage. Le même jour, je me suis rendu à MALATHIVU où je suis resté 20 jours. Puis, toujours en barque, j'ai rejoint la ville de RAMESHWARAM, en Inde.

J'ai été accueilli par un cousin de mon père, Nalaija THARMAKULASINGAM, qui résidait dans le quartier tamoul de THIRISY, au n°22, Pourthullovil road Kilaiur.

Mais en Inde, je n'étais pas en sécurité car la police effectue de nombreux contrôles d'identité et il est impossible d'y vivre sans documents. En particulier, les jeunes hommes en situation irrégulière sont suspectés d'appartenir au LTTE et risquent d'être renvoyés immédiatement au Sri-Lanka. C'est pour cela que je n'avais pas d'autre choix que d'essayer de fuir en Europe.

Le cousin de mon père a contacté un passeur qui m'a demandé 5 photos et qui a fait établir un faux passeport indien. Une semaine plus tard, il a téléphoné pour dire qu'il venait me chercher pour me conduire à l'aéroport de MADRAS.

Le 30 mars 2002, j'ai pris l'avion pour l'Arabie Saoudite, puis pour MOSCOU, après deux escales je ne sais pas où. A Moscou, le passeur m'a repris le faux passeport indien et m'a demandé d'attendre une autre personne qui allait s'occuper de moi. Nous étions 4 dans la même situation. Un homme blanc est venu et nous a conduits dans un appartement où se trouvaient 10 personnes qui attendaient comme nous. Ce passeur venait de temps en temps nous apporter à manger. Nous sommes restés là ensemble 25 jours.

Puis, un passeur est venu le soir et il a emmené trois personnes et moi. Nous avons roulé en voiture jour et nuit durant plusieurs jours, puis nous avons été déposés dans une forêt où attendaient déjà une vingtaine de personnes. Nous avons alors marché à pied pendant une vingtaine de jours, nous reposant la journée et reprenant notre marche la nuit. Nous avons été laissés dans une sorte d'étable, puis j'ai fait partie d'un groupe de 5 personnes emmenées dans une voiture pour une étape de 5 jours. Nous avons à nouveau attendu dans un bâtiment durant environ deux semaines.

Puis nous avons été embarqués dans un camion où nous étions cachés dans le noir et où nous respirions difficilement. Au bout de deux jours et demi, je n'en pouvais plus, j'ai crié

au secours. Le chauffeur m'a alors déposé au bord de la route. Je ne savais pas où j'étais. J'ai arrêté une voiture et j'ai pu parler au chauffeur en anglais. Il a accepté de me conduire dans la ville la plus proche : c'était Strasbourg. J'ai cherché la gare et j'ai fini par trouver un compatriote qui m'a expliqué quelles démarches il fallait faire pour demander l'asile.

Je sollicite la reconnaissance du statut de réfugié en France parce que je ne peux plus vivre au Sri-Lanka où je crains à la fois par les Tigres qui me reprochent mon soutien au EDPS et par le gouvernement sri-lankais en raison de mes origines et de l'engagement de mon frère dans la LTTE. Je demande à être convoqué à l'Office pour apporter oralement toute précision à mon récit.

Certificat médical établi par Dr Hoibian des Hôpitaux Universitaires de Strasbourg (21.11.2002) - Extrait : *"Je soussigné certifie avoir examiné Monsieur RAJENDRAM ELANCHELVAN né le 29.08.76 et avoir constaté : 1 - cicatrice verticale à l'arrière du crâne de 4 cm de long ; 2 - une cicatrice oblique de 7 cm de long à la face externe de l'avant bras gauche ; 3 - une cicatrice de 2 x 3 cm à la face antéro externe de la cuisse gauche ; 4 - une cicatrice de 3 cm longitudinale sur le bord interne de la main droite. Elles seraient en rapport avec des violences, mauvais traitements et tortures subis entre le 31.08.98 et le 20.09.98 - Dr. M. HOIBIAN Praticien Hospitalier - Hôpitaux Universitaires de Strasbourg"*

