Special Issue Reprint

Ethics and Literary Practice II

Refugees and Representation

Edited by
Michelle Boulous Walker and Adam Zachary Newton

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Cover image courtesy of Adam Zachary Newton and Michelle Boulous Walker

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About the Editors

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MDPI

Refugees and Representation: Introduction—The Mimesis of Diaspora

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In keeping with the title we have chosen for this follow-up volume to the Special Issue "Ethics and Literary Practice I", we frame our introduction and summary of the essays collected here with a brief archaeology of modern literary realism at its conjoined genesis in classical Greece and the ancient Near East; such contextualization serves as a prescient backdrop for the varied focus, across a compilation of thirteen articles, on refugees and their representation.

Composed between 1942 and 1946 while the author was exiled in Istanbul, Erich Auerbach's magisterial work of hermeneutical philology, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, famously begins with a scar. In its opening line, Homer's Odysseus is denominated *polytropos*, "of many turns"—a figure for both his signature cunning and the character of his return journey to Ithaca with its decade's series of *parékbases* or deviations:

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ

πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν:

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of many turns, driven to wander

very greatly, after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy.

Befitting the epic hero now turned refugee, the *xenos* or vagrant stranger entreating hospitality, whom Auerbach invokes in the opening chapter to his book, Odysseus is portrayed in the same verse as *mála pollá plánghthê*, "forced to wander very greatly".[1] The etymology of this phrase's final word has been captured by Daniel Mendelsohn as, variously, "to turn aside or away from", "to ward off", "baffle or balk", and "to embarrass or trip up"—all vicissitudes familiar to history's myriad *dépaysées*, Auerbach himself included, as he was forced to abandon his position at the University of Marburg in 1935 due to anti-Jewish legislation once National Socialism seized power in Germany (Mendelsohn 2020, pp. 19ff and 41ff).

In contrasting (but also coordinating) Homeric and Biblical, *vordergründig* and *hintergründig* styles of mimetic narration,[2] Auerbach juxtaposes chapter 19 of the *Odyssey* and Genesis 22, the *akedah* or "binding" of Isaac, which begins with God's command to Abraham to take his son to the land of Moriah as an *olah* or "burnt offering", serving Auerbach as a paradigmatic instance of the Bible's purposeful opacity and recessed signification. As Abraham is "tried" during this episode (one of ten such ordeals, according to the rabbinic tradition), so hermeneutic engagement with this text is itself a matter of *Versuchung*, "trial" or "temptation", as readers answer the continual call, distinctive to this scripture, to interpret. Thus, Rashi, the 11th c. rabbinic commentator from Troyes will often remark, *Ein mikra ha-ze omer ela darsheni*, "this scriptural text says nothing other than 'interpret me'". In contrast to Odysseus's traumatic injury laid bare (Eurykleia's recognition of the cicatrix above his knee which prompts a detailed *parékbasis* about the boar-hunting incident years earlier with his grandfather Autolycus), the internalized experience of aborted sacrifice *itself* is the wound recorded in Genesis, a "memory scar", in Geoffrey Hartman's poignant phrase, that runs oblique to the Hegelian view of history's progressive flow whereby "wounds of the spirit leave no scars".[3]

Directly or implicitly, a scarring that accompanies woundedness of spirit—the persistence of trauma—is the pivoting point for the majority of the essays about "the refugee" collected here. Refracted through the two foci of chapter 19—present indigence (even if only a feint one) and recalled trauma, and ostensibly just to highlight certain stylistic features of Homeric narrative—Odysseus' story refracts not only the depredations visited upon Auerbach's contemporary European culture but also his own odyssey of professional crisis and loss. Similarly, Auerbach's analysis of the story drawn from the Hebrew Bible confines itself to the sole fragment from Genesis not only because its figurality for New Testament revision made it "one of several Biblical scenes forbidden across schoolrooms in Germany",[4] but also because it provided the *locus classicus* for medieval and later penitential prayer and poetry in times of persecution. The *akedah* thus serves as Auerbach's own coded "nod to Jewish martyrdom"[5] in immediate view of the Nazi persecution of European Jewry from forced exile in Istanbul.

There is, however, another more archetypical moment of leave-taking in the Abrahamic story-arc, less relevant for Auerbach's immediate critical purposes, less in dialogue with the historical realities of a twentieth-century world at war, but more salient for, and in closer parallel with, Odysseus' own fugitivity: the matter of refugees and their mimetic representation. This would be *Mimesis* in its guise as a coded meditation on exile, *Auffassung und Darstellung* (perception and representation) of the elsewhere and of the outside. The first of Abraham's trials, just as Isaac's binding marks the last, is—perhaps needless to say—but one of numerous instances of forced migration/alienation from Genesis through Chronicles.[6] In the twelfth chapter of Genesis, the patriarch is commanded (just as in Genesis 22), לֶךְ-לְךָ, *lekh lekha*, to "go forth (for, to, beyond) yourself".[7] Here, however, the departure is absolute, world-abolishing: "go from your land and from your kindred and from your father's household to the land I will show you"—a string of multiple abandonments, each one its own excision from a "you", together a compound of relinquishment.

Nachmanides (an 11th c. exegete) interprets the indeterminacy of God's directive as a warrant for Abraham's cumulative wandering before any divine promise is fulfilled in the form of a promised land: in Avivah Zornberg's words, "an Abraham who is set on a course of total displacement, a series of encounters with *mekomot*, geocultural environments to be entered, known, and left" (Zornberg 1995, p. 75). Indeed, after Abraham's journey there, the land that God shows him becomes a setting for famine, and he is forced to migrate once more. As Emmanuel Levinas differentiates the two disparate figures, where Odysseus (Ulysses) figures the movement of return, "who through all his peregrinations is only on the way to his native island", Abraham models a move permanently outside and away, "un movement sans retour"—from self to altered self, or from self to other.[8]

Genesis 20:13 has Abraham say, "And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house", putting him in close parallel with Odysseus.[9] If Odysseus can exploit the *polytropos* quality of both his mind and of his wanderings, Abraham's wholesale assumption of a nomadic, fugitive identity requires compensatory divine blessing—threefold, as spelled out by the very next verse; because, as Rashi comments, traveling-as-travail unsettles family life, reduces one's wealth together with one's renown, hence God's promise of children, wealth, and a great name. From a generic perspective, Abraham's wanderings might be seen as in no way singular, as noted by the novelist Marilynne Robinson: "To an observer his life might look like the life of any pastoralist, this stranger drifting through the countryside, looking for grazing for his herds" (Robinson 2024).[10] But it becomes clear that hegira—his "going for himself"—whether as full-on leave-taking towards an unknown destination (Gen. 12) or towards impending but aborted tragedy (Gen. 22)—becomes a defining trait for him as both individual and "father of many nations".

Unlike Odysseus, the fugitive husband and father (at least until he reaches Ithaca), Abraham's departure, with its multiple forfeitures, is one of accompaniment, joined as he is by wife, nephew Lot, and all the souls he "made" (acquired, converted) in Haran. Like Noah and his entire household ten generations before, or Jacob and the sixty-six relations bound for Egypt two generations later, this is a whole family that migrates, the

Western tradition's first climate refugees. Abraham's wife, we learn in 11:30, is infertile: עֲקָרָה: אֵין לָהּ וָלְדוּתְּהִי שָׂרַי *vatehi Sarai akarah ein lah valad*, "But Sarai was barren; she had no child". Moreover, the biological condition of *akarut*—of fruitlessness and sterility—is also the condition that prompts the couple's departure in the first place (the Hebrew verb stem also signifies forced displacement or extraction): they uproot themselves from what has become futile or no longer nurturing, their ongoing exile a paradoxical movement towards rejuvenation and belonging, as their migration forces them to "act out all the meanings of deracination, of disconnection, from a succession of pasts" (Zornberg 1995, p. 77). Abraham's wanderings describe the condition of *tiltul*, of moving around haphazardly, distractedly,[11] part of a whole complex of disturbances, says Zornberg (*akarut* (uprooting), *keri'a* (tearing), *tiltul* (distractedness), and *teruf* (alienated selfhood)), which underpin and pervade the refugee experience.

Placed in conjunction with his "wandering greatly" (turning away from, being thwarted and tripped up) which rehearses Odysseus's nomadic saga, along with the trauma, scarring, and recollected wounding which identify him in his guise as vagrant alien (that is to say, paired, on Auerbach's model yet even more closely, with a Homeric counterpart), Abraham's exilic moment figures for us the question of the foreign refugee in foundational texts from the eighth century BCE as both mimetically inaugural and central.[12] We have harkened back to their conjunction here, as Auerbach paired them orthogonally at midcentury, because they link the representation of reality in the Western literary tradition in two of its earliest moments of portrayal to historical nomadic experience—in troubled flight from any one of numerous places, be it Eritrea or the Central African Republic or Somalia or South Sudan or Afghanistan or Central America or Myanmar or Ukraine or Venezuela or Yemen or Syria or Gaza (all in the here-and-now of 2024), toward uncertain arrival.

According to Galili Shahar, as Auerbach's methodology of selecting literary extracts signifies "fragment" or "cut" itself as the sign of crisis of loss, so "the scar is the signature of *Mimesis*. It is the sign of German Jewish writing that was charged with an experience of pain, crisis, and exile–Europe, 1942" (Shahar 2011, pp. 616–17). *Hier ist die Narbe*, Auerbach avers, "perceptible to the senses"(Auerbach 2003)[13]. So, in turn, we might take license to amplify that dialectics of representation, the tension between allegory and history—as Auerbach's personal mid-century travails signpost for us—to the uprooting and altered selfhood that represent universal, indeed immediately recognizable, hallmarks of migrancy.[14] *Here, right now* is the wound, "here is the scar". It is more than fitting, then, for our contemporary purposes, too, that along with the Greek loanword in the title itself, the first "foreign" word we encounter in *Mimesis* is the Hebrew הִנֵּנִי *hinneni*. It means "here I am" or "behold me here" or even, with a slight vocalic alteration, "I am here to. . .", "hereby, I"—a figure for our positionality as witnesses, at the margins, of an ethics of reading.

Each of the following essays, programmatically or by implication, picks up from this common point of departure, whether through reflections on seventeenth-century devotional art in the context of contemporary tragedy, the politics of translating a memoir by an imprisoned Kurdish-Iranian journalist/asylee, or the "slow reading" of literary representation in selected migration narratives. The second of two Special Issues devoted to the problematics of ethics and literary practice, "Refugees and Representation" makes an especially exigent case for their linkage by directing our critical gaze to one of the prototypical and truly planetary problems of our day.[15] Alongside, and in often concert with, the parallel ecological crisis of climate change (see, for example, Lysaker 2023), the vagaries of having to seek refuge—forced migrancy, travail, and homelessness—render mimesis a complex welter of both ethical and political choices for author-creators and their several kinds of audience alike.

Article Précis

1. In "Refugees and Representation: An Impossible Necessity", Mieke Bal stages what she refers to as a fictional encounter between the work of Indian artist Nalini Malani and the novel *No Friend But the Mountains* (2018) by the Kurdish-Iranian writer Behrouz Boochani.

The encounter Bal establishes explores what arguably lies at the heart of this Special Issue, the paradoxical task of "representing what cannot but must be (re-)presented", i.e., the paradox of representing trauma. Bal's desire to enable these works to speak to one another focuses on trauma in all its complexity, allowing her to distinguish constructively between instances of violence, trauma, and empathy. Alongside this, she explores the power of figuration, as an alternative to representation narrowly defined, in an attempt to say the unsayable in and through color. Here, Malani and Boochani momentarily meet: Malani, for whom in exile color is the primary tool, and Boochani, caught between a paralyzing loneliness and an inhumane crowdedness, whose words retreat to color (blue and gray) when representation and narrative fail. From this, Bal explores the "unfathomable distress" of the suffering of others, reminding us of the very worldly nature of trauma and the very different attitudes we can adopt to respond to it.

2. Francesco Zucconi's "Regarding the Image of the Pain of Others: Caravaggio, Sontag, Leogrande" examines the recontextualization of two of Caravaggio's most famous paintings at humanitarian events convened to draw attention to the European "migrant crisis", the most infamous being the shipwreck of 3 October 2013 when at least three hundred and sixty-eight migrants lost their lives off the Isola dei Conigli. Drawing severally from a journal article by the Nigerian-American writer and photographer Teju Cole about the peregrinations of Caravaggio's own life; Susan Sontag's famous essay about the politics of looking; and *La frontiera* (2015) by Alessandro Leogrande, an investigation of the historical and political implications of migration and "the ways in which the life of those who are forced or wish to move is represented and considered", the article puts witnessing in the dock in regard to both pictorial art and humanitarian visual culture. The (self)-critical process of "witnessing is understood here as a continuous questioning of one's own position, and of the images or stories that are produced from it. . .that makes it possible to continue to denounce marginalization and suffering without becoming the accomplice of those who produce and reproduce it".

3. "The Slow Refugee: Transit as Stasis, Narrative Ethics, and Level Telling Fields" by Roy Sommer argues that the slow humanities (a cross-disciplinary challenge to an uncritical culture of speed) can contribute in helpful ways to exploring the tendency of migration theories to focus almost exclusively on movement (where transit is rethought as "a form of involuntary stasis or stagnation"). In this article, he adopts a methodology of slow reading (a notion of reading as a form of attentive listening) to reread and reconsider the study of migration narratives and migration fiction. Sommer reads Dave Eggers's *What is the What* (2008) alongside Afghan activist and writer Parwana Amiri's work *My Pen Won't Break But Borders Will: Letter to the World from Moira* (2020) to investigate how collaborative storytelling helps to restore agency and authority in order to move beyond the "exemplary, documentary, and ambassadorial functions of vicarious storytelling". In so doing, he challenges storytelling that speaks on behalf of, rather than with, others. The slow refugee that emerges from this rereading thus provokes new ways of thinking about forced migration (including both movement and stasis), and the acts of narrative solidarity that can accompany it.

4. In "On Representing Extreme Experiences in Writing and Translation", Omid Tofighian (philosopher/translator) engages in conversation with Erlend Wichne (translation studies scholar, University of Agder, Norway) to explore Tofighian's translation into English of Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (2018). The session is important for many reasons, including for its focus on writing, translation, collaboration, and publishing through the lens of writing as a form of political resistance. Here, the refugee experience is mediated through Manus Prison (a neo-colonial Australian experiment of "illegal imprisonment. . .conducted by a liberal democracy") understood as a "site of knowledge production", and this experience is ultimately represented through complex "forms of shared knowledge produced between author and translator". What emerges is an account of the shared and collaborative philosophical effort required to bring the work into being. Questions of the responsibility of translating the writing of others, the

conditions that make translation possible, and of translation as a form of political activism structure these excerpts from the original exchange.

5. In "Writing: The Question as Revolt in Kristeva and Boochani", Michelle Boulous Walker figures writing as a form of radical questioning with the potential to challenge authority, making possible both creative and critical thought in a time when the radical act of questioning, of putting a state or a regime or an ideology into question, is arguably under threat. By coupling writing with both questioning and revolt, the author is able to link two very different projects: Julia Kristeva's exploration of the European tradition of revolt alongside Behrouz Boochani's literary revolt against his incarceration in the refugee detention center of Manus Prison. Rereading and borrowing from Sartre's oeuvre, Kristeva claims that we can think of European culture as a culture of questioning and of revolt, which, this essay argues, has implications for how we think of the kind of revolt Boochani's writing achieves. Boochani's revolt thus expresses a powerful contemporary response to the dark legacy of European culture, positioning the intimacy of the suffering body as a locus of what ultimately emerges as a protest and resistance directed externally to an unjust world in which he is illegitimately detained. In sum, reading Kristeva with Boochani gestures toward the legacy of European colonialism and the limits this places on Europe's framing of what it means to question and to oppose.

6. His second essay in our volume, "Translation in Digital Times: Omid Tofighian on Translating the Manus Prison Narratives", showcases the author in conversation with Anna Poletti and Onno Kosters (both from Utrecht University, the Netherlands). The focus here is on the nature of Tofighian's English translation of Boochani's unpublished Farsi original, as well as the Dutch and Kurdish translations of Tofighian's English translation, and the eventual publication of the Farsi original. The exchange explores the difficulty of translating across the diverse genres of poetry, myth, epic, folklore, philosophical rumination, psycho-analytic analysis, activist prose, political commentary, journalism, and observation, and the "anti-genre" label Tofighian ultimately adopts to make sense of Boochani's remarkable book. From here, anti-genre becomes the attitude of "horrific surrealism" (a mixture of horror and surrealism), the term Tofighian coins to chart the blurring between the realist horror and the psychological horror Boochani lives as a refugee ("illegal immigrant") in the Australian-run offshore immigration detention center.

7. "'In the First Place, We Don't Like to Be Called 'Refugees': Dilemmas of Representation and Transversal Politics in the Participatory Art Project 100% FOREIGN?" by Anne Ring Petersen highlights an art project consisting of 250 life stories of individuals who were granted asylum in Denmark between 1956 and 2019. As an experiment in visual culture as well as dialogic praxis, 100% FOREIGN? imagines "a collective portrait and multivo-cal narrative that inserts citizens of refugee backgrounds into the narrative of the nation, thereby expanding the idea of national identity and culture". The article's title quotes the first sentence of Hannah Arendt's 1943 essay "We, Refugees", setting the stage for the defining question of how to represent "the refugee" in the context of a postmigrant society, with an emphasis on the ethical problematics of "democratic participation, recognition, and belonging". As a theoretical scaffolding, the article puts Arendt's essay about the ethics of alterity in conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of speaking nearby and the feminist concept of transversal politics outlined in Marsha Meskimmon's *Transnational Feminisms* and elaborated further by Nira Yuval-Davis. In the author's concluding words about the singular opportunity afforded by this participatory art project in Northern Europe, "it gave those willing to listen some new answers to the question of what citizenship is, and what civic ethics from the perspective of the refugee can bring to a postmigrant society".

8. Azade Seyhan's "Perpetual Exile: Legacies of a Disrupted Century" foregrounds the transnational dimension of modern German literature by bringing two respective literary histories and literary genres of exile into dialogue: the *Exilliteratur* of Lion Feucht-wanger (one of several prominent German authors who immigrated to Southern California during the Second World War); the 1944 novel *Transit* by Anna Seghers, who escaped Nazi-controlled territory through wartime France and made a new exilic home in Mex-

ico City before returning to Germany; and the emerging literature of hyphenate German ("Bindestrich-Deutsche") writers, as exemplified in essays by the Iranian-German poet SAID. Certain transits in this cross-generational dialogue are fortuitous; thus, the author's choice to place SAID in conversation with Feuchtwanger is explained by the fact that they resided at different times in the same place—520 Paseo Miramar, Pacific Palisades—where their destinies crossed. In other respects, the essay's correlation of Seghers's *Transit* with Feuchtwanger and with fellow expatriates Thomas Mann and Hannah Arendt underscores the importance of language and translation in exilic conditions as mutually informing reference points. Although dictated by different circumstances and historical imperatives, the two genres of *Exilliteratur* authors and transnationalism alike exemplify a shared set of ethical implications and cautionary tales.

9. "Representation of Whom? Ancient Moments of Seeking Refuge and Protection" by Elena Isayev revisits the terrain provisionally outlined in our introduction: the mimetic art of Late Antiquity. Since "there is no 'mass' of refuge seekers, to whom a single set of rules could apply across time and space" in the Greco-Roman representational corpus, a more obvious political sense of "representation" comes to the fore in the attempt to reclaim or interpret this past. The question thus becomes not only "representation of whom" but also, on whose behalf or in whose name? Refugees and asylum seekers, as we understand these terms against a contemporary horizon, did not constitute a "distinct category" of person, thus complicating our own initial move of correlating Homeric and Biblical figures as generically such. The article's aim is not "to shape into existence an ancient refugee or asylum seeker experience. Rather, it is to highlight what may be lost by pressing a multiplicity of experiences within narratives of victimhood and the confines of such labels as *refugee*, *asylum seeker*, and even perhaps the *displaced*". Even if ancient cultures share with ours the wide-spread experiences of "exclusion, precarity and the threat of violence", the choice to reproduce familiar mythic figures and scenic constructions depicting such individualized conditions was "based on their capacity to display affinity with a particular sociocultural knowledge system and, potentially, political affiliations, whether that of Pan-Hellenism or Imperial Rome". The article concludes by stressing the relevance of ancient context for current concerns as "the need to critically address the damage of exceptionalizing the refugee, even when it is well meaning".

10. In "Exilic Roots and Paths of Marronage: Breaching Walls of Space and Memory in the Historical Poetics of Dénètem Touam Bona", Geoffroy de Laforcade examines the work of Afropean anthropologist, philosopher, and art curator Dénètem Touam Bona. Bona's *Fugitive: Where are you running?* focuses on the liminal, unarchived figure of the maroon (escaped slave) in the Northern and Southern Americas within a tradition of Caribbean historical poetics, e.g., Édouard Glissant and Michel Trouillot. For Touam Bona, marronage becomes "a mode of invention, subterfuge and utopian projection", a "perpetual art of dodging". "Fugue" and "refuge" serve as conceptual pivoting points, along with the metaphor of the liana, "a long-stemmed tropical vine that climbs and twines through dense forests, weaving relation in defiance of predation, to evoke colonized and displaced peoples' subterranean evasion of commodification. . .cultural erasure, and ecological annihilation". The article sketches a suggestive resemblance between marronage in Touam Bona's work and the fugitive practices of displaced people against the background of contemporary capitalism—an illustration of what the author calls "transgressive commonalities" that link contemporary experiences of fugue and refuge with the unique case of Haitian self-liberation.

11. Moritz Schramm's "Dancing with the Sniper: Rasha Abbas and the "Art of Survival' as an Aesthetic Strategy" considers the short stories of Syrian journalist and writer Rasha Abbas, which the article reads as emblems of empowerment, autonomy, and survivability. In light of the reflexive turn in migrant studies that aims to complicate migrant and non-migrant, native and foreign, past and present polarities; eschew the "cult of authenticity"; and, in short, "demigrantize" the field of migrant or refugee literature, Abbas's fiction explores "how to create space for marginalized voices and perspectives

while simultaneously avoiding reproducing traditional representations and ascribing the 'migrant' and 'refugee' labels to predefined positions in society [by] replacing them with novel and imaginative escape routes". As a number of her works have appeared in translation even before being published in Arabic, Abbas's work dramatizes the politics of heteroglossia, of moving between old and new languages, and thus establishing a fluid space within "a field of cosmopolitan literature that extends beyond binary distinctions". The article calls this space "Post-Otherness", which has found a particularly fruitful home in Berlin's *Postmigrantisches Theater* and the state-funded Maxim Gorki Theater in the center of the German capital, where several of Abbas's stories have been staged recently. In her work, the transition from refugee to citizen exchanges the logic of integration and assimilation for "the conflation of the distances and times. . . between the Other and the imagined community of non-migratory Europe".

12. Ellen Wendy Kaplan's "Refuge and Resistance: Theatre with Kurds and Yezidi Survivors of ISIS" examines theatrical efforts under the auspices of the Springs of Hope Foundation for Relief and Development in Iraq (SOHF). In particular, the essay focuses on two embryonic initiatives of applied theater—participatory, inclusive, and non-didactic— in Iraqi Kurdistan designed to revitalize arts and culture among the Yezidi and broader Iraqi Kurdish communities in the wake of the 2014 genocide by the Islamic State. With occasional reference to thinkers like Elaine Scarry, Hélène Cixous, and Emmanuel Levinas, and influenced by the work of Augusto Boal's Image and Forum Theaters, the author recounts her own own experience with a theater program launched in 2022 at SOHF, in addition to the *Me-T—The Middle East Theater Project* begun in 2020 at the University of Duhok. The essay rehearses some of the challenges and opportunities of theater as social practice in zones of conflict and contestation.

13. While not illustrative of ethics in concert with literary practice per se, "Together We Prepare a Feast, Each Person Stirring Up Memory" by Ed Stevens, Anna Khlusova, Sarah Fine, Ammar Azzouz, and Leonie Ansems de Vries treats representation more broadly understood as material culture against the background of cuisine and its communal preparation: food as the engine and focal point of social exchange. Through a series of interactive online cookery classes led by refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, in concert with researchers and artists, all under the aegis of the UK charity Migrateful, an exercise in collaborative storytelling was initiated by the authors, whose outcomes illuminate a unique conceptual amalgam of refugee representation, food, and belonging, co-creative storytelling, and virtual engagement. The results offer "a 'recipe' for what [the authors] hope to be a more meaningful and ethical model of engagement activity that builds on this learning".

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

1   Robert Garland' study of diasporic wandering in Grek antiquity (Garland 2014) supplies an entire taxonomy of displaced persons, e.g., the overseas settler, the deportee, the evacuee, the asylum-seeker, the fugitive, the economic migrant, and the itinerant. Relatedly, see Julia Kristeva (1991) for a more critical-psychoanalytically framed approach.

2   Just two of the book's structural dichotomies that capture, as Edward Said expresses it, "the paradox of a Prussian Jewish scholar in Turkish, Muslim exile handling (perhaps even juggling) charged, and in many ways irreconcilable, sets of antinomies that, though ordered more benignly than antagonism suggests, never lose their opposition to each other". (Auerbach 2003, p. xviii).

3   Cited and analyzed along with Auerbach, Primo Levi, and Cathy Caruth in (Goldwyn 2022, chap. 4).

4   (Krystal 2013, p. 86). See also Auerbach's 1938 essay, (Auerbach 1959).

5   (Krystal 2013), ibid.

6   Subsequent to Terach's journey to Haran from Ur-Kasdim; Abraham's sojourn from Ur to Canaan; Jacob's migration from Canaan to Haran; Joseph's family's descent from Canaan to Egypt; the Israelites' 38-year long desert wandering from Egypt back to Canaan; the ten tribes' migration from Northern Israel to Assyria: Tiglath Pilezer III (734 BCE), Shalmenser V and Sargon II (724 BCE), and Sargon II to Media/Persia (716 BCE); Nebuchanezzer's Babylonian exile (586 BCE) back to Iraq.

7   The tradition of Torah commentary has much to say about the internal vs. external nature of this odyssey, as reflected by the multivalent pronominal affix "*lekha*".

8   (Levinas 1986, pp. 345–59). See also, among other treatments of this binary and the question of "return" in Levinas' thought, Chapter 3 "The Ethics of Uprootedness: Emmanuel Levinas's Postwar Project", in (Hammerschlag 2010; Herzog 2006).

9   Zonrnberg notes the peculiarity of a plural verb, *hitu*, to express "caused me to wander", hinting at a plurality of places across the length of Abraham's journey to Canaan. She also cites Rashi on this verse, another closer approximation of Homer: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, brought me forth from my father's house to be a nomad, wandering from place to place".

10   Explicating more tendentiously than Zornberg (as she eschews any commentarial tradition in favor of reading the Biblical text as *sola scriptura)*, Robinson nevertheless adds another and especially salient point when she writes, "There were no doubt any number of families more or less like this one, wandering Arameans" (81), neatly linking Abraham's *lekh lekha* to the more generalized migrational narrative recounted in the Passover Haggadah, which Robinson further connects to the moral values of respect for alterity and an "interest in the outsider" (85).

11   A midrash on Gen. 12: 1 observes, "The first trial was *tiltul*, which is the hardest of all [ten of Abraham's]".

12   Auerbach's (and our) privileging of the Western Canon and the paradigms of hero and nomad is alleviated somewhat with attention to the figure of the "pilgrim" in chapter 5, "Greek Heroes, Jewish Nomads, and Hindu Pilgrims: Ulysses, Abraham and Uddhava at the Cross-Cultural-Roads" of (Ellis 2013, pp. 165–200).

13   *Mimesis*, 6.

14   Pakistan's threatened deportation of 1.7 million Afghan migrants and the internal displacement of 1.9 million citizens of Gaza (85 percent of the total population) in 2023/24 are only the most dramatic instances of forced exodus at the time of this Special Issue's final revisions (Spring 2023).

15   https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html (accessed on 29 February 2024); https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/aug/18/century-climate-crisis-migration-why-we-need-plan-great-upheaval (accessed on 29 February 2024).

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Article

Refugees and Representation: An Impossible Necessity

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Abstract: Staging a (fictional) encounter between two artworks, a work on paper by Indian artist Nalini Malani and the novel *No Friend but the Mountains* by Iranian-Kuridsh writer Behrouz Boochani, the text—an essay, rather than a traditional scholarly article—peruses the paradoxes of representing what cannot but must be (re-)presented. Issues such as the required modesty in the face of the suffering of others, the irrepresentability of trauma and intermediality are examined through the ongoing analysis of the two artworks.

Keywords: refugee-dom; expulsion; trauma; drawing; intermediality; unrepresentability

1. Tensions Leading to Concerns

The issues of refugees and representation have preoccupied me for decades, especially in view of the difficulty of combining them: the problem of the conjunction "and". This difficulty rests on other tough combinations and tensions, the primary one of which is time: the time of publishing. Ever since the social reality made it impossible to distinguish my academic work, which frequently focuses on historical texts and "old master" art, from the contemporary world, I began to bring the latter explicitly in contact with the former. Even though the social consequences of the artistic and formal aspects of artefacts have always been part of what I was examining, the temporality of historicity was more or less a background. However, when I selected more recent, even contemporary, topics, I became aware of the consequences of the durational process of publishing. Both books and journal articles take years to appear. When this finally happens, they are already "historical", addressing situations that most likely have changed drastically since the time of writing. This makes research on the contemporary impossible or at least very challenging, even if some particular issues remain urgent and actual. The long and the short durations are always in tension. Yet, historical artefacts, now often termed objects of "cultural heritage", continue to matter, for they remain with us and keep talking to us. Therefore, a drastic gearshift in relation to time does not seem a solution.[1]

And then there remains the tension between academic and non-academic concerns. This is not a problem for me, but for the reception of my work, it sometimes is. Then came the invitation to contribute to this Special Issue of *Humanities*. This is a journal title that foregrounds both aspects of that tension: the scholarly interest in cultural artefacts; in their social–historical framing, which it is the mission of "the humanities" in the academy to study; and the social need to involve myself in the contemporary, which requires an engagement with the "humanity" of other human beings. These two meanings of the title trigger my wish to integrate, in this case, the two terms of the title of the Special Issue, one social, one analytical. How can refugees and representation be brought together in reflection and analysis that will not betray one side of this duality in the journal's title? Asking this question already assumes tension, which, indeed, I feel is an important aspect of the combination. In other words, representation is a problem when it comes to the disempowered people who have had to leave their homes in order to survive, without having a clear and welcoming place to go. At the same time, "representation" is an ambiguous word. It means not only speaking about but also speaking for, as in political situations. This form of representation remains acutely necessary. This tension underlies

my reflections in this text. This is a problem that we cannot wish away. Representing—in artwork, documentation and literature—people and their situations imports both the lack of modesty and the distortions caused by the inevitable fictionality that is involved, for the makers of artwork and also of academic studies are bound to appeal to the imagination alongside the account of the social reality they seek to make visible for others. This produces tension as well as a fruitful domain of communication.

Five thoughts, or standpoints, opinions or convictions, summed up as *concerns*, all quite simple and even banal, which I have had on my mind for a long time, will guide my reflections in this essay in which these tensions are pervasively present; not as sections but as red threads that meander through it. Moreover, when I say "essay", I mean this quite literally. This is not a simple, traditional scholarly article, developing research and drawing conclusions *about* something, which, in addition to the tensions sketched above, I cannot write because I do not know enough and have no experience of life as a refugee, but it is an essay in the literal sense of an *attempt*: a noun, attempt, and a verb, attempting, which will recur frequently in this text, as its key. With a growing awareness of the tension between publication pace and the contemporary, I spent much time during the past two decades *attempting*, indeed, to better understand in the moment, in the *now*, the contemporary culture in which I live in several ways that challenged me to divert from, or expand, the classical academic discipline. This is difficult; in addition to the fact already mentioned that scholarly publications are always-already belated in relation to the people and events about whom and which they are written, it also produces tension between the single voice of the scholar undertaking the research and the plurality of the interlocutors—whom I decline to call "subjects" in the traditional, subordinating sense common in ethnography and sociology. This is why the essay, with its ongoing *attempting*, seems a more appropriate genre than the monologic polished scholarly analysis or overview. Therefore, to borrow and inflect Donna Haraway's title *Staying with the Trouble* (Haraway 2016), instead of overcoming or surpassing it to end with firm conclusions, I want to *stay with the attempt*. The essay as form, as Adorno famously phrased it (Adorno [1954–1958] 1991), precludes propositional conclusions, and so does the discrepancy between what I know and what other people experience. The essay, taken at its word, is therefore the only possible genre of writing that has the slimmest chance to at least soften the opposition between the impossibility and the necessity to write about—inevitably representing—refugees.[2]

I have tried other means as well. In addition to broadcast conversations and journalistic articles, the most different and difficult for an inveterate academic, one of these attempts I tried was video making—without formal training as a filmmaker. This just happened when, in my social environment, I witnessed an injustice against someone that I felt compelled to address, analyse and make known (Bal 2022, chp. 3). Since this was accomplished in the name of European law, I could not disentangle myself from what happened to my neighbour, an immigrant from an Arabic country who was trying to evade poverty and the lack of education that comes with it. This became the first of a series of documentaries and installations on issues of migration, identity and the need to escape. In what follows, I will briefly invoke some of the resulting films. I chose this genre, or medium, mainly because the feature of video- and filmmaking, which is the collectivity-, interactivity- and contact-based mode, is what has glued me to that ongoing attempt. In this respect, it is opposed to the monologic tendency in academic writing. This has brought me not only a precious new experience but, most importantly, into close contact, friendships and contemporaneity with people I would probably never have met otherwise and to whom the events presented in the films were happening then-and-there.

As always when I try something new, there is an issue of terminology here, and terminology matters. To use a generalizing term, I have called the people I met migrants. This seemed the more generalizable term for people who escaped a situation that did not let them develop, flourish, even survive. In common parlance, people tend to distinguish refugees, who are running for their lives, from economic migrants, who "simply" want to improve their economic situation. I find that distinction reasonable, yet somewhat

problematic, not to diminish the horror and fear of refugees but to acknowledge that no one would leave behind all that constitutes their life without having a good, life-saving reason to do so. In addition, such terms indicate others, leaving "us" out of sight. In my view, a better way to speak "about" as well as "with" the people I had the profound pleasure to get to know is the concept I have developed elsewhere of "migratory culture". That term avoids the "us"/"them" divide that so perniciously rules the world. Instead, "migratory culture" is the culture in which migration is a normal situation, in which everybody lives and participates and which is of all times (Bal 2015). Refugees are as much part of that culture as anyone else—that culture we all share. The primary starting point of these reflections is the simple but crucially important insight that the people we call "immigrants" or "newcomers" cannot but have serious reasons to uproot their lives, reasons that are much more profound and serious than the reasons inhabitants of the so-called "host countries" (think they) have to resist their arrival.

The concerns I cannot shed are all anchored in tensions. First, the news on television works *against* any (audio-visual) engagement with the fate and plight of people in hard times, such as refugees. It is too repetitive and each item is too short. Second, refugees live in long duration, without having the perspective of an end in sight. This enduringness, as well as for having to leave behind their entire lives and relations because where they are they are no longer safe, must be a traumatic experience. However, third, trauma cannot, indeed, must not, be represented. It *can*not for reasons of psychic foreclosure, which is the defining aspect of trauma; it *must* not because trying to do so would entail being trapped in voyeurism, the lack of modesty, but neither can it be ignored. My political view is obvious: refugees have the same "human rights" as everyone on the planet has or ought to have. This all converges in the impossibility of what is necessary, and that is my fifth concern, a fundamental contradiction. The life and experiences of refugees must, even if they cannot, become known to us, if we are to be of any help whatsoever to our fellow humans. The conjunction "and" in the theme of this Special Issue, "Refugees and Representation", confronts us as (essay) writers with the contradictory task of doing the necessary-impossible.

2. Trying, Failing and Thinking

I am beginning this writing during the Taliban take-over of Afghanistan; the attack on the airport of Kabul where people fearing for their lives, trying to become legitimate as refugees, were killed; the US revenge attacks; and images of desperate, anxious and deprived people in low-resolution, badly iPhone-filmed takes, repeated as soon as I open my television—and all this on an everyday basis, in the present. Just barely exiting the COVID-19 lockdown and knowing it will return, I keep having these five concerns whirling through my head. To sum these up succinctly, they are: the combinations and the resulting tensions the conjunction "and" entails. This includes the time of publishing and of history— that of refugee experience as well as that of cultural artifacts from the historical past; the academic reflection and the socio-political context; the question the journal's title, *Humanities*, raises; and the lack of modesty paired with the distortions that fiction creates. In all this the *now* of writing participates. Instead of shedding them and escaping into the rationality that supposedly guides intellectual work, I will be trying (essaying) to do something that I know can only fail: making two artworks speak with each other in connection to the five concerns mentioned, even though they could not be more different.

In spite of their stark differences, they have two things in common: both are contemporary and have been made during difficult circumstances, away from "home". One is anchored in refugee-reality, imprisonment, suffering and loneliness; the other, as the title of the ensemble of artwork of which it is apart puts it, in exile, dreams and longing. The former is a literary work, a novel of which the traumatic now of writing precludes the development of a narrative as we would expect in a novel. Instead, it has a strong autobiographical voice and is full of philosophical musings, written in an improbably difficult situation. The latter is a visual artwork, one or two of a series of 89 drawings

made on a kitchen table by an artist who was exiled by the 2020–2021 lockdown. It is not autobiographical, although, in a sense I will explain, it is (at least a little). Bringing these two works together can only fail, but failure is perhaps also a useful, instructive performance of the impossible. Thus, the failure softens that tension, which, I speculate, is ultimately the goal of this Special Issue.

Let me briefly introduce the two *persons–artists–voices–speakers* I will try to make speak to each other, although they have never met and probably do not know each other's work. The Kurdish-Iranian journalist Behrouz Boochani fled his country, where he was in danger of persecution, as journalists so frequently are. He planned to seek asylum in Australia, a country we tend to take as a model for democracy and freedom. Alas, instead of being welcomed as a refugee, as he had rightfully expected, or at least hoped, he was imprisoned without any legal formalities on Manus Island, in the middle of the ocean. There was a detention centre that was so scandalously illegal that it ended up being closed by the government of Papua New Guinea, normally an ally of the government that had opened and used it. For Boochani, as a refugee-turned-prisoner, the traumatic situation of not knowing if and when his plight would end lasted a full five years. As readers, we do not receive that end as the happy ending, although the revolt of the prisoners in the last chapter suggests it might be coming. The interlocutor I will stage in relation to him is the Indian visual artist Nalini Malani. She was less than a year old when the division of British India into India and Pakistan took place and her family was displaced to India. To her life-long experience as exiled was recently added the year-and-a-half-long impossibility of returning home, due to the COVID-19 lockdown, after she had installed an exhibition in Barcelona at the occasion of the Miró Prize she had been awarded. She reached Amsterdam on the last flight. Of course, I am not comparing the respective situations in which these artists made their artworks; no comparison is possible in this respect. I will only try to deploy some aspects of each work to shed light on the other. Instead of comparing, I will address the two works, each speaking in their own "voice", attempting to stage a potential (and of course, entirely fictional) dialogue that helps understand the "and" in the title of this Special Issue.[3]

Boochani wrote his gripping novel, if "writing" is even the appropriate verb and "novel" the right noun, in the shortest fragments. These he sent, one SMS message at a time, from his prison cell, hence, in fragments, after writing them on a hidden mobile phone. His title, *No Friend but the Mountains*, speaks to the utter loneliness in which he was caught. That loneliness is the core of the situation. This is paradoxical in itself, given that much of the text describes the inhumane crowdedness of this prison, where sounds and smells of the other hundreds of prisoners physically assault him constantly. Malani drew her works on paper in much more fortunate circumstances. Prevented from going home, she nevertheless worked in comfort and was not alone. Still, as she titled the series she made in one year, she was full of *Exile—Dreams—Longing* (Malani 2021). In a very different, much more bearable situation, her working circumstances also left much to be desired, with her usual studio and materials lacking, and she had no choice but to work on paper. "No choice" is a phrase that will recur in this essay, although here, it is not at all tragic. The phrase also characterizes the involuntary decision of refugees to leave their homes. Malani, especially, worked under a certain psychic duress, not only because of her exilic situation but also because she took upon her and addresses in her work not only her own life but also that of others, in past and present. And whereas her autobiographical voice, which is very characteristic and unmistakably hers, shines through in certain works from the series, not only in the words and images but in the mode of making itself, those others are constantly present, and the violence against them hurts her, too. This is why I cannot see it as non-autobiographical.[4]

What both artworks have in common is a strong sense of the intricate intertwinement of artmaking and thinking, performing and acting, "on" or "around" the disempowerment that both exile and refugeedom entail (please pardon the neologism I use). This serves to indicate a state, without specifying why and how, where and how the people we call

refugees are at any one time. In a dialogue with his translator, Boochani calls his SMS-based patchwork that ended up a novel something like a philosophical performance when he says in the essay that follows the novel in the publication I am citing that the book "is a playscript for a theatre performance that incorporates myth and folklore; religiosity and secularity; coloniality and militarism; torture and borders. [. . .] we act out our ruminations, we embody our thinking . . . argument is narrative . . . theory is drama". (p. 296)

This expression of the interdisciplinarity of the literary text as philosophical, performative and also "imaging", to use a verb that takes the visuality from the word imagination, forcefully foregrounds thinking. Moreover, this expression "argues" that these aspects are best seen as integrated. In this sense, his novel is also an essay, as are Malani's drawings. The "play" in the word "playscript" and the integrated elements that follow suggest that his novel also exceeds autobiography and that the imagination participates. This integrative nature, in all its aspects, is the primary common element between the two artworks—the ground that makes the dialogue between them possible and fruitful.[5]

Malani's drawings frequently also contain texts, quoting poems by others, statements by herself, such as that in the drawing I bring in here (Figure 1), strongly positioned-visually on the sheet in ways that make more of the words than just words: "You only leave home when HOME won't let you stay", with the multi-layered word EXODUS, in somewhat broken letters, at the bottom of the sheet. The two artworks are both essays in the sense of attempts, but we must not expect decisive answers. In spite of the difficulty of truly saying what is at stake in the lives of refugees, prisoners and exiles, the failure to manage doing so is their most crucial achievement. That may well be the most enriching thought—in the sense of Boochani's statement about his novel I just quoted—that they both create and propose. Both are complicating their "primary" medium, and thereby they counter the routine-produced indifference that the everyday presentation of the horrors on the news cannot avoid conveying. In this way, they both address my first concern: art against television news, or fast consumption of information resisted by intermedial, entangled, slow engagement. Engagement, as distinct from consumption, can only occur when it is slow.

With the qualifier "slow", I am alluding to an important book by one of the editors of this Special Issue, *Slow Philosophy* (Boulous Walker 2017). This Australian philosopher, Michelle Boulous Walker, explores and recommends essayistic reading as a strategy for slowing down reading. Slow reading is an activity that is under threat of disappearing due to internet culture, with zapping as its primary skill. The term "screenagers" for today's young people says it all. Rereading Boulous Walker's plea for essayistic reading as I am writing this essay, I can only share what I suppose she must have felt while slowly reading that SMS-based novel that came out of her country's policies. This resonates with my own deep shame when confronted with the injustice committed against my neighbour. For, this was done in my name, as a European citizen who is not a refugee but has the ethical duty to encounter refugees in the migratory culture in which we live, and for which we are all responsible. Slowness is of crucial importance if art in our culture, our migratory culture, is to remain a fertile source for thought. Slow against fast, unique against routine inducing indifference, I join Boulous Walker's plea, and with her, I believe this is the crucial change that our culture badly needs. We will see if it can also dissolve the tension between the necessary and impossible representation of refugeedom. That tension emerges primarily from the similar tension in the trauma that refugeedom produces.

But the tentative nature of the essay entails more. I keep returning to Adorno. The following passage characterizes the philosophical *tone*—a nuance that goes well with his use of "form" in the title:

> The essay allows for the consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character. (1991, p. 9)

Figure 1. Nalini Malani, *Exile—Dreams—Longing*, 2021, nr. 89.

Along with the series that comprehends the rejection of reductionism, "partial"—mind the ambiguity of that word!—and "fragmentary", in particular, seem to bring us closer to what an essay can be or do. Both words resist the idea of the total, of the encompassing whole and also, in its shadow, the totalitarianism that currently seems to rule in so many places of the world. In addition to the opposite of totality in the sense of wholeness, "partial" means several things. It also means subjective, as in acknowledging that what the essayist brings forward cannot pretend to be an objective, factual truth; passionate, in that the holder of the view developed in the essay cares about it—hence, is "partial" to it, as the productive ambiguities in English would have it—and rational, since partiality also encompasses the wish to persuade, which can only be accomplished through rational arguments. The latter meaning fits well with my attempt to ride the fine line between academic and non-academic work. As for "fragmentary", an idea that will return below in Boochani's novel, this accords well with the non-total(itarian). These two words, "partial" and "fragmentary", foreground even more strongly that nothing can be whole, complete,

objective. Boochani's SMS messages and Malani's eighty-nine artworks made on a daily basis, they could not be more "fragmentary", hence, less "whole".

In addition to being taxing and difficult, the word "essay" literally means trying, another fortunate ambiguity in English. Taking its toll on the peace of mind of the person trying, the latter is attempting to say something for which no ready-made (literary or artistic) genre exists as yet. Perhaps genre is not where we should look to understand the essay, then, but rather explore the word-name itself. The modesty, not only in the sense of the necessary discreteness and reticence but also of unpretentiousness, that the word "essay" includes is crucial. Trying, attempting, groping towards, fumbling, even floundering—that modesty itself acknowledges that nothing is perfect and also that no one does anything alone, that making something is not only enduring but also collective and social. This has been my attraction to video making, where even the illusion of such aloneness cannot hold. It also has a temporal consequence since it intimates the idea that "things", such as artworks or films, are never finished; they are, as the saying has it, "in progress", since "trying" is never over. They remain "in becoming", to speak in Deleuzian, a concept tersely explained by Archer (2021). It is about process, not product, but it is important to realize that "essay" also includes "thought". This is where the intellectual, to avoid the term academic, returns. One does not try something without, first, thinking about it. That thinking is necessary and cannot be performed alone. For this reason, I have myself experimented with this aspect of essaying in a particular film-cum-installation. One of my theoretical fictions or essay films, REASONABLE DOUBT: SCENES FROM TWO LIVES (2016), concerns precisely thought; the social, collective and performative aspects of the activity and the resulting ideas. The main character of that film is the philosopher known for his rationality, René Descartes—a reputation that my film attempts to complicate. According to the essayistic thrust of that film, thinking itself is tentative, and the philosopher demonstrates this, including in bouts of hysteria. Thinking, then, occurs in the essay mode. This makes the essay an important, indeed, crucial cultural phenomenon.[6]

3. Intermediality

Let us try, then, to make fragments of the two artworks interact, in the sense of speaking to each other. To open this conversation, I return to antiquity. When the Trojan hero Aeneas fled from the burning city of Troy, he carried his ageing father Anchises on his back. This much we know from the millennia-old legend in the epic traditions. The flight turns them into refugees, and the long history from today to classical antiquity and back demonstrates that the idea that migration and refugeedom are specific to our time is "preposterous", as I have called it, with an ambiguous qualifier that means both ludicrous and something else altogether. I came up with that word in a theory of historical time as reversible or "pre-posterous" (now with a hyphen), that is, two-way, a dialogue between times, or "inter-temporality" (Bal et al. 1999). This is one reason I began to consider Malani's series with its final image, which I read retrospectively. I immediately saw it as an allusion to the Aeneas–Anchises flight, so that the final image goes back to the oldest tradition. Although when I asked her, the artist said it referred to the Rohingya people chased out of Miramar in 2020, this seemed exactly right to me: to bind antiquity and our current time together. In Malani's last, but not concluding, image of her series of 89 drawings, the strong young man carries his father; or at least I assume he does, knowing the legend. Drawing and painting, or staining, together already produce a hint of intermediality. Both figures are drawn in light black or grey ink, coloured in terracotta, the colour of burnt earth, in Malani's typical watercolour-like staining technique. Terracotta is the predominant colour in the 89 drawings of *Exile—Dreams—Longing*, a choice which, in my interpretation, hints at the artist's commitment to respecting the earth, working with it, elaborating it, as the -cotta ending of the colour's name suggests.[7]

Here and there, the colouring exceeds the lines, as would happen with watercolour, and has different layers, and both figures exceed the frame made up from hand-drawn rectangles in terracotta-red lines, filled in on the sides with different colours, mainly

terracotta, yellow, blue and green, of different levels of opacity and semi-transparency. The middle part of the top half is left un-coloured, making space for the two superposed heads of the old man and the younger one, whom we take to be father and son. They do not fit the image neatly; a cropping is needed, which hints at the imperfection of the state of refugeedom as well as at the fundamental incompleteness of the essay. The father's head exceeds the frame on the top; the son's legs are cut off at the bottom. As an entrance into the issue of intermediality between the two artworks, it matters that, whereas Boochani's prose is full of imagery, Malani tends to integrate words in her visual works. She does this in a visually significant manner. At the level of the young man/Aeneas's breast, on the left side of the image, the words "you", "only" and "home" are written in printed letters but disposed somewhat irregularly, one word beneath the other. All three are bound by double oblique lines, clearly drawn with a ruler, in terracotta and grey-green that cross over the figures to the right side of the sheet. There, these lines come together to (literally-visually) point at the word "leave". That word stands on its own, on the other side of the words addressing the "you", either the second person or a generalized subject. A bit below the younger man, on top of Aeneas's waste but overruling the figure's substance, we are given access to the connection between the three words and the one that is key to the refugee status: "leave", as in leave behind, quit, abandon. Leaving is the act, what happens, but the isolation of that word on the right side of the sheet is telling. It visually embodies, figures, the separation that leaving entails. The three double lines forming a triangle and arrow foreground the word's central importance.

The connection between the left side towards which the figures walk and the ominous words "you", "only" and "home" there, on the one hand, and the single word "leave" on the right, only comes in once we have absorbed, slowly, these two sides of the words. This connection is the reason, the profound motivation, the lack of choice, which defines refugeedom: "When HOME won't", and on the next line, "let you stay", "leave", then, becomes an imperative: "Get out of here!" The separation figured in the isolation of the word "leave" resonates with the emphasis figured by the capital letters in "HOME". Home, the basis of your existence, kicks you out by means of violence: either poverty or persecution. These explanatory words are written over the bodily tools for leaving, the legs, on the level of the old man/Anchises's calves and the young man/Aeneas's thighs.

The figures, glued together, walk in the direction of the left, on their way to the West. Their departure from the East is motivated without explaining it in political terms. "Home won't let you stay" means that whatever the actual reason, you have "no choice". In the legend of the destruction of Troy, the situation is war, and the city is burning. Both Homer and Virgil tell the story in their famous epics. These two figures are refugees. There can be other reasons than the burning city, such as censorship, hunger, fraud, violence or anything else that causes the strong fear that, according to Boochani's childhood memories, "ran deep within our bones" (p. 264). The fear is what kicks you out, away from what you always assumed to be your safety ground. The lack of wholeness, of coherence, stays with him, as he writes in another visualizing passage: " . . . the images form into coherent islands, but they never lose that sense of fragmentation and dislocation." (p. 265)

The direction east–west is, on the one hand, a traditional (in the West) but hardly adequate view of people's movements when they flee. It connotes the division of the world in rich and poor, expressed in such bizarre numbers as "first" and "third" world (of "second" we hardly ever speak). Moreover, it matches both Aeneas's escape from burning Troy to Greece and Malani's own back-and-forth movement from India to Europe, in which she got stuck in 2020—and which sealed her solidarity with the Rohingya refugees. On the other hand, when we consider Boochani's itinerary—and this is another moment where the two works speak to each other, in the mode of discussion—going-fleeing from Iran to Indonesia to Australia is a reversal of this habitual assumption, thereby undermining that belief's semantic stability. This is one aspect of the shocking account that challenges so many of our assumptions about migrancy and refugeedom as well as about which countries are oppressive and which celebrate freedom and boast that beautiful value.

One example of an emphatic West–East movement is William Kentridge's 1999 animation *Shadow Procession*. There, an endless stream of shadow figures, cut-out profiles, some of them carrying household furniture on their backs, walking and walking, present an image of migration of people on the move, clearly refugees, from west to east. Kentridge is also a deeply politically engaged artist, and he has enough in common with Malani, in spite of enormous differences, to have compelled Andreas Huyssen, a brilliant German-American cultural critic, to write a book about both, centred on the shadow plays they both make to embody political memory (Huyssen 2013). Using the technique of a Brecht-derived puppet theatre, Kentridge's work shows one-directional, relentlessly eastward movement. Realistic representation is cast aside in favour of a mode of presentation that leaves to the viewer the option to flesh out in what mood to watch these relentlessly moving rows of displaced people, figures with their burdens and their stacks, including a miner dangling from the gallows, including workmen carrying entire neighbourhoods and cityscapes. This ambiguity of mood—"no choice" or, from an opposite perspective, freedom—accounts for, or rather is enhanced by, the visual and musical discourse of vaudeville that acoustically "colours" the seven-minutes long animation in black and white, hence having no colours of its own. This is a merry form of entertainment that hits the viewer with its sudden moments of a "cruel choreography of power relations".[8]

Boochani's SMS messages miraculously ended up as a novel—an award-winning novel, seen as a literary masterpiece, translated in many languages. Like Miguel de Cervantes, author of the world-famous novel *Don Quijote* from 1605 with a second part added in 1615, the author of *No Friend* was captured and imprisoned for five years. The Spanish author wrote the novel afterwards. In both cases, there is no motivation for the captivity, no legal ground for it and, for the captive, no sense of its ending. Cervantes's captivity was part of the then-common slave trade in the Mediterranean region, an early instance of our contemporary hyper-capitalism. Boochani's was part of the Australian protectionism of the country's borders. Both are unthinking, cruel and, for their victims, traumatizing actions. In other words, Australia's refusal to help refugees turned them into what the author persistently refers to as "prisoners". In both cases, the cruel and traumatizing treatment remains unmotivated. The temporality, or rather the lack of it, already signifies the state of trauma. The text begins with Boochani's flight from Indonesia, first in long truck rides and then on a ship that soon turns out to have a hole in it, is ultimately wrecked and ends up capsizing. The description of alternating between fear and hope is contagiously gripping. After a last-minute rescue, the country of freedom he has been longing to reach, however, captures him, like Cervantes's slave traders, without providing any reason. The moods described teeter from total fear and anxiety to jubilant joy and then back to the worst again. This subtly raises the underlying question of what the worst is: death or timeless imprisonment?[9]

As an opening hint to the intermediality of the novel as a whole, on page one a visual image literally colours the mood. The visuality is enhanced by the use of the present tense, of which W.J.T. Mitchell has brilliantly analysed the visual–political collaboration (Mitchell 2021): "we look up at the sky the colour of intense anxiety". The present-tense visualization continues on the second page: "The looming shadow of fear sharpens our instincts." When the first-person narrator is finally rescued, he describes what happens as "a series of distorted and broken images". (p. 42) Just as Malani deploys different media while staying in the genre of what she names "drawing", Boochani calls upon the cinematic to depict the scene, using the primary medium of language to do so:

> Just like a scene from a film consisting of a few frames, separated from one another but interconnected: hands waving; men on the brink of exhaustion; the dark of the ocean; the presence of the motorboat; the dark ocean; bodies pulled up into the boat, completely debilitated; and finally the sound of the motorboat moving away, and the wake it produces. (p. 42)

The audio-visual medium of cinema, itself a mixed or intermedial medium, is required to represent the scene the least bit adequately. This I see in the final mention of sound, but

the broken quality of the images barely shows what we can nevertheless see and hear—in fragmentation only, like the first recipient of Boochani's SMS messages. However, the same brokenness also imports temporality, which may well be the primary reason for this appeal to the cinema.

A film is not the news. This fragmented film contrasts with what German artist Monika Huber critiques as the systematic speed in her current project *Archive One Thirty*, pointing at the one-and-a-half minutes which the television news devoted to worldwide political protests between 2011 and 2021. While the news always tries to save time to make items fit into the tiny, pre-established timeslots, Boochani, like Huber in a different way, searches for means to convey endlessness. Huber's work consists of an archive of snapshots from television screens and press photographs that she has modified, mostly through over-painting them in ways that Malani would recognize as staining and Boulous Walker as slowing down. Huber has been doing this, intervening in "official" information, for a long time, and the result is very powerful, impacting the notion of information itself.[10]

The intermediality may be more eye-catching in Malani's image than in Boochani's novel because we *see* letters in her visual work, whereas the novel is "only" writing. However, the following passage demonstrates that intermediality can manifest itself within a single medium:

> The prison is besieged by fences encircling its outer rim. Fences cordon off the bathrooms, and through their wires are tied numerous small pieces of cloth. These pieces of cloth look like ribbon and are remnants from the people who were held here before us. The ribbons of cloth are withering away due to the intense sun; each one represents a memory, the ribbons are a series of recollections, all of them hark back to another lamentable time. (p. 111)

Already, the metaphor "besieged" turns the description of what is visible into a theory of what cannot be seen of imprisonment: the combination of hostility and surroundings. This makes the invisible visible. The triple repetition of that one descriptive element, the "pieces of cloth", insists on the visual presence of the experienced past. What follows is a theory of memory as it is attached to, and dependent on, materiality, the visuality of the pieces as well as the relationship of memory to the past, where the remembered happened, and the present, where one performs an "act of memory". In this short passage, Boochani brings visuality, literary rhetoric and thinking together.[11]

For an intermission, and to give a sense of the continuity in Malani's way of carrying the burden of her political commitment, I offer two other sheets of the collection (Figure 2). On Christmas Eve, 2020, Malani drew this diptych. The two images ended up as the cover of the beautiful 2021 book in which the 89 drawings are reproduced in actual size and on the same paper on which they were made. I introduce them here in their numbered order, although on the book cover the nr. 42 is on the front, the nr. 41 on the back. I see this reversal as a well-deserved pushing back of the tyrant and a bringing forward of childhood fear quoted above, the terror-stricken child. Indeed, the figure on nr. 42 reminds me of Boochani's expression.

On the image nr. 41, the figure of the same size looks more like a monster. Of course, the written words make it hard to see it otherwise. "All tyrannies rule through fraud and force" is a clear political statement, and the second image draws, or draws out, the consequences. Behind the statement of nr. 41 are some small figures, one of which is drawn in terracotta and looks like the young girl Malani frequently calls up in her worldwide autobiographical tenor, her version of herself and/as Alice. The thought bubble the girl releases to fly upwards like a gas-filled balloon cries out for the freedom that the monster is destroying through fraud and force. Her light-coloured shape cannot overrule the black-outlined monster, who is, in any case, looking the other way. The monster, looking away, is callously walking on a small, headless human figure. Underneath it, two hands, one drawn in red, one in black, point to it: the red one to the neck-without-head, the black one to the monster stepping on it.

Figure 2. Nalini Malani, *Exile—Dreams—Longing*, 2020, nrs. 41 and 42.

The second image holds a warning, a piece of advice: "When fraud fails, look out for massive force". The failure of fraud does not help. The drawing says this to the child who seems to be running away, as a prediction of refugeedom to come and motivated by the words in small letters: terror, treason, fear, torture, hunger and fear again. "Fear" is written twice, as the emotional consequence of the other nouns. "Force" is difficult to read, because it is written not in the black of the main words or the colours, red and blue, of the other nuances of states inflicted on the child and its people, but in the gold of the triumphant capitalism that is able to buy weapons to perform the other things mentioned. The arrows that pervade the image connote causality. A blue arrow-like shape, perhaps a knife or a missile, flies over the child-figure's body. *No Friend but the Mountains* almost seems to comment, in support, on this powerful but terrifying image, when we read:

> "A few people appeared who chanted in unison, 'Freedom! Freedom!' This encouraged the others to band with them and join in. However, it seemed from the very beginning that fear had seeped in". (p. 335)

Referencing nr. 89 once again, if I now seek to bring Malani's and Boochani's works in dialogue, I would say that the (audio) visual aspect in the writer's evocation resonates with the work with lines in the visual artwork. The lines are both straight (drawn with a ruler) and somewhat irregular, in size as well as in colouring, and a tiny bit wonky. This is not negligence ("sloppy") but, on the contrary, a carefully staged tension, through that so aptly named tool "ruler", between the attempt at order and the inevitable irregularity of hand-made work, which is the artist's signature and embodies her commitment. This in turn reverberates with the behaviour of Boochani's fellow prisoners, who are obedient to the rules but nevertheless never perfectly orderly. The powerful visualization of words in the drawing somewhat irregularly placed and the letters of the final word broken helps Malani's participant-viewers to an understanding that the traumatized Iranian writer cannot offer precisely because of the trauma; the traumatized cannot reach the violent event in their memories. Boochani needs Malani's help. The millennia-old war story does not need unpacking; all we need to see/read is that the refugees have "no choice" in the wake of that imperative or kick, figured in the isolation of the word "leave" that the disposition on the sheet has turned into an imperative. This is what matters today for the political decisions through which refugees may or may not obtain a humane existence, after having endured the life-threatening, breath-stopping and heart-breaking plight of their flight.

And conversely, the harrowing evocation of the night when life and death were near-exchangeable—notice the repetition of "dark" (a colour) and "ocean" (the limitlessness of

the space of danger) in the description—gives Malani's succinct, crystal-clear and generalizable explanation that flesh and blood substances are needed to make it concrete a visual support, even expressed in language. However, concrete does not mean anecdotal. Instead, it is an issue of reversal. The old man sitting on the shoulders of the younger man—or is he walking beside him, standing or hanging over the young man's shoulders?—amounts to a reversal of "ordinary", normative roles, for, in normal sociality, parents are supposed to take care of their children, not the other way around. This reversal *figures* the absurdity of the refugee situation, where, at least per Boochani, the "land of freedom" (p. 65) becomes the worst oppressor. This in turn figures the reversal of what humane duties would prescribe: to welcome and help those who had "no choice" so that their presence among "us" in migratory culture can work as an enrichment of that culture instead of a problem. Taking your aging parent on your shoulders is obvious, normal, in no-choice situations.[12]

How would our opinions be transformed if we began to see the incoming novelties as an enrichment indeed? Just think about it: how often are we not mesmerized by the originality that comes with films from far-away cultural settings, what is called "world music", or artworks that exhibit images, figurations of situations we would not have seen otherwise, and different habits of dress and hairdo. One example is a "migrating phenomenon" I have studied and made a film and installation about to visually grasp it better: the simple, tiny habit of eating sunflower seeds in public space. This habit has been imported by newcomers from countries where it is the normal way of sharing public space. How do the older residents see this imported habit? It results in dropping the shells on the sidewalk, which some might consider dirty but others a nice addition, visual and auditive, to the streets of a city like Berlin, formerly too neat. It entails the smell of the roasting, the cracking of the shells under the shoes of walkers; in short, all five senses are involved. Most importantly, it offers occasions for people from the resident culture to speak with the "newcomers" about the meaning of this habit. Hence, in all sorts of ways, in small phenomena such as this eating habit and in larger issues, the social fabric and what Chantal Mouffe (2005) calls "the political", meaning the domain where disagreement and discussion lead to better understanding instead of enmity, can be improved, be intensified and solicit discussion and changing one's opinions. The political is not the politics of parties and tyrants, but the domain in which we all participate. In this domain, I propose, we must stretch out a helping hand to those who not only had "no choice" but also lost their ability to remember, to be aware and to live in time. This is why trauma cannot be represented yet nonetheless must be addressed.[13]

4. Trauma and Representation, an Impossible Necessity

Indeed, the compulsion to make these two artworks speak to each other, instead of simply interpreting them separately, emerges from the predicament of trauma, which in my view is the inevitable consequence of the profound disturbances that develop "when HOME doesn't let you stay", in other words, when you have "no choice". First of all, to obtain some clarity about that starkly and darkly confused issue of unfathomable distress, I propose we distinguish carefully between three aspects of trauma: its cause, the situation or state that cause produces and the state of near-powerlessness of bystanders who yet wish and hope for a possibility to help people suffering from it. I have formulated this distinction succinctly as follows:

violence—an event (that happens)
trauma—a state (that results)
empathy—an attitude (that enables)

The subjects of these three facets are different: the violence is performed by an agent (the culprit, the perpetrator); the traumatised subject is its direct object, the victim; and the subject of empathy, for the artworks, their "second person", is the social interlocutor, who can potentially help them overcome it, at least partially. To avoid confusion between event and state and between perpetrator and victim, it is helpful to foreground the non-

evenemential, enduring situation of *captivity*. This is what produces the timelessness, hence my choice of Boochani's, as well as, earlier, of Cervantes's novels. This avoidance is also important with respect to the role and attitude of witnesses, which activating art can encourage.

As I have argued elsewhere (most recently in my 2022 book), the term "trauma" has been terribly over-used in the aftermath of discussions of cultural memory in the 1990s, when Holocaust survivors and witnesses started to disappear. That end of the possibility of consulting eye-witnesses made a renewed examination of the issues the Holocaust had generated most urgent. However, as often happens when an issue becomes widespread, from that moment on, the term began to float around too frequently and easily to remain useful as a concept for analysis and understanding. As a consequence, I would say, it has practically lost its meaning. (Bal 2022, chp. 6) The issue of refugeedom and the trauma I consider this state to entail induces a serious rethinking of trauma, for this flattening of the concept is unacceptable since it brings up a real and very grave issue of today's cultural moment, in which refugeedom is such a burning issue. We are surrounded by, we live among, traumatised people.

The un-representability of trauma, serious as it is—a seriousness that in my view sits at the heart of this Special Issue—might threaten to relegate it also to incurability. We cannot let this happen. This would be in accordance with Freud's view (more on this below), which is especially intolerable since it entails simply giving up on human beings. Therefore, I have been preoccupied with this in various video projects. Most recently, in my *DON QUIJOTE* project (2019), as well as in others, especially the earlier and co-made film and installation project *A LONG HISTORY OF MADNESS* (2012), the attempt has been to *present*, but not re-present trauma. We attempted to give it *figurations* that do not infringe on the injunction of modesty, do not enforce an understanding of those who can only survive through their efforts to forget and cannot even reach the memory of what happened and caused their trauma. However, the attempt was to bring it to the awareness of those social interlocutors who might be able to stretch out a helping hand instead of turning their backs on the traumatized, considered "mad" and therefore frightening. Don Quijote's alleged madness is legendary, but I speculated that he was not driven mad by his excessive reading, as the cliché reading of the novel has it, but by horrors in the real world, with the author's and the character's captivity at the heart. For this purpose, I have been thinking experimentally, in other words, attempting-essaying, how to deal with the contradictory aspects of the trauma-*and*-art encounter. The two artworks discussed here, in their dialogue, help bring this predicament closer not to a solution but to an acceptance and endorsement of the contradiction of impossibility and necessity, respecting and following up on both.[14]

For this, Malani's riveting and demanding image, which will hold the viewer's attention for quite a long time, is compelling. It is precisely in the irregularities, the broken letters, the somewhat left-leaning lines, the technique of layering water-colouring or staining instead of a perfect opacity of colours and the paint spilling over the lines of the drawings that the time-consuming effect it generates lies. Both artworks demand slow engagement, enduring commitment to what they present, and in dialogue, they exchange between an intertemporal historical recall (Malani) and an a-temporal, because of trauma, fragmentation (Boochani). In the traumatic situation, time itself breaks down. The allegedly still image that halts the rapid flight from the burning city for viewers stopped in their tracks by the slight irregularities, the gripping drawing lines and the colours that remain subdued, joins, in this temporal aspect, the harrowing descriptions, repetitive and elongated, and the unbearably cruel practice of, for example, the "queuing as torture" of hundreds of prisoners under the burning sun. (pp. 189–221) Together, they can contribute to overcoming, or rather attempting to overcome, the contradictory nature of binding refugees to representation. Together, also, they can call upon the social interlocutors who are indispensable, as witnesses and participants, for the improvement of the social fabric of migratory culture within which refugees must be welcomed, to give them a second chance to the life they are entitled to, as per human rights.

In the case of my video installation projects, it is the visitor who is the primary addressee of the exhibition, its interlocutor and the interlocutor of the fictional figures brought to life. These exhibitions aim to activate visitors to become such empathetic subjects. The display is meant to have performativity in this specific sense by sharing the different aspects Boochani mentions in the statement quoted above. The two artworks I discuss in this essay each have, of course, their own performativity, embedded in their respective media, situation and temporality. The potentially helpful interlocutor is the viewer, for Malani, and the reader, for Boochani. Both are hooked by the artworks to *stay with the fear*, to abduct Haraway's title once again, but are these functions truly distinct? This is the reason why I try to bring these works together, not in an impossible comparison but in the way their distinct media reach out, speak to each other, enriching both while respecting their differences. What I am trying to suggest here is that they can also be made to perform in interaction, creating the beginning of a larger cultural ground on which to stand. Perhaps the way the feet of the figure of the old man/Anchises in Malani's work appear to stand—not that they have anything to stand on—alludes, figuratively, to the need for such a ground. Between my interest in closely analysing artworks, the myopic detailing that I have often experienced as very productive, and my simultaneous wish to foreground migratory culture as a greater environment where the analysis spills over into society, my attempt to bring two artworks into dialogue is the first step, one that may, perhaps, become wider and wider, like the ripples of small waves in water after a stone has been thrown into it.[15]

A comparable small plot of ground can emerge from a dialogue which we have attempted to conduct before. When it comes to the contradictory relationship between the trauma that threatens in refugeedom and the subsequent need as well as impossibility to represent it, I have examined the predicament in relation to representation. Françoise Davoine's book *Mère Folle* from 1998 (Davoine [1998] 2014) was the central source and resource. Michelle Williams Gamaker and I made the video project based on that book (A LONG HISTORY OF MADNESS). In her book, this extraordinarily committed author, a psychoanalyst, deploys her special kind of "theoretical fiction" to argue with—not against— Freud, the inventor of the term "theoretical fiction". Freud proposed this term to justify the obvious fictionality of his *Totem and Taboo*. Davoine takes Freud to task, within his own invented genre, about the possibility to analytically treat psychotic patients, most significantly the traumatised. Freud considered this impossible because, he alleged, these patients cannot perform transference, which is indispensable for the psychoanalytic cure to work.

Reversing the burden of proof or the possibility of medical success, Davoine claims that psychosis, the madness resulting from trauma, is mainly inflicted by social agents or situations, the perpetrators of the violence. Therefore, society has the duty to help and cannot hide behind theoretical suppositions. If the method of psychoanalysis poses a problem for the treatment of traumatized people who need it so badly, then it is the method that must change, rather than locking people up in institutions or turning them into zombies by feeding them drugs. This fits well with my fourth and fifth background concerns. For this purpose, Davoine revised some tenets of the Freudian method, and with great success, both theoretically, and in the treatment of patients. In our video project we present these revisions. One revision matters most to me: instead of the analyst sitting behind the patient laying down, who cannot see the analyst, they sit opposite or next to each other.[16]

Cervantes had understood, as an "experience expert", the core aspects of trauma at a time that the term, the theory and the attempts to remedy it were not at all available. One of these aspects is *time*. Not only is time stopped in its tracks, halted and stretched out; it is also frequently interrupted, but such interruptions do not restore the everyday experience of time. Instead, they impose a dramatic re-enactment on the disempowered subject. Another aspect of trauma related to time is the *movement* of the invoked images of actions. Traumatised persons, because they cannot even consciously recall the trauma-

inducing violence, are, however, also locked up, alone within themselves. Boochani reverts to that experience several times. That loneliness makes the traumatized vulnerable to the assaults of the trauma, which they cannot master by the narrativity of memory. Instead, these assaults become a drama inflicted on them. In Boochani's novel, the most striking, empathy-inducing emotional realm is where loneliness and crowdedness go hand in hand. This is also where the senses participate: the sound of others, the smell of their sweat, the inevitability of touch due to lack of space and the seeing of hostile eyes converge in the hunger that drives the prisoners to that disgusting queuing, which the narrator considers "as torture".

This insight into trauma as a drama that imposes itself from the outside is the core of the work of French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, a colleague-intern of Freud's at the Paris Hospital La Salpétrière. Janet's work was neglected until the late nineteenth century in favour of his more famous fellow intern. In a very useful article, van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995) return a century later to Janet for a rethinking of trauma in the 1990s. They take issue with the standard conception of *repression* as the motor of the creation of the unconscious. Instead, they draw attention to the difficulty of incorporating trauma into narrative memory, so lucidly explained by van Alphen (1999), who therefore characterizes trauma as "failed experience". This makes repression impossible, for there is nothing to repress. Instead of the focus on repression, which was the crucial concept in the then-successful psychoanalytical theory of trauma, Janet, and in his wake Kolk and Hart, propose more attention for *dissociation*. That concept already hints at the multiplicity involved in what is termed schizophrenia. In narratological terms, repression entails ellipsis, the omission of important elements in the narrative. Dissociation, instead, doubles the strand of the narrative series of events by splitting them off into a side-line, called paralepsis. Repression interrupts the flow of narratives that shape memory, whereas dissociation splits off material that cannot be integrated into the main narrative. The over-spilling of colour in Malani's staining seems to hint at such doubling and the resulting multiplication.

Sparsely, Boochani explicitly mentions the concept of trauma a few times, but his novel mostly consists of representations of what can only produce trauma—the cause, not the state itself, if we follow my tripartite summary. The most terrifying one is the constant merging of absolute loneliness and suffocating crowdedness, both making life impossible. When he mentions the word, he is talking about the collective trauma of all those who made the horrific journey with him. He explains: "The collective trauma from the journey is in our veins—each of those boat odysseys founded a new imagined nation". (Boochani 2018, p. 124) He then proceeds to explain what the prison system does to rupture any attempt at community: "In this context, the prison's greatest achievement might be the manipulation of feelings of hatred between one another" (p. 125) But when he talks about himself, the word "trauma" does not occur. Instead, it is the multiplicity of personalities that is most striking, a schizophrenia figured by colours: "I feel that I am being taken over by multiple personalities: sometimes blue thoughts parade through my head, and sometimes grey thoughts. Other times my thoughts are colourblind". (p. 130)

These words do not constitute a representation. It is no coincidence that this trauma-tized author manages to express with such clarity what it is to be traumatized through the deployment of colours. Visuality plays a major part in writing, as, *per* Malani, vice versa. Hence the need to continue our efforts to understand what it means for a human being to be locked up in refugeedom, without resorting to representation, with its inherent problems. Figuring, or figuration, is a more adequate mode of saying the unsayable, and in the dialogue with Malani, colour is the primary tool.

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Notes

[1] Some issues do remain, often the unfortunate ones. On the ongoing issue of expulsion, for example, see (Sassen 2014). Needless to say, expulsion produces refugees, but changes easily pass unnoticed when we stay with the moment beyond the moment itself. This is the problem of contemporaneity. The use of the conjunction "and" in scholarship was discussed with great intelligence by Shoshana Felman long ago, apropos of literature "and" psychoanalysis, a critique of "and" what has often been a guideline for me (Felman 1977).

[2] I have written an essay to accompany both my response to Adorno's essay and my attempt to make an "essay film", at the invitation of the Łódź film school in Poland (Bal 2020). For the resulting essay film itself, see http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/its-about-time/.

[3] As a tool for analysis, the concept of "voice" is problematic in many ways, but neither can we dismiss it too easily. See Chp. 3 of my 2022 book. On asylum seeking and the discrepancy between the concept and the practice, see the powerful study by Ranjana Khanna (2009).

[4] I have written a book about Malani's famous "video shadow plays" (Bal 2016) and an article specifically about her painting techniques (Bal 2017), analyses I cannot reiterate here.

[5] I have explained this multi-tentacled integration and the value of the non-distinction between linguistic and visual, "true" and imaginary, all together, in a forthcoming book (2022).

[6] On this film, see http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/reasonable-doubt/ and the following pages. Descartes is beautifully played by Thomas Germaine. This film on René Descartes and Queen Kristina of Sweden premiered in the Muzeum Sztuki MOCAC in Kraków in the film and philosophy festival in 2016. Professor Roma Sendyka made this possible. Simultaneously, the Museum of Photography displayed the 5-screen installation on the same subject, curated by Roma Sendyka and Curatorial Collective, with an Open Access catalogue (in Polish). http://jagiellonian.academia.edu/KolektywKuratorski. A book on this project appeared later (in Polish).

[7] I insist on -cotta as an indication of elaboration, in allusion to anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's groundbreaking classic *The Raw and the Cooked* (Lévi-Strauss [1964] 1990). The predominance of colour is very prominent in the premier exhibition, curated by Benno Tempel in the Kunstmuseum in The Hague in 2021.

[8] Sitas (2001, p. 59). The backdrop of Johannesburg suburbs and the devastated landscape that surrounds them is extremely relevant for the artist's work. For more context of Johannesburg, see the city's illuminating "biography" by Mbembe (2004).

[9] On Cervantes's five years in slavery, see Garcés (2005), a brilliant and solidly documented biography. Chapters 39 to 41 of *Don Quijote* are devoted to "The Captive's Tale" and have an autobiographical ring to them. Boochani's debut novel won the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature in addition to the Non-Fiction category. He has also won the Special Award at the 2019 New South-Wales Premier's Literary Awards, Non-Fiction Book of the Year, Australian Book Industry Awards and the National Biography Prize. These rewards which were won in the same country of and following his captivity by the government have an ironic ring to them.

[10] Of the many publications on cinema, its fragmentation and its temporality, I recommend the brilliant article by Mary Ann Doane from 1996, as well as her book from 2002 for more in-depth elaboration and history (Doane 1996, 2002). Huber's project will result in a book publication in 2022.

[11] "Acts of memory" is the concept I have proposed in the introduction to the 1999 book cited under Alphen.

[12] I use the verb "figure" in the sense of Lyotard's "figural" and its connections with Freudian dream theory. Lyotard proposed the term "the figural" in 1971 (Lyotard [1971] 2020) to overcome the word–image opposition. For an excellent presentation of the concept, see Rodowick (2001), esp. chapter 1; and for a presentation of the concept's relevance for art history, Ionescu (2018).

[13] On this project, see http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/installations/glub-hearts/ and Cohen (2014) and Aydemir (2008) for analyses and commentaries.

[14] Don Quijote is a 16-channel video installation from 2019, all 16 elements of which can be watched at http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/installations/don-quijote-sad-countenances/. A Long History of Madness is a film from 2012, followed up by video installations, made with Michelle Williams Gamaker. See http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/a-long-history-of-madness/ for information and a trailer, and for exhibitions based on the project, see http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/exhibitions/ from "Saying It" to "Landscapes of Madness".

[15] On *performativity*, see (Austin [1962] 1975). Of the many discussions, I consider the most lucid one the overview by Jonathan Culler (2007). A ground-shifting recent text focusing on trauma is by van Alphen (2019). This and the following contain reduced and modified versions of the arguments in my 2022 book, Chapter Six.

[16] A brief overview of references on trauma in relation to representation: van Alphen's article (1999) provides a systematic explanation of trauma in relation to narrative, especially relevant for our understanding of Boochani's novel. Other important publications on *trauma*: in psychiatry, van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995); in cultural analysis, Cathy Caruth (1996); Alphen's critique of "postmemory" (van Alphen 2005) and Marianne Hirsch's reply (Hirsch 2008). Caruth (2015) published a book of interviews with trauma specialists, including Davoine. Susan Brison (2002) wrote impressively about the aftermath of trauma

as an analytical philosopher and a traumatised survivor of a horrific sexual assault. Her book, written in the first-person, is particularly relevant to Boochani's text.

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Article

Regarding the Image of the Pain of Others: Caravaggio, Sontag, Leogrande

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Abstract: Why were Caravaggio's *Sleeping Cupid* (1608) and *The Seven Works of Mercy* (1607) requested for display at a number of humanitarian public events? And why did Caravaggio's work inspire a series of photographic and journalistic reportages on contemporary migratory phenomena? This article surveys the main circumstances linking Caravaggio's pictorial corpus to the so-called European migrant crisis. After critical reflection on the social construction of the "humanitarian Caravaggio," the focus shifts onto a book that is at the same time a journalistic investigation of migratory phenomena, a literary work, and a theoretical reflection on the ways of looking: *La frontiera* (2015) by Alessandro Leogrande, which concludes with a reflection on the representation of suffering in Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (1600). By following a path that connects Caravaggio's painting, Susan Sontag's thought, and Leogrande's writing, what emerges is the critical and self-critical potentiality of a comparative approach to the arts and images.

Keywords: Caravaggio; quoting; displacing; witnessing; representation of suffering; humanitarian visual culture

1. Introduction

He has never been as contemporary as he is today. To describe the public events dedicated to his paintings over the last few years, an entire article would not suffice. But there is definitely something more than this: his old gaze pushes us to reflect on our contemporary ways of looking. I am referring to Michelangelo Merisi, better known as Caravaggio.

At the end of the last century, Bal (1999) had already developed a reflection on the quotation of Caravaggio's paintings in contemporary art and on the "preposterous," anachronistic approach implied in his masterpieces. Nowadays, Caravaggio's work seems to constitute a reference point not only for contemporary art, but also for curatorial, photographic, literary, and journalistic practices focusing on social and humanitarian issues. Caravaggio's painting is not only quoted; as I will explain in detail in the following pages, it is also physically or metaphorically transferred with the intention of paying homage to migrants and all those who live in dramatic circumstances.

Quoting and transferring Caravaggio has become an easy form of public engagement, yet the extraordinary strength of his paintings—the attention to bodies, gestures, forms of pathos—pushes us to think critically and deeply about the ways in which we still represent bodies, suffering, life, and death. Within this scenario, it is therefore necessary to be aware of the risks and potentialities involved in the juxtaposition of paintings from the history of Western art with the most haunting and compelling images of the present. Instead of deluding ourselves that bringing Caravaggio close to the most dramatic events of our time can solve anything, it is necessary to value the gesture of displacement and the critical potential that it opens up. As I have argued elsewhere, embracing the notion of "displacing" (Zucconi 2018) as a theoretical and methodological paradigm for the humanities may therefore help to investigate the persistence of visual configurations that have characterized Western visual culture and that still questionably frame the present on a global scale.

Reflection on the relationship between the forms of photo reportage and the repertoire of Christian iconography is certainly not new. In one of the best-known pages of *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag (2003, p. 80) noted that

> Photographer-witnesses may think it more correct morally to make the spectacular not spectacular. But the spectacular is very much part of the religious narratives by which suffering, throughout most of Western history, has been understood. To feel the pulse of Christian iconography in certain wartime or disaster-time photographs is not a sentimental projection.

I do not intend to venture into an exegesis of Sontag's text. It is enough to say that after Sontag, the representation of suffering has become the focus of attention of various scholars.[1] I would like to start from her suggestion that looking at the pain of others has to do with the forms of representation of Christian art. The main objective is therefore to return to this idea at the end of the article, where I will try to reconsider the ethical dilemma present right from the title of her acclaimed book.

This paper develops some of the issues already present in my above-mentioned study dedicated to the explicit and implicit presence of Caravaggio's painting in contemporary humanitarian visual culture. Each section opens a space for comparison of visual arts and literature, trying to highlight the relationship between the forms of representation inherited from the past and the dramatic contingencies of the present time that somehow demand to be witnessed through the images.

In the Section 2, I reconstruct some of the attempts that have recently occurred to physically transfer Caravaggio's painting within humanitarian initiatives, or at least to produce juxtapositions between his work and the topicality of the migratory phenomenon in Europe. The idea is to describe these attempts, restoring both the impetus that has characterized the social construction of a "humanitarian Caravaggio" and the limits of those projects that, however ambitious and committed in their intentions, end up concealing differences and asymmetries, contributing to strengthen the consensus around the status quo.

In the Sections 3 and 4, I reflect on the final pages of an important book that came out in Italy in 2015, but which has not yet been translated into English: *La frontiera*, by the late lamented Alessandro Leogrande. In particular, I analyze the way in which the writer approaches Caravaggio's painting at the conclusion of a book that reconstructs stories of the suffering and hope of those who have crossed and continue to cross the thresholds between the so-called Global South and the Global North. The aim is to highlight the critical and self-critical potential of anachronistic juxtaposition and the anatopistic displacement of images.

Obviously, the three authors mentioned in the subtitle occupy different positions in both scientific and cultural discourse and assume different functions in this paper: Caravaggio's painting is capable of arousing easy enthusiasm in contemporary public debate, but also of activating an investigation at the crossroads of different times and spaces; Sontag's essay is the starting point for any reflection on the image of people who are affected by a disaster, living under emergency conditions, or in structural poverty; Leogrande's book is an ideal object of analysis to conceive Western arts in a dialectical way, as well as to reflect on the very idea of "witnessing," whether visual or literary. Through a path that connects Caravaggio, Sontag, and Leogrande, what emerges is the *pars construens*, the potentiality of a comparative approach to the arts and images. This is an approach capable of pushing us to reflect critically and self-critically on the ways in which Western art, media, and communication still tend to imagine violence, suffering, and assistance.

2. A Humanitarian Caravaggio?

In the summer of 2014, a painting by Caravaggio became embroiled in negotiations among a group of institutions and representatives of civil society. The talks concerned the possibility of its temporary transfer. The painting in question was *The Seven Works of Mercy*, which was delivered by Caravaggio to the Confraternity of the Pio Monte della Misericordia of Naples on 9 January 1607 and has rarely been moved since that time. The

negotiations—which lasted for several weeks, at times sparking public debate—focused on the possibility of transferring Caravaggio's iconic masterpiece from Naples to Milan, specifically for the 2015 Universal Exposition. The possibility considered by the lay and religious institutions was that of exhibiting the seventeenth-century work inside the pavilion of Caritas. The pavilion would house the pastoral body of the Italian Episcopal Conference for the promotion of charity and the Italian branch of Caritas Internationalis, one of the largest nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the world, whose humanitarian activities spread over dozens of countries. As is well known, Caravaggio's painting is a powerful representation of the iconographic theme of the corporal works of mercy, which every good Christian is expected to perform in aid of the needy by providing basic necessities such as food, water, clothing, shelter, and so forth. The reasons behind the request to borrow the painting can therefore be found in the Expo 2015 theme—"Nourish the Planet, Energy for Life"—and even more so in the humanitarian campaign launched for the occasion by Caritas called "Divide to multiply," along with its global action campaign "One human family, food for all: it's our duty."[2] Despite the authority of the institutions involved, the idea came to nothing. The painting remained where it was. The pavilion had to manage without Caravaggio's work or, at best, referred to it indirectly. As soon as news of the painting's possible transfer became public, protests erupted in Naples—not so much because of the risks associated with transferring any work of art, or even because of potential issues bound up with introducing Caravaggio's painting into a contemporary humanitarian framework, but because the demonstrators demanded that the historical and artistic heritage of southern Italy should be defended from a predatory attitude on the part of political and cultural institutions in the north.[3]

At the beginning of 2016, Caravaggio's *The Seven Works of Mercy* found itself enmeshed once again in a controversy, also involving several institutions and a possible transfer—this time from Naples to Rome. The idea was to display the work inside the Palazzo del Quirinale—the residence of the President of the Republic and a symbol of the power of the Italian state—during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, which was inaugurated by Pope Francis on 8 December 2015 and ended on 20 November 2016. This was a tribute to the desperate condition of migrants attempting to reach Europe along the Mediterranean routes and, by extension, to everyone suffering from the hardships of war or natural disaster.[4] At first it seemed as if the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, was personally involved in implementing the proposal. However, not long afterwards, the Presidency was forced to specify that a group of people linked to the Pio Monte of Naples had put forward the idea of the loan for the Jubilee, so it was not the Quirinale that had spearheaded the initiative.[5] As a matter of fact, the President of the Republic had, a few days earlier, been addressed in an open letter published in the newspaper *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, in which intellectuals and art historians had asked him to give up on the idea of exhibiting the masterpiece. They reminded him that, in 1613, "the Founding Members of the Pio Monte established the 'perpetual immovability' of the painting because the chapel, on whose main altar it is preserved, was created specifically for Caravaggio's masterpiece: the architecture, the context, is complementary to and inseparable from the extraordinary pictorial work."[6]

From the Expo to the Jubilee, then, this time too, prompted by its relevance to a large public event with a strong symbolic impact, someone had had the idea of moving the same painting by Caravaggio. Controversies then arose and everything stayed where it was. But this was hardly the last word on the matter. Attempts to juxtapose Caravaggio's art with humanitarian emergency conditions did not end in Naples; nor were they limited to the failed cases mentioned here.

In June 2016, President Mattarella inaugurated the exhibition "Toward the Museum of Trust and Dialogue for the Mediterranean" on Lampedusa. Located in the heart of the Mediterranean, the island has been the main arrival point for migratory routes from the African continent since the 1990s and a host for NGOs regularly engaged in rescue and hospitality operations along its shores and in its interior. The exhibition center, located only a short distance from the sea, brings together works of art with a variety of objects

salvaged during recent years from shipwrecks and, in particular, from the shipwreck of 3 October 2013 when at least three hundred and sixty-eight migrants lost their lives off the Isola dei Conigli. Screens were installed on the walls that showed television images of the rescues at sea. In the various rooms, works of art and precious objects were exhibited, in some way linked to the theme of intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean area. The centerpiece of the 2016 exhibition was a painting: Caravaggio's *Sleeping Cupid* (1608), normally displayed at the Galleria Palatina in Florence but loaned to the fledgling museum for the occasion. After the many failed attempts to move Caravaggio in the name of "humanitarian relevance," the initiative had finally met with success. One of the forces behind the loan was the director of the Uffizi Galleries, Schmidt (2016, p. 64), who tried to express the relevance of the transfer of Caravaggio's work to Lampedusa by focusing on two particular aspects. The first was that,

> like the refugees who arrive in Lampedusa, the painter (however, to escape conviction for murder in Rome) in 1606 had taken refuge in Malta, welcomed with open arms by the knights of the eponymous order, certainly moved by the interest of gaining the services of an artist of fame, but perhaps also by a shred of the same human solidarity that today, every day, the inhabitants of Lampedusa show for those who land on their shores.

The second aspect behind the transfer of the *Sleeping Cupid* on Lampedusa was that

> Caravaggio's painting abruptly brings the memory of antiquity back to the most harrowing events of the current day. Indeed, more than a few visitors to the Palatina Gallery of Florence were struck and disturbed by the forceful and explicit naturalism of an image that they instinctively connected to that of the Syrian child Aylan Kurdi, who lies lifeless on the beach of Bodrum in Turkey.

The juxtaposition proposed by Schmidt between the iconographic theme of Caravaggio's work and the dramatic photo of Alan Kurdi (the correct name of the child), taken on 2 September 2015 by journalist Nilüfer Demir, was taken up repeatedly in media discourse, so much so that it became the dominant interpretation of the entire Lampedusa show. The exhibition ended on 3 October 2016 with a flurry of journalists who arrived on the island for the event.[7]

I would like to conclude this overview with a reference to the literary sphere, which opens the second part of the article. Among the attempts to refer to Caravaggio in relation to migratory phenomena is the article by the Nigerian-American writer and photographer Teju Cole, published in September 2020 in the *New York Times* and reproduced inside a book that collects some texts realized in the last few years.[8] Cole traces Caravaggio's extraordinary painting and adventurous life—his geographical transfers—and somehow decides to project them onto the present time, onto the bodies and gestures of those who cross or have crossed the Mediterranean:

> What if I traveled farther south, to each of the places where Caravaggio spent his exile? Many of the works he made in those places remain, some in situ. Naples, Valletta, Syracuse, Messina and possibly Palermo. The more I thought about the idea, the more I wanted to make it happen. I wasn't after a luxurious summer sojourn. The places of Caravaggio's exile had all become significant flash points in the immigration crisis, which was not entirely a coincidence: He'd gone to them because they were ports. A port is where a given territory is most amenable to arrival and to escape, where a stranger has a chance to feel less strange. (Cole 2020)

Cole's article therefore develops, in a programmatic way, through four stops on his journey: Naples, Syracuse, Malta, and Porto Ercole. Each stop includes a visit to a painting by Caravaggio (except in Porto Ercole, where Merisi, exhausted and ill after the long journey from Naples, died a few hours after arriving, on 18 July 1610) and an encounter with a migrant or with a contemporary story of migration. In particular, at the Neapolitan stop, Cole dwells on the extraordinary fascination of *The Seven Works of Mercy and The Flagellation*

(1607–1608) kept at the Capodimonte Museum, but he also expresses the feeling of euphoria felt while wandering around the Quartieri Spagnoli, described as "the populous quarter where Caravaggio lived." (Cole 2020)

Even in their diversity, the criticalities and the limits of the operations mentioned so far seem to me substantially to be two, both concerned with the supporters and the detractors of the "humanitarian Caravaggio."

In the first instance, those who opposed the transfers did so mostly with the intention of preserving the painting within the historical–artistic context in which it originated. This is a principle of conservation and curatorial sensibility that can be applied in any case. In contrast, these specific transfers and juxtapositions required an in-depth examination of social and political issues: the fact of bringing together the religious theme of Misericordia and the tendentially secular field of contemporary humanitarianism; the ethnocentrism potentially present in the gesture of bringing the work of a master of Italian painting closer to the conditions of the subjects assisted by NGOs, in different parts of the world; and the risks of giving rise to a sort of oblivion, or at least of placing in the background the actual suffering of those affected by catastrophic events, to the advantage of the work of art.[9]

Second, what drove these projects—think of the Lampedusa exhibition, but also of Cole's article—was the idea of superimposing the venturous life of Caravaggio, who sought refuge in Malta and lived in many other port cities, on to the troubled life of migrants. This is as if to say that, instead of questioning the paintings and letting them question us and our gaze, the tendency has been to superimpose the biographical paths, making Caravaggio and the characters represented by Caravaggio into contemporary migrants.

In summary, the idea of juxtaposing a work of seventeenth-century art with the phenomenon of migration and the activities of NGOs—but without problematizing the anachronism and anatopism of this maneuver—threatens to conceal and hinder understanding of the historical and political phenomena in question. Under these conditions, even the idea of moving paintings by Caravaggio or by other masters of western art in conjunction with historical or current events might in itself constitute a threat to fully developing a postcolonial discourse.

3. In Front of the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*

In November 2015, having written several books on the exploitation of workers in southern Italy and on the migratory phenomena, Alessandro Leogrande published a book on the Mediterranean border and on the stories of those trying to cross it. *La frontiera* is a hybrid text: at the same time a first-person reportage and an interweaving of the voices collected in close contact with migrants in various parts of Italy and Europe. But it is also an investigation of the historical and political implications of migration that open glimpses of the recent colonial past of the Old Continent.[10] The book—and this is the aspect I am most interested in focusing on—is therefore a theoretical and critical reflection on the visual regimes associated with the very notion of "migration," and on the ways in which the life of those who are forced or wish to move is represented and considered.

La frontiera occupies a particular position within that field of practices concerning Caravaggio mentioned above. In his book, Leogrande does not merely produce a "humanitarian Caravaggio" or emphasize his topicality; he seeks to reflect on what makes him contemporary, on what in his painting concerns our way of imagining and shaping the events of the present time. A red thread runs through the various chapters of the book: the "question of the gaze;" the way in which we tell, and represent what comes from the horizon and what is already here; our very way of seeing, describing, and narrating.[11] We need only recall the title of Chapter 1—*Seeing, Not Seeing, 1*—which is continued in Chapters 16, 20, 24, and 27: *Seeing, Not Seeing, 2, 3, 4,* and *5*. So we should not be surprised if the book concludes in front of a painting, a painting by Caravaggio.

Compared to the curators and authors of the aforementioned projects, Leogrande neither asks nor refuses to physically move a painting, nor does he revive the myth of the cursed artist who travels the Mediterranean. In the final chapter of the book, Chapter 29,

entitled "The Violence of the World," the writer himself enters the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, where two famous paintings by Caravaggio are preserved. His entrance is described in simple words as an experience he finds himself sharing with a handful of tourists. His gaze points straight to the *Vocation of St. Matthew* (1600) and the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (1600). The reasons for this interest do not lie so much, or only, in the biography of the painter, in what he was doing at the time he made that specific works. Nor is the iconographic theme of the martyrdom of the saint the specific reason for Leogrande's visit:

> It has been years since I have seen the *Vocation* and the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, although those paintings made between the end of the sixteenth century and the dawn of the seventeenth have always accompanied me and have remained in a corner of my mind, at the bottom of many conversations. So I find myself enchanted looking at the *Martyrdom*, which as always captures my thoughts even more than the *Vocation*. In that scene of raw, absolute, sudden violence, our weaknesses in the face of the mystery of evil crowd in. Between the folds of the work hides the enigma of not acting." (Leogrande 2015, p. 309; translation is mine)

This passage from the book opens up a reflection on what it means to see, to look, to bear witness, and on the ethical and political limits underlying such verbs, somehow devoid of "action," which identify something as problematic as it is precious, never taken for granted.[12] In front of the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, the writer is interested in the formal *dispositif* of the image itself; in the orchestration of an extraordinary number of bodies in space; in the gesture of violence in the foreground that tends to take over the suffering of the victim; in the system of gazes of those who are attracted by the spectacle of violence and, at the same time, seek shelter by pushing toward the margins of representation.

As we know, the painting is the spectacular staging of an event recounted in the apocryphal Gospels, according to which the saint was killed on African soil in the midst of his mission of Christian evangelization. In the center is the half–naked and fully illuminated body of the assassin, just a moment before mortally attacking the saint, defenseless, wounded, and lying on the ground. On the left, a cluster of men in seventeenth-century dress struggle as they try to protect themselves from the violence. While an angel hands Matthew the palm of martyrdom, on the right side of the painting there is the plastic gesture of a novice who is walking away. In the foreground, some figures lying on the ground seem to observe the scene, only partially surprised. Like the hired man, they are mostly naked. They are catechumens waiting to be baptized. The composition of the figures in space is centrifugal: the spectator's gaze moves progressively away from the center of the composition, passing from one body to another.

As Leogrande points out, in the background of the painting one can recognize a figure characterized by a particularly intense gaze that seems to stare at the violence in front of him. It is the man with the beard who leans out from the black background, behind the assassin. That man is Caravaggio. Before and after *La frontiera*, many art historians and theorists have proposed such an identification.[13] But Leogrande's intuition is to enhance the absolute modernity of this self-portrait:

> There is a pain mixed with pity in his gaze: an infinite sadness. Unlike the other spectators, Caravaggio does not flee, he looks at the victim because he cannot do anything but stay on his side and see how what is about to happen will end. He has already guessed everything, but does not intervene. He knows he cannot intervene, he cannot stop that sword. His commiseration is even more painful because he is totally powerless. The lucid interpretation of the facts, and even more the genius of art, will not stop the massacre. He can only feel pity. (Leogrande 2015, p. 311; translation is mine)

Concluding his inquiry with a theoretical reflection on violence, the writer investigates the powerlessness as much as the power of this figure present in the painting:

more than an image of himself to be handed down to posterity, in the half-light of the church broken by the spotlights that portion of the canvas seems to me a manifesto. An incandescent reflection on the violence of the world, and on the relationship it establishes with those who observe it. (Leogrande 2015, p. 311; translation is mine)

This is a clever description that enhances the anachronistic and anatopistic character of Caravaggio's work: its ability to look at the present by questioning it, and its capacity to decentralize Western art.[14] In his pause in front of the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, Leogrande expresses the importance of reconceiving the historical-artistic heritage and the disciplines that take care of it as a tool for critical interrogation of contemporary visual culture; but he also proposes an approach, a way of looking and a style of writing that make all this possible. The question is no longer whether or not to authorize a transfer of the material good at the expense of its original context, but how to manage a plan of comparative interrogation and inaugurate new paths of critical reflection.

"By painting his own gaze," the author writes, "Caravaggio defines the only way he can look at the horror of the world. He geometrically establishes the right distance at which to place himself in order to stare at the beast. Inside the canvas, manifestly next to things, not outside with brush in hand" (Leogrande 2015, p. 311). Caravaggio, therefore, is the author and character of this representation—inevitably outside the painting as a painter and, at the same time, inside it as a witness of the facts. I would like to conclude by trying to continue and, in a certain sense, to force this interpretation offered by Leogrande in order to use it as a possible key to understand contemporary forms of artistic engagement.

4. Regarding the Image of the Pain of Others

In an interpretive gamble—at least in part legitimized by Fried (2010, pp. 201–19)—one could say that the representation of Caravaggio in the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* is not a generic self-portrait, but a "self-portrait as a painter." To support this hypothesis, I would like to emphasize the inclination of the figure's head to the side to observe the scene as if he had a canvas in front of him. One could also conceive of the left hand reaching forward as a transfiguration of the palette, while the right hand holds the brush. The artist's sad gaze might then be reconceived as a concentrated, absorbed gaze. If this were the case, it would be an anticipation of some of the traits that characterize the extraordinary visual *dispositif* that is *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez, notoriously and masterfully analyzed by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*:

Now he [the painter] can be seen, caught in a moment of stillness, at the neutral centre of this oscillation. His dark torso and bright face are half-way between the visible and the invisible: emerging from that canvas beyond our view, he moves into our gaze; but when, in a moment, he makes a step to the right, removing himself from our gaze, he will be standing exactly in front of the canvas he is painting; he will enter that region where his painting, neglected for an instant, will, for him, become visible once more, free of shadow and free of reticence. (Foucault 2002, p. 4)

In both Velazquez's and Caravaggio's masterpiece, the self-portrait takes on a theoretical and critical function; it explicitly invites the spectator to reflect on visual representation, on the point of view that structures it and on the limits of the composition. By carefully observing the figure of the painter and comparing it with other self-portraits by Caravaggio, it does not seem entirely improbable to argue that the one proposed in the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* is not only an image of himself "in front of the pain of others," but also and at the same time—transforming Sontag's famous formula—an image of himself "in front of the image of the pain of others." On the one hand, in this painting, Caravaggio's self-portrait invites us to observe a real event and suggests an emotional attitude to take in front of the violent gesture. On the other, with his spatial positioning and posture, he urges us to observe the composition of the entire scene "from a distance" or rather "from outside," precisely as if it were just an image.

From the seventeenth century through the tradition of twentieth-century reportage and up to the new millennium, a self-portrait of the painter, photographer, director, or writer is certainly not enough to validate the authenticity and effectiveness of the testimony or its ethical value. The risk of a self-referential drift is also discernible behind this trend: why represent ourselves when we are faced with the pain of others? At least since the publication of Spivak's famous essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, this question has occupied a central position in scientific and cultural debate. In this way, it has been possible to observe and question asymmetries of gaze and speech, which until then had been invisible or indisputable.[15] At the same time, the questioning of such asymmetries and the assumption of a completely new role by the "subalterns" in the telling of their conditions cannot coincide with the removal or disengagement of external points of view. Starting from the awareness of the asymmetry between the "self" and the "other" and of the ethical and political problems it has caused, the photographic reporter, the journalist, the writer or the visual artist who want to assume the function of witnesses must activate a process of critical and self-critical questioning of their own gaze and position.

Rather than glibly promote all self-reflexive tendencies, the self-portrait of Caravaggio in *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* is useful and interesting to the extent that it is a manifestation of the fact that, although this painting represents an event that is definitely worthy of note, it remains an image among many other possible images of this event and does not claim to coincide with it and reproduce it through the media for the spectator's benefit. Observing that an image is an image is therefore not part of a process of "derealization;" rather, it constitutes a way of recognizing the positioning of one's gaze and reflecting on its perceptive but also cultural, moral, and political limits. This is a way of honoring the duty of narrating and showing the most shocking events of our present time, even if they do not seem to concern us personally, and even if speaking on behalf of "others" or portraying their discomfort and suffering always risks being a form of appropriation, the umpteenth expropriation.

In the pages of *La frontiera* dedicated to the Lampedusa shipwreck of 3 October 2013, Leogrande wonders about the most suitable term to describe the work he has done in the field, in an attempt to handle memory and to put the pain of others in written form: "Witness is not the right word. It is now such an affected term, so conventional, that it appears suffocated by rhetoric and the boulder of officialdom" (Leogrande 2015, p. 146). If Leogrande concluded the book in front of a seventeenth-century painting, this is not because Caravaggio himself was a migrant in the Mediterranean, nor was it because of a generic love of painting. On the one hand, Leogrande's book expresses a profound interest in and analytical capacity for visual representation. On the other, it consists of a diagnosis of the journalistic discourse and of his own writing practice, on the risks involved in "speaking for the other," and on the necessity of reconceiving the practice of reportage as an interweaving of paths and narratives, as a crossing of gazes capable of investigating the "line of the frontier," always on the move.[16] It is precisely by focusing on the relationship between the presumed transparency of the event and the forms of its representation—be they pictorial, photographic or literary—that I think we can understand the book's ending and the homage to Caravaggio. Observing the painter's self-portrait—his simultaneously transitive and reflective gaze—becomes a way of recovering and regenerating the very idea of "witnessing," beyond any simplistic conception, beyond its institutionalization. Witnessing is understood here as a continuous questioning of one's own position, and of the images or stories that are produced from it. In this sense, the witness is the one who reflects on the discursive and iconographic stratifications of his or her testimony at the very moment in which he or she produces it, always seeking to evaluate its appropriateness and effectiveness. This is a critical and self-critical process that makes it possible to continue to denounce marginalization and suffering without becoming the accomplice of those who produce and reproduce it.

Caravaggio, Sontag, Leogrande: these are the three names of a path of reflection on the forms of ethical and political imagination. While Caravaggio is displaced beyond the

field of art history, the investigation on the arts is called to enrich itself with theoretical and methodological tools to study the aesthetic, social, and political issues involved in painting. Sontag's thoughts, the quality and transversality of her writings, the many ideas she threw at her readers and perhaps liquidated in a few sentences, remain some of the critical reflections of the present; it is only necessary to have the patience to collect, verify, and eventually push forward—in the practice of analysis, in the confrontation with images—the intuitions of the American essayist. Leogrande's writing crosses physical and imaginary geographies – however political—and overcomes the boundaries between genres and forms of expression, until it finds in an old painting with a religious theme a way to reflect on what it means to be a writer and a journalist, a cultural worker in twenty-first-century Europe.

These are three ways of looking, at once transparent and opaque, ancient and contemporary. They are names and approaches for a history and a thought of the arts that can suggest paths to orient us and force us take a position in the sea of images we refer to as visual culture.

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Notes

[1] The literature on the topic is vast and constantly expanding at the crossroads of sociological studies, communication studies, political science, art history and theory. Here, the reference is restricted to (Boltanski 1999; Bennet 2005; Chouliaraki 2006; Reinhardt et al. 2006; Grønstad and Gustafsson 2012; Di Bella and Elkins 2012).

[2] For all content regarding these campaigns and initiatives, please refer to the webpage of the Caritas pavilion during Expo Milano 2015: https://www.caritasambrosiana.it/expo-1/strumenti/una-sola-famiglia-umana-cibo-per-tutti-i-materiali (accessed on 6 March 2022).

[3] (Un Caravaggio all'Expo ma scoppia la polemica 2014).

[4] For a reflection on the idea that the Jubilee Year of Mercy was an invitation to rethink the iconographic repertoire of Mercy in relation to current events, see (van Bühren 2017).

[5] (Merone 2016).

[6] (Signor Presidente, Roma rinunci alle 'Sette Opere' del Caravaggio 2016).

[7] For more details on successful or failed attempts to use Caravaggio's painting for humanitarian public events, see again (Zucconi 2018).

[8] See (Cole 2021).

[9] On the relationships between religion and the contemporary migration regime, see (Mavelli and Wilson 2016; Meyer and Van der Veer 2022). More explicitly on the relationship between the themes and forms of Christian art and contemporary humanitarian communication, see (Careri and Zucconi 2019).

[10] On the relationship between migration and colonial history in Leogrande's work, see (Santoro 2017, pp. 133–38), and (Poli 2019, pp. 201–19).

[11] On this point, see (Milani 2018, pp. 191–216).

[12] The reference is to the classic study by (Wieviorka 2006). On the testimonial potential of photography, film, and multimedia arts, see (Azoulay 2008; Dinoi 2008; Montani 2010; Demos 2013).

[13] On the presence of self-portraits in Caravaggio's paintings and especially in the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, see (Careri 2017, pp. 207–9).

[14] On anachronism, see (Didi-Huberman 2000). On anachronism as a theoretical problem and a methodological tool in the history and theory of the arts, see also (Nagel and Wood 2010). On anachronism as a form of "preposterous history," see again (Bal 1999). Although closely related to the previous one, the reflection on the idea of "anatopism" is less developed in current literature; I have developed this idea in (Zucconi 2018), especially pp. 199–206 and (Zucconi 2020, pp. 33–41).

[15] For a critical reflection on speaking in the place of others, and therefore on the possibility of subaltern subjects taking the floor, the classic reference is (Spivak 1988). For a reflection on these issues in the field of humanitarian communication and, more generally, contemporary visual culture, see (Perugini and Zucconi 2017, pp. 24–32).

[16] On the problem of speaking on behalf of others (as on the risks of victimization of migrants), with reference also to Leogrande's book, see (De Capitani and Sbrojavacca 2020, pp. 23–45).

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Article

The Slow Refugee: Transit as Stasis, Narrative Ethics, and Level Telling Fields

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Abstract: The slow humanities, this article argues, can make valuable contributions to the study of migration narratives. A slow take on literary representations of refugees and migrants has two distinct but related dimensions. On the one hand, the figure of the slow refugee introduced here challenges theories of migration which emphasize movement. On the other hand, the slow approach to literary representations of forced migration focuses on various forms of narrative empowerment. My readings of the novel *What is the What* (2008) by Dave Eggers and Parwana Amiri's work *My Pen Won't Break But Borders Will: Letter to the World from Moria* (2020) demonstrate how collaborative and allied forms of storytelling help restore narrative agency and authority, moving beyond the exemplary, documentary, and ambassadorial functions of vicarious storytelling. Instead of speaking on behalf of others, or even worse, for others—the default case in many conversations on migration—the literary representations of refugees discussed in this article emphasize the need to tell and share stories with others, for the benefit of everyone. In this sense, they help establish a level telling field, initiating a debate on the terms and conditions of fair conversation on forced migration.

Keywords: refugees; (forced) migration; narrative; ethics; slow humanities; attentive reading; level telling field

1. Introduction

The slow movement in the humanities is a cross-disciplinary response to the negative impact of the "cult of speed" (Honoré 2004) on reading, scholarship, and education. Acceleration produces, and thrives on, the political, economic, and cultural climate of what has been dubbed the attention economy, fast modernity, or the metric society. Its effects are felt by slow professors increasingly alienated by the "corporatization of universities," "standardized learning," and "a sense of urgency," as Berg and Seeber (2016, p. 8) have argued. Resisting the regimes of speed and haste, the slow humanities in general, and "slow philosophy" (Boulous Walker 2017) in particular, rely on attentive reading and deep thinking to create and disseminate knowledge.

A fuzzy concept par excellence, slow in this context also means patient, thorough, and sustainable. In contrast to fast success, which is often short-sighted and superficial, slow practices and interventions seek persistence and purpose, and they foster resistance and resilience. Slowness puts more emphasis on ethics than efficiency and advocates "attentive listening rather than a closed mind" (Boulous Walker 2017, p. 33). Reading and attentive listening—both so closely related in practice that Boulous Walker's concept of "reading as a kind of attentive listening" (ibid., p. 103) hardly seems metaphorical—are among the first victims of late modern "hyperacceleration" (Rosa 2013, p. 298) and of the commodification of time in the "attention economy" (Davenport and Beck 2001). This is most obvious in contexts where stories matter most, such as the defense of human rights in discourses of displacement and forced migration. In what follows, the notion of reading as listening serves as a conceptual link between the slow humanities and the study of fictions of migration—a link that explores the forms, functions, and effects of storysharing in cross-cultural encounters.

With respect to migration narratives, which are the focus of this essay, a slow take on literary representations has two distinct, but related dimensions. On the one hand, the figure of the slow refugee introduced in the next section challenges theories of migration which emphasize movement. By reading transit as a form of involuntary stasis or stagnation, I emphasize that being a refugee means, for most people, losing agency and becoming dependent on others. In narrative terms, this includes relying on others to speak for you—the realm of vicarious storytelling (see Gebauer and Sommer 2023) that often characterizes advocacy work.[1] Slow critique engages both with the ethical problems arising from vicarious representations and with the state-sanctioned stasis which characterizes life in detention camps, denying human beings the right to move and, as a consequence, the right to arrival, development, planning, and to any future at all.[2]

On the other hand, the slow approach to literary representations of forced migration outlined here focuses on various forms of narrative empowerment. In section three, I discuss the novel *What is the What* (Eggers 2008) by Dave Eggers—a rare example of truly collaborative storytelling. Section four will demonstrate how the School of Resistance (2021), a hybrid event curated by Swiss theater director Milo Rau, provides an opportunity for Afghan activist and writer Parwana Amiri to present her recent work *My Pen Won't Break But Borders Will: Letter to the World from Moria* (2020) to a wide audience. Both examples place emphasis on the lived experience of refugees and create conditions which allow the refugee perspective to take center stage, serving as a correlative to policy narratives on forced migration.[3]

My analyses will show how collaborative and allied forms of storytelling help restore narrative agency and authority, moving beyond the exemplary, documentary, and ambassadorial functions of vicarious storytelling. Instead of speaking on behalf of others, or even worse, *for* others—the default case in many conversations on migration—the literary representations of refugees discussed here emphasize the need to tell and share stories *with* others, for the benefit of everyone. In the final section of the essay, I will link these findings and ideas to the notion of the level telling field, a mechanism to secure fair play in the narrative market. Developed in an ongoing research project funded by the European Union, the metaphor of the market and the analogy with level playing fields in international trade make a political point: Toxic debates are the discursive equivalent of trade wars; sustainable solutions must involve all parties on an equal footing. In this sense, the figure of the slow refugee is a provocation that aims to start a new dialogue on migration and successful integration.

2. The Figure of the Slow Refugee

The figure of the slow refugee resonates with Thomas Nail's book *The Figure of the Migrant* (Nail 2015), which seeks to develop a political theory or "philosophical history" (p. 3) of the migrant. Nail points out that "the migrant has been predominantly understood from the perspective of *stasis* and perceived as a secondary or derivate figure with respect to place-bound social membership" (ibid.). Existing theories of the migrant are thus biased, as "more than any other political figure (citizen, foreigner, sovereign, etc.), the migrant is the one least defined by its being and place and more by its becoming and displacement: by its *movement*" (ibid., original emphasis). Nail's own project seeks to move beyond notions of the migrant "as a failed citizen" (ibid.) by proposing a theory of social motion, or "kinopolitics" (p. 24), which emphasizes "regimes of motion" (ibid.). While this analysis recognizes, rightly, that "societies are always in motion" (ibid.), it is somewhat at odds with the precarious status of the refugee, stuck at borders or waiting in detention, who is *denied* mobility.

The figure of the refugee is not part of Nail's typology, which distinguishes four figures of the migrant: the nomad, the barbarian, the vagabond, and the proletariat. Under the figure of the vagabond, Nail subsumes "illegal people" (p. 201), i.e., "the migrant whose status is specifically criminalized in relation to an expanding system of local, state, national, and international law" (ibid.), explicitly acknowledging both the history and

the ongoing practice of criminalizing vagrancy. Equating the refugee with the vagabond, however, stretches the concept unnecessarily. Adding the figure of the (slow) refugee or migrant to Nail's typology and aligning it with the existing types would require an equally comprehensive 'kinopolitical profile,' i.e., a social *and* historical account of how it "invents a form of kinetic power of its own that poses an alternative to social expulsion" (p. 125). Such a profile would fall in the domain of the "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller 2014), however, and would deviate too far from my present focus on narrative ethics and empowerment; it might be interesting to see, though, to what extent the two perspectives can be reconciled in future work.

The figure of the slow refugee, then, insists on the relevance of stasis, a series of obstacles which eventually stall free movement. It proceeds from the observation that more often than not migrants in transit do not move but *are moved* from one place to another. The agent controlling the movement—the date of departure, means of travel, and final destination, as well as the duration of the passage and the risks the migrant has to take—can be a smuggler or trafficker, a hierarchical community of fellow-migrants,[4] or a state deciding where immigrants, once they have crossed the border, must dwell. The state and its institutions also decide the terms and conditions under which migrants can remain in a country or place, the freedoms they enjoy or are denied until an application for asylum is submitted and granted or rejected, and whether they will eventually be denied entry and sent "back" (in the case of unaccompanied minors or second-generation migrants with no ties to their parents' country of origin, back simply means away). The slow refugee is thus systematically denied agency, often for years,[5] and forced to accept decisions made by others; sometimes a stroke of luck may help along the way, but coincidence hardly suffices to turn patients into agents deciding their own fate.

The same holds true for irregular migrants waiting to cross borders. Around the world, refugees and migrants in transit are subjected to unspeakable horrors including family separation, debt bondage, human trafficking, rape and other forms of violence, illegal pushbacks, racism, hunger, disease, and trauma. They are often stuck in transit for ages, waiting for a lorry to hide in, a boat with an uncertain destination, a hole in a fence, some kind of asylum status. This can mean years spent in limbo (cf. Trilling 2018, p. 107), waiting for an opportunity, years in which people die and children are born and life somehow goes on—some kind of life, a life dependent on the goodwill of others, a life that can change fundamentally from one day to the next, a life deprived of agency, where planning is reduced to day-dreaming.

Any theory of forced migration, whatever its focus, should therefore be sensitive to the realities of involuntary, enforced stasis and the impact of uncertainty and unpredictability on refugees in detention, well-documented by ethnographers (see, for instance, Turnbull 2016). Literary scholars can make an important contribution by acting as mediators, putting migrant writing on the syllabus, encouraging more sensitive ways of reading, and engaging with the ethical questions raised by vicarious storytelling. Speaking or narrating on behalf of another person is the rule rather than the exception when migration is framed as a threat, a crisis, or a management problem. Walls and illegal pushbacks, numbers and statistics, or rules and regulations are designed to repel, exclude, and silence people in transit, with the result that others—activists, NGOs, artists, lawyers, aid workers—have to step in to tell the stories that would otherwise go unheard. Despite their humanitarian intentions, however, vicarious narratives raise ethical, political, and economic concerns. Who may speak for whom, and under what circumstances? How can storytelling help to address the lack of agency and narrative authority which characterizes lived experience in transit? What strategies are used by storytellers in order to draw a line between representation and appropriation?

From a generic angle, one can distinguish at least four different types of vicarious storytelling (see Gebauer and Sommer 2023) that deal with such questions. The first type is exemplary case stories featuring anonymous characters, as routinely used in fundraising campaigns by NGOs to create empathy in audiences. The second type is documentary

narratives created by investigative journalists, whose work is often the only reliable source of information on the actual situation along refugee routes or in camps. Third comes ambassadorial storytelling describing narrative projects curated by NGOs working not only for, but *with* refugees and migrants, using stories as a form of empowerment. Finally, there are various forms of collaborative storytelling with 'allies' such as activists, artists, and writers—allied storytelling that helps the migrant experience and perspective take center stage in the public debate. My two case studies, short readings of *What is the What* and *My Pen Won't Break, But Borders Will*, belong to this latter type.

3. How to Tell Your Story When You Can't: Valentino Achak Deng, Dave Eggers, and *What Is the What* (2006)

What do you do if you want to share your life story but find yourself incapable of narrating it? You ask somebody to write it for you. That is what Valentino Achak Deng did, teaming up with Dave Eggers; together, writer and activist managed to co-narrate Deng's story, bending generic rules to reinvent the vicarious novel and demonstrate that fair co-telling is definitely possible. The result is a strange hybrid, a prime example of collaborative autofiction: a book that claims to be an autobiography (title), is labeled a novel (paratext), and yet openly acknowledges that the author of the book and its first-person narrator are not identical (preface), meaning that this alleged autobiography is really, in Deng's words, a "biography" (p. xiii). This confusing acknowledgement of generic diversity or hybridity can be complicated even further: "*What Is the What* exhibits self-awareness about the various genres it draws from and transcends, openly rehearsing their generic complexities: the humanitarian narrative, autobiography, the human rights bildungsroman, fiction, testimony, oral history" (Peek 2012, p. 118).

What is the point of playing with the conventions of self-writing? Michelle Peek suggests that the novel "is about the limitations of autobiographical humanitarian storytelling and witnessing" (p. 119). Two such limitations, pragmatic and technical in nature, are mentioned in the preface. After being saved by a charity called the Lost Boys Foundation, Deng migrated to the US, where he later became a public speaker. However, as well as sharing his experiences at live events, he wanted to reach a "wider audience" (p. xiii)—hence his wish to write a book. Yet, as he was "not a writer" (ibid.), he did not know how to accomplish this and needed someone to do it for him. What, then, does the "novelization" (Brooks 2010, p. 36) of Deng's life story entail? Brooks points to the effective telling, well-paced narration and "crystallizing moments of reflection and repetition" (ibid.), plot structure (handling of three interwoven subplots), and powerful ending—clearly such a display of narrative technique requires a competent writer.

More limitations surface as we read on: memory, framing, tellability. As Deng was only a boy when he fled his home, he barely remembered some episodes, and could not properly comprehend and process many of the events and encounters that marked his journey. Writing the story—even before Deng asks Eggers to retell it professionally—thus becomes a matter of collaborative reconstruction of timelines and itineraries, a tale that has been told before, by himself, a young man growing up in a refugee camp:

> The UNHCR and the United States wanted to know where we had come from, what we had endured. We were to write our stories in English, or if we could not write adequately in English, we could have someone write it for us. We were asked to write about the Civil War, about losing our families, about our lives in the camps. Why do you want to leave Kakuma? they asked. [...] Whichever strategy we applied, we knew that our stories had to be well told, that we needed to remember all that we had seen and done; no deprivation was insignificant. (p. 485)

But what is a "well-told" story? The answer depends, of course, on context. For the young storyteller eager to start a new life, success means meeting the criteria for the resettlement scheme. The expected framing is suggested by the task: "Are you afraid to return to Sudan, even if there is peace? We knew that those who felt persecuted in Kakuma

or Sudan would be given special consideration" (ibid.). Deng, however, still finds it "very difficult to know what was relevant and what was not" (ibid.), and compares his own story with the one written by his friend, Achor Achor. He reminds Deng of all the details he has forgotten and encourages him to try harder: "I worked on it for weeks more, thinking of every last thing I had seen, every path and tree and pair of yellowed eyes, every body I buried. When I finished, it was nine pages long" (pp. 485–86). Nine pages, as opposed to a novel that runs to more than five hundred pages. The difference is the intended audience: American and international readers for whom a life is not a short story. Here, nine pages will not do.

A third limitation, closely related to context, is what sociolinguist Neal Norrick (2005) has called the "dark side" of tellability, namely events that need to be talked about in order to come to terms with trauma but are considered taboo: "[O]ver half of the young men who call themselves Lost Boys were child soldiers to some degree or another. But this is a part of our history that we have been told not to talk about" (Eggers, p. 17). Even the horror is neatly categorized; the persecuted cannot be perpetrators. Later readers learn that Deng himself was spared: "I was almost a soldier, Julian. I was saved by a massacre" (p. 318). The well-crafted contrast between those two sentences betrays the dramaturgical expertise of the competent writer who knows how to capture the reader's attention. This is not how you open a conversation, not even an imagined one with a staff member in a hospital; this is how you start a new chapter.

A complementary question, then, is: How does Eggers accomplish the formidable task of writing on behalf of somebody else without generating either a sad protocol of the genocide in Darfur—something historians could do better—or a generic refugee tale that fails to do justice to the complexity of the refugee experience (including the fact that all the suffering, in Sudan as elsewhere, is acted out in front of a global audience)? Instead of hiding the inconsistencies and discrepancies which are part and parcel of biographical life-writing in general and refugee life-writing in particular, and unwilling to resort to conventional framings, Eggers has his character-narrator Deng confront the reader with unpleasant truths: "Survivors tell the stories the sympathetic want," he says in a matter-of-fact manner, "and that means making them as shocking as possible" (p. 21). The kind of mediated refugee experience that relies on narrative templates such as "the image of the lost child in need of rescue" (Peek 2012, p. 121) satisfies the demand for clichés, fueling the reproduction of cultural stereotypes such as the "timeless African subject" (ibid.), or the notion that Africans are incapable of helping themselves, even given the right kind of support. This is the vicious circle that well-meaning, but poorly executed vicarious storytelling finds itself in.

Eggers creates a counter-narrative to vicarious case stories, those streamlined exemplary narratives whose prominent status in humanitarian migration discourse rests on their ability to elicit empathetic responses. His take on allied storytelling follows a different strategy: the narrative design reflects ethical principles, empowerment, and sustainability, which also have clear economic implications. Eggers worked for free, with all his author's proceeds from *What is the What* going to the Valentino Achak Deng (VAD) Foundation, a nonprofit organization he established with Deng in 2006 promoting access to education for young people and sustainable development in South Sudan.[6] Almost twenty years later, the book continues to have a strong impact on the next generation of Sudanese children, young people, and women for whom it was written.

With this in mind, the novel's generic hybridity can be read as a conscious design choice allowing the inconsistence and incoherence of a young refugee's perspective to take center stage. What is at stake here, from an 'allied' perspective, is not so much the question to what extent Deng's (auto)biography fulfills the expectations raised by the 'autobiographical pact' (Lejeune), but rather how creative writing can amplify "silent stories" in such a way that "story ownership" (Shuman 2015, p. 41) is guaranteed not only in a literal sense, but also metaphorically—or rather, is complicated to such an extent that it ceases to matter. In vicarious narration, there is always a thin line between representation

and exploitation, whether intentional or not; Eggers and Deng are clearly aware of this. Their novel is the product of two like-minded people who collaborated in founding the VAD Foundation and share the humanitarian worldview expressed in the story's final sentences: "How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist" (p. 535). Their joint work, a prime example of collaborative storytelling grounded in an alliance between partners, transcends the limitations inherent in more conventional, and more problematic, forms of speaking on behalf of somebody else.[7] Seen in this light, the novel's defamiliarizing hybridity is instrumental in avoiding the ethical pitfalls of vicarious storytelling.

4. "I Am a Girl in a Tent": Parwana Amiri's *Letters from Moria* (2019–2020)

My reading of *What is the What* not only demonstrates why the narrativization of lived experience or "life-into-story," Newton's (1997, p. 4) term for the "union" of life and story, is from an ethical perspective far from trivial. My second example, Milo Rau's School of Resistance and Parwana Amiri's text collection *Letters from Moria*, continues this line of thought, linking refugee writing to the notion of 'migration as stasis' introduced above. But first, some context.

On 24 September 2021, Schauspiel Köln (Germany), the International Institute for Political Murder, the National Theater in Gent (NTGent, Belgium), and the School of Political Hope hosted, in cooperation with #LeaveNoOneBehind and numerous organizations from all over the world, a School of Resistance for a new politics of humanity and justice.[8] Comprising a workshop program, three hybrid panels, a solo rally, a concert, and the launch of a joint fundraising campaign, this event was headed by Swiss theater director Milo Rau, artistic director of NTGent since 2018, whom *The New York Times* has called a "provocateur" who "loves an ethical minefield".[9] In 2018, Rau published a radical manifesto for the theater which, among other things, called for a ban on classics and demanded that all stage productions should involve amateurs. Such provocation is not an end in itself for Rau: his programmatic approach serves to cast new light on the most pressing challenges of our times, including neo-imperialism, jihadism, and inhumane migration policies,[10] as well as on the political functions of theater as a post-dramatic art form.

The 2021 School of Resistance included a hybrid panel discussion on "Practices of Art and Justice"[11] in which Mourad El-Keddani, a refugee from Afghanistan who came to Germany in 2016, and Omer Shatz, an international lawyer and the legal director of NGO front-LEX, joined Rau on the Cologne stage for a discussion of the harsh realities of refugee lives. Online participants were Congolese lawyer and human rights activist Céline Tshizena, together with S.—an anonymous exiled refugee from Afghanistan not shown on screen for safety reasons—and Parwana Amiri, a nineteen-year-old Afghan human-rights activist and writer.

Speaking on Zoom from a refugee camp in Greece, Amiri reminded her European audience that refugees are invariably afraid of speaking out about life in transit (55:00).[12] Viewers gained an unintended glimpse of that reality, as Amiri was not speaking from an office space or some other neutral environment but from a small bedroom flanked by bunk beds, a wardrobe, and various articles of clothing. Four people, one room: The lack of privacy in the camp—in stark contrast with the spacious, half-empty theater from which the School of Resistance audience was listening or the comfort of a private space enjoyed by online viewers—was enhanced by two interruptions during her short presentation.

First, a young man entered from a door to the left to get a backpack (57:52). After looking curiously at the screen for a split second, the intruder stooped low to stay invisible, trying to hide from the camera. A second person entered a little later (1:00:10) to retrieve an item from the top right bunk bed (1:00:35); he also stooped to withdraw without too much of an interruption. It is impossible (and unnecessary) to decide whether these intrusions should be read as signs of curiosity (entering under a pretext) or as signaling sensitivity and politeness (keeping disruption to a minimum). Either way, two interruptions in a mere five minutes emphasize that life in transit means an almost complete lack of privacy.

This is also a recurrent theme in documentary storytelling; "you spend all day on the street" (Trilling 2018, p. 33), says Jamal, a Sudanese refugee hoping to cross from the infamous "jungle" in Calais (France) to the UK. His testimony allows investigative journalist Daniel Trilling to piece together a life spent searching for a meal, a shower, and a place to charge a smartphone while waiting for sunset and an opportunity to hide under a lorry heading for the Channel Tunnel. For the literary scholar, Amiri's disrupted appearance conjures up Virginia Woolf's timeless essay *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf [1929] 1993), which famously defines independence and freedom for women writers not only in terms of money and space—"five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door" (p. 103)—but also as leisure and time for contemplation (cf. p. 107).

Amiri's memoir *My Pen Won't Break, But Borders Will: Letters to the World from Moria*, a collection of short autobiographical, auto-fictional, and vicarious narratives illustrating life in the camp, is a reminder that such luxuries are out of reach for refugees, especially women, who are systematically deprived of resources for self-expression, self-empowerment, and self-fashioning, from education in general to writing in particular. "These letters were written mostly at night by torchlight in the tent that Parwana shared with her eight-person family, in the olive grove," the editor's introduction tells us (Amiri 2019–2020, p. 5). "She always waited until everyone was asleep, so that she would have the peace of mind to write in the darkness with her torch" (ibid.).

Unlike Deng, Amiri cannot yet enjoy the luxury of retrospection. Hence 'writing to the moment,' the key feature of the epistolary novel since Samuel Richardson's Pamela (1740), seems a natural choice. Best characterized as a participating observer, Amiri records impressions from inside Moria, Europe's most infamous refugee camp, destroyed in a fire in 2020. Amiri speaks about herself but also employs (partly fictionalized) narratives of vicarious experience in Fludernik (1996), Norrick (2013), and Hatavara and Mildorf (2017) sense—i.e., accounts of other migrants' life stories, collected in oral conversations—to create what Susan Lanser in *Fictions of Authority* (Lanser 1992) has called "communal voice". Criticizing the "narrative individualism that European cultures take for granted," (p. 21) Lanser defines communal voice as "a spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority" (ibid.).

Although Lanser's concept originally refers to fictional narration, her concept of communal voice, together with her project of a feminist poetics, help us do justice to Amiri's take on vicarious storytelling from the inside. The author puts herself in the shoes of a desperate mother, a volunteer translator, an unaccompanied boy, or an old woman. Her fictionalized retelling of experiences shared in conversation serves multiple purposes. On the one hand, her stories focus on the individual human being: "It is only one aspect of my current situation," she cites her interlocutor, the translator, "that I am also a refugee, one among thousands of others" (p. 18). On the other hand, she acknowledges that shared experience creates an, albeit temporary, narrative community: "We are different people with a thousand different stories. What unites us is that we had to leave our homes" (p. 25). Every refugee story is an account of individual suffering, but they all feature similar events, emotions, and expectations, contributing to the universal "story of inequality and discrimination among human kind" (p. 25) which Amiri seeks to end, against all odds.

Human nature is the biggest hurdle, not only outside, but also inside the camp: "Instead of establishing friendly relations between each other as oppressed people that face the same discrimination, we become part of the reason people have fear. We escaped war, but it seems we are in war again" (p. 30f.). Anger, violence, drug abuse, sexual harassment, and rape add to the overall hardship, lack of food, and non-existent medical supplies. Amiri's bleak description of life in the camp is emphasized by dark metaphors, resonating with the Roman proverb *homo homini lupus*: "Wolves hunt in the darkness of night and the shepherds look after the flock. But here the wolves are the shepherds, the shepherds are the sheep and sheep turn into wolves" (p. 32). The brutality of life inside an overcrowded, underfunded camp means that people do not dare move: "All our wealth is our blankets and a few warm clothes. Fear of losing even these keeps us near our tent 24 h a day" (ibid.).

It also underscores, sadly, Amiri's humanist agenda: "We are not another quality of people; another class of humans; another kind" (p. 25).

In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Julia Kristeva contemplates the "silence of the polyglot," claiming that "between two languages, your realm is silence" (p. 15). Writing in English, a major challenge for nineteen-year-old Amiri (cf. p. 4), means raising the stakes in the struggle against this silence. It allows the writer to address her intended audience, sympathetic European publics, directly, using bold print and exclamation marks to remind them of their own ethical dilemma: the gap between knowledge and action. As readers participating in the School of Resistance, the least we can do is listen to Amiri, appreciate her work, and find a safe place for it in the emergent discourse on slow ethics and narrative.

After all, the refugee perspective is a much-needed corrective to the official migration policies that are turning Europe and North America into fortresses. Kristeva's reading of Arendt's classic *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt [1951] 2007) reminds us of the consequences of putting the nation state above people: "The world of barbarity thus comes to a head in a single world composed of states, in which only those people organized into national residences are entitled to have rights" (Kristeva 1991, p. 151). As Arendt put it: "It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man" (Quoted in Kristeva 1991, p. 151). There is no better way of insisting on the obvious: If human rights are universal, the principle of sovereignty protected by borders must be subordinated to human development.

To sum up: While Eggers's retrospective narrative foregrounds Deng's journey and development, which ties in well with Nail's notion of migration as movement, Amiri's account is best understood as a struggle for agency and authority. The refugee experience of Moria implies terms such as stasis, paralysis, and enforced slowdown.[13] "I am a girl in a tent," says Amiri, "and I am thinking about this world as the days won't pass by and I am waiting for permission to leave this place" (p. 25). By speaking out for others and reminding Europe of its responsibilities, Amiri regains agency for herself. Her appeal to dignity ("Our shields of protection are naked hands and our dignity", p. 32) resonates with the Preamble and Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".[14] Yet dignity without a right to development is as hard to imagine as freedom without development—the two concepts are, as Sen (1999) has argued, inextricably linked.

5. From Ethics to Politics: Toward a Level Telling Field

Vicarious storytelling is ambivalent. It seeks to raise awareness for refugees and migrants, yet often undermines their individual agency, precisely by highlighting the importance of an ethical approach to narrative representations of refugees across genres and media. Insisting on the value of slow practices such as reading and listening, and thinking of reading as attentive listening, are first steps in the right direction. However, the current conversation in, and on, the slow humanities also reveals two limitations which narrative ethics can discuss but cannot overcome. Ethical readings analyze specific constellations, e.g., ethical questions raised by the story's content or by the act of narration. They can also theorize more generally the limits of tellability and the problems inherent in speaking *for*, rather than *with*, somebody else. An ethical approach cannot offer solutions, however, to what is essentially a systemic problem: making sure that everyone is heard. This is also a political problem in the sense that a fair conversation is often not desired, in order to prevent refugees from becoming integrated in society before they are granted asylum; it is harder to get rid of people who have become valuable members of a community.

Systemic problems require systemic solutions: the subaltern *can* speak, to quote Spivak's famous article, but they will only be heard if they gain access, literally and metaphorically, to stages and PA systems. In the absence of political will to introduce humanitarian migration policies, to support welcome cultures in destination countries, and to promote social inclusion, the humanities should take a more active part in campaigning for new narratives and practices. It may be unusual for literary scholars to team up with

social and political scientists, let alone NGOs, to advocate a different approach to migration. Yet in times of uncertainty, when civil rights and human rights are under attack both in the US and in the EU, slow professors must take a stance.

What kind of contribution can narrative research make? Funded by the European Commission, the collaborative research project "Crises as Opportunities: Toward a Level Telling Field on Migration and a new Narrative of Successful Integration," promotes level telling fields as an essential factor in the move to transcend ethically problematic forms of vicarious storytelling and to overcome toxic debates that frame migration as a threat to sovereignty and national security. Adopting the economic metaphor of the level playing field, which stands for fair competition, equal opportunities, and a condition of parity, the 'Level Telling Field' (LTF) approach develops playbooks and mechanisms to facilitate a fair dialogue on migration involving migrants, citizens, and stakeholders. This comprises both theoretical work—defining, discussing, applying, evaluating, and modifying the premises, principles, and processes that characterize fair debate—and advocating a more inclusive narrative on integration grounded in an ethics of listening and mutual recognition. Within this framework, which considers migration as an opportunity rather than a crisis, NGOs working with refugees and migrants have been organizing local events in several European and African countries, establishing and testing level telling fields in practice.

In principle a scalable concept, the LTF approach also seeks to initiate a new conversation on fair play in public debate. This will involve further conceptual work to reconcile the Habermasian notion of the public sphere (see Habermas [1962] 1989, 2022)—along with its critique by Fraser (1990) and others—with the narrative dynamics of discourses on migration in the digital age (see Sommer 2023). The latter is characterized by new overlaps between private and public spheres, the crisis of political representation, the rise of 'alternative' media, and what one might call 'nonpublic' publics, e.g., private groups on instant messaging services, which are instrumental in channeling discontent and fostering societal division. More pragmatic than the normative conception of the public sphere proposed by Habermas, level telling fields do not seek to unite competing counter-publics with an appeal to rationality, but rather to initiate a debate on the terms and conditions of fair conversation on controversial issues, the sine qua non of a pluralist democracy.

6. Conclusions

Returning to the figure of the refugee, the starting point of my argument, one can now see how the ethical dilemmas posed by the (re-)telling of vicarious experience can be overcome through collaboration or other acts of narrative solidarity. With the benefit of hindsight, Deng and Eggers tell a story of survival and success, a story which accepts the burden of representation, speaks for those who did not live to tell their tale, and addresses a generation of young people in Sudan. From her bedroom in a refugee camp, affording her no privacy to speak of, Amiri addresses an invisible audience, demanding the most basic human right: a future. Haunted by the past, the refugees she represents are stuck in the present, unable to move forward; women cannot, literally, leave their tents in the camp without fear of harassment and theft. In transit, then, retrospection offers little solace—one intolerable situation has been replaced by another, at least for the time being. Both narratives highlight key aspects of the migrant experience. Being a refugee means, on the one hand, being dependent on others—smugglers, activists, authorities. On the other hand, Amiri's example shows how, even in the most difficult circumstances, activists and writers are fighting to regain some kind of agency. Her stories tell of resilience in the face of hardship, small signs of solidarity, and the power of writing as a means of self-fashioning, community building, and empowerment.

Theories of forced migration, I have argued, should therefore consider both movement and stasis. What is more, they should be aware of how they position themselves in discourses on migration, what texts they discuss, what contexts they create, what canons they establish, implicitly or explicitly, or what reading methods they encourage. This is where the humanities come in, with slow concepts, of which reading as attentive listening is

a prime example. The narrative dynamics of migration is an emergent field of study which explores the hierarchical and often antagonistic relationships between public narratives on migration and the stories of refugees and migrants. Silencing the other is another form of slow violence in Rob Nixon's (2011) sense. I have briefly outlined the political implications of such silencing in Section 5. Marginalized, subaltern voices can only speak for themselves, if we, the silent majorities in destination countries, are prepared to listen attentively, leveling the telling field.

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Notes

1   The term vicarious storytelling, used here to describe the practice, results, and ethical implications of retelling (parts of) somebody else's story, often in humanitarian contexts and with specific audiences and goals in mind, is closely related not only to concepts such as the "narrative of vicarious experience" (Fludernik 1996, p. 14) and "stories of vicarious experience" (Norrick 2013, p. 386) that focus on distinctions between first-hand and second-hand experience, but also to participation frameworks and telling rights. This line of research is continued in Hatavara and Mildorf's work on related issues raised by narratives of vicarious experience, such as "storytelling rights and authority, which are intricately related to the questions of mind reading or mind attribution" (Hatavara and Mildorf 2017, p. 396). From the perspective of migration studies, it is crucial to question the aims and purposes of vicarious stories, as the practice of speaking on behalf of another has significant implications both for narrative agency and authority in general, and for the creation of a 'communal voice' in particular (see Section 4).

2   The sociology of waiting, i.e., "the study of how individuals wait" (Price 2021, p. 2), has emphasized the link between waiting time and the characteristics of waiting (Gasparini 1995, p. 36). Long-term waiting not only "creates a relatively stable condition" (ibid.), but may also lead to a new social role for waiting actors. Whether this holds true largely depends on context. I am chary of following Rotter's (2016) interpretation of the daily routines of asylum seekers waiting for a resolution of their immigration status as an intentional and agential process; Turnbull (2016) takes a more critical stance.