Source: <http://www.reseau-terra.eu/article572.html>

Sample 2, F.G, Albanian Asylum seeker

“ Monsieur le Directeur de l’OFPRA,
Certains disent qu’il faut naître chanceux et d’autres qu’il faut mériter sa chance ; personnellement, je pense que le plus grand mal est de naître coupable sans rien faire pour cela. Je me dois de faire une rétrospective de ma vie en rappelant les années d’une tragédie familiale, laquelle m’a poussé à quitter ma patrie que nos ennemis politiques ont transformée en tombeau. Comme une panthère noire me suit toujours le souvenir de tristes événements.

[...] Tous nos biens ont été confisqués dès 1946. En 1955, le pouvoir a condamné mon père à 12 années de prison. Toute la famille a été déportée à [...], un endroit à 1 500 m d’altitude où nous étions privés d’études et d’aide médicale. Le but d’une telle condamnation était de nous causer la mort par les conditions insupportables de vie. En conséquence, mes deux frères H. et I., âgés respectivement de 4 et 6 ans sont morts. Après 6 ans de déportation, nous sommes rentrés chez nous. Notre maison était détruite, un isolement total nous attendait.

Les communistes, par l’intermédiaire de la Sigurimi¹³, m’ont posé comme condition la collaboration avec eux, chose impossible au vu de mon caractère. Au moment où nous croyions que la vie allait prendre une autre tournure, d’autres prisons se sont ouvertes.

À cette époque, la police a arrêté mon frère L. G. Il a été condamné à 12 ans de réclusion criminelle pour agitation et propagande contre le régime et tentative de fuite [...]. “

“ La bâtisse du pénitencier a été entourée de trois rangées de policiers et soldats, ils ont coupé l’eau et l’électricité et des hélicoptères ont été envoyés ainsi que des forces spéciales de la police. Ils se sont jetés comme des bêtes féroces sur les prisonniers éreintés. La prison s’est transformée en un champ ensanglanté de gladiateurs. Les forces spéciales de la police ont finalement maîtrisé la plus grande révolte de l’Europe de l’Est. Quatre personnes ont été fusillées [...], dont mon frère.

Nous avons appris la nouvelle de l’exécution pendant une réunion improvisée où j’ai été convoqué. Après l’annonce du malheur, le chef de police [...] demande s’il y a un membre de la famille du fusillé dans la salle. Complètement abasourdi je me lève.

“ Dites : vive le Parti ! “ m’a ordonné quelqu’un tandis que j’avais du mal à retenir mes larmes sous le regard d’une centaine de personnes. Quel frère au monde pouvait rester sans protester ! ? Peu après, le chef de police a donné l’ordre de me mettre les menottes sur place, afin de donner un exemple. J’ai été emmené au commissariat, où j’ai été torturé dans une pièce. Les policiers me demandaient d’avouer le caractère juste de la condamnation de mon frère. J’ai refusé. Ils m’ont retenu pendant 48 heures et avant de me relâcher m’ont dit : “ Si tu racontes ce qui s’est passé ici, tu vas finir comme ton frère ! “ Touché profondément par cette tragédie, j’ai été hospitalisé pendant 20 jours pour dépression. Mon père tombe également malade et meurt.

Le fossoyeur refusant de creuser la tombe de mon père, nous avons été obligés de la creuser nous-mêmes ; en ce qui concerne mon frère, mort à l’âge de 25 ans, nous ne savons toujours pas où se trouvent ses ossements. Cela s’est passé dans la région de V. Les années passaient pour moi avec l’anxiété que le même sort m’attendait. Malgré mon comportement “ correct “, je me savais en point de mire. Dans ma famille, nous comptons trois fusillés par le régime, deux (mes petits frères) morts au camp de déportation ; nous accumulons 54 ans de prison et 42 de déportation.