3   Among the various forms of vicarious storytelling in migration discourses (exemplary, documentary, ambassadorial, allied), distinguished by Gebauer and Sommer (2023), allied storytelling, such as the *Refugee Tales* books series, edited by David Herd and Anna Pincus (Herd and Pincus 2016–2021), is the exception rather than the rule. The novel is an inherently vicarious genre which allows authors to imagine and stage, through characters and conflicts, the experiences of others. Whether that means that allied storytelling is more frequent in literary fiction than in factual narrative is open to debate.

4   Trilling (2018, p. 25ff.) describes in detail how irregular migrant communities, largely separated by nationality, run informal camps, establish sets of rules, and pass on tacit knowledge. For an in-depth discussion of the problematic implications of commonly used terms such as "irregular" or "undocumented", see (McNevin 2007, p. 655 (fn. 2)).

5   In the UK, for instance, more than 40,000 asylum seekers have to wait for one to three years for a decision on their claim, according to *The Guardian* (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/14/more-than-40000-asylum-seekers-in-uk-waiting-one-to-three-years-for-decision, accessed on 5 July 2023).

6   https://www.vadfoundation.com/, accessed on 5 July 2023.

7   Cf. Peek (122): "Even though *What Is the What* is prefaced with Deng's statement of faith in the power of humanitarian story [...] the narrator Valentino foregrounds limitations of humanitarian narrative and activism by implicating humanitarian aid and US hospitality in racial and colonizing histories".

8   https://www.schauspiel.koeln/en/schedule/a-z/school-of-resistance/, accessed on 5 July 2023.

9   https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/06/theater/milo-rau-familie-ntgent.html, accessed on 5 July 2023.

10 Rau's film *The New Gospel* (2020), for instance, combines interviews with African immigrants in Italy with a fictional reenactment of the story of Jesus, reimagined for the 21st century.

11 A video recording of the event is available on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-1XECEloLk, accessed on 5 July 2023. References in the text refer to the timeline of this recording.

12   Paynter (2018, p. 45) points out that the experience of transit also affects support networks of activists and advocates which supplement aid at local levels: "Yet the limbo of transit is also, in many ways, the limbo of these collectives: their stability depends on the recognition and permission of local authorities".

13   "Could you control yourself, stay calm and create peace while your fate was uncertain for months and years while trapped in Moria?" (p. 32)

14   https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights, accessed on 5 July 2023.

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Commentary

On Representing Extreme Experiences in Writing and Translation: Omid Tofighian on Translating the Manus Prison Narratives

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Abstract: On 10 June 2021, the Norwegian translator Signe Prøis (for publisher Camino Forlag) organised an event with both Behrouz Boochani and Omid Tofighian (both by video link from New Zealand and Australia) in conversation with translation studies scholar Erlend Wichne (University of Agder, Norway; Agder forum for translation studies). The event was titled: 'Can I translate it? On representing extreme experiences in writing and translation'. The dialogue in this article features excerpts from the seminar with a focus on Tofighian's translation of Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus* Prison (2018) into English. The topics covered include responsibility, translation as activism, some aspects of the broader context to translating *No Friend but the Mountains*, the role of place, and a shared philosophical activity.

Keywords: refugees; Behrouz Boochani; borders; exile; prison narratives; Australia

1. Introduction

Australia has built and manages immigration detention centres on islands in the Pacific thousands of kilometers away from the nation's international borders. Through the illegal practice (according to international law) of exiling and imprisoning people it deems undesirable and expendable, Australia reactivates and invigorates dimensions of its violent colonial legacy. The Australian border, therefore, remains fluid and extends into neighboring countries in unsettling, debilitating and irreparable ways. Exploitative agreements with poorer nations to construct prisons also enable Australia to impose on the sovereignty of those countries and disrupt and damage their socio-cultural, economic and moral fabric, thus maintaining a longstanding colonial dynamic. Australia was established as a penal colony by the British Empire; today, Australia transforms other islands into prisons.

Manus Island and the Republic of Nauru are recent examples of locations for Australia's immigration prison camps. The Australian government began exiling and incarcerating people seeking asylum in these offshore prisons between 2001 and 2008, which was referred to as the 'Pacific Solution'. Since 2012, the second iteration of the Pacific Solution, over four thousand people have been held in these carceral sites. Manus Island is part of Manus Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG): the detention centres on Manus have now been closed. Over one hundred men who were locked up in Manus for over six years are still being held in Port Moresby, the capital city of PNG, with no clear pathway to restarting their lives in a third country. Currently there are over one hundred men and women still being held in Nauru with no clear pathway to restarting their lives in a third country (the facilities in Manus and Port Moresby are for men traveling alone, and in Nauru for women, families and unaccompanied minors).

PNG is a former Australian colony, Nauru is a former protectorate (PNG gained independence in 1975, and Nauru in 1968). Since 2001 Australia has exploited these islands,

using them to warehouse people who travelled to Australia by boat to ask for protection. The natural environment of these locations has been destroyed in order to construct carceral sites of various forms for imprisoning and controlling people seeking asylum for an indefinite time period. The construction, management, security and maintenance contracts for the prison camps have mostly been given to multi-national companies; these extremely lucrative agreements, some of which were made after questionable tender processes, have enabled many companies to profit significantly from the misery of human beings. Approximately ten billion dollars has been spent since 2012 to sustain Australia's offshore detention industry. Australia's two major political parties are complicit; over time, numerous politicians and companies have devised even more complex and brutal technologies for controlling human movement. In conjunction with the mainstream media and a multitude of organizations, they have helped enhance the border-industrial complex, and they have contributed to further demonizing refugees and further securitizing and militarizing the border.

Border politics in Australia is a ruthless political and economic enterprise. Similar to most nation states around the world, border politics has become central to many debates in Australia regarding elections, national security, national interest and national identity. In 1992, the Australian government implemented the policy of mandatory and arbitrary detention designed to deter people seeking asylum by boat. In 2001, John Howard's Liberal government first introduced the Pacific Solution which, as mentioned above, involved the creation of offshore immigration detention centres. Stage two of the Pacific Solution was reintroduced by Julia Gillard's Labor government in 2012. Kevin Rudd took over leadership from Gillard in 2013, and soon after he introduced a new policy where anyone arriving by boat after 19 July 2013 would never be settled in Australia.

Behrouz Boochani fled Iran in 2013 after increasing persecution for his cultural and political advocacy for Kurdish rights and identity; a member of a marginalised and persecuted ethnic group, he was forced to leave his homeland soon after his journalist colleagues were arrested during a raid on their offices by Iranian authorities. Despite being rich in natural resources, the Kurdish regions in Iran are among the most impoverished in the country, and Kurds face systemic discrimination on all levels of society, culture and politics; this creates a deprived, humiliating and unbearable existence in Iran for Kurdish people like Boochani, similar to the situation faced by Kurds in other parts of Kurdistan (areas in Iraq, Syria and Turkey). Significantly, the recent nation-wide uprisings in Iran occurred after Kurdish-Iranian woman Zhina Mahsa Amini died from a brain injury after being violently detained by the state's 'morality police'. The now-iconic cry of resistance that has come to represent the struggle of Iranian people united against state violence, "*zan, zendegi, āzādi*"("Woman, Life, Freedom"), is a translation of a resounding Kurdish political slogan.

After fleeing Iran and arriving in Indonesia, Boochani attempted to reach Australia by boat to ask for protection. He nearly drowned during his first attempt to travel to Australia when the boat sank. After he was returned to Indonesia, he embarked on a second journey. However, when the July 19 ruling was made, his boat was lost at sea for a week and, he arrived four days after the new law was announced. Like thousands of others fleeing dictatorship, discrimination and war he found himself trapped in Australia's border-industrial complex.

In 2013, Australia experienced a change in government with the Liberal-National Coalition defeating the Labor Party. The new Prime Minister, Liberal leader Tony Abbott, continued to further militarize Australia's borders with the support of Scott Morrison as the new immigration minister. With Morrison as immigration minister, the border-industrial complex entered a new phase of brutality: Operation Sovereign Borders (Peter Dutton took over from Morrison as immigration minister in 2014). To date, this regime has caused the deaths of 14 people who were held in Manus and Nauru (not including those who lost their lives after deportation). Morrison became Australia's Prime Minister in 2018 and remained in power until 2022, with Dutton taking over the Liberal Party leadership after years as the Minister for Home Affairs; the Department of Home Affairs is a newly-created 'super-

department' (with Michael Pezzullo as secretary). Operation Sovereign Borders remains in operation following the Labor Party win in the 2022 federal election, with current Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Australia's border regime is in breach of international law. People seeking asylum by boat are exercising their right to seek asylum under international law; the people who have been held in Australia's immigration detention system have been incarcerated without ever committing a crime and without trial. Behrouz's writing and other creative forms of resistance while detained documented this tragedy and humanitarian crisis. His critical analysis from inside the prison created a new discourse for exposing border violence. Together with his translator and collaborator Omid Tofighian—a Sydney-based academic and activist who first made contact via Facebook and WhatsApp when Boochani was still using a smuggled mobile phone—they created Manus Prison Theory, a multidimensional theoretical and creative framework for understanding the recent incarceration of refugees on islands. It is a critical perspective that situates immigration detention within a long history of oppression, domination and subjugation which began with the dispossession and genocide of First Nations peoples and the establishment of the land as a penal colony for the British Empire.

Manus Prison Theory is an evolving ecosystem of philosophical and artistic initiatives coupled with political action and community advocacy; it emerged out of over six years of collaboration between Boochani and Tofighian. It can be described as a collective form of knowledge production that continually incorporates new collaborators, which Tofighian has referred to as a 'shared philosophical activity' (Tofighian 2018b). This growing body of knowledge involves devising effective political actions aimed at abolishing Australia's carceral-border logic and transforming the nation's dominant social imaginary using diverse strategies and techniques; this work has matured into original and radical networks of scholarship, art and collective action. For instance, Boochani and Tofighian assert that the border-industrial complex is global and is interlinked with many different forms of intersectional discrimination, exploitation and subjugation. They argue that the systems of oppression that characterize the border-industrial complex are interconnected, mutually-reinforcing and self-replicating. As such, the detention industry is indispensably connected to other forms of violence, especially oppression in contemporary Australian society; in relation to Australian imperialism in the Pacific and beyond; and from Australia's colonial past. Significantly, Manus Prison Theory acknowledges and builds on diverse decolonial and intersectional perspectives and practices; as a philosophy of resistance, some of its contributions involve the use of concepts such as kyriarchy (a term from radical feminist theology first introduced by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza); Boochani's incorporation of Kurdish resistance and history; and the introduction of what Tofighian refers to as 'horrific surrealism' (Tofighian 2018b, 2021). In sum, Manus Prison Theory is dedicated to examining and challenging Australian border violence by identifying it as a dimension of the nation state's dominant social imaginary and also by critiquing the symmetrical relationship between the Australian border and Australia's socio-political structures and institutions (Tofighian 2020).

Boochani started collaborating with Tofighian on different projects at the beginning of 2016. Together, they began strategizing ways to expose and dismantle Australia's border-industrial complex, and one of their aims was to radically transform the mainstream image of refugees. They attempted to disrupt the social imaginary in Australia pertaining to displaced and exiled peoples. The social imaginary—or rather, a colonial imaginary when considering the dominant role of Australia's colonial legacy in representing and determining domestic and international relationships, interactions and futures—involves the material, symbolic and epistemic conditions that render displaced and exiled peoples weak and without agency. Many widely-held assumptions about refugees are often patronizing and debilitating; they are determining factors that result in refugees being subject to inhumane punishment and abject conditions. That is, the social/colonial imaginary pertaining to refugees functions interdependently with other forms of bordering and therefore must be considered a fundamental component of the border violence nexus. As part of Manus

Prison Theory, Boochani and Tofighian propose new acts of debordering. Tofighian's support primarily involved editing and translating Boochani's journalism, speeches and statements from Persian/Farsi to English; co-authoring scholarship; creating subtitles for his film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (Boochani and Kamali Sarvestani 2017); assuming the role of translator and editor of his multi-award-winning and genre-defying autobiographical novel *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (Boochani 2018); and co-translating and co-editing (with Moones Mansoubi) the collection *Freedom, Only Freedom: The Prison Writings of Behrouz Boochani* (Boochani, forthcoming, edited by Tofighian and Mansoubi).

No Friend but the Mountains was written by Boochani during the first five years of his incarceration in the Australian-run offshore immigration detention centre on Manus Island (the original site within the Lombrum Naval Base). It was written completely on WhatsApp via hundreds of text messages and sent to friends and colleagues in Australia for translation, editing and publication (Farsi/Persian-English). Moones Mansoubi—Boochani's first translator and collaborator—collated most of the messages into individual chapters and created PDFs for Tofighian to translate; Boochani continued to send text messages to Tofighian to insert/change the text, with the final chapter arriving directly to Tofighian via one text. The final chapter (Chapter 12: 'In Twilight/The Colours of War') was completed during the 23-day siege and forced removal of refugees to new prison camps on Manus in October–November 2017; during this period, the Australian and PNG authorities discontinued food, water, power, medication and services and withdrew security and management personnel in order to force the refugees to move to the new camps. After 23 days of resistance, the PNG police and military were sent into the prison camp to brutally transfer the detainees.

Soon after publication, *No Friend but the Mountains* was awarded the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature, among many other prestigious awards, and Boochani (through video link from the prison until Nov 2019, and afterwards from New Zealand) was invited to speak at many Australian and international festivals, book launches, seminars, campaign events and conferences, together with his translator and collaborator Tofighian (mostly in person). Since the release of the book, a few of these events have focused on translation.

On 10 June 2021, the Norwegian translator Signe Prøis (for publisher Camino Forlag) organised an event with both Boochani and Tofighian (both by video link from New Zealand and Australia) in conversation with translation studies scholar Erlend Wichne (University of Agder, Norway; Agder Forum for translation studies). The event was conducted in English and was titled: 'Can I translate it? On representing extreme experiences in writing and translation'. This event was distinct due to its focus on writing, translation, collaboration and publishing as resistance; Manus Prison as a site of knowledge production; and the forms of shared knowledge produced between author and translator.

The following dialogue, 'On Representing Extreme Experiences in Writing and Translation: Omid Tofighian on Translating the Manus Prison Narratives', is from this seminar. The excerpts chosen for this article address Tofighian's translation of the book into English and the collaborative shared philosophical activity necessary for producing *No Friend but the Mountains* and similar works. The topics covered included responsibility and translation as activism, some aspects of the broader context to translating *No Friend but the Mountains*, place and a shared philosophical activity (see Supplementary Materials with a reading list of articles by Tofighian and Boochani about related themes and issues).

2. The House of Literature in Fredrikstad, Norway 2021

Erlend: In your preface to the book *No Friend but the Mountains*, you write that to translate the voice and perspective in Boochani's texts, one needs a big imagination (Tofighian 2018a). I imagine that for you there must have been a point in time when you were realizing that you were going to translate and make a book of Boochani's texts sent out from Manus prison. I am wondering about when and how you made this realization, and I am also wondering how you evaluated your own situation in contrast to that of Boochani's, where you, as a philosopher and translator, were working from within the

Australian frontiers that Boochani had tried to enter and that were depriving him and his fellow prisoners from expressing their abilities as human beings. What could Boochani see of the world that you could not see (Tofighian 2018a)? And what kind of responsibility did you recognize when taking the role as translator for his accounts?

Omid: Thank you for that question. This is something that, to be honest, I have been thinking about from day one, and it is something that has grown and developed from the time I started working with Behrouz. And still today, I continue to learn so many new things after reflecting on the whole process, and seeing the directions that the book has moved in and the way it has been taken up. And now we are talking to people in Norway about it, and about the translation of a translation (all translations of the book are based on the English translation). This is a really fascinating topic and I think a whole book needs to be written about this particular interaction. *No Friend but the Mountains* needs to be understood as one moment, one phase, one example of a very long process. And that process began before the book. Originally I was translating Behrouz's journalism and working on different kinds of activism with Behrouz; we were thinking about ways to challenge the system, dismantle the system, thinking about abolition in this context, not just in terms of borders and immigration detention, but much wider than that. This developed, it came together and influenced the book. After we started working on the book—and then, after the book was finished—this kind of thinking and acting continued and continues still today. The book is actually part of a much larger story and is not the main focus; the book is one element in a very complex, multidimensional narrative that includes many other people. And I think here it is important to mention how I came across Behrouz's work; it was through another translator. Again, the importance of translation, this shows why translation is so important. I came across Behrouz's work and him as a person through the translations of his first translator, Moones Mansoubi. She lives in Sydney and was working with Behrouz for quite some time before I met him; she translated many articles for him. It was through his first article that was published in *The Guardian*—and the first time that he published under his real name—that I came across his situation and his writing, and then I got in touch and we started a relationship. Soon after that I began translating for him, amongst other things, and then that led to the opportunity to translate the book.

It is interesting to examine the notion of place; we are addressing a particular place here that I call a neo-colonial experiment. It is a whole new phenomenon. I am glad Behrouz explains that it needs to be understood in relation to this age, this time, because we are talking about a form of illegal imprisonment that is being conducted by a liberal democracy. And one of the key features is the paradox associated with a liberal democracy creating a particularly brutal space that it controls and manages, a space that Australia is indispensably connected to and which resembles tactics, techniques, ideologies we often associate with fascism. One of the key tropes in this book is paradox. And I think Behrouz worked paradox really well into his book because of the fact that he was engulfed in paradox in the prison camp. This paradox also pertains to the political situation, the border politics in relation to Australia. So here we have a prison camp where people have not been through a court system, have not been convicted of any crime, but are being kept indefinitely. Unlike a prison where you know your sentence, in immigration detention you are being kept indefinitely. At a certain point, phones were illegal, but then they became legal at a certain point; they were no longer criminalised, and there was no ban on phones. At first, people were also locked up in smaller prison camps inside the larger prison, so they could not even communicate with each other. But then at a certain point, the doors opened and people could leave the prison camp, and then the whole island became a prison. So what we are talking about here is maybe something unprecedented in history. And I think paradox or even surrealism is one of the best ways to think about it; I introduced the term 'horrific surrealism'. The last thing that I will mention in terms of translation and the importance of translation and interpreting the whole phenomenon, including the book, is that unlike some of the writers who were imprisoned by fascist regimes in Europe who are looking to European tradition, European philosophy, European poetry, European

arts in terms of their salvation, in terms of their release and resistance, Behrouz here was not looking to the Western tradition or to the Australian cultural scene and its history; he was going back to his Kurdish heritage. Not only that, he was going back to a Kurdish heritage that was particular to his own region, particular to his own village. And I think this is really striking. There is so much to say about it. He connected with the Indigenous people on Manus Island and drew strength from their history and from their stance against colonialism. So as a translator, I had to do so much work to think about how all of these different pieces fit together and how Behrouz's voice comes out of the intersection between all of these facets.

Erlend: I have a question for you about language. Many people work with or within the Australian immigration prison system, and among them we find interpreters. In general, there is a very pessimistic development in the image of the interpreter in this book. First, Behrouz imagines a Kurdish interpreter seeing her own story in him and in his physical presence, almost; this is when he enters the plane from Christmas Island to Manus. Then later, the group of interpreters are perceived as under a total control of the kyriarchal system. It is written that in many ways, the interpreters are the most helpless in the prison; they are deprived of their identity, they are like thinking loud speakers, and they are under total control and deprived of their ability to express sympathy. One would think that the linguistic competence that they have was going to serve more noble goals than enabling the Australian kyriarchy to oppress its prisoners in a language that they understand. But in a way, the interpreters have lost their language. I would say not by not speaking it, but by being forced to turn it against the people in which they see themselves and their own personal history. And your activity as a translator in principle is not that different from that of the interpreters. Why is your agency as a translator so much wider than the agency of the interpreters in this system?

Omid: Behrouz says that knowing the system helped him survive, so really that intellectual activity, that deep analysis, that sophisticated critique, was basically some of the reasons why he was able to come out of the system with his faculties, with his mind in a good place. He felt healthy coming out of the system, even though the system was designed to take his identity and ruin him psychologically, emotionally and spiritually, as well as physically. But I think this particular point that Behrouz makes relates directly to what you are asking about in relation to interpreters and translators. This is just my own personal interpretation and I think it will be interesting to do research on this topic, but I think a lot of the people working in the system as interpreters, as translators, as caseworkers, as counselors, as doctors, I think some of them actually feel, at least in the beginning or before going into the system, that they are doing a good thing. Some of them think that they are actually there to help the people who are imprisoned. And I think they have this imagination that if they did their work really well, if they really treated the detainees with respect, if they were attentive to all of their needs and perform their duties in exceptional ways, then they could help them find freedom very quickly and there would be no need to detain people in this particular way for such a long time. I think genuinely some people working in the system feel that they can help, they can do something positive. But I think this goes back to Behrouz's point about knowing the system. I think right across Australian society and politics a lot of people do not understand the system. Behrouz makes a really great point in his book and in other places that even people in the system, those who designed the system, even they do not know the system. The system is so complex, it is so fluid, it is organic, it grows, it morphs, it multiplies, it changes direction, it defends itself, it justifies itself in really obscure ways, in really unpredictable ways. So I think a lot of the people working in the system who are there because they think they can make a change, they in fact do not know the system. I am not saying that I know the system. I am not saying that I have cracked some kind of code, or anything like that. But we have to be clear on a number of things. I worked with Behrouz on a day-to-day basis, as he has said, before we were in conversation every day, analyzing, talking, sharing ideas. I was going away and researching so much of what he was telling me. I was contributing

a lot of my own ideas as well and sharing a lot, and we transformed and changed a lot of things as well. It is impossible that when you spend this much time thinking about a system that you do not eventually go into the depths or into the belly of that system in some way. You know, I felt at some point that I was walking through the prison. I was in the prison for a certain period of time when we were working so closely. I could feel the anxiety, the stress, especially when Behrouz would send me works to translate—his journalism, for instance—and it had to be done the next day. It had to be done that very day sometimes. This remains in your body, I actually still have that in my body now. I mean, those years of doing that kind of work is in my body. It will take me years to get it out of my system. By doing this kind of work in such an extreme way you come to know the system, you come to understand something particular about state-sanctioned violence. You know something particular about border regimes in Australia after doing this for such a long time. And that is why I took a completely different approach. My approach was not just political, not just practical, but it was also epistemic, it was symbolic, and it was about attacking the colonial imaginary. So I was taking a very different approach to changing things; we just had two telephones, two people, and one book. We made a rupture, we injured the system in a way that I think people who have spent many, many years trying to change it were not able to. The last point that I will make is about my own experience as a marginalized person in Iran and someone who lives in exile and who has also experienced racism in Australia, someone who has lived in Australia and researches and is committed to decolonisation and the study of different aspects of settler colonialism here. That gave me a good platform to work with someone like Behrouz. This helped me to know the system. So when Behrouz talks about colonialism, it is not something unfamiliar to me; when he talks about discrimination and the kyriarchal system, it was, in fact, something that I was seeing around me quite regularly.

Erlend: I want to continue talking about the connection between experience and language. We have been speaking about creativity, intellectual work and theorizing, and also loss of language in the case of the interpreters. I think that we are starting to see the importance of language when giving meaning to extreme experiences like the ones described in *No Friend but the Mountains*. And these invite us to consider the possibility of translating texts written by people who have experienced this by people that do not necessarily have the exact same experiences. And this issue is not unique for the translation of refugee experience, it's probably a case of all translation that you do not have exactly the same experiences. But in cases like refugee experiences and also gendered and racialized experience, this might be relevant to discuss within a framework like this, where it is evident that language is formed by specific experiences. And in Europe and in Norway, this has gotten an expression very recently in the debates over who might or who might not translate the poetry written by Amanda Gorman, for example. I am interested to hear your perspective on this issue. How do you perceive the issue of translating writings about experiences which are not yours?

Omid: Thanks for raising this issue. I have to admit, I have only very briefly looked into the debate around the translation of Amanda Goodman's work. I know a little bit about it, but I have to look into it a lot further. But to respond to your question, maybe I will try to put a different angle on it. Rather than limit the debate about who is able to translate or whether it will be a good translation, whether it will be accurate, whether preference should be given to people who have the same kind of identity or socio-cultural position, instead maybe we could talk about the conditions that actually give rise to the possibilities of a translation. For instance, I am not trained as a translator, and even today I kind of find it weird to think of myself as a translator. I came into translation by accident. I started translating for people a number of years ago, maybe eight years ago, and that was only just a few lines here and there. When I met Behrouz, I had never really translated a full article or a complete text. But I did grow up interpreting for my parents since I was a child. So I was already thinking in two languages. But still, that was very different from translating a text. So, my first real substantial experience in translation came from working

with Behrouz, and it came from an activist space. When I say the conditions for translation, I think it is important to look at the political dimensions regarding: who is encouraged to learn translation?; to appreciate translation?; why isn't translation being taught in some spaces?; how is it being taught?; who is being encouraged to engage in translation? I think these questions about who should be translating someone's work and who shouldn't be may not even be a major debate if we already had a long tradition, and already had a political vision about what translation means in our lives, what it means in our world, and what kind of work should be done as a result of teaching translation. Why is it that there are not more people with backgrounds in displacement and exile being encouraged, funded and employed to do translation work that would end up resulting in something like *No Friend but the Mountains*? Why is it that now, after winning all of these prizes and all of this international attention and all of this different research being done, it is still almost impossible for me to get support for my next translation project with Behrouz? Why is that the case? For me it is surprising, and it is unsurprising at the same time. Why is this the case? Why are there not more people with lived experience of particular situations, particular kinds of struggles, involved in his work? Why are there no programmes? Why are there no benefactors available to really think about the importance of this to everyone's knowledge, everyone's understanding of the world, everyone's understanding of each other? Maybe thinking about this debate in those terms might add something significant and take the conversation in other directions, maybe more important directions.

Erlend: I think in your essays published with Behrouz's book, you introduce a very important concept of translation which could be useful to what you outline; exactly the idea of translation as a shared philosophical activity. I think that is a beautiful concept which you write clearly about in your translator's note and which gives a very good expression of what translation can be and how it can be more a dialogic than, sort of, a monologic process from the translators. Could you say something about this shared philosophical activity regarding translation?

Omid: If we want to think about it a lot more radically, I also consider Behrouz as one of the translators. We were always in conversation every day, always clarifying terms, I was always explaining the kinds of experiments that I was engaging in. Behrouz was giving feedback on the translation, he was helping with the translation, he is part of that shared philosophical activity. Moones Mansoubi was my translation consultant and Behrouz's first translator, and another translation consultant was Sajad Kabani, an Iranian researcher who was in Sydney at that time. Consider the kind of critiques that are made about this idea of the single, lone genius who creates theories and philosophies and writes books and articles; we need to move away from that idea. We are all relational. We all interact with each other, and particularly in these important projects, these really pivotal, influential projects that end up having a huge impact on different fields and on different people from different places. It is more the case that relationships make the product, relationships make the outcome and something like *No Friend but the Mountains* could never have been produced if it were not for people who were all committed, all focused on making it happen and all investing and believing in what Behrouz was writing, investing in Behrouz's resistance, really seeing the outcome. I realized that this book was going to be a masterpiece after reading two or three pages; I really believed in it from that point, I said, "This is going to be something special". I can see something, I can feel something here, I can see how this can be used to make change, how it can be leveraged to make real transformation, to change the way people see displacement, exile and incarceration. I could see how we could make a rupture in the system. Once this team came together, everyone had the right kind of vision and the right kind of commitment. We had many bodies, but one mind. In terms of philosophy of mind or in terms of metaphysics, I think there are really important discussions to have about this phenomenon. You have situations where there is one body, many identities. But what we had in our case was really unique because we had many bodies, one identity. And it was only when we were working on the project that this took place, that this was solidified. Now we are all separate and we are all moving on with our

lives, doing different things. But that moment, that special moment, I think that is one of the magical aspects of *No Friend but the Mountains*. And imagine if we could invest more, if we could create the conditions again, going back to my point about creating the right conditions for a translation. A translation that involves so many different stars aligning, so many different kinds of principles and beliefs, notions and commitments for change, all coming together. If we could make that happen again, if we could replicate that shared philosophical activity, not just in this space but in other spaces, I think we will see other magical moments, other special outcomes.

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Article

Writing: The Question as Revolt in Kristeva and Boochani

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Abstract: Writing offers a privileged access to the culture of revolt, a kind of radical questioning that has the potential to unsettle illegitimate forms of authority and sense. Writing bequeaths a future and a society capable of creative thought, and this is all important in societies where questioning and critical thought is increasingly under threat. This work explores the importance of writing in relation to questioning and revolt in two markedly different contexts: in Julia Kristeva's celebration of the European tradition of revolt and dissent, and in Behrouz Boochani's literary revolt against the illegitimate incarceration of refugees in Manus Prison. If Kristeva is correct and European culture is, in part, a culture of the question and of revolt, then what does this mean for the non-European world? Boochani's writing offers a powerful contemporary response to this question, a response that positions the suffering body as a locus of protest and resistance.

Keywords: philosophy; ethics; literature; writing; Kristeva; Sartre; Boochani

1. The Question of Writing

"Rather than falling asleep in the new normalizing order, let us try to rekindle the flame (easily extinguishable) of the culture of revolt". (Julia Kristeva, *SNRS*: 9)

"O my body, make of me always a man who questions!". (Frantz Fanon, *BSWM*: 181)

Writing offers a privileged access to the culture of revolt, a kind of radical questioning that has the potential to unsettle illegitimate forms of authority and sense. Writing bequeaths a future and a society capable of creative thought, and this is all important in societies where questioning and critical thought is increasingly under threat. In this work I explore the importance of writing in relation to questioning and revolt in two markedly different contexts: in Julia Kristeva's celebration of the European tradition of revolt and dissent, and in Behrouz Boochani's literary revolt against the illegitimate incarceration of refugees in Manus Prison.

If Kristeva is correct and European culture is, in part, a culture of the question and of intimate revolt, then what does this mean for the non-European world? Boochani's writing offers, I think, a powerful contemporary response to this question, a response that in part challenges what may at first appear as Kristeva's arguably privileged account of intimate revolt as a *self*-questioning. Against this, Boochani's work leads us toward a revolt that questions more directly the system that illegitimately detains him. In Boochani's writing, the internal focus on the suffering body is ultimately directed externally, to the world. In writing, his suffering body becomes the locus of protest and resistance to an unjust world. In reading Boochani's work alongside Kristeva's, we are, I think, better able to glimpse aspects of the legacy of colonialism and the limits it places on a specifically European framing of questioning and revolt. We are, perhaps, better able to situate intimate revolt in its very worldly context.

While Boochani's writing offers a powerful reminder of the social context of our intimate revolts, there is an important sense in which Kristeva's account helps us to better understand the links between intimacy and world. Indeed, her claims that revolt is an index of the imaginary, and that radical questioning rests on our ability to remember, i.e.,

to a renewed relation with the past, establishes a resurrectional process that ultimately bequeaths a culture capable of creative thought. In so doing, Kristeva's work on revolt bridges the intimate with the collective.

2. Writing and/as Revolt: Kristeva Reads Sartre

In 1996, Kristeva published *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (Kristeva 2000), and a year later *Intimate Revolt* (Kristeva 2002a). These are, I think, important books—if not for any other reason than that they code (or encode) a certain (local) history of what Kristeva herself refers to as revolt.[1] In these works, Kristeva spends considerable time (one of eight chapters in *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* and three of fifteen chapters in *Intimate Revolt*) rereading Jean-Paul Sartre and building a case for both returning to his body of thought[2] and for rereading or reframing his work as an emblematic instance of revolt.[3] It would not be unfair, I think, to say that Kristeva bases her claim to reclaim or salvage Sartre's work precisely by presenting his writing, his thought, and his political actions as questions. For Kristeva, Sartre's work expresses a persistent questioning. Given this, it is not surprising to find that her reading or rereading of Sartre effects a persistent return to what we might refer to as the ethics of the question.[4] With this in mind, let us now turn to a brief discussion of Kristeva's work on revolt, and the prominent place she accords Sartre within it. While this is an interesting discussion in its own right, I hope to link this with more general questions concerning the Sartre that emerges from her particular framing, and the implications of this Sartre—if any—for the questions we have regarding refugees and writing.

At first glance, for those who know her extensive work in the domain of psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva's focus on Sartre's writing may seem somewhat odd. Given Sartre's at best troubled relation to the unconscious (or at least the psychoanalytic theory of it), it may seem strange that at a time when Kristeva is defending psychoanalysis from attack and denigration,[5] she characterises Sartre as one of the twentieth century's most radical practitioners of what she refers to as "intimate revolt". This incongruity is, I think, more apparent than real, and I shall return to it at a later point. For the moment we need only consider that, for Kristeva, Sartre's questioning positions him on terrain that is more than familiar to those of a psychoanalytic persuasion. However, what are we to make of Kristeva's focus on revolt? What fuels her interest in the question, and what are the implications for contemporary social and political theory? In order to understand this, we need to explore her analysis of contemporary society and her argument concerning the malaise that European culture currently suffers.[6]

Following on from and adapting Freud's observations at the level of the psyche, Kristeva believes that for a society to be healthy and free it must continually question itself; it must habitually undergo a retrospective questioning that amounts, in effect, to revolt. This regenerative revolt—or perpetual self-questioning—involves a return to, reconstruction of, and displacement of the past.[7] It allows a restoration of memory and as such is a resurrectional process of consciousness—a consciousness, or society, whose mode of being is to question itself. By perpetually re-engaging with the past, the individual or society is able to refigure it. This leads, she says, to a creative re-thinking that serves and nourishes "the life of the mind"[8] and the individual's attempt "to find meaning". The benefits for society are, for Kristeva, clear. Such a creative engagement with or questioning of the past means that we are better able to avoid the dangers of simply *opposing* the past or (even more significantly) *forgetting* it.[9] Likewise, we are better placed to avoid the dangerous situations of failing to engage with what the past means, or might still yet mean, or *even* might have meant. Significantly, Kristeva positions Sartre as one of the most important (if somewhat currently disavowed) instances of such a critical engagement in the twentieth century. Accordingly, he serves as the *place* of Kristeva's own return and creative re-engagement. Returning to Sartre (her Sartre) is, if you like, part of the meaning of Kristeva's revolt. A revolt, we should underline, that takes a particularly European form.[10]

If the health of a person and a people is tied to the intricacies of revolt, then it is perhaps true to say that an unhealthy society is one that, for whatever reason or reasons, bars the ability to question. Radical evil is, Kristeva says, "the halting of representation and questioning" (IR: 10). For Kristeva, what justifies our return to the question of revolt today is precisely the danger that *our* society (she is at times vague about this term, though the eurocentrism of her analysis is made clear) is headed toward a situation in which the creative re-engagement of a questioning culture is lost. She speaks of the normalizing and pervertible order of post-industrial and post-Communist democracies in the west, where the "society of the spectacle" or "society of the image"[11] threatens to displace culture and art (SNSR: 4, 8)[12], or at least the culture and art of revolt.[13]

Kristeva characterises this new order in the following terms. Firstly, she contends that its normalizing nature is tied to a power vacuum, an absence of plans, a disorder and anarchy that makes it almost impossible to determine who governs. What this suggests, in Kristeva's terms, is a symbolic system in crisis—a law, power and authority that is no longer clearly centralized and stable, a pseudo-symbolic system. In the legal sphere, this power vacuum can be seen in the falling away of culpability (in favour of public menace), the decline of fault (in favour of damage) and the rise of liability in the place of responsibility. She writes: "Though we are not punished, we are, in effect, normalized" (SNSR: 5). And the effect of this normalizing order? *We* are threatened, she says, with the loss of memory and our subsequent inability to question (SNSR: 16).

The second characteristic of this creeping normalization can be linked with what Kristeva refers to as the Patrimonial Individual. (Patrimony as property inherited from one's father or ancestors; one's heritage). Here she questions the status of the individual, or, more specifically, the fate of the individual in a normalized and pervertible economic order. For example, she enquires into the status of the person in relation to new biological technologies, arguing that we must "protest the primacy of the market economy over the body before it is too late" (SNSR: 6). If not, we are in danger of witnessing the disappearance of the human subject as a person with rights, so that what remains is merely a patrimonial individual who possesses organs "convertible into cash" (SNRS: 6).[14]

Now what ties the arguably disparate threads of Kristeva's analysis of the normalizing order is her firm conviction that the ills of modern (Western) societies can only (perhaps paradoxically) be countered by revolt or permanent contestation.[15] The effect of this order is the stifling, or eradication, of revolt. Without the means to question and creatively resist, we become a culture of docile bodies ordered by an ever increasing move toward a normalized world: "the very notion of culture as revolt and of art as revolt is in peril, submerged as we are in the culture of entertainment, the culture of performance, the culture of the show" (SNRS: 6).[16] For Kristeva, art, writing, and a certain critical thought thus serve as antidotes to an order that has already, in rather chilling ways, taken its toll. Thus, the need to return to the question of revolt.[17]

> "There is an urgent need to develop the culture of revolt starting with our aesthetic heritage and to find new variants of it. Heidegger thought only religion could save us; faced with the religious and political impasses of our time, an experience of revolt may be the only thing that can save us from the automation of humanity that is threatening us". (SNRS: 7)

> " ... I see no other role for literary criticism and theory than to illuminate the experiences of formal and philosophical revolt that might keep our inner lives alive, this psychological space we call a soul and that is no doubt the hidden side, the invisible and indispensable source of what is Beautiful" (SNRS: 7–8)

In a careful discussion of the etymology of the term[18] Kristeva traces the myriad paths that lead us, around the time of the French Revolution, to our contemporary European understanding of revolt. To the meaning that we most readily assign to revolt—a protest against established norms, values and powers—she appends a discussion that would have us think of it in terms of a "questioning of one's own being", a return that is simultaneously

"recollection, interrogation and thought" (IR: 5–6).[19] Kristeva is quick to distinguish this understanding of revolt from what she refers to as rejection and reactionary opposition:

"What has been taken for revolt ... for two centuries, particularly in politics and its attendant ideologies, has more often been this abandonment of retrospective questioning in favour of a rejection, pure and simple, of the old, destined to be replaced by new dogmas ... Generally, when the media employ the word 'revolt', we understand nothing other than this nihilistic suspension of questioning in favour of so-called new values, which as values, precisely, have forgotten to question themselves and have thereby fundamentally betrayed the meaning of revolt that I am trying to emphasize here" (IR: 6)

Revolt thus refigured—or more correctly for Kristeva, revisited—enacts a return, a displacement, a creative engagement and transformation of the past. It is both a "questioning and displacement of the past" that ensures for us a future (IR: 6). Kristeva's aim, in these works, is thus to look for "experiences in which this work of revolt, which opens psychical life to infinite re-creation, continues and recurs, even at the price of errors and impasses" (IR: 6).[20]

While Kristeva has elsewhere devoted significant intellectual energy to an analysis of the ways in which revolt is inscribed in psychoanalytic interpretation[21], she turns her attention, in these two books, to a discussion of the revolt that structures the very possibility of thought and writing in, amongst other things, Sartre's *œuvre*. In the process she draws delicate lines between his questioning and the Copernican revolution that Freud's discovery of the unconscious effects within both the philosophical and psychological domains. To say this, though, is not to suggest that she reduces his work to Freud's. Kristeva is keen (at least consciously) to preserve the unique negativity[22] she sees at work in Sartre's thought.[23] Whether she is ultimately successful, though, in avoiding this reduction remains an open question.[24]

So, why Sartre? What is it about his work that captures Kristeva's interest in revolt as a form of permanent contestation? Why Sartre, rather than say Camus or Fanon?[25] Kristeva offers an initial response to these questions by characterising his work as belonging to the "monumental history" of Nietzsche's challenge (SNSR: 218, n.14). In effect, for Kristeva, Sartre's monumental work on freedom places the radical violence of the question at the heart of our understanding of all identity, faith, and law (IR: 9). Following, (yet separate from), Hegel and Heidegger, Sartre charts "the moment when the knowing subject's questioning of himself and his truth ... leads him to nothing less than a familiarity with [what Kristeva calls] psychosis", when he comes up against "a psychical reality that endangers consciousness", exposing itself "to the pulse of being" (IR: 8–9).[26] For Kristeva, Sartre's thought and writing are henceforth devoted to a certain revolt, one that confronts the unity of law, being, and self, and one that searches continually for a language and style equal to the task of countering any barrier that would result in "the halting of representation and questioning" (IR:10). In this it contributes to—perhaps even leads—a culture of revolt dedicated to keeping the question alive.

Sartre's magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre 1996), is a work that is, for Kristeva, central in any understanding of Sartre's enactment of revolt.[27] Here Sartre depicts consciousness as "essentially nihilating and interrogating, a process, in conflict and in flux" (IR: 124). This emphasis on nothingness (the negativity of consciousness) is what makes it possible for him to resist, for example, the logical calculations of cognitivism (IR: 124). What emerges from this confrontation is a consciousness that Kristeva describes as resurrectional: "consciousness is not alive unless it allows itself to be questioned—even at the risk of annihilation—by intimacy in revolt" (IR: 125).[28] And this is the meaning of freedom for Sartre. Freedom as questioning.

Thus, by formulating freedom in terms of the question Sartre comes to occupy the terrain of what Kristeva repeatedly refers to as revolt:

" ... as soon as man posits himself in the world and the relationship between them is possible, the fundamental conduct of man is that of 'questioning': 'At

the very moment when I ask, 'Is there any conduct which can reveal to me the relation of man with the world?' I pose a question . . . In every question we stand before a being which we are questioning. Every question presupposes a being who questions and a being which is questioned' (BN: 4)". (IR: 142)

The revolt in question here is precisely the revolt in or of being. *Man's* questioning conduct is internal to consciousness (IR: 143) and is inseparable from the negativity of *his* freedom: "if man is able to question, it is because he is able to put himself outside of being" to pose himself as question and to question himself (IR: 144). This, for Kristeva, is the meaning of Sartre's statement that "Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom" (BN: 25).[29]

To this point, Kristeva draws the various threads of Sartre's literary and philosophical works together in order to make a case for writing and aesthetic experience as marking a privileged domain of revolt.[30] Sartre's various aesthetic experiments (whether "literary" or "theoretical")[31] serve as a model of radical questioning, always at the limit of sense and non-sense. In this, (for Kristeva) he shows us the way, providing us with a map of revolt and radical interrogation. And yet, Sartre—perhaps true to form—refuses to remain here. At a certain critical point, Sartre returns to the aesthetic domain only to bid it a fond adieu. Kristeva marks *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Sartre 1976) and *The Words* (Sartre 1981) as critical moments in his retreat from literature.[32] Here Sartre famously renounces the imaginary in favour of action and his search for an agent of history. Negativity, for Sartre, no longer resides in the imaginary of the literary domain, but, rather, in the committed actions of social praxis and politically engaged writing. In *What Is Literature?* (Sartre 1998). Sartre is already on his way to this renunciation by privileging "the collectivity" over and above the negativity of the individual and his or her imaginative world (IR:185). "In this last period of his life, cured of his 'madness,' his 'neurosis,' and his 'belief,' including his religious worship of Literature" (IR: 135), Sartre "bids a magnificent farewell to literature" (IR: 159), if even in literary and imaginary form[33] And Kristeva laments this passing in the following terms:

> "Henceforth Sartre will relentlessly disparage the imaginary in favour of action, particularly political action . . . This flagellation quickly turns into an auto-da-fé, however, because the political activities in which Sartre continued to engage, de-spite their incisive impact in a France settling into consumerism and the spectacle, seemed to lack the density and polyphony that once accompanied the splendours of the master of Saint-Germain. Deprived of the imaginary, political engagement is fleshless, cut off from its emotional and unconscious substratum, castrated, in a way, of its fateful connotation". (SNRS: 183)

Sartre's renunciation of negativity as "a force at work in the imaginary"[34] (SNRS: 183)—whether in his novels, plays or the famous images and metaphors of *Being and Nothingness*—accompanies a simultaneous stabilisation or sedimentation of his thought. In effect he leaves behind the "imaginary 'madness' that opened an infinite abyss in each (necessarily erroneous) position he took, thereby saving it" (SNSR: 183). What Kristeva suggests is that Sartre's revolt is, perhaps ironically, an essentially "unintended outcome of a writing practice" that exists "where it would be least expected"—his literary works—and "does not exist where one might [logically] expect it" to be—his explicitly engaged political writing and action.[35] For Kristeva, revolt is an index of the imaginary. A revolt-culture, if we can speak of such a thing, is one in which the inner life of the individual is given free reign for its own intimate revolt, its own self-questioning. And this intimate revolt exists most clearly and unambiguously for Kristeva in Sartre's earliest works. For here, Sartre creatively questions in such a way as to keep the psychic space of the self open to perpetual interrogation and revolt.

What emerges in Kristeva's reframing of Sartre is arguably a picture of his writing as something akin to Freud's *unheimlich*; work that stands in for a history, past, and memory that can only be forgotten or overlooked at *our* peril. In this spirit of revolt Kristeva is

literally compelled to return to and engage with Sartre's writing.[36] In her own terms, we might say that her retrospective questioning of Sartre generates a regenerative revolt, one that leads to a renewed relation with the past and the other. This restoration of memory (has France "forgotten" Sartre?) serves to revitalise the negativity of the question, of all questions and all questioning. It is—once again to use her words—a resurrectional process of consciousness that bequeaths a future, a society, and a culture capable of creative thought.

While there are arguably problems with what some have characterised as the euro-centric and "intimate"[37] orientation of Kristeva's analysis, i.e., with the focus on questioning as a *self*-questioning, her understanding that radical questioning and revolt rests upon the ability to remember, to recall, to create a renewed relation with the past is helpful in thinking through and making links with the writing of contemporary refuge-seekers. This is, in part, due to the sense in which Kristeva's understanding of intimacy undoes any neat opposition between the personal and the collective. In what sense (or senses), then, might a resurrectional process of consciousness or remembering help us to better understand the complex relations between writing, questioning and revolt in representations of refugee experience today? In what sense might Kristeva's focus be illuminative of contemporary refugee writing?

3. Behrouz Boochani: Writing as Horrific Surrealism

It is helpful to think of the writing of the Kurdish-Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani in terms of questioning and revolt. Imprisoned on Manus Island[38] by the Australian government, "without charge, without conviction, and without sentence" (Boochani 2018, x), Boochani's revolt takes the form of an uncompromising account of his six years spent in detention between 2013 and 2019. To be sure, Boochani's questions and his revolt emerge from different worlds and different concerns than those Kristeva identifies. And yet, questioning and revolt are central to Boochani's significant literary and political accomplishments. In *No Friend But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (Boochani 2018), Boochani's literary and philosophical experimentation culminate in what the Australian writer Richard Flanagan has described as "a strange and terrible book" (Boochani 2018, xi).

In his Foreword to the book, Flanagan suggests that Boochani's work "can rightly take its place on the shelf of world prison literature" (Boochani 2018, ix).[39] This is an important point as it brings to mind a deeper question concerning the role of writing and the imaginary in response to representations of captivity and trauma. Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (written between 1929–1935) mark a notable instance of the negativity and force released in writing under conditions of incarceration. Like Boochani's work, Gramsci's *Notebooks* were smuggled out of prison only later to see the light of day. However, the force of this literary relation between captivity and trauma predates Gramsci's impressive legacy. In her provocative account of the literary achievements of Miguel de Cervantes, Maria Antonia Garcés argues that the writer was imprisoned for five years (1575–1580) in Algiers and that this experience of captivity, and the trauma it induced, lies at the heart of his work, thus grounding modern literature as an imaginary expression of, or flight from, incarceration.[40] Given this, Boochani's turn to literature and the imaginary is arguably an attempt to represent the unrepresentable, an attempt to make sense of the senseless; in this case, the senseless suffering of the incarcerated refugee. While, as we have seen, Kristeva maintains that Sartre moved away from the imaginary toward praxis in his later work, Boochani's writing is a forceful reminder that praxis (the ability to act) is precisely what the incarcerated refugee has taken from him or her. What remains is writing and the imaginary, and yet access to this form of revolt is by no means a given.

"Behrouz Boochani's revolt took a different form", writes Flanagan, a literary form different from the physical acts of revolt carried out by others in detention:

"And so over the course of his imprisonment Behrouz Boochani began one of the more remarkable careers in Australian journalism: reporting about what was happening on Manus Island in the form of tweets, texts, phone videos, calls, and emails. In so doing he defied the Australian government which went to

extreme lengths to prevent refugees' stories being told, constantly seeking to deny journalists access to Manus Island and Nauru; going so far, for a time, as to legislate the draconian section 42 of the *Australian Border Force Act*, which allowed for the jailing for two years of any doctors or social workers who bore public witness to children beaten or sexually abused, to acts of rape or cruelty". (x)

Boochani's extraordinary book was painstakingly written as a series of texts and tweets on illegal mobile phones, smuggled out of Manus Prison. This, too, is significant, as it demonstrates a remarkable reframing of the text and tweet as an ephemeral and ultimately superficial form of communication. Boochani appropriates the only form of communication available to him—the instant thought, the superficial remark—to construct a complex and reflective text that demands critical reflection and attention. In short, he achieves the near impossible—to go against the instant and distracted form of the internet where information is sampled in an infinite series of meaningless bits—by creating a work of focused attention that demands an enormous effort from its reader.[41] Over and against the speed and superficiality of internet skimming, Boochani's revolt is to call forth a concentrated and contemplative response to a "normalized" world (to use Kristeva's term), largely oblivious to the refugee's plight. In this, Boochani remakes the technology in his own image. A remarkable achievement indeed.

In remaking technology, Boochani's literary revolt simultaneously pushes the very limits of journalism. His genius here is to undo the restrictions and limitations of the "embedded journalist" who, since the war in Vietnam, has more often than not been employed to report an official narrative.[42] Boochani's writing effects a very different form of "embedded journalism", one able to subvert the official narrative which, in the case of Australian immigration policy, is effectively one of silence. Boochani's revolt is precisely to give voice to his "embedded" and very "embodied" experience of incarceration and trauma. In this, his writing is a form of protest literature written, in part, to inform the Australian people of the workings of a detention system established in their (our) name.

Boochani's translator, Omid Tofighian, refers to Boochani's writing (both the book and subsequent works) as an embodied mix of "literary language and journalism to depict the strategic use of starvation, thirst, insomnia, disease and emotional and psychological pressure as tools of torture" (xix). Boochani's revolt takes the form of questions the government would prefer not to be posed, questions articulated in a language consonant with the horrors he invokes. Moones Mansoubi, another translator contributing to the book[43], writes: "Behrouz's use of words and phrases in this book is so complex and unique—the context in which he's using language is deep and challenging, and often bizarre in a remarkably creative way" (xxiv). For Tofighian and Mansoubi, to fully understand the force of Boochani's writing, one needs to understand the complex links between colonialism, imperialism, and economic exploitation, and in particular the intimate associations between colonialism and forced migration. Such understanding marks the book as a decolonial work. Mansoubi writes:

" . . . many of Behrouz's narratives illustrate the connection between [*estemar* -colonialism/imperialism and *estesmar*—economic exploitation]; he emphasises how domination and control are related to aggressive extraction and manipulation of natural resources, the destruction of the ecosystem, and exploitation of human bodies". (xxvii)

The decolonial effects of Boochani's writing depends to a significant degree on a strategic fusion (or confusion) of genres, mixing literature with political commentary and a myriad of unexpected discourses. For Tofighian, this strategic play results ultimately in the production of an anti-genre:

" . . . Behrouz's literary techniques and forms of expression have connections with horror realism and culturally—or ethically—situated forms of surrealism. Identifying these factors facilitated the translation: it made expressing Behrouz's voice, choosing the words, developing the tone and style, and creating intertextual

figures more compelling and consistent. I interpret his genre (or anti-genre) as 'horrific surrealism'". (xxxi)

Literary experimentation is central to the revolt that Boochani is able to achieve in his work, an experimentation complicated by work that is written in Farsi (the language of Boochani's colonial oppressors) and translated into English (the language of his contemporary goalers).[44] In this sense, experimentation works to question the authority and sense of the language of his oppressors, confronting it with a kind of excessive non-sense or meaning—literally a horrific surrealism that echoes in certain respects Freud's *unheimlich*.[45] Boochani's horrific surrealism, depicted by Magdalena Zolkos as a kind of poetics of detention,[46] works to undo the carceral aim of eliminating the possibility of revolt and freedom, of imagination, hope and resistance: "resistance against oppression consists of carving out narrow spaces of political action and reclaiming not only voice but precisely the subject's capacity to imagine and to dream" (Zolkos 2019, 79). This literary revolt challenges what he refers to throughout the book as the "The Kyriarchal System" or the "kyriarchy", "a term that signifies intersecting social systems that reinforce and multiply with the aim of punishing, subjugating and suppressing" (Boochani 2018, xxix).[47] This is the ideological apparatus that governs the prison within what Boochani refers to as Australia's "ubiquitous border-industrial complex" (xxix). Additionally, writes Tofighian, "the notion kyriarchy amplifies the extent and omnipresence of the torture and control in the prison" (xxix). By renaming what the Australian government refers to as Manus Island Regional Processing Centre as Manus Prison, Boochani challenges the ideology of the border-industrial complex, laying bare the violence that structures and supports every aspect of daily lived experience for those incarcerated there. For Tofighian:

> "Naming has special aesthetic, interpretive and political functions in the book. For Behrouz, renaming things is a way to affirm his personhood and establish a sense of authority; naming is a way of reclaiming authority from the prison, disempowering the system and redirecting sovereignty back to the land. Naming is also part of a creative endeavour, and it works as an analytical tool for examination of the political and material circumstances". (xxviii)

In short, Boochani's horrific surrealism signifies an embodied revolt that questions and ultimately refuses the legitimacy of the Australian government's refugee policies. As such, it questions the government's right to detain and incarcerate refugees in indefinite detention. Given this, Boochani is not so much concerned with questioning himself (Kristeva's intimate revolt?) as he is with questioning the system that illegitimately detains him, stripping him of freedom, dignity, and personhood.[48] Boochani's embodied revolt is directed not inwardly, but externally, to the colonial and carceral institution within which he finds himself imprisoned. For example, he rails against the ubiquitous gaze of the prison, and the larger culture that it supports, writing: "All the pockets and corners in far-off sections of the prison are dominated by their gaze—eyes tracking us down and committed to pursuit . . . There, in every section of the prison, they keep watch like hostile animals. Their gaze ploughs through and it seems that there is no chance of avoiding its pervasive scope" (Boochani 2018, 142). Such writing is, for certain, a different form of revolt, one that returns the gaze of the legacy of European colonisation which (paradoxically?) supports the revolt-culture Kristeva champions. In this, Boochani's work arguably echoes—and provides a very local intonation to—the words of Fanon that open this essay: "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (Fanon 2008, 181).

Boochani's revolt and Boochani's questions are in part directed toward exposing the near impossibility of revolt, the near impossibility of posing or formulating questions within the colonial context of incarceration. He writes: "The Kyriarchal System presents the prisoner with the blueprint", a blueprint that constructs a reality that cannot be questioned. "Don't come up with any questions . . . You can't understand the system. Even the officers are ignorant. You shouldn't rebel. Just submit to the power of the rules and regulations" (Boochani 2018, 210). The prison's kyriarchal system is designed to punish, subjugate,

and suppress to the point where questions and revolt evaporate. In the place of questions: humiliation, desolation, despair. From wounds, anguish, and affliction, however, a new writing of raw humanity emerges, a writing of pure rebellion. A writing that revolts against the degradation of daily existence simply by naming it, witnessing it: "There is nothing left of that pretend pride—my head has dropped down low. A crushed person. Someone extremely degraded. Someone worthless . . . I have been degraded in no uncertain terms. The mood infused with sorrow . . . is weighing down on me. I take a few deep breaths, trying to breathe some dignity back into my spirit" (Boochani 2018, 98, 99). Time and again, Boochani's writing bears witness to and exposes the structural humiliation built into the system: "The prison dictates that the prisoners accept, to some degree, that they are wretched and contemptible—this is an aspect of the system designed particularly for them. An objective of the Kyriarchal System: no-one has the right to express the very human feeling of munificence" (184). In outlawing munificence, the system outlaws humanity, humanness.

Bereft of humanity, the prisoners of Manus sink into a deep and perilous well, a loneliness that robs the impulse toward hope: "These forced conditions of loneliness make everyone endure scenes of an internal odyssey that would ruin any man. The odyssey summons dark angels and secrets relegated to the unconscious; like a magical curse it positions before every prisoner's eyes the most long-standing issues and bad blood tied up in the soul . . . The prisoner is a piece of meat with a mind that is always moving between the darkest, dullest and most worn-out scenes" (131). Without hope, anguish: "The cubicles are places for screaming out. Or they are marked as chambers of devastation, the devastation of youth who have lost their innocence, a devastation constituted by absolute hopelessness. A location of the clash between terror, hopelessness and outbursts of deep anguish" (171). An anguish expressed in the non-language of weeping, wailing, moaning:

> "Moaning that doesn't involve words or meaning/
> Moaning, perhaps wailing as well/
> And perhaps also weeping/
> And perhaps all of them together/
> Crying out. Moaning. Wailing. Crying" (279).

Kristeva's revolt, as we have seen, is a revolt directed against the new order, characterised by a creeping normalization capable of stifling or eradicating dissent. It is a Sartrean revolt that ultimately reawakens our ability to resist by literally placing the self in question. However, bereft of the means to question and to resist, we are in danger of losing the very ability to moan, to weep, to wail. Boochani's non-language, his weeping, wailing, and moaning, his embodied and horrific surrealism, demonstrates how his writing can return the gaze of a colonial incarceration that wills him nothing, non-being, leaves him with no place, no home to return to, no self to question. In this, his rebellion—his revolt—is a writerly revolt, a torrent of embodied words and images that construct a new place, a different home. A strange and terrible book indeed.

And yet, while Kristeva's focus on the intimate revolt of *self*-questioning may seem at first distant from Boochani's obviously political concerns, there is an important sense in which the two meet. For all their differences, Kristeva and Boochani share, I think, an understanding of resistance in and through memory. As we have seen, Kristeva calls for a regenerative revolt that leads to a renewed relation with the past, a restoration of memory which serves to rekindle or revitalize the negativity of the question. By resurrecting his own past in writing, Boochani resurrects, at the same time, his own traumatic experiences of war and displacement, and creates from this the foundation of a regenerative revolt, a restoration of memory that serves to revitalize the negativity of the question, of all questioning.

In *No Friend But The Mountains*, the contemporary narrative depicting Boochani's unliveable life in Manus Prison is interspersed with passages resurrecting the trauma of his childhood during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s. This is best captured in the recurring motif of the mountains in his dispossessed Kurdish homeland. Both source of refuge and

place of desolation, Boochani's memory of the mountains draws the horror of childhood experience into the current crisis of his incarceration, forging transformative associations that permit him to question and to resist:

> "Where have I come from?
> From the land of rivers, the land of waterfalls, the land of ancient chants, the
>   land of mountains . . . " (258).
> "Truth be told, I am a child of war. Yes, I was born during the war. Under the
>   thunder of warplanes. Alongside tanks. In the face of bombs. Breathing
>   gunpowder. Among dead bodies. Inside silent cemeteries. These were
>   the days when war was a part of our everyday lives and ran like blood
>   through our identity . . . A war that devastated our families and sizzled
>   and incinerated all of our vivid, green and bounteous homeland" (257).

In the poetic play of Boochani's writing, the mother and mountains merge in search of a re-membering that does justice to both. This is anything but a sentimentalized remembering.[49] It is, rather a poetic resistance that draws strength and insight from the past. Boochani writes: "Horrified mothers . . . mothers wrapped their children within the instincts of motherhood and escaped to the mountains" (259). Both mothers and mountains are sites of refuge, protection, shelter and solidarity, though never in any unambiguous sense. In Boochani's memory, mothers and mountains are simultaneously wounded, destroyed; they are far from immune to the violence and devastation that surrounds them.[50] And yet, in conjuring images of these ambiguous sites, Boochani confronts a history that allows him to reframe his contemporary experience, in effect, to resist it.

Notes

1   See also: (Kristeva 2002b).

2   Kristeva argues that we need to analyse what appeared at the time to be the (French) rejection of Sartre's work in the later part of the twentieth century: " . . . it seems important to underscore right away the common impetus that incites and characterizes the specific resistance toward . . . [his] works. The innovation of . . . [his] texts, which has yet to be fully appreciated, resides in the revolt against identity . . . " (SNSR: 18).

3   While Kristeva focuses on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Aragon and Roland Barthes in these two works, I shall restrict my discussion here to Sartre (cf. SNSR: 1, 17 and IR: 3). What is worth noting, though, is that Kristeva's choice of these three somewhat disavowed, or at least unfashionable authors, is strategic. It is part of her project of revolt as a return to and creative engagement with the history/past/memory that she claims "we" are currently in danger of forgetting.

4   For a discussion of the ethics of the question, see chapter three of (Boulous Walker 2017).

5   Kristeva writes: "You are no doubt familiar with the attack, denigration, and marginalization that psychoanalysis has undergone recently . . . Psychical curiosity yields before the exigencies of so-called efficiency; the unquestionable advances of the neuro-sciences are then ideologically valorized and advocated as antidotes to psychical maladies. Gradually, these maladies are denied as such and reduced to their biological substrata, a neurological deficiency" (*Intimate Revolt*: 11).

6   Kristeva's focus is undoubtedly on Europe; she describes revolt as an essential historical component of European culture: "a culture fascinated by doubt and critique" which is currently in danger of "losing its moral and aesthetic impact" (IR: 4). And further: "an essential aspect of the European culture of revolt and art is in peril . . . the very notion of culture as revolt and of art as revolt is in peril . . . " (6). In regard to the contemporary relation between "east" and "west" it is interesting to note that in 1996, five years before September 11, Kristeva writes: "Why does one sacrifice? Why does one enter into a religious pact and embrace fundamentalism, of whatever sort? Because, Freud tells us, the benefits we extract from the social contract threaten to disappear 'as a result of the changing conditions of life': unemployment, exclusion, lack of money, failure in work, dissatisfactions of every kind. From then on, assimilation to the social link disintegrates; the profit 'I' find in my integration in the *socius* collapses. What

does this profit consist of? It is nothing other than the 'appropriation of paternal attributes.' In other words, 'I' felt flattered to be promoted to the level of someone who could, if not be the father, at least acquire his qualities, identify with his power; 'I' was associated with this power; 'I' was not excluded; 'I' was one of those who obeyed him and were satisfied with that. But sometimes this identification with power no longer works, 'I' feel excluded; 'I' can no longer locate power, which has become normalizing and falsifiable. What happens then?" (SNSR: 14).

7   Kristeva writes that this regenerative revolt "expresses a fundamental version of freedom: not freedom to change or to succeed, but freedom to revolt, to call things into question" (Kristeva 2002b, 12).

8   There are numerous references to Hannah Arendt throughout the two works, (e.g., IR: 6).

9   Kristeva draws a clear distinction between what she sees as reactionary opposition (forgetting or opposing) and creative revolt (engaging the past).

10   Indeed, if Kristeva were to engage Fanon on these questions, a different (arguably non-European) orientation toward revolt might emerge.

11   Kristeva borrows this term from Guy Debord's analysis in *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 1994). The culture of the image can be understood in terms of its seduction, swiftness, brutality and frivolity, and Kristeva opposes it to the "culture of words" or revolt-writing that "preserves the life of the mind and of the species" (IR: 5). Further to this, Kristeva writes that "technological development has favoured the knowledge of stable values to the detriment of thought . . . " (IR: 6).

12   She suggests that this modern order threatens the art and culture of revolt, not the art or culture of "the show" or of "consensual information favoured by the media" (SNSR: 8).

13   Kristeva notes a tension here: " . . . 'this society of the image' justifies the attempt to rethink the notion of revolt, but seems simultaneously to exclude the possibility of doing so' (SNSR: 4).

14   She writes: "'I' am not a transcendental subject . . . as classical philosophy would have it. Instead, 'I' am, quite simply, the owner of my genetic or organo-physiological patrimony; 'I' possess my organs, and that only in the best-case scenario, for there are countries where organs are stolen in order to be sold" (SNRS: 6)

15   Kristeva's analysis of the political events of May'68 in Paris characterize revolt as permanent contestation: "One word on everyone's lips in May '68 was 'contestation'. It expresses a fundamental version of freedom: not freedom to change or to succeed, but freedom to revolt, to call things into question. [Now] . . . we're so used to identifying freedom merely with free enterprise, that this other version doesn't seem to exist; it's got to a point where the very notion of liberty is fading in people's minds and absent from their actions. Remember, liberty-as-revolt isn't just an available option, it's fundamental. Without it, neither the life of the mind nor life in society is possible. I mean 'life' here, and not just maintenance, repletion, management . . . It's precisely by putting things into question that 'values' stop being frozen dividends and acquire a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life" (Kristeva 2002b, 12).

16   Kristeva's analysis here builds upon Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry. See "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 80–108).

17   Indeed, the following questions bear testimony to Kristeva's insistent and self-reflexive return to this question: Can we recapture the spirit of revolt and extricate it from the impasses of rebellious ideologies and the surge of consumer culture? (7); What is the necessity of this culture of revolt, and why should we resuscitate cultural forms whose antecedents lie in Cartesian doubt? (7) Can a revolt-culture emerge/exist/be sustained given the structure of the normalized society? (8) Who can revolt, and against what? (8).

18   See SNRS: Chapter one, esp. 1–4 and IR: Chapter one, esp. 3–4.

19   For an insightful analysis of the move in Kristeva's thought over time from "revolution" (transgression of the law) to "revolt" (a restructuring of psychic space), see: de Nooy 1997. Here, De Nooy argues that Kristeva's work in the nineties on revolt (in *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*) offers a less oppositional form of contestation than her earlier work in the seventies (in *Revolution of Poetic Language*). See also the "Introduction" to (Lechte and Zournazi 1998).

20   This is partially what Kristeva intends in her title *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, i.e., those instances where revolt "works", and those where it does not. See also IR: 171.

21   See *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Kristeva 1984), *Powers of Horror* (Kristeva 1982), etc. In *SNSR* Kristeva identifies two occurrences of revolt in psychoanalytic theory: Freud's exploration of Oedipal revolt and the return of the archaic (SNRS: 11f), and in IR she characterizes psychoanalysis's revolt as being "an invitation to anamnesis in the goal of a rebirth, that is, a psychical restructuring" (IR: 8) In general, Kristeva links much of Freud's understanding of revolt with his discussion and analysis of the sacred.

22   Kristeva links this negativity with nothingness and interrogation, see: IR: 140.

23   See IR: 136f, 124, and 144.

24   See IR: 175, 177 and 130. See also SNRS: 180.

25   In an interview with Philippe Petit, Kristeva acknowledges Camus's contribution to the history of revolt, by rewriting his statement "I revolt, therefore we are!" as "I revolt, therefore we are . . . still to come" (Kristeva 2002b, 44). In this work, Kristeva also acknowledges the role of women writers (Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, and Colette) in the history of revolt (Kristeva 2002b, 95).

26   Kristeva adds that Freud's work "belongs to this interrogation into Nothingness and negativity" carried out—in different ways—by Hegel, Heidegger and Sartre (IR: 9). See Freud's work "Negation" (Freud 1925).

27   Kristeva argues, rightly I think, that we can only understand *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre 1996) by reading it simultaneously with *Nausea* (Sartre 1964): "*Being and Nothingness* can only be understood in light of this novelistic, imaginary experience . . . " (SNRS: 171). Certainly, doing so has led to some interesting feminist readings. See: (Le Dœuff 1980, 1991; Collins and Pierce 1976).

28   Prior to *Being and Nothingness* in 1943, Sartre pursues this nihilation and questioning of consciousness in *L'Imaginaire [The Psychology of Imagination]* 1940 (Sartre 2010). In *Transcendence of the Ego*, 1936–37 (Sartre 2004) Sartre explores the negativity that becomes so central in *Being and Nothingness*.

29   Kristeva goes on in this chapter ("Sartre: Freedom As Questioning") to depict psychoanalytic interpretation as a questioning; in so doing she returns—if somewhat obliquely—to the question of Sartre's proximity to psychoanalytic interpretation.

30   De Nooy writes: "The truth of aesthetic experience marks the limits of revolt—and of play" (De Nooy 1997, 157). However, de Nooy goes on to wonder aloud whether the ironic distance of women in relation to a patriarchal symbolic shouldn't also be seen in terms of a subtle revolt, as a form of play and contestation: I even wonder whether not only the mimicking of revolt but the mimicking of law itself may not already constitute an invisible form of rebellion. Women, for example, might indulge while affirming phallic law . . . " (157).

31   See Kristeva's extensive discussion of Sartre's literary works in IR and SNRS.

32   *The Words* marks both "the apogee and the end" of imaginary experience (SNRS: 185).

33   Kristeva asks: "by dismissing the arduous task of demystification through writing, doesn't social praxis, far from avoiding the madness that sustains literature, run the risk of coming up against new dead ends, falling into the old errors of Promethean optimism?" (SNRS: 185).

34   Kristeva suggests that Sartre's work on the imaginary prefigures critiques of the society of the spectacle in significant and yet largely unthought-out ways: "it seems quite simply impossible to pretend to venture into this world—where an increasingly virtual imaginary reigns, which we call the society of the spectacle—without revisiting the old Sartre, who again emerges as a precursor" (IR: 123).

35   See: (Lechte and Zournazi 1998, 13).

36   In SNRS Kristeva writes: "To examine revolt in the contemporary world, in contemporary literature, Sartre's experience cannot be ignored. I am all the more delighted to present his work here because a sort of weak consensus has reigned for some time that disparages Sartre, unfairly, in my opinion" (SNRS: 149).

37   In their "Introduction" Chanter and Ziarek comment on the manner in which Kristeva's work unsettles a too neat distinction between public and private, thus problematising a sharp distinction between "intimate" and "collective" forms of revolt: "Kristeva's work has been often criticized for focusing primarily on the personal or the psychic maladies of modern Western subjectivity rather than on group formations or the political structures of oppression. Presupposing a rather stable private/public distinction, this criticism has failed to address, however, how Kristeva's work . . . not only challenges this distinction but also elucidates the process of constitution of the traversable private/public boundaries" (Chanter and Ziarek 2005, 1).

38   Referred to by the government as Australia's Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre.

39   Magdalena Zolkos suggests that Boochani's work is, additionally, "part political philosophic dissection of the confluence of Australian coloniality, oppression, and racism . . . as well as a more general critique of the institution of border-industrial complex and liberal states' border politics" (Zolkos 2019, 70).

40   See: (Garcés 2002, 1–14).

41   For a helpful discussion of the fragmenting tendencies of internet technologies, see: (Carr 2010).

42   For an account of the complexities of "embedded journalism" see (Buchanan 2011). Buchanan explores historical responses to initial attempts to "frame the narrative" (115).

43   Mansoubi began translating Boochani's journalistic work in 2015, and she assisted Tofighian as a consultant in the translation of *No Friend But The Mountains*. Tofighian includes extracts from his discussions with Mansoubi in his translator's introduction: "A Translator's Tale: A Window to the Mountains" (in Boochani 2018, xiii–xxxvi). See also: (Tofighian 2018).

44   "Boochani situates his book within the broader Persian tradition of writing that traverses the prosaic and lyrical forms, and is unafraid of bold dramatizations and lurid descriptions" (Zolkos 2019, 70).

45   Boochani's English translator, Omid Tofighian, writes: "To evoke the atmosphere and features of the text in English we needed to experiment with different techniques. Therefore, the translation arranges and presents the stories in unorthodox ways and purposely fragments and disrupts sentence and passage, appropriating and blending genre and style" (Boochani 2018, xxxiv).

46   Zolkos writes: "Boochani's poetics of detention is circumscribed by the goals of political analysis of the carceral state and border-politics, but it is not identical with, or reducible to, the political. Rather . . . [his book] establishes a deeper connection between, first, the emotive, lyrical voice of the poet; second, the question of insurgence and political action in oppressive conditions; and, third, a conjuring gesture, understood not only as a way of intertwining the realistic narrative with magical and

47 Boochani borrows the term from Schüssler Fiorenza's analysis of "'interconnected, interacting and self-extending' forms of structural domination and submission" (Fiorenza cited in Zolkos 2019, 71). Zolkos adds: "It encompasses techniques of surveillance and the carceral organization of place, architecture, and of the detainees' daily routines, as well as the violent 'theatre' of degradation and control. For the system to remain in operation, it also requires the cooperation and complicity of broad social groups—not just the guards, but also medical professionals, translators, journalists, lawyers, and the Australian public at large" (Zolkos 2019, 71).

48 Although, early in the book Boochani attempts to lay himself bare: "The odyssey across the ocean on a rotting boat had created the space for a colossal encounter—where the essence of my being could manifest—where I could interrogate my soul—so that I could lay myself bare: *Is this human being who he thinks he is?/Does this human being reflect the same theories that be holds?/Does this human being embody courage?* (Boochani 2018, 70).

49 Boochani creates poetic and "non-sentimental figurations of homeland and the mother, as sites of refuge, subversion, and solidarity from which resistance against . . . [his carceral] oppression arises" (Zolkos 2019, 80).

50 Zolkos writes: "just as with the figure of the mountains, the mother herself is wounded, and the shelter she provides is not immune to violence, but permeated by it" (Zolkos 2019, 78).

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Translation in Digital Times: Omid Tofighian on Translating the Manus Prison Narratives

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Abstract: On 12 February 2020, while on an international tour promoting Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, the translator of the book, Omid Tofighian, participated in a seminar at Utrecht University, organised by Australian academic, Anna Poletti (associate professor of English language and culture, Utrecht University). Poletti is also co-editor of the journal *Biography: an interdisciplinary quarterly*, which published a special issue on *No Friend but the Mountains* in 2020 (Vol. 43, No. 4). The seminar involved Poletti, Tofighian and translation scholar, Onno Kosters (assistant professor of English literature and translation studies, Utrecht University) in conversation. Iranian–Dutch filmmaker, Arash Kamali Sarvestani, co-director with Boochani of the film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017), was in attendance, as well as the Dutch publisher, Jurgen Maas (Uitgeverij Jurgen Maas, Dutch translation based on the English translation). The event was titled 'No Friend but the Mountains: Translation in Digital Times'. The following dialogue, 'Translation in Digital Times: Omid Tofighian on Translating the Manus Prison Narratives', is derived from this seminar and focuses on Tofighian's translation of the book from Persian/Farsi into English. The topics covered also include the Dutch translation from Tofighian's English translation, genre and anti-genre, horrific surrealism, Kurdish elements and influences, the Kurdish translation (from Tofighian's English translation), publication of the Persian/Farsi original, translation as activism, process and technology.

Keywords: refugees; exile; Manus Island; Australia; Behrouz Boochani; translation; literature

No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison (Boochani 2018) was written by Behrouz Boochani during the first five years of his incarceration in the Australian-run offshore immigration detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea—a former colony of Australia. It was written completely on WhatsApp via hundreds of text messages and sent to friends and colleagues in Australia for translation, editing and publication (Persian/Farsi to English). Moones Mansoubi collated most of the messages into individual chapters and created PDFs for Omid Tofighian to edit and translate; Boochani continued to send text messages to Tofighian to insert/change the text while they worked on it as a cocreation; the final chapter arrived directly to Tofighian via one text. The final chapter (Chapter 12: 'In Twilight/The Colours of War') was completed during the 23-day siege and forced removal of refugees to new prison camps in October–November 2017 (see Boochani Forthcoming, chp. 5 for reports and critical commentary about the siege). *No Friend but the Mountains* was awarded the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature among many other prestigious awards, and Boochani (through video link) was invited to speak at many Australian and international festivals, book launches, seminars, campaign events and conferences together with his translator and collaborator, Tofighian (mostly in person). Since the release of the book, a series of events have focused on translation (for a comprehensive account of the history and context associated with Boochani's plight and his collaboration with Tofighian see the introduction in Tofighian's article published in this issue titled 'On Representing Extreme Experiences in Writing and Translation: Omid

Tofighian on Translating the Manus Prison Narratives' (Tofighian 2022), https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/11/6/141 accessed on 10 November 2022).

On 12 February 2020, while on an international tour promoting the book, Tofighian participated in a seminar at Utrecht University, organised by Australian academic, Anna Poletti (associate professor of English language and culture, Utrecht University). Poletti is also co-editor of the journal *Biography: an interdisciplinary quarterly*, which published a special issue on *No Friend but the Mountains* in 2020 (vol. 43, No. 4; Poletti 2020). The seminar involved Poletti, Tofighian, and translation scholar, Onno Kosters (assistant professor of English literature and translation studies, Utrecht University) in conversation. Iranian–Dutch filmmaker, Arash Kamali Sarvestani, codirector with Boochani of the film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (Boochani and Sarvestani 2017), was in attendance, as well as the Dutch publisher, Jurgen Maas (Uitgeverij Jurgen Maas, Dutch translation based on the English translation). The event was titled: 'No Friend but the Mountains: Translation in Digital Times'.

The following dialogue, 'Translation in Digital Times: Omid Tofighian on Translating the Manus Prison Narratives', is derived from this seminar and focuses on Tofighian's translation of the book from Persian/Farsi into English. The topics covered also include the Dutch translation from Tofighian's English translation, genre and antigenre, horrific surrealism, Kurdish elements and influences, the Kurdish translation (from Tofighian's English translation), publication of the Persian/Farsi original, and translation as activism, process and technology (see Supplementary Materials for a reading list of articles by Tofighian and Boochani about related themes and issues).

Utrecht University, the Netherlands 2020

Onno: I read the English and the Dutch translation.[1] I am in touch with the translator, Irwan Droog. You say the last chapter was written in epic form—chapter twelve. It has long stretches of text that really look like poetry and definitely also read like poetry. But there are also long stretches of prose and that is one of the things that struck me about the entire book; that is, it is so diverse in the genres that it includes. It has activist prose, observation, poetry and more. And I was wondering from a translator's point of view whether those various genres offered any particular difficulties, particularly the way in which you deal with translation issues that you come across. Was there a big difference in how you tackled the various problems in the various genres?

Omid: I think this is an excellent question and especially something that really dives right into the peculiarities of translation, or the difficulties of translation. So I appreciate it. Could I say something about genre first and then I will move on to talk about the translation style, the decisions made and the difficulties in translating?

So first of all, regarding genre, the last chapter is written in epic form but has other genres mixed into it. But that is a characteristic of the whole book. The whole book has a mixture of political commentary, aspects of Behrouz's journalism, it has philosophical ruminations, psychoanalytic examination, poetry, it has realistic accounts of what was happening. But mixed into all of this—and somehow also structuring these other genres—is myth, epic and folklore. You could read this book as a modern epic. You could read it also as a contemporary or an updated form of Kurdish folklore. So much of this book is based on the stories Behrouz grew up with, what he learned from his mother, first of all, from his village and also from Kurdish history, literature and resistance.

Onno: You wrote about that in your supplementary essays in *No Friend but the Mountains*. Yes.

Omid: And working with Behrouz, I had to do a lot of research and came across a lot of really important Kurdish writers. I noticed how deeply influential their

work has been on Behrouz's thinking and writing. So regarding genre, I call it an anti-genre. So much about this book resists the principles, assumptions and norms associated with genres. It basically challenges us to rethink exactly how or why we use categorisation the way we do in the first place. So I call it an anti-genre. And I was trying to think of a style or maybe a framework or hermeneutical schema with which to position this book, because I did not want to use genres to describe it. So I coined the term 'horrific surrealism' (Tofighian 2018b, 2021) for two reasons; first of all, the mixture of horror realism and psychological horror with surrealism is characteristic of not only his own positionality and his personhood but also the circumstances, the Australian political situation, even our relationship with each other. But also, it says so much about the contemporary Kurdish situation or the Kurdish plight, the Kurdish struggle. And you find the mixture of horror and surrealism in other Kurdish writers as well like Sherko Bekas, who Behrouz is deeply influenced by; Bekas uses these features quite a lot. Also, horror and surrealism are fundamental in the writings of Sherzad Hassan, who Behrouz also reads. Kurdish filmmakers like Bahman Ghobadi, who is a Kurd from Iran—you also find them in his films (Tofighian 2018a). So this mixture of horror and surrealism I found really interesting, not as a genre but maybe as an attitude, a vision or a schema through which to think about the book.

Onno: That is a very powerful mode, of course, a very powerful way of seeing it. I am thinking of the film, *Parasite*, that many of you would have seen, which is a satire and also has kind of a horrific surrealism aspect, as well. So it is a very powerful way of showing what is actually going on and bringing across the message.

Omid: Definitely, another thing that I like about the reference to surrealism and horror is that it links the book to other anti-colonial forms of resistance that use art and literature, particularly in the Caribbean, other examples of the African diaspora, also within Africa. So consider the Négritude movement and then later with Afro–Surrealism, for instance. And so there you find very similar themes. Behrouz is not familiar with those works, but his anti-colonial perspective, his way of being, and also his Indigenous Kurdish identity, all these elements feed into each other in similar ways.

Onno: So it is something that Salman Rushdie, of course, would also mix in all his works, the idea of the surreal, the real and the mythical.

Omid: Although I think that Salman Rushdie and many others say, for instance, Toni Morrison and I think here in the Netherlands with Kader Abdalah and Abdelkader Benali, use more magical realism. This was not a distinction I was making in the beginning when I started translating the book, I thought Behrouz was only employing magic realism or magical realism (even though there are many similarities and overlaps with surrealism). But then I had a conversation with a colleague in Cairo—I was working in Cairo for a couple of years and moved there when I was half-way through the translation—who is an expert on magical realism. And when I was telling her about this book, she said, that is interesting, it is great and there are some overlaps, but it is not magical realism. And so we were involved in a really long and interesting discussion about this. And I realised that unlike magical realist writers that assume the world is already wonderful, fantastic, magical, *No Friend but the Mountains* talks about the subconscious mind creating these sorts of images, scenes and centres Behrouz's interpretations. Also, the fragmentation and the dream visions put this work maybe on the cusp of magical realism, but more into the area of surrealism.

Anna: So just to pick up on the second part of Onno's question, was horrific surrealism the kind of overall schema that you used to negotiate the challenge of translating all these different genres? Is this part of the consistent approach and

the way to both retain what is special about philosophical reflection and poetry? That is, you retain both the specific contributions to the work, but you keep them consistent through horrific surrealism?

Omid: Yes, particularly because other aspects of surrealism are fragmentation, disjunction, disjointedness, what is shattered.

Anna: Can I pick up on something that you said that links into one of my questions? I thought it was really interesting when you were listing all the things that horrific serialism captured both about the text itself and about the process of its production, and you said *including our relationship*. So I am interested in that. What is the horrifically surreal nature of the relationship between the translator and the writer, particularly under the conditions that you outlined for us? So could you talk a little bit about how your practice of translation is also an intellectual collaboration. How is your relationship with Behrouz an example of horrific surrealism? And then talk to us a little bit about your translator's note and translator's reflection in which you talked quite a bit about intellectual collaboration, political solidarity and aesthetic interpretation as being key to your approach to translation. Could you tell us whether that philosophy of translation emerged out of the practices itself, as you were doing it? Was that how you worked out what your principles of translation were, or whether that was already your kind of philosophy of translation, and you were using those principles to inform your decision making?

Omid: I will start with that and then go back to the specific surreal aspect of our collaborative work.

We did not have time to really think deeply about everything we were doing and planning. Everything was so urgent. Everything was so pressured. There was just too much going on at the same time. I also had a life, you know, other things that I was doing. And it basically meant that for the last four and a half years I have not really had a break. I had to deal with my own responsibilities, my own commitments, and whenever I had time—and if I did not have time, I made time—I worked on Behrouz's writing and also the work of other people on Manus Island and in other Australian offshore and onshore detention centres. So I am working with others there as well, writers and other creatives and intellectuals. Everything was basically born out of lived experience. Everything emerged out of our interactions, out of our resistance. I was learning from Behrouz, I was sharing things with him, and vice versa. We were discussing, we were debating. We could not plan one particular strategy for activism because the minute we actually came up with something that we thought would work, would challenge the system . . . the system changed. And this kind of absurdity, this irony, planning without any certainty, without the hope for any specific outcome, is also part of the surreal nature of the whole situation. I do not have a clear answer for you because nothing was planned, and so much was just spontaneous, ad hoc. But what we did do, and what I can say for certain, is we identified all the gaps and weaknesses in the system, and also the gaps and weaknesses in activism. So we knew what we should not be doing, what does not work, what ends up being exploitative, what ends up being pointless.

Onno: Could you give us an example?

Omid: One thing that I realized from the early 2000s when I was an undergraduate and engaged in very early and basic forms of activism was that I was not comfortable working with any particular organisations or groups. I was let down a number of times. I was kind of disappointed with some of the behaviours and responses. There is also a kind of Orientalism in some circles that I felt uncomfortable with. I mean, in activist circles. And I realised that I could do so much more working with individuals, smaller groups and communities, people

who I felt were already engaged in activism, doing some of the most important forms of activism, but were never recognised as activists because . . . they are just part of a cultural community . . . they are just doing what they do because they need to be 'there'. And in many ways, for them it was a form of survival and pride. Those kinds of community outreach projects, those kinds of commitments and the dedication to their community was basically something that many people did because they did not have a choice. It was something they had to do in order to make sense of the world and to thrive. So those early experiences characterised my own activism and I left Australia soon after that time and lived in different countries—in the Emirates, in Belgium and the Netherlands for my PhD—and I learnt a lot about activism when travelling around. There are some great things happening in activist circles in the Middle East and Europe. So I returned to Australia and started working again in this space—that was at the end of 2010. I think it was about five years after that I met Behrouz and realised that something different needs to happen in this situation. In direct response to your question, one of the big gaps that I referred to is the complicity of the human rights organisations connected with the detention industry; when we are talking about immigration detention in Australia, we are talking about a business. This is about racial capitalism. This is about neoliberal policies. This is about people making money. This is about the system, the border-industrial complex. This is something we cannot really talk about a lot now, but we will in the future. Behrouz and I have talked a lot about the role of human rights organisations in this industry. Maybe I will leave it there because it is so complicated, and Behrouz and I are very strategic about how and when to address this. We have a long-term plan, he had to work with these organisations in some way in order to plan his escape to Aotearoa New Zealand. So there will be a right time to talk about this and not in a kind of 'call-out way', not in a toxic kind of way or making an accusation, but in a really constructive way to find out, basically, where we need to go from here, and ask how we stop this. Because this is not just about people subject to border violence. This is also about citizens; it also affects us (Tofighian 2020).

And this leads us to your question about our relationship and the surreal nature of it. So much about my relationship with Behrouz is about not only understanding his circumstances, the kind of system that has been designed and implemented in the prison island, but also about me as a citizen. Where do I stand in this? How am I complicit? Maybe in order to talk about horrific surrealism, we need to talk about Behrouz's positionality, his own identity, the fragmented, disjointed, shattered, absurd nature of what he has gone through and how that speaks to and relates to the political situation in Australia, the absurdity of the whole system, the fluidity, all the ironies associated with a liberal democracy doing this sort of thing, conducting systematic torture. That also corresponds to our relationship. So there is this kind of circular reinforcing going on, because I get to travel across borders. He was stuck in an island prison, in a cell, and I was travelling the world showing my Australian passport all over the place, getting invited to events and attending receptions—I remember this when Arash [Kamali Sarvestani] visited Sydney from the Netherlands for the premier of *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017, dir. Kamali Sarvestani and Boochani). I would have my drink in hand, talking to all of these people, hearing gestures of gratitude while Behrouz was still stuck in Manus. So when the phone switches off and Behrouz is off the screen, after the Skype connection or the Zoom connection ends, we all go back to our everyday lives. And then I travel the next day, or I go to another place.

Onno: Does that make you feel you are part of the system, as well?

Omid: I am part of the system. I mean, we could go into so much detail about this, because even as an academic in Australia my university superannuation until 2015 was invested in immigration detention. I was profiting from refugees while supporting them. Can you see the ironies here?

Onno: So are we in a way, so are we today because we are here listening to you. Oh, it is very surreal indeed.

Omid: Absolutely. I mean, in 2015, UniSuper said that it divested from detention, but so much still is not transparent. It is hard to actually investigate and prove it. And there are so many academic projects in universities that have relationships with the department of immigration. There are engineering and technology departments or schools working with border security initiatives to develop new technologies. So we are all complicit. This is multifaceted, multidimensional.

Anna: Which is horrific.

Omid: And I will mention that in addition to those three dimensions—Behrouz's identity, the political situation and our relationship or our interaction with each other—there are also other significant dimensions that condition and are conditioned by horrific surrealism: the structure, the content, the symbols, the tropes, and the style of the book. So everything we talked about in the beginning in response to your question Onno about anti-genre, the complexity, the confusion, the unusual juxtapositions, the incongruity, the mixture of things together, the poetics, are all part of this absurd, ironic, surreal, fragmented quality.

Anna: I would just like to pick up on something that you said about the process; you gave a great answer about your philosophy of translation, which is essentially I did not have one. You characterised it as a process that was defined by urgency, pressure and response to immediate challenges. This reflects digital technology, the kind of workflows and communication practices that digital mobile technology itself kind of traps us in. And there is a lot of interesting work in media studies about these very short circuits of emotion and feeling and response that mobile technology catches us in, but these are no way near as important and extreme circumstances as the ones that you were working in. It is more like, should I get shopping on the way home or not? And consider this short circuit of communication and pinging, and no one can plan anything anymore because we can all just message each other five minutes before we get there. And in terms of our interest in the role of mobile media in this process and in this product [*No Friend but the Mountains*], it is interesting to me that there is such a close alignment between the political urgency and also the way the technology itself is a technology of urgency in many ways.

Omid: The whole idea of horrific surrealism and different notions such as a 'shared philosophical activity' (Tofighian 2018b) or a collective agency emerged through the translation process. And all the things that you are talking about, the sound bite style communication, the quick responses or quick back and forth associated with digital technology, are relevant because Behrouz was working on WhatsApp, which is like a cell in itself. It is like a prison that he was dependent on. He ended up modifying WhatsApp, using it as a kind of Microsoft Word, he used WhatsApp like we use files on our Microsoft Office. Actually, he was using dormant WhatsApp numbers to file different pieces of writing. And because of the way he was writing on WhatsApp, I think it influenced the structure of his writing as well. I will give an example; I have a PowerPoint slide of one of the passages.

Chapter 8
Queuing as Torture: Manus Prison Logic /
The Happy Cow

A twisted, interlocking chain of hungry men /
Bodies mutate under the burning sun /
Heads in an oven fired by the sun /
Undergoing sickening transformations /
A long line of men of different heights, weights,
ages and colours.

Days in the prison begin with the commotion of
long queues – long, pulverising queues .

Especially with literature, Persian/Farsi texts include very long sentences, extremely long, maybe longer and more complicated than some German texts, or maybe Dutch. The subject is at the beginning and the main verb is at the end. In between there are many clauses that go in different directions, consecutive clauses. Now, to translate that into English and maintain the same sentence structure will be messy and will lose all the rhythm, all the poetic quality, all of its profundity and style. So what I had to do was break up the long sentences into shorter sentences. This aspect and approach formed into a kind of philosophy, something that emerged out of the translation process. I decided the best way to translate these difficult parts was to split up the sentences into smaller sentences and then repeat nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, etc., so that there is a clear connection between the different newly created sentences. At a certain point we realised—I think it was the third edit that we were going through—that some parts actually sound more like poems than they do prose. Behrouz only wrote prose, but a poetic style of prose. So while we were editing we thought more about my suggestion to make some of these passages that sound like poetry, actual poems in the book. The poetry parts in the book, which are in italics, were originally poetic or rhythmic prose. But as a result of the translation process, we decided to make the format poetry in English. The passage in the slide is an example of that. These images represent the surreal nature of the prison system; this passage is poetry and then converts to prose. In Farsi or Persian, that whole passage was one sentence. And you can see the repetition I employed. One sentence written in prose became this passage. Half of it, or part of it, in poetry and part of it in prose. It was all about experimentation. I am not trained as a translator, and this was my first major translation project after only some really small tasks. I had no format, or confines or formalities to abide by. I was just free. I was just doing whatever felt right. And so it was all experimental.

> **Onno:** I think it works really well. I mean, I had not realised this at all, of course. But it is because you have this kind of island hopping. That sounds really ironic, I do not mean to be ironic, but you have these poetic passages that you and Behrouz discussed, and you came up with this solution.

> **Omid:** It is part of the shared philosophical activity, we were discussing it and discussing it, and then we thought, why don't we do this and see if it works?

Onno: Because it really magnifies it, particularly passages like this. It really magnifies the suffering and the absurdity and surrealism, as well.

Omid: We thought to ourselves, it is not our purpose to give a totally realist account of what is going on. Behrouz hates the idea of his book being seen as a memoir. It is not a memoir, and the film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is not that kind of documentary. The film is not about people's lives and characters and histories. It does not go into a lot of characterisation. It is about what it feels like to live in a system that is absurd, that is designed to punish, and with technologies of systematic torture. Behrouz and Arash want you to feel that. So his purpose in the book is not to give a factual account like a journalistic piece or any kind of reportage. He is not interested in that. He says this is a work of art. He wants you to enter this world.

Onno: It made me think of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, as well.

Omid: I am really glad you brought that up. He was reading Beckett as he was writing. He was reading Kafka, too. He was reading Kurdish writers, Persian writers as well, and Camus. Chapter 8, 'Queuing as Torture: Manus Prison Logic/The Happy Cow' is up to thirty pages long and is about waiting in line. You know, he was reading Beckett while he was writing that particular chapter.

Onno: That makes sense.

Anna: Given this really great, illuminating example of the move from Persian/Farsi into English; Onno, I am wondering whether this is a nice moment for your question about the Dutch translation?

Onno: Yes, well, this is very interesting because as I understand it, Jurgen [Maas, the Dutch publisher] correct me if I am wrong here. Irwan translated this from English into Dutch, not from Persian/Farsi into Dutch.

Jurgen: No, because there is not a Persian/Farsi edition yet, but I just heard today that there will be a Persian/Farsi edition of the book.

Omid: This is an interesting story, as well. I should mention that the Kurdish translation is already out, it was actually produced by Hashem Ahmadzadeh, an academic and translator who knows English, Persian/Farsi and Kurdish [in addition to other languages] really well. He had the original raw text that I was working off and he had the English translation. However, he used the English translation to then translate into the Kurdish version, which is really unique. I do not know of any other example where this has happened.[2] About the Persian/Farsi version, Behrouz was contracted by Nashr-e Cheshmeh (or Cheshmeh Publishing House), which is one of the most reputable literary publishers in Iran.[3] Unfortunately, it will be censored.

Jurgen: In what way?

Omid: Probably for references to Kurdish struggle, Kurdish resistance.

Jurgen: What about his name, will his name be published?

Omid: It will be published in Iran with Behrouz's name. Again, if you try to understand this rationally it will fall apart. This is another part of the surreal nature of this whole project. They take out the Kurdish political sections, but they leave the title, which is explicitly Kurdish and explicitly political. They also take out anything referring to sex and similar sensitive topics due to the moral restrictions in Iran.

Anna: And the character Maysam The Whore, is that character still in there?

Omid: They have changed his name.

Jurgen: Is the fact that it will be published under his name also the reason why Behrouz accepted it? Because that would be a very difficult issue for him.

Omid: Behrouz originally did not want to publish it but apparently he received a lot of requests from people all over the world saying they want to read the original Persian/Farsi. But, you see, the translation was done together, and I call him one of the translators because we were working closely through the whole process. We made all the changes to the English translation, but we did not modify the original. So when he decided to put the original Persian/Farsi out into the world he had to work with an editor from the publisher to try and locate all the changes in the English and apply them to the Persian/Farsi—I do not think they identified everything because there were so many significant changes during the translation process (the Persian/Farsi version is significantly shorter than the English; writing in Persian/Farsi, Tehran-based translator and writer Araz Barseghian has published on this and many other issues, including a detailed comparative analysis of selected sections from the original alongside the English translation).[4] He even made his own changes that were not in the English. Again, this is another complicated process to describe. I do not know much about it; I was not involved. But we have a long-term plan. This Persian/Farsi publication is for now, I think he wants to make a statement and leverage for political and cultural reasons. In the future, watch this space. The uncensored version might come out (the Persian/Farsi version was rumoured to have been banned after three months in Iran and taken off the shelves in stores. However, according to press reports in Iran the fifteenth reprint was distributed in 2020 by the publisher [with the sixteenth expected soon after]; the audio book [read by award-winning actor Navid Mohammadzadeh] and the e-book are still available online—even hard copies [authorised editions by the publisher and pirated copies] are still available in many bookstores and other places. Pirated copies of the English translation are also sold in Iran).

Onno: Did Irwan Droog, the Dutch translator, collaborate with you at all? Were you in touch?

Omid: No, but I was in touch with Jurgen.

Jurgen: Omid did, of course, offer to help. But we did use a very good editor— two in fact. The main one is brilliant in English. One of the people who is mentioned in Omid's essay at the end of the book is a Kurdish Iraqi intellectual, Mariwan Kanie, he lives in Amsterdam and is one of my best friends. So I thought I can call him, I can cycle to meet him only two minutes away in Amsterdam-West. It sounds strange, but we did not need Omid's help translating it from English to Dutch. First, the material was very clear, the English is very clear in the book.

Omid: Most translators have not contacted me. The Italian, yes, we are in contact.

Onno: For instance, one footnote says ID which is Irwan Droog. So that is very specific for the Dutch translation, which is about that border-industrial complex. And I am not sure that every English reader would know what the BIC would refer to. But, anyway, there is definitely a different take on certain aspects of the translation.

Omid: But also, this book encourages people to go out and do more research and find out more about it. So these are all suggestions, sort of directions for readers.

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Notes

1. Dutch title: *Alleen de Bergen Zijn Mijn Vrienden: Verslag Vanuit de Manus-gevangenis*, published by Uitgeverij Jurgen Maas in the Netherlands on 6 November 2019.
2. Kurdish translation by Hashem Ahmadzadeh published in 2019 by Arzan (Sweden); includes new introduction by Ahmadzadeh. In 2019 his Kurdish translation was also published by Ghazalnus in Sulaymaniyah (Slemani) in the Kurdish Region of Iraq. Ahmadzadeh has also published a scholarly article in Kurdish on *No Friend but the Mountains* and his translation.
3. Boochani's original manuscript written in Persian/Farsi was published in Iran in 2020.
4. Barseghian's first critique of *No Friend but the Mountains* was published soon after the Persian/Farsi version was released, it is featured in a Persian/Farsi language site: metropolatleast.ir.

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Article

"In the First Place, We Don't Like to Be Called 'Refugees'": Dilemmas of Representation and Transversal Politics in the Participatory Art Project *100% FOREIGN?*

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Abstract: *100% FOREIGN?* (*100% FREMMED?*) is an art project consisting of 250 life stories of individuals who were granted asylum in Denmark between 1956 and 2019. Thus, it can be said to form a collective portrait that inserts citizens of refugee backgrounds into the narrative of the nation, thereby expanding the idea of national identity and culture. *100% FOREIGN?* allows us to think of participatory art as a privileged site for the exploration of intersubjective relations and the question of how to "represent" citizens with refugee experience as well as the history and practice of asylum. The conflicting aims and perceptions involved in such representations are many, as suggested by the opening sentence of Hannah Arendt's 1943 essay "We, Refugees": "In the first place, we don't like to be called 'refugees'". Using *100% FOREIGN?* as an analytical reference point, this article discusses some of the ethical and political implications of representing former refugees. It briefly considers recent Danish immigration and asylum policies to situate the project in its regional European context and argues that, similarly to its neighbouring countries, Denmark can be described as a "postmigrant society" (Foroutan). To frame *100% FOREIGN?* theoretically, this article draws on Arendt's essay, Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of speaking nearby, as well as the feminist concept of transversal politics (Meskimmon, Yuval-Davis). It is hoped that this approach will lead to a deeper understanding of what participatory art can bring to the ethical politics of representing refugee experience.

Keywords: refugees; representation; ethics; transversal politics; participation; citizenship; national identity; belonging; postmigration; contemporary art

1. Dilemmas of Representing Refugees

"Representation is a complex business," observed the British–Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall, especially when dealing with "people and places which are significantly different from us" (Hall 1997a, pp. 225–26). This is so because "difference" is a contested area of representation that constitutes a key site of the ongoing negotiation between the competing social and political forces through which power is defended, contested, and shifted. In addition, representations of difference, especially visual representations, engage emotions and attitudes. They may trigger the viewer's anxieties and desire, as well as mobilizing cultural stereotypes that reinforce already existing prejudice and conventions. Representations are important, therefore, not only because of what they *are*, but also because of what they *do*, i.e., for their discursive and cultural functions and effects.

Drawing on Foucault's discursive approach, Hall stresses that the subject is produced within discourse and can thus become "the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourse produces [. . . and] the object through which power is relayed" (Hall 1997b, p. 55). In discourse, a subject has two sides, or "sites." As a representational practice, discourse produces *subjects as identifiable figures*—the national citizen, the foreigner, the refugee, etc. In doing so, discourse also constructs *subject-positions for the reader or viewer* from which to make sense of its particular knowledge and representations (Hall 1997b, p. 56). Hall's point about the dual role of the subject in practices of representation is fundamental to any

engagement with representational practices pivoting on "difference," especially when they have a stake in the construction of a binary opposition between "us" and "them," self and other, as is the case with the representation of refugees.

To begin with, it should be stressed that the focal point of this article is not the uprooting and flight from home, nor the forced displacement of refugees. As Emma Cox has noted, "an emphasis on *transiting* bodies risks distilling refugee subjectivity to beleaguered mobility" (Cox 2017, p. 495). This study shifts the perspective to the open-ended processes of "regrounding" (Ahmed et al. 2003) and "worldmaking" (Meskimmon 2017, 2011) which refugees undergo in the receiving country, and it links the representation of such processes to the broader debate about belonging and citizenship in Europe. Despite their mundane character and embeddedness in inconspicuous everyday life, the processes of settlement and belonging are inseparable from political discourses and the tightened policies on asylum and integration that have been implemented in connection with the resurgence of nationalism and the fortification of national borders in many Western countries. "Refugees and representation" is thus a profoundly politicized topic that brings societal conflicts to the fore, as also when experiences of refugeedom and questions of asylum are addressed within the spheres of art and literature, which are still widely believed to possess some degree of freedom and distance from society, despite the fact that the rich tradition of political art developing since the 1960s and 1970s has effectively refuted the modernist idea of radical autonomy and separateness.

Given the politicized nature of the topic, a study of artistic and curatorial modes of representing refugees should include a consideration of the entanglement of aesthetics with politics and ethics. Instead of choosing the traditional route and turning to Jacques Rancière's theorization of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, thereby following in the footsteps of the numerous scholars and other professionals in the art field who have embraced Rancière's theory in recent decades, I would like to pursue new avenues.[1]

The ethical dilemmas and conflicting aims and perceptions involved in representing refugees are many, as suggested by the opening sentence of Hannah Arendt's 1943 essay "We, Refugees": "In the first place, we don't like to be called 'refugees'" (Arendt 2007, p. 264). The question of how to "represent" refugees (and other marginalized or vulnerable groups) leads to two kinds of ethical consideration. Firstly, there is the risk of conforming to pre-existing tropes and thereby unintentionally exacerbating stereotypes of suffering and victimization, or their compensatory antidote which over-emphasizes assimilation and "notions that refugees should be 'just like us'" (Blomfield and Lenette 2018, p. 325). Secondly, there is the issue of agency and empowerment: Should refugees be represented, or represent themselves in the receiving country?; Should they "have" agency, voice and visibility, or should they be "given" agency, voice and visibility by spokespersons and other mediators in order to increase their chance of being "heard" and "understood" by the authorities and citizens of the receiving country?; Should they be given full control over the means of representation and platforms of communication?; Or should "speaking" and "making visible" in public spheres be based on a collaboration between refugees and native citizens? If so, what can participatory practices accomplish, and what dilemmas and conflicts of domination and suppression do they involve?

This article will explore the problem of representing refugees by way of a case study of the art project *100% FOREIGN?* (*100% FREMMED?*), initiated in 2016 by photographer and curator Maja Nydal Eriksen and Metropolis/Copenhagen International Theatre. The project *100% FOREIGN?* is Denmark's first major documentary collection of individual accounts of former refugees. It consists of 250 life stories and photographic portraits of individuals who were granted asylum in Denmark between 1956 and 2019. Thus, it can be said to form a collective portrait and multivocal narrative that inserts citizens of refugee backgrounds into the narrative of the nation, thereby expanding the idea of national identity and culture, or more specifically, "Danishness." Additionally, at the time of its completion in 2019, it was distinguished as the most encompassing civic participation project undertaken in Denmark. *100% FOREIGN?* was an extraordinary ramified, expansive and viral project

that engaged inhabitants, cultural institutions, cultural producers and municipal officers in cities across most of the country.

As an interdisciplinary project, *100% FOREIGN?* aimed to "give voice to" refugees, and it spanned several genres—interview-based narrative, photographic portrait, art in public space, and more. Thus, it allows us to think of participatory art as a privileged locus for the exploration of intersubjective relations and the question of how to "represent" citizens with refugee experience as well as the history and practice of asylum—the building of a future life in a foreign country.

In a study of arts-based methods in refugee research, Isobel Blomfield and Caroline Lenette have proposed that, through collaboration with people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, artists can create representations that are more empowering. One way of achieving this is to produce "counter-narratives that provide a more holistic construction of refugees' individual historical, gender, political and cultural circumstances" (Blomfield and Lenette 2018, p. 325). However, there are many dilemmas and ambiguities involved in such an endeavour: *100% FOREIGN?* will serve here as the analytical reference point for a discussion of some of these issues. The article's basic methodological premise is that both the politics and ethics of representation must be addressed when engaging with representations of refugees; furthermore, such representations must be situated in their immediate contexts of production and reception for their politicized character and meaning to become comprehensible. Only by considering the socio-historical circumstances and political climate is it possible to understand what *100% FOREIGN?* set out to do, and why and how the project sought to engender a new civic ethics from the perspective of the refugee.

To situate the project in its historical and regional European context, I will briefly consider recent Danish immigration and asylum policies, and argue that, similarly to its neighbouring countries, Denmark can be described as a "postmigrant society" (Foroutan 2019a). My consideration of the *ethical* aspects of *100% FOREIGN?* draws on Arendt's essay and what Andreea Deciu Ritivoi has described as Arendt's attempt to articulate an "ethics of alterity" from the perspective of the refugee (Ritivoi 2019), as well as the Vietnamese–American filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of speaking nearby. When considering the *political* aspects of the project, I turn to the feminist concept of transversal politics (Yuval-Davis 1999; Meskimmon 2020), which has a strong intersubjective and ethical component. The case study illuminates some of the difficulties involved in representing refugees in a participatory art project, especially the challenge of ensuring that there is scope for the participants' agency to unfold, as well as the question of how to create narratives (Blomfield and Lenette 2018, p. 235) that counter stereotypification and articulate claims for the democratic right to be treated as an equal—or, in other words, a civic ethics of a plural community, springing from the perspective of the refugee. It is hoped that by threading the theoretical discussion through an example, this article can contribute to a deeper understanding of how participatory art forms and their interpretive and collaborative practices can intervene in the field of representation, and what they can bring to the ethical politics of representing the refugee experience.

2. Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics

For the purposes of this case study, I define ethics broadly but with a special emphasis on what ethics are understood to be within the domains of artistic practices and aesthetics, understood here in the broad sense of "sensory embodied experience" and not as a branch of philosophy and art theory. I adopt Geoffrey Galt Harpham's understanding of ethics as "the arena in which the claims of otherness—the moral law, the human other, cultural norms, the Good-in-itself, etc.—are articulated and negotiated" (Harpham 1995, p. 394). As Harpham explains, ethics has two functions: to formulate an ethical critique of the norms that are constituted within a given ethical system, and to articulate and defend different norms. I would like to suggest that *100% FOREIGN?* sought to fulfil both purposes. Another way of describing the project's dual function is to see it as pursuing both

political and ethical ends. This rephrasing indicates why it is relevant to turn to Hannah Arendt. As Ritivoi observes, Arendt's "ethics of alterity" was connected to her ideal of a political community as an arena in which individuals are not seen as born with a fixed and unchanging identity, but defined by their actions, opinions, and shifting positionalities; a plural community in which figures of alterity are not pushed to assimilate into sameness, but where difference is embraced (Ritivoi 2019, p. 105).

In recent decades, the discourses on ethics and literary practice have increasingly focused on questions about otherness and witnessing related to the practices and responsibilities of both authors and readers (Newton 2019, p. ix). In the field of contemporary visual arts, however, the discourse on ethics has taken a different course.

Since the 1960s, an expansive definition has extended the significance of art beyond the singular, discrete object, which is the work of art, to encompass the human relationships engendered by its production and its reception, as well as its institutional and social framework. As a result, artistic production has become increasingly reflexive about its complex relation to society, and shifted towards a strengthening of the connections between the work of art and its social context, site(s) of reception, and its audiences. To strengthen the interaction of audiences with works of art, a host of participatory practices—ranging from "relational aesthetics,"[2] to "relational antagonism,"[3] to "artivism"[4]—have been introduced by artists who more often than not engage with politicized social issues, such as inequality, marginalization, gender, racism, stigmatization, climate crisis, and more. The discourses on the so-called "social turn" and "participatory turn" in art are thus inseparable from questions about "aesthetics and politics".[5] It is from within these dominant and entangled discourses that a contemporary discourse on "the ethics of aesthetics" has emerged and has sought to define the special qualities of the social field and the intersubjective relations that an artwork engenders, and of which it is also a part (Beshty 2015, p. 18). In other words, the discourse on art and ethics is a discourse *within* the discourses on art's relationship to politics, participation, and social engagement, from which it is rarely singled out for separate theorization. A rare example is the artist and writer Walead Beshty's attempt to define an "aesthetics of ethics" in his introduction to the anthology *Ethics*, with its source texts from the 1970s to the early 2010s. Beshty characterizes art that turns to ethics as "an art that operates directly upon the world it is situated in" (Beshty 2015, p. 19) and whose ethical dimension is "manifest in the aesthetic appearance of the work itself" and in the "conditions of reception" it creates for its audience in order to propose "a modification to the social contract, with the artwork acting as the signification of this modification" (Beshty 2015, p. 20). Applied to the practices of representing refugees, this understanding would shift the attention from the work of art as a discrete object to the ethical relationship between the way in which an artwork depicts subjects as *identifiable figures* and how it co-constructs *subject-positions* (Hall) to make its figures and message readable for the recipient—or, to borrow a more accurate term from literary parlance, for the implied reader.

3. Denmark's Immigration and Asylum Polities

To fully understand the implications of *100% FOREIGN?* as an artistic, ethical, and political intervention into current public debates, it is necessary to draw the contours of Denmark's asylum policies and the popular feeling with regard to immigration and the growing demographic diversity of the population. Immigration has not only divided public opinion, but has also turned demographic change into an existential question about the perception of self and other. What does it mean to be Danish? Additionally, what does it mean to be foreign?[6] What does it take to become "a member of society" socially, and what does it take to be recognized as a citizen in the legal sense of the word?

Since the considerably increased influx of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa into Europe in 2015, the narrativization of arrival has placed refugees within "a condemnatory frame" which is legitimized by concerns about refugees being a threat to national safety rather than people in need of aid and shelter, and which is backed by "combative modes of political leadership" (Cox 2017, p. 485). An important change in

European asylum policy and law is the introduction of further restraints on the possibility of gaining the security of permanent residency and access to citizenship. In recent years, Danish governments have introduced some of the toughest requirements for naturalization in the world. The restrictions on citizenship also affect well-established groups in society, such as immigrants who have lived and worked in the country for most of their lives, as well as the descendants of immigrants. In 2021, a report from the Danish Institute for Human Rights criticized the fact that only 65% of the descendants of immigrants born and raised in the country had obtained Danish citizenship. The fact that the number of people granted citizenship has declined to its lowest point in 40 years has also raised concerns about the democratic problem that a growing section of the population does not have the right to vote (Denmark 2021; Andersen et al. 2021, pp. 48, 58–59, 32–35).

Furthermore, in 2019, a study from the three Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, showed that young adults in Denmark believed that the acquisition of citizenship had become too difficult, indicating that there is a widening gap between parliament and the views of its population, especially young people (Erdal et al. 2019, pp. 29–31, 60, 228–29). Although most researchers have argued that there is no genuine political multiculturalism in Denmark, recent surveys suggest that Danish "monoculturalism" is waning (Larsen 2016a; Holtug 2013). In addition, both the philosopher Nils Holtug and the sociologist Christian Albreckt Larsen have suggested that Danes increasingly base their notion of national community on the idea of Denmark as a political entity rather than a cultural community (Holtug 2016; Larsen 2016b). Larsen has convincingly argued that the growing significance of diversity in Danish national self-perception results primarily from *generational* effects, and can therefore be considered irreversible. Based on a comparison of two large surveys conducted in 2003 and 2013, Larsen concludes that the national self-perception of the population seems to be "moving slowly but surely towards multiculture" (Larsen 2016a, p. 135. See also: Petersen et al. 2019, p. 40).

Regarding asylum policies, in 2015, Denmark saw the introduction of a new tertiary protection status of "temporary protection" for those fleeing general violence and armed conflict. The year after, access to family reunification for those granted "temporary protection status" was removed during the first three years of residence unless special considerations applied. Following the surge in the number of primarily Syrian asylum seekers in the summer of 2015, Denmark also ran an anti-refugee advertising campaign in Arabic-language newspapers, warning refugees about the plight that asylum seekers and refugees will have to endure in Denmark. Professor of Migration and Refugee Law, Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, has described these restrictive asylum policies as a consciously deployed form of "negative nation-branding", intended to deter refugees from applying for asylum in Denmark (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017, pp. 99–124, 109; see also pp. 99, 105–6). In short, Denmark, which has historically prided itself as being a liberal advocate of the protection of refugees, has become increasingly reluctant to integrate even a comparatively small numbers of foreigners. Anxious to stem the tide of right-wing nationalistic backlash and win back voters from the anti-immigration populist party, the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti), both the conservative and the centre-left blocs in parliament have more or less appropriated the anti-immigration policy of the Danish People's Party and supported the seemingly endless series of restrictions on asylum, immigration and citizenship (Denmark 2021), thus testifying to how an "invasion complex" has permeated national politics (Papastergiadis 2017, p. 13; see also Papastergiadis 2012, pp. 36–40).

In 2019, the year that the project *100% FOREIGN?* was completed, the flagrant dehumanization of refugees by Danish asylum policies became obvious when the social democratic government declared that some asylum seekers from Syria could be sent back to Damascus province, although no other country in the world had yet declared this region safe enough for people to return. This repatriation plan has been fiercely contested by left-wing politicians, humanitarian organisations, ordinary citizens, and, importantly, young Syrian refugees who see their whole existence destroyed, as well as by some members of the social democratic party. Even so, Danish politicians still find voter and parliamentary

support for continuing their aggressive anti-asylum seeker policies (Abend 2019). Thus, in February 2021, the social democratic government presented a legislative proposal to externalize asylum processing and refugee responsibilities away from Danish territory by establishing an extra-territorial detention centre for asylum seekers on the African continent—a model reminiscent of Australia's offshore detention camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea (Lemberg-Pedersen et al. 2021, pp. 10, 46–48). As Lemberg-Petersen observed, "[t]he proposal aims at shutting down Danish authorities' processing of asylum claims, and granting of stay for refugees, on Danish territory" (Lemberg-Pedersen 2021, p. 7).[7] Although the proposal encountered predictable and severe criticism from numerous scholars, journalists, citizens, and organisations concerned about the protection of refugees and the violation of their human rights, a bill enabling the externalization of asylum was passed in the Danish parliament in June of 2021. This led the newspaper *Politiken* to conclude in their editorial that Denmark had ended up as a "scare story" and "a caricature of the rich" (Politiken 2021; see also: Thobo-Carlsen 2021).

As noted by Holtug, immigration policies are closely linked to the policies that govern civil society at large. This is reflected in the scramble for votes and the fact that "there is a growing part of the political spectrum that sees a welfare state and a multicultural society as directly incompatible, or at least difficult to have side by side." The broad political and voter support for such restrictive policies thus indicates that "Danes are quite polarized over immigration," as Holtug puts it (Holtug, quoted in: Abend 2019, n.p., see also: Holtug 2013). The polarization over immigration is aggravated even further by the ways in which anti-racism and feminist identity politics are often framed in the media and public debates by hostile narratives on "political correctness" and "the culture of hurt", and wrongly interpreted as attempts to introduce prohibitions and suppress freedom— especially the white majority's freedom of speech—rather than as struggles for social justice and expressions of a changing demography (Marker and Hendricks 2019, pp. 120–21, 148). As philosophers Silas L. Marker and Vincent F. Hendricks observe in their book on the Danish public debates, both narratives "are used by one side of the debate to frame the public as an *us*, who are the sensible and rational ones who do not get offended or hurt by trivial matters, and a *them,* who can be hurt by anything, has no sense of humor and cannot take a joke" (Marker and Hendricks 2019, p. 163).

With immigrants and their descendants making up 14% of the population, a figure expected to rise to 20% by 2060, it could be stated that Denmark is already well on its way to becoming a multi-ethnic society (Statistics Denmark 2020, p. 22). Using a term from the German debates on the role played by immigration in the development of plural democratic societies, Denmark can thus be characterized as a "postmigrant society," which is detailed further below.[8] At this juncture, the point I wish to stress is that the ways in which Danish governments have dealt with the challenge of refugees and their protection have not only affected the people directly concerned. In the longer term, the historical move away from humanitarian commitments that were defined in the twentieth century will also change Danes' perceptions of society and national identity—these have, in fact, already changed. In the words of Søren Jessen-Petersen, former Assistant UN High Commissioner for Refugees:

> Today, the joy and pleasure I felt by being Danish in an international organization, has been replaced by shame and embarrassment when former colleagues and friends contact me after yet another critical article in a major international medium about constraints, restrictions and inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark.[9]

4. *100% FOREIGN?*—An Overview of the Project

The art project *100% FOREIGN?* emerged from and grapples with the socio-political circumstances outlined above. At the same time, it also engaged with the world history of refugeedom since the end of World War II and the adoption of the United Nations' Refugee Convention in 1951. It constituted a targeted attempt to expand the understanding of citizenship by inserting a wide range of personal stories and portraits of citizens with refugee backgrounds in the official narrative about Denmark, thereby adding a new chapter to Danish history (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, p. 3).

It is important to emphasize that the aim was not to tell the stories of the wars and persecutions that forced people to flee, or about internment in detention camps and the other troubles refugees had to go through before being granted asylum in Denmark: *100% FOREIGN?* aimed to involve citizens with a refugee background in a multi-voiced rethinking of national identity as a heterogeneous rather than an ethnically homogeneous category. Here, the refugee and migration perspective became a tool for bringing the country's actual diversity to light. In other words, the project was not about the escape, the journey, and the arrival, but about the lifelong, open-ended identity formation that the process of building a life in a foreign country entails. As explained to the digital visitor on the project's website, the aim was "to update the national romantic portrayal of Denmark and place the participants in the official image of Denmark."[10] In addition, the project made an ambitious attempt to unite art, history, identity, inclusion, learning, and democratic participation in one project.

Maja Nydal Eriksen and Metropolis initiated the project in 2016. The first phase of the project resulted in a series of 100 portraits of and stories by former refugees living in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. It was first shown at an exhibition in Copenhagen City Hall in the spring of 2017, and also included the performative event *Live stories* (*Levende fortællinger*), during which the audience could engage with some of the participants in a one-on-one conversation. This was followed later that same year by an open-air exhibition at a centrally located quayside in Copenhagen. In the next phase (2018–2019), the project was transformed into a travelling exhibition, which expanded the project's geographical reach to include participants from cities across the country; the project was shown in public spaces and included newly added portraits of local residents (Figures 1 and 2).[11] With each city, ten new portraits of local inhabitants were added. The exhibition was also accompanied by other events, such as theatre productions (with some of the participants as performers), community dinners, events at local libraries, and, importantly, educational activities for school classes. The latter, as a spinoff from the documentary project, was developed by Eriksen and the project group into an ambitious educational package launched in 2021, consisting of a website about dual cultural identity based on material and nine key themes from the exhibition, as well as classroom material and classes taught by former refugees.

Figure 1. Installation view of the *100% FOREIGN? (100% FREMMED?)* exhibition in the city of Viborg, Denmark. The general exhibition setup with the local portraits was at ground level, with the 100 portraits from Copenhagen installed on cubes on the steps above them. Curated by Maja Nydal Eriksen in collaboration with Metropolis/Copenhagen International Theatre. The photographic portraits and the texts are mounted on cubes measuring 200 × 200 cm. © *Maja Nydal Eriksen*.

Figure 2. Installation view of the *100% FOREIGN? (100% FREMMED?)* exhibition in the city of Aabenraa, Denmark. The local portraits took over a public park while the main exhibition was placed in a public square. Curated by Maja Nydal Eriksen in collaboration with Metropolis/Copenhagen International Theatre. The photographic portraits and the texts are mounted on podiums measuring 100 × 300/100 × 200 cm. © *Maja Nydal Eriksen*.

5. A Postmigrant Society

Although the idea for *100% FOREIGN?* arose from the debates about the European "refugee crisis" that dominated the media in 2015, the project's focus on the Danish context must be understood from its origins in Maja Nydal Eriksen and Metropolis's previous collaboration with the Berlin director and author group Rimini Protokoll on the staging of

a Copenhagen version of their successful 100% City concept at the Royal Danish Theatre in 2013. This was a performance with 100 individuals selected based on statistical criteria, with each individual representing 1% of a city's inhabitants, and the group collectively drawing a sociological portrait of the city. In this way, the 100% City concept created an interesting tension between individual and type, and between individual and society. Since the premiere of *100% Berlin: A Statistical Chain Reaction* in 2008, which "showcased Berlin's diverse population in an inclusive and cheerful atmosphere" (Garde and Mumford 2016, p. 105), it has been developed into many productions, including *100% Melbourne* (2012), *100% Gwangju* (2014), and *100% São Paulo* (2016). In the performance *100% Copenhagen* (*100% København*), the 100 citizens on stage were thus selected based on statistical criteria, as prescribed by Rimini Protokoll's 100% City concept (Eacho 2018, p. 185). Similar criteria were used to select the first 100 participants in *100% FOREIGN?*[12] The project aimed to include equal numbers of male and female participants, and in the photographs, Nydal Eriksen also played with the depiction of women in typical "masculine" postures, and vice versa. In the photographs, there are, for instance, more men shown lying down and more women playing an "active" or "leading" part. Moreover, many of the individual stories address questions of feminism and equality through narratives of social control, both positive and negative, and by seeking to unsettle gender stereotypes.[13]

As a unique feature of the Copenhagen edition, the performance *100% Copenhagen* was followed, in 2015, by an exhibition of staged portraits of the people behind the statistics, accompanied by their own suggestions on what sets them apart from the crowd. Here, Maja Nydal Eriksen assumed the dual role of artist and curator. This exhibition thus provided the model for *100% FOREIGN?*,[14] with the portraits in both cases emphasizing the actual cultural and ethnic diversity of the capital.

It could be argued, however, that the meaning of the figure "100%" changed, because *100% FOREIGN?* does not seek to map the demography of a whole city but, rather, suggests that alienation and belonging can be measured qualitatively on a scale from foreign to Danish. However, the question mark indicates that the proposition is deliberately provocative and should not be taken at face value. If anything, it implies that the binary opposition between "Danish" and "foreign" should be questioned. This is, in fact, what many of the participants did. Some refused to be measured according to this binary system. For instance, Sri Lankan-born Santha Selvam declared herself to be her very own "Santha mixture."[15] Others used the percentage scale to criticize anti-immigration sentiment and policies, or to express their feeling of alienation and stigmatization, or conversely, their sense of belonging and inclusion. Overall, the percentage scale was used by the participants to communicate, in a succinct way, their personal experience of, and their position on, social inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, most of their stories implied knowledge of the fact that being Danish and foreign are co-existing parts of the participants' identity and feelings of dual belonging. As such, the project is a multi-voiced articulation of a "postmigrant" sense of belonging.

This emphasis on complexity brings me to the idea of postmigration. In recent years, the term "postmigrant" (from the German *postmigrantisch*) has been used about societies undergoing change as a result of immigration. It offers a framework of understanding within which one can examine art's contributions to societies in the process of recognizing that they are moving towards increasing cultural and demographic diversity. This collective process of cognition and transformation is full of conflicts and entails a number of battles for recognition and equality alongside struggles over identity and culture. The postmigrant condition is thus characterized by political disagreement and clashes between, on the one hand, various forms of cultural pluralism, and on the other, various forms of nationalism, including anti-immigration and racist right-wing populism—clashes that have also brought *100% FOREIGN?* into the firing line. When the exhibition's portraits of mainly brown and black citizens were shown outdoors at Islands Brygge in Copenhagen over the summer of 2017, unknown perpetrators scrawled graffiti over all the exhibited portraits and threw half of the exhibition into the harbour—vandalism that not only embodied a gloomy reminder

of the boatloads of refugees drowning at Europe's borders, but also raised some concerns in the municipalities with which the project team subsequently collaborated. Would the exhibition be vandalized again? In that case, the show might risk producing bad publicity that would shift the focus to racism and hostility in the local area.[16]

Several German researchers have used the idea of the "postmigrant society" strategically and politically to relaunch migration and socio-cultural diversity as a normal state of affairs, and thus as circumstances that affect all citizens regardless of origin, simply because they are embedded in everyday life—for example, when an ethnic Dane marries a foreigner, when classmates form friendships based on similarities and sympathies that cross ethnic boundaries, or when one has colleagues with dual citizenship. At the same time, postmigrant thinking remains critically attentive to the pervasiveness of anti-immigrant sentiment in European societies and political discourses. In her perceptive analysis of postmigrant democratic societies as societies in transformation that harbour a significant potential for social conflict, the German political scientist Naika Foroutan has convincingly argued that "migration" operates as "a twofold trigger" and "a symbolic battlefield for social self-description." On the one hand, migration functions as "a metanarrative loaded with accusations of social conflict and insecurity, against which social antagonisms are constructed;" on the other, it serves as a vehicle for "identity formation that trades in the normality of diversity, hybridity and plurality as new markers of alliances and changing post-migrant peer group identities" (Foroutan 2019b, p. 153).

It is in this light that one must understand Foroutan's idea that Germany has become a postmigrant society, and that the acknowledgement of this change must lead to a renegotiation of established institutions, structures, and values (Foroutan 2018, p. 185; see also Foroutan 2019a, 2019b). The concept of a postmigrant society thus also harbours a normative, or perhaps even utopian, dimension: it is nurtured by the dream of change towards a more pluralistic and inclusive democratic society (Schramm et al. 2019)—a postmigrant imaginary that also sustains *100% FOREIGN?* Importantly, with regard to the participatory method underpinning the project, Foroutan has argued that connections through family, friends, school, political engagement, or the workplace have produced "new kinds of knowledge, empathy and attitudes" that construct "post-migrant alliances" of "heterogeneous peer groups" whose participants share moral and democratic ideals:

> Immigrants and their descendants are not alone in their struggle for representation and participation. They have supporters for their cause who do not necessarily have a migration background, but share views on democracy and equality. [. . .] Post-migrant alliances are a powerful tool to challenge structures of discrimination: they enable a shared fight against racist attitudes and the isolating othering of migrants, transcending socially constructed divisions and concepts. (Foroutan 2019b, p. 158)

From a postmigrant analytical perspective, *100% FOREIGN?* can be seen as a response to the migration-related changes and debates of the twenty-first century, and as an attempt to put the postmigrant negotiations, ambivalence, and contradictions that surround national identity into perspective by raising questions about the refugee experience of belonging and alienation. Importantly, the exhibition catalogue with the 100 chronologically arranged portraits from Copenhagen reflects the contemporary political situation because it makes clear that the feeling of being a stranger and not belonging is most pronounced among the participants who have been granted asylum in recent years, not just because they have only had a few years to build a connection to Denmark, but also, as explained above, because asylum seekers have been surrounded by growing suspicion in the political and legal system and it has become more difficult to obtain a permanent residence permit and citizenship (Petersen 2020, pp. 21–23; Jensen et al. 2018).

6. Individual and Type

Thus endowed with a postmigrant perspective, we can take a closer look at some of the individual portraits and stories in *100% FOREIGN?* The photographs suggest that

Nydal Eriksen deliberately used the tension between individual and type in the original 100% City concept to challenge the viewer's expectations. Overall, the portraits communicate that the project is not an advocacy of assimilation into a predefined, monocultural Danishness, but an attempt to put something else in place of the national romantic myth that unity presupposes sameness by demonstrating the actual diversity of the population. In the photographs, Nydal Eriksen has also consistently followed a contrapuntal principle that a slightly humorous, experimental, and often colourful visual staging of those portrayed should provide a contrast to their stories, which often give glimpses of adversity, alienation, ambivalence, and criticism. The text and the image thus form a tensional whole, where the image sometimes tells one thing about the person and the text something else. That tension is deliberately constructed through the curation of the participants' voices and appearances, and it helps to nurture the audience's questioning interest about the individual's character, precisely because one cannot make image and text validate one another in any straightforward way.

Let us take two examples from the first part of the project, where all the participants were photographed in Tivoli, one of the oldest amusement parks in the world, and which is located directly opposite Copenhagen City Hall. Tivoli is popular among Copenhageners and tourists because its environment combines contemporary forms of entertainment with a nostalgic mix of exotic historical styles appropriated from other cultures, something that has been the visual hallmark of the park since its inauguration in 1843.

At the photographer's request, the participants chose the clothes in which they would like to be depicted, and brought an object or person(s) with whom they wanted to be photographed. A cross-sectional gaze quickly identifies variations in how participants and photographer use attire and props to express identifications and affiliations. In some cases, a "type" or stereotypical figure is implied, in the sense that the portrait of the individual rubs up against common notions of particular ethnicities and nationalities. For example, if anyone might have expected to encounter a primitivist stereotype in the portrait of Congolese-born Julien Kalimira Mzee Murhul, they will be surprised to meet a highly educated man who signals, with his tie and attaché briefcase, an affiliation with the business sphere (Figure 3). However, there is something else in the picture that provides resistance to stereotypification and puts the viewer to work: Murhul's right arm is clad in armour, the meaning of which is open. It could be interpreted as a sign that Murhul is a man who has something to fight for—or against—but other interpretations are also possible. Behind him is a white mansion-like architectural model, which could carry thoughts in the direction of the White House in Washington, or Marienborg, the official residence of the Danish Prime Minister, and thus towards the centre of political power and parliamentary influence from which the surrounding fence seems to exclude Murhul. Tivoli's Concert Hall can be glimpsed in the distant background. Unlike the amusement park's original concert hall, which was built in a flamboyant Moorish style and crowned by onion domes, the current building from the 1950s is a piece of de-exoticized modern modular architecture that discreetly supports Murhul's photographer-assisted self-representation.

Conversely, the portrait of Iraqi-born Nawras Al-Hashimi overtly plays with the exotic (Figure 4). His aubergine-coloured winter coat almost blends into the deep burgundy semi-darkness of the background, from which an enigmatic construction in green and gold emerges, as if from Aladdin's cave, conjuring up fantasies of oriental palaces and mystics. However, the figure of Al-Hashimi pulls the flying carpet of imagination from under the feet of any spectators who might think that they can recognize an "oriental type" in his portrait. Not only does Al-Hashimi look back at the viewer with a piercing gaze, but when reading his story, viewers will discover that he is a childhood educator and lives in "a spiritual collective, where, through meditation and therapy, we heal and support one another to help us find and accept ourselves as we are, freed from culturally based layers of identity such as gender and ethnicity" (Al-Hashimi in: Jensen et al. 2018, n.p.). Thus, confronted with their own stereotypical expectations, the viewers' migrantizing perception of Al-Hashimi as an "outsider inside" (Ahmed 2000, p. 3) is nudged towards the realization

that the source of mysticism in the picture should not be sought in the Middle East, but in the Western spirituality movements that have long since become an ingrained part of Danish culture.

Figure 3. Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Julien Kalimira Mzee Murhul, from *100% FOREIGN? (100% FREMMED?)*, 2017, photograph, 100 × 100 cm. © *Maja Nydal Eriksen*.

Figure 4. Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Nawras Al-Hashimi, from *100% FOREIGN? (100% FREMMED?)*, 2017, photograph, 100 × 100 cm. © *Maja Nydal Eriksen*.

7. A Human Exhibition?

Several portraits play with the notion of the exotic; therefore, some people are likely to read *100% FOREIGN?* as an exoticizing project. For example, Marta Padovan-Özdemir, who researches integration, discrimination, and pedagogy, has argued that it is a "migrantological human exhibition" because the portraits from Tivoli recall a problematic aspect of Tivoli's history. Between 1878 and 1909, there were fifty "human" exhibitions in Denmark that displayed "exotic" human beings from distant cultures. These exhibitions travelled to major European cities. When reaching Copenhagen, they were often hosted by Tivoli, or alternatively, Copenhagen Zoo, where huge crowds of curious Danes visited exhibitions such as "China in Tivoli" (1902) and "South India in Tivoli" (1903). These displays of ethnographic stereotypes stimulated both scholarly anthropological interest and a popular desire for entertainment and the spectacularly exotic (Bak 2020, n.p.). In addition,

these exhibitions did not just passively reflect the fact that racial hierarchies and prejudice permeated European mentality of that time; they actively contributed to disseminating the theories of race and European civilizational superiority that were used to legitimize colonial exploitation abroad. Considering Tivoli's past, Padovan-Özdemir's comparison of *100% FOREIGN?* to the historical human exhibitions is thus not surprising, but it does come across as somewhat superficial, because it is based solely on the observation that persons of foreign descent have been portrayed in Tivoli, and the fact that racial prejudice and fantasies of white supremacy still persist. Such a reading brackets all the historical differences, and the "postmigrant" message they communicate that is key to this project.

To begin with, a straightforward comparison with the earlier human exhibitions neglects the fact that in the early twenty-first century, the audience for exhibitions in public urban spaces is inherently diverse. Padovan-Özdemir, for example, assumes that the audience of *100% FOREIGN?* is similar to the crowds of white Danes who visited the human exhibitions around 1900. This leads her to conclude that the reception of these representations of "refugees" is "pedagogically dependent on the imagination and the aesthetic and discursive register of the majoritized viewer" (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, p. 55). Secondly, there were sexual and ethnographic aspects to the human exhibitions, because exotic peoples such as "Laplanders" (i.e., Sami), Nubians, Bedouins, Indians (India), and Japanese were displayed with sexual connotations. According to Rikke Andreassen, the leading Danish expert on the subject, "the women were often half naked and performed sexually provocative dances" (Andreassen 2003, pp. 22, 25). Moreover, there was a connection between the exhibitions and the scientific disciplines of anthropology and ethnography, which explains why great attention was paid to the "authentic" ethnographic details of the exhibits and the way in which exotic people were displayed, not as individuals but as representatives of racialized groups according to the scientific paradigm of evolution that dominated the decades around 1900 (Andreassen 2003, pp. 22, 26–28).

Thirdly, the peoples staged in the human exhibitions did not have any "voice," either collectively or individually. Nor did they have any influence on how they were represented in the commercial and ethnographical images of the time—as opposed to the participants in *100% FOREIGN?*, who were co-producers of both their portraits and their stories. Moreover, as an exhibition based on portraits of individuals, *100% FOREIGN?* sought to create a kind of "contact zone" (Pratt 1991) that could facilitate mediated face-to-face encounters between people living in Denmark. Conversely, the human exhibitions were mass spectacles of temporary "guests" performing their "authentic" daily life as allegedly unspoilt people of nature living with their animals in an exhibition environment designed to look untouched by Western civilization (Andreassen 2003, pp. 23–27). In other words, the stereotyped tableaus of these exhibitions were designed to serve as mirror images of their "'primitive' villages," thereby "preserving a European white world order" (Andreassen 2003, p. 35):

> The majority of Danes did not personally engage with the exhibited people; they remained distant observers. For them, as for Denmark as a whole, the exhibitions had a larger cultural function in creating a racial imagination of the nation. (Andreassen 2012, p. 147)

In summary, an ahistorical comparison neglects how Nydal Eriksen's artistic and curatorial approach differs from the human exhibitions, and how the subtle evocation of racial exhibition history is intended to highlight the differences: all the details of individualized backgrounds and the participatory strategy of portrayal testify to the fact that Danish society has become a plural postmigrant society. That only people of migrant backgrounds have been portrayed arguably makes the project *migrantizing*, although in a country that has not yet officially recognized that it has become a postmigrant society, such a systematic inclusion of "other" bodies, voices and stories—their coming into appearance in the public sphere—is a necessary first step that may help pave the way for a deeper understanding of what living under postmigrant conditions entails for all citizens.

Here, a note on how the word "foreign" is used in the title is in order. On the one hand, "foreign" designates someone who has arrived from an "outside" and is perceived

as "an Other;" thus, it has an othering or a migrantizing effect. On the other hand, the question mark points to the inadequacy of the term and conveys that the dual aim of the project was to problematize the misconception that refugees do not transculturate and "belong," and to acknowledge the persistent, albeit in many cases dwindling, feeling of alienation that refugees (and immigrants in general) must tackle, precisely because they are subjected to various forms of exclusion and migrantization. Arguably, representations of people that are already migrantized in the popular perception and public discourse will never be completely free of racial markers or hierarchies of power, but this should not overshadow that dignifying representations can work against marginalization and exclusion, and radically challenge the nationalist divide between "us" and "them."

A comparison with another travelling exhibition can help us get a better grip of the ethical and political work *100% FOREIGN?* aspired to do: Alfred Steichen's 1955 exhibition *Family of Man*, as interpreted by Ariella Azoulay, an expert on photography studies. Azoulay describes *Family of Man* as "a landmark event in the history of photography and human rights" (Azoulay 2013, p. 19). As with *100% FOREIGN?*, its objects of display were photographs of people from across the world, and it was likewise historically related to the period after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948. The purpose of Steichen's exhibition was to demonstrate the universality of human actions in daily life and the human life cycle. Azoulay reads the images of the exhibition as an "archive containing the visual proxy of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Azoulay 2013, p. 20). She notes that the exhibition cannot be ascribed to a single creator, i.e., the curator, but, similar to *100% FOREIGN?*, bore "traces of an encounter of multiple participants" that included both subjects and viewers (Azoulay 2013, p. 32). Importantly, Azoulay emphasizes the "multiplicity" of the photographic material that Steichen subsumed under categories such as "work" and "family," and how its "heterogeneity" seemed to work against misconceptions of universality as an ideological regime of sameness and the eradication of difference. Its multiplicity suggested diversity in unity:

> The identical format of black-and-white photographs showing humans in allegedly similar situations actually foregrounds to what extent the photographed persons differ from each other—their crafts vary, their gestures are multiple, and every expression or smile hints at a different experiential world that cannot be organized along generalizations of nation, gender, or race. (Azoulay 2013, p. 28)

Paying close attention to the exhibition's potential effects, i.e., what the exhibition *does*, Azoulay proposes to read the photographs in *Family of Man* not as "descriptive statements with universal claims", but as "prescriptive statements claiming universal rights" (Azoulay 2013, p. 20). Turning back to the portraits of the Danish project, I propose to read them not as documentary descriptions, but as prescriptive statements claiming democratic rights.

8. The Domestic Culture of Public Discourse

With its basis of co-creation and collaboration between citizens, interviewers, and artist/curator, *100% FOREIGN?* can be linked to a broader current in contemporary art where artists, curators and other professional actors reach out to new user groups and audiences in participation-based projects.[17] More precisely, *100% FOREIGN?* belongs to the growing number of such projects that have sought to find ways to "give voice to" minority groups and to improve their access to democratic participation in society. Although every single story in *100% FOREIGN?* is based on a long interview, the conversations are systematically boiled down to short stories of a uniform length and with varying perspectives on the overall question of belonging and alienation that was posed to all the participants: "What percentage foreign do you feel?"[18] As Padovan-Özdemir has noted, the voice speaking can thus be described as a "curated voice" (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, p. 50). She criticizes this artistic–curatorial approach for being a "pedagogically domesticating form of oppression" that "neglects structural suffering and offers the resolution of

alienation" (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, pp. 55–56), whereas I prefer to perceive the project as an ethical and political attempt to establish the kind of voice or enunciation that Trinh T. Minh-ha has called speaking nearby. Minh-ha defines speaking nearby as an alternative to the prevailing practice of speaking *about* the Other, thereby making the Other an object that is "absent from the place spoken from." She describes speaking nearby as an "indirect" way of speaking—for example, it could appropriately be added here, through the dialogic form of an interview. This mode of enunciation does not disempower those affected (deprives them of their voice and visibility), and it is predicated on the speaker's/artist's awareness of their own privileged position of utterance (Chen 1992, p. 87). In *100% FOREIGN?*, the privileged position is that of the white majority understood as a position of naturalized dominance and preference that eases access to airtime and to making oneself heard in a Danish public sphere, a positionality shared by this author.

As Nermin Duraković has explained, "the domestic culture of public discourse" is dominated by "a discourse in which 'they' (foreigners) are seen as objects rather than subjects" (Duraković 2021, n.p.). Or, put differently, speaking nearby is something of a rarity. Duraković is in a better position than most to put his finger on the problem. As a child, Duraković came to Denmark from the then-civil-war-ravaged Yugoslavia. He has thus been part of "them," the newcomers. At the same time, he is also a graduate of the Funen Art Academy, Denmark, and a recognized figure on the Danish art scene. He is thus undeniably part of "us." Such ambiguous positions have tremendous difficulty in finding acceptance in Danish politics, public discourses, and mainstream national culture. People with a dual or multiple sense of belonging are rarely embraced, and it is into this ideologically and emotionally charged field that *100% FOREIGN?* makes an intervention. As Duraković puts it, the public conversational culture treats "'them'(strangers)" as:

> anything but an included part of our common consciousness or as a common and equal voice that must be taken seriously and that can act and function with a critical potential. It tells us very directly that our society does not rest on equality, equal rights or equal access to critical expression, and that there is still a long way to go. The idea and the realization of equality require a more nuanced view of ourselves. (Duraković 2021, n.p.)