Le vent des changements en Europe de l’Est après la chute du mur de Berlin, a aussi soufflé sur l’Albanie. Dès l’instauration du pluralisme, j’ai créé les premières sections du parti démocratique. C’était une tâche colossale, tellement il était difficile de déraciner les idées qui avaient régné 47 ans durant. En mars [...], je suis élu chef de la section de [...] et, peu après, membre de la présidence du parti démocratique¹⁵ de V. J’aimais beaucoup la littérature et particulièrement Molière, Balzac, Maupassant, Hugo, et je désirais suivre des études supérieures en lettres [...]. “

“ Il s’agissait pour nous de réparation d’une injustice dans la mesure où pendant toute notre vie, nous avons été destinés à des emplois physiquement très durs, ce qui n’était pas conforme à nos qualités.

Notre section du parti démocratique comptait dans ses rangs une trentaine d’adhérents. Nous avons réussi avec difficulté à hisser ce nombre à 100 [...].

Nous sommes en 1996. Le “ cheval de Troie “ était déjà entré chez nous, les sociétés pyramidales. En février 1997, les révoltes ont commencé dans le sud du pays¹⁶. Les socialistes ont renversé par la violence le pouvoir en place ; ils ont mis le feu au pays

et ont distribué des armes partout. La présidence de notre parti s'est réunie pour remédier à la situation et doubler les vigiles dans les institutions encore intouchées. J'ai insisté avec force, en donnant des noms, sur le rôle que d'anciens agents de la Sigurimi avaient joué dans l'incendie de certaines institutions. En sortant de la réunion, j'entends des voix qui disaient : " F. doit être éliminé car c'est un os dur ". Je rentre chez moi à bicyclette. Il faisait noir. Dans une ruelle, je suis attaqué de derrière ; je suis frappé avec un objet dur et je perds connaissance. Une voiture occasionnelle m'a amené à l'hôpital. Le matin, un individu s'est présenté comme un ami, entre dans ma chambre et m'a dit : " F., tiens-toi tranquille, maintenant ce sont les armes qui parlent et nous pouvons t'effacer. " [...]

Les socialo-communistes ont remporté les élections¹⁷ de cette année sous la protection des kalachnikovs [...]. La pression communiste augmentait de façon systématique. Dès le début de leur installation au pouvoir, les socialistes ont entrepris le nettoyage des éléments indésirables. "

" Les policiers m'ont mis les menottes et m'ont frappé où ils pouvaient. "Comment oses-tu insulter notre parti et mentionner nos noms ?" Encore plus lourdes que les coups étaient leurs offenses que je ne puis oublier. N. B. a cogné ma tête contre le mur jusqu'à l'évanouissement. J'ai passé au commissariat 48 heures, dans la cellule n° 2, destinée spécialement à ce type de travail. Le chef du PD de V., entouré de mes amis, vient de façon démonstrative protester contre mon arrestation. Avant de me libérer, l'officier de garde observe : "Je crois qu'à présent tu es devenu sage, une fois dehors, réfléchis bien !" "

" Monsieur le Directeur de l'OFPRA,

Ma main tremble en écrivant l'histoire de toutes les tragédies vécues par ma famille [...].

Ayez la bonté et la patience, Monsieur le Directeur de l'OFPRA, de lire jusqu'au bout ce récit sur ma famille, que les communistes albanais cherchent à tout prix à effacer. Le 5 octobre [...], je marchais avec mon ami K. sur le trottoir. Une bicyclette me heurte violemment de derrière, je me tourne et je me retrouve en face de M. V., qui travaille au SHISH18. Les mots échangés ont pris un caractère violent. M. V. a sorti sa radio et juste après, un fourgon avec 8 policiers à l'intérieur a débarqué sur place. Ils

se sont jetés comme des sauvages sur moi et mon ami et nous nous sommes retrouvés au commissariat, tous deux dans la même pièce. “ J’ai remarqué que M. V. nous suivait, mais je n’ai pas pensé à cela “ — me dit K. Il est relâché peu de temps après tandis que je suis enfermé dans une cellule spéciale. Les policiers m’ont battu jusqu’au sang. Après mes tentatives de résistance, ils ont rempli la cellule d’eau en me laissant ainsi quelques heures. De terribles maux d’estomac qui me poussaient à crier ont amené le médecin à m’enlever de là et à me donner des calmants [...]. Malgré ces tortures, je ne renonce pas à mon militantisme [...].