Although the delicate balance between listening and communication that the ideal of speaking nearby requires is hardly achieved in all 250 interviews, comments such as the following show that the participants in *100% FOREIGN?* could articulate experiences with structural discrimination, suffering, and alienation. This not only must be presumed to separate them from the white Danish interviewers, but also leaves a question mark over the modern myth of Denmark as a country characterized by democratic equality and populated by friendly residents who welcome strangers as their equals with openness and tolerance: "I have found it very difficult to feel at home here because it's been a constant struggle with the Danish Immigration Service," says Samira Khalifa. Similarly, the aforementioned Julien Kalimira Mzee Murhul explains how changing governments have created a climate of inhospitality by using refugee policy for negative nation-branding to scare refugees from seeking asylum in Denmark as he voices his claim for democratic representation: "I feel foreign in Denmark, even more than 100%. When the government constantly tightens legislation on immigration instead of making legislation that will facilitate integration, it is hard to feel at home . . . . Us new Danes born south of the Sahara are not part of the Danish Parliament (Folketinget), and as a result we don't feel like we are part of society either" (quoted from: Jensen et al. 2018, n.p.). The experience that it is difficult to be recognized as a 100% citizen is shared by Cong Hung Nguyen, who describes the feeling of alienation in a way that is strikingly similar to the critical reader's letters and posts that brown and black Danes increasingly publish in the daily press and on social media, especially since the Black Lives Matter protests against racism flared up in the early summer of 2020 after the police murder of the African–American George Floyd: "I have no ambition of returning to my home country like a lot of other foreigners talk about. I am 50% foreign, but only because everyone always asks me where I come from" (Jensen et al. 2018, n.p.).[19]

In summary, the participants took part in a project based on informed consent that was very much about claiming democratic rights, specifically, the rights of refugees. To that end, the project sought to provide a framework for self-representation in public—even though it is evident, particularly in the photographs, that it was an assisted and mediated form of self-representation, where the artist remained the ultimate curator of the project's individual representations and its overarching narrative. An additional point is that the majority of those who have seen one of the exhibitions or read the catalogue, and the pupils who have explored some of the individual stories in school, have probably not applied a top-down or "vertical" birds-eye view. The curatorial design deliberately hampered attempts to survey the exhibition in its totality. Instead, it constructed a "horizontal" experience for viewers/readers, in which they moved around the exhibition, or browsed the catalogue or the website, and let themselves be captured by the stories and portraits that aroused their curiosity. It was exactly this conscious curatorial organization of intersubjective face-to-face meetings, i.e., encounters with one individual after another (rather than an encounter with a group or a mass), which opened up the project's narratives and portraits to different interpretations, identifications, and counter-identifications by recipients whose position in relation to the depicted individual depended on similarities and differences in gender, class, ethnicity, age, experience, political conviction, hometown, country of origin, etc.

9. Hannah Arendt's Ethics of Alterity

As a participatory project foregrounding both actual and imaginary intersubjective relations, *100% FOREIGN?* offers a productive site for examining the ethical potential and dilemmas of representing refugees by speculating on what conflicts of domination and suppression the project involved, and how it may contribute new answers to vital questions on democratic participation, integration, belonging and citizenship. According to Ritivoi, Hannah Arendt "grounded ethics in aesthetics because she viewed aesthetic representation as a way of understanding how the world appears to different human beings. To let the imagination 'go visiting' another's world, as she put it, was all the more important when it could recover marginalized and repressed perspectives" (Ritivoi 2019, p. 103).

As a Jewish refugee from the Nazi persecution and genocide of European Jews, Arendt emigrated from Germany to France in 1933 and travelled via Portugal to the United States in 1941. Her essay "We Refugees" was first published in 1943 in the Jewish–American periodical *Menorah Journal*, but its rhetorical construction suggests that it was addressed to a larger American audience as well, "the audience of citizens, rather than immigrants" (Ritivoi 2019, p. 110). It would be fair to say that *100% FOREIGN?* is also addressed to a larger audience, and notably one that includes both citizens and immigrants. Despite this difference, Arendt's essay serves as a reminder of the pressure to assimilate imposed on refugees—a pressure that *100% FOREIGN?* sought to counter by stressing how the navigation between different cultures has fostered a unique, composite character in each participant that does not conform to traditional notions of being Danish, born and bred. At the same time, the project explored the effects of this pressure by measuring the participant's mixed feelings of belonging and unbelonging against "the official image of Denmark."[20] Even if the project challenged the dominant image and proffered an alternative founded in an ethics of alterity, the curatorial framing nevertheless had to walk on a razor's edge in order to steer clear of the subsumptive approach that overemphasizes resemblances and thereby subsumes minoritarian differences under a majoritarian umbrella of cultural commonality. Arendt can help us better understand this probably unsolvable ethical (and political) conundrum of representation.

The "we" of Arendt's essay fuses her own fate as a Jewish refugee during World War II with a general analysis of the predicament of refugees forced to settle temporarily or permanently in whatever country will receive them.[21] She critically analyses the dual assimilative pressure put on refugees by the expectations of the receiving country and the efforts of the refugees themselves to blend in, as part of their process of building a new life and gaining recognition as a fellow citizen. Arendt describes, and not without humour,

how Jews fleeing Nazi persecution rushed headlong to assimilate and become ordinary citizens of the host country (Meyer 2016, p. 45). According to Arendt's analysis, refugees are driven partly by the desire to rid themselves of the label "refugee" and to erase all the traces of refugeedom and a different heritage that may result in self-disclosure, and partly by the inducements and pressure of the host community: "We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever imagined. In a friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans" (Arendt 2007, p. 265).

In the wartime United States, German refugees were perceived not only as "prospective citizens" but also as "enemy aliens" (Arendt 2007, p. 266); therefore, they were anxious to not convey their refugee status:

> we are already so damnably careful in every moment of our daily lives to avoid any-body guessing who we are, what kind of passport we have . . . . We try the best we can to fit into a world where you have to be sort of politically minded when you buy your food. (Arendt 2007, p. 269)

As an antidote to this assimilationist erasure of the refugees' difference and past, Arendt proposes a new political self-consciousness of refugees who insist on the right to disclose their character, deviate from the norm, and not subject themselves to "the narrowness of caste spirit" (Arendt 2007, p. 274). However, the public appearance of such performances of alterity would require a change in attitude in the host community. Drawing on Arendt's ethics, Ritivoi suggests that "[t]o recognize and respect alterity requires us to understand another's standpoint and see how it came about, as well as what beliefs and values it makes possible." (Ritivoi 2019, p. 104).

Seen in the light of Arendt's ethics of alterity, *100% FOREIGN?* presents itself as an ambiguous endeavour because it contributes to both assimilative and politically self-conscious processes of identity formation. Not surprisingly, the 250 individual stories and portraits reveal that the participants responded differently, some stressing their (partial) integration into and identification with Danish society, others their critical stance, their (partial) difference, and their ties to their country of birth. Recapitulating Hall's point about the dual role of the subject in representation, this participatory project could be said to construct a vantage point or subject position for recipients, from which it was possible to glimpse the diversity of standpoints taken by migrantized citizens as identifiable figures who have to continually negotiate their identity and subjectivity, and who do so in very different ways.

Interestingly, Arendt used the metaphor of the blueprint to explain how aesthetic representation can serve as exemplary. Writing on Franz Kafka, she likened his stories to the blueprint's representation of a model or plan, i.e., a tool that enables us to imagine what a future construction will look like. The metaphor of the blueprint captures the emergent nature of aesthetic representation, and also suggests that the audience needs "to realize by their own imagination" the intentions of its maker and the future it envisions (Arendt 1994, pp. 76–77). The metaphor thus suggests that it is indeed the indeterminate character of *100% FOREIGN?* that enables us to see in it the contours of a future plural society. In Ritivoi's accurate wording, the blueprint "captures configurations in which we can discern both a world now around us and the world as it is most likely to take shape" (Ritivoi 2019, p. 107).

10. Transforming the Image of Denmark

The participants from other cities portrayed in the second phase of *100% FOREIGN?* were photographed in local cultural landscapes and thus inserted "in the official image of Denmark" in a both concrete and symbolic way. These portraits raise the question of whether this approach represents an "apparently consensus-seeking" update of the image of Denmark (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, p. 48), or, as I would suggest, an intervention, rather, that reveals some of its cracks and changes? As my examples show, Nydal Eriksen was not content to merely state that citizens with a refugee background are also included in the

Danish cultural landscape (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, p. 51). The portraits and stories did not leave the official image of Denmark unchanged.

Fatima Yassin was photographed together with some of the other participants from the town of Sønderborg at Dybbøl Mill (Figure 5). The image shows that they have come on Segways as tourists on a guided tour to one of the most important memorial landscapes in Danish history, Dybbøl Banke, the site of the war against the Germans in 1864 and a traumatic national defeat that nurtured an enduring fear of strangers from the south. Behind Fatima Yassin stands an elderly gentleman wearing a uniform jacket similar to those worn by Danish soldiers during the battle. However, his bicycle helmet suggests a different time and role—that of a Segway-riding tourist guide. The introductory text for the exhibition in Sønderborg described Dybbøl Banke as "a memorial landscape of war and peace for two nations and a symbol of Danish identity and community." It also explained that the visit reawakened the participants' "own experiences of war and unrest, the delineation of frontiers, as well as minority and majority issues."[22]

Figure 5. Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Fatima Yassin, from *100% FOREIGN? (100% FREMMED?)*, 2018, photograph, 100 × 100 cm. © *Maja Nydal Eriksen*.

The picture of Fatima Yassin and the others reveals nothing about how they each experienced their own history crossing tracks with Danish war history. It communicates a general message about the connection between past and future, anticipation and memory. The portrait plays on the contrast between the older man, a gatekeeper of Danish history, in the background, and the young woman in front who is eager to move on. Fatima Yassin stands still, like a statue, on her Segway, and even though the photograph freezes all movement, her figure nonetheless speaks of mobility and change. The bodies on wheels introduce today's motorized mobility into the representation of a commemorative landscape, serving as a synecdoche for national history. At the same time, the female figure's latent restlessness supports the interview's narrative of a mother who came to Denmark from Syria in 2015 and who is now looking to a future where Danish culture has undergone some changes. As she observes: "My children must learn both cultures, but I think they will become 90% Danish" (Eriksen et al. 2021, pp. 45–46). What the last 10% of the children's cultural identity might include is suggested by Bosnian–Danish Amira Saric's story: "I love the Nordic names, but since both my husband and I are of Bosnian origin, it would be too strange. I would feel as if I had stolen the child of someone else. My middle daughter is named Esma, and one of her girlfriends has got a rabbit that she calls Esma. That's my secret plan. That it should not be abnormal to be named Esma in Denmark."[23] This desire to make Denmark more culturally inclusive is akin in spirit to what I described

above as a postmigrant mindset that will pave the way for an understanding of migration and socio-cultural diversity as a normal and integrated dynamic in society.

Turning to the portrait of Alia Ismail El-Aynein from Vejle (Figure 6), it becomes clear that "the Danish cultural landscape" must be understood in an expanded sense, which also includes the digital landscape and the way politicians use social media, and specifically Facebook (Eriksen et al. 2021, pp. 165–166). Most Danes will remember that, in 2017, a grinning Inger Støjberg posed with the crown jewel of the traditional Danish birthday celebration—the layer cake—to boast that she, as Minister of Immigration and Integration in Lars Lykke Rasmussen's Liberal government at the time, had implemented fifty tightenings of the immigration laws. Danish media willingly helped spread the controversial image of the minister with the layer cake adorned with Danish flags over interconnected media platforms, so that the image and everything it said about Danish immigration policy became an indelible part of the memory of citizens across the country— a collective memory. Nydal Eriksen, together with Alia Ismail El-Aynein, has created a counter image to this piece of digital cultural heritage. El-Aynein, who runs a catering company in Viborg, presents a magnificent heart-shaped layer cake decorated with berries and flowers to the viewer. Behind her stands Amira Saric, who holds a plate of layer cake, and thus acts as an identification figure for the viewer, making it easy to imagine receiving a piece of the cake oneself. El-Aynein is photographed at the heritage site Kongernes Jelling (home of the Viking kings); more precisely, at the place where, in the Viking Age, two rows of stones formed the outline of the ship that, according to Norse mythology, sailed the dead to Valhalla. Today, the "ship" is marked by large slabs of concrete. As in Fatima Yassin's portrait, there is thus a clear thematization of travel and mobility as being integral to the Danish cultural landscape. El-Aynein stands at the head of the "ship", like a traveller ready to walk down the gangplank. Just as Dybbøl Banke is portrayed as a place where different war memories intersect, Jelling is interpreted as the place where religions meet, because in this image, the Old Norse faith crosses with Christianity and Islam.

Figure 6. Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Alia Ismail El-Aynein, from *100% FOREIGN? (100% FREMMED?)*, 2019, photograph, 100 × 200 cm. © *Maja Nydal Eriksen*.

Nydal Eriksen has photographed from an angle that causes the two rows of concrete tiles to encircle El-Aynein like a mandorla, i.e., the tapered oval halo that encloses the entire figure in medieval Christian images, as in images of the Virgin Mary. As an art historian raised on Western pictorial traditions, this is my first association. El-Aynein's red scarf and red-edged cloak flutter in the wind; the folds in the cloth create a visual abstract and spiritual dynamic around the figure, as seen in Renaissance and Baroque religious paintings, such as Titian's famous altarpiece of the Assumption of the Virgin in

the Frari Church in Venice (1516–1518). However, my association is quickly followed by an observation: El-Aynein's veil is a Muslim tradition. In the interview, she explains that the headscarf connects her with her roots in Lebanon, where she was born to Palestinian parents: "When I came to Denmark, I did not wear a headscarf, but I started to miss it. I do not quite know why: Maybe you are looking for your roots when you come to a new country?" (Eriksen et al. 2021, p. 165). Drawing on the political and popular meaning of the cake, the history of the place, the religious symbols, and the visual composition, Nydal Eriksen, together with El-Aynein, has created a counter-image to Støjberg's image, which exposes the inhospitality of Støjberg's self-presentation and elevates El-Aynein to the true defender of the layer cake as a positive symbol of hospitality and heart-warming generosity. She is at once portrayed as the newcomer who comes ashore in an unknown country, and the hostess who invites us all inside for cake.

11. A Postmigrant Transversal Politics through Art: Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have threaded a theoretical discussion through a case study to provide an answer to the question of what participatory artistic practices of representation can bring to the ethical politics of representing refugees. To emphasize the challenges involved in representing alterity, the article opened with Stuart Hall's observation that representation, especially the representation of "difference," is a complex and contested matter that provokes strong emotions and conflicting sentiments. As a participatory project, *100% FOREIGN?* took a collaborative approach to representation by "speaking nearby" (Minh-ha). It brought a transformation to the ethical politics of representing refugees: firstly, of the way in which subjects of refugee backgrounds are depicted as identifiable figures by ensuring that each participant was portrayed as a unique individual; and, secondly, of the way representations co-construct subject positions for the audience. The latter was achieved by way of a "horizontal" curatorial design that staged the visitor's encounter with the portrayed as a one-on-one encounter.

With four selected portraits, I have tried to show how *100% FOREIGN?* contributes to creating a richly differentiated and inclusive narrative about identity, belonging, and citizenship in Denmark. As I have argued above, this encompassing documentation of the experiences of those living in this country with a refugee background should not be read as mere documentary descriptions, but rather as prescriptive statements claiming democratic rights (Foroutan 2019b, p. 158).

The ethics and politics that governed the collaboration on *100% FOREIGN?*, as well as how the individual portraits and stories were curated to stimulate audience engagement, can be more accurately described through the feminist concept of transversal politics. A further reason for turning to feminist theory is the fact that Nydal Eriksen has consistently foregrounded a feminist notion of equality by including men and women in equal numbers, and, as previously explained, by consciously letting some women adopt a classical "masculine" pose, as seen, for instance, in the image of Fatima Yassin leading the Segway trip to Dybbøl Banke.[24]

To begin with, the term *transversal politics* signals crucial links between political, ethical, and artistic agency. My use of the term is indebted to the feminist sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis's understanding of transversal politics as a feminist intersectional and transnational theory and practice of democratic solidarity-building and conflict-resolution; and, especially, to art historian Marsha Meskimmon's generative extension of Yuval-Davis's concept to the sphere of art. Meskimmon has developed Yuval-Davis's feminist intersectional approach to identity formation and solidarity-building into a theoretical sensibility, which not only facilitates an aggregated analysis of sameness and difference that complicates established assumptions about power and domination, but also examines how intersectionality can "create kin" and "affective coalitions" (Meskimmon 2020, p. 8). The feminist conception of transversal politics can be traced back to the peacebuilding work of the feminist activist movement Women in Black in Bologna from the 1970s to the 1990s. They used the term "transversalism" about the method they used in their work with conflicting national

groups—Serbs and Croats, Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women—to find a fair solution to the conflict. Crucially in the context of *100% FOREIGN?*, the boundaries between the participants were not, as explained by Yuval-Davis, perceived simplistically as if they were merely representatives of their groupings. Their different positioning and background were "recognised and respected." Using the key words of "rooting" and "shifting", the Bologna feminists worked from the idea that each participant would bring with her "the rooting in her own membership and identity," but would also try "to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different membership and identity." In other words, "[t]he transversal coming together should not be with the members of the other group 'en bloc' but with those who, in their different rooting, share compatible values and goals to one's own" (Yuval-Davis 1994, pp. 192–93; see also: Yuval-Davis 1999). Thus defined, transversal politics can be seen as a practice of intersubjective exchange which is in agreement with Hannah Arendt's idea of an ethics of alterity from the perspective of the refugee. Both are based on the conviction that to respect alterity, we need to recognize another's standpoint and to understand how it came about, and what compatible values and beliefs it makes it possible to share.

The transversal politics of *100% FOREIGN?* generated an affective coalition. The project brought together people of many different heritages and from all walks of life to collaborate on the production of portraits, stories, exhibitions, educational material, cultural events, and, importantly, solidarity, and what Foroutan has described as reshuffled peer groups or postmigrant alliances where people of different ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds come together because they share similar attitudes on equality and diversity as hallmarks of a plural democracy. Interestingly, with regard to the recipients' engagement with the exhibition, Foroutan notes that postmigrant alliances are "also possible without contact or interaction" and that they can be forged on the basis of empathy and proximity, but also "be more than just empathetic; they can be political or strategic" (Foroutan 2019b, p. 158).

Using the Bologna feminists' terms to explain how transversal politics was practiced in *100% FOREIGN?*, it could be said that the project invited producers, participants, and recipients to adopt the interactive approach of rooting and shifting. However, the audience would obviously also have included individuals who refused to be interpellated, or hailed, as an ally, and who remained critical, even hostile, to its ethics and politics of representing people of refugee backgrounds, as included in the image of the nation. The project can thus be seen as a continuation of the long tradition of using art exhibitions and art projects as instruments for the education of the audience: *100% FOREIGN?* provided an opportunity to discuss essential issues of democratic participation, recognition, and belonging, and it gave those willing to listen some new answers to the question of what citizenship is, and what civic ethics from the perspective of the refugee can bring to a postmigrant society.

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Notes

[1]   According to Oliver Marchart, Rancière's theory has been put in the service of a depoliticizing ideology of art. Rancière's proposition that art's potential for "redistribution of the sensible" enables it to reframe material and symbolic spaces has been widely adopted by art world professionals as philosophical legitimation that whatever is produced by "antipolitical artists and curators" is truly *political* (Marchart 2019, pp. 13–14). See also: (Nielsen and Petersen 2021, note 11). For a recent example of how Rancière's theorization of the relationship between aesthetics, politics and ethics can be applied in a study of representations of refugees, see: (Arda 2019).

2   This much debated concept was coined by art theorist and curator Nicholas Bourriaud (Bourriaud 2002).

3   This term was coined by art historian Claire Bishop as part of her seminal critique of Bourriaud's concept (Bishop 2004, p. 77).

4   "Artivism" is a contraction of art and activism. A definition of the term and practice is given in (Reestorff 2017, p. 16).

5   This brief outline does not do justice to the breath and complexity of these discourses on contemporary art. For a more elaborate account on the social and participatory turns, and for further references, see (Nielsen and Petersen 2021).

6   Lisa Abend makes similar observations in a feature article about the effects of Danish immigration policies on public opinion and the self-perception of the Danes (Abend 2019).

7   Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration. *Forslag til Lov om ændring af udlændingeloven (Indførelse af mulighed for overførsel af asylansøgere til asylsagsbehandling og indkvartering i tredjelande)*. [Law to reform the Aliens Act (launching the possibility to transfer asylum seekers to case processing and residency in third countries)], 2021. UUI Alm. Del. Bilag 73, page 5. Available online: https://www.ft.dk/samling/20201/almdel/uui/bilag/73/index.htm (accessed on 18 May 2021).

8   I use the dominant term "postmigrant society" that is increasingly used in the social sciences, especially in Germany, instead of the term "the postmigrant condition". The latter describes Danish society more accurately and is more apt for studies in art and culture, but would also require further explanation. For a discussion of the difference between the two terms, see (Schramm et al. 2019). For a thorough introduction to the concept of the postmigrant society by its leading theorist, see (Foroutan 2019a, 2019b).

9   (Jessen-Petersen 2021). Unless otherwise stated, the translation of quotations and titles in Danish are by the author.

10   "100% FREMMED?", https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/ (accessed on 21 May 2021).

11   like Note 10.

12   The statistical method was explained on the project's first website and included information about how the 100 participants from Copenhagen were distributed over twenty-nine different countries of origin. https://100pctfremmed.dk/flygtninge-i-danmark/ (accessed 9 September 2019). The same figures were given on a large poster placed at the entrance to the exhibition at the Copenhagen City Hall in 2017. The fact that this statistical distribution was not included in the catalogue with the 100 portraits from Copenhagen published the following year indicates that the project had evolved and freed itself from Rimini Protokoll's 100% City concept (Jensen et al. 2018).

13   Maja Nydal Eriksen, in an email to the author, 1 June 2021. Examples of reclining men: https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/ahmed-kadhim-al-sovirawi, https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/gervais-nombe; examples of active, leading women: https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/rawan-abdullah, https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/santha-selvam (accessed on 27 September 2021).

14   For the theatre production *100% København*, see https://www.metropolis.dk/tag/100-koebenhavn/ (accessed on 5 October 2021). For a recording of the performance, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2oisa3Eh4I (accessed on 21 May 2021).

15   Santha Salvam, https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/santha-selvam (accessed on 27 September 2021)

16   Interview with Maja Nydal Eriksen, 26 November 2019.

17   For an introduction to this move towards participatory and collaborative practices, see: (Nielsen and Petersen 2021).

18   "Hvor mange procent fremmed føler du dig?" quoted from Maja Nydal Eriksen's unpublished interview guide "Samtaleguide 100% FREMMED?" (2016), n.p.

19   For a critical introduction to Danish refugee policy, see: (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017). For a critique of the historical development in Danish immigration policies since the mid-1990s, see (Bolt Rasmussen 2011).

20   like Note 10.

21   Hannah Arendt actually used Denmark's provision of refuge for its Jewish citizens and some Jewish refugees during World War II as a historical asylum case. Nathan Bell has convincingly argued that Arendt's use of the case of Denmark sheds light on her understanding of political responsibility and her influential notion of the "right to have rights," i.e., the right of refugees to asylum: to be admitted to the territory and accepted into a political community to ensure that their human rights are upheld (Bell 2020).

22   The introductory text for Sønderborg is not on the project website. Quoted from an email from Maja Nydal Eriksen to the author, 15 March 2021.

23   https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/til-undervisere-1/amira-saric (accessed on 18 March 2021).

24   Maja Nydal Eriksen in an email to the author, 1 June 2021.

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Perpetual Exile: Legacies of a Disrupted Century

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Abstract: The transnational configuration of contemporary German literature cannot be detached from its historical continuum, since such a separation would render the archive of histories of exile in and out of Germany inconsistent and incomplete. Bringing literary histories of exile in a dialogue, in this instance, *Exilliteratur*, represented by prominent German authors, who, during the Second World War, immigrated to Southern California (Thomas Mann, Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Franz Werfel, among others), as well as Anna Seghers and Stefan Zweig, who went into exile in Mexico and Brazil, respectively, and the emerging literature of contemporary transnational or so-called hyphenated German ("Bindestrich-Deutsche") writers would enable an inclusive paradigm that communicates across communities of research. To that end, I briefly review one novel each by Anna Seghers and Lion Feuchtwanger and essays by the Iranian-German poet SAID, which exemplify the two distinctive genres of exile literature: the long-established *Exilliteratur* and what I elsewhere described as transnational literature of writers mostly from the non-Western world, who in the latter part of the twentieth century began immigrating to the West. While I acknowledge the different circumstances and historical imperatives that have dictated the features of the two genres, I foreground the ethical implications and the cautionary tales the respective works of *Exilliteratur* authors and transnational writers share.

Keywords: German *Exilliteratur*; transnational writers; Lion Feuchtwanger; Anna Seghers; SAID; exile in translation

> Exile teaches you about individual fate with universal implications, because it is eternal and has always been with us. (Breytenbach 1994, p. 182)

1. Introduction

In an essayistic story, "mit walt whitman in los angeles", (SAID 2008, p. 158) the late Iranian poet SAID, who spent his whole adult life in German exile, imagines meeting Walt Whitman in Los Angeles. What is noteworthy about the place from where he writes is not that it is just Los Angeles, but the Villa Aurora in neighboring Pacific Palisades, which was the residence of Lion Feuchtwanger, one of Germany's leading novelists. The first short paragraph of the essay notes the significance of the setting:

> los angeles. pacific palisades. paseo miramar nr: 520: villa aurora. die letzte zu-flucht von lion feuchtwanger vor den nazis. ("the last refuge of lion feuchtwanger from the nazis" (SAID 2008))

Feuchtwanger, along with other prominent German writers and artists, such as Thomas Mann, his brother Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Franz Werfel, film directors Billy Wilder and Fritz Lang, and composer Arnold Schoenberg, among many others, belonged to a coterie of star-studded Jewish and anti-Nazi Germans, who had fled Hitler's Germany to what (Bahr 2008) referred to as "Weimar on the Pacific".Although many émigrés returned to Europe after the war, a few like Feuchtwanger and Heinrich Mann stayed in Los Angeles until the end of their lives. Today, Villa Aurora is a residence for visiting German-based writers, artists, and filmmakers. In memory of the German emigration in the 1930s, Villa Aurora, in cooperation with the University of Southern

California Feuchtwanger Library, offers the annual Feuchtwanger Fellowship to writers and artists, many of whom had been censored and persecuted in their home countries.

It is at the above address, where he was an artist-in-residence, that SAID "salutes" his fellow émigré Feuchtwanger. The inhabitance of the same space three-quarters of a century apart by a writer exiled from Germany and another who went into German exile is not merely an interesting coincidence in literary exile studies. The ever-growing number of refugees to European states in recent decades bears witness to a historical irony, for during most of the last century Europe itself was a site of exodus, embroiled as it was in the inferno of two world wars. Germany, of all European countries, arguably represents the most radical transformation of a geography of emigration into one of immigration within the span of a few decades.

Such transformations, however, bring their own crises and interdictions that necessitate new assessments of exile experience, which cannot simply be inferred from available statistics and surveys. Epistemic paradigm shifts are identified only belatedly in the future anterior, while contemporary theories of exile cultures rely on preexisting concepts. Perhaps in some sense, SAID's prizewinning work, written in the target language in advance, already a translation from the author's first language, suggests the future anterior of the *Exilliteratur* of the 1930s and 1940s by the émigré German authors in Los Angeles as well as by Stefan Zweig and Anna Seghers who immigrated to Brazil and Mexico, respectively. In other words, the German exile literature of the Nazi period needs to be reevaluated in the future paradigm, which its own historical conditions had projected into the coming age. It is imperative to stress the importance of historical positions in assessing the adequacy and coherence of contemporary cultural theories.

In *Writing Outside the Nation*, I tested the paradoxes of exilic experience through the competing imperatives of reclaiming lost homes and accepting the inevitability of migration and change. Since cultures are not necessarily rooted in a given place and cultural legacies can survive at multiple sites and transform themselves across zones of time and space, the conceptualization of cultures in transition and translation requires a multitude of complementary interpretive protocols. *Writing Outside the Nation* engages in a broadly based analysis of literary and (auto) biographical works conceived in the interstices of diverse languages, linguistic practices, and cultural heritages. While the diversity of the books included in this study was not easily classifiable and the existing terminology applied to these—immigrant, hybrid, and migrant literature—was problematic, I used the term "transnational literature", following anthropologist Arjun Appudurai's notion of the transnational to define the increasing flow of capital, commodity, and media across borders in a rapidly globalizing world. The term is now widely used and variously defined. It has occasionally been taken up by other critics and redefined, refined, edited, and expanded. The late Dubrovka Ugrešić, herself the subject of many studies on transnational women writers, finds "transnational literature" a fitting term of choice for "the new alternative literary zone", which she inhabits (Ugrešić 2008, p. 149). At the same time, the popularity and the extensive use of the term have erased its specificity, and in some cases "transnational" has unwittingly relapsed into "national", as in *Transnational American Literature* (Goyal 2017), where the adjective denoting nation slips between "transnational" and "literature".

Since the field of exile studies is expanding and moving in different directions, terminology cannot remain stable. While no critical vocabulary can adequately describe the steadily emerging texts from movements across borders, it behooves the critic to diminish the underrepresentation of writers, often from the Global South, whose experience of persecution, loss, and voluntary or involuntary exile demonstrates unique lessons in the seismic shifts of history, geopolitics, and the inequalities of power among nations and racial-ethnic, or religious collectivities. Such lessons are often lost, as there is little information about these writers and their work. Bringing them in a dialogue across time and geography with writers of renown not only allows their voices to be heard but also enhances our understanding of literary history. Rather than focusing solely on transnational literature as

a product of contemporary culture, we ought to include the pioneering work of historical predecessors in our study of transnational writers/works.

Transnational lives and literature are not only a phenomenon of the present. While the critical gains of postcolonial theory and discourses of identity politics have afforded important insights into modern diasporic experience, representations of other selves, cultures, and beliefs cannot only be abstracted from and analyzed in the immediate present. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, most exiles took their national or cultural-linguistic consciousness with them to the host land. The recent "transnational" experience, on the other hand, marks a state of movement and fluidity across territorial and linguistic borders. In these two instances, the activity of translation and transport take different forms, which, in turn, critically affect acculturation versus cultural alienation and isolation.

My plea for bringing renowned exile writers into a dialogue with today's underrepresented transnational writers, which would reciprocally enhance our understanding of their respective works, also concerns the need to balance the research archive, where the well-established works by far outweigh those of the contemporary exilic situation. However, balancing the archive should not simply be understood as an academic exercise. It involves the rehabilitation of important works lost in the violent shuffle of histories of war and migration. In "Finding Odysseus's Scars Again: Hyperlinked Literary Histories in the Age of Refugees", Venkat Mani argues that providing historical literary context is a condition of understanding the configurations of modern exilic experience (Mani 2022, pp. 13–35). With every age, the reality and perceptions of exile, banishment, and displacement change, and such changes necessitate paradigm shifts in narrating them.

Along the lines of interlinked literary histories, my critical interest has focused on the historical shifts that both connect and separate the early twentieth-century mass exoduses out of Europe and the current flight of large populations from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. The transnational configuration of contemporary German literature should not be detached from its historical continuum, which would render the archive of histories of exile in and out of Germany inconsistent and incomplete. "Hyperlinking" literary histories of exile, in this instance, *Exilliteratur* and the emerging literature of the so-called hyphenated writers of Germany would enable an inclusive paradigm that communicates across communities of research. To that end, I review one novel each by Anna Seghers and Feuchtwanger and essays by the Iranian-German poet SAID, which, respectively, exemplify the two distinctive genres of exile literature: the long-established *Exilliteratur* and what I describe as transnational literature of writers mostly from the non-Western world, who in the latter part of the twentieth century began immigrating to the West (Seyhan 2001). Furthermore, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR led to a remapping of several national borders, thereby also displacing writers from Central and Eastern Europe, many of whom have settled in Germany.

Even though in the manner of SAID, who imagines having a chat with a spright Walt Whitman in Los Angeles, I conjure up an imagined encounter between Feuchtwanger and SAID at Villa Aurora, my interest lies rather in their experience of exile in different historical contexts. Their fictionalized accounts of documentary value foreground the role cultural inheritance, language, and translation play in exile writing and its afterlife. Furthermore, the prescience of their writing implies that the exiled writer, more than other writers, is often endowed with a Cassandra-like premonition of catastrophes to come. While a writer is metaphorically described as writing from a foreign place and considered somewhat of a visionary, Feuchtwanger and SAID write from an actual foreign place in real time but also predict in chilling minute detail the coming age of terror in Nazi Germany and in the Ayatollahs' Iran, respectively. The barbarity of the Iranian clerics SAID disclosed a quarter of a century ago while hiding from the censors in Germany has since continuously accelerated, as shown in a human rights group's statement that Iran has hanged at least 354 people in the first six months of 2023. Although written at different times and under dissimilar circumstances, the respective works of Feuchtwanger and SAID hold relevant lessons for our troubled present, which is witnessing the realization of their premonitions.

2. Chronicle of a Refugee Crisis Foretold: Anna Seghers's *Transit*

Literary, artistic, and autobiographical works, transported and translated in and out of German, reveal continuities in exile writing as well as writing under erasure and censorship. They enable a renewed understanding of censorship-defying aesthetics, of translation and translatability as the afterlife of works, and of the instability inherent in any paradigmatic norm in exile writing. This instability, however, enables the entry of once obscured texts into the archive as well as a revaluation of established existing works. We can test this hypothesis in the example of Anna Seghers's recently translated and reissued books (Seghers 2013, 2018, 2021) by the New York Review of Books that republishes the works of enduring relevance by writers from around the world for contemporary readers.

Seghers's *Transit* (Seghers 1944, [2011] 2018, 2018) chronicles the desperation of armies of refugees trying to escape a continent terrorized by Hitler's armies. Holed up and held up in Vichy Marseille, they try to get out of the Nazi-occupied port city at any cost. The novel paints a masterly panorama of Marseille, a tiny outlet through which the flood of Europe's fleeing thousands sought to pour. Although that heart-tearing picture has been drawn before, both in factual reports and in fiction, the plight of people caught in the web of such historical trauma is perhaps most poignantly memorialized in the work of a distinguished German writer, whose own experience of exile lends critical force to her semi-autobiographical novel. *Transit* is an uncanny premonition of the 2015 refugee crisis when thousands of families fleeing war-torn Iraq and Syria were risking their lives to cross the Aegean to Greek islands, the first European safe harbor, on rickety boats. The curtain falls on *Transit* in a scene reminiscent of the tragic end of today's many refugees. Passengers lucky enough to secure visas and immigration permits to board the ship to the United States drown in the Atlantic in the sinking vessel.

It is perhaps not surprising that the reissuance of new translations and editions of the major works of a writer, not well known outside of Germany, coincided with one of the greatest refugee crises since the Second World War. Although the 2015 refugee crisis was extensively covered in the media, for the reader and the critic it was the novelistic rather than the journalistic medium that drove home the reality of forced exile.

3. Lion Feuchtwanger's Tragic Vision: *The Oppermanns*

While Lion Feuchtwanger's works written in his Pacific Palisades home were mostly historical novels that do not specifically bear the imprint of his Southern California exile, *Die Geschwister Oppermann. Roman* (Feuchtwanger [1933] 2013), the second installment of his *Wartesaal* (Waiting Room) Trilogy, matches the novelistic grandeur of *Transit*. The first book of the series *Erfolg* (Success) was published in 1930 and the last one *Exil* came out in 1940. Considered by many critics to be one of the greatest epic novels of German literature, *The Oppermanns* (Feuchtwanger [1933] 2022) conjures the terror Jewish businessmen and intellectuals experienced at the hands of the Nazis, as they were robbed of home, hearth, and all means of survival. In this epic work, Feuchtwanger offers one of the most compelling sociopsychological determinants of fascism, the mentality of its victims, and their resistance to leaving Germany even in the face of certain death. Although Feuchtwanger was writing the novel in 1933, while on a book tour in France before Adolf Hitler's *Machtergreifung*, the book foretells with uncanny prescience the coming systematic persecution of German Jews. In the almost nine decades since Hitler seized power, arguably no single historical or fictional work has more insightfully portrayed the relentless dissolution of German humanism and Nazism's insidious permeation of German society. Even as early as 1983, when the novel was made into a two-part television film in West Germany, a critic for the *New York Times* remarked that the novel was written "with a prescience that would seem like hindsight were it to be written today" (Roffmann 1983, p. 2/31). Feuchtwanger finished the book in six months; within the year, it was translated into nine languages. Upon Hitler's ascent to power, however, Feuchtwanger's friends warned him not to return to Germany, and thus began his lifelong exile.

The timeline of *The Oppermanns* begins in November 1932 on the eve of an election and continues through the chronology of a proud German-Jewish family's fall from a high socioeconomic and cultural position to ruin and extinction. The Oppermann furniture company, founded by Immanuel Oppermann, the grandfather of the clan, who was honored for his services to the army during the Franco-Prussian War, is known for its quality products at reasonable prices and is run by Martin, a successful businessman. One of his brothers, Gustav, is a literary scholar, and the other brother, Edgar, is an ear, nose, and throat specialist, who has gained worldwide fame for developing a surgical procedure. The youngest Oppermann son was killed defending the *Vaterland* in World War I. Their sister Klara is married to a Polish Jewish man, who is an American citizen and whose international business dealings are crucial for the German economy. Between November 1932 and April 1933, members of the family are torn away from a land they have been a part of since time immemorial and hunted and crushed by their fellow Germans who ran to Hitler's call. One of the most heart-wrenching subplots is the harassment of Martin's seventeen-year-old son Berthold by his newly appointed teacher Dr. Vogelsang, an ardent nationalist, whose Nazi sympathies are barely disguised. A sensitive, well-read, and attentive student, Berthold commits suicide, when Vogelsang humiliates and fails him in a paper he painstakingly researched and wrote on a classical work of German literature instead of writing on the assigned topic of a nationalist invective.

We do not know if the recent reissuance of Feuchtwanger's *The Oppermanns* in a new English translation with an introduction by the Pulitzer-winning novelist Joshua Cohen was meant to coincide with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing refugee tragedy. Nevertheless, a review by Cohen in the *New York Times*, which characterizes the work as a classic novel that "holds lessons for today" (Cohen 2022) reads like an aide-memoire, lest we forget the brutality of the Nazi regime. The review warns of the impending threat of fascism in American politics. In any case, the reissuance of this novel at the time of the global expansion of authoritarian rule cannot be coincidental.

The implicit link or dialogue between Feuchtwanger's *Oppermanns* and SAID's *Der lange Arm der Mullahs. Notizen aus meinem Exil* (The Long Arm of the Mullahs. Notes from my Exile), a cross-genre of poetry, memoir, lectures, letters, and testimony, is not based on a visceral comparison or the coincidence of SAID gazing at the Pacific surf ("nun liegt der stille ozean zu meinen füßen: so klar, so blau", ("there lies the silent ocean at my feet: so clear, so blue" (SAID 2008, p. 158)) from the same spot where Feuchtwanger had been watching the Pacific Ocean decades ago. While there are other coincidences between the lives of the two writers—both die in exile at 74, Feuchtwanger in Los Angeles and SAID in Feuchtwanger's hometown Munich—their works exemplify very different experiences and cultures of exile. Nevertheless, even though *The Oppermanns* and "The Long Arm of the Mullahs" represent different historical epochs and locales, they stand as powerful testimonies to the betrayal of peoples by their own governments. Their writing is both a warning and a plea for restitution. However, it is important to point out that while Feuchtwanger's warning is remembered, as he was an established European writer, cautionary tales from today's exiled writers like SAID or the Algerian Yasmina Khadra (Mohammed Moulessehoul), who are almost exclusively from non-Western countries, are either forgotten or were not listened to in the first place.

4. Precarities of Transport and Translation

There are significant disparities between the life and career paths of *Exilliteratur* writers and prominent German intellectuals like Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, also exiles from Germany at this time, and writers, artists, and academics living in exile today. The former were already well-known and prominent figures in their countries and, for that reason, also visible targets for persecution on religious and political grounds. They were aided in their escape through various stations of exile by international agencies and relief organizations, such as the American Emergency Relief Committee and charitable individuals like the American journalist Varian Fry and the American vice consul Harry

Bingham Jr. in Marseille, who hid Feuchtwanger in his home. Feuchtwangers' flight to Los Angeles was fraught with danger at every turn and replicates, to a certain extent, the fictional Oppermann brothers' multiple displacements over borders.

On the other hand, most contemporary writers of transnational stature emigrated on their own under difficult circumstances and often through several countries that denied them entry. Most began writing in exile. Only a few had made a name for themselves as professional writers in their homelands. They were driven to exile as a result of war, economic hardship, ethnic discrimination, or being censored and persecuted on political and religious grounds. They lacked the economic resources of a Thomas Mann or a Lion Feuchtwanger. They were born into lesser-known and translated languages. Writing in the language of the host land would be their only way to social or cultural solvency and toward what the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo called "cultural citizenship". For them, exile became an act of translation in many senses of the word. The German verb *übersetzen* illustrates the double meaning of the word, depending on whether the verb is separable or inseparable. The separable form *setzen-über* means ferrying over or crossing, usually a body of water, and the inseparable verb means translating. In consecutive order, the two forms of the verb conjure an image of the exiled writer crossing over a water border and thereafter translating.

Since the writing career of most contemporary transnational writers only began in the host land, they adopted its language, thus becoming "hyphenated writers" like the Syrian-German Rafik Schami, Romanian-German Carmen-Francesca Banciu, Bulgarian-German Ilija Trojanow, among many others. While they lacked the "already-famous" status, financial means, and the ready availability of translators and publishers their more famous forebears enjoyed, they had full control over their already translated writing, which integrated them into the cultural fabric of their host society. For many of these writers, the language of the host land provided a welcoming refuge. As SAID put it, "So suchte ich Zuflucht bei der deutschen Sprache/Und sie nahm den Flüchtling auf, so gastlich sie konnte" ("Thus, I sought refuge in the German language, and she received the refugee as hospitably as she could" (SAID 2001, p. 57)). In a similar vein, in his poem, "deutsche sprache" (lower cases in the original), the Turkish-German poet Yüksel Pazarkaya refers to the German language as the language, which he loves unconditionally and which is his second homeland: "die ich vorbehaltlos liebe/die meine zweite heimat ist" (Pazarkaya 1989, p. 7).

For these writers, mastery of the host country's language has proven to be somewhat of an advantage over their better-known predecessors in exile, who depended on translators and publishers. This advantage is more an emotional peace of mind than a practical or financial benefit. Nothing is lost in translation, rather something is gained, since for the translating writer the distance from the source language allows not only self-reflection but also the freedom to say what was formerly repressed or censored. However, for many writers of *Exilliteratur*, the price of their established name, umbilical relationship to their first language, and relatively affluent lives came at a high cost. In an address delivered in California to a Writers' Congress, Feuchtwanger spoke for many famous émigré writers, when he gave voice to the vulnerability of world-renowned writers, who cannot connect to the reading public in the host land:

> Very many writers of the highest talent, whose products were in great demand in their own countries, find no markets in foreign lands, either because their chief merit lies in the stylistic qualities of their language, and these qualities cannot be translated, or because their choice of subjects does not interest the foreign reader. Many exiled writers cannot or will not comply with the well-meant suggestions of their publishers to make concessions to the taste of the foreign public. It is surprising how many authors whose accomplishments the entire world has acclaimed, in spite of their most earnest efforts, now stand helpless and without means in the face of this situation. (Feuchtwanger 1994, p. 257)

Later in his speech, Feuchtwanger also says that many writers "preferred suicide to the tragicomedy of such an existence" (ibid.). While Feuchtwanger's remark may sound like a hyperbole, there is no denying that for writers, especially established ones, whose capital is language and whose fame and fortune rest on it, surrendering their language and style to the vagaries of publishers, public taste, or political and ideological positions would amount to an irrevocable loss.

Like Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann laments the severance of linguistic, cultural, and spiritual ties with the country of his birth. He maintains that emigration in his time assumed a much more radical form than in the past. He envies Victor Hugo, who, although outcast far from Paris and lived in exile for fifteen years on Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands, could maintain the spiritual ties that bound him to France: "What he wrote was printed in the French press; his books could be bought and read at home". The loss of the writer's own idiom exacerbates the pain of physical expulsion: "Our books are outlawed, just as we ourselves are; they exist only in translations, in fact, since the conquest of the European continent by the enemy, they exist only in English". He then adds that they can, nevertheless, count themselves fortunate, since what they "produce exists at all, for every writer will feel with us what it means to exist only as a literary shadow, to live only a translated and denatured life" (Mann 1994, p. 103). While both Feuchtwanger and Mann delivered the above-quoted addresses in October 1943 at the same Writers' Congress in California, Mann's lecture is passionately hopeful about the war's imminent end and his return to Germany to re-establish the bond with his language and readers.

Unlike Feuchtwanger and Mann, Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse chose to write in English and remained in their chosen exile until the end of their lives. One can assume that as academics rather than creative writers, they considered the language of concepts more universal and unrestricted than the specificity of literary narrative in terms of style, idiom, and tone. As "translators" of an intellectual legacy, they not only transported what had remained of a fractured Western humanism to American academia but were also integrated into the political life of their host country. Arendt interestingly never considered herself and her compatriots in American exile as refugees. "In the first place, we don't like to be called refugees" (Arendt 1994a, p. 110) she writes in "We Refugees". A refugee used to be a person, who committed acts or held adverse political opinions. Arendt says they committed no acts and none of them could be accused of harboring radical views. To counter the label "refugee", she states that they call each other newcomers or immigrants. In contrast to the tone of nostalgia for German that marks the lectures of Mann and Feuchtwanger, Arendt claims that they have no problems with another language, "after a single year optimists are convinced they speak English as well as their mother tongue; and after two years they swear solemnly that they speak English better than any other language—their German is a language they hardly remember" (ibid., p. 111).

Arendt's statements appear to contradict Mann's laments about living "a translated and denatured life" by almost celebrating a total assimilation into another language. However, when the prominent journalist Günter Gaus asked her during an interview what, in her impression, remained in Germany after the disaster of the Nazi years, she famously responded "language remained". When Gaus wanted to know, "Even in the most bitter times?" "It wasn't the German language that went crazy", she said (Arendt 1994b, pp. 12–13). However, like Feuchtwanger and Mann, she asserts that there is no substitute for one's language. All those years, when she was lecturing and publishing in English, she consciously preserved her German.

In this aspect, Arendt remains close to contemporary writers in exile, who negotiate between languages and cultures and dare to separate literary and cultural currents and memories from entrenched sources of belonging and synthesize them as new forms of cognition and recognition. It seems that this bivalency in the use of language both in everyday speech and literary creation allows the exiled artist the freedom to choose integration into the language of the host land or to return to their first language and cultivate its expressive power through exposure to the other language, as Arendt did.

Theodor Kallifitades is one of those writers, who appreciates the luxury of moving between languages. Born in Greece, he moved to Sweden in 1964 at the age of sixteen and has lived there ever since. After publishing several books in Swedish and receiving numerous awards for his work, he has turned to writing alternately in Greek and Swedish. By his own account, the turn to Greek was an act of love and a triumph over forgetfulness. Although his books have been widely translated, many into English and Spanish, his name seldom comes up in studies of exile literature. Yüksel Pazarkaya, the father of the Turkish-German literary movement, is another poet who writes simultaneously in German and Turkish. He came to Germany at nineteen as a student at the height of the *Gastarbeiter* migration. After obtaining a degree in Chemistry, he earned a PhD in German Literature under the advisership of the renowned Germanist Fritz Martini. He also happens to be a prolific practicing translator and cultural critic. Writers like Kallifitades, Pazarkaya, and Zafer Şenocak do not see themselves as exiles but rather as free agents moving between languages, cultures, and literary and academic circles.

This choice not to commit to a national, ethnic, or even linguistic identity or group is what differentiates the writers I call transnational from, say, the members of the Weimar on the Pacific group, who saw themselves, despite certain differences in opinion, as a closed German community, continuing to write in German, and showing little interest in the culture of their surroundings. Granted, Southern California had little to offer in the cultural riches category. Yet, I wonder if any one of these émigrés read John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, a philosophical epic of deracinated migrants trying to reach California, a story that paralleled their exile in a way. However, in this context, credit is due to Feuchtwanger whose voluminous literary output in Los Angeles was not detached from his fascination with the city. In the title story of his *Venedig (Texas) und vierzehn andere Erzählungen* (Feuchtwanger 1946, Venedig [Texas] and Other Stories), Feuchtwanger juxtaposes the Venice on the Adriatic and the Venice on the Pacific in an amusing tale reminiscent of Heinrich Heine, one of his favorite authors, who also lived and died in exile. He presents a fictional account of the creation of the Angeleno Venice as a commercial enterprise. Feuchtwanger draws on the historical facts surrounding the construction of Los Angeles with his own critique of both modern European and American civilizations (see, Seyhan 2014, p. 228).

Unlike most other writers of Weimar on the Pacific, Feuchtwanger, who settled permanently in America, arguably made the most of his bi-cultural experience. Although the majority of his work completed in California focused on the major figures of European cultural history, such as the Spanish painter Francisco Goya and the Swiss-born philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the events and personages of history are refracted through the experience of the émigrés in the Los Angeles area. A case in point is his *Goya oder Der arge Weg der Erkenntnis* (1951, Goya or the Dark Way of Knowledge), where the Spanish painter Francisco Goya's appearance before the Inquisition clearly evokes the experience of Bertolt Brecht before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947 and the government surveillance of many German émigré authors, including Feuchtwanger (see, Stephan 2000).

While the engagement of the German émigré writers in the coastal enclave of Los Angeles with American literature was practically non-existent (see, Berman 2010), the work of almost every non-German writer of Germany shows an intimate familiarity with the classical works of German literature. Pazarkaya and Özdamar are avid readers of Heinrich Heine. It is not surprising that Heine is frequently quoted in the work of Turkish-German writers, as his experience of censorship, persecution, and exile perhaps most closely parallels theirs. The diverse scales of transnational writing offer the conditions for the realization of a dialogue between exilic voices that are separated in time and space, such as those of Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) with Pazarkaya (1940–), Özdamar (1946–), or SAID (1947–2021), thus mapping ways in which these writers deepen our understanding of the power of language against censorship, persecution, and human mortality.

5. SAID, in Memoriam Motherland

Many writers from Islamic countries, who live in chosen or forced exile in Germany or the West, have written about unimaginable suffering and trauma political Islam has caused for themselves and their people. SAID was one of the most eloquent writers in this group and had lived since 1965 in Germany and wrote in German. He was the recipient of numerous literary prizes, president of the German P.E.N Center in the early 2000s, and his *Landschaften einer fernen Mutter* (SAID 2001) was translated and published by the University of Chicago Press as *Landscapes of a Distant Mother* in 2004, right after it was issued in Germany to great acclaim. Despite the volume of his work and the many literary prizes it has garnered, critical studies of SAID's work are few and far between. This was partly the result of his total rejection of oriental cliches that sell well but also of his criticism of the West despite being on a war footing with the Iranian regime throughout his life in exile. Like many self-reflective exiles, who do not turn a blind eye to the social injustices and political failings in the host country, SAID remained critical of the exclusionary practices, racism, and political simplemindedness in Germany. He was first and foremost a poet whose verses caress the ear with Heinean musicality. However, the unbearable pathos of his double exile from his motherland and his own mother, who was divorced from his father when he was a young child, often surpasses the most elegiac of Heine's verses. Even his rather untimely death from a damaged heart seems like a metaphor for dying of a broken heart in search of a homeland. His last collection of short stories, *flüstern gegen die wölfe* (SAID 2021) was published in March 2021, shortly before he died on 15 May 2021, in Munich, which had been his permanent home in exile.

SAID's "The Long Arm of the Mullahs" is a powerful and poignant montage of poems, conversations, prize acceptance speeches, lectures, letters, news briefs, and autobiographical sketches that narrate both the atrocities of the Ayatollah regime and the agonizing isolation of an exiled poet, who can never go back home. Like Heine, who returns to Germany after a thirteen-year exile in France only to find his homeland even more oppressive than before and hastens back to Paris, SAID returns to Iran after the fall of Shah Reza Pahlavi in 1979 and witnesses the barbarities of a regime much more brutal than the Shah's. He escapes back to Germany, which becomes his permanent exile until the end of his life. SAID's notes "*Notizen*" from his exile bear witness to his experience of forced exile first from the Shah's and then from Ayatollah Khomeni's Iran.

SAID, cognizant of the unprecedented scale of murders of non-Christians in the twentieth century in the middle of Europe and as a living witness in Iran to executions of thousands of students, intellectuals, and particularly women, who did not abide by the mullahs' religious norms and dictates, cannot foresee anything like the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, while his accounts of the tortures and killings carried out by Khomeini and his eager executioners are gripping, he avoids the graphic; his verses are elegiac but not pitying. The experience of trauma requires indirect forms of expression since long-winded depictions take away from the intensity of lived horror. The elliptical and fragmentary forms of lyric writing represent extremity by suggestion rather than by description. SAID's memories rely on the intimacy of shared words and silences with the persecuted. The simultaneously personal, conversational, epistolary, and public nature of his writing marks this remembrance as an exemplary instance of poetic *Trauerarbeit*. "The Long Arm of the Mullahs" brings together SAID's poetic commentaries on exile and the horrors of the two successive dictatorships in Iran in the format of journal entries. Some diary notes do not disguise the horror of the bloody executions of "immoral" men and women, who have "sinned" against the dictates of Islam by their weakness for art and music, and the brutal persecution of the members of Iran's various religious (especially Bahais) and ethnic minorities. In a series of "Confessions (*Beichte*) of Ayatollah Khomeni", SAID lists in parodistic language Khomeni's "teachings" that all start with the salutation "Herr" (Lord): "Herr, ich habe auch alle anderen westlichen Erscheinungsformen des Genusses verbieten lassen: Tanz, Ballett, Theater, Oper die in ihrem Wesen dem Islam nicht entsprechen, ja ihm sogar entgegen sind" ["Lord, I also

had all other Western forms of pleasure banned: dance, ballet, theater, opera, which by their nature do not agree with Islam and are, in fact, opposed to it"] (SAID 2001, p. 45); "Herr, ich habe die Bahais verfolgen und ausrotten lassen. Diese letzten Abtrünnigen vom Islam—und daher die schlimmsten" ["Lord, I had the Bahais persecuted and exterminated. These are the last apostates from Islam and, therefore, the worst"] (ibid., p. 47). The most powerful entries are in verse form and are apostrophes to the dead. Here, SAID provides the reader with censored, erased, or forcefully forgotten events of recent Iranian history and restores, in poetic memory, name and dignity to the victims executed without rhyme or reason.

In an insightful article, Thomas Baginski (2001) emphasizes that the first and foremost concern of SAID's lyric is not a sense of geographic or existential homelessness but rather the tragedy of being persecuted. In this aspect, he shares the humanistic spirit of writers like Else Lasker-Schüler, Franz Werfel, and Walter Mehring, who emigrated from Nazi Germany, and Oskar Loerke, a leading poet of "inner emigration". Like these poets of the German language, who precede him in the experience of perpetual exile, SAID focused on the agony of private lives rather than the upheavals of the larger sociopolitical picture. In the manner of his humanist German predecessors, SAID, as a "Chronist des Schreckens wider Willen" (SAID 2001, p. 7) gives lyrical form to his subjective reaction to dehumanizing events. He portrays the experience of exilic existence from the perspective of privation suffered and forlornness ("Verlorenheit") endured.

Reading SAID's account of religious fanaticism, which drives a ruthless dictator, his minions, and the revolutionary guards of the Islamic Republic to execute thousands of their own kin, throws light on how rightful revolutionary movements, well-meaning individuals, and communities, and even apparent democratic regimes can pay an enormous price for the lack of political vision and preparedness. The well-educated opponents of the secular but dictatorial Shah Reza Pahlavi allied themselves with the supporters of Ayatollah to overthrow the Shah, only to become the immediate targets of the much bloodier tyrant, who returned triumphantly to Iran after his exile in France. SAID pays tribute to thousands of intellectuals, writers, and students, who were ruthlessly hunted and summarily executed by the so-called revolutionary guards of the Islamic Nation of Khomeini. Seghers's *Transit* and Feuchtwanger's *Oppermanns* also depict with deep psychological insight how many Germans and Europeans did not or could not foresee the imminent rise of fascism and the speed with which apparently stable regimes can fall. In a tone as unforgiving as SAID's, Arendt states that even some German intellectuals coopted and attempted to rationalize Nazism after 1933, "friends 'co-ordinated' or got in line" (Arendt 1994b, p. 10), leaving an empty space around her, and she never forgot that. Historical decisions are not for the moment; they have consequences that should not have been unseen.

The Oppermanns, *Transit*, or "The Long Arm of the Mullahs" should not simply be considered additions to a curriculum based on exile literature and included in the syllabi of a few college literature, history, or political science courses. *The Oppermanns*, which already in November 1933 was published in several languages, became a most accessible and effective source of information on the conditions in Nazi Germany. When a new translation of *Transit* was issued in 2013 with an Afterword by the German Nobel Laureate Heinrich Böll, critics and readers praised it as a definitive story of displacement and an uncannily perceptive account of refugee mentality. The similarities to the contemporary refugee crises were noticeable enough for the renowned German film director Christian Petzold to translate the novel into a highly acclaimed 2018 film, adapted to be set in the present. "Mullahs", which could only be written by a persecuted writer, who was witness to the summary executions of thousands, uncovers a historical trauma that no official history or journalistic reporting could have brought to light. An archive of such exilic works should be required reading instead of trendy and artificially propped-up bestsellers that fit in with a trend. As I have said elsewhere a long time ago, stories remember what history forgets.

What are the political, epistemic, and moral challenges that the exile and transnational literature of the disrupted century reveal? Neither the rooted nor the exilic condition is a

stable entity, shuffled as they are by historical and sociopolitical shifts. These shifts also reroute migratory patterns. Seghers returned to a different Germany, to the DDR (or GDR, The German Democratic Republic), which she mistakenly regarded as free of the chains of the past, as did Bertolt Brecht. Thomas Mann returned to what he hoped would be a rehabilitated land. As of this writing, the first-generation Turkish-German writers Özdamar, Pazarkaya, and Şenocak, remain in Germany, even though the conditions that led to their respective exiles have changed; however, their sense of home has also changed.

In this context, SAID, who chose to remain in Germany permanently, advises his Chilean friend Christian Cortéz, who has decided to return to Chile after thirteen years of exile, to take exile and especially time back with him. In an epistolary entry dated February 1990, SAID expresses with deep philosophical insight that in exile we develop a different sense of time since we feel what happens there does not concern us. The thirteen years Cortéz spent in exile no longer exist in Chile; they perished in his absence. He will now exist in a time he does not know and which does not know him. SAID implores his friend, "Und nimm die Sprache mit, die Dir das Exilland gegeben hat. Denn auch diese wirst Du nötig haben". He continues, "Anfangs wirst Du Dich begierig auf Deine geliebte Sprache stürzen, doch dann erscheint sie Dir vulgär und verroht." ("And take the language that the land of exile has given you, because you will need that, too. At first you'll eagerly throw yourself on to your beloved language, but then it will appear to you vulgar and brutalized". (SAID 2001, p. 96)). This advice from a permanent exile to another, who hopes to end his exile, drives home the impermanence of exile in its permanence.

Described by the renowned German writer Christoph Hein as not a born German but a learned German (or trained as a German, "Gelernter Deutscher"), SAID leaves a literary legacy without a major work that has defined some other exile writers, such as Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, E.S. Özdamar's *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* (Life is a Caravanserai) or even his compatriot Shahriar Mandenipour's *Censoring an Iranian Love Story: A Novel*. Yet the totality of his work constitutes a critical corpus, a compendium of poetic criticism on exile, banishment, loss, longing, and memory that is neither nostalgic nor sentimental. While confrontation with injustice, repression, and censorship strongly inform SAID's work, its greatest strength lies in his reflections on the power of language as a liberating force. *In Deutschland leben*, *ein Gespräch mit Wieland Freund* (Living in Germany, a Conversation with Wieland Freud) is a compilation of interviews with Wieland Freud, correspondent for one of the leading German newspapers *Die Welt.* These "essayistic" conversations reveal SAID's concepts of language, translation, and linguistic identity in a philosophically grounded idiom. He shows how the addition of a second language not only grants the speaker more freedom but also a "third ear" that becomes an essential component of the poetic craft. In "deutsch als auffanglager ein fremdsprachiger monolog" (German as reception camp a foreign language monolog), he says that many years ago he had written a fairy tale "es war einmal eine blume" (once upon a time, there was a flower). Twenty-two years later that story is published as a book, but not in Persian, "damit übertrat ich eine grenze, eine schwelle. denn meine notizen waren in deutscher sprache geschrieben, nicht auf persisch". He adds, "ich hatte zuvor gar nicht geschrieben, um mich auszudrücken. und jetzt tat ich es in der fremden sprache, die mir umgab." ("with that I crossed a border, a threshold, because my notes were written in German, not Persian. Before this, I had never written to express myself, and now I did this in a foreign language that surrounded me". (SAID 2004, p. 33)). There is a tone of surprise in this revelation, a sense of wonder that the mastery of this other language is the passport that allows the writer to cross the border to freedom. Here, SAID confirms my above statement that almost all contemporary transnational writers became writers in exile and in the language of the host land. While this sentiment of crossing a threshold by mastering the host's language is often expressed by other writers of exile, SAID's reflections center on the very act of writing itself and on writing in the second language as writing to the second power.

SAID's contrapuntally composed montages are like memory capsules to pass down to future generations, who are likely to live in a world where exile is the norm. At the same time, they remind us that exiles and refugees should not be seen as a unified body or collectivity by virtue of national or ethnic origin, race, religion, or creed, that is, as Turks, Arabs, Muslims, Vietnamese, or even more specifically as Bahais, because inevitable social, cultural, and ideological divisions exist among all these communities. Both Franz Werfel, the Austrian novelist, who was also a member of the Weimar on the Pacific community, and Arnold Zweig, a German socialist writer, who went into voluntary exile after the Nazis took power and spent time in France with Arendt and Feuchtwanger, were openly critical of Feuchtwanger because of his earlier Stalinist sympathies. His praise of Stalin's regime later delayed his naturalization process in the United States. It was only shortly before his death that Feuchtwanger was granted American citizenship.

SAID further emphasizes how painful isolation can be for exiles, who fall out with their compatriots in exile over partisanship or ideology. In a section titled "Briefe-aber an wen?" (Letters-but to whom?), he writes that whoever knows exile and its laws, knows how hermetic political isolation is among emigrants. When he turned into an active Shah opponent, he was immediately shunned by his compatriots and realized how unbearable such isolation is for a renegade (SAID 2001, p. 54). Because there can be vast ideological differences, even violent disputes among seemingly united groups, transactions between the hosts and émigrés necessitate nuanced cultural translation, that is, insight not only into the specificities of a given culture but also into discordant components of cultures and the ability to interpret these.

In the final analysis, certain works, written under conditions of displacement, political, historical, and personal trauma reemerge at critical points in history with renewed relevance. Walter Benjamin, himself an exile and victim of Nazi persecution, warned in his final essay that the true picture of the past is only recognized at the moment it flashes by. If not seized in that instant, it disappears never to return. For Robespierre, ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now that he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate (Benjamin 1977, pp. 253, 258). By that logic, writers like SAID detonate the memory of *Exilliteratur* out of the continuum of history. Exile is a universal but also a traumatic experience. Since literature is an institution of memory *par excellence*, it synchronizes the voices of exiled writers across time and geography, making them resonate with the present.

There is no common discourse of ethical conduct toward or among exiles, émigrés, or refugees. Feuchtwanger's epigraphs for the three "books", "Yesterday", "Today", and "Tomorrow" of *The Oppermanns* perhaps best summarize the moral challenges and imperatives of understanding the historical and contemporary conditions and forms of exile. The epigraph to "Tomorrow" from the *Talmud*, "Es ist uns aufgetragen, am Werke zu arbeiten, aber es ist uns nicht gegeben, es zu vollenden". ("You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it". (Feuchtwanger [1933] 2013, p. 232)) is an apostrophe to the writer to remind the reader of the moral imperative not to forget, even if that reminder can never be final. The image of SAID contemplating the Pacific Ocean from the garden of Villa Aurora, where half a century ago Feuchtwanger used to have his breakfast, is a poignant reminder of the perpetuity of exile kept up by bloody regimes and the experience of persecution and terror that drove Feuchtwanger to escape the long arm of the Nazis and SAID the long arm of the mullahs.

Note: All translations from the German are mine.

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Article

Representation of Whom? Ancient Moments of Seeking Refuge and Protection

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Abstract: Within the ancient corpus we find depictions of people seeking refuge and protection: in works of fiction, drama and poetry; on wall paintings and vases, they cluster at protective altars and cling to statues of gods who seemingly look on. Yet the ancient evidence does not lend itself easily to exploring attitudes to refugees or asylum seekers. Hence, the question that begins this investigation is, representation of whom? Through a focus on the Greco-Roman material of the Mediterranean region, drawing on select representations, such as the tragedies *Medea* and *Suppliant Women*, the historical failed plea of the Plataeans and pictorial imagery of supplication, the goal of the exploration below is not to shape into existence an ancient refugee or asylum seeker experience. Rather, it is to highlight the multiplicity of experiences within narratives of victimhood and the confines of such labels as *refugee* and *asylum seeker*. The absence of ancient representations of a generic figure or group of the 'displaced', broadly defined, precludes any exceptionalising or homogenising of people in such contexts. Remaining depictions are of named, recognisable protagonists, whose stories are known. There is no 'mass' of refuge seekers, to whom a single set of rules could apply across time and space. Given these diverse stories of negotiation for refuge, another aim is to illustrate the ways such experience does not come to define the entirety of who a person is or encompass the complete life and its many layers. This paper addresses the challenges of representation that are exposed by, among others, thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Liisa Malkki and Gerawork Gizaw.

Keywords: displacement; forced migration; representation; refuge; asylum; Aeschylus; supplication; Greek Tragedy; Cassandra; Aeneas; exceptionalism; Euripides; *Herakleidai*; *Medea*

1. Introduction

The question that begins this investigation is simply, representation of whom? Such a starting point is necessary because the ancient evidence does not easily lend itself to exploring attitudes to refugees or asylum seekers, either individually or in groups. At least this appears to be the case in the Greco-Roman material of the Mediterranean region in the period which will be the focus here—before the Roman Empire of the 1st century CE. The situation changes somewhat towards Late Antiquity and with the coming of Christianity.[1] The reason that representation and attitudes are difficult to gauge is not that there were few who sought refuge and protection. Numerous records attest to people being driven from their homes because of warfare, the threat of violence, enslavement, political instability, social tensions and environmental pressures. However, people who had to endure such challenging circumstances were not envisioned as necessarily belonging to a distinct category in these records. The multiple factors which defined their perilous condition were not flattened into a single entity that could form the target of policies and particular attitudes, or be the subject of study and representation—whether that is in literary works, historical narratives, paintings or sculpture. Nor did such a condition define the entirety of the person or designate their status.

The predicament that in the 21st century is often referred to as 'forced migration' in ancient contexts is not separated from other challenging experiences that result in people

having to endure precarity, exclusion, violence and the lack of protection or a home for other reasons. What is more, the experience of exclusion or exile is often not the focus of the accounts within which it is conveyed but rather is intertwined with diverse narrative strands that highlight different sociopolitical concerns. Authors have used exchanges between refuge seekers and potential hosts as a poignant setting and catalyst for discourses on ethical dilemmas concerning democracy, cosmopolitanism, sovereignty, hospitality and other subjects relating to civic society and foreign affairs.[2]

In reflecting on select ancient representations in text and image, the goal of the exploration below is not to shape into existence an ancient refugee or asylum seeker experience. Rather, it is to highlight what may be lost by pressing a multiplicity of experiences within narratives of victimhood and the confines of such labels as *refugee*, *asylum seeker*, and even perhaps the *displaced*. The persistent challenges of moving beyond such representations in the 21st century are captured in Gerawork Gizaw and Kate Reed's reflections on Alideeq Osman's autobiographic *Prison of Dust*: 'woven through his memoir is an ambivalence about this project of representation as an impetus for empathy, and empathy as an impetus for action. "There are no words," he admits, "to describe the real fear and horror inside each thirsty and hungry person that showed up, seeking refuge during the Somali civil war"' (Gizaw and Reed 2022; Osman 2020). The goal in what follows is thus to illustrate the ways that such experience, even if it persists across a whole lifetime and transforms into permanent temporariness, still does not define the whole of who a person is or encompass the complete life and all its layers.[3] Ancient voices help give meaning to Hannah Arendt's *We Refugees*: 'In the first place, we don't like to be called "refugees". We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants"'.[4] As Arendt traces the multiple routes, externally and internally taken by those who were persecuted by the Nazi regime, she outlines the instability of identity and how there is no single 'We'.

Those representations of ancient suppliants or refuge seekers which remain are never generic but are rather of named people whose stories are known and whose lives encompass moments of such displacement and precarity. As we will see, they are often the protagonists of myths and are depicted in scenes from epics and well-known tragedies: such powerful characters as Medea and the Trojan war hero Aeneas. We will examine the way that negotiations for refuge with potential hosts become the setting for Classical Greek tragedies of the 5th century BCE, as Aeschylus's *Suppliant Women* and Euripides' *Herakleidai*. Unlike the mythical corpus, there are few historical records that chronicle in any depth requests for protection. Of these, the most extensive from the period which we will consider is that of the Plataeans, who came to Athens for refuge following their city's takeover by the Thebans in the 370s BCE.[5] Most other historical references to refuge seekers appear only in passing, usually within ancient accounts of war and conquest. These often mention sieges and the necessity for local populations to flee in order to escape violence, starvation and enslavement,[6] such as during the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage in the 3rd century BCE. Polybius, in the first two books of his *Histories,* chronicles the extent of these operations through the numbers of those affected: the 50,000 suffering from famine in the besieged Agrigentum held by Carthaginians in 262 BCE;[7] the 20,000 enslaved by Rome on the capture of Aspis in Libya;[8] and the 10,000 prisoners taken by Rome to Lilybaeum.[9] Such summary notations give few details or commentary on the circumstances under which refuge was sought, given or denied. Historical narratives and epigraphic texts, inscribed on stone or metal, may also include remarks on individuals who were being exiled and the situation that would have led to their expulsion or opportunity for return. We have a number of surviving decrees and honorary stelae with the names of exiles inscribed along with those of their exilic hosts.[10]

The most-in-depth explorations from within moments of exile are given by those experiencing it, but even these figures have little to say about seeking refuge or the negotiations to obtain it. For the exiled philosopher, Diogenese the Cynic, from Sinope, who lived in Athens for part of his exile during the 4th century BCE, the focus of his philosophical expositions was to subvert his destitute condition, using it to critique the inequities of

the polis-state world that he inhabited (Gray 2015; Isayev 2021). In the writings of other prominent figures who experienced exile, such as the 4th-century BCE Greek general and historian Xenophon or the later Roman politician Cicero and the Latin poet Ovid, the focus of their emotion is not the search for refuge but the longing for home, which remains inaccessible.[11] Hence, for the purpose of this exploration, such exiled figures will be set aside because I have had a chance, elsewhere, to consider some of them within the context of ancient wandering and permanent temporariness (Isayev 2017b, 2021, 2022). Here, the focus will be on the few surviving ancient representations of people in the moment of seeking refuge and protection, as distinct from those who wrote from exile, having found somewhere to inhabit but who were unable to return to a place of home.