La campagne pour les élections locales a démarré en juin 2000. Le chef du PD de V. a distribué les tâches aux chefs de sections. Dans la zone sous ma responsabilité, mon travail consistait à un contact de tête-à-tête avec les électeurs. J’exposais la plateforme politique du parti démocratique tout en soulignant la corruption et la criminalité du parti au pouvoir. À cette époque, j’ai reçu anonymement beaucoup de menaces par téléphone. Je poursuivais mon chemin en participant aux rassemblements organisés sur la place principale de la ville. La campagne électorale a pris fin et nous attendions les élections [...]. La veille des élections du 1er octobre, nous étions chez nous en train de dîner, lorsqu’une décharge d’armes à feu s’est fait entendre tout près de chez nous. Les vitres ont volé en éclats. Les balles se sont enfoncées dans le mur en face. Notre vie a été sauvée grâce à l’emplacement que nous avions dans la pièce. Nous avons demeuré traumatisés toute la nuit, d’autant plus que la ligne téléphonique avait été coupée.

[...] Les scrutins ont commencé à 7 heures du matin. Les socialistes, comme d’habitude, essayaient de voter deux fois. Avec des mots durs, j’ai protesté contre cette attitude. Le chef de la commission [...], responsable du parti socialiste, m’a dit à l’oreille : “ Pense à ta famille plutôt qu’aux élections ! “ Par la suite, un membre du parti socialiste a cherché à introduire des bulletins déjà tamponnés. Je me suis révolté et ai demandé la suspension de la procédure. Le chef a refusé. J’ai rédigé le procès-verbal qui a été signé par tous les membres des partis de droite et je l’ai remis au chef de la commission. La tension est montée après quelques débats. J’ai été appelé à l’extérieur et isolé dans une pièce pendant 3 heures. Mes agresseurs ont augmenté la pression pour nous forcer, moi et mes camarades, de réintégrer la

commission. Ils exigeaient que je signe le procès-verbal rédigé par leurs soins. J'ai protesté avec force contre cette dérogation à la loi. L'agent du SHISH [...] me monta dans une fourgonnette qui a pris la direction du commissariat de police. Là, trois personnes conduites par [...], revolver à la main, sont venues me voir avec le procès-verbal. J'ai refusé de signer malgré les menaces de mort de [...]. Il m'a frappé derrière la tête avec la crosse de son pistolet en disant : " Ne rêve pas de victoire ! " Le lendemain matin, j'ai entendu le vacarme des salves et les cris d'exultation de la victoire socialiste. On m'a libéré le soir même en me rappelant ironiquement [...] l'obligation de me présenter au commissariat une fois par semaine.

Le soir du 13 décembre [...], après une grande manifestation démocratique [...], une voix me dit au téléphone : " F., pense à ta femme et à ta fille. Tu es jeune encore, pourquoi chercher à mourir prématurément ! " J'ai raccroché sans répondre. "

" Le 25 mars [...], en rentrant de chez moi, le soir, j'ai remarqué une situation particulière. Trois hommes, dont un détenait un revolver dégainé, menaçaient ma fille et mon épouse. Ils se sont ensuite tournés vers moi et, pointant le revolver sur ma tempe, m'ont ordonné de marcher devant. Je suis monté dans leur voiture et nous sommes allés au commissariat de police. J'y ai passé 24 heures de tortures. Il ne me restait qu'à partir. Nous avons quitté précipitamment Tirana et nous nous sommes réfugiés à D., chez un ami jusqu'à notre départ pour la France, le 11 mai [...].

J'ai choisi la France comme le pays le plus démocratique d'Europe. D'ailleurs, la famille de mon épouse est de nationalité française.

Monsieur le Directeur de l'OFPPRA, je me demande souvent : qu'avait fait mon grandpère pour être qualifié de koulak et d'ennemi, qu'avait fait mon oncle pour être tué ?

Parce qu'il était démocrate ! Qu'avait fait mon père pour être condamné à 12 ans de prison avec confiscation de tous ses biens ? !

Et mon frère [...] qu'a-t-il fait pour être fusillé en prison ? [...] Mes deux petits frères méritaient-ils de mourir en déportation avant même d'avoir le temps de grandir ? [...]

Avec tous ces malheurs arrivés à notre famille, notre vie étant synonyme de prison, assassinats et déportation (deux fusillés, 54 ans de prison, 42 ans de déportation).

Nous ne sommes que trois survivants ; peut-être le sommes-nous pour donner notre témoignage sur ces tristes vérités.

Dans l'espérance de trouver asile et compréhension en France je vous remercie pour l'attention que vous voudriez bien porter à ma requête.

Très respectueusement,

F. G. “

Source : <https://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/233>

Appendix B



OFFICE FRANÇAIS DE PROTECTION
DES RÉFUGIÉS ET APATRIDES
(OFPRA)
201, rue Carnot
94136 Fontenay-sous-bois
CEDEX

Demande d'asile

Les questions de ce formulaire sont posées dans le cadre des dispositions de la loi du 25 juillet 1952 modifiée. Les réponses sont couvertes par la confidentialité conformément à cette loi aux termes de laquelle l'OFPRA a reçu pour mission de statuer sur les demandes d'asile.

Ce formulaire doit être impérativement rempli en français et **signé**. Vous y joindrez **2 photos d'identité récentes**, tête nue sur fond clair, format 5 cm x 4 cm, **la photocopie de votre titre de séjour en cours de validité** (Autorisation Provisoire de Séjour, ...) et les originaux des documents en votre possession.

À défaut, votre demande ne pourra pas être enregistrée.

Emplacement réservé à l'OFPRA

Emplacement réservé à l'étiquette
code barre permettant d'identifier le dossier

	Nature de la décision	Date de la décision	Officier de Protection	Signature et cachet du chef de service
Demande arrivée le :				
Demande enregistrée le :				
Par :				

Comment remplir le formulaire ?

Vous devez le remplir **en français**. Remplissez toutes les rubriques qui vous concernent. (**voir la notice explicative à conserver.**)

Je soussigné(e), certifie sur l'honneur que les renseignements me concernant, contenus dans le présent questionnaire, sont exacts (toute fausse déclaration risque d'être assimilable à une fraude susceptible de sanctions) et je sollicite d'être placé(e) sous la protection de l'Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides.

Je donne mon accord à l'Office pour transcrire sur un fichier informatique les informations inscrites sur ce formulaire, conformément aux dispositions de l'article 31 de la loi 78-17 du 6 janvier 1978 et suis avisé(e), qu'en conformité avec la délibération n° 85-16 du 14 mai 1985 de la Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés (CNIL) ces mêmes renseignements peuvent être communiqués au Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, aux Préfectures concernées, aux administrations et organismes en charge des prestations sociales, et au représentant pour la France du Haut Commissaire des Nations Unies pour les Réfugiés (HCR).

En aucun cas ces informations ne seront transmises aux autorités de votre pays d'origine.

Je suis informé(e) de mon droit d'accès aux informations me concernant contenues dans le fichier et de mon droit de solliciter des corrections conformément aux dispositions des articles 34 à 36 de la loi 78-17 du 6 janvier 1978.

Je donne mon accord pour que les informations me concernant puissent être échangées entre l'Office et d'autres organismes chargés de la détermination de la qualité de réfugié, en application des normes européennes et internationales.