As the following discussion will show, the specificity of each context within which ancient negotiations for refuge took place seems to preclude the emergence of a generic suppliant case or the manifestation of a homogenised 'mass' of refuge seekers to whom a single set of rules could apply across time and space.[12] What is not clear from the ancient evidence is what proportion of those seeking refuge would have needed official permission from authorities to physically remain at a particular site, as distinct from any request to gain some form of civic status or recognition that would bring with it rights and responsibilities. In a world without any equivalent to the territorial nation-state, where the mere physical presence within its borders activates certain rights and the potential for status and belonging, thus prompting an increasingly securitised border industry, those in need of refuge in the world of ancient city-states could physically access most places, except for the site or region where they were expelled from or where their well-being was threatened.[13]

There are the rare occasions when the origin-polis (city-state) forbade asylum to be given to its own citizens. This was the case of the Acarnanians, who in desperation during the Aetolian invasion in 211 BCE, passed a severe resolution: if any Acarnanians survived and escaped, authorities beseeched that no one was to give them refuge, and they cursed all who took fugitives into their territory.[14] Technically, the challenge for the ancient refuge seeker was primarily one of the inability to return to a designated home place rather than the inability to find a new one. This does not mean that there would be a welcome at every port,[15] not least because those seeking refuge one day may have been the perpetrators of former violence and expulsion. In addition, there would have been particular pressures when whole communities found themselves homeless owing to siege and conquest for extended periods of time. The intricate negotiations to gain protection in the cases considered here were necessary because the requests were not just for the ability for those who fled to physically remain where they were, but also for the commitment by the host to take up arms to repel any who may threaten the refuge seekers and potentially the host-community itself, for its decision to grant refuge.

2. Protagonists of Ancient Refuge Seeking

Primarily, ancient depictions of refuge seeking and supplication are in the form of testimony given directly by those who are in search of it. This is the case for the mythical characters in legendary and dramatic accounts who speak on their own behalf. Of those with a particularly strong voice is Medea as she is portrayed in Euripides's tragedy of the same name created in 431 BCE.[16] This mythical figure, who helped Jason and the Argonauts acquire the Golden Fleece at the cost of her home and family, appears in multiple guises through the ages. She is a complex character who gains sympathy despite her horrific crimes, which are driven by the intrigues of gods and men; although she is the victim of their machinations, she refuses to be confined by victimhood.

But will you banish me without the regard due a suppliant?

. . .

I accept my exile: it was not exile I sought reprieve of.

(Euripides, *Medea* lines 326, 338)

> What do I gain by living? I have no fatherland, no house, and no means to turn aside misfortune. My mistake was when I left my father's house, persuaded by the words of a Greek. This man—a god being my helper—will pay for what he has done to me.
>
> . . . Let no one think me weak, contemptible, untroublesome.
>
> No, quite the opposite, hurtful to foes, to friends kindly. Such persons live a life of greatest glory.
>
> (Euripides, *Medea* lines 798–810)

Euripides's harrowing dramatisation of Medea's abandonment by the oath-breaking Jason, of her wrath, of the agony of loss and of her enduring exile, continues to resonate through the ages.

Other prominent voices from moments of refuge seeking are those of the mythical Danaids, as portrayed in Aeschylus's *Suppliant Women*. This tragedy, first performed in the 460s BCE, is an exploration of the balance of power and responsibility at the start of the Athenian experiment with polis-state democracy (see note 16). Its protagonists are the chorus of 50 daughters of Danaeus who left Egypt for Argos to seek refuge from forced marriages with their cousins, who were in pursuit. The Danaids' position appears very different from Medea's, and their request for refuge is more straightforward. However, there is affinity in the root causes of their exile: the consequence of their resistance to being made pawns in a world driven by the ambitions of gods and men. They too, like Medea, refuse to be treated as mere victims of their fate. Even when represented as a group, as here, those seeking refuge are envisaged as individuals, who may have a similar story but who do not form a 'mass'. Thus, although they speak as a chorus, they also use 'I', the Greek ἐγὼ, in reference to themselves:[17]

> So I (ἐγὼ) too, fond of lamenting in Ionian strains,
>
> rend my soft, sun-baked cheek
>
> and my heart unused to tears;
>
> I cull the flowers of grief,
>
> in apprehension whether these friendless exiles
>
> from the Land of Mists
>
> have any protector here.
>
> (Aeschylus *Suppliant Women*, lines 69–76)

Before we explore further these Suppliant Women's positioning of themselves in negotiations for refuge, it is worth briefly pausing on the well-known Greco-Roman epics, which are often drawn on for considering the condition of exile and wandering through the stories of central figures.[18] These include Homer's *Odyssey*, the 8th-century BCE account of the long journey home from the Trojan battle of one of its Greek heroes, Odysseus, and Vergil's *Aeneid*, written some 700 years later, in the 1st century BCE, chronicling the journey stories of Aeneas, another of the Homeric heroes, though from the side of the besieged city of Troy. Vergil's epic extends the story by charting Aeneas's flight from his burning city and eventual arrival in Italy with his followers, thus stitching his wanderings into the foundation story of Rome. The travails of both of these heroes, Odysseus and Aeneas, are used to represent the experience of longing for home and family, either lost or far away, and the precarity of the wandering condition. There are no epics centred on a female hero from this period, a subject beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to acknowledge the prominence of stories with female protagonists such as Medea or Helen (both the focus of tragedies by Euripides) who in very different ways embody many of the sentiments of exile and exclusion.[19]

Another epic incorporating wandering is *Exodus*, the second book of the Bible, which is important to note here for its different approach and focus, not on the individual life story but rather on that of a whole people. It too is based on traditions of the 8th century

BCE, even if those go beyond the immediate shores of the Mediterranean. While there is some emphasis on prominent figures, in this case divinely chosen leaders such as Moses and those around him, it is among many things primarily the story of a 'nation' whose journey is not only towards place but freedom and the divine. In the Greco-Roman epics and myths, there is no similar wandering narrative of a whole people. Even if there are instances of groups who claim kinship with their potential hosts and in relation to certain regions—as do the Suppliant Women, who fleeing from Egypt assert their common descent with the Argives through the line of the mythical Io. These legendary stories are distinct from the way they are used in later claims to lands, cities and resources through story making of past expulsions, and case making for rightful returns, such as those charted in the case of the Messenians (Luraghi 2008).

Ancient historical writings contain scattered references to crises that drive populations to flee their cities and arrive at varied destinations to await a moment of return or to stay away in perpetuity. A well-known example is of the Romans' taking shelter in Veii and other nearby towns when the Gauls sacked their city in 390s BCE. The most extensive surviving account is by the ancient historian Livy, who narrates the events of the Gallic Sack some three centuries later, in the fifth book of his annals of Rome, entitled *Ab Urbe Condita*.[20] Although his description is detailed enough to include fictionalised speeches and debates, there is little about the moment of the Romans' arrival among neighbouring regions and there is no discourse on how refuge was attained. In this episode, the absence of the inhabitants from Rome becomes notable primarily on their return to the city following the departure of the Gallic invaders. Otherwise, little is mentioned of the Romans' experience while in exile. The subject of those who left Rome during the sack surfaces in the narrative, when measures have to be brought in to entice those who fled to seek refuge to return and make decisions about what to do with the destroyed city.

It is notable that any generalisations made by Livy in reference to Rome's population tend to be in relation to the citizens of plebeian social status. They are frequently presented as a homogenised group in Roman historical narratives and often negatively, with particular political interests and struggles for power.[21] Their time away from Rome during the siege, along with that of other citizens, is of little interest to the narrator, who also does not refer to them as either refugees or exiles, upon their flight from the city. This may be compared with the multiple references to the pain of being expelled from Rome experienced by the Roman general Camillus during his exile in Ardea, at the behest of Roman authorities prior to the Gallic Sack: 'Camillus was languishing there in exile, more grieved by the nation's calamity than by his own' (Livy 5.43.7–8). He was eventually recalled from exile (Livy 5.46) to help defeat the Gauls and became the heroic figure who reclaimed Rome for the citizens.

Such vivid portrayals of return, as of the fictionalised Roman return to their city described here, are rare. Primarily, what remains in historical narratives are passing references within virtually formulaic depictions of events in the wake of conflict. Such a trope is evident in Livy's description of the imagined 7th-century BCE Alban departure from their destroyed city, which focuses on the grief of leaving rather than arrival in Rome and their subsequent settlement there, depicted as usefully helping to increase early Rome's population:

> ... at Alba oppressive silence and grief that found no words quite overwhelmed the spirits of all the people; too dismayed to think what they should take with them and what leave behind, they would ask each other's advice again and again, now standing on their thresholds, and now roaming aimlessly through the houses they were to look upon for that last time.

> Rome, meanwhile, was increased by Alba's downfall. The number of citizens was doubled.

> (Livy 1. 29.3; 1.30.1)

Such brief accounts are situated as stages within wider historical descriptions of conflict and interstate relations where there is little space for, or interest in, pausing to consider what

such an experience entailed in negotiation for protection, the places of refuge, everyday life there and modes of survival.

3. Episodic Images of Flight and Appeals for Protection

Here, we return to the question from the introduction: representation of whom? The aim of outlining some of the mythical and historical figures is to highlight the centrality of specific individual lives in the ancient tradition. Experience of precarity triggered by exile and loss of home, some resulting in extensive wandering or displacement, are encapsulated in narratives of its endurance and struggles for its overcoming. Popular episodic images that appear across historical periods of some of these figures attest to the power of their stories, which capture a shared understanding of the pain of such circumstances. The focus in the exploration that follows is on the choice of scene for representation rather than on its aesthetic quality, which would require further study beyond the scope of this investigation. Of the well-renown episodes depicted, one of the most prolific is a stock image of Aeneas carrying his elderly father, Anchises, on his shoulders in their escape from the defeated burning city of Troy. One example can be found on an Archaic Attic amphora of the late 6th century BCE (Figure 1) This depiction predates by a half a millennium Vergil's retelling of the episode in the 1st century BCE in his second book of the *Aeneid*: [22]

Come then, dear father, mount upon my neck;

on my own shoulders I will support you, and this task will not weigh me down.

(Vergil *Aeneid*, 2.707–708)

Figure 1. Aeneas carrying his father, Anchises. Attic black-figure amphora, last quarter of the 6th century BCE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA. Accession Number: 41.162.171. (Open Access–Public Domain (The Met) https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/2543 42 accessed date: 2 January 2023).

The scene has been imagined in multiple forms and mediums over the centuries, appearing on ceramic vases, marble friezes[23] and wall paintings[24] and shaped into objects such as this terracotta figurine from the 1st century CE, found in Pompeii, Italy (Figure 2).

The popularity of the image, however, was not motivated by an interest in the plight of those escaping conflict and needing to seek refuge. Rather, its reproduction was driven by Greco-Roman cultural trends of depicting scenes from the Trojan legend. This Aeneas scene became ubiquitous, especially from the Roman Late Republican period onwards, with the rising fame of Vergil's epic *Aeneid* and the story's appropriation to serve as a founding myth of Rome, which was rapidly becoming the head of a growing empire.
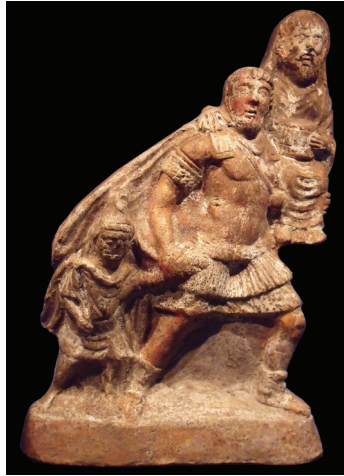
Figure 2. Aeneas carrying his father, Anchises, and his son, Ascanius. Terracotta figurine from Pompeii, 1st century CE. National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy. Accession Number: Inv. 110338. Photo Source: Alphanidon. (Creative Commons Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. https://upload. wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2a/Terracotta_Aeneas_MAN_Naples_110338.jpg accessed date: 2 January 2023).

A different kind of scene construction, which is familiar from narratives of supplication, is centred on sanctuaries, altars and statues of the gods: the inviolable sites of divine protection from where appeals were made. These sites were intended to shield suppliants from violence and to prevent their eviction or return to a state of danger (perhaps in the spirit of today's nonrefoulement clause in Article 33 of the UN 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees).[25] They were also there to stop perpetrators from gaining access to the suppliants. Historically, we know that sanctuaries performed these short-term refuge roles and that at times their protective powers were wanting – in that suppliants were driven out and their appeals ignored.[26] What is absent from the historical record, however, is any detailed insight into how negotiations progressed between suppliants, who lodged at such sites, and their potential hosts. The historic plea of the Plataeans as presented by Isocrates,[27] which will form the focus of the final section of this paper, is not made from the grounds of such a sacred setting. It is situated within the institutions of the polis (city-state) and framed within its semantic register of diplomacy. Unlike the historical record, the ancient literary and visual corpus re-create such sacred spaces by drawing on mythical subjects to portray the tensions of exchange and the agonising vacillation between force and fragility, as hope grows or recedes. Such a space, thronged by sculpted gods and symbols of the divine, is brought to life by the Danaids' chorus of Aeschylus's *Suppliant Women*:

A. Chorus:

> O ancestral gods, hear us with favour, and see where justice lies:
>
> by not giving our youth to be possessed in marriage
>
> against what is proper,
>
> by showing you truly hate outrageous behaviour,
>
> you will act justly < >
>
> Even for distressed fugitives from war
>
> an altar is a defence against harm that gods respect.
>
> (Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*, lines 79–85)
>
> . . .

B. Pelasgus (king of Argos):

> Why do you say you are supplicating me in the name of these Assembled Gods, holding these fresh-plucked, white-wreathed boughs?

Chorus:

> So that I may not become a slave to the sons of Aegyptus.
>
> (Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*, lines 333–35)
>
> . . .

C. Chorus (addressing Pelasgus):

> If you don't make a promise to our band that we can rely on—
>
> . . .
>
> With all speed . . . [we will] hang ourselves from these gods.
>
> . . .
>
> You understand! I have opened your eyes to see more clearly.
>
> (Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*, lines 461, 465, 467)

By continually making reference to the protective altars and statues surrounding them, the Suppliant Women's chorus animates the divine beings and compels them into guardianship of the refuge seekers. While no ancient images depicting episodes from the *Suppliant Women* have been recognised to date (Taplin 2007, p. 146), illustrations of other such moments do survive. The most analogous is a scene on a red-figure Lucanian pelike of circa 400 BCE, from South Italy (Figure 3). The composition illustrates an episode from the myth of Herakles' children in flight from the Argive king Eurystheus, which is the subject of Euripides' tragedy *Herakleidai*.[28]

Figure 3. Children of Herakles, and Iolaus. Lucanian red-figure pelike, ca. 400 BCE, from near Heraclea, South Italy. Policoro, Museo Nazionale della Siritide, Italy (inv. N. 35302). (By permission from Ministero della Cultura, Direzione Regionale Musei Basilicata).

The scene depicts children within a sacred precinct scattered around an older man leaning on a column who holds suppliant branches, which confirms them as a group of suppliants. This central figure is likely Iolaus, the guardian and uncle of Herakles' children who led them to the Athenian sanctuary, from the safety of which they plead for refuge. The protective quality of the space on the image is signalled by its separation from the rest of the scene, often by the presence of a raised platform or other structures surrounding it.

At its centre it often has either an altar or, as in this case, a column or pedestal holding up a statue of a deity or other sacred object. The sculpted deity that strides atop the column here is either Apollo or Herakles. Athena is also included, protectively standing on the right to counterbalance the threatening agent of Eurystheus on the left—dressed as a herald.

The general motif is one characteristic of supplication scenarios,[29] not just those resulting from forced displacement, and can denote a last resort of pleading for divine protection when none is forthcoming from the human sphere. It becomes a particularly powerful setting for the multiple representations of Cassandra, the virgin priestess of Apollo and daughter of Priam, the defeated king of Troy. Images of this episode from the Trojan War legend survive on diverse mediums across centuries, as depicted in the following two examples: on a tondo from an Attic cup of the 440s BCE (Figure 4) and another half a millennium later as part of a 1st-century CE wall painting in Pompeii, from the House Menander (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Cassandra abducted by Ajax the lesser. Tondo of an Attic red-figure cup, ca. 440–430 BCE. Louvre, Paris, France. Accession Number: Louvre G 458. (Public Domain. Image File Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aias_Kassandra_Louvre_G458.jpg accessed date: 2 January 2023).

Portrayals of Cassandra fixate on her struggle to cling on to the seemingly unmoving statue of Athena, as the priestess is dragged away by Ajax the lesser in an act of abduction, brutality and sacrilege. The depiction of Cassandra may not itself be a direct representation of exile or displacement, but it does convey the urgent struggle for refuge and protection, which is denied by gods and men. This episode from the Trojan War epic foreshadows imminent displacement, hardship and, particularly through Cassandra's role in the story, the palpable violence already experienced in war and now to be further endured in the subjugation to come.

As with the images of Aeneas, these too depict recognisable stories from popular myths and legends, created to appeal to the latest cultural trends and specific market settings. The Lucanian pelike, with the scene of Herakles' children, was found near the ancient South Italian town of Herakleia/Heraclea (Policoro), as was another vase with a similar scene, a column-krater created around the same time.[30] The choice of image in this context may be explained by the association of the site with Herakles and hence also a regional interest in Euripides' dramatisation of it in his tragedy *Herakleidai*, which was a likely source for the images on the vases. Equally, it may be part of a more widespread growing interest in the Greek dramatic corpus, representations of which remain on a significant number of ancient vases across sites in South Italy from the 5th century BCE onwards. The site of Ruvo, for example, had the remains of some 40 such vessels (Robinson 2004, 2014, p. 326).

Figure 5. Cassandra abducted by Ajax the lesser with her father, Priam. Section of a wall painting, 1st century CE, from the House of Menander (I, 10, 4), Pompeii, Italy. Image Source: Ranieri Panetta (2005, p. 349). (Public Domain. Image File Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Pompeii_-_Casa_del_Menandro_-_Menelaos.jpg accessed date: 2 January 2023).

Although we do not know the exact provenance of the cup with the tondo of Cassandra and lesser Ajax in Figure 4, other than it was likely made in Athens and found in central Italy,[31] a very well-preserved context remains for the depiction of the scene on the Pompeian wall painting in Figure 5, which adorned the atrium of the House of Menander (I, 10, 4). The house is richly decorated with images that were likely copies of earlier now-lost paintings and mosaics familiar in Italy, which depict literary and other motifs throughout the ages (Varriale 2012, pp. 170–71). Among these were a number with episodes from the Trojan War cycle. The choice to include images of emotive and painful subjects, such as Cassandra's violent abduction and ensuing rape, may have provided potential for reflection on the suffering and brutality endured by the victims of conflict. However, from its context in this Pompeian house, it is evident that they were chosen primarily for the prominence of the image (or its artist) and perhaps the capacity of the subject matter to be particularly arresting, thus ultimately drawing the visitor's attention to the work as a cultural artefact. The ancient elite house thus became a gallery displaying the owners' cultural appreciation, cosmopolitan knowledge, connectivity and wealth, demonstrated by their capacity to have the means to acquire such objects or commission artisans to create them.

Looking at these images through the lens of the theme of this volume, *Refugees and Representation*, abstracted from the context of their creation, concentrates the gaze on the convergence of human suffering and the importance of the individual story through which it is conveyed. In contemplating them, we may perceive that their subjects challenge the observer to look beyond the pathos of the victims towards their persistent strength and the human will needed to endure and overcome conditions beyond their control. It may also allow contemplation on the way that such circumstances are not separate from but instead part of the society that is implicated in their making.[32] While such images may have evoked similar reflections from the ancient viewers, the choice to reproduce these dramatic scenes, whether on ceramics or on wall paintings, was based on their capacity to display affinity with a particular sociocultural knowledge system and, potentially, political affiliations, whether that of Pan-Hellenism or Imperial Rome.

4. Modes of Petitioning in Negotiations for Refuge and Protection

Surviving ancient representations of historical persons or mythical figures who are exiled or in need of protection and refuge are not generally presented as the 'other'. They are portrayed as part of the wider sociocultural (if not always geopolitical) thought world and their circumstances the result of its creation. Even those protagonists who arrive from elsewhere to seek refuge, by speaking on their own behalf (as does the chorus of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*), preclude the possibility of being othered despite being newcomers. In telling their own story, they convey the multiplicity of lifeways and circumstances that brought them into such a predicament. Their bodily and speech acts are forcefully conveyed even from within a condition of precarity and victimisation. Such a stance challenges the image of those seeking refuge as merely destitute, or weak and helpless.

Contemporary scholars, such as historian Gerawork Gizaw and anthropologist Liisa Malkki, who focus on current requests for asylum and contexts of refuge, recognise how pervasive and potentially damaging such tropes of the idealised deserving subject of pity and charity are (Gizaw 2022; Gizaw and Reed 2022; Malkki 1995, 1996, as well as: Behrman 2016; Cabot 2019; Coutin and Vogel 2016; Kushner 2006; Marfleet 2007; Reed and Schenck 2023). Heath Cabot, in a critical reflection on anthropology's approach to refugee issues, also recognises in her own work a 'tendency to aestheticize certain "tragic" aspects of asylum processes, which demonstrates how tropes of victimhood also imbued my own writing even as I sought to critically contest them' (Cabot 2019, p. 266). The paradox of the necessity for refuge seekers to be represented as unthreatening and deserving of sympathy, while not simply being characterised as victims, is captured within the following ancient episodes of exile and negotiations for protection. In the first extract, from the *Suppliant Women*, Aeschylus foregrounds this paradox of the suppliant's position in the dialogue between the 50 Danaids and their father, Danaeus, who counsels them as they prepare to make their case to the Argives:

> answer the natives in words that display respect, sorrow and need,
>
> as it is proper for outsiders to do,
>
> explaining clearly this flight of yours which is not due to bloodshed.
>
> Let your speech, in the first place, not be accompanied by arrogance,
>
> and let it emerge from your disciplined faces and your calm eyes
>
> that you are free of wantonness . . .
>
> Remember to be yielding—you are a needy foreign refugee:
>
> bold speech does not suit those in a weak position.
>
> (Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*, lines 192–199)

Yet it is precisely bold speech that we hear from suppliants in Greek tragedies, such as the argument presented by the guardian Iolaus, in Euripides' *Herakleidai*. His response is addressed to the Athenian citizens and most directly to Demophon, their king. The response acts as a counter to the threatening words of the herald of the Argive king, Eurystheus, whose mission is to prevent the Athenians from giving refuge to Herakles' children:[33]

> Herald of Argive Eurystheus addressing the Athenians:
>
> I am an Argive myself, and those I am seeking to remove are Argives who have run away from my own country, persons sentenced to die in accordance with that country's laws. We, who are the city's inhabitants, have the right to pass binding sentences against our own number.
>
> (Euripides, *Herakleidai*, lines 139–46)
>
> . . .
>
> Iolaus addressing the Athenian king, Demophon:
>
> My lord, since this is the law in your land, I have the right to hear and be heard in turn, and no one shall thrust me away before I am done, as they have elsewhere.

> We have nothing to do with this man. Since we no longer have a share in Argos, and this has been ratified by vote, but are in exile from our native land, how can this man rightfully take us off as Mycenaeans, when they have banished us from the country? We are now foreigners. Or do you think it right that whoever is banished from Argos should be banished from the whole Greek world?

(Euripides, *Herakleidai* lines 181–90)

The tension that pervades these speeches in the tragic corpus is equally evident in the second set of extracts from the historic case of the failed plea by the Plataeans to the Athenians in the 370s BCE, following the Theban capture of their city Platea. Their request for refuge and protection, which was addressed to the Athenian Assembly, is recounted by Isocrates in his 14th speech, *Plataicus*: [34]

> For when the Argives came to your ancestors and implored them to take up for burial the bodies of the dead at the foot of the Cadmea, your forefathers yielded to their persuasion . . . and thus not only gained renown for themselves in those times, but also bequeathed to your city a glory never to be forgotten for all time to come, and this glory it would be unworthy of you to betray. For it is disgraceful that you should pride yourselves on the glorious deeds of your ancestors and then be found acting concerning your suppliants in a manner the very opposite of theirs.

(Isocrates, *Plataicus*, 14.53)

> to have no refuge, to be without a fatherland, daily to suffer hardships and to watch without having the power to succour the suffering of one's own, why need I say how far this has exceeded all other calamities?

(Isocrates, *Plataicus*, 14.55)

> Alone of the Greeks you Athenians owe us this contribution of succour, to rescue us now that we have been driven from our homes. It is a just request, for our ancestors, we are told, when in the Persian War your fathers had abandoned this land, alone of those who lived outside of the Peloponnesus shared in their perils and thus helped them to save their city. It is but just, therefore, that we should receive in return the same benefaction which we first conferred upon you.

(Isocrates, *Plataicus*, 14.56–57)

The Plataeans do not hide their position of weakness, destitution or expulsion from their city. Instead, they confront the Athenians as equals, as previous allies, as hosts and as compatriots in exile; after all, the people of Athens, too, have endured its hardship. In praising them for their past glory and just actions, the Plataeans challenge them to live up to the prominence of their ancestors and stand by their claims of greatness. They also remind the Athenians of reciprocal duties owed for the refuge they previously received among the Plataeans.

Part of making the case for protection was also increasingly the need to present the reasons for seeking refuge as being just. As Angelos Chaniotis observes, from the early 5th century BCE, supplication and requests for asylum were perceived as claims that ought to be respected not automatically but rather only after a close examination of each case, ensuring that certain conditions would be fulfilled.[35] For the potential host, it was not the individuals who were of interest so much as their cause, which underpinned the decision as to whether the suppliant's request was sanctioned. It was important, furthermore, for positioning those who were the reason for exile and to assess their potential threat towards the seekers of refuge as well as to the hosts themselves. Certainly, these ancient episodes signal the existence of protocols that framed requests and negotiations for refuge and protection, but they do not necessarily indicate that there was recourse to any overarching policy which resulted from inter- or intracommunity directives.[36] Suppliants were dear to the gods, and in that sense, there was an expectation that those with a just cause should be given protection, with a holding to account if they were mistreated. While the sway of such

divine authority may be questionable in historical cases, that it did have some power is evident from the fact that sanctuaries and altars acted as sites of refuge from which appeals were made, at least temporarily.

Ancient cases for refuge were also built on the premise of a shared commitment to sociopolitical interdependence. Thus, there are references to honouring the duties of reciprocity, whether in the past or the future, as well as pledges to provide military and other services, as mentioned by the Plataeans in their speech to the Athenian Assembly.[37] In their case, these arguments may have had some impact but in the end were not decisive. Presumably, the most compelling factors for the hosts in coming to a resolution was assessing the level of risk and any sacrifice that would be required in providing protection. This may have included the need to take up arms to repel the threat of violence from those who instigated expulsion. It may have also shifted the balance of power between internal civic factions, either challenging or supporting those who held power. Significantly, the decision could affect the wider framework of interstate relations, either adding or losing allies.

5. Conclusions

The mythical and historical narratives from the ancient world reveal the shared experience of exclusion, precarity and the threat of violence. Yet there is no evident homogenising characterisation of people who are seeking refuge and protection, as distinct from the inclusion of signifiers in depictions that would identify people as suppliants and in need of safety. The difficulties that people endure in such circumstances as displacement are presented as affecting a part of one's life trajectory rather than as a defining element of a particular historical or legendary figure. There is no flattening of the multiplicity of experiences into a single moment that comes to overshadow or overdetermine the person's past and their potential for a future beyond it. There is no fixating on a refugee experience which separates those who have lived it from those nonrefugee citizens who seemingly have not.[38]

The damage that can ensue from such separating out underpins Shahram Khosravi's work reflecting on Mohsin Hamid's 21st-century novel *Exit-West*:

> Hamid says that focusing on the journey is part of the othering. He avoids journeys, which in his eyes make refugees look different from non-refugees, to focus on everyday experiences that the majority of human beings share, such as love, sadness, and the will to live.

> (Khosravi 2018, p. 3; Hamid 2017)

Studies increasingly demonstrate that the category of the refugee, by homogenising diverse experiences of those who are forced to leave their homes and seek protection, allows for the subjugation of asylum claimants within legal and governmental frameworks (Malkki 1995; Blommaert 2001, 2009; Kobelinsky 2015; Cabot 2019, esp. 267–68). A key element to note in any discourse between the ancient and contemporary representations of those seeking refuge, is that in the Greco-Roman context of the Mediterranean no such legal and governmental frameworks for addressing asylum claims existed. Still, as noted earlier, there were sites designated for protection under the auspices of the divine and protocols of interdependence and reciprocity that influenced intergroup relationships and negotiations for refuge. Where the ancient context provides insight for current concerns is in the need to critically address the damage of exceptionalising the refugee, even when it is well meaning.

It is a matter for another investigation to understand why there are so few remaining ancient historical representations of such moments, especially in the period of Rome's early rise to power and imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean. It would also be important to explore the way empire affects negotiations for refuge and representations of those who drive them, particularly in a world order beyond that governed by the city-state. The influence of Christianity on the changing role of the divine in providing protection and the

positioning of suppliants, especially from Late Antiquity onwards (e.g., the discourse by Marfleet 2007, 2011; Rabben 2016; Peters 2019), provides another rich area for exploration.

Historical inquiries motivated by publications such as this (*Refugees and Representation*) allow for a richer context in which to situate the current 21st-century representation of those who seek refuge. They allow for a better understanding of the power of representation in both the undermining or facilitating of requests for refuge. In this paper I have only alluded to the unliveable situation for millions today without access to rights and protection, as I have sought to expose the extent to which representations of such lives can and do affect decisions concerning their future, made by policymakers throughout the world.[39] This raises the question of who should be able to represent the lives of those seeking refuge, especially given the impact that such representations have on the actions of the electorate. It is hoped that the longue durée perspective contributes further insight into how diverse modes of self-portrayal and representation by others can offer multiple ways of understanding the predicaments of those seeking refuge and what lies behind such representations, historically and in the present day.

Notes

1. See, for example, the way that late antique terminologies and the status categorisation of noncitizens and outsiders were connected to levels of protection (Peters 2019, pp. 87–88).

2. (Gray 2015), in particular, discusses forms of exilic discourse in his *Stasis and Stability.* See also (Dougherty 2022; Kasimis 2018; Isayev 2022).

3. For perspectives on permanent temporariness, see (Gizaw 2022; Hilal and Petti 2018); for context and further discussion in relation to ancient wandering, see (Isayev 2021).

4. (Arendt 1943, p. 264) (in Kohn and Feldman edition 2007). See also discussion: (Ritivoi 2019), especially p. 103.

5. Isocrates 14, *Plataicus.* All text and translations are from: Isocrates. *Evagoras*, *Helen. Busiris. Plataicus. Concerning the Team of Horses. Trapeziticus. Against Callimachus. Aegineticus. Against Lochites. Against Euthynus. Letters.* Translated by La Rue Van Hook. Loeb Classical Library 373. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1945.

6. The frequency of this is indicated in the case of the Acarnians and is noted below: Polybius, *Histories* 9.40.

7. Polybius, *Histories* 1.18.6–7.

8. Polybius, *Histories* 1.29.6–7.

9. Polybius, *Histories* 1.61.8.

10. A substantial collection is included in *IG* XII, 6.1.17–41 (*IG*–Inscriptiones Graecae 2000), with detailed discussions by (Engen 2010; Gray 2015; Rubinstein 2018).

11. Xenophon, *Anabasis*; Cicero, *ad Familiares* 4.4.4; Ovid, *Tristia.*

12 For a recent discussion of representing contemporary seekers of refuge as a 'mass', see Behrman (2016).

13 For an overview of ancient migration and mobility, see (Baroud and Isayev 2022; Isayev 2017a, chps. 1, 10, 11).

14 Polybius, *Histories* 9.40.

15 See, for example, the complicated story of Polyartus, who attempted to seek sanctuary at the public hearth of Phaselis: Polybius *Histories* 30.9.

16 Euripides, *Medea*. For a more extensive discussion, see Isayev (2021, esp. 12–16). All text and translations are from the Loeb edition: Euripides. *Cyclops. Alcestis. Medea.* Loeb Classical Library 12. Edited and translated by David Kovacs. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. vol. 1. For a detailed discussion see (Bakewell 2013; Cole 2004; Isayev 2017b; Zeitlin 1992).

17 Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*, Lines 69–76. All text and translations are from Aeschylus. *Persians. Seven against Thebes. Suppliants. Prometheus Bound.* Loeb Classical Library 145. Edited and translated by Alan H. Sommerstein. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2009.

18 These include studies on the ancient context, such as (Garland 2014), and the more contemporary, such as (Derrida [1997] 2000).

19 Euripides *Medea* created in 431 BCE; Euripides, *Helen* created in 412 BCE.

20 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*. For an extended discussion on the subject, see Isayev 2017a. All text and translations are from Livy. *History of Rome, Volume V: Books 21–22.* Loeb Classical Library 233. Translated by B. O. Foster. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929.

21 In relation to their presentation as dregs of society, see Jewell (2019). For critical discourse on the plebeians and earlier bibliography, see (Logghe 2017; Mouritsen 2001; Purcell 1994).

22 Vergil *Aeneid*. All text and translations are from: Virgil. *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1–6.* Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough. Revised by G. P. Goold (2019). Loeb Classical Library 63. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916.

23 For example, the marble Tabula Iliaca of the 1st century CE in the Capitoline Museums, Rome: Petrain (2014).

24 For example, the 1st-century CE wall painting that used to adorn the House of M. Fabius Ululitremulus in Pompeii, IX.13.5: (Spinazzola 1953, Tav. XVII).

25 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 189 UNTS 150, 28 July 1951 (entered into force 22 April 1954).

26 For a discussion on historical cases and the conflicting debates around giving asylum, see (Chaniotis 1996; Naiden 2006, 2014; Sinn 1993). Examples of unsympathetic treatment of suppliants, where such treatment tends to have moralistic undertones in ancient literature, catalysed many legends that speak of punishments against the perpetrators, often in the form of natural disasters: earthquakes and tidal waves are noted for example by Pausanias 7.25.1 and Thucydides 1.128.1.

27 Isocrates 14, *Plataicus.*

28 That the image is most likely related to the opening scenes of Euripides *Heraklaiedai*: (Taplin 2007, p. 127).

29 For an overview of supplication scenes on ancient vases, see (Pedrina 2017).

30 For the interest in Greek theatre outside Greece and its representation, see (Biles and Thorn 2014; Robinson 2014; Nervegna 2015; Taplin 2007, 2012).

31 Reference and provenance: Louvre G458: https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010270306 (accessed on 10 December 2022).

32 They may represent what (Sassen 2014, p. 211) refers to as the 'systemic edge': 'the extreme character of conditions at the edge makes visible larger trends that are less extreme and hence more difficult to capture'.

33 Euripides *Heraklaiedai*. See also a discussion on the play: (Burnett 1976; Tzanetou 2012, pp. 73–104). All text and translations are from Euripides. *Children of Heracles. Hippolytus. Andromache. Hecuba.* Loeb Classical Library 484. Edited and translated by David Kovacs. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

34 All text and translations are from: Isocrates. *Evagoras, Helen. Busiris. Plataicus. Concerning the Team of Horses. Trapeziticus. Against Callimachus. Aegineticus. Against Lochites. Against Euthynus. Letters.* Translated by La Rue Van Hook. Loeb Classical Library 373. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1945.

35 (Chaniotis 1996, esp. 82–86). For contemporary perspectives on representation of refugee experiences, asylum requests and the law, see (Behrman 2016).

36 For a discussion on accords, statutes and laws that would have impacted on the potential to be given or denied refuge and protection: (Moatti 2021).

37 Isocrates 14, *Plataicus*, lines 45–47, 57; for a discussion on services, see (Isayev 2017b).

38 For a discussion on ancient refuge and contexts of citizenship, see (Gray 2018), and in relation to the *metic* (resident alien), see (Kasimis 2018).

39 Some examples of the discourse on the most recent events include (Neumann 2021, 2022). Those concerning these last decades include (Malkki 1992; Mbembe 2003, 2019; De Genova 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Tazzioli 2015; Boano and Astolfo 2020).

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Exilic Roots and Paths of Marronage: Breaching Walls of Space and Memory in the Historical Poetics of Dénètem Touam Bona

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Abstract: Afropean anthropologist, philosopher, and art curator Dénètem Touam Bona is an original "border thinker" and "crosser" of geographic and conceptual boundaries working within a tradition of Caribbean historical poetics, notably represented by Édouard Glissant. He explores ideas of "fugue" and "refuge" in light of the experience of maroons or escaped slaves, key actors of the simultaneous expansion of freedom and industrial-scale chattel slavery in the Americas. In "*Freedom as Marronage*" (2015), Neill Roberts defines freedom itself as perpetual flight, and locates its very origins in the liminal and transitional spaces of slave escape, offering a perspective on modernity that gives voice to hunted fugitives, defiant of its ecology, enclosures, and definition, and who were ultimately excised from its archive. Touam Bona's "cosmo-poetics" excavates marronage as a mode of invention, subterfuge and utopian projection that revisits its history and representation; sacred, musical, ecological, and corporeal idioms; and alternative forms of community, while also inviting contemporary parallels with the "captives" of the global border regime, namely fugitives, nomads, refugees, and asylum seekers who perpetually evade norms, controls, and domestication. He deploys the metaphor of the liana, a long-stemmed tropical vine that climbs and twines through dense forests, weaving relation in defiance of predation, to evoke colonized and displaced peoples' subterranean evasion of commodification, classification, control, cultural erasure, and ecological annihilation. This article frames his work within an Afro-diasporic history and transnational cultural criticism that envisions fugitivity and exilic spaces as dissonant forms of resistance to the coloniality of power, and their relevance to understanding racialization, representations of the past, and narratives of freedom and belonging across borders.

Keywords: marronage; fugitivity; exile; diaspora; poetics of relation; Afro-diasporic history

> A refusal is also a commitment to continually seek to create forms that do not exist.
>
> Marilia Loureiro (2022)

> To maroon is to dissolve not only the chains that hinder our movements, but also those, invisible and insidious, that hinder our spirit.
>
> Dénètem Touam Bona (2013)

A paradox signaled by Damian Alan Pargas is that the last quarter of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century witnessed two simultaneous movements: an unprecedented expansion of Black freedom and an unprecedented expansion of slavery. However, historians have often characterized maroons or escaped enslaved Africans as "absentees" or "transients" rather than permanent freedom seekers, and often downplayed their larger significance as purveyors of freedom (Cf. Pargas 2022, pp. 6 & 69). Afropean anthropologist, philosopher, and art curator Dénètem Touam Bona offers a counterpoint to this perspective. Agreeing with Neil Roberts that enslaved peoples were the first moderns to treat freedom as the highest human good (Cf. Roberts 2015), he asserts that "(m)ore than revolts—however frequent and devastating as Caribbean cyclones— much more than the good conscience of European philanthropists, it was the thousand and one escapes of

intractable Negroes who ultimately liquidated the slave-owning Babylons".[1] Gary Wilder counters that this celebration of maroons' agency and unwritten emancipatory politics falls short of a normative political ideal (Wilder 2017, pp. 5–6), a stand to which scholars such as Sylviane Diouf contribute, by asserting that while fugitives "opted out and exiled themselves", they did not fundamentally undermine the supremacist and oppressive foundations of slave-owning societies. "The argument that maroons, collectively, were antislavery insurrectionists is a difficult one to make. There is no indication that maroons inspired, led, or participated in large numbers in uprisings against enslavement, either in North America or in the rest of the Western hemisphere." (Diouf 2014, pp. 284–85).

How, then, do we characterize the centrality of African maroons and their descendants to the Haitian Revolution, which in the words of Susan Buck-Morss "was not a modern phenomenon *too*, but *first*" (Buck-Morss 1989, p. 138). The experience of marronage began in Africa itself, as Silvia Hunold Lara, who studied the transfer of Central African "political grammar" from Angola to Brazil and its impact on the longest lasting fugitive experiment of secession in Latin American history, the *Quilombo* (an Ovinbundu term) of Palmares (1580–1710), has shown (Hunold Lara 2010). It inspired Abdias Do Nascimento to theorize Brazil's *quilombola* movement's contemporaneity as an ongoing struggle for autonomy and Afrodescendant remembrance (Cf. Do Nascimento 1980). This article will examine Touam Bona's alternative representation of marronage and exilic spaces as dissonant forms of resistance to the coloniality of power, understood, following Aníbal Quijano, as the need to de-link rationality and modernity from coloniality, and ultimately from "all power not constituted by the free decisions of free people" (Quijano 1992). It will explore their relevance to understanding contemporary fugitivity, representations of the past, and narratives of freedom and belonging across borders. It is based on a close reading of his two monographs, *Fugitif, où cours-tu?* (Touam Bona 2016, 2023) and *Sagesse des lianes: Cosmopoétique du refuge* (Touam Bona 2021b).

"The most serious blow suffered by the colonized," Albert Memmi wrote in 1957, "is being removed from history and from the community. Colonization usurps any free role in either war or peace, every decision contributing to his destiny and that of the world, and all cultural and social responsibility." (Memmi 2003, p. 135) Historians excised the memory of maroons, or fugitive enslaved men and women in the Americas, from the archive of modernity for centuries. In recent decades, marronage has generated both historical controversy and a poetics of caesura, or interruption, in the canonical narrative of freedom; a reimagining, in the words of Martinican poet, novelist, and philosopher Édouard Glissant, of the "art of traces" that were left scattered and "invisible to the eyes of their pursuers" by fugitive acts of flight and rebellion (Glissant 2006, p. 128). Michel Trouillot's seminal *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* distinguished between two types of historicity, "what happened" (celebrations that trivialize history) and "what we *say* about what happened (mythicized histories)" (Trouillot [1995] 2015). Nearly two decades earlier Trouillot self-published a work of historical marronage in Kreyol, *Ti difé sou istoua Ayiti* (*Stirring the Pot of History*) (Trouillot [1977] 2021), a hybrid form of literature and archival memory characterized in the preface by Lyonel Trouillot as "a counter-discourse, a subversive knowledge", a kind of "trickster" historiography.[2] It drew, to paraphrase Anna Tsing, from "a mosaic of open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life, with each further opening into a mosaic of temporal rhythms and spatial arcs" (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2021, p. 4), setting the environment in which elusive maroon leaders plotted their freedom from captivity and social death. Figures such as Louis Guillot (Yaya), Plymouth, Polydor, Télémaque Canga, Noël Barochin, Colas Jambes Coupé, and François Makandal, whose rebel exploits, documented as early as 1811 by Jean Fouchard (Cf. Fouchard [1811] 1972) and resurrected recently by historians Carolyn Fick and Crystal Eddins (Cf. Fick 1990; Eddins 2022, pp. 227–28 & 231–33), emerged from the rhizosphere of impenetrable landscapes and surreptitious lore long before forcing the gates of public discourse.

Trouillot's work hearkened to Glissant's plea that "we must be poetic historians, we must reinvent the periodization of our history by poetic divination" (Glissant 1984),

In this vein, Dénètem Touam Bona, the author of *Fugitif, où cours-tu?* (*Fugitive, Where Are You Running*?)[3], collaborator on a documentary film of the same name (Klotz and Perceval 2020), furtively furrows the memory of maroons, from the colonial hinterlands of the Afro-Atlantic world to the refugee encampments of the contemporary Calais Jungle, with vivid poetic undertones in both his narrative and performative enunciation. He explores the ideas of "fugue" and "refuge" in light of the historical experience of African-descended persons who escaped enslavement in the Northern and Southern Americas. For him marronage as a mode of invention, subterfuge, and utopian projection is of singular relevance to contemporary captives of a global border regime governed by manhunts and the looting of the living. "Fugue" or escape in his reading evokes "cosmo-poetics", from the Greek "*kosmos*" (meaning "the world" in the artistry of its arrangement) and "*poiêsis*" (the production of an *oeuvre* or work). He narrates the hidden histories of nomadic gypsies, deserters, "alien" migrants, and others who evade norms, controls, and domestication, secreting an underground version—both clandestine and heretical—of reality, the refuge, which evades enclosure and thwarts definition. Marronage denotes more than a rejection of so-called civilization or a reaction to a system of bondage. It is an inventive response of the body and the imagination, a subterranean expression of tricks and subterfuges ranging from concerted slowdowns in the pace of work or ruses of language to deliberate sabotage; a perpetual "art of dodging", of subversion through gestures of avoidance, flight, and lawlessness, in defiance of colonial discipline.[4] Escaped captives blended into dense forests, indomitable landscapes, and intricate swamps strewn with mortal traps, and hid in plain sight in cities, cultivating invisibility as a matter of life or death against their pursuers. "To camouflage the community," he writes, "to hide it from view, is to extend the cover of the forest, to prolong the shadow of the foliage, to call down the mist of the marshes."[5]

Touam Bona argues that what drove capitalism historically, from the plantation to the factory, were efforts to capture, tame, and discipline a constantly fugitive labor force, to enclose and to harness nature and nomadism. To reduce the enslaved person to the status of victim is to deny her all agency and to perpetuate, albeit with the intent of honoring her memory, her dehumanization. Any situation of domination entails the possibility of resistance, of action, of creation. Defined and classified by the slaving state as a criminal offense, the penal gravity of which depended on the profits lost, boundaries crossed, and scale of contempt of authority, in practice the outcome of marronage was most often torture and death. Our author calls it a "secession" in the sense that fleeting communities composed of diverse cultures and linguistic groups, more or less creolized men and women, alongside escapees from the dungeon holds of slave ships recently arrived from Africa, catalyzed the energy, adaptability, survival skills, and collective intelligence of heterogeneous peoples in circumstances of extreme emergency. They created, albeit for the brief duration of the epic (which sometimes lasted for decades), the matrix of a new horizon of possibility, diametrically opposed to the values and hierarchies of the plantation, which in effect represented, in today's language, the securitized border of colonial society. Absent from the chronicles and treatises produced by the colonizers, from maps and diagrams of plantations, quantitative data on human trafficking, rules of labor discipline, and random classification of assigned ethnicities, to political and legal rhetoric in favor of emancipation (all of which are still mined by historians for written traces of experience), marronage embodies an elusive memory. Like the histories of women, the forms of domination they endured, and the cultural and societal resistance they carried, its memory is excavated by giving voice to barely perceptible and often ambivalent traces of alternative agencies. In Patrick Chamoiseau's words, the maroon storyteller, "does not draw from African memories alone, but from all the memories that have washed up in the present, in a thousand moving traces. Of all old curses and damnations that have been forgotten. He must inventory these crumbled silences. In this web that unites, he must speak" (Chamoiseau 1997, p. 183). Vanessa Massoni da Rocha writes:

> In this context of subjugation, repeated violence, and losses of all kinds, the
> supremacy of the voice of the colonizers imposes itself as the bastion of the colo-

nial and slavery movement. Under the aegis of the single enunciation, promises and stories in the plural are annihilated and the long dark empire of the soliloquy disseminated throughout official chronicles. Beings henceforth become deprived of the multiple possibilities of themselves; somehow incomplete, mutilated individuals. (da Rocha 2019)

After independence in 1804, maroon bands organized the Gorman rebellion (1807–1820) led by Jean-Baptiste Perrier and the Piquets Insurrection (1843/1844–1848) led by Jean-Jacques Acaau against the coercive labor systems established by the new Haitian state (Cf. Hector 2019; Gonzalez 2019). In 1918–1919, Chalemagne Péralte and the peasant Cacos rebellion defied the resurrection of the colonial *corvée* (forced labor), promulgated in Charles Boyer's 1826 rural code, by the occupying United States Marines (Cf. Gaillard 1982). This rural popular contestation echoed the early 19th century dissent of *nègs mawons* against the power of the new élites. It undermined the classic nationalist narrative of heroic nation making theretofore dominated by a hagiography of founding statesmen Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Alexandre Pétion (Cf. Célius 2004), calling into question what David Scott terms the "romantic mode of emplotment" (Scott 2004, p. 31) by which the Haitian Revolution is remembered. Caribbean literature and cultural criticism often refer to the revisionism to which these events gave sway as "ideological marronage". In the words of René Depestre:

> The socio-cultural history of the enslaved masses of the Western hemisphere is globally the history of the ideological marooning, which allowed them not to reinterpret the Europe of the sword, the cross, and the whip, but to show evidence of heroic creativity, to painfully re-elaborate new ways of feeling, thinking, and acting. The marooning of dominant values allowed them to re-elaborate African traditions. (Depestre 1984, pp. 272 & 274)

The Péralte rebellion led to the radicalization of Pan-Africanist and diasporic movements that supported a free Haiti in the 1920s, and fueled an intellectual and cultural movement within the country, rejecting both the occupation and Francophile elites, which began to reevaluate Haiti's African inheritance in a positive light. *Indigéniste* writers began rehabilitating the sacred tradition of Vodou, criminalized and marked for extermination by colonial France and post-independence leaders alike and blamed for the Caco War (Kuser 1921), instead casting it as a source of Haitian pride (Joseph 2011). Dimitri Béchacq notes that the reclaiming of an idealized inheritance of marronage was instrumentalized by the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier (1964–1971) in official commemorations, the most prominent being the erection of a statue to the "*Marron Inconnu*" (Unknown Runaway) designed by architect Albert Magonès in 1967–1968. It represented a "patrimonialization of history toward political ends" that aimed to "defuse, by breaking the dynamics of power and counter-power, elements potentially loaded with protest value." The statue, he argues, is the embodiment of a paradox:

> (T)o designate the Haitian state as being maroon amounts to ignoring by the inherent contradiction between these terms, one of the constituent elements of marronage: it begins where the limits of the state stop, and can only exist at its periphery. This audacious intellectualization of marronage, which ascribes it broad explanatory value, as if it designated a state of mind common to all the actors of a national community, does not aid in understanding because it tends to homogenize and dilute the original meaning of the term. (Béchacq 2006)

In his collection of oral testimonies about the lives of the 18th century Saramaka people in Suriname, the largest single population of maroon communities of African descent in the world, Richard Price calls "First Time", their vast corpus of maroon historiography, a counter-history that reverses perspective in that the first historians are the actors themselves. It draws from Afro-diasporic oral traditions, performances of music, dance, and ritual and searches for surreptitious inferences and double meanings, evidence of

stratagems for obfuscation and transgression, of exilic spaces within the policed landscape of spatial imprisonment and existential annihilation.

> While serving as a basis for resistance, memories are transformed by the very action that tends to save them; they are taken up in an original, absolutely new meaning, that of revolt against the order of colonization. Those who were regarded for a long time as 'savages' and denied any form of action or civic life possess their own concrete utopias, theologies of liberation, and political spiritualities. It could be that in our struggles to come—struggles for a world no longer governed by the fear of the other, by generalized predation and commodification—we will have to learn a few subterfuges from them. (Cf. Price [1983] 2002, p. 56)

Like Price, Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique relies on oral histories and archaeological findings to suggest that Haiti's legacy of marronage through speech and sacred traditions is an ongoing legacy that originated in early contact between Africans, indigenous Taínos, and European swashbucklers (Cf. Beauvoir-Dominique 2010). For Jean Casimir as well, marronage in Haiti survives as a collective mode of living, resistance, and critique grounded in the Vodou religious tradition, the Kreyol language, and a system of interdependent labor and family relations (Cf. Casimir 2020). Crystal Eddins makes the case that it has unfolded over four centuries as a protracted struggle, contributing not to one but two colonial-era Black-led revolutions, dating back to the 16th century revolt led by Wolof maroons allied with the Taíno *cacique* Enriquillo. That destruction of Spain's sugar plantation industry left the island without masters until the French colonization in late 17th century, and well-tested maroon tactics subsequently informed the definitive overthrow of French rule. Jean-François Papillon, Boukman Dutty, Georges Biassou, Hyacinthe Ducoudray, Romaine Rivière, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and other prominent Haitian rebels incorporated maroons into their ranks. Dessalines, a defector before becoming a leading figure of the revolution, led the colonial charge against African-born maroon leaders who refused to capitulate to French rule, such as Sylla, Jean-Baptiste Sans-Souci, Makaya, Lamour Derance, Noël Mathieu, and Va Malheureux.[6]

Thus, maroon secession, rather than birthing new states, consecrates the "furtive becoming" of a community of rebels. "The borders of maroon territory," Touam Bona writes, "can only be effectively maintained by their own erasure, by the permanent jamming of the devices of capture. A collective form of the fugue, the 'secession' constitutes a metamorphic process—the retreat into the forest where it begins is the 'unfolding' of a continuous variation applied both to the place of existence and the mode of appearance of the fugitives".[7] Marronage is a war machine only insofar as it is a machine of disappearance, and "the forest is the privileged scene of this disappearance. (. . .) merging with the most diverse 'natures'—vegetal arabesques of Amazonia, thorny *caatingas* of Brazil, steep mountains of the Caribbean, marshes and labyrinthine mangroves of Louisiana". Taking advantage of their slightest accidents, the maroon community is 'phasmatic' (from the Greek "*Phasma*", phantasm or ghost);[8] hence, the tendency in the colonial imaginary to attribute cunning and magic to its protagonists.

Touam Bona's *Fugitive: Where are you running?* explores a variety of "*communautés buissonnières*" or "truant communities", ranging from *palenques* and *cumbes* in Spanish America to *quilombos* and *mocambos* in Brazil, maroon communities in Jamaica and Florida, and *campu* settlements in Guyana and Suriname, which he argues all share a common art of the fugue.[9] In music, the term refers to a contrapuntal composition in which a short melody or phrase, the subject, is introduced by one part and successively taken up by others through an interweaving of the parts. Before denoting a polyphonic movement in the fourteenth century, in Medieval French the term referred to the flight of prey from the hunter, reversing the earlier word "*chace*", which emphasized the chase. The perspective shifted to imply the reversibility of the roles of hunter and prey, eschewing victimhood and giving rise to archetypes of social banditry and creative indocility.[10]

Geographer Willie Jamal Wright makes the point that "the ability of select fugitive groups to obtain forms of spatial autonomy", the quest for freedom through fugitivity, "is reliant on their ability to seek, find, and settle within difficult and seemingly uninhabitable landscapes". He describes landscapes of marronage as "those difficult terrains that marginalized, hunted, and exploited people have made habitable—areas where communities have taken a desire for liberation and merged it with an ignored and undervalued environment to gain liberties in opposition to repressive administrations" (Wright 2019, pp. 1134–36). In his recent *Sagesse des lianes: Cosmopoétique du refuge* (*Wisdom of the Lianas: A Cosmo-Poetics of Refuge*)[11], Dénetèm Touam Bona employs the metaphor of a long-stemmed tropical vine that climbs and twines around other plants to evoke colonized and displaced peoples' subterranean resistance to commodification, classification, and control. Inextricably entangled, lianas, from the French "*lien*" or relation, are a vegetation hydra that in the eyes of the colonist turns a virgin and tempting forest into an inextricable trap, like the web of a spider, obstructing and hindering colonial penetration. The derivative term "*lyannaj*" used in the sugar plantations of Guadeloupe and Martinique to describe the technique of weaving the cane into bundles as the fruit of slave labor has become, paradoxically, a contemporary expression embedded in the language of practices of solidarity, alliance, and creative improvisation. In a performance, he describes them as sites of poetic invention:

> (T)he spider is the paradigmatic weaving animal. In many sub-Saharan cosmologies, she plays the role of a trickster, that is to say a prankster deity. Constructing her canvas at the crossroads or in the dark recesses of dwellings, she is one of the powers of the threshold whose ambivalence and versatility she shares. (. . .) (T)he spider is the master of the passages, mischievous and elusive, always located in between the worlds that it connects. (. . .) The spider and *lyannaj* of the vine share the same dynamic of allying and weaving, of linking and tying and relaying all that is disunited. There is not a gesture, an action, a life so miserable that its author cannot be saved by a story, a dance, a change, a barricade. It is through creative storytelling that a community, whatever it may be, recovers the power to act. Our concrete utopias, our active chimeras are not intended to validate states of fact or "objective truths", our often intolerable present, but to outline our unsuspected futures.[12]

Rather than the botanic species itself, Touam Bona is interested in the visualization of its topography, the ways in which it defies our tendency to classify beings into ethnicities, to enclose them within categories or boxes. In his words, "the liana blurs our abstractions of representation through its amorphous, unending race towards light (. . .) by twists, contortions that allow it to roll up or develop tendrils (. . .) it connects, relays, intertwines (. . .) we observe its irrepressible drive that pushes us (. . .) to constantly reappear in spite of the cut, the fire, the rape, the devastation, always springing up where we are not expected" (Svadphaiphane 2022).

Marronage here is depicted as a process, a continuum, a range of actions encompassing the smallest gestures of disobedience, the lore of storytelling, collective flight and insurrection, the creation of new forms of freedom. Contemporary migrant crossings challenge the sacred features of the border rituals and symbols. Those very sites, for Touam Bona, are reminiscent of the tracking of maroons in the era of slavery, a futile colonial assault on the impenetrable forests of resistance within which escapees occupy, albeit furtively, exilic spaces of relation and creation that are memorialized in stories of resistance and evasion.

In his written work, as well as his visual and performance work, Touam Bona embodies the "poetics of relation" of Edouard Glissant, of whom his "*Institut* du *Tout-Monde*" or "All-World Institute" bears the name of a transformative mode of history that envisions contemporary resistance as ecological as well as symbolic (Glissant [1990] 1997). The "science of relations", referred to in the West as "ecology", is developed and enacted by indigenous and Afro-diasporic communities through "certain uses of the imagination (complex dream practices, various states of trance and hypnosis) amplified by the use of psychotropic plants, by bodily techniques such as dance, by complex forms of enunciation such as incantatory songs, all coupled with artefacts (masks, drums) and ritual devices

(tent circle, spatial markings), which lead to a synesthetic (associating all senses) and pluriversal perception of the word (diffracting the universe into a multiplicity of versions and temporalities). It is because these traditions are fundamentally ethical in scope (in that they integrate perspectives other than those of the subject and her immediate community) that they nourish political spiritualities".[13] "The wisdom of lianas", he concludes, "consists not only in the experience of these cosmo-poetic relations, but also in their ability to transform them into the stretched strings of battle bows".[14]

A variant of marronage is the Underground Railroad in the Antebellum United States, chronicled in newspapers and memoirs and publicly influential in civic contestation against slavery, which weaponized the technologies of modernity (trains, waterways, cities) to evade its entrapment. Touam Bona relates the figure of the fugitive slave to the more recent archetype of the refugee:

> Because it gave rise to a real movement of migration, the Underground Railroad introduced into the context of young American nations the thorny question of the status of minorities and the right of asylum. Faced with the ongoing stigmatization, criminalization, and repression (retention, incarceration, banishment, etc.,) of 'migrants' and with the proliferation of targeted controls (. . .) we may have to reinvent marronage, "underground passages", "subterfuges" that disconcert a society obsessed with enclosure, immunity, security. What is fascinating (. . .) about the Underground Railroad is the way in which the old figure of the fugitive slave and the more recent one of the refugee are closely imbricated, one illuminating the other and vice-versa.[15]

Here, we are reminded of Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason,* in which he describes the present-day landscape of capitalism from the perspective of the migrant, the exiled, the asylum seeker:

> Capture, predation, extraction, and asymmetrical warfare converge with the rebalkanization of the world and intensifying practices of zoning, all of which point to a new collusion between the economic and the biological. (. . .) The contemporary world is deeply shaped by ancestral forms of religious, legal, and political life built around fences, enclosures, walls, camps, circles, and, above all, borders. Procedures of differentiation, classification, and hierarchization aimed at exclusion, expulsion, and even eradication have been reinvigorated everywhere. (Mbembe 2017, pp. 5 & 24)

However, as with the colonial slavery of yesteryear, this contemporary configuration is not immune to fissure. James Scott calls "shatter zones" the interstices that are found "whenever the expansion of states empires, slave trading, and wars, as well as natural disasters, have driven large numbers of people to seek refuge in out of the way places" (Scott 2009, p. 8). Stefano Harney and Fred Moten evoke the proliferation of borders between states, within states, between and within people, of states of statelessness, to underscore the fallibility they share with the older plantation complex. "(B)orders," they write, "grope their way toward the movement of things, bang on containers, kick at hostels, harass camps, shout after fugitives, seeking all the time to harness this movement of things, this logisticality. But (. . .) borders fail to cohere, because the movement of things will not cohere. This logisticality will not cohere" (Harney and Moten 2013). They continue:

> Can this being together in homelessness, this interplay of the refusal of what has been refused, this undercommons apositionality, be a place from which emerges neither self-consciousness nor knowledge of the other, but an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an unasked question? Not simply to be among his own; but to be among his own in dispossession, to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing, and who, in having nothing, have everything. (. . .) Thrown together, touching each other, we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment,

family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history, and home, we feel (for) each other.[16]

Touam Bona brings his understanding of marronage to this critique of our contemporary condition, our "society of control". It is a system in which "traceability" marks the bodies of urban nomads who circulate within a "vast electromagnetic field" that follows their history and movements in real time, generating a biometrics that in turn perpetuates new forms of eugenicism, a system that has turned discrimination into a science.[17] Penitentiaries, created in the 18th century to contain, like medieval leprosariums before them, the undesirable elements of society, and their present-day extensions, which are detention and holding camps for the perceived detritus of humankind, fix nomadic and racialized threats to the civilized organism of the territorial state in a permanent condition of incarceration and dehumanization.[18] Visiting one such prison, the author reflects:

> All of this strangely reminds me of the steel architecture of old transatlantic liners and only makes the lake of a horizon more noticeable. Around me, men walk their loneliness up and down and down and up in the corridors, holds, machinery, between decks and sheet metal stairs of the Titanic prison. They are the forced passengers of a motionless cruise, the scouts of an announced shipwreck; the scuttling of the 'free world', in which a rising tide of citizen informers, border guards, devices of control, measures of exception (states of emergency, administrative searches, house arrest of activists), surveillance laws, sentries armed to the teeth are supposed to guarantee our freedom.[19]

For Touam Bona as for Mbembe, the systematic risks experienced by enslaved persons in the early phases of capitalism have become the norm for racialized poor and uprooted people everywhere. Their practices of capture and predation, reminiscent of enslavement, and logics of occupation and extraction derived from colonialism, prosper globally amidst ongoing warfare on the fringes of rival imperial spheres of influence. Counterinsurgency, intended to track and eliminate enemies, real or imagined, has a long history in the Black Atlantic and larger colonial worlds.

Human rights activists also sometimes frame their defense of migrants in a language borrowed from the age of captivity, when they demand measures to suppress unauthorized movement in order to counter human trafficking; in other words, to protect migrants, broadly characterized as victims, from falling prey to "modern slavery". Angelo Martins and Julia O'Connell Davidson explore parallels between the historical archive of marronage and the journeys of contemporary sub-Saharan African migrants to Europe and Brazil. They make a strong case that migrants' rights, options, and agency recall enslaved people's fugitivity in the context of an unspoken retrieval of slavery's predations that deploys state-sponsored restrictions on movement with a full arsenal of surveillance, policing, and incarcerating technologies. Stories of fugitives "are both about breaking loose *and* about being hunted, caught, imprisoned, trapped". Not all their stories end well, if they end at all; they "have no evident trajectory (. . .) and are open to multiple directions and detours" (Martins and Davidson 2022, p. 1481). Their struggles, however, are neither irrational, devoid of meaning, nor irrelevant to historical memory, as we have seen. They occur in what Andrej Grubačić and Denis O'Hearn define as "exilic spaces, areas of social and economic life in which people strive to escape from capitalist relations and processes, forging subterfuges of autonomy, whether territorial or symbolic, or in other words liminal and non-state areas that remain relatively autonomous from capitalist valorization and state control" (Cf. Grubačić and O'Hearn 2016). The fugitive "is the simultaneous embodiment of life, culture, and pathways to freedom, on the one hand, and the singular exposure of the state as a tenuous system of unstable structures constantly teetering on the brink of illegitimacy, on the other" (Sojoyner 2017, p. 526). Marronage, thus, constitutes both a fugitive movement from bondage and the subterranean articulation—rather than an overt definition in the sense of a classifiable ontology—of an alternative worldview.

In his poetic rendering, Patrick Chamoiseau describes migrants of our time as the "clandestine, banished, expelled, expurgated, exiled, desolate, wayfaring, rowdy refugees, expatriated, repatriated, globalized and deglobalized, desalinated or drowned, seekers of asylum, seekers of all that the virtues of the world lack, seekers of another cartography of our humanities" (Chamoiseau 2018, p. 42). Like W. Jeffrey Bolster's seaborne runaways, who "by embracing a flexible, diasporic identity that took account of the many cultures, religions, languages, and political struggles of the Atlantic world", they are "able to negotiate their way into different geographic and political landscapes" (Bolster 1997, p. 41). By not remaining in their proper place, or in the places to which they have been confined and assigned, they enact "everyday practices of refusal, resistance, and contestation" thar undermine the very premises that have historically negated their lived experience (Campt 2012), "insurgent geographies" in which flight, triggered by the compulsion of geopolitics, becomes a transformative force that destabilizes these very configurations (Chinea 2009, p. 512).

Discussing their concept of the "undercommons" as a nuanced relation, a fugitive approach to the memory of captivity and freedom, Harney and Moten state the following:

> It may be that (it) is less a set of common capacities or an imagined common space—as the term common(s) often denotes—and therefore less about collective living than about a collective being, or better still, being that is both collected and stranded together, both stolen and given away, not enough but already good and plenty, or maybe collective living in uncollected, disheveled, dispersed being. Maybe the question concerning "where" belies or deflects or obscures a radical non-locality, a general displacement, a field of the feel, a social disruption of ontology, or at least of already existing modern ontology's commitment to a certain classical notion of space/time (. . .), an openness to ways of thinking and feeling that are focused on (re)creating life from the ruins of homelessness and precarity. (Harney and Moten 2016)

This article has drawn parallels, in Touam Bona's work, between marronage and the fugitive practices of displaced people, migrants, refugees, and castaways of the policed border regime of contemporary capitalism. Not as empirical equivalence, but as metaphorization, an illustration of transgressive commonalities though which we might revisit Neil Roberts' idea of "freedom as marronage", stripped of its suggestion that the invention of freedom implies a linear path to alternative state formation, as was the case in Haiti.[20] "Poetics" for Touam Bona, as for Glissant, is a means of building new imaginaries, outside of the system yet within grasp of those who are situated on its margins. Relations between all things in this world can be viewed as threefold: "as *tout-monde* (the world in its entirety), *écho-monde* (the world of things resonating with one another), and *chaos-monde* (a world that cannot be systematized)" (Last n.d.).

What Glissant calls "relation" cannot be defined, only imagined[21] as identity—not its usual atavistic and dualistic expressions, but rather as "guided by the principles of errantry and hybridity".[22] "Relation is the moment when we realize that there is a definite quality of all the differences in the world" (Glissant and Diawara 2011). This approach eschews the consideration of decolonial identity as stemming from the polar opposites of resistance or submission, instead viewing it "in opposition to the processes of identification and annihilation" triggered by the dominant colonial power[23] as escape.

In a 1993 photographic exhibition entitled "Runaways", American artist Glenn Ligon juxtaposes 19th century fugitive slave ads and self-descriptions of African-Americans in an era of mass incarceration and police brutality, contemporizing their condition through a visual dialogue with images of historical marronage. He allows an escape from the panoptic system of identification incurred by racialization "by placing himself within the form of the runaway, a rebel who refused to relinquish his autonomy to an oppressive regime" (Higinbotham 2017–2018). In forging a link between the obstacles encountered by the fugitive slave and the dangers faced by the contemporary black subject, Ligon enacts

a kind of repetition familiar to students of African-American culture, so that history, text, and performance become circulating quantities always subject to reiteration and renewal. In the process, he asks a question most eloquently posed in his own words: "Who are the other 'masters' from which we flee" (Copeland 2013, p. 129). In a similar vein, Martinican artist René Louise calls for an aesthetic that frees collective and individual consciences from the shackles bequeathed by the legacy of slavery and colonialism (Cf. Louise 2017)."It is the genius of modern maroonism that manifests itself in works with asserted symbolism, such as the 'triangular journey', to nourish and regenerate an imagination in the grip of the pangs of reification", writes his translator Frédéric Lefrancois (Lefrancois and Louise 2016). Like Touam Bona, for whom "(s)ome believe, in a somewhat archaic vision, that one does not change the world by fleeing" (Marchand 2022), these contemporary Afro-diasporic artists reclaim marronage, not simply as an inventory of historical narratives, but as a means of answering the question posed by Puerto Rican philosopher Pedro Lebrón Ortiz: "How can one conceive of a struggle for liberation—which necessitates a sense of futurity—if coloniality (. . .) is ubiquitous and therefore inescapable" (see also Lebrón Ortiz 2020a, 2020b).

Notes

1   Dénètem Touam Bona, "*M comme Marronnage*: éloge de l'indocilité", op.cit.
2   Ibid., pp. xxii & xxiii.
3   Cf. Dénètem Touam Bona, *Fugitif, où cours-tu?* op.cit.
4   Dénètem Touam Bona, *Fugitif, où cours-tu?* op.cit., pp. 31–32.
5   Ibid., p. 42.
6   Eddins (2021). See also Eddins, *Rituals, Runaways, and the Haitian Revolution. Collective Action in the African Diaspora*, op.cit.
7   Dénètem Touam Bona, *Fugitif, où cours-tu?* op.cit., p. 94.
8   Ibid., p. 95.
9   Ibid., p. 80.
10 Ibid., p. 85.
11 Cf. Dénem Touam Bona, *Sagesse des lianes: Cosmopoétique du refuge* op.cit.
12 Ibid., pp. 103–6; (Touam Bona 2021a) *Les Échos du territoire: la Sagesse des lianes avec Dénètem Touam Bona* Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA, 2021; min.7:33–9:07. https://youtu.be/qyJT-CCJ5Vc (accessed on 10 January 2023).
13 Dénem Touam Bona, *Sagesse des lianes: Cosmopoétique du refuge* op.cit.; pp. 71–72.
14 Ibid., p. 73.
15 Touam Bona (2016); Dénem Touam Bona, *Sagesse des lianes: Cosmopoétique du refuge*, op.cit., pp. 48–51.
16 Ibid., pp. 94 & 96.
17 Dénètem Touam Bona, *Fugitif, où cours-tu?* op.cit., p. 115.
18 Ibid., pp. 130–31.
19 Ibid., p. 137.
20 Cf. Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* op.cit.
21 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* op.cit.; pp. 170–71.
22 Ibid., p. 79.
23 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* op.cit., p. 17.

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Article

Dancing with the Sniper: Rasha Abbas and the "Art of Survival" as an Aesthetic Strategy

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Abstract: In the last few decades, a growing dissatisfaction with traditional approaches can be observed in migration and refugee studies. In particular, the widespread focus on the "refugee" and "migrant" as exclusive objects of study has been criticized for its underlying tendency of repeating the binary polarization between migrant and non-migrant, native and foreign as well as majority and minority. This chapter considers the short stories of Syrian journalist and writer Rasha Abbas against this background. Instead of reducing her stories to the depiction of flight and exile, this chapter explores her stories as aesthetic expressions of what can be called the "art of survival"—the concept focusing on strategies of empowerment and tactics to regain autonomy. In Abbas' prose, this "art of survival" is achieved and expressed through the blending of times and spaces as well as the aesthetic transformation of reality into surreal realms. Experiences of war, displacement, exile, and patterns of exclusion in the new homeland merge into complex pictures of the human capacity to reframe and reinvent a given reality. When viewed from this perspective, the surreal and psychedelic nature of her writing intensifies the power of aesthetic freedom, thus helping overcome traditional representations of migrants and refugees in cultural expressions and literature.

Keywords: art of survival; Rasha Abbas; aesthetic freedom; postmigration; post-other; victimization; maxim gorki theater; reflexive turn

1. The "Reflexive Turn" in Migration Studies

In an influential essay from 2016, migration scholar Janine Dahinden observed how a growing number of voices in the migration studies community had been calling for "more reflexivity on the part of migration researchers" (Dahinden 2016, p. 2208). This call is sometimes also described as a "reflexive turn" and is a reaction to what Boris Nieswand and Drotbohm (2014, p. 1) referred to as an "intellectual crisis" in migration studies. Moreover, since the late 1980s, categories such as "ethnicity", "society," and "culture" have lost their conceptual innocence, and even that of "migrant" has increasingly been rejected as an assumingly neutral description.[1] According to Dahinden (2016, p. 2209), this category is fundamentally bound to the logic of the nation state and the "supposedly natural congruence" among different national, territorial, political, cultural, and social boundaries. Studies on migration and exile grew out of this historical foundation and are arguably still bound to the same "paradigm of normalized difference" (Dahinden 2016, p. 2210). Consequently, Dahinden (2016, p. 2210) noted the "difference" between migration and non-migration as "ultimately the *raison d'être* of migration research". On a methodological level, this intellectual crisis has incited ongoing discussions on how to reframe migration studies when seeking to avoid the danger of unwillingly reaffirming traditional boundaries and distinctions through the scholarly focus on "migrant" and "refugee" as the only objects of scholarly interest. In this context, the cultural anthropologist Regina Römhild (2017, p. 70) even identified a "fundamental dilemma" for critical migration research. While on the one hand, this research seeks to classify migration as "a productive societal and cultural force" to counter anti-immigration discourses in the public sphere, on the other, it runs

the risk of reproducing the very distinctions it wants to overcome (Römhild 2017, p. 70). In particular, the widespread strategy of endlessly repeating the "narrative of alternative, transnational, hybrid migrant worlds" runs the risk of again fixing the "migrant" outside the normality of society (Römhild 2017, p. 70). Thus, as Römhild argues in her essay from 2017, the underlying problem is:

> that migration research is often understood merely as "research about migrants", producing a "migrantology" that is capable of little more than repeatedly illustrating and reproducing itself; a "migrantology" that at the same time plays its part in constructing its supposed counterpart, the national society of immobile, white non-migrants. (Römhild 2017, p. 70)

However, Römhild's answer to this dilemma has gained traction in part of migration research. Along with Manuela Bojadžijev and others, she advocated for a methodological turn that she described as the need to demigrantize migration research while migrantizing it into culture and society (Römhild 2017, p. 70; see also: Bojadžijev and Römhild 2014; Dahinden 2016; Petersen et al. 2019, pp. 13–15; Yildiz 2022). Instead of making migration itself the object of study, she advocated for a research perspective that "takes as its starting point in societies negotiations over migration" (Römhild 2017, p. 72). Further, she explained that what is lacking "is not yet more research about migration, but a migration-based perspective to generate new insights into the contested arenas of 'society' and 'culture'" (Römhild 2017, p. 70). Dahinden's (2016) appeal for the "demigrantization" of research on migration and integration is in a similar direction.[2]

2. The Politics of Representation

In literary and cultural studies, the aforementioned appeal for the "demigrantization" of migration studies has been echoed rather slowly. Instead, for a long time, there has been a strong focus on literature written by migrantized persons and their descendants, often labeled as "migration literature" or the literature of migration. Historically, this influential label grew out of the attempt to disrupt persistent narratives of national homogeneity and, in opposing them, recognize the growing cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of contemporary societies (Schramm 2018). And even if the "migration literature" label is less used in more recent approaches, some elements of its critical approach are still visible. In particular, major parts of the current studies on the representation of migration and flight are focusing on the "voice of the refugee" and the "perspective of the refugee" (Bromley 2021, p. 59). This approach is typically employed as a critical intervention against the longstanding tradition to represent "migrants" and "refugees" as either threats or victims in public discourse. Since the so called "refugee-crisis" in 2015, the public discourse in most of Europe has been dominated by a securitization-approach, where forced migration is mainly viewed in relation to questions concerning security and border control. In this context, the perspectives of persons with a background in migration and flight has been "largely ignored" (Hill 2019, p. 302). The most recent focus on the role of art and literature must be considered against this background. Specifically, as cultural studies scholar Roger Bromley (2021, p. 9) pointed out, art and literature are often seen as mediums that can help provide agency to the "refugee" or "migrant" by creating space for the "perspectives of the refugee," exploring "counter-narratives", and subverting or at least questioning hegemonic and nationalistic narratives as well as "negative, populist representations of refugees" (See also: Hallensleben 2021, p. 197). There is no doubt that this focus on the "perspective of the refugee" is necessary and extremely important, not in the least to give more nuance to the public discourse. However, in academia, it is often overlooked that this "epistemological turn" (Yildiz 2022, p. 45) cannot necessarily and by itself overcome the "fundamental dilemma" of critical migration studies, referred to above. Rather, the focus on the aforementioned perspective also implies, by positioning the "refugee" as the Other, the risk of reproducing the binary distinctions between the migrant and non-migratory we-group. This becomes especially apparent when the focus on the voice of the refugee is combined with the expectation of biographical coherency, truthfulness, and authenticity.

In this context, the theater critic Nora Haakh (2013, p. 38) identified a widespread tendency of writers and artists with "immigration backgrounds" being expected to deliver personal and authentic insight into supposedly "shuttered worlds" to non-migratory readers. This "cult of authenticity" (Haakh 2013, p. 38) not only limits the range of stories that the "refugee" and "migrant" is supposed to tell but also reaffirms and reproduces the persistent distinction between "us" and "them" and between the supposedly non-migratory we-group and the Other. Conclusively, the focus on the "perspective of the refugee" is not in itself enough to overcome persistent patterns of representation and anti-immigration narratives. Rather, this important approach has to be reflected upon and discussed in relation to the aesthetic dimension of the story as well as the subject positions the "refugee" is expected to take. The issue here is how to create space for marginalized voices and perspectives while simultaneously avoiding reproducing traditional representations and ascribing the "migrant" and "refugee" labels to predefined positions in society.

In an essay from 2022, the Syrian actress Kenda Hmeidan discusses a similar issue by focusing on the challenges that former refugees from Syria are confronted with in their new homelands. Everybody she knows who like herself fled from Syria to Europe in recent years had a different story about how they ended up in the countries where they are currently living in exile, and everybody has "his own tools how to settle, how to start to integrate or refuse to integrate within society" (Hmeidan 2022, p. 4). However, they are all involved in the same transition from "being a refugee to being a citizen" (Hmeidan 2022, p. 4). In this process, Hmeidan emphasized that dealing with the memory of the past is particular challenging. While the focus on the memories of the past arguably allows the exiled Syrians to "save" the lost homeland, it also implies the risk of remaining fixed on the past and thus preventing oneself from moving forward and redefining one's own identity. In this context, Hmeidan (2022, p. 4) asks, "Will forgetting helps us to move on? Or is it the other way around? [. . .] When will we stop digging inside us and will have the opportunity to look around us?".

Here, it is clear that these questions do not just simply refer to a traditional narrative of "arrivedness", which would include the idea of a linear progression from the position of being a "migrant" or "refugee" towards the new position as an allegedly integrated or assimilated subject (Heidenreich 2015, pp. 300–1; see also Petersen 2019, p. 79). For Hmeidan, the challenge of how to deal with the past instead implies the formal and aesthetic challenge of when and how to tell the story of the past as well as of how to include this story in a future identity without being fixed in a specific position in the society. Hmeidan (2022, p. 5) goes on to ask, "In what forms can Syrians express their stories, ideas, trauma, and their transitions from the homeland to Europe?" before adding:

> How can we talk about our experiences, without always being in the position of the victim, "the poor Syrian refugee"? How can we talk about the past, not by showing only the drama and the destruction where we came from (and the constant nostalgia of leaving it) but about a past which can enrich the present, and the future? (Hmeidan 2022, p. 5)

Here, Hmeidan's questions are not only about the memorization of the past but also about possible subject positions and identities in society. The focus on the past seems to limit and restrict former refugees from moving forward and from, in particular, overcoming the persistent victimization of "refugees" and "migrants" in public discourse, which, once again, contributes to the distinction between the "refugee" on the one side and the supposedly white and non-migratory we-group on the other. Moreover, Bromley (2021) addresses the challenges connected to this victimization. In his attempt to develop counter-narratives to traditional, nationalistic narratives about refugees and migrants, he also turns to the narrative of the refugee as the "sentimentalized, passive victim, the object of compassion" (Bromley 2021, p. 8). The widespread humanitarian concern and sympathy in public discourse tends to focus on the vulnerability of the refugee. And while this vulnerability should obviously be protected, the tendency to see all refugees as victims or vulnerable people "is a perspective that needs to be critically examined for

its reductiveness and refusal of agency" (Bromley 2021, p. 8). The challenge here is how to find new complex representations, which allow for "the agential subject, the resistant activist," and "the newly emergent citizen" (Bromley 2021, p. 8). In this context, one can even argue that every representation of flight, migration, and exile always is incoherent, as it always implies a level of distance from and misrepresentation of the sometimes-traumatic experiences of the past. This challenge does not necessarily disappear when the focus is on the marginalized voice of the Other or the perspectives of those who, according to the predominant Eurocentric worldview, have been and still are conceived of as "non-modern," "non-civilized," "non-enlightened," and "non-emancipated" (Yildiz 2022, p. 45).

As Butler (2005) pointed out, every attempt to give an account of oneself is necessarily bound to schemes and narratives, which are not possessed by the subject alone but rather exist outside of the subject. In relation to migration studies, this further increases the need for more multifaceted narratives and more complex representations, which are not bound to traditional expectations and hegemonic narratives as well as avoid falling back into "terminological ghettos" (Geiser 2015, p. 307). Bromley addresses these issues when he refers to the challenges of representation and the need to broaden our understanding of the possibilities and limits of what has been called the politics of representation (Hall 1997). While the "experience of refugees *is* unrepresentable in a sense" and "representational forms are always inadequate," Bromley (2021, p. 8) argues that new narratives and lenses are still necessary to create space for new perspectives and forms of representation. To do so, he mentions the "development of other lenses for perception," "a greater aesthetic-political reflexivity and sensitivity" as well as "a search for new, and radical, rhetorical forms which unsettle and disrupt expectations and preconceptions" (Bromley 2021, p. 8). In the end as Yildiz (2022, p. 45) noted, an "epistemological turn" is required, substituting the focus on traditional politics of representation with that on processes of "ambiguities and liminal experiences".

One specific way of dealing with the aforementioned challenges and offering new and more complex representations and aesthetics can be found, as I will argue in this chapter, in the literary works of the Syrian journalist and writer Rasha Abbas. Abbas was born in 1984 in Latakia, Syria, and left Syria in 2011 to Lebanon and three years later to Germany, where she currently lives in exile. In her short stories, she not only explores the consequences and aftermaths of war and forced migration but also develops an aesthetic strategy, which allows her to combine the past with the present and explore what I call the "art of survival". In this strategy, the subject regains autonomy and agency by rejecting persistent external ascriptions and replacing them with novel and imaginative escape routes, transforming the reality into a new space of negotiation and participation. In particular, the widespread public demand for authenticity and realism is turned upside down in Abbas' stories. Through her combining of times and places and focus on the inner multiplicity of persons and protagonists in her stories, she manages to redefine her own subject position beyond external expectations and ascribed labels. Further, her aesthetic strategy of the "art of survival" allows her to depict the cruelties and atrocities of war and exile on the one hand, while simultaneously making space for a broader space of negotiation and dealing with the challenges of memories and times on the other. This broader space of negotiation is also mirrored in relation to language. Abbas' works are not only part of a long-standing Syrian and Arabic literary tradition but have also started to circulate and be read in translation within Europe. Some of her books have even been published first in German before being published in Arabic, becoming in this way part of an ongoing negotiation between memory, space, and time within Europe. My own lack of Arabic language skills means that I have only read English and German translations of her texts. It mirrors, however, the transformations and openings, embodied by her work: instead of remaining fixed on the past, her work rather conflates times and spaces. The transition from being a refugee to "being a citizen", referred to above, involves moving between old and new languages and growing into a field of cosmopolitan literature that extends beyond binary distinctions. Before focusing on the theoretical and methodological

challenges of her aesthetic strategies, it is necessary to take a brief look into some elements of Abbas' writing and at the staging of her works at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin at the beginning of 2022, which was also the point of departure for Hmeidan's essay.

3. War, Displacement, and Aesthetic Freedom

Rasha Abbas' first literary publication goes back to her time in Syria, where she lived as writer and journalist. In 2008, she won a young writers award in Syria for her first collection of short stories, *Adam hates TV*. However, in the wake of the Syrian revolution, she was forced to leave the country. Her breakthrough to a broader audience came in 2016 when she published her second book of short stories, *The Invention of German Grammar* (Abbas 2016). The book, originally written in Arabic, was published in the German translation before the original and was received positively by German critics and readers, not in the least because of her humoristic and critical stance on the challenges of arriving in a new country. Subsequently, she published several stories partly translated into English and German in magazines and newspapers.

In 2018, her next collection of short stories came out, once again, first in German: *Eine Zusammenfassung von allem was war*, which is *A Summary of What Happened* in English. The book has been a major success among critics as was its staging at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin in the beginning of 2022. Unlike those from traditional mainstream literature, the stories are formally and thematically challenging. They often combine surreal and dreamlike scenarios with the description of war and its aftermath, thus allowing for new and different perspectives. In a short reader's report, the translator Guthrie (2017) characterized Abbas' literary stories as being "eclectic, intense, often psychedelic." Many of her stories, Guthrie (2017) continues, "are dreamscapes which creep up on the reader with sudden plunges into haunting hyper-realism, operating within a punk aesthetic". These dreamscapes include experiences of the Syrian war, dancing scenes, surrealistic parties, and family negotiations in unspecified places. They are obviously taking place in both her former homeland and in exile. Political events from the Syrian revolution and the war are intermingled with experiences of fleeing to a new homeland and living in exile. In various stories, we are confronted with the cruelty and harshness of war as well as with death, destruction, and the experience of being powerless when standing at checkpoints in warzones as well as at European borders. In other stories, these experiences are combined with surreal scenes such as the following: an overflowing toilet, which is flooding the narrator's house during her mother's family party due to a positive pregnancy test that she tried to flush down the toilet; or the depiction of a severed head, exhibited in a flowerpot in a private house, which the narrator is expected to water, so it can grow roots. The flap-text of the German edition attempts to provide an overview of some of the motifs: "Time-loops and Russian rockets above outdoor swimming pools, paranoid teenagers, checkpoints and remote hotels. Drug trips, cinema-productions for dictators and refugees living in exile in collective housings: in *A Summary of What Happened* the images of the old and the new home are merging into each other" (Abbas 2018, cover).

The stories are often situated in "dreamlike, gaming realities" but also take place in the "dusty-grey rural world of the Middle East, in tropical swamp landscapes, in endless deserts of ice, or in the villa of Max Liebermann," a famous German-Jewish painter who lived in Berlin in the beginning of the 20th century (Abbas 2018, cover).[3]

Abbas' surrealistic, psychedelic style was already visible in one of her early stories, *A Plate of Salmon is Not Completely Cleaned of Blood*. This story—translated from Arabic into English by Alice Guthrie and published in the broadly discussed volume *Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline* in 2014—also combines different layers of reality and offers a level of aesthetic transformation of reality (Abbas 2014). The story starts out with the narrator's dialog with another person—seemingly directly addressing the reader—who is invited to eat salmon for lunch at the narrator's house. Even though the place where the story takes place is never mentioned directly, references to the Syrian war are evident. For example, the story directly refers to historical facts such as the massacres from Baniyas

and Al-Bayda, which received international attention after Syrian activists posted videos and pictures on social medias (BBC 2013). However, in the story, these historical events are portrayed with a focus on their appearance in social media. The narrator says "Baniyas? Of course, I am friends with it on Facebook," at one point in the story before referring to the videos documenting the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime (Abbas 2014, p. 276). As is typical in Abbas' writing, such references to warzone massacres merges with daily routines, often combining the horror of war crimes with daily-life experiences. Specifically, war experiences are interspersed with questions about the narrator's hobbies and smoking habits. "You don't smoke? My hobby is collecting foreign coins," the narrator says before continuing, "please, eat up, there is salmon for lunch—don't watch the corpses and children with ripped out fingernails on YouTube before lunch, you don't want to lose your appetite for salmon" (Abbas 2014, p. 276).

This merging of daily normality with killings and torture becomes particularly significant in relation to a sniper who is running through the house to kill the narrator's mother. In the beginning, the narrator asks the invited lunch guest to not tell the *Hajja* (an Arabic term referring to an older and respected woman, which later appears to be the narrator's mother) that she is smoking in the house: "Whatever you do, please don't tell the Hajja that I smoke in the house and that I invite my friend the sniper in while she is not there [. . .]. The sniper's taking a stroll along the corridor, come and listen to this Robbie William song with me" (Abbas 2014, p. 276).

Inviting the sniper into the house may be read as a literary symbol for the aftermath of the Syrian revolution. While the revolution was overwhelmingly begun by a young generation of Syrian activists, the regime then turned against them, thus threatening every single household and family member. Consequently, private spaces were transformed into war zones causing the narrator to blend the threats of war with not only daily routines but also private dreams and fantasies. The depiction of the sniper running through the house is related to the longing for a popular crime series on television and sexual fantasies ("it'd turn me on if you made love to me with the TV on", Abbas 2014, p. 278). Later, eating lunch while watching TV appears as a possibility in the narrator's reality, even after her mother had been killed by the sniper: "Listen, if the sniper kills my mum we'll go and eat that salmon with slices of lemon on her bed, there's a TV in there too, we'll watch it while we stain her clean sheets with a bit of salmon, what do you say to that?" (Abbas 2014, p. 278).

These references to the sniper, who potentially may kill the narrator's mother, seems to refer back to the well-known novel *The Story of Zahra* by the Lebanese author Hanan al-Shaykh, which was published in 1980. In this novel, the plot of which takes place during the Lebanese civil war, the narrator, Zahra, invites a sniper into her house even though she is afraid of being killed by him. While al-Shaykh's novel ends with the killing of the female narrator, Abbas' reworking of the story at least provides some agency back to the narrator. In contrast to the abuse and killing of Zahra in al-Shaykh's novel, the morbid and sarcastic option of eating lunch on the bed of the murdered mother offers a dreamlike vision of survival. Accordingly, the scene not only illustrates the shifting realities in Abbas' writing—combining TV-series, gaming realities, and sexual fantasies with war-experiences and existential threats—but also includes attempts at regaining control through the dreamlike transformation of reality, as shown by the following comment in the story. Confronted with the threat of the sniper, the narrator considers the possibility of stopping him by embracing him, slowing him down for a dance: "The sniper is running through the corridor, what a shame he doesn't slow down so we could dance with him a bit" (Abbas 2014, p. 278). Even though the dance never actually takes place in the story and even though it would require an active change in the sniper's behavior—he would have to slow down—the somehow strange picture of a common social activity with the potential perpetrator disrupts the traditional representation of war and its consequences. The picture also seems to refer back to a scene in al-Shaykh's ([1980] 1995, p. 157) novel, where Zahra considers whether a "troupe of dancers" would help to divert the sniper from aiming his rifle and randomly killing people. In both stories, the idea of dancing offers a disruption to the power of

war and violence. In Abbas' story, however, the picture also becomes surreal and even humoristic. The idea of "dancing together" minimizes the real threat by including it in the imagination of a common activity, in which the narrator and potential perpetrator meet and engage with each other on an assumingly equal level.

In her essay *Dreaming the Same Dream in Different Places*, which was previously quoted, the actress Hmeidan (2022) described the aforementioned scenes of aesthetic imagination as attempts in Abbas' prose to open new escape routes, thus giving agency back to the characters as well as to the reader. When she read Abbas' prose for the first time, Hmeidan noted that they were completely different from all other representations of war, flight, and exile that she has ever come across. Additionally, the strength of Abbas' writing, Hmeidan explained, can be found in her combining of different perspectives, times, and realities. Instead of being defined by the past, Abbas manages to transform topics such as exile, detention, isolation, loneliness, alienation, torture, and loss of identity into a new reality. The fact that Abbas chooses not to "document" the devastation of war "or talk about it from a personal perspective," makes it possible for her to depict the atrocities of war and challenges of the exile while simultaneously overcoming the danger of being defined by the memories of the past (Hmeidan 2022, p. 6). It is "through fictional and abstract images, by inventing surreal events and scenarios, using sarcasm and contempt" and with the "overlapping of places and times" that Abbas' stories suggest "the possibility of escaping" (Hmeidan 2022, p. 6). Hmeidan (2022) goes on to elaborate, saying:

> The constant movement of the characters from one place to another and the inability to stand still in a world, where chaos rules. By refusing to take reality as it is, it gives us as readers a feeling of resistance and the capability to survive what is happening, either through physical movement or mental moving our strong ability to imagine and to jump in our heads and times and places. (p. 6)

Both the protagonists of the story and the reader are emboldened to explore shuttered doors, new escape routes, and hidden paths through its realities. As in computer games where protagonists can choose different paths and versions of reality, Abbas' aesthetic approach gives the characters in the stories "an ability to choose" (Hmeidan 2022, p. 6). As it is the case in the early writings of German philosopher Walter Benjamin or in Gaston Bachelard's ([1958] 2014) reading of the transformative power of architecture and spaces in *The Poetics of Space*, the logic of the dream extends the idea of a clearly shaped and inescapable reality and thus creates space for the very possibility of social change and transformation. Following the writings of German philosopher Rebentisch (2016), one can even see similarities with the transformative and political power of the notion of "aesthetic freedom." More specifically, Rebentisch considers this notion as the foundation of all democratic existence. She goes on to argue that the experience of "aesthetic freedom" allows the individual to mediate between two different but yet interrelated dimensions of an individual's identity: dependency on pregiven social norms and values, which at least partly define personal identity; and the idea of complete freedom from the social order, which is often assumed to give agency to an individual. The tension between the two polarities—the uncritical acceptance of pregiven and ascribed identities on the one hand and the complete distance from all predefined social roles on the other—is constantly negotiated inside the individual. Typically, this tension appears as the "immediate experience of self-difference" (Rebentisch 2016, p. 9), which is that when the pregiven roles and identities do not match the experience of who we are or want to be. Abbas' artistic engagement with the war and exile and her usage of imaginary, dreamlike escape routes and alternative realities includes a similar confrontation between the pregiven social order and the possibility to define one's own life. The aesthetic distance from the social world is a necessary condition "for the self-determined appropriation or transformation of the social practices by which we are always already determined" (Rebentisch 2016, pp. 9–10). Abbas' dreamlike prose thus constantly redefines the political community as a concept.[4]

4. Post-Otherness and The Imaginative Formation of the Theater

At first glance, Abbas' surreal aesthetic and her insistence on "aesthetic freedom" may be seen as world escapism, where the characters are fleeing from political struggles and conflicts into a dreamlike world of fictive existence. Alternatively, as Halasa (2015, pp. 165–66) puts it, Abbas "uses fiction to affirm the value of the individual amid the collective barbarities of the conflict". Conversely, from a theoretical perspective, the collapse of stable representations and the combination of spaces and time can also be considered part of what curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and cultural anthropologist Römhild famously called the emergence of "post-Otherness" and the figure of the "post-Other." (Ndikung and Römhild 2013). Further, they critically engage the historical and ongoing production of "Others" at various racist, sexist, and political levels (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, p. 207). In particular, the widespread notion of "integration,"—discussed here as the ideology of "integrationism"—is strongly connected to processes of Othering (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, pp. 211–12). It also plays a major role in establishing the idea of a supposedly homogenous, white we-group as the foundation of the modern nation state. The promise and the condition of integration, Ndikung and Römhild (2013, p. 213) argue, "makes use of the assimilated Other to create and stabilize the notion of a 'natural', racially unmarked, white self". This process of constructing and stabilizing an allegedly stable we-group is historically intertwined with the colonial thinking of spatial and temporal integration. However, this historical condition is changing due to more recent transnational openings and entanglements. While the "colonial Other" has historically been "integrated into the binary hierarchical relation between 'metropolis' and imperial 'periphery' across geopolitical distance", this "spatial order of 'here' and 'there',", according to Ndikung and Römhild (2013, pp. 213–14), "is collapsing because of the past and present of migrations and mobilities". In this situation, a paradoxical moment in history is clear. On the one hand, new forms of mobility and migration have led to a spatial implosion, where the formerly distant Other is now flourishing inside Europe. Former and ongoing migration movements have not only changed the components of populations in European countries but also incited new forms of self-perception, new identity formations, and new ways of defining one's belongings (Bromley 2006; Römhild 2018). Consequently, Europe now consists of "a multitude of minorities" (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, p. 214). Thus, the position of the distant Other has changed, as Ndikung and Römhild (2013, p. 214) elaborated:

> Due to that spatial implosion the significant position of the distant Other has proliferated in a multitude of neighboring minorities vis-à-vis the respective majorities they constitute, including the diverse forms of "irregular" migrations emerging while crossing the new European borderlands, and the presence of postcolonial, post-migrant, post-socialist subjects and citizens as well as "dissident" genders, sexualities, subcultural, anti-neoliberal, post-capitalist political articulations and movements.

On the other hand, while this transformation increasingly shapes modern societies, it is being recognized in public discourse and politics at a slow pace. Confronted with the new and developing situation, the dominant politics of integration has reacted to this situation by insisting on traditional narratives and perceptions. They have had to increasingly overemphasize "constructions of an ethnicized, racialized Other in order to still keep up the fiction of a national, European, western domination over and distance from culturally inferior, marginalized subjects" (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, p. 214). Consequently, the political and cultural struggles about migration address the very idea of who Europe wants to be and which role the former distant Other will play in its present and future. According to Ndikung and Römhild (2013, p. 214), the figure of the post-Other emerges in this paradoxical moment of time, still bearing the "signs of historical Othering" while simultaneously "representing and experimenting with unknown futures beyond it".

Rasha Abbas' blending of various spaces and times as well as her surreal usage of dreamlike, hallucinatory spaces anticipated this moment of post-Otherness. The protagonists in her prose are not framed anymore as "distant Others", or as minoritized subjects who have to "integrate" or "arrive" in the new homeland. They are instead already part of

the new and emerging Europe. With the constant movement between different spaces and with the blending of different times, her stories disrupt the very logic of here and there as well as of integration and assimilation, which is historically built on the spatial dimension of colonial thinking. Further, Abbas' prose is anti-integrational in the sense that she does not accept the fundamental order of time and space, which the traditional European identity is built on. Rather, her characters unsettle the very distinction between us and them, "evanescing the border between the 'self' and the 'Other'", as Ndikung and Römhild (2013, p. 214) noted in relation to the most recent developments in contemporary arts.

Moreover, in their essay, Ndikung and Römhild also highlighted a few examples from contemporary art and culture, in which the aforementioned figure of post-Otherness appears and unfolds. The first example of the new artistic practices in contemporary art and culture, in which the new condition is expressed and reflected on, is the *postmigrant theater* in Berlin. In 2008, the theater director Shermin Langhoff along with cultural practitioners and activists took over Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, a small, independent theater in Berlin-Kreuzberg, which is a multiethnic and multireligious neighborhood. They labeled their work as *Postmigrantisches Theater* or Postmigrant Theater. In the following years, the theater became a major success among critics and audiences, offering a platform for new and other representations of migratory stories, which had not been staged in mainstream theaters in Germany (Sharifi 2011; Stewart 2017; Langhoff 2018; Petersen et al. 2019, pp. 33–35). With its artistic practices, the theater transgressed "the restricted space of 'ethnic minorities' towards 'native' mobile subjects" (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, p. 215). By doing so, they spoke "of and for an inclusive post-migrant Germany/Europe/world" (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, p. 215). The success of the concept continued when Shermin Langhoff in 2014 took over the long-standing and state-funded Maxim Gorki Theater in the center of the German capital, which has since emerged as the heart of postmigrant theater.

With this background in mind, it is therefore not surprising that the transformative power of literature and art was also at the center of the staging of Abbas' stories at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin in the beginning of 2022. Specifically, the staging of her stories was part of the theater's attempt to present new stories of migration and disrupt traditional narratives. Instead of repeating the binary distinction between leaving and arriving and dislocation and relocation, the staging brought together various scenes from different stories, blending them into a multi-aesthetic and multi-language experience. The play, directed by Nübling (2022), consists of four actors, three of whom have a background in Syria themselves including Kenda Hmeidan. Additionally, it blends different forms of expressions, such as techno music and dancing scenes as well as monologues and playful performance of mimetic expressions. During the play, excerpts of Abbas' stories are quoted by actors, voiced through a telephone, or shown on text boards in Arabic, English, or German. Additionally, the four actors have different ways of dealing with the difficult and often surreal character of Abbas' prose: one actor, for example, uses changing and voiceless face-expressions to illustrate the feelings of the narrator; the dancer Lujain Mustafa—who was educated at the classic ballet school in Damascus and who is living in exile in Berlin as well—uses dance performances as the main form of aesthetic expression for the scenes and emotions in the stories. Far from establishing the traditional theater of representation or developing a coherent story, the staging instead evokes a "nightmarish, trancelike and imaginative formation," as a critic recalled (Büsing 2022). Meanwhile, another critic noted that the play evokes "animations from computer-games, video-projections of destroyed cities and tunnels" (Müller 2022). The spectator's view repeatedly penetrates into the scenery and backdrops of the stage as if following the perspective of a running film camera. However, in this ride with the camera everything repeats itself, creating a repetitive loop of voices and themes (Müller 2022).

Additionally, the actors introduce themselves with differing names and ages at various points, often triggering confusion among the audience. The name that the actors use repeatedly is from one of Abbas' stories: "Samt" (Abbas 2018, p. 7). Further, the ages, the professions, and the situations constantly change: Sometimes, they are 30 years old

and at other times, 20, 17 or 24. Overall, the idea of one linear story of migration and exile, typically framed through the binary distinction between leaving and arriving and between dislocation and relocation, is replaced by a more complex and more opaque story of migration and its aftermaths. Like the short stories, the staging blends different phases of life and brings together times and spaces. Thus, there is no coherent character, and the story is not centered with one predominant narrative. This rejection of a coherent story is mirrored in the recurring and yet ironic announcement of the actors that they will soon, in the next minutes, give "a summary of *A Summary of Everything that Happened*" (Nübling 2022). Against the widespread public expectation of being presented with a coherent story of migration and flight, this "summary of a summary" never occurs. Since this is only announced but never given, the expectations are playfully rejected, which emphasizes the impossibility of presenting a consistent linear storyline or providing a reasonable picture of the experiences of war, displacement, and exile. Moreover, the persistent fixation of the migrant or refugee as the Other—who is defined through their experience of flight and exile—is substituted with the recognition of the indispensable multiplicity of memories, identities, and experiences within the same person. Memories from the revolution in Syria, from war, and from the flight are part of the play, as is the case with various experiences and memories of the time spent in exile. Thus, instead of reaffirming a one-dimensional and simplified image of the refugee or the migrant, this multilayered staging of the stories connects pieces of memories, surreal family scenes, and experiences of being subject to xenophobia and racism in the Berlin night life. It highlights the impossibility of concentrating the manifold experiences and memories into one "clearly defined point" (Wahl 2022). As a result, the theater event turns out to be an impressive, "confusing, multiperspectival and multilingual theater-evening" (Büsing 2022), which does not support the traditional logic of representation of "refugees". The play rather depicts an "abyss, that seems to constantly reproduce itself" (Müller 2022).

5. The "Art of Survival" as an Aesthetic Strategy

The staging of Abbas' prose is surely not only impressive because of its aesthetic expression of the spatial implosion and what Ndikung and Römhild (2013, p. 215) called the "dissident reality of post-Other conviviality". It is also because of its depiction of the horrors of war, displacement, and flight.[5] However, most importantly, the play never falls into the pitfalls of patronizing and victimizing the "refugee." Instead, the staging constantly focuses on the transformative power of aesthetic freedom and imagination. In the beginning of the play, this imaginative power is emphasized and verbally expressed. Before taking the stage, the actors are placed among the audience, from where they repetitively whisper "imagine, imagine, imagine" into microphones (Nübling 2022). As this meta commentary appears before the actors are on stage, the spectators are compelled to see the scenes of the play as possibilities and potentialities rather than as truthful and authentic depictions of experience of flight and exile. The "cult of authenticity," often applied to artists dealing with experiences of migration (Haakh 2013, p. 38), is thus explicitly rejected from the very beginning. The staging clearly widens the range of possible stories that refugees and migrants are expected to tell as does Abbas' surreal and partly hallucinogenic stories. In addition, the audiences are forced to "read" the play in a different and more complex way. Based on French philosopher Rancière's (2009) writing, one can even say that the spectators are forced to find their own way through the impressions, images, and associative pictures presented during the play. Instead of being presented a singular story or message and meaning, the spectators are made to explore individualized paths through the multiplicity of images and impressions (Rancière 2009, pp. 1–23).

Moreover, the notion of "survival" is at the center of the play constantly. Specifically, the actors repeatedly lean forward against the imaginative power of a strong wind coming against them while chanting, "survival, survival, survival." In those scenes, the combination of techno-music, dancing scenes, the experiences of insecurity and vulnerability in the asylum system as well as memories of war and flight merge into the subject's longing to

stand against the power of history and of external identity ascriptions such as those by migration and border regimes. In this context, the repeatedly performed scene illustrates the longing to stand against the influence of power regimes, ascribed identities, and various forms of oppression.

Abbas' emphasis on the aesthetic transformation of the reality as well as the recurring references to the notion of "survival" can be understood through the concept of *Überlebenskunst* or the "art of survival." This concept has been highlighted in more recent migration studies in relation to the question of agency (Seukwa 2006; Hill 2019; Schacht 2021). It is based on the development of autonomous strategies by refugees and forced migrants who are constantly confronted by the power of migration regimes. The concept expresses the idea that migrants and refugees are not only objects of those migration regimes and power oppression but also actively develop strategies of agency and autonomy. It is particular interesting, as Schacht (2021, p. 20) notes, "how humans under restrictive societal circumstances develop creative strategies und life-concepts, in order to position themselves in the society". According to this perspective, while refugees and migrants are influenced by the power relations and social limitations that they are confronted with, they are also actively reacting against those restrictions and limitations. Thus, it is important "not (only) to conceive persons with migratory and refugee experiences as objects of external representations and powerful discourses, but to understand the creation of their own strategies as active reaction against the circumstances at the borders" (Schacht 2021, p. 21). The term *Überlebenskunst*, or art of survival, mirrors these strategies to regain agency in a difficult power relationship. Migration researcher Seukwa (2006), who introduced the notion of *Überlebenskunst* in academia, went on to define the "habits of the art of survival" that refugees develop during forced migration.

Thus, refugees and migrants do not submit themselves as innocuous victims to border regimes. Instead, they employ "multiple tactics and tricks," both in relation to the challenges of flight and the struggles in the new homeland's asylum system, which is typically "dominated by alienation, social isolation and incessant insecurity" (Seukwa 2015). When read from this perspective, the stories of Rasha Abbas illustrate that the aforementioned strategies of survival are strongly related to the concept of aesthetic freedom and the transformative power of art. It can even be said that the very concept of "art of survival" appears to be an aesthetic concept, as it presumes the aesthetic imagination of new realities and possibilities, potentially expanding the given version of reality. The post-Other as a struggle to survive and regain control beyond traditional identity ascriptions needs the imaginative power of art and culture in order to unfold visions of "unknown futures" beyond the historical state of Otherness (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, p. 224). Accordingly, the artistic practice of "juxtaposing the apparently unknown with the apparently known" also poses the question of "how to address and to make space for 'difference'" in a society that is still dominated by homogenization discourses (Ndikung and Römhild 2013, p. 224).

By rejecting traditional logics of representation and working towards the conflation of various spaces and times in artistic images, Abbas reflects on the complexities of contemporary subject positions. While the harshness of war, exile, and exclusion is clearly expressed in her prose, these experiences are no longer presented as markers for the "distant Other". Instead, Abbas' aesthetics of the "art of survival" can be viewed as an outspoken and complex artistic articulation of "post-Otherness": a mode of existence where the experiences of humiliation, war, and flight are part of the collective memory of an emerging "postmigratory normality" (Ratković 2018, p. 129).[6]

6. Postmigratory Normality

In her essay from 2016, Dahinden mentioned three strategies of how to deal with the methodological challenges of contemporary migration studies. First, the acceptance that the migration research originates in what she calls a "migration apparatus" that works within the field and the system of power relations connected to it (Dahinden 2016, p. 2212). Second, a "strategic positive essentialism" could be employed using the commonly

accepted distinction between migrants and non-migrants in order to address and challenge certain forms of inequality (Dahinden 2016, p. 2212).[7] Third, a reflexive attitude could be pursued by searching for new ways to approach migration research. This would imply, as Dahinden (2016, p. 2212) explained, an investigation into "methodological strategies that make it possible to de-naturalize and to de-ethnicize migration and integration studies". Her own approaches contribute to this reflexive attitude, by, among others, opening the field of migration studies to the use of general sociological theories as well as examining the contexts of traditional distinctions between the migrants and non-migrants—that is, "exploring when, how, and on behalf of which markers that specific boundaries between us and them are established, transgressed or dissolved, and what consequences such boundary processes may have" (Dahinden 2016, p. 2216). As per this perspective, migration scholars would no longer be specialists in migration and integration issues but rather social and cultural scientists who focus on processes of migration and alienation as part of their research in social and culture negotiations (Dahinden 2016, p. 2218). Clearly, this third position is in line with Römhild's (2017, p. 70) statement, quoted above, that we do not need more research in migration but rather migration-based insights into the "contested areas of 'culture' and 'society'".

When considered against this background, Rasha Abbas' stories can be seen as depicting the harsh reality of war and exile but also allowing for new and broader perspectives and complexities. Instead of reading her stories as mere depictions of the experiences of war, flight, and exile—which would potentially cement her to the heritages of the past—and instead of reducing her work to expressions of a supposedly authentic and victimized Other, they should be seen as reframing the very experiences of migration and flight and integrating them into a new, complex picture of contemporary societies. With her combining of time and spaces, she allows us to perceive the aforementioned experiences as part of a conflictual but emerging post-Other-Europe: where different backgrounds and experiences stand side by side, and the multitude of minorities interact instead of being positioned at the margins, outside the imaginary center of society. By doing so, Abbas' stories force us to reconsider the logic of "migrantology" and to explore new and different paths in the scholarly discussions on the representations of displacement, migration, and flight. While the traditional representation of refugees as either victims or threats tend to place them outside of the normality of postmigrant societies, Abbas' surreal and hallucinatory stories instead move the experiences of war and exile into the center of society. In doing so, the stories support a novel understanding of contemporary societies, which has been discussed through the concept of "radical diversity" (Czollek et al. 2017).

According to this concept, the diversity of "backgrounds" is not reserved for persons with backgrounds in migration but is rather an inherent part of modern societies' multiplicity. In a short and programmatic text, published in a monthly program flyer by the Maxim Gorki Theater (2016) in Berlin, this expanding of the notions of backgrounds is put forward. Specifically, the flyer confirms that there has been a lot of talk about "backgrounds" when speaking of the Gorki Theater, which is an unmistakable reference to the widespread use of the notion of "immigration backgrounds" in the public discourse in Germany.[8] In the next line, however, the flyer expands the perspective by saying that it is true that the people working at the Gorki Theater have "biographies that go far beyond their own lives," but the flyer notes that this simply affirms that they are "just like everyone else" (Gorki Theater 2016). Thus, instead of reserving the notion of "backgrounds" for only one part of the population, as it is done in large parts of the public debate that revolves around the notion of "immigration backgrounds," the concept is applied to everybody. Consequently, the flyer then mentions the various backgrounds of people working at the theater, including family backgrounds inside and outside Germany as well as different social, sexual, religious, and political backgrounds (Gorki Theater 2016).[9] Finally, the flyer ironically states that this is just as unbelievable as it is real before moving on to note that the background of a person is not necessarily the decisive factor for artistic practice at the Maxim Gorki Theater. Instead, the background of a person only "becomes a statement when they themselves decide if,

when, and most importantly, how it should be told" (Gorki Theater 2016). Against the persistent tendency of attaching "migrants" and "refugees" to their "background", the Gorki Theater focuses on a person's autonomy of how and when to address their individual backgrounds and experiences of the past.

Here, it is important to note that Rasha Abbas' stories and her aesthetic strategy of the "art of survival" feeds into this way of thinking. Her stories not only challenge traditional, hegemonic narratives about migration and flight and substitutes representations of victimhood with the agency of aesthetic freedom, but also envisions a realm of radical diversity where different backgrounds and times and spaces stand side by side and interact with each other. Fighting the persistent power of binary distinctions and separating "migrants" and "refugees" from a supposedly non-migratory we-group, her approach is insistent on the post-Otherness of modern existences. Through the "art of survival" as an aesthetic strategy, the past becomes an undeniable part of the present and future and is thus part of a developing postmigratory normality. Against the widespread cult of authenticity, which expects the "refugee" and the "migrant" to tell a coherent, personalized, and realistic story, it is the non-authenticity, the non-personal, and the non-realistic approach that allows Abbas to create spaces of aesthetic negotiation and participation where the experiences of the past can become a part of present and the future identities. At the core of this aesthetic strategy surfaces a utopian vision of post-Otherness, as traditional approaches and perspectives are replaced with "formerly marginalized forms of knowledge practices" (Yildiz 2022, p. 47). Moreover, the transition from being a refugee to becoming a citizen, which Hmeidan (2022, p. 4) identified as common task for all Syrian refugees living in exile, is not taking place through the logic of integration or assimilation, but rather through the conflation of the distances and times between "us" and "them" and between the Other and the imagined community of non-migratory Europe. Thus, the formerly distant Other has moved into the center of society. Accordingly, the idea of "dancing with the sniper" is not the dream of the Other but instead an inherent part of our common present and future.

Notes

[1]   The "reflexive turn" is at least partly a consequence of the debates in cultural studies in England and the US in the late 1980s. In particular, the attempts to de-essentialize concepts such as "culture" and "ethnicity" influenced the field, emphasizing the necessity to reframe some of the traditional approaches and perspectives (Hall 1997). Some of the most recent developments in migration studies, such as the emerging concept of "postmigration," are in reaction to those fundamental changes by creating space for new reorientations (see Baumann and Sunier 1995, regarding the historical development, see Gaonkar et al. 2021, pp. 14–16).

[2]   Dahinden's essay from 2016 was a reaction to the original version from Römhild, which was published in German in 2015 (Römhild 2015). The English version came out in 2017 in themed issues on "(Post-)Migration in the Age of Globalisation" (Petersen and Schramm 2017). The plea for the demigrantization of migration research goes back to the discussions in "Project Migration" from the Humboldt University in Berlin (see Römhild 2017, p. 70).

[3]   In an interview with Clara Hermann, Rasha Abbas refers to the dreamlike nature of her stories, saying that she usually follows "a dream's logic to build a story." She goes on to then address the intercultural and transnational dimensions of dreams and the "collective subconscious," which she believes exists despite all cultural differences and individualized historical backgrounds. Accordingly, employing a dreamlike logic both entails traces of a culturally-determined field of references—as dreams are also working with images and pictures inspired by various cultural histories and traditions—and deconstructs them by focusing on the "collective subconscious," which transgresses cultural spaces and times (Abbas 2015).

[4]   In her book, Rebentisch (2016) critically engages with the widespread stance against the aestheticization of politics and aesthetic performativity, as put forward by numerous philosophers and political thinkers since Plato. She then goes into detail and shows that this critique of aestheticization is historically conceptualized around the fear that the theatralization of politics and personal

identities would have a "disintegrating effect" not only on politics but also on the "political community" (Rebentisch 2016, p. 7). According to the position of the critics of aestheticization, the supposedly close and naturally born social bonds between members of society would be replaced by nothing more than "'aesthetic' relations," destabilizing the political community (Rebentisch 2016, p. 7). However, in her own examination of the relation between aesthetics and the political, she comes to a different conclusion. The distance from the social, as it appears among others in the self-transformations of the so called "Lebenskünstler" with their aesthetic lifestyle, does not necessarily entail "a kind of distance from all social determinacy that is as abstract as it is imaginary" (Rebentisch 2016, p. 9). Rather, it is the overall mutability of the social, which is expressed in aesthetic existences and dazzling life-forms. When seeing it this way, the aestheticization of freedom can no longer be considered the "misunderstanding of a kind of freedom from the social in a kind of non-dialectic opposition to freedom in the social." Rather, it expresses "the tension at the heart of every individual's life" (Rebentisch 2016, p. 9). Accordingly, every change in social norms and values takes its point of departure in the individual's experience of self-difference, which "compels the subject to reconceive of itself, its self-understanding, and the meaning of its subjectivity from a distance" (Rebentisch 2016, p. 9). The democratic existence, she notes, is founded in this experience of "aesthetic freedom," as it highlights and makes possible the changeability and mutability of the given social reality (See also Rebentisch 2007, 2013; Schramm 2015).

[5] In a similar way, Rebentisch pointed out the importance of content for the aesthetic experience. According to her, aesthetic experience is dependent on both the aesthetic form of the images we are presented with, and the content that those images engage. Aesthetic experience, "seems only to be able to gain a certain intensity and thereby quality if the contents, that are brought into the aesthetic play, matter for the experiencing subject" (Rebentisch 2007, p. 63).

[6] The concept of "postmigration", including the notion of the "postmigrant society," has gained traction in academic circles during the last approximately 15 years. The concept does not denote and signalize the end of migration and thus not refer to an already existing state where the exclusion of "migrants" and "refugees" is overcome but instead to a conflictual space of struggles and negotiations, occurring after migration has taken place (on the different conceptualizations of the term, including the criticism against it, see Petersen et al. 2019, pp. 11–24, 50–63; Gaonkar et al. 2021, pp. 17–25; Foroutan 2019a, 2019b).

[7] This approach is mirrored in traditional concepts of "migration literature." As mentioned above, this concept emerged historically as an attempt to increase the visibility of formerly marginalized voices. Till today, the approach can be used as a form of "strategic essentialism" (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) to overcome patterns of exclusion and marginalization. At the same time, the following question arises: does this approach reaffirm binary distinctions and symbolic demarcation lines between the works of the "migrant" and non-migratory we-group? (see the discussion in the beginning of this chapter).

[8] The concept of "migration background" (*Migrationshintergrund* in German) was introduced in Germany in the beginning of the 21st century for the statistical purpose of "counting" the percentage of immigrants and their descendants in German society. Today, the concept is controversial in discussions. However, it is broadly used in public discourse, as apparently everybody knows and uses it (on the different definitions of "descendants" from an international perspective, see Supik 2014).

[9] See on the following reading of the flyer also Moslund et al. (2019, pp. 242–43).

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MDPI

Refuge and Resistance: Theater with Kurds and Yezidi Survivors of ISIS

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Abstract: This essay looks at ongoing efforts to revitalize arts and culture among the Yezidi and broader Iraqi Kurdish communities. The Yezidi are survivors of the 2014 genocide perpetrated by the Islamic State (ISIS, also known by its Arabic acronym Da'esh) which resulted in mass killing, captivity and expulsion from their ancestral homeland of Mt. Sinjar in northern Iraq. They are part of the Kurdish people, who have engaged in centuries of struggle to protect their cultural and political identity, establish autonomy and ensure their security in the broader Middle East. After a brief overview of the Yezidi genocide and its aftermath, we trace some theatrical efforts in the 20–21st century and look at two embryonic theater initiatives in Iraqi Kurdistan. The description of cultural projects at Springs of Hope Foundation (Shariya Camp) is followed by personal reflection and analysis of the aims, uses and challenges of Applied Theater. This 'umbrella term' refers to a process that uses a theatrical tool-kit in non-theater contexts. The aesthetic, ethical and political challenges inherent in this work are considered: the essay explores questions of ethical care and the implications and pitfalls of working with vulnerable and displaced populations, issues of representation, and creating spaces for healing and expression through participatory theater. Finally, we discuss a new initiative in Iraqi Kurdistan that seeks to address ethnic and political fissures through theater. The essay culminates with a consideration of belonging and re-imagining home.

Keywords: Yezidi; Kurds; Applied Theater; Springs of Hope; ME-T

"If we weren't strong, we wouldn't be here". Gawre, resident of Shariya Camp.

1. Springs of Hope, Shariya Camp, Iraq

In the blazing heat of August, seven young Yezidi women in simple chiffon robes seem to float into a plaza filled with spectators. As they enter, they are preceded by dozens of young men and women in traditional Kurdish dress shimmer in the bright sun: women in long flared skirts and sequined vests, a few in hijab, and men wearing round multi-colored hats, loose trousers and cummerbunds. They are clapping and playing the *daf*–a traditional Kurdish drum in resounding rhythm. This is Kurdistan, a semi-autonomous region of northern Iraq; Yezidi residents of Shariya Camp for Displaced Persons are commemorating the 7th anniversary of the 2014 genocide, when ISIS murdered, enslaved, and expelled thousands of Yezidi people from their ancestral lands.

Somber and serene, the women enter a plaza filled with spectators and streaming with light. Slowly, they encircle a small fountain. Their robes are shaded from black to slate gray, to light sea blue, to pure white. Each carries a small blue stone, which represents the heavy burdens of memory; one by one, solemnly, they kiss their stone, take a few steps to toss it away, and return to the circle. The girl in white, who led the seven girls into the plaza, crowns each one with a tiara. They join hands and lift their arms to the sky. celebrating themselves, their hopes for the future, and their dreams.

Since 2015, Springs of Hope Foundation for Relief and Development in Iraq (SOHF) under the leadership of Lisa Miara (Founder, President) and Dr. Alo Saeed (CEO) has served hundreds of women, teens and children who reside in Shariya Camp and the pre-existing Yezidi village of Shariya[1] in Iraqi Kurdistan, near the small city of Duhok.[2] The

camp houses some 20,000 Yezidi internally displaced people (IDP),[3] most of whom fled their homes on Mt. Sinjar (part of the Shengal region, alternately Shingal) in 2014. SOHF sits directly adjacent to the camp, occupying a complex of buildings that house classrooms, a health center, a large playground and sports area, and a newly built stable for three horses and Zamir,[4] a just-born foal. In addition to educational programming, vocational training, and group therapy, SOHF serves as a social hub, fostering community and connection for people who have spent eight years living in tents.

2. Yezidi History

Until the August 2014 massacre, the Yezidi were little known outside of Iraq. They are an ethno-religious group indigenous to Kurdistan—a region that includes parts of Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. The Yezidi community is one of the oldest in the Middle East, with roots in the ancient Medean peoples of Mesopotamia. Most Yezidi speak Kurmanji, a Kurdish dialect, though policies of Arabization throughout Kurdistan have meant loss of language, land and livelihood for minority communities, including Iraqi Kurds (the majority of whom identify as Sunni Muslim, or secular), Assyrian, Chaldean, and other minority communities in northern Iraq.

There are approximately one million Yezidi, more than half in diasporic communities in the US, UK, Germany and Australia.[5,6,7] Whether or not Yezidi are Kurds is "a matter of dispute among scholars, Kurds and Yezidi themselves, as to whether they are ethnically Kurds or form a distinct ethnic group". (Khattar 2022). Yezidi say they are the "original Kurds", although some identify as a subset of the Kurdish people, while others identify as a separate ethno-religious group. The religion has pre-Zoroastrian roots, is orally transmitted, and is syncretic, incorporating aspects of Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic faiths.[8] At Lalish, the holy compound deep in the mountains of Nineveh Province (presumed to be 4500 years old), a doorway to the main temple features the image of the snake that, we were told by one of the caretakers at the temple, saved Noah's ark from sinking by inserting itself into a hole in the boat. Other Yezidi customs, including baptism with consecrated water and anointing with oil, have parallels in Christianity. But, Muslims do not consider Yezidi to be '*ahl al-kitab*', or 'people of the book' mentioned in the Quran.[9]

Yezidis say they have experienced 73 *fermans*, or pogroms, over their long history. With the introduction of Islam to the region in the 7th–8th centuries, Muslim clerics charged them with heresy stemming from the mistaken belief that Yezidi people worship the devil. (God's representative on earth, the Peacock Angel Melek Taus, is also called Shaytan, incorrectly translated in Arabic as Satan). The Ottoman empire conducted campaigns against them beginning in the 17th century through its collapse in 1922; in Republican Iraq (post 1958), Pan-Arab nationalism made targets of Yezidis and Muslim Kurds. After the 1974 Kurdish uprising, and again in the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988), Saddam Hussein confiscated Yezidi land; in the 1990s, pan-Islamism inflamed biases toward religious minorities. After Saddam's death in 2006, Al-Qaeda murdered hundreds of Yezidi as it swept across Syria and Iraq. On 3 August 2014, ISIS massacred thousands on Mt. Sinjar: Yezidi men were murdered, women were kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery, small girls were used as domestic servants, boys were forcibly converted to Islam and forced to fight as jihadis.[10] Dispossessed, their homes and families destroyed, hundreds of thousands fled. Those who escaped were housed in camps throughout KRI (Kurdish Region of Iraq).[11] Mass graves are still being uncovered on the mountain, and the threat of renewed violence is increasing.[12] The explicit intention has been permanent demographic change and territorial gain accomplished through the extermination, forced conversion, expulsion, and permanent dispossession of the Yezidi people.

In 2019, I spoke with Baba Chowith, a spiritual leader (*pir*) who resides at Lalish Temple, the holiest site of the Yezidi. "We are tired", he said. "We are broken. There is nothing left". He shared his thoughts about the dilemma facing the Yezidi: the young women captured on Mt. Sinjar were sold, resold, repeatedly raped, forced to convert. They were taught to hate their families; those that returned could no longer speak their own

language. "We welcome them back, we forgive, if we did not, there'd be no more Yezidi".[13] Although the women are re-integrated, their children, born of non-Yezidi fathers, were not welcomed. The community still wrestles with this.

Conditions on the mountain continue to deteriorate; homes are turned to rubble, basic infrastructure is nonfunctional, and by May 2022, a tentative agreement with Yezidi forces has broken down, Turkish incursions near Mt. Sinjar, and the failed agreement between Yezidi protection forces and Turkish and Iraqi government forces is causing continued instability.

3. Bringing Theater to SOHF

In 2019, I intended to spend several weeks in Rojava, a Kurdish-led socio/political experiment in northeast Syria.[14] In the previous year, I interviewed several dozen Kurdish activists, artists, emigres and refugees in the US and Germany who had lived in or had relatives in Rojava.[15] But as fighting against Isis raged, I was unable to procure permission to cross the border from Iraq into Syria. I remained in Iraq, and with help from Kurdish friends and local service organizations, I visited several IDP camps (Essayin, Gawilan, Khanke, and Shariya) in the Kurdish Region of Iraq and spoke with over a dozen severely traumatized women. All had fled their homes, most were still hoping to ransom or rescue their children in "Raqaa"[16] and all had lost multiple family members in the 2014 attacks. At the invitation of Kurdish–Iranian actor Mozarref Sheife,[17] I wrote *Testimonies*,[18] a play that incorporates verbatim accounts of the genocide and aftermath as recounted by Yezidi women. The stories they shared were chilling, and they reflected both grief and resilience in the face of unspeakable horror.

In May 2022, I returned to Iraq to work with Yezidi IDPs whom the Springs of Hope Foundation (SOHF) serves. Most of the students at SOHF fled Daesh in 2014; some were born in the camp; many are orphans or are sole survivors of their tribe. They did not have a childhood. They have few memories other than of devastation. After years of servitude, they speak only Arabic; their names have been changed. A large percentage are illiterate. They have been living in tents for the last eight years.

Since its inception in 2015, SOHF has served Iraqi Arabs escaping the ISIS invasion of Mosul (June 2014), Syrian Kurds fleeing the Assad regime during the civil war, Yezidi from Shingal, and other minority communities in Kurdistan. A broad set of educational programs and psychosocial support work includes classes in sewing, music, art, computer literacy; coding and programming, and ESL; mental health services, including play therapy, psychotherapy, and equine-assisted therapy. In a post-genocide society, the needs are enormous and resources scarce; on the ground organizations such as SOHF offer safety, care, respect, social support, and dignity.

My work at SOHF was to offer a theater program to create supportive, playful spaces for creative expression. As a director and writer, I make "traditional" theater; I perform in and write conventional plays. I also work 'outside the building' with diverse groups who do not know, do not like—or cannot afford—mainstream theater. I have worked extensively with inner city, rural and special needs students across Pennsylvania; theater and literacy with teens and adult pre-GED students; with elders; at risk-youth, adjudicated teens, and in prisons.

The strategies and practices I employ derive from my 40 years of training and teaching acting, honed in theater work across borders, in conflict zones, and with under-resourced communities. This work is a type of Applied Theater, which is defined as a "broad set of theatrical practices, involving community participation, taking place outside of traditional theatre spaces", (Prentki and Preston 2009, p. 9)[19] responsive to people and communities, honoring particularity of story, history and culture, in service of social transformation. "The boundaries between actors and spectators are purposefully blurred as all participants are involved as active **theatre** makers" (O'Connor & O'Connor, 1).

The work is participatory, inclusive and non-didactic; it is defined not by message (what it says) but who it is by and for. In part, it is influenced by the path-breaking

work of Augusto Boal[20], whose Image Theater and Forum Theater offer a template for addressing community concerns; participants draw from a well of creativity and curiosity that makes each exploration exciting and fresh. The primary goals are inclusion, process, and becoming: in Levinasian terms; this pays more attention to the Saying, and less to the Said, as we examine below.[21]

Work with vulnerable communities requires a focus on the interests, concerns and priorities of the participants and respecting their agency, autonomy and dignity. I am aware of the limits of what I can offer. I lead and offer structure, but as Guglielmo Schinina asserts: "one first asks the community what its priorities are in order to understand its resources. Then one must adapt one's competencies to meet those needs". (Schinina in Balfour 2012, pp. 169–75).

The goal is to create positive healing spaces, as Yuko Kurahashi's discussion of Ping Chong's Children of War project demonstrates (in Balfour 2012, p. 254), not as therapy but as psychosocial support. Gentleness is key, as is humility. Part of what is required is, as Carol Gilligan writes, a radical listening[22], a deep, relational listening, predicated on an ethics of care, which may build connections with participants-as-creators. As a facilitator, I am aware of the trepidation with which many in this welcoming but vulnerable community approach creative play; I am a stranger here, and we need time to build trust. We work slowly, with the assurance that everyone participates only to the extent they desire, and no more. The goal, which we articulate at the beginning of each workshop, is to cultivate "self-esteem, self-confidence and self-expression" (Rostami 2019, p. 164).

Our sessions are tailored to meet the needs and interests of each group, with people of different life histories, levels of trauma and personal damage. (We do not engage with or address past trauma, but memories emerge unbidden, both in and out of workshops and classes: a pregnant woman, already a mother, suddenly begins to cry, recalling her father, who has joined ISIS; another, Gawre (quoted in the epigraph) recounts that of her five children, only three are with her, the other two are still missing in "Raqaa"; a young woman has a violent, psychotic break and has to be taken to hospital, but there are few resources for needs assessment, psychiatric services or medications in the camp. The young women in the workshop needed time to process this; we sat in silence, held and massaged hands, hugged, and little by little, they began to speak about their care for each other; they made drawings, and one girl drew a symbol of infinity—life goes on, she says. By the end of the hour and a half, we were interviewing each other on our cell phones, entertaining each other and laughing out loud.)

Cultural competency is crucial, though even with deep study and familiarity with Yezidi history and customs, and many Yezidi friends and acquaintances, I am still a stranger. The students assured me that the simple presence of an outsider is gratifying: they fear that they are invisible, unseen by history. Throughout my time at SOFH, I relied on the teaching and administrative staff to help negotiate cultural differences. Sahla Eanes, a Yezidi woman from Shariya village who directs the Hope Center at the camp, was an invaluable translator and partner as we played, explored physical expression, imaginative story building, and staged stories old and new. Eanes explains what to keep in mind: [23]

> Everything is changing. Here in the village, you cannot better yourself, there is no opportunity. But in the city, perhaps you can. Some years ago, Shariya was like a village, now it is like a city, and Duhok is near here—so the culture changes. If you see social media you see new things, you want new things. You have new dreams. Things are lost, but if something is not working then you need to change. If something is beautiful but useless, you have to change. Before, people don't go to school. There was no communication with the world. Now parents say, go to school. Now they encourage the kids to learn. But even now, our culture won't accept all the changes.

> Few can read. Especially women are illiterate. But they see a different life for their daughters. They don't know what will happen in the future. But—they can't go

back. Shingal—the impact of Arab culture there is too strong. They dress like Arabs. They have Arab names, they were neighbors. But still they are Kurds. Yezidi.

With the younger children, we introduced games that engaged their physical energy and delight in play to build intra-group cooperation and trust. Gleefully, they soared around the space, played with imaginary balls of fire, acted out original stories, and became superheroes with self-selected powers.

With older groups, including a therapy group led by a psychologist who invited me to offer a session, we began with breath, sensory awareness, mindfulness (I used Jon Kabat-Zinn's 'raisin' exercise, in which we slowly and with full awareness, smell, touch, taste and eat a single raisin), and being present in the body. It is not easy for traumatized people, whose senses have registered excruciating pain, to focus on the moment; we worked slowly, patiently, to the limits of each person's ability to concentrate, and then discussed the difficulty and power of this work. The Yezidi have a strong connection to nature, and cultivating this led to work on centering the self, breathing and relaxation, and imaginative visualization, which was expressed through drawing, poetry, simple improvisations and wide-ranging discussion.

Building trust and emphasizing cooperation and support were primary goals; cultivating imagination and responding physically to imaginary stimuli were important guideposts. Exploring the expressive potential of the body is a key element of the work, which is modulated by the comfort and ease of each member of the group at any given time.[24] We explored story building in depth; strategies include physicalizing responses (solo and in groups) to evocative words the group proposed: birth, growth, joy, hope, vanquishing fear; to imagining the story of photos of Kurdistan (mountains, animals, flowers, roads); drawing 'thumbprint' characters, imagining oneself to be a leaf (what kind? On what tree? Where? Who is there with you? What happens to the leaf? How does the story end?). We found stories in abstract paintings; in photos of something beautiful students took with their phones; we built stories from Kurdish proverbs, and from single lines of Rumi's sublime poetry. We staged classic Kurdish stories, including *Kawa the Blacksmith*, which is a foundational tale of Kurdish nationhood.[25]

Collectively, we developed original fairy tales, using a basic quest structure (a girl/boy walks into the woods to find something important; gets lost; meets an animal helper; finds a magic object; encounters an obstacle; with help from the animal and the object, the hero/ine overcomes the obstacle and gets what s/he wants, to a happy end. We shaped these stories gradually, encouraging each contribution, discussing options, analyzing and then acting out the stories as a group.

A cornerstone of the process was to delve into salient issues that the older students (ages 14 to 26) wanted to explore. We used a structure of three actions, beginning with a middle 'frame', that shows a frozen image of an identifiable problem. We then stage a 'before' frame (roots of the problem), and an 'after' frame—a potential solution or outcome. Drawing from Augusto Boal's work, we asked the other members of the group to imagine what the frozen statues might be saying, and then, the statues themselves spoke what they were thinking. Using mimesis (a drama therapy technique in which the group asks questions and the actor responds in character), each actor develops their characters and then creates short scenes about the issues that emerged, including bullying, drinking, and lack of productive work. Finally, we explored gender differences and limitations: we physicalized 'portraits' of men and women, looking at how we perceive each other, how gender determines education and job opportunities, and how things are changing as the younger generations (many of whom have no direct memories of their culture) are exposed to film, TV and social media.

Many of the participants value their experience with SOHF; they recognize their transformation over time and look to the future. One by one, they show how they have changed since they first arrived. From closed, isolated, collapsed bodies, they opened their torsos, faced outward, and gradually reached out to touch others. Strength, confidence,

and friendship were gradually achieved. "Before I had nothing, here I am a princess", says a fourteen-year-old girl who had fled Mt. Sinjar when she was six years old.

After the physical transformations from past to present, we considered generational change. Two empty chairs sat in front of the group, each an imagined space which holds the roots and branches of their families. First, they were to call into being their great-great-grandmother (or grandfather, as they wished). One by one, they approached the empty chair, addressed this ancestor with his/her (imagined) name, asked for advice, and received a gift. Then, we repeated the process, imagining a great-grandchild; they would name her, give a blessing, give advice, give a gift. This led to discussions of heritage, generational change, of what gets passed down and what can be carried forward. The past and the future are connected through the now.

We made portraits of the camp, of Kurdistan, of the world now and how it might look in 2050; we made a 'newscast' from the future. The students were eager and curious; some spoke a lot, others had very constrained ideas about the 'world out there' and the future we all face. Later, they finished the sentence, "When I look up I see . . . ", which led to mythic stories about other worlds, to talk about space and to looking at recent photos of the black holes at the center of the Milky Way. We discussed possible universes, as described in Yezidi lore, and in modern science. Both versions inspired awe.

Some imagined easily, others had trouble fantasizing or speaking about what they felt they did not know. But by the end of our time together, everyone engaged (whether still a bit shy or lustily involved), we made theater through exercises and strategies such as self-interviews, duologues, storytelling, role playing and improvisation, to create a joyful noise. Like music, one camp resident said, theater "is full of hope".

The most moving event I attend at SOHF is "Art in the Park". Dozens of small children are given easels and paints or markers and paper and sit in a wide circle. In a postage-stamp size local park with stunted trees and little greenery, they paint and draw while people from Shariya Village join or look on. The kids are concentrated, happy, proud; having an audience brings them to life, and they paint with abandon. Older boys from the camp sing and play rousing Kurdish music on *daf* and guitar. After the kids finish their artwork, and they receive free balloons and juice drinks, they gather in a thick knot of excited kids sitting in front of the band. The musicians jump into an energetic, Kurdish call-and-response song, which everyone knows. There are gales of laughter and energetic choruses from the kids. The musicians seem to be watering the children, nurturing, nourishing them, strengthening these kids with their music. The children are visible; they are loud and joyful; they are seen and heard.

4. Writing and (Re)presenting Stories on Behalf of Others

Doing theater work *with* vulnerable groups and writing plays *about* them are clearly different processes, with aims that may be aligned (or not), but they have different outcomes. But significant aesthetic, political and ethical challenges arise when we bring the work to a wider (non-refugee/non-IDP) audience: Anna Street notes three dilemmas artists face when engaging in this work: speaking on behalf of the other; aestheticizing trauma; and reinforcing oppositions (Street 2021, p. 2). Texts written by outsiders can generate problematic, reductive simplifications, in which the representations and performance of victimhood is presented as a spectacle, compelling empathy through, a "quagmire of personal narrative and victimhood discourse" (Balfour 2012, p. 219).

Many of my plays[26] integrate verbatim testimony and documentary evidence to consider individual trauma as it is linked to social and political dynamics. Verbatim plays are "one of the most common forms of theatre in this field reflecting an urge to maximize the truth claims for the work and generate a sense of authority for the stories presented" (Jeffers 2011, p. 80). Typically, this work is "not so much concerned . . . with ideological as with affective transformations in their audiences" (Burvill 2008, p. 234). But, when these audiences are comprised of the relatively privileged, there is an implicit (or explicit) call

to action; audiences are asked to assume a level of responsibility for official policies that create or contribute to the problem.[27]

Traumatized communities need to be heard and seen. But who tells the story? The aesthetic challenges are imbricated into the ethical: when we make theater on behalf of others who are not "here": whose voices, who embodies the stories? Who performs on stage, even as we agree that performance turns any space into a stage? Many people do not want to perform in public, others do not have the technical skills or training to effectively perform, and at times "performing" a traumatic event can re-trigger. In South Africa, for example, many witnesses for the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions requested that their testimony be performed by actors, who brought the stories to villages and towns around the country.[28] The victims could not, would not, repeat their trauma, but they wanted their stories told. "Telling", as James Thompson says, is not a neutral act (Thompson 2005, p. 25). Moreover, stories are not "owned", and giving dramatic structure to painful experience can be deeply meaningful.

We organize our experiences by telling, retelling, "mastering" our stories, making them our own. Narratives shape our mental landscapes, creating fluid and contested identities, which in turn are shaped by our personal and communal identities. Joanna Higgs, in her discussion of child soldiers among the FARC, brings in Husserl's concept of 'life worlds' which she defines as "a world of meanings and understandings that are socially, culturally and historically situated". (Higgs 2020, p. 79). Stories, shared and shaped collectively, scaffold the life worlds we inhabit.