À

le

Signature

Encadré étiquette identité destiné aux préfectures :

1 Votre Identité

Nom de naissance :

Nom du conjoint :

Alias :

Prénom(s) :

Sexe : M F

Lieu de naissance :

Date de naissance : Pays de naissance :

Photographie
du
demandeur

2 Votre Pays de nationalité

Actuel :

Antérieur (le cas échéant) :

Autre pays de nationalité actuel ou à défaut, pays de résidence :

Ethnie d'origine ou citoyenneté (s'il y a lieu) :

3 Votre Adresse personnelle en France (ne pas oublier de préciser le cas échéant « chez M. X... ») :

IMPORTANT : Vous devez avertir l'OFPPRA, par écrit, de tous vos changements d'adresse et de numéro de téléphone éventuels.

Code postal : Téléphone :

4 Autorisation provisoire de séjour (APS) :

Département : N° APS :

Préfecture de délivrance :

Date de délivrance : Date d'expiration :

5 Documents d'identité ou d'état civil que vous joindrez obligatoirement à cette demande s'ils sont en votre possession (documents originaux) :

Je certifie sur l'honneur :

- que je suis en possession d'un passeport joint à cette demande
- que je ne suis pas en possession d'un passeport
- que je suis en possession d'un laissez-passer joint à cette demande
- que je ne suis pas en possession d'un laissez-passer
- que je suis en possession d'une carte d'identité jointe à cette demande
- que je ne suis pas en possession d'une carte d'identité
- autre(s) document(s) joint(s) à cette demande



6 Les membres de votre famille :

A – Vos parents

Nom de votre père : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Profession : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom de votre mère : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Profession : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

B – Vos Frères et Sœurs

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

7 Votre situation de famille :

Votre situation personnelle actuelle

Célibataire Marié(e) Concubin(e) Séparé(e) Divorcé(e) Veuf (ve) Pacsé(e)

S'il y a lieu, date du mariage : jour mois année Lieu : _____

Autorité qui a célébré le mariage : civile religieuse autre

En cas de divorce ou de séparation, date : jour mois année Lieu : _____

Autorité qui a prononcé le divorce : civile religieuse autre

En cas de décès du conjoint, date : jour mois année Lieu : _____

Votre Conjoint(e) Concubin(e)

Résident(e) : en France à l'étranger dans quel pays ? _____

Réfugié(e) : en France à l'étranger dans quel pays ? _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Date de naissance : jour mois année Lieu : _____

Pays de naissance : _____

Nationalité : _____

Adresse actuelle : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Vos enfants issus de votre union actuelle

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____
Prénom(s) : _____
Sexe (M/F) : _____
Date de naissance : _____ jour _____ mois _____ année
Lieu de naissance : _____
Lieu de séjour actuel : _____
N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____
Prénom(s) : _____
Sexe (M/F) : _____
Date de naissance : _____ jour _____ mois _____ année
Lieu de naissance : _____
Lieu de séjour actuel : _____
N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____
Prénom(s) : _____
Sexe (M/F) : _____
Date de naissance : _____ jour _____ mois _____ année
Lieu de naissance : _____
Lieu de séjour actuel : _____
N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____
Prénom(s) : _____
Sexe (M/F) : _____
Date de naissance : _____ jour _____ mois _____ année
Lieu de naissance : _____
Lieu de séjour actuel : _____
N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____



A

R

P

F

D

8 En cas d'unions antérieures et/ou polygamiques.**A – Nom et prénom(s) de votre second(e) conjoint(e) ou concubin(e) :** _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

Date et lieu de votre second mariage (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Date et lieu du divorce (s'il y a lieu) : _____

ou du décès de votre second(e) conjoint(e) ou concubin(e) : _____

Vos enfants issus de cette union

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

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B – Nom et prénom(s) de votre premier(e) conjoint(e) ou concubin(e) : _____