In considering how to represent marginalized or vulnerable people, ethical concerns are paramount. There is the risk of exacerbating stereotypes of suffering and victimization, or there is a compensatory antidote that over-emphasizes assimilation and notions that refugees should be 'just like us.' There are questions about agency and artistic control: Should refugees be represented or represent themselves? Should they be "granted" agency, voice and visibility in order to increase their chance of being "heard" and "understood" by the audience and by the authorities (Blomfield and Lenette 2018, p. 325)? "Representation is a complex business", says cultural theorist Stuart Hall, especially when dealing with "people and places which are significantly different from us" (Hall 1997a, pp. 225–26, cited in Petersen 2021).

As outsiders, we are only a temporary part of the communities we visit, and simply by our presence, we are in a position of relative power.[29] As a Roma father in Bulgaria whom I interviewed in 1996 told me, "You can come here. We can't go there. Please tell our story". When we write and produce texts, we are helping to make our participant-colleagues visible. The subjects of our inquiry are traditionally without a public voice. Too often, they are merely "symbols of suffering" (Hamburger et al. 2021, p. 56).

Helene Cixous, discussing her collaboration with director Ariane Mnouchkine on *Le Dernier Caravansérail*[30], says the author has to disappear so that the other may appear (Cixous quoted in Jeffers 2011, pp. 73–74). She asks, should the author be there at all? The author may be present as a framing device, providing information and context, or as an avatar of empathy, a touchstone for identification. The question of representation, however, remains. Whose words are extracted, who voices those words, and to what end(s)?

Trauma numbs, silences, robs us of voice. Elaine Scarry suggests that in the moment of the infliction of pain, language disintegrates, and it is only after that moment that it can be recreated and shared, stating that "physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story" (Scarry 1985, p. 3). Participatory theater, made with, by and for the community, focused on process and without the necessity of public performance, gives space for stories to emerge organically, if and when that is healing; it obviates the aesthetic dilemma of who tells and who acts. But ethical challenges remain.

5. Levinas and Ethical Relations with the "Other"

The ethical concerns that emerge when working with vulnerable others require close attention. What marks out unbridgeable difference? How to serve others, without dis-

placing their dignity? How do we support the gradual, partial, recuperation of another person's humanity, or for that matter, one's own, particularly when power positions are so radically different? Wherein lies my responsibility? I am inadequate; yet, I am required to act. But *act*, how? In the face of compelling social and political needs, I hope to offer tools, 'expertise' and effort, and to do so with humility, whether through participatory work or through "writing on behalf of" as in plays such as *Testimonies*, my 2019 play about Yezidi survivors.

These questions are grounded in Emmanuel Levinas's "radical concept of ethics as unconditional responsibility". For Levinas, the face of the Other is the first absolute, the requisite on which the framework of ethical response is built. The ego is commanded by a transcendent order to take responsibility for the other person. Since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him (Levinas cited in Balfour 2012, p. 202; Levinas 1985, p. 96).

Levinas insists on the "absolute alterity of the Other" (Drabinski 2013, p. 103). We are not the same; to annihilate difference is anti-ethical. By the "Other", Levinas meant the other human being, who is other not because he or she is different from me but because he or she is absolutely other and cannot be reduced to an identity. When we make categories, we erase the individual, which is the antithesis of ethical responsibility to the other.

The Other has needs that must be addressed: "To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give" (Levinas 1969, p. 75), where giving is without expectation of return, so as not to be simply exchange. This means that one cannot approach the Other "with empty hands and closed home" (1969, p. 172). It is not that I believe myself as under an obligation to give. I cannot not give, which is to say there is no gift. I have already been dispossessed by the face of the Other.

"It is Levinas's idea of the *active, responsive, corporal encounter* with alterity that is so pertinent to ethical responsibility" (Balfour 2012, p. 210, my italics). What Levinas calls for can be seen in moments of performance as an embodied, affective and interactive mode (p. 241). The "saying" for Levinas is corporal (embodied), active and responsive, engaged and always in process. This embodied encounter is at the core of theatrical expression.

With the concept of "saying", Levinas evokes "interactive human discourse" rather than the more purely representation "said". "Saying" is always provisional, subject to exegesis (as Levinas indicates in his discussions of Torah, there is a vast gulf between vigorous open-ended interpretation and the view that Torah is settled law). The "said" always reduces the other to the known, and controllable, the Same (Balfour 2012, p. 203, citing Crichley). In these terms, whereas scripted drama is the realm of the "said", participatory theater is a space for "saying", and the "Other" is less likely to be rendered and reduced to the "Same".

Theater is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: making theater with people from "other" backgrounds is very much, as Dwight Conquergood notes, about "knowing how", and "knowing who" (Conquergood 2002, p. 146).

6. Yezidi Oral Culture and Kurdish Theater

In an interview in 2021, Zêdan Xalaf, translator and researcher, spoke about the Shingal Lives project at the Kashkul Center for Arts and Culture at (AUIS) (Jango 2021). Xalaf, originally from Shingal (Sinjar), is a survivor of the 2014 Yezidi genocide and manages a team that collects oral histories from Yezidi elders, storytellers, and others.

> We have never written anything down in our own language in at least the last 500 years. Under Ottoman rule we were not allowed to because they were in power, and we as the Yezidi community were demonized by them. . . . the Ottomans burnt everything that belonged to the Yezidis and launched genocidal campaigns. Yezidis kept their oral tradition because . . . . you need to tell stories to survive, you need to make sense of your existence. The archive that we have in the Yezidi community is intangible; it's just in our memory. This is how we kept our history, through oral tradition, and how we still manage to keep our

tradition alive. They can't destroy it because it is in our minds. If you survive, those stories will survive with you, if you don't, then nothing survives.

More broadly, Kurdish theater draws on collective memory, traditional stories, music, and poetry to strengthen social cohesion and pride in Kurdish culture, to cultivate a sense of national unity, and to create an identity based on shared culture and language. From 1974 to 1991, Kurdish theater developed primarily in response to Baathist efforts to eliminate Kurdish nationalism.[31] Kurdish language was banned and replaced by Arabic in Iraqi schools. Kurdish plays were subjected to strict censorship nation-wide.[32]

In the 1980s, mainstream Kurdish theater turned to stylistic (non-political) experimentation. A 'Theatre of Images' developed in Erbil and Duhok, which foregrounded color, image, sound, and imaginative explorations. But in the mountains and villages, a form of guerrilla theater emerged. During the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), many Iraqi Kurds fled to the mountains, where cultural activities included theatrical performances aimed at political education. A prominent technique was Living Newspaper, which was developed in the Soviet Union and adopted in the US by the Federal Theater Project, in which news headlines were acted out for the benefit of largely illiterate audiences, to introduce and foster dialogue about controversial social issues. The style was heavily influenced by Brechtian epic theater, using simple sets, props, and costumes, to create socially conscious work that wrestles with political concerns. Later, some Iraqi Kurdish theater incorporated the work of Augusto Boal, as mentioned above.

Theater became a space for collective mourning after the Anfal.[33] In 1991, when thousands again fled to the border regions between Iran, Iraq and Turkey, performances began to take place in refugee and IDP camps. By the mid-1990s, theater groups emerge in the Autonomous Region of Iraq (KRI/Kurdish Region of Iraq) particularly in the cities of Erbil and Duhok, with the persistent goal of making Kurdish identity visible, and resisting cultural erasure. Memory is knowledge; memory is strength.

7. Me-T—The Middle East Theater Project

Theater is a social practice; in zones of conflict and contestation, theater can be a means to strengthen community, mediate conflict, and support dialogue across difference. Middle East Theater (ME-T) is an initiative provide space and opportunity for young people from across ethnic divides to enhance their skills and lead their communities. The initiative, begun in 2020 at the University of Duhok, focuses on research and building platforms for dialogue.

One ME-T project is titled: The Voice of ISIS War Survivors: A Platform for Youth Dialogue in Iraq, and it aims at using theater to explore the difficult past and build bridges toward a workable future. By sharing research and utilizing theater to generate dialogue, young Yezidi, Arabs, Kurds, and Christians build relationships, explore common aspirations, and consider competing claims and narratives. Principle strategies include dialogue, discussion, and social theater (particularly Boal's Forum Theater); story swaps, oral histories, field interviews; archival work and documentation; and building a digital archive of transgenerational memories across groups.

Dialogue across difference and between antagonists is crucial. Groups become trapped in their own stories, which then feed into cycles of reciprocal violence. Dialogue (may) facilitate reconciliation, and using tools of theater to air controversial issues, explore the roots and branches of conflict and analyze potential steps forward through participatory models such as Boal's Forum Theater can help to identify our differences, define goals and build bridges. In asymmetric conflicts, focus on commonalities is problematic if used by the dominant group to silence or diminish disavow the experiences of the minority. There is no need to agree, but there is a need to hear.

Clearly, in any political conflict, material conditions must change. As Antonio Gramsci warns, refashioning culture is not sufficient for producing social change; economic and political structures must also be transformed. ME-T works in the cultural as well as the political realm, with a focus on transforming and transcending habitual enmities, building

relationships and committing to reciprocal respect. By exposing each other to different versions of the same historical events, both commonalities and differences across groups can be productively explored. Large-scale problems are more likely to be resolved through cooperative efforts. The goal is to humanize the other, to fight xenophobic myths, and to determine factors (and challenges) that can be the basis for a superordinate identity. Making things together, focusing on cooperation and common aspirations, is the way forward. ME-T offers a platform for facilitating this work.

8. Re-Making Home

The Jewish definition of sin is something that is *out of place*. Refugee bodies, such as those of the internally *displaced* are out of place, through no fault of their own; they are reluctant residents, wherever they are. Political currents, material exigencies, and stereotyping mean refugees and IDPs are often treated and punished as sinners. But this formulation begs the question: Who belongs? Much of the work of SOHF and other theater projects helps participants to re-imagine home and to establish new ways of belonging. *Making* oneself at home is a continual and open-ended process of making the world and the self in mutuality (Arnold and Meskimmon 2015, p. 263).

SOHF is building a home for people that have lived for eight years in tents who have lost family, tribe and home. Everyone is welcome; those fleeing Mt. Sinjar and unstable encampments in Syria still arrive. Lisa Miara explains that once she had to remove ISIS "missionaries": "two young men, youth, came to us as rescues, but they tried to surreptitiously recruit for ISIS". But all who work (as staff) or study at SOHF are victims of ISIS or have renounced jihad. Miara says of them, "we love them to life".

The camp residents have been deeply traumatized, but they embrace hope. Material conditions have improved, and aspirations are fully voiced. A young musician, guided through his studies, is enrolled in the Fine Arts program at the University in Duhok. Hiba Qassim, a young woman from Sinjar, grew up in an IDP camp. She achieved the highest high school GPA in Iraq in 2020 and now is studying medicine on full scholarship, at UKH. Services such as SOHF offer affirmation, dignity, and, to some extent, opportunity.

"Daesh wanted to cover the whole world in black", they tell us. Young women who were raped, tortured, and dehumanized now wear pink, orange, green, red, every color, except black.

Notes

[1]   "Saddam Hussein systematically destroyed Yezidi villages, then he collected our families together in one complex. In 1991 the name of the village was changed to Shariya". Sahla Eales (personal interview, 12 May 2022).

[2]   Duhok, a city of 180,000, houses over 400,000 refugees and IDPs. https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/iraq/ (accessed on 22 August 2022).

[3]   "IDPS are defined by the UN as persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border". (Jeffers 2011, p. 17).

[4]   *Zamir* is Arabic for Diamond. Days before the mare gave birth, we were told that she would have twins, but there was just this baby; the other would have been named Gold.

[5]   Estimates of Yezidi population vary between half a million post-genocide (in *Yezidi Identity Politics in the Wake of the ISIS Attack*) to up to two million (in Khattar), but after the 2014 genocide, an accurate count is impossible.

6   The 1951 Refugee Convention defines refugee as "[a] person with a 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 unable to avail himself of the protection of that country". (cited in UNHCR 2010).

7   By mid-2022, UNHCR Global Trends (2021) estimates that there are 84 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html (accessed on 22 August 2022).

8   Yezidism is considered one of the most ancient Eastern religions, and its followers believe that their religions originated from the ancient Babylonian religion that appeared thousands of years ago in Mesopotamia, and it is one of the religions that graduated from natural worship to monotheism and has its own beliefs and rituals that differ from the Abrahamic religions. https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6467/ (accessed on 22 August 2022).

9   Among the many resources on Yezidi culture, I found the Khattar, S., Rostami, M. and Spat, E. cited below to be helpful.

10   Prior to 2014, there were some positive connections between neighbors. For example, before relations deteriorated, Yezidi and Muslim men in the region practiced *kreef*, a blood bond in which men participate in the circumcision of each other's sons and become co-equal godfathers.

11   According to the UN, 250,000 Yezidi from Sinjar were displaced in KRI, between 1500 and 5000 civilians were murdered; 5000 to 9000 were captured; as of June 2016, 2500 Yezidi women and children had escaped captivity or were ransomed as of June 2016; 1000s are missing or still in captivity.

12   As of May 2022, Turkish troops and Iraqi army forces have surrounded Mt. Sinjar, and the agreement with Yezidi self-defense militias have broken down. Turkish airstrikes recently hit Mount Sinjar, just as more than 150 Yezidi families had returned after living in IDP camps. Turkey justifies both the occupation of northern Syria and the airstrikes in Iraq as necessary to target PKK militants. But Turkish military operations also deter Yezidi civilians from returning to their lands.

13   Personal interview, March 2019.

14   The Kurds are a stateless people who have endured cultural genocide and disenfranchisement in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran. Rojava (Autonomous Administration of North East Syria) is an attempt to carve out a space that is safe from ISIS, Turkish incursion, and the depredations of the Syrian civil war. it is best described as a noble but fragile experiment. Interviews with women, families, activists, artists, refugees and fighters tell a complicated story.

15   My larger project is to write a play about women's lived experience in Rojava, this autonomous region where female leadership is foregrounded. I plan to conduct discussions and interviews with the women of Kongreya Star, and Mala Jin, both women's education and social services organizations that deal with domestic violence and women's empowerment. I plan to spend time with families, talk with women soldiers, mothers, daughters, students, political actors, attend classes and workshops at the Universities of Kobani and Qamislo and visit Jinwar Free Women's Village, an ecological village presently under construction.

16   Raqaa is a city in Syria where many captives were taken and sold, but more broadly, it refers to towns and cities in Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other places where women were enslaved and children forced to join ISIS.

17   Mozarref Sheife is an Iranian–Kurdish actor and husband of **Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman**, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Representative to the United States.

18   *Testimonies* had a public presentation (2021) at Silverthorne Theatre, Greenfield MA.

19   Prentki, Tim; Preston, Sheila (eds.). *The Applied Theatre Reader*. doi:10.4324/9780203891315 is a central resource for defining and exploring Applied Theater.

20   Augusto Boal's books *Theatre of the Oppressed, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, The Rainbow of Desire*, among dozens of other publications by and about Boal, offer a vital framework for using theater in non-theater settings, to explore issues of political and social importance.

21   In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (Levinas 1991, Alphonso Lingis trans.), (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1978) Levinas considers the linguistic tension between the "Saying" and the "Said". The "Saying" is fluid, open to possibility, and as such able to respond to "the inconceivable nature of otherness", as Melissa Rachel Schwartz says in her 2017 dissertation, The Language of Ethical Encounter: Levinas, Otherness, & Contemporary Poetry (Schwartz 2017, p. 4) The "Said" is static, frozen, complete in itself. For further reading, see the *Two Aspects of Language: The Saying and the Said in The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas*, Jeffrey Dudiak, Fordham, 2001, and Bernhard Waldenfels's "Levinas on the Saying and the Said", pp. 86–97 in *Addressing Levinas* (Nelson 2005).

22   For an extended discussion of Gilligan's theory of radical listening and ethical care, see Perspect Med Educ. 2017 Apr; 6(2): 76–81. Carol Gilligan and Jessica Eddy. Published online 2017 Mar 27. doi:10.1007/s40037-017-0335-3.

23   Personal interview, 16 May 2022.

24   Speaking at the College Women's Research Center in Amherst, MA (2000), Egyptian choreographer Nora Amin shared her experience working with British and Arab women who did not speak each other's language. Amin asked the women to embody their idea of "woman". They found commonality in physical portraits of bending, crouching, stooping over, weighed down by work. I utilized this technique with male and female groups, as we explored how gender plays into their lives. This led to hilarious skits, which was followed by discussion of women's roles and rights in Yezidi society.

25   The story is repeated in many versions of Kurdish tales; I used *A Fire in My Heart: Kurdish Tales* retold by Diane Edgecomb, Westport, CT, 2008, pgs. 95–96, as a principal source for the Kawa tale.

26   These include *Testimonies* (2019), noted above; *Someone is Sure to Come* (Kaplan 2019) based on work with Death Row inmates, presented at La Mama Annex, NYC and other venues in Massachusetts, published in Tacenda Journal; and plays that have been produced and performed but not published, including *Sarajevo Phoenix*; *Homeland/Homeless*, among others.

27   Jeffers, in *Refugees, Theatre, and Crisis*, discusses *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* an Australian performance that rejects "notions of empathy and looks for an alternative way of engaging the natal Australian audience with questions of responsibility" (64–65). "Refusing to stage the bodies of refugees and show instead the obfuscations and evasions of the performative speech at the government enquiry represented a deliberately provocative challenge to the Australian audience asking, "Who speaks for whom, under what privilege and with what force?" (Dwyer quoted in Williams 2017, p. 202). "There were no refugees to be pitied and no refugee stories to sadden or enrage an audience. Instead audiences were confronted with . . . stories of the professionalism with which high ranking military men side-stepped and evaded the difficult question of how an untrue story had gained such a hold in the national rhetoric of asylum. They rejected the emphasis on placing the citizen in a position of empathy and ask instead that audiences take on a level of responsibility *as citizens.* (Jeffers 2011, p. 65) In *Refugee Performance*, Chapter 11: 'Politics Begins as Ethics': Levinasian Ethics and Australian Performance Concerning Refugees, Burvill addresses many of these issues.

28   See Parr (2021) and others.

29   For discussion of outsider as researcher and relative positions of power, see Hume and Mulcock (2004).

30   A theater piece featuring stories of refugees, first performed by the Théâtre du Soleil in 2003.

31   Second Iraqi–Kurdish War was led by Iraqi forces against rebel KDP troops of Mustafa Barzani during 1974–1975. The war came in the aftermath of the First Iraqi–Kurdish War (1961–1970), as the 1970 peace plan for Kurdish autonomy had failed to be implemented by 1974 (Wikipedia, Iraq-Kurdish conflict).

32   I am indebted to Mari Rostami's book-length study of Kurdish Theater for this overview.

33   The Anfal refers to Saddam Hussein's attacks on Kurds, most notably in Halabja, in 1988. Overall, 182,000 Kurds died, some 5000 in chemical attacks orchestrated by the notorious Chemical Ali.

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'Together We Prepare a Feast, Each Person Stirring Up Memory'

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Abstract: Our story starts in April 2020, in the early stages of the UK's first national COVID-19 lockdown. A multidisciplinary team of researchers and artists began a collaboration with Migrateful, a charity that runs cookery classes led by refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants struggling to integrate and access employment. Teaching classes and sharing their cuisine and stories helps the chefs develop their confidence and sense of belonging, and food is central to the enterprise. The focus of the project was a series of interactive online cookery classes delivered by Migrateful chefs, with ongoing involvement from the researchers and artists. In this paper, we weave together the research team's reflections on the project with commentary from the participants and artists. We outline our methods and our learning from the collaboration and explain how it inspired new ways of thinking about refugee representation, food and belonging, co-creative storytelling, and virtual engagement. We discuss the ways in which Migrateful's model helps to support the production of counter-narratives that value, foreground, and amplify migrants' perspectives and voices while acknowledging the tensions involved in adapting this model to the virtual space. We emphasise the power dynamics inherent in engaging and researching with marginalised people and their stories while considering whether artistic involvement and creation may help to navigate some of these challenges, and we address how the virtual environment affected the potential for collaborative storytelling, interaction, and engagement levels among participants. Together, these reflections form a 'recipe' for what we hope to be a more meaningful and ethical model of engagement activity that builds on this learning.

Keywords: migration; refugees; integration; food; belonging; power; virtual engagement; art; COVID-19; affective storytelling

1. Cooking Up an Idea

In April 2020, during the early stages of the first national COVID-19 lockdown in the United Kingdom (UK), close friends Ammar and Ed were living together in London. In various respects they felt fortunate. They were within easy reach of large parks and well-stocked food shops. Yet, like so many people, they felt a sense of distress, uncertainty, and relative powerlessness in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic. They realised that what happened next with the pandemic was entirely out of their control, but how they responded was not.

Their sense of distress was most acute in their personal lives. Ed shared an experience all too common for many during the pandemic. One member of his family, a parent, was in hospital many miles away, with Ed unable to visit. He waited anxiously for the daily telephone updates about his parent's serious and fluctuating condition. Ammar remained

forcibly displaced from his family and country of origin. The pandemic added another layer of complexity and disruption to his life. Ammar fled Syria in 2011 and has been unable to return. He knows more than most what it means to be separated from the people we love and from the support networks we cherish.

Perhaps it was those personal experiences that stirred in Ammar and Ed the desire to make a positive difference. They were eager to use whatever power they had to support communities and civil society organisations struggling with the pandemic's effects. They were not alone in this; volunteering levels in the UK reached new heights during the pandemic (Ricketts 2021). Like many others keen to make some form of difference, they wondered how they could channel their resources to best care for those around them. Where did their power lie? An answer emerged: through their professional positions.[1]

Ed is an expert in community engagement and participatory research. At the time of the pandemic, he was Manager of the Arts & Humanities Research Institute (AHRI) at King's College London. King's is a resource-rich Russell Group university. Like many other universities in the UK, in recent years King's has re/discovered civic aspirations,[2] expressed as a desire to leverage knowledge to address social problems and to contribute towards building just and sustainable communities (Cuthill 2012). King's has developed a strategic aim of 'Service', articulated as a commitment to positive social impact locally, nationally, and internationally (KCL (King's College London) 2020). Within the context of 'Service', the AHRI had a specific remit to support creative and socially engaged research activities, including participatory activities that would develop deep and trusting partnerships with local communities and that were oriented towards social justice.

Ammar's research expertise is in architecture and urban studies. During the pandemic, he was working at Arup, an international corporation which provides engineering, architecture, design, planning, project management, and consulting services for all aspects of the built environment. Arup has a community engagement programme and was keen to support communities hit by the pandemic. The programme encourages Arup staff to partner with external organisations, and aims to produce a more sustainable world, focusing on food security, clean and renewable energy, water and sanitation, improved shelter, and social mobility. Ammar had already been involved in several projects through the community engagement programme, working with displaced communities and partnering with local charities, and was eager to make use of the programme for further good.

While Ammar and Ed had public-spirited motivations and solidaristic intentions, they understood the ethical challenges inherent in their plans given their positioning within organisations driven by market-oriented imperatives. UK universities increasingly operate as neoliberal institutions, preoccupied with competition, efficiency, and economic value. This has all sorts of consequences in higher education. For example, as Burawoy (2011, p. 29) contends, the focus is on making knowledge "more efficient, more productive and more accountable by more direct means." Hence, the rise of elaborate indices and measurements of output and impact across the sector—including the Research Excellence Framework, the Teaching Excellence Framework, the Knowledge Exchange Framework, and the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey—that look to calculate the quality and efficiency of universities' research, education, and third-mission activities (the latter being contribution to societal and economic challenges) (Stevens 2020). Their re/discovery of civic aspirations might be read as just another way for universities to signal their socioeconomic worth and to leverage associated competitive advantage. The danger is that social justice-oriented community engagement work is approached instrumentally, as a means to the university's own (corporate) ends, rather than as a valuable end in itself (Tomlinson and Schwabenland 2010).

Pragmatically, Ammar and Ed recognised that they, and any project they developed, could not exist outside the conditions and locations of their host organisations. At the same time, they hoped it would be possible to manage the contradictions while pursuing their social justice-oriented goals (Muhammad et al. 2015). Indeed, Archer (2008, p. 282) found that a variety of academics in these corporate-style institutions commonly perform a

balancing act through a psychic splitting between "performances of self and the internalised sense of self." In short, they can perform their role without *becoming* a neoliberal subject. Ammar and Ed hoped to perform just such a balancing act, retaining their social justice identities through affirming the possibility of real social change and through creating moments and spaces of resistance.

With that critically reflexive framework in mind, Ammar and Ed searched for the right project. Inspiration came quickly in the form of a Twitter post by Migrateful that struck a chord. Migrateful is a charity that was at the time in desperate need of funds due to the pandemic's deleterious impact on their activities.[3] Ed was already aware of the charity's work through AHRI links with the Migration Museum, and Ammar was interested due to his own lived experience as a forcibly displaced person.

Migrateful runs cookery classes led by refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants struggling to integrate and access employment. At the time of writing, the charity has trained 66 chefs. Often, these chefs are struggling both to process the traumas they have experienced and to fit into UK society. Teaching classes and sharing their native cuisine, culture, and stories helps the chefs develop their confidence, self-esteem, and sense of belonging. Food is central to this enterprise. While we all need food for survival, food means so much more than that. It has an equally important social dimension (Bardenstein 2002; Raman 2011). There is a reason the kitchen is considered the heart of the home. Shopping for food, talking about it, preparing it, cooking, entertaining, sitting around a table, and breaking bread together are all key ingredients in how we share our lives and love with others. As everyone at Migrateful well appreciates, food forges understanding and connections, linking us to our past, to places, to people, to the present, and to ourselves. This is particularly important in contexts of displacement. Through recipes and cooking skills, we remember, celebrate, and pass on our distinctive traditions and knowledge.[4] In the words of Migrateful chef Ahmed Sinno:

> While delivering a cookery class, in a status of an asylum seeker, during these couple of hours... you feel yourself a part of the society. You feel yourself contributing in something within the society. Although it's very small, but you're doing something. You are joining your culture, your food, your sense of aroma, with others. And, to be honest, I never had this feeling in my entire life...

> In our culture, when you share food with someone, it means you're sharing life. When you deliver someone food and you teach them how to make a cuisine, you'll be teaching him your own recipes, your own touch. And I believe when someone tries your food, he will feel the passion that you have for your own country. He will feel what you are feeling being so far away from your home... So when we cannot go back to home, food is actually taking us there, and it's helping us take others with us to that place.[5]

Migrateful's classes seek to enhance integration through challenging preconceptions about migration and fostering greater cross-communal understanding. Before the pandemic, classes were held in person. Ostensibly there to cook and learn about food, participants shared an intimate physical space, cooperating with each other to prepare the meal and then eating it together. The charity found that informal intimate settings encouraged the emergence of personal stories and positive interactions that challenged misconceptions (Migrateful 2021). However, with the arrival of lockdown, Migrateful had to cancel 60 in-person cookery classes, leaving them with a shortfall of GBP 40,000. Their Twitter plea was to raise funds through online cookery classes.

Ammar and Ed realised there was an opportunity here to make a meaningful contribution under the auspices of the 'Service' and community engagement ambitions of their respective workplaces. Their organisational positionings meant that market-driven imperatives could never be entirely erased (Tomlinson and Schwabenland 2010), however, a project with Migrateful offered the tantalising prospect of creating an oppositional space full of transformative potential. As a first step, Ammar and Ed assembled a team of migra-

tion researchers from the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences across King's, with interests in public engagement and social impact: the then AHRI Director Amza Reading from the Department of Culture, Media & Creative Industries, Leonie Ansems de Vries from the Department of War Studies and Chair of the Migration Research Group and Sarah Fine, then of the Department of Philosophy). The team were very excited about the chance to work with Migrateful, and prepared plans for a pilot engagement project.

1.1. Pilot: Breaking Bread

The pilot project was named *Breaking Bread*. Through the AHRI, the team commissioned Migrateful to deliver online cookery classes for King's and Arup staff, with attendees invited to make an additional financial donation. While Migrateful would benefit from much needed funds via the classes, the hope was that Arup and King's colleagues would benefit with a cookery lesson, great food, a welcome distraction from the stresses of lockdown, and an opportunity to connect with others around the globe. It would be a learning experience for the researchers and participants.

In keeping with the creative remit of the AHRI and the work of the researchers involved, the team commissioned artists to participate in the classes with a view to their producing art pieces in response. The artists had migration backgrounds and lived experiences of themes of migration, identity, and belonging. We hoped the art might help to capture the spirit of the project, sharing the experience of those involved through diverse media and leaving a legacy. The artists created poetry, dance pieces, and visual and performance video art, enriching the engagement aspect of the project and encouraging deeper reflection on the experience.

Breaking Bread took place in May 2020 and consisted of four two-hour online cookery classes. The project raised over GBP 5000, and 68 participants learned to cook diverse cuisines from a variety of countries, from Pakistan and Syria to Lebanon and Sri Lanka.

While conceived as a community engagement activity to fundraise, it soon became clear that the impact of *Breaking Bread* extended well beyond that. Migrateful's cookery classes centered and amplified the voices of those who are commonly marginalised. In teaching their cuisine, chefs shared their stories and memories of home and of their migratory experiences. This was much appreciated by class participants. In the words of one attendee:

> It was lovely to be taught recipes which are important to the Chef and to hear her stories of food and life in Syria, and in London, during the cooking class. It made it about more than just food but also about experiences, memories and building connection.

(Testimonial from *Breaking Bread* participant, 2020).[6]

Indeed, at a time of physical distancing, we were struck by the power of the online classes to help participants feel socially close and to share a universalising connection through food. There was something special and inspiring about making, smelling, and tasting the same dish, separately but together. While we were on Zoom, we were not facing each other as stationary postage stamp heads and shoulders. Family members and housemates joined in or just passed through. We moved around our kitchens, opened cupboards, chopped, stirred, and chatted. More than simply fundraising, the online classes offered an ethical model of participation that amplified the chefs' stories and fostered shared understanding across cultural divides. Chef Ahmed agreed:

> Everyone was in different places, but all of us were on the same platform. All of us were at the same level, enjoying the same food, having almost the same aroma, which is taking us into the Middle East, taking us into Lebanon, taking us into the history of the Lebanese food, and that's the beauty about this.[7]

Migrateful's model for engagement mirrored the ethical dimensions of participatory research approaches. Such approaches are overtly political and democratic. They aim to re/frame whose and what knowledge 'counts', and result in co-produced knowledge

of mutual benefit to those involved (Checkoway 2015; Stehr 2010). They strive for social justice-oriented change. According to Banks and Manners (2012), participatory research approaches are underpinned by the following principles:

- Mutual respect
- Equality and inclusion
- Democratic participation
- Active learning
- Making a difference
- Collective action
- Personal integrity

As an institute, the AHRI was in the business of supporting and propagating participatory research projects though doing so with a critical eye on the potential for the co-optation of the participatory by the neoliberal. As Leal (2007) argues, there is a danger of counter-ideology becoming integrated as part of the dominant ideology. He notes that participatory approaches may be incorporated as technocratic approaches, with participation being depoliticised and "liberated from any meaningful form of social confrontation" (ibid: p. 544). The challenge is to avoid developing participatory research projects that simply perpetuate the current neoliberal hegemony.

Nonetheless, despite these challenges, Leal (2007) agrees that we would not want to miss out on the social transformation potential of participatory work. Participation may serve broader struggles and be re/articulated as radical political projects through the participation of marginalised groups. Considering that the Migrateful model centres people with marginalised identities and shares ethical similarities with participatory research, we saw potential for further critical socially transformative projects here. Therefore, drawing on our learning from *Breaking Bread*, we laid plans for an additional project.

1.2. Kneading Knowledge

The resultant project was *Kneading Knowledge*. It followed the pilot model of *Breaking Bread* but was larger in scale. The project involved eight interactive two-hour online cookery classes delivered by Migrateful chefs and hosted by Migrateful staff. Classes ran in October and November 2020, and this time open were to King's and Arup staff and students. This happened to coincide with another national lockdown, and the classes fostered a sense of positivity and connection during a difficult and isolating time. To maintain continuity and build on our learning, the same four artists as in *Breaking Bread* were commissioned to produce artworks in response to the classes. However, this time their artistic responses provided material for the project, generating valuable research insights.

In contrast to *Breaking Bread*, *Kneading Knowledge* was learning-focused from the start. We were interested in how the online cookery classes offered an innovative and ethical model for community engagement activities that provided both informal and formal learning opportunities. The project aimed to explore the value of the virtual sharing of embodied knowledge of migration, both for mobilising affective storytelling and for promoting more inclusionary and nuanced ways to consider diverse refugee experiences, thereby effecting positive change for participants. In this way, *Kneading Knowledge* prompted us to consider the ethics and efficacy of virtual engagement activities, including how these activities might create spaces for participants to reflect on their experiences, articulate their memories, negotiate their feelings of isolation, and build a sense of virtual belonging and solidarity.[8]

What we are interested in when we speak about affective storytelling are the ways in which emotions are not just individual feelings, but also create subjectivities at interpersonal and collective levels. As Sara Ahmed (2004, p. 10) puts it:

> It is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others (emotionally), that surfaces and boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others. . .the surfaces of bodies 'surface' as an effect of the impressions left by others.

These surfaces and boundaries include experiences of belonging, comfort, otherness, etc. Thus, we were interested in storytelling as a form of knowledge production that is attentive to processes of connecting and collaborating through research and to who we become in the process. This necessitates thinking and feeling beyond traditional forms of knowledge production and paying attention to affective, sensory, and somatic dimensions.

At this stage, postdoctoral researcher Anna Khlusova from the Department of Culture, Media & Creative Industries joined the research team. Anna led the research component of the engagement activity. The research process involved collecting ethnographic digital research data on the virtual cookery sessions and discussions during the classes, interviewing a selection of artists and participants, and analysing the artworks produced. All members of the research team took part in a selection of the cookery classes, thereby generating additional autoethnographic data.

This paper is an outcome of our collaborative efforts. Weaving together the research team's reflections on *Kneading Knowledge* with commentary from participants and artists and insights from the artworks, it considers the activity as a form of ethical practice that inspired new ways of thinking about refugee representation, co-creative storytelling, and virtual engagement. We discuss what we have learned from Migrateful's model to help support the production of counter-narratives that value, foreground, and amplify migrants' own perspectives and voices. We acknowledge the tensions involved in adapting this model to the virtual space. What are the power dynamics inherent to engaging and researching with marginalised people and their stories? How can artistic involvement and creation help navigate some of these challenges? How does the virtual environment shape the potential for collaborative storytelling, interaction and engagement levels among participants? Considerations outlined in our discussion form a 'recipe' for what we hope to be a more meaningful and ethical model of engagement activity that builds on virtual learning of embodied knowledge.

2. Food for Mind and Body

In this section, we explore in more detail our role as researchers in *Kneading Knowledge*. We reflect on some of the ethical dimensions of the project, and we elaborate on our observation that the Migrateful model for engagement resonates with participatory research approaches.

As a multi-disciplinary and multi-national research team, we came together as people who wanted to engage practically in supporting marginalised groups and as researchers with a shared interest in migration, social justice, and the ethics of conducting participatory research with people who experience forms of exclusion. We were mindful of the many and various challenges involved in a project of this sort. The Migrateful model spoke to us, as its focus on the creation of solidarity and belonging through embodied migrant-centred storytelling chimed with our conception of ethical research practices as outlined in Section 1.

It is important to emphasise that the research element of the project emerged from socially engaged practice rather than the other way around. We noted that the Migrateful model shared much with participatory research approaches and that it generated outcomes that complemented the research, educational, and 'Service' aspects of our organisations. What the model shared with participatory research was the effort to move away from extractive and hierarchical practices.[9] We aimed for democratic engagement between all participants—chefs, artists, attendees, fellow researchers. Throughout the process we were inspired by a desire for mutual understanding, collaboration, and the co-production of knowledge.

Participatory research approaches are well-established among ethnographers, and are becoming more popular within the Humanities and Social Sciences more generally. They provide an alternative to 'traditional' social research approaches through their overtly political, democratic, and action orientation along with their valuing of both theoretical and experiential knowledge (Banks et al. 2019). Such approaches enable people to generate

new ways of knowing and acting in the world, with the active involvement of stakeholder communities in the research and in the afterlife of the research (Cuthill 2012; Hawkins 2015; Lather 2006). As such, participatory research creates spaces that are both transformed by and transformative of those involved (Stevens 2020). A range of practices comprise participatory research, among which creative methods such as photography, film, and theatre are common (e.g., *Migrant Voices in London* 2018; *Migration through Dance* 2020; Fine and Rubinstein 2020; Ng and O'Briain 2021). The use of culinary practices is less common (though see Pettinger et al. 2019). *Kneading Knowledge* was our first foray into observing the potential impact of cookery classes as an engagement method.

Participatory research approaches are reflexive, involving awareness of researcher positionalities as well as an acknowledgement that we cannot simply overcome or reverse power relations. While power may be pervasive and dynamic, in a continuous dance of cooperation, disruption, and co-optation with forms of resistance (Foucault 1991; Ansems de Vries 2016), they can become deeply entrenched and difficult to challenge.

Further, power is highly dynamic, its balance shifting over time between differently positioned subjects (Burke et al. 2017). Power hierarchies and forms of structural and epistemic violence may arise through engagement activities, as well as through participatory research. The goal may be "collaborative empowerment" (Huxham and Beech 2008, p. 562), in which both the capacity of the weaker partner to set priorities and control resources and that of the relatively powerful to challenge the status quo are transformed. Yet, in practice, power asymmetries may remain; as Smolovic-Jones and Jacklin-Jarvis (2016) argue, the aim should be to bring out the values of those voices commonly marginalised in everyday public life.

Here, the concept of "micro-power" (Huxham and Beech 2008) is important. Micropower plays out in the minutiae of the day-to-day. For example, in a collaboration it can refer to who arranges access to participants, the time/location/format of meetings, the preferred forms of communication, and so on. Therefore, everyday interactions and conversations become sites where people can seize micro-power, shaping actions and influencing discourse (Stevens 2020). Thus, while power asymmetries may remain at the macro-level, moments of micro-power may prevail. We were interested in the question of which power dynamics were at play in *Kneading Knowledge* and how we might stir these up. For us, this was part of the ethics of affective storytelling.

Crucially, in line with participatory research approaches, we engaged in the project reflexively. We examined our own positions of power, with an awareness of the ways in which power relations permeate all social relationships (Foucault 1991) and with the intention to challenge 'traditional' frameworks of knowledge production, that is, 'traditional' social research that assumes a hierarchical distinction between those who do research and those being researched (Banks and Manners 2012). Such research is underpinned by an "objective consciousness" (Hawkins 2015, p. 468) in which the 'detached' academic gathers data on 'human subjects' through 'value-free' methods (Checkoway 2015). In this way, 'traditional' social research negates other ways of knowing, marginalising anyone who is not an academic. As researchers, we sought to liberate knowledge from such exclusively academic modes of production and to find release from our "personal and cultural biases that can develop through the achieved status of rigorous academic training" (Muhammad et al. 2015, p. 1058). Central to this liberation was the embrace of a "compassionate consciousness" (Hawkins 2015, p. 144) seeking empathy and an integration of different ways of knowing into knowledge production processes. In essence, our task was to "produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (Lather 2006, p. 52). We did this in part through our involvement in the cookery classes, not (or not merely) as researchers but as active participants.

From the start and throughout the process, the team reflected on how *Kneading Knowledge* was discursively and materially framed and pursued. Discursively, this meant constantly challenging the idea of 'giving voice' to migrants, which presumes that without 'we' researchers 'they' would have no voice. Rather, our starting point was that migrants have

voices and have always been telling their own stories from their own perspectives; the issue is that they are often silenced, ignored, or sidelined. Ammar was pivotal in pushing us to attend to the ways the Migrateful model addressed this. The cookery classes fostered an environment in which the chefs' skills and experiences were central and the stories they shared were actively received and valued.

In this way, the Migrateful model stirs (up) knowledge production by centering marginalised voices and bringing to the fore the power of affective storytelling. The model provides a platform through which migrant chefs can exercise *their* micro-power, challenging structural and discursive limitations and creating possibilities for counter-hegemony. This is a matter of empowerment rather than the 'gifting' of power from 'powerful' to 'powerless' (Burke et al. 2017). By teaching us how to prepare food, both practically and through their stories of home and belonging, Migrateful chefs create a counter-narrative. Their stories of unsettlement—of forceful displacement from home and of being subject to continued violence in the UK's hostile environment—disrupted hegemonic narratives of migrants as either criminals or voiceless and vulnerable victims; there was the opportunity for positive interactions that challenged misconceptions about migration. As one participant commented:

> It [*Kneading Knowledge*] was a really good way of learning and breaking down barriers between refugees and asylum seekers and non-refugees and non-asylum seekers by sharing a skill that's a great leveller—everyone has to cook, everyone has to eat, so I think that's a really great way to do it. I especially enjoyed hearing chef's stories about their life, and what certain meals, or certain sounds of cooking or smells of cooking . . .what those memories mean.

> (Participant 8, December 2020)

Affective, sensory, and somatic dimensions were important in this context. Though they were 'virtual' (a context which is sometimes also described as 'remote', as in 'remote learning' and 'remote working'), the cookery classes facilitated creation of embodied connections that involved all senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. The food we prepared in our kitchens became an apparatus for engaging and sharing, a recipe for embodied storytelling and for reducing feelings of spatial and experiential distance between participants.

The food and its preparation served to stir things up for us all. As we chopped, kneaded, and mixed our way through the classes, new connections were made and new insights were gained. This was less a matter of acquiring knowledge in the traditional sense and more an awareness of something being disrupted:

> (. . .) Food, the act of eating and act of cooking with the smells, tastes, and the textures of things kind of brings up memories, brings up ideas, brings up creations in your head. And that combined with the context of where we were—so we all sat at home, we listen to people who have way less provisions than we do, and we are learning these beautiful new recipes (. . .). I found that very enlightening and nurturing as a space.

> (Participant 2, December 2020)

> In the Albanian class I saw clearly the migrant atmosphere. Deshira was really open and she started talking about her life, where she came from, and then you are cooking and you are thinking about her life and being a migrant and suddenly the cooking becomes secondary really. . . I was imagining these things happening to her, her life and that was the most incredible thing.

> (Participant 9, December 2020)

For all participants, this represented an alternative way of learning distinct from gaining knowledge through reading an academic book or conducting an interview. There was a sense of affective change in perspective, a feeling that we were not quite the same person as before, a perception of having been nourished in new ways. Working together

with food through the classes provided new ways of seeing, knowing, creating, and sharing knowledge. It stirred affect and an inward critical gaze in pursuit of an ethics of solidarity:

> [I]t just made me realise my own privilege, which is something that this year kept telling us—the importance of having enough food and have safety and not be persecuted for any reason really.

> (Participant 1, December 2020)

> Food is a good leveller—it unites people, doesn't it? We know that for thousands of years food brings people together; with cooking stories come out naturally, it feels like a natural process. You're just connecting with someone as a human unlike some other . . . forced workshops, that might feel somewhat curriculummy. Instead, this felt very natural, like you would talk with your friend.

> (Participant 1, December 2020)

While we had some idea of the research we wanted to do—thinking about displacement, belonging, embodied knowledge, and solidarity—we did not start the project with clear research questions or objectives. We wanted these to emerge through the process and in the doing. In part, this was because we were feeling our way through new methods, collaborations, and the blending of different disciplinary approaches. Furthermore, it was part of the very nature of project that the research was guided by a desire for democratic participation and outcomes. Thus, we did not want to impose our predetermined research 'goals' on the participants. What exactly the research was 'about' developed as we cooked, shared, and reflected.

For us, this approach was key to an affective research ethics, an ethics readily supported through the Migrateful model. In short, as researchers, we used the model to stir and to listen; we disrupted predominant approaches to engaging with and understanding migrants by learning from them and by valuing their skills and insights.

Considering the pervasiveness of power relations, both productive and violent, in social relations and research practices, we must reflect on what *Kneading Knowledge* stirred and what was left untouched, along with the impact that this had.

As a research team, we adopted and adapted the Migrateful model. We drew on the format that Migrateful used for their in-person classes. A member of staff from Migrateful hosted the two-hour cookery classes, facilitating discussion and monitoring questions that came through, while Migrateful chefs guided participants through one or two recipes.

Our modifications to the model were threefold. First, we introduced artist participation, as we discuss in Section 3. Sometimes, the artists took part in the classes and then drew on their experience to create pieces of art afterwards. On other occasions, the artists were creating during the class itself, as when Sivan Rubinstein danced in time to Chef Majeda's food-making and when Anna Virabyan sketched Chef Ahmed as he led the class. Art that emerged from the process has been used by some of us as teaching aids in arts and humanities degree courses.

Second, the cookery classes were held online rather than in person due to the pandemic, with the translation to the virtual providing both opportunities and challenges, as discussed in Section 4. Finally, as researchers, we hoped to mix additional questions and conversations around migration into the classes in order to learn about the experiences and perspectives of all participants. We had less success with this part, as explored in Section 5.

As previously identified, the Migrateful model empowered migrant chefs in *Kneading Knowledge*. In effect, the chefs were teachers, with all other participants—researchers, artists, and general attendees—being there to learn. The term 'class' reinforced the notion of *Kneading Knowledge* as a learning activity, with the chefs rather than the researchers positioned as experts. The chefs' micro-power was enhanced by the fact that they did most of the talking and by participants constantly checking in with them about their progress, seeking reassurance that they were doing the 'right' thing.

As Lather (1986, p. 74) notes, there may be a "gap between intent and practice" in participatory research, with subtle coercion by academics coming into play. As such, power

differentials can remain. We were conscious of these dynamics. First and foremost, the eight *Kneading Knowledge* classes were commissioned by the AHRI. King's funds paid for Migrateful's planning and delivery of the classes, for the artists' contributions, and for Anna's role as the research project coordinator. The AHRI therefore set the terms of engagement for the project. Migrateful effectively provided a service and, while we adopted their model, they had to agree to our desire to add both artists and a research angle to *Kneading Knowledge*. These requirements were stipulated at the outset rather than coproduced with Migrateful.

As Leal (2007) contends, those with power may condition it within the bounds of the existing order, determining how much of it they want to 'give' and thereby restricting its transformative potential. There was an element of such conditioning to *Kneading Knowledge*, as just discussed. That said, although the project was set within the bounds of the existing order, it did seek to disrupt neoliberal frameworks for research within King's itself. The institution was on a spending alert due to the financial challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. A member of the senior management team in the faculty questioned why we were spending money on cookery classes. We explained our research plan, how we hoped to disrupt 'traditional' knowledge production processes, and that the project represented an opportunity to re/imagine academic research and higher education spaces as trans/formative and deeply connected to social justice. We discussed the significant wellbeing and learning benefits reported by participants. Nonetheless, some scepticism about the project's value remained.

While we researchers took part in classes as learners and not as 'experts', there were elements to the research angle of *Kneading Knowledge* that reinforced the power of the academics. For research ethics reasons, each class started with Anna outlining the research project and gaining explicit consent from the participants to be involved. Thus, there was an academic framing at the outset which may have set the tone for the discussion and in some sense undermined our democratic intentions. Furthermore, as researchers, we took part in some of the classes while taking turns to observe them. Anna herself was positioned more like the Migrateful host, as an observer and facilitator of discussion, rather than as a cooking participant. When observing, we performed more 'traditional' academic roles detached from those being observed.

We had hoped that the reflexive discussions about power dynamics that we had as a research team would limit power differentials, creating more equitable and inclusive practices where participants could express themselves freely and easily. However, there remained at least an informal divide between the research team and other participants (including the Migrateful representatives and artists). Moreover, we did not include the chefs and artists in our planning discussions or post-class discussions. Thus, we missed an important opportunity to learn more about their motivations and experiences, about the 'bigger picture', and to set up the classes in ways that were conducive to them achieving their own objectives (Banks et al. 2019). We recognise that we would have benefited from their input at earlier stages in the process. For example, the artists may have liked to take a more active role during the classes and in thinking through how best to showcase their artwork. Nevertheless, through our own participation in the classes our ideas and assumptions about the research element of *Kneading Knowledge* were disrupted. We learned as we went along, and we continue to learn through reflections on the project.

Overall, *Kneading Knowledge* simultaneously reproduced our privilege as researchers and enabled transformative and counter-hegemonic work through the centering of migrant voices, knowledge, skills, and experiences. We stirred up knowledge production in different ways by developing an ethics of storytelling based on collaborative and affective culinary practice. We hope this will inspire new ways of thinking about migrant representation, co-creative storytelling about unsettlement and belonging, and virtual engagement.

3. The Art of Cooking

Artistic involvement was central to *Kneading Knowledge* from the start. While the researchers shared a range of interests, we came from different disciplines, and it made sense for us to take a pluralist approach to media and methods. In addition, collaborations between artists and researchers meet a strategic need of the AHRI, as the Institute was keen to explore the potentially transformative effects of such collaborations.

The team had extensive experience of arts-based research and of working with artists and arts institutions on migration-related projects. We were eager to bring the benefits of that learning into both *Breaking Bread* and *Kneading Knowledge*. As researchers who have embraced creative research methodologies in the past, we believe that "art can induce emotion, challenge understanding and be disrupting and even disconcerting, serving to redefine how we make assumptions and potentially, catalysing transformative change" (Eaves 2014, p. 147). Within research, art disrupts the hegemony and linearity of written texts and helps to focus memories and unleash details (Harper 2002). It may evoke deeper elements of our consciousness, re/presenting experiential knowledge and unleashing inside perspectives through authentic expression (Wang 2016). Furthermore, we were in agreement that art can enable the acquisition of what is called 'modal knowledge', that is, 'knowledge of or about possibility' (Stokes 2006). This is particularly exciting for projects oriented towards social and political change, which often require us to be able to imagine the possibility of alternative realities in order to work towards their realisation.

More pragmatically, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, arts venues were closed, shows were cancelled, and arts funding and jobs were in jeopardy. *Kneading Knowledge* presented an important chance to commission artists for online work. It offered an informal opportunity to experiment artistically with formats—Zoom, homemade videos, working from our kitchens—that were increasingly part of our daily lives. We hoped that the artworks created through *Kneading Knowledge* would prove to be valuable and enduring artefacts of the collaboration and would be of use as teaching aids in degree classes. In addition, we wanted to engage with an alternative narrative about the connections between migration, displacement, and food, through artists and their work. We hoped that this would contribute to the creation of additional media for communicating the stories of displaced communities and the food they bring with them as they build new homes for themselves in the UK.

Through our prior experiences of research collaborations with artists, we thought about how to foster accessible and productive spaces for open conversations about difficult subjects. Traditional academic venues and fora, such as the lecture theatre and the journal article, are often not the best places to do that. Artist participation was another aspect of our attempt to disrupt traditional research hierarchies during the project. Through artists' contributions, our outcomes would extend beyond the boundaries of individual academic disciplines and beyond written publications such as this one.

All four of the *Breaking Bread* classes and four of the eight *Kneading Knowledge* classes included artist involvement. The artists were Tolu Agbelusi, a Nigerian British poet, playwright, educator, lawyer, and the author of *Locating Strongwoman* (Jacaranda Books 2020); Sivan Rubinstein, a London-based choreographer and King's Artist 2019–2020 in the Department of Philosophy at King's, whose work includes *MAPS* and *Dance No 2°*; Xavier de Sousa, a performance maker and culture worker now based in Porto, who curates the digital research and live art commissioning platform performingborders and who is a co-founder of Migrants in Culture; and Anna Virabyan, an Armenian artist who has collaborated with the King's Migration Research Group and King's Student Action for Refugees. Tolu and Anna already had ongoing collaborations with Leonie, while Sivan and Xavier were engaged in arts and research projects with Sarah.

The artists participated, observed, listened, and reflected on the class experiences, producing artworks during the classes and in the weeks following. Through their work, they engaged with themes such as homeland, heritage, memory, embodied knowledge,

identity, displacement, loss, and solidarity. They acknowledged that their reflections were shaped by their own lived experiences of migration and displacement.

Tolu attended two classes. She paid attention to the details of cooking, to the ways the chefs used language and prepared the ingredients, and most importantly, to the process of cooking and its role in sustaining rituals and heritage. Tolu commented:

> I am talking about food, not just being about eating. The process of cooking is also about ritual. It is also about mental release. Because the food is not just the end product, all those things—where you are working your hands through something, or when you are teaching yourself something, or throwing things together, all of that is also process in a way that you don't normally think about.

Tolu wrote two poems, *Lessons from Majeda's Kitchen* and *It Is Impossible to Lose Joy In Translation*, which she recorded herself performing. Our article takes its title from a line in *Lessons from Majeda's Kitchen*. Through her poems, Tolu takes us beyond the recipe. She brings us closer to the story behind the dishes, to the memories they evoke in the process of making. In *Lessons from Majeda's Kitchen*, she reflects on the cooking of Majeda, a Syrian activist and chef based in London and a former detainee in Syria. Tolu offers her own interpretation of the class, reminding us of the roots of displacement and exploring the ways in which people have reconstructed their homes through food in exile.

Lessons from Majeda's Kitchen

What we don't have
we substitute—250 g of tamarind
works best, but 2 lemons will do.
5 seconds for the bread to golden,
a tortilla will take one minute.
Watch it close. We watch her

how she lifts each ingredient
as though paying homage, how easily
vegetables yield under the knife
how her English dissolves
when she stirs the lentils, the food
communicates anyway

its own language. When all the houses
have been burnt beyond recognition
and those who can, have left, when
the women gather to rebuild
in a foreign country, they will not talk
about ashes. Instead, each week

in twos or twenties, they will lay a table
take turns reconstructing dishes from
a place held close—a bouquet of parsley
conjures an absent mother, the women
tell stories of the dough for Harak Osbao
even though here, pasta substitutes
for dough, a pomegranate seed spills its red
on the white counter and for a moment

an automated silence takes over.

I don't know if it has a name
we don't have this one in Syria. I prefer
iceberg lettuce she says, pointing
to the water lettuce. Her ignorance
is a small rebellion recalling levity
refusing to let go of home.

Together we prepare a feast, each person
stirring up memory as dishes take shape.
Is this not how we call ourselves back
to who we are when home seems too far?

(Tolu Agbelusi, 2020)

Anna Virabyan painted *Oriental Still Life* (Figure 1, watercolour) after attending Chef Ahmed's Lebanese cookery class and *Sarande* (watercolour) following her participation in Chef Deshira's class, where she learned to cook Albanian Jahni (meat stew) and Petulla me Kungulleshka (courgette pancake). As Anna reported:

I found some similarities with my Armenian traditional food. While cooking it was very touching to listen to Deshira's story and how she is overcoming such a challenging time by being an asylum seeker. A few years ago, I was going through the same process and understand how hard it is for her. . . I thought to create a piece of art that will remind Deshira of Home! During the process of creating a coastal town in Albania—Sarande, I connected with her by thinking of both, her home and mine, which I also missed so much. . .!
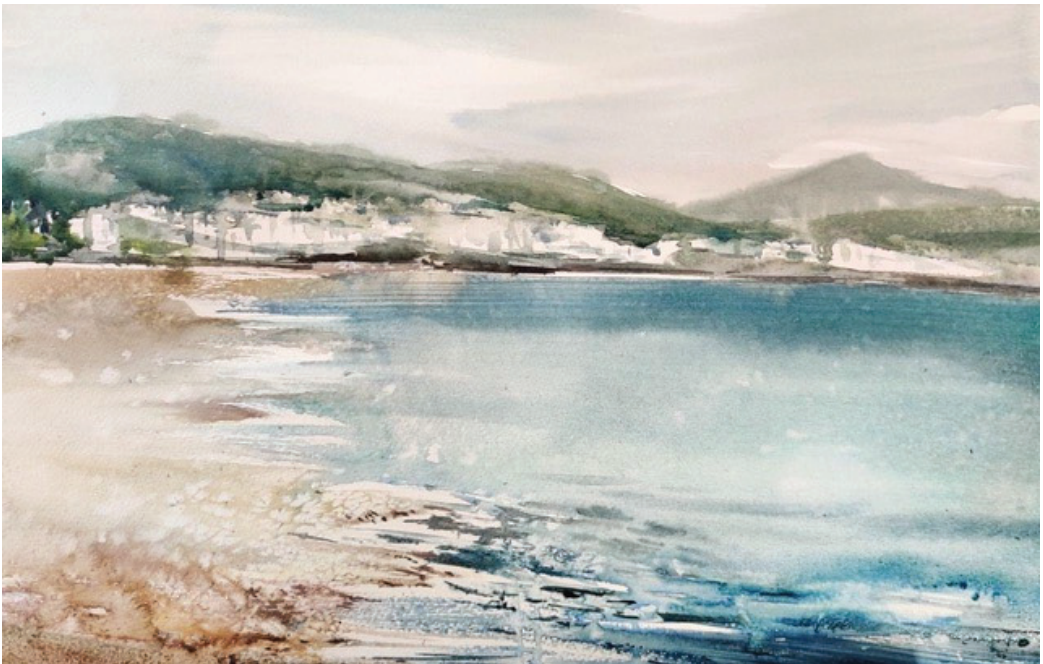

Figure 1. Sarande, by Anna Virabyan, 2020. 40 cm × 60 cm, watercolour medium on Arches paper.

Sivan Rubinstein devised *Reflection to Migrateful Online Cookery class with Chef Noor* <Available online: https://youtu.be/stmQSidgft0, accessed on 18 July 2023> following Noor's Pakistani cookery class, and *Dancing Food: A quarantine reflection video* <Available online: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/kneading-knowledge, accessed on 18 July 2023 and see image still, Figure 2> in response to Chef Majeda's class. Both pieces feature videos of Sivan moving, with creative use of staging and editing, set against audio snippets of the chefs teaching the class. The pieces capture something about the distinctive experiences of the classes, as all participants learned new communication and cooking techniques while building online community and solidarity.
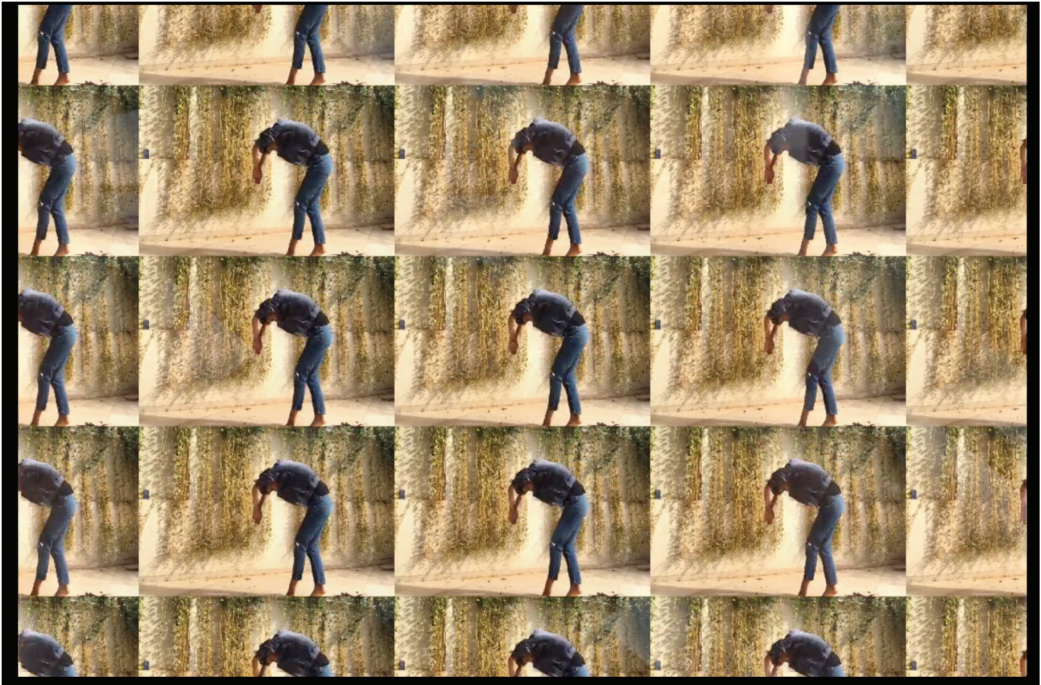
Figure 2. Still from Sivan Rubinstein's Dancing Food, 2020.

Xavier wrote and performed *FRAGMENTS*: *or Four Chapters For Possible Futures* <Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMkfjxSgaCQ, accessed on 18 July 2023 and see image still, Figure 3> (camera and editing by Rowan Briscoe, produced by Foreign Actions Productions) after a Sri Lankan cookery class with Chef Nafa, and *of rivers crossed and lessons learned* as part of their reflections on their own migration experiences and on participating in *Kneading Knowledge.* Of their motivation for joining the team, Xavier explained:

> My shows, my theatre shows. . . revolve around the act of eating and making food live on stage and kind of bringing people together at the table . . . I thought this will be quite a nice way that we can create a sense of commonality without being—together—commonality around food, and food sharing, and experience sharing, and story sharing without having to be physically together . . . And . . . that could be a useful tool for me as well to kind of experiment with form . . .

Figure 3. Still from Xavier de Sousa's FRAGMENTS: or Four Chapters for Possible Futures, 2020.

And discussing what they would be taking away from the project, Xavier said:

... I think the main thing was a sense of digital commonality through people working together to achieve a goal—even though that goal was quite individual for everyone. We all were there for a task, for very specific task. . . Food, the act of eating and act of cooking with the smells, tastes, and the textures of things . . . bring up memories, bring up ideas, bring up all creations in your head. And that combined with the context of where we were . . . and that we are learning these beautiful new recipes that we haven't done before . . . I found that very nurturing as a space.

(Xavier de Sousa interview with Anna Khlusova, 16 December 2020)

As Xavier responded to the Migrateful class in *FRAGMENTS*, 'the house hasn't felt so joyous since this all began, and for once I am thankful. Because it lingers, you know? The taste of proximity'.

Collaboration between academics and artists is no new trend; as Pfoser and de Jong (2020) note, some academics have always worked at the crossroads of the arts and academia, while for others the impact agenda has been a welcome nudge to develop exchanges with artists. With their multidisciplinary impacts, such collaborations bring a wide range of opportunities (Pahl et al. 2017; Rasool 2017). For academics, involvement in the co/production of artwork can offer insights into a range of research and creative practices, networks, and spaces, opportunities to meet interlocutors and audiences beyond the academy, and modes of engaging with complex topics and ideas in alternative and sometimes more welcoming ways. For artists, these academic collaborations may offer access to knowledge, expertise, resources, networks, and audiences in academia. For displaced communities, these art–academic collaborations can be a platform for sharing stories of displacement through different media and methodologies.

In our project, the artworks were disseminated online via the King's website and have been used in student classes. Future opportunities could include sharing these pieces more broadly in public-facing platforms, art exhibitions, and cultural festivals.

4. When Life Gives You Lemons

A fundamental feature of *Kneading Knowledge* is that it took place at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which drove a dramatic shift in how participatory research and socially engaged activities connect with public audiences as a result of participation pivoting to online activities (Khlusova 2021; NCCPE 2021). At this time, physical spaces for participation and research were contracting and their virtual equivalents were expanding (Khlusova 2021). The pandemic challenged us to re-think our usual approaches and consider new creative ways of working, learning, and connecting with each other and with different communities. In this sense, while the adaptation of the Migrateful model to online environments was initially driven by the necessity of lockdown, it presented a unique opportunity to explore the efficacy of digital engagement activities. We became particularly interested in the question of how the digital environment shapes the potential for collaborative storytelling and for enhancing inclusivity, interactivity, and engagement with participants.

The advantages of digital engagement practices in reaching larger and more varied global audiences than face-to-face activities have been widely discussed in previous research (Ross 2012). The literature points to increased possibilities afforded by digital formats for expanding the participation and reach of engagement activities, including the possibility of connecting with new and more diverse demographics (Khlusova 2021; NCCPE 2021). This was certainly evident in *Kneading Knowledge*. Opportunities to participate were unconstrained by geography, physical access, or significant travel and its accompanying costs (though live classes remained constrained by the issue of international time differences). People joined *Kneading Knowledge* from across the globe, including UK, USA, Israel, and Europe.

Online classes presented an opportunity to engage with new demographics who had not previously heard of Migrateful. Several participants said that they would have found it too intimidating or challenging to attend in-person classes. In this way, *Kneading Knowledge's* virtual approach spoke to Migrateful's wider goals to do more than just "preach to the converted" (Migrateful 2021), that is, to super-serve the already engaged. As some participants commented:

I think it [the virtual format] opens up this whole new world for people who don't feel comfortable doing that [in-person classes] and go and meet people. I had my camera off most of the time, and it made me more comfortable... If you're anxious, socially anxious, you can still participate, so you can feel like you have joined in, even if you've got your camera off and there is nothing in the real world that is like that.

(Participant 7, December 2020)

I embraced it because I probably wouldn't do as many [classes] otherwise, you know. I wouldn't go to an in-person cooking class so many times... But now I've done three, because I've done them in my own space. I guess it's easier, I think. This is a really great idea, overall.

(Participant 1, December 2020)

Alongside the possibility for broadening access and reach, the digital format was recognised by some participants as fostering a more inclusive environment. It provided a safe space to join in the experience from the comfort of their own home, while the undemanding nature of the virtual helped to reduce anxieties associated with in-person interactions. This is an important ethical concern that we ought to take into consideration as we look to the future; in returning to face-to-face practices, we should not forget those people who found online forms of engagement more suited to their mental and physical needs.

As well as offering a safe space for engagement, *Kneading Knowledge's* virtual environment was described by participants as fostering a "warm", "nurturing", and "familiar" space, and as a "home away from home". Underpinning these notions was a strong sense

of the co-presence shared online, a sense of "digital commonality", as Xavier de Sousa put it. Even though we were separated physically, located across the globe, through these digital affordances we were able to observe the chefs' home environments and the ways in which they created their recipes while trying to recreate the experience in our own homes and sharing the process and outcomes with each other:

> The fact that we've seen a little bit into chefs' space, home space, there was something for me quite special about this... And you think "yeah, of course, these people are just like I am, living in a London flat, of course. They just had more of a struggle to get here, or to secure their place..." But seeing that, it made it more personal.
>
> (Participant 1, December 2020)

> (...) You've got to know a person that was doing this class in a personal way . . . It was like watching your mom cook. They might throw in something and . . . not necessarily telling you what they're throwing in but they do it so naturally that it feels more homely and comforting (. . .) and then you can see others working on the same task and be like "we are in this together."
>
> (Participant 8, December 2020)

As these comments illustrate, the feeling of being invited, albeit virtually, into the chefs' homes added to the affective dimensions of the overall experience, fostering a sense of virtual belonging and solidarity. Crucially, while we were able to see into the chefs' homes, we were not intruding; the advantage of the digital format was that the chefs retained agency and control. Through adjusting video settings and camera placements, they were able to choose how much or how little of their homes to show and to share. Again, this was an enactment of their micro-power. The act of virtual sharing here was reciprocal; as participants, we all let others into our homes, showing our utensils and skills, revealing our culinary creations, and telling our stories.

5. The Proof Is in the Pudding

Despite its multiple benefits, the digital format presented its own challenges, not least for facilitating engagement and spontaneous interactions amongst participants. One of the main issues in translating the in-person Migrateful model into an effective online format was enabling storytelling to emerge naturally.

As the research team all noticed, it was difficult for conversations to flow organically for a variety of reasons. There were no opportunities for casual informal chats between participants in the online space of the cookery class, and the format did not allow for breakout rooms. The classes had to be carefully facilitated by Migrateful and their chefs, which kept them relatively 'formal', and we were running to a tight schedule, with most of the time being occupied by cooking and cooking-related questions. Moreover, we were operating with different levels of digital literacy and comfort with technology and, as is all too familiar to internet users, sometimes we experienced connectivity problems, technical glitches, audio issues, and delays. For example, some participants told us:

> I would have liked a bit more chance to talk [to the chefs and other participants] or I think because the cooking is obviously the main thing it takes up a lot of time and then you want to eat obviously... It's quite hard to get that conversation going.
>
> (Participant 1, December 2020)

And:

> The difficulties of doing things virtually is that you never know when to properly interject without interrupting.
>
> (Participant 3, December 2020)

Some offered helpful suggestions for improving the online experience:

Maybe that is something to look into: supporting the chefs with the technology more.

(Participant 1, December 2020)

Meanwhile, the fact that both *Breaking Bread* and *Kneading Knowledge* ran during national lockdowns meant that they were accompanied by a complex range of additional challenges. We were aware that, in the context of global crisis, we were "asking more of our participants than ever before" when inviting them to take part (Pacheco and Zaimağaoğlu 2020). This was true for the artists, for Migrateful and the chefs, for the people participating in the classes, and of course for the researchers.

In the research team alone, members were caring for their children and other relatives, home-schooling, separated from family across borders, dealing with complex health issues, trying to manage their full-time jobs, experiencing the uncertainties of furlough and management restructurings, and living with the anxieties induced by the pandemic, all while coordinating the projects. We all benefited from the learning, camaraderie, creativity, and conversations that emerged. *Breaking Bread* and *Kneading Knowledge* were bright spots in an otherwise dark period (see Figure 4, an image taken from one of the classes).

Figure 4. Preparing for a Migrateful Class. Photograph by Sarah Fine.

Yet there is no denying that conducting collaborations during a global crisis is extremely difficult. It goes without saying that these were not the best circumstances for devising and carrying out socially engaged activities. The project was itself a product of its unique context. With these limitations in mind, we would like to reflect on the ingredients for a meaningful and ethical model of engagement activities.

6. A Recipe for Success?

To conclude, we draw on what we have learned to provide our own 'recipe' for cooking up an effective and affective online, socially engaged research activities:

1. Start with a base stock of money but ensure that it does not overpower other ingredients.
2. Add a liberal measure of a multi-disciplinary, democratic team of collaborators to the melting pot. This could include researchers, artists, practitioners, community stakeholders, and participants. Simmer to unleash diverse expertise and experiences.
3. Add a generous dollop of self-reflexivity about power dynamics and structural inequalities, and centre the participation of stakeholders who are commonly marginalised.
4. Throw in some digital spice and taste frequently, adjusting levels of digital literacy and technical requirements as required.
5. When all the ingredients have cohered, share widely so that others can have a taste and adapt to their own contexts.

Bon appétit!

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Notes

1. For further discussion of the complex intersections of 'privileges and burdens', see (Nash 2008).
2. See for example the work of the Civic University Network at https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/ (accessed on 18 July 2023).
3. For more information, please visit www.migrateful.org (accessed on 18 July 2023).
4. FOOD, a fascinating Forum for Philosophy discussion between Sarah Fine, C. Thi Nguyen, Or Rosenboim, and Ahmed Sinno about food's social dimension, is available online here: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/theforum/food/ (accessed on 18 July 2023).
5. Ahmed Sinno's contribution to FOOD, here: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/theforum/food/ (accessed on 18 July 2023).
6. See further feedback from participants on the project's webpage, here: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/breaking-bread (accessed on 18 July 2023).
7. See Note 5.
8. For an informative examination of the use of participatory research approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic, see (Hall et al. 2021).
9. On concerns about the possibility of extractive and exploitative practices in research drawing on testimony, see (Fine 2019).

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