Date et lieu de votre premier mariage (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Date et lieu du divorce (s'il y a lieu) : _____

ou du décès de votre premier(e) conjoint(e) ou concubin(e) : _____

Vos enfants issus de cette union

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____

Prénom(s) : _____

Sexe (M/F) : _____

Date de naissance : _____
jour mois année

Lieu de naissance : _____

Lieu de séjour actuel : _____

N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

Nom : _____	Nom : _____
Prénom(s) : _____	Prénom(s) : _____
Sexe (M/F) : _____	Sexe (M/F) : _____
Date de naissance : _____ <small>jour mois année</small>	Date de naissance : _____ <small>jour mois année</small>
Lieu de naissance : _____	Lieu de naissance : _____
Lieu de séjour actuel : _____	Lieu de séjour actuel : _____
N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____	N° de dossier OFPRA (s'il y a lieu) : _____

9 Informations personnelles

Votre langue maternelle : _____
 Autre(s) langue(s) couramment parlée(s) : _____
 Votre religion : _____
 Votre niveau d'études : _____
 Votre (ou vos) profession(s) : _____
 Dernier emploi dans le pays d'origine : _____
 Votre lieu de résidence habituelle (village, ville, province) : _____
 Service militaire : oui non
 Dates et Lieu : _____

10 Sortie du pays de nationalité ou de résidence habituelle :

Date : _____
jour mois année
 Lieu : _____

A

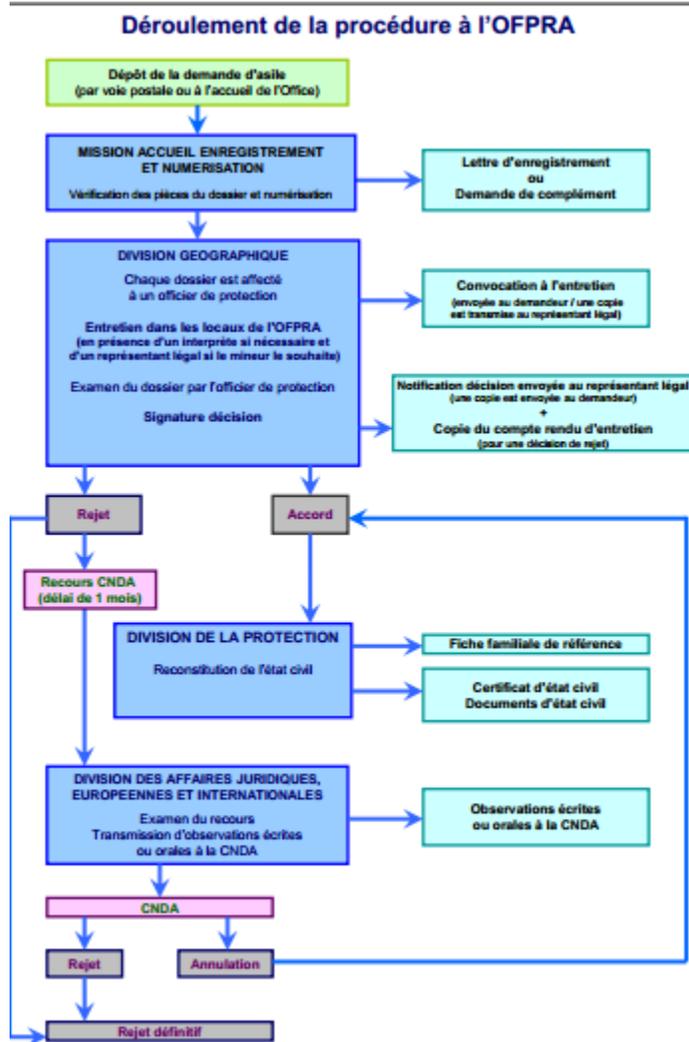
B

P

E

O

Appendix C



Source: https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/deroulement_de_la_procedure_0.pdf

